



**REFLECTIONS:  
60 YEARS OF ALA**



**Adult  
Learning  
Australia**

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### **Acknowledgements**

Our thanks go to Professor (Adjunct) Barry Golding for commissioning and editing this cameo compilation.



## Foreword

by Professor (Adjunct) Barry Golding

The 41 'Cameos' that follow were finalised by me one year ago during 2019 (pre-COVID) in an interactive process with the people who are featured as part of preparation for the 'ALA turns 60' Celebrations in 2020.

The intention was to allow a wide range of people currently or previously actively involved in ALA, or in adult and community education research, policy or practice in Australia or internationally, to critically reflect, have a say and be heard, in their own words.

In essence they provide very diverse, personal and potentially insightful reflections about where those consulted suggest things are at, where they have been and where things might be headed for ALA in the future.

My sincere thanks to everyone who generously contributed their Cameos for their patience and honesty, as well as to ALA CEO Jenny Macaffer and Catherine Devlin for bringing them to life for publication with photos and formatting.

## Limitations and caveats

A 'snowball' process was used to select other possible contributors after an initial list of potential participants was drawn up in consultation with ALA staff and Board. Not everyone currently or previously involved in ALA on these lists was able to be contacted or could be included. A very small number declined. Many of the very early ALA 'pioneers' are unwell or have passed away. What people say is based on their own recollections and opinions and does not necessarily reflect the views of ALA or its Board. Given that everyone was encouraged to respond personally, the format and length of the Cameos varies as does the emphasis. The end result, after an interactive editing process, is what participants agreed with me could be publicly shared. My sincere apologies as the person responsible for the process and the final product for any mistakes or omissions.

## Process

I was responsible for contacting and collecting the information from each Cameo participant, writing a draft version of each Cameo in standard format and working with participants to ensure a totally acceptable, final version of the Cameo was signed off.

Participants contributed on the understanding that their Cameos, once finalised in a form they agreed with as 'final', would be circulated more widely by ALA during 2020 as part of ALA's 60th birthday celebrations.

Each Cameo was co-constructed with Barry Golding's assistance, primarily using the contributor's original words, based on responses to a series of questions posed in late 2019 to approximately 50 people in Australia and internationally. All had extensive knowledge and experience of adult and community education (ACE) or ALA as practitioners, researchers or managers of peak national adult learning organisations.

The questions asked about past aspects, current perceptions and future prospects for adult learners, ACE, Adult Learning Australia (ALA) and the *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* (AJAL).

## The groups represented in the Cameos

The 41 Cameo personalities fall into four broad groups. The first group comprises a small number of people who were first actively involved with the association, including as President, over three decades ago: Barrie Brennan, Chris Duke & Alistair Crombie.

The second, sizeable group includes people who were first involved in ACE over a decade ago in Australia in a range of previous capacities, either on the ALA Board (Garry Traynor, John McIntyre, Dorothy Lucardie, Sue Ross & Mark Tennant), as a former CEO (Sally Thompson) or Executive Director (Francesca Beddie), former Editors of the *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* (Roger Harris & Tony Brown) or as experienced practitioners and researchers in the broad field of adult and community education (Roger Morris, Peter Kearns, Sue Shore, Dave Tout, Mike Newton, Griff Foley & Peter Willis). Several people in this second group have worn more than one of these 'hats' over the decades.

The third sizeable group consists of people whose contribution to ALA as managers, Board members or in the broader ACE field across Australia is either current or relatively recent. They include Jenny Macaffer & Catherine Devlin, Annette Foley, Donna Rooney, Chris McCall, Catherine Dunn, Mark Brophy, Tony Dreise, Paul Mulroney, Tracey Ollis & Sue Howard as well as Merv Gardner, Robbie Guevara & Jane Chilcott.

The fourth group comprise people located outside of Australia with recent or current, high-level experience internationally in the ACE field either as researchers or managers, and in some cases both. This group includes Sandy Morrison, Colin McGregor & Brian Findsen (NZ/Aotearoa), Niamh O'Reilly & Rob Mark (Ireland) as well as Alan Tuckett & Peter Lavender (UK).

Importantly, most of the people featured as Cameos within Australia, several going back four decades, are still active and enthusiastic members of ALA.



## Professor (Adjunct) Barry Golding AM

The best and most enjoyable things I have achieved and enjoyed in my life I regard as serendipitous, almost accidental, but all have been enhanced by learning by doing and believing in things that are community-driven and ‘bottom up’.

I am delighted and warmly congratulate ALA ‘coming of age’ and turning 60 in 2020. ACE has influenced and ‘rescued’ me at three important junctures during my life in ways that I have not written about before. This ‘Cameo’ narrative gives me that opportunity, for which I am very grateful.

First, as a child growing up in rural Donald in north-western Victoria in the 1950s and 60s, the Donald MLA (Music Literature and Arts Society) was a welcome cultural beacon into a then very mono-cultural, isolated community. The MLA Book Club and theatre touring groups were supported by rural outreach through the Council of Adult Education (CAE) and Victorian Arts Council. The Donald History and Natural History Group provided me with wise and experienced mentors and memorable field trips to cultivate my lifelong passions for history and environment. These insights beyond school set me up for a life of research and inquiry.

Second, from the time when I was unemployed cutting timber in the bush for an early ‘Work for the Dole Scheme’ in Daylesford in the mid 1970s, to when I was teaching in Ballarat in the 1980s, the Ballarat Community Education Centre (BCEC) was my ‘go to’ place to access a whole range of educational resources and technologies.

BCEC helped me keep sane and social, connected and contributing, feeding my passion for lifelong and lifewide learning, leading to a lifetime of studying and researching. I was such a ‘rusted on’ BCEC user they invited me onto the Committee, where I first learned how organisations really ‘ticked’.

My 1990s PhD delved into some shortcomings of the formality of both TAFE and university. It alerted me to the ubiquity, nature and value of less formal learning and led me into a lifetime of academic research into ACE. I became a specialist in rural learning beyond paid work, most recently focussed on older men’s learning and the Men’s Shed movement internationally.

I came to realise that the value and power of learning is not directly through what is learned or earned, but by the social and community connections indirectly made as a consequence, by participants, families and community

others. The best and most enjoyable things I have achieved and enjoyed in my life I regard as serendipitous, almost accidental, but all have been enhanced by learning by doing and believing in things that are community-driven and ‘bottom up’.

Third, while neither being a Professor in Adult Education nor being ALA President were on my bucket list, both gave me much hope and joy. They also gave me a convenient platform to help research, write, collaborate, advocate and agitate for change nationally and internationally, in what I perceive is an increasingly barren, formal, user pays educational landscape and an increasingly beleaguered and fractured ACE system. Whilst it’s not yet ‘All over Red Rover’ in Australia as I warned with Annette Foley in *AJAL* in December 2011, the case and research evidence for accessible and affordable lifelong and lifewide learning for all Australians is stronger than ever.

I was fortunate to work during the most recent decade as ALA President for several years with a creative ALA Board and CEO, Sally Thompson. I was delighted recently to be given the joyful tasks of trawling through the Irish and Australian ACE journals for AONTAS and ALA over 50 and 60 years respectively, to create a research narrative about how the ACE field was researched, shaped and changed, and also to work through ALA to co-create three dozen other Cameos.

I was therefore very reluctant to craft this, my own Cameo, but after some ‘arm twisting’, here it is. Like many others, I’ve ‘gone feral’ and ignored some of the ten ‘set questions’ I posed for Cameo contributors, but do acknowledge the need to briefly address some of them, as below.

ALA has a proud history and living heritage of supporting adult learning in all its diverse forms in community contexts, lifelong and lifewide. ALA’s flagship Journal *AJAL* has become an important part of the hull of what I sometimes call the ‘Good Ship ALA’. ACE and ALA are both sailing into economically irrational waters. Governments are abandoning public education in all its forms to the market. As with climate change, the costs to governments of doing nothing in the ACE space in order to enhance

and encourage learning, literacy, culture, community and democracy are far greater than the costs and benefits of doing something,

The main issue facing adult learners in diverse community settings in Australia in 2020 is, I believe, remaining literate and connected enough to survive and stay well in an era of rapid change and diminishing public support for adult learning beyond paid work. That education and housing are now unaffordable for young people in Australia is shameful. It is something that was caused by my generation and that I did not experience. That the next generations are also saddled with the many deleterious effects of climate change that was predicted and avoidable, and with our government in denial, is arguably our biggest learning hurdle.

Educators need to be better educated about the nature and benefits of learning for adults and children that occur in very diverse community settings without teachers, formality or curriculum. ACE, despite being the submerged base of a huge iceberg of learning, is barely visible on the government policy radar.

The biggest hurdle facing ALA in promoting ACE in Australia is widespread ignorance and confusion about what ACE is and why it is important. This ignorance and confusion is exacerbated by very different histories and systems of ACE provision and support across Australian states and territories. To 2020, we have not been a very clever country when it comes to learning from the past or governing for the future.

My optimistic hope in 2020 is that Australia will, led by our young people, finally come of age: negotiate a treaty, unconditionally welcome migrants and refugees, reduce our carbon footprint and develop a more equitable and sustainable '2020 vision'.

ALA must be part of this vision as there is so much to do and learn.

### About Barry Golding

Professor Golding is associated with the School Education, Federation University Australia in Ballarat. Barry has extensive research experience in vocational, adult and community learning. His research has focused mainly on equity and access to learning in less formal community contexts. His recent international emphasis has been on men's informal learning through participation in community organisations.

He has completed many national and international studies of older men's learning and wellbeing through community participation including through Men's Sheds internationally. His recent Australian field research has included studies of alternative schools and vocational education for young people in regional and rural settings.

Barry is honorary Patron of the Australian Men's Sheds Association, a former President of Adult Learning Australia and is on the AJAL Editorial Board. In 2015 Barry was awarded the Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for his 'significant contribution to tertiary education as a researcher and author, to professional organisations and to the community'.





# Sir Alan Tuckett

ALA has achieved much in 60 years, by bringing widely disparate public and voluntary sector agencies together to celebrate the importance of adult learning and promoting participation to others. It has advocated to governments during a time when neo-liberal policies have dominated.

Firstly, sincere congratulations to ALA for turning 60! It's a great achievement just to survive in these very hard times for community-based organisations.

I have enjoyed a long and active relationship with ALA and its predecessors for over three decades first in 1986 when I spoke at the AAAE conference and its anti-racism sub-conference in Canberra. I was back for a keynote at a 1990 conference in Melbourne, also giving evidence to the Senate Committee that produced the successor to 'Come in Cinderella' in 1991.

In 1993, I went with Alastair Crombie of AAAE to successfully argue the case with government for an Australian 'Adult Learners' Week' whilst in Sydney as a Visiting Fellow at UTS. I next came across as guest speaker at Adult Learners' Week in both 1996 and 2008. In 2015, whilst a Visiting European Fellow at RMIT, I participated in ALA events in both Sydney and Melbourne.

ALA has achieved much in 60 years, by bringing widely disparate public and voluntary sector agencies together to celebrate the importance of adult learning and promoting participation to others. It has advocated to governments during a time when neo-liberal policies have dominated. It has celebrated the diversity of multi-ethnic, multi-lingual Australia, and encouraged respect for Indigenous communities' learning strategies. In recent decades its support for neighbourhood houses mainly for women and Men's Sheds mainly for older men has been noticed and copied internationally.

## Learning is at the heart of wellbeing

I see lots of good reasons for promoting community learning, lifelong and lifewide as in ALA's mission. Learning is at the heart of community wellbeing, and research confirms it helps with health, justice, diversity and social cohesion – yet is starved of resources. Good willed people in the ACE sector often risk burn out. Adult learning organisations are often squeezed for space, and constantly battling to provide training, undertake curriculum

development, ensure good governance and still maintain the centrality of learner voice. All of this is very hard to do without adequate government support.

There is no silver bullet, but continued advocacy for learning, including for national and state learning strategies is essential. A range of place-based, community-focussed initiatives including Learning Cities can also make a difference. The challenge for ALA is the scale of the task versus the scale of its available resources (people, money). Knowing what to prioritise with so much to do is really hard.

ALA's excellent journal, *AJAL*, also faces future challenges, with a likely shrinking audience, with less people with the time to read and also write articles. There will always be a need for implementing complementary communication forms geared to the short attention span of the media.

In conclusion, ALA brings people to reignite the fire to argue the case for adults to have the right to learn, to transform their lives, their communities and the wider society.

## About Alan Tuckett

Professor of Education, University of Wolverhampton; Past President, International Council for Adult Education; Honorary Fellow, UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning Formerly CEO NIACE in England & Wales, 1988–2011; initiated 'Adult Learners' Week'.



# Alistair Crombie

ALA and its predecessor organisations greatest achievements ... [include] initiating the Senate inquiry that produced 'Come in Cinderella' in 1991; ... being a prime mover in the creation of the first national ACE policy [and] ... actively supporting and fostering international adult education via ASPBAE and the ICAE.

My experience of ALA mainly goes back to its antecedent organisations in the 1980s and 1990s. My involvement spanned the period of significant change and growth of the organisation from AAAE to AAACE to ALA.

I am too far removed from it all now to make sensible suggestions on the future of ALA or its current journal *AJAL*, but am delighted to critically reflect on what I regard as ALA and its predecessor organisations greatest achievements over the 60 years.

- The first was gaining significant federal government funding for a national office: \$185,000 per year in 1992.
- The second was initiating the Senate inquiry that produced 'Come in Cinderella' in 1991.
- The third was being a prime mover in the creation of the first national ACE policy.
- The fourth was actively supporting and fostering international adult education via ASPBAE and the International Council of Adult Education (ICAE).
- Finally, initiating 'Adult Learners Week in Australia' has been an ongoing national success.

My considered reflections on the 1990s, the period of my most active involvement, are recorded in my paper 'AAACE in the Nineties' published in *AJAL* in 2010 (50[3], 543–50).

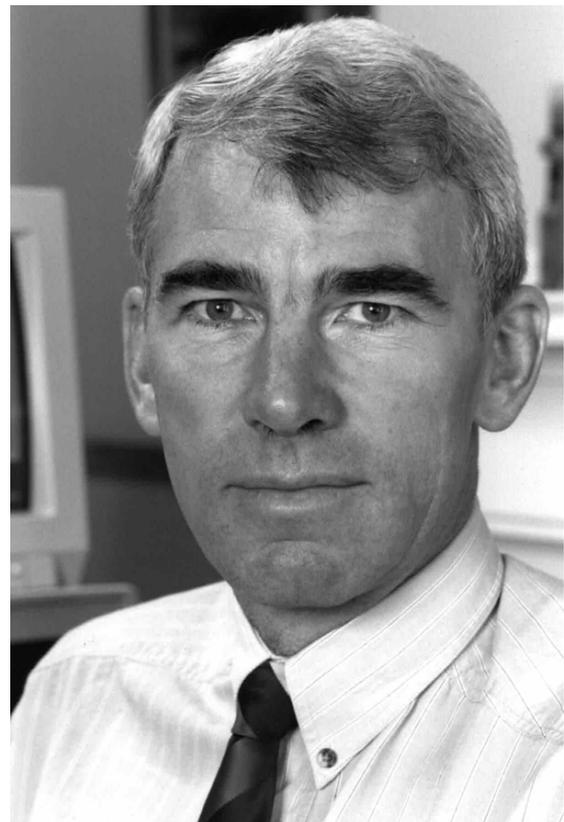
## Feminising and modernising

Up to around the mid-eighties AAACE was university centred, male dominated, and rather traditional. Later it was feminised and modernised and became more engaged with important social issues.

The introduction of Adult Learners Week nationally in 1993 underlined this shift, and the name change to ALA was also emblematic of a shift towards and focus on the 'demand side', prioritising learners rather than providers.

## About Alistair Crombie

Formerly a committee member AAAE & AAACE, 1987–1993, and President 1988–1990; Executive Director AAACE & ALA, 1993–1999. Currently retired.



# Assoc. Professor Annette Foley

The 60th anniversary is an important milestone for ALA. It is a time when we can reflect back and celebrate our achievements and it is also a time to look ahead at the key challenges for our communities and identify how ACE can assist communities into the future.

ALA is an important peak body that represents, advocates and supports adult community education across the country. Some of its important and critical achievements involve advocacy work and drawing from evidence-based research to highlight the importance and benefit to communities through lifelong learning, community based learning and its impact on the health and wellbeing for community members across the country. ALA is a tireless supporter of the importance of recognising community education and its role in healthy connected and supported communities.

There are many issues facing communities now and into the future. Those that spring to mind are the importance of recognising community education for diversity and sustainability, along with ongoing support and advocacy for learning opportunities and support focusing on early school leavers, indigenous and diverse communities and on an ageing population that benefits from community participation.

ALA has supported and recognised research evidence that shows the health and community benefits of programs and learning spaces of all types and forms. Men's sheds, for instance, provide opportunities for men from all walks of life to come together to share friendship and skills. In neighbourhood houses, community support and general education are mixed to cater for specific needs directly affecting local communities. U3As, also community based, offer support through lifelong learning opportunities for older Australians.

It is critical for ALA to keep abreast of community needs, advocate for these needs and where possible, support communities through recognising diversity, environmental challenges and ongoing support for diverse learners. I think having a louder voice at the decision makers table is one way to 'lift up' the importance of ACE to the Australian community.

The biggest hurdle facing ALA in promoting ACE is a lack of recognition of the broader health benefits of ACE and a lack of recognition of the grassroots and community based

positive impacts it has on local communities.

One of the main 'hurdles' I see facing academic journals (such as *AJAL*) is that ACE is a relatively under researched area in this country. The academic community researching and publishing in this area in Australia is less than in other areas, hence the journal is not as well serviced or circulated as other journals. That is why we need to nurture up and coming academics to research in adult and community education and share their research.

The 60th anniversary is an important milestone for ALA. It is a time when we can reflect back and celebrate our achievements and it is also a time to look ahead at the key challenges for our communities and identify how ACE can assist communities into the future.

## About Annette Foley

Associate Professor in Adult and Vocational Education at Federation University Australia. She is also the current President of ALA and on the editorial board for the *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*. Annette has been a researcher and advocate for adult and community education for many years. She is currently researching with Adjunct Professor Barry Golding and Dr Helen Weadon the impact of men participating in Men's sheds on their partners and substantive others. She is also researching the use of adult pedagogies to engage early school leavers.

Annette previously worked in roles and researched in the adult community education sector and in the VET sector for many years. She is a member of two Federation Universities research groups: Research in Adult and Vocational Education (RAVE) and Social Justice, Inclusion and Diversity in Education (SJIDE).

These research groups frame her key research efforts, which include access and equity, informal learning, gender, lifelong learning, adult education, education for health and well-being, youth engagement in adult education and Vocational Education and Training (VET) opportunity and pathways.



# Barrie Brennan

I believe our 'introduction' of women onto AAE committees between the 1970s and 1990s and then 'en masse' was a major and positive influence on AAE and Australian Adult Education.

On critical reflection a decade on, I believe the 'introduction' of women onto AAE committees between the 1970s and 1990s and then 'en masse' was a major and positive influence on AAE and Australian Adult Education. There was just one female on the Board when I joined (Joan Allsop), but a female became President the year after I retired as President by the early 1980s. For me, a key factor then (as now) was that problems in adult education had to be tackled at 'ground level', and women in female groups proved to be particularly effective at doing this in the local town or suburban areas.

## Solutions beyond the metropolis

A problem not really attacked across several generations of ACE in Australia has been to find solutions beyond the metropolis. The key innovations in large urban ACE providers were never successfully transported beyond the state capitals, to local, small, rural groups or communities, or even across the border into neighbouring states.

We lacked success at devising and building programs and strategies and then incorporating them into our national structures. We were really never truly an Australian organisation (to Australians) or to people overseas. In my view, there was never a distinctive 'Aussie brand' of adult education aside from our Indigenous one.

Living in Tamworth, I seem to be one of very few ALA members contributing perspectives beyond the big cities. The typical pattern, as I see it is that 'experts' from Sydney (or Canberra) come here and give the big talk. There is a report in the local paper. End of story.

Meantime we have lots of organisations or groups, here in Tamworth and elsewhere in rural Australia, that don't know what to do, what or who to ask: for real answers to their common problems. One hears, however of things that are good and that really happen.

- Children from the coast of Asian islands learn to swim.
- People from a Pacific island discover how to grow their 'real home foods'.
- A Chinese cook from Indonesia teaches the local 'cooks' in his new home town how to cook fish.
- An Asian mother shows local mothers how to make clothes for their children.
- Mothers of Pacific island children demonstrate at the local school how to dance their own island's dances for a special school celebration.

'Big things from little things grow': I have read about and seen evidence of all of these things. There are more boys with an African heritage in our local school basketball team than white Australian boys, and the locals are the best team in the district!

These stories, when publicised do have an impact, and if reproduced usually get positive traction for people and organisations involved. That is what I want to hear and read about in *Quest* and other ALA publications. That's what I want the residents of Tamworth and Timbuktoo or wherever (beyond Sydney or Brisbane) to read and then put into practice.

(Read Barrie's recollections of AAE in the 1970s in *AJAL*, 2011 (50(3), 535–39).

## About Barrie Brennan

Barrie is active in retirement in Tamworth with U3A and Country Music organisations.

Former AAE President and AJAE Editor (6 years in 1980s); involved with ASPBAE, and DVV (an international adult education and development agency) in Australia and overseas; Vice President of Australian Folk High School Association.

# Dr Brian Findsen

ALA has constructed and critiqued public policy in adult learning throughout its existence; making serious attempts to unite a diverse field in a large country

As a recently retired Professor of Adult Education, it is sobering to reflect that I was the last one in New Zealand. I highly value my ongoing links with both ACE Aotearoa (New Zealand) and ALA. Most of my research has been focussed on later life learning in NZ, Australia and internationally.

Given my longevity in ACE over three decades, my Australian involvements have been varied, beginning with participation at the Canberra (32nd National ACE) Conference in 1992 and contributing a paper on university-based ACE in NZ. In the 1990s I tracked the development of ACE policy in Australia in reports/books such as 'Come in Cinderella' (1991) and 'Striking a balance: ACE in Australia' (1992), and 'The Fourth Sector: Adult & Community Education in Aotearoa New Zealand' (1996). There is fascinating comparability across several benchmark publications on ACE in our adjacent countries.

