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From the Editor's desk

Associate Professor Trace Ollis

We begin this editorial by noting changes in Ministerial portfolios with the most recent cabinet reshuffle in the Federal Albanese Government. Andrew Giles is now the Minister for Skills and Training, replacing Tony Burke; we look forward to seeing the Labor government's further advancement of adult and lifelong learning in Australia. The July issue of AJAL offers four refereed papers on a broad range of research related to adult learning education, from the role of academics advising on adult learners' transitions to university to an article on Bessie Harrison Lee's fight for suffrage that brings together adult learning and popular education traditions, highlighting the importance of adult learning, resistance and social change. Adult learning in the community theatre and arts education space is explored in an article on adult community education. Continuing the current research in the post-pandemic era is an article from Eswatini in Africa, examining the perceptions of adult learning for those with visual impairment in the pandemic era.

Our paper from the field, or "practice", outlines the practices of using "Eight Ways Pedagogy" and how adult educators can incorporate Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing through adult learning pedagogy. AJAL papers on practice are non-refereed articles, enabling adult educators and practitioners in the field to examine current trends in pedagogy, policy, and practice, passing on knowledge and skills of

current and past educators in the field and building a community of practice (Lave, 1991). The April edition includes reviews of two books on adult learning. The first **Making Connections: A Selection of Writings 1983 – 2009,** written by Delia Bradshaw (2022), reflects on a lifetime of being a teacher of adult learning and is reviewed by Ursula Harrison . The second book review on **Adult language education and migration: Challenging agendas in policy and practice** by Simpson and Whiteside (2015), examines the policy context of English language learning for adult migrants around the world and is reviewed by Kenneth Charles Lambo

The first article in the April edition, titled "**The experiences of an online academic advising approach supporting adult learners' transition into an enabling program preparing them for university**" by McGovern, Crank & Green, outlines a transition program at a university. This mixed methods research notes the role of online academic advising support services for students transitioning to university, rather than the traditional academic advising support services traditionally provided in person and on campus. Transition programs provide equity and access to adult learners in higher education and contribute to democratising education in university spaces (see Biesta, 2009, for example). Research into University enabling programs has increased in recent years along with the massification of higher education and the increase of "first in family" students at universities (Jarvis, 2021). This is an important space for adult learning as students taking non-traditional pathways to higher education require support services with orientation and academic literacy to ensure a smooth transition. Nieuwoudt (2021) has noted, for example, the psychological stress for students who enter higher education programs through enabling programs. The authors argue in their paper that "Online modes of study are increasingly prevalent in higher education programs, including university-enabled programs". This study outlines the design and evaluation of an online academic advising program that students believed had benefits and was a valuable service to provide support and advice to adult learners supporting the transition to higher education with access to support and timely information, assisting the development of student identity and a sense of belonging at university.

In the paper "**Bessie Harrison Lee's fight for Victorian Women's Suffrage in the late nineteenth century: Educating urban and**

rural women on the democratic process" by Jennifer Caligari, draws on the educational traditions of adult learning, popular education and public pedagogies (See Crowther, et al, 2005 & Sandlin, 2010, for example). Bessie Lee Harrison's quest for the democratic right for women to vote via the women's temperance movement in Victoria saw her use "multiple pedagogical methods". She argues, that using the Women's Christian Temperance Movement (WCTU) as a force for consciousness-raising enabled women "to visualise the possibilities of improving their lives through the democratic process." These were not "radical" women by any means, the majority of the women were Christian conservatives. Nonetheless, as Caligari Identifies, "The WCTU taught Lee the value of female-centred political action. The WCTU and Lee's involvement successfully influenced the debate about women's suffrage and contributed to the mobilisation of the international women's movement." The actions of individual and collective women's mobilisation for change have a long history in the women's movement and in the adult education literature on social movement learning and popular education (Clover, 2012). Often using incidental and informal education strategies to educate the citizenry about an issue of justice. Lee used strategies such as public speaking in town halls, outside public bars, private lounge rooms and in people's homes, mobilising change through citizen-based direct action. As Caligari notes:

> *"These spaces were the places of learning" .... the meeting places of the WCTU, whether private lounge rooms or church halls, enabled women to support each other in the political process of debate, addressing community issues, and devising strategic plans to improve the lives of women."*

However, the author notes that Lee and the WCTU excluded Indigenous women and women of non-Anglo-Celtic backgrounds, thus contributing to the great silence of marginalised women, notable in the history of the women's movement (Behrendt, 1993).

Continuing the themes of learning in community settings, Rob Townsend and Jeff Jones, in their article, **Adult, community education in acting and performance as personal development: "I can look people in the eye now!**" This paper considered theatre performance and creative arts courses delivered at the community level, for mature-aged adult learners in a changing

environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This article examines the processes of personal and relational transformation that occur as learners participate in community theatre productions. The data reveals the profound transformation of the participants from anxious, self-doubting adults to having experiences of empowerment, agency and confidence. This is reminiscent of transformative adult learning in the work of Jack Mezirow, who theorised about the significant transformation of the "self" and the "identity change" that occurs as learners embark on profound journeys of self-discovery (Illeris, 2014). The authors note the importance of the knowledge, skill and pedagogy of the teacher is essential in assisting adult learners in their journey of transformation. The paper provides a timely reminder of the importance of arts-based curricula and adult learning, including teacher pedagogies of care and support, which can transform adult learners' lives.

Our final article for the edition is called, **Perceptions of adult learners with visual impairment throughout COVID-19 Pandemic: Implications for institutional assistance in Eswatini**, by Nomazulu Ngozwana. The paper observes the experience of students with a visual impairment during the Covid 19 pandemic, leading to students withdrawing from their course at a university in Estwatini Africa. The paper is a phenomenological study drawing on data from a small sample of three students, providing rich insights into these students' experiences. As noted in the paper these findings reveal issues of access and equity for students with a disability. "The findings revealed the themes of socialisolation, personal challenges, and lack of institutional assistance." The paper outlines the importance of teachers embedding including pedagogy and practices in their teaching, noting: "The participants acknowledged the awareness of using technology during the COVID-19 pandemic: however, they stated the lack of devices, inadequate technology skills, and their reliance on sighted adult learners and peers to read the content for them." The author calls for inclusive policies at Universities in Estwatini for students with visual impairment, particularly with the uptake of delivering courses with new technologies and online in the post-pandemic era.

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The experiences of an online academic advising approach supporting adult learners transition into an enabling program preparing them for university

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Online modes of study are increasingly prevalent in higher education, including university-enabling programs. As student cohorts diversify, access to individualised and holistic support strategies is increasingly important for students to expeditiously transition into higher education. On-campus provision of academic advising, while an effective transition support strategy, potentially disadvantages online students. This study explores the design and evaluation of online academic advising to support adult learners' transition into a regional Australian university enabling program. Quantitative and qualitative data was analysed from 199 survey responses of student experience of engaging with online academic advising. Participants agreed online academic advising had benefits and was useful. Findings included online academic advising provides adult learners support with

enrolment, access to relevant and timely information, and development of their student identity and sense of belonging. A transitional typology was used to critically review online academic advising and a method to evaluate the success of the transition.

Keywords: *online academic advising, enabling, university preparation programs, transition, sense of belonging, connectedness*

Introduction

Higher education institutions offering enabling education have experienced increased numbers of students enrolling over the last decade into their enabling programs (McKay et al., 2018). Student numbers and diversity have increased and there is a need to better understand the transition experiences of adult learners and consider improved and nuanced approaches to introduce and orient students into commencing university-enabling pathway programs (higher education study). Transition as a concept and an experience is a critical element for effective change and success from school to university, university to work and it also applies to considering higher education study inclusive of enabling programs (Lisciandro, 2022; Taylor & Harris-Evans, 2018). Articulation and retention are key drivers and determinants of success and are of interest to students and the university. This increase in student numbers is being sustained by the offering of online modes of study (Shah et al., 2014). Stone (2017) and Diep et al. (2019) concur and highlight the opportunity yet realise the need to critically consider the design and support of online learning and support of adult learners. Online academic advising can support students' transition into higher education, enhancing their preparation and empowering them in their studies, and reducing attrition while increasing retention (Rimbau-Gilbert et al., 2011). This study is from a university that was experiencing a high volume of students, many from underrepresented groups and the majority were studying online. Academic advisors were established to design and implement an innovative and sustainable financially viable online solution to transition students into the pathway program and prepare and empower them for undergraduate study. This study investigates engagement with online academic advising by adult learners to transition into an enabling program and facilitates an

evaluation of the design and implementation.

Enabling programs

Access to higher education through enabling programs has been increasing for over a decade (McKay et al., 2018). Enabling (university or pathway education) is a growing segment within the higher education sector. Enabling programs contribute to widening university participation. Enabling programs are non-award courses that offer an alternate pathway into university and prepare adult learners for success in their undergraduate degrees with foundational academic skills and capabilities (National Association of Enabling Educators of Australia, (NAEEA) 2023; Syme et al., 2022). As cited by Davis et al., (2023) in a benchmarking report "there are 48 enabling programs across Australia" responsible for" enrolling 32,579 students in 2020" (Department of Education, 2022)"(p.6). Enabling education adopts a strengths-based approach (Crank, 2023) as enabling students brings diversity into educational settings and offers "valuable skills and experiences that benefit them, their peers and their tutors by enriching the learning process" (Klinger & Murray, 2011, p. 19). Despite these strengths, effective transitions into higher education are particularly significant for many of these students, who may have experienced long absences from formal education or have complex and disrupted educational experiences. Enabling programs seeks to address inequity in higher education by offering alternative pathways into university for students unable to enter through matriculation from high school to university. Students enrolling in enabling programs "are often of mature age, from vocational pathways, from low-socioeconomic, Indigenous, disabled, rural, regional or non- English speaking backgrounds, and often the first in their family to attend university, and can often be online or part-time working students and parents" (Davis & Green, 2023, p.287). Commonly, enabling programs have high attrition rates (Bookallil & Harreveld, 2017; Vherastidtham & Norton, 2018) and academic advising can play a valuable role in supporting students transitioning into university studies, preparing them for future academic success and positively impacting retention (Dollinger et al., 2021).

Implications and change to the learning environment

The massification of higher education has increased participation

in higher education and the movement to more open and inclusive enrolment policies and resulted in increases in both student numbers and diversity. Enabling programs are designed for students from a wide range of equity groups and underrepresented cohorts. Enabling programs have proven to be successful for equity groups and non-traditional students and if they continue into higher education they can perform at a higher academic level, have higher satisfaction levels and have persisted more in studies when compared to the traditional high school matriculated students (Baker et al., 2020; Jarvis, 2021; Pitman, 2016). The increase in student diversity, and the accompanying increase in the variety of student strengths and needs, calls for a more nuanced approach to adult education to be considered (Thomas et al., 2021; Weiler, 2020). Institutions need to adopt a multi-faceted, proactive, holistic approach to managing student transition into learning and understand the initial and evolving needs of the learners (Heagney & Benson, 2018; Lisciandro, 2022). Stone and O'Shea (2019) further alert practitioners and administrators to the multiplicity of diversity and the significance of staying connected with students as they adjust to the university learning environment. Connectedness improves student confidence, academic performance, and retention (Jones et al., 2019; Pritchard et al., 2018). “Positive student staff relationships are critical to mature age student engagement in learning” and this supports student confidence and retention, and fosters a sense of belonging, and can strengthen commitment to the university” (Cuility, 2006, p. 254). Students also need to have realistic expectations and support so that they can take control of personal challenges and develop agency (Pitman et al., 2016; Zepke, 2018).

Online learning environments support equity by enabling student participation regardless of proximity to a higher education institution and/or personal situational demands, "who would otherwise be excluded through a diverse range of circumstances, including disadvantage due to disability, remoteness, work and/or caring responsibilities" (Dodo-Balu, 2018, p. 33). However, research highlights that online students encounter greater barriers to study than their on-campus peers, including feelings of isolation and being disconnected from the physical presence of peers and their academics (Coman et al., 2020). These barriers are further exacerbated for the non-traditional students, overrepresented in the online cohort. Although enabling

education can provide opportunities for higher education to wider and more diverse cohorts, Engstrom and Tinto (2008) state that access without support is not an opportunity and Tinto (2006) and Lizzio (2006) argue that institutional support should be holistic and require efforts of both academic and administrative staff. Transitioning students into higher education can be achieved by implementing academic advising which usually involves investigating the needs of the student/ individual, considering the 'how to help' and providing the information pertaining to the new environment of systems and procedures. Adult learners particularly benefit from guidance and support in making the necessary academic, cultural, and organisational adjustments to smoothly transition into the university environment and successfully engage with their studies (Powers & Waratalski, 2021).

Transition

Transition is complex, encompassing concepts of induction into university culture and practices; and student development of a sense of belonging and identity. Successful transitions are crucial for adult learners commencing studies after absences from formal education, inevitably from non-traditional students. "Successfully managing the process of transition into university involves acknowledging that students in all their diversity come to us to learn and that we are responsible not just to keep them, but for creating environments where active learning can take place" (Kift & Nelson, 2005, p.225). Transition into higher education is complex from an individual perspective and because universities choose different approaches to support their students, however, it is acknowledged that transitions into higher education are challenging for both traditional and non-traditional students (Kahu et al., 2022; Kift et al., 2010; Thomas et al., 2021). Early experiences of transition into university are a crucial component of the student's first-year experience (FYE) (Baik et al., 2019) as negative transition experiences can create uncertainty and low levels of confidence for the commencing students (Goodchild, 2019). A further hurdle to transition can be enrolment. Zaytsev (2011) highlights the importance of students making appropriate enrolment decisions, as enrolment decisions impact confidence and ability to succeed (Lawrence et al., 2019). Student retention and completion can be supported by a range of transition practices, including pre-enrolment information

and preparation, and projects aimed at orientating and transitioning during the start of study, as well as increasing a sense of belonging and recognising and supporting diversity (TEQSA, 2020). The traditional view of student transition is through a lens of induction, or intervention, that prepares incoming students for success in higher education. Such approaches posit transition as a linear movement through phases, such as preparation, encounter, adjustment, and stabilisation (Coertjens et al., 2017, citing Nicholson's (1990) transition cycle). These concepts of transition tend to privilege academic knowledge and cultures of the respective higher education institutions, and accept these as uncontested and unexamined (Taylor & Harris-Evan, 2018), potentially positioning students as external and deficient (Gravett & Winstone, 2019). More student-centred approaches to transition consider the transition from the perspective of the experiences of students as individuals or as members of particular cohorts. Such research considers student transitions from a range of narratives and perspectives, including equity (Kezar & Kitchen, 2020), adult student identity (Brunton & Buckley, 2021), and first-year advising (Burnett & Larmar, 2011). The complexity and breadth of students' lives require approaches to transition that move beyond a "dominance of the conceptualisation of transition as linear" which "drives simplistic thinking, resulting in reductive policy and practice" (Baker & Irwin, 2019, p. 15). Approaches to transition have emerged that consider the student holistically, and transition in the context of 'whole of life' (Gale & Parker, 2012, p. 738). Gale and Parker (2012), draw on "a systematic review of the national and international literature on transition" (p. 735) and developed a comprehensive typology with three conceptions of transition; Transition as Induction (T1), Transition as Development (T2), Transition as Becoming (T3). Transition as Induction (T1) emphasises institutional concepts of transition, including linear student journeys with predictable, sequential navigation milestones of induction into established university culture and accepted practices. T1 is support by institutional interventions such as first-year sessions, orientation and timely information. Transition as Development (T2), while still conceiving transition as linear, emphasises the trajectory of students as individuals within a socio-cultural context. T2 is supported by individualised transition practices, including student mentors, placements and "Championing narratives of student and career trajectories by successful students and staff" (Gale & Parker, 2012, p.738). Transition as Becoming is Rhizomatic (T3) is the most

complex and comprehensive student-facing concept of transition Transition in T3, is holistic, fluctuating and, fragmented, requiring the navigation of various narratives and subjectivities. T3 is supported by flexible study offerings and pathways, "including multiple opportunities to change course and enter, withdraw and return to study throughout life" (Gale & Parker, 2012, p. 738).

Academic Advising

Academic advising is considered standard practice in North American universities and is being implemented internationally; however, the Australian context is still an under-researched area (Dollinger et al., 2021). Academic advising is described as:

> *"A series of intentional interactions with a curriculum, a pedagogy, and a set of student learning outcomes. Academic advising contextualises students' education experiences within the frameworks of their aspirations, abilities, and lives to extend learning beyond campus boundaries and timeframes" (NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising, 2006).*

Academic advising has predominantly been provided on campus and in person. However, recent changes in the higher education landscape, including increases in student numbers, diversification of study modes, and COVID-19, encourage the consideration of alternative approaches. Online delivery of academic advising has the potential to enhance the sustainability and cost-effectiveness of supporting a large number of students with a limited number of academic staff. Cuseo (2011) highlights how academic advising supports the transition into study and other studies substantiate the value of academic advising in supporting student success (Dollinger et al., 2021; Karmelita, 2020). Different approaches to academic advising include; developmental approaches that consider the student holistically, process-driven approaches, what the student must do, and intrusive approaches that are advisor-initiated, and tend to be reactionary and prescriptive approaches that are focused on providing information on what students should do (Troxel et al., 2022). Although different approaches do exist, foundational to academic advising is student engagement leading to their individual progress (NACADA, 2017). Online academic advising was explored as an option

for the enabling program, because of the diverse student population of various needs and high enrolments, with the majority being online and achieving equitable access to all students by online delivery and considering the challenged financial environment of providing academic and student support.

Methodology

Online academic advising development

In considering how best to support student transitions a trial was conducted in which 120 students were regularly contacted by email and phone calls through their first semester of study to explore their experiences and ascertain their needs. This trial found students 1) experienced enrolment and lacked awareness of ways to consider and adjust their study load; 2) needed specific guidance through all the firsts (e.g., enrolment process, navigating LMS (Learning Management System), accessing support services); 3) needed accessible information at 'point of use' and 4) needed varying levels of support, from minimal to intensive. The trial and a review of literature review indicated the value of using a constructivist pedagogy (Bada et al, 2015). This pedagogy is based on encouraging students to construct their knowledge through experience and activities rather than directed, this is comprised of a suite of inter-connected approaches which informed the design of online academic advising. This involved mastery of enrolment, through self-guided lessons and agency in decision-making. Empowering the student throughout the onboarding and commencing of study was essential in their experiential learning. Developing a self-regulated learner is an outcome of academic advising and is of particular importance with students who are new to higher education study. The online academic advising drew upon adult learning principles (Knowles, 1980) to develop student-centred learning experiences that actively involve the learner in building on and extending their prior experience and knowledge developing student capacity and agency for immediately applicable, timely, aspects of their transition. The online academic advising was facilitated through the institute's LMS (Moodle), providing an interactive learning environment with a tiered support structure, and adapting Lizzio's (2006) senses of success (purpose, connectedness, academic self, self-efficacy, growth & resilience, and exploration &

enjoyment) across five phases that each considered the potential point of student attrition, as indicated by the initial trial. The phases, and aspects of support, were Readiness (enrolment), Orientation (setting up for study), Commencement (planning for managing multiple simultaneous study and assessment tasks), Enrichment (focused on motivation and maintenance of study habits) and Outcome (reflection and action-oriented to what next) (Figure 1). A Getting ready to enrol section was also designed to prepare students so they could enrol effectively. It guided them through accessing information and questions that assisted them to be able to make informed and suitable choices for their personal situation.

