

Volume 33 Issue 2

cjsae

the canadian journal for the study of adult education

la revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes

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EDITORIAL

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Donovan Plumb, and Scott MacPhail

*The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education/  
La revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes*  
Editor-in-Chief: Robert Mizzi  
[www.cjsae-rceea.ca](http://www.cjsae-rceea.ca)

33,2 November/novembre 2021, xv-xxv  
ISSN1925-993X (online)

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L'Association canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes  
[www.casae-aceea.ca](http://www.casae-aceea.ca)

# A CJSAE EDITORS' REFLECTIVE DIALOGUE

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## Abstract

*Five editors reflect on their experiences as editors of the Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education. One thread that emerges from this conversation is that leading the journal requires a broad effort involving many people who are deeply committed to academic work and social change. A second thread is that CJSAE does more than publish articles. It builds community, provides a vital knowledge resource, and advances adult education and social development in Canada.*

## Résumé

*Cinq membres de l'équipe de rédaction partagent leurs réflexions sur leur expérience au sein de la Revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes. Un des thèmes émergeant de cette discussion est que la direction de la revue exige un effort élargi impliquant de nombreuses personnes profondément vouées au travail d'universitaire et au changement social. Un deuxième thème est l'idée que la RCÉEA fait bien plus que publier des articles. Elle bâtit une communauté, constitue une ressource essentielle de savoir et fait avancer l'éducation des adultes et le développement social au Canada.*

The Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (CASAE) is 40 years old. As part of this achievement, we reflect on our experiences as editors of the *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education* (CJSAE). The journal was established in the initial years of

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the CASAE (Boshier, 2011) and has since grown over the decades. The goal of the journal remains steadfast, which is to provide a necessary and reliable space to share research and theory about adult education in Canadian contexts and elsewhere. We should not be modest about this achievement. CJSAE is an open-access, peer-reviewed online journal, making knowledge more accessible to the public. CJSAE, like other open-access journals, is a vital resource toward sharing current research and scholarship to advance civil society.

The year 1981 was a significant year in Canadian history. Besides the launch of CASAE, there were other important events that had a lasting impact on Canada's social fabric. Terry Fox raised \$1 from every Canadian to fight cancer prior to his passing (Terry Fox Foundation, 2020) and the Canadarm was launched aboard Space Shuttle Columbia (Canadian Space Agency, 2018). The bathhouse raids by police in Toronto ignited a national civil rights movement to end legal and social persecution toward LGBT2Q Canadians (Canada's Human Rights History, 2020). The United Nations also declared 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons (United Nations, 1981), which marked an important crossroads in the way Canadians became aware of issues facing people with disabilities. Adult education is undoubtedly a part of these historic moments and many more, as it was necessary for adults to learn (and challenge) values, knowledges, conditions, and skills to create change and advance dialogue.

Since 1987, there have been 20 editors of CJSAE, and we are incredibly grateful for their service to the journal over the years. We took this 40th anniversary of CASAE as an opportunity for a few of us, as CJSAE editors, to assemble and reflect on our experiences editing CJSAE, generate some insights and share stories, and conceptualize possibilities for CJSAE in the future. We created the following questions and responded to them as a means to facilitate this discussion.

The organizer of this article is Robert Mizzi from the University of Manitoba, who was editor from 2019 to 2021. Article contributors include Leona English, St. Francis Xavier University, who served as associate editor from 1998 to 2001; Donovan Plumb, Mount St. Vincent University, who was editor from 2014 to 2017; Scott MacPhail, Mount St. Vincent University, who started as managing editor in 2014, was editor from 2016 to 2017, and has continued to work with many editors; and Nancy Taber, Brock University, who was editor from 2017 to 2019, when she passed the reins to Robert Mizzi.

