Discipline and hegemony in adult education journals: Editors’ perspectives

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As key vehicles for creating, communicating and legitimating knowledge, scholarly journals play a pivotal role in the life of any academic field. Much can be learned through considering how they disseminate research approaches and accomplishments, policy orientations, and reflections on practice. Academic journals not only represent the knowledge base of a given discipline, but also reflect its history, trends, research norms and social structure of communication between scholars and others with professional expertise (Brockett, 1991; McGinty, 1999; Weiner, 1998). This is particularly relevant in a comparatively new and diverse field like adult education. How adult education practitioners and scholars communicate with each other through their various journals, although necessarily partial and subjective, both reflects and constitutes the field and helps shape its future development.

The practice of analyzing scholarly publications has informed the study of adult education for some time (Blunt, 1994; Boshier & Pickard, 1977; Dickinson & Russell, 1971; Fisher & Martin, 1987; Taylor, 2001). However, despite some notable exceptions (e.g., Hayes 1992; Fejes, 2008), most analyses have tended to focus on one publication at a time rather than make comparisons with other journals in the field. Such studies also tend towards retrospective analyses of publication patterns or author characteristics rather than a consideration of the broader contexts of scholarly publishing, the social, economic and academic relationships involved, or the roles of journals in the processes of how academic fields are produced and reproduced.

Furthermore, one voice that is too rarely heard (at least publicly) in such discussions is that of the journal editor—the human face behind the metaphorical gate—who plays a crucial role in any process of legitimization and control (Wellington & Nixon, 2005). What perspectives on adult education do different editors provide through the window of their journal? What might they say about the nature of an academic journal itself, its ends and purposes, epistemological emphases, and academic norms? How do
academic journals and their editors contribute to or downplay particular worldviews of adult education? What are editors’ motivations and interests? What tensions and contradictions exist in their work? How far do editors’ conceptions of what matters shape the broader field and to what extent should they assume this role? What are editors’ responsibilities to develop new areas or approaches to study, encourage new (and old) talent, or build “quality”? What are their perspectives on “really useful research” and how do they promote critical perspectives on evidence-based policy and practice? What roles do they play in maintaining intellectual space in the emerging and growing agendas of journal metrics and quality assurance and the various requirements of commercial publishers? How do funding arrangements influence their work? How do editors view and balance the changing needs and demands of their readers, the authors they publish, and the demands of corporate and other owners and sponsors?

In an effort to address such questions and subject an important aspect of academic work to closer scrutiny, this symposium brings together several journal editors from the international field of adult education. The journals they edit are representative of those whose primary mission is to cover the broad fields of adult and continuing education and lifelong learning in the English-speaking world: *Adult Education Quarterly*, the *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*, the *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *Studies in Continuing Education* and *Studies in the Education of Adults*. Each editor in turn reflects on the questions raised above.

**David Boud (Studies in Continuing Education)**

It is important to start a discussion of academic journals in adult education with the basic questions: What is an academic journal? What can it do and what can’t it do? My view is that an academic journal is an outlet for publication of research and scholarly material in a given area in which decisions about what is and is not included are made through a process of peer review, that is, other scholars primarily make judgements. The editor has an important influence on who to choose, what to pass to these referees and how to deal with conflicts, but it is a brave editor who overrules a consensus among reviewers, for that is the route to undermining the integrity of the journal. I used to have the view that editors could be influential in shaping the direction of a discipline through encouraging authors to submit work in particular areas or of particular kinds. Having attempted that from time to time, I found that it rarely works unless one has identified a trend that was underway anyway and that there are other authors wanting to contribute to the direction. It worked in earlier years of the journal in the move to post-structural studies, to learning in workplaces and in doctoral education, but didn’t work then for professional learning or for critical reflections on practice. In the late 80s and early 90s I sought to position *Studies in Continuing Education* more squarely within continuing education, but there simply wasn’t
the volume of material available of sufficient standard to sustain such a
narrower interpretation of our brief.

