

**Editorial**  
***In Memoriam***  
***Alan Thomas (1928–2009)***

As this issue was about to go to press, we learned of the untimely death of our distinguished colleague Alan Thomas. To honour him and his immense commitment to Canadian adult education, we dedicate this issue of the journal to his memory.

Michael Welton writes:

Alan Thomas probably could have been many things. He had the intelligence and the pedigree to make it big in Ontario corporate or governmental affairs. But very early, while still in his twenties, Alan fell into the company of adult educators. When the illustrious names in the field of North American adult education (Knowles, Houle, Verner, London, Kaplan, and others) were meeting in the Commission of Professors gathering in April 1957 to figure out how to create a discipline of adult education, he was there. He was in on the ground floor of establishing a Department of Adult Education at UBC, teaching there in the late 1950s. After serving as the president of the CAAE in the 1960s, Alan joined the emergent Department of Adult Education at the OISE under J. Roby Kidd's direction and humanist vision. When CASAE was formed in the early 1980s, he was there, too.

In 1958, Alan worried that “being professional” seemed “almost an act of treachery to the old order, designed to hasten its decline.” He worried that adult education would be boxed in like formal schooling. Alan thought that emphasizing the human capacity to learn created a capacious space for adult educators to work. I remember when I first read his catchy aphorism—“adult education floats in a sea of learning”—exclaiming, “Yes, that’s it exactly!” Indeed, I recall reading one of his papers on the “learning society” when he was working with the CAAE in the 1960s. He was ahead of his time. The man wrote and did many different things pertaining to adult education. He fought hard to create a viable space for the study of adult learning. He fought hard for state recognition and funding for various kinds of adult education projects. He fought hard for his elegant formulations of learning. For all these things, he must be remembered and honoured. I hope that he is now floating in a sea of learning up there in the sky, perhaps conversing with St. Augustine about his views on self-direction.

Alan would have been the last person to rest on his laurels. While cautioning that we must pay attention to our experiences and the lessons from the past, he always insisted on looking to the future. In speaking about adult educators, he once said that he knew of no other group of people in the world who are likely to have glimpsed what is true about

learning: that it is both a product and a process. The four manuscripts we publish in this issue typify that. First, Scott McLean explores the early years of continuing education at two of Canada's most prestigious universities: McGill and UBC. In the early part of the 20th century, both universities discovered the value of university extension courses for working adults and established dynamic and comprehensive programs. McLean's article underscores the importance of, and broadens our understanding about, the role of universities in Canadian adult education. Next Darlene Clover and Corrina Craig consider a very different form of adult education: an arts-based program on homeless/street-involved women in Victoria, BC. Their study considers the impact of the program on the women themselves and on members of the public who attended exhibitions of the artwork produced by the project. Their study shows how such projects can build a strong sense of belonging and trust among those involved while also encouraging the development of artistic skills and creative responses to pressing social problems. Significantly, it also shows how meaning, identity, recognition and empowerment can be enhanced by the collective creation and public display of artworks.

Next, Shibao Guo explores the situations of recent immigrant professionals to Canada and the denigration and devaluation of their prior learning and work experiences. He uncovers the roots of such non-recognition, showing how epistemological misperceptions of difference and knowledge combine with an ontological commitment to positivistic and universalist ideas of measurement to produce, in effect, a new "head tax" that excludes the undesirable and perpetuates oppression. The final article looks at the social practices entailed in environmental problem-solving by adult learners without high school diplomas. Charline Vautour and Diane Pruneau studied two groups of learners in New Brunswick and Montreal who were examining the local effects of climate change. Despite their lack of formal educational achievement, these learners were successfully able to plan, conduct, and sustain several group projects in ways that enhanced their awareness of the issues and augmented attitudes of resilience and collective efficacy. The study underlines the crucial importance of building educational activities upon people's everyday life experiences.

We also publish four book reviews: *Rebuilding the Left*, an overview of the Left in Latin America from the Cuban Revolution to the present day; *Teaching Qualitative Research*, a detailed account of contemporary qualitative research education; *Narrative and the Practice of Adult Education*, an exploration of narrative as the primary structure of human meaning making and its implications for adult education; and *The Future of Lifelong Learning and Work*, an examination of changing relations between learning and work in terms of unpaid work and informal learning as well as paid employment and formal education. Finally, we publish the annual list of degrees in adult education and cognate subjects awarded by Canadian universities in the past year. A quick perusal of the titles and topics shows the continued vitality of our Canadian field. Alan Thomas would have been proud.

**Tom Nesbit**  
Editor