Figure 1: The five phases of the online academic advising approach.

Online academic advising was designed to develop and reflect the ways in which the various senses of success were pertinent to each transition phase. Each phase had a range of self-directed interactive student learning and reflection activities made available to the student at the relevant time and building on their existing knowledge. A tiered support structure was incorporated into selected activities with two-way interaction to encourage students to self-identify when they needed to access support services and for academic advisors to view, respond and act when required. The tiered model facilitated students to access various levels of support; from minimal guidance through to personal support by an academic advisor, encouraging students to be self-regulated engaged learners. The online academic advising was managed and monitored by a small team of academic advisors who provided proactive academic support to empower student agency in their transition into university.

Research questions

Rotar's (2020) recent systematic review of existing research on university online student support strategies highlights areas of research oversight, investigations of transitions, and studies that measure and evaluate the impact of support interventions. Thus, the aim of this study is to evaluate students' engagement with online academic advising in supporting their transitions into a university preparation course. The study evaluated online academic advising, considering the following research questions.

1. How did students engage with online academic advising when transitioning through their first semester of online study?
2. What did students find beneficial and useful about online academic advising?
3. What does this engagement suggest about the potential value and benefits of online academic advising approaches for student transitions into university?
4. How does applying a transition typology evaluate to online academic advising?

Method

A convergent parallel, mixed methods research approach was used to evaluate student experiences of accessing online academic advising to support transition into higher education study. Mixed methods research approaches support multiple methodologies (Cohen, 2017) and enabled the study to capture quantitative student data, enriched by qualitative student reflections on their transition experiences. Convergent parallel design facilitated the simultaneous, comparative analysis of quantitative and qualitative data (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2018) and allowed the data in this investigation to be coherently merged.

Sampling and participant demographics

Data was collected over three semesters from 199 students who accessed online academic advising during their first semester of study in an enabling program. Ethics was approved, prior to participants being invited via an email invitation to an online survey. Participation was

voluntary and the invitation email was only sent to students after completion of their first studies, to avoid potential academic-student power or grade-related bias. Table 1 provides the enrolment data of the participants, and is representative of the student population, 68% of participants had more than 10 years since high school, the majority were enrolled in 3 courses, and (82%) were studying online.

Table 1: Participants' enrolment data

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Time from high school</td><td colspan="2"><1 year</td><td colspan="2">1-5 years</td><td colspan="2">5-10 years</td><td colspan="2">10-20 years</td><td colspan="2">20-30 years</td><td colspan="2">> 30 years</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">11.3%</td><td colspan="2">9.6%</td><td colspan="2">10.7%</td><td colspan="2">31.6%</td><td colspan="2">23.2%</td><td colspan="2">13.6%</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Course enrolment</td><td colspan="3">1 Course</td><td colspan="3">2 Courses</td><td colspan="3">3 Courses</td><td colspan="3">4 Courses</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">23%</td><td colspan="3">28%</td><td colspan="3">39%</td><td colspan="3">10%</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Mode of study</td><td colspan="6">Online study mode</td><td colspan="6">On campus study mode</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">82%.</td><td colspan="6">18%</td></tr>
</table>

Data collection and analysis

The study evaluated how students engaged with, and what they valued in online academic advising. An online survey was selected as surveys offer a proven data collection method, commonly used to obtain feedback from students at various stages of their learning journeys (Kember & Ginns, 2012). The survey was designed with a range of open and closed questions, to investigate their engagement of online academic advising, the extent to which they valued these elements and what they valued from online academics about the approach. The survey was tested for validity and reliability before being administered. The primary source of data was student responses to a series of Likert scale survey questions which was descriptively analysed using SPSS (Creswell et al., 2003). The secondary source of data, the open-ended questions, were simultaneously thematically analysed. The thematic analysis was inductive and iterative following the commonly used framework of familiarisation, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes and defining and naming themes before selecting extracts for the final report (Kiger & Varpioa, 2020). The analysis used NVivo 12 to support coding the open-ended written responses, clustering patterns of expressions of what students valued in the experience. In this way the analysis moved beyond simply cataloguing

responses to exploring meaningful references to ideas and concepts (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The resulting themes generated by the thematic analysis were triangulated against, and converged with, the quantitative student preference data to provide the integrated findings that were the outcomes of the study.

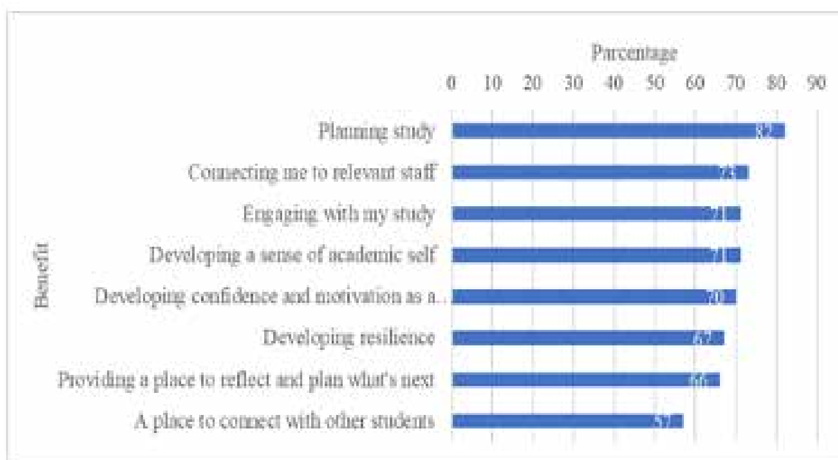
Findings

1. Quantitative Data

Student perceptions of the benefits of the online academic advising

The majority of participants (78.4 %) indicated that the online academic advising was helpful (5% did not consider the approach to be helpful, and 16.6 % responded they are unsure). The most frequently identified benefit was planning study, by 82%. Other highly agreed benefits were being connected with university staff, engaging with study, developing a sense of academic-self, and building confidence and motivation as a learner. Only 57% rated a benefit of a place to meet students (Figure 2).

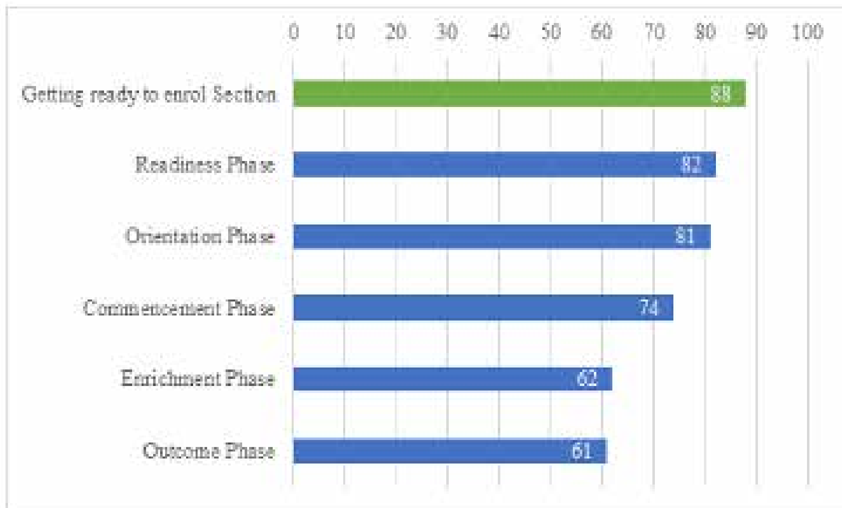
Figure 2: Participants' perception on benefits of online academic advising (%)



The survey also explored the frequency of student use of the six components of the online academic advising platform (Getting ready to enrol Section, Readiness Phase, Orientation Phase, Commencement

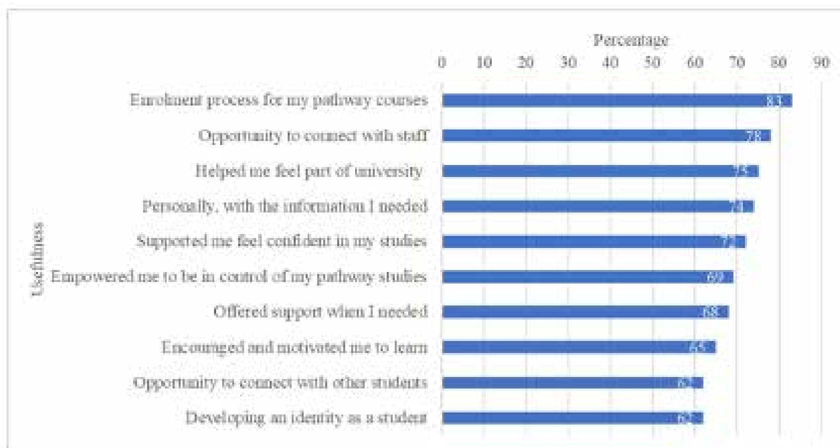
Phase, Enrichment Phase and Outcome Phase) and found that students accessed and used online academic advising more in the early stages of the semester, with use showing a steady decrease, but still remaining at a high 61% in the final outcome stage. (See Figure 3).

Figure 3: The section and phases that participants accessed (%)



The study explored the student engagement with the features of online academic advising. Likert-style response options allowed students to rate their academic advising experience, with options from very useful to not useful, for each aspect of the online academic advising approach. Figure 4 displays student data on the usefulness of ten aspects of online academic advising. In general, all aspects were considered useful, but the data particularly highlighted the valuing of support that offered guidance through the enrolment process, connecting with staff, and developing a sense of belonging.

Figure 4 How online academic advising was useful for the participants



2. Qualitative Data

The survey also contained three qualitative questions encouraging students to clarify or expand upon their experiences and gathered over 400 comments. The thematic analysis of these students' responses (see Table 2) generated two themes, offering insight into what students valued about the online academic advising approach. The first theme was Students value transition support. This theme was composed of three subthemes relating to the types of support valued by the students: enrolment support, access to information and support in making connections. A further theme, Students value navigability, was apparent from the qualitative student responses and capture responses related to the students valuing ease of navigability and user-friendliness when accessing online academic advising.

Table 2: Themes from qualitative analysis

Themes	Components
Students value transition support	Enrolment guidance
	Information
	Connectedness – relationships and student identity
Students value navigability	Ease of access in using the LMS facilitating the online academic advising approach User-friendliness

The findings show that students engage with online academic advising, with 78.4% saying yes, online academic advising was useful and it was most useful at the start of the semester in the Getting ready to enrol phase (88%) and declined over the remainder of the semester to Outcomes phase (61%). The quantitative and qualitative data present what participants perceived as the benefits of online academic advising and how useful it was. Participants indicated agreement with benefits, and top were planning study, connecting with staff and engaging with my study. Participants found online academic advising most useful for the enrolment process, for connecting with staff, feeling part of the university and for getting information they needed.

Discussion

1. Student experiences of engagement with online academic advising

Overall, the study offers insight into student engagement with online academic advising and indicates the approach offered support and was beneficial to the students. The data indicates students are most active before and at the beginning of the semester according to the use of the Getting ready to enrol section, readiness and orientation phase. Student activity did reduce as the semester progressed, which may be attributed to students developing confidence, and connecting with peers and teachers, thus, reducing the use of online academic advising as they developed their sense of purpose, developing self-efficacy and feeling they belong as they learn and enjoy their studies indicating achievement

towards senses of success and confidence as required according to Jones et al., (2019) and Pritchard et al., (2018).

Enrolment guidance: Both the quantitative and qualitative data indicated that students value enrolment guidance. Of the students surveyed, 83% agree/strongly agree online academic advising guided them through the enrolment process. It is critical that students commence study feeling in control and able to navigate the required activities of enrolment and orientation to prepare for being a functioning student and ready for success. Thangavelu et al. (2019) highlighted the value of an integrated service model of enrolment support, providing a positive experience for new students starting in a new environment. Students commencing study have questions and concerns about what program and courses to do. This concern has been recognised in the literature (Lawrence et al., 2019) and the online academic advising provides the support and can facilitate students enrolling successfully and confidently. This is suggested by the qualitative data such as student comments that the online academic advising supported students by, "*help(ing) to choose and decide the right courses to enrol in*", "*Assisting with enrolment*", "*Being guided through enrolment!*" and "*Help(ing) enrol and get(ing) everything ready for start of studies*." As one respondent commented, "*The most significant benefits to me was all the early advice and help getting enrolled and getting started with my studies because I have been out of study for many years and so was a bit unsure about what I should do*".

Relevant, timely information: Quality timely information is another theme revealed by the quantitative and qualitative data. Access to quality and timely information contributes to the ability of commencing students to make informed decisions and limit the anxiety they may experience when entering a new environment. Student experiences in enabling programs are improved by clear and easy-to- access information about the purpose and structure of their programs (McKay, et al., 2018). Students require access to information when they need it and at a time that is convenient and in a format they can use. Heagney & Benson (2017) highlighted that quality timely information supports and empowers students at the start of studies and at various stages. Thus, the information needs to be tailored to the recipient, and this was supported by the online academic advising phases which gave information at the relevant point in time and built confidence an agency

in the student. (McKay et al., 2018; Zepke, 2018). The survey responses noted student perceptions of the usefulness and benefits of the various learning experiences embedded in LMS used to facilitate the online academic advising approach. This point was reinforced by students' comments such as the online academic advising provided "*Me (the student) personally with information and support when I needed it.*" The qualitative data contains 65 comments about timely, quality and accessible information, these open comments corroborate the findings of online academic advising providing timely information "*It is user friendly and the information is presented in a positive and supportive tone*", "*it provided great information and guidance on the stages from enrolment to the end of the semester*" and "*All the important information in one place*".

Feeling connected: Connectedness is a third salient aspect for students commencing study (Hellmundt & Baker, 2017; Thomas, 2012), emphasized by both the quantitative and qualitative data. Students' feelings of connection validate they are in the 'right place. A sense of connectedness requires students to develop new relationships with staff and students. Interestingly the data findings have indicated a higher agreement level for connecting to relevant staff (78%) than opportunity to connect with other students (62%). However, this could be because it can be challenging to form asynchronously connections with a dispersed online peer group. Nevertheless, the survey responses noted that 75% agree or strongly agree that the online academic advising helped them feel part of the university, and 62% agreed the approach developed their student identity. The qualitative data supports and adds detail to the survey data through student comments such as, "*a great place when needed to connect with others and staff*", "*it helped to connect with teachers and other online students*", "*it was good to connect with other students and staff for asking questions*" "*it helped me connect to my peer and the uni support network*", "*it helps to share and gain ideas and knowledge.*" With students realising they are connected and confident, students feel empowered and can contribute and take ownership of their student agency and motivation (Stone, 2022). Finally, the open-ended nature of the qualitative questions allowed students to express ideas external to the survey questions. A second theme in the qualitative data was that students valued accessibility in the design and navigation of the LMS platform that facilitated the

online academic advising approach. Student comments were divided on this theme. Many students commented that they valued online academic advising because it was accessible and “*easy to navigate*.” Other students disagreed, commenting that the LMS “*can be confusing when navigating*” and suggesting to “*make site layout easier/simpler to navigate for people who are not familiar with computing*”. Online academic advising was the students’ first experience with university’s online systems and both types of comments, the positive and negative, highlight the value students place on the navigability of university systems. The theme of navigability offers a salient reminder when considering designing online academic advising for students who may be novices to university systems and online.

2. Applying a transition typology to evaluate online academic advising

Gale & Parker’s (2012) transition typology provided a lens to evaluate online academic advising.

Transition as induction: Transition as induction considers the student journey as an enculturation into the practices and culture of the university. Although students in enabling programs typically have a wealth of life experience, they often have limited experience with a higher educational institution and need an introduction and orientation to the culture, expectations and procedures. The online academic advising is aligned with this category of transition as an induction. The success of transition as induction is evidenced in the findings and the reflective comments “*online academic advising was helpful in giving advice and information and helping with understanding how Uni operates*.” It also provided the support in adjusting to university “*online academic advising was extremely helpful to me as I have never studied at University*” and “*online academic advising initially helped me to understand what I needed to do and helped me get ready to commence studying"*.

Transition as Development: Transition as development considers the students’ personal development and forming of a student identity. The individual recognises the changed environment they find themselves in and can form habits e.g., studying and interacting with people who will become their new circle of influence and support system. Meeting and interacting with staff and students online or in person are indicative of the new environment they find themselves in. The findings are

consistent with students forming a sense of connectedness and ability to navigate this new ecosystem. The success of transition as development is evidenced in the findings and reflective comments: "*This was particularly beneficial as an online mature-age student,*" and "*it gave me some reassurance and confidence getting started.*" "*I found it great to reflect on myself and study methods and it was helpful as it made me feel like I wasn't [alone] starting my university journey*."

Transition as Becoming: Transition as becoming considers the complex nature of change and learning. It includes agency and ownership of choices, actions and attitudes, recognising that transition is not a singular, linear path but multifaceted, iterative and rhizomatic. The success of transition as becoming is more challenging to address and evaluate. Online academic advising aims to support students both personally as individuals and collectively as a cohort. There are reflective comments that alluded to a change, such as "*developing a sense of resilience*" and "*Gaining a sense of support, and great to reflect on skills and readiness*". However, the study does not provide significant confirmation of Transition as becoming, as the data collection did not explore the personal aspirations of transition and change. This observation highlights the value of using typologies and frameworks that represent a developmental approach when critically examining student support initiatives.

Limitations

A key limitation is that the study examines an instance of an online academic advising for enabling students at a regional university. Student experiences of a differently designed approach in an alternate context may not provide similar findings. Also, as the participants chose to take part in the survey, in their own time and of their own volition, the data may be skewed towards students with strong opinions of the efficacy or failures of the advising approach. However, the findings of this study offer experiential insights that may be transferable to other contexts where an online academic advising may be considered due to a similar adult learner cohort in which the majority of students study online.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore adult learners' engagement in online academic advising to support their transition into their first semester of study in an enabling program. Transition is a complex and multifaceted concept, requiring consideration and critical examination from a range of perspectives, including student induction, development and becoming and the institution’s role in evaluating success. Transition needs to embrace adult learners, who are often non-traditional students and help them belong. The findings provide evidence engaging with online academic advising has benefits and is useful and empowers agentic, self-regulated learners. Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data has indicated that students valued the three broad areas of transition support: enrolment guidance, timely and accurate information and feeling connected. The qualitative data corroborated and added the need for online advising platforms to be easily navigated. Overlaying the study’s findings with a transition typology, which offered a range of perspectives for critical reflection, highlighted online academic advising was most effective in supporting transition conceptualised as induction into university expectations, cultures and systems, and transition conceptualised as developing as a student, including developing a sense of belonging and student identity. While the findings of this study of online academic advising are encouraging, further research needs to be conducted to explore the value of online academic advising in a range of contexts for students and higher education institutions.