Unfortunately, the number of well-written papers submitted is insufficient for
much opportunity for hegemonic decisions to get made by the editor’s initial
screening. When a paper arrives, the editor makes an initial judgement about
if it’s in scope and is sufficiently well executed to be sent to at least three
referees without embarrassment. The main reasons for rejection from *Studies
in Continuing Education* are that the paper does not deal with adult students,
is poorly written, the research conducted is so inadequate that referees could
not be expected to offer enough remedial advice, or the author is not familiar
with the most prominent literature on the topic (mainly because they have
come from another field and have engaged with little else). I have never
rejected a paper because it dealt with weird subject matter or strange
methodology or took a view that I would not take, so long as it was apparent
that it was dealing with some issue connected with adults learning.

The crucial stage of influence by editors is the selection of referees. The
majority of papers in all our journals would not have been published if editors
had not made an appropriate choice of referees. It is relatively easy to find a
referee for a paper to give it a hard time: just choose someone known to be
unsympathetic to a particular issue, methodology or orientation and you can
probably elicit a rejection. The integrity of the editor comes in seeking to find
referees who (a) are good scholars themselves and are published in some
aspect of the work being considered, (b) are not antagonistic to the approach
being adopted and (c) can offer comments to improve the quality of the work,
not just of the writing, but the location and conceptualization of the paper.
This I find the most demanding aspect of my role. It is fairly straightforward in
the areas I write in myself and where I am well read, but beyond that I find
myself delving into unknown areas and seeking the advice of those who I
think might have better contacts in these areas. On occasion this may involve
approaching several referees before finding someone who will take it on.

The next most important stage of decision-making is in dealing with
differences in referees’ reports. We normally have three referees. If two or
three say reject, then there is nothing more to be done. However, when this is
not the case, then I have to make the decision on the basis of the three
reports (rarely do I seek another report). I tend to discount recommendations
that appear to have come from antagonism to the approach used, but
following that there is considerable discretion open to me. While I am
influenced by the persuasiveness of the arguments, it is up to the editor to
choose what to focus on in a response. Few papers are accepted without
change, so I can influence what I highlight in my response and what I might
suggest authors ignore. At this stage I can still effectively reject the paper
even if I allow it to be resubmitted if the changes required are so onerous they
are unlikely to be undertaken. It is important to note that while details can be
influenced at this stage, and sometimes vastly improved papers result, unless
the referees put forward substantial objections, the type of paper and its
general approach has de facto been accepted. There is of course a
subsequent round of resubmission and review, but it is much less common for
the paper to be rejected or revised in a major way then.

This discussion makes clear that I see my main responsibility as an editor to
treat respectfully the material that is submitted and seek to bracket out my
prejudices. I am sure my personal predilections have an influence though. At
the margins I can influence the acceptance of a paper that I would like to see
published, but I have certainly published papers that I wouldn’t want to read
myself as a consumer of the journal or using approaches to which I am not
sympathetic. Editors have a wider responsibility though to encourage authors,
particularly those new to publishing. It is here that more direct influence
occurs. If someone presents something that impresses me at a conference,
then I do encourage them to submit a paper. If I get an email asking if
something might be suitable for the journal, I am more encouraging of things I
would like to see published or those new to publishing.

A part of this wider responsibility is to ensure the good standing of the journal.
With the rise of more journal-rating metrics in different countries, being well
placed on the league tables is becoming important. Some of these metrics
are generated by quantitative citation and impact studies, others by peer
esteem. It was particularly pleasing to get an ‘A’ rating in the recent Australian
ERA exercise which was mainly from peer esteem. The way to get and keep
good ratings I believe is by providing a good service to authors who want to
have their work published in outlets where it will be seen and read, and
increasingly which also have good ratings. It is a vicious cycle. We are now in
a sequence where the highest rating journals will attract better papers and will
become even better and those poorly rated will either see the quality or
quantity of papers diminish. In areas that are over-provided with journals,
some outlets will inevitably be lost. While publishers produce guidelines to
editors about how to position their journals well, there is however only a
limited amount that editors can do on this front.