### Our Dialogue

*Question: Although it might be commonplace to begin our dialogue with a summary of our experience as editors, let's take a creative route. What is a metaphor that illustrates the educator/learner aspects of the job as editor and why did you choose that metaphor?*

**Leona:** In the late 1990s, literally the turn of the century, I was an associate editor with Allan Quigley as editor-in-chief. Dorothy Lander was also associate editor, so the whole department at St. Francis Xavier University was an editorial team. Jane Dawson came on board a bit later. I suppose the experience was a little bit like a vegetable strainer. We were there taking everything that came our way, hoping for more, and then putting it through the strainer (the consulting editor's review), and then sending it back to those who submitted. Every day there was a learning challenge, from finding out who the academics were in Canada and the U.S., to figuring out who would review on which topics. Then we had to figure out the process of sending the papers in the mail and eventually the finished journal

to the subscribers. Email was new then, so we used the old method of Canada Post and waited and waited for the reply from the consulting editors. Sometimes this meant two or three iterations of mail until we finally had a full review. As a team, we became friendly with the guy at the post office who gave us advice on mailing rates and subsidies, and then let us borrow a cart to wheel the journals down to the post office. Literally. In many ways, we were caught in the middle, subject to the vagaries of reviewers and costs. And I enjoyed every minute.

One of the greatest lessons of that time was how labour-intensive journal editing was. As someone new to academe and publishing, I had an idea that reviewing and publishing was an exalted process, free from human error and somewhat immune from politics. I found out quickly that it was anything but, and that the editor was really at the mercy of many forces, mostly beyond them. Allan Quigley had rigorous processes in place and even he had to throw up his hands sometimes. Allan had a great work ethic (he still does), and he gave it his all to find funding, get university support, and have academics rally behind him. Thanks to his leadership, the journal thrived in that time.

**Robert:** I appreciate Leona's image of a vegetable strainer! The walks to and conversations with Canada Post must have been memorable. As a recent editor-in-chief, my human interactions were of a different nature. The advancement of technology has meant the possibility of, for example, finding reviewers more quickly. However, it has also meant less frequent in-person exchanges, which are often helpful in fostering relationships. What comes to mind is a lamppost. Our light is always on, especially during dark times. I hope that passersby (e.g., readers, authors, reviewers, editorial board members) find some brilliant ideas from the journal that light their learning journeys. As editor, my hope was to connect our lamppost with others along the street so that we can have a brighter path and a future for everyone.

**Nancy:** I like the strainer and lamppost metaphors, so I'm going to combine them with a twist. My main aim as editor was to keep adult education as a field central to the journal's articles. Often, well-written articles on important topics would be submitted to the journal, but without a strong connection to adult education. My approach was then to refer the authors to other journals or, when feasible and sometimes preferable, ask them to better integrate adult education into their research. In this way, adult education was kept central to the journal while also branching out in an interdisciplinary way. I suppose my approach could be described as directing a lamplight onto a strainer in a way that assured the research that shone through helped scholars and readers learn about and forefront adult education.

**Scott:** The metaphor that comes to mind is juggling in the dark. I did not seek out the role of editor for CJSAE: I became editor by default. At the time, I was also the journal manager and was trying to understand the complexities of managing the journal. Becoming default editor added another layer of involvedness.

Fortunately, I received a tremendous amount of support from CASAE. Leona English, Kaela Jubas, Donovan Plumb, Susan Brigham, and Tanya Brann-Barrett are just some of the CASAE members who provided support and direction as I worked my way through my term as editor.

I often felt (and still do) that I was receiving accolades that I did not deserve as there is a strong team that buoys the journal. I have had a few authors comment that Lana Okerlund is the best copyeditor they have ever worked with. Our French translator, Catriona LeBlanc, is faultless in her work. Layout editor Stephanie Leslie provides the continuity to the online

publishing. Underlying all this is Roger Gillis, the OJS wizard who answers all of my questions and keeps the journal online.

Though I was juggling in the dark, I had a support team to keep me going.

**Donovan:** Strainer, lamppost, strainer/lamppost, juggler—yes, I can relate to all of these. Our task as journal editors is to advance the intellectual purpose of our charge, which, in the case of CJSAE, is to support the advancement of knowledge about adult education, especially as it takes place in, draws upon the history of, and reflects the realities of the Canadian context. So, yes, this was indeed my task as well. For me, though, this very important task was, to be honest, often overshadowed by the very additional initiative during my time as editor of putting the journal online. As you might imagine (and, at times, I wish I could have foreseen this prior to taking on the task), transitioning the journal online was a really big job. Sometimes, I felt like one of those poor characters on a home-renovation reality show who keep discovering new things they need to tear down or build up in order to put together a reasonably livable new edifice. Very fortunately, the CJSAE that I inherited from the very competent Tom Nesbit had wonderfully “good bones.” I was supported by a marvellous copyeditor, Lana Okerlund, and, with the help of Robert McGray, secured SSHRC Aid to Scholarly Publishing funding. Roger Gillis was an invaluable help prepping the journal for online delivery. Despite the rather difficult task of living in a journal in the process of renovation, it is my view that we now have a very nice and functional home in which Canadian adult education can flourish in years to come.