I've regularly participated in ACE conferences in Australia, including Lifelong Learning conferences in Yeppoon in the early 2000s, the ALA Conference at UTS in 2003 and collaboration in organising the 'Getting of Wisdom' conferences in February 2017 (Ballarat; Melbourne; Wellington). Joint venture connections with fellow researchers in older adult education in Europe and collaboration in publishing in ACE with Australian colleagues Barry Golding and Roger Harris have been important part of my networking, as has been acting as a reviewer for *AJAL*.

ALA has made many major contributions: constructing and critiquing public policy in adult learning throughout its existence; making serious attempts to unite a diverse field in a large country (including balancing national and state level practices and policies while acknowledging the self-determination at local levels); sustaining *AJAL* as a credible academic journal for both VET and general ACE; breaking down barriers between vocational and expressive forms of adult education, and the application of a continuing consciousness to frame ACE developments in Australia within a global context.

ALA faces several serious 'headwinds', including gaining sufficient financial support at a national level; gaining more public acceptance of the need for lifelong learning (a question of parity of status with other education sectors), and developing unity out of diversity (speaking with a united voice to effect change).

In order to rise to these challenges, ALA needs to continue to develop a coalition of sub-fields of ACE to gain stronger traction with policy developers at varied governmental levels, and also gain more leverage with current leaders to exert more influence in gaining sustainable funding to affect learner outcomes.

## Visible and proactive

ALA has to be visible and proactive in locations where funding/policy decisions are made; identify a critical mass of leading academics/practitioners to help hold government accountable, and also help to develop with Indigenous leaders policies/practices that promote the life chances of First Nations people across Australia. In order to achieve this, it may be necessary to look beyond the usual narrow perspectives and make connections (partnerships) to strengthen the voices of/for the least resourced adult learners.

*AJAL* is an excellent international journal. Unfortunately, we lost ours in New Zealand around 2010. *AJAL* faces several future challenges: identifying key players who can provide continuity of editorship (via succession planning); identifying and promoting the benefits of contributing to/supporting such journals, and competing against a myriad of other channels of information/stimulation in social media. In the process it needs to clearly identify what is distinctive about the journal.

This 60th anniversary is a good time to reflect on how ALA can simultaneously strengthen the internal (Australian) dynamic of ACE practice, policy and research, as well as to boost its global connections via effective social networking and contributions to interrogation of international issues.

Finally, I think that strengthening the relationship between ACE Aotearoa and ALA needs to be sustained (e.g. encouragement of trans-Tasman participation in annual conferences; continuing dialogue over joint issues; co-publication in strategic outlets). At a personal level, the Getting of Wisdom conferences and resultant publications were a highlight of my later career. It's great to see such imaginative ventures become a trans-Tasman reality.

#### About Brian Findsen

Currently a lifelong learning consultant. Formerly Professor of Education, University of Waikato, New Zealand.



# Catherine Dunn

Adult learners today face a lack of available, suitable, accessible and affordable learning opportunities. Today it seems it's often down to a matter of luck, and more about where you're from, where you live, who you know, and who is there to help you.

ALA's main achievement over six decades has been flying the flag for ACE, with consistent, strong national advocacy for ACE. It has built a strong network community of practitioners through professional development programs, events and publications and media. It undertakes high quality work, being accessible to and interested in even the smallest of ACE providers, always keeping a focus on the learners.

Adult learners today face a lack of available, suitable, accessible and affordable learning opportunities. Today it seems it's often down to a matter of luck, and more about where you're from, where you live, who you know, and who is there to help you. As my potted history of ACE in WA below reveals, in my view, things seem leaner here in the West than they have ever been.

Up until about 20 years ago, the WA state government supported adult community education by subsidising 'night' classes run through technical colleges. Each term, broadsheet advertising across WA sparked strong community interest. Everything was offered from bricklaying and ballroom dancing to Mandarin Chinese and matriculation English, and was always affordable. Enrolling in classes was a public conversation. Going back many decades, our major local university (UWA) also offered a very wide range of 'extension courses', still very eclectic but a bit more expensive and geographically limited. Through to the 1970s, UWA also ran a summer school for adults, which was very popular, but with a relatively limited clientele.

The major change for ACE occurred when public policy in vocational education came to focus on skills and work readiness, and the government dollar then had to be accountable on these criteria. Courses for lifestyle or hobbies or in non-vocational areas were no longer supported and the fees became prohibitive to many people. Understandably, the technical colleges were forced to pull away from offering these courses.

From about 1995, the increased national focus on ACE through the Australian National Training Authority brought some extra traction at state level. The WA Department

of Training established an ACE Advisory Committee that oversaw the introduction of annual Adult Learners Week activities, which also included project grants to organisations and awards for students and teachers.

At this time, ALA was invited by the WA Department of Training to join its new ACE Advisory Committee, and proved to be a key advocate and influential member. The representative from ALA was drawn from its local WA subcommittee. Other members included UWA Extension, Council on the Ageing, a TAFE college representative, Learning Centre Link (now LinkWest) and the Department of Regional Development representing the state-wide Telecentre network. The diverse and collaborative nature of this group led to some dynamic times for ACE projects funded through the Department.

Even greater funding, which became available through the Commonwealth under its 'Australians Working Together' program, augmented this. All states participated at a national level in developing the Ministerial Declaration on ACE. The Department also provided a proportion of Learning Centre Link's core funding (as a peak body for the network of community learning centres across WA) and also for the Telecentre Network across WA's regional areas.

## Fostering learning pathways

Over this time, funding for major projects was allocated as grants to foster learning pathways for vulnerable and disadvantaged students, drawing together the best that registered training organisations and community not-for profit (NFP), non-registered organisations could offer in collaboration. This funding continued for around six years and led to the development of programs and relationships between providers that continue now. And of course, the number of learners whose lives and prospects grew was significant.

The Department initiated some major projects including a series of biennial ACE Conferences that attracted participants from across the state and beyond, regular project workshops for grant recipients, and commissioning of research and publications. ALA representatives provided

the Department with ideas and offered practical assistance for many projects at this time.

In summary, by 2005, ACE here in WA was dynamic and visible amongst adult educators and had created a sense of identity among providers and a collegial sense of shared purpose. After just a few years at that peak, the commitment to ACE policy and funding began to diminish, with input waning at both state and commonwealth levels.

There remains a strong government commitment to foundation skills for adults, delivered to students as 'wrap-around' extra tuition and support in accredited courses. However the Department of Training's support for ACE more broadly has shrunk even further. As of late 2019, the only major non-accredited program still being funded was Read Write Now! While there is no prospect of change on the horizon for that Department, ACE still continues to be offered in many other ways in WA, albeit in a highly fragmented manner.

For instance The State Library of WA is the driving force behind developing a state literacy strategy, and suburban libraries offer classes of various kinds. The Department of Communities funds both LinkWest, and Community Resource Centres in regional areas, Neighbourhood Centres and multicultural groups, all of which are involved in community level adult learning activities to some degree. UWA still offers extension programs, some local government councils fund local learning centres and Men's Sheds are funded through a range of sources.

Meantime informal adult education is still alive and well in environmental groups, church groups, craft groups, sporting clubs and a host of other special interest groups. In addition, several larger NFP community organisations have become registered training organisations (RTOs,) offering both foundation and non-accredited courses to their participant groups. Any government funding for adult education in WA is now mainly directed to sectors interested in developing their volunteer base and for community development purposes.

In these lean and difficult times for ACE in WA and nationally, I identify several possible solutions. Engaging the attention and providing information to community aid workers/volunteers would help raise awareness of learning opportunities and pathways for their clients. Building learning into a person's current range of activities creates adult learners. For those who are time-poor, learning in the context of child-rearing, work, aged care, with limited mobility and diverse other practical considerations, are the starting point, and pathways beyond that can develop.

It's essential to make available an accessible summary of classes and costs, what's free, what's not, and what's negotiable, to help attract those who are thinking it's all beyond their means. I think we also need to keep the profile of adult learning as big, wide and normalised as possible, through a constant public presence. For example through popular TV programs, through community services, local newspapers, shopping centres and local council initiatives.

The perennial hurdle for ALA as the national peak is where it sits in the mix of ACE definitions, delivery and funding across the country. Firstly, each state has a different approach to ACE policy and funding, resulting in ALA having a higher, lower, or no local profile there.

Secondly, ALA is logically aligned with the government departments of education and training, but those departments no longer provide funding to support ALA as a peak organisation. Dollars are being directed to accredited training programs with an industry focus rather than to broader lifelong learning programs. The challenge is now to find other areas across national, state and local government where adult learning is a required element to attain strategic goals, but where education is not their core business.

Thirdly, as funding shrinks, so does the pool of providers that identify as offering ACE programs, resulting in fragmentation. There is less awareness of us being part of a sector of adult education.

In my view, ALA has the expertise and vision to partner with organisations across a variety of areas, not just traditional education and training portfolios, and to be a strong strategic ally in research and program development. Some examples might include more work with the disability sector, ageing, and multicultural communities.

## Maintaining relevance

It's important for ALA as the national peak body to continue to be relevant to ACE/community providers in all states and territories. This takes extra work and resources, particularly outside of Victoria and New South Wales. Speaking for Western Australia at least, ALA needs to rebuild its identity, and to do that it will need to increase its visibility and presence in order to be more relevant and claim to represent local interests. With the fragmented nature of ACE in WA, it might be beneficial to have state-specific discussions with members (and potential members) from time to time, forming interest groups and a local network, and having more presence at local events.

Not being in academic circles, I don't have a good knowledge of the hurdles facing our flagship journal, *AJAL*. I guess that the online nature of research means greater competition for readership, as it's much easier to access international research and translations. I also suspect that there is a shrinking pool of researchers and students in adult education.

### About Catherine Dunn

Catherine is currently an ALA Board Member and Treasurer. Formerly Senior Policy Officer/Manager of WA State Government policy related to equity in VET and ACE (1998-2013, including developing the WA Strategy for ACE, managing research projects, coordinating ACE conferences, grant funding programs and contributing to national policy development for ACE & equity in VET. Elected to ALA Board in 2012 including a term as President.



# Catherine Devlin

Our focus must be on building a new future and showing through our advocacy where adult education and learning fits in modern Australia.

Recently I found some time to open a few boxes from ALA's storage unit. Photos, journal editions and other artefacts are now piled high around me as I attempt to get a handle on the history of this organisation. The artefacts of ALA, both old and new, weave a narrative that is largely about adult learning in the context of opportunity, access and agency.

The premise of ALA's mission, that everyone should have access to learning throughout their lives, may seem obvious to some but ALA devotes significant resources to communicating its mission in different ways in order to reach those who find the concept a little 'grey'.

Our advocacy is underpinned by research, including the peer reviewed research in the *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* (AJAL), which is an important tool – but it isn't the only one nor should it be.

## Joining the dots

ALA embraces traditional forms of advocacy such as lobbying and campaigning but technology, including social media, is increasingly playing a greater role. Our reach through these platforms is far beyond what was possible previously.

ALA also communicates its mission by sharing stories of learning, innovation and transformation in *Quest*. *Quest* allows readers to connect with personal stories of learning. It helps them to join the dots because the stories reveal the people and communities behind the research and statistics. This type of advocacy may be considered 'benign' by some but people remember stories especially those that resist a patronising tone opting instead to show how access and opportunity equal agency. Good stories communicated well also support meaningful action at a policy level.

Through our publications, websites, social media platforms, and through our submissions, media releases and commentaries – we are telling the world who we are and what we care about. Communication is fundamental to everything we do from our internal relationships with staff and the Board, through to our external relationships with members, supporters, governments and stakeholders. It is more important than ever for us to clearly and simply articulate who we are and what we are trying to achieve.

ALA has long embraced the use of technology in its operations. We quite simply couldn't function as effectively without it. Our social media platforms give us access to information and they also give us a direct line to politicians, stakeholders, supporters and potential supporters – people who believe in what we believe in.

Our professional development and communities of practice are largely online. The technology supports the organisation to build the capacity of adult educators across Australia. For some in regional or remote areas, this may be the only way they can connect with other adult educators.

ALA has been a sector leader in the provision of online forums, webinars and communities of practice but we must also find new ways of working that support us to do even more with the resources we have.

ALA continues its long tradition of being a voice for equitable access to lifelong learning. Over the years, some things have changed – some things haven't. In fact, it's striking how little the core narrative of the organisation has changed.

And why should it? It remains as relevant today and it did then. We just need to be alive to new ways of communicating and building relationships around a time honoured narrative.

ALA will continue its work calling for a genuine commitment from all tiers of government to lifelong learning and to the central role of adult education. These are the things that drive all the work we do.

Before we tape up the boxes and put them back into storage, we should reflect on the extraordinary work of ALA and the long line of passionate people and members that have created this organisation and its strong values. But dwelling too long on yesterday is not the answer. Our focus must be on building a new future and showing through our advocacy where adult education and learning fit in modern Australia.

## About Catherine Devlin

Operations manager at ALA. Part of ALA's senior management team, with direct responsibility for managing ALA's operations, and leading ALA's national projects such as Adult Learners Week.

# Professor Chris Duke

‘Speaking truth to power’ is not a new idea. But it gets tougher, the more governments slide into short-term, populist and authoritarian ways.

I was centrally involved in the development of ALA’s predecessor AAAE (Australian Association of Adult Education), as Executive member in 1969 and Chairman [sic] from 1972, whilst Director of Continuing Education at ANU. During that time AAAE broadened its scope, loosening previous NSW University and WEA control. The association became more national and much more community-based as neighbourhood centres and other bodies grew, as well as more strongly connected and recognised internationally.

Since returning to England in 1985–96, I lost institutional connection but remained close to Australian developments in adult and community education (ACE), lifelong learning and the higher education and TAFE systems, especially later in terms of adult access, recognition and progression in NSW and at dual-sector RMIT.

I’ve been present and professionally involved in ACE in both UK and Australia (as well as in Europe, Asia, North America and globally) every year since 1969. This makes me one of many who enjoy close connection with the adult education work in both countries over many years.

I cannot comment accurately on ALA’s main 21st century achievements, but delight in its evident strength, stability and productivity through hard times and on its approaching 60th. So my remarks here about work and critical issues today are general, and not well informed by recent and current ALA performance.

Looking at the bigger picture, we share an ever-more stressed universe, with common shared trends and crises, from social and economic injustice, inequality and (dis)-stress to intransigent insistence on equating ‘education’ with schools and qualifications. We need to make all of education our business in terms of individuals’ ‘life trajectories’ and learning needs ‘from cradle to grave’. School curriculum and culture are part of our business, and an essential basis for good adult learning.

ALA members should be really clear what we mean by ‘education’ and ‘learning’, and what words we use. Otherwise we will never give workplace learning and its support, or community-based learning, the recognition

and support that they need. We need to think and practise lifewide as well as lifelong.

We must also get to grips with the learning of communities and organisations as ‘learning agencies’ in themselves, not just as places where individuals learn, or worse, are instructed and certificated. We need courage and thick skins to go on advocating: persuading and harrying those in power and with resources, to value and support the learning of their citizens in all their diversity, through all life phases and learning needs.

## The culture wars

‘Speaking truth to power’ is not a new idea. But it gets tougher, the more governments slide into short-term, populist and authoritarian ways, and covert forms of oppression. We have moved during my working lifetime from the optimism that went with more personal freedoms, rising prosperity and narrowing gulfs of inequality between rich and poor nations and people, to a viciously competitive and untrustworthy individualistic culture, deliberately created in the 1980s, that has since deepened its roots and spread world-wide.

So, like it or not, ALA is enmeshed in a national culture war, affecting its peoples as well as the different governments to be lobbied. If we try to remain aloof from politics, as did some in the old liberal AE tradition, we remain powerless. ALA has held to its core values and sense of priorities well. It needs to sustain its support, membership and shared direction: with Aboriginal communities and other ethnic, religious, and disadvantaged groups like refugees and those managing disabilities and other special challenges. Gender and age remain highly relevant.

Today’s trends are not cheering. Across all domestic and foreign policies, in the vital arenas identified by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ALA needs alliances and collaboration with others sharing its ethics and sense of what directions are good for our richly cosmopolitan country. Events like Adult Learners Week, adopted from the UK innovation, are important, celebrating achievement and for high morale and camaraderie.

PIMA has a strong Australian base, currently with 30 Australian members. It has recently worked with ALA in the area of older adults' learning. The PIMA Bulletin carries material about Australia and relevant to ALA, such as the current focus on celebrating anniversaries – looking back and looking forward.

PIMA, with its strong home-based and overseas network of experienced and committed activists, offers one vehicle for ALA to give and gain from experience and action elsewhere. Another is the very fine and well-led body ASPBAE, in which Australia has enjoyed welcomed participation and at times leadership. ALA also has many friends elsewhere, especially where there are strong historic and cultural links: as with well-governed neighbour New Zealand, and still loved-and-well-mocked Britain, current Brexit breakdown notwithstanding.

I am only an occasional reader of *AJAL*, as of its predecessor *AJAE*, to which I first contributed in 1970. My sense is that the Journal does well to meet its scholarly and wider readership.

Academic publishing is highly fraught today. The recent trend to largely publications-driven competitive ranking pulls writing towards ever more specialised readerships. Academically prestigious publications are vital to university and individual prestige and career progression.

Some *AJAL* contributors are under this pressure, at a time when many good and useful field-oriented ALE journals are disappearing. *AJAL* is much needed. In Britain the fine NIACE publication house has gone, and big publishing houses call the shots. Tragically, the excellent DVV German journal *Adult Education and Development*, far and away the best in serving the Global South, died in 2019.

Maybe *AJAL* needs to check its breadth and benefit especially to its non-academic readership and ensure that it does not fall victim to the publish-or-perish war game. Is there a stronger and more viable future in more fluid virtual open-access publishing that above all serves the field of ACE practice and practitioner research?

To mark ALA's 60 years a national bottom-up participatory review might be valuable as well as fun. Each State and Territory might encourage review-and-brainstorm events drawn together to a national review through an annual conference. This could report on past progress and achievements, and also and especially look at future possibilities and desirable new directions at least for the new decade.

Remember – and disprove – an old historians' adage: the one thing we learn from history is that we never learn from history.

### About Chris Duke

Current Editor and Governing Committee Member, PIMA; Honorary Professor, RMIT University & University of Glasgow.

Former Professor of Adult & Continuing Education or Lifelong Learning (LLL), PVC and CEO at Australian, UK, and New Zealand Universities: ANU, UWS, RMIT; Leeds, Greenwich (then Woolwich Polytechnic), Warwick; Auckland.

As a Civil Society Non-Governmental Organisation (CSO and NGO) activist and leader, Chris's university has been a base for work with national and international Adult Learning and Education (ALE) bodies, including with such International Governmental Organisations (IGOs), as UNESCO and UIL, OECD, EU, ILO, IBRD, as well as mainly with NGOs. In Britain as Secretary, then Vice President, of the Universities Council of Adult Education (UCAE, later UACE), and Deputy Director HE at NIACE; regionally as Sec-Gen of the Asian and South Pacific regional organisation ASPBAE; internationally with the International Congress of University Adult Education (ICUAE) as Board member and Editor of its *IJUAE* for 24 years; with the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE); and as 1st Secretary General of PASCAL from 2002, then of its spin-off Pascal International Member Association PIMA.



# Chris McCall

What is needed is genuine recognition of the important role that peak not for profit bodies play in supporting ACE and learners, especially learners who are second chance learners, or newly arrived.

Some of the highlights of my time as President of ALA were participating in the Year of Lifelong Learning, attending and speaking at the launch of the Adult Learners Week in 2017 and 2018 and the establishment of ALA's Learning Changes Lives Foundation in 2018.

I am continually amazed with what the ALA staff achieve on an annual basis; including managing and delivering an ever-growing national Adult Learners Week each September, editing and producing the widely recognised *AJAL*, and delivering a quality and diverse range of accessible professional development webinars.

Another achievement of ALA that stands out for me is the establishment of a foundation that aims to be the catalyst for educational development, encourage engagement in both a civic and social sense, and foster excellence in learning.

The main issues I see as facing adult learners in diverse community settings are:

- a focus on employment outcomes, without adequate focus on facilitating learners to develop the skills they need at their own pace and through differing pathways
- the rapid change in technology means that many ACE cohorts are left behind
- eligibility barriers impact on learners needing or wanting to change careers
- the high cost of education for learners who don't meet the criteria means that they are unable to upskill or change careers due to the financial constraints.

## A national shift

We need a national shift, whereby we:

- provide funding for informal learning and recognise the role it plays in the pathways to higher study and employment
- reduce the eligibility barriers for education and provide low fee or no fee education for people needing to upskill
- recognise ACE as the fourth component of the education sector and recognise the value it plays in people's lives.

## Financial hurdles

The biggest hurdle facing ALA and other peak national ACE organisations is financial sustainability. ALA has the knowledge, skills, networks, an impressive body of research, and a large membership base. Government could be utilising this research and the membership base to communicate with the ACE sector and learners.

What is needed is genuine recognition of the important role that peak not for profit bodies play in supporting ACE and learners, especially learners who are second chance learners, or newly arrived. Base funding must be provided to enable ALA to continue to deliver and expand the valuable work that it currently provides.

## About Chris McCall

Currently the Vice President of ALA and CEO of the Yarraville Community Centre (YCC). Chris leads a team of dedicated staff who develop and deliver education and community strengthening programs. YCC programs and services are developed with learners and community at the forefront. YCC learners (newly arrived community members, second chance learners and young people) are supported to successfully achieve their learning and life goals. Over the past 18 months she has been working on a project that facilitates and enables African women to develop English, sewing and hospitality skills. This group of amazing women are close to achieving their goal of a social enterprise.

Previously ALA President (2015–2018). In her time as President, Chris led the Board and staff through a period of change, including recruitment and appointment of CEO, Jenny Macaffer, and shifts in ALA staffing; this was through a time of discontinuation of federal government funding for research, advocacy or policy development in relation to the sector.

Formerly on the ACEVic Board, the peak body for Adult and Community Education in Victoria; Board of a local neighbourhood house; and past member Education Industry Reference Committee.



# Colin McGregor

Much ACE work is done ‘under the radar’ with little publicity. We need to ... increase collaboration between our respective national ACE organisations and increase dialogue with government.

ACE Aotearoa is the peak body for the ACE sector in New Zealand. Like ALA it has also been in existence in a variety of forms for about 60 years. ALA has been a long and good friend to ACE Aotearoa. We have greatly valued the support and continue to do so. We both have lots of great people doing great work.

