

This issue: Changing literacies

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Features

3 **New literacies for new times: the convergence of the internet and literacy instruction**

by Donald J. Leu Jr.

Using the internet means finding a new form of literacy. The alternative is to keep adult education shackled to the past.

7 **NESB youth and the internet: fuelling the spark of motivation**

by Terry O'Reilly

Teaching with the internet was once a relatively simple experience, but the increasing sophistication of software, computers and students means educators need to keep their wits about them as much as ever.

15 **Reading the new museum: an email panel**

with Margaret Griffith, Geraldine Zeccola, Barbara Goulborn and Daryl Evans

The new Melbourne Museum—how successful is its mix of traditional and ultra-modern presentations? A panel of museum staff members has an email discussion with *Fine Print*.

Regulars

19 **Foreign Correspondence**

Charles Ramsey tells about Canada's National Adult Literacy Database Inc.

21 **Open Forum**

Mary Rogers presents DETYA's reply to last edition's article about the LANT program, Chris Anderson examines the internet's role as a literacy tool, Isy Bylander says it is just one of many tools and Julia Griffin talks about the difference between screen and paper-based texts.

27 **Policy Update**

Should the LANT and AEMP programs be merged? Definitely not, says VALBEC.

29 **Beside the Whiteboard**

What are Artistbooks? What is Mailart? David Dellafiora explains.

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Editorial

Here is the winter edition of *Fine Print*, with a theme of 'changing literacies', following on from the last edition which looked at the changing contexts of literacy.

Donald Leu makes the point that change is eternal where learning, literacy and technology are concerned. In fact there's a word for it—deixis. Read his article and you'll find that something 'deictic' is something that's impossible to pin down, because it's always changing. A new word for this editor—more evidence that you just never stop learning.

Terry O'Reilly follows his popular spot at the recent VALBEC conference with an article exploring the changing ways that young people learn in a technological environment, and how technology can increase motivation.

The new Melbourne Museum has created a stir with its constructivist, popular-culture approach, bringing in adult learners by the bus load. *Fine Print* invited a number of interesting and involved people to join a discussion via email—a sort of 'e-panel'. The results are thought provoking, and should have you visiting the museum again to think for yourself.

In Open Forum, we have some thoughts from Isy Bilander, Chris Anderson and Julia Griffin on how the changing literacies of the technological era are affecting classroom practices.

There's also a continuation of the debate started by Pauline O'Maley and Karen Manwaring on LANT (DETYA's Literacy And Numeracy Training Program). Mary Rogers, the manager of the programs unit at DETYA, Victoria, writes a reply which is timely, given the current consultation paper.

The VALBEC General Committee has taken a position on this consultation paper, printed here in Policy Update.

Finally, in *Beside the Whiteboard*, *Fine Print* chats with David Dellafiora, a practitioner with a different approach and background from many in the field. In the context of changing literacies, his practice draws on the traditions of visual literacy and art publishing.

Read and enjoy—and remember—the most useful skill for anyone, learner, teacher or administrator, is the ability to adapt to change.

VALBEC aims to lead the adult literacy field through identifying issues of importance to practitioners and facilitating positive change. This is achieved through networking, professional support, the sharing of information and the promotion of best practice.

NESB youth and the internet: fuelling the spark of motivation

by Terry O'Reilly

This paper is designed to be a practical guide for teachers working with the internet, particularly those involved with ESL and ESL literacy delivery to youth.

Setting the scene

The class is using the internet to conduct research on chosen topics as I roam the room attending to students in need of assistance. The students seem genuinely interested in the upcoming excursion and several have the Parliament of Victoria home page up on their screens. At closer scrutiny, I see four sites minimised at the bottom of one student's screen: *napster.com* (a music download site), *arabchat.com* (a chat line), *blueskyfrog.com* (a mobile phone site) and *hotmail.com* (a free email service). In the classroom window I can see the reflection, from another screen, of a naked woman.

A few years ago, teaching with the internet was a comfortable experience, apart from the obligatory technology failures. Teachers could direct learners to targeted searches, set up email networks and facilitate a website construction project in a collaborative learning environment. As students become more internet savvy, teachers are confronted with the questions of, 'What activities are considered a worthwhile use of time?' and 'How do we facilitate learning without stifling motivation?' This paper proposes that trying to control the anarchic nature of the internet is futile and that much is gained by 'going with the flow' of the learners.

The YAMEC multimedia class

YAMEC (Young Adult Migrant Education Course) students are aged between 15 and 26, and generally are refugees with interrupted schooling in their first country. Completing secondary education in Australia is not a realistic option for most of these students. YAMEC is a holistic bridging program for students on a pathway to mainstream TAFE courses or employment. The social aspect of the program is crucial, creating a sense of belonging. Many of the students have come through the secondary school system where they are on the periphery, but after spending time in the course they develop friendships and a realisation that everybody here is in the same boat.

The multimedia stream accommodates those with an interest in computers. Students have a minimum six hours per week of computers, as part of a 20 hour-per-week program. They

are encouraged to explore their own interests, especially during internet access time, as a medium for developing language and literacy skills. Invariably these students are obsessed with mobile phones, email, MP3 music, computer games, pornography, L₁ sites, and chat lines. With the exception of pornography, which is prohibited and inappropriate in this setting, significant language and literacy value can be extracted from all of these activities.

Motivation and the flow

Underpinning the methodology of YAMEC multimedia is the belief in the importance of motivation. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) uses the term *flow* to describe the sensation of being intensely focused and totally immersed in a creative act—sustained periods of peak motivation, losing all sense of time as we are engrossed in something we love doing. When I discovered that one student had spent more than fifteen hours on the internet over one weekend, I pondered the likelihood of him spending that amount of time on teacher directed homework. What benefits was he obtaining? Was he just wasting time? To assess the value of the internet activities we need to launch ourselves into the world of the learner.

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Music-related internet sites record more hits than sites of any other single subject area and are popular predominantly with youth. The process of searching for music and downloading requires substantial multiliteracy demands, involving both traditional print literacy and the symbol systems of the internet. Understanding of computer-related concepts—file management, compatibility, system requirements, and so on—is also required. Students who are deficient in these skills or lack the necessary knowledge are motivated by the desire to have their own copy of Tupac's latest posthumous release.¹

Usually two or three students in the class have had experience with the music downloading process, creating a natural knowledge gap within the group. The room is a hive of activity as they discuss how to search, how to spell a particular word, how to get volume on their machine, how to download an MP3 player, how to open the file once it has been saved, and where to save the song because it won't fit

on a floppy disk.² The issue of storage was resolved in one situation by a student alerting another to www.xdrive.com—a site that allows you to store 100Mb of data for free, solving the problem of where to keep your songs.

Mobile phone sites create a similar communication frenzy in the internet lab. We have a policy in the program of no mobile phones as they are a major disruption to classes, with the exception of the internet lab where they can be useful tools. Students seek to find their favourite songs as ring tones, download graphics for their telephone displays or seek better deals from alternative phone companies. Email, L₁ sites and games also have the potential to be excellent activities for collaborative problem solving and target language development. So what is the teacher doing while the students are 'flowing'?

Role of the teacher

- 1 It is important for students to have a goal in order to maintain focus. The class can degenerate into a mind-numbing waste of time if they don't know what they are looking for. A ten minute meeting with the class away from the screens to discuss what students have planned for the session is a good way to establish some short term goals. It gives the teacher a chance to prepare for foreseen problems and offer suggestions, which may take the learners in a particular direction that the teacher sees as beneficial. Discussions away from the machines are essential if you want students to give their undivided attention, while time in front of the machines can be used for one-to-one/small group communication. Meetings at the outset of a lesson also provide the opportunity to revise the previous day, establish continuity and raise any concerns people may have. Of course, the initial class should involve a discussion about the value of project-oriented learning compared to teacher-centred learning. It is important to gauge resistance to the student-centred approach and accommodate learners by negotiating the curriculum.
- 2 It may not be the teacher's aim to avert problems. In fact, this may be counter-productive to achieving the desired language development outcomes obtained through collaborative problem solving. One thing a combination of people and technology provides is the potential for unlimited problems. For example, a student suggested that he would like to download *Napster*, a software program that allows MP3 files to be shared around the world. Virtually any recorded song can be found through *Napster* or similar software programs. Of course, this attracted the interest of the majority of the class and in small groups they set out to first download the software and then find their favourite songs.

However, many organisations prohibit the use of such software because it operates on a *peer-to-peer* basis—

exposing the school or institute's system to potential security risks—so a firewall is set up to stop the use of these programs.³ Withholding this information from students was, in a way, setting them up for failure, but knowing there was an alternative avoided major frustration. In any case, tinkering often produces unpredictable results and the group gained far more from the activity than would have occurred if I had just explained the reason for not being able to access the songs through *Napster*. As a result, students were involved in a collaborative problem-solving activity which demanded not only the pooling of their knowledge but provided exposure to the multiliteracies of digital electronic texts which are based on the notions of hybridity and intertextuality.

The lateral connectedness of hypertext, which users access by clicking on buttons and hotlinks, immerses the navigators in an intertextual and multimodal universe of visual, audio, symbolic, and linguistic meaning systems. In hypertext navigation, reading writing and communicating are not linear or unimodal (that is, exclusively language and print-based) but demand a multimodal reading of laterally connected, multi-embedded and further hotlinked information resources variously coded in animation, symbols, print text, photos, movie clips, or three-dimensional and manoeuvrable graphics (Luke, 2000).

- 3 To intervene or not to intervene? Teacher intervention can act as a lubricant, so less time is wasted when students 'seize up' at dead end sites. Students can become disengaged from the activity when they have lost their way or focus. Tinkering and the lateral connections of hyperlinks can take the learners a long way from their objective, and it is the teacher's role to intervene by redirecting the student. One of the dangers of the internet is that it can easily become a distraction. Companies have gone to great efforts to redirect the user—advertising ruses, site entry buttons disguised as warning dialogue boxes, exit crosses in the right hand corner of the window that take you to another site, and so on—in the hope that he or she will part with a credit card number.
- 4 The teacher's role is to initiate activity and interaction, and to help students sustain engagement (Debski, 2000). Creating a sense of the group is vital if your aim is to establish a socio-collabrative, technology-enhanced learning environment. This can be done through providing opportunities for natural social interaction (barbecues, parties, sporting events) and can be consolidated through the use of group photos—concrete proof that we are working together as a group on a common project (Barson, 1997). Without peer support in the internet lab the teacher is left frantically trying to assist all students at once as they inevitably hit barriers.

it is important to gauge resistance to the student-centred approach

5 The more I understand a student, the better position I am in to assist him/her. Working closely with students while they explore their passion provides an insight into their sense of identity that otherwise may never surface. It is amazing what is revealed incidentally while the learner is experiencing the flow of intense motivation, in particular vocational aspirations and leisure interests. The teacher's skill is crucial in recognising a spark that can be fuelled by some useful advice or minor assistance. For example, one of the students' most pressing concerns in this course is what they are going to do in Australia. Vocational counselling is an integral component and the student directed learning here provides an insight into not only language and literacy competence but also sheds light on personalities, subject-specific knowledge levels and suitability for further study pathway options.

6 As a facilitator in this learner-directed approach, the teacher needs to be creative in finding extension exercises. It is easy to revert to producing 'literacy-type' worksheets developed from internet sources, but more often than not this has the effect of breaking the flow. I have found that even though a student may be passionate about a particular topic that he spends hours researching on the internet, when it appears on paper as a close exercise, information gap exercise, speed copying text, cut-up word sequencing exercise, vocabulary-building task or recount, the interest is not there.

I am not suggesting the traditional approaches to teaching literacy are not valuable for NESB youth, but from my experience it is unreasonable to expect the same enthusiasm as witnessed in the computer lab purely because it is the same topic. What sometimes works, as you are looking over the shoulder of a student, is recommending he/she attempt something on a site that you feel has some particular language value. It may be asking them to download software, complete a registration form, cut and paste some text that has certain information in it, rename files or explain to another student an aspect of the site. This often happens naturally without intervention. Ideally, their internet work would be part of a larger project enabling greater depth and continuity. Project-oriented learning lends itself to exploration and the learner-centred approach.