In short, I have a relatively conservative view about the role of a journal. It
should act as an academic journal as best it can and not proselytize or distort
its operation because of other agendas. Journals create a marketplace of
ideas. We should be more concerned with ensuring that this marketplace
works effectively without external intrusions than with being market players
ourselves. Journals discipline authors by demanding that they write well and
have a compelling argument underpinned by compelling evidence, but when
they exert hegemony, the editor is probably the last person to be aware of it!

John Holford (International Journal of Lifelong Education)
Any field of academic inquiry is shaped by its academic journals and what they publish. The journal editor stands at the gateway between scholarly authors, from the most distinguished to the most inexperienced, and their readership. They therefore have both responsibility and power to shape scholarship. In education, as in other applied subjects from management to engineering, journals of scholarship and research also have a strong relationship to practice. Much adult education scholarship—though not all—is also marked by a strong normative dimension: it is concerned not just to relate to practice, but also to support and encourage particular forms of (typically democratic, participative) education and learning. In this respect, the typical adult education journal probably differs from the typical education journal; though by the same token I suspect the typical education journal has is more strongly normative than the typical management or engineering journal.

The *International Journal of Lifelong Education (IJLE)* has always sought to be a scholarly academic journal; although many of its papers relate to practice, it is not a journal of practice, or for practitioners. Its central mission has been to raise the quality of scholarship in the field. Having said that, its editors would, I think, see the journal as contributing to a scholarly field which they also see in normative terms. If asked to define this in terms of foundational literature, each of the editors would probably mention different names—there is certainly no “editorially approved” list of great works—but the major figures of liberal and radical adult education (Dewey, Tawney, Yeaxlee, Freire and so on) would certainly figure. In terms of contemporary policy themes, they would wish to encourage contributions that view social inclusion and citizenship as central to the purpose of adult education rather than accepting a narrowly vocational or “skills” agenda. In terms of theoretical or political concerns, there would be a strong encouragement for investigations and perspectives relating to gender, ethnicity and class; and for those which draw out issues of power and inequality; and for those which speak to the concerns of ‘non-western’ parts of the world.

Is the particular attitude of *IJLE* editors related to their age, their ethnicity, their social class, or their gender? During the 1990s, during a symposium at the AERC conference in Saskatoon, Canada (Peters et al., 1992), prominent editors in the field were subjected to a major assault by their ‘younger’ colleagues. The argument, much abbreviated and grossly over-simplified, was that when editors acted as ‘gatekeepers’, they served to exclude new and creative, but particularly more (politically) radical, perspectives. Of course, many of the targets of that assault have now retired (as indeed have some of the most strident critics), and some of the critics are now themselves senior editors in the field. No serious social scientist would doubt that men and women are shaped by their biographies; the present editors of journals are no exceptions. One can certainly identify links between the concerns addressed by the editors of *IJLE*, for example, in some of their editorials, with
particular aspects of their social, cultural or ideological formation. (A recent editorial, for instance, refers to Tawney and Raymond Williams (Editors, 2009)). To some extent, editors are custodians of traditions and values they hold dear.

But of course journals cannot afford to speak only to those concerned with tradition. Adult education is a fast-moving field, shaped by the rapid technological, cultural, social and economic changes such as those to which the label ‘globalisation’ has in recent years attached. Journals which remained locked in the past would command declining readerships; and publishers (increasingly corporate giants, and certainly in the last resort concerned with their ‘bottom line’) would certainly notice. Editorial meetings regularly receive publishers’ reports on circulation: trends in subscriptions by country, for instance, or the developing shift from a ‘paper-based’ to an ‘on-line’ readership. I can recall no occasion when a specific editorial decision (to publish or not to publish) has been influenced by commercial concerns, but there is certainly a desire to encourage contributions on topical or emerging issues or themes. One can see this in the focus of special issues, and in the gradually shifting “aims and scope” flags under which journals sail. And publishers have an apparently insatiable desire to increase the size and frequency of journals; a trend which, as editors, we resist quite firmly—justifying our position on grounds of quality.