ACE Aotearoa is accepted by the New Zealand government as a national organisation that provides effective professional development for ACE organisations. We work to build their capacity through the provision of professional development grants, an annual conference, a hui fono (‘conference’) for Māori and Pasifika ACE organisations and a quarterly newsletter that disseminates good practice. In 2019 we received a very small increase in government funding. Currently we are working with the Ministry of Education on policy development for the ACE sector.

Our recent achievements include the development of an ‘outcomes toolkit’ to help providers with their accountability. We have other tools for supporting learner pathways, quality assurance and teaching standards. ACE Aotearoa has also established a ‘Strategic Alliance’ of all the national organisations providing non-formal and community education.

I work closely with Jenny Macaffer from ALA. Jenny attended our ACE Aotearoa Conference in 2019, I have attended the 2018 ALA Year of Lifelong Learning Symposium and also visited ALA when in Australia. We are in frequent email contact about common policy and operational issues. In the past, ALA and ACE Aotearoa members have attended each other’s conferences. We also supported the ‘Getting of Wisdom: Learning in Later Life’ events in 2017, organising the New Zealand activities.

I regard ALA’s main achievement as its continued advocacy for ACE in Australia. Your implementation of ideas such as the Environmental Scan and the Year of Lifelong Learning are great recent examples of your policies in practice. I also regard the production of your journal (*AJAL*) as a huge achievement in times of resource paucity. Our organisations both face challenges ensuring access to quality learning opportunities in diverse community settings. The changing

nature of work is also impacting on many in the ACE sector. There is lack of ACE policy relevant to the 21st century, although we are now addressing this in New Zealand. We are fortunate in New Zealand to be working in a productive way with government.

One of the ways of confronting these challenges is to get more funding for community learning hubs where staff are skilled at engaging marginalised learners, supporting them in their learning and helping them to achieve the next steps on their learning pathways. Revisiting ACE policy and working with government to assist them in understanding these issues helps in negotiating a way forward.

## Flying under the radar

We both need to work on acceptance by governments of ACE’s valuable contribution to a sustainable economy, and the distinctive role that our peak bodies play in supporting the sector to support learners. There is also a need for the community to be made more aware of the role that ACE plays in supporting learning. Much ACE work is done ‘under the radar’ with little publicity. We need to continue and increase collaboration between our respective national ACE organisations and increase dialogue with government.

Australia is fortunate to have *AJAL* as a proud 60-year legacy. No doubt this has required a lot of effort over the years. We now have nothing similar, having lost our equivalent journal around 2000. The main hurdle I see is one of keeping the journal relevant and maybe including more practical suggestions and advice that practitioners can use. It might be worth examining the value of combining *AJAL* with other journals and encouraging more symposia like the ‘Getting of Wisdom’ series to support more themed publications.

## About Colin McGregor

Director, ACE Aotearoa, New Zealand.

Formerly Private Secretary to the Associate Minister of Education in Parliament; 10 years experience in the Ministry of Education, New Zealand.



# Dave Tout

Lifelong learning is something a lot of people, including politicians and bureaucrats, will espouse, but not really believe in or support in any meaningful way.

My association with ACE (Adult and Community Education) began with teaching literacy and numeracy in ACE in the early 1980s and has flowed on from there for almost four decades. I helped establish and manage the Victoria-wide Adult Basic Education Resource and Information Service (ARIS) for the Division of Further Education and then Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) in Victoria for over a decade. We provided teaching/learning support through our library and journals, publishing resources, running professional development and visiting the then network of ACFE regions. This was a valuable service when LLN and ACE were more valued and supported by governments. The two decades from the 1980s was a very active period for ACE and LLN in Victoria and a privilege to be part of. I still promote ACE as a vital cog in the adult education world.

## The essential role of community

ALA's main achievement is promoting ACE and adult learning, an ever-increasing challenge as we move further into the 21st Century. The main challenge ahead, on the basis of the evidence, is that Australia is increasingly becoming more inequitable. The divide, in both social and economic terms, between the well off and privileged at one end, and disadvantaged children, adults, and their families and communities at the other, is increasing. The key way to address that divide is through education and local support. The role of a person's community is essential to overcoming and addressing that growing gap, particularly providing opportunities to learn and succeed. Access to ACE and LLN programs and adult education is crucial. ACE needs to be recognised as providing those opportunities, but needs to be funded well, and not be expected to do it on the smell of an oily rag. Lifelong learning is something a lot of people, including politicians and bureaucrats, will espouse, but not really believe in or support in any meaningful way.

There is no silver bullet here. We need to keep collecting evidence and trying to demonstrate that there is an issue in Australia in the 21st Century, that ACE plays a pivotal role, and that lifelong learning is crucial and needs to be invested in and supported. The support needs to be across

all sectors, starting with communities and ACE, but also including workplaces and Vocational Education and Training (VET), such as the way the former Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program operated.

I have two thoughts. First, we need to get better at collaboration and partnerships, something adult education can be excellent at, but has tended to get shut down by education being pushed into being more business-like and competitive by governments. Second, we need to find a number of 'champions' to promote ACE and adult/lifelong learning. They need to be well known and popular e.g., from sport, music, TV or business. A good example of a campaign is what the UK has done for numeracy since their international LLN (PIAAC/PISA) results and data started to be listened to. They have done lots more than just use champions, see <https://www.nationalnumeracy.org.uk>

The *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* (AJAL) can play a part in overcoming the invisibility of ACE and adult education in higher education, by publishing articles that show that adult learning counts and is even more important than ever, despite the number of courses/programs at universities that focus on or specialise in adult education being greatly reduced.

During this celebration of 60 years, maybe we need to critically reflect on why ACE and lifelong learning was successful in getting recognised and supported back in the late 1970s and gained momentum into the 1980s and 1990s. Why did that happen? Are there lessons that can be learned?

## About Dave Tout

Dave is a Senior Research Fellow, Numeracy & Mathematics, Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) where he has worked on a range of national, regional & international literacy & numeracy projects.

Formerly a literacy and numeracy teacher in TAFE & ACE in Victoria; Manager of teacher & learning support programs & services in Language, Literacy & Numeracy (LLN) in Victoria & nationally.

# Dr Donna Rooney

The biggest hurdle currently facing ALA is that there is not really a national understanding of ACE that ‘speaks’ to all state and territories.

I have gone ‘full circle’ through ACE and ALA in professional, research and Board roles over three decades. I regard ALA as an organisation that keeps adult learning on the national agenda of important key stakeholders. It is a quintessential ‘smoke and mirrors’ association! I’m continually impressed by how they manage so much work with such a relatively small team. They do an outstanding job, advocating for adult learners who continue to face considerable barriers to accessible and affordable learning, lifelong and lifewide. If there was something extra, I’d really like to see ALA get behind, it would a big (and I mean MASSIVE) national research project that packs a huge ‘evidence’ punch.

I have no doubt that the evidence is out there.

## A national understanding of ACE

The biggest hurdle currently facing ALA is that there is not really a national understanding of ACE that ‘speaks’ to all state and territories. As a NSW ACE practitioner, this is something I have struggled with for two decades. I still suspect that ALA is ‘missing out’ because of the way ACE itself is framed. For example, ACE in NSW tends to be the remit of (sanctioned) community colleges and the like. This position overlooks a huge number of other sites where adult learning is happening. NSW neighbourhood centres, as just one example, may not see themselves as part of this ACE sector.

This is why I prefer to talk about ‘adult learning’ rather than ACE, and why I think that any evidence-based research will have to cast a broader net than a restrictive understanding of ACE alone. This is especially important if we are to capture the equally valuable adult learning happening beyond organisations that identify as being part of the sector. My solution, albeit a NSW-centric one, might be for ALA to maintain focus and emphasis on ‘adult learning’.

All in all, our flagship journal, *AJAL* does a great job, but because of the changing way research outputs are ‘counted’ in universities, there may be potential for academics to be less likely to publish in it in the future. For example, and

sadly, it is a reality that academics in my own institution have recently been encouraged to publish only in journals above a particular ‘citescore’.

Unfortunately, *AJAL* is a little under this ranking. This means any manuscripts that we do submit do not ‘count’ as part of our work. It’s a typical ‘Catch 22’ I suspect, but I think *AJAL*’s main focus could be developing strategies to increase the journal’s already respectable research ranking.

## About Donna Rooney

Currently co-opted ALA Board member (2018–); Senior Lecturer, University of Technology Sydney (UTS).

Formerly an ACE Project Worker; Community College Coordinator; Project Coordinator of numerous NSW ACE Equity Projects (formerly BACE, Department of Women); Elected ALA Board Member, early 2000s.



# Dorothy Lucardie

ALA's 60-year history demonstrates its ability to span decades of change while remaining true to the guiding spirit of every member.

By changing its name to 'Adult Learning Australia' 20 years ago, the organisation acknowledged that while members were mainly adult education practitioners, the focus of members and the organisation should be on adult learners across the spectrum of age, socio-economic status, geography, educational achievement and culture.

By embracing all adults, ALA has avoided marginalising adult learners from a deficit model. It celebrates all endeavours that may be challenging but also joyful in the experience of learning, producing outcomes that underline the importance of the learning journey, not just the outcomes.

ALA has continually provided strong and strategic advocacy nationally and internationally on the role and impact that access to adult learning opportunities and achievements can have on the life of an adult, their family and the community. This is particularly in terms of greater access to resources and the ability to participate as citizens in our democratic society.

I identify two main issues facing adult learners in diverse settings today. First, access to appropriate and encouraging learning that is financially affordable for adults. Second, the need to focus on adult learning as a key mechanism to enable children's literacy and a love of learning.

## Investing in family literacy

I can think of several possible solutions to these issues, including putting back some of what we have arguably lost, and seriously considering investing in family literacy. In the post-World War 2 era, there was government support for adult education. At that time adult learning was valued for individuals, their families and the community, rather than just for the economic benefit of business. Community-based adult education provision from the 1980s was built on the principle of providing easy access, both geographically and psychologically, to those who had not previously experienced encouraging education. They were able to participate in interesting learning that was not competency-based, but which provided an opportunity to experience learning success in mainstream community education settings.

Family literacy is a concept that has great currency in developing nations but has not been considered necessary in Australia. While the national government focuses on NAPLAN tests and decreasing class sizes to improve children's literacy and numeracy, it ignores the fact that the major educators of children are actually their families. Teachers can only do so much.

Australia has a very high proportion of adults who do not have functional literacy and numeracy skills, and many adults have quite negative experiences of formal schooling. Not only are these adults ill equipped to function and prosper in a modern society, they also face difficulties when trying to foster basic skills and enthusiasm for learning in their children. I think ALA should campaign to support strategies for family learning, but as with all campaigns, ALA resources and membership are limited.

Diminishing membership is an issue for all professional associations. It seems that formally joining these groups is less valued by younger generations. I acknowledge that the use of social media to network is now a more relevant way to connect with others and to advocate for adult learners. I do think ALA has demonstrated the ability to use digital technology and social media to engage members.

Turning to ALA's excellent journal, *AJAL*, I think there has always been the danger of relying on volunteer editors to keep the 'ship afloat'. A massive effort by Roger Harris as former Editor over 20 years is unlikely to occur again. The strategy of having guest editors to support the volunteer editor is a good one. I am not sure how difficult it is to encourage this and how many people we have 'in the pool' in Australia or overseas to draw from.

My final reflective comment during this 60th anniversary, is that it would be fascinating to have an 'adult education thermometer' that charts the changes in our impact over time. If we factored into the adult education 'temperature' the proportion of adults with post-school qualifications, levels of literacy, accessibility of learning, diversity of providers and the amount of government support, for example, what might it show for the nation and its states and territories in 2020? I have a gut feeling its not getting 'warmer' (or easier) for many adult learners.

## About Dorothy Lucardie

National Training Manager, Pharmaceutical Society of Australia; ALA member; Foundation President & acting Secretary, PASCAL International Member Association (PIMA).

Previously President ALA; member ALA Board; member Executive Council ASPBAE; Inducted into the 'International Adult Education Hall of Fame', 2014 OAM for services to adult education (2016).



# Franscesca Beddie

I would like to see an integrated solution to adult education that starts at school so people are equipped with foundation skills and the ability to keep on learning through life.

ALA has done well to survive the tough policy and funding environment over the years. Maintaining a voice at the table and Adult Learners Week are some of the most important contributions of ALA.

Chronic underfunding, inadequate school preparation in LLN, inadequate English language and mental illness are key issues facing adult learners today.

It's great to see ALA campaigning for the reinstatement of a WELL-like program. The challenge here is to get industry to make co-contributions.

## Integrated solutions

I would like to see an integrated solution to adult education that starts at school so people are equipped with foundation skills and the ability to keep on learning through life. That means catering to all types of learners and genuinely providing alternative pathways to tertiary education.

VET-in-schools must not be seen for dummies. Work-to-tertiary education transitions need greater exploration. A new mindset will be needed to overcome obstacles to proper credit transfer and RPL. The funding system must be flexible enough to cater to learners who need time to overcome learning and other barriers: the investment will pay off in many cases. Decent wages for all teachers and more professional development opportunities. The latter should extend to others working in the community, for example public health practitioners, so that they can harness the power of learning.

A narrow policy focus on productivity and an 'industry-led' training system would be amongst the biggest 'hurdles' facing ALA and other peak national ACE organisations. There is also a racist undertone in the way Australia treats newcomers from non-English backgrounds and there remains the persistent challenge of how best to work with Indigenous Australians.

It has always been a challenging area but it is good to maintain a presence in the policy debate. It can be effective to concentrate on a few big issues, e.g. adult

literacy, but that has risks too, if the decision makers are not open to listening. Further, that might be seen to exclude some of your constituents. Bringing all the peak bodies together to build a strategy and speak with a united voice could be a good thing.

Continuing to show the returns on investment in adult learning is a must. Measures of non-economic returns are becoming more sophisticated and can help to show how your work is improving social capital, health and well being, as well as productivity. More numbers about savings to public sector budgets (corrections, welfare, hospitals) would be effective.

One theme that should unite the sector is the role of adult learning in tackling global warming. The whole community must be mobilised to change individual and community habits, as well as to influence policy settings. Education is key.

The narrow rankings system is not helpful to *AJAL* in the field of ACE. Furthermore, as far as I'm aware, the pool of academics working in the area is evaporating. I have a view that the language of academia is not helpful for the wide dissemination of new ideas and evidence, which should be the goal of journals.

What I liked most about *AJAL* was its practitioner part, because I am interested in research having impact beyond the academy. The problem here is that educators are not necessarily comfortable about writing such articles (especially if they believe, erroneously I'd argue, that they have to employ scholarly jargon). Writing workshops and mentoring for contributors might help but so does practice. Congratulations on turning 60!

## About Francesca Beddie

Independent researcher and writing coach; member of the executive of Professional Historians Australia.

Formerly an adjunct Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Canberra, 2014–2016; General Manager, Research, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2007–2012; Executive Director, Adult Learning Australia, 2002–2004.

# Garry Traynor OAM

ALA as an active, innovative and connected organisation is very well placed to reflect the contemporary reality of the total education environment.

I am neither an education academic nor historian, but someone whose issues and whose interests combine. My comments arise from a long career in what has been termed 'the community sector' and from my long association, first with the AAAE, then AAACE, and more recently with ALA. These associations have put me in contact with many excellent people and provided me with valuable insight and experience which holds me in good stead to this day.

Notable in ALA's past titles is the word 'Adult'. Yet, the mission of ALA is about lifelong learning. Is it time ALA become Lifelong Learning Australia – LLA? Has Adult Education as a field of practice been consumed by lifelong learning?

It is widely acknowledged that educational design and methodology is informed by demographic groupings such as age. In my view, our long-term use of the word 'adult' combined with 'education', though seeking to distinguish our field, may have inadvertently distanced us from what is considered, especially by governments, as more outcomes-focused educational systems.

Indeed, the current governmental approach is to map and record post-secondary educational transitions as being about moving into higher education or VET training AND for preparation into work. This fails to recognise (or, at best, under-recognises) the educational activity that takes place during, after, or in lieu of this construct in the form of personal/professional development education and/or work skills training, which is not part of the national training system. It fails also to recognise the value provided by education and training generally to the total social infrastructure and its role in the building of harmonious and peaceful societies.

## Reflecting contemporary realities

ALA as an active, innovative and connected organisation is very well placed to reflect the contemporary reality of the total education environment, as well as to help change the thinking that societal and workplace participation is best measured only through education that bestows an award or an accreditation. To be clear, formal qualifications

are important. However, in putting so much value on the attainment of qualifications, the contribution, value and reputation of continuing education and training and achievement in Australian society perhaps has in my view been sidelined.

Under a mission to promote and achieve 'lifelong and lifewide learning for all Australians', ALA can prosecute the case that the work of its members relates to the purpose and priorities of Australians as a whole. To do this, ALA may consider a possible name change to reflect the purpose and priority of lifelong and lifewide learning, a return of its office to Canberra to reinforce its national focus, and the move to a digital version of its journal, the *AJAL*, to expand its access and influence.

ALA has much to be proud of in its six decades in operation. I know also it will continue to rise to the new challenges before it and ensure an identifiable and enriched place is afforded to the work of its members in Australian public policy, business and society.

## About Garry Traynor

Principal/CEO, Sydney Community College; Member, ALA & International Association Comparative Adult Education.

Long time member of ALA and antecedent associations AAAE & AAACE; ALA Board member (1999–2008) & President (2005–8); Member, NSW TAFE Accreditation Council (2005–14); Deputy Chair, Sydney TAFE Institute Advisory Committee (2003–10); Member, Education Advisory Committee, Business Skills Australia (2007–13).



# Dr Griff Foley

The neoliberal political economy has had a determining and deleterious effect on ACE for 40 years.

My research and writing pre-and post-retirement in 2000 relates to adult education, learning and social action. My work with colleagues at UTS involved developing a practitioner-centred approach to the professional education of adult educators. My participation in AAAE/ALA activities over almost four decades has included conference presentations, journal and newsletter contributions, participation in ABC adult education radio and participation in projects such as a study of the educational role of community radio.

ALA plays a crucial role in adult education and learning. It provides educators with a network of colleagues, and opportunities for sharing experiences. As the ACE peak body in Australia, it provides a vital conduit to policy makers. Its conferences, workshops and journal have contributed to the development of knowledge of the field.

## The effect of neoliberal politics

Adult learners in diverse community settings face a range of issues. The neoliberal political economy has had a determining and deleterious effect on ACE for 40 years. It will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. ACE, always the poor cousin of education, has become ever more marginalised and starved of resources. Public provision and humanist notions of learner-focused education and lifelong learning have been displaced by commodified provision and a crude, economic conception of learners as human resources.

Combatting this conception of adult education is the core challenge facing adult educators today. There is no straightforward solution to this. Nevertheless, ALA can play a pivotal role articulating and implementing alternatives to neoliberal education and learning.

The *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* experiences many of the same problems as those facing all academic and professional journals: costs, staffing, reach, and relevance to practice. Many journals become 'cosy corners', satisfying only to a few cognoscenti. There are no easy answers here, but two things are crucial. The journal should be useful to practitioners as well as academics, and it should have a clear and strategic knowledge-building focus.

Six decades as adult education's peak organisation is a real achievement, and worth celebrating. One way to do this would be to hold a futures colloquium. I'd be happy to discuss this idea further with ALA.

Articulating a counter-hegemonic conception of adult education and learning is crucial to the future of the field. A broad notion of adult education and learning and a clear emancipatory and strategic focus would be central to this conception and might be one focus of the proposed colloquium.

## About Griff Foley

Active in Newcastle community organisations since retirement in 2000, continuing to research & write on environmental & urban design issues.

Previously Associate Professor of Adult Education, University of Technology Sydney (1979–2000).



# Jane Chilcott

Adult Learning Australia is excellent at celebrating and sharing the achievements of ACE across Australia.

Linkwest is the peak body for Neighbourhood and Community Resource Centres in Western Australia (WA). ACE is a fundamental way our members bring people together and grow communities. And yet there is almost no ACE funding or recognition in WA other than through TAFE. However, there is a lot of learning happening at a grassroots level across the Linkwest membership of 150 Centres. For example, Linkwest is currently a Be Connected partner and we are increasing the number of seniors learning to use computers and get online. In turn, this is growing the number of senior computer clubs across WA where individuals come together to learn and connect. In addition, Linkwest has a partnership with another not-for profit (NFP) called Befriend. Befriend is working with many of our centres to help them attract local people who want to connect and host events and learn together in their communities and at their local centres. Many centres are now embracing community gardens, running programs about waste reduction, composting, recycling and hosting repair cafes. All are great ways to learn and connect.

Linkwest has shared stories and case studies for *Quest* and ALA has been incredibly supportive of the funding situation in WA. In 2019, ALA hosted the Adult Learners Week launch in WA. This has definitely sparked a renewed interest in ALW and ALA across the state.

Linkwest's membership with ALA goes back a very long way. Our organisation was established as Learning Centre Link in 1982 with a focus on learning centres and adult learning. Up until about six years ago, Linkwest received a small amount of state government funding to support ACE in WA when there were a number of ACE grants available. During that time Linkwest was more directly involved in ACE, helping to provide policy advice to state government on ACE and working with ALA to run joint conferences between ALA and the National Peak for Neighbourhood Houses and Centres. Over the years, Linkwest staff and its board members have served on the board of ALA.

ALA's main achievement is keeping the importance of adult and community learning in its many forms on the federal and state government's agenda despite being a small organisation. It is excellent at celebrating and sharing the achievements of ACE across Australia.

The main issues facing adult learners in diverse community settings today from our perspective involve acknowledging and addressing inclusion and understanding of different learning styles and different needs. A lot of this is about addressing social isolation and a fear of learning. One way is about making learning fun and disguising it as something else. Another way is to train for tutors volunteers on how to be inclusive and welcoming of learners with different learning styles.

One of the biggest hurdles ALA faces here in WA is not having ACE recognised in policy, and there not being government funding at all for ACE in WA. The lack of recognition in this and several other states weakens ALA's representation across Australia. With increased pressure on funding, other states may follow Western Australia, resulting in all the representation coming from Victoria and South Australia.

Meantime ALA needs to keep doing what it is already well doing well, such as launching Adult Learners Week in different states, advocating and where possible working with the state peaks to influence state policy. ALA might provide us with some suggestions about who and how to start conversations with about the importance of ACE and what the benefits are of the funding in the other states.

AJAL as ALA's academic journal faces two main problems from a WA community-based perspective. First, most ACE is informal and those involved at a grass roots level are mostly volunteers who do not read academic journals. Second, politicians who need to be informed of the findings are not necessarily interested in the articles or findings.

