This issue: Theory and practice

Features

Regulars

Editorial

This issue of *Fine Print* addresses the problem of the nexus between theory and practice. While we all acknowledge the importance of theoretical underpinnings of what we do, it is increasingly difficult to decide what those underpinnings should be. With economic and human capital theories having revolutionised training provision, and a host of providers competing for dwindling funds, it seems almost a luxury in straitened times to ask: "Why are we doing this? What transformations do we want to bring about, and why do we believe this is an effective way of doing it?" And yet these are questions which any reflective teacher will ask.

Fine Print wanted to know which theories are significant today in the field of adult literacy and basic education and so we asked the writers of these articles to discuss how theories can usefully inform practice. Unsurprisingly, the responses are widely different from each other, but what they all have in common is that the authors are striving to make connections between what teachers do and why they do it.

We start with a practising teacher - Judith Newcombe, who discusses candidly the ways in which her practice has changed over nearly twenty years of teaching, influenced by social, linguistic and psychological theories. Many of us will recognise and empathise with Judith's experiences. It is worth noting that, while Judith describes the shifts in her views over the years, and identifies her approach as being that of a "bower bird", she has come to place more faith in linguistic approaches, specifically the genre approach.

Phonics is one of those subjects which rarely gets discussed in adult literacy journals and conferences - and yet some form of phonics is taught by nearly all teachers, at least some of the time, and however shamefacedly. Kerry Hempenstall argues that it is time to forget about the shame and bring phonics back to the centre of our practice. He maintains the research shows unequivocally that people cannot learn to read effectively without strong letter-sound knowledge, and that this has to be taught explicitly. This involves, for Hempenstall, disposing of one of the sacred cows of whole language teaching - authentic texts. A question which many readers would want to ask is, is this enough? Does the ability to 'crack the code' of letter-sound recognition mean that a person is literate? Where do more advanced thinking skills fit in?

Josie Rose's article addresses the uses of new learning technologies, and importantly links classroom practice to theories of learning, language and motivation. The article reminds us that although technology brings about changes in our practice, and its bells and whistles can be very seductive, approaches using new technologies are still doomed to failure unless they are based on valid theoretical frameworks.

The articles by Robyn Hodge and Merilyn Hickson are companion pieces. Robyn Hodge's article is a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of the important new framework for basic education programs, *Transforming Lives, Transforming Communities*. According to Hodge, the framework attempts to balance the tensions of economic rationalism and social justice. She also asserts that the framework is informed by liberal, radical and postmodern theories of education. A question which the reader may want to ask is whether these theories are really reconcilable, and how far it is possible to hold on to a clear vision of the purpose of teaching and learning whilst trying to satisfy all these competing forces. Merilyn Hickson's article suggests a possible answer to this question, with an account of a program focussing on a form of literacy that has rarely been discussed in Fine Print - musical literacy. The program is an example of the successful implementation of the principles of the *TLTC* framework - a movement from theory to practice.

In the final article Andrew Lohrey, the author of a professional development resource for critical literacy, describes the thinking behind the resource. He explains that critical literacy is "the sympathetic yet critical ability to read a broad and deep range of meanings in any text." Lohrey is clearly a critic of much of the western educational tradition. Yet readers may wish to apply critical literacy to Lohrey's own text and ask whether western thought really has been a stable and coherent unity, or rather whether it has been a convulsive turmoil of competing and divergent ideas. Is Lohrey's approach really new, or can it be linked to some older educational traditions, perhaps even the Socratic?

Finally, we asked some students of adult literacy teacher training courses to tell us how they are matching up theoretical ideas with practical approaches, and which theorists' work they find compelling.

You will find all the regular columns in this issue of Fine print, plus a new column, Foreign Correspondence, which will be giving us snapshots of adult literacy and basic education in other countries. For our first column, we go to Pakistan, where literacy campaigns on a huge scale have been carried out. While cultural differences are evident, Australian practitioners will recognise some of their own problems and struggles in Vincent David's report. We are planning future columns from Canada, the United States and Ireland.

As ever, we invite readers' responses and comments to any of the contents of this issue - positive, negative or outraged.

The Editorial Group

Teaching literacy—the bower bird approach

by Judith Newcombe

In this article, Judith Newcombe discusses the phonics/whole language debate in the light of her own practice since the early 1980s.

Fine Print asked me to write about the phonics versus whole language debate as part of the overall theme of the relationship between theory and practice. What I have done is to reflect on how my practice has changed over the years, and touch on some of the theories which have clarified and shifted my thinking. My experience and thoughts about the phonics/whole language debate are woven through this. I have chosen two snapshots which crystallise these shifts: the first snapshot is from my first days as an adult literacy teacher, and the second from a class I taught in 1998. Central to my more recent practice has been my study of systemic functional linguistics and genre based approaches to teaching, although, it is also true that, like a bower bird, I have gathered teaching strategies from all sorts of places.

Snapshot one

In the early 1980s I fell headlong into the phonics versus whole language debate when I began adult literacy teaching at the Council of Adult Education. At the time, the CAE was alive with a sense of change. The debate about praxis and about methodology was invigorating, and at times, heated and polarised. One event exemplifies this.

In 1983, *The Complete Guide to English Spelling: a new approach* was published. This is a phonics based approach which systematises the patterns and rules of spelling, and by drawing on etymology, argues that, despite its complexity, English spelling is logical. The author, Elsie Smelt, a dignified woman with many years ESL experience launched her book at CAE by presenting her work to a packed room of teachers and students. She opened the session by dramatically enunciating her central underlying principle: "Spelling is writing letters for sounds to form words." (Smelt:1983:11).

There were a few mutterings and some head shaking. This was a defiant stand to take at a time when the adult literacy field was drawn towards the psychological, personal historical and to some degree, social explanations for low levels of literacy, and when there was a avalanche of interest in whole language and psycholinguistic approaches to teaching. We were reacting against the meaninglessness of phonic based approaches to teaching reading, what could be called the 'fat cat on the mat' approach. With good reason, phonic decoding was said to be totally inappropriate to teaching adults: after all, most of those who had failed at school had done so because of phonic based approaches to learning to read and write. (The wheel has turned and these

> '*like a bower bird, I have gathered teaching strategies from all sorts of places*'

days we hear that most of those failed at school did so because of the whole language approach!) However, in the early eighties, there were arguments about whether to teach 'Look, cover, say, write, check', or 'Look, cover write, check': if visual memory was so important, did sounds have any relevance?

However, as I sat and listened to Elsie Smelt at that memorable book launch, I was deeply affected by her passion for words, their sounds, their meanings and their history. Even if she had the 'wrong line', parts of that stayed with me. So too did her preference for using the big dictionaries in class, the Oxford or the Macquarie, which include entries on etymology.

And what of my early teaching practice? At the time, I was teaching a number of adult literacy classes, including a 'spelling class' which had been set up to meet the needs of so many students who came back to 'school' to learn to spell. Everyone except the students and the departmental manager seemed to be uncomfortable about the existence of a separate spelling class - prevalent theories indicated that spelling should only be done in the context of writing. We encouraged students to invent spelling as means of expressing meaning. Ever a pragmatist, I sat on a the fence and asked students to bring their writing drafts from their other classes, and we worked on those. I taught self correction strategies; we built up spelling patterns on the whiteboard; students compiled personal dictionaries. From memory though, it wasn't a very interesting class, and not terribly successful.

And, what of my literacy method? As my diaries from the time reveal, I thought it was important to get to know each individual learner and to foster the personal growth dimension of literacy learning. I foregrounded the interpersonal: I showed respect for the learner, and explicitly valued their experience. I changed my high school teacher tendencies so that failure was never reinforced by win-lose competitions, or by insisting that students read out loud or write on the board. I used the language experience approach, and students learnt to read the texts I scribed. Students talked about and wrote personal recounts, and I drew on process approaches to writing. We published little books. These were all good lessons to learn. I still use language experience with non readers and writers and incorporate process approaches to writing; my collection of booklets written by students keeps growing; I flinch when I hear teachers speak dismissively of students, or slash through students' work with red pens. But I was unconvinced, even then, that process writing and whole language approaches were in

themselves 'empowering', or that they constituted a comprehensive methodology for adult literacy practice.

Teaching reading

One of the problems with discussing the teaching of reading within the framework of phonics versus whole language is that this sets up an exclusive polarity. This either/or framework fails to capture for the complexity of the reading process and secondly, it does not account for the difference between spoken and written language. A more embracing and useful concept views reading as an interactive process in which meaning is constructed by the reader. This includes "the interaction between levels of language within the text which the reader draws on in the course of reading" (Wallace:1992:47). The "levels of language within the text" include 'bottom-up' features such as a graphophonics and syntax as well as 'top down' features such as the reader's schemas: that is knowledge about the subject, or Field - what we predict the text will be about and how it will unfold.

Knowledge of phonics is an essential knowledge which readers draw on when they read, but phonic strategies are only one of the 'bottom up' strategies. Furthermore, for many adult literacy students, the difficulty in reading lies in an over reliance on phonic strategies and the belief that sounding out each word is how reading is done. Effective reading also involves moving your quickly down or across the page when you are skimming or scanning, and even when we read in detail, our eyes do not read each word in sequence. Reading also involves breaking text into larger, more meaningful chunks.

The reading done by many adult literacy students shows an over reliance on phonic strategies, laborious word by word reading in which, quite often, the meaning gets lost. Drawing on the work of Goodman who described reading as a "psycholinguistic guessing game", the teaching strategy frequently used to counter this is to focus on meaning, and to develop pre-reading activities which strengthen the student's prediction strategies in relation to the Field. Phonic strategies are used, as is whole word recognition. But many literacy teachers are mindful that in drawing on the levels of language in the text, "efficient readers predict and sample, selecting the minimal visual information consistent with their prediction" (Wallace:1992:42).

For many adult literacy teachers, assisting the reader to make his or her own sense of what the writer of the text means is the goal when we teach reading . However, Wallace also suggests that of the 'top down' strategies we employ in reading, genre prediction may be the most important. That is, our expectation of the likely meaning in a text is more heavily influenced by our knowledge and expectation of the genre of the text we are reading: "we interpret texts in the light of the schemas which are constructed through exposure to a range of genres and discourses" (Wallace: 1992:43)

> 'phonic decoding was said to be totally inappropriate to teaching adults'

Differences between written and spoken language

Before moving on to my second snapshot, it is important to discuss further another limitation shared by phonics based approaches and whole language approaches. Both approaches fail to recognise the differences between written and spoken language. The language experience approach, while useful as a beginning point with beginner readers, seems to assume that students can automatically make the giant leap from simple spoken language which is scribed and to reading denser, nominalised texts.

Halliday characterises language "in terms of the part it plays in the social life of social man" (1978:51) and his grammar provides a tool for analysing the linguistic choices which are made by the speaker or writer as they use language in a social situation to convey meaning to others. The particular choices made in constructing any text are determined by the social context in which meaning is being made, and what the purpose is. The context includes the interpersonal dimension, the subject about which you are communicating what channel of communication you are using. Whether you are speaking or writing profoundly affects the language choices you make.

Speech or spoken text can be described as a process, "as language which happens as waves travel through air" (Halliday:1985:81). It is characterised by hesitations, unfinished clauses and grammatical complexity. On the other hand, written text may be seen as a product which has been polished and reworked by the writer. It is characterised by lexical density: that is, more meaning is packed into each clause. The language and language patterns used in spoken and written texts are quite different, and typically, the way clauses are constructed internally and in relation to each is shaped by whether you are talking or writing.

Both written and spoken texts are also shaped in culturally determined ways in order to achieve particular purposes. This is the genre of the text. For example, we can, with a fair degree of accuracy, predict the most likely genres which begin with 'Good morning. Can I help you?' and 'Once upon a time..' There are of course, many different spoken genres and written genres.

When we are reading, "genre knowledge will tend to over ride other knowledge sources" (Wallace:1992:40). For adult literacy students who have had little exposure to written texts, and so have little knowledge of written genres, the reading process is likely to be much more difficult. In other words, although they may know about the Field, or subject matter, they do not have a sense of how the text is likely to unfold.

Snapshot two

During 1998, I taught an evening adult literacy class at Carlton Adult Reading and Writing Program (CARWP), described as a mixed CGEA level 2 - 3 class. In describing

their reasons for coming, the students said things like "I want to know the rules of spelling", "I can't read properly, I'm too slow", "I want to learn my sounds"; "It's embarrassing at work when I read something because I'm so slow".

All of the students wanted to be able to read the newspaper more effectively. In the early months of the course, we had enjoyed using *Public Literacy* (Moraitis & McCormack:1995) and through this, and other work around the four literacies, students had learnt that when they came to write, they needed to consider their social purpose and the shape and method of development of their text.

Skimming and scanning strategies had been taught and were practised each week. Before we read a newspaper story in detail, we usually focussed on the headline and brainstormed all the content, or Field, that the students expected to find in the text. Midway through the year I became aware of the work done by Peter White (1997) on newspaper stories: the hard-news-event genre. White's work deserves a much more detailed discussion than is possible here, and I am only able to touch briefly on one aspect of his work in this article.