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Bessie Harrison Lee's fight for Victorian Women's Suffrage in the late nineteenth century: Educating urban and rural women on the democratic process

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> *We ask for suffrage that we may stand side by side with our fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons, working with them ... for a noble political life for the country's wealth. Not for a man's place do we ask, but for the fullness of women's. (The Argus, 1891, p. 9)*

In the late nineteenth century, adult and public learning pedagogy were the key instruments utilised in the campaign to achieve Victorian Women's Suffrage. The democratic process of changing state government legislation on franchise demanded multiple pedagogical methods. Through the actions of Bessie Harrison Lee (1860-1950), this paper identifies the reaching out to urban and rural women by the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), where they engaged in a transformative exercise in consciousness-raising. This helped women visualise the possibilities of improving their lives through the democratic process. The WCTU taught Lee the value of female-centred political action. The WCTU and Lee's involvement successfully influenced the suffrage debate and contributed to the emerging

international women's culture (McLean & Baroud, 2020, p. 506). Part of this culture featured Australian women adopting the petition as a political instrument. The petition had already had a long history in Britain, used by groups with little political influence. Ian Fletcher's conception of the British Empire as "a set of relations, rather than the sum of their parts, as frameworks structuring political, economic and cultural exchanges between metropole and colonies" is useful in understanding how political ideas travelled to and were adapted in the Australian context (Fletcher, Levine & Mayall, 2012, p. xiv).

This paper argues that new ways of knowing were made possible by Lee, who, empowered by the evangelical faith (her cultural capital) spoke out confidently in public spaces such as town halls, outside public bars, and on the front doorsteps of women's homes in both cities and rural towns. These spaces were the places of learning, or as Bourdieu described, the field. Also, the meeting places of the WCTU, whether private lounge rooms or church halls, enabled women to support each other in the political process of debate, addressing community issues, and devising strategic plans to improve the lives of women.

Through critical discourse analysis of newspaper reports, WCTU's publication The White Ribbon, the Victorian Alliance publication Alliance Record, and Lee's autobiography, this paper identifies these learning spaces. It also explores the community of practice in WCTU meetings, doorknocking, pamphleteering and the physical act of collecting signatures for the 1891 'Victorian Monster Petition'. The language and actions used to enact democratic activity that involves women in ways of saying, doing, and being full citizens are unlocked; however, the WCTU was exclusionary of Indigenous and non-Anglo-Celtic ancestry. Therefore, their learning spaces were complicit in the Great Silence (Stanner, 1968).

***Keywords**: Woman's Christian Temperance Union, adult learning pedagogy, public pedagogy, Monster Petition, evangelicalism, social movements, Bourdieu*

Introduction and background to the research

Bessie Harrison Lee was born in Daylesford Victoria during the peak of the gold rush in 1860 (Lee, 1900, p. 4). Her mother tragically died of consumption and so, at the age of eight, her father took Lee to be cared for by an aunt and uncle in the inner-city suburb of Footscray. Initially, they smothered Lee with loving kindness, but as time passed, cracks in their family unit began to appear. Her observations show the depletion of her aunt and uncle's possessions because their money was increasingly being used to feed their drinking habit. Lee lamented: "Bit by bit the furniture went; the carpets and pictures were sold; and then they moved from their comfortable home to a cheaper suburb" (Lee, 1900, p. 9). Not only did Lee witness the diminution of home comforts, but also the damaging erratic and violent behaviour of her carers. Chillingly, Lee wrote "My aunt would one day treat me with a love inexpressible; the next my bruised and blackened body would give evidence that drink had the ascendency" (Lee, 1900, p. 13).

Upon hearing of the abusive treatment experienced by his daughter, Lee's father relocated her to the mining town of Enochs Point to be cared for by another aunt and uncle (Lee, 1900, p. 14). The town was characteristically a region of high alcohol consumption. Alcohol was a staple part of a miner's diet not only because drinking water was often contaminated, but as the alluvial gold diminished, the miners experienced heightened disappointment, frustration, and loneliness (Pilkington, 1996). It was in the atmosphere of this harsh mining culture where diggers found solace in the non-hierarchical evangelical faith, a movement in the protestant churches that Lee was motivated by. A key characteristic of this movement was activism, and this, Lee believed, "gave her the confidence and licence to speak out against injustice" (Lee, 1900, p. 21; see also Piggin, 1996). At the age of nineteen, Lee married a railway worker and moved to Melbourne where she was introduced to the teachings of the WCTU.

The WCTU was initially founded in America by a group of women who believed alcohol consumption was the sole reason for the breakdown of families. Initially, the organisation had a singular goal, but with new leadership, the policy of 'do everything' emanated (Willard, 1892). The WCTU's popularity was such that it had organisations throughout the world, including Australia; it was during this time that Lee joined

the Footscray branch. The WCTU transformed into a transnational community where the aims and values of the organisation went beyond national boundaries. It promoted a temperance lifestyle that included abstaining from alcohol through a physical act that resembled a sacred ritual, the signing of a pledge. Other objectives of the WCTU were achieving women's suffrage, raising the legal age of consent, missionary work, the establishment of kindergartens, and lobbying to reduce the number of publican licences (called 'local option' campaigns).

The education of women by the WCTU took place beyond formal schooling, in places of learning such as church halls, in the open, or on the doorsteps of homes, where women would encourage the signing of the 1891 Monster Petition (O'Malley, Sandlin & Burdick, 2020). Lee emerged as the heroic figure advocating for the marginalised – women who were dependent on men for financial security, safety, and social status. As a leader in the WCTU, she performed what O'Malley describes as "educative interruptions of public space, on popular yet disqualified knowledge, and on communal engagement that organises around shared dissent" (O'Malley et al., 2020, p. 8). Public pedagogy involved the ideological transfer of a different way of being, evident in Lee's ability through the WCTU's organisational network to encourage women's participation in petitioning.

Literature Review

Studying Lee's leadership in the WCTU allows new pathways through which to interpret the first-wave women's movement in its multiple forms of education and organising, and their influence on social change to achieve the vote. Despite Lee's contributions to contemporary debates and leadership in social reform, scholars have not made Lee a central focus of sustained study. Interpreting the life of Lee requires reference to diverse bodies of literature – on evangelicalism, temperance, suffrage, colonial and women's history – indicative of the complex nature of her achievements. This paper draws on current Australian, American, British, New Zealand, and Canadian debates over female sexual autonomy and first-wave feminists (Hewitt, 2010; Morgan, 2000; Bedford, 2017; Pickles, 2010, 2002).

Within the interdisciplinary field of academic study, 1960s scholars in women's studies, which emerged in the late 1960s, became interested

in the WCTU and other women's organisations and their transnational relationships. Janice Brownfoot concluded: "visiting missionaries working for the Temperance cause inspired many women to form branches of the WCTU" (Brownfoot, 1968, p. 24). The first phase of research published on the First Wave Women's Movement primarily focused on women's suffrage and highlighted the WCTU's contributions to political lobbying and educating the electorate. Drawing on Audrey Oldfield's detailed descriptions of the suffrage debate in Australia, this paper, by focusing on Lee specifically, adds new dimensions to Oldfield's overall narrative. She identified that Australian suffrage organisations were supported or initiated by the WCTU, its members often from non-conformist churches. Also, Oldfield discovered that whilst the woman suffrage movement launched itself in urban Australia, the rural branches were important in "spreading their tentacles out beyond country towns" (Oldfield, 1992, p. 183).

This paper also contributes to the dialogue Patricia Grimshaw initiated in the 1980s by showing that Lee presented serious challenges to contemporary laws with her support of reforms to education and legal and political parity with men (Grimshaw, 1985). Grimshaw observed that Lee and her contemporaries "extended prevailing ideologies, which stressed women's superior moral and spiritual role within the family, to support the idea of women's role in the larger family, the State" (Grimshaw, 1985, p. 143). Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Ann McGrath and Marian Quartly in the landmark study 'Creating a Nation' identified Lee as one of four notable colonists who took public stances on issues of social justice in colonial society (Grimshaw, Lake, McGrath & Quartly, 1994). Lee was seen as significant because she distinguished structural disadvantages underlying individuals' troubles, be it workers or, in Lee's case, members of a particular sex.

Ian Tyrrell's comprehensive scholarly study first described the WCTU from an international perspective. He identified the evangelical movement and holiness doctrines as foundational influences on WCTU policies and actions, which also profoundly influenced Lee (Tyrrell, 1991). Religious discourses, as Tyrrell identified, were never passively received within religious institutions or in the wider culture; instead, they were constantly reinterpreted by women. Despite the 'religious turn' in gender and cultural history, historians of religion have by contrast still produced less sustained research on women and gender.

Recent scholarship has identified that some of the liveliest supporters of women's suffrage came from evangelical communities. Jacqueline deVries' research highlighted how religious belief could and did encourage different, and even oppositional ways of thinking. This led to a questioning of separate spheres as formulated in terms of 'public' and 'private' (deVries, 2019). Australia's continuous evangelical tradition places Lee at the centre of its sustained development (Piggin, 2007). Professor Stuart Piggin linked the growth of evangelicalism taking place in rural Victoria to understanding the environment Lee was exposed to whilst living in Enochs Point. Evangelical women's ability to make sense of human extremity, the strong communities forged in this movement, and the 'salvation for all' ideal contributed to Lee's skills in political activism (Piggin, 2007).

Professor Clare Wright's research narrates the victory of suffrage for women in Australia and highlights the many public methods of protest utilised (Wright, 2018). In this work, Wright details a political world, local and national, of which Lee was an active part. James Keating furthers the research suggesting how suffragists in Australia and New Zealand connected with their counterparts in the United States and Britain over their shared goal and worked to position themselves within the internationalist struggle for women's enfranchisement (Keating, 2020). Little attention has been given to the significance of the day-to-day struggle for suffrage in the lives of ordinary members, as well as their role in the campaign. Keating's research has remedied this void and helped position Lee as integral to mobilising these urban and rural members.

Illuminating the learning that takes place in non-traditional environments, Michael O'Malley and colleagues' work identifies the problematic processes of dominant discourses, such as patriarchy. This provides the framework to view Lee's public speaking as 'developing counter discursive strategies' (O'Malley, Sandlin & Burdick, 2020, p. 5.) Paulo Freire's pedagogical frame also informs a study of Lee's activism. The spirit of his comment "We learn and teach democracy by making democracy" married perfectly with Lee and the WCTU's aim to equip women with the knowledge and practical skills of why and how laws could be changed (Melero, 2019).

Methodology

For this paper, a critical discourse analysis was employed that focused on the language used by Lee, the newspapers, and the WCTU, so that "deeper explorations of how language works could be obtained" (Gee, 2014, p.1). Studying the language of Lee's speeches conducted outside public bars, inside church halls, or at WCTU meetings invites insight into the language and actions Lee utilised in educating women and widening the definition of citizenship. Lee's role in cultivating women's understanding of the words and actions of democracy is shown by her organisation of petitions, debates, and educating women on the parliamentary process. This helped women identify with wanting change and developing their awareness that change was possible, as well as that their political aspirations required strengthening and mobilising.

The aim and purpose of this research is to identify Lee as an educator, a practitioner of public pedagogy, and the learning outcomes of adult education in public places. It provides insights into the significance of the learning relationships that helped women mobilise and produce the 30,000 signatures over a three-month time span that were needed to communicate to the Victorian Parliament women's concerns and demands for franchise in 1891.

Collection of information

The examination of the archives of WCTU of Victoria (1887-1900) at the State Library of Victoria and the University of Melbourne has fashioned and framed this paper's investigation. These archives contain organisational records, from individual meeting minutes to national and international convention programs and minutes.

At first, the WCTU had no journal of its own, but women were granted the use of a page in the Alliance Record, the official newspaper of the Victorian Temperance Alliance (also known as Victorian Alliance, the male temperance organisation). The Victorian Alliance provided the voice of the WCTU in Victoria through the publication of the Alliance Record from 1881 to October 1887 as a monthly publication, then bi-weekly until July 1892, when it returned to a monthly schedule. Offering eloquent editorials written by Lee and a wide range of temperance news items, the WCTU page assisted the rapid growth of the Union in its

early years; membership increased from some six hundred at first to about four thousand by 1892. The network structure of the temperance groups contributed to the large number of signatures collected in only a few weeks for the Monster Petition of 1891 for women's suffrage. The major contributor was the WCTU, supported by the Victorian Alliance and their use of media with the Alliance Record. The Alliance Record therefore was a valuable tool for providing WCTU members and other readers with the latest information about WCTU activities. I will use these archives to assess pedagogical methods surrounding the fight for female suffrage.

The commencement of the official WCTU publication White Ribbon Signal in November 1887, which Lee had helped to coordinate, was a distinctive move asserting both the importance of women's issues and understanding the need for a woman's voice. This was historically important for Victorian women as it heralded a paradigm shift in their participation in political debate. The archive, held at the University of Melbourne, covers publications from 1887 to 1999. Reading this archive has revealed that the pages strengthened women's collective identity and established common grounds for action. Studying the archives of the WCTU and Lee's dynamic contributions to the work show the organisation's political agenda.

Theoretical framework and conceptual analysis

There was great complexity in Lee's motivation to achieve a democratic voice for Victorian women and it was through adult and public pedagogical methods that her actions were framed. McLean's work on public pedagogy is a useful comparative scaffold (McLean, 2020, p. 504). It was Lee's position in the margins, her working-class background, early exposure to what alcohol dependency could destroy, and her talent for oratory that helped her build relationships with other women to the point of obtaining signatures for political change. Public education was employed as a tool for social and political reform by encouraging her audience to question what it meant to be a woman. Helping women imagine their role in public policies on family life was transformative for many, who initially could not envisage being part of the political process (McLean, 2020, p. 504).

Bourdieu's theories can illuminate how the WCTU women and Lee

organized, practised, and interacted with each other. Lee interacted socially by penetrating different learning spaces while educating her audience on doxa, the social field rules of democracy. Lee's persona as an evangelical Christian was a powerful resource to promote progressive thoughts and ideas (Bourdieu, 1984).

Findings

The early leadership of Lee and the WCTU provided multiple learning opportunities for Victorian rural and urban women. Although women first received the vote in the State of Victoria by default in 1863 through a piece of faulty legislation drafting, in 1865 the lower house (the Legislative Assembly) changed the clause to restrict the vote for parliamentary elections strictly to male ratepayers (Victorian Parliament, 2014). A contentious issue for the women's suffrage movement across all states of Australia was whether advocates for women's suffrage should argue for the vote on the same conditions as men, or whether they should first seek abolition of the property vote ('Female suffrage', 1891).

The fight for women's suffrage became a natural extension of Lee's evangelical and temperance sensibilities. Lee's involvement with the practicalities of the 1891 Victorian Monster Petition demonstrated how she navigated a woman's place in the political landscape. On becoming the Footscray Branch President of the WCTU, Lee helped women to "not ask for this [the vote] except upon the same terms, and for the same reasons that it has been granted to men" (McLean, 1891, p. 2).

Using Bourdieu's theory of practice, the habitus, values, and dispositions placed on late nineteenth-century women are questioned. Confidence in Lee's leadership was gained by her insistence that she was "a girl who without education, money, influence, position or friends [could], by taking Christ's hands, and trusting her all to Him, rise to any eminence" (Lee, 1900, p. 153). The field – the hierarchical structure – was questioned by Lee, and women's involvement in the WCTU widened their life's chances. Referring to Bourdieu, Lee's social and cultural capital obtained more leverage with her leadership in the WCTU (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 2). Also, Bourdieu emphasised a reflective practice of learning made evident by Lee's ability to establish insightful conclusions about her own life's challenges and achievements (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 2).

Petition

Lee's involvement and successful influence over the suffrage debate was influenced by and further contributed to an emerging international women's culture. Part of this culture made frequent references in the media to parliamentary petitions. Within this world culture of using the petition as an effective instrument of women's political expression, Australian women's political activity, in which Lee became a leader, involved vigorous campaigning and petitioning in support of women's suffrage. These petitions were collected in all states and presented to the various parliaments.

In 1891 the media reported that "Mrs Harrison Lee and the Blue Ribboners [an alternative name for WCTU members] interviewed Premier James Munro with a request that he bring in a bill to extend the franchise to the females" ('The extension of the franchise to women', 1891). Premier Munro assessed their ardour and pointed out the prosaic difficulties in the way of granting womanhood suffrage ('The woman's suffrage question', 1891). Munro suggested that women who were ratepayers might have their names inserted on the Roll of Parliament electors. Such a change, he argued, would practically make very little difference and it would fall very short of the demands put forward by the deputation. Lee and the women exhibited a "fine scorn for any less proposal" ('The woman's suffrage question', 1891, p. 4-5). In response to Premier Munro's advice that women needed to show a united and representative front, or as one report described it, "an army of Amazons" ('An army of Amazons', 1891, p. 2) to the suffrage issue, Lee organised a conference. This conference was between the Victorian Alliance (the male temperance organisation) and the WCTU, regarding the "best means to promote women's suffrage" ('Women's suffrage and marriage', 1891, p. 5).

Freire's problem-solving pedagogy was enacted here. A resolution was adopted by the WCTU that "a parliamentary subcommittee should be formed in connection with each branch, and as there are 88 branches in the colony which will receive instructions from headquarters it is evident that considerable influence will be exerted" ('Adult suffrage', 1891, p. 5). The WCTU also approached the two suffrage societies, the Victorian Women's Suffrage Society (VWSS), and the AWSS. Turning to public pedagogy theories, Lee demonstrated success in "organising women

and men around shared dissent from marginalisation and constructs alliances across difference" (O'Malley, Sandlin & Burdick, 2020, p. 8). Lee also performed the role of "interrupter intending to enact political and cultural questions through the very acts of public interaction and human togetherness" (O'Malley, Sandlin & Burdick, 2020, p. 9).

Campaign to mobilise women

Lee's leadership changed the Women's Suffrage movement so that the local environment became the focal point of woman suffrage activism, its battleground. She did this by working diligently through the Monster Petition to reach an audience that in the 1880s and 1890s was almost wholly outside the metropolitan suffrage organisations. The individual sheets of paper were pasted on cotton or linen fabric backing, which was then glued together and rolled onto a cardboard spindle. The VWSS, AWSS, and the WCTU organised hundreds of women to engage in a united door-knocking campaign (Third Annual Report and Methods of Work done by the Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Victoria, 1890). Firstly, the WCTU divided the city into districts, and each of these was visited by different members of the union ('Adult Suffrage', 1895). Signatures were not only collected in the metropolis but across Victorian rural and regional areas, particularly where towns were linked by railway lines. Nearly 30,000 signatures were recorded on sheets of paper, an average of 5,000 signatures a week (over 700 a day). According to the census data for the same year, these signatures comprised about ten per cent of the adult female population of the colony (Victorian Parliament, 1891). This was a 260-metre-long petition to the Victorian Parliament, which stated that "women should vote on equal terms with men, a government of the people, by the people and for the people. Adult persons should have a voice in making the laws which they are required to obey" (The Women's Petition, 1891). Lee was a leader, as Freire articulated, in the struggle to be more "fully human" (Freire, 1978, p. 21).