Finally, and importantly, turning 60 is an incredible achievement. ALA must be one of the oldest national NFPs in Australia. Here's to the next 60 years and the importance of lifelong learning being celebrated and acknowledged across Australia.

## About Jane Chilcott

CEO, Linkwest, Perth, Western Australia. A lifelong learner who has just completed a Graduate Diploma in Ontological Coaching. Previously HR Manager & volunteer in many forms in learning & community centres around the world.

# Jenny Macaffer

There is an increasing divide in our society between the haves and have-nots which makes our mission for lifelong and lifewide learning for all Australians even more timely.

I will be in my fourth year as CEO as ALA proudly celebrates and reflects on its six decades. It's very important for the organisation, its members and the Board to better understand the 60-year journey, and to learn from its history. 2020 gives us an opportunity to reflect on what has been achieved, provide insights into what has worked (and not worked), to allow us to critically think about our present situation, and to take more informed decisions in the future.

Reflecting on our organisational and journal history can also teach us valuable lessons when put in the context of a wider social history of Australia. Furthermore, it helps us recognise the value and worth of adult learning, from 1960 until now, and how it can be read differently over time, providing an organisational archive and historical narrative.

One of ALA's main achievements is its ability to build and sustain a national presence in adult education and learning in Australia for 60 years. It has worked hard to transform itself as an organisation to meet the very different needs and challenges of the sector than those that existed in 1960. There is an increasing need now, more than ever, for accessible adult learning opportunities to help manage the avalanche of change that is happening at a local, national and global level. People and communities that are vulnerable deserve the right to learn about themselves and their world, and how they can make and shape their own place in it.

## A national lifelong learning policy

While education and lifelong learning are identified and signed up to by Australia (and 69 other nations) as UN Sustainable Development Goal No. 4, there is currently no national policy, funding, interest or political will to implement it in this country. Research shows that lifelong learning matters more than front-end education, but resources for it are limited. Social justice issues and healthy active citizenship have been stripped away, and we are often left with 'bare bones' education.

We know that lifelong learning, especially in adult years, can help inform, democratic decision making so that people

can better participate in shaping their own lives and communities, and also question governments, institutions and law makers. Adult and community education also can be part of the solution to increasing isolation and exclusion.

Meantime, adult learners in diverse community providers across Australia face a range of complex issues in a rapidly changing political and socioeconomic environment. They are constrained by a rigid government focus on vocational training and skills development for work, rather than support of lifelong and lifewide learning. Our challenge as adult educators is to acknowledge that every adult learner is different. Adult learners from disadvantaged backgrounds face multiple barriers and require a holistic approach in community settings. One size does not fit all learners or communities.

There is an increasing divide in our society between the haves and have-nots which makes our mission for lifelong and lifewide learning for all Australians' even more timely. I despair when I see the level of homelessness in our streets. Lack of housing is the most significant 'in your face evidence' that our society is not working fairly. If you don't have a place to live, are transient or at risk of homelessness, you hardly have a chance to learn. Without a fixed address or stability, you cannot vote and partake in democracy.

ALA does a great job, but it faces a range of challenges in a rapidly changing political and socioeconomic landscape. There is a lack of funding for research, advocacy and professional development. There is the issue of how best to strategically position ALA in the education sector with limited resources and funding, in order to compete across the education space for a place at the table with decision makers. We need more evidence from up to date research on ACE, including measuring its costs and benefits. We need to find well known and well-respected champions of adult learning who can influence the government agenda and its allocation of resources.

A national lifelong learning strategy and a literacy plan should be developed collaboratively with the sector, ensuring sufficient resources and significant national investments into the future. Learning in all of its forms should be valued.

Adult learners, family or intergenerational learning should be considered integral to the wellbeing of the country. There is a need for ALA to be acknowledged, supported and properly funded as the national peak to provide policy advice, undertake research and support the ACE sector, to produce quality outcomes for learners who are disadvantaged.

In part, it is about putting ACE 'on the map' and recognised as a legitimate player in the education space, although it is much more than that. It is also about valuing ACE as part of a solution to growing despair and hopelessness in the community, where increasing incarceration, mental health, domestic violence as well as drug and alcohol issues are

sucking up resources at the back end. More enthusiasm for preventative measures like ACE would give better and longer lasting results, building resilience, capabilities and connections and save governments money.

ALA has created and supports a great international journal, but it faces the challenges of publishing new, interesting and meaningful research and maintaining the quality and diversity of submissions. Some of these issues might require a targeted promotion or marketing plan to attract a stronger, wider and newer audience. ALA might benefit from sponsoring events linked to the release of special edition and themed AJAL issues in order to maintain the profile of an already excellent journal.

#### About Jenny Macaffer

CEO of Adult Learning Australia.



# Dr John McIntyre

ALA, can and should lead the way, keeping the focus on the ‘big picture’ political analysis, formulating the policy challenges and developing a research agenda that speaks to the issues.

Whilst previously an active researcher and academic in the field, I am nowadays less engaged. I have published a few things since I left UTS and worked in policy, including a chapter for the ‘Second International Handbook of Lifelong Learning’ (2012) on the Australian policy process. That further convinced me of the importance of a historical perspective in policy advocacy and the crucial role ALA has played in maintaining a breadth of view. Meantime I have been pursuing other writing interests, including a history of the Theatre for Children Sydney (in the History of Education Review, 2017) and a three year project writing a social history of a pioneering Australian Buddhist organisation, a learning organisation of a particular kind. Our natural tendency with age is to want to tell of the past, to record and understand it, so I’m delighted to be asked to contribute this Cameo, and warmly congratulate ALA on its six decades of valuable national service to adult education and adult learners in Australia.

I regard ALA’s main achievement as creating and sustaining a national organisation that brought together disparate state and territory organisations and made possible national advocacy for adult learning policy and the promotion of the critical role of community sector providers. It gained greater recognition for this sector through skilful policy and research activity. Despite its best efforts sixty years on, it seems there are diminishing opportunities for adult learners and increased costs, partly as a result of diminished political interest in and commitment to a national policy agenda for lifelong learning, rampant individualism and deregulation, amongst other factors.

It seems from a learner perspective we are back to where we started, with fragmentation of opportunities and a lack of direction that existed before AAACE was formed in 1989 and the first Senate ‘Cinderella’ Report of 1991 offered new thinking and an ambitious agenda for change. It’s hard to remain optimistic when arguably national gains have been lost.

As a policy idealist and believer in the influence that a national policy agenda can exert across a broad field of provision, supporting the development of provider

organisations and their relationship with other agencies is ultimately to the benefit of learners. That belief possibly reflects my experience of the inspiring period that followed the 1991 Senate Report, from which we must learn something if political indifference is to be overcome.

It is disappointing to see the depressing state of national policy, though being now based in the ACT I am not in touch with developments in my home state of NSW, where a decade ago I was active in ACE policy as the Chair of the short-lived Advisory Committee on Community Education that succeeded the Board of ACE. Most of the NSW community sector, in its wisdom, decided to do without a formal body to advise government and placed its hopes instead in a new peak organisation (Community Colleges Australia). Compared to Victoria, the NSW sector did not have the same policy influence. Now community sector issues are overshadowed by the parlous state of the TAFE system. In the past, the more populous states had a role in leading national developments.

## It’s not all doom and gloom

I like to think that it’s not all doom and gloom. The national association, ALA, can and should lead the way, keeping the focus on the ‘big picture’ political analysis, formulating the policy challenges and developing a research agenda that speaks to the issues. It has the ability to bring different interests together in a roundtable approach.

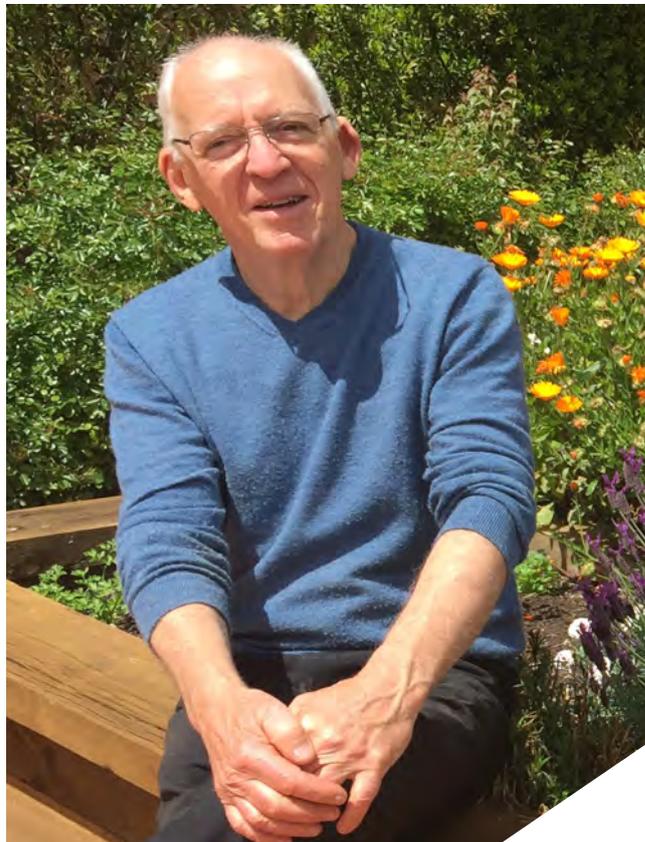
The *AJAL* is a great journal with a proud tradition going back to 1961 that has a key role in maintaining a breadth of view. To the extent that there is a dearth of Australian scholarship, there is a need for *AJAL* to be a catalyst for policy ideas and debate. To this end the journal could make a greater use of themed issues, with guest editors inviting contributions on a particular theme or topic, looking to the Australian scholarly field.

This would help to shape research new and emerging agendas. There are problems with ‘adult learning’ as a field, having been captured in part by workplace and professional

learning. Research on community provision can sometimes get stuck with well-worn themes like pathways and learner stories. A broadening is needed, and perhaps it's time to look to the riches of old-fashioned disciplinary sources of scholarship, the sociology of participation, institutional histories such as the recent work on the development of neighbourhood houses, the socio-cultural analysis of adult learning. In other words, broadening the theoretical resource base. That will encourage the coming generation of scholars to define new directions for future research.

A reflection on the past. At a high point in the early 1990s we began to think that research on ACE could illuminate the sociology of participation, that it would show the outcomes of different clienteles, experiencing learning in different organisational contexts, and that the community sector could be appreciated for the special part it played in the broad pattern of provision. There was a belief that research would contribute to national policy. There was optimism about a national approach buoyed by the momentum of education and training reform with governments in the lead.

We complained at the time that there wasn't a national lifelong learning policy, not realising at the time that it wasn't going to get much better. Two decades on, that momentum and the optimism has been lost and it's hard to see how big picture thinking will return. ALA has to be there for the big picture and the long haul.



## About John McIntyre

Adjunct Associate Professor, University of Canberra.

Previously Director, Research Centre for VET, University of Technology Sydney (UTS); independent policy research consultant; ALA Research Fellow.

# Dr Mark Brophy

Our education system, encourages us to conform to the existing social systems rather than think we can change them. The lack of attention to the learner and to wider issues pertaining to the learner, discourages empowerment.

Some of ALA's most important achievements include establishing Adult Learners Week and contributing to the development of the Ministerial Declaration on ACE – 2008.

One of the key issues I see today is that most adult courses are designed to have a vocational focus of attaining skills to improve employability 'shaping pegs' to fit the employment "holes". Training is therefore seen as the route to obtaining a job.

This vocational model focuses on work related competencies and largely ignores both individual and group needs. Our education system, encourages us to conform to the existing social systems rather than think we can change them.

## Learning and empowerment

The lack of attention to the learner and to wider issues pertaining to the learner, discourages empowerment. There needs to be a much greater recognition of informal and non – formal learning from governments.

One of Einstein's quotes is 'The more I learn, the more I realise how much I don't know.'

Here is what I still don't know –

Why there is still no national policy, strategy and dedicated funding for the ACE sector in this country?

- Aside from the success of Men's Sheds, why aren't there more government supported programs that help build literacies and promote social inclusion in informal and non-formal learning environments?
- Why do we still make the priority in this country just VET or higher education? We are more than just what we do in a job, or what formal qualifications we've attained.
- Why do some public service regulators treat tiny and small not-for-profit, community driven, low risk ACE providers exactly the same as huge multimillion dollar,

Stock Exchange listed private RTOs that blatantly seek new ways to rip off the system?

- Why don't governments understand lifelong and lifewide learning?
- Why does support end after university?

As long as these issues are not addressed – ALA has a purpose.

## About Mark Brophy

CEO/Manager, Williamstown Community and Education Centre Inc.; Fulbright Scholar, Selection Committee, Australian-American Fulbright Program; Victorian Fulbright, Australian Fulbright; University of Melbourne and Victoria University Alumni Member.

Formerly Director, Treasurer, National Board Member ALA; Committee of Management Member, Network West; Adult Community Education Peaks Group Member; Australian Training Award Judge, NCVET; Research Supervisor, Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association; Research Register; Member, Community of Practice Scholarships, NCVET, Member of selection panel, Building Researcher Capacity Advisory Group, NCVET; Award Winner Not-for Profit Category Hobsons Bay Business Excellence Awards; Adjunct Fellowship Victoria University, Melbourne; Kettering Foundation Scholarship, Dayton, Ohio, USA; Research Fellowship, ALA, Canberra; Distinguished Academic Achievement by a Postgraduate Research Student in the School of Education Faculty of Human Development Award, Victoria University; Seacomb Conference Award Scholarship, Australian Postgraduate Award Scholarship Victoria University



# Emeritus Professor Mark Tennant

ALA should seek to provide solutions to the problems of government and policy makers. This can be done by reframing the problems as those requiring education solutions, that focus equally on social, democratic and economic outcomes.

My main contribution in the adult education field has been as an academic at the University of Technology, helping set up a range of courses (from Associate Diploma to PhD) for adult educators working in community education, training, Aboriginal education, literacy, numeracy and English as a Second Language (ESL). In the early 1990s I was the Dean of the Faculty of Education at UTS when it was really strong in adult education. I recall them as great days with much energy and excitement!

As a national peak body ALA has always kept the issue of lifelong and lifewide learning on the agenda of policy makers. Many of ALA's aspirations have been realised, when you take into account access to higher education through a variety of pathways, the role of community education providers in delivering programs for community and individual capacity building, the acceptance of continuing education in industry, commerce and the wider community, and the changing pedagogical landscape toward a more inclusive and participative model. This is quite an achievement.

## Access that is relevant

The issues facing diverse adult learners today vary according to learner group, but mainly it's about how to gain access to education that is relevant and productive, whether it be Indigenous learners, migrants, those who have not completed schooling, older workers seeking employment, learners with a disability or people in care settings. Most of these issues and learner groups can only be addressed with a focus on the social, community, and ultimately economic benefits of providing education programs that are well funded and appropriate to their different needs.

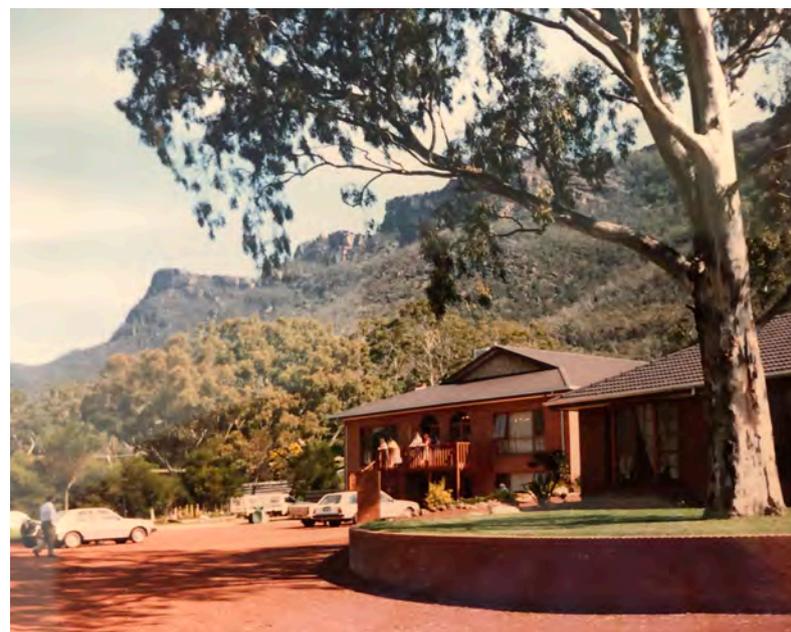
The biggest hurdles facing ALA in their promotion of ACE are about overcoming the exclusive focus in the economic outcomes of education to the detriment of social and democratic outcomes, the commodification of education, and the pervasive regimes of compliance, audit and

reporting that plague the education sector. While there are no easy answers, ALA should be at the forefront of the critique of these hurdles. The skill is about doing so in a persuasive manner. ALA should seek to provide solutions to the problems of government and policy makers. This can be done by reframing the problems as those requiring education solutions, that focus equally on social, democratic and economic outcomes.

I haven't read *AJAL* for quite some time, but I imagine that it is difficult to get good quality contributions given the numerous education journal outlets and the pressure to publish in journals with higher citation metrics.

## About Mark Tennant

Emeritus Professor of Education, University of Technology Sydney. Formerly: academic at UTS; Principal of the Warringah Evening College (from 1981); Editor Adult and Continuing Education in Australia (1988); briefly member of ALA executive; Chair of ALA 2003 Conference.



Libraries and Adult Education Conference Halls Gap 1987

# Merv Gardner

In the absence of effective national policy or support, we desperately need our state government to fund a diverse range of adult learning opportunities

My perspective in this cameo is from the field of practice in southeast Queensland. Some of it is not happy reading. As a committed adult educator, I believe it's important to 'tell it how it is' in order to address the many difficulties we face in a state where adult and community education has almost no state resources beyond a page with hot links on a government website.

My observations are made as two large adult literacy programs we have been associated with have closed recently due to financial reasons. I have been involved with national research projects with Dr Ralph Catts and Dr Darryl Dymock over the years and our recommendations have simply gone into the ether.

I identify two main issues for adult learners in this huge state. The first is the availability of learning opportunities within reasonable travel distance anywhere beyond metropolitan Brisbane. The second is a desperate lack of entry level training options for people with low level skills or education to enable access to VET (vocational education and training) or tertiary options.

## The role of the states

In the absence of effective national policy or support, we desperately need our state government to fund a diverse range of adult learning opportunities across Queensland to cover regional, rural and remote areas. Funding needs to be made available to community public providers (TAFE: Technical and Further Education), since their reach rarely goes beyond the larger cities. Until Adult and Community Education (ACE) is regarded as a social and wellbeing issue as well as a VET outcomes issue, we are stuck in a state with a broken and often non-existent system.

Here in Queensland there is total apathy towards our plight from state politicians. ACE is simply not recognised or valued, hence it receives nil or little funding. Nationally, most state governments ignore or pay lip service to the Ministerial Declaration on ACE that is now hopelessly out of date. The fact that there has not been a commitment from the COAG (Council of Australian Government Ministers) Ministerial Council since 2008 says it all. The last time I looked, the Queensland government was reporting TAFE as

ACE to COAG, as there is no ACE here to measure!

ACE nationally and in most states and territories is not simply valued because there is no simple dollar value that can be attached to ACE outcomes. ACE, unlike other social issues, it is seen as a component of the VET system, and the only measurement demanded is employment outcomes.

If votes were affected by ACE, then there would be more interest. ACE in my view needs to become more political. We have always seen this as a risk, in that what little dollars there are could be removed. We have always believed it was wise to attempt to work with government but in a state that has such poor NAPLAN (National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy: a series of tests focused on basic skills that are administered annually to Australian students) results that are reflected in adult LLN (Language, Literacy & Numeracy) skills levels, we continue to be frustrated. TAFE here in Queensland is supported meantime because it has strong union and political friends: ACE does not.

*AJAL* is a very good academic journal for the field in Australia, but it tends to be talking to the converted. Academic research regarding ACE appears to be ignored at government levels. If research on ACE at NCVET (National Centre for Vocational Education Research) is ignored and never informs policy, is there really hope for *AJAL* having influence? Aside from the parlous general state of ACE in Queensland, we do have some excellent, grassroots community providers that operate effectively and valiantly to make a difference, despite government apathy. We know from local knowledge here in Caboolture that the adult literacy needs here in Queensland are as acute as anywhere else in the nation.

Our Caboolture Community Adult Literacy Group commenced in 1983, self-funded through car washes, lamington drives and street stalls. Since 2012 when the Queensland government defunded community adult literacy programs, our organisation has once again become self-funded, through market stalls, by making and selling a range of jams, butters, pickles and chilli sauces as well as handicrafts.

Just because the state government here does not value ACE does not mean it has no value in the community. A small group of dedicated people here in Caboolture has made a world of difference to people's lives. When will state and national governments realise spending a small amount of money on literacy will make a huge difference to people's lives, communities, the workplace and the economy, and save them very much more money in the long run?

As we have been disappointed by government responses to community based adult learning, we are encouraged that Adult Learning Australia has remained the beacon on

the hill. ALA keeps the dispersed, diverse and disparate communities around Australia connected. We can become self-absorbed in our own communities. Knowing we are not alone and that there is a Peak Body lobbying on our behalf brings comfort in the value of our work.

For ALA to achieve a 60th anniversary for an organisation shows that there is an ongoing need into the 21st century and that community educators and advocates are a tenacious bunch. Well done ALA; congratulations and many more years ahead.

### About Merv Gardner

President, Caboolture Community Adult Literacy Group Inc., Queensland; long time ALA Member.

Previously co-authored the Course in Volunteer Community Adult Literacy Tutoring; conducted initial training for start-up adult literacy programs in multiple southeast Queensland sites; managed a cluster contract to deliver adult literacy classes and volunteer tutor training in the Brisbane North region.

# Michael Newton

Reflection on the past, such as during ALA's 60th celebration, is useful but can lead to a soft validation of past undertakings.

WEA Sydney celebrated its 100th Birthday in 2013. It remains the face of general adult education in Sydney and is a pre-eminent provider of general adult education in Australia, generating almost 15,000 enrolments each year. While the majority are fee-paying students, we offer substantial concessions for eligible enrolments. Our course mix and governance procedures mirror our mission to be '... a voluntary, independent, not-for-profit adult education organisation ... providing adults with stimulating and varied educational activities which develop their knowledge, understanding and skills, with a special emphasis on opportunities for the serious and objective study of the arts, humanities and sciences', in the belief that WEA's educational offering is '... of value to individuals both in their personal life and in their role as citizens in a democratic society'.