7 It is important for the teacher to have enough technical knowledge to extend students' technical knowledge, to be aware of further study/vocational options and recognise the broader educational value in activities rather than merely emphasise language and literacy goals. It is true that amongst young NESB youth, computers are often seen as a panacea or at least a guarantee of a secure, prestigious, well paid job. This in itself is a motivating factor regardless of its accuracy.

Therefore, for those intending to undertake information technology courses, exploring the internet is a little like learning language through the topic-based approach. Technical aspects can be highlighted for their knowledge-building potential—file management, file compression, networks, role of the server, downloading, installing, software and hardware are all interesting and motivating for someone wishing to work with computers.

8 The teacher is responsible for encouraging students to reflect on the activity and in so doing develop a meta-language to discuss the target language gains from this approach to learning. Self-assessment can be incorporated as a useful tool in a project-oriented approach.

9 Exploring sites for their critical literacy value is important. If a mobile phone site gives you free ring tones and graphics, then how do they make money? What is the role of advertising on the internet? What techniques do site developers use to trap the user? What is actually happening when you try to close a page but you keep getting bounced to other sites? How is this done technically? The ubiquitous mobile phone raises many issues. One of my students complained of being hungry and not having enough money to buy lunch despite receiving Youth Allowance. When questioned about his budget he revealed that this month's large mobile phone bill meant he had to wait a few days until pay day to buy food.

Easier said than done

So the classroom is buzzing with the target language, focus is purely on the task at hand, students are willingly helping others, everyone is smiling and literacy gains are as measurable as the temperature in the room. Well, not quite. Student directed project-oriented learning is messy, contingency-based and difficult to prepare for, and lessons can be a major flop. It is extremely demanding on the teacher and students. As problems arise, the teacher needs to decide how to respond. Should I intervene

and if so what is my motive? Sometimes we need to resist the temptation to explain and do for the students. Practical considerations may take precedence over pedagogy. Classroom management issues surface—two new students have arrived in the class and are completely lost, so they need extra attention, while some of the others are becoming distracted. Technology glitches hinder the success of projects.

The class ends and I feel as though things could have gone a lot better. My colleagues are not at all convinced that the boys in the computer lab with the hip-hop music are gaining anything from the class. Preparation for classes comes in the form of building one's own intuition to the point of feeling confident in being able to tackle all problems that may arise, and thinking a great deal about the possibilities and directions the class may take.

in this learner-directed approach, the teacher needs to be creative in finding extension exercises

Occasionally I am confronted with moral dilemmas when students pursue their topic of interest. I had one student asking for an explanation of how the software he had downloaded worked. It was a program designed to crack the passwords of Hotmail accounts. Pornography is an ongoing issue with boys. Despite punitive measures including suspension, the temptation for adolescents is great. We explore precedents of sexual harassment in the workplace via email porn and it is an opportunity to explore what is and isn't socially or legally acceptable in this country. The internet is largely uncensored, despite futile attempts to limit access to some sites, and this again is explored for its merits and shortcomings.

A new way of learning

So what about the importance of *learning styles* in language acquisition and the fact that some learners may not cope with the multiliteracy demands of the internet environment? At the risk of sounding as though I am giving in to a form of technological determinism, computers show little consideration for learning styles. Computers demand the user adopts a non-linear, tinkering approach to learning and seeking information (Turkle, 1995). Anyone who is wanting to be shown how to do everything or follow a set of instructions for the computer is delaying the inevitable: at some point they will need to let go of the edge and make an attempt to swim to the other side. It is for this reason that many teachers, myself included, who have been educated in a structuralist system, can feel uncomfortable with the fragmented, unpredictable nature of the internet lab. We are scared of being out of control and students need to be encouraged to feel comfortable with trial and error. Mistakes, getting lost and losing your work are unavoidable predicaments in the digital world. To function effectively on a computer requires time to build intuition. I ask all my students not to write down instructions on how to do things on the computer. Instructions rapidly become redundant and create a counter-intuitive reliance on a piece of paper. It is therefore crucial that the teacher ensures students are operating in their zone of proximal development, both linguistically and technologically (Vygotsky). Some learners are not ready for such freedom on the internet and will flounder unless given a higher level of support, which ideally is given by peers in a project-learning environment.

Conclusion

My reason for adopting this approach to working with ESL youth classes in the internet lab was that the alternatives were failing. Teacher directed tasks were, at best, carried out with a sense of duty and little enthusiasm. The student-initiated projects, such as website construction, were beginning to lose their novelty value as more and more students became aware of the potential of the internet. What were once popular activities became minimised at the bottom of the screen.

computers demand the user adopts a non-linear, tinkering approach to learning

In my opinion, the benefits for the students are immense, and given that the internet classroom is becoming increasingly difficult to manage (for the reasons mentioned) it seems an opportune time to experiment. My only concern is that it requires heavy monitoring and intervention on the part of the teacher, and a degree of cooperation amongst the group of students. The extra day-to-day demands on teachers are such that we don't often have the time to concentrate purely on methodology, and this style of teaching cannot be conducted half-heartedly or without complete focus on the task at hand.

Terry O'Reilly worked in ESL literacy for ten years, and teaches on the Young Adult Education Course program at NMIT Preston. He has an interest in project-oriented learning and 'social computing'.

Notes

- 1 Tupac is a recently deceased American rap artist who is very popular with youth.
- 2 MP3 is the most common file type for internet music—relatively high quality and small in size.
- 3 Peer-to-peer technology allows computer users around the world to open up their computers to share files directly with other users, as opposed to downloading files from a server as happens in the more conventional client-server relationship.

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New literacies for new times: the convergence of the internet and literacy instruction

by Donald J. Leu Jr.

The convergence of literacy, literacy instruction, networked information and communication technologies like the internet mean the development of new literacies that must be a central part of any adult education program. The alternative is to prepare adults only for the literacies of our past.

A state of change

The essence of both literacy and literacy education has always been change. Reading a book changes us forever; we return from the worlds we inhabit during our reading journeys with new insights about ourselves and our surroundings. Literacy education is also a transforming experience: it opens new windows to the world, creating a lifetime of new opportunities for each individual who extends their literacy skills. Change has always defined our work as literacy educators—by supporting individuals in becoming literate, we change the world.

Today, literacy education is being defined by change in even more profound ways. New forms of information and communication technology (ICT) such as the internet are rapidly generating new literacies required to effectively exploit their potentials (Eagleton, 1999; Karchmer, 1999; Meyer & Rose, 1998; Reinking, McKenna, Labbo, & Kieffer, 1998; Topping, 1997; Warschauer, 1999; Wood, 1999). These technologies also make possible new instructional practices to help individuals acquire the literacies of their future. Traditional definitions of literacy education will be insufficient if we seek to provide individuals with the futures they deserve.

Convergence

A central aspect of the changes taking place today in literacy and literacy education consists of the convergence of literacy, literacy instruction, and networked information and communication technologies such as the internet (Leu & Kinzer, 2000). The internet creates new literacies that must be a central part of any program in adult education today. To think otherwise means that we prepare adults for the literacies of our past, not the literacies of the future.

The convergence of ICT with literacy and literacy instruction will continue to grow—largely as a result of their continued importance to societies and the concomitant demands by many nations that networked technologies for information and communication be integrated into adult literacy programs. The convergence of the internet, literacy and

literacy instruction will be driven as much by the forces that shape societies as by research results, perhaps even more.

What are the important societal forces at work today that will frame the story of literacy instruction in adult education programs? I believe they include the following:

- global economic competition within a world economy based increasingly on the effective use of information and communication
- public policy initiatives by governments around the world to ensure higher levels of literacy achievement
- literacy as technological deaxis.

An information-based economy

As we begin to consider the nature of literacy instruction in the years ahead, it is important to understand changes taking place in the nature of work. Particularly in the recent past, adult literacy education was designed to prepare participants for life's opportunities through the workplace (Bruce, 1997a; Mikulecky & Kirkley, 1998).

In some cultural contexts, the nature of work has been defined by one's access to land, labour, or capital. Analyses by Reich (1992) and Rifkin (1995) indicate this definition has fundamentally changed in many countries. Increasingly, work is characterised by the effective use of information to solve important problems within a globally competitive economy. Today, rather than land, labour, or capital it is access to information and the ability to use information effectively that increasingly enables individuals to seize life's opportunities. Moreover, as networked, digital technologies provide greater and more rapid access to larger amounts of information, the efficient use of information skills such as reading and writing become even more important in competitive workplace contexts (Gilster, 1997; Harrison & Stephen, 1996).

Changing workplaces

Information skills such as reading and writing are important within organisations that specialise in technology and information services, of course, but they are also increasingly

important within all types of workplaces. Because trade barriers are falling and international trade is expanding, many workplaces are undergoing a radical transformation (Bruce, 1997a; Drucker, 1994; Gilster, 1997; Mikulecky & Kirkley, 1998). In a global economy, where competition is more intense because competing companies are more numerous, workplaces must seek more efficient ways of conducting business if they hope to survive. Often, they seek to transform themselves into high performance workplaces, workplaces that are more competitive, more efficient, and more responsive to the needs of their customers. These new types of workplaces are characterised by several elements, each of which has important implications for the nature of literacy instruction.

As we consider the economic context of the new millennium and the consequences for literacy instruction, it appears that problem solving, information access, evaluation of information resources and communication will be important elements in the workplace. It is likely that these aspects will be increasingly important to shaping the nature of literacy instruction in adult literacy programs. In the information age, individuals, groups and societies will succeed to the extent they are able to access the best information in the shortest time to identify and solve the most important problems and communicate this information to others.

Power and literacy

This analysis, of course, is based on a view of economics and literacy that is liberating, not one that is oppressive. Alternative views are possible, suggesting that new technologies and literacy are deliberately manipulated for economic gain or political control (Selfe & Selfe, 1996; Virillo, 1986; see also Bloome & Kinzer, 2000), usually by those seeking to maintain and expand hegemony. Literacy typically serves those in power, not those out of power (Graff, 1981; Harris, 1989; Levi-Strauss, 1973, Shannon, 1996). Both views are probably justified since historical realities compel one to recognise that societies do not long survive without also valuing peace and justice and societies that value peace and justice do not long survive without actively protecting their interests.

Regardless of how this tension is interpreted, I believe that information economies, global competition, and the changing nature of work are some of the most powerful forces driving the changing nature of adult literacy programs. They prompt very real consequences for literacy education as we seek to prepare individuals for their future. They also contribute to the increasing convergence of literacy instruction with the use of networked ICT in the classroom, since these new technologies of literacy provide powerful preparation in developing skills central to success in an information economy: accessing the best information,

doing so in the shortest time, using this information to identify and solve the most important problems, and then communicating these solutions to others. Global economic competition provides important impetus for the convergence of literacy instruction with the use of networked ICT in the classroom.

‘ individuals, groups and societies will succeed to the extent they are able to access the best information in the shortest time ’

Seeking higher literacy levels

Governments around the world are keenly aware of the consequences of global economic competition for their citizens. They have responded by implementing public policies to raise literacy achievement in an attempt to prepare their citizens for the challenges that lie ahead. Simultaneously, they have responded with initiatives to provide new ICT resources to schools, preparing individuals for the literacies of their future.

We see this in Australia where the federal government has circulated a document, ‘A Strategic Framework for the Information Economy: Identifying Priorities for Action’, which outlines a strategic framework for an information economy. The second of ten action priorities in this document is ‘deliver the education and skills Australians need to participate in the information economy’ (Ministry for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, December 1998). In a related decision, a combined group of commonwealth, state, and territory education ministers agreed to a common set of literacy benchmarks (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 1998) initiating a national plan with annual assessments and support from commonwealth, state, and territory governments. In addition, they developed the ‘Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century’. This document identifies technology use as one of the eight curriculum areas for the nation’s schools (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs: School Division, 1998). Finally, the Australian government has developed a central internet resource for educators at all levels in Australia in order to support efforts to prepare students for a global economy in an information age, EdNA (available at <http://www.edna.edu.au/EdNA/>).

Raising standards worldwide

Many nations around the world, aware of the need to prepare students for the challenges of a competitive global economy, are similarly developing public policy initiatives to raise literacy standards and infuse IT and ICT into the curriculum. While each nation approaches the issue in its own fashion, what is striking is the common effort in this direction. A review of these efforts (Leu & Kinzer, 2000) shows three common patterns:

- nations are implementing rigorous systems of national or state assessment as they raise standards, or benchmarks, for reading and writing

- nations are integrating information technologies or information and communication technologies into their curriculum, often for the first time as a central curriculum strand
- nations are developing extensive internet resources for children and teachers.