White identifies the generic structure of the hard-news-event story as an orbital structure. The nub of the story is encapsulated in the headline and (the story's) opening sentence. This is the Nucleus. The remainder of the text is made up of subcomponents which elaborate, contextualise, appraise, suggest cause and effect or give justification. White describes the structure as orbital because "the key logical and lexical interactions in the hard new report are not between adjacent subcomponents in the body of the text but between each individual subcomponent and the Headline/lead nucleus." (White:1997:119). A feature of the subcomponents is that they can be edited—rearranged or omitted—"without rendering the text incoherent" (White:1997:119)

One evening in the CARWP class, before we read a newspaper story, I drew a simplified diagram representing this orbital structure on the board.
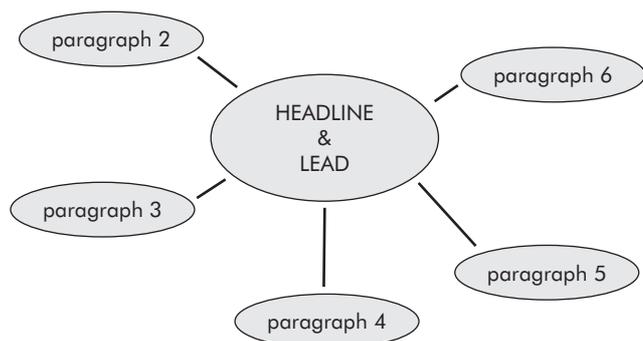
> ' But I was unconvinced, that process writing and whole language approaches were in themselves 'empowering' '

Somewhat to my surprise, students in the CARWP class grasped the simplified concept of generic structure and, more importantly, the diagram was a revelation which made reading newspaper stories easier. In discussion with the students as to why this was so, it seemed that they had expected newspaper stories to unfold chronologically (for example: and then.. earlier on.. and then..) or to be developed in linear fashion like some kind of argument.

Obviously, many confident readers manage to develop a sense of how newspaper stories are likely to unfold and how they have been deliberately structured to make meaning. They have learnt which parts to skip, and how ideology has affected what is given prominence, but for students who lack confidence in reading, making the generic structure explicit provides another strategy which enables them to undertake reading more effectively, and more critically.

Teaching spelling

So, as the second snapshot indicates, the study of systemic functional linguistics and genre has been important to my teaching practice and has provided a methodological framework for teaching writing and reading. But what about teaching spelling? After all, improving spelling was what students in the CARWP class wanted, just like the students in my less successful CAE spelling class.

The reality of evening literacy is that students often come exhausted, their time is precious and they expect to have their needs met. So, I taught spelling explicitly. The class was scheduled for two hours and by-and-large the first half hour or more dealt with 'word study'. Sometimes the word study was based on a text we had studied, or was part of the pre-teaching for a text. Sometimes it wasn't. What was essential was that the spelling section remained interesting, non-threatening and yet of clear use and relevance to the students.

What had changed since the CAE class was the way I explained the theories informing my practice. The theoretical dimensions which I discussed frequently during the spelling segment of class were those from cognitive psychology, about adult memory and learning. The assertion, based on research, that "Adulthood is not a period of static or declining intellectual competence but of ongoing, qualitatively different intellectual growth" (Pogson and Tennant:1995:23) is clearly reassuring to adults who doubt their capacity to master the complexities of English spelling. Research into the memory of experts shows the importance of "chunking", of "seeking out meaningful patterns" and of developing "strong self monitoring skills" (Chi et al cited in Pogson and Tennant: 1995: 25). The seminal work of McCormack and Pancini (1991) provides valuable teaching material in this field.

In 15 years then, my approach had shifted from a concern about whether or not I should teach spelling explicitly, to a focus on how adult students might begin to improve their

spelling. The metalanguage of graphophonics was introduced: for example, vowels, consonants, syllables, prefixes, word origins. We sought out spelling patterns. We did some phonics, although students who write 'wen' for 'when' and becos' for 'because' do not lack basic sound-letter correspondence.

As the students' knowledge and confidence developed, I moved to a type of morphemic approach to teaching spelling. This simple activity allowed great flexibility: it involved putting a word like 'plant' on the board and students then created as many words as possible based on the morpheme 'plant'(planted, planting, plantation, replanted, supplanted and so on). As well as focussing on the meaning of words, we constantly reinforced the graphophonic system, and began to learn the terminology of word classes such as noun, verb (this terminology appears in most dictionaries and, although students weren't expected to identify word classes—the old parsing approach to grammar—they enjoyed being treated as people who could understand such mysteries). We began to experiment with lexical collocation and to build expanded nominal groups. As well as developing spelling strategies, this approach assists students to unravel what happens linguistically in the more complex, written texts which students wanted to be able to read. Had I continued with the class, I would have wanted to explore with the students how words change depending on their function in a text—and so continue to extend their knowledge of language.

Judith Newcombe has worked in adult education and ALBE for about fifteen years: as teacher, a coordinator, for the Network of Women in Further Education and as union organiser in adult education. As part of her post graduate diploma and incomplete master of education degree, she has been studying systemic functional linguistics at the University of Melbourne. She is currently manager of Learning North West (formerly Glenroy Adult Literacy Program).

References

Christie, F. and Martin, J.R., 1997, *Genre and Institutions: Social Processes in the Workplace and School* Cassell, London.

Foley, G., (ed) 1995, *Understanding Adult Education and Training*, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, Australia.

Halliday, M.A.K., 1978, *Language as a Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning*, Edward Arnold, London.

Halliday, M.A.K., 1985, *Spoken and Written Language*, Deakin University, Geelong.

McCormack, R. and Pancini, G., 1990, *Learning to Learn*, Division of Further Education, Victoria.

Moraitis, P. and McCormack,R., 1995, *Public Literacy: A Curriculum for Adult Basic Education*, ACFEB, Victoria.

Pogson, P. and Tennant, M., 1995, "Understanding Adult Learners", pp.20-30, Foley, G., (ed) 1995, *Understanding Adult Education and Training*, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, Australia.

Smelt, E., 1983, *The Complete Guide to English Spelling: a new approach*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne.

Wallace, C., 1992, *Reading*, Oxford University Press, U.K.

White, P., 1997, "Death, disruption and the moral order: the narrative impulse in mass-media 'hard news' reporting", pp. 101-133. Christie, F. and Martin, J.R., 1997, *Genre and Institutions: Social Processes in the Workplace and School* Cassell, London.

Coming issues
Fine Print in 1999

In 1999, Fine Print seeks to examine a number of different perspectives on Adult Literacy and Basic Education.

This autumn edition considers the essential question of where Theory and Practice meet. It seems clear that the two cannot be separated, but it is still possible to hear some saying, "We want practical ideas rather than theory", as though the two are somehow in conflict. Hopefully such distinctions will be less apparent after this edition.

The winter edition will focus on "the brain" and psychological perspectives on adult learning. It will address such issues as:

Theories of personality in adult education;

What is dyslexia and how does it affect learning?

How much of learning is "hard wired" in the brain?

(If you have other ideas related to this theme and you wish to contribute an article which adds to the discussion, please see details on the back cover about contributing to Fine Print.)

The spring edition then considers the broader questions of cultural perspectives on literacy.

As the year 2000 looms ever closer, the final, summer edition will attempt to stand back and consider the place of ALBE in the new millennium.

The role of phonics in learning to read: what does recent research say?

by Kerry Hempenstall

In this article, Kerry Hempenstall presents a powerful argument for the centrality of phonics to the teaching of reading.

The role of phonics instruction in learning to read has always been controversial. It has been particularly so in the last 15 years in Australia given the dominance of the Whole Language movement in pre-service and in-service teacher education, and in education department policies. The Whole Language philosophy rejects explicit phonics teaching on principle because it teaches reading by emphasising units smaller than the whole word, that is, through individual letters, syllables and morphemes.

In several English speaking countries, there is a strong momentum for reform of reading instruction. Dramatic legislation in the USA and Britain in recent months may possibly lead to similarly far-reaching policy changes in Australia in the not-too-distant future. The changes have arisen because of an overwhelming concern over literacy in those communities, and because of evidence that the Whole Language model of reading, the same approach supported by governments throughout Australia, is exacerbating the problem.

> 'there is a strong momentum for reform of reading instruction'

International directions

In the USA, the Reading Excellence Act (1999) was recently enacted because of the unacceptably low reading achievement of students in US schools. It acknowledges that part of the responsibility rests with methods of reading instruction, and with policies that have been insensitive to developments in the understanding of the reading process. The Act attempts to bridge the gulf between research and classroom practice by mandating that only programs in reading that have been shown to be effective according to strict research criteria will be funded in future. This reverses a trend in which the criterion for adoption of a model was that it met preconceived notions of 'rightness' rather than that it was demonstrably effective for students. Thus, the basis for adoption of programs formerly emphasised preferred process over student outcome.

Under the new Federal system, explicit phonics teaching is highlighted as an essential element in any beginning reading program. Teacher training institutes have long emphasised Whole Language as the model of choice, and few teachers have been provided with the skills necessary to teach in the newly prescribed manner, so massive teacher retraining programs are being introduced. Of the programs thus far accredited for funding, two approaches are known in Australia: Direct Instruction (Corrective Reading, Reading Mastery, Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons), and Success For All. Both approaches emphasise early and systematic instruction in phonemic awareness and make use of explicit phonics in the early stages of reading. Though unsupported by Department of Education funding, the Direct Instruction approach is now in use in an estimated 150-200 schools in Victoria. Its value in assisting those students who struggle with reading is being increasingly recognised by schools, most of which adopt the programs after viewing their use in other local schools.

In Britain, the National Literacy Strategy (1998) has been released to all primary schools, requiring them to abandon the current Whole Language approach to reading. Components of the former system such as reliance on context clues to aid word reading are discredited in the Strategy, and explicit phonics are to be introduced from the earliest stages of reading.

Current practice in Australia

In Australia, some Whole Language purists consider phonic cues have no place at all in a reading program, though most would view them as worthy of mention as secondary strategies. They envisage reading as primarily a linguistic rather than a visual exercise; one of only sampling segments of the print and actively predicting what the words will be. If children need assistance, they are urged to predict more wisely by attending more closely to the context. This approach is disastrous for learners in difficulty, and has been gradually discredited by research over the last fifteen years.

Even those who acknowledge a role for phonic cues in Whole Language approaches expect students only to identify a letter or two of a word so as to aid the confirmation of the guess. Further, Whole Language advocates argue that these phonic cues can and should be learned without explicit teaching. A central belief is that exposure to meaningful, authentic literature is all that is required to learn to read because learning to read entails similar processes as learning to speak - a natural process. Since we learn to speak without formal instruction, so we should learn to read the same way. Unfortunately, it isn't so. Mastering a written language is an achievement that far outweighs the requirements of speech production. Written language is an artificial, visually-based device quite distinctly more challenging than the biologically-wired, sounds-based processes of speech.

Phonemic awareness: The missing link?

An extensive amount of reading research over the past ten years has emphasised the critical role of phonemic awareness in successfully beginning reading. It is an awareness that words are made up of smaller sound segments or phonemes. It is this conscious reflection on the structure of words that allows us to decide that "sat" has three phonemes, and "splat" has five. This is a difficult task for young children—many even consider a spoken sentence as one continuous stream of sound. With appropriate help, they can learn to distinguish individual words despite the uninterrupted flow of a sentence. In stages, they learn to appreciate that it is possible to segment words into syllables (foot-ball); and, around Year 1, into phonemes (m-a-t). This awareness is critical in learning to read and spell an alphabetic writing system like ours. It is a skill that can be reliably and accurately assessed in children, it can be taught or (for the fortunate) it may be deduced by experience with print. Its absence is now considered a major cause of reading failure, though its presence alone does not guarantee success.

The relationship between phonics and phonemic awareness is often misunderstood. Phonemic awareness is an aural/oral skill that (at least in part) can exist without contact with print. Until contact with writing however, there is no communicative value in developing such a skill, and many children do not routinely pay attention to these meaningless segments of speech, and hence do not develop this capacity. Other children become fascinated with rhymes and alliteration, Pig Latin, Spoonerisms, and they enjoy inventing words—constructing them from speech segments. Some children enter school with thousands of hours of valuable literacy experience through rhyming games, Sesame Street, Playschool, I-Spy, plastic letter games, stories read to them, and teaching dolly to read. Other children have had either little interest or lacked the opportunity for such exploration. Still others may have had such experiences but without taking the cognitive leap towards a conscious awareness. Students described as dyslexics, for example, may have a weakness (perhaps partly genetic) in this area, and require intensive structured teaching (as opposed to mere opportunities) to develop their phonemic awareness. A lack of phonemic awareness alone is not a primary language deficit, as it is unnecessary for oral communication, and only becomes important when one is confronted with the reading task.

When print is encountered, the capacity to perform the phonemic operations described above becomes critically important. In order to develop the alphabetic principle (that units of print map onto units of sound), students must already have (or soon develop) phonemic awareness. It is the alphabetic principle that allows students to move beyond the early logographic stage of reading in which each word is a unique, indivisible shape to be recognised visually. Memory constraints make the logographic strategy of limited usefulness

> **'Mastering a written language is an achievement that far outweighs the requirements of speech production'**

and the strategy does not assist students to decipher words previously unseen. When students enter a reading program with phonemic awareness they are part the way towards appreciating the alphabetic principle. Reading becomes a task that 'makes sense', not a confusing array of shapes jumbled together seemingly at random. When phonemic awareness and letter-sound knowledge are combined the effects are enhanced; that is, the children associate the shape of a letter with the sound in a word.

It is the understanding of the alphabetic principle that allows students to decipher novel words. Using the alphabetic principle as a cipher represents what Perfetti (1991) calls a productive process in contrast to the very limited process of memorising words. Share (1995) sees this phonological recoding process as critical to the development of skilled reading, and describes it as being:

"… a self-teaching mechanism, enabling the learner to acquire the detailed orthographic representations necessary for rapid, autonomous, visual word recognition" (p. 152).

This point is also critically important in designing effective programs for older students. Tempting as it may be to teach whole word recognition to older struggling readers because the phonic strategies seem so 'babyish', one cannot bypass the 'sounding-out' stage. It is a necessary step on the path to automatic whole word recognition. It is only by practising these steps that 'word pictures' arise.