From a marketing perspective, one threat to adult education scholarship is certainly the shift to journal ‘metrics’ and the widespread redefinition of ‘quality’ in metric terms. A particular problem here is the focus of many metrics-based research quality systems on commercial databases such as the Thomson Reuters Social Sciences Citation Index (http://thomsonreuters.com/products_services/scientific/Social_Sciences_Citation_Index). The SSCI, for instance, features only one adult education journal (Adult Education Quarterly). Attempts by others to join are rejected, generally with little or no explanation, but chiefly one suspects because the field is a small one with little commercial ‘clout’. Yet the criteria and procedures for gaining inclusion, or exclusion, are hardly transparent. It is the SSCI (and the ‘web of science’ of which it is part) that forms the basis of most impact factors. In some countries, there is already a discounting of publications which do not appear in the SSCI: a matter of some concern. (Interestingly, Australia, whose Research Council is currently attempting to construct its own independent journal rankings, has come to judgements often rather at odds with the SSCI’s.)

We have all learned over recent decades that markets matter: but they are the context, not the first or overwhelming priority, for editors. The principal concern is to contribute to a field which is vibrant, renewing itself with new scholars and scholarship, relevant to concerns of practice, yet also concerned with principle and what matters. Albeit at some distance, academic journals
contribute to political and policy perspectives. For this reason, in a commentary arising from the current economic crisis, the editors of IJLE recently asserted:

It is time to call a halt to the pretence that education is justified by the economic alone. The civilised society requires more than consumer durables and tradeable derivatives. It requires values and principles. It requires rigorous and organised knowledge and understanding. This means … making a humane, liberal lifelong education available as a matter of principle to all members of society—not only to the élite.

This can be done. Occasionally, something close to it has been achieved. But seldom for long: it is in the nature of the disciples of Mammon, who value commodities only by their scarcity, to see to that. But their values have held sway for too long. Over the years ahead, those who have brought the world’s economy to its present pass will assert the need for more of the same: more competition, more vocationalisation in education, more targeting on identified outcomes. After all, money will be scarce (at least for those who have not squirreled away their excess profits); it must be spent cost-effectively. But as educators, we must contest the de-intellectualisation, de-valuing and de-humanisation of our calling, and of the human society which we serve. It is time to reopen the debate on educational principles—and to assert the human value of lifelong education. (Editors 2009)

Tom Nesbit (Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education)

Founded in 1981, CJSAE is owned by the scholarly association that promotes the study of adult education in Canada. It currently publishes a print issue twice annually; each issue containing four articles (written in either English or French) plus a number of book reviews. Articles can be reports of original research, critical reviews of the literature, essays that focus on analytic examinations and critiques of issues in adult and continuing, biographical and autobiographical reflections on the field and practice of adult education. Although the journal accepts manuscripts from anywhere, its editorial policy claims to privilege the Canadian practice of adult education and the practice of Canadian adult educators. CJSAE also seeks to address the emergent issues affecting adult education and adopt a critical perspective on all aspects of adult education theory and practice. As editor, my concern is to uphold and further this tradition whilst also maintaining an avowedly bilingual approach and reflecting the broader concerns of the scholarly association, the diverse interests of fellow adult educators in Canada, and the extensive and broad practice of Canadian adult and continuing education.

One of the key factors affecting the journal involves some uniquely Canadian characteristics. Ethnically diverse and multicultural, Canada is physically huge (4.5m sq mi) though with only a relatively small population (30m). Only about a dozen of its 70 universities offer programs in adult and continuing education and these tend to be located quite distant from each other. This means that
the adult education professoriate and student body is relatively small and rarely gets to meet and interact with each other. Despite that, Canada hosts a variety of adult education organisations, associations and networks of scholars, policy makers and practitioners that variously promote adult learning and the interests of adult learners, provide forms of adult education to specific sectors of society or promote various facets of adult education. These groups draw upon a rich adult education tradition that (like so much of Canadian culture) has developed from its aboriginal and colonial heritages, its proximity to the USA and the successive waves of immigration from countries in Europe, Asia and Central and Southern America. Not surprisingly, Canada has also a strong reputation for internationalism, not least in adult education where Canadians have played a prominent role in international adult education organisations for many years. To acknowledge and reflect this diversity, both *CJSAE* and its parent organisation have tried to foster a distinctively Canadian approach to adult education that encompasses these academic, professional and practitioner perspectives. This approach has been recently summarized as:

A set of unyielding social purposes, informed by passion and outrage, and rooted in a concern for the less-privileged; a systematic and sustained philosophical and critical analysis that develops the abilities to connect immediate, individual experiences with underlying societal structures; and a keen attention to the specific sites, locations, and practices where such purposes and analyses are made real in the lives of Canadians. (Fenwick, Nesbit & Spencer, 2006, p. 17)

In practice this means that *CJSAE* acts as an important resource for Canadian adult educators to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and encourage diverse groups to feel united in common interest. Not only does the journal allow for dissemination of the academic work of Canadian adult educators but it also tries to address, in an educational way, the specific issues and challenges that mark Canadian society. *CJSAE*'s editors believe that debate and research about such issues is important but also that challenges to received ideas are both healthy and necessary. They view the study and practice of adult and continuing education as informed by a multiplicity of voices and perspectives. So for them, the practice of adult education in Canada is not the manifestation of a set of abstract concepts but one part of a broader and vital mission for “really useful knowledge” that helps build and sustain a Canadian movement of adult education committed to creating a more equitable world.

That’s the rhetoric anyway. In practice, the extent to which *CJSAE* reflects this policy is dependent upon the practicalities of academic journal publication and the number, foci and quality of the manuscripts it receives. In its almost 30 year history, the journal has regularly changed editorial homes: tending to move every 3 or 4 years. The day-to-day editorial work is carried out by a small band of volunteers with regular jobs as adult education academics or
professionals (usually at the same institution) supported by a diehard cadre of authors, reviewers and consulting editors. For most of its early years CJSAE also dealt with the printing and distribution aspects of journal production but with only sporadic institutional support this proved unwieldy and occasionally led to publication delays and all the attendant frustration, reduction in support and loss of reputation. To counter this, CJSAE has recently shifted the production aspect of its work to a commercial scholarly publisher, which has both sharpened its commercial approach and appearance and raised its prominence and visibility in academic and practitioner circles. Of course, this comes at enhanced cost but the benefits have allowed the editors to concentrate on improving the journal’s scholarly product and reputation. To date, CJSAE has yet to be explicitly challenged by the rise in journal metrics—although as Canadian scholars are subject to the same pressures to publish as their counterparts, I’m sure they compare different journals before choosing where to submit their manuscripts. My hope is that Canadian scholars would always choose a Canadian journal first but my editorial responsibilities lie in improving the journal’s quality so that my hopes become real.

In addition, as much as editors are portrayed has having a gatekeeper role, they can only publish what gets submitted…and the decisions about which manuscripts are accepted or rejected are made on the basis of blind review by several of the journal’s panel of consulting editors rather than by editors’ personal proclivities or interests. This is not usually much of an issue: we don’t receive an overwhelming number of manuscripts (about 25/year) and most (90%) clearly fall within our editorial remit. So, the decision about whether to publish or not is dependent upon answers to the standard questions we ask of reviewers: How important is the research and/or theoretical problem? How well-defined is the purpose? How well-developed and appropriate are the theoretical frameworks and literature reviews? How sound are the methodological approaches? How well-supported and convincing are the inferences and conclusions? Are the theoretical and practical implications appropriately indicated? How well-organized, well-written, and readable is the manuscript?

Where uncertainties occasionally arise—and the editor’s judgement called for—lie in the area of what’s considered in or out of scope. With a field (or moorland in Richard Edwards’ term) as rich and diverse as adult education, I tend to adopt a fairly catholic approach: so long as the manuscript focuses on adults (however defined) and some aspect of their learning or education or the contexts in which these processes occur and draws upon at least some of the adult education literature then it’s deemed in scope and sent out for review. So, judgements about quality and inclusion are based upon our reviewers’ individual professional opinions. Rather than reflecting any universal norms, these appear instead to be grounded in a tacit and socially-situated set of conventions and customs about what is acceptable. When
differences in opinion occur, the editors seek additional reviews and then debate the concerns in board meetings until consensus is reached. This aspect of editorial work seems to me to be less about the conventional gatekeeping role of policing and control and more a way to better stimulate debate and discussion and hopefully facilitate engagement between different forms of knowledge and meaning. In practice, CJSAE’s editors see their role as the entirely appropriate adult education approach of not shutting the gate to keep people (or diverse opinions and approaches) out but rather opening it to let them in.