Especially salient is the fact that nations with a long tradition of local control are initiating these policy initiatives at the federal level. In countries such as Australia and the US, the federal governments are beginning to develop important national initiatives to raise literacy levels and prepare students in the use of information and communication technologies. Public policy initiatives such as these, and many more that will undoubtedly follow, will affect the nature of literacy instruction in profound ways. We have only just begun to see the effects of these changes in the classroom. I believe these initiatives will contribute, in important ways, to the increasing convergence of literacy instruction with the use of networked information and communication technologies such as the internet.

Literacy as technological deixis

There is also a third force I believe will be central to defining the nature of literacy instruction in the next millennium. Literacy is regularly changing as new technologies for information and communication continuously appear and as new envisionments for exploiting these technologies are continuously developed by users. It is becoming increasingly clear that we are in a period of rapid technological change. Technologies in nearly every field are undergoing fundamental change on a regular basis. This is especially true for the technologies of literacy (Leu, 2000). It seems that nearly every day we encounter a new technology of literacy, one with which we are unfamiliar. New versions of internet browsers, new versions of operating systems, new upgrades of word processing programs, new email software, new forms of chat software, new forms of mailing list or bulletin board software, new video conferencing or telephonic software, new forms of presentation software—the list goes on and on. Consider how different this list will look only ten years from now, let alone hundreds of years from now. It is clear that the technologies of literacy are rapidly changing.

Rapid changes

To make the point another way, consider the changes to the forms and functions of literacy experienced by many students who are graduating from secondary school during the current year. Fifteen years ago, few students needed to know how to use word processing technologies; ten years ago, few students needed to be able to access the rich resources of CD-ROM technologies; five years ago, few students used internet and email technologies. Today, each of these

technologies is an important part of the curriculum in many schools. One can only wonder at the dramatic changes in ICT ahead for children who begin their school careers in the future.

Leu (1997a, in press) argued that we have entered a period of literacy as technological deixis. During this period the forms and functions of literacy rapidly change as new technologies for information and communication emerge and as new envisionments for their use are constructed by users. The term deixis is a word used by linguists and others (Fillmore, 1972; Murphy, 1986) for words like *now*, *today*, *here*, *there*, *go*, and *come*. These are words whose meanings change quickly, depending upon the time or space in which they are uttered. If I say 'now' as I write this article, it means my current moment during the end of 1998. If you say 'now' when you encounter this example, it means the moment in time when you read these lines. While to Gertrude Stein 'A rose is a rose, is a rose', *now* is not *now*, is not *now*. Its meaning depends upon the temporal context when it is uttered.

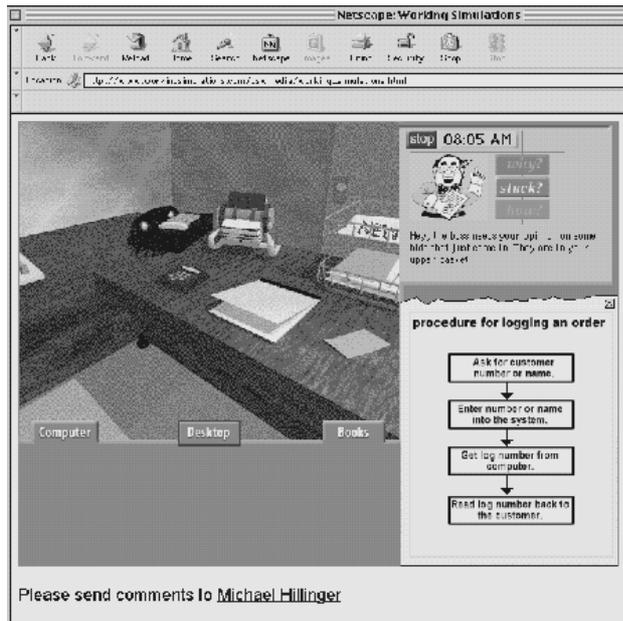
Literacy is also deictic. Both the forms and functions of literacy have regularly changed over time. This will continue into the future but at a much faster pace. As literacy increasingly becomes technological deixis, we will see greater convergence of literacy instruction with networked technologies for information and communication. The changing constructions of literacy within new technologies will require us to prepare adults to keep up with these changes. Networked technologies for information and communication will quickly become the best means for accomplishing this.

Virtual training

Consider just one example of how the internet permits us to prepare adults for the changing literacies demanded in the workplace, the SCANS Interactive Prototype Project. This is a recent project funded by the U.S. Department of Education designed to use the internet to provide workplace training in a virtual office environment (<http://www.workingsimulations.com/>). At this location, you enter an office context and must develop a number of new literacies as you complete office tasks. The phone rings and customers call you about orders they have placed, you receive email in a virtual computer on your office desk, and you find yourself performing a myriad of other tasks. Simulations like these are likely to become an important part of our adult literacy programs since they provide a sheltered workplace training experience for adults at all levels of literacy proficiency.

The deictic nature of literacy will present important challenges to all of us in the years ahead. As we seek to prepare adults for their literacy futures we must recognise that the literacies of today will not be the literacies of tomorrow

Technologies in nearly every field are undergoing fundamental change on a regular basis



(Leu 1997a, in press). Rapidly changing definitions of literacy will alter our work in important ways. One might, for example, anticipate that literacy would not be measured simply by our ability to comprehend, analyse and communicate. Instead, we expect literacy will be increasingly defined around our ability to adapt to the changing technologies of information and communication and our ability to envision new ways to use these technologies for important purposes. Learning how to learn new literacies will be a central aspect of the new literacies of internet technologies.

The deictic nature of literacy in the years ahead will be an important factor moving us toward the convergence of literacy instruction and networked technologies for information and communication such as the internet. These technologies will permit us and our students to keep up with the new technologies and the new literacies that will appear.

The future

Given the many changes taking place in literacy from the changes in technology (Reinking, McKenna, Labbo, & Kieffer, 1998) and the environments these technologies inspire (Bruce, 1997b; Leu, 2000), any conclusions must be cautiously framed. Often, conclusions must verge on the edge of predictions since change happens so quickly. Given this conditional preface let us look at what might be reasonably concluded about the new literacies as literacy converges with internet technologies.

Change is a defining element of the new literacies

New literacies are new literacies not because they appear now but because they will *continuously appear* as new technologies for information and communication regularly emerge and as people regularly construct new environments for how they might be used. The dynamics of continuously changing literacies have profound consequences for literacy

education from classroom instruction, to assessment, and especially to teacher education. Adapting to change and learning how to learn unfamiliar technologies for information and communication will be critical component of the new literacies.

New literacies build on previous literacies

New literacies complement and build upon traditional literacies. Reading and writing will always be central to the new literacies but each will change in important ways. Reading will require similar types of vocabulary knowledge, for example, but new strategies for locating, evaluating, and using information will be required. Writing will require similar types of spelling knowledge, but new strategies for structuring text and additional media forms will be required.

New literacies require new forms of knowledge

Mayer (1997) reminds us that each technology contains different contexts and resources for constructing meanings and requires somewhat different strategies for doing so. New technologies for networked information and communication are complex and require many new strategies for their effective use. Moreover, the future will see these technologies continue to change. Thus, the new literacies will largely be defined around the strategic knowledge central to the effective use of information within rich and complexly networked environments. There will be many types of strategic knowledge important to the new literacies.

New literacies involve critical reading of information

Because networked information technologies invite more and diverse people to exchange information, the new literacies require us to read more critically and they enable us to develop new insights about far more cultural traditions and ways of knowing than we have ever experienced. Being sensitive to this diversity and developing more critical reading skills within networked ICT will be an important aspect of the new literacies.

New literacies are socially constructed

Early evidence (Labbo, 1996; Labbo & Kuhn, 1998), as well as logical deduction from current trends, suggests that the new literacies will be ever more dependent on their social construction than traditional literacies. It will be impossible for every person to become expert in every new technology for information and communication that appears.

As networked information resources become more extensive and complexly structured, and as ICTs continue to change with some frequency, no one person can be expected to know everything there is to know about the technologies of literacy; these technologies will simply change too quickly and be too extensive to permit any single person to be literate in them all. Each of us, however, will know something useful to others. This will distribute knowledge

about literacy throughout the classroom, especially as students move through the above beginning stages. One student may know the best strategies for developing a hypermedia presentation while another may know the best way to use a new video conferencing technology. We will need to support individuals in learning how best to learn from others. Each of us will have a certain level of understanding of core technologies that meet our needs. For other technologies, we will need to rely upon others, expert in those technologies, to show us how things are accomplished. Internet workshop and other collaborative approaches will be especially useful (Leu & Leu, 1999).

The social construction of meanings in our texts will also be facilitated by the technologies themselves. Since the new technologies increase our connections with others, we will have the opportunity to develop a wider understanding of how others understand the texts we create. The new literacies will require us to develop even greater appreciation for the wider interpretations that are possible to any text we create. New opportunities for supporting adult literacy learners in understanding their multiple audiences will be possible and central to the effective use of networked technologies for information and communication.

Interest and motivation provide opportunities

One of the more compelling and consistent findings from the research literature in this area is that students are highly motivated and interested in the new literacies (US Congress, 1995). The same appears to be true for at least some teachers (CAST, 1996; Follansbee, Hughes, Pisha, & Stahl, 1997; Reed, Ayersman, & Liu, 1995a, 1995b). The fact that the new contexts for literacy appear to be highly motivating may provide special opportunities for supporting adult learners in acquiring the new literacies and special opportunities to support the important staff development and teacher education efforts that lie ahead.

That adult literacy learners may be especially interested in the new literacies, however, is a double-edged sword. One wonders if this will mean less interest in the more traditional literacies that form an important foundation for the new literacies. Perhaps, we will need to consider how best to support these initial steps within the more engaging possibilities of hypermedia (Reinking, in press) and networked information and communication technologies.

The teacher becomes more important

Internet resources will increase the central role teachers play in orchestrating learning experiences for their students. Teachers will be challenged to thoughtfully guide students' learning within information environments that are richer and more complex than traditional print media, presenting richer and more complex learning opportunities for both

them and their students. This alone would make teacher education and staff development issues important priorities. In addition, we must recognise that as the new literacies continually change, new staff development and teacher education needs will emerge. It is safe to say that our educational systems have never before faced the professional development needs that will occur in our future. Neither staff development efforts nor teacher education programs have responded adequately to this challenge.

Governments are investing in the new literacies

We have seen how national governments, in an effort to prepare their citizens for global, economic competition in an information economy, are raising literacy standards and infusing networked technologies for information and communication into the curriculum. What is significant about this movement is that it is happening in many nations with a limited history of federal intervention in educational policy. In the US, over \$2 billion is being spent each year by the federal government to support internet connections in classrooms and libraries. In Australia, a national plan has been developed to raise literacy levels and integrate technology into the curriculum. A national website for classroom teachers is being developed. In New Zealand, national plans are underway to infuse technology into the curriculum and to raise literacy standards. In the UK, there is a major effort to integrate IT into the curriculum and to focus attention on increasing literacy achievement. In Ireland, similar national policies are being implemented. National governments are changing the ways in which they respond to educational issues because they perceive new literacies to be important to their citizens.

Challenges to change

I have described my view of the cultural forces that are likely to shape the nature of literacy instruction in this millennium. I have also described the broad outlines of the story I expect to see. The details of this story, however, will be determined by our collective responses to several important challenges to change.

Change is always difficult, and educational systems are widely recognised for being resistant to change (Cuban, 1987; Luehrmann, 1985), especially changes in technology use. I expect three important challenges to have the greatest impact in refining the picture we have painted for the nature of literacy instruction in the future:

- 1 challenges related to budget considerations
- 2 challenges related to professional development
- 3 challenges related to using technology in ways that will make *all* of our lives better.

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In large part, the ending to our story will be determined by our responses to these issues.

The budgetary challenge

Central to this vision of the future is an important budgetary challenge all countries must face. Never before have educational systems been faced with the expenses of their literacy futures. The capital investments that are required in a world of continuously changing technologies of literacy may slow the vision for literacy instruction we describe. This will be a special challenge for nations who face extraordinary financial pressures, where the important issue facing a child is where the next meal will come from, not how to obtain access to the internet.

