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Editorial

Michael Osborne

This issue of JACE begins with an extensive historical overview from Alan Rogers of the historic extra-mural tradition within UK universities, drawing comparisons with current forms of external engagement. Having recently attended a conference concerned with social mobility and access to higher education, and perceiving the almost complete lack of historic perspective amongst participants, I welcome reminders of the antecedents for contemporary activity. Ultimately Rogers offers a bleak message for those wedded to the liberal traditions of the past, noting that the 'formal system of education, the hierarchical, transfer-of-information epistemology of the extension approach has won, it has captured virtually the whole of university outreach activities in the UK'. He further argues that there has been a 'loss of a whole epistemology' and 'the loss of the critical faculty in relation to society as a whole'

Somewhat in contrast Paolo Di Rienzo considers a phenomenon that in contemporary times has attracted considerable attention not only in universities but also across other forms of adult education. The recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning, certainly within Europe, is viewed as one of key pillars of achieving lifelong learning targets. The results reported in the article are based on a survey of Italian universities that sought to identify instruments and organizational procedures for validation of prior vocational learning. A number of practical proposals are made for policy and for the training of staff within universities. Ultimately the call made is for 'the transformation of thought processes' in universities in Italy.

Maria Gravani and Yiasemina Karagiorgi also focus on the university role in adult education, but through a focus on blended learning approaches. The programmes from which their data are gathered are offered by the Open University of Cyprus and the Hellenic Open University, and have face-to-face components. One of their assertions is that 'sound instructional design in distance education depends on a clear understanding of what affects adult learning'. Their study suggests that principles of adult learning practice are used only to a limited degree within the contexts of this study.

Olaf Zawacki-Richter, Heinke Röbbken and Yvonne Ehrenspeck-Kolasa have previously undertaken a classification of research areas in the field of distance education and in their article apply a similar approach, that of literature review and the Dephi method, to adult and continuing education (ACE). In their paper they develop a categorisation of research areas in ACE, and then identify areas that are important and those that are most neglected in research. They argue that the area can be categorised by three broad levels and 28 research areas.

Patti Guthro's article concerns narrative approaches to research in lifelong learning, with a particular focus on links to social purpose and/or feminist perspectives. Her material is drawn from four separate studies: of older Jamaican adult educators; learning trajectories of women in four different provinces of Canada; life history interviews with eight women in Nova Scotia who were identified as 'active citizens'; and life histories of authors to explore interconnections between lifelong learning, citizenship, and fiction writing. Commonly our rhetoric in universities is of research-led teaching. Guthro puts forward a case for the ways in which life history and biographical research can provide a means for learning in the field of adult education, and for a range of actors including educators, students, participants and practitioners and policy makers.

Mauro Palumbo considers the region of Liguria in Italy, which has both a low birth rate and high life expectancy. He describes it as the 'oldest region' in Europe, and one that can be used as a living laboratory to explore policies that view older people as a provider of resource rather than as people who are needy and consumers. He reports on work support by the Foundation of a bank together with an association and a university in which short courses were provided for those near retirement in order to promote active citizenship both as volunteers and in various forms production of goods and services. The experiment showed the potential for the harnessing of the abilities of older citizens, and proposes that public bodies should support the creation of a 'third market' that produces goods and services alongside private and public markets.

Colin Calleja article focuses on a scholar, well-known to many in the field of adult education, Jack Mezirow, and his influential transformational learning theory. He traces the evolution of Mezirow's work, and how it has been influenced by the work of Freire, Kuhn and Habermas. The final sentence of the article is worthy of continual repetition: 'Adult learning goes beyond acquisition of knowledge, it transforms action and in turn transforms the community in which learning takes place'.

The final article in this volume from Anna Hansen & Henrik Zipsane rather than considering how older people can provide new markets, looks at older people as a market. The context is sites of cultural activity, specifically an Open Air Museum in Sweden, and older citizens as a market for both social and learning activities and for commercial gain. The authors recognize that older people has been somewhat neglected by heritage sites and museums, and provides a number of arguments for a greater focus on this part of society.