Special Issue Part 1: Exploring Adult Learners' Experiences

Introduction to the Special Issue Part 1: At the Confluence of Adult Lives, Literacies, and Learning Landscapes

Leah Katherine Saal, Loyola University Maryland

A year ago, the response to the Special Issue Call for Papers demonstrated remarkable enthusiasm for exploring adult learners' experiences. Authors from diverse contexts across the field submitted thoughtful and creative examinations of learners' journeys, practices, strengths, challenges, and sources of support across formal and informal learning landscapes. The breadth and quality of these contributions affirmed both the continued salience of the special issue's focus as well as the field's commitment to understanding literacy learning with and from the perspectives of adults, the educators who work alongside them, and their extended learning communities. The abundance of high-quality submissions led the editorial team to expand the special issue into a two-issue series, enabling the journal to feature a fuller range of scholarship and practitioner perspectives than a single issue could accommodate.

Together, the two issues reflect the richness and complexity of adult learning across literacy, language, numeracy, digital learning, and related contexts. Organized around the subtheme *At the Confluence of Adult Lives, Literacies, and Learning Landscapes*, this first issue examines how adult literacy learning is shaped by and shapes work and family responsibilities, personal identities, community participation, institutional access, social relationships, and everyday literate practices in face-to-face and digital environments. Understanding these intersecting influences can help educators, researchers, and policymakers both recognize the value of adults' knowledge as well as use these perspectives to address barriers to participation and strengthen the resources that support authentic literacy learning.

The three Research Article contributions in this issue illuminate how adult learners' identities, print-based and digital literacy practices, relationships, responsibilities, and communities shape learning across workplace, every day, and postsecondary landscapes. In *Understanding Adult Learners Through the Development of Persona Profiles*, Jen Vanek, Jill Castek, Kathy Harris, and Gloria E. Jacobs use empirical data to develop multidimensional profiles of working learners in employer-supported education and training. These personas reveal learners' varied backgrounds, assets, goals, challenges, and the often competing priorities within profiles, offering educators and researchers a practical framework for centering adults' lived realities in program planning and instructional decision-making. Moving from the workplace to everyday life, Sandra Schamroth Abrams's *Practice and Practices: Three Adult Literacy Learners' Interactions with Text in Daily Life* examines developing readers′ practices beyond the classroom. Through three learners' experiences, the study shows that adults′ roles, beliefs about reading development, literacy sponsors, relationships, purposes, and material conditions shape both opportunities and motivation to read. These findings position reading development as socially situated and suggest ways teachers can more intentionally support practice beyond instructional hours. Extending this attention to literacy across settings, Jessica Kubiak's *"I Write Outside of Here": Adult Learners' Writing Ecosystems and Experiences of Corrective Instructor Feedback* examines how college writers interpret instructor feedback through networks of everyday literacy practice, digital mediation, family, friends, and peers. The article shows that learners bring writing identities and support systems developed across

Correspondence: lksaal@loyola.edu

multiple spaces/landscapes into classroom encounters, with important implications for instruction that build on existing strengths and relationships. This perspective invites instructors to treat feedback as a relational and contextualized practice rather than as an isolated correction of errors in a single academic text.

Next, the Viewpoint Article further broadens the issue's examination of learning landscapes by foregrounding the structural and geographic conditions that shape educational access. In *A Snapshot of Adult Education in Nigeria*, Ifedola Owoeye Morayooluwa uses the story of Rakiya to illustrate how socioeconomic and gender inequality, cultural expectations, geography, stigma, and limited public investment shape access to literacy learning. By connecting an individual learner's experience to national and community-wide conditions, the article demonstrates why flexible, locally relevant, and sustainably funded literacy landscapes are essential to learning participation and empowerment.

The two Field Reports included in this issue also showcase how community-based literacy learning landscapes can expand or contract adult learners' opportunities for literacy, connection, agency, and belonging. Josie Voorhies's *Finding the Missing Piece: Book Clubs Supporting Adult Literacy* describes READ Out Loud, an inclusive, student-driven book club that complements structured literacy instruction with collaborative meaning-making, high interest literate activities, and social connection. The report shows how accessible literacy-rich spaces can strengthen confidence, motivation, belonging, persistence, and participation within and beyond specific programming. In the second report, Jennifer Kobrin, Paul Barrett, and John Boccanfuso's *Navigating Power, Voice, and Equity in Community Adult Education: Lessons from The Welcome Table* examines the opportunities and tensions involved in creating genuinely learner-centered community education. By confronting questions of power, positionality, material need, and community voice, the authors deepen understandings of how equitable learning landscapes must be developed with—not merely for—the adults and communities they are intended to serve. Their reflections offer practical guidance for building partnerships that share decision-making power and remain responsive to community priorities. Finally, the Technology Report highlights the affordances of digital adult learning landscapes. In *Mentimeter for Engagement and Assessment*, Vi Hawes shows how anonymous responses and real-time data can reduce barriers, increase participation, and support responsive teaching across adult literacy education settings.

Taken together, these contributions reveal adult learning as a dynamic, relational, and context-dependent process. They show that literacy development and lifelong learning are shaped not only by access to instruction, but also by work and family responsibilities, everyday practices, social supports, community and institutional structures, and public policy. Most importantly, they remind us that adult literacy learners are not simply recipients of educational services; they are knowledgeable participant/creators whose experiences, assets, and aspirations should guide the design of teaching, programs, and policy which serve them. By examining the confluence of learners' lives, literacies, relationships, and environments, educators, researchers, and policymakers can gain a richer understanding of how to create meaningful, equitable, and effective learning environments.

The ALE Editorial Team and I are grateful to the authors who responded so generously to the call, the peer reviewers whose thoughtful feedback strengthened the work presented here, and the adult learners, educators, and communities whose experiences animate these contributions. We hope the voices and perspectives in this first issue inspire educators, researchers, and policymakers to collaborate with adult literacy learners in creating and sustaining learning landscapes that reflect their diverse experiences, strengths, needs, and aspirations.