ALA has, in my view been a constant voice of advocacy for the role of adult and community education, both to government agencies and within the sector itself. It promotes and describes the value of many wide-ranging activities that form part of the core of ACE delivery. It is actively involved in the formulation of events for the annual centerpiece of ACE, Adult Learners Week (ALW), creating formats for individual organisations to use in their promotion of their ALW activities. It encourages broad internal review of its associated organisations through its seminars, conferences and publications.

Despite the best efforts of ALA, knowledge of the ACE sector remains very limited. Proper Public Relations (PR) campaigns need to be mounted, with joint financial contribution from ACE organisations, if support funding cannot be raised either by donations or from government sources. Such PR campaigns should feature the description and outcome of mainstream learning, in addition to specialist VET programs. ACE faces increasing competition to its class-based education activities, from free talks to member activities, with the role of internet-information seeking (for leisure or skill based learning) becoming ever more prominent – let alone the developing presence of online courses (or MOOCs). ALA needs to understand its role in this wider education market. In addition, ALA and providers in the sector need to address the relevance and

role of ACE. Is it simply training, or for social benefit, or for specific financial or job outcomes?

In our view, strong advocacy of mental health and wellbeing should become a core element of such PR campaigns. The wider benefits of social interaction need to be continually emphasised. In essence, ALA's stance should focus on lifelong learning, not the government endorsed idea of 'lifelong re-training'.

The greatest hurdle faced by ALA and other peak bodies is one of public relevance. Are peak bodies there to service the needs of their member organisations, or do they have a wider remit to work to promote the sector as a whole? Generating wider public knowledge of ACE could involve building a casebook of both professional studies, and anecdotal reports, with the aim being to create a vibrant image of the sector. To some extent, ALA already does this with its *Quest* magazine. *AJAL* does a very good job for a small academic audience. Circular logic then becomes a driving force in the type of article that is published (even if the authors and/or editors are unaware of this). Breaking out of this pattern to report forms of relevant research into the wider benefits of adult education should become a prime objective in the ongoing struggle for public relevance. And Australian-based research is absolutely necessary.

Reflection on the past, such as during ALA's 60th celebration, is useful, but can lead to a soft validation of past undertakings. We need to ask whether the work of ALA has been fundamental to either changes in social settings or in adult job creation, such as the contribution that the WEA in the United Kingdom has arguably achieved. A rose-coloured view of the past doesn't help planning for a future of new realities: increasing economic and social divisions, dog-whistling politics, fraying civility, an eroding centre. Finding a role for ALA and ACE in this new setting will be a challenge – the past may not always be the best guide.

## About Mark Newton

Executive Director, WEA Sydney (12 years in ED role). Previously with the University of Sydney (archaeologist/researcher) & Marketing.

# Niamh O'Reilly

Ireland and Australia have a number of similarities in the field of adult learning, including between AONTAS and ALA. As a national umbrella peak body, we share a social justice agenda while promoting and advocating for adult learning in the broadest sense.

AONTAS is the Irish, non-governmental, national adult learning organisation, that has been advocating for the rights of all adults to a quality education since 1969. Like ALA, AONTAS recently celebrated an important (50-year) milestone in 2019. We warmly congratulate ALA on turning 60 in 2020! It is certainly an important achievement.

For context, as CEO of AONTAS, I am an experienced (15 years plus) educationalist with specific expertise in adult learning methodology, learner voice, community education, policy analysis, organisational development and governance. In partnership with the AONTAS membership, I helped establish the AONTAS Community Education Network in 2007. I was part of the Irish Non-Government Organisation (NGO) delegation to the international adult education (CONFINTEA) gathering in Belem, Brazil in 2009, participating in the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) International Academy of Lifelong Learning Advocacy. I was also an elected Board Member of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) for three terms (2011–17).

I have lectured on adult learning in a number of Higher Education Institutions and was appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills to serve on the State Boards of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority. My European adult learning policy experience includes acting as the designated national coordinator of the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL) since 2016.

## A social justice agenda

Although we are on opposite sides of the world, Ireland and Australia have a number of similarities in the field of adult learning, including between AONTAS and ALA. As a national umbrella (probably fitting for us here in the relatively rainy, Irish context!) peak body, we share a social justice agenda while promoting and advocating for adult learning in the broadest sense.

The most important achievement that both our organisations share, and which resonates most for me, is

the history of our commitment to community education. Keeping the value of community education on the political agenda is no easy task, and I sense ALA has continued to strive for greater recognition and support for community education across Australia as we have done here in Ireland.

There are many challenges in the Irish context facing adult learners. Not the least of these challenges is having basic life needs met, including the cost of accommodation, childcare and transport, so that they can participate in learning. Many prospective learners also need to overcome health issues, particularly including mental health. In Ireland, 25 per cent of people who left education after primary school (and 16% of people who left school after the Irish Junior or Intermediate Certificate) cited health and age as reasons why they could not participate in lifelong learning. By contrast, only four per cent of those with higher (third level) qualifications cited health or age as a barrier.

However, when learners do return to learning in a community context, the evidence of the multiple benefits is significant. AONTAS creates and shares videos, learner stories and podcasts based on and illustrating the many positive experiences of community education.

AONTAS actively engages with learners through forums that we run. Learners in these forums cite three main sets of factors affecting access and retention to learning as adults. The first set is about learner supports (childcare, transport, funding and guidance). The second set is about learning methodology (dialogical, respectful and supportive), and the third set is about collegiality (peer support and peer learning). Learners need to be part of the dialogue in shaping provision. Indeed, learners hold the key to addressing these issues. We in our respective national umbrella bodies are responsible for listening, acting and advocating effectively.

In my view, the biggest hurdle for national organisation such as AONTAS and ALA in promoting ACE is maintaining our critical voice in our ability to promote the broader purpose of adult learning, particularly beyond the skills

agenda, to include learning for active citizenship and democracy. Of course, education for employment is essential for supporting people out of poverty. However, we need to balance the kinds of programmes we offer, supporting non-accredited programmes so that people can build their skills and confidence. We are short-changing the power of adult learning if we only focus on skills attainment.

I sense we are at a crossroads, and I believe adult learning has a huge part to play in environmental sustainability and building strong democracies. Additionally, the civil society space is shrinking broadly and the important role of advocacy in organisations needs greater recognition. Finally, funding will always be an issue, particularly as project funding can limit the time available to engage in advocacy work.

Our experience here in Ireland confirms that membership of supranational NGO bodies and networks are essential. As a member of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA), where AONTAS is also represented at Board level, as well as on the International Council of Adult Education (ICAE), the support from fellow NGOs, there is a collective ability for action that needs to be leveraged as much as possible. Additionally, we can move the dialogue to a more holistic discourse on adult learning by amplifying common messages. For example, the EAEA manifest is explicitly referenced in the AONTAS Strategic Plan. Sharing experiences of navigating the funding landscape is also invaluable, together with sharing resources. AONTAS has a close relationship with the Learning and Work Institute (formerly NIACE) in the UK, which has also been very beneficial.

Our respective journals (AJAL and the Adult Learner Journal) both face big challenges. The cost of such journals in terms of time and resources is significant. The AONTAS Adult Learner Journal is open source, which we regard as being essential for democratising academic work, but it can be a strain financially. Because of our journal's lower academic rankings, we find it harder to attract submissions from some academics. However, there is an appetite from practitioners and students for the AONTAS Adult Learner Journal, and presumably also for AJAL. The research base for advocating for adult learning needs to be strengthened, and both our journals can play an important part in this.

We are addressing some of these hurdles, in the case of the Adult Learner Journal, by means of a new Editorial Board that includes international members. This has enabled

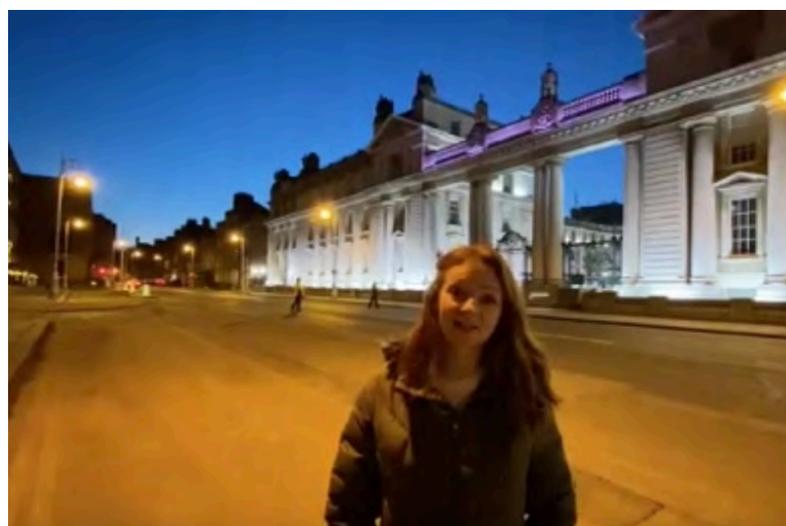
us to broaden our reach in addition to gaining expertise from overseas. Increasing the journal readership to ensure we remain relevant has also been important. We recently launched our 2019 journal at a special event, where authors shared information about their articles in order to build momentum and lift the profile and interest in the journal. This year we launched the '50 years of AONTAS' journal in conjunction with Cork Learning Cities, which was very well received. Barry Golding's recorded presentation certainly added that critical international dimension to the event.

Linking with higher education institutions and launching the journal in adult learning centres is about 'building the bridge' between adult learning advocates to further strengthen our advocacy and promotional work. In 2018, we were fortunate to have high-level civil servants in attendance at our Adult Learner Journal launch, which helped to link, theory, policy and practice in a collegial environment.

Adult learning is transformative with wide-ranging benefits at the personal, community and societal level. Persistent educational inequality in the adult population is unacceptable. We intend to continue to support critical dialogue across the field so that adult learners have the opportunity to fulfil their education aspirations, which they so richly deserve.

### About Niamh O'Reilly

CEO, AONTAS, Dublin, Ireland; Chair, Editorial Board, Adult Learner Journal; about to submit my PhD on Adult and Community Education.



## Paul Mulroney

The advocacy role ALA played in getting Australia's literacy standard measured in the next global assessment and the reviews conducted of ACE within Australia are an example of its effective and pivotal role nationally.

My recently completed professional work in the South Australian community sector put me in a very good position to provide regular updates on the field from this state during my five years on the ALA Board. I believe that the efforts ALA goes to ensure diverse representatives from as many Australian states and territories as possible get to sit around the table and contribute in many other ways to the association is exemplary. The lobbying I was able to do whilst on the Board allowed me to meet with national politicians and put ALA's case. I also presented two professional development webinars for ALA. All ALA webinars provide a valuable and accessible professional development service to adult learning practitioners.

I believe ALA to be a highly ethical and pivotal organisation to adult literacy and learning in Australia. The advocacy role ALA plays with state, territory and federal governments is essential. Its voice in VET and across the many diverse dimensions of adult learning including ACE is significant. It makes valuable contributions to discussions and policies relevant to all domains of adult learning.

AJAL, *Quest* and ALA's other publications and research papers are important. They detail current issues and developments in an accessible manner to those working at the 'grassroots' level of adult literacy, specifically to the academic field through AJAL. The advocacy role ALA played in getting Australia's literacy standard measured in the next global assessment and the reviews conducted of ACE within Australia are an example of its effective and pivotal role nationally.

There are many issues facing adult learners in diverse community settings to 2020, but there are solutions. Prospective learners find it hard to navigate the options available and how to access them. It can be difficult for adult learners to participate and simultaneously fulfil Centrelink compliance requirements. There is no smooth, graduated pathway for learners from ACE to VET to employment. A clear, easy to navigate pathway would greatly assist learners to develop, practise and implement skills and knowledge in a practical and meaningful manner and strengthen readiness for employment. There is a

need for support for sustained learning once employed so that learners can continue to develop their confidence and skills. Employers are often unaware of the needs of new staff and the wider benefits of learning to their organisations, in terms of productivity and efficiency as well as employee wellbeing, that can grow and improve organisational and workplace cultures.

Aside from piecemeal, short term, local, market and state or territory interventions, there is a desperate need for a national approach towards unemployment and a methodology developed to educate, prepare and support learners into sustained employment. This could be achieved through funding organisations over longer periods of time, so that strategies and partnerships between learning organisations and industry could be firmly and effectively established. Learners would then have greater confidence and knowledge in a process which would assist them, not being "thrown" from one program to another with little confidence in a transitory system in which they can unwittingly become a victim. I envisage a national strategy designed and developed with a learner-centric focus, sustained funding for organisations, working and linking to create a smooth continuum for entry level learners through to VET and employment, backed up by support mechanisms to enable recently employed workers to be able to sustain their employment.

Historically, Adelaide was something of an early leader in adult education. The very first Australian Journal of Adult Education (AJAE, published in July 1961) gave University of South Australia as AAAE's address, where the national association's 'prime mover', Arnold Hely (also the journal's first Editor) as well as the association's first Secretary, Des Crowley (later journal Editor in 1964) were both based. Adelaide hosted the first national Conference in 1961 on the still unfulfilled vision of 'Adult Education: The Nation's Responsibility'.

In recent decades South Australian ACE has been delivered predominantly, but not exclusively, within community and neighbourhood houses across urban and rural areas. The effective informality of this context has, over recent years,

grown into a more formalised and professional delivery of Foundation Skills, whilst maintaining a culture of nurturing participants and addressing their individual and personal circumstances.

I was fortunate to be involved in South Australia's review of ACE in 2017. A thorough consultative process was conducted involving multiple stakeholders resulting in increased funding to the ACE sector and the appointment of Pathway Coordinators throughout the state to promote ACE. These Coordinators worked collaboratively with ACE providers and assisted participants into volunteering experiences, further study and employment. ACE was set to flourish. We then had a change of government and priorities changed. Such inconsistencies with policy and funding is demoralising to the ACE sector and limits future possibilities for both providers and participants alike.

ALA does a great job with inadequate and diminishing resources, still trying valiantly to fulfil its 1961 vision, by stitching together and supporting our different (and very patchy) state and territory systems. Funding remains a huge issue for ALA. Sustaining funding to enable the organisation to undertake longer-term projects with the relevant and necessary staff numbers to achieve even more effective outcomes is a huge hurdle to ALA. It also faces competition for scarce resources with other peak bodies, emphasising the need for it to be able to provide the demonstrable 'point of difference' to funding bodies, philanthropic as well as governments.

ALA would really benefit from having a dedicated person whose role is to identify potential funding opportunities and how they might best be used in alignment with ALA's purpose and foci, and then to write the funding application. In this way, existing staff would be able to continue their core work without the exhausting and distracting functions of finding funding and submitting applications.

AJAL is a creditable publication supporting academic research and after nearly 60 years remains an important Australian journal. Despite many of the journal review processes now being streamlined on line, the internal staff time and costs required to maintain the professional quality and reach of publications such as AJAL and Quest remain significant. It is essential that AJAL continues to be supported for academics to propose, review and publish their research, with an Australian flavour and relevance.

This issue of relevance, particularly to ACE practitioners, assumes importance in a field of practice that is so patchy and diverse across the nation. In some parts of the country, such as here in South Australia, tutors who would not be

categorised as 'professional educators' typically facilitate ACE. I do not mean this disrespectfully. They are often paid a minimal amount of money for their work. Where accredited ACE is delivered, tutors are qualified, but they are often severely underemployed. In the case of non-accredited learning, many tutors are volunteers. Hence, the typical practitioner audience for an ACE journal in Australia is less inclined to be academic, and many adult educators would not consider it a priority to read or contribute to an ACE journal.

This is understandable but also problematic. I believe to be a really effective ACE tutor, one requires more highly developed andragogy (knowledge of adult education methods and principles) than a university lecturer, to be able to engage, sustain and create learning dimensions that stimulate and foster adult learning. The adult education workforce in many Nordic countries is infinitely more qualified than our own. One huge challenge is to get the Australian ACE sector to embrace the need for higher levels of formal training and critical practice. Part of this is about having accessible and relevant journals in the ACE space, to enable tutors to see the need to access and contribute to them, and powerfully implement increasingly skilled teaching within their classes.

It was a privilege to be invited onto the ALA Board and to be able to contribute to adult learning through the work of ALA. Being a part of the work of ALA and addressing the national issues facing adult learning within Australia was energising and enlightening. It also exposed me to wonderful professional development opportunities. I encourage others in very diverse and different ACE settings around Australia to get involved and experience the personal and professional benefits from more involvement in ALA, at the same time promoting the national adult education agenda within Australia.

### About Paul Mulrone

ALA Member. Formerly on the ALA Board (2004-2019), one year as Vice President; Primary and Secondary Teacher, VET Lecturer, RTO Manager, Language, Literacy & Numeracy Trainer and ACE Tutor mentor.



# Peter Kearns, OAM

Much remains to be done in finding good ways to integrate the strands of sustainable development and developing broad community and political consciousness of the dangers of climate change

I sense that ALA's 60th anniversary celebrations would be an excellent time to revisit our 2005 attempt to get a national lifelong learning policy for Australia. Much of what I wrote about in 2005 for ALA is even more relevant in 2020.

I regard ALA's most important achievement as keeping alive the necessary vision of Australia as an inclusive learning society in very difficult circumstances. Demographic and technological changes, with the uncertain future of work in an emerging era of artificial intelligence, make the need for a national lifelong learning policy even more imperative in 2020.

Learners today face significant cultural barriers to learning throughout life, with barriers to learning in later life emerging as a major issue to be addressed. In order to address these barriers, supportive coalitions need to be built up in local communities. Governments could assist by funding pilot community learning projects in each state in both urban and rural areas. This would be a cost-effective way to harness the relevant resources existing in local government. Initiatives in communities such as Melton, Brimbank, Hume and Wyndham (in Victoria), Gwydir (in NSW) and Townsville (in Queensland) show what can be achieved. There is much international experience to draw on, including the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities.

I regard the three biggest 'hurdles' confronting ALA (and other peak national ACE organisations) in promoting ACE as cultural apathy, a lack of understanding, and fragmented effort. These same issues are recurrent problems throughout society, calling for more organisations, governments and communities to work in dialogue and partnership. Fostering learning throughout life and building community should be seen as dual connected imperatives in building a good sustainable society in an era of dislocation and turbulence.

Industry should also be a partner if the issues at stake are well put. ALA could use the 60th Anniversary to

strategically build relations with other organisations involved in later life learning in community settings. These organisations might include U3A, Probus, Country Women's Association, Men's Sheds, COTA (Council of the Ageing), National Seniors, and National Librarian's Association. Such a coalition of organisations could promote the idea of a 'National Lifelong Learning Policy'. All organisations involved, and Australians generally, would stand to gain.

Experience to date in the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) shows that much remains to be done in finding good ways to integrate the strands of sustainable development and developing broad community and political consciousness of the dangers of climate change. ACE can contribute much in building a mindful learning community with a strong civic consciousness.

Finally, in 2020 I would like to see more active collaboration between ALA and ACE Aotearoa in New Zealand. This could be a first step towards improved ACE collaboration across the Asia/Pacific region. Much would also be gained through collaboration by working with countries like Singapore, where lifelong learning is already highly valued.

## About Peter Kearns

Board member, PASCAL International Observatory; Founder, PASCAL International Program on Learning City exchanges, including with Beijing, Cork, and Taipei; interest in adapting Learning Cities to new challenges; joint editor (with Denise Reghenzani-Kearns) of PIMA Special Interest Group report, Towards good active ageing for all (2018), circulated internationally; Life Member, ALA; Fellow of Australian College of Education.

Formerly commissioned by ALA to prepare a report Achieving Australia as an inclusive learning society (2005) on future directions for lifelong learning in Australia, involving consultations in all states. Former member of the Australian Delegation to OECD in Paris, involved in translating OECD ideas to Australian contexts, including school to work transition and the role of generic skills in lifelong learning.

# Professor Peter Lavender

Everything we propose is within the grasp of the system if we all want it enough ... We are not recommending an idealistic dream.

At the outset, it might be useful to confess that though I have spent almost all of my life and career working in England across all phases of education, I am very proud to be an Australian citizen, by descent. Nevertheless, my views are likely to be more Eurocentric than most.

I think ALA's major achievement is survival at a time of instrumentalism and managing well in spite of an increasingly narrow policy focus on young people, basic skills and vocational skills. This is an international trend.

I sense that there is a tension between what state governments provide and what citizens see as ACE. Looked at generally, I note that some state governments describe ACE rather well, acknowledging a spectrum of providers offering a wide variety of learning opportunities. However, when examined more closely, it is clear that what a state actually pays for is very much narrower and more limited. This is a pity, when we know that often any kind of learning can change horizons, enhance confidence and improve opportunities.

Given that there is relatively good research into the wider benefits of adult learning and the extent to which adults can really change their lives through learning, continuing this might be a productive research direction for the future in Australia. More consideration could be given to encouraging research into the value and place of adult learning, preferably connected to policy development on better ageing, better health and more active citizenship.

## The adult learner's voice

Further, I notice that the voice of adult learners in Australia has been muted. It is not an obvious part of the student union movements, nor is there a very visible set of learner voice organisations. Learner voice development may well be the next step beyond the celebration of Adult Learners' Weeks. If this is to be the case, providers will need mechanisms to help adults to get more involved in managing and developing provision.

One of the barriers facing ALA and other peak national ACE organisations might well be a simple lack of imagination. I have seen extraordinarily powerful adult education

partnerships with bodies that have a housing, community development or social impact, and these make learning more relevant to real life for many people. It would be good to see this more widespread in communities.

Promoting the best ideas and projects is not easy, but if a little financial support could be given to training and development for providers, this might be a significant move forward.

I am reminded of John Tomlinson's comment in the introduction to our report on 'Inclusive learning' from 1996:

Everything we propose is within the grasp of the system if we all want it enough, because its full growth or its seeds are already present somewhere: we are not recommending an idealistic dream, but the reality of extending widely the high quality which already exists in pockets, locked in the minds and actions of the few who must become the many.

And then there's writing. I would hate to see *AJAL* become a journal solely for academic articles. In the UK we lost 'Adults Learning', one of the most helpful journals in Europe, which captured much that was useful for providers, academics and policy makers. It was perfectly normal to see articles by education ministers reflecting on what matters to them; researchers explaining the value or impact of their research; the findings of public inquiries; themed issues on particular curriculum innovations; cameos of outstanding



learners and teachers. It would be good to see a blend of the academic, developmental and celebratory in journals.