As we seek to meet this challenge for all individuals, we should also recognise that one common view of these expenses may not be correct. The common view is that budgetary considerations have to do with hardware issues such as purchasing computers for use in educational institutions. This is not always the area that poses the greatest budgetary challenge. Instead, the issue in many nations is changing from purchasing hardware to providing the staff development and teacher education necessary to use new information technologies in wise and thoughtful ways to support the important learning needs of students.

Clearly, the budgetary challenges are immense as we move toward merging new technology into changing definitions of literacy. Will schools and nations allocate the necessary resources to meet expenses such as these? The answer is uncertain. There is, though, some indication that many countries are beginning to recognise the costs of raising standards and infusing ICT within educational programs. The international reports show the political will is developing to provide the necessary funds. For many nations, there is a collective realisation that it is simply more expensive, in the long term, if the budgetary challenge is not met in the short term.

The professional development challenge

As in all educational endeavours a committed and knowledgeable teacher is the most instrumental factor in effective instruction. This will be especially true as new technologies for information and communication regularly appear and converge with literacy and literacy instruction (Leu et al, 1998). The repeated changes we envision in the nature of literacy instruction will require continuous staff development to support educators in the effective use of new technologies for information and communication. Never before have we been faced with the professional development needs that will occur in our future. Will we be able to continuously support educators when the definition

of effective literacy instruction regularly changes? The answer to this question is not yet clear.

The challenges will be enormous. We also need to keep in mind that the commitment to support staff development must be continuous and substantially larger than it is today. We have argued that literacy can be viewed as a deictic term. We feel that a similar argument can be made for literacy

instruction. New approaches as well as new content will regularly emerge as new technologies for information and communication appear. We are just beginning to see some of these changes, changes that will repeatedly occur in our futures.

Perhaps an even greater aspect of this challenge will be the response of programs within universities and colleges that prepare adult literacy educators. These programs *must* begin to include the new literacies of networked information and communication technologies within their courses. Most importantly, those of us in reading and literacy education must begin to lead the way in these efforts, bringing our special insights about literacy education to

these new contexts for literacy and learning. Unless we begin to rethink the commitment we have to staff development and teacher education, our ability to prepare citizens for the literacies of their future will be severely limited.

The challenge to make our lives better

An important challenge we all face is how to use these new technologies of literacy to make our lives better. Internet and related technologies are often viewed as facilitating personal and collective freedom. There are, however, issues on the darker side that restrict individual and collective freedoms. With the increasing appearance of networked ICT, issues of privacy are coming to the fore as in no other time in our past. This will demand vigilance and thoughtful choices among us all. Privacy issues surrounding email and other information transmitted and available to third party monitoring have raised legitimate concerns from advocacy groups and have also energised critics who wish to slow down computer implementation in our societies.

An additional challenge to making all of our lives better concerns issues of equal access to information and to the technology that allows such access. There is still a large discrepancy between groups who have access to information and communication technologies and groups who do not. This takes place on multiple levels—nations who are unable to afford the costs of ICT for their citizens, cultural groups within a nation who do not share in the access to ICT, and individuals who do not have home access to ICT. Technology has the capability to make *all* of our lives better, but only if persons in positions of power and those who have policy-making capabilities ensure issues of access and equity are addressed.

the capital investments that are required... may slow the vision for literacy instruction

A question of dominance

One of the subtle ways in which access may be denied is through linguistic or cultural dominance by nations who dominate networked information resources (Leu, 1997b). In the past, languages and cultures were dominated by nations possessing superior military and economic power. In our ICT futures, the potential exists for languages and cultures to be dominated by nations possessing superior information resources and superior vehicles for communication. We already see this happening. Currently, the vast majority of internet sites and internet traffic takes place to and from locations in the United States. Will this eventually result in our global village only speaking one language, only thinking within one culture's view of the world, only accessing information shaped by one reality?

An alternative vision of our world is possible. It is possible to support equal access to the new forms of literacy in our futures. It is possible to use ICT to develop richer understandings of the diverse world in which we all live. It is possible to use these new opportunities for literacy education to bring all of us together in ways that have never before happened. The technologies of information and communication possess special opportunities to help everyone better understand the unique qualities in each of our cultural traditions. No other instructional resource available in our classroom has ever been as rich in its potential for developing an understanding of the diverse nature of our global society. The question is whether we have the vision and the will to accomplish this.

Equal access equals quality of life

There are some indicators that lead us to anticipate that access will become more equitable in the future. Each time there is a price drop in hardware more people are able to afford them. Commitments by churches, public libraries, community centres and schools that are making computer labs available to parents and children after hours, are extending access to traditionally disadvantaged groups. Such trends will continue, as will public policy initiatives to provide greater equity. Just as public education was thought to be a necessary prerequisite to a better quality of life, which led to a guarantee of education for all, policy makers are beginning to realise that access to technology will be a prerequisite to quality of life and employment opportunities. Whether or not a guarantee of access to technology for all will occur remains to be seen, but it is the case that availability in school classrooms and adult literacy programs will become common.

Conclusion

I have attempted to describe the future course of literacy and literacy instruction for adult educators by presenting a broad outline of the direction in which we appear to be

heading—the convergence of literacy instruction with the internet and other networked technologies for information and communication. We are only able to see the beginning of what the new literacies will be and how to support their development. We have much to learn about these new forms of literacy. It does appear that change will be an important part of their definition and that our response to this change will determine how prepared our citizens will be for their

future. The adult education community needs to play a central role in this conversation, a role that has yet to be adequately fulfilled. Our work must begin to focus on how these new technologies are changing reading and writing, the touchstone of our common work, and how we can best support educators and adult learners in their use. There is no more important issue for us in the years ahead. For some, change will be difficult since many of us have built our careers around the book. For all of us, change is essential if we hope to prepare individuals for their literacy future.

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Change and literacy in the museum: a new way of messaging

Fine Print decided to experiment with an interview/panel via email. We invited Margaret Griffith and Geraldine Zeccola from the Melbourne Museum's adult education and visitors program, Barbara Goulborn—who has worked on producing materials for the museum, and Daryl Evans, who has had an active interest in museums through his work and studies.

Fine Print 1: The new Melbourne Museum has created a stir with its challenging exhibits and its focus on popular culture. Would you say that text and information are presented in a different way from a more traditional museum? How so?

Griffith/Zeccola: Firstly, thank you for inviting Melbourne Museum to participate on the panel discussing issues on literacy in a museum context.

Melbourne Museum opened its doors to the public in October 2000, and has since seen more than 600,000 visitors engage with gallery exhibitions, performances and activities. Of these, more than 3000 have been from the ACE sector.

The etymology of the word museum is taken from the *muse*, the goddesses who would inspire learning. In today's context the museum inspires learning in a multilayered and functional way for adults, families and children.

To answer your first question about the presentation of text and information at the museum, it is important to understand that text is only one method of communicating information about an exhibition to the public. A museum style guide was developed by the museum after extensive research on what is comprehensive and accessible in terms of text and information. Aspects of the style guide included such things as clarity of language. Some of the text went through a consultative testing process with groups of various reading abilities. Writers were encouraged to try their text on people with no prior knowledge of the subject. Where there were conflicts between aesthetics and literacy issues, clarity of expression took precedence.

Goulborn: To me the biggest difference is that it is more self-consciously interpretive than a traditional museum. In a traditional museum the orthodoxies of the field—anthropology, history, biology and so on—were taken for granted and presented without question, whereas the new museum attempts to be a bit postmodernist through presenting alternative interpretations and in some exhibits even being self-conscious about museology itself.

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I would not see this presentation (a mix of tradition and alternative) as altogether positive, because it is sometimes difficult to 'read' what is the orthodox/commonly held/mainstream interpretation and what is the alternative. I believe it is useful to be able to make this distinction in order to better understand modern culture (knowing that some ways of thinking and operating in the world are more powerful than others), and from a practical point of view, for example, health sciences (knowing that some ways of doing things are proven to work better than others, such as antibiotics versus palmistry).

Yes, it is refreshing to be presented with different ways of looking at the world, especially if the 'new' views represent repressed and hidden ones, such as Koori experiences. However, how did you know whether what you experienced at the museum was 'different' or not? And how would someone with less education and prior knowledge than you read 'different' presentations or interpretations?

For example, if I had no previous knowledge of history of Australia I would come away from the Melbourne gallery believing that women in the 20th century made jam, embroidered aprons and spread sexually-transmitted diseases to the US military. How would I know these are only selected, random, episodic topics?

Given that people won't spend very long at each exhibit, and given limited space and money, which prevents *all* aspects of, for example, women in Melbourne in the 20th century to be represented, what should a museum present? Is it more sexy and entertaining to present some things, more 'educational' than to present others? Proponents of postmodern orthodoxies might think it doesn't matter what is presented.

I actually enjoyed the Melbourne gallery and it really did get me and my fellow visitor discussing representations of history, but we had already read things, watched documentaries, spoken to women who had experienced the first half of the 20th century in Australia. We could fit what we saw into a bigger picture

Evans: I suspect that it is best if I try to roll questions one to three into something seeking one response.

There are a couple of interesting things I would tentatively say about the general interest in and debate around the new museum. But please remember that I am writing as a person who spends a lot of two-shillings for entry to nostalgic places, and who fantasises about virtual museums that pick up where Waypoint left off. (Waypoint is a CD-ROM produced for and about the Museum of Victoria several years ago, and was selling very well when I inquired at Scienceworks last year).

I have been to the Museum of Victoria twice only, and enjoyed it both times. I am also writing as someone who has hardly been responsible in a classroom for two years.

First, there is the issue of the tension about the museum's performance as a magnificent event for interaction with a public, and for contributing to scientific research. Second is the contribution our new museum's history makes to the tradition and future of spectacle, gallery (from Arnhem Land to Tate Modern), zoological gardens, Bedlam, Mechanics Institute, theme park, and travel book full of museums as places of infotainment and more. What is their role vis-a-vis emerging recreation, entertainment and research worlds? Do museums follow or reflect trends in commerce, and perceptions of government responsibility in educating a public, and in researching a world for a scientific public?

And, to be more specific, do museums contribute to ALBE student enjoyment and knowledge, to possible change in cultural practice (giving away my middle-class pre-occupation), to accessibility of ALBE education to non-students turned off by our adult schooling or who don't like their classes anyway? Further, does our discussion of museums contribute to debates about value systems underlying all this?

I reckon these are questions I'll be asking myself in a few months' time and deciding on whether they are useful questions.

Fine Print 2: We're wondering about the perspectives on language and literacy that may have informed the presentation and content of the exhibits. Was there any perspective or position taken and do you think it shows?

Griffith/Zeccola: Your next question asks about perspectives on language and literacy that may have informed the presentation and content of the exhibits. Each exhibition team had a learning adviser in order to assist with how adults and children learned and how best to present the intention of the exhibitions through language and other non-linguistic means.

Goulborn: Can't answer this one as well as Marg can, but most new museums put a lot of time and money into trying to get the labelling right, with clear protocols, style guides and so on.

do museums follow or reflect trends in commerce, and perceptions of government responsibility in educating

Fine Print 3: How would you describe the literacies and language skills required to read the new museum?

Griffith/Zeccola: The literacies and language skills required to read are assumed to be basic functional level. The language used in the exhibition texts is accessible to adults, families and children. We also have special pathways texts especially designed for children who are learning to read. Once again, the research in producing the style guide ensured that various abilities were taken into consideration in order to produce layered presentation of text and information. Text at Melbourne Museum aims to be:

- Simple and concrete
- Positive, active and direct
- Free of jargon—where specialist terminology is used, it is explained
- Interesting and appropriate in tone
- Aimed at the visitor with an average reading age and no prior knowledge of the subject.

Goulborn: This varies a lot between galleries. In the human body gallery I felt overwhelmed by the amount of text in relation to objects, and noticed no one was spending much time reading. However the texts in other galleries, juxtaposed with great use of photography were the right length (much shorter) to take in. They were clear, simple, straightforward, interesting and not too taxing even for those who are not used to reading a lot. A new literacy that is required though, is being able to distinguish between text that is 'decorative'? /evocative of a theme? Sometimes there are collections of objects, graphics and text put together to mean something (or are they?).