Lee's political mobilising skills were evidenced in the physical presentation of the Monster Petition to the Parliament of Victoria on November 18, 1891; it had the support of Premier James Munro, whose wife Jane Munro was one of the key signatories (Victorian Parliament, 1891). Mrs. Munro was often a special guest on key social occasions with Mrs T. Ferguson, Mr R. Baker MLA, Mrs. Hunt, and Mr. Vale (leader

of Victorian Alliance) (Alliance Record, 8 August 1891). Other notable signatures that adorned the top of the petition were Margaret McLean, head of the WCTU; Margaret Higinbotham, wife of George Higinbotham (a controversial politician and lawyer), and Bessie Harrison Lee.

To support the second reading of the women's suffrage bill, which gave women suffrage and abolished plural voting, the 30,000 signatures were presented on 29 September 1891 (Victorian Parliamentary Debates, 1891, p.1613). Support by the male temperance organisation the Victorian Alliance, of which the Premier was a key member, was voiced in their paper, the Alliance Record: "is it not much nicer to see a brother standing up for his sister's rights, and gallantly giving them to her, than to be calmly monopolising all the privileges..." ('Woman's Petition', 1891, p. 5). The Victorian Premier James Munro was strongly attacked by his opponents for risking the abolition of plural voting by linking it to woman suffrage. By doing so, although the two provisions were passed 39-13 in the Legislative Assembly, Munro lost votes for women before the bill went to the Legislative Council, the upper house. The women were bitterly disappointed that this should happen after all their hard work.

Political activity

Whilst not successful in achieving women's suffrage, it was not until the WCTU and the suffrage societies collected these signatures for the petition that women's enfranchisement became a frequently debated question. A suburb of Melbourne, St Kilda, had only been colonised for thirty-six years and proclaimed a city for one year when two hundred and eleven local women added their names to the Monster Petition and demanded that the suffrage be extended to them (Eidelson, 2001, p. 7). The St Kilda Advertiser demonstrated that a significant volume of women's suffrage activities took place in St Kilda from the 1890s until the early twentieth century. Many local meetings and debates discussing the issue of women's suffrage were arranged by Lee under the auspices of the WCTU, such was the effectiveness of her leadership at the local level. Lee utilised a coterie of rhetorical tactics to communicate her message to a range of audiences (McLean & Baroud, 2020, p. 505). During a rally in St Kilda's Alma Road, the Prahran Telegraph report highlighted Lee's ability to "design her language in terms of how she would like her recipient(s) to be, think, feel and behave" (Gee, 2014, p.

21). It wrote:

> *Mrs Harrison Lee was as pleasantly piquant and as softly sarcastic as ever. She alluded to the triumphs of the women's cause in New Zealand and South Australia and declared that Victoria was not leading just now and would have to be quick to catch up with the sister colonies ('Woman suffrage: a rally at St Kilda', 1891, p. 3).*

Lee's problem-posing involved a "constant unveiling of reality" in her assessment of Victoria's position to other states (Freire, 1978, p. 99). The decentralised nature of Lee's public pedagogical methods "take[s] the form of performative and improvisational" (O'Malley, Sandlin & Burdick, 2020, p. 6). For example, Lee communicated "the discovery by women of America that legislation was for and by the people, and how all the wise men, assisted by the Philadelphia lawyer, discovered that women were not even 'people'"; in response to Lee's assessment, "ripples of laughter followed" from her audience ('Woman suffrage: a rally at St Kilda', 1891, p. 3). Lee's sarcastic tone was used as an instrument of critical discovery that both they and the speaker were victims of degrading laws. For example, Lee's referenced that "in Victoria, it was found that all persons were entitled to vote except 'criminals', lunatics, idiots and women", which mirrors Freire's practice of helping the audience "recognise the necessity to fight for it [suffrage]" (Freire, 1978, p. 19). Her ridicule of American democracy coupled with the revelation that Victorian women "were not even people" evidenced Lee's sharp rhetorical ability to highlight that the oppression of women's voices was a form of dehumanisation (Freire, 1978, p. 22).

Lee's rallying visits and unrelenting work to remote rural towns were also evidenced in, for example, Castlemaine, and other informal sites of learning:

> *Our tract distributors are doing good work, and the WCTU literature is being distributed to nearly every home in our town. Our alliance superintendent [Lee] is indefatigable in getting subscribers for the paper, five dozen copies being disposed of every fortnight. ('White Ribbon News', 1891)*

During her public visits, Lee also excited her audience with her news on membership levels overseas, which made WCTU members feel part

of a vibrant and growing international community – a striking message to keep and attract members, and an instrument of public pedagogy. For example, while addressing an audience in Moe she comforted her audience with the reassurance of numerical strength and transnational support: “Mrs Lee said the union that she represented numbered in America 300,000, England 170,000; in Victoria 30 branches with 1,000” (‘Mrs Harrison Lee in Moe’, 1889, p. 2).

Speeches

The speeches made by Lee demonstrate her powerful use of language and public performance. For example, her lecture tour of 1894 is illustrative of her talents on several levels. She was a skilled social observer, and she was able to read her crowd and develop a framework for debate. One reported speech that she performed in Wagga Wagga in 1894, for example, provides a vignette of her social commentary and arguments as to why suffrage should be granted to women. Lee worked systematically through the arguments against women's suffrage, a clever and tactical strategy. Her speech briefly documented her personal journey from anti-suffrage to a suffrage campaigner, a map through which others with similar values could navigate. Initially “believing the agitation was fostered only by strong minded, objectionable females pictured by Punch”, Lee quickly followed this claim with: “Further experience had, however, shown her that the movement was taking part, with the best women in both England and America, who desired to have some voice in the making of the Laws which govern society” (‘Women Suffrage, Address by Mrs Harrison Lee’, 1894, p. 4). A succinct message was communicated by Lee: the vote should be granted first and foremost in terms of citizenship; Australian women needed to take part in the creation of laws that govern society. Identifying to her audience England and America as exemplary participants in this campaign was a powerful approach, reminding listeners of the possibilities that they, too, could be part of this civilising process in the making. This theme was apparent in many of her public addresses during this tour, where the vote, Lee highlighted, should be awarded to women because “it was right and just and [...] it would advantage the whole community”, she contended; “this would follow woman suffrage” (‘Mrs Harrison Lee Franchise for Women’, 1893, p. 5).

Portrait

The uniting of Lee's skills within the specific historical context of the suffrage debate shaped and altered traditional symbols and images, reinvesting them with further content and renewed vigour. Such a process of change occurred in the image of the 'true Christian woman', where the promotion of Lee's image infused traditional ideals with new possibilities of content and meaning. Lee's strategy was what Gee would define as actively trying to entice her audience to be who or what she wanted them to be. In other words, she positioned her followers to take on a new identity that may lead to new or different beliefs, opportunities or actions (Gee, 2014, p. 121). From 1891 until 1908, Lee dedicated all her waking hours to the WCTU and Victorian Alliance, not only in Victoria but also throughout the world. Her fame increased to the point that the Victorian Alliance made profits by selling her photos, where power for change was inherent in the symbols and images featured in her photos. By their very nature, photos are capable of revealing new depths of meaning and lend themselves to nuances of interpretation. With Lee's photograph plastered on thousands of pamphlets, she became recognisable in the public arena. Pamphlets contained her words: "I am a woman, and knowing now the feelings of a very large number of our women, I plead on their behalf for women's suffrage" (Lee, 1906, p. 24).

Lee's photographs, as representative of Australian womanhood, served as an incongruous symbol alongside the public definition of citizenship. The photograph of Lee in typical Victorian fashion boldly communicated that women intended to move from the private, domestic sphere into the public world and not be lumped together with "other criminals, lunatics and idiots" who had no legal status. In including this statement, she made clever reference to Frances Power Cobbe's influential essay outlining the logic of British women's rights to parliamentary franchise. Lee envisioned a limitless space for women's abilities and talents. While not iconoclastic (she had not abandoned or destroyed the ideal of 'true womanhood'), she sought to broaden and re-vision its possibilities:

> *We ask for suffrage that we may stand side by side with our fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons, working with them in purity and truth for a noble political life for the country's wealth. Not for a man's place do we ask, but for the fullness of women's ('The Woman's Suffrage Question', 1891, p. 9)*

In other words, Lee's struggles were what Freire described as "creating a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity" (Freire, 1978, p. 21).

Discourse

Women of the WCTU did not cast off their faith, but instead were led to re-examine it and redirect it into radical work. Lee contended that "God made man and woman equal – see Genesis, Ch. 1, verses 27-28 - and gave those [women] equal powers to rule the earth. The stronger half had, therefore, unjustly defrauded the weaker, and should make restitution" ('The woman's suffrage question', 1891, p. 9). Freire argued that "the oppressed were not unaware that they were downtrodden. Their perception of themselves as oppressed was impaired by their submersion in the reality of oppression" (Freire, 1978, p. 19). Lee questioned existing interpretations of the Bible while continuing to hold a literal reading of Scripture in the evangelical sense. She announced that the Bible supported that "women take part in the making of the laws which govern the whole people" (South Australian Chronicle, 1894, p. 24). Freire identified that people "will not gain liberation by chance, but through the praxis of their quest for it, through their recognition to fight for it" (Freire, 1978, p.19). Lee acknowledged that "Ten years ago it would have been difficult to speak about women in the church; there were many men who knew only one text, 'let you women keep silence in the church'" (Women's Franchise League, 21 April 1900).

Through her story telling ability, she was able to cite examples from the Bible such as Anna, the woman of Samaria, and Mary Magdalene to normalise women's leadership. She also did this through her observable presence and leadership. In Ballarat for example, The Western Mail reported that "Mrs Harrison Lee conducted divine service at the Baptist Church and in the evening at Trinity Congregational Church on franchise and temperance" ('Arrival of Mrs Harrison Lee', 1900, p. 39).

Discussion

The life experience of Lee gave her the qualifications to speak out against injustices and promote suffrage for women. Growing up in Daylesford, Footscray and then Enochs Point, Lee witnessed people suffering from disappointment, loneliness, poverty, and alcoholism. As a committed evangelical Christian, Lee became committed to activism. Her marriage and subsequent move to Footscray and exposure to the WCTU further ignited her desire to work for a more just society. Through public and adult education, she helped her audience understand why they were learning the ways of politics and how the franchise would be transformative. Immediate relevance to women and children's economic and physical safety was emphasised in Lee's public speeches and writings. Through Lee's leadership, she was able to mobilise women and supporters of the suffrage cause through the network and support of the WCTU, which had a long history of community-based activism. The directive by the leader of the American WCTU to "do everything" also ignited the response to change laws. The transnational nature of the organisation fuelled Lee's confidence that she was working in a united front with other sisters. However, Lee's adult education was not inclusive and did not communicate the suffrage message to Australia's Indigenous or non-Anglo-Celtic women.

Drawing on Canadian women's experiences, Jill Vickers argued that pedagogical theorists should chart women's different modes of 'doing politics', noting especially women's participation in community-based groups and organisations where an 'amateur tradition' of politics flourished. She argued that:

> *For the first generation of women's citizens, it was the collective power of feminist consciousness-raising through mass organisations such as the WCTU, that constituted the important forms of political power, for it was broad social reform, not careers for aspiring women politicians, that were their primary goal (Vickers, 1989, p. 21).*

Lee's experience endorses Vickers' observation, which highlights her consciousness-raising; but it also went beyond the boundaries that Vickers suggests, to informal places such as homes, church halls, the outdoors, or formal environments such as audiences with politicians or

meetings with other suffrage groups.

Conclusion

Adult and public pedagogy were integral to Lee's campaign to achieve suffrage for Victorian women in 1891 (Sandlin, Schulz & Burdick, 2010, p. 130). The place of education was the front veranda of homes, town halls or WCTU meetings and conferences. It was these places where Lee had to convince her audience of the importance of democratic participation to properly fulfil their role as women and citizens. It was in this environment that she pontificated that women and children would be protected and families would prosper. Lee's upbringing and influence of the wave of evangelical faith gave her the confidence and licence to speak publicly to diverse audiences. Lee's materials of education were tracts, pamphlets, newspaper reports, speeches, and her photos. Recent scholarship on adult and public pedagogy has provided significant new ways to interrogate Lee and nineteenth-century women's activism.

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Adult, community education in acting and performance as personal development: "I can look people in the eye now!"

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Creative arts and performance courses at the community level for mature age individuals. Theatre and drama as education and as therapy. This article charts and reflects on several ACE arts-based courses and community theatre productions that have changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the professional experiences of the teacher. Change for individuals via education occurs intentionally and unintentionally and needs to be documented, with some examples presented here. If personal change and development were the intention of the courses described here, then participants did have the opportunity to integrate their self-discoveries into their real lives, potentially leading to transformation. The teacher being aware of, and skilled in, emotional regulation strategies can benefit students and teachers in all forms of learning, specifically adult community education. The students in the course described in this article have transformed from anxious, self-doubting individuals into empowered, self-confident people who bravely create their own acting techniques.

***Keywords**: performance, acting, personal development, theatre, community, social contexts, social isolation*

Introduction

This article outlines the reflections and research about the experiences of a teacher and students of acting and performance courses, workshops and performances produced by Hobo Playhouse in Victoria, Australia. Hobo Playhouse presents small-scale plays on social realism themes such as homelessness, mental health, and social isolation, and in recent years has facilitated adult education courses and workshops for people wanting to learn acting skills. Courses have included *Let's Act - An Introduction to Method Acting, Scene Study; Creating a Character, Improvs and Imagination, Acting for Beginners I, Acting for Beginners II* plus one-day and online workshops on *Introduction to Method Acting; Impulse Acting*; and *Personalisation*. All the short courses run for eight weeks, and each session runs for three hours with a maximum of eight adult participant places. Hobo Playhouse plan their performances and courses with a philosophical connection to small group learning that creates opportunities for people who experience social isolation in regional and rural communities to participate in learning activities of their choosing that are safe, ‘intimate’ and playful (Millis, 2014).

Hobo Playhouse courses, workshops and productions are conducted in community-owned and managed venues, Maldon Neighbourhood Centre, Castlemaine Community House, Creswick Community Theatre, Kyneton Bluestone Theatre and Emerald Community Theatre. These venues and their calendars of events promote adult learning, through community access to a range of programs aimed at reducing social isolation in rural, and regional communities via participation in community activities. The acting and performance courses focus on specific philosophies and theories, including the principles of Stanislavski (Pia, 2006) and Strasberg (The Lee Strasberg Theatre & Film Institute, 2024) and Hagen (Hagen, 1991); they include a diversity of individual and small group activities that expand the five human senses, imagination, concentration, communication, and emotional recall.

The teacher initiated the acting and performance courses and workshops in Maldon to 'give something back' to the acting and performance industry which he affirms changed his life after completing a method acting course in Sydney in the 1980s. He credits the course for enhancing his self-confidence and self-esteem, which flowed from the stage into his daily life. It is the source of this creative and personal development, achieved through acting and performance, that he wanted to share with others.

Hobo Playhouse Acting courses commenced in 2017 when there was a significant gap in community theatre and the availability of actor training in Central Victoria. During the COVID-19 lockdowns, the teacher worked online with past students and local actors, some of whom were reaching out for emotional support. The small groups worked on scenes, monologues, and a short comedy during 2020 and then post-pandemic, Hobo Playhouse facilitated a course called *Improvs and Imagination* aimed at assisting community members with their health and wellbeing. There was no performance outcome at the end of this eight-week course; instead, students were immersed in a process that involved drama games, theatre exercises, music, and storytelling as a means of rekindling their creativity, generating self-confidence, and facilitating social inclusion in a safe space.

The acting and performance courses are primarily aimed at individuals and experienced actors aged 18 years and over to incorporate small-group learning (Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 2014) that supplement discussions, presentations, and other course formats. This allows adults to work together in groups of 3-6 members, helping each other to think critically, master new concepts, and then reflect and apply them to real-world situations. Students are then motivated toward a common goal and work together to support each other's learning. Small-group learning is different from working in teams, which typically involves longer periods of time, consistency of group membership, and more interdependence in completing the task (Johnson, Johnson & Amith, 2014).

Adult learning research has revealed that small-group learning (when compared to competitive and individualistic learning) improves academic achievement, relationships with classmates and teachers, and promotes psychological well-being (Millis, 2014; Johnson, Johnson

& Smith, 2014). The **social** benefits of small group learning can be profound with individuals developing social and leadership skills, drawing out reluctant speakers, and giving them the opportunity to learn to 'manage' people who dominate conversations, and social situations. Students who process information and work together on problem-solving in groups are also more committed to staying in the course and are more likely to integrate across different ethnic, cultural, language, class, ability, and gender groups (John, Johnston & Smith, 2014).

The **psychological or emotional** benefits include assisting socially isolated people, who normally would not participate in front of a larger group or audience. The small group learning promotes self-esteem as compared to competitive or individualistic learning.

The **academic or professional** benefits, when compared to individualistic learning, result in better problem-solving skills and a deeper understanding of the material at hand (Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 2014). Regardless of the content of a course, students learn more and retain material longer from small group learning than when the same content is presented using more institutional types of instructional practices, with attendance, participation, efficiency, and persistence improving across the life of the course, no matter how long it goes for (Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 2014).

In 2022, the teacher commenced a Master of Creative Arts Therapy degree majoring in Drama Therapy and immediately connected this form of psychotherapy with his own teaching and group facilitating methods (The British Association of Dramatherapy, 2020a). He discovered his community education courses for actors had numerous similarities with drama therapy, both utilised drama and theatre techniques, worked with small groups and could facilitate personal development (The British Association of Dramatherapy, 2020b). This was evidenced in Hobo Playhouse's acting and performance courses, where the primary goal was to improve participants' acting ability, however, many participants were observed to significantly increase their self-confidence and self-esteem in the process.

The difference between drama education and drama therapy includes the intention of the facilitators, the structure of the programs, and whether the context is tilted towards education or health (Holmwood,

2014). While 'theatre and drama can be randomly therapeutic' on stage and in classrooms, drama therapy intends to fully effect constructive change and create the basis for personal healing; it is not specifically concerned about participants' acting abilities (Andersen-Warren & Grainger, 2000; Holmwood, 2014; Langley, 2006, p.1). Connecting both adult community education (ACE) and drama therapy in a community context is a future aim of these courses.

History of social and community theatre as ACE

An exploration of the research literature around theatre, acting, performance and personal development indicates that adults who pursue acting, gain many new skills that improve their personal development (Author, 2022). Research indicates that no matter the ability of the actor, they all appear to develop some additional skills and ways of thinking (Langley, 2006; Moore et al., 2017; Ali et al., 2019). Performers have developed an increased sense of self-awareness, they have become happier within themselves, and they report their self-esteem has increased as well as their mental and physical health. Others reported they improved their time management skills, as there was a set time for each class and rehearsal, which also led to a performance (Langley, 2006; Moore et al., 2017; Ali et al., 2019).