Many students enter school with little phonemic awareness (Adams, 1990), and exposure to any one of a variety of forms of reading tuition may be sufficient to stimulate such awareness for them, thus making the alphabetic principle more readily conceptualised. However, in an unacceptably high number of students this process does not occur. The aim of phonics teaching is to make explicit to students this alphabetic principle. In a Whole Language classroom, in which phonics is viewed at best as one (subsidiary) strategy among others, to be used only when the prediction-confirmation strategy breaks down, there is considerably less emphasis on student mastery of this principle.

Teachers may point out word parts to students in the context of authentic literature as the situation arises, but the limitations of such incidental phonics may impact most heavily on at-risk students (Simner:1995). The major problem for at-risk students, argued by Byrne (1996) involves the risk for such learners of failing to be explicit and unambiguous.

"It might be prudent to tell children directly about the alphabetic principle since it appears unwise to rely on their discovery of it themselves. The apparent relative success of programs that do that (Bradley & Bryant:1983; Byrne & Fielding-Barnsley:1991, 1993, 1995) support the wisdom of direct instruction." (p. 424)

Similar sentiments have been expressed by a number of researchers in recent years (Adams & Bruck:1993; Baker, Kameenui, Simmons, & Stahl:1994; Bateman:1991; Blachman:1991; Felton & Pepper:1995; Foorman:1995; Foorman, Francis, Beeler, Winikates, & Fletcher:1997; Moats:1994; Simmons, Gunn, Smith, & Kameenui:1995; Singh, Deitz, & Singh:1992; Spector:1995; Tunmer & Hoover:1993; Weir:1990).

Consensus remains to be achieved regarding the details of the strategies best able to ensure the understanding of the alphabetic principle; however, the cited authors acknowledge that direct instructional approaches are more likely to be successful than relying upon discovery or embedded-phonics approaches.

Phonics ain't phonics

If one accepts the value in teaching phonics, there are essentially two approaches that may be employed: implicit and explicit phonics instruction. What is the difference? In an explicit (synthetic) program, students will learn 40-50 associations between letters and their sounds. This may entail showing students the graphemes and teaching them the sounds that correspond to them, as in "This letter you are looking at makes the sound sssss". Alternatively, some teachers prefer teaching students single sounds first, and then later introducing the visual cue (the grapheme) for the sound, as in "You know the mmmm sound we've been practising, well here's the letter used in writing that tells us to make that sound".

In an explicit program, the processes of blending ("What word do these sounds make when we put them together mmm-aaa-nnn?"), and segmenting ("Sound out this word for me") are also taught. It is of little value knowing what are the building blocks of our language's structure if one does not know how to put those blocks together appropriately to allow written communication, or to separate them to enable decoding of a letter grouping. After letter-sound correspondence has been taught, phonograms (such as: er, ir, ur, wor, ear, sh, ee, th) are introduced, and more complex words can be introduced into reading activities. In conjunction with this approach 'controlled vocabulary' stories are employed—books using only words decodable using the students' current knowledge base.

> 'A lack of phonemic awareness ... only becomes important when one is confronted with the reading task'

Herein lies another problem for Whole Language purists. A fascination with authentic texts precludes the use of controlled vocabulary stories - the very ones that will build students' confidence in the decoding strategies that they have been taught. Flooding children with an uncontrolled array of words does no favours for struggling students; it forces them to guess from context (a strategy promoted by their Whole Language teachers). Even good readers find that contextual guessing is accurate on only about one occasion in four. Guessing is a hallmark of poor readers—good readers

abandon it as moribund. The end result is that struggling students are burdened with a limp strategy—one that fails them regularly when they most need it.

The term "synthetic" is often used synonymously with "explicit" because it implies the synthesis (or building up) of phonic skills from their smallest unit (graphemes). Similarly, "analytic" is used synonymously with "implicit" because it signifies the analysis (breaking down) of the whole word to its parts (an analysis only necessary when a child cannot read it as a whole word). In implicit phonics, students are expected to absorb or induce the required information from the word's structure merely from presentation of similar sounding words ("The sound you want occurs in these words: mad, maple, moon"). The words may be pointed to or spoken by the teacher, but the sounds in isolation from words are never presented to children. A major problem with implicit phonics methods is the erroneous assumption that all students will already have the fairly sophisticated phonemic awareness skills needed to enable the comparison of sounds within the various words. More importantly, when the effects on readers of implicit phonics programs are compared with those of explicit programs, the differences are significant and favour explicit approaches (Foorman, et al.:1997).

The instructional process

There are also two approaches to the instructional process (as opposed to the instructional content)—"systematic" and "incidental". In systematic instruction, attention is directed to the detail of the teaching process. Instruction will usually be teacher-directed, based on an analysis of the skills required and their sequence. At its most systematic, it will probably involve careful demonstration, massed and spaced practice of those skills (sometimes in isolation), corrective feedback of errors, and continuous evaluation of progress.

Incidental (or discovery, or embedded) instruction shifts the responsibility for making use of phonic cues from the teacher to the student. It assumes that students will develop a self-sustaining, natural, unique reading style that integrates the use of contextual and graphophonic cues, avoiding the (argued) negative effects of systematic instruction.

In Whole Language literature is now something of an about-face. The new position is "But we've never disparaged phonics, only the teaching of it outside of the context of stories". Unfortunately, even if one accepted this sophism, such a restriction precludes many students from deriving benefit from phonics.

Purist Whole Language teachers have never felt comfortable with demonstrating to students precisely how words are composed of sounds. They were exhorted in their training not to examine words at other than the level of their

meaning. Teachers who acceded to this stricture took meaning-centredness to extremes, unfortunately producing an example of ideology precluding effectiveness. Other Whole Language teachers who could not accept such an extreme view, might have included some references to alliteration or rhyming words during a story. "Did you notice that 'cat' and 'mat' end with the same sound?" Sadly, for struggling students such well-intentioned clues are neither explicit enough, nor are they likely to occur with sufficient frequency to have any beneficial impact. This approach is sometimes called "embedded phonics" because teachers are restricted to using only the opportunities for intra-word teaching provided within any given story.

Many students have great difficulty in appreciating individual sound-spelling relationships if their only opportunities to master them occur at variable intervals, and solely within a story context. In a story, the primary focus is quite properly on story comprehension not word structure; in this circumstance focussing on word parts is both distracting and ineffective.

Activities in context or in isolation?

The 'We do phonics in context' model also implies that it is valuable to mix phonics instruction with comprehension activities. In the early years of schooling, students are vastly superior in oral comprehension compared to written comprehension. Most children enter school already knowing thousands of words, but it is some years before their written vocabulary matches their oral lexicon. Written and oral language development are each appropriate emphases for instruction, but given the wide initial disparity, it is more effective to address them separately. Thus, the use of teacher-read stories is an appropriate vehicle for oral comprehension, and allows for a level of language complexity that students could not attain if the stories were presented in written form. The relatively undeveloped decoding skill requires simpler text to allow the development of the competence and confidence needed for the ultimate objective - equivalent oral/written comprehension proficiency. Those arguing that the two are inextricable have confused process with objective, and compromise the development of both oral and written language.

What phonics elements should be included in a comprehensive reading program?

There are aspects of reading that are not well comprehended unless they are explicitly taught in isolation from meaningful text. Among these are letter-sound correspondences. Children must be taught the most common sounds that letters represent, and at-risk students especially require careful systematic instruction in individual letter-sound correspondences ("This letter says mmm"). At-risk students also need ample practice of these sounds in isolation from stories if they are to build a memory of each sound-symbol relationship. Second, they must have the opportunity to

> ❛ **It is the understanding of the alphabetic principle that allows students to decipher novel words** ❜

practise these phonic generalizations in text that is controlled for regularity to a reasonable degree, otherwise they may fail to appreciate the benefits of this strategy. Phonics encourages children to seek patterns of letters they can recognise. It also focuses attention on all the letters, not only a few; we know from eye movement studies that skilled readers view every letter and do not sample only a few as some Whole Language theorists have claimed.

Students also must be able to blend the letters or letter clusters. The beginning reader approximates the word by sounding it out, and then matching that approximation to a real word that fits the meaning of the sentence. This requires teaching and time allotted for adequate practice - children vary in the amount of practice needed to achieve mastery. Blends should be taught as continuous sounds where possible e.g. "man" should be sounded "mmmaaannn" not as "mmm-aaa-nnn". Continuous blends make it easier to telescope the sounds into a real word.

Oral reading practice provides the teacher with opportunities to provide corrective feedback to students. Every error (not only those altering meaning) is an opportunity for teaching: systematic correction is far more valuable for students than is waiting for self-correction, or worse, ignoring errors because of the erroneous view that correction may dishearten the child, or because of a faith that errors will eventually reduce through some presumed but undefined mechanism.

Automatic, rapid, context-free decoding occurs as the over-learned sequences of letters gradually begin to be perceived as syllables and words. Then skilled reading becomes so effortless that our limited attentional capacity can be devoted to comprehension of what we read. In contrast, children who continue to struggle at the level of print are using most of their attention to decode, and have little left to devote to comprehension. About 90% of reading problems occur at the level of the word (Stuart:1995), not with the process of comprehension. Once children master the basics, subsequent progress is largely determined by their volume of reading experience. Hence, our reading program should now be devoted to ensuring literature matches their interest and extends their higher order comprehension processes. To see children progressing in this way is exhilarating. To presume that the processes of skilled reading can be induced in children without their progressing through beginning stages is sadly misguided.

Does phonics mean enormous quantities of work sheet exercises, trying to remember large numbers of rules with dubious utility? Does it necessitate the use of such stilted stories as "Nan can fan Dan"? It certainly happened in past times when the purpose of reading became submerged under a fascination with the elements of the process. However, research has continued to separate the necessary from the marginal, and has increasingly defined the proper place of phonics in a comprehensive literacy program.

The learner or the task?

There has long been tension between the points of view of those primarily interested in the qualities of the learner and those more interested in the capacity of the environment (instruction) to influence what is learned. The former group have sought explanations within the learner for educational success or failure, whilst the other side (instructivists) has examined the structure of the task and the process of teaching for the such explanations.

Thus far, the results are on the board for the instructivists whilst the 'qualities of the learner' side have detoured through some pretty muddy swamps. Remember the "ability training model" - in which one sought underlying process variable like visual perception, memory, motor skills for explanations of reading failure? Having diagnosed such an underlying cause, one attempted to train the pesky skill to 'unblock' the barrier to learning. A whole generation of students with difficulties learned how to draw a pencil line without straying from between two parallel lines. Unfortunately the acquired skill had no impact on reading. In fact, meta-analytic research has produced the following outcomes for such comparative research (See Kavale, 1993; Kavale & Forness, 1987; White, 1988).

'there are essentially two approaches that may be employed: implicit and explicit phonics instruction'

Intervention	No of studies	Av effect size
Perceptual-motor training	180	0.08
Modality instruction	39	0.14
Direct skill teaching	25	0.84

Effect size: Strong >0.5; Moderate 0.35–0.5; Weak <0.35

The instructivist approach of examining the task and manipulating instructional variables has led to much better results. This is advantage holds true in the comparison of phonic instruction and whole langauge instruction (Foorman, Francis, Beeler, Winikates, & Fletcher:1997).

When considering adults, since the task remains the same, the techniques proved most successful for young students have an a priori advantage over other alternatives in the absence of contrary evidence. There has been some reported work with older children, adolescents and adults. Elbro, Neilsen and Petersen (1994) argued for emphasis upon the alphabetic principle because of the memory constraints imposed by training in whole word recognition:

"In many cases the adults reported that they had completely overcome their reading difficulties, but when asked to read novel words they hesitated and admitted that this was difficult for them. These results underline the validity of a positive definition of dyslexia that is based on poor mastery of the phonemic principle of written language. (Siegel, 1988; Stanovich, 1991; Rack, Snowling, & Olsen, 1992; Stanovich & Siegel, 1992)" (p.220).

A number of similar studies involving adults with reading difficulties have revealed marked deficits in decoding (Bear, Truax, & Barone, 1989; Bruck, 1990, 1992, 1993; Byrne & Letz, 1983; Perin, 1983; Pratt & Brady, 1988; Read & Ruyter, 1985; cited in Greenberg, Ehri, & Perin, 1997). In theGreenberg et al. (1997) study the adults' performance on phonologically-based resembled those of children below 3rd grade. The findings were also consistent with those of Bruck (1992), Byrne & Letz (1983), Fawcett & Nicholson (1995), Pennington, Van Orden, Smith, Green, and Haith (1990), and Pratt and Brady (1988). Even very bright well-compensated adult readers acknowledge that they have had to laboriously remember word shapes, have little or no idea how to spell, and are constantly struggling with new words, especially technical terms related to their occupations. These are classic symptoms of the need for a strong phonics emphasis in the instructional process; indeed, some have argued (Greenberg et al., 1997) that it is most likely the failure of the school system to address the phonological nature of the reading problem that precluded satisfactory progress for these individuals.

The critical variable is not age but stage - whether child or adult—the path to facile reading is similar. Certainly adults have a history that cannot be ignored—most relevant is the likelihood of unproductive habits strongly engraved by years of practice. Adults need to unlearn in addition to learning. The implication is that this may entail slower progress, with the requirement of (possibly) vast amounts of practice accompanied by feedback to ensure the new habits are used effectively. On the positive side is that adults are usually vastly more experienced with language in general, and when their decoding difficulties are relieved their comprehension of what they read improves much more rapidly than it does for most young children.