*Question: Many people may not realize the educator/learner practices and the collaborative leadership experiences of being an editor of a journal. When you reflect on your time as editor of CJSAE, what is an experience that sticks out for you? This can be any kind of story, such as an accomplishment, amusement, disappointment, or surprise.*

**Leona:** Remembering back to that time in the 1990s, I can't help but smile as we were all in it together. Dorothy, me, Allan, and John Reigle (the copyeditor). We consulted each other, laughed and shook our heads a lot, and really saw this journal as a team project. My favourite memory is when we had to package up the journals for mailing. There we were in the hallway between our offices, licking and addressing envelopes and drinking a bottle of wine and eating pizza. It was dark in the evening and we had already done a day's work, but this journal work was important enough that we would have stayed all night. The rules these days are much tighter and no doubt a security guard would show up to address the situation, but at that time we felt free to have a little party. Allan was there to make sure we did the mailing correctly—he had a long list of rules from the post office about mailing rates and somehow we managed to get it all done. I remember thinking how lucky I was to have this opportunity, and to get to know who was who in adult education. I experienced a thrill mailing off a journal issue to Stephen Brookfield in Minnesota and thinking that somehow I had hit the academic big time. Those were the days.

A surprise would be when we received irate letters from an author who had been rejected. Somehow the person submitting believed we were behind the rejection. Little did they know that we had little to do with it. We had waited and waited on the reviewers—our peers—and we relied on them for an assessment. There was no agenda on our part, save efficiency and respect for the reviewers. I have carried that insight with me all my academic career: our peers often make the big decisions, not our designated leaders.

**Robert:** I think every day is different. I can never predict what Scott MacPhail (our managing editor) will send me, or what people will write me about. I think a surprise is that people are unaware that there is an editorial review before the peer review. Perhaps authors assume that every article submitted into the journal will be sent directly to peer review. This is not quite the case with CJSAE, as, upon submission, the French-language editor or I determine if the paper is suitable for review. When it is not and the article is immediately rejected, sometimes I get letters from authors thinking there was a misstep or technological issue somewhere. Then those awkward conversations follow suit! What I miss are some of those “wine and pizza” parties that Leona describes, as those experiences often create opportunities to share stories and learn of different ways to navigate sticky situations.

**Nancy:** I think the best aspect of the journal is that, even as editor, you are never working alone (similar to Leona's comment about relying on reviewers, minus the pizza and wine—the downside of working at a distance and online). I could always rely on Scott MacPhail, the managing editor without whom CJSAE could not have survived over the last several years; the reviewers (wonderful adult education scholars and colleagues); past editors (Donovan, in particular); and the incoming editor (Robert). If I had a question or needed any reassurance, there was always someone to assist with the sticky situations Robert mentioned.

**Scott:** As editor/manager, I was often working away on my own. It was a great surprise when I attended a CASAE AGM and was noticed for my effort. As I mentioned, I came into this position by default and needed the leadership of the CASAE to help me.

**Donovan:** Certainly, like Leona and Nancy, I relied heavily on past editors and other adult education experts to ensure that the academic mission of the journal, to provide a critical voice for the study of adult education in Canada, continued to be served. In addition, though, and in retrospect most pleasing, was the number of people who were willing to support me as I worked through the ramifications of getting the journal online and, importantly, open-access. Library personnel at my university, especially Roger Gillis, offered me all kinds of guidance as I explored the potential of OJS, as I worked through the ramifications of making the journal open-access, and as I adapted the journal policies, including tricky topics like copyright, to support the operations of the university. Originally, Scott MacPhail was brought on as an assistant. As he developed his expertise, though, things shifted and, thankfully, he agreed to assume the role of managing editor of the journal.