Evans: When considering the 'language, literacies and requirements' of the new museum I have to say 'pass', but I do respect the work done by other people as practitioners who develop work that students can share for knowledge, 'ah-hah' experiences and enthusiasm.

As you know, I am keen for us to pursue (for example) the use of Linda Ferguson et al *Meanings and Messages—language guidelines for museum exhibitions* (1995) as a way of mediating Michael Halliday's applied linguistics for general adult literacy staff development (although I haven't seen the rewritten edition of Halliday's book yet, so this may become less relevant), and to follow up on work by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen.

In other words, how can we research theories of adult literacy using such work, and seeing if the museum world of

exhibit plain English and three-dimensional interaction has a message of deeper significance for the wider world of ALBE theory and practice.

I am informed that this book stems, in part, from a project involving Louse Ravelli (and others?). They worked with the Australian Museum in Sydney to use their (Halliday-influenced) linguistic knowledge to gain insight into the way in which presentation to a museum's public could, and should, enhance understanding, interest and interaction.

Fine Print 4: In your view are there any assumed literacy levels for people visiting the museum, and what are those levels?

Griffith/Zeccola: There are no assumed language literacy levels for people visiting the museum. One of the functions of the museum is to inspire learning, and it is hoped that each visitor comes away having had a learning experience. The museum's collection items are presented so that all the senses are engaged, and appeal to various learning needs and styles. It is a multisensory museum and adopts the principles of constructivism and multiple intelligences.

Goulborn: I think there are huge differences between galleries but am not sure how much this was planned (Marg would know if this was a conscious strategy.) Personally I believe the museum (any museum) works best when the objects and the way they are presented speak for themselves, with as little text as possible. People go to museums to look at things, not to read.

Fine Print 5: Do you think museums have the potential to change people's understanding of text, literacies and /or knowledge? In general, do museums meet this potential? What about the Melbourne Museum?

Griffith/Zeccola: To best answer your next question Michael, any museum sets out to inspire learning. Each museum legitimately adopts its own methods of presenting its collection items and demonstrating its research. It is not the museum's intention to change people's understanding of texts, literacies and/or knowledge because the learner is central and it is the learners who construct their understanding in order to assist them to gain understanding of the world they live in.

Goulborn: I'm not sure—generally speaking—if there is much potential to change people's understanding of text and literacies unless the subject matter of a museum exhibit is text and literacies, which of course it can be, though I don't think there is any such exhibition in the Melbourne Museum (although I haven't seen the IT exhibition yet which may be about electronic literacies?). Because my work is mainly concerned with writing/designing learning resources and my background is in literacy teaching I am always

aware/reflective/critical of how texts and literacies are used, especially in educational contexts, but if this is not your line of work, I don't think your understanding would be changed just through experiencing an average museum exhibition.

As for knowledge—yes, I think there is a much greater potential for changing understandings of knowledge through museums. People can be presented with new ways of thinking (not always for the good of humankind though, Nazi Germany attempted to change people's knowledge through museums, amongst other things).

“Nazi Germany attempted to change people's knowledge through museums, amongst other things”

Evans: With respect to questions five, six and seven, it does really seem like a chicken-and-egg dilemma. I don't know how much framework knowledge (let alone, a museum habit) an ALBE student needs in to avoid being overwhelmed by the spectacle and the detail. I bet if I were back in the classroom I would be preparing checklists for those wanderers who quickly get bored.

Fine Print 6: The new museum's adult education program has been well planned and marketed. What impact could this have on the adult literacy field? Is it having an impact already?

Griffith/Zeccola: You state, 'the new museum's adult education program has been well planned and marketed' ...thank you for the compliment Michael! The two people at Melbourne Museum with responsibility for adult education (amongst their many other roles) have community adult education experience. We are aware of many of the learning needs and curriculum frameworks in the ACE, tertiary, U3A, TAFE and Correctional sectors. Our programs and our museum exhibitions are already having a positive impact on the learners who are often left breathless by the building, the exhibitions and the learning experience. We have also had some unhappy and disgruntled teachers who perhaps were not satisfied with the content or style of some of our developing material resources.

Each comment and feedback is taken seriously and addressed. While it is our intention to embrace adult learners and providers in our community, we seek only to facilitate the museum experience rather than direct it by having adults walk around the museum with their heads down copying information to complete a set task on bits of paper. We encourage tutors and facilitators to adapt our material by editing it to suit the needs of their learners. We offer unlimited free entry to teachers preparing for their class visit (just show a letter from your centre at the ticketing desk stating you are a teacher). We also offer professional development sessions. We encourage students to develop critical literacy, learn to do research, find their way around the building, develop a sense of ownership of one of the state's cultural institutions and use Melbourne Museum as an informal learning environment where they can return with their friends and family.

Goulborn: The museum people could answer this better. Feedback on the resources I developed has only been from friends in the field. Adult learning theory and practice does seem to provide an important underpinning to all museum work these days, so there's huge potential for museums and adult education practitioners to work together.

Fine Print 7: How much scope do you see for adult literacy learners to learn about how a museum exhibit is put together, and to use this in their learning practice?

Griffith/Zeccola: There is an enormous amount of scope for adult literacy learners to learn about how a museum exhibit is constructed and to use this in their learning practice. For example, one of the museum's most challenging and talked about art pieces is 'Stilled Lives' by Janet Lawrence. This work of art seeks to tell a story about museums and their role today. It is often mistaken for a natural science exhibition. Visitors are constructing their own world of understanding as they look at it. In Bunjilaka, the Aboriginal Gallery, one of the exhibitions looks critically at this museum's history of collecting and its changing approaches to anthropology.

Goulborn: Great potential! When I was developing the adult education resources for the museum's Forest Gallery, most of the museum was still at the drawing board stage. I found it fascinating to visit the offices and later the almost-built museum. Such a huge project to manage. It felt like the production of several big films was going on. I'm looking forward to the film about the making of the museum (is anyone making it?). I'm sure adult literacy or any other adult learners would be as interested as I was. It would provide interesting content, but also could demonstrate literacy-specific things like planning and editing (labels) in relation to writing other texts for subject, audience and context.

Evans: I dream of having the time to pursue my Wall Education idea where, at the very least, ALBE providers can rent (and develop their own) corridor and coffee room vertical and three-dimensional displays. This can become an enjoyable cross-reference from the classroom, and also

a deliberate first and tiny step towards training (and I mean 'training') some students in the craft of independent learning from an artefact display, but with peers and teachers back in the classroom to help and extend in the formal follow-up assignment and (hopefully) informal debate. I think there should be 'staging' towards using museums not just through induction beforehand into the knowledge context but also into the navigation and coping skills.

I hope VALBEC tenders for preparing travelling preparatory exhibitions according to advertised schedules of special displays.

Fine Print: Thank you all for your time and joining in the discussion.

Margaret Griffith worked in the adult education sector before becoming program coordinator for public activities at the Melbourne Museum.

Geraldine Zeccola is education and visitor programs officer at the Melbourne Museum.

Barbara Goulborn has produced materials for the museum, and her language and literacy teaching career ranges from university and TAFE institutes to vehicle manufacturing plants. Examples of her work are at <http://melbourne.museum.vic.gov.au/Adultedforest.html>

Daryl Evans is department head of Adult Literacy and Work Education, TAFE division, Victoria University. He has been a teacher, administrator, curriculum and professional development worker in ALBE since 1974. Wall Education projects by Daryl and colleagues from Victoria University are at <http://wdb.vu.edu.au/abe/>

You can visit the Melbourne Museum on the web <http://www.museum.vic.gov.au/>

Interesting reading on the nature of a Constructivist Museum by George Hein at the Group for Education in Museums web site at <http://www.gem.org.uk/> specifically <http://www.gem.org.uk/hein.html>

Foreign Correspondence

Charles Ramsey tells us about Canada's National Adult Literacy Database Inc.



NALD: Canada's Adult Literacy Information System

The National Adult Literacy Database Inc. (NALD) is a non-profit organization the mission of which, simply stated, is to provide information and resources to the adult literacy community in Canada in English and French, Canada's official languages. This community is typically under-funded, under-resourced, isolated, remote, in short, anything that gets in the way of the smooth delivery of programming! And, indeed, a literacy program in this community can be isolated even though it is being delivered in the heart of a major city.

On the other hand, in the decade since International Literacy Year in 1990, the group of both volunteer and paid professionals that is part of this community has grown in numbers and in its capacity to address the issues. Excellent resources have been developed, often from within the community itself with funds made available by both the federal and provincial governments, to enhance the materials available in the classroom, in the workplace and for tutorial sessions. The fragmented nature of the community, however, has caused the growth and development to happen in 'pockets', usually found in urban centres and has resulted in these resources, after a brief flurry of distribution immediately upon publication, not finding their way outside a ten-block radius of the location where they were created.

At NALD we recognized that the Internet and the World Wide Web presented an opportunity to change all of that. With support from the National Literacy Secretariat, a division of the federal government's Human Resources Development Canada, and from the government of the province of New Brunswick, we set out to:

- create a community of literacy providers on the World Wide Web so that practitioners in Canada would become aware of who is doing what and where they are;
- create a resource centre for literacy information and resources so that under-funded and under-resourced programs would have access to current and useful materials no matter where they are situated in the country;
- provide a platform from which practitioners could share their information and resources with others so

that people would eventually come to see the NALD system as a resource that belongs to them for their use;

- organize the many good educational resources available on the World Wide Web into a system that would make it easier for busy practitioners to find useful materials quickly.

We use a broad definition of literacy to include K-12 for adults including family and workplace/workforce literacy and English and French for speakers of other languages. We also gather resources that will support special needs groups and the vast cultural diversity that is characteristic of Canada.

In the five years since NALD's web site (www.nald.ca) was launched in February of 1996, we have created, host and maintain one hundred and fifty web sites for national, provincial, regional and some local literacy and literacy-related organizations in Canada with about twenty new web sites under development at any given time. There has been an observable increase in partnering and collaboration in the literacy community as we have created this visibility, and there has been a dramatic increase in the interest shown by practitioners in other countries about what is happening here!

The NALD site consists of some 35,000 pages of information such as Events, Annotated Bibliographies, Awards, Contact Information, Links to Discussion Groups, Headline News, Calls for Presenters, etc. In the Resources sections ('The NALD Literacy Collection,' 'Full Text Documents' and 'Literacy Newsletters' 'Story of the Week') we have many excellent resources to be downloaded for use with learners or for the practitioners for their own continuing education. All these services are free of charge to non-profit organizations.

We attempt to make the NALD web site a useful source of current information and resources, easy to use, pleasant to look at and easily navigable. We present the resources in multiple formats (html and pdf) where we can, and assuming no one browsing logic, we create various pathways to information. The response has been excellent. In the twelve months of our last fiscal year (ending March 31st, 2001), there were 1,005,621 visits to the site by people who viewed 7,027,192 pages of information and who downloaded 100,529 full documents in pdf format. These numbers are beyond the wildest projections that we made five years ago

when we launched this service (I might add, in the face of some degree of scepticism). We feel that this concept has found its time and place. NALD has become a major source of educational information and resources in Canada, and, because there are no territorial borders on the Internet, for others in the world. (About 65% of our user activity is from outside Canada)

Many challenges remain:

- we want to post more and more educational resources because we think that this is where we can have the greatest impact and provide the greatest contribution;
- we want the information and resources that we post to remain useful, current and comprehensive;
- we will develop on-line counselling services and 'ask an expert' services to serve those programs that are located where they have no access to these basic educational supports;
- we are in the process of creating 'thematic streams' of information and resources on our site so that users interested in family literacy or ESL for example, will be able to browse through a collection of materials organized to respond to their specific needs;
- we are preparing specialty databases to provide broader access to information, e.g. The Family Literacy Directory (<http://www.nald.ca/Famlit/>) and the Directory of Adult Literacy Research in Canada (<http://www.nald.ca/crd/>);

- we continue to work with the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) in their LINCS project (<http://novel.nifl.gov/>) to attempt to create a seamless bridge between our resource offerings to provide easier access for practitioners in both the United States and Canada;
- and we want to continue to develop a network of contributors who will let us know about what's happening in their part of the literacy world. It is too big a challenge for us to be aware of everything. We like people to see this as their system and have them help us keep it current.