It can be concluded that adults who join acting or theatre-based activities have some level of improvement in their interpersonal and communication skills, personal growth, and improvements were seen within participants' physical and mental health (Langley, 2006; Moore et al., 2017; Ali et al., 2019). Participants felt that they were part of a community when engaged in theatre groups, with like-minded people. Theatre group participants were shown to flourish when time had been taken to get to know them. Roles were allocated according to their abilities, and goals were set to explore skills that they can potentially learn from the character, or from interactions with other characters whilst in a particular role. Theatre groups allow participants to explore the roles they are accepting in their own lives, how they present themselves, and learn new skills to create a new and better version of themselves (Author, 2022).

Community theatre

Before any kind of Anglo European form of theatre in Australia, Indigenous clans and communities would participate in Corroboree; a sacred ceremony including dance, music, and costume which may take the form of a sacred ritual or an informal social gathering. Post the European invasion, the first documented theatrical performance occurred with convicts performing *The Recruiting Officer* in 1789, the performers were convicts and the audience was the guards (Evans, 2020).

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2011), theatre's most successful theatre years were not the 1940s, 1950s or the 1970s, theatre's most successful period was in the 2009–2010 financial year. The ABS found that 16.3% of Australians attended a theatrical performance in that year, meaning that around 3.5 million people went and saw a show (ABS, 2011). Localised and community-based theatre venues and organisations play a vital role, and for many, funding comes directly from their audiences and sales of merchandise, rather than the governments. A thriving theatre is one that maintains strong connections with its community, and local businesses such as caterers, printers, and wine merchants. They build a sense of comradeship, and provide opportunities for locals to perform, upskill and reduce social isolation (Evans, 2020). Even though the landscape may be evolving as we move into a new era of digital art and online productions, especially during the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, we can acknowledge the important relationship that exists between community, theatre, and identity.

Hobo Playhouse as community theatre and community education

Hobo Playhouse is one case study of community-based, social realism theatre in Central Victoria. Hobo Playhouse has produced and performed the following plays from 2012-2019, with the COVID-19 pandemic disrupting productions 2020-2022 with the company embarking on community education and individual NDIS-funded support work from 2021-2024. Successful social realism plays were a feature of the Hobo Playhouse productions from 2013 -2019 including *Bums* (2014) by Robert Shaffron, produced and performed in Castlemaine and Emerald, Victoria to sell out audiences which also

won several awards at the Dandenong Ranges One Act Play Festival. *Outsiders* (2015) featuring *Bums* and a young Slam Poet Sam Hasel was produced and performed in Castlemaine, Victoria, to sold-out audiences and was then performed at the Bluestone Church Arts Space, Footscray, Melbourne as part of Fringe West 2015 where it received great reviews and feedback.

Come Back for Light Refreshments after the Service (2016), a play by Julie Day about kinship carers was produced and performed in Castlemaine, Maldon and Belgrave, Victoria to sell out audiences. *Me and My Friend* (2016) a two-act version of the play by Gillian Plowman was produced and performed in Castlemaine, Maldon and Emerald, Victoria as part of Mental Health Week in Mount Alexander Shire in Central Victoria.

Encounters (2018) featured three plays, *Upwardly* by Mark Cleary, *Tuesdays are for Bill* by Paul Hannah and *A Poster of the Cosmos* by Lanford Wilson, produced and performed in Emerald, Victoria to enthusiastic audiences. *Red* (2019), a play by John Logan about Mark Rothko the New York artist, was produced and performed in Bendigo, Victoria. *The Carer* (2019), by Alan Hopgood about surviving a partner with dementia, was produced, and performed in Castlemaine, Creswick, Kyneton and Bendigo in Victoria.

Biting the Hand (2018/2019), a one-act play by Dr Anne Southhall, produced by Hobo Playhouse, was performed for La Trobe University in Bendigo, Victoria to teacher education conference participants. It generated excellent feedback and ongoing conversations and research about managing young people on the autism spectrum in schools (Rossini, 2018; La Trobe University, 2018).

This production will be re-launched in 2024 at Bendigo for a performance-based inquiry that aims to create a space for professional public re-negotiation of teaching practices and approaches through the lived experience of an adult and an adolescent who have experienced childhood trauma. Through theatre performance, it will create an interactive and immersive experience as a source of learning for mentor teachers and undergraduate students to interrogate their trauma-informed understandings and current practices (Southall, personal correspondence, 2023). Part of the inquiry will be to facilitate a drama therapy component for the actors and director, providing them with

strategies to deal with pre-show anxiety, secondary trauma, and post-performance depression (Emunah, 2020; Powell, 2024).

Research method

The evaluations of, and reflections on, the Hobo Playhouse courses, workshops and productions (2017-2021) aimed to explore the social, psychological, and emotional benefits for individuals, their personal development within specific social and small group learning contexts and acting and performance in the rural and regional community.

> *"The link between creativity and wellbeing has been suggested for generations, but not well understood. The Creativity and Wellbeing Hallmark Research Initiative is working across disciplines, to learn more about this link and to reveal how creativity can help us to live happier and healthier lives" (The University of Melbourne, 2021).*

Research methodology

Ethnography is a research methodology developed for the study of cultures and cultural sense-making, it is derived from anthropology and is linked to inductive research which has a focus on local interpretations, aimed at understanding an insider's perspective: habits, norms, practices, rituals, patterns of interaction, rituals. Ethnographic research methods can be designed from different epistemological approaches, for example, critical, interpretivist, postmodernist etc., and can include auto-ethnography or performance ethnography (Bryant, 2021; Sarantakos, 2013).

Angrosino (2005) makes two important methodological distinctions, an objectivist approach to ethnography/observation is related to positivist research and researchers claim that they can maintain objectivity and that they do not influence, or interfere with people or activities under observation. Observational objectivity is neither feasible nor desirable – the researcher is part of the production of knowledge. Regardless, we should acknowledge the Hawthorne Effect created by researchers when conducting observation (Bryant, 2021; Sarantakos, 2013).

Observation is a method of data collection in which researchers observe within a specific research field, it is sometimes referred to as

an unobtrusive method. Participant observation involves the observer being a member of the setting in which they are collecting data, there are quite a few variations of this definition, but observation is normally associated with an ethnographic methodology and can be used as part of other research designs. Ethnographic research seeks to locate, 'what is going on here?' Ethnographic research is better able to understand and capture the context within which people interact, firsthand experience with a setting allows researchers to be open to discovery and inductive, rather than guessing what the context is like. The research may see things that routinely escape the awareness of the participant using a different method, it provides a chance to learn things that people may be unwilling to discuss in an interview (Bryant, 2021; Sarantakos, 2013).

Ethical issues for ethnographic research are not dissimilar from other forms of qualitative research such as informed consent of all involved, guarantee of anonymity, and giving back to the research site. There are some additional issues such as committing ourselves as researchers to long-term relationships, trust is an especially important issue as we will see and hear things of a sensitive nature, as we may become a sounding board for the participants, Van Maanen (1988, p.30) describes the ethnographic researcher as "part spy, part voyeur, part fan, part member" (Bryant, 2021).

Research data

Data was collected through participant observations during courses, workshops and productions, unsolicited feedback via conversations, texts and/or emails and solicited feedback via emails on the research question; What was/is the greatest personal impact of participating in the courses, workshops, productions? Surveys were conducted following the Hobo Playhouse's acting courses in 2021, 2022 and 2023 and Maldon Neighbourhood Centre.

All courses were facilitated by Hobo Playhouse as private ventures with the company hiring local venues for classes and advertising for students in the local media (newspapers and local radio), social media, posters in shopfront windows and via word-of-mouth. Fees were paid by participants and profits generated by the courses paid for the venue, the tutor, catering and production expenses for the Showcase at the end of the year.

The recent development of the 2023 course was it being funded by the State Government under the auspices Learn Local at Maldon Neighbourhood Centre (MNC) which managed and administrated enrolments and funding for the course. This course has also been funded for 2024 terms one and two at MNC.

The 2021 acting course

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the Hobo Playhouse acting courses in 2020. A single term was held for six (n = 7) students in Creswick, Victoria, in 2021. At the end of the term, feedback was received from those students and compiled with comments from previous students who had attended Hobo Playhouse acting courses in Maldon and Castlemaine between 2016-2019. The feedback was from three students who stated they had gained self-confidence; two students stated that the teacher had provided a safe place and two students stated that the course made them feel happier. Students reported that they felt braver, had started using feelings as tools rather than barriers, had more self-belief and made new friends. Individual students stated the course had a significant impact on their acting career and mental health and was a great outlet to channel emotions for a useful purpose and pulled them out of their comfort zone.

2022 acting course

The 2022 course was offered in Maldon, Victoria, without any funding. It started with 10 students with two people withdrawing for personal reasons. Four (n = 4) of eight remaining students responded to a survey at the end of the course. From this survey we learned that four participants had gained self-confidence, three stated that the course had improved their memory, three stated they had improved self-esteem, four stated the class size (8) was ideal and four stated the 3-hour weekly sessions were just right.

2023 acting course

This course was offered in Maldon, Victoria and was funded by the Adult, Community and Further Education Board (ACFE) to Maldon Neighbourhood Centre, which provided the venue and administration, and received the profits from the course. Fourteen students enrolled

in the first term of this course. Five dropped out - two were travelling overseas, one had family issues, and two did not give reasons. The nine (n = 9) who returned all completed the second term and performed in a public showcase of scenes and monologues.

After two terms of the Hobo Playhouse acting course in 2023, eight (n = 8) students responded to a survey which revealed: that seven planned to undertake a community activity after the course, six planned to undertake further study, six stated they had gained confidence from the course, six were planning to act in upcoming local theatre productions, two stated they had gained more self-esteem and two stated they were more adept at public speaking. Other statements of gains included improved memory, more use of imagination, feeling empowered, social companionship, more courage, improved communication skills, and the experience of working as part of a team.

Since the first course in 2017, the teacher has witnessed three students with learning disabilities, all aged in their 20's and 30's, grow significantly in self-confidence and self-esteem after completing the Hobo Playhouse acting course. Following the final workshop, one of the students said directly to the teacher, *"I'm going to miss coming here. It's been good for me. I can go down the street and I can look people in the eye now."*

Discussion

Pedagogical differences

The course content has changed significantly since the first course started in 2017. In the early years, sessions started with a 15-minute relaxation exercise followed by a 30-minute lecture on the history and the principles of the Method technique. Each of the eight sessions was dedicated to exploring a Method exercise (place, coffee cup, animals, emotional memory, sensory memory) in full (Timoney, 2014). There was not a strong emphasis on creating a safe place, it was about students getting the technique right. The difference in 2022-23 sessions was that there was much more emphasis on creating a safe place, play, and improvisations.

Students explored the many roles they play in real life and how changing their expectations, or their mindset could change the role they

adopted and the outcome of a situation. They explored voice, gibberish, non-verbal and physical approaches to expressing emotions during improvisations which proved to be challenging for some.

Another key difference was that for the past two years, students were able to select their own monologue to work on. Previously, the teacher would select monologues for students after a discussion with them. The teacher's final selection was based on their preference for a comedic or dramatic monologue and his observations of the skills they had displayed and the progress they had made in the first term. It was also influenced by the teacher's preference for Australian contemporary plays and strong dramatic scenes, and his instinct on how challenging and achievable a monologue would be for the student. Nearly half of the students in 2023 chose for themselves; most selected dramatic pieces, others chose poems, and one student wrote her own monologue. The teacher observed students connect with their monologues during the eight-week term, providing opportunities for self-discovery, new learning, and personal growth (Banks, 2017).

Conclusions

Facilitation of ACE courses

The teacher's approach changed significantly between 2017 and 2023, mainly due to his increasing knowledge of drama therapy methods and theories which influenced his teaching. His teaching transformed from an authoritarian, directorial style to an inclusive, relational approach where students were offered choice and control (Cassidy et al., 2014). The primary goal of the teacher undertaking the drama therapy course was to acquire the skills to manage students who could potentially experience adverse therapeutic consequences resulting from the Method acting technique. Many acting teachers may not possess the capacity to safely contain and hold students who have a traumatic response to a Method acting preparatory exercise such as 'emotional recall', where an actor relives an experience (Arias, 2019, p.14; Holmwood, 2014; McFarren, 2003).

Not all actors want to unearth their past experiences (Powell, 2024) for the sake of acting realism and as evidenced by the 2023 course, three students were content to take a safe, and traditional approach to acting,

maybe to avoid triggering past trauma (Powell, 2024). In the student feedback, this trio of students reported gaining increased confidence from the course and planned to undertake further study in performance and the arts, highlighting two of the aims of ACE programs (Adult Learning Australia, 2024).

In 2023, the teacher followed the lead of another Method acting teacher, Nick O'Brien (2018) and temporarily removed the 'emotional recall' exercise from Hobo Playhouse courses. This significantly changed the content of the courses with greater emphasis placed on growing students' imaginations by exploring playful activities, drama games, improvisations, somatic and voice exercises, embodiment, rituals, storytelling, and role-playing. These are all drama therapy methods, used to assist clients work through their problems or maintain their health and well-being (Jones, 2007).

Following the 2023 Student Showcase of monologues and scenes for a public audience at the MNC, the teacher reflected on several significant observations. Changes to the course content and his approach to teaching had resulted in students gaining more agency, becoming empowered to create their own individual styles of acting and how their scene would be staged. These have been loosely categorized as follows:

Aesthetic: Five students appeared to adopt lessons learned from role-playing and improvisation training by playing a part of themselves in a different situation and, by controlling the appearance of the scene. The students insisted on creating theatrical elements of the scene themselves including choosing the furniture, costumes, props, and sound effects.

Cognitive: Three students prepared extensively for their monologues before stepping on stage to rehearse or perform. They aimed for their performances to be word-perfect and appeared to be guided by their actions and positioning on stage to remember lines.

Affective: One student utilised movement and voice exercise training to embody her character, channel emotions and explore personal material. A minimal set, few props and a basic costume were employed. Strong emotions appeared to emerge from the student's body and subconscious during the performance.

The teacher checked with all students after the Showcase and observed the majority were delighted with their performances however one

('Cognitive') student was disappointed because they forgot their lines.

The three approaches described above align with drama therapist Robert Landy's (1993, p.25) aesthetic distance continuum which identifies three points on a spectrum that indicate a client's 'level of involvement in the playing of a role'. These are 'over-distanced' (highly cognitive) at one end, 'under-distanced' (strongly affected by feeling) at the other extremity and, 'aesthetic distanced' (an ideal balance between cognition and affect) at the mid-point. The latter is a transition state where both reflection and feelings are possible, which links to an actor who has found aesthetic distance being engrossed in the role and in control of their emotions and thinking while performing on stage (Landy, 1993).

However, is this 'aesthetic distanced' state the goal for actors, actor trainers and community educators? The acting course students were provided with opportunities to explore an extraordinary amount of choice and control (Cassidy et al., 2014) and worked with metaphors and role play, which assisted them in achieving aesthetic distance (Landy, 1993). This does not usually occur on a stage or film set, where a director commands the amount of distance actors and viewers will possess (Landy, 1983) and there is little time to explore play or drama games. When the teacher studied acting in the 1980s, he attended a commercial acting school where all students aspired to be working actors. Competition was fierce and commitment was crucial for students to graduate from the course. Aesthetic distance was non-existent in this world. This was the mindset he brought to teaching in 2017 essentially replicating the hierarchy (Hartley, 2020) and, while it worked for some students, he quickly learnt that people enrol in community acting courses for a range of different reasons. These include: socialising, building confidence, continuing learning, or attaining a life-long goal. Over the past seven years, only two students stated they wanted to become working actors. Hartley (2024) states acting teachers should ask students what they want from training, why are they doing the course and then work together to achieve their goals. Further research is needed to discover the potential benefits to directors, community educators and actors of exploring aesthetic distance themselves, assessing the level of choice and control they possess and offer others and placing the aspect of care at the heart of their work (Cassidy et al., 2017; Hartley, 2020; Landy, 1993).

Theories are fluid

The teacher has created an abundance of learnings over the past two years, including differentiating between Stanislavski's System and Strasberg's Method Acting (Arias, 2019). He has explored alternative techniques including Demidov's (2016) etudes, Johnstone's improvisation exercises (2021), Unsworth's drama games (2017) and Powell's (2024) Actualizing Characters by Expanding Self-awareness (ACES) process. Combined with Drama Therapy methods such as play, storytelling, embodiment, and role-playing, these techniques have significantly influenced the content of Hobo Playhouse acting courses.

Safe play is learning

Creating a safe place in the first few sessions is vital to building connection, trust, and collaboration (Emunah, 2020). Music, movement, and drama games are playful warm-up tools that can connect students with themselves and each other. It is believed that play is the key to acting and creating a character. 'Play is at the root of imagination, creativity, and the ability to think' (Dickinson & Bailey, 2021). In the 2023 acting course, the teacher utilised play before students improvised scenes to transport them to a playful, creative state of mind (Oren & Pendzik, 2021). Improvisations provided opportunity for students to explore spontaneity, role play and creativity, which can enhance a student's flexibility and diminish self-criticism (Fabian et al., 2022).

Scene work and monologues followed, character exploration, then performance followed by a post-performance discussion between students and teacher. The process that has evolved in the teaching connects to Emunah's (2020) Integrative Five Phase Model of Drama Therapy with its progressive stages: dramatic play, scene work, role play, culminating enactment, and dramatic ritual, which also aligns with Yalom and Leszcz's (2005) Five Stage Model for Group Development: Orientation, Conflict, Cohesiveness, Working and Termination.

From a drama therapy perspective, improvisations and role play provide opportunities for students to imagine and play with future possibilities, not to replay and focus on present or past problems (Slade, 1958). This is attained by the student establishing a safe distance from reality using metaphor and imagination; ultimately, hope can emerge from play (Slade, 1958; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Furthermore, if change had been

the intention of the course and its processes, then participants would have had the opportunity to integrate their self-discoveries into their real lives, potentially leading to transformation (Landy, 1993).

Drama therapy can also assist actors/students and facilitators in developing personal safety strategies. Aesthetic distance and deroling (a process an actor uses to discard a character post-performance) are key drama therapy elements that can assist actors regulate their emotions by creating a safe distance from the role they are playing (Arias, 2019; Powell, 2024). Emotional regulation strategies can benefit students and teachers in all forms of learning including community education (Fried, 2011).

What's next?

The content of the Hobo Playhouse acting course has evolved into a version of Emunah's Integrative Five Phase Model (2020) with similar stages: play, improvisation, characterisation, performance, and reflection, albeit without the therapeutic intent. The teacher intends to continue exploring this process of merging drama therapeutic methods (play, role play and reflection activities) with actor training theories including Stanislavski (Arias, 2019), Bloch (2017) and Demidov (2016) across two terms of Hobo Playhouse's acting course at Maldon Neighbourhood Centre in 2024.