*Question: One noticeable element of the Canadian adult education landscape is that we are a relatively small contingent. What may be a benefit and a challenge of our size when it comes to leading CJSAE?*

**Leona:** The editor of the journal, indeed any journal, has to have a team. There are no academic rewards for being a journal editor, or it seems that way to me, so any editor these days has to have people to share the workload and help make the decisions. Of course, in Canada, we have few academics publishing in adult education journals, so it is hard to find reviewers and even harder to find contributors, so we have to have everyone on deck to be part of the journal, as contributors, reviewers, or editors. Thanks to Donovan Plumb, the journal has a secure place online, so the physical part of publishing and mailing is now over, but the intellectual work remains. I learned from serving as an associate editor all those years ago that we are indeed challenged to keep a journal going, especially if the rule still is that the editorial team cannot submit papers to the journal while they are editing.

In our case, that rule wiped out three authors and potential contributors. I understand the need to protect academic integrity of the journal, but maybe there is a way around it in this current time. Despite the challenges, editors and contributors in Canada do come to the fore. Academics want to contribute and want to help make the journal strong. With Scott MacPhail as the managing editor, the day-to-day work of the journal is well managed, so the editorial team is well supported.

**Robert:** The Canadian adult education world is indeed a small one! However, that does mean it is easier to grow and involve new people and new perspectives. We can more easily network with other associations or agencies when we are looking for partners or to announce new developments. A challenge to our small size is justifying its presence to potential partners and showing how adult education exists outside of higher education. There have been several times when I observed aha moments from people who never considered before the value of adult education in their worlds, and other times when I have had to explain that an "adult educator" does not simply mean that an educator is an adult.

**Nancy:** The overarching benefit of our small Canadian contingent is knowing who has expertise in what area of adult education. We see each other every year at the CASAE conference (or we did, before COVID); it is always a joy to reconnect and learn about each other's research. When an article was submitted on a specific topic, I usually had at least one potential reviewer spring immediately to mind. The challenge is getting reviewers to agree to a review without exhausting their goodwill by asking them too often. Another challenge relates to the question, just what exactly do we mean by the term *Canadian* in our journal's name? Does the article have to connect to Canada? Be written by a Canadian? Or is the journal, rather, housed in and run by Canadians, with no other restrictions? I think we are still working through these questions.

**Scott:** Having a small contingent is a great advantage for my role as managing editor of the journal. Attending both national and regional CASAE events has provided me the luxury of having met many of the contributors and reviewers whom we use. Often, I know who a good reviewer would be, as I know the subject area that they specialize in. Plus, I hope, the familiarity that has emerged between the journal staff and its users allows for a congeniality that is not affordable in larger publications.

Being an online publication allows us to reach an international audience. So while being small, we can still reach a much larger readership.

**Donovan:** As Scott has described, being small does give the journal a very community/collaborative kind of feel. Friends and close colleagues can really get things done efficiently when the need arises. I often enjoyed the feeling of being connected with like minds when I struggled with this or that aspect of running the journal. I think that one of the ongoing challenges of a small operation is that it is difficult to enjoy the gains in efficiency that come from being big. CJSAE is a full-bore operation that needs to carry out most of the same tasks as much bigger journals or publishing companies. Managing the website, promoting the journal, administering the submission and review process, preparing manuscripts for publication (copyediting, formatting, translating, etc.), managing journal issues, managing access, and guarding the quality and relevance of the journal are ALL still there. The volume of work entailed in all these tasks is considerable and, incidentally, not always cheap! The risk, I think, is that given the challenges, it is tempting to turn all of this over to a publishing company. I'd be very concerned with this, however, because, as has been experienced by so many other organizations, such a move would endanger the autonomy of the journal.

*Question: We have read many CJSAE papers over the years in the role of reader, editor, or reviewer. What is a quote from a CJSAE article that resonates with you? This quote can be from any time period, and not when you were editors. Why did you choose that quote?*

**Leona:** I am not sure I remember any specific quotes from papers that I have read. I do remember Allan Quigley always saying "it is forever thus" when referring to some situation or other. He joked he had seen it all in his years in the American higher-education system, and perhaps he had. Errant reviewers—he had seen them. Badly written papers—he had seen them. Uncooperative authors—he had seen them. On a more serious note, the paper from CJSAE that I am repeatedly drawn to, and cite, is James Draper and Elizabeth Carere's (1998) chronology of the field of adult education, a piece that is inclusive of adult education in all arenas, from community, to university, to international development work. I have found inspiration in his wide vision of adult education, not to mention his helpful listing of dates and events in Canadian adult education.