**Edward W. Taylor (co-editor Adult Education Quarterly)**

The *Adult Education Quarterly (AEQ)* is the official academic journal for the American Association of Adult and Continuing Education. Established in 1950 as *Adult Education*, it originally emphasized program descriptions and personal experiences of teaching and adult learning where as today it focuses exclusively on theory and research and is a major outlet for the academic profession of the study of adult education. In understanding the perspective (e.g., world-view, ideology) of the journal, one approach is to look back and analyze what has been published over a period of time. For example, the last six years of the *AEQ* reveals an evolving portrait of scholarship: articles about adult learning still dominate although cultural issues (e.g., gender, race) show a growing presence and there continues to be little research about human resource development, teaching, or historical topics. Another approach, less typical, though just as revealing is reviewing the mission statements of the journal over time. For example, in 1979 the mission of the journal was “devoted to research and theory”…. [and] manuscripts concerned with the implementation of the arts and techniques of practice” were seen out of scope. Almost 30 years later *AEQ* mission keeps the same focus, that of theory and research, but now recognizes the growing complexities in research methodology and the nature of scholarship in general. For example, the current mission includes:

> The *AEQ* publishes research employing a variety of methods and approaches, including … survey research, experimental designs, case studies, ethnographic observations and interviews, grounded theory, phenomenology…..Innovative and provocative scholarship informed by diverse orientations is encouraged, including … positivism, post-positivism, constructivism, critical theory, feminism, race-based/Africentric, gay/lesbian, and poststructural/postmodern theories.

However, what these approaches don’t reveal about a journal’s perspective or “story” are factors that play a role in shaping the editorial process. In other words, the journal is not just a product of the mission statement it expresses or the manuscripts it receives and ultimately publishes. There are several contextual factors that play a role, to a greater or lesser extent, in shaping the production of the journal. These factors are often overlooked and rarely discussed, but are always present in the editorial process.
One factor is the journal’s proprietor, the institution or association that owns the journal, selects the journal editors, oversees operating expenses of the journal, and establishes a relationship with the publisher. Being owned by the American Association of Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE) provides AEQ with academic credibility among the Association’s membership and connects them to the academic side of adult education. Along with this scholarly cachet, the AEQ also provides a substantial amount of income through the sale of individual and institutional subscriptions and the successful management of the journal is key to the Association’s professional well-being. In other words, the journal must both maintain its integrity with the academy and garner a substantial readership or it will not be successful and serve the needs of AAACE. Connected intimately to the fiscal benefits and professional visibility of the journal is a second factor, that of its publisher SAGE.

SAGE is the marketing and press arm for the AEQ. For most of its existence the AEQ operated without a publisher and the Editors and the Association handled the marketing, editing, copy-editing, and proofing of the journal. In the mid-nineties SAGE assumed these responsibilities with a consequentially substantive impact—demonstrated by a significant increase in visibility, manuscript submissions, and growth in sales of the journal. For example, one significant byproduct of this relationship was placing the journal submission and production process totally on-line (e.g., Scholar One). This web-based system helps the journal streamline the submission of manuscripts, monitors the review process, manages the production of accepted manuscripts, and allows for easy administrative, editing and reviewing capabilities. As result (along with other factors), the journal’s submission rate has increased by over 60% over the last three years. However, a less obvious impact of this on-line submission system has been access to and analysis of data about publication activity of the journal. The data allows the publisher the means to annually evaluate of the journal, based on a nationally recognized impact factor (citations of publications in other nationally recognized journals). As a result the publisher’s relationship with the editors expands beyond just “publishing” the journal. Sage now regularly proposes action plans (e.g., to published widely cited authors and literature reviews; promote international diversity among submissions; market at major conferences etc.) to the editors in an effort to raise the journal’s scholarly impact.

