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Getting serious: The national 'vision splendid' for adult education 60 years on

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This paper poses three research questions, based primarily on evidence from six decades of the Australian Journal of Adult Education (AJAL, 2000-present) and its antecedent journals dating back to 1961. Firstly, it asks what was the context for establishing a national adult learning association, Australian Association of Adult Education (AAAE) in 1960, renamed the Australian Association for Adult and Community Education (AACE) in 1989, and Adult Learning Australia (ALA) in 1998? Secondly, it asks how the association, the research in its journals and the field of adult education adapted to the rapidly changing context, opportunities and needs for lifelong learning in Australia? In doing so, the paper critically examines evidence of ongoing tensions and difficulties delivering on ALA's 2020 vision of 'lifelong and lifewide learning for all Australians'. It also asks what the current situation is for Australian adult education, and what possible new courses for the future ALA and AJAL might take. The first two research questions are addressed in the body of this paper. The third question is addressed primarily within the Discussion.

Keywords: *adult education, national association, history, Adult Learning Australia, journal*

Introduction

Duncan (1944) wrote about a national 'vision splendid' for adult education in Australia almost 80 years ago. The four quotations, below, each separated by approximately 20 years (written in 1944, 1965, 1991 & 2009), raise questions about what has happened to this vision since the Australian Association of Adult Education (AAAE), was formed in 1960, as well as where it might go hence.

R. B. Madgwick, then Director of the Australian Army Education Service at the University of Sydney, later to become the first President of AAAE in 1960, wrote in 1944 that:

> *We must never go back to adult education as we knew it. In the past, adult education was a thing of shreds and patches. We did a little here … we did a little there … But when we look at it dispassionately, it is clear that we only lived from hand to mouth. – and … the hand when it reached the mouth was usually empty, anyway. (in Duncan, 1944, pp.25-26).*

These same words written 75 years ago, along with those that follow written 45 years ago, could have similar applicability in 2020.

> *Adult Education is regarded as a marginal activity stuck onto to our education system somewhere between our leaving primary school and going senile; we have to run it with meagre budgets, leftover facilities and other people's spare time. … In spite of the … growth of adult education there has been little enough research into adult education … and very little investigation of the most basic component, the adult student himself [sic.] (Hanna, 1965, p.3).*

Perhaps the closest Australia came to achieving Duncan's (1944) vision was almost 30 years ago, when the 'Come in Cinderella' Senate (1991, p.160) report concluded that:

> *A commitment to a 'clever country' and 'lifelong learning for all'*

> *requires a willingness to embrace a larger vision of how people get their education and training in Australia. If we as a nation are to get serious about economic and social justice goals we need to get serious about adult education.*

Holmes (2009, p.1) summed up frustration around Duncan's still unrealised national vision a decade ago.

> *After several decades, the merits and necessity for lifelong learning have been dutifully intoned by policy makers and elsewhere. In practice, and sadly more so in Australia than in many comparable countries, the pursuit of lifelong learning has been honoured more by the breach than the observance.*

Each of these statements highlight that adult learning has been regarded in Australia for at least eight decades as a marginal activity, not taken sufficiently seriously by governments or policy makers. This paper takes up the Senate (1991, p.160) call 'to get serious about adult education'. It is called 'Getting serious' in three main senses.

Firstly, it contends that given the situation and the imperative nationally to 2020, as summarised in this paper, it is time to get serious in terms of ALA's unmet vision for lifelong and lifewide learning for all Australians. This is despite 60 years of evidence-based exhortation and government policy commitments. Secondly, it is arguably time for communities, non-government organisations (NGOs) and governments to get serious and heed the research evidence about the many benefits of learning. Finally, for many Australians, *not* having access to the learning they need to flourish, stay connected, in work and well, poses serious future risks to individuals, their families, the community, democracy and the economy.

Method

A full set of back issues was assembled of the association's 168 journal issues: the A*ustralian Journal of Adult Education* (AJAE, 1961-1989), the *Australian Journal of Adult and Community Education* (AJACE, 1990-1999) and the current journal, AJAL. Of these journals, more than one third (37%; 62/168) included sets of papers solicited, contributed or organised around a particular 'theme', a practice that began on a regular but intermittent basis from 1984. AJAL journal articles in the 25 issues published between 2011 and 2019 (No. 1) were coded using Harris and

Morrison's (2011) code frame from their comprehensive, thematic and quantitative 50-year study (1961-2010) in relation to authorship and paper theme. The aim was to provide two new data points within the nine years post 2010 to extrapolate to the present.

In total, over the approximately 60-year time frame, there have been 1,031 journal articles published (not counting book reviews) with a total of 1,450 authors, noting that some authors have multiple publications. Each of the journals was examined to identify particular articles and content that would help inform this retrospective historical study.

Literature review

AJAL is likely the third oldest extant adult education journal in the world after the *Indian Journal of Adult Education* and the US-based *Adult Education Quarterly* (AEQ), which commenced in 1938 and 1950 respectively. Reflecting critically via content analysis over several decades on such a rich, formally organised academic publication trove, as Harris and Morrison (2011, p.18) noted, 'can tell us much about a field of study, as publications reflect the knowledge base of a discipline'. Harris (1990), the journal editor for 23 years had previously editorialised in *AJACE* on the journal's 30th anniversary that 'this journal itself can act as a mirror, reflecting back the contours and complexions of those three decades that this journal itself can serve' (Harris, 1990, p.2).

There have been several previous historical analyses of adult learning in Australia and ALA and its antecedent organisations including by Harris and Willis (1992). As for the current article, several reflective thematic and historical analyses have been published around the turn of each decade beyond 1960 as articles in ALA's journal.

There have been several previous content analyses of adult education journals internationally. Taylor (2001) undertook an analysis of all submissions to *AEQ* over the decade of the 1990s. Long and Agyekum (1974) undertook a similar decade long (1964-73) study of AEQ's antecedent journal, *Adult Education* as did Dickinson and Rusnell (1971) over two decades from 1950. Shah and Choudhary (2018) published a comprehensive 75-year history of the Indian Adult Education Association (1939-2014) that included an analysis of the content in its journals and newsletters.

Golding and Harvey (2019) undertook a 50-year study of the Irish peak adult education organisation, AONTAS, based on an analysis of *The Adult Learner* and antecedent journals dating back to 1971. As for the current study, Golding and Harvey used a thematic, partly quantitative methodology informed by Harris and Morrison's (2011) methodology.

The context for establishing a national learning organisation in 1960

This section seeks to answer the first research question about the context for the creation of a national learning organisation in Australia. The formalisation of the initial national association, AAAL, occurred six decades ago in 1960. Some understanding of the events that preceded its formation is important in establishing how, when and why it was formed and through the agency of which prior organisations.