**Robert:** As a researcher on the regulatory effects and normative underpinnings of professionalism in adult education, I am drawn to Anne Alexander's (1991) article that analyzed the professionalization of adult education. Even though this is a dated article, I feel this work is still very important today. She wrote, "Adult educators can experience colonization of their life-worlds by their own organization and become dominated by them" (p. 127). We still experience this colonization today, and perhaps expanded by some to include neo-liberalism. Alexander called for a critical view on professionalization and prompted learners and facilitators to shed "technical instrumental rationality" and foster critical reflection. I strive to embody Alexander's earlier work by employing critical and humanistic approaches to all aspects of my life.

**Nancy:** Tough question! If I had to pick just one, I would go with Patti Gouthro's (2002) article "What counts? Examining Academic Values and Women's Life Experiences from a Critical Feminist Perspective," which I often cite and recommend to students. She argued, "The homeplace is an important site of living and learning that has been often overlooked or devalued in assessing educational experiences. By drawing connections to the homeplace, one can begin to see some of the important issues in women's lives that are often ignored or glossed over as insignificant or irrelevant" (p. 7). What I like so much about this quotation is not only its specific content, but how it demonstrates the wide variety of contexts in which people learn and how learning intersects with issues of power and privilege, key aspects of adult education scholarship.

**Donovan:** I'm with Nancy on this one. Over the many years I've been associated with the journal, I've read much that inspired and interested me. It's really tough to pin down one quote. Most recently, though, I was really stirred by Robert Mizzi's editorial for the April 2020 issue. In his second paragraph, Robert offered a prescient summary of the challenges currently facing a scholarly engagement with adult education. The massive disruptions of COVID and the rather incredible shifts in global politics that attended the 2020 presidential election in the U.S. added even more fuel to the fires of change that Mizzi described as constituting our current context. Like so many adult educators throughout history, I believe that, in times of shift and change, adult education has a more important role to play than ever.

**Scott:** This, indeed, is a difficult question to answer. As journal manager, I have read most journal submissions over the past 6 years. No one piece stands out or resonates with me (other than the truly odd submissions). I find that I learn and am inspired by the variety of

topics offered to the journal by many different authors. In a recent issue, Carole Roy and Kathy Mantas (2020) opened my eyes to the artful processes and adult education.

*Question: Editors often have inside knowledge of what makes a strong article. What is one recommendation that you would tell authors when they are writing their articles for submission to CJSAE?*

**Leona:** I know from this journal and from co-editing *Adult Education Quarterly* for 5 years that a strong article takes work and a lot of reading and rereading. Writers need to acknowledge that good writing is a myth—good writing is rewriting and rewriting. So when you submit an article, submit your best work and be ready for feedback. All authors get feedback and all authors have to rewrite their paper. The reviewers have likely put a lot of time and effort into the reviews, so you would do well to listen to their insight. You may not take the insight, but you do need to consider it seriously. I would also say that it is a good idea to read the journal and find published articles that are somewhat similar to your own (e.g., a qualitative study with interviews). Have a good look at the format to see how that writer structured the article, how long the literature review section is, how wordy the findings are, and so on. An academic article is not a fictional piece, so if you want to be published in CJSAE, try to follow the rules or accepted norms in your submission.

**Robert:** I echo Leona's thoughts, and that "good writing is a myth." I would also add that while there is a certain element of prestige to having an article published in an academic journal, that prestige does not grant free licence to make bold, sweeping claims. All authors have to do their research and support their claims in the literature, in human experience, or in their research.

Further, when feedback is received via the journal, the first thing is to do nothing. However counterintuitive as that may seem, sometimes reviews can be prickly beasts, and authors may wish to write their revision and responses to the feedback in a clearer state of mind. I suggest authors consult with Tonette Rocco and Tim Hatcher's (2011) *The Handbook of Scholarly Writing and Publishing*. They cover a broad range of topics on the writing and publishing process, from getting started to being published.

**Nancy:** I agree wholeheartedly with Leona and Robert. I'd add two things to their recommendations: (1) write a clear thesis statement (which would more accurately be described as a series of statements) that specifically outlines the article's argument and structure the article accordingly, and (2) connect the research to the field of adult education in a substantive, meaningful way (if it doesn't fit, send it somewhere else). To further explain the second point, the research in adult education is vast, but not all-encompassing. If a certain aspect has not been written about in the field, then connect it to aspects that have been, and then extend the argument outward as needed. For example, one of the years (2015) that I served on the committee for the CASAE Alan Thomas Graduate Student Paper Award, a student, Matthew Bailey-Dick, submitted a paper on bereavement education, a topic that had not been heretofore explored in the field. He connected death education to adult education in a way that was commensurate with each field of study while advancing the understanding of bereavement in both fields. He won the award that year.