Phonics is the starting motor for an engine subsequently fuelled by confidence and enjoyment. Some starting motors turn sluggishly and demand a significant load from the battery (parents and teacher). If the battery fails, the journey may never begin. However, all phonics are not equal. It is possible to teach phonics carefully and with parsimony; it is possible to do so ineffectively and excessively; and it is possible to do it in name only. Questions such as "What/When/How much phonics?" continue to be examined, but not the question "Should we teach phonics?", for it has been answered resoundingly in the affirmative.

Dr. Kerry Hempenstall is a lecturer in the Department of Psychology and Intellectual Disability Studies at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) in Bundoora

References

Adams, M.J., 1990, *Beginning to read: Thinking and learning about print*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Baker, S. K., Kameenui, E. J., Simmons, D. C., & Stahl, S. A., 1994, "Beginning reading: Educational tools for diverse learners" *School Psychology Review*, 23, 372-391.

Bateman, B., 1991,. "Teaching word recognition to slow-learning children", *Reading, Writing and Learning Disabilities*, 7, 1-16.

Blachman, B. A., 1991,. "Early intervention for children's reading problems: Clinical applications of the research in phonological awareness", *Topics in Language Disorders*, 12 (1), 51-65.

Byrne, B., 1996,. "The learnability of the alphabetic principle: Children's initial hypotheses about how print represents spoken speech", *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 17, 401-426.

Elbro, C., Nielsen, I., & Petersen, D. K., 1994, "Dyslexia in adults: Evidence for deficits in non-word reading and in the phonological representation of lexical items", *Annals of Dyslexia*, 44, 205-226.

Felton, R. H. & Pepper, P. P.. 1995,. "Early identification and intervention of phonological deficit in kindergarten and early elementary children at risk for reading disability", *School Psychology Review*, 24, 405-414.

Foorman, B. R., 1995,. "Research on 'The Great Debate': Code-oriented versus Whole Language approaches to reading instruction", *School Psychology Review*, 24, 376-392.

Foorman, B. R., Francis, D. J., Beeler, T., Winikates, D., & Fletcher, J., 1997, "Early interventions for children with reading problems: Study designs and preliminary findings" *Learning Disabilities: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 8, 63-71.

Greenberg, D., Ehri, L. C., & Perin, D., 1997, "Are word reading processes the same or different in adult literacy students and third-fifth graders matched for reading level?" *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89, 262-275.

Kavale, K.A., 1993,. "A science and theory of learning disabilities", In Lyon, G.R., Gray, D.B., Kavanagh, J.F., & Krasnegor, N.A. (Eds.): *Better understanding learning disabilities*. Baltimore: Brookes Pub.

Kavale, K.A. & Forness, S. R., 1987, "Substance over style: Assessing the efficacy of modality testing and teaching", *Exceptional Children*, 54, 228-239.

Moats, L. C., 1994, "The missing foundation in teacher education: Knowledge of the structure of spoken and written language" *Annals of Dyslexia*, 44, 81-102.

Perfetti, C. A., 1991, "Representations and awareness in the acquisition of reading competence". In L. Rieben, & C. A. Perfetti (Eds.), *Learning to read: Basic research and its implications*, pp. 33-44,. NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Share, D. L., 1995, "Phonological recoding and self-teaching: Sine qua non of reading acquisition" *Cognition*, 55, 151-218.

Simmons, D. C., Gunn, B., Smith, S. B., & Kameenui, E. J., 1995, "Phonological awareness: Application of instructional design", *LD Forum*, 19(2), 7-10.

Simner, M. L., 1995, "Reply to the Ministries' reactions to the Canadian Psychological Association's position paper on beginning reading instruction", *Canadian Psychology*, 36, 333-342.

Singh, N. N., Deitz, D. E. D. & Singh, J., 1992, "Behavioural approaches", In Nirbay N. Singh, & Ivan L. Beale (Eds.) *Learning disabilities: Nature, theory, and treatment*. New York: Springer-Verlag.

Spector, J., 1995, "Phonemic awareness training: Application of principles of direct instruction", *Reading and Writing Quarterly*, 11, 37-51.

Stuart,M., 1995, "Prediction and qualitative assessment of five and six-year-old children's reading: A longitudinal study", *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 65, 287-296.

Tunmer, W. E. & Hoover, W. A., 1993, "Phonological recoding skill and beginning reading", *Reading & Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 5, 161-179.

Weir, R., 1990, "Philosophy, cultural beliefs and literacy" *Interchange*, 21 (4), 24-33.

White, W. A. T., 1988,. "A meta-analysis of the effects of direct instruction in special education", *Education & Treatment of Children*, 11, 364-374.

Hard Fun: using computers in the language classroom

by Josie Rose

Here, Josie Rose discusses the necessary interrelationship between the New Learning Technologies and sound language learning principles.

Introduction

Narre Community Learning Centre has been involved in the design and development of technology enhanced language learning programs for the past 6 years. Our experience is predominantly with ESL and to a lesser degree adult literacy students. This paper will draw upon the experiences and challenges we have encountered during this period. We will be examining some educational theory and look at its application in the NLT (New Learning Technology) classroom; as well as investigating if and how different learning and teaching strategies are employed in the NLT classroom. We will also be looking at the issue of teacher training.

Martha Pennington, in her book The Power of CALL (1996) states that the power of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is that the new types of input that CALL generates and facilitates, leads to a richer language learning environment. It also increases the variety and diversity of learning opportunities and the quality of the learning experience in making input of more varied kinds learnable and accessible to each individual learner. She also states that computers seem to facilitate an increase in students' willingness to take risks and experiment with learning and with language. It is our firm belief that these statements regarding the power of CALL manifest themselves our literacy/NLT classrooms.

The Bigger Picture

It is imperative that the students have positive, manageable and enjoyable learning experiences from the very first lesson. The challenge for the teacher is to know how to integrate various CALL environments into the literacy curriculum. What is important is how the teacher manages and prepares for the quality and quantity of input the students are presented with. This implies that the teacher needs to be confident and well prepared as well as able to deal with the unexpected. This requires careful planning and a great deal of technological fluency on the part of the teacher as well as a fair amount of technical backup at provider level. This makes effective and ongoing professional development and good, patient technical support a vital part of NLT planning and delivery.

> **The challenge for the teacher is to know how to integrate various CALL environments into the literacy curriculum**

Computers add a rich and challenging dimension to language teaching and learning, and one that all students and most teachers take up with enthusiasm and a real sense of adventure. Most of our students vary greatly not only in their levels of education in their first language but also in their experience and attitudes towards computers. It is important that we ensure that whatever we present to the students is not counter productive and resultant in frustration and feelings of inadequacy. In our experience the vast majority of our students find the added dimension of CALL in their literacy studies tremendously motivating and empowering.

According to Stevens (1992) computers have the unique advantage of being viable instructional tools, and at the same time being devices that students want to use and become familiar with for reasons quite apart from language learning. This is certainly the case in the majority of adult literacy and ESL students that we encounter in our programs. They come to computer classes to learn English, but see their increased familiarity with and knowledge of computers and their operating environments as a very important aspect of their capacity to help their children in their school work, and making informed choices when they are confronted with requests regarding computers from their children.

In a recent study on the motivational aspects of the motivational aspects of using computers in writing and communication, Warschauer (1996) found that:

"the students overall had a positive attitude toward using computers and that this attitude was consistent across a number of variables, including gender, typing skill, and access to a computer at home … [and that where] … differences were found in student motivation among the different courses, … these differences were seen to be at due at least in part to the *degree to which computer-based projects were integrated into the overall goals and structure of the course*" (my italics).

Pennington (1996) further points out that Computer Mediated Communication, for example, is a:

"psychologically and cognitively accessible, engaging and non-threatening form of input from which the student gains a real communicative response".

We believe that all activities presented in the NLT classroom need to be accessible, engaging, non-threatening and they need to facilitate a communicative response, as well as integrate seamlessly into the students overall literacy program, for, as Kraus (1998) states:

"computer assisted instruction (using either Internet or non-Internet resources) will not in, and of itself, help students acquire English, nor become more creative, proficient writers. However, when integrated thoughtfully and relevantly into a curriculum, it becomes a very effective tool".

Curriculum Contexts

In our workplace all students follow modules of the Certificates of General Education for Adults. Our computer tutors are also literacy tutors. We are all involved in curriculum design. The eventual success of our NLT lessons lie in the fact that are part of a task-based curriculum centred around themes which complement and strengthen the students' language learning activities as well as preparing them for eventual assessment. As ESL practitioners, our practice is firmly rooted in systemic linguistics (especially the notions of genre and register as developed by Halliday) and communicative language teaching (CLT). Burns (1990) states that:

"systemic functional approaches to language learning and teaching fit well with communicative language teaching as they provide teachers and learners with a means of exploring language use within a framework of cultural and social purpose."

Bray (1998) raises the issue of whether people need to learn to read and write at a certain level before they can use a computer, and whether they can or should be developing these skills using the computer as a tool, but I would argue that any literacy level can be accommodated in the NLT classroom. In fact, I have had students in my class who have very little spoken English as well, and yet they have made considerable gains in a very short time.

Our strategies

The following strategies have proved useful and successful in our NLT classrooms. They take what is useful and appropriate form above mentioned theories of learning and adapt them to the unique situation each teacher and group of learners find themselves in. These strategies work especially well with the lower levels of the CGEA. Its foundation is a content/ task based curriculum as outlined by Karet (1998). It is a curriculum that is based on:

> '**the vast majority of our students find the added dimension of CALL in their literacy studies tremendously motivating and empowering**'

Sequential learning—looking at ways of scaffolding and reinforcing the students language needs within a particular genre or unit of work, and integrating computer skills in a similar manner.

The importance of recycling and reinforcement—especially in building up the computer skills needed to perform a task independently and with confidence.

The use of authentic language—in this case language that is generated by the students and is at a level the majority can cope with. This is therefore very important in the NLT classroom as the students also needs to deal with the computer meta-language and the complexities of actually operating the equipment. It is important that the students feel comfortable with the level of language presented to them. This should not be an added burden or obstacle to them, but rather a positive, achievable experience. A good way to facilitate this is to give the students an opportunity before they work on their machines to contribute to the text that will be the focus of the lesson. If the student is required to use any other texts, it is important that the students have ample opportunity to discuss and internalise the text before they are required to interact with it on their machines.

The use of elements from holistic language learning approaches—it is within this context that elements of the teaching and learning cycle as described in the genre based approach to language learning has a lot to offer the literacy teacher in the NLT classroom. It gives the teacher the opportunity to look at both the language and computer skills she would want to teach. She can isolate computer skills that will facilitate the development of a particular genre and model both the computer skill and an example of the genre being studied. Particular elements of the genre can be highlighted whilst students develop control in the joint negotiation phase—putting all the verbs in bold to emphasis the point that this particular genre uses the present tense predominantly, for example. The learner will now have a model to follow when she starts composing her own text. She can use particular computer functions to highlight the more common occurrence of the linguistic features of her own text. She and the teacher can then discuss inconsistencies, which will lead into reinforcing editing skills. This redrafting process is a lot more efficient and enjoyable on the computer and the final product can be produced with colour and pictures to make the work even more satisfactory. All these activities can be presented in such a way that they are accessible, non-threatening and above all engaging and fun.

A strong culture of mutual mentoring—there is tremendous potential for peer-editing and peer-mentoring. This is one of the most important aspects of a productive and successful NLT program in literacy provision. The conscious facilitation of a strong peer mentoring system in the computer

room, more than anything, fosters cohesion and trust, not only amongst the students, but also between the student and teacher. The students accept the teachers role as facilitator, but acknowledge that she has not got all the answers, and realise that there are cohorts sometimes know how to do things better and faster. Students and teachers work together as a team to maximise language development and learning opportunities for all.

A culture of recognition and the establishment of pathways for students—it would be very difficult to manage the amount of learning in an NLT classroom if there were only one teacher to, for example, ten complete novices. The system of rewarding students who have developed skills and giving them recognition and reward as official and fully fledged helpers in the classroom is one that is crucial to the success of a vibrant NLT program in literacy provision.

Teacher Training

Javed (1998), in his examination of literacy learning through (online) technology, found that he could categorise teachers' skill levels at three distinct stages: "starters", "users" and "developers". I find this distinction a useful and practical one , and agree that each of these groups of adult literacy providers need support and professional development specifically targeted to their needs. Javed found that the main factors in the development of teachers through these phases was access and the related issues of time available to spend on the development of skills, a technical support network, as well as personal motivation and purpose. All these factors, if present and supported in the teaching and learning environment, will lead to the teacher gaining greater technological fluency and therefore confidence. This will enable her to give her students richer and more varied learning experiences. Bray (1998:66) claims that lack of access to computer facilities was a factor in ACE provision not taking up computers, but I believe that this is changing, with ACE councils supporting and/or facilitating the development of computer facilities and the acquisition of software.

I agree with Javed that we need to look at targeted professional development for all three these groups and that we need to foster mentoring groups, both in the online environment and through just-in-time and just-for-us learning. Centres need to be encouraged to develop professional development programs for their literacy staff that will meet their specific needs targeted at the level that they are operating at.

There are two crucial factors to the success of and NLT program in the language and literacy classroom - teacher confidence and commitment and a sense of enjoyment and fun. Although the term 'Hard Fun' is probably more often heard in the primary and secondary sectors of computer education it has a clear resonance for us also. It would be

> ' our practice is firmly rooted in systemic linguistics ... and communicative language teaching '

very difficult for us as teachers to do our jobs with the huge amounts of enthusiasm and spirit of adventure that I have experienced in ACE provision if it was not for the fact that, although it is not always easy, it is usually a lot of fun!