Lifelong learning cultures in Australia: An ancient perspective

It is misleading to start a history of adult learning in Australia commencing with Duncan (1944). Australia's diverse First Nations peoples have one of the oldest continuous lifelong learning cultures in the world. For almost 230 years migrant and refugee cultures, initially from Europe, particularly the UK, largely ignored, discounted and suppressed these rich and complex Indigenous learning cultures, knowledge systems, pedagogies and languages, through centuries of patronising and culturally insensitive state and missionary interventions, including through adult education. The patronising term 'adult education for Aborigines' was a commonly used term until quite recently, even in ACE.

As a brief illustration, in the same year that W. G. K. Duncan's national vision was finally published, Alan T. Duncan's (1973) article on 'Strategies in Aboriginal adult education' in *AJAE* makes for uncomfortable but important contemporary reading. It reminds us of how far we have come and also how far we have to go in terms of national reconciliation. Alan Duncan, a Sydney University academic reported on an attempted 'experiment' teaching Aborigines in a formal lecture style. This formal delivery style had been the cornerstone of university extension and WEA programs. Because it didn't work, Duncan rationalised that 'Today Aborigines find the concept of deferred gratification very difficult to accept ... [as] clearly demonstrated in attitudes towards education

and employment'. One of the problems Duncan identified '… in teaching Aborigines how to overcome the problem of isolation on one of the reserves', in his view, 'arose from the fact that Aborigines were encouraged to express themselves freely' (p.117).

Twenty years later Byrnes (1993, p.157) identified that for many years adult education programs 'have been instituted in Aboriginal communities, primarily by non-Aboriginal people which have not worked as intended … because both the intended outcomes … and the teaching methods were based on false assumptions'. As McClay (1988, p.147) put it in his doctoral thesis on S*urviving the Whiteman's world: Adult education in Aboriginal society*, 'adult education can be an agent that serves Aboriginal people or one which seeks to control or dominate them.'

Adult education in Australian Indigenous contexts, and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems and pedagogies have seldom been discussed or seriously interrogated within the association journals. By contrast, contemporary ACE Aotearoa approaches and pedagogies which validate and equally value Indigenous (Maori and Pacifica) learning cultures and peoples and that involve bicultural management of adult education in New Zealand are extensive and inspiring: light years ahead of anything yet contemplated or attempted in Australia.

Almost 180 years after the Maori and Pakeha had negotiated the Treaty of Waitangi in Aotearoa/New Zealand in 1840, the Australian government in 2019 refused to even consider the 'Uluru Statement from the Heart' (Uluru, 2017). That statement respectfully asked for a well overdue 'First Nations Voice in the Australian Constitution' and a 'Makarrata Commission' to supervise a process of 'agreement-making' and 'truth-telling' between government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. If and when these processes finally take root nationally, acknowledging and supporting culturally appropriate forms of adult and community education underpinned by Indigenous pedagogies and knowledge systems can be one important way of ensuring respectful and effective dialogue as part of a well overdue national reconciliation.

The loose and fraying strands of Australian adult education since 1960

W. G. K. (Walter) Duncan's biography (Stretton, 2007) identifies why historians of Australian adult education have conventionally gone back to the Duncan (1944) report as the start of adult education in Australia.

> *Duncan was seconded in 1944 to the Universities Commission to investigate adult education in Australia. He believed that lifelong learning `should cater for all the interests and problems of adult life'. His report recommended that `adult education ... should be organised as a nation-wide service; and that responsibility for it (both moral and financial) should be accepted and shared by Commonwealth, State and Local Governments'. The [Duncan] report was neither adopted nor published. (Stretton, 2007)*

There are many strands in the story of how adult education was introduced to colonial Australia, well before 1960 and long before Duncan in 1944. Much of it is about boom and bust. Mechanics Institutes on the British model spread across Australia beginning during the 1850s gold rushes and had spread to over two thousand sites within 60 years. This network at its peak, was perhaps the most devolved and widespread local adult education network in Australia's white history. Though targeted at working men, particularly on the goldfields, Mechanics Institutes are seen by many as a very early forerunner of the national TAFE (Technical and Further Education) system first envisioned in Australia by Kangan (1974).

'Evening Schools', were set up by some state governments in the late 1800s 'to provide primary education for adults who had missed out on normal schooling' (Dymock, 2001, p.5). Several early Australian universities including Melbourne and Sydney had Adult Education Extension Boards before 1900, but most had disappeared by the 1980s.

Workers Education Association (WEA) providers briefly boomed but soon busted in most states in the three decades after 1913. WEA's birth in Australia was prompted by the 1913 visit to Australia by the WEA's British co-founder, Albert Mansbridge (Dymock, 2001). Mansbridge's original rationale for setting up an association to promote higher 'liberal' education of working men was that workers wanted industrial and political power but lacked the knowledge to use it (Dymock, 2001, p.3). WEA was based on a voluntary and democratic model committed to high academic standards and a pursuit of objectivity. Like the Mechanics Institutes, they tended instead, partly due to the inappropriate pedagogies, formal content and delivery styles, to cater for the middle classes rather than the workers for whom they were intended.

Unlike the Mechanics Institutes, the effective reach of all other forms of early white adult education was limited to some states and some capital or regional cities. John Anderson's free-thinking liberation philosophies about free and open discussion of issues in Sydney in the decades of the 1940s and 1950s (Duke, 1970, p.107) provided alternative and challenging home grown visions of adult learning aside from WEA's relatively liberal pedagogies.

Several (now mostly defunct) state-based Boards of Adult Education were established from 1946. The Council of Adult Education (CAE), which dominated the scene in Victoria from 1947 was effectively subsumed by Box Hill Institute after 2012. While each of these adult education 'movements' has shone brightly (and declined) over different decades and with different emphases in different Australian states, the reality of adult education in Australia as a national project remains problematic and unfulfilled to 2020.

At the time AAAE formed in 1960, WEA was in decline but still retained strategic alliances with the small number of adult education extension departments operating on the fringes of some of the older 'sandstone' universities, particularly in NSW but also in South Australia and Western Australia. Smith (1968a) cuttingly remarked from his Adult Education Board, University of WA vantage point that whilst WEA was created to 'fill a deplorable gap' in educational provision, since the gap no longer existed, WEA had 'become quite redundant and something of an encumbrance' (p.68).