We also need to encourage more providers, students, partners and teachers to write for journals. Starting with doctoral students and use of mentors might be helpful. Sponsorship from higher education institutions and other sources might be of value too. We also need more online solutions to cost-effective journals.

And we need to celebrate too. While it's important for ALA to celebrate its 60 years, it might be helpful not to be too self-regarding.

I have been struck by how much greater the publicity can be when we celebrate students' achievements, rather than the achievements of a concept (like adult learning), or of teachers or establishments. Perhaps the modest sponsorship of awards for students would be helpful.

It has always been a privilege working with colleagues in Australia. At a time when the world seems to be getting more divided and ever smaller, mutually supporting adult learning developments may be one of the very few things that can make a long-term difference to people's lives.

### About Peter Lavender

Professor of Education, University of Wolverhampton; Member of AJAL Editorial Board.

Formerly Deputy Chief Executive of National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, England and Wales (NIACE: now Institute of Learning & Work); Member of ALA & AJAL contributor; international contributor to ALA Conferences & Adult Learners Week.

## Dr Peter Willis

I sense the main challenge for ALA is the dominant consumerist culture promoting skills and knowledge acquisition, only about wealth attainment and not about personal, social and environmental issues.

Like many educators of adults, I didn't immediately identify as such until I read journals like AJAL and books like Mike Newman's 'The third contract'. I became proud to see myself as an adult educator, and warmly congratulate ALA on its six decades of service to adult educators and learners.

I believe ALA's main achievement is raising awareness of adult learning ideas as an important theoretical and practical element in both vocational training and re-training for adults and community development.

The main two issues facing adult learners in diverse community settings today, in my opinion, are erosion of humanist and convivial values under media enhanced consumerism, and cultural thinning by adults spending huge amount of time on unthoughtful videos, reports, stories and games, and not reading books. Neither issue, in my view, has a simple solution.

I sense the main challenge for ALA is the dominant consumerist culture promoting skills and knowledge acquisition, only about wealth attainment and not about personal, social and environmental issues. As I see it humanistic educators need to explore ways to arouse interest in the life of the mind and the service of humanity, though this is very difficult.

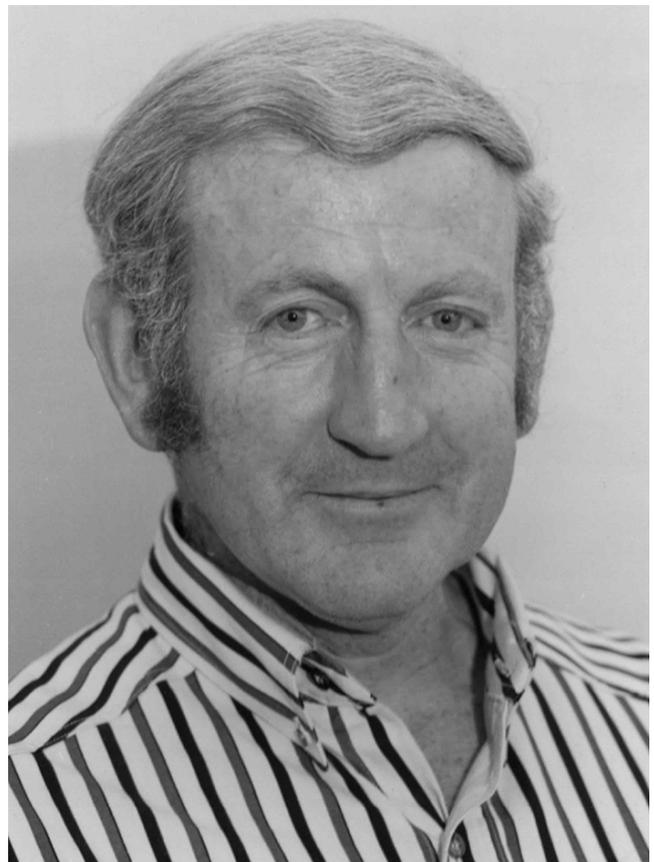
Whilst *AJAL* is a great journal, I sense it faces three main challenges. The first two are about dwindling readership and writers in adult and vocational education, and a lack of professional development interest around enriching learning among adults. The third challenge is that other disciplines have taken our readership, such as in psychology, brain science, natural science and Ted Talks.

While none of these challenges have simple solutions, I would personally love to see more work on the imagination as well as on forms of narrative learning, but I sense there are others doing similar stuff on Facebook and social media.

### About Peter Willis

Adjunct Senior Lecturer, Adult & Vocational Education, University of South Australia, Magill Campus; Acting Director, Australian Centre for Inclusive & Convivial Backyard Civilisation; Acting Director, Brompton Scholars Writing Group; Acting Director, Movement with Music.

Formerly President, SA Organisation for Adult and Community Education (SAOFACE) for about 10 years in the 1980's and 1990s; Member of AJAL executive for approximately 10 years in the 1980's and 1990s.



## Assoc. Professor Jose Roberto Guevara

The 'invisibility' of ACE, I would argue, continues to be one of the main issues currently facing the ACE community, which includes educators and adult learners in diverse community settings today.

Reflecting on ALA's most important achievement, I think it is ALA's ability to transform itself as an organisation yet remain committed to its mandate. These transformations and continuing existence have managed to overcome what I describe as the on-going 'invisibility' or the lack of appreciation of the concept, and the first-hand experience, of 'adult and community education' (ACE).

For most involved in ACE, these transformations will be evident from the various name changes (my first contact in 1991 was via AAACE). What is even more significant is that ALA has kept at the core its commitment to advancing the right and the practice of ACE within the context of lifelong learning. This is a demonstration of an agile and resilient organisation.

Further evidence of the significance of ALA's achievement is the current formulation of the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all". This has allowed ALA to play a leading role in the advocacy for lifelong learning in Australia and the Asia-Pacific. I am sure I first encountered the concept of 'lifelong, life-wide and life-deep learning' from AAACE colleagues.

The 'invisibility' of ACE, I would argue, continues to be one of the main issues currently facing the ACE community, which includes educators and adult learners in diverse community settings today. Even though lifelong learning is enshrined in the mainstream global development agenda, the dominant notion of education continues to be 'front-end loading' or schooling. Hence the priority in terms of funding, and therefore programs, tends to be narrowly focused on the education of youth and children, which is contrary to the concept of lifelong learning.

While schooling is important, the main problems we face, like the climate emergency, on-going conflicts and the growing gap between the rich and the poor, are issues that are at the core about equity and equality. These problems need to be understood by our youth so that they grow up living these values. However, these problems require

the urgent attention from our leaders, who are adults in positions of power and influence. Furthermore, it is adults in countries with electoral democracies who vote for these leaders, based on the best information available to them.

That is why, now more than ever, critical thinking based on a deep contextual understanding and the need to act are urgent. I think Paulo Freire (1985, in 'Reading the world and reading the word') best captures this idea when he says that literacy is not just about reading the word, but about reading the world and writing and re-writing it, through practical action, to transform the world.

Turning to possible solutions to these adult learner issues, it is essential to recognise that while these issues will affect individual learners, these issues affect us all. Therefore, the solutions, unless viewed in the context of equity and equality across the wider community and the world, will continue to be responded to through a narrow, self-interested, individualistic approach.

For example, the argument that Australia can continue to justify inaction on climate change because we only contribute less than two per cent of global carbon dioxide emissions, and therefore the reduction would be negligible, is an argument based on individualistic self-interest. Central to this understanding of the world in order to transform it, is a relationship-based inter-connectedness. This for me is what adult and community education has always given emphasis to, learning not just about context, but also in context.

For peak adult education organisations like ALA, the challenge is to continue to capture this relational learning amidst the emergence of online learning, not just for adult learners but also for adult educators. The fracturing of peak bodies based on narrow issues even within the ACE sector has had its advantages. So, we have smaller and more focused organisations, such as an association of neighbourhood houses or community VET providers, who share more in common and can respond to the specific needs of their learners. However, we will continue to need a broader peak body that embraces the central elements

of lifelong learning, able to cut across the interests of the different sectors, to come together to advance the right to education for all.

This, I think, requires relationship building across these different ACE sectors. We have been encouraged to work in partnership. As a sector we need to learn to work better in partnership. This was made more challenging because of the practice of 'competitive tendering' when we were made to compete against each other. Now the government has further reduced the available funding. But we need to continue to be a resilient force, to continue to advocate to the government to support ACE, while learning to wean ourselves away from being dependent on government grants and funding.

As national peak bodies, it is important to remind ourselves of why we do what we do. Our commitment is not about sustaining our organisations, but about advancing the rights of all adults to learn. This is a delicate balance, keeping one's commitment to our mission, while keeping the organisation, alive. This, ALA has done very well.

For me, the main issue facing AJAL and other journals in the ACE space it is about audience: who reads and who contributes. Currently, the whole industry of academic journals has become too focused on satisfying the needs of those of us in the academy to achieve our own KPIs. In a discipline like adult learning, it is important to strike the balance between ensuring we advance the knowledge and practice of the field by engaging the academy, and also engaging the practitioners to contribute and to read the journal.

Most journals are focused on the review process that is very much about the refereed article. I would love to see a journal focused on the learning process, where the author is guided in re-writing an article. While that requires much more time, it is a demonstration of a commitment, not just to the individual educator/facilitator, but also to building the foundations of a strong community of practice. I look forward to ALA's commitment to such a process.

Finally, I think it is important to acknowledge ALA's positive contributions to the several regional and international networks that I have been involved with. It is important to recognise the role that Alistair Crombie had in giving ASPBAE, a base in Australia to help advance ASPBAE's work in the South Pacific, through his support for Bernie Lovegrove (currently Executive Director of ASPBAE-Australia).

Personally, my initial contact with AAACE was through Helen Hill and Shirley Randell, who were both actively

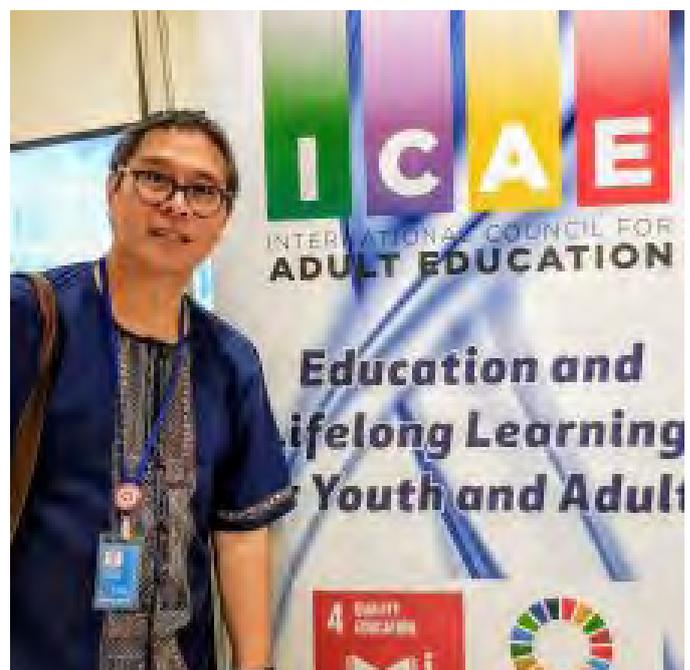
engaged with ASPBAE. It was through their networks in Melbourne that I gained a deeper understanding of ACE. The CAE (Council of Adult Education) exposed me to an institution that needed to learn how to transform itself in response to the changing context. I then experienced the introduction of competency-based learning and the demise of community-based courses. It was through Helen Hill's work at Victoria University and in East Timor, that I was first exposed to regional advocacy for adult learning. Helen guided me (together with Prof Allan Patience) to complete my PhD on my adult and community environment education work in the Philippines.

ALA as a peak body organisation has masterfully managed to make our community of practice more visible, by advancing lifelong learning that recognises the reciprocal relationship between formal and the non-formal education, by facilitating learning that is contextual and transformational, and by ensuring that we remember that at the heart of our commitment to advancing the right of all adults to learn.

#### About Robbie Guevara

Associate Professor, International Development, RMIT University; Vice-President (Asia-Pacific), International Council of Adult Education (ALA is a long-standing member of ICAE).

Previously President, ASPBAE (Asia-South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education: the precursor of ALA played a crucial role in its establishment in Sydney in 1964), 2009–17.



## Dr Rob Mark

We need to create a new dialogue on how to live with differences in tomorrow's world. The real challenge is how we prepare and educate citizens for living in a better world more at peace with itself.

Firstly, I warmly congratulate ALA on celebrating 60 years of service to the Australian community. Its journal, AJAL, has been an excellent resource and reference for staff and students across various fields.

Following on from several collaborative international research projects which I worked on with Australian researchers, I was fortunate to be able to visit Australia on several occasions to participate in conferences and other events supported by ALA. This experience has enabled me to develop my own perspectives on the common issues we face and to develop global perspectives.

ALA's role has become one with many perspectives and complexities in 2020. Adult learning has become so diffuse, and not just neatly contained within lifelong learning and community services organisations. This prompts questions about how we continue to provide a service beyond the direct adult learning function, which can assist those working in other services such as voluntary agencies, religious institutions, businesses, housing and health services. Meantime, access to relevant programmes is still restricted for many adult learners in increasingly diverse settings for many reasons, including time, location, finance, disability and access to technology. For all these reasons, adult learning increasingly needs to connect across services to be effective.

There are many common international challenges. Adults need better understanding of world problems and the contribution communities can play, to promote greater interconnectivity for peace and reconciliation, alleviate the effects of climate change, reduce hunger and challenge discrimination and inequality wherever it may come from. Some of my research with Barry Golding and others internationally around gender has included different aspects of disadvantage experienced by some men. It's my opinion that gender research should focus on both male and female inequalities and how we can address them. If we want to produce a fairer and more egalitarian society, we must be mindful of everyone's needs. This includes facing up to different aspects of race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, and so on, without prejudging what is right and wrong.

We need to create a new dialogue on how to live with differences in tomorrow's world. The real challenge is how we prepare and educate citizens for living in a better world more at peace with itself. I was recently in Gallipoli in Turkey, Ypres in Belgium and the Somme in France, where so many young Australian lives were needlessly lost. Surely, we must learn from and never repeat these mistakes.

As a former Editor for The Adult Learner journal in Ireland, I am aware that our journals need to reach out to include perspectives from different organisations beyond the academic community, to people who are seeking to solve problems in communities, and to find and share ways to learn from experience elsewhere. Our journals need to provide an opportunity for a real exchange between research, policy and practice. Maybe we need not just one formal, academic journal, but several other ways of sharing research, which meet different kind of needs.

The emphasis in journals is always on the written word, but what about other forms of communication? Technology provides new and exciting ways to learn from others. For example, why is this Cameo only in words? Could it have been transmitted more effectively and directly via a video clip, pictures and interactive discussion online? Might that have provided a richer evidence for us? Journals should connect not only within their own country but internationally. Research students and practitioners should be encouraged to submit articles, but they might need more guidance and training. There is a lot to celebrate as ALA turns 60, but all of us who are passionate about lifelong learning and have made it our lives, need to ask: 'What could we have been better at? What are the new challenges?' These need to be identified and tackled in the next decades.

### About Rob Marks

PASCAL Learning Cities Coordinator and Honorary Senior Researcher, University of Glasgow and Dublin City University. Formerly Head of Lifelong Learning and Director of Education (UK); Coordinated and managed a range of research and development projects on policy and practice themes at national and international level; Editor and Board Member, The Adult Learner journal (Ireland, 2007-18).

# Emeritus Professor Roger Harris

A focus around lifelong learning is the only way forward as society becomes increasingly complex and bewildering, technologically and culturally, and as more people desperately need to engage in adult learning in some form.

Congratulations to ALA on 60 years of service in the community, its association and its many activities (such as Adult Learners Week, conferences, workshops, newsletters and webinars). Keeping the ACE flame flickering and sustaining a high-quality international journal (AJAL) on a shoestring is no mean feat. It has done a wonderful job over the 60 years and deserves to be well celebrated in 2020!

The main issues facing diverse adult learners in Australia are that they are often time-poor and have limited finances and resources. There is lack of recognition of their informal and non-formal learning unless it leads to a credential. One solution might be learning vouchers going to individuals as distinct from grants to organisations. Another could be placing higher value on informal and non-formal learning activities. It is very important meantime that adult educators are well trained and well versed in adult learning principles and practices.

ALA's challenge is to elevate the status of adult and community education in comparison with university, VET and school, which are well known, long established and commonly experienced by the populace. In contrast, ACE as a 'fourth sector' is variously perceived as 'second chance', 'remedial', the 'Cinderella'. Whilst adult education occurs in most places most of the time, it is neither recognised nor acknowledged as 'adult education'. There remains a lack of government recognition of its value in policy, finance and publicity, even after the excitement generated by the two Senate 'Cinderella' reports in the 1990s.

ACE has a disparate nature. It's difficult to define precisely and typically remains 'under the surface', largely invisible (especially as it has become enveloped within the VET sector) and used politically by governments as a stepping-stone for getting people into VET and hopefully then employment. Its unique contributions to society have always been under-resourced and under-valued.

The value-adding effects of ACE are very difficult to disentangle from other factors and are notoriously difficult to evidence. For example, ACE's enabling, and bridging

functions go relatively unnoticed when it is only completed qualifications and accredited programs that are officially 'counted' in statistics and on the political agenda for funding. Its lower status is brought about by its concern for the under-privileged and disadvantaged. Its provision of lower level qualifications that tend to cater for equity populations counts against it in the cutting of government funding cakes. ACE also lacks a solid research base to be able to compete effectively in a competitive tendering and evidence-based environment. ACE's diverse and disparate character, so often considered a strength in the local practice context, works against it in the political arena when it can't readily be defined, measured or defended compared with the more formal sectors.

ACE is also held back by the deadweight of tradition. As the association's first President, Sir Robert Madgwick, expressed 80 years ago, it has been 'a thing of shreds and patches ... [and] adult education was very much at the bottom of the educational pecking order'. Long before the Senate inquiries of the 1990s four different experts in 1973 characterised it as having 'a Cinderella-like existence in the back kitchen of education', 'almost unbelievably barren', a 'sterile field' and 'a crazy pavement, with provision and ideas differing across each border'.

The association's first female journal Editor, Joan Allsop, in 1973 wrote that ACE 'urgently require[d] a fresh and fundamental reappraisal in the light of recent world thinking around the concept of integrated lifelong education'. I think she is still correct. A focus around lifelong learning is the only way forward as society becomes increasingly complex and bewildering, technologically and culturally, and as more people desperately need to engage in adult learning in some form.

The pendulum has swung dramatically in favour of the economic rather than the social. Economic factors are increasingly becoming the main rationale for making educational policies and measuring their effectiveness. Rather than the primary role of education being to assist individuals to realise their full potential and contribute to social and cultural development, the focus is more on

its contribution to the achievement of national economic success, by developing the human resource capital required by industries and enterprises.

At the macro level, I sense there is a need for re-framing policy in Australia such that there is a more explicit recognition of lifelong learning that meshes with the visions articulated by other components of the educational system, and a more balanced acknowledgement of social-cultural as well as economic-technological goals. At the micro level, I believe we need to more closely examine how learning occurs in its various forms in diverse settings, such as in the workplace. This is an under-researched and rapidly changing component within a lifelong learning philosophy that needs to be reconstructed around the increasingly information-based economy of the 21st century.

Our excellent journal AJAL is faced with the related, under-valuing of ACE as an academic field. Like other adult education journals, it struggles to maintain a wide enough reader-base for publishing houses to retain interest in journals concerned with ACE. The numbers of journal subscribers are diminishing as the numbers writing from

and about ACE is decreasing. University departments related to the field are being closed, and practitioners in the field are too busy to write about their practice and theorise about their work.

Journals like our own have typically sprung up within national associations, and therefore find themselves in a bind between trying to remain faithful to their origins and relevant to their practitioner (and often national) readers, and trying to become increasingly credible in a fiercely-competitive, international publishing arena. It is a balance that is extremely, if not impossible, to strike.

My fervent hope is that, despite these difficulties, ALA and other associations will continue to support wholeheartedly their respective journals.

#### About Roger Harris

Lifetime Honorary Member, Adult Learning Australia, from 2011.

Previously a Lecturer/Professor of adult and vocational education for 40 years at University of South Australia to 2014; Editor of AJAL (1990–2012); presenter at ALA annual conferences; published in AJAL, including a 50-year review (2011).



# Roger K Morris AM

I have always seen the major difficulty facing adult education, as a field of practice and study, is the lack of realisation of most educators of adults that they are indeed firstly adult educators.

ALA's most important achievements in the early 1990s as AAACE include obtaining substantial federal funding, both core and project and a substantial ordinary membership, strong state/territory associations, a strong and very competent staff, and a large and representative Executive ;

As such it acted very much as a parliament for the fourth sector. Its conferences were well attended [often 300 + attendees] and local state based seminars/meetings were attracting up to 100 attendees.

It had the clout to work in partnership with government [federal and state] at both the political and bureaucratic level to achieve much. Here the roles of Alastair Crombie and Mary Hannan can not be underestimated.

Among its achievements were Federal funding for AAACE; the funding of projects such as the Reconciliation and other study circles and achieving the presence of a full official Australian delegation to CONFINTEA 5 in Hamburg 1997.

As alluded to above the AAAE, AAACE & ALA has always had three main roles as professional association for adult educators; a lobbyist to government in support of the sector and an organisation promoting adult learning/ education generally across the broad community

As an educator of adult educators I have always seen the major difficulty facing adult education, as a field of practice and study, is the lack of realisation of most educators of adults that they are indeed firstly adult educators.

Ask a primary teacher what she teaches she will answer children. Ask a secondary teacher what she teaches and she will answer French, etc. This problem also applies to many educators of adults, to them, the context/subject matter of their work is more important than the why/underlining nature of that work. They see themselves as defined by a narrow subject matter/skill transfer and not as part of a life long and life wide process designed to help individuals take greater control over their lives.

Most educators of adults do not see themselves as operating as a subset of the broader field of adult education eg. Education = Preschool primary secondary post secondary = Adult education = Tafe teasol vet community health parent prison military police etc.

If we could get all the thousands of people, who work across the spectrum of adult education assisting adults to learn/grow, to understand that they were firstly adult educators, many of the problems of adult education, as a field of practice would be resolved.

Solutions might include continuing to work towards some sort of coalition of like minded associations/groups/etc. Across the sector to pursue common objectives. In the 1990s we advanced the idea of coala i.e. The coalition of adult learning associations with some initial and limited success.