Josie Rose is the educational technology manager at Narre Community Learning Centre and the NLT project worker for ACFE, Southern Western Port. She is also actively involved the development and implementation of a literacy component in one of the Virtual Campus online learning network projects, and is currently studying for a Computer in Education qualification at Monash university.

References

Bray, L., 1998, "Computer Use in adult literacy in South Australia", *Proceedings of ACAL Conference: Literacy on the Line*.

Burns, A., 1990, "Genre based Approaches to Writing and beginning Adult ESL Learners". *Prospect*, Vol 5 No 3, May, 62-71.

Bush, M. and Terry, R.M. (editors), 1997, *Technology Enhanced Language Learning*. Illinois, National Textbook Company.

Karet, J., 1998, "Integrating Internet Literacy into the ESL classroom: a content-based approach", Presentation at *TESOL98*. Website at: http:134.173.117.152/faculty/jkaret/tesol98

Kraus, M., 1998, "Integrating technology Across the Curriculum: Internet/computer writing resources for a content based curriculum.", *TESOL98 Conference papers*, at: www.lclark.edu/~krauss/tesol98

Pennington, M. C. (editor), 1996,. *The Power of CALL*, Athelstan Publication.

Stevens, V., 1992, "Humanism and CALL: A coming of Age", *Computers in Applied Linguistics*.

Warschauer, M., 1996,.). Motivational aspects of using computers for writing and communication, In Warschauer, M. (Ed.), *Telecollaboration in foreign language learning* (pp. 29-46). Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Second Language Teaching and Curriculum Center.

Wilson, J. and Javed, S., 1998, *Going online: A Research Report on the Use of on-line Technologies by adult literacy Teachers and Learners*, Melbourne, VUT.

Transforming lives, transforming communities: making the incredulous (in)credible

by Robyn Hodge

In this article, Robyn Hodge seeks to contextualise Delia Bradshaw's recent curriculum framework within the broader historical, social ideas.

Introduction

Transforming Lives, Transforming Communities (TLTC) (Bradshaw:1997), is a conceptual framework for Further Education (FE) curriculum developed for the adult community education sector. This article critically reflects on TLTC in terms of recognised and articulated traditions of education, as well as from a perspective derived from readings in post-structural, or as more commonly known, postmodern theories.

In the late nineties, Adult Community Education (ACE) and Further Education (FE) sectors in Victoria reflect the recognition of individual and community needs, tempered by the political and economic influences of the day, reacting to funding restraint, and responding through competitive tendering. The sectors are now responsible for low-level literacy, numeracy and language delivery, within the realm of further education, in the domains of community, vocational, workplace and pre-academic education in competency-based and/or accredited curriculum! This is a far cry from the role that the ACE and FE sectors undertook from the late seventies to early nineties.

In the face of great educational change and reduced employment opportunities, this small but energetic field has resisted the temptation to back away from its responsibilities. The ACE/FE sectors remains committed to providing educational opportunities, and through this, pastoral care, to marginalised individuals and/or sections of the wider community, while continuing to philosophise on the narratives that drive some of the theories in adult education.

TLTC is authored by Delia Bradshaw, who, as many will know, is a long-term member of the ACE and FE sectors in Victoria. Bradshaw has prepared this report for the Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE) board, a government body which must lobby for funds, and, in turn distribute them, nominating and monitoring the ways in which expenditure is described and accounted for.

Bradshaw argues how the Board's needs can be met through the formulation of a 'coherent and visionary approach' to further education, through:

"enhancing the quality of provision through articulating the educational objectives;
supporting diverse, local provision;
ensuring the integrity of pathways to further opportunity;
researching and integrating 'best practice' initiatives in curriculum development;
catering for the professional development requirements for its teachers."

Bradshaw refers to enduring questions of how learners, knowledge and practices in adult education are perceived. She also reiterates the ACFE board's commitment to learner-centred curriculum and draws these themes or ideas together through their common commitment to the goals of lifelong learning:

"These goals refer to all aspects of living, not only to working life, they incorporate understanding, knowledge and ethics as well as observable behaviour, skills and performance." (Bradshaw:1997)

Liberal traditions

It is useful to contextualise TLTC within the larger picture of the generally accepted paradigms of adult education and training. TLTC can readily be interpreted as an example of the liberal tradition of adult education. The adage of 'lifelong learning' has long been linked with theorists like Lindeman (1926), Dewey (1964), Knowles (1990), and Rogers (1969). Their beliefs about adult education centre on the growth of the individual, that s/he may realise her/his full potential and autonomy of self, and through this, contribute to the betterment of a democratic and ethical society by attaining and maintaining an independence of self, and a tolerance of others.

Liberal values have been integral to the ACE/FE sectors for many years, with the provision of educational programs for women, people of non-English speaking backgrounds, the elderly, the literate and the not very literate, the unemployed and the employed. Free classes were timetabled for day and night, with childcare provided where possible. Curriculum focused on the needs of the individual, with teachers actively facilitating learning, by sequencing experiences enabling

learners to understand their learning processes for themselves. The ACE/FE sectors have also consistently recognised the lifelong learning needs of teachers, and maintained a commitment to their ongoing professional development. TLTC reflects these liberal values, with its attention to lifelong learning goals, which amongst others, advocate the opportunity to:

"reinvent the self, privately and publicly, civically and occupationally, throughout life;
extend learning styles and repertoires; and
encourage sustainability in relationships and the environment"

Community educations

TLTC does not however, sit wholly within the traditions of liberal education. Foley (1991) cites the work of Brookfield, (1983), and Lovett, Clarke and Kilmurray (1983) in discerning three models of community adult education. The first model cited is a market model, where the capability to fill classes of fee-paying students determines whether the class runs, (art/craft, computer, exercise etc.) The second is a community-based approach, where the local community, often through a community centre or neighborhood house, is emphasised as a resource for learning in an informal and relaxed setting. The third model is a community development or empowerment approach, which seeks to link adult education to attempts to improve the material conditions and the social power of oppressed groups (Foley:1991).

Aspects of these models can be found in different ACE/FE settings, in different ACE/FE programs in the same setting, and sometimes within different aspects of the one program. The influence of radical education theorists such as Freire and Horton lies close to the heart of many in the ACE/FE sectors. Although they came from vastly different backgrounds, they shared a belief that the potential for social change could be realised through education which grapples with:

"... local conditions from the knowledge of global patterns of domination. Both realise that very often significant educational change can only occur as part of a larger social movement (e.g. literacy for voting) in which education is a fundamental empowering tool." (Findsen:1998)

For the marginalised or oppressed, it is not enough to learn about a civil and equitable society. There has to be the creation of dialogue about what social action is, its potential, and about what would be required that would enable all to live in a society, and be content within it. Bradshaw's vision for the future is founded on ideals of personal as well as social transformation, where members of society have the opportunity to live in peace, prosperity and good health. Like Freire, Bradshaw believes that education can drive this kind of transformation, by offering an alternative to traditional education encounters. Learners and teachers are acknowledged as fellow travellers on a collective journey of

reflection, action and communication. What is also acknowledged is that education is political:

"... it either functions to domesticate or limit people's lives, or to liberate and create new possibilities for them." (Findsen:1998)

This framework concerns itself very much with the recognition of the creation of new possibilities for participants in ACE and FE. These new possibilities have the potential to be realised as transforming acts for individuals and communities. These transforming acts, of what Bradshaw describes as 'knowing', may resonate through some or many aspects of an individual's life, and consequently lead to a productivity that may be recognised in terms beyond what has been traditionally known as educational. Bradshaw describes these educational values:

"the transformative and productive potential of knowing and meeting the needs of the locale, be that community, enterprise or workplace;
the powerful socio-economic benefits of integrating personal, social, cultural, vocational, economic and political perspectives and achievements into all education and learning;
the empowering strength of fusing knowledge understanding and skills; and
the generative possibilities that result from negotiation and reconciliation, in particular, from negotiating complexity, difference and paradox."

Postmodern readings

We can recognise and read TLTC as an educational framework constituted by implicit and explicit ideals of liberal and radical education, but these are not the only readings that can be made. By articulating values of complexity, difference and paradox, Bradshaw signals her attention to some of the more recent postmodern readings in adult education. I would like to take up this cue as an opportunity to explore TLTC in light of some of these postmodern readings. To do this I need to articulate what I understand postmodern thought to be, to explore where it has come from, and to qualify what I believe to be its strengths and its weaknesses.

Post-structuralist, or as it is often named, postmodern thought has evolved out of the structuralist theoretical work of Swiss linguist Ferdinand Saussure (1867-1913). Saussure argued the centrality of language systems in forming the basis for the systems and structures that manifest all phenomena. This 20th century theory of social organisation was markedly different from 19th century theories like Darwinism and Marxism, which framed their explanations of particular phenomena on premises of cause, origin and effect. During the 1960's, a number of European writers working in vastly different fields, (Barthes in criticism; Levi-Strauss in anthropology; Althusser in Marxist theory; Foucalt in sexuality, madness and imprisonment; Derrida in linguistics; Irigaray

in feminist theory) began to pick up on some of the ideas, terminology and work of Saussure. The work of these and other theorists evolved into a collective loosely described as post-structuralist. There is a degree of interchangeability about the terms post-structuralist and the post modern nowadays, and I have adopted this. Just as the term post-structuralist evolved as a response to structuralist theories, the term postmodern is a reaction to those ideas named as being central to the modern era.

Post-structuralist thought challenges accepted humanist traditions of universal truths, that give hegemonic explanations or justifications of phenomena. Postmodern theories articulate a notion of an individual's subjectivity as being fluid, plural, and manipulable—"constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak." (Weedon:1987) It is generally agreed that postmodernism represents a cynicism for the technical and rational science traditions and the ideal of what constitutes human progress, and a recognition that perception is interpretive and inseparable from the structures of our lives, including language. Knowledge is seen as contingent, contextual, and linked to power, and value is not intrinsic but determined by choice, negotiation, manipulation, or domination depending on how power is used, and by whom. There is a view of power as a process that enables or restricts, promotes or discourages, forms of practice or thought. Binary opposition is used as a means of analysing how differential meanings are created from two-term systems. (Kerka:1997)

As I mentioned before, the theories that constitute the realm of postmodern thought are a loosely bound collective. They are as elusive and fluid as the varied subjectivities they illuminate. It is at times, easier to get one's head around what postmodern thought is not. Postmodern thought is not: a substitute or replacement 'narrative' of another kind of universal truth; an absolute rejection of all the ideals that have come before it; a solution to all the contradictions, problems and exclusions that adherence to 'isms' can create.

For all its appeal as a way of raising awareness and moving beyond constructs that oppress, postmodern ideas have fervent critics. In challenging the universal truths by which the Western world has operated, postmodern ideas are "often nihilistic. If nothing is to be valued above anything else, then nothing is to be valued at all." (Neville:1992). It sometimes seems that:

"one has to live two lives, one defined by the meanings and values available to us to make sense of our lives, and the other defined by the affective sense that life can be no longer be made sense of." (Grossberg:1989)

Postmodern adult education

Every time we, as adult educators, name the structures, traditions and objectives of the educational paradigms we work within, we create barriers and spaces that restrict or deny the practice of those who do not 'fit' within them. What postmodern thought can do for educational theorists and

practitioners alike, is provide a means for recognising and talking about what can and does happen within those spaces, and act as a means of dissolving existing barriers - hopefully without creating new ones.

TLTC is, in one reading, an exemplary postmodern text, reconciling what the ACE sector has to be, whilst maintaining integrity in terms of the theories on which good educational practice is based. It is an inclusive framework, celebrating diversity and embracing many of the values that have motivated different domains of educational thought throughout the modern era. Bradshaw has rejected binary paradigms that suggest that education can be about one thing or another, i.e.:

- academic-informal
- vocational-'further'/community
- workplace-classroom
- theoretical-experiential
- traditional-liberal
- liberal-radical
- learning process-learning outcomes, and so on.

In TLTC, Bradshaw embraces all of these values, articulated within four key principles:

Multiplicity

Bradshaw's objective is a "broad and deep educational reach." No identity or allegiance is valued over any other. In an effective use of language, Bradshaw makes the point that education is:

"multipurpose, multidimensional, multifaceted … multiform …; encompassing multiculturalism, multilingualism, multimedia and mutliliteracies."

Connectedness

In talking about 'connectedness', Bradshaw refers directly to the breaking down of the structures or narratives that bind. She challenges her audience to conceptualise a framework of connection rather than oppositional difference as a means of negotiating the contradictions and inconsistencies that constitute the reality of educational programming and delivery.

Critical Intelligence

Diversity is embraced yet again within the framework, articulating multiple definitions of intelligence, and advocating a fusion of the diversity of knowledge(s), ways of knowing, and ways of acting and reflecting on knowing. This principle recognises different ways of learning, teaching and assessment. In doing this, the framework validates a definition of intelligence that balances the critical, the practical and the reflective.

Transformation

Bradshaw includes a diverse range of networks as agents for potential change, and talks about creating a greater awareness of the connectedness between personal, local and global transformation, especially as they relate diverse aspects of community and citizenship.

These principles are recognised as being interrelated, and overlapping both individually and collectively when represented in diagrammatic form. By resolutely avoiding the construction of finite boundaries to its underpinning principles, Bradshaw describes a postmodern perspective that is compatible with multiple positioning and fluid subjectivities.

Some final thoughts

In articulating this conceptual framework or way of thinking, Bradshaw provides a new language for communicating to funding and administrative bodies. It is a lexicon of values that support integrated, transformative and collaborative curriculum. Bradshaw has given ACE/FE providers an opportunity to make sense of the rapid social, economic, technological, cultural and industrial changes that are manifest in Australian society today. To put an even more positive spin on TLTC, I think that there is enormous potential for a 'sea change' in the conceptualisation of what adult education is, and what it could do. If decision-makers in the public and private sectors alike were to incorporate lifelong learning principles that balanced the tensions of economic, industrial welfare and social justice demands, adult education could be valued as a framework that encompasses all those demands, rather than as a competitor for government attention and funds.