Smith's (1968b, p.116) scathing critique of liberal education WEA style comes close to more contemporary thinking when he wrote in 1968 that:

> *It is time we stopped dreaming of a population agog for pure enlightenment and looked at the situation as it exists. … The brute fact is that in this country, at this time, very few people study for the joy of it. The vast majority of adult students are seeking social contact, amusement, status advantage, useful skills or, above all, economic advantage. This does not mean that they may not achieve a considerable measure of 'broad liberal education' in the process.*

Badger (1966, p.51) also recollected that before World War 2, formal provision of adult education beyond the universities was extremely

limited. An Army Education (later Services Education) system operated during the war on the premise that 'the ordinary man [sic.] in the services should know something about the purposes of the war'. This purpose was seen to distinguish informed democracies from uninformed dictatorships. Badger (1966, p.52) noted that during the post-war years, 'much energy and invention, that extended in part to adult education, was associated with 'post war reconstruction'. The Argus (22 Sept 1945, p.2) noted, in the context of the then recent Commonwealth government announcement about 'taking full control of education in Australia', that the problem of adult education, made more acute by demobilisation, was:

> *... a national problem with a vengeance. It is usually undertaken at present by university extension boards in collaboration with the Workers' Educational Association, with state endowments that can only be called beggarly.*

By the mid 1950s, the seedbed for a national adult education association was being prepared by several players in spite of defensive resistance from the WEA. Fred Alexander's (1953) book, *Adult education in Australia: An historian's point of view*, was republished in Australia in 1959. It poured fuel on an existing heated debate about whether WEA, particularly in metropolitan NSW, had become an outmoded and elitist form of adult education (Dymock, 2001, p.34). By then several State Adult Education Boards had become active and some universities and WEAs perceived a threat to their government funding.

Annual meetings of various state adult education providers had commenced in Australia in 1955. At the 1958 (Sydney) and 1958 (Adelaide) meetings the question of a national adult education association was discussed. AAAE was formally established at the 1960s National Directors Meeting in Hobart. Arnold Hely played an important role in resolving conflicts between the many people and organisations involved and their different perceptions of adult education. Hely became inaugural AAAE Editor for the first *AJAE* published in July 1961. Hely's life and considerable Australian adult education legacy are covered in Morris (2011). Two of the three articles in the first association journals addressed the issue of a national association, including W. G. K. Duncan's article, 'Agenda for a national association' and E. M. Hutchinson's (Secretary of NIACE in the UK) article on 'The international importance of a national Association'.

AJAE (3[2], pp.5-22) in 1963 contains a comprehensive article titled 'Background to the foundation of the Australian Association of Adult Education' by the CAE Director, Colin Badger. In summary, at the time of the association's formation in 1960 the key, all male players in Australian adult education were part of an uneasy and fractured coalition. The coalition comprised mainly city-based WEA's and university-based Adult Education providers, Evening Colleges in NSW and state-organised Adult Education Boards, as well as the Council for Adult Education (CAE) in Victoria. The *AJAE* 'News' (p.3) in December 1962 reported that the association's first year was 'formative and exploratory'. It was acknowledged that 'There is a still a good deal of experiment to be carried out on what the Association can and cannot successfully do, and room for improvement on what it is doing'.

Adult education in Australia across the decades since 1960

This section seeks to answer the second main research question about how the association, its journal and the field changed in the past six decades. The first two decades that followed the long and painful birth of AAAE in 1960 (Hely, 1961) would perhaps be the most difficult and contested ones. As soon as the ink was dry on the formal agreement to associate, the very different histories, pedagogies and visions for the future of the key players and organisations would emerge and lead to ongoing contestation, including between researchers and practitioners, about what adult education was or should be. Evidence-based research was rare in those decades. Unlike the early *Adult Learner Journal* in Ireland, the Australian association's early, very academic journals included very little learner or practitioner voice.

Duncan's (1961) 'Agenda for a national association' that appeared in the first edition of *AJAE* in 1961 was found to be difficult to implement in practice. In Duncan's (1961) words, 'the duration and difficulties … of the issues involved and the unconscionably protracted period of gestation … would have shamed even an elephant'. The diverse, highly opinionated, often quarrelsome men and organisations that had given birth to the new association were in for a very difficult fatherhood.

By 1964 the AJAE 'News' (p.4) was asking adult educators who had assisted:

> *… the developing countries in their construction of adult education [effectively the birth of ASPBAE in 1964], whether the time had*

> *come … to come to grips in our discussions – to sift out the wheat from the chaff among our differing perceptions? And is not Australia – heir to the British tradition and culture, but strongly influenced by her sister frontier-born society, the United States -well placed to make a reconciling contribution to world debate?'*

This jingoistic exhortation aside, there was no government funding, limited resources and serious disagreements between organisations about the desirable role of AAAE during the 1960s, which became 'years of crisis' for the association. Examination of the rapid turnover of AAAE office bearers in the five years between 1963 and 1967 confirms there was much shuffling of positions on the decks during this titanic struggle. The association's home base moved from Adelaide to Sydney to Melbourne and back to Adelaide. One new bright star that would become ASPBAE (Asian-South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education) was born in this tumultuous period in 1964. This occurred through the efforts of AAAE, largely due to the stellar networking and insight of Hely. The July 1964 AJAE News confirms that the impetus for ASPBAE arose out of a UNESCO Asian-South Pacific seminar that AAAE helped to organise. The December AJAE News in 1964 reported that after eight years in Australia, Hely, then Chair of AAAE was returning to New Zealand to head up their Council of Adult Education.

The Universities Commission (Martin) Report in 1964 recommended that university provision of adult education should cease. It led to 'old wounds' being reopened about the nature of adult education and how it might best be provided. If AAAE was to support this recommendation, the status of State Boards would increase. AAAE by a slim margin, with WEA and university lobbying, opposed the recommendation. The fierce debate associated with this decision about what counts as adult education and who might be funded to provide it did a lot of organisational damage.

'The Martin Report and adult education' article was published in the July 1966 issue of *AJAE* by Phillip Rossell of University of Sydney. It acknowledged (p.4) that '… the Australian adult education provisions are not only limited, but the scene is confusing and many who operate within it are confused'. There was disagreement also among 'many adult educators as to aims, functions and standards'.

Duncan's (1944) ideas therefore remained largely 'a vision splendid' nationally when revisited and published by Whitelock (1970). Fifty years on from Duncan, Crombie (1995) confirmed that well developed community state-supported and coordinated ACE provision was restricted to Victoria and NSW. The federal government (and some states such as Queensland without state-based ACE provision) sometimes released reports and policies but rarely provided any funding. Eighty years on from Duncan things have changed little. It is now almost a decade since Golding and Foley's (2011) 'All over, red rover' paper about the demise and unrealised potential of Australian adult education. This is despite new and compelling international research evidence identified in their paper and published since, about the many benefits of learning, lifelong and lifewide.

Brennan (2010) described the 1970s as AAAE's period of 'adolescence'. The tensions of the previous decade were still evident in 1970. Chris Duke's article on the 'Liberal and the socio-emotional' (*AJAE*, 1970, 10(3), pp.107-17) identified the nub of the tensions. The 'discipline-oriented liberal adult education' at one polarity 'emphasised a teacher who was an authority on a subject and who exposes his students to the discipline of the subject'. The other polarity was referred to by Duke as 'problem- or student–oriented adult education ... which emphasises an environment of learning in which students undergo experiences which they are induced to relate to previous experience ...' (p.107).