## About Roger Morris

Member of AAAE, AAACE, & ALA. Life member ASPBAE; Member of the Board of Directors of the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame (2013–2017).

Member of the Order of Australia [AM] for his contribution to adult, continuing and community education through practitioner development, research, and professional. Inducted into the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame at a ceremony held, in September 2006, at the University of Bamberg, Germany: the first Australian to be so honoured.

Formerly Associate Professor in the Adult Education Program at the University Technology, Sydney in 2005.



# Sally Thompson

There is a growing gap between marginalised learner groups and the mainstream community as increased social isolation, mental health issues and a hollowing out and shrinkage of the labour market call for more rather than less opportunities to learn.

For context, I know ALA particularly well from the past two decades, having served as ALA CEO from 2010 to 2015. As a long time, passionate ALA member and supporter, I have gone ‘full circle’, having first worked in the ACE sector as an adult literacy teacher, worked as a Manager of an Adult Education Centre in Melbourne, as a National Women’s Officer for the AEU and more recently at RMIT. Formerly a Member of the ACFE Board in Victoria, I am currently working on a PhD researching aspects of adult literacy in community contexts across several sites in Victoria. What follows is my personal vision for the future of ACE and ALA.

I regard ALAs’ most important achievement as maintaining a consistent and ongoing commitment to lifelong and lifewide learning in the face of the relentlessly narrowly focussed, neoliberal human capital agenda offered by both sides of government for decades now. Adult learners in diverse community settings across Australia are subject to the downsides of privatisation and marketization at all levels of education. There is a growing gap between marginalised learner groups and the mainstream community as increased social isolation and mental ill health issues and a hollowing out and shrinkage of the labour market call for more rather than less opportunities to learn, lifelong and lifewide.

My solution to these difficulties, and one I would recommend to ALA and other peak national bodies, is to keep emphasising the importance of learning for social engagement for wellbeing in order to support adults through the many difficult life transitions. As researchers I believe we need to develop more sophisticated means of measuring benefits in this wellbeing and social isolation space.

The advice to ALA would be to resist leaping from one emerging trend to another. Sticking to the core mission and making sure it is tight and focussed is more likely to maintain the energy and to withstand the lack of interest from government. Keeping skilled staff in such a tough environment is not easy. Adult learning is a broad church and has a habit of continually trying to expand its mission with fewer resources. ALA’s mission is also very broad and

there are other groups and networks in this umbrella. It’s really important that ALA works collaboratively with these other bodies and takes a “first among equals” leadership approach to ACE.

All up, I reckon ALA does an amazing job under tough circumstances – it has to resist the temptation to look for new breakthroughs: there is no such thing as a quick win in this space – only hard-won outcomes. ALA needs to find new ways for members to engage with its mission, other than by joining its Board or being employed as staff. The recent Year of Lifelong Learning, the short commissioned articles and the summit were very good, recent examples of how this might be achieved. ACE across Australia is extraordinarily diverse that calls for diverse dissemination strategies. I think ALA’s newsletter ‘Quest’ that has been around at least 20 years is a very high quality publication that brings the very diverse Australian ACE sector together and disseminates it nationally in a cohesive way.

I think the main current hurdle facing AJAL and like journals is the lack of funding of ACE research, that makes it hard for them to maintain a strong ACE / Adult Learning focus. As a result, particular trends in education other than ACE dominate the journal at times. One option might be for AJAL to seriously consider joining up with NZ (which lost its national journal in 1998) and Asia South Pacific journals and focus more on the region – particularly on Indigenous adult education.

## About Sally Thompson

Independent researcher.  
Former CEO of ALA, 2010–15;  
and Deputy Director, Future  
Social Service Institute,  
RMIT.



# Assoc Professor Sandra Lee Morrison

Leaders must be active and committed in order to carry on a strong legacy throughout its generations.

I'm so proud for all of what ALA has done over six decades, and all it continues to do! I believe ALA has several notable achievements, aside from its longevity, including a cadre of strong and active leaders who are not afraid to push boundaries and come up with new initiatives. It's great to see ALA increasingly working with Indigenous members in Australia, following the example and strong lead set by ACE Aotearoa here in New Zealand. Quality education has different meanings for different people. Validating the Indigenous knowledge base, while supporting the revitalisation of Indigenous culture and language, is integral for identity and building an inclusive society.

ALA's biggest future challenges are similar to what other adult education bodies face around the world. Maintaining a high profile of the worth of adult education continues to be a consistent challenge.

The world is increasingly complex with a raft of multi-level crises, some occurring simultaneously. While the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have garnered the international community to work together to find solutions, the role of non-formal adult and community education continues to be underestimated. Bringing its benefits to the fore and creating actions to develop more support and resourcing is integral to meeting the SDG's and the Framework for Action 2030.

ALA is nicely placed to have a strong advocacy role and to promote good advocacy positions firstly within its own country as well as regionally and internationally. ALA has strength and capacity to support its communities through sound representation and to draw on the plurality of knowledges that exist within its diverse communities. Maintaining a strong leadership and not compromising on that is essential for all national peak bodies. Leaders must be active and committed in order to carry on a strong legacy throughout its generations. ALA's 60 years of service is testament to this.

The main issues facing adult learners in diverse community settings today is how to build sustainable communities and in so doing show tolerance and understanding of others. March 15th, 2019 in New Zealand revealed brutally and

sharply what hate against others can do. Australia has had its dark days, as do other countries. In addition to such a social dilemma are the dilemmas around environmental constraints including climate change, political ruptures and the continued dominance of economic liberalism. Adult education can never be still and passive. Adult educators must be poised and ready to respond to the fast changing context while ensuring that we continue to be critical thinkers, solution focussed and active global citizens. We have the capacity to address these issues within the solid infrastructure built by ALA.

AJAL and other academic journals face many challenges, including who will lead and all the large and small tasks of what leading a journal means. These include: the challenge of online versus hard copy; producing articles which are on time so that their relevance is maintained; the need to be available in many formats and across many communities, acknowledging that some communities may need more targeted publications, and alternative forms of communication. Having different editors for different themed editions can also spread the journal editorial workload.

Let us not lose the power of the written word that promotes the benefits of learning, through investing in theory and analysis tested against reflexive praxis. The publication of an academic journal has multiple benefits.

As the national peak body for ACE in Australia, ALA has a stated mission to promote and achieve 'lifelong and lifewide learning for all Australians'. In addition, the concept of 'life deep' has also emerged but with less defined meanings. Coming from my indigenous perspective, with the privilege of also sitting on the peak international body of ICAE, I never can forget that as humans we have both physical and spiritual manifestations.

In my world, spiritual development is guided by the many Gods who had domain over various spheres. Education and learning supported us to fulfil the roles to keep the world in harmony. The world is inter-related extending to the animals, insects and all who share the bounty of our earth, Papatūānuku.

As we promote lifelong and lifewide learning, life deep is for me, an essential component of being an active global citizen.

In whatever learning journey that we are now part of, be it as a peak body or otherwise, it is no longer possible for any of us to ignore the life sustaining qualities of Mother Earth that is now under immense pressure.

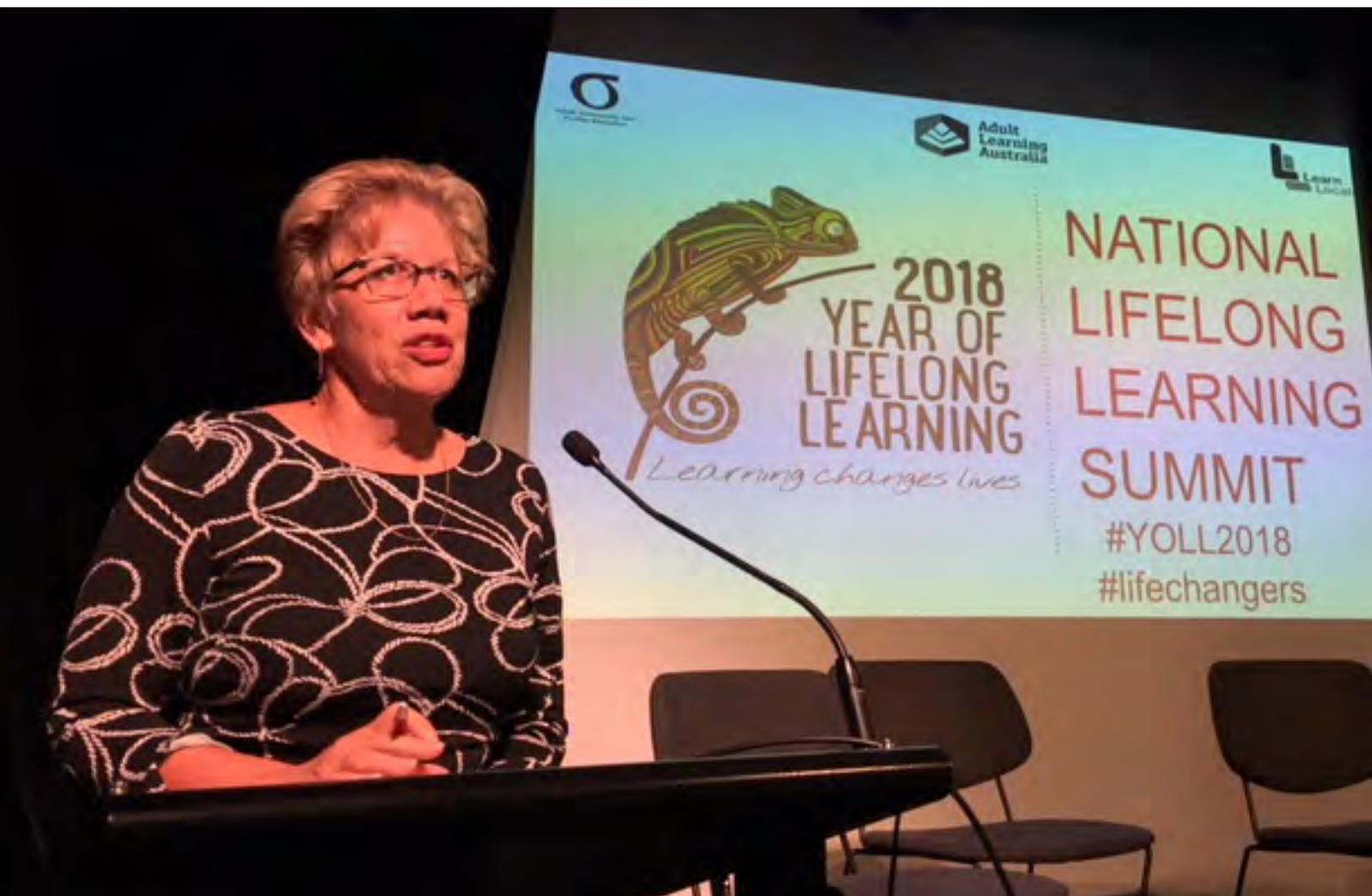
Our learning revolution is just as much a spiritual revolution if we are to treasure the sacred and dependent relationship that we must now protect, not only with Papatūānuku, but also with life itself. Kia ora koutou katoa.

### About Sandra Lee Morrison

Tribal affiliations to Te Arawa, Maniapoto, Ngāti Rārua & Ngāti Tama ki te Tau Ihu

President, International Council of Adult Education (ICAE) 2015 to present; Vision Mātauranga Māori Leader for the 'Deep South Science Challenge: Changing with our Climate'; Trustee, Indigenous Māori & Pacific Adult Education Charitable Trust (IMPAECT), working with Recognised Seasonal Employment workers from Tonga on adapting to New Zealand culture.

Admitted to International Hall of Fame for Adult & Continuing Education (2009); President, ASPBAE (2004-8); Ex Committee Member, ASPBAE, (2000-4); long time ACE Aotearoa member; Co Chair, Tertiary Education Commission Reference Group for ACE (2004-8); Member, ACE Working Party (1998-2000).



# Sue Howard

Adult education in Tasmania since 2010 has been significantly enhanced through libraries and neighbourhood houses working together with online access centres.

When preparing my words for this Cameo, I came across a photo of myself with two other participants at an ALA conference held in Ross in Tasmania. I recall some of us were accommodated in Oatlands and travelled to the conference venue by bus. It must have been in the late 1970s or perhaps the early 1980s. It was my first professional conference attendance as an ALA member. I recall we had a group of local Aboriginal women working through how they had reignited their language and basket weaving skills from records held in archives. I was in Queensland then and recall arriving in the Tasmanian Midlands woefully underdressed for the winter weather conditions. I came to live here 30 years later and now know better!

## Adult education in Tasmania

Adult education in Tasmania since 2010 has been significantly enhanced through libraries and neighbourhood houses working together with online access centres. These agencies provide a range of courses and pathways for Tasmanians to access learning. They also partner with RTOs (Registered Training Organisations) to deliver accredited training, thus completing the pathway for some Tasmanians from community-based introductory or re-engagement learning to formal qualifications.

Tasmania has a relatively small population (around 540,000 people of whom about half are under 16 years), which is very dispersed in small communities. The digital divide is clear in Tasmania. Our most recent influx of migrants are often seeking a range of learning opportunities which enable them to participate in the social, cultural and political spheres of their new country. A diverse range of providers work cooperatively to provide these opportunities.

Adult learners in diverse community settings across Australia today face many difficult access issues, including accessing digital technologies and learning how to participate in their communities. The strong national focus on job skills further reduces the capability and capacity

for people in diverse communities to share their cultures with a lifelong and lifewide, two-way learning perspective we need in our society and for the jobs of the future. Governments need to recognise that building job skills is not a sufficient condition for a great country. It may simply meet some necessary conditions.

## Defining ACE

I see two major hurdles currently facing ALA as the peak national body. The first is that ACE in its current definition as a sector is not consistent across the country. It's a definitional hurdle that we are working to clarify for our stakeholders and ourselves. The second is that the public value of community education is not clearly determined nor articulated. Having an independent review of the value of the sector to the national economy is well overdue as we move toward the range of predicted megatrends for 2025 and beyond.

One way around the hurdle around what ACE is might be tackled by means of agreement via the current ALA Board as to who is included in the sector based on the work they undertake, rather than on the basis of their self-identification. This would allow us to fully explore the range of providers of lifewide, lifelong learning and include them in the sector.

Once this definitional issue is sorted, public value can then be better scoped based on who is in the sector, what they do and with whom. This could be a project for a post-graduate student in a university or for a national consulting firm as part of their social responsibilities/corporate contribution programs.

Whilst our own journal, AJAL, does a great job with minimal resources, I think that academic journals across the board face declining subscriptions by individuals, as online access to professional reading is more readily available via virtual academic libraries and professional resource websites. Practitioners can sometimes find it hard to make time to work through full journal articles. Perhaps

the use of online summaries of the journal articles with key findings might help learning facilitators in the sector and increase the journal's accessibility. These summaries could then be uploaded to sites like LinkedIn and particular sector professional learning sites, somewhat like that used by NDIS for professional development in the disability sector. Having access to the full article, linked to either ALA or via a subscription payable to ALA to have the article accessible immediately via their website might also be workable.

The public value of community education is not clearly determined, however, ALA has over 60 years of existence and advocacy which clearly shows its value - congratulations for keeping this on a range of agendas.

## About Sue Howard

Deputy Director Operations, Service Tasmania

ALA President (2019-20) and previously Acting Manager, 26TEN Strategy; Manager, Burnie Library and catchment libraries, Libraries Tasmania.



## Sue Ross

Constantly flexing in response to ever changing government agendas with the same consistent message of recognition for adult and community education, lifelong and lifewide learning is a great challenge.

As current director of a community centre that is 41 years old, my role is diverse and has few boundaries but includes programs that respond to community demand with a wide range of community organisations. As Chair of Community Centres SA, I am an advocate to local, state and commonwealth governments for the provision of funding, providing information and developing the importance of the ACE sector's significant role in engaging those most disengaged from learning.

I have in many ways gone full circle. Offered a coffee by a worker sitting on the seat outside a community centre led me into a world I could never have envisaged. With no formal qualifications, but great skills in shorthand and typing, my learning journey had only just begun.

Five years ago (2014) I came full circle ending up where I started in a community centre. I now utilise my position to influence public debate and policy to ensure that community-based providers are adequately resourced to deliver engagement programs to those disadvantaged and isolated within local communities.

It is sobering to reflect on the theme of the first Conference of our antecedent association, AAAE in Hobart in 1960: 'Adult education: A national responsibility', and reflect on what has really changed in the past 60 years, given we are still striving to achieve national recognition of adult education?

ALA has had the longevity and ability to work within constantly changing environments, whilst at the same time having a voice for members, students and providers, and adult and community education across Australia. Constantly flexing in response to ever changing government agendas with the same consistent message of recognition for adult and community education, lifelong and life wide learning is a great challenge.

While education is an ongoing process of improving knowledge and skills it is a means of bringing about personal development and building relationships among individuals, groups and nations. It is this fact that

bureaucrats fail to recognise as being the building blocks for our national future.

Today's adult learners face challenges that have not changed over the years: access to self-directed relevant local learning; relevant pathways to further education, training and or employment for older adults, or learning for community engagement and civic participation. Today's learners face new challenges such as digital technologies that are taking jobs and looking at futures where they will have many jobs requiring different skills.

Solutions too many of these adult learner issues goes back to funding. We would benefit from funding for nationally coordinated marketing and promotion activity that articulates lifelong and life wide learning and the connections with local learning opportunities.

We would also benefit from funding for engagement programs, which are not tied to pathways to training or employment outcomes. This would assist community-based organisations to engage those most disadvantaged in programs that encourage learning. Importantly, we need more funding to increased local access to digital technologies particularly in regional areas of Australia.

As a peak national body ALA faces a big hurdle with a lack of recognition by governments that ACE (as the fourth sector of education) plays a major role in supporting and developing individual's skills for work and life. As a member-based organisation, ALA needs to engage new members and identify what's in it for them that they can't get of the internet already, in terms of information content.

Consideration of the ALA member base and journal audience is a hurdle that needs to be addressed, with a better mechanism for engaging educators and tutors in the community sector. I pose the question, 'How do we close the gap between those in communities and those in universities?' An opportunity exists for AJAL to connect better with community-based education providers in community centres to enable them to contribute to a

journal such through a mentor to help write a journal article. This opportunity could be supported as an activity such as through state peaks or community centres.

### About Sue Ross

Director, Eastwood Community Centre Inc., Adelaide (since 2014);  
Chair, Community Centres South Australia (CCSA).

Previously engaged as a volunteer and first qualification through a community centre; Community Centre and Language, Literacy & Numeracy Coordinator; Coordinator, Adult Learners Week (1995-2008); Principal Project Officer/Manager, VEET Board & ACE Council; State representative, MCEETYA ACE Taskforce; Australian representative, International Lifelong Learning Exhibition & UNESCO Conference, Korea, 2007; CEO, Workers Education Association (WEA) SA, 2008-14; supported ALA's 50th National Conference, Adelaide, 2010; ALA's 'Adult Educator of the Year', 2012.



## Dr Sue Shore

Community educators are not recognised nor are they paid adequately for their contributions, yet their work is often central to reinvigorating sustainable local economies and precarious forms of hope.

I began my affiliation with adult learning before the ACE or VET sectors were formalised as policy entities in South Australia. After completing a science degree at Adelaide University, I turned away from formal education on a path of on-the-job learning, including working in the textile and clothing industry, local government horticulture, hospitality, and other random jobs. I then returned to formal education and spent the next eleven or so years as a community educator in TAFE community and access programs and in Aboriginal controlled organisations in Alice Springs and Adelaide.

When I entered the higher education sector (in 1988) as a lecturer I 'expected' to be involved in running conferences, producing and writing for conference proceedings, and researching my practice, not just reflecting on it, but by writing about it, publicly talking about it and publishing about community education. I am still confused by the contemporary narrative that implies Colleges of Advanced Education lecturers did not participate in scholarly activities and that our activism was not research.

One of my first leadership roles was in Alice Springs in 1982 as Secretary of the Central Australian Adult Literacy Group. At that time remote communities had access to a full range of resources from community-based adult educators to support 'on country' learning. I have been a member of national peak bodies such as ALA (formerly AAACE), ACAL (Australian Council of Adult Literacy), AVETRA (Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association), WAVE (Women and Vocational Education) and a number of state-based advocacy organisations.

I chaired a national consortium of Australian universities (Google ALNARC for details), which produced local and national studies of adult literacy and numeracy in workplaces as diverse as funeral homes, farms, tourism companies, bars, community houses and more.

Projects that brought all of these interests together include some of the only work that addresses privilege, whiteness and adult education include: Positively different:

guidance on developing inclusive adult literacy language and numeracy curriculum; Reflecting on privilege in the teaching professions; Understanding lifelong learning as a racial project; Racialised discourse and 'adult learning principles; Race and the deep starting points' of inclusion/exclusion; and Theory building as racialised practice.

My hybrid approach to education research grew out of principles of community work and the gruelling work I undertook during my PhD. This always and already conjoined theory-practice helped me to understand how core assumptions about adults and learning flow through sites as diverse as RPL and pathways to postgraduate study, early childhood teacher renewal, internationalisation as academic work; cross-cultural and cross-sectoral engagement in teacher education, schooling, and vocational education, and the racial assumptions embedded in global research rankings and measures of adult learning such as the International Adult Literacy Scales.

My most recent university work has included two funded research projects. One was about military veterans returning to study. The other was about strategies universities put in place to support students who defer, especially those on low wages and in poorly resourced or "first student in the family" communities.

I regard ALA's main important achievement as keeping adult learning on the agenda as a public service and as a policy issue. This has not been easy because of three main factors. The first is the impact of 1980s OECD studies that privilege global comparisons of national productivity.

The second is the influence of national policies that audit progress based on 'national' benchmarks for curriculum, assessment, progression, organisational reporting and pedagogy (often conflated to delivery) that conform to a workplace or community imaginary that is metropolitan to its very core.

The third is the consequence of global and national policies, UNESCO for example which has always foregrounded adult learning, but in recent times have

focussed more heavily on early childhood education. The middle-aged and elderly are not so subtly presented as a lost cause: not so cute, less compliant, more recalcitrant than the 'bubbies'. In the wake of these and many other pressures, it has been a real challenge for all advocacy organisations to resist being drawn in to competition for the learning dollar.

