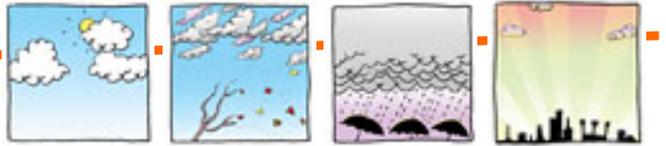


four seasons in one day –

literacies in changing climates

Adult Literacy Conference ■ Melbourne ■ September 10-11, 2004



Spot the Difference: reading short texts from adult literacy and ESL teaching perspectives

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How would you teach an adult to read the following short text?

Pete, the accident-prone budgie, is no more. It broke its leg falling off its perch and then it set fire to itself by rubbing the match stick splint on its leg along the bottom of its cage. Its London owner says it was a bizarre thing to happen.

(Odd Spot, The Age, 16/10/92)

Or recipes, cartoon captions, letters to newspaper editors, signage at airports, and so on?

This workshop discusses some of the teaching methods that have been used in teaching students to read texts like those alluded to above. It builds upon an ACAL presentation nearly ten years ago (see Fine Print, Winter 1995, Vol 17, No 2, pp.18-21) that generated interest amongst our colleagues and so we plan to follow a similar format on this occasion.

1994:

We were involved in a conference workshop with some twenty participants who used group work to share and then extend ideas for teaching student groups that increasingly, during the 1990s, included both adult literacy and adult ESL students within any one group. Some initial handouts were provided that described several prior teaching ideas, some sample texts to be used in the workshop itself and several references to relevant journals.

Participants developed an organisational system on which to record the ideas that were generated by each group during the workshop and then worked on a particular text, *Pizza that corners a captive market*, distributed to each group. Workshop groups listed their adult literacy and adult ESL teaching ideas for that article (within the classifications of the agreed CGEA Framework and ESL macro-skills chart) and began to extend this approach to other distributed texts - but found that time was too limited for completion.

Participants therefore opted to post in their worked examples over the next few days. These were then compiled into a summary report which, in turn, was sent back to participants.

2004:

Some things will remain the same this year, some will change.

Once again we will use a slightly whimsical, possibly trivial, story to begin this exercise... acknowledging that the workshop is scheduled late on the second day of a conference.

A frame of reference derived from sketch histories of methods for teaching students to read will be presented (from Back to Basics versus Psycholinguistics, from Immersion Method to this and that) and used to generate a sample teaching plan on a cartoon, an exhibition caption or whatever short texts can be accommodated in the limited time.

Social context, purpose of text... and realities of time or pressures on an increasingly casualised teaching force will all influence both size and nature of how we would like to design the plan for teaching students to read. The question: *what old teaching theories and practices are we merely re-hashing, and what, if anything, is new?* will therefore be part of our discussion.

However, in view of the hectic nature of the workshop, many handouts will be provided and, if ten years ago sets a precedent, post-conference discussion will then lead to a useful group report to be sent back to participants - by email.