During the decade of the 1970s the federal government gave a funding grant to AAAE for the first time. It allowed the appointment of the first paid association Secretary/Treasurer from January 1971. The 'block grant' over the following decades grew but more recently has shrivelled, being only partially replaced by funding for providing services such as Adult Learners Week.

Whitelock (1970) took Duncan's unpublished (1944) report and republished the main text with 15 commentaries as *Adult education in Australia*, a 288 page tome, introducing it as the *Magna Carta* of Australian adult education, asserting that it was `the most substantial, comprehensive and thoughtful document on adult education in this country' (Stretton, 2007). Even in Whitelock's view, the authors were each grinding their own axes. The book was reviewed by Duncan (1970), who observed that each contributor 'deplores the lack of recognition accorded, as yet, to adult education' (p.83), that 'remains in all its forms

beset by many problems', including a want of resources, adequate buildings, lack of money as well as sufficiently skilled staff to practise, experiment, write and research.

Zelman Cowen (then a university Vice Chancellor, later to become Australian Governor General, 1977-82) put the most positive spin on a fractured coalition. He rationalised in the Preface of Whitelock (1970) that each adult education agency (by then identified by Duncan (1970, p.82) as comprising 'universities, statutory bodies, government departments and voluntary bodies') '... has its place and special qualities. The last thing that the adult education movement in a democratic society wants or needs is conformity'.

Winds of change were blowing through the 1970s, and some people could see some forward-looking national solutions for adult education. Joan Allsop, then AJAE Editor, contributed an article on 'Toward lifelong learning' in the July 1974 issue of AJAE 14(2). It optimistically and presciently anticipated that "Educational Resources Centres' across Australia will be essential for all its citizens, not just as community centres, ... but as places of social and civic learning for all ages and at all times' (p.54). The same winds of change also blew through AAAE, which by 1975 diversified membership. It abolished the distinction between 'professionals', who had dominated the executive, and 'associates' with an interest in the field, and allowed for the creation of state branches. By 1976 the Australian Council of Adult Literacy (ACAL) was operating as an independent entity following discussions within AAAE and there was an upturn in ASPBAE activity.

In 1978 national Labor politician Al Grassby, sometimes referred to as 'the father of Australian multiculturalism', was urging adult educators to get more involved in the cultural revolution in 'multicultural and poly-ethnic' Australia (AJAE, 18:1). Grassby lamented that Australia's '... extirpation of 500 Aboriginal languages ... [built] one of the most mono-lingual, xenophobic people on earth' (p.17).

But still researchers locked horns trying to make theoretical sense of what adult education practitioners were actually doing. In 1977 (*AJAE*, 17:1) Guest Editor A. Wesson complained that:

> *... it has not proved possible for our craft to agree on a framework in which to develop an adult education theory; it*

> *may indeed be a fruitless search. … [W]e continue, on one hand, to amass fairly unconnected heaps of "hard data" and, on the other hand, peddle our current favourite framework, in the hope of acquiring fellow believers amongst our colleagues. (p.1)*

By the mid-1980s as 'community education' and 'ACE' started to enter the discourse, national training reform began to be debated seriously in the journal. Radical changes to state-based ACE and TAFE provision became evident with this national reform with the release of the Kirby Report (1985) and the introduction of competency-based training (CBT) by ministerial decree in 1989. The National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA) constituted a series of reforms in vocational education and training. These reforms were designed to improve the competitiveness of Australian industry, progressively introduced by commonwealth, state and territory governments from the mid 1980s to 1996.

The association journal under Barrie Brennan's Editorship set up an Editorial Panel in 1984, later to become an Editorial Board by 1999. Articles became somewhat more evidence-based, but few articles during the 1980s had more than ten references. By 1990 with Roger Harris as Editor, the Panel would have its first international board member, a trend that accelerated in *AJAL* from 2000.

Deliberately or not, the NTRA reforms had the effect of largely emasculating the FE (further education) including ACE from Kangan's (1994) original TAFE vision, making life much harder for many providers of ACE within and beyond TAFE. The journal records the pushback against vocationalism as the NTRA gathered pace into the mid-1990s. Butler's (1989) *Lifelong learning* revisited for the Commission for the Future was buttressed by international exhortations for action coming out of the 'World Conference on Education for All'.

Despite this pushback, many providers of adult education would either drastically change or go to the wall in this new competitive environment over the decades that followed. The association by the late 1980s (Brennan, 1988b, p.34) was hamstrung by its restricted resource base. This limited the scope of its activities, the quality and intensity of its work, the ability to respond quickly or over an extended period of time, and the ability to service the field as well as its members. Brennan (1988b, p.34) wrote presciently that 'Those who write the story of the AAAE, if it survives, will be able to recount how these problems, that

are not new but as old as the Association itself, were resolved ...'. The following year the 'C' (Community) was added, to become AAACE in 1989, when AAAE 'amalgamated with the ailing Australian Association of Community Education whose core focus was the community learning role of schools' (Crombie, 2010, p.542).

A lot was written, researched and promised about adult education on many fronts in the 1990s as *AJAE* logically became *AJACE*. Much of it came to very little in practice or for the association. In several senses the decade to 2000 represented a high watermark for adult education nationally and for some states. In the most recent two decades there is evidence that the tide has been going out, as have been the resources to properly carry out the association's national vision. The national policy preoccupation in the past two decades with training reform and privatisation has meant that invitations to the 'Adult Education Ball' have not extended to the 'Cinderella' sector, despite the visionary recommendations in the 1991 and 1997 Senate reports. In effect invitations were only extended to the increasingly competitive universities, an increasingly emasculated TAFE and increasingly unscrupulous Registered Training Organisations.

After three decades of men's domination of the field of theory and practice, adult education in the 1990s was characterised by Brennan as 'a decade of women' for the AAACE. The association had appointed a female Secretary from 1965. Its Business Managers from 1982 had all been women. Joan Allsop had been *AJAE* Assistant Editor from 1968 and was Editor several times between 1974-76. Women have comprised a majority (54%) of those 72 persons invited onto the journal Boards and Panels in the 25 years since these positions were created in 1994. During the 1980s Diane Berlin became the second female association President in 1987-8 after Pauline Seitz (1983-4). Berlin (2000) leveraged off Brennan's (2000) 1990s 'adolescent' characterisation to instead describe the 1980s as an era of 'young womanhood'. There was the emergence of the community-based adult education movement particularly in Victoria from the 1980s, largely for and by women. This development paralleled the global movement towards feminisation and would have an ongoing national impact on adult education.