All in all, it has been a lot of fun. For those of you who work in the literacy community, you know that this is easy work to feel good about. We work with dedicated and enthusiastic people and serve learners who are extremely appreciative of everything that we do for them. We would be delighted to hear from you with information, resources, ideas and suggestions about the service that we offer. Help us to help you!

Charles Ramsey has worked in adult education for over 30 years. He is currently Executive Director of the National Adult Literacy Database Inc. and his passion is to harness the power of the Internet to the service of the adult literacy community. Ramseyc@nald.ca

Open forum

We welcome your responses to the articles featured in *Fine Print*. See the back cover for contact details.

In this edition, Mary Rogers presents the Department of Employment, Training and Youth Affairs reply to last edition's article about the Literacy and Numeracy Training program, Chris Anderson asks if the internet is more pain than gain as a literacy tool (and says no), Isy Bylander describes how this new tool is but one of many, and Julia Griffin helps us visualise the difference between screen and paper-based texts.

LANT: the journey thus far—the DETYA response

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the matters raised in your paper 'LANT—the journey thus far'. The paper springs from discussion and feedback generated by participants in a workshop conducted at the recent VALBEC Conference.

There are some misunderstandings in the paper concerning the origin and purpose of the Literacy and Numeracy Program (informally known as LANT) and where the program sits within the provision of adult literacy in Australia.

The Department of Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) annual report of 1998–1999 places the program within the context of other literacy programs directly funded by DETYA under the overall program title of 'Vocational Education and Training'. The goal of this program was stated as the improvement of 'the skills of Australians to meet the needs of both industry and individuals in order to facilitate economic competitiveness and sustainable employment'. The objectives of the program were being met, in part, 'through measures to improve language, literacy and numeracy skills including their integration into vocational education and training standards, products and services through initiatives such as:

- the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program to assist workers to meet the demands of their current and future employment
- the Adult Literacy National Projects, funded by ANTA, which include the Reading Writing Hotline (an adult literacy telephone referral service) and a television series, 'The Never Too Late Show'
- the Literacy and Numeracy Program, providing training for unemployed people, particularly young job seekers, in literacy and numeracy skills
- the Advanced English for Migrants Program, providing advanced-level English language assistance to help job seekers to gain employment, or enter vocational courses in TAFE or other post-secondary institutions.

It is important to understand that one of the department's strategic priorities is to 'develop and implement policies to

ensure the continuing relevance of the education and training system to contemporary needs, including in the context of the emerging knowledge-based economy and the growing requirement for access to lifelong learning' (DETYA Annual Report 1999–2000). In addition to the above programs, DETYA provides funding to ANTA for the development of initiatives such as the recently tendered Innovative Projects in the field of Literacy. It funds ALNARC and provides grants to Language Australia.

In light of this it is not accurate to assert, as the paper does, that 'LANT operates within a policy vacuum' or that the federal government has 'located Commonwealth provision for adult literacy exclusively within the domain of unemployment and unemployment benefits' or, again, that the 'current provision of adult literacy in Australia is certainly as much about limiting the payment of unemployment benefits as it is about encouraging adults to take up studies in adult literacy'.

The LANT program

Dr Kemp first announced the LANT program in his media release (K4/98) on January 28, 1998. This release advised, *inter alia*, that additional funding for mutual obligation arrangements would 'expand opportunities for young unemployed people to gain vital literacy and numeracy skills'. Mutual obligation arrangements were to apply from July 1, 1998 and a number of options was made available to fulfil the obligation, such as voluntary work, part-time employment, education and training, or participation in a government-funded program including Work for the Dole, Job Preparation Education and Training (JPET) or the Literacy and Numeracy Program.

The target group for these activities was people aged 18 to 24 years who had been in receipt of an allowance for at least six months and young people were able to choose the activity. The inclusion of a literacy program recognised that for many young people, poor literacy was a barrier to getting a job and could also affect their access to education or even their ability to benefit from programs such as Work for the Dole.

In early 1998, a Request for Tender was released inviting submissions to provide both assessment and training services. The program was launched in August 1998, with the Minister's

announcement of successful tenderers (refer Media Release K63/98). The Request for Tender stated that 'one of the main reasons for establishing this new literacy and numeracy training initiative is the strong link between poor literacy and numeracy skills and difficulty in getting a job.' It further stated that, not only would improved skills enhance the opportunities for young people to gain employment but would also 'improve job seekers' daily lives by making it easier for them to interact with other members of the community'.

Mutual obligations

The Prime Minister's Federation Address of 28 January 1999, 'The Australian Way', announced an extension of eligibility for the program to a range of job seekers (not all job seekers) and also iterated the requirement of unemployed young people who are subject to the mutual obligation arrangements to undertake training if they were assessed as needing it.

It is important to note that the obligation to undertake training is initiated by a professional assessment of needs, not by any Centrelink decision. Centrelink is responsible for referring persons who may have a literacy and/or numeracy problem to a contracted assessor. Only if the assessor deems the person to be suitable for training (that is, below NRS level 3 and likely to benefit from training) does the program form part of the job seeker's Preparing for Work Agreement.

The program certainly experienced poor uptake in its early stages. This was partly due to the narrow target group of 18 to 24-year-olds, many of whom were found to be involved in activities which satisfied their obligations—such as part-time education—or because many young people were dealing with other problems which would have affected their ability to benefit from the program. The identification of prospective students is obviously a factor. Centrelink staff are not trained literacy/numeracy assessors, nor is it realistic to expect them to become experts in the field. They administer a large number of other programs in addition to LANT in an environment relying only minimally on the exchange of written information or on lengthy personal interviews.

The importance of relationships

Centrelink officers have received training in the program, but have benefited most from the relationships which they have established with their local providers. The success of this relationship is demonstrated by the fact that providers maintaining close contact with their local Centrelink offices have had participants far in excess of the numbers anticipated.

Undoubtedly, it is a fact that in any literacy and numeracy classroom including LANT students, there is the possibility that reluctant participants may prove disruptive. This is the nature of the client group and is frequently the product of the problems which poor literacy, combined with other factors, can cause. This was also the case under previous programs (notably the Special Intervention Program and JOBTRAIN) where participants were often present only

because the Commonwealth Employment Service had referred them under threat of a possible cancellation of their benefits. It is also worth noting that both programs have had a reasonable proportion of willing participants

It is also the case that, with expert guidance, many of these unwilling students will recognise the personal benefits that accrue from effective training and will successfully complete their courses. Students who are repeatedly absent or disruptive should be withdrawn from training as they are unlikely to benefit from it and may endanger the learning outcomes of other students. Centrelink should be advised that they might need to be considered for alternative program activities or other forms of assistance such as counselling.

A matter of choices

Voluntary students have several avenues to follow if they wish to gain literacy and numeracy skills, either through community provision or through TAFE. It could be argued that by removing the so-called 'coercive element' of the LANT program, the need for the program would be so severely reduced as to render it unnecessary where such alternative provision is available.

On the issue of professional development, it is pertinent to point out that the Request for Tender asked providers to give details of 'the arrangements in place or proposed to support the professional development of staff', in addition to specific training 'undertaken or planned in the use of the National Reporting System'. All successful tenderers stated that these requirements were being, or would be, met. Before the first year of provision had elapsed, it became clear that not only were some organisations not undertaking or arranging for professional development of their staff, but also that some assessors had no formal training in the use of the NRS.

Despite the fact that it was not DETYA's responsibility to provide professional development, it did undertake to fund and participate in several workshops for assessors and teachers. DETYA staff are not qualified adult literacy teachers and cannot provide PD for providers. They can provide support in the administration of the program and have generally arranged provider meetings to discuss all elements of the program and to facilitate the exchange of information and good practice.

I am unable to comment on either the industrial issues or the level of assessment fees raised in the paper, as these are matters concerning the tendering body. Similarly, the matter of distances to be travelled by providers is one which is the province of the provider alone. Tenders were offered for specific labour market regions and were accepted on the basis that they offered a service to cover that region.

The administrative burden

It is acknowledged that the program brought with it a heavy administrative burden for providers, requiring not only the

assembly of a detailed pre- and post-training assessment, but also the notification of events to both DETYA and Centrelink. The flexible nature of the program also requires that each participant be regarded as undertaking a unique and individual course, with discrete records and claims for each individual. The introduction of an internet-based recording and payment system has greatly reduced the paperwork for the program. Unfortunately, this system relies for its efficient operation on the provider having good access to the internet and this requirement was certainly not anticipated at the time of the original request for tender.

There have also been problems with the entry of data by Centrelink as there are, inevitably, staff turnovers in both providers and Centrelink. Problems with payment to providers occur, not with the final 20 per cent as stated in the paper, but with the initial assessment and training commencement and this can always be rectified by DETYA. These problems are already receding with the bedding down of an improved referral system in Centrelink.

Substantial benefits

Although it is acknowledged that there have been some teething problems with the Literacy and Numeracy Program, it has been beneficial to those clients who have taken advantage of the training it provides. The basic premises on which the program was established remains relevant, which is that, for many people, poor literacy and numeracy skills can be a barrier in getting and keeping a job, or to participating in further education and training.

The Commonwealth remains committed to helping job seekers remove this barrier, hence its allocation of ongoing funding for the program. The government is also committed to providing language assistance to those who need it to be competitive in the labour market or to utilise their overseas-gained vocational skills.

The Literacy and Numeracy Program and the Advanced English for Migrants Program will be amalgamated to form a new and more flexible language, literacy and numeracy program from the beginning of 2002. A competitive tender to secure contracted service providers under the new program will be conducted in the second half of 2001.

Mary Rogers is programs unit manager at the Department of Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Victoria.

Literacy and computers

The hype surrounding 'dot coms' is abating on Wall Street, and we see a similar trend closer to home on Collins Street and in Martin Place. The same cannot be said about the 'dot comming' of education. If anything, educational institutions are putting ever-greater resources into getting their courses online. Yet, a similar fallacy bedevils both sectors—a belief that the human element can somehow be removed from

social interactions in order to improve the efficiency of enterprises.

Buying and selling is a human activity—no matter how powerful computers are, they cannot simulate the atmosphere surrounding something as simple as purchasing a loaf of fresh bread from a bakery. Yet there is an expectation abroad that what goes on in a typical classroom can be reproduced on individual screens for individual learners, if only enough bells and whistles (read 'interactive multimedia') are included. If anything, adult literacy students are particularly reliant on the human qualities of their teacher—they need warmth and encouragement as much as they need a well thought out literacy curriculum. The heat generated by a spinning hard drive will not do, nor will the behaviourist's rewards built into many a literacy application.

Computers are not people

The dream of medieval alchemists was to turn base metals into gold. The inventors of the industrial revolution had a similar dream—a machine that could use the inexhaustible low-grade energy found in the air around us to do complex tasks. The discovery of a remarkable law of nature known as the second law of thermodynamics, put paid to all such dreams. Physicists and chemists have various ways of expressing this law, but it boils down to this: No matter how clever you are, you can't get something for nothing. Unfortunately, the laws of thermodynamics still await translation into the language of educational policy makers. Computers cannot replace teachers, but like all useful machines, if used appropriately, they can enhance the quality of human endeavour.

So do computers have a place in a literacy classroom? My answer is an unqualified 'Yes, this is precisely where they do belong—in the classroom'. Computers are tools, extremely powerful tools, but tools nonetheless. They should be used as they are needed. As such, they belong with the learners in the place of learning. They may be a lot more expensive than a class set of coloured pencils, but that is not sufficient reason for locking them in a special room and providing learners only occasional access to them. Actually, if somewhat older but still serviceable models are used, one can get a few computers for not much more than a class set of textbooks.

This brings me to another important point: not every learner needs a computer. On the contrary, to fill a room with computers is to turn it into a computer lab, a place where each student is mostly pursuing a solitary path. The literacy classroom is a place for human interaction, discussions and the sharing of experiences. It is the setting for a small community. Much of its space needs to be devoted to these communal tasks. A few workstations against a wall should be sufficient if students use the computers as they need them.

A flexible tool

There are many valuable uses for computers in our classes. Word processing is the most obvious, with its ease of redrafting

and correcting, capacity for illustration (clip art or photos), and with accessibility features helping overcome physical handicaps. There are the marvellous literacy applications (*The Alphabet, The Interactive Picture Dictionary and Issues in English*) devised by Heather Kaufman of Protea, where Australian voices help students learn the alphabet at one end, and grapple with social issues like euthanasia at the other. There is the new writing genre, email, and the virtual library of the internet. On another tack, while some students are 'talking' to computers, the teacher can be freed to help others with their individual needs. Also, whatever the students work on can be kept readily in a minimum of space.