As critics of postmodern thought will quite rightly point out, the danger with TLTC is that there is still the potential for a framework that appropriates adult education towards an orthodoxy, which could be prescriptive and exclusive, for groups of relative privilege. By celebrating the diverse, and embracing a multiplicity of values, TLTC potentially validates the singular 'the package deal', as having an equal place. This gives those who are stakeholders in values of the modern age, the language to justify their actions and intentions. For adult education, the scenario that most likely comes to mind, is the expansion of workplace training for the employed at the expense of the marginalised. This kind of educational experience will favor those with a positive outlook to education, and when described in quantifiable competencies, will give decision-makers the statistics to justify their policies within the tradition of 'rational science'.

TLTC is an exceptional way of thinking and talking about adult education. From a postmodern perspective, one of its readings is an exultant vision of what adult education could become. It is a vision that incorporates the best of the modern traditions of education, while recognising and reconciling the complexities of the world today. TLTC, for adult educators, is integral to the current dialogue "..about recreating our democracy within and as part of its twenty first century world." (Duke:1995)

Robyn Hodge is the Education Officer at ARIS, Language Australia. Formerly she worked as an ALBE/ESL teacher-coordinator in Melbourne's west.

References

Bradshaw D., 1997, *Transforming Lives, Transforming Communities: Conceptual Framework for Further Education Curriculum*. ACFE Board, Victoria.

Brookfield S., 1983, *Adult learners, adult education and the community*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes.

Dewey J., 1964, *Democracy and Education*, Macmillan, London.

Duke C., 1995, "Metaphors of Learning", *Adults Learning*, June, Sydney.

Findsen B., 1998, "Freire as an adult educator: an international perspective", *The New Zealand Journal of Adult Learning, May*, Vol. 26 Number 1.

Foley G., 1991, "Radical Adult Education", Tennant M. (ed.), *Adult and Continuing Education in Australia*, Routledge, London.

Foley G., 1995, *Understanding Adult Education and Training*, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, NSW.

Grossberg, L., 1989, "Pedagogy in the Present: Politics, Postmodernity and the Popular", Giroux H. Simon R. et al (eds.), *Popular Culture, Schooling and Everyday Life*, Bergin and Garry, Massachusetts.

Kerka S., 1997, *Postmodernism and Adult Education*, ERIC Clearinghouse, Adult, Career and Vocational Education. USA.

Knowles, M., 1990, *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*, (4th edition) Gulf publishing, Houston.

Lemert, C., 1997, *Postmodernism Is Not What You Think*, Blackwell, Cornwall.

Lindeman, E., 1926, *The Meaning of Adult Education*, New Republic, New York.

Lovett, T., Clark, C., and Kilmurray, A., 1983, *Adult Education and Community Action*, Croom Helm, London.

MacKeracher, D., 1996, *Making Sense of Adult Learning*, Culture Concepts Inc. Toronto.

Neville, B., 1992, "Myths We Teach By", *Australian Journal of Adult and Community Education*, Vol.32, Number 3, November.

Rogers, C., 1969, *Freedom to Learn*, Merrill, Ohio.

Usher, R., Bryant, I., and Johnston, R., 1997, *Adult Education and the Postmodern Challenge*, Routledge, London.

Weedon, C., 1987, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, Basil Blackwell, London.

a journal of adult english language and literacy education

From Theory to Practice

by Merilyn Hickson

In this companion piece to Robyn Hodges analysis of Transforming Lives, Transforming Communities, Merilyn Hickson provides us with an example of how the framework has worked successfully in practice.

Introduction

A number of our daily endeavours require a shift from the theoretical to the practical, from concept to application. Parenthood, learning to drive, and attempts at replicating the mouthwatering images in cookbooks all need a shift from theory to practice. No amount of immersion in theory is adequate preparation for the experience of parenthood. It's my experience that practice and daily application of theory are no guarantee of success either. Similarly, I have had a number of memorable experiences in an unidentified disconnection between theory and practice in the kitchen!

To make a meaningful shift from theory to practice is easier using previous knowledge and experience. For this reason further education teachers should have no major concerns about implementing the conceptual framework for further education published as Transforming Lives, Transforming Communities. Whilst the concepts and ideas of the framework design were arrived at after a far reaching literature search of current debates in adult education, they are also the result of wide consultation with further education practitioners. The document is infused with examples of the application of theory and concept.

Further education teachers committed to the UNESCO goals of:

- learning to know
- learning to do
- learning to live with others and
- learning to be

will easily find those goals in their own and their colleague's current practice and in the conceptual framework for further education.

The conceptual framework for further education contained within Transforming Lives, Transforming Communities consists of four lifelong learning principles and four curriculum aspects. See next page.

A case study

In 1998, I was involved in the development of two courses which saw them accredited as short courses reflecting the principles and aspects of the conceptual framework for further education. The courses were selected on the basis of their potential for statewide applicability, their proven appeal to tutors and students, and the fact that a similar course did not already appear on the register of accredited further education courses. The capacity of the courses to reflect the principles and aspects of the framework was also considered. I will talk about only one of these courses here - the *Course in Music Access*.

Making sure they fitted the definition of further education was the first step. In *Transforming Lives, Transforming Communities*, further education is taken to mean:

"adult education that is infused with a further education perspective. It is education that gives priority to foundations, preparedness and pathways."

Adult literacy, English as a second language, return to study, work preparation and a range of general preparatory programs are all further education programs.

The *Course in Music Access* was developed to meet the needs identified by the teachers of the *Diploma in Music Performance-Jazz and Popular* at Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE, Wangaratta Campus. During selection processes a number of students were found to have quality performance skills but the lower skill level of their music theory was a barrier to course acceptance. Prospective students would benefit from an opportunity to develop some return to study skills as well.

Consequently, an intensive music theory short course was designed as a direct pathway to the TAFE music course. This short course was developed in consultation with the teachers of the music course and conducted at "The Centre" in Wangaratta. The course has now run over several years as both an intensive program and as a more extended program over many weeks, but always with a total of 70 hours. As the course grew in reputation, some participants enrolled with a desire to improve their music theory skills but no desire to continue with the TAFE music course.

At this stage, the already well developed curriculum was redeveloped using the principles and aspects of the conceptual framework for further education. It has 5 modules which build on each other, developing broad skills in music theory and in learning to learn. The modules are:

- Introduction to Musical Notation and Learning Skills
- Pitch and Value
- Keys and Chords
- Composition and Analysis
- Performance.

Lifelong learning principles

Multiplicity
encompasses diversity, complexity and paradox. It embraces multiple:
- Literacies
- Intelligences
- Cultures
- Identities
- perspectives and interpretations
- personal and social roles
- personal and political allegiances
- educational goals
- educational subject areas
- educational methods
- educational outcomes

Critical intelligence
involves learning to learn, judgement, analysis, interpretation, self-understanding, questioning, and the acquisition of knowledge and skills.

Critical intelligence is needed for:
- intuition
- interpretation of symbols
- use of practical skills
- creativity and innovation
- framing issues and questions
- solving problems
- spatial judgement
- personal relationships
- communication through language

Connectedness
emphasises the educational imperative to establish connections between:
- emotional and rational
- physical and spiritual
- cognitive and ethical
- personal and political
- knowledge and action
- past, present and future
- individual and community

Connectedness is a counterweight to multiplicity.

Transformation
means the power to take action to effect change. It is closely allied to a the notion of agency.

It requires consciousness of what generates personal and social change, the alternatives available and the consequences of choices.

A key concept of transformation is citizenship - of neighbourhoods, communities of interest, workplaces, nations, and the global community.

Curriculum aspects

Educational practices
A multiplicity of inclusive, interconnected practices that encourage:
- creativity
- critical analysis
- transformation

They are based on:
- multi-dimensional pedagogies
- embedded assessment
- continuous evaluation

Learning outcomes
A plaited subject-specific model that incorporates multiple connected outcomes including:
- subject knowledge and understanding
- language, literacy and numeracy
- learning to learn
- critical analysis
- action and reflection

Recognition outcomes
The multiple ways of documenting and validating learning achievements and credit arrangements.

Pathways
A wide-ranging interpretation of pathway planning that embodies multiple possibilities for:
- evaluative choices
- coherent connections
- future action

The four principles of the conceptual framework for further education are evident throughout the course.

Multiplicity
The course participants contribute to one another's experience with the performance skill they bring using varying instruments. A participant can be accepted with no previous performance skills but with an interest in producing electronic sound. The broad age range of participants also brings depth to the learning experience for all. Participants have differing personal goals for the course so this diversity can be used to challenge points of view. An understanding of origins of music within our western tradition forms a unit of the curriculum and includes discussion and the appreciation of other musical traditions. A multiplicity of skill development is encouraged which includes: music theory, aural skills, problem solving, tolerance in group settings, study skills and confidence in new situations.

Connectedness
is fostered in group planning for a recital to conclude the course and by the coherent and sequential manner in which theory skills are built up so as to complement the participant's individual and group performance skills. Music language skills, including a music numeracy language, are also interwoven in a connected manner.

Critical Intelligence

is developed as the skill in chord and key structure is advanced, particularly with reference to individually composed pieces. Further, there is opportunity to reflect on the influence of western traditions in the appreciation and understanding of musical pieces.

Transformation

can be identified as participants begin to focus on barriers to their own skill development and begin to create personal learning plans. Developing mutual support in working collaboratively towards the common goal of the final recital is also an example of transformation. This aspect is not to be trivialised. For some participants, more experienced as solo performers, a group recital can be quite a challenge.

The four aspects of the conceptual framework are also evident in design and practice.

Educational Practices

The course encourages students to develop their creative skills in new areas, for example, in technology and or, in composition. Assessment practices are ongoing and varied from the more traditional theory tests to personal journal entries for a reflection on an enhanced appreciation of music traditions. Discussion, demonstration, practice and application are characteristics of classroom activity. The development of personal learning plans exemplifies educational practice underpinning this course.

Learning Outcomes

Perhaps this is the aspect of the course which reflects most clearly the impact of applying the conceptual framework for further education. Previously, the learning outcome could be described as one dimensional. The participants and tutors alike, identified a successful learning outcome as a demonstrated improvement in music theory knowledge. With the application of the plaited learning outcome as articulated in the conceptual framework, the learning outcome can now be expressed in a multi-dimensional manner. For example, enhanced skill in literacy, numeracy, music theory knowledge and the application of choices based on critical reflection can now coalesce in a multi-dimensional learning outcome. An example of this in Module 1 is a learning outcome which reads: "ability to learn independently, the recognition and valuing of personal music skills and developing a perspective on musical notation."

> *the framework is a woven cloth where the colours appear in the warp and weft of intricate design to create an overall pattern*

Recognition Outcomes

A certificate of attendance and completion is available from the provider, "The Centre" in Wangaratta. This certificate is recognised by the Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE as satisfying an entry requirement for the *Diploma in Music Performance—Jazz and Popular* course. In the redesign, attempts were made to ensure that the level of theory covered could be identified as that which would be parallel with other music theory examining bodies. Participation in the final musical performance also provides community recognition of the value of the course.

Pathways Outcomes

Pathways are about possibilities. For this Music Access course, the possibilities are great. Gaining entry to the *Diploma in Music Performance—Jazz and Popular* is a geniune possibility if that is what the participant has planned. Attempting music theory exams for other examining bodies with enhanced skill and confidence is a second possibility. Music skills create opportunities for private enjoyment and the enrichment found in music performance cannot be overstated. It is equally feasible that the learning to learn aspects embedded in the course enable the participant to develop renewed interest in other learning experiences.

The principles and aspects of the *Course in Music Access* have been described separately here to give an appreciation of the application of the conceptual ideas embedded in the conceptual framework. This does the course and the framework a disservice. It suggests a fragmentation, which is not in the course documentation. A metaphor for the framework is a woven cloth where the colours appear in the warp and weft of intricate design to create an overall pattern.

Transforming Lives, Transforming Communities will have a major impact on further education. As more curriculum is developed or redesigned, the shift from the theoretical to the practical will be very exciting.

Merilyn Hickson is Policy Officer, Policy and Executive Services in Adult, Community and Further Education Division.

Reference

Bradshaw, D., 1997, *Transforming Lives, Transforming Communities: Conceptual Framework for Further Education Curriculum*, Adult Community and Further Education Board Victoria.

# Critical Literacy Resource: A Background

by Andrew Lohrey

In this article, Andrew Lohrey provides us with an insight into the ideas underlying his professional development package on the teaching of Critical Literacy.

The thinking behind *Critical Literacy: a Professional Development Resource* came from two sources. The first was my concern with the manner in which Critical Literacy is often presented in educational literature and the second comes from a theoretical perspective on meaning.

The present trend in educational literature seems to me to refer to Critical Literacy in terms of enabling students to understand content and/or the social or formal elements embedded in texts. Such elements pertain to questions of power and gender, or grammar, or, in relation to content, a range of questions to do with what happens in the text. (Morgan:1996; Wignell:1997; Fraser:1995) These elements, while important, are only part of the broader picture of Critical Literacy.

To my mind Critical Literacy should be based on the generic concept of 'text'. A text is any expression - written, spoken, drawn or shown - and as a form it crosses all disciplines and curriculum boundaries. Critical Literacy should therefore be a critical reading ability which is applicable to any text in any circumstance. What does this mean? One of the things it means is treating texts in their entirety, that is, as integrated expressions that carry an extensive range of implied and hidden meanings.