Crombie (2010, p.543) described the 1990s as the 'decade of AAACE'. It was bookended by the shift in name and emphasis of the association

to AAACE and the journal to *AJACE*, as the field in some (but not all) states moved more towards community education. The move to ALA in 1998 in Crombie's (2010, p.543) words, '… to claim to being the peak advocacy body on behalf of adult learners, as well as providers … was bound to be a difficult act to sustain'.

Mezirow's major works on critical, transformative and emancipatory education in 1990-91 began to inform and enthuse scholars and practitioners to work with learners to transform their fields of adult education practice. However the national policy makers remained largely unmoved. One national innovation that was taken up in the mid-1990s (in Australia in 1995, following its UK invention by Alan Tuckett in 1992), that has proved to be successful and persistent over the 25 years since, has been national 'Adult Learners Week' (ALW). It gave ALA an annual 'reach' into states and territories where adult education has a lower profile. ALW has also been increasingly important as a source of otherwise diminishing national funding and loss of most of its core grant.

The decade from 2000 started positively with a flurry of serious and critical investigations of adult education in Australia. *Come in Cinderella: The emergence of adult and community education* (1991) identified significant changes in the patterns and level of participation by adults (particularly women) in education and training. It described the organisation of adult and community education (ACE) provision in the states and territories and identified emerging technological, demographic and economic trends such as an ageing population and the internet. In retrospect, the Senate report completely missed the main population segments that still tend to be underrepresented in community forms of ACE: young adults and men.

Later in the same decade, *Beyond Cinderella: Towards a learning society* (1997) sought to bring together national ACE and VET policy, leading to the creation of the first national ACE policy. It is pertinent to add here that the 'Cinderella' metaphor in relation to adult education was first used at least two decades earlier by J. L. J. Wilson (ANU) in 'Some reflections of adult education in Australia' (*ASPBAE Journal,* 1(4), cited in AJAE, 1968, 8(2), p.94). The same 'Cinderella' metaphor had earlier been used to describe Australian technical education in 1936 (The Age, 2 July, p.9). University research was also called 'the Cinderella of tertiary education' in 1945 (*The Argus,* 22 Sept, p.2).

The decade from 2000 also saw a lot of retrospective soul searching as ALA turned 40. NCVER commissioned *A consolidation of ACE research 1990-2000* (Golding, Davies & Volkoff, 2001). It waded through recent and voluminous literature about the complex, poorly defined, nationally patchy, very loosely coupled and often elusive ACE 'sector'. Sometimes ACE was described as a type of course, a type of organisation, an ethos and a sector of provision (Schofield & Associates, 1996). At other times, for policy, planning and resource allocation purposes, the term 'ACE' was used loosely and interchangeably to describe a group of clients, a learning philosophy, a category of provider, an educational sector and a type of course.

These obvious ambiguities, combined with the artificial distinction between ACE and VET, plagued and impacted on national and state surveys of ACE as well as on ACE research published in *AJAL*. By the end of the 1990s, AAACE had become ALA. This change reflected both the perceived need to better understand adult learning wherever it might occur, and the trend towards acknowledging the agency and needs of learners rather than the primacy of educators. Consistent with these changes, by 2000 the *AJACE* had become *AJAL*. There was a move to peer review most articles in *AJAL* after 2000. Articles and issues became larger, and during subsequent decades reference lists have often spanned several pages.

It is perhaps too soon to confidently characterise adult education in the decade to 2020 aside from what is evident though *AJAL*, including a further decade of data to add to Harris and Morrison's (2011) 50-year analysis in a section to follow. Two years after the celebration of 50 years of ALA, including many retrospective and historical articles in AJAL in 2010(3) and its 2011 'Special Edition', Tony Brown replaced Roger Harris in 2013 as AJAL editor, followed by Trace Ollis from October 2017. From 2013, AJAL created a web presence and author contributions were managed and reviewed online.

During 2014-15 evidence of the downsides of the widespread marketisation of VET (Vocational Education and Training) had become a national disgrace. A feeding frenzy by private Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) further eroded the public TAFE system and the very small amount of ACE still embedded within it. The learning needs of men, particularly of older men, crept into the adult learning research discourse. The 'Men's Shed' movement developed some parallels with the women's 'Community 'House' movement in the 1980s (Golding, Kimberley, Foley & Brown,

2008). As global warming became more of a recognised phenomenon the trickle of papers on environmental themes also increased.

If all of what happened before 1944 is put to one side, and the birth of AAAE in 1960 is taken as an arbitrary starting point, there is one obvious, fundamental problem permeating Australian adult education and policy research over the following six decades. It is that there has been no simple way of defining a coherent national ACE 'sector' (Golding, Davies & Volkoff, 2001, p.39). Australia to 2020 remains a nation riven by division between states and territories that have (and have not) provided government support for adult education in community settings. The Australian ACE and TAFE typology proposed by Crombie (1996, in Golding, Davies & Volkoff, 2001, Figure 2, p.40) remains somewhat similar 25 years on.

The 'state-supported and co-ordinated ACE sector' in Victoria remains the strongest ACE sector in Australia to 2020. Ongoing support from the current Minister for Training and Skills, Gayle Tierney, was outlined in her commitment in the 2020-25 statement (Tierney, 2019). Considerable resources and support are provided to the 'Learn Local' sector and Victoria is the only state to have legislation supporting an entity such as the Adult, Continuing and Further Education (ACFE) Board. The NSW Minister for Skills and Tertiary Education, Geoffrey Lee recently released a statement (Lee, 2020) in support of ACE. While some Community Colleges have received extra resources in NSW, the ACE sector does not have the same level of support as in Victoria. Over the same 25 years recognised ACE provision, including through TAFE in WA, Queensland and Tasmania has greatly diminished or disappeared.

If adult learning is to be defined as all informal, non-formal and formal adult learning, it raises the question of where does one start and stop, and how might it be measured and analysed (for example by learner surveys), other than in particular sites or via its component parts. Hierarchical education systems position formal education in universities at the top and the least formal and less literate and informal learning, including ACE on the bottom. These hierarchies are '… regarded as normal and desirable by most stakeholders … legitimised through neo-liberal educational discourses such as standards, standardisation and accountability that permeate the educational structures in the contemporary Australian education system' (Golding, Brown & Foley, 2009, p.53). Formal,

accredited learning, with many more things to measure, is also much easier than ACE to define, measure, track and research.

Evidence from the changing nature of research in the journal

Most of the 'research' reported in many early association journals would likely not be published in the current journal *AJAL*. Durston's (1967) article about 'Research in adult education' was based on an examination of 60 articles already published in the *AJAE*. It provided evidence of the poor quality of these early articles. Durston found 'exceedingly few studies which 'meet the canons of adequate research' (p.5), with 'little systematic attempt to isolate and investigate particular problems scientifically' (pp.5-6), inadequately defined problems for investigation and methods, plus inadequate description and presentation of data, raising serious questions about 'the value and reliability of conclusions' (p.6).