As an academic I think the sustained production of AJAL over such a long time has been significant. I've edited special editions of AJAL on Adult Basic Education (1990) and Workplace Education (1993), and co-edited national and international books on adult education: *Diversity in education in Central Australia* (Institute for Aboriginal Development, Alice Springs, 1983); *Adult Education @ 21st Century* (Peter Lang, 2004) and *Disrupting Adult and Community Education: Teaching, Learning, and Working in the Periphery*. SUNY Press, NY (2016). What I have enjoyed when doing this work is what I learn from practitioners around the globe, and how 'darn hard' it is to be public about practice.

When I was asked, 'What do you regard as the main issues facing adult learners in diverse community settings today?' I really fired up. 'Adult' and 'learner' are terms that can be used with brutal precision to define what counts and what doesn't in education; who gets funded; what acceptable benchmarks are established as a norm for progress and productivity, what counts as waste: wasted effort, wasted money, wasted people.

In all of this the 'people of community' are often left to fumble along on the 'smell of an oily rag'. Community educators are not recognised nor are they paid adequately for their contributions, yet their work is often central to reinvigorating sustainable local economies and precarious forms of hope.

Precarious, because education only provides a privileged few with a free and uncontested pass in the world of work. But education, especially that which is embedded in community, goes a long way towards establishing what former South Australian Premier, Don Dunstan worked hard to create: a culture of ethical decision making, enjoyment of life individually and collectively within a frame of social, economic, educational, cultural and recreational activity. He wanted "to see that every citizen in society has the social, economic, educational, cultural and recreational wherewithal to enjoy life and draw the most personal satisfaction from it".

His was not a view that defaulted to economic measures alone, yet this vision Australia wide has been repeatedly

hijacked by the 'measured life'. And adult educators and researchers, myself included, have from time to time returned to this as the bedrock of our thinking. It's one part. Yes, an important part. But not the whole.

Some years ago, in an Opinion Piece I was frustrated enough about the demonising of 'adult illiterates' to offer the opinion that global surveys actually consolidated a derogatory discourse about productive and wasted lives. I wrote that we needed to:

... stop thinking about literacy and numeracy problems as indicators of a person's worth. We have to stop talking about literacy as if it is simply a problem of not being able to spell, not being able to write and not being able to add. We have to stop implying that jobs will automatically appear when literacy and numeracy abilities improve. And we have to stop assuming adults have literacy and numeracy problems primarily because they were not taught properly in school.

I am fairly certain that many residents in communities across the country know this, as do many adult educators. It's a constant challenge to be alert to the parochial discourse of 'adult learner's needs', one that sits at the core of a lot of activist and conventional community work and research practice, but also sustains a disparaging storyline about 'wasted lives'.

My first response to the question about suggested solutions to these adult learner issues is that narratives of heroic male/female educators (and indeed researchers) are not always helpful where profound disregard for heritage, language, culture and ancestry set up blockades to living one's life on one's own terms within one's community where ever that is – a large city, a 'rustbelt' suburb, a rural town, a remote or very remote community.

'Starting' from this premise goes against the modern push to solve problems, fix disadvantage and fashion productive citizens. Yet future industries opening to young and old are so varied, so 'not yet imagined' that we have to 'listen', to be open to alternatives, stories, events, resources of/ for knowing. Stopping to listen and learning to hear: these are the soft skills of the future that are so hard to promote when policy directives, industry council demands, community diversity and the sheer need for a job, are pressing in on learners, educators, and researchers.

I've never really been able to say to people that a degree in "adult education" will provide them with a plethora of

astoundingly well-paid job opportunities post-graduation. Astonishingly rewarding, yes. Abundant in learning opportunities for themselves, yes. Amazingly rich in the friendships they will make, of course. But quite appalling in terms of the economic and employment pathways that such a public service should reward.

ALA's role in promoting adult and community education (ACE) is, in my humble opinion, different from promoting lifelong learning or workplace or 'formal adult learning'. The latter terms and forms of provision fit neatly – have been incessantly and seamlessly integrated – into visions, mission statements, blueprints, strategic plans, roadmaps and other textual devices that show the way. National organisations, by their very nature speak to the national voice, and in doing so invariably get caught in what Dorothy Smith describes as extra-local coordination, control from afar through assumptions about resources and social life, which is then translated in generic terms (competence, outcome, knowledge) and which then lose their meaning locally.

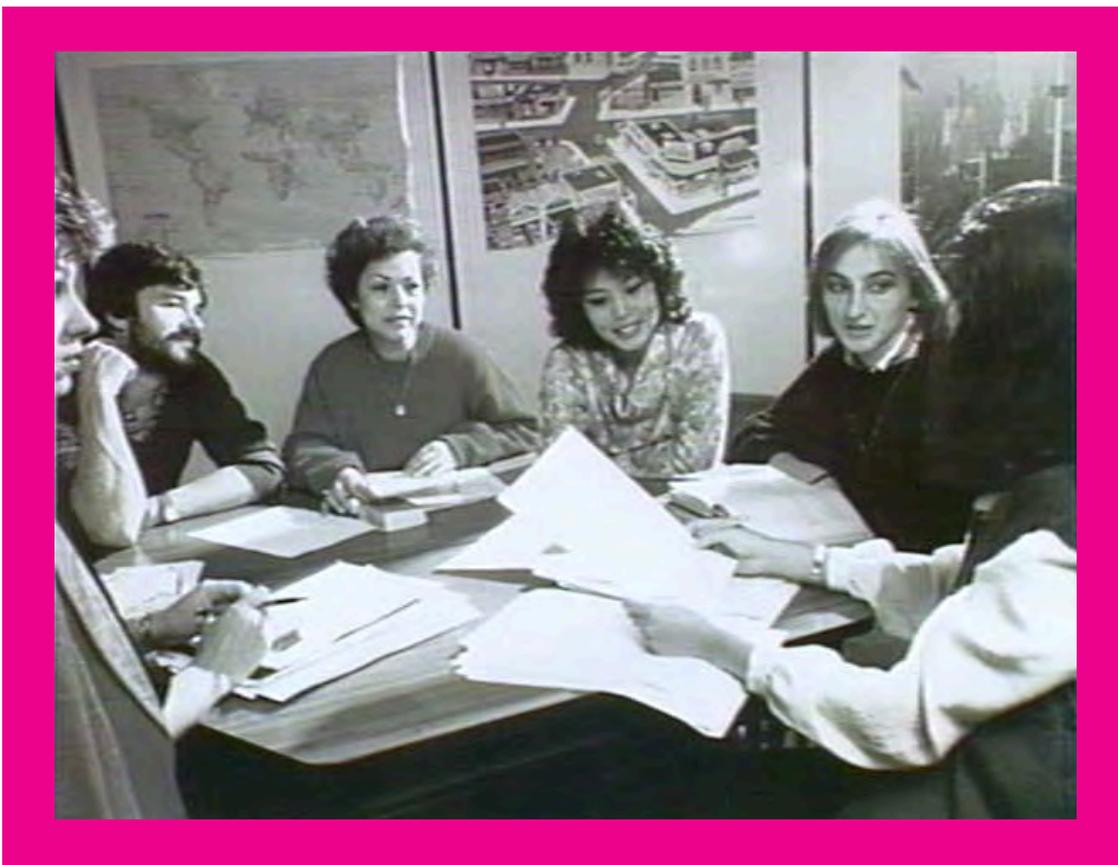
In terms of practical solutions, one big challenge is to build a diversified income and resource base. This will enable an organisation to remain responsive and focused

while maintaining some distance from the strings attached to a single funding source. Another issue is to take seriously student voice. With such an under resourced sector this is also challenging. Historically, adults as residents, citizens and workers have found ways to be very vocal and productive about how to “enjoy life and draw the most personal satisfaction from it” as individuals and communities – union movements, social rights movements such as LGBTQIA, Indigenous, feminist and women’s activist groups – are all made up of ‘adult learners’. However, when classified as adult learners, it seems the industrial and social conditions required to meet their aspirations default to their own resources.



#### About Sue Shore

Professor in Education (Research), with Charles Darwin University until August 2019; NT Executive member of Women and Vocational Education (WAVE); Member, AITSL Teaching Education Expert Standing Committee.



## Dr Tony Brown

There is fierce competition from non-education providers in the same fields ... who lack the necessary educational approaches or expertise.

ALA has a lot of creditable achievements to celebrate over six decades. It was the motivating force behind the two national inquiries in the 1990s. It introduced major national initiatives such as Adult Learners Week and Learning Circles. Promoting a broad and inclusive view of adult education and learning through ALAs ongoing promotion of the concept of lifelong and lifewide learning and keeping ACE in the mind of governments and oppositions at both national and state level has also been critically important. Supporting research into adult education and contributing to international adult education policy development such as through ASPBAE and ICAE has been icing on a cake that ALA deserves to truly celebrate.

The context in which many of us work and also prospective adult learners find themselves is not easy or simple. We are faced with the precarious nature of adult education centres as organisations, financially and educationally. There is fierce competition from non-education providers in the same fields (particularly in health & fitness, technology, media & arts) who lack the necessary educational approaches or expertise. Many adult educators and leaders of its organisations are working in the field with little or no educational expertise (qualifications, educational theory or practice). The cost of undertaking adult education can simply be prohibitive for many adult learners. The solutions to these issues may require fundamental change. It might involve a reorientation of our understanding about what adult education is as well as the wider benefits of learning, and a change in policy approaches to supporting and funding adult education that recognises the interlinked nature of learning in the contemporary world.

Meantime ALA is likely to struggle organisationally to survive and develop with reduced national funding. Identifying what it is that the organisation is trying to promote and achieve will be important in these challenging times. Understanding and reorienting organisational purpose is a constant need, and the rapidly changing landscape of politics, educational provision and technology makes this doubly difficult. Previous attempts to develop a coalition of adult learning organisations have faltered though it remains a good idea. I sense that collaborating with other organisations operating in the same, broad field of adult education that share similar educational values will be increasingly essential for ALA's survival.

My views about AJAL and academic publishing in the field are informed by my recent experience (2013-17) as its Editor. Academic publishing has undergone major change, which continues. There are many reasons behind the pressure to publish for academics, including technological ease of publishing (blogs, multi-media, book publishing, online presence etc.) and increased commercialisation within academic publishing. This has made competition for rankings among journals more intense, and concurrently the pressure to publish for academics is flooding journals with a wide range of submissions of variable quality.

There are fewer researchers in the field of adult education. Among those remaining, their efforts are often focussed on either international publications with higher rankings and status, more narrowly defined sub-fields, or specialist areas of adult education practice. There is a lack of support from Australian academic researcher/writers for the journal. These challenges are not unique to AJAL. Despite all these difficulties I think there is sufficient interest among researchers to believe AJAL should continue. However, changes around publishing and focus might be considered.

It is a proud achievement for ALA to have adapted as an organisation from the 1960s to make 60 years, especially given that the field we work in has been historically under-resourced and poorly recognised. The organisation today is very different from when it became ALA in 1998/99, but still benefits from the efforts of so many dedicated and committed educators from earlier times. The Association has not been as good at maintaining its own history, its archives or recognising the achievements of its own leaders and stalwarts as it could have. Hopefully these Cameos will help address this in a small way, shining the light not only on the past but also on ALA's possible futures.

### About Tony Brown

Adjunct Associate Professor, Adult, Community & Higher Education, University of Canberra; member, AJAL Editorial Board; Teacher, researcher and writer on Adult Education (since 1996). Member, AAACE & ALA since 1992; Presented my first paper at an AAACE Conference in 1992; Senior Project Officer, NSW Board of Adult & Community Education (1992-96); Co-organiser, first NSW Adult Learners Week (ALW) including ALW Conference (1996); Executive Director, ALA (1999-2001), including responsibility for ALW (1999-2001); Board Member, Sydney Community College (2002-15); Editor of AJAL (2013-17).

# Professor Tony Dreise

ACE ... needs to connect more with younger people, or it runs the risk of being seen as a sector just for older people.

My first and most important starting observation, too rarely acknowledged is that ACE as a sector is very young in this country, but lifelong learning is not. It's at least 70,000 years old. Highly relevant to this, I am a proud member of the Guumilaroi and Euahalyi First Nations of northwest New South Wales and southwest Queensland. I was born in St George, rural Queensland, one of eight children, six of whom are university graduates. I have had a long history of active and innovative involvement in Indigenous education at a national and state level.

I worked as an Equity Manager in the Australian National Training Authority and later headed up ANTA's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Training Advisory Council as its National Executive Officer, researching, developing and implementing Australia's first National Indigenous VET Strategy, called 'Partners in a Learning Culture'. I have since served in a number of education and public policy leadership roles in Queensland and NSW. I served as Principal Indigenous Research Fellow with the Australian Council for Educational Research. My recently completed PhD at ANU explored the overlap in Australia between Indigenous education and philanthropy.

While I have no current, direct affiliations with adult education I remain intensely interested in the wellbeing of the sector, including calling regularly and stridently for an Australian Lifelong Learning Policy at every strategic opportunity that I can, including when delivering the 2019 Reconciliation Address at the ANU.

ALA's most important achievement is shining a light on the Australian adult education sector during a period of shameful neglect, political inertia and paucity of policy attention. ALA is one of very few groups nationally that promote promising practices in lifelong learning at a national level.

I believe that the main issue facing Australian adult learners is the lack of a policy framework and program funding at a national level. Take the state of Queensland, where the sector is barely in existence. And yet, given Queensland's cultural and geographical diversity and its

locational and intergenerational disadvantage (including high rates of unemployment in regional areas), it is inconceivable and reprehensible that adult and community education remains out of mind, out of sight.

There is, frankly, a policy short sightedness and blindness when it comes to adult education in Australia. When policy makers think education, they think early childhood education (ECE), schools, TAFE (VET) and universities. ACE is often only marginally considered or completely ignored in framing education policy and programs.

It was not long ago that ECE also failed to garner sufficient policy attention. But through research and smart advocacy, the ECE sector has been highly effective in promoting its national profile and importance over the past couple of decades. With an ageing population and a rapidly changing workforce, ACE could and should be a sector of greater policy attention and investment. Let's face it, 'sixty years old is the new 30', when it comes to lifelong learning.

ACE at the same time needs to connect more with younger people, or it runs the risk of being seen as a sector just for older people. The obvious connection that needs to be emphasised here, is that it is the 'oldies', parents and grandparents that nurture and educate kids and create families and communities of the future.

ALA and state-based peaks could get more traction by collaborating more and pursuing a vision of 'collective impact' in ACE. I suggest that academics who contribute to journals such as AJAL not simply look 'within' the sector when researching and analysing but look to links between adult learning (as a movement, not just a sector) and wider life. Lifelong learning is a key not only to Australia's economic future, but also our social and cultural fabric and our environmental sustainability.

## About Tony Dreise

Director of the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research & Professor of Indigenous Policy, Australian National University.

Formerly Member, ALA Board.

## Dr Tracey Ollis

The recent launch of the ALA Foundation, 'Learning changes lives', is a potential game changer for ALA.

Aside from my professional and research roles outlined later, I've been actively involved in many non-government, not-for-profit organisations, typically as a volunteer, for around 30 years. My professional education role began as a TAFE teacher for Kangan Batman TAFE. For ten years I taught community development, welfare work and financial counselling students, predominately in community development theory and practice.

I have since published extensively in the area of adult learning and adult community education. My academic research focuses on adult education in workplaces and lifelong learning, ACE and community settings, specifically concentrating on epistemological, ontological and ethical understandings of practice. I mainly use case study methodologies in a range of adult and vocational learning research projects. In 2012 I completed a book on adult learning in the human rights industry. I am chief investigator on two Victorian research studies with other Deakin researchers focusing on lifelong learning in neighbourhood houses and transition pathways to higher education. I am currently leading an evaluation for Neighbourhood Houses Victoria of their learning and development project.

I identify many proud achievements for ALA over six decades. There is its involvement in the 2008 ACE Ministerial Statement and the 'Cinderella' reports of 1991 and 1996. ALA considered and coordinated a national response to adult learning issues in Australia in the Asia Pacific region on a policy level and has maintained connection to and supported the work of ASPBAE since its inception. ALA's consistent and focussed work on raising the national status of ACE and its educators/teachers is considerable. It has supported ongoing professional development for its members, as well as organising seminars, forums, conferences and webinars too numerous to mention.

ALA's foundational work on the Broadband for Seniors Programs was a major achievement in skilling a community of elders in new technologies. Its outstanding communications publications, such as 'Quest' and member news have been buttressed by its use of social media and

other new technologies to disseminated information. The recent launch of the ALA Foundation, 'Learning changes lives', is a potential game changer for ALA, as it seeks to become self-funding in future years.

ALA's very survival in these increasingly lean times, without ongoing core funding, is a major achievement in itself. ALA punches well above its weight for a not-for-profit organisation, essentially with less than the equivalent of four full-time staff. It does an enormous amount of work in the ACE space, being involved with every current issue relating to the ACE and also the VET sector. Governments often call on ALA for its knowledge and policy expertise. Without ALA, the sector would be poorly resourced and nowhere near as nimble and flexible. ALA is a measure of the work of the Board of Directors and its outstanding staff over many years. ALA is a federated peak, in that its Board is elected from the membership. This is a strength but at times can also be a weakness.

Its journal, *AJAL*, has been published for more than 60 years. While my recent appointment as Editor is a very small part of its long history, I am aware of the need to protect and guard the journal's considerable legacy for future generations of adult education scholars, researchers and adult community education workers.

*AJAL* has always nurtured the work of young scholars, backed by an active Editorial Board of esteemed adult education scholars within Australia and internationally. The journal's publications have reflected the changing and evolving nature of adult education scholarship and history in the Australian and Asia Pacific context.

When I was asked to identify the main issues facing adult learners in diverse community settings today, my initial response was "That is a very big question". In part because my response will perhaps be different if we are talking about adult learning as a 'broad church', or if we take it to include other diverse learning spaces such as VET or TAFE.

While I think adult education faces many challenges for learners, one huge factor is the cost. Free TAFE here in Victoria in 2019 has had a large uptake, but research shows us that many adult learners have chequered histories

of learning. Many require extra support and time to reconstruct previous difficult learning experiences and to combat the anxiety and motivation that often limits their engagement in learning.

ACE provides the essential but often unseen reparative work for second chance learners, older learners, learners retraining in the workforce and disengaged learners, just to name a few. As the literature has shown us, what works about ACE are the relationships that are built between ACE learners and tutors, learners and centre staff. They provide a welcoming approach and adult learning pedagogies that are about engaging people with applied and experiential learning. It is essential that we insist that ACE providers are prioritised by government in terms of recognition and funding.

Meantime adult education scholarship and research in Australia is in atrophy. Scholarship in adult learning whilst once focussed on ACE has now been broadened to include practice based learning, adult learning, professional learning and learning in the workplace. There is also minimal funding for ACE research projects. NCVET (National Centre for Vocational Education Research) remains heavily focussed on VET and does not generally fund ACE research.

I have a list of possible solutions to the even longer list of adult learner issues identified above. We desperately need a comprehensive review of ACE and VET provision across Australia, so that a clear framework is developed in conjunction with the states for future adult education. This would identify where there are gaps in services, particularly in relation to the educational needs of lower SES (socio-economic status) groups in rural areas. There is an impending Ministerial Statement on ACE here in Victoria that has been developed with stakeholders, but we still have no current national ministerial statement on ACE.

Given we haven't really had a comprehensive review of ACE, with associated serious research attached to it since the Senate 'Cinderella' reports of the 1990s, a review is well overdue. Of course, this will not be easy to achieve, and would require unusual bipartisan support from all levels of government. I also believe NCVET needs to open up its funding to ACE research so that we know more about what is happening in terms of adult learning across the nation.

I would dearly love to see a national ministerial statement properly recognise ACE as the 4th sector of education in Australia. This would provide recognition of the huge work that is done and is required in this ACE space. Australia also needs a national lifelong learning policy

linked to the UN sustainability policy goals for education. Finally, but importantly, we need to raise the status of the ACE workforce, with better pay and conditions and decent qualifications for educators, tutors, teachers and community development workers.

In the bigger picture, we may need some serious rethinking of the states vis a vis federal responsibility for the provision of education, but we certainly need a serious scan of ACE. I think we also need new research led by economists and sociologists that will identify the economic and social inclusion benefits of ACE to local communities.

When I was asked to respond to the Cameo question about 'the main current or future 'hurdles' facing academic journals (such as *AJAL*) in the field of ACE', I can do no better than share what I recently shared with our Editorial Board, briefly summarised below.

Although we still have a large number of journal submissions, article quality and academic rigour continue to be an issue that affects all journals. We are receiving more international than Australian submissions, mainly from the Middle East, Asia and South Africa but many don't make the grade, before or after the peer review process. There is clearly a huge pressure from universities for their researchers to publish in quality journals that include *AJAL*.

While *AJAL's* readership likes to see articles on adult education in ACE, the submissions we are receiving reflect current trends in VET, learning in the workplace or digital learning, older learners and current trends in higher education. This reflects the change in academic scholarship in universities, with less academics in ACE and more learning centres in universities that take a less-critical approach to adult education. This all combines to impact on the nature and quality of articles that *AJAL* receives and can publish.

While *AJAL* has a history of supporting and nurturing new scholars, there are fewer scholars in this space, so less articles to publish. I'd really like to be able to support adult education scholarship from people in developing countries, but often they don't have adequate resources or support to get through the publishing process.

Some good quality articles are sourced by inviting people to publish in an area of their current research. Having special themed editions of the journal has worked well. While we still have a non-refereed section, we rarely get submissions for this unless I ask someone to submit on a particular topic/program that I think is significant to the readership.

Looking at the bigger picture, I believe more research resources are needed. Our education schools should not be so teacher education-focussed and acknowledge the value of adult education research and scholarship. Fortunately, my own university, Deakin, does this to some degree. It is sobering to realise that there are now only three adult learning journals globally listed in the Web of Science, and *AJAL* is one of them. That says a lot to me about the decline in scholarship in adult learning.

To survive, *AJAL* has had to broaden its scope to be inclusive of adult learning in higher education, in workplaces, in informal learning communities and other diverse sites.

### About Tracey Ollis

Senior Lecturer, Adult, Vocational & Applied Learning, Discipline Leader, Applied Learning Professional Education & Training Group, School of Education, Deakin University; ALA Board Member; *AJAL* Editor.

Previously Vice President, ALA; NTEU Committee, Deakin University; member, Australian Council of Deans' Education, Vocational Education Group; member, Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE); member, Popular Education Network United Kingdom (PEN) & Australia (PENA): a network of academics, teachers & community development workers with an interest in the intersection between education, social justice & civil society; Research Associate, Public Pedagogies Institute, Australia.





Adult  
Learning  
Australia