Implied and hidden meanings are those that are 'below the line', that is, below the visible line of what is immediately obvious or what can be ascertained by asking questions about content. ('Below the line' refers to below the line of explicit meaning as seen in the pyramid of meaning, reproduced here from p, 26 of the Critical Literacy Resource). The overwhelming proportion of meaning in any text is always found below the line and an ability to read below the line should be the major outcome of any Critical Literacy program. When reading below the line we engage with a variety of contextual meanings. In the Critical Literacy booklet I have identified seven such contexts: 1. The Situation; 2. The Text Form; 3. The Author(s); 4. The Voices; 5. Genre; 6. Rhetorical Strategies; 7. World View.
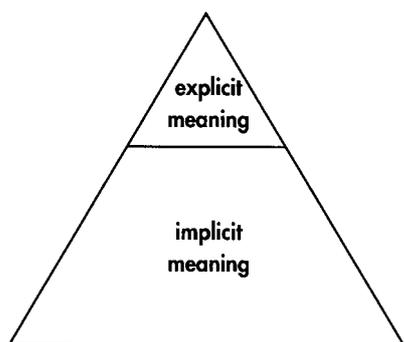
Critical contexts

These seven contexts incorporate the specific factors of grammar, gender, power and political and social considerations, but these factors are not the focus of this program. Rather I see a danger in focussing on these kinds of issues as if they represented a Critical Literacy program. Such a focus does not assist students to develop an openness of mind or a tolerance and empathy for different texts. It is these attributes that I see as the essential outcomes from a Critical Literacy program. A focus on the social or formal elements of a text alone will only result in developing a limited reading ability. The successful student of this kind of limited approach to literacy ends up by developing a 'veneer of accomplishment', that is, a proficiency for answering questions correctly.

While such results may make assessment easy for teachers, they do not produce students with Critical Literacy abilities. For students to develop Critical Literacy abilities they should be able to 'read' all the sub-contexts of a text, not just a select few. And while grammar is important it is only a formal means to an end. And that end is to enable students to know and use the appropriate rhetorical strategies that fit the particular genre of the text. A competent knowledge of grammar should never be seen as Critical Literacy but only ever as a formal base to be used in relation to rhetorical strategies and genre considerations.

I therefore view Critical Literacy as the sympathetic yet critical ability to read a broad and deep range of meanings in any text. Students have to be open to and relaxed with a wide range of meanings if they are to develop this kind of breadth and depth of reading. For students to be open and relaxed in the face of what may often appear to be offensive or intolerant expressions they have to have a level of detachment from the text itself. Such detachment only comes with a certain level of self knowledge and confidence. Self-reflection should therefore be an explicit aspect of every Critical Literacy program. Confidence, self-knowledge and detachment from texts are abilities which are relevant to outcome statements about Critical Literacy standards. Such ability outcomes contrast with outcome statements related to correct answers of content or correct answers on gender and power questions. As I have implied, Critical Literacy should never be about ticking boxes or working to have students attain a high percentage on a test.

Meaning

The second source of my thinking behind this Critical Literacy Resource comes from a theoretical perspective on

the structure of meaning. A short piece on the pyramid of meaning is contained in the Resource on pages 25-6. Some further comments are made here in relation to Critical Literacy.

I have argued more fully elsewhere (Lohrey:1997) that there are two types of meaning and therefore two kinds of knowledge. These two types of meaning are implicit and explicit meaning. All symbolic meaning-making, all speaking, reading and writing, all mathematics, all texts and every teaching and learning situation, and practice, combine these two systems of meaning.

Insofar as it is possible to speak definitively of explicit meaning it is created and constructed by and through the observed, visible and differential marks of the learning process. An example of explicit meaning in written expression is the letters of the alphabet, mathematical numbers, and the marks, signs and words of sentences. In the case of visual images, explicit meaning refers to the lines, colours or contrasts of light and shade which construct the image or system. In texts, linguists refer to these explicit, differential marks of language as 'signifiers'. In the more general sense of teaching and learning, explicit meaning usually refers to the 'facts', 'data', 'objects' and explicit informational content of the curriculum.

A teaching and learning practice that emphasises explicit information is one that is generally instructional and directed at having students remember factual information which has been built up from the past experience of others and which is contained in the curriculum. Quite often this 'factual information' is seen to exist on its own, almost like a commodity that is disconnected from its implicit contextual backgrounds.

In contrast, implicit meaning refers to all that meaning which is hidden from immediate observation. Implicit meaning has the general characteristic of always automatically creating unity through the underlying process of self-referral. This kind of meaning is also always contextual and comes in four broad categories:

- the situational context of the learning activity which includes the subjectivity of the teacher;
- the socio-cultural conventions, traditions, institutional protocols and linguistic habits that contextualise the curriculum;
- the values hopes, desires, agendas and world views of students; and
- the universal context of meaning itself.

There is no sharp division between these four categories for they overlap each other. There is therefore no separation between the 'outside' world of society and culture and the 'inner' world of subjectivity—both represent overlapping contexts within the same relative field of implicit meaning. A teaching practice that emphasises implicit meaning is therefore one that teaches how to read below the line as well as above. Such reading is through a range of interrelated and overlapping contexts which should include having students self-reflecting on their hopes, desires, agenda and world view.

It is important to note that there are no strict boundaries between implicit and explicit meaning. As in life, in any teaching and learning situation these two can never be separated as if they were rooms in a house or two polar opposites. These two forms of meaning are always integrated in the way that explicit constituents are always integrated into their background contexts. Thus the visible, manifest and explicit meaning of the curriculum content which is above the line is always framed by the many overlapping implicit contexts below the line. This is the case for learning generally and for Critical Literacy in particular.

Transfer

The pyramid of meaning with its two kinds of meaning (implicit and explicit) is compatible with that important concept in education called learning transfer. Learning transfer, or what is often referred to in education literature as 'transfer', has two modes. These two have various titles depending upon the author. For example, Perkins, (1986) described learning transfer in terms of 'automatic' and 'mindful'. These terms were modified by Salomon and Perkins (1988) who came up with 'low road' and 'high road' transfer. More recently (Fogarty 1997) has referred to the two modes of learning transfer as 'content-oriented' and 'process-oriented' transfer.

For convenience I use 'high' and 'low' road when referring to the two modes of transfer. These two modes of transfer are predominantly concerned with the construction of two types of meaning. As a result, all teaching and learning can be said to be directed at the development of the following two processes:

- duplicating meaning through repetition and memorisation; and
- transforming meaning or what can be called meaning-making.

Duplicating meaning is the central practice of low road transfer while meaning-making is the central focus of high road transfer. Low road transfer tends to be predominantly concerned with memorisation, that is, the duplication of explicit meaning (facts, data, information) through repetition and duplication. On the other hand, high road transfer tends to be concerned with transforming meaning through the reconstruction of hidden, implicit meaning and its creative use.

Traditional low road educational programs assume that learning is an exclusive process that works from a base of having students duplicate the explicit meaning which others in the past have produced. In other words, learning operates (horizontally) from the explicit to the explicit. We see this relationship operating in low road assessment where tests are based on the possibility of students duplicating 'correct' answers, ('correct' here referring to the explicit duplication by the student of explicit meaning in the curriculum). This duplication of explicit meaning is also the basis of low road instructional methods that are common to most secondary and tertiary institutions.

The inherent values of low road learning transfer and the 'horizontal' structure (from explicit to explicit) of meaning it creates happen to represent the values we find in conventional, empirical and rational approaches to science and technology. The values and view which this low road model encapsulates are those of empiricism and rationality and these represent the underlying wisdom or world view of much of Western culture.

Thus the world view inherent in this low road model is the one of naturalism, that is, we are presented with the possibility of an unqualified objective and natural world, a world in which the rationality of self-evident first principles (explicit self-referral) is held to be the highest of intellectual values. For learning, this world view presents us with the possibility of information stability and certainty, astability that comes from the certainty engendered by raw data and or factual information beyond socio-cultural contexts and subjective preferences. This is a world where complex systems are technologised, that is, reduced to a technology; where meaning for example, is reduced to the concept of 'information' which can then be further reduced to a social technology.

This 'low road' world view promotes an exclusive system of meaning, a system in which the explicit tends to exclude the implicit by repression, suppression, denial or erasure. These are the exclusion processes at work in unqualified 'low road' learning transfer. Thus teaching and learning practices based solely on low road transfer (meaning duplication) will not be able to develop open, tolerant and empathetic attitudes and abilities in students - abilities that are essential for Critical Literacy . In other words, Critical Literacy cannot be taught by low road methods which rely on assessment questions about content.

Meaning making

In preference to the more traditional reliance on low road methods, a teaching practice that can integrate low and high road transfer is the one which is necessary for teaching Critical Literacy. The pre-condition to high road meaning-making is thus the low road duplication of meaning. These two processes occur simultaneously in the learning processes of individual children, particularly gifted children. For the majority of children however, the duplication of meaning has traditionally been given a special place in education in the form of instructional theories and a concentration on correct memorisation.

A strong but not exclusive focus on 'low road' learning can therefore be appropriate for those students where memorisation is a difficulty; where for example, students are having problems learning basic curriculum content like the number and names of bones in the human body, or letters of the alphabet, or correct spelling, or musical scales, or a host of other important basic content. Thus one of the points being made here is that low road learning with its focus on duplication and memorisation should never be considered an end-in-itself, but rather the necessary pre-condition for 'high road' transfer to occur.

'High road' teaching practices work across the line (vertically) by making the implicit explicit and the explicit implicit and in this interactive process students consciously make meaning rather than only concentrating on its duplication. For example, we can come to know our attitudes, cultural values and strategies for successful social interaction by expressing them. In their expression these implicit meanings are changed, refined, transformed and symbolised. This means that once transformed into explicit systems of expression, implicit meaning will modify conditions of earlier thinking and expression.

It is these across the line processes of exchange and transformation which are central to Critical Literacy. How to teach across the line? The most effective way is to take the four categories of implicit meaning (referred to above) and teach through them. This means a program of teaching through context as well as teaching about context. A context is the background conditions of something. In education the 'something' is usually the constituents of the course or subject content assessed by testing. Teaching about and through context is a process where the focus is on the background meaning of course constituents. Such meaning is always implicit and not immediately obvious, and represents most of the meaning of content. Assessment of Critical Literacy should therefore be through performance criteria (which are suggested by the seven contexts of text) and these related to abilities like empathy, tolerance, flexibility and openness.

It should be noted that teaching through a context is different from teaching about context. Teaching about context is a low road, instructional practice while teaching through context is a high road, meaning making process that involves students making decisions and evaluations and solving problems. Teaching through context is therefore the necessary process for Critical Literacy but this should be based on some, but not an excessive amount, of low road instruction about context.

What then are the important contexts to teach about and through in order for students to develop a Critical Literacy?

This was the question I confronted in writing the Critical Literacy Resource. Along with most other writers on Critical Literacy I decided that the important contexts for Critical Literacy were the contexts of a text's production. Unlike most other approaches to Critical Literacy the present one deals with the concept of 'context' as a generic category, rather than the usual way of seeing context as a special issue of social or political construction. The effect of this has been to provide a coherent and systematic approach to Critical Literacy, one that incorporates every possible context of a text's production and also establishes an integrated set of performance criteria.

In this manner the Resource lays before a teacher the entire range of possible contexts of a text. Teachers can then decide whether they want to use all seven contexts in their Critical Literacy classes or only a select few. If only a few are used, then because of the systematic nature of this approach,

That's a good idea!

by Naomi Evans, Marie Williams and Maria O'Callaghan

Three language and literacy practitioners talk about how the theories of learning and teaching encountered in their postgraduate courses have affected their practice.

Naomi Evans

Naomi

My name is Naomi Evans and I have recently completed a Post Graduate Diploma in Literacy/TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) - last year, in fact, at Victoria University of Technology, or VUT, at the Footscray campus.

I undertook Literacy Methodology and Advanced Literacy Methodology over two semesters, both with Rosa McKenna as lecturer. As I had been a sessional teacher of literacy over the past two and a half years or so, I was very interested to learn through the initial sessions about current theories of literacy, with a strong focus on Australia.

The course segued into a searching look at the 1996 ABS survey, *Aspects of Literacy*, including a critical examination of the definitions and implications for policy and practice. The politics of large scale surveys was delved into, and the idea that if the survey, because of strategy and content could not possibly gather holistic statements about a person's multi-faceted literacies, then what should the government resolve to do for literacy in Australia in the face of such findings?

At this point we looked at policy texts for adult literacy and ESL and examined theorists such as Gee and Street, who both examine the social implications of notions of 'illiteracy', and say that it can be beneficial to think of person having a number of literacies or discourses which they employ in daily life, and perhaps may only need help in a specific area when they come to a literacy program. (See Gee 1990: 137-159 and Street 1990).

These ideas seemed to articulate what I had been thinking about many of the students in my classes. The texts raised concerns about the meaninglessness and futility of talking about someone being illiterate, when upon examination they may have a multitude of literacies, from being able to repair panels on a car to being able to recite the entire history of an Australian sporting icon's career, for example. The need for assistance in certain areas of reading and writing may be so, but the possible social stigma created for the person concerned through being labelled 'illiterate' is potentially far more damaging.

After Easter was a look at literacy learners, and an attempt to gauge just who our students are. Are there differences in learning literacy as an adult than when

> **' These ideas seemed to articulate what I had been thinking about many of the students in my classes '**

acquiring it as a child? Do women benefit from different teaching strategies? Are there various pedagogies more appreciated by ESL/ Literacy learners than students who have English as their first language? Within and out of class, we discussed such questions, marvelling at the crossovers, variety and richness of the literacy student body.