A third factor is the varied perspectives of the editors themselves. AEQ currently has three editors, which allows for varying perspectives on what is considered adult education “scholarship”. Having multiple editors also provides an opportunity for rich dialogue and multiple views on reviewing submitted manuscripts. Also, the work of AEQ with a growing submission rate, is shared and the burden on one editor is not so great. Where differences among the editors are most evident is discussion of potentially
out-of-scope manuscripts. Roughly 20% of the manuscripts to the journal are screened out of scope, meaning they inadequately demonstrate significance for and connection to the field of adult education or are so poorly written and/or conceptualized the outcome is readily apparent. Deciding on if a manuscript should be reviewed, particularly those that are potentially out of scope, brings light these differences among editors. Although, the editors’ most important decisions are informed by their consulting editors on the editorial board who are responsible for reviewing manuscripts.

The editorial board, another factor, is the academy of scholars who review and make decisions on submitted manuscripts. In many ways they are like-minded about the nature of research and standards for publication. This like-mindedness helps ensure consistency, but at the same time the journal becomes risk averse and is slow to respond to the trends of the time, discouraging publication of manuscripts that don’t fit the norms of the journal (e.g., young adults, other ways of knowing). Like my colleagues I am captured by the same academic norms and standards. In response to the slowly changing nature of the journal is the importance of recognizing that the selection of the CE board is one of the most important decisions when taking over the editorship of the journal. They are the true gatekeepers, determining what manuscripts go to press, through timely and thorough reviews. Even though my co-editors and I play a role in the gate-keeping process, we see the editor more as a liaison between the reviewers and authors honoring the integrity of the reviews, even though at times they might be at odds with our own professional opinion. The challenge lies in accurately interpreting the CE’s intent and making decisions about the status of submissions when reviews are not in agreement. Editor needs to be both a sentry in maintaining the integrity the journal, and an advocate for the author(s) who gives much time and energy in preparation of a manuscript.

These contextual factors a role in shaping the story of the journal, determining to a greater less extent, what is considered scholarship in the field of adult education. Coming to terms intellectually with the competing voices about a manuscript makes the editorial process exciting and a welcome distraction from the often mundane and instrumental nature of editorial work–writing letters, maintaining contact with authors, and managing the publication process.

**Miriam Zukas (Studies in the Education of Adults)**

When I finally sat down to address some of questions for this symposium, I was struck by the ways in which editors and journals were positioned by the opening questions (and by would-be contributors) as relatively powerful in establishing, developing and maintaining intellectual territory and knowledge. I do not want to deny that journals and editors are part of the academic power game. But the problem for me is the implied reach of their influence, for example in creating the shape of the discipline, sponsoring the areas written
about (or silenced), or responding to ‘needs and demands’ of readers, authors and others.

My view is that the journal does not in some inanimate way ‘reflect’ the field of study which I, as Editor, maintain and patrol, or that I shape the broader field in any way. Instead, I find it more helpful to think of the journal in terms of actor-network theory (ANT). Whilst there are many versions of ANT, most share the premise of ‘relational materiality’ in which ‘materials do not exist in and of themselves but are endlessly generated and at least potentially reshaped’ (Law, 2004, p 161). Actors might include humans, journals, technologies, machines, research instruments, texts, policies and so on. If the journal is an actor, it does something (Latour, 2005), along with all the other actors (authors, reviewers, editor, publisher, and so on) in the network of the education of adults.

So far, so good. But the actor-network is not a fixed entity which is constituted by its actors (the Editor, the Executive Board, the journal, the contributors); it exists with other actor-networks as ‘fluid and contested definitions of identities and alliances that are simultaneously frameworks of power’ (Nespor, 1994, p 9). Whether or not the actor-network can be defined as a field of practice depends on its success as a stable entity ‘constituted by cycles of accumulation within networks that organise flows of people through space and time’ (Nespor, 1994, pp10-11). In the case of the education of adults (and not adult education, as I explain below), I suspect that the actor network’s success depends rather more on the intersections with emergent and stabilising actor-networks (workplace learning, higher education pedagogies, lifelong learning policy fields, to name a few) and rather less on the journal or its Editor per se.