Influenced and informed by drama therapy and his own further education, the teacher's original goals for the acting course have changed from sharing his passion for acting with others to now holding purposeful aims for students to make connections and enhance their self-belief. He has witnessed students transform from anxious, self-doubting individuals into empowered, self-confident people who bravely create their own acting techniques and others, who gain enough self-esteem to be able to look people in the eye now. In 2024 research will be conducted into trauma-informed, self-care and well-being strategies for actors during the 2024 production of *Biting the Hand* (Hobo Playhouse, 2024) and, undertake individual consults in acting and drama therapy with several individuals. All of these will need to be evaluated and reflected on to see if the themes of connection and transformations have been realised.

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Perceptions of adult learners with visual impairment throughout COVID-19 pandemic: Implications for institutional assistance in Eswatini

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The importance of providing institutional assistance to adult learners with visual impairment throughout the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be overemphasised. This paper examined the experiences of adult learners with visual impairment, whose studies were significantly affected by the implementation of lockdown and social distancing that led to their dropping out from one university in Eswatini. Using phenomenological design, three adult learners with visual impairment, who dropped out of the university, were chosen to participate in the study. Adult learners responded to a semi-structured interview guide during the individual conversations. The data were analysed using qualitative thematic analysis. Ethical considerations such as informed consent and anonymity were observed. The findings revealed the themes of social isolation, personal challenges, and lack of institutional assistance. Adult learners with visual impairment reported that there was no support received from the institution. Furthermore, adult learners indicated that some lecturers excluded them by not communicating and providing suitable materials for their condition. The participants acknowledged the awareness of using technology during the COVID-19

pandemic; however, they stated the lack of devices, inadequate technology skills, and their reliance on sighted adult learners and peers to read the content for them. This paper suggests that lecturers at this university in Eswatini be trained on how to teach and support adult learners with visual impairment, and the institution should consider developing a comprehensive education policy to cater to all different adult learners. Comprehensiveness has always been a challenge for adult learners with disabilities generally, but the pandemic has escalated it.

***Keywords**: institutional assistance, adult learners, visual impairment, COVID-19 pandemic, social capital theory*

Introduction

Research on access to higher education in African countries indicated that higher education institutions face obstacles that violate treaties such as the Salamanca Statement and the framework for action agreement (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1994) and the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [UNCRPD], 2006). In Article 24, the convention demands the provision of education that is comprehensive and reactive to the needs of persons with disabilities, the visual impairment is included. In most institutions, including in Eswatini, disability policies are lacking, which often fail to accommodate adult learners with a disability, including the ones with visual impairment (UNESCO, 1994; Mosia & Phasha, 2018; Ngozwana et al., 2018). One of the fundamental principles of the comprehensive school is that adult learners should study together, to encourage solidarity between adult learners with disability and their peers (UNESCO, 1994). This agrees with the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which stipulates that somebody with disabilities should not be excluded from the general education system because of disability. Subsequently, inclusive education was detailed in the General Comment No. 4 to Article 24 of the CRPD (GC4) (UNCRPD, 2016), which recognised the ongoing discrimination against individuals with disabilities in various forms. In addition, UNESCO encouraged governments to implement

steps to transfer the education of learners with disabilities to the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, ensuring sufficient resources and actionable plans to eliminate segregated provisions and foster a comprehensive, government-wide commitment (UNESCO, 2019). This also covers adult learners with visual impairment who ought to receive the support required, to facilitate their effective learning just like other learners.

Before the advent of COVID-19, adult learners with visual impairment relied on support from their colleagues pertaining to their educational performance in Eswatini. Their colleagues would read the study materials including the assignments written for them so that they understand what is expected and then act accordingly within the institution of higher learning in Eswatini. Likewise, lecturers would ask other adult learners to always volunteer to assist adult learners with visual impairment by printing the notes that are posted on the Learning Management System, reading to them, and explaining the instructions provided in any document. This implies that the possibility for access to education by adult learners with visual impairment heavily relies on the support they get from other learners in Eswatini. Efforts to create an enabling situation for learners with disabilities in this institution of higher learning in Eswatini were long overdue and not without challenges (Ngozwana et al., 2018).

However, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic came with an undesirable effect on adult learners with visual impairment. This is because of the social distancing, the country lockdown and the university closure that led adult learners with disabilities to be isolated and unable to access educational support due to COVID-19 preventive measures (WHO, 2020) in Eswatini. Therefore, the colleagues who used to provide support to adult learners with visual impairment stopped their interaction with these adult learners with visual impairment because of being locked down in their homes in Eswatini. Thereafter, the university adopted rapid online teaching and learning without giving adult learners and course facilitators the necessary training before the online learning implementation during the country's lockdowns (Mhlanga & Moloi, 2020; Toquero, 2020). Moreover, many adult learners did not have access to digital gadgets such as smartphones, tablets, and funds to buy internet bundles. The gadgets are needed for connectivity for adult learners to participate in the learning activities on the Learning

Management System that is used by one university in Eswatini. The lack of digital devices to use by adult learners with visual impairment in Eswatini possibly affected their access to education in a negative manner as communication was impacted.

Eswatini is a developing country where most citizens lack a steady power source, including the lack of internet that can allow facilitators and adult learners to fully participate in learning online (Ntinda & Ngozwana, 2021). Moreover, the data is expensive and unaffordable for many adult learners. These encounters with inadequate resources would have affected most adult learners including adult learners with visual impairment who may have been disturbed, thus obstructing their learning results.

Therefore, this study details the perceptions of adult learners with visual impairment who dropped out from one university in Eswatini because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The objectives were: 1) to discover the effect of COVID-19 on adult learners with visual impairment in Eswatini and 2) to identify the kind of support they got from their institution.

Literature review

The COVID-19 crisis exacerbated the existing inequalities and disparities that some learners face daily. Although the pandemic posed a threat to everyone in Eswatini, it caused significant emotional distress for people with disabilities. Individuals with disabilities encompass anyone with long-term physical, mental, emotional, or visual impairments. These impairments, when interacting with various environmental barriers, hinder them from fully or effectively participating in society on an equal basis with others (UNCRPD, 2006). Many individuals with disabilities were affected by obstacles to applying simple safeguard actions and maintaining social distance because of dependence on physical interaction from others to receive help (WHO, 2020; Samaila, Ayanjoke, Mailafia & Joshua, 2020). Consequently, their contextual background could also facilitate the hardships they experience throughout the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. United Nations indicate that individuals with disabilities have greater health requirement and poorer health outcomes (UN, 2020).

In Hungary, Gombas and Csakvai (2021) conducted an online survey with 132 adults with visual impairment and found that accessibility to

study and shopping was a major challenge during the lockdown. The Kennedy Krieger Institute (2020) reported the challenges institutions face in meeting adult learners with disability and individual needs during online virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This could be the same for adult learners with visual impairment, which this study would establish pertains to challenges faced by adult learners. In Bangkok, UNESCO (2020) found that individuals with incapacities, including the visually impaired, face barriers to education through remote practices. In addition, UNESCO noted that the difficulties faced by individuals with incapacities affect their active participation because of the materials, support, and cost accompanied by remote learning (UNESCO, 2020).

In Eswatini most facilities such as health, transport, and educational organisations lack enough services concerning the requirements of individuals with incapacities (Ntinda & Ngozwana, 2021). This is due to the drastic implementation of remote learning by most institutions, including one university in Eswatini that may have negatively affected learners with visual impairment, who may not have the necessary devices to support them (Samaila et al, 2020). Furthermore, Samaila et al (2020) found that the epidemic and the preventive measures such as self-isolation, and social distancing have disrupted the educational assistance individuals with incapacities rely on. Thus, these created obstacles to learning throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, affecting their general performance and appropriate support, and ultimately excluding them from accessing education. The lockdown pronouncement that occurred because of COVID-19 required universities to suddenly utilise online learning to reduce the interruption in education. However, the institutions never considered how many adult learners from ostracised and poor societies lack the digital gadgets and the competencies that are expected for online learning (Mhlanga & Moloi, 2020). This is common in both advanced and emerging nations such as Eswatini (Demuyakor, 2020; UNESCO, 2020) hence the need for strong adult learners' institutional support.

Institutional support

It is not clear how adult learners with disabilities are receiving educational support because of the prolonged postponement of the universities throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. There have been

reports about the lack of political will and underfunding for adult learners with disabilities before the COVID-19 pandemic (Samaila et al., 2020). The other noted issue for adult learners with disabilities is the negative impact of school shut-downs, as it exposes their omission from education, when leaders execute online remote learning platforms that may be unavailable to them, including the lack of essential technological gadgets that could permit their involvement and adaptation based on their learning requirements (UNESCO, 2020). Although some researchers refer to assistive technologies, many existing solutions that use digital technologies do not reflect the needs or circumstances of adult learners with disabilities, or the facilitators who are teaching them (UNESCO, 2020), which may also be true for adult learners with visual impairment in Eswatini.

Moreover, encounters with unpaid readers, distinct documentation, movement, and widespread procedure were reported in Nigeria (Onuigbo, Eseadi, & Ebifa, 2019). Such assistance can help adult learners with visual impairment cope with obstacles connected with incapacity, relational abilities, modest surviving ability, and minimal self-esteem, express their ability within their disability, and improve their well-being (Onuigbo et al, 2019). Adult learners with disabilities require exclusive amenities and support to continue their learning at institutions of higher learning. For instance, visually impaired adult learners need exceptional assistance and tools such as workstations and supportive packages, particularly in public libraries (Hasnah, 2009). For example, Amin et al (2021) assert that adult learners with visual impairment, need Braille comprehension assistance in the Malaysian context. This could be the case with adult learners with visual impairment in Eswatini who may require support from familiar backgrounds to develop their value of living (Rosalinda et al., 2013).

Adult learners with visual impairment appeared to be reliant on assistive apparatus and on the help of their fellow sighted adult learners or other skilful individuals (Kisanga & Kisanga, 2020). The implication is that the lack of support affects access to equitable educational performance for all learners, especially in Eswatini where there is slight legislation to protect people with disabilities (Ngozwana et al., 2018). The next section discusses the social capital theory that was adopted as a guide to this study.

Social capital theory

Coleman (1988) and Savage and Kanazawa (2004) posit that social capital features the social relationships that produce benefits for individuals, or any collective action linked to families, communities, and society for positive outcomes. The social capital theory is deemed fit as it relies on the available networks for social support for adult learners with visual impairment during their learning journey following the COVID-19 outbreak. Bourdieu (1986) relates social capital theory to the context of communal problems of communities and societies in general and for the powerless people such as adult learners with visual impairment in this study. However, in this study, the networks are discussed pertaining to resources that assisted individuals, in this case, adult learners with visual impairment.

The three common forms of the social capital theory: bonding social capital, bridging social capital, and linking social capital are briefly discussed to show how the networks serve as a resource to an individual, which is a student with visual impairment in this case.

According to Thakaso (2016) and Ferlander (2007), the first layer of bonding social capital inclines to be thin as it permits the creation of relations between persons with similar features within the same social group where people know each other well. This could be family members and relatives as they share values and the elements of trust and norms of reciprocity together (Putman, 2000; Hawkins & Maurer, 2010) as this is associated with strong ties. It is hoped that this study will reveal whether adult learners with visual impairment had developed the local reciprocity and trust, that provided social support and helped them during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The second form is bridging social capital, which is an outside layer that extends beyond the individual's immediate social boundaries. In this form relations with other external groups with similar characteristics are explored such as neighbours, casual friends, and colleagues (Ferlander, 2007). This means that the network is for people who are unidentical in their demographics but may have similar culture, race, or social aspects where people involved may share a thin trust. The study would establish how adult learners with visual impairment benefitted from accessing network resources outside their families but within their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The third, linking social capital, is the last form that helps individuals to spread into peripheral organisations and other individuals who have influence (Thakaso, 2016; Hawkins & Maurer, 2010). This refers to interactions among the persons and the groupings in several collective sections wherever issues of capacity and collective position are retrieved differently. In this case, the university support for adult learners with visual impairment will be determined in this study. Coleman explains shared investment (social capital) as an immediate or unplanned means because of shared links combined with care along with family, friends, and neighbourhood members. It is a source for interaction, along with confidence construction, which is crucial for people and could impact their condition of life expectancy (Coleman, 1988) particularly for the group members who engage and share information in unity and collectively.

Methodology

The study used phenomenological design by Collaizzi (1978) to analyse the perceptions of adult learners with visual impairment, who used to attend one university before the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown was implemented in Eswatini. The phenomenological study is about individuals' lived experiences and the essence of those experiences; therefore, the researcher's aim was to understand the perspective of adult learners with visual impairment and their genuine real-life experiences. Moreover, Rakotsoane (2019) indicated that phenomenology is also an interpretative process. It connects the diverse connotations of existing involvements and viewpoints by adult learners with visual impairment (Van Manen, 2016).

Purposive sampling was utilised (Rozmi, 2015) to get the participants for the study. The participants were the only three adult learners with visual impairment, who were selected based on being affected by an institutional closure and the country's lockdown because of the COVID-19 pandemic. They volunteered to respond to the questions by giving informed consent and sharing their perspectives.

A semi-structured interview guide was used to collect the data, with the help of a secretary from the department where the three adult learners were housed in one university in Eswatini. The secretary approached the adult learners telephonically and booked the appointments for

data collection, each for the time that was convenient for them. The participants were interviewed from their homes, with one interview lasting between forty to sixty minutes. The English language was used by all three participants. Some of the questions asked are included in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Individual interview guide

Questions
• What are your experiences in terms of your access to education at the university?
• How has the COVID-19 situation affected you in terms of accessing your education?
• What means have you used in furthering your studies during this COVID-19 crisis?
• What support have you received from your institution during this advent of COVID-19 that enabled you to continue with your studies?
• What measures have you taken to advocate for your support from your university?
• How have you been supported because of your self-advocacy?

The data were analysed thematically following a guide by Braun and Clarke (2006). Nuremberg Code of 1949 and the Declaration of Helsinki by the World Medical Association (1964) were observed when dealing with human beings and realising the ethics of informed consent from the participants. Pseudonyms were used as part of protecting and maintaining confidentiality for the participants alongside other ethics that were considered after the issuing of ethical clearance by the institutional review ethics committee in Eswatini. Issues of trustworthiness were observed, such as member checks for credibility, transferability, and confirmability (McMillan &Schumacher, 2010).

Findings

Three themes emerged from the data: social isolation, personal challenges, and lack of institutional assistance. All three participants were males aged between twenty-five (25) and thirty-five (35) years and were at the undergraduate level. The themes are presented, and direct quotations are provided to support the findings.

Social isolation

The participants expressed their loneliness and isolation due to social distancing and the lockdown that was implemented by the country and followed by one university closure in Eswatini. The adult learners with

visual impairment further reported that their situation was also made worse by the pandemic as one stated that he got sick. When responding to the question of how COVID-19 impacted their learning, Zonke said:

> *This was my hardest time as I felt useless with no one checking on me, no one giving me information about anything… we discovered late about online learning… (sneezing as he speaks).*

This was reiterated by Lihle who stated:

> *I am feeling overwhelmed, I have been locked up for the entire time and could not go to school. I have no one to share information with or to talk to. I was sick during the past two months, and I still feel weak …I couldn't continue with my studies anymore (Lihle).*

The above two adult learners shared that they felt isolated and lonely because of the lockdown. It can be noted that the learner engagement was a concern to Zonke who stipulated that lecturers did not communicate the transition to online learning. Their situation escalated with sickness, which led to them dropping off from their studies, which may have affected their personal goals as that was another challenge.

Personal challenges

Regarding the means that they tried to use in furthering their studies, all the participants reported to have encountered personal challenges. The following is what transpired from the interviews:

> *I personally do not have any mobile device…I was limited, could not get help from my colleagues due to lockdown (Tom).*

Furthermore, Zonke said:

> *I could not meet my friend who usually assist me financially and help me to reach at school.*
>
> *I do not have technology gadget to use for my studies here at home. Electricity is another challenge; it is not stable here in this area and most families use solar or other alternatives (Lihle).*

It can be noted that restrictions on assistive technologies and internet

connection were causes for the lack of access to education for adult learners with visual impairment (World Bank, 2020) in this university in Eswatini. Moreover, these adult learners reported their challenge of movement on their part as indicated below:

> *When we have to move from home to school or to any other place, it becomes a challenge because we need to be helped… now it is lockdown, our friends cannot come over, remember they also need to observe the social distancing… otherwise they would want to be paid … my mother is no longer working and that has affected me badly as I no longer have reliable means of financial support. Now this lockdown, and social distancing makes it difficult for us to be helped. That is why I stopped learning. (Tom)*

Additionally,

> *It is even worse these days because of social distancing and lockdown, we can't move and go to the university… in fact we heard that other adult learners are learning online. (Lihle)*

Adult learners like Tom and Lihle expressed their challenges in getting support from significant others such as peers and colleagues due to social distancing and lockdown brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused their university to close.

Lack of institutional assistance

The adult learners with visual impairment reported that they never got support from the institution like other abled adult learners who continued to study online. Seemingly, the lack of support for these adult learners has been ongoing even before the advent of COVID-19, which shows the lack of regulation to cover all learners in terms of accessing education. This is what they said:

> *Some Lecturers used to point at a screen and ask questions and meanwhile you do not have sight to see…now during covid they never informed us about online learning or even involve us, that's why I left. (Tom)*

Lihle has almost a similar view when saying:

> *Lecturers did not communicate with us…we needed to make them aware that we struggle to use Moodle, but we heard that all the PowerPoint slides [content] and videos were posted on Moodle.*

The unsociable character of certain lecturers, whom they described as strict with the way they teach, affected adult learners with visual impairment in this institution in Eswatini. This has an implication on how learners with disabilities access their education at this university.

> *They should have provided the electronic version of content materials to allow us to learn better… even the library does not recognise that we learn and read differently from other adult learners. (Zonke)*

The library is an entity that adult learners with visual impairment recognise to be crucial in assisting them to accomplish their educational pursuits. However, the challenge to access up-to-date resources hampers the capabilities of learners with disabilities to further develop and excel like other learners. Tom said:

> *We had enrolled because we wanted to be taught and if stuffs like, Braille Embosser, Audio Browser, Braille Tap are not in the library, we are behind.*

It is noted that the library does not have electronic versions of the books for adult learners with visual impairment, thus making it problematic for the learners. The three adult learners believed that it was a waste of time for them to be registered at their university because of the hardships that they were facing.

It is evident from the findings of this study that adult learners with visual impairment were not satisfied with the assistance from their university. Adult learners with visual impairment reported not getting their needs met. They felt that providing support for them was not a priority for this university in Eswatini, hence their reason to stop learning.