Durston (1968) undertook another systematic, critical analysis of all 76 articles published in *AJAE* spanning 1961-7, noting that most 'articles [were] descriptive or narrative accounts … and should more properly be termed writing than research' (p.81). Durston urged contributors to move beyond the preoccupation with case studies and 'move on to the level of generalisation, proposition and theory' (p.81). However, he acknowledged that adult education was then a new field of academic study and that no '… large accumulation of factual material concerning it exists' (p.81).

In the defence of journal contributors in the early decades, the first *AJAEs* were very slim volumes, and academic guidelines were far less defined or rigid. Guidelines as to style and length (4,000 word maximum) were only introduced in 1984 under Barrie Brennan's editorship, as were regularly 'themed' editions of the journal. The list in Table 1 identifying those themed issues illustrates how Editors were shaping as well as responding to contributions by actively soliciting articles.

The themes adopted for all 'Association conferences over 50 years' to 2010 were listed in *AJAL* 2010 (Issue 50 (3), pp.636-9). Four national ALA conferences were held in Australia to 2020: Melbourne 2011 and Byron Bay 2012 , one conference conducted jointly with ACE Aotearoa in 2013 in Wellington, New Zealand and one held in partnership with LincTas in 2017 in Hobart. In 2018, in lieu of a conference, ALA declared it the Year of Lifelong Learning (YOLL) and held a series of forums. These typically broad-based, future-oriented conference themes as well as journal issue

themes in Table 1 shine the light on new or emerging trends, sectors or aspects of ACE delivery and practice. In the fourteen years between 1985 and 1999, over one half (55%: 25 out of 45) of journal issues were themed, likely influencing several of the thematic peaks evident in Harris and Morrison's (2011) nine content-related graphs. In several instances, the Editor (Harris) had called for articles on themes but was unable to get enough articles to fill an issue. In other cases, an 'overarching theme' was created retrospectively to fit the author contributions.

Table 1: Journal themes

Year (Issue)	*Themes*
1977 (3)*	*Adult education & development*
1985 (1)	*Technology & education*
1985 (3)	*Multicultural education*
1986 (1)	*Learning*
1986 (2)	*Adult education in Asia & the Pacific*
1986 (3)	*Innovations*
1987 (3)	*The celebration of learning*
1988 (1)	*The history of adult education in Australia*
1988 (3)	*A re-examination of the future of adult education in Australia*
1989 (1)	*Prison education*
1989 (2)	*Adult education in rural areas*
1990 (2)	*Adult basic literacy*
1991 (1) *AJAE*	*Community education*
1991 (3)	*Adult education responses to economic rationalism*
1992 (2)	*From the learner's standpoint*
1992 (3)	*Ways of working with adult learners*
1993 (2)	*Workplace education*
1994 (1)	*Gender & community education*
1994 (3)	*Education for marriage and family life*
1995 (1)	*The adult vocational sector*
1995 (2)	*Adult learners & learning in the adult HE sector*
1995 (3)	*Adult community education sector*
1996 (1)	*International perspectives*
1997 (1)	*The many roles of ACE*
1998 (1)	*ACE in regional areas*
1999 (1)	*Adult learning in different sectors*
2000 (1) *AJACE*	*Lifelong learning*
2000 (3)	*40th Anniversary edition*
2002 (1)	*Explorations of practice*
2002 (2)	*Informal learning*
2003 (3)	*Online learning*
2004 (3)	*Enabling education*

2007 (2)	*Outcomes from learning*
2009 (3)	*Learning to be drier*
2010 (3) *AJAL*	*AJAL 50 Years*
2011 (Special)	*50th Anniversary edition*
2012 (3)	*Food pedagogies*
2014 (3)	*Adult education & lifelong learning in the Asian century*
2015 (3)	*Public pedagogies*
2017 (3)	*Getting of wisdom: learning in later life*
2018 (3)	*Lifelong learning & sustainable development*
2019 (3)	*Bridging social movement theory with popular education*
2020 (3)	*60th Anniversary edition - Adult learning: Transforming individuals and communities over the decades*

* The 1977 themed issue preceded Editorial policy from 1985 to theme one or more issues each year, though no themed issues were published in 2001, 2005-6, 2008, 2013 or 2016.

There has been a gradual and significant increase in the association journal over the six decades in academic formality, permissible maximum length, average number of references cited and the international spread of those references. This trend was also observed in Golding and Harvey's (2019) 50-year Irish Adult Learner Journal study. Just one typical, peer reviewed journal article in *AJAL* in 2019 took the whole article space of one *AJAE* issue published during the 1960s.

There has been increasing pressure in the past decade for university academics to publish in higher status international journals and development of more rigorous research methodologies. An extension of the word limit to 6,000 words and the introduction of double blind reviewing has raised the academic bar and affected authorship in many ways. This phenomenon is later analysed in more detail, for AJAL for the decade since 2010.

Evidence from reviews of the journal contents

Long (1983) provided the first systematic content review of the association journal, *AJAE*, covering the decade 1970-1979. Long was puzzled by what he regarded as the observed mismatch between the journal's interest in articles contributed from Australia either to do with the philosophy of education (23% of topics) or on overseas topics (14% of topics). Given the 1970s in Australia was in such a state of political, demographic and public policy flux, Long speculated that the data 'might suggest an intensive period of self-conscious reflection,

coupled with a certain degree of insecurity about the directions of adult education in Australia' (Long, 1983, p.7).

Long was surprised to not see more articles from Australia reacting 'to the events swirling around the association at that time' (p.8). The same might be said of most of the journal articles in the decades since. Writers often have research interests that do not necessarily match the concern of practitioners, providers, learners, governments or policy makers, and vice versa. Indeed, if researchers are involved in truly critical research, their perspectives may be oppositional. While academic journal editors are, by convention, free to select themes and publish articles independently without pressure from the organisation that sponsors them, in the case of AJAL there are times over the decades where the line with the association has perhaps been blurred.

At the time of his 1983 study, Long noted that whilst the stated objectives in the association's journal did not include establishing an international reputation (p.11), the significant proportion of overseas authors was indicative of the '1:4 dependence on foreign scholarship' (p.10). 'Journal objectives over 50 years' (reproduced in AJAL, 2010, 50(3), pp.628-30) and subsequent journal objectives confirm that between 1990 and 2012, the journal's objectives had changed. Before 2013, the journal acknowledged that whilst the '... prime focus is on Australia ... papers relating to other contexts are also sometimes published.' Since 2013, after Tony Brown became Editor, the overseas invitation became more global and more explicit. Still acknowledging that the journal's prime focus was on Australia, the objective shifted to emphasise that '... the practice of adult learning is an international field and Australia is connected to all parts of the global, and therefore papers relating to other counties are welcome' (AJAL inside cover, post 2013).

