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EDITORIAL

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FEMINIST ADULT EDUCATION AND THE IMAGINATION: CREATIVE AND ARTS-BASED PRACTICES

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Civilisation self-destructs. Nemesis is knocking at the door . . .

Through art create order out of the chaos . . .

Be subversive, constantly question reality and the status quo . . .

Trust in the imagination and re-fertilize it . . .

You can never see or hear or feel too much.

—Lawrence Ferlinghetti, *Poetry As Insurgent Art*, 2007

We live in a deeply troubled world, a world that we, the guest editors of this special issue, see as a colossal failure of the imagination. This failure of the imagination is an emboldened neocolonial, patriarchal capitalism that has decided whose stories matter to history while putting the future of our planet in peril. It is a failure that ridicules equality, democracy, collectivism, and cultures of care as it simultaneously gives unfettered licence to racism, xenophobia, misogyny, and sexualized violence. As a failure of the imagination, colonial patriarchal capitalism manufactures poverty and disappears truth and analogue reality under the greed of technical rational innovation. All of this hampers our efforts as adult educators to help people not only challenge these practices of power but also imagine a different course.

Another world can only become thinkable and actionable once it is imaginable. For Haiven and Khasnabish (2010), if there was ever a need for the imagination, and even more so a

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radical imagination for a different world, it is now. The imagination is “highly consequential, because control over it is control over . . . the future. Imagining what could be is a very powerful tool” (Gillespie, cited in Helmore, 2021). Without opportunities to imagine and reimagine the world, people are left not only with an “impoverished sense of the creative possibilities of human life” (Williamson, 2004, p. 136), but also with the self-serving delusions of the powerful, which puts them in danger of retreating into an immobilist, fatalistic acceptance of the status quo. If, as Wyman (2004) argued, the “liberated imagination” is central to what we hope to be or become as a society, then how do we stimulate the imagination? Where do we begin, and what are the tools or practices required to imagine and reimagine a liberated future for all?

For Ahmed (2017) and Olufemi (2020), one thing that is required is feminism, because it provides a springboard for subversive thought, a space for wilfulness and risk-taking that tests our own limits and the limitations of culture and society. Feminism offers an avenue for asking provocative and ethical questions about how we live better in our present unjust and unequal world and how we create together a liberated future for all (Ahmed, 2017; Olufemi, 2020). For Adler (2006), art and artistic creation are also required. These practices can reveal things about injustices that are often unseen because they are so deeply embedded as “common sense” in the way we live. Art matters because it rearranges us by “creating surprising juxtapositions, emotional openings, startling new presences” (p. 490). This feminist aesthetic also allows us to engage in a world of opposites—of critique and possibility, reason and playfulness, gravity and hopefulness, pragmatics and imaginary, disruptions and constructions—that are never simple dichotomies but rather dynamic tensions that are neither easily reconcilable nor completely dissolvable (Clover et al., 2022; Hein, 1990; Olufemi, 2020).

This special issue brings together art and feminism with the imagination. It joins a cadre of publications that have concentrated in diverse ways on what Wildermeesch (2019) called the “aesthetic turn” in adult education. This turn is an exponential growth in the use of established and new artistic mediums and creative practices, combined with a focus on what we see, do not see, or are able, allowed, or made to see. As the contributors to this volume from Canada, England, Singapore, and Chile weave together arts, imagination, feminist aesthetics, and feminist adult education, they provide a snapshot of dynamic and creative work being done in the interests of a new socio-gender just world. As examples of a “feminist aesthetic turn,” they offer a (re)entry into the cognitive and affective realms of the imagination through diverse forms of creative and artistic expression, experimentation, investigation, and production. Visually and performatively, they show what it is to have “the courage to believe that a more dignified world is possible” (Olufemi, 2020, p. 84).

Articles

Women’s histories are never homogeneous, and they tend to travel in whispers and memories. When we lose those histories, we lose our ability to learn from them. Whispering history out loud and performatively is central to the article by Adrienne Kitchin and Nancy Taber titled “A Day in the Life of Clandestine Women War Workers at Casa Loma: Using Feminist Fiction-Based Research to Pedagogically Peel Back Layers of Invisibility.” They illustrate the role non-fiction/creative writing can play in capturing women’s history, depicting the real

material conditions, but also propelling forward new ways to see and know the past through the imaginary power of art. “Casa Loma Fillies,” their series of vignettes about women workers in World War II involved in a clandestine project at Casa Loma (a military castle), offers a creative investigative and intersectional retelling that disrupts hierarchical gender and racial categories and typical masculine accounts. Through their intersectional lens, they illuminate interrelations of patriarchy, militarism, and racism. Their work demonstrates how creative non-fiction can operate as a space of critical reflection and feminist learning.