Discussion

The study examines the effects of COVID-19 on the educational

experiences of three visually impaired adult learners in Eswatini. The findings reveal that these learners faced social isolation and discomfort due to lockdowns and social distancing measures, which led to their institution's abrupt transition to online learning. The shift caused these learners to abandon their studies as they felt excluded from online educational activities. Additionally, concerns about their health may have disrupted their focus on online learning. This finding is in accord with Samaila et al. (2020) and WHO (2020) regarding the COVID-19 pandemic that created an extra obstacle for adult learners in higher education, with many abandoning their studies. The situation got worse for the adult learners with visual impairment who felt excluded from their right to education, which went against what UNESCO (1994) and UNCRP (2006) regarded the provision of education that is comprehensive and relevant to the needs of individuals with disability. This finding refutes what is stated about the bonding social capital resource (Bourdieu, 1986), as peers and classmates could not help adult learners with visual impairment (Kisanga & Kisanga, 2020), which led to their exclusion from online learning and made them drop out of the university.

The findings showed that those adult learners faced personal challenges with online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The lack of social interaction and getting assistance from other people reiterate assertions by Kisanga and Kisanga (2020), which made adult learners with visual impairment to be excluded from participating in their learning activities. The findings revealed that the three adult learners experienced difficulties with assistive technologies as they indicated the lack of devices, expensive data, and unstable internet connectivity. This finding is in agreement with several authors (Mhlanga & Moloi, 2020; World Bank, 2020) regarding the challenges faced by adult learners with disabilities throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Poverty and financial challenges of not being able to afford digital devices and internet access, unstable internet connection, high cost of data, lack of knowledge on navigating online resources are some of the rife challenges (Mhlanga & Moloi, 2020) experienced by university adult learners in developing countries such as Eswatini.

The findings revealed the lack of institutional assistance for adult learners with visual impairment in Eswatini and highlighted adult learners' dissatisfaction with their institution's failure to meet their

educational needs. These adult learners also felt they encountered difficulties both at home and in school, echoing Samaila et al. (2020), who noted that many institutions, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, lacked the political and institutional commitment to support students, particularly underfunded adult learners with disabilities. One of their complaints was the lack of library services. They experienced that the library did not have electronic books available for download, making their education more difficult. This finding supports research by Amin et al. (2021) who established that adult learners who are visually impaired, need Braille reading assistance, which was not available for the adult learners with visual impairment in Eswatini. In this instance, the support provided by the institution to adult learners with visual impairments was inadequate, contradicting the principles of linking social capital as described by Coleman (1988) and Thakaso (2016).

The findings indicated that these adult learners also experienced communication challenges with their lecturers, as they felt excluded from online learning, and as a result, they could not adjust but dropped out of the university. Again, the findings implied that adult learners hardly received support and care from their families, peers, lecturers, and significant others throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (Kisanga & Kisanga, 2020). Thus, showing the weak social capital networks for them in Eswatini. This had a serious implication for the adult learners who cannot afford some assistive devices (UNESCO, 2020) and therefore could not access education as were their human rights. This calls for training for educators on how to handle and teach adult learners with disabilities. Additionally, this suggests that current policies should be revised to incorporate self-advocacy by individuals with disabilities prior to decisions being made by higher education institutions.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a detrimental impact on some adult learners with visual impairments in Eswatini, leading to their withdrawal from their institution. The learners cited significant challenges, such as a lack of assistive technologies, health issues, and exclusion from online learning opportunities. Their dependence on sighted individuals, who were unavailable, highlighted the weak support networks from family, peers, and lecturers. Furthermore, insufficient institutional support and inaccessible online

content, including library materials, contributed to their decision to drop out. Consequently, these learners faced social, emotional, and financial hardships, and their right to education was compromised.

Implications

Despite the limited sample size, the results of this study have policy implications for both adult learners and lecturers at this institution in Eswatini. It is recommended that the university in Eswatini should develop robust comprehensive institutional policies for adult learners and lecturers; train lecturers to teach adult learners with visual impairment and empower lecturers with proper skills in using various teaching methods that can accommodate all learners including adult learners with visual impairment. Additionally, the policy review might consider the importance of self-advocacy and representation for adult learners with disabilities in educational decision-making. Comprehensiveness has always challenged people with disability generally and the situation has escalated for adult learners with visual impairment.

Limitations

The findings from this study cannot be generalised to other areas because of the small qualitative sample size used. Second, the nature of the participants used is unique, therefore, their perceptions cannot be universally applicable to the views and opinions of all people generally. However, the views and opinions of the participants in this study may apply to a similar minority group in other areas.

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Supporting diverse learner needs: A case study using the 8 Ways of Aboriginal learning

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During my 20-year career as a specialist language and literacy educator, I have found that inclusive and experiential classroom pedagogies stimulate and engage learners of all ages and demographics. What is more, these same methods can be effectively implemented to support individuals with diverse learning needs. This article discusses the 8 Ways of Aboriginal Learning (NSW Department of Education, n.d.) as a pedagogical approach for engaging and supporting learners with diverse needs and, using a case study example, demonstrates how the holistic integration of different strategies enhances learning opportunities for all students. Whether you see yourself as an educator, teacher, trainer, mentor or supervisor, and regardless of whether you 'teach' in a standard classroom, workplace settings (e.g. office building, health clinic), or a community-based learning centre, the ideas and approaches presented in this paper will help you construct learning opportunities that will support student success and make lesson planning and preparation more effective and time-efficient.

Keywords*: inclusive education, experiential learning, integrated curriculum, Indigenous pedagogies*

Introduction

In any given student cohort, there is always significant diversity between learners in terms of their abilities, prior knowledge and experience, and their individual learning preferences (Teemant & Pinnegar, 2020). Learners will also vary across a range of dimensions including physical or learning challenges, differences in cultural and linguistic backgrounds, socio-economic status, and variances in social-emotional needs (Gronseth et al., 2021). Best practise education literature has evidenced the need to reduce barriers and challenges for diverse individuals since they face greater challenges to academic achievement (Howard & Aleman, 2008), and long-term success in education and employment (Sanderson, 2020). Strategies demonstrating how to adjust your teaching style to accommodate learner variability are widely available (Gronseth et al., 2021; Teemant & Pinnegar, 2020). While these methods are appropriate and effective for one-on-one planning and delivery, 'classroom' populations have become increasingly diverse with the collective diversity (multicultural, learning disabled, and speakers of other languages) now often making up the majority rather than a minority (Gronseth et al., 2021; Teemant & Pinnegar, 2020). Educators are increasingly time-poor with greater administrative responsibilities and demands than ever before (Tisdell, 1995) which makes the tailoring of content to meet the needs of each individual a near impossibility. Scholars now suggest planning for individual learner variabilities from the outset (Gronseth et al., 2021) with programs aiming to meet 'collective' needs rather than addressing needs individually (Brownlie et al., 2016; Teemant & Pinnegar, 2020).

Pedagogical approach

The 8 Ways of Aboriginal Learning (8 Ways) reflects Aboriginal perspectives and ways of learning which can be effectively used to improve educational outcomes for a range of student diversities (NSW Department of Education, n.d.). The 8 Ways framework (Figure 1) comprises eight interconnected pedagogies to create a holistic, non-linear and contextualised approach to teaching and learning. The methods are non-sequential and interconnect with individual learning preferences. The depicted pathways are narrative-driven learning, the visualisation of individual learning plans, the use of practical

and hands-on approaches, using symbols, artworks and metaphor, connecting to land and country, understanding of synergies and logic, using scaffolding and modelling to pack and unpack information, and community connectedness.

Figure 1: The 8 Ways of Aboriginal learning

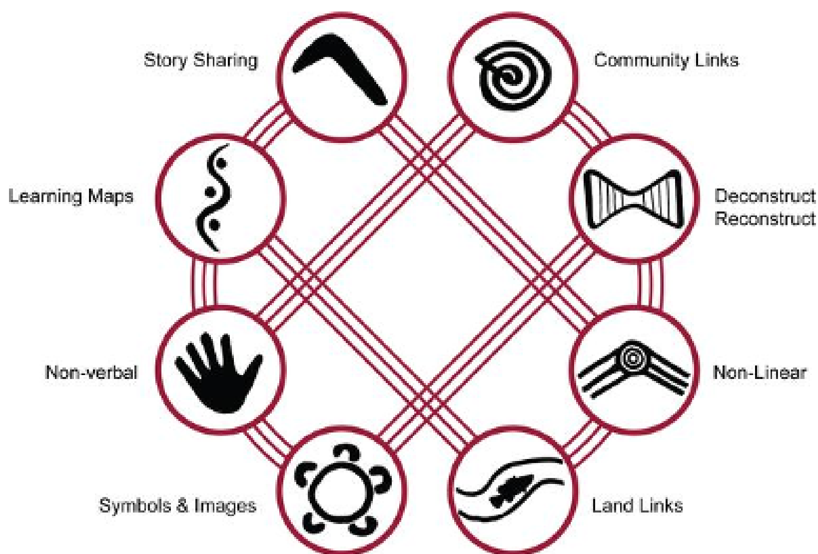

Image from: (NSW Department of Education, n.d.)

Pedagogies that promote experiential learning have been shown to be particularly effective with diverse learner groups (Townsend, 2008). Through the 8 Ways methodology, students explore visual, kinaesthetic and social aspects of knowledge which is developed through a constructivist framework. Learning is seen as the internal contextualisation and comprehension of information through the creation of personal connections to skills and knowledge. Through introspection and self-reflection, students frequently return to learnt knowledge and by integrating these lessons into everyday content,

learning is cemented at a deeper level (Holloway & Gouthro, 2024). Programs that provide behavioural modelling, repeat practice, self-expression, creativity, and self-reflective dialogue have proven to be more effective than other teaching and learning methods in supporting learners to integrate and internalise knowledge (Ricci & Bravo, 2022). Learning through trial and error, copying or mimicking, instruction and demonstration, thinking and reflecting, exploring and investigating, and planning before doing, as incorporated by the 8 Ways, are also effective methods for fostering fundamental cognitive skills and processes that form the basis of lifelong learning (Jarvis, 2014).

Context

While working as the Managing Director for a vocational education and training (VET) centre in the Northern Territory of Australia, I observed the impact of the 8 Ways pedagogy on students from diverse backgrounds and was able to verify the effectiveness of this approach in catering to individual student needs. The VET Centre offered a range of accredited training courses to secondary school students and adult members of the public. A significant portion of the learner group came from Indigenous or multicultural backgrounds, and this created specific language and literacy challenges. Student diversities also included behavioural and learning challenges (e.g. attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), and students who identified as having autism spectrum disorder who faced difficulties with learning, language production and social interaction. Given the diversity in cultural backgrounds, linguistic proficiency, and cognitive, affective and behavioural learning abilities, the VET Centre utilised the 8 Ways pathway model to provide experiential learning opportunities through a scaffolded and contextualised curriculum.

To exemplify the 8 Ways in practice, I present personal observations and interactions with a group of learners undertaking a Certificate II in Conservation and Land Management (AHC21016 - qualification now superseded). As a key component of the program, the students attended work placement at local nursery businesses where they undertook duties such as stock control, customer services, product demonstrations and nursery plant care. Additionally, students were responsible for the nursey area and the mechanical workshop, including equipment maintenance and repairs, at the VET Centre itself. The program was

designed to introduce the learners to various contexts and environments where they would be exposed to and experiment with learning in new and engaging ways. The provision of contextualised experiences aided the students to integrate, internalise and absorb the relevant information through understanding and application of knowledge and skills that were drawn from, and also applied to, the everyday world (Tharp, 2020).

Sharing stories

Behind the VET Centre was a large, protected parkland area and the course trainer regularly guided students on 'walk-throughs' of the area. There was rarely a specific learning intention set for these forays and often this was used as a 'break' from more structured classroom activities. Through these excursions, the trainer would provide opportunities for shared story telling using found objects in the parkland as conversation prompts. For example, when the trainer asked the students if they could identify a particular plant seed, Student A (young Indigenous male) shared a story about foraging with his grandmother to collect the seeds and roasting them in the hot coals of a fire. By allowing the students to explore the area without specific goals or objectives, the trainer was able to engage the learners in genuine conversation and, through this, evaluate what they already knew about a particular topic. Recognising and valuing their existing knowledge helped direct the conversations, allowing the students to co-teach the content. Fostering a 'two way' teaching and learning environment builds relationships through learner to learner knowledge transfer (Purdie et al., 2011) and can provide an opportunity for the role of educator and learner to become more fluid and flexible. Increasing student interaction by allowing students to take a lead role generates meaningful dialogue and shifts the responsibility for the conversation and the learning to the students themselves (Hurst et al., 2013).

Interpersonal exchanges between learners and educators is an integral component in the teaching and learning process (Purdie et al., 2011). The acquisition of new knowledge, and in particular the development and expansion of language and vocabulary, occurs in response to shared activity, direct observations, discussion, and questioning (Tharp, 2020). The course trainer employed effective prompting techniques to stimulate conversations, encouraging learners to share and compare

their knowledge. This sharing of personal narratives is essential for relationship building, and can have a significant and positive impact on a student's participation, motivation and improvement (Ollis et al., 2018). Learner success is enhanced by interactive learning behaviours such as turn-taking, negotiation of meaning, and providing feedback through peer-to-peer interaction (Purdie et al., 2011). Joint production through story-telling increases agency and ownership of the conversation which positively affects learning and contributes significantly to competency development (Jarvis, 2014; Tharp, 2020).

Learning Maps

During the course, each student was responsible for maintaining an individual portfolio that provided formative evidence and demonstrated knowledge competencies applied over time in varying contexts. Each student maintained their portfolio differently; some were text-based with short sentences or stories, others contained artwork, images or symbols, and one was a digital notebook with photos, videos and voice recordings. The portfolios provided an ongoing record of learning but also formed a key part of the preparation and reflection activities undertaken to reinforce learning. The trainer used learning maps as a way to plan for learning, to reflect on learning and to highlight the connectedness of knowledge from one subject area to another. Learning maps can assist students to define and plan out learning activities or for sequencing of tasks within a larger topic or project. For example, prior to work experience placements, the trainer would encourage students to note down questions to help them prepare. Prompting questions such as 'what might you need to know when starting in a new work environment?' or 'what do you want to learn from this experience?' assisted the students to define questions and set learning goals for themselves.

Learning maps were also used for reflective practice to recycle vocabulary and to reaffirm skills and knowledge. Before the conclusion of each day's training session, the trainer would ask students to reflect on their learning for the day and add this information to their workbooks. During these sessions, the trainer would ask students three prompt questions; 'what did you learn today, how does this relate to what you already know, and, what else do you want to know about this topic?' This approach motivated the learners to record new knowledge

and link that information to other subjects and ideas. Equally, they were encouraged to consider what additional learning would enable them to get to the next level. Having an awareness of yourself as a learner, including the ability to plan and manage your own learning is a fundamental life-long learning skill (Jarvis, 2008). The use of learning maps to plan, organise and reflect on knowledge encourages students to use this lifelong learning skill to take ownership of their own learning pathway. According to Teemant & Pinnegar, teachers should model and promote these learning techniques as a way to foster their use (2020).

Non-verbal

I have found non-verbal skills and kinaesthetic, hands-on learning to be successful with diverse learner groups as it allows for the demonstration and expression of knowledge in alternative ways. Learners can model a task without words by using miming actions, gestures or facial expressions to demonstrate meaning and concepts. To promote non-verbal pathways, the trainer would encourage students to act out processes to demonstrate an understanding of key safety concepts. For example, having the students demonstrate how to undertake a safety check prior to using a piece of machinery. To promote discussion and engagement for other students, the trainer might ask other class participants to describe the actions as they are being demonstrated which reinforces key language and vocabulary associated with the topic in a fun and memorable way. Non-verbal performance of tasks was also a helpful mechanism for the trainer to assess the knowledge of those students who were less verbal.

Symbols and images

Symbols, images or metaphors may be used to help students understand, define or record concepts and information. Many of the student portfolios included artwork, images, and photos to document their learning. The use of art and imagery was also used effectively by students to demonstrate their knowledge when completing assessment activities. When defining the assessment requirements for the AHCNSY203 Undertake prorogation activities unit of competency, the trainer advised the students that they were required to propagate and care for a plant over a period of 8 weeks. Students were required

to either propagate five plant seeds or to take and strike cuttings. The assessment also required the students to separately identify each plant to monitor and record its progress, including records of feed and watering cycles. Student B (female student who identified as being on the Autism Spectrum) distinguished each of her plant pots with stickers that showed drawings of each of the plants and their corresponding flower. Her propagation log recording the monitoring cycles for each specimen, used symbols to depict the days when plants were watered or fed. The ability for each individual to contextualise the assessment activity output to suit their strengths created ownership and a learner-led approach to competency development and demonstration.

Land-links

One day, I joined the group on a walk to the parkland area behind the VET Centre. Student C, a 15-year-old Indigenous male, who identified as having attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), guided me through the area. As we walked along the trail, he pointed out various trees, plants and landmarks and provided a running commentary on the living landscape. He named trees and plants with both common and scientific names and detailed plant genus, propagation methods, and described common pests and diseases that might affect each plant. He also shared stories about certain native plants and their medicinal benefits; passing on to the class this Indigenous knowledge that had been passed to him through the oral tradition of community elders. If the student had been directly asked 'what is this tree' or 'how do you propagate this plant', the likely response would have been silence. However, being in the natural environment where he could link knowledge to physical specimens and his own personal experiences, increased his confidence and interest in sharing the information. When it came time for the assessment of the ACHPCM201 - Recognise plants unit of competency, the trainer conducted the assessment orally with the student using the same informal format. Student C provided an explanation of each of the plants and specimens indicated by the trainer as they walked through the parkland with the trainer recording direct student quotes on the assessment sheet to provide evidence of the key knowledge competencies.

Non-linear

Learning is not always sequential and is often relational. It is a complex process where learners reflect, evaluate and link new information through associations and connections with the physical environment, social and emotional experience, and existing knowledge (Jarvis, 2012). Non-linear learning acknowledges students' educational and cultural experiences and empowers them to explore different ways to integrate knowledge and skills from other learning areas. Another successful technique employed by the trainer was the use of a 'true or false' game to introduce new topics. Firstly, the trainer would provide a statement about the topic for the students to consider, e.g. 'the lawn mower uses diesel fuel'. The students were then required to decide if they believed this to be true or if they thought the statement was false. Then, students would stand on the left side of the room if they believed the fact to be true, or on the right to signal that they thought it was false. For some students, their existing knowledge might be sufficient to provide them with a known answer, while for others it might be just a guess. Once all students had decided on the statement's merit, the trainer would invite them to justify or explain their answers, encouraging the students to share their knowledge and negotiate with each other to determine the correct answer. The benefit of this approach was that it allowed learners to revisit and reaffirm prior knowledge, to explore and test hypotheses and apply rationale and logic to justify their decision making.

In non-linear learning models, the student is required to filter and critique information that is received from a wide variety of sources (e.g. personal experience, prior knowledge and learning from peers, family and community) and, because of this, the student's critical thinking and problem-solving skills are expanded. Where students are undecided or have limited information to guide their choice, providing prompts to stimulate analysis and reflection and to probe existing knowledge can be useful to aid student thinking. For example, in the case study provided, the trainer asked prompter questions; 'what type of vehicles use diesel fuel', and 'what type of fuel does your car (or parent's car) use?'. Rather than providing answers for the students, questioning techniques were used to stimulate critical thinking and generate further discussion. This technique provides opportunities for learners to explore information through logical reasoning and deduction. Students may be able to deduce the answer about fuel type based on the knowledge that large

vehicles (e.g. trucks) use diesel fuel. Sometimes students were unable to arrive at the correct true or false response, and, in these cases, the trainer would write the statement on the board and return to the game later in the session. Upon revisiting the question, the students would have more information on which to base their answers and were more likely to articulate the reasoning for their answers due to the additional information acquired throughout the lesson.

