

EDITORIAL PREFACE

Special Issue on Imagination and Power Issues in Adult Vocational Education

Patricia Cranton, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, Canada

I was honored when Victor Wang, the Editor-in-Chief of this journal invited me, along with Stephen Brookfield, to be a Co-Editor-in-Chief. I have a long history with adult education, beginning in the late 1970s. I have a special interest in adult vocational education, as I taught at the University of New Brunswick in a program for tradespersons who were making the transition into becoming teachers of their trades. I was a part of this program for about 25 years until it was moved out of the university and into a department in the provincial government. My students were, for example, practicing electricians, plumbers, auto mechanics, marine mechanics, hospitality workers, carpenters, and welders. For most, this program was the first time they had set foot on a university campus, and they walked softly and fearfully into this new world. By the end of the first intensive summer session, they were saying “I am a teacher of welding,” rather than “I am a welder.” It was a transformative experience for most people—a deep shift in identity.

As a Co-Editor in Chief, I happily agreed to organize a special issue for the IJAVET. I chose

two themes for the special issue: imagination in adult vocational education, and power issues in adult vocational education. These are important themes for the field, and they have not been well-addressed in the literature. I then recruited authors from people I know in the field and also through word of mouth. I hoped to honor the “international” in the journal’s title. I was only partially successful in this endeavor; the authors appearing in this issue come from Australia, Canada, the UK, and the US.

IN THIS ISSUE

The first article by James and Brookfield examines the use of play and metaphor. Two techniques are described—the use of “legos” to build metaphorical models and the use of labyrinths. The authors describe in detail workshops for 130 international students on a Diploma course designed to prepare them for progression to a UK fashion course with a design, business or media orientation. They go on to offer several applications of walking through labyrinths.

In the second article, Lovell and Karr describe the experience of community college students who were earning vocational and transfer degrees as they became researchers and shared their experience with others through traditional posters or interactive digital posters. The purpose of the study was to assess students' perceptions of research through a pre/post survey with three variables: interest in psychology, academic efficacy and project based learning /group work. Assessment measurements revealed changes among students indicating increased academic commitment through the lens of research.

Athanason describes, in the third article in this issue, the role of students' interests in their selection of courses in a vocational education program. In vocational psychology, six fundamental personality types based on general interests are proposed: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising and Conventional. The author chose to focus on those interests of the artistic or creative type, so as to align the article with the imagination theme. The author found that the role of imagination subjugated to other concerns even when though it was highly and independently ranked as a major career interest.

In the fifth article, Sawchuk addresses the complex and interrelated questions related to on-the-job vocational learning, power, and technological change in the context of dynamic notions of knowledge economy and contemporary public sector in Ontario, Canada. It is based on a seven year mixed-methods study (learning life-history interviews n=75; survey n=339). It seeks to explain the emergence of difference between the on-the-job vocational learning of newcomers and veteran workers. The author concludes that all workers in this context are desperately, searchingly, pragmatically, successfully and less successfully seeking a resolution to the contradictions of control amid the machinations of advancing austerity and monopoly-finance capitalism bearing down on the state and, in turn, their occupation. In so doing, they are tracing both the power and the limits of control at each step.

Willis takes a mythopoetic pedagogy approach to understanding creativity and imagination in adult vocational education in the sixth article. The article looks at the learning challenges of creating a convivial civilization in Australia. Willis examines the nature of human knowing and learning with particular interest in the imagination, and how different kind of knowing and learning can be evoked and shaped for human enrichment. He illustrates this with a description of practice story exchanges as a way of evoking informal learning about a just and convivial society in community settings.

In the final and seventh article in this special issue, Brookfield examines the way educators talk about power and proposes four elements that lie at the heart of powerful teaching: understanding how power dynamics intersect with adult educational approaches, supporting empowerment, helping learners understand how power works, and rendering teacher power transparent. Brookfield explores the problems and contradictions inherent in adult educators working in a democratic manner, especially in trying to balance their prescriptive agendas with a learner-centered approach.

Looking Forward

It is my hope that the articles in this special issue will inspire others to consider the role of imagination and power in adult vocational education in their practice and in their research. In light of the articles, I cannot help but to think back to my years of teaching tradespeople. We very often brought arts-based and imaginative activities into the learning process. I will never forget the paintings, sculptures, and collages created by the participants as they worked to understand their teaching roles. And just as important, if not more so, were the intense conversations and debates we had about politics and power in the community college system. I invite you to join in these kinds of reflections.

Patricia Cranton
Editor-in-Chief
IJAVET

Patricia Cranton earned her PhD in Measurement, Evaluation, and Computer Applications from the University of Toronto in 1976. She has taught at McGill University, Brock University, University of New Brunswick, St. Francis Xavier University, and Penn State University. She is currently a Professor of Adult Education (retired) affiliated with the University of New Brunswick in Canada.