Good as the above is, there is a more overwhelming reason why computers go hand in hand with literacy. Let me illustrate this with an anecdote about Len (not his real name), one of the first literacy students I introduced to computers. When he first sat down at the keyboard, this 60-year-old was trembling and sweating. I reassured him: 'Don't worry Len—there's no way you're gonna' break the computer'. On the screen was a letter recognition activity from *The Alphabet*. It required the use of that demonic invention, the mouse, so hard to master by so many late starters, particularly older men. In no time Len found a way of leaving the mouse in place, using it only for clicking, and became independently expert in the activity. When he got up, half an hour later, he beamed and sang: 'I did it'. He kept repeating: 'I did it. I can use a computer'.

Demystifying technology

Many of our literacy students need above all else, a boost in their self image. With it come improvements in confidence and motivation. Becoming familiar with computers, and using them as a matter of course, demystifies and gives our students a sense of mastery over an all-pervasive technology.

So should we all rush the nearest computer swap meet and equip each room with a few of the second hand cheapies? Not if we pay attention to the above-mentioned second law of thermodynamics. Getting the computers is the easy bit. Using them productively is another thing entirely. Resources are needed for the professional development of teachers and for maintaining the machines. Setting aside some funds for applications with a literacy focus is also a good idea. Systems are needed for maintaining the computers' health (they are virus-prone) and for documenting good practice. While students are unfamiliar with their use, class teachers may need extra support—a friendly volunteer who hovers near the workstations and solves minor problems may be the answer. Everything may run more smoothly if students are first given some introductory lessons on using computers.

Ela's new world

Ela's story (not her real name) demonstrates the difference computers can make. She and Len were in a literacy class for adults with intellectual disabilities. Ela's physical disabilities preclude her from managing a pen. For a time she hardly spoke and would not enter the room if strangers were present.

The introduction of computers was accompanied by a gradual yet remarkable change in her behaviour. She found her voice and became an active class participant. She now had the means to write, and starting with her own name she acquired a sufficient written vocabulary to send meaningful love letters to her boyfriend via email. Her written work could now be displayed alongside other students and it looked good. Her artwork could be reproduced via a scanner, displayed and applauded. Plainly, achievements and their recognition boosted Ela's confidence and this led to further progress. However, not everything got better; while her speaking, writing and computer skills improved, her reading hasn't.

Similar, if not as dramatic, stories can be told about most other members of this class. Plainly, computer usage can make a positive contribution to both the confidence and the literacy of adult learners. Furthermore, to be literate in our society increasingly includes knowing how to use a computer. But knowing how to use a computer, even with unlimited access to some virtual reality, will not suffice for most students who seek to improve their literacy.

Dr Isy Bilander has a Ph D in chemistry. He retrained in ALBE/ TESOL and taught literacy and numeracy in the adult TAFE and ACE sectors.

The internet— help or hindrance?

The idea to write this article arose as I watched a group of young adults ranging in age from 16 to 22, with generally low literacy levels, attempt to enter specific web addresses and utilise search engines. The web addresses and searches were relevant to the interests of each individual and were not being imposed. The desire to find text and/or pictures was the motivation. Not all, but most, who would not care normally about accuracy were keen to know the correct spelling to type. There were none of the negative attitudes concerning spelling that are usually voiced when the same group is given a cloze test or jumbled letter exercise. Students were keen to ask each other, or myself, how to spell this term or that name, and so on. They wanted to know. They wanted to read the texts, view the pictures and experience the sites.

Slow networking speeds aside, the internet provides an instantaneous reward for being correct and making the effort to be correct, hence being a concrete example of the need to improve spelling.

New skills and challenges

Web page designs succeed by being engaging and providing many cues to help convey messages. These cues include colour, text size, pictures, graphics, layout and sounds. They often use the maxim that less is more, limiting the amount of text on a page to make a more readable product. Literacy

teachers and tutors already know the benefits that students can derive from such an approach. Accessing specific information requires a selection of the following skills: reading search engine responses, clicking links, and following paper-based, verbal and online instructions.

Being the flavour of the moment for many people, organisations, businesses and governments, the internet captures the imaginations of many students who as a result wish to use it. When they are successful this naturally creates a sense of achievement but also provides an opportunity for them to converse at a similar level to friends with better literacy skills, for example, 'Have you seen the ... site?' or 'You should check out the latest ... site'. It is a world in which they are increasingly immersed. For those who have not previously been bitten by the internet bug there is a plethora of topics available at one's fingertips or with a few mouse clicks.

Integrating the internet

The aforementioned students undertake a three-hour information technology elective as part of a pre-employment program. At first the free time to use the internet was the reward for persevering with the other computing work from earlier in each session but increasingly the internet is being integrated with other computer applications. While learning about word processing and/or presentation software the students often want to insert pictures from the internet. This encourages them to tackle some of the more mundane aspects of computing and to complete set tasks.

It is possible to cover in meaningful ways all four reading and writing domains of the Certificates in General Education for Adults with the materials available. Students at levels 2, 3 and 4, even those without much prior knowledge of the internet, have used it as an integral part of their studies, researching such diverse topics as Antarctica, Ned Kelly, cloning, Easter, capital punishment, and Anzac Day. For them the internet is not simply an extension, it provides core text resources. Specific navigation instructions to a limited number of sites makes for efficient learning.

Keep it brief

A cautionary note to make here is that sites that are slabs of text with little interactivity are not those being advocated and are likely to be counter-productive.

Other motivators to develop skills available on the internet are of course email and chat. While these make challenges to normal spelling and grammatical conventions they are here to stay. There is absolutely no doubt that the internet helps in literacy acquisition.

Chris Anderson teaches in the Vocational and Community Services Department and the Language Centre of Holmesglen Institute of TAFE.

Untangling the web— teaching digital literacy

Pedagogical assumptions of traditional print-based classrooms do not translate to the digital field. Print-based notions of reading left to right, of sentences, paragraphs, and linear narratives differ from screen. Analysing online materials uses different set of decoders. Students talk about a site in terms of home pages, icons, graphics and logos. Pages load. Text scrolls through a window. Sound and animation may be an essential part of the reading process.

Questions to take into a classroom context

How does the physical act of reading a book differ from reading a screen? Think about times when you are motivated to reading a book or the paper.

- What mood are you in?
- Where/how do you sit?
- What expectations do you have when you read print media?
- What inspires you to read?
- How does this differ from reading on the screen?
- How often do you read a screen for pleasure or information or entertainment?
- How does your body feel when you look at your screen?
- What physiological or emotional changes do you experience?

The reader has a unique relationship with a screen. The act of reading becomes much more kinaesthetic. A reader uses their hand/mouse to interact with hypertext and make choices about 'what' and 'how' they will read. S/he also brings different expectations to the screen. The learner may be less prepared to sit with a digital text for a long time. Reputedly, users make a decision to stay within a web environment in less than three seconds. Concentration is limited so information must be scannable. Accommodating the need for 'easy access' and 'instant engagement', text is reduced to chunks of information with bullet point, bylines and tag lines. Web guru Jacob Neilson (both loved and hated) says:

Web pages have to employ scannable text, using highlighted keywords (hypertext links serve as one form of highlighting, typeface variations and colour are others); meaningful sub-headings (not 'clever' ones); bulleted lists; one idea per paragraph (users will skip over any additional ideas if they are not caught by the first few words in the paragraph); the inverted pyramid style, starting with the conclusion; half the word count (or less) than conventional writing.

<http://www.useit.com/alertbox/9710a.html>

This approach to information impacts on quantity and quality of online language. It differs from print language. Nuances of meaning, apparent in print or spoken text, don't usually

work in digital text. There is no time for it. Generally, users want to get in and out of a site quickly. The tone embedded within online text has a neutral voice.

If screen copy represents what should be about one half to a third of the volume of its print equivalent, then usually humour, digressions and 'vocal colour' (which are frequently perceived as frustrating or annoying and a block to understanding) are eradicated. Online literacy is visual literacy. Meaning is embedded not only in text but also colour, imagery and design. ALBE classes are discussing site design, production values, interactivity and metaphor. Visual and aural elements carry cultural meaning.

The print-based notions of author or writer and reader have their digital equivalents in a graphic designer, copy editor and market audience.

Questions to take into a classroom context

- What screen icons work for a global audience?
- For example, does a circle surrounding a lower case 'i' carry the meaning 'information' for everyone?



- When you look at a website, where is the first place that your eyes rest?
- Do graphics assist or hinder meaning?
- What makes you trust a site?
- How does colour influence a reader?
- What colours evoke safety, danger, security, wealth, knowledge, power, disharmony, and the environment?
- Can colour suggest gender, evoke culture or appeal to a certain demographic?
- Do all cultures respond to colour in a similar way?
- What implications does the colour black have for a global classroom?
- What is corporate branding?

- What colour is the Commonwealth Bank?
- What colour is the store Target, David Jones, Coles Myers?
- What do you expect of their websites?

Digital literacy is easier to introduce to a student now that print, television, and film texts freely references online design. Media convergence is creating a uniformity of design. A quick glance at the layout of newspapers over the last few years will see an increase in the use of bullet points and lines. A reader can make meaning from a film which looks and moves like hypertext—short bites of information and a non-linear narrative. Students are operating in a design environment that refers to the internet even if they have not been exposed to it as such.

Questions to take into a classroom context

- Compare the front page of 'The Age' to *theage.com.au*
- What has happened to the amount of text when it is put on a web page?
- How does your eye navigate the screen as opposed to the printed page?
- What has happened to the usual juxtaposition of heading and images when the article is translated onto the screen?
- Look at the graphics presented during a news bulletin.
- How has the internet influenced them?
- Do they look like they have been manipulated in a web authoring tool like Photoshop?
- What about the use of typography?
- What Internet qualities can you see?
- Study way a graphic or piece of text moves across the screen.

Julia Griffin has worked as an ALBE teacher at Olympic Adult Education for ten years. She is currently studying multimedia at Victoria University.

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Policy Update

The LANT and Advanced English for Migrants Programs (AEMP) have different target groups, articulated outcomes and time allocations. Merging the programs would disadvantage many clients, says VALBEC, but more importantly, it is an equity issue.

From VALBEC to DETYA— a response to the LANT consultation paper

This year is an important one for the Literacy and Numeracy Training (LANT) program and the future of Commonwealth funded literacy programs. The first LANT contracts will end by December 31 and the re-tendering process will soon be gearing up. As part of this process DETYA has put out a consultation paper and called for feedback from stakeholders. VALBEC has taken the opportunity to reply and details of that reply follow.

The consultation paper outlines a revised program that would merge the current LANT and Advanced English for Migrants Program (AEMP). LANT is a literacy and numeracy program that targets Centrelink clients who are required to comply with an activity test. To be eligible for the program these clients have to be assessed at level 1 or 2 against the NRS and based on this assessment receive 300 or 400 hours of training, usually part-time. AEMP is a language program for Centrelink clients, for whom English is a second language and who have a minimum English language proficiency of NRS level 3. This program is usually offered full-time for a semester.

No merging, no coercing

VALBEC is concerned about several aspects of the proposed program. As with the current program we have ongoing concerns about the ideological premise that prospective students may be coerced into attending classes. The negative impact on the classroom culture of this approach has been reported to us by providers. We are disappointed that this agenda remains a part of the provision of services. We also find the way in which language and literacy are conceptualised within the paper rather limiting.

We strongly oppose the merging of these two programs. They have quite separate perceived target group, articulated outcomes and time allocations. We see this as primarily an equity issue. Some prospective students, literacy students, can only access training if they are assessed at level 1 or 2 on the NRS. Whereas other prospective students who fit the profile for AEMP can access assistance even when they are at level 3 on the NRS.

Additionally we are unsure of the logic that would call for, in this new program, a focus on reading and writing at the

lower NRS levels of 1 and 2, while focusing on speaking at the higher NRS level of 3. We believe that when a prospective student's skills are assessed at a particular level it is the job of the teacher and student to decide which skills need to be the focus of learning. There is no logic for choosing this hierarchical arrangement.