Deconstruct – reconstruct

For the Operate basic machinery and equipment unit of competency (AHCMOM203), the learning evolved through several stages: exploring prior knowledge, text and topic prediction, reconstructing information, demonstration, modelling, and finally, creation. Using a deconstruct-reconstruct approach, content is sequenced downwards with a focus on understanding the whole before exploring the constituent parts. When the students arrived in the workshop on this particular morning, they found three items on the workshop benches, (a battery-operated power drill, a lawn mower and a whipper snipper). The students were asked about their prior knowledge of the items and were encouraged to name the item, to explain its function or purpose (verbally or visually), and to talk about their own personal experiences in using each item. Vocabulary was developed and practised through a discussion of known parts of each item. Students were subsequently provided with a pile of cards and each card contained the name of a part from one of the items (e.g. choke, drill bit). Students were then asked to break the list of parts into three piles (one for each of the pieces of equipment). The cardboard name tags were then applied to discrete parts of the machinery items. Like the True or False game, students were encouraged to negotiate with each other and use their logical reasoning to name all of the parts.

The next segment of the lesson involved a discussion and demonstration of how items worked. Initially, the trainer asked the students to describe how they thought the items would operate and encouraged them to mime actions to demonstrate. The discussion naturally evolved to cover the safety features of the equipment and the required personal protective equipment that might be needed for safe operation was discussed. The next phase involved a text prediction activity where students were asked to define what information they thought would be included in an operational instruction manual for one of the items. The

students were then provided a cut-up version of the instruction manual and worked in small groups to re-order the operational instructions back into sequence. The trainer then provided explicit instruction and demonstration on how to use each item, relevant safety features and general operational principles. Continuing from this, students were able to trial and practise with each piece of equipment safely. Once they were confident with each of the pieces of equipment, the learners were tasked with creating their own set of instructions to describe how to use one of the items. Some students designed flowcharts or created a sequence of images to define steps in the operational process. One group recorded a video where they provided a demonstration while explaining how to operate and maintain a lawnmower.

Community links

Sharing and connecting through new knowledge is an important part of the learning process, as knowledge sharing and mentoring can reaffirm that knowledge for the sharer (Marshall et al., 2021). Marshall et al., (2021) also argue that acquired benefits from peer mentoring include greater understanding and relational knowledge of the topic, increased self-awareness and confidence, and reinforcement of lifelong learning skills. A clear example of this was when Student D (19-year-old with complex medical issues) attended a first aid course run by his local Scouts group, during which he taught some of those students about the medical properties of the native plants he had learnt about from Student C. On Monday morning, Student D came to class seeking validation from Student C to confirm that he had passed on true and correct information. The community is linked through this story: Student C learnt this traditional Aboriginal knowledge from his grandfather, which he in turn shared with the students in the conservation and land management course. Student D, by passing this information on, continued the cycle where knowledge and learning are reaffirmed for the individual while also being applied for the benefit of the greater community.

Conclusion

Learning is an active and individual process (Jarvis, 2012) that occurs in response to external interactions that are critically reflected upon

and connected to prior knowledge and personal experience. The 8 Ways philosophy promotes side-by-side learning where the teacher and participants all equally engage in the exchange of knowledge and skills. Using this approach, educators can utilise a range of social, educational and environmental settings where learners are empowered to take agency and ownership of their learning and express their ideas and demonstrate competencies in a way that is meaningful to them as individuals. Through increasing learner control, and opportunities for experimentation and negotiation, trainers can create the 'optimal conditions for learning' (Ellis, 1999, p. 166). The example case study demonstrates how the 8 Ways of Aboriginal Learning can be used to generate a learner-centred environment that supports students with diverse learning needs through the simultaneous development of specific subject matter and reinforcement of essential life-long learning skills.

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Book review

Making Connections: A selection of writings 1983 - 2009

Delia Bradshaw, 2022. Textcraft, Melbourne, Australia. 366 pp.,
ISBN 978-097540140

Reviewed by Ursula Harrison
Deakin University

Making Connections is a must-read for anyone interested in adult education. The book showcases the evolution of Delia Bradshaw's thinking and writing about the transformative potential of adult education through keynote speeches, articles, reflections, lesson plans and workshop activities. A passionate and committed educator, during her four decades of engagement with adult education, Delia worked in numerous roles in a broad range of organisational contexts. The book principally focuses on making connections between her roles and different 'voices' as a teacher, writer, researcher and public speaker.

Structurally the book follows a chronological sequence and is divided into five main sections with subsections. Throughout the book, Delia's contemporary reflections preface the piece that follows. The conversational tone of these reflections personalises the work, offering insights into her work involvements, influences and thinking at the time.

In returning to her earlier writing, she notes that evaluation, with the word 'value' at its centre, was central to her thinking and practice, and this is evident throughout the book.

The first section is the prelude to her expositions on adult education. Titled *1993-1999: Who Am I?* it sets her work in context in writings exploring personal, cultural and political identity. She answers the question Who am I? by outlining the sources and meanings of her names and reflects on the importance of naming in identity formation. Among other things, she reflects on some key life influences including exposure to educational, intellectual and political ideas, loved books, people who have inspired her, and her own aspirations. Her aspirations (abbreviated here) could equally serve to describe her achievements as an educator: to excite adult educators about the powerful personal and social possibilities of their work; to write well with passion and clarity; to participate in pioneering projects on the margins; to be a thoughtful and energetic contributor to her varied communities; to commemorate key life experiences through arts-based rituals; and (the list ends with) to laugh and dance more.

Three more pieces follow in this section. A letter to a friend about what feminism means to her is prefaced by her reflection that *'feminism is at the core of my identity'*. "Since coming here…" (1984) a piece on her work as a project officer for a migrant women's recreation project she loved, illustrates her willingness to take risks, to be on the margins, diving into opportunities without knowing exactly what was expected of her. A lifelong habit of questioning meanings and purposes led her to ask of the project titled "Recreational Opportunities for Migrant Women", what images spring to mind when we talk about recreation? And recreation for migrant women? To avoid the constrictions of typical 'sporty' connotations of recreation the project developed the more liberating definition of "opportunities for migrant women to re-create themselves and their lives". This broader definition, involving deep listening to the women as they interpreted their own needs and aspirations for transformation and regeneration, became widely adopted in neighbourhood houses and learning centres.

The first section highlights important aspects of her pedagogy, questioning, reflecting and bringing her whole self to the work. For the following four sections, I have selected key insights from each section

showing how her values were embodied and shared in her thinking and practice as an educator.

The second section *1985-1993: Working at the Council of Adult Education (CAE)*. The five pieces in this section were written during the time Delia was manager of the Adult Basic Education and Literacy programs at the CAE. A short manifesto about the ABEL programs details the two basic educational goals and the necessary learning environment believed to offer the combination essential for adults to 'read the world as well as the word' in action. The published piece *From Fill-ins to Foundations: Changing Views of Literacy (1992/5)* raises the question, who determines what happens in class? and explores the fundamentally political decisions inherent in views and approaches to literacy. After critiquing several historic and more current approaches to literacy Delia, in her voice as manager, leads us to the three important ethical principles she uses to judge all human behaviour, including literacy practices. They are 1) what contribution does it make to social justice, that is the degree to which wealth and power are shared, 2) its contribution towards the creation and sustenance of a healthy world that allows people to live a peaceful, fulfilling and ecologically mindful life, and 3) the degree to which it throws light on the storehouse of truth, on life and the human condition. She argues that the only defensible literacy position is the critical social literacy perspective that is premised on the position that being literate automatically incorporates critiquing in the name of truth and justice. Teachers must take the lead in deciding class purpose, content and activities, critiquing discourses in pursuit of constructing a more just society, rather than correcting the use of language.

The third section *1997-1998: Questions of Identity*, includes two pieces with different attempts to identify herself as an ALBE worker. In *Ourselves as Texts (1997)*, she presents an example of how she set about examining the interaction of her personal values and politics with her teaching practices. She sets out a credo of her beliefs about the work of adult literacy teachers to initiate students into the cultural, social, and political worlds of meaning-making through a series of practices, including for example broadening ways of viewing and representing the world, interrogating the values and power relations of both groups and texts, and revealing education as knowledge construction. Here she identifies her own intentions of modelling, enacting, embodying those

practices, interrogating and transforming herself through constantly reinventing her educational practices along with her personal and vocational selves. In a workshop exercise with teachers, it was clear that questioning her ethics, epistemologies, methodologies, and making spaces for internal and classroom conversations was not an easy task for her or the participants. Echoing an early theme 'naming' – the name teacher matters, and the work teachers do matters. However, with increasing casualization, and isolation of teachers from one another, there is little opportunity to share educational ideas with each other, making the culture of teaching increasingly fragmented and at risk.

In the fourth section *1997-2002: Transforming Lives, Transforming Communities*, also the name of the published Victorian further education curriculum framework, we hear Delia's voice as a researcher. The first piece *Redefining Knowledge, Transforming the Future (1997)*, sets out the process that culminated in the development of the framework. She was appointed as the project worker to develop the ACFE Board's response to state and national reforms to curriculum and accreditation. Kress's (1995) idea that curriculum is always a design for the future, had Delia asking questions about what we have in mind for the future. At the time a paradigm shift was occurring in thinking about education, towards pluralism and interconnectedness away from uniformity and fragmentation. The framework identified four key principles – multiplicity, connectedness, critical intelligence, transformation – and four curriculum aspects – educational practices, learning outcomes, recognition outcomes, and pathway outcomes – as the way to realise the eight lifelong learning goals (See pages 11 and 16-17 in *Transforming Lives, Transforming Communities*). Delia was widely known as the author of this seminal and influential work on adult education theory and practice.

The final section, *2002-2004: Professional Development Workshops*, presents pieces, and we hear again Delia's voice as a teacher. "What I take into the Workplace with me" Workshop (2002) asks participants to consider the beliefs and values they bring to their classrooms. "Pathways Planning" Workshop (2004) uses a wide range of activities to consider the pathways outcomes domain of the TLTC framework. A book chapter, *All Mapped Out?*: The dynamic relationship between worldviews, democratic imaginations and educational practices (2004).

Delia's writing is engaging, creative and inspiring. If you enjoy talking, reading and thinking about adult education, either as educator or manager, this book is a must-read. It takes us back to the critical fundamentals of transformational adult education, locating its purpose and values within the quest for a just, compassionate and harmonious world where learners are encouraged to 'read the world as well as the word' in action, and teachers embody and continually question their own practices and beliefs.

Download a free copy of the book from the ALA website store:
https://ala.asn.au/members/cart/index/product/id/1452/c/Book review

Book review

Adult language education and migration: Challenging agendas in policy and practice

Simpson, J. & Whiteside, A. (Eds.), 2024. Routhledge, London and New York. 291 pp., ISBN 9780415733601

Reviewed by Kenneth Charles Lambo
Charleton University

Given the recent world events of unprecedented proportions (e.g., COVID-19, wars, and populism), the movement of people across borders looks like a scene in an apocalyptic movie. Whether migration is fueled by choice or by force, it is the numbers that tell the truth. According to the UN's World Migration Report (2022), an estimated 281 million people live in a country other than their country of birth, which is 128 million higher than in 1990. Much research is done on its impact on children, yet scarce literature is dedicated to adults, especially on the policies that influence their education in a foreign country. To address this disparity, the editors of "Adult language education and migration: Challenging agendas in policy and practice" touch a sensitive topic of migration with a critical examination of policy maneuvering on the opportunities for adult language learning in nine focal countries

(i.e., Australia, Canada, Spain (Catalonia), Finland, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, the UK, and the US). They gather 25 contributors to analyze and, in the process question, the language education policies of these countries, bringing us a comparative study of their policy and practice. This comprehensive analysis is a significant contribution to the field, shedding light on wide-ranging issues of integration, top-down policy, language and citizenship testing, monolingual hegemony, multiculturalism, plurilingual classroom practices, and teaching challenges.

Though my lifetime dwarfs that of the combined years of experience of the authors, I strive to be objective and critical. My reviewer positionality is that as a developing researcher interested in the interplay between education policy and adult education, this is the area that both shapes my ontological belief and lived experience of being a product of immigration myself. I am also a Canadian adult language educator involved in the immigrant community of learners, so this is a turf I can speak with confidence. The book starts with an Introduction from the editors. They acknowledge the uneven and contradictory relationship of policy and education (i.e., practice). Chapter 1 traces Australia's history in migration and language policy from two opposing poles—one that seeks to preserve the dominance of English and the other is embracing a proactive and inclusive culture—while Chapter 2 discusses four transformative approaches in ESL teaching that help learners develop skills relevant to their local communities. Chapters 3 and 4 investigate Canada's language policy and its province's (Quebec) effort to preserve its French heritage. Chapter 5 appraises the Catalonian government to push Catalan as a language for Catalonian unity. Chapter 6 proves that ignoring a monolinguist ideology secures teachers and learners in a freer expression of identity in classrooms and the Catalonian community.

On the Nordic region, Chapter 7 describes Finland's language policy as problem-centred in the discourse of migration, and in contrast, stay-at-home mothers' language education in Chapter 8 sees that being a mother inspires them to learn the language of the new country for public access on resources and social life. Going to France, Chapter 9 supports the French for Integration framework that interprets multiculturalism differently from Canada. Chapter 10 contrasts the position in the previous chapter in a way that learners must be encouraged to utilize their full linguistic repertoires to learn French. Chapter 11 balances the

precarious relationship between British English (colonial language) and Irish (historical status) in Ireland, whereas Chapter 12 describes the politicization of immigration in times of good economy and the failure to support once immigrants arrived. In northwest Europe, Chapter 13 describes the anti-immigration turn of the Netherlands' political life. Chapter 14 reports that ICT-based apps for language and literacy development for new arrivals have their pros and cons. Chapter 15 examines the UK's underfunded language policy and policies historically rooted in protecting the border from outsiders. Chapter 16 looks at a London-based action research initiative inspired by the works of Paulo Freire called Whose Integration? Chapter 17 explores the US language policy that sets the literacy and English proficiency standards for migration, obtaining a Green Card, and becoming a US citizen despite the country's no official language. Chapter 18 relates to community-based literacy programs in New York to support the educational needs of adult immigrants in the US who are developing literacy skills in both their native language and English. The last section of the book is the Afterword by Martin-Jones.

From the Introduction to Afterword, this 18-chapter comprehensive compilation of the state-of-the-art knowledge-sharing on some of the world's best and brightest truly revolutionizes the policy and practice of adult migrants' education worldwide. One of the notable strengths of this book is its bold attempt to show the reality of migrant adult education in liberal welfare states. They are bold, I argue, because they point out inequalities in a time when right-wing politics (Chapter 13), budget cuts (Chapters 12 and 18) and strong calls for heritage language preservation (Chapters 4 and 5) could potentially change research and policyscapes. They expose the "language planning agents, levels, and processes" like "unpeeling the onion" of the layers of language policy (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996, pp. 401-402). In addition, they provide innovative teaching practices: content-based teaching (Chapter 2), ESL educators as social justice enforcers (Chapter 4), translanguaging (Chapter 6), plurilingual competence in the classroom (Chapter 10), and community-based programs (Chapters 12, 16, and 18). These emerging pedagogical toolkits are unique to the "divergent geographical, historical and ideological factors" (p. 7) of the country. The teaching practices illuminate accounts of actions taken by countries to defy their "monolingual disposition" (Piccardo, 2013, p. 610), favouring a more

neo-liberal provision and support for migrant learners.

A striking criticism on this book is its lack of a unified definition of "immigrants". It may be true that it is a common word but think of it like the word "terrorist"—to some, they are extremists, and to others, freedom fighters (e.g., Ganor, 2010). *Immigrant* is operationalized and treated differently in many countries as permanent residents, "migrant, foreign born, and international migrant" (Bolter, 2019, p. 1), and some would go as far as those who are asylum seekers, refugees, and undocumented. Each use of the term corresponds to specific immigration policies and to some extent limits access to government funded language programs such as the case of the *inmigrantes indocumentados* or undocumented in the US (see Chapter 17). Such a lack of definition hardens the distinction between the "winners and losers" of "governmental decision-making" (Zahariadis, 2016, p. 2), and therefore the cycle of policies would not have a long-term effect.

Another observation to highlight is the choice of exemplary countries. Historically, these countries have welcomed immigrants; however, it seems Eurocentric to only focus on the Global North, given that migration is a globally occurring social phenomenon. There are countries outside of those mentioned in the book that experience human mobility. Many international migrants live in Asia and Europe, each accounting for 31%, followed by North America with 21%, Africa hosts 9% of migrants, Latin America and the Caribbean account for 5%, and Oceania for 3% (United Nations-International Migration, n.d.). Including other non-OECD member states in the book would have comprehensively described worldwide migration and education.

Regarding the general argument and content of the book, the contributors of the volume pitch their years of expertise to bring to life a new wave of wisdom, sparking a discussion not just within the academic circle but also on the political side. The book juxtaposes policy and practice in each focal country, which exemplifies what the government chooses to do or not to do (Dye, 1972). This tells me that they are reaching out to the audience to think about the ideologies and agendas surrounding the policies and to take stock of what equitable language education means to them. In particular, the book ties up the role of politics in language education. I have seen this eminently in Chapters 3-4, 7-8, and 17-18. The interrelationship of education and policy could

not be underestimated, more so now that the line between the two has become blurry, contentious, and filled with ideological forces at play. For instance, in Chapter 11, the tension between British English and Irish goes far beyond and is muddied with violence and dark colonial history, so it is only fitting for policymakers to tread their policies to balance the significance of both languages. This situation in Ireland is not an isolated problem. As this book implies, a deficit perspective remains a firm grip in policymaking. By deficit, policies are meant to solve the *problem*—which is, in this case, the immigrants. It happens in the US and Canada, too, as their chapters explain, and to which Douglas Fleming of Chapter 4 succinctly sums up: "To deny learners opportunities to explore meaningful and active civic engagement on the basis of their English language proficiency is to do great disservice not only to them, but also to Canada" (p. 78). This connects not only in Canada but also to the country where language education is implemented.

From diverse intellectuals united with a common goal, this oxytocin-infused book is packed with transformative ideas, discussion starters, and inspiration for a social justice movement. It resonates mainly with an audience composed of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers devoted to studying language education in migration contexts. The academic tone and research-backed chapters call the readers to reconsider their assumptions and take an epistemological turn on how adult education should be approached from the social justice perspective. While the book concludes that there is a mismatch between practice and localized interpretation of policy, one good thing emerges: the innovative spirit of people to stick to democracy and a just society in a complicated world. And this book is all about that.

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