How do we decolonize the imagination to reimagine the future? This question is taken up in the second article, “Decolonial Provocations Through Ecofeminist Pedagogies: Imagination in Times of Ecological Precarity,” by researchers Claudia Diaz-Diaz and Manuela Royo. They explore how women water and land defenders in Chile imagine the future in a time of climate precarity and threats to their livelihoods. Grounding the work in the ecofeminist imagination, an embodied practice in pursuit of *la vida digna* (a dignified life) in their project, the authors discuss their practices of communion, action, and relationality and show how, through new imaginative learning alliances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women, they provide the stamina to continue against an onslaught of patriarchal capitalism that threatens their territories.

Nelesi Rodrigues, Katherine E. Entigar, and Natalia Balyasnikova situate their article, “(Re)collecting and (Re)turning to Ourselves: Creative Feminist and Queer Praxes with Migrants in Adult Learning,” in a feminist queer imaginary and collaborative approach to thinking and writing. The article shares their collective learning journey of working with culturally and linguistically diverse learners from 2SLGBTQ+ and migrant communities. They explore the challenge of teaching experiences across their different positionalities as itchy, sweaty, and sounding moments. Yet, through creative multivocal narratives, they also demonstrate how this discomfort is generative, enabling them to learn from failure and practise what they call “moral humility.” These feminist researchers invite the reader to consider the complexity of learning with others and the deep emotional work that is required, including remembering without turning away, reflecting without idealizing, and responding with honesty.

At a time when carelessness and neglect prevail in relation to how we humans care for each other, Chatzidakis et al. (2020) argued that we need to put care back at the centre of our practice, and that is what the next three articles do. In “Feminist Imaginaries of Equitable, Just Care: Our Pictures Speak Louder Than Words,” Lynn Ng presents a compelling account of the feminist imagination of care through the perspectives and experiences of migrant care workers (MCWs) employed as live-in caregivers in Singapore. Ng argues that MCWs are frequently overlooked as feminist intellectual partners, leading adult educators and scholars to miss their contributions to alternative forms of activism and digital solidarities. In this context, Ng advocates for a reciprocal approach that centres on the lived experiences and ideas of migrants to reconfigure care ethics. Through a Facebook support group boasting over 50,000 members, MCWs not only supported one another but also envisioned alternative understandings of care practices within Singapore society’s market mentality. This cyberspace served as a container for diverse forms of digital solidarity and a hub for imagining and asserting its members’ rights to receive, and not simply provide, care. Ng cautions, however, against a romanticized global sisterhood by highlighting the disparities that arise from care practices where working-class women take care of the middle- and upper-class elderly.

Perspective

Tiffany T. Hill, Laura Wright, and Catherine Etmsanski continue the idea of care in their article titled “Cultivating Relationality and an Ethics of Care Through Arts-Based and Play-Based Research.” These scholar-practitioners anchor their observations and reflections in a theoretical frame associated with an ethics of care. However, the real strength of the paper comes from the very practical introduction to various arts- and play-based research activities they used in their course on Global Leadership. Their creative approaches included using photovoice, found poetry, collage, narrative métissage, river journey, and Lego visioning. The paper explores the potential of these tools and techniques to foster deeper connections, promote collective accountability, and support the ongoing work of decolonizing education. It will be of particular interest to educators considering using these creative approaches in their own teaching.

Field Notes

The idea of care continues in the field note “Are Caring, Collaborative, and Creative Research Practices Possible in the Western Academy?” Authors Caroline Firmin, Kerry Harman, and Réka Polonyi reflect on the CARE subproject Reimagining Homecare, which employs exploratory creative methods to rethink approaches to care work in the United Kingdom. Using poetry, blogging, drawing, and a storytelling format, the authors share how they co-produce knowledge about embodied ways of knowing and practising homecare—perspectives that are often overlooked, unrecognized, and undervalued in traditional academic research hierarchies. Creative, arts-based approaches play a significant role for them by expanding how they themselves understand care work and, in particular, expertise—or, better said, who the “knowers” are in this world of care.

The final field note, “Ukrainian Gendermuseum: Innovations in Gender Education in Times of War and Beyond,” by Tetiana Isaieva and Darlene Clover, offers insights into the feminist adult education work of this museum. As the only feminist, interactive, non-governmental museum in Ukraine and post-soviet Eastern Europe, Gendermuseum works with audiences that range from schoolteachers to university professors to civil servants to government officials to challenge exclusions and deeply embedded patriarchal beliefs in the Ukraine. Of particular focus is the Ukraine-Russian war. Through the exhibition HerStory of the War, which includes stories by hundreds of women of different ages and locations, the museum illustrates the critical roles women play in war efforts as it makes women’s lives both visible and knowable to present and future generations.

Together the contributors in this special edition show how the imagination, inspired by contact with creative practices and coupled with the political agenda of feminism, can, to borrow from Greene (1995), help us “to see more in our experience, to hear more on normally unheard frequencies” (p. 123). And as Ferlinghetti (2007) reminds us in his epic poem, in times of risk “You can never see or hear or feel too much” (p. 9).

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