

INVITED ARTICLE**Adult Education Journals:
Essential Tools for Professionals**

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Abstract

This article offers suggestions on how adult educators can use journal articles and other professional association opportunities for extending their practice and knowledge base. Written by the editor of *New Horizons in Adult Education*, it places our new journal, *Perspectives*, within the greater context of the field of adult education practice, scholarship, and research.

Never in our history has there been a time in which adult education professionals have been in greater need of up-to-date knowledge and expertise. The rapidly growing developments in learning technologies, particularly as they are related to different modes of distance learning, challenge us continually with new ideas and possibilities. In addition, the recent and dramatic cultural, social, and economic events in our world, country, and the state of New York present new environments and opportunities for adult learning.

At the same time, the growth of journals in adult education has been evident. A range of paper and electronic journals reflecting regional, national, and international interests, both scholarly and practitioner oriented, have been added to meet the needs of professionals working in the many diverse areas that characterize our field. In addition to the areas we have long recognized as part of the field, such as ABE/GED, literacy, ESL, post-secondary and higher education, continuing education, and training and development, distance education and E-learning have become prominent topics for articles. Further, many people in a wide range of positions and settings now realize that a key aspect of their work is to help adults to learn, and to be able to learn how to learn and become more competent learners. They are discovering the value of adult education journals.

These many diverse journals offer articles on research, conceptual analysis, thought pieces, book reviews, case studies, invitational columns, as well as those that focus on particular areas of practice. Sometimes theme issues, focusing on a particular area of practice, scholarship, or specific interest, provide a range of useful articles to the practitioner or scholar. The following are some examples of the diverse topics covered in theme issues I have noticed in recent years in different journals: action research, adult learners with disabilities, distance

learning, recent developments in philosophy, trends in religious education, women's literacy, and application of adult learning principles to web-based courses.

Journals in our field provide us with an excellent source of up-to-date material to help us learn new approaches and techniques and keep up with developments and technologies that we can apply in our day-to-day work. As an adult education professional I find these journals to be a rich source of information and ideas. As a faculty member teaching and advising doctoral students in a wide range of professional areas, I have been able to learn some of the new directions and trends in such areas as religious and military education, as well as keep up to date on adult learning theories and incidental and informal learning in the workplace. As a mentor at SUNY Empire State College, I have also learned many useful ideas from others in the field, such as new and effective strategies for working with adults with learning disabilities and a greater understanding of the learning needs of adults whose primary language is not English.

Our personal and professional development also is strengthened by connections with other adult education professionals who work in very different areas of the field, and even in other parts of the country or world. This learning from adult education journals with a focus on learners in diverse settings can greatly enrich our own understanding of the field, as well as our particular area of practice. Reading the story of one learner and the strategies that were used successfully in helping that person learn can help me with a learner I may work with tomorrow. Findings from recent research about adult learning may be added to my resources to share with graduate students and other adult educators. The richness of our field is directly related to the amazing diversity of adult learners, as well as the ever-growing range of areas of practice.

Professional journals, along with the organizations and institutions that publish them, provide those of us with a great source of personal and professional development. My first job in the field of adult education was in continuing higher education at Elmira College where membership in a professional organization brought with it the journal published by that group. As a result of reading this publication that focused on continuing higher education, I began to attend the regional annual meetings and eventually the annual national conferences. Involvement with this adult education association was responsible for my decision to pursue a doctorate in the field. Several years later I served as the president for that organization.

Adult education journals also provide an excellent and inexpensive source of information for use with staff and colleagues in our own organizations. Sharing an article with a colleague who has an interest in a particular area is greatly appreciated. Using an article as the basis

for a workshop, training program, or on-the-job learning can be a valuable way to learn a new strategy or provide the basis for discussion of the needs of the adult learners we serve.

For students in adult education, reading relevant journals in their particular area is essential. Faculty often introduce new students to the range of available adult education journals and use them as part of learning activities in courses and in bibliographies provided. I frequently have graduate students who bring to class recent articles they have found that add to the topic under discussion. The connection with professional adult education organizations and their publications often begins in graduate school and continues through years of professional practice.

For all of the reasons I have described in this article, I am delighted to be a part of welcoming *Perspectives: The New York Journal of Adult Learning* to the field of adult education. I am confident that this new journal will provide a rich source of learning for those of us who work in adult education in New York, as well as many others around the country and world!