The current paper does not revisit Harris and Morrison's (2011) comprehensive 50-year content analysis of the history and trends in the association's journal authorship to 2010. As outlined earlier in the Methodology, the section that follows seeks to extend that study to the present decade (to 2019).

Evidence from AJAL since 2010

Data were analysed from 25 AJAL issues since 2010 in two time convenient intervals (2011-2014: 12 issues, 90 articles, 185 authors;

2015- April 2019: 13 issues, 97 articles, 180 authors). Table 2 presents data on AJAL author characteristics by these time periods inclusive of the most recent publication period (2011- April 2019), alongside comparable data from Harris and Morrison (2011). Authorship data available from a similar time period (2011-17) from Golding and Harvey's (2017) study of the Irish Adult Learner Journal, a journal with a somewhat similar national profile, have been added as a useful international comparison.

Table 2: AJAL author characteristics by time period

	Journal time period				
Author characteristic	50 year average to 1961-2000, % n=1085	1999-2000, % n=386	2011-2014, % n=180	2015- April 2019, % n=185	*The Adult Learner*, 2012-17 %
Female	?	60	68	68	61
Male	?	40	32	32	39
Overseas	23.4	30	23	34	33
Australian	76.6	70	77	77	
University affiliation	64	77	93	97	65
NSW	*37*	*27*	*23*	*20*	
Victoria	*18*	*24*	*30*	*32*	
SA	*14*	*14*	*11*	*5*	
Queensland	*13*	*17*	*26*	*25*	
ACT	*6*	*6*	*3*	*5*	
WA	*6*	*5*	*3*	*7*	
Tasmania	*5*	*4*	*3*	*5*	
NT	*2*	*3*		*1*	

In summary, Table 2 confirms that many of the previous broad trends in journal authorship, identified by Harris and Morrison (2011) in *AJAL* over 50 years, continued into the decade after 2010. There was a further increase in: the proportion of authors with university backgrounds (rising steeply from 77% in the decade from 2000, to 95% since 2010); female authors (increasing from 60% in the decade from 2000 to 68% since 2010). Overseas authors fluctuated around the same level (30% in the decade from 2000, 29% since 2015). Of the small proportion (5%) of *AJAL* authors without a university affiliation in the past decade, aside from the 'private, including retired' authors, no authors in the most recent decade identified an ACE affiliation, and only two were affiliated with a VET or TAFE provider.

There is an overwhelming proportion of *AJAL* authors with a university affiliation, often addressing themes related to formal university-related programs. This is perhaps indicative of the languishing state of adult education as a professional practice and academic discipline in Australia. Many of these Australian trends parallel findings in the Golding and Harvey's (2019) Irish Adult Learner Journal study. However in the Irish journal, one third of authors were still from non-higher education backgrounds, including ten per cent with an ACE work affiliation. As a caveat, it should be noted that some authors, particularly those studying a higher degree by research, may have another personal, vocational, or professional association with adult education. *AJAL* authors from India and Nigeria, prominent in the decade to 2010 (total 46 authors in the decade to 2010; two since 2011), slowed to a trickle as the proportion of authors from Europe (10 nations) and other countries in Asia (six countries) and Africa (three countries) increased.

Table 2 shows that the proportion of *AJAL* authors from South Australia fell since 2010 and from NSW reduced, as Victorian and particularly Queensland authors greatly increased. Some of these changes are likely to be indicative of the demise of 'adult (and vocational) education' in University of South Australia and University of Technology Sydney around this time and the retirement of the relevant staff and researchers. As Harris and Morrison (2011) suggested, some of these trends by state are partly related to the state and institutional location of the journal editor. Others are likely affected by states that have adult and vocational programs and researchers in many of their universities.

When Australian authorship was analysed by university affiliation spanning the most recent decade since 2010, authors identified affiliations with a large number of (30) different Australian universities. Six universities affiliated with ten or more authors across the past decade contributed 44 per cent of all Australian authors, including from NSW: University of Newcastle (11 authors) and UTS (10); Victoria: Monash University and Deakin University (both 14); SA: University of SA (15); Queensland: CQU (19). Some of these trends appear to be related to more academics researching and publishing in groups.

Numeric analysis of the same 22 themes utilised in Harris and Morrison's study (similarly allocating up to four themes per article) did not yield statistically meaningful results when applied to the small

number of (187) AJAL articles published over the past decade. However some recent trends were evident. There is an increasing trend towards research about adult learning practice, pathways and pedagogy in higher education contexts, workplace settings and informal community settings, including for older adults.

What is as interesting is what is missing. It is useful but concerning to be able to return to words written by Long (1983, p.14) in a content analysis of a decade of AJAE articles going back 40-50 years (1970-79). Inserted, in square brackets, is the number of articles on those topics in the most recent decade of the 187 articles published in AJAL. Long wrote there is a trend towards:

> *... an abundance of articles on topics of relevance to those catered for educationally (e.g. Retraining, Upgrading [29]) and a dearth of articles reflecting migrant education [4], literacy development [8], participation, public policy [0], prisons [3], agriculture [3], [A]boriginal education [5] and union education [0], to name just a few.*

Few articles since 2000 have been about young adults (1) or people with a disability (2) in ACE, compared to 34 that included learning in older age as a theme.

Discussion

This section seeks to discuss and explore the third main research question, about what the current situation is for Australian adult education and what possible new courses for the future ALA and AJAL might take. The discussion here is necessarily brief but is covered in more depth in a separate paper prepared for the ALA Board, titled 'Casting forward: Alternative futures for adult education in Australia' (Golding, 2019).

Discussion about ALA in the future

Duncan's original (1944) vision for a comprehensive national adult education system in Australia has not yet been realised despite 75 years of effort. Looking across the decades, the closest Australia came was perhaps soon after the 'halfway post' with the 'Come in Cinderella' and the 'Beyond Cinderella' recommendations in 1991 and 1998 respectively. Many of

these key recommendations were never implemented or funded. State-funded, decentralised adult education systems lingered longer in Victoria, but in other states and territories there has been less or no appetite for governments to pay for adults to learn. By 2020 they had virtually disappeared as state-funded systems in all states except Victoria.

Community and neighbourhood houses, as well as Men's Sheds have, in the past two decades by bottom up, local action taken up some of the more acute needs for adults to learn to live, connect with other people, share their skills and dreams and survive on the margins beyond paid work. However adult education coverage per se remains patchy nationally, and restricted to some states and territories. As of early 2020, state funded ACE provision was much reduced in Western Australia, at risk of further cuts in South Australia and almost totally missing in Queensland and the Northern Territory.

There remains an almost total silence in the critically important national migrant and Indigenous adult education space. Opportunities for lifelong and lifewide learning across most Australian states and territories remain more limited and patchy, particularly in rural and regional Australia than they were one decade ago.