We were encouraged to partake in site visits in order to develop a profile of a group of learners, and work out if there was such a phenomenon as a typical adult literacy learner. I had a fellow classmate interview a student in one of the literacy/ computer sessions I was teaching at St. Albans. I'm not certain how much information my classmate gleaned from the interview, but by the end of the class she had certainly done the rounds and assisted most of the students with their queries! Undoubtedly, these learners were a very enthusiastic and motivated group of students, eager to ask questions, learn and enjoy the experience of learning.

After trying to ascertain a literacy student profile, our class moved on to an investigation of the methodologies of literacy teaching and learning. We looked at the issues of whole language, phonics, grammar and genre in terms of theory and practice. I found that this was particularly pertinent to the approaches to the teaching of the Reading, Writing and Oral Communications streams of the Certificate II in General Education for Adults, or the CGEA, with which I had been engaged at VUT.

In second semester the course moved around such topics as literacy approaches and teacher attributes, Competency Based Curriculum, the National Reporting System document and Industry Training Packages. We were required to complete a practical project as part of our assessment, and I took on the suggested topic of designing learning and assessment resources for a stream of the CGEA. I was teaching a General Curriculum Options Computer class, and had in the past found it very difficult to find appropriate support literature for literacy/ESL students.

I decided to create a booklet in which the basic functions of word processing on a computer were explained and practiced through simple, yet enjoyable exercises. An attempt to leave out superfluous, difficult language and heavy text was made, and effort instead put in to having layout consist of a few ideas or instructions per page, large fonts, visuals and more simple language than the standard

computer software texts available. I have started using the booklet with students this year, and it seems to working well as an introductory text.

In general, I found studying literacy and TESOL a very consolidating and extending experience. I started teaching adult literacy on a sessional basis in 1995 after completing a Bachelor of Education in Visual Arts in 1992, and doing some part-time art and emergency teaching. I had begun to study TESOL as a postgraduate course at this stage, but didn't continue with this, so for the time prior to last year I was relying on art teaching methodologies, fellow staff members and time in the literacy/ESL section of the library to get me through!

Certainly, the literacy course coupled with TESOL subjects and a look at the linguistic aspect of the English language made for a well-rounded pedagogical experience. Hopefully, this will be one which will be taken further, perhaps in the form of a Masters study in Literacy and Technology practices, but who knows? At least in the meantime I can continue exploring the linguistic, social, political, pedagogical and curriculum theories inherent in what I hope will be a satisfying teaching and learning experience.

References

Gee, J., 1990, *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in discourses*, The Falmer Press, Hampshire.

Street B. V., 1990, "Putting Literacies on the Political Agenda", *Open Letter*, Vol. 1 No. 1.

Marie

Who wants to study when you have a full-time job, three children in or nearing teenage years and a husband who works a variety of shifts? "Not me!" was my reply for a number of years as I delayed putting off something that I knew I would have to eventually do. The inevitable came to pass after a discussion with my HOD about my Professional Development plans for the coming year.

So what course to do? I inquired at a number of Institutions as to what courses were on offer. After enrolling in two Institutions I finally decided that the Graduate Diploma in TESOL and Literacy course, offered at the Victoria University of Technology would suit my needs perfectly. I required a course that covered all aspects of the ESL and ABE fields as my work at that stage required me to teach in both departments. I wanted to study part time and believed it would better suit my future employment prospects by being qualified with a Graduate Diploma as opposed to a Graduate Certificate. I put my name down for in the Graduate Diploma in TESOL and Literacy at the Victoria University of Technology for 1998.

' **whole language, phonics, grammar and genre in terms of theory and practice. I found that this was particularly pertinent** '

Now, twelve months into this two year course I have learnt so much about the field of ESL (my choice of study for this first year was in the area of ESL). Christine Riddell, a Senior Lecturer and Coordinator of the Post Graduate TESOL and Literacy Programs at VUT has been a most inspirational lecturer. Her passion for the field and her depth of knowledge regarding the issues relating to ESL affect the student in such a way that leaves them thoroughly prepared to take on the role of an ESL teacher.

The course has been a very balanced mix of theory and practice. Two of the assessment tasks in TESOL Methodology and TESOL Methodology2 (two of the subjects that I studied in 1998) were designed so that every student would have to present a work shop on a practical aspect of teaching. At the end of each semester we had a folder of 'tried and tested' classroom activities. The feed back from other students regarding these activities was in itself a wonderful learning experience. Many times students were heard to say " I tried that teaching idea and found...."

In TESOL Methodology 2 I had to study a curriculum document and design 20 teaching idea to be used in the teaching of that curriculum. I found that particular activity to be most useful because it gave me the opportunity to study a curriculum in detail and plan teaching activities that correlated to the learning outcomes. I also knew that I would be critiqued on my choices.

Another particular assignment I found to be most useful was a case study of a non-English speaking background student that was undertaken in the light of Yorio's taxonomy. My interview with my student highlighted his Classification of learner variables in a most understanding way. Yorio lists 6 points as being critical in influencing a learner's ability to acquire a second language. These being Age, Cognition, Native Language, Input—context of learning—context of teaching, Affective Domain—socio-cultural factors, motivation and Educational background. I find myself referring back to my notes when I encounter an 'interesting' student. The course has given me a greater understanding of some of the less obvious influences on a student's progress in learning a second language..

The practical usefulness that the course generated was wonderful. But there is more to being a good practitioner than just having relevant activities for the classroom. One must also have an understanding and knowledge of the theorist of the particular field. In the course we studied in detail the theories of such people as Brown, Clyne and Crystal to mention just a few.

From a practitioner's point of view the course has been responsible for me reviewing my teaching methodology for students from a non -English speaking background. Previously I tended to teach ESL students from the prospective of my Literacy background. I now have a completely different view of the 'needs' of the ESL student and plan my lessons accordingly.

So far I have enjoyed the course immensely. I have found it to be challenging and stimulating. The benefits of meeting up so regularly with others in the field and discussing 'day to day' issues has been just wonderful. The course forces one into thinking about and reviewing issues relative to teaching. One can only come out a better teacher for this inward reflection. I look forward to this next year of study.

Maria

I have recently completed a Graduate Diploma in Tesol and Literacy at Victoria University. I completed my Bachelor of Teaching(Primary) at the Australian Catholic University(Brisbane) in 1991 and went on to teach for 3 years at St. Pauls Primary School in Woodridge, QLD. I had three challenging but wonderful years at St. Pauls and I think it was my time there that initiated my desire to be an ESL teacher. If I remember correctly, there were over thirty different nationalities at St. Pauls.

I left St. Pauls to travel as far and as much as I could. I spent 2 years living and teaching in London, doing the typical Aussie extended working holiday and I worked in many schools and taught children who came from all over the world. Many of my classes had 60-90% of students from NESB. I also travelled through Africa and Eastern and Western Europe where I tried to immerse myself in the culture and interact with the people of the country I was in. I experienced the sheer frustration of not being able to speak the language of the people. Simple questions such as "What time is the next train?", and, "How much is that?", were sometimes quite difficult to communicate. Anyway, travelling and teaching in London increased my interest in other countries and cultures and heightened my desire to become an ESL teacher. On my return to Australia in January 1997, I moved to Melbourne and spent the year doing supply teaching. and my full-time Graduate Diploma in Tesol and Literacy in 1998, choosing to do it full time.

I learnt new theories and practices which consolidated my own beliefs from my previous teaching experience. I was introduced to theorists such as Halliday and Friere and engaged in the practical component of teaching English to students from NESB. I was fortunate to benefit from the knowledge and experience of both Christine Riddell and Rosa McKenna who lectured in the language and Tesol methodology and literacy subjects. Their practical knowledge was invaluable.

'**I think the theories of language teaching and learning become most relevant and useful when they can be practically engaged in the classroom**'

Important and useful areas I gained insight into were the teaching of grammar and the various theories of second language acquisition. These were very practical and I could relate them very easily to my experience as both learner and teacher. Not having been taught formal grammar at school or university, I had never embraced it as an important component of my teaching. I followed the belief that it was incidental and not necessary to instruct it in a formal manner. However I now see it as an essential element in ESL teaching. There needs to be a balance between formal instruction and informal practice to alleviate the danger of learners knowing grammar rules perfectly but not knowing when or where to use them. The teaching of grammar and indeed language in general needs to be as practical and relevant as possible for the learner.

The most interesting component of the course for me was on second language acquisition(SLA). This was an area I knew very little about but was very keen to learn. We became familiar with the theories and practices of Ellis, Brown, and Krashen. We explored the factors affecting SLA, including social situation and the must of input and interaction in the second language. in particular I found Ellis to be especially useful and informative in highlighting conditions necessary for successful SLA and the different ways learners acquire a second language.

I think the theories of language teaching and learning become most relevant and useful when they can be practically engaged in the classroom. I believe theories can be used as guides for teachers. Each and every teacher teaches differently. Each and every student responds differently to different methods of construction.

I have learnt that it is important for teachers to be open to the many theories and methods of instruction but also to be realistic of ones capabilities, strengths and limitations as a teacher.

Naomi Evans is a sessional teacher in Adult Basic Education at Victoria University of Technology, St. Albans Campus; Marie Williams coordinates and teaches in Language Studies and Adult Basic Education at Werribee campus of VUT and; Maria O'Callaghan is teaching in Queensland.

Foreign Correspondence

This is the first in a new section which seeks to present some glimpses of work being done in ALBE around the world. As you will see, ALBE is alive and well in Pakistan.

The Adult Basic Education Society of Pakistan

by Vincent David, Director

The Adult Basic Education Society (ABES) was established in 1971 and it is affiliated with Pakistan Volunteer Nutrition and Health Association, Karachi, Non-Government Organisation Coordinating Council Karachi, Family Planning Association of Pakistan, Lahore, and World Association for Christian Communication, London.

It is not officially affiliated or registered with the following International Organisations, but there are links with UNESCO and various world churches for different projects, workshops, seminars, exhibitions and training.

Organisation

The ABES is a non-sectarian, non-profit organisation under the sponsorship and supervision of an autonomous Board of Directors, who are all Pakistanis, working for the welfare of all the people in Pakistan without any discrimination of race, class, or creed. Besides the 25 permanent staff members, there are experienced and trained supervisors, and community development workers on contract basis. Teachers are selected from local areas and trained in the ABES methods. ABES is paying them just an honorarium during the teaching period i.e., six months. Local leaders are organised into committees, which eventually adopt the project's responsibilities entirely. Functional relationships are established with cooperating government and private departments, institutions, and committees. Since 1972, the Director has been Mr. Vincent A. David, a Pakistani working in the field of Adult Literacy for 32 years.

Aims and objects

The goals of the ABES are outlined in its Constitution, designed for the welfare of all the people in Pakistan. Basically, the ABES:

1 runs experimental literacy projects;
2 trains local teachers, supervisors and administrative staff;
3 publishes literacy and follow-up literature;
4 produces teaching aids and audio-visual equipment;
5 concentrates on post-literacy development;
6 conducts research and evaluation of programmes and new tecchniques;
7 serves other organizations by sharing its experiences and making available publications and teaching materials.

Projects and achievements

During the period before the advent of placing TV sets in the class sites, closely supervised small groups achieved an outstanding rate of 94% success. In other words the drop-out rate had been reduced to only 6% for the full six-months course. The projects included a variety of people and constant revision of tactics to combine successful elements that we re discovered and re-emphasised in each following campaign. These elements are listed as principles at the end of this paper.

Female participation

Females were found to be better teachers and regular students; they had less drop-out and higher test scores. Considering the literacy rate among females which is as low as 5.5% in rural areas, the ABES was reaching those most in need of functional literacy. The afternoon classes also provided a social gathering for bored and lonely women who could fellowship in a positive activity approved by their husbands and leaders. In recent projects, women students out numbered the men 2:1. The newly educated women also motivate the men to understand how literacy can be practical and to seek such classes for themselves.

Youth clubs have been formed to run libraries and carry out social activities. Classes were started in factories with the cooperation of management and labour, each giving up half of their time for the class hour. Rural areas were successful when paved roads and electricity were present two factors for progress and mobility.

A special Project was launched in 1984, working with a particular nomadic tribe of beggars who lived in tents. The community leaders asked for education for their children who could then adopt another profession. In just five years with ten teachers, over 2,000 out of 10,000 total illiterates have been educated, many going on to matriculation. In just 24 months of basic literacy and non-formal primary education, the children were enrolled in the 5th and 6th grades of the local formal schools. Five graduates are teachers in their community.

Area served

The ABES serves the districts of Gujranwala, Sialkot, Lahore, Kasur, Sheikupura, Jhelum, and Gujrat of about 25,000 square kilometres for running its adult education projects. However, the training courses, methodology via video lessons, books, and other audio-visual aids cover include the whole country. Over 200,000 adults have been made literate directly through projects of the ABES while an estimate of over one million people have been benefited through

services rendered to other institutions. About 500,000 books are sold each year and 56 organisations have been served regularly through training and teaching aids.

Methodology and strategy

The adult literacy primer, NAYA DIN (New Day) was initiated 36 years ago, based upon the eclectic method of picture—word—syllables & sounds—writing—different exercises—short sentences to make a functional message or story, all in one page or lesson. The 56 lessons of the primer stage are covered in 60 days, an hour daily for six days a week. The trained teacher combines the precise teaching technique with the use of charts and flash cards attached to the portable blackboard. Audio and video cassettes of the primer lessons are also used by semi-trained teachers. The primer has been revised and re-printed 45 times and the 46th edition, answering recent minor objections, is now in the