The consultation paper states:

The primary objective of the new program will be to enable job seekers to improve their English language, literacy and numeracy skills to assist them in securing sustainable employment or to participate in vocational education and training. It is recognised that gains in language, literacy and numeracy skills will also improve the quality of participants' daily lives.

Equality of access

Given this objective we fail to see a reason for a distinction in educational access. If the provision of language and literacy services to some prospective students at NRS level 3 will help them in the securing of sustainable employment, participation in vocational education and/or quality of life, why wouldn't it help all prospective students?

We are concerned that this arrangement will not only exclude some prospective students from educational opportunities but also that small providers will be marginalised by this approach. They will be unable to offer the mix of classes necessary to satisfy these different groups, there is no longer room for specialist services provision. Small providers will also be disadvantaged by the stipulation that providers will need to be open and offering services 50 weeks of the year. Indeed this stipulation is probably unrealistic for all providers.

On the other hand

There are however, several aspects of the new provision VALBEC welcomes. Firstly, the acknowledgment of the need for one-to-one training and the possibilities this offers for some students. We hope that these hours will be additional to the hours offered to prospective students to work in a classroom-based situation. Second, we welcome the request to providers for the provision computer access to all clients. We trust that the Commonwealth realises that the provision of these changes will raise the cost of training.

Third, VALBEC welcomes the broader interpretation of outcomes to include all indicators of competence. However, we are still concerned that an increase in one indicator on the NRS at levels 1 and 2 will not be enough to provide most literacy students with the skills they need to access training and/or employment. VALBEC is also concerned about lack of guarantees in place for numeracy provision.

We strongly agree with the recommendation that trained teachers are employed in the delivery of literacy and

numeracy programs, we also recommend a requirement that the assessors are trained and experienced teachers in adult literacy contexts in order to guarantee appropriate placement of applicants into programs.

In response to DETYA's request for suggestions for a new title, VALBEC recommends that the term 'training' be removed from the title which should rather incorporate broader terms such as 'teaching', 'learning' and/or 'education'.

Overall, while a few positive changes have been mooted in this consultation paper VALBEC is generally disappointed that administrative and compliance issues take precedence over pedagogical considerations and that the conflation of two different provision types into one program would privilege some learners over others. VALBEC believes that issues of quality, accountability and equity would be better addressed if the LNP and AEMP guidelines were informed by a national language and literacy policy.

From the VALBEC General Committee

Coming issues

Fine Print in 2001

In 2001, *Fine Print* will be looking at changes in the field. The last edition examined changing contexts of literacy, while this issue covers changing literacies and changing perceptions of literacy. Spring 2001 will investigate change in accreditation and accredited documents such as the CGEA and the new Certificate of English Language and Literacy (CELL), and the summer edition will scrutinise changes in professional development for the ALBE field.

2001

Autumn: changing contexts of literacy

Winter: changing literacies and changing perceptions of literacy

Spring: change in accreditation and accredited documents

Summer: changes in professional development

See details on the back cover about contributing to *Fine Print*.

Beside the Whiteboard

David Dellafiora has worked in Geelong for several years, leading people into new worlds of art, publishing and networking. Michael Chalk from *Fine Print* saw his presentation at the recent VALBEC conference.



You presented at the recent VALBEC conference, touching on your journey from artist books to publishing with groups of young people in adult education—is there a history of using text in visual art?

At the conference, I gave a brief outline of artists using text ranging from the 1920s, the Russian constructivist books, to the conceptual art of the 1960s and present day almost neo-conceptual art where the use of similar ways of making books and looking at text is starting to appear in installation artworks, and use of text in public buildings by artists such as Lawrence Weiner.

For those who don't know, what are Artistbooks, or Mailart—are they different?

Artistbooks are incredibly broad, and can take the form of *Libre Dell'Artiste*, which is a series of fine art prints inside a folio, or it can be more conceptual, such as in the 1960s, where almost anything at all could be conceived as an artistbook.

There's a recent piece by Martin Creed, which is a hundred balls of paper—he's actually just crumpled up these balls. I think that statement is a great artistbook, because it's about the act of a writer who's not happy with his piece of writing so he scrumples the paper, throws it into the bin, and instead of throwing the thing away it's taken out of the bin, and becomes an artistbook in its own right. So, the aggression of not being able to make is transformed into another form and becomes sculpture. That's an example of artistbooks at its most avant-garde.



Bookman: Library Residence workshops in creating one-off artist books from withdrawn library books.

In terms of today's artistbooks, I think the most interesting aspect about them is that anyone can make one. With people having access to computers at home and photocopiers in photocopy shops, anyone can make their own small books. In terms of what I conceive of as artistbooks, it in very broad terms, it's about access for everyone to publish.

Artistbooks also often explore the notion of what it is to be a book. Often they deal with how we conceive literature and how it's almost like breaking the material back down to its basis—the block of wood. This is one of the things I wanted to talk about during the VALBEC conference. If you bring the book back to its raw material, wood, then the student can be empowered and it eliminates the fear that books can often hold for people who have literacy problems.

I see artistbooks in terms of open access, and mailart shares in this way of looking at the world. Mailart originated in the 1950s and is a network of practitioners who send artworks through the post—it's a form of exchange.

These exchanges now take on larger forms. An artist in one country might instigate a project on a particular theme, invite others to take part who send works to be shown. It doesn't matter if you're an artist or not—the idea of mailart is that it's total access, which offers opportunities for people from all walks of life to interact. You might have different ages, different cultural backgrounds and all would be shown within the same exhibition.

The artworks aren't returned to the individuals, but documentation is sent back. This usually takes the form of an artistbook or address list, and this list acts as a way to get in touch with other participants in that particular show. At any one time you might have hundreds of projects instigated. This alternative network flows outside of the conventional gallery system.

Mailart projects also offer a great opportunity for individuals to create exhibits around particular themes, and can act as rallying points. For instance, Amnesty International often uses mailart projects in overseas countries to instigate large showings of works. One show I took part in, 'Remembrance of Sarajevo', had over 400 artists from 28 countries.

Mailart and artistbooks often share the same network of practitioners who exchange works through the post, and it's a very kind, generous circle to be a part of, quite the opposite to the traditional fine art scene which can be a bit cut-throat.

If anyone's interested in mailart shows, look on the internet, type in the words 'mailart', and that will lead you to a number of sites.

You've been working with groups of young people in the Geelong area. Could you tell us about your programs and methods?

Since moving to Geelong in 1998, I've been involved in a number of projects involving young people in the area. In 1999 I coordinated, with Sue Jones, the Plus Program which was run by Youth Services within Geelong and aimed at giving young people access to the arts.

Open Hand Press was created during the Plus Program. This was a shop run with Pete Spence, a visual poet. For a month, we made artistbooks, and members of the public rocked up, took part and created works. Over thirty books were produced. Alongside Open Hand Press, there were a number of artists who created installation artworks in the local area, seating areas and the shopping precinct.



Open Hand Press 1999. Pete Spence and David Dellafiora

It was around this period that I started working for GATE in Geelong (Geelong Adult Training and Education), and developed the Boundless Books program. Boundless Books aims to encourage students to develop their reading, writing and mathematical skills, as well as visual literacy. Making books and 'zines, participants look at how they can self-publish using photocopiers, rubber stamps, handwriting, drawings and collage. Boundless Books draws on participants' own experiences and ideas, which go to form the inside of the book. A theme is often chosen a week before so students can collect material to bring to the book.

Boundless Books works with students from a whole range of ages and abilities. It's part of the Certificate of General Education for Adults (CGEA) and comes under the General Curriculum Options. We have students ranging from 18 to 60. Since 1999 we have produced between 60 and 70 books.

As well as Boundless Books, I'm involved in the media studies course at GATE, for which students produce their Media News, and Barwon Youth Options (BYO) program. Also, two days a week I coordinate Breathing Space, a Work for the



Boundless Books. Sea Scroll book workshop. Adult Learners Week 1999.

Dole program where participants work on community-based art projects. These can take the form of installations, making things for festivals, or individual projects where they can explore their own ideas and desires about future directions.

And how do you find young people respond to your methods?

I think one of the most interesting responses I often get is that you have to deconstruct the student's view of how they see art or how they've been taught what constitutes art.

Often they have the problem of feeling that they can't draw, yet I think it's to do with how art is taught at school that is the issue. Instead of actually saying it doesn't really matter how good you are this particular task, it's about being empowered to make your own statement. So that's one of the things I try to work through with the young person—to really look at how they can collaborate on group projects, so it doesn't rely on a single maker, doing things collectively. By making things collectively you also have that collective strength, so you can actually start building on that supporting structure of one individual helping another.

So you might have, for instance, two students who are good at drawing and others who are more into the ideas-based way of looking at the artwork. Together they complement, and by acting as this complementary unit they create work which can convey the message and the message becomes the important thing, not what the artefact looks like.

How much do you tell your students about the art history that informs your teaching?

It varies from group to group. For instance with my younger group, I might not actually emphasise too much the historical positioning of what they're working on. I think they would become too self-conscious about their working processes if you start to anchor them too much to a particular art

movement or way of thinking. But with Breathing Space and Boundless Books, I do place their work in context with art history. They are able to see how some of their works match up with those of famous artists and they can feel quite empowered by that.

What projects are you currently working on?

My present projects are linked to Field Study, the mailart network I coordinate. Through Field Study, three artists' editions will be created which will link up to the adult education programs at GATE. The first of these is a folio of works created as a documentation for a Breathing Space show at the National Hotel in Geelong. Students created works around themes of the culture of drinking and overseas artists were invited to contribute works.

The second artist book to be created this year is The Visualised Page, which is working with the Boundless Books students. We've invited overseas visual poets to create works on the idea of the Codex and the Rubis to be incorporated into an artistbook. Students have made pages as well as overseas participants so they're sharing the same space.

For Barwon Youth Options, again it's a link to overseas artists, where we've asked students of BYO to create a series of 'artist trading cards', and we've also invited overseas artists to make trading cards as well. The result will be a boxed edition incorporating everyone's works.

What about networking between people in your groups and in other places?

The reason we want to create these links between mailart networking and adult education classrooms is to create networks where people could do exchanges and to broaden the outlook of where people lie within their own makings. One thing I try to do within my classes is to link people up to organisations which could promote their working practices. One of these organisations is Arts Dyslexic Trust, based in the UK. It is a large index of artists with dyslexia, again which is a very open structure for people to contribute works to.

Do you think there is any potential for more networking between groups of adult literacy learners, or young people in adult education?

I think there's great potential for networking between groups of adult literacy learners and young people in adult education. The potential lies in the fact that if we all feel we're in a similar area and think in similar ways by sharing

things collectively, it's empowering. That's where the importance lies in networking—to stand back and say we all share similar histories and we're all lifetime learners embarking on lifetime experience of learning.

So, what's your background? How did you come to be working in adult education, where you are now?

I was born in the UK and educated at Exeter College of art and design where I got a degree in fine arts. I left college in 1988, and worked on a number of artist installations, created Artistbooks, commissioned from various arts bodies to do installations in as diverse areas as swimming pools and works for the National Trust. I emigrated to Australia in 1998 and since being here I've been teaching at GATE on Boundless Books, teaching young adults with Barwon Youth Options and since 1999 I've been the coordinator of Breathing Space community arts program.

I probably came into literacy from quite a different background to most teachers. I come from fine arts, but text has always been important within my work practice. I am dyslexic and a lot of my earlier works were about trying to come to terms with this problem and how I could be more resourceful within structures and create my own sense of language.

Who's your favourite artist and why?

I see teaching as an art practice in its own right—I definitely don't take the view that teaching is separate from the artistic practice. I share the same space with it and I think that's probably something that I share with my favourite artists, I suppose the most influential one being Joseph Beuys. I think with Joseph Beuys, it was a position where he was one of the first to really state that his teaching practice was as much part of his art and I think that process where you don't make a division between your work and your art, it's all merged, it's all one, that life is art.

A similar philosophy is shared by Alistair MacLennan, who teaches in Belfast, Northern Ireland. MacLennan also links the teaching practice to his work as a performance artist, and he's quite similar to David Harding who teaches public art in Glasgow, again that shared practice where teaching itself becomes an artistic tool.

Thank you David

Find out more about mail art projects through Field Study, c/o David Dellafiora, PO Box 1838, Geelong, Australia, 3220.