**Scott:** As journal manager, I have first read of most submissions. For all authors, keep in mind that the focus of the journal is adult education. The article should hinge on the topic.

For those who are trying to get their first articles published, my advice is to study articles published by the journal. Look at the depth of research. Often, I have had to send papers back as they lack the depth of research and insights that we are looking for.

**Donovan:** In addition to the more practical pointers offered by my colleagues, my advice would be for potential contributors to the journal to really pay attention to the varied pressures that are at play in their professional and maybe even personal lives that are motivating them to seek publication. In my view, the very best papers submitted to CJSAE are those motivated by a genuine intellectual commitment to some aspect of our field. Given the increasing pressure academics are experiencing to publish at all costs, sometimes the motive for submitting an article is more to fulfill a tenure and promotion requirement than it is to address a real and telling intellectual question, especially if that question or issue is a bit out of fashion. My advice, then, as much as possible (and I realize that this is very far from easy in the hyper-managerialized context of the contemporary academy), is to keep one's eye on the intellectual ball and not on the career score you may or may not be racking up!

*Question: CASAE is now 40 years old. How can CJSAE, as an important resource for CASAE, foster adult teaching and learning over the next 10 years?*

**Leona:** CJSAE is doing a great job of leading the field. It is publishing good work on issues relevant to adult learning and education and has not decided to decamp to sociology or psychology. It is a journal that represents the best in our field and our country. I would say, stay the course. Stay online, keep having a strong managing editor, and keep pushing for better and better submissions. This is a good journal.

**Robert:** CJSAE has an important legacy to build from, thanks to all the predecessors who have worked on maintaining and growing the journal. Seeking new partners and sharing more practical, empirical, and theoretical wisdom should help carry it through the next decade. Another way forward can be maximizing the potential of its virtual platform by offering more curated and peer-reviewed work that engages multimedia and art. Steady as she goes!

**Nancy:** Continue to unapologetically advocate for adult education as a distinct field of scholarship by publishing articles that are central to the field. Continue to work to advance its reach, authorship, and readership.

**Scott:** Adult education as an important component of social movements and a voice for the marginalized of society has weakened over the past 30 to 40 years. CJSAE can help maintain the impetus of social movements and be a voice of social movements. CJSAE can also start building or contributing to a theory of adult learning.

**Donovan:** Oh my. I was talking to my dear friend and long-time compatriot Michael Welton the other day about the state of our world and how, as much as things have seemed to have gotten so much more wild in our current context (we talked in-depth of the pandemic in the weeks preceding the 2020 American election), one thing remains the same for us: adult education has a crucial role to play in building a better, more just, more environmentally sustainable, more open, more collaborative, and more peaceful world! Thoughtful, engaged, open-minded, imaginative, intellectual engagement with the theories and practices of adult education remains of upmost importance in our shifting world. Organizations like CASAE and publications like CJSAE continue to hold great promise. It is our deepest responsibility to ensure that, as much as possible, we continue to develop the hidden powers of adult

education. CJSAE, in this view, continues to be an extraordinarily important publication. It is up to us to realize its crucial contribution.

### Concluding Thoughts

We hope that this dialogue unveils the historical and contemporary behind-the-scenes work in editing the journal. A couple of trends emerge when we reflect on this dialogue. First, CJSAE is more than the editor-in-chief, as there are many others who are involved with the journal in making it an ongoing success story. This includes, but is not limited to, the managing editors, technical support, copyeditors, typesetters, translators, reviewers, authors, editorial board members, and associate editors involved with the journal over time. It certainly does take a village to raise a journal! Second, CJSAE is more than a space in which to publish articles, perspectives, field notes, and book reviews. The journal builds community, provides a vital knowledge resource, and advances social development by way of providing necessary empirical research and theory development. The journal contributes to shifting and expanding the field of adult education and prepares us for the social trials and changes that lie ahead. It would serve us well to review articles published over the years and reflect on persistent social and economic challenges in Canada. Vive la CJSAE!

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