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Guest Editorial: Adult Education within Faculty of
Education Contexts

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Guest Editorial
Adult Education within Faculty of Education Contexts

At the close of the Commission of Adult Education Professors in Canada meeting during the 2012 conference of the *Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education* (CASAE) at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, we noted that many of us were at an interesting crossroads, as more adult education departments or specializations were becoming part of their respective faculties of education and/or were beginning to engage in undergraduate, pre-service teacher education programs. The recent shifts we were experiencing within our own School of Education at the University of Calgary were not unique – other colleagues across Canada were challenged by similar shifts. The common ground we shared was the *discomfort* and *disease* we were experiencing in light of these shifts. We wanted to know more about this emerging phenomenon and believed it was important to systematically delve into how this shift impacts and influences the field of scholarship and practice of adult educators in Canada and the teaching, research, and service of adult educator academics and practitioners within our universities. This Special Issue of *CJSAE* extends and deepens the panel presentation we facilitated the following year, at CASAE 2013, titled “Locating Adult Education within a Faculty of Education Context.” Panelists provided a diversity of perspectives and experiences regarding tensions, opportunities, and challenges when adult education is located within a faculty or school of education.

More specifically, this Special Issue profiles the panelists from the CASAE 2013 conference and takes into account the broader context of other Canadian adult education departments and/or specializations. This discourse occurs against the backdrop of university shifts, transitions, and pressures influenced by larger societal forces and a neo-liberal agenda that is clearly claiming centre stage in universities across Canada and beyond. As adult educators and academics, we draw from our experiences of navigating university landscapes during this time of great change. We offer our voices, insights, and perspectives and invite you to ponder where and how adult education is located within your own work as an adult educator and within the broader faculty and university culture and context you continue to traverse.

We begin with a dialogue between Budd Hall and Darlene Clover from the University of Victoria. *Imagine/Learning: Thoughts from Two Adult Educators* is a dialogue between two adult educators who convey, through words and action, their passion for and unwavering commitment to adult education and how the field has and can continue to be a powerful catalyst for individual and collective transformation, social change, and resistance. Hall and Clover locate adult education within the broad landscape of *education*, a discourse that continues to be reduced and confined by many to a “schooling discourse.”

Nancy Taber from Brock University adds to the discourse in her article *Tensions between Practice and Praxis in Academia: Adult Education, Neo-liberalism, Professional Training, and Militarism*. Drawing from her own rich experience in the military and now as an academic and advocate of adult education, Taber speaks to the escalation of a “militarized context” in the university that impacts and influences her scholarship, service, and practice within undergraduate and graduate education in a faculty of education. She argues for “critical inquiry in a societal critique ... based on critical praxis,” and maintains that this is paramount in confronting “practice-based approach[es] influenced by neo-liberalism, commodification, corporatism, and militarism.”

Focusing on sexual and gender minorities, André Grace from the University of Alberta advocates for a critical and inclusive education practice that advances adult education and all of its merits “as a constituent of lifelong learning unencumbered by any hierarchy of educational formations.” In *It’s about Adult Education and More: It’s about Adult Learning for All and for All of Life*, Grace expresses deep concern about the decline of social education in faculties of education and, subsequently, to the need for adult education/educators “to [sit] at the learning table with public and higher education” as a pathway to guide, enrich, and inform the work, understanding, and caring practice of educators and other professionals.

We follow with an article from Erin Graham, PhD candidate from the University of British Columbia. Graham offers her perspective as a graduate teaching assistant in a teacher education program offered at a large research-intensive university. Highlighting tensions observed and experienced when teaching in a teacher education program (without having any direct experience as a K–12 teacher), Graham focuses on the need to prepare PhD candidates who teach in teacher preparation contexts. She sheds light on how adult education philosophy and practice have great potential to mitigate some of the glaring gaps that currently exist in teacher education curricula.

In our paper (Groen & Kawalilak), we share our experiences of stepping out of the margins to develop and implement a compulsory adult education course for the pre-service teachers in our Bachelor of Education program. As we reflect on the dynamics of stepping into the mainstream, we suggest that if we don’t, we may be perpetuating some comfort of being located in the margins. While we recognize the importance of continuing to nurture the growth of scholarship within our field, and the tensions and discomfort of stepping in, we consider the necessity of challenging ourselves to reach out to new audiences and adult learners, including those in professional education programs. We assert that, “indeed, as universities increasingly reflect societal neo-liberal policies and the push toward globalization, our own places of work and learning have become the new frontier for adult educators and adult learners.”

In the Prospectus section of this Special Issue, *But You’re Not a Teacher: Bridging the Divide between Adult and Teacher Education*, Shauna Butterwick from the University of British Columbia shares her perspective and experience, drawing from her “serendipitous pathway into the field of adult education.” Butterwick then speaks to teaching in a teacher education program and to how linking adult education to pre-service teachers provides the potential to “open up new horizons of understanding” for all involved.

We would like to thank all of the contributors to this Special Issue. The conversation regarding the location of adult education specializations and departments within faculties of education is part of a much larger discourse about the role of adult education within a rapidly changing society. Our discussion spans basic questions about our survival within the academy to broader philosophical questions pertaining to our role in the university and within society at large. While the tone of the conversation illuminated in this Special Issue conveys a sense of urgency, we assert that the tensions highlighted by the authors have existed within Canadian universities since adult education appeared on the university landscape more than 60 years ago. To elaborate, we have always experienced the push and pull of establishing a credible academic presence within the broader university culture, alongside our aspirations of maintaining our presence at the grassroots level in social movements, in community programs, in supporting continuing education programs, in

adult literacy programs, and in fostering citizenship education in formal and informal and in traditional and non-traditional, adult learning settings.

In this Special Issue, we attempt to offer another perspective by shifting the lens, and we invite you to consider that vigilance in promoting and advancing the essence of adult education and adult learning, which need not equate to being pulled in opposite directions and/or remaining separate from mainstream education. We refer to working together – thoughtfully, purposefully, and intentionally – to establish a stronger presence in our universities and within our respective faculties and departments. More specifically, our pre-service teacher education programs can be a space within which we locate our important work to advance a deeper understanding of teachers as lifelong, adult learners and to contribute to a more equitable and just society where access to education has the power and potential to impact and influence the lives of individuals and communities. Consider that it is within our own backyards, the very places we currently work and learn as academics and as lifelong, adult learners, where this new frontier that begs our attention and focus can be recognized and realized. As Nesbit (2013) indicated, while we as adult educators have established a very strong presence locally, nationally, and internationally “to demonstrate [our] respect for and allegiance with adult learners and their commitment to the global practice of adult education ... [we] have been less influential within [our] own universities’ organizational architecture” (p. 9). Indeed, many of us can attest to the confusion and/or lack of understanding felt by our own colleagues and university administrators regarding the meaning, focus, and agenda of adult education as a worthy and significant area of scholarship and practice. Paradoxically, this lack of understanding, and sometimes disregard in our faculties of education as to the significant contributions that adult educators make to teaching, research, and service, may actually be something we are contributing to, quite unintentionally. In other words, if we step away from opportunities to educate our colleagues in other disciplines within our faculties of education, we refer to those who hold little or no comprehension or appreciation of our good work, might this not be contributing to a creeping complacency within our own field – a complacency that we mistakenly refer to as vigilant steadfastness? To push this further, if we find too much comfort in the margins of the academy, shrouded by complacency and benignly left to our own devices, might we be creating some of the barriers that keep us located in those margins?

We caution against this trap of complacency for two reasons. First, holding too tightly on to a radical either/or stance may actually work against recognizing and stepping into those spaces and places where collaboration and authentic dialogue that informs a deeper understanding of our contributions as adult educator academics hold some potential. An alternative to this dichotomous posture is to acknowledge that the tensions and discomforts we experience, as adult educator academics within faculties of education, present a new frontier that begs for our collective focus, attention, and commitment. Through this lens, locating ourselves around the table as critical friends actively engaged in challenging and influencing policies and practices of exclusion would better align to the very foundations, history, and philosophy that have guided adult educators in the past. We need to be at this table to thoughtfully contribute to the discourse as universities undergo the shifts, challenges, and tensions brought about by competing agendas and perspectives on the changing face and nature of society. Important strategic discussions are occurring regarding our universities’ missions and visions and how these play out in teaching, research, and service activities. More specifically, university administrators and colleagues are exploring

“several areas in direct interest to adult educators: civic engagement and community outreach; challenging social exclusion; strengthening the role of continuing education and advancing citizenship” (Nesbit, 2013, pp. 9–10). The second reason for deeper active engagement within our university cultures, to put it simply, is that we believe we will *not* survive as adult education specializations and departments if we do not alter our course of action and come together to strategize how to navigate this new frontier successfully. This latter reason must not be misinterpreted, as we are not suggesting that our motivation to step beyond the margins should be predicated on fear! Rather, we see active engagement in our pre-service teacher preparation programs, faculties of education, and universities as a significant opportunity to educate colleagues and learners about the important work we do as adult educator academics.

As you read the articles in this Special Issue, we invite you to listen for the underlying tenor of hope and possibility we feel from these authors. While we are cognizant of increased pressures and expectations to morph adult education into programs, courses, and initiatives that support and move forward certain political, corporate, and business and industry agendas, we offer these articles as an alternative approach – as a way to engage with our colleagues and students within K–12 education to expand and deepen their understanding and appreciation of adult education, adult learning, and the power and potential that resides within when we gather together to co-create community. Indeed, we are all adult learners traversing a lifelong learning pathway that cannot and should not be separated from the larger narrative of what constitutes a just, equitable, and inclusive society. We have something significant to offer faculties of education and we need to become more actively engaged in contributing to a deeper understanding that education for life is not confined to the bricks and mortar of K–12 schooling. Indeed, many of our colleagues are doing exactly this through their critical scholarship and thoughtful practice. We also suggest that many of the successes experienced thus far, in adult education program design and delivery in university settings, are largely due to the unwavering commitment of some of our valued colleagues who continue to knock on the doors of those who misunderstand and/or disregard or devalue our work. It is no coincidence that those who have continued to step beyond their own comfort zones, those who embrace a language informed by the personal plural pronoun *we* as opposed to possessive pronouns like *ours* and *theirs*, have made great gains in advancing the good work that we do. Sennett (1998) referred to the pronoun *we* as being too frequently disregarded and underused. *We* speaks to gathering together, as collective community, to share and act on our beliefs, values, and vision. As an association of adult education scholars and practitioners, we continue to work tirelessly to do this in CASAE. Rather than waiting to be recognized and acknowledged by “others” outside our field of scholarship and practice, however, it is time to articulate and craft a more collective strategy, one that involves assuming a place at the table with those who are simply unaware of how our teaching, research, and service can advance our understanding of “Big E” Education, that broad berth of learning and knowledge co-creation that cannot be easily bookended within the confines and defining structures of traditional, formal, K–12 education.

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