Perhaps this is seen most clearly in retrospect. The journal was started, 40 years ago, by the British Universities Council for Adult Education. Elsewhere I provide a full account of the first edition (Zukas, 2008) but essentially it looked like an attempt to establish a rather weak new actor-network. The then Editor, Tom Kelly, suggested that, whilst Britain was one of the ‘foremost countries in the world in practising adult education’ (and as far as the universities were concerned, this would have meant extramural provision), it needed to establish adult education as a legitimate intellectual field in universities. He argued that adult educators had now to draw on theoretical ideas from sociology and other social sciences in order to develop academic and professional self-awareness and critique. So that first edition included short reviews of relevant articles from other journals, as well as papers about practice, policy and, most notably, a paper positioning the academic and professional study of the education and training of adults firmly within the social and behavioural sciences (Duke and Marriott, 1969).
If the journal had retained that focus on extramural provision, how ironic it would have been to be writing this today, as two more English universities (Reading and Bristol) announce the death of their specialist adult provision. But *Studies* does not reflect a field of practice or study; instead, together with its various editors, Executive Board members, International Advisory Group, authors, referees, readers, publisher(s) and sponsors, it has constituted a new actor-network—*the education of adults*. That network exists in time and space through actors’ disciplinary practices (reading each other’s work, meeting informally at conferences, reviewing applications for funding, acting as referees, writing together, existing as a text, etc). The actor-network is asserted partly through the title of the journal itself, and partly through an explicit statement at the back of the journal where it ‘acknowledges and promotes the study of the education of adults as a field of study in its own right (as opposed to an academic site for other established subject areas).’

The rhetorical move to ‘the education of adults’ signals a freshly-constituted and potentially more inclusive (more powerful) actor-network than adult education. But proclaiming the network as more inclusive also requires diligent interpretation: just because adults are the subjects of a study, does that make this an appropriate subject for the journal? And what does it mean to talk about the *education* of adults—do we mean only that which is intentionally pedagogic? What about the media? Or work? Who decides?

The interests and concerns of the Editorial Board and the International Advisory Group (IAG), as well as their interpretation of ‘the education of adults’, are critical in these negotiations, and membership of those groups is controlled, not by the Editor, but by the Editorial Board. The *Studies* Board also has a policy that papers are reviewed by a member of the Board or IAG, and, significantly, by someone from a country other than the author’s. Within these constraints, the Editor chooses reviewers and, to this extent, is able to decide who would (or would not) be able to comment on this and other aspects of the article. Such decisions are reliant on the actor-network—who one knows, or at least whom one has heard of in connection with the putative field. Often, as Editor, I will seek advice from members of the Board, on the suitability or otherwise of papers for the journal, or appropriate reviewers, further developing the actor-network of the education of adults in the process.

But those who write for the journal are also part of the actor-network—at least potentially—provided they remember that they have to claim membership and to show that there is overlap in time and/or space with other members of the network. This is often the point of failure rather than the content of the study. Reviewers having to judge whether a paper ‘acknowledges and promotes’ the education of adults are more likely to agree that it does if the author cites others who write for the journal, particularly in connection with debates which are ongoing within the journal. We frequently reject papers whose authors fail to do this. I might implore new writers who send me suggested articles to read...
papers which have already been published in the journal, but there is no guarantee that they will take my advice, not least because they are part of other actor-networks and cannot recognise the existence of this one.

This analysis is intended to throw a different light on the question of discipline and hegemony in adult education journals from the usual ‘gate-keeping’ view of editors. This is not to deny my own interests and passions: of course, there are submissions that bore me rigid; proposals which seem to me to be on (or over) the edge; approaches that are (polite) experimental (in the non-methodological sense); papers which I hate. But those are my views: they do not determine what is published in the journal or what constitutes knowledge in the field. That is a much more complex process.

References


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