In what form ACE survives or transforms beyond the long tail of the 2020 COVID-19 epidemic nationally and in Australian states and territories is unclear. However seismic shifts in other forms of education, the economy and government funding and the likely long road to recovery for many already socially isolated and economically disadvantaged people, groups and regions is suggestive of a need for future increased government support.

Meantime, Australia is far from a clever country educationally as Golding and Foley (2011) concluded in 2011. Prior to the COVID-19 epidemic, around third of Australian adults were functionally illiterate. One third spoke a language other than English at home. One half of all adults were not in full time, paid work. One half of adults in paid work in Australia had completed no formal qualifications post-school. One half of adults who were unemployed or not in the workforce were unwell. And yet research shows that adult education can make a huge difference to people's employability, lives, literacy, language, productivity, families, communities and their wellbeing. All the while most governments have been totally concerned about the cost of educational provision and

ignorant of the multiple likely wellbeing benefits and savings of adult learning and community association.

ALA on its own to early 2020 lacked the membership, resources, funding or networks to gain sufficient political traction for a national system, where front-end education and training imperatives dominated. There might be an opportunity to link strategically and more effectively with other national or international peak bodies, but the emphasis can't be on learning for learning's sake. It has to be about saving governments money by ensuring people of all ages, in and beyond paid work, are socially connected, physically and mentally well, and learning in the process. Before the COVID-19 epidemic in late 2019 I wrote in a draft of this article that it may 'perhaps and unfortunately' take a '… catastrophic natural event, or future crisis in the national or international economy to change the situation in relation to national policy or funding for adult learning'.

Discussion about AJAL in the future

AJAL remains one of a small number of well-regarded adult education journals in the world. This is a huge achievement for the journal and Adult Learning Australia and one that must not be lost or squandered. ALA, its journal as well as the adult education field of practice and research are clearly related. However they are never accurate or complete reflections of each other. The Harris and Morrison (2011) 'through the looking glass' metaphor, taken from the Lewis Caroll novel, means 'on the strange side, in the twilight zone, in a strange parallel world'. This is arguably pretty close to what Harris and Morrison saw when they looked *only* at the journal. A journal will never be an accurate reflection of the very diverse adult education communities of practice in Australia or worldwide. Nor will it provide a full or accurate history of the organisation that sponsors it.

Researchers choose whatever they are most interested in and passionate about to research and write. Similarly, associations choose annual conference themes and newsletter articles which they sense are strategic, useful and timely. Researchers will choose a convenient or interesting site or research method and may write it with a specific journal in mind. A particular article that appears in *AJAL* will be only one of around one thousand articles about adult education published globally annually. Whether it actually gets published will be mediated by deliberately chosen themes and by a rigorous peer review and selection.

What gets published where is also increasingly affected by academics seeking to publish in journals with higher impact and quality ratings. Examination of international journal impact and quality as measured by Scimago scores to 2017 (Scientific Rankings, 2018) ranks *AJAL* third in the world in the second quartile (Scimago score 0.3) after two like journals: *AEQ* (0.57) and the UK-based *International Journal of Lifelong Education* (0.48).

However these league tables raise the question as to what value the journal is and should be beyond its status, including to ALA and the field of adult education. Impact on the field internationally is one just measurable value. An advanced search of Google Scholar shows that some articles published within *AJAL* in the past decade (to 13 August 2019) already had a significant impact, as measured by the number of subsequent citations internationally.

Five illustrative examples include Owen's (2014) 'Teacher professional learning communities: Going beyond contrived collegiality toward challenging debate and collegial learning and professional growth' (128 citations); Christie, Carey and Robertson's 'Putting transformative learning theory into practice' (144 citations); Le Clus' (2011) 'Informal learning in the workplace' (115 citations); Falasca's (2011) 'Barriers to adult learning: Bridging the gap' (94 citations) and O'Toole and Essex's (2012) 'The adult learner may really be a neglected species' (64 citations).

Conclusion

In relation to the first research question, the context for establishing a national adult learning association in 1960, whilst fundamentally different to early 2020, remained even less receptive than ever to an inclusive and effective national system. Many of the early debates of 'classical liberal versus learner-centred' have moved on to become debates about the cost and values of learning in work, versus those beyond paid work. The institutions that created ALA have thankfully transformed to be more inclusive, pedagogically informed and learner-centred six decades on. Sites, institutions, and states where adult learning provision was strongest six decades ago have largely vanished or diminished. Universities with adult education as a specific research or curriculum focus have come and mostly gone in Australia and many similar, mostly English speaking nations.

Adult *education* has totally transformed in six decades, from being controlled and provided formally by a small number of men, providers and courses in a small number of capital cities, to adult *learning* now being facilitated informally mainly by women in very diverse community settings. State and territory funded adult education systems only took hold in around half of Australian states or territories, but by early 2020 most were much diminished or run down. There is a government attitude at national, state and territory levels that mediocre is good enough and that if adults want and value learning enough they should access it online, or if face to face, pay for it themselves. The non-funded or low-funded ACE contributions continue to produce important outcomes across the country despite the national government's continuing blind eye and ignorance of the multiple benefits and beneficiaries of learning.

The account in the body of this paper confirms how the national peak body (previously an association: since 2018 'Adult Learning Australia Limited'), the research in its journals and the field of adult education have adapted to the rapidly changing context, opportunities and needs for lifelong learning. By its heavy reliance on significantly reducing government funding in the most recent decade, ALA is just able to cover all its essential bases including its role and as a member-based national adult education peak body. Understandably, ALA is careful not to over extend. It has little capacity to fund research and by 2018 its journal editor was working unpaid.

Mounting an effective campaign for a national, place-based adult education system is perhaps an even more daunting task in 2020 than was in 1960, given the many more efficient ways of networking and learning via new media and online information and communications technologies (ICT). These ICT platforms have become almost universal during 2020 as a way around mitigating the risk of COVID-19.

The Discussion section, above, has summarised what possible new courses for the future ALA and AJAL might take. What happens to adult education and who funds or pays for it depends in part on the Australian economy and also which government is in power. Priorities about learning and education also shift depending on a wide range of social and demographic changes that occur independently of governments.

The 2019 national election showed that Australians had no appetite for national policy-based change. The penultimate version of this paper written in late 2019 before the COVID-19 epidemic prophetically read as follows.

If, however, the social, environmental or economic order becomes frayed as a result of any external or internal future shock, the imperative of governments might be to act on the copious, existing research evidence of the multiple benefits of adult learning. Meantime in Australia, there is a national attitude of mediocre is 'good enough' in terms of adult education, which may prove disastrous, costly and difficult in terms of social cohesion, sustainability and future international competitiveness in the case of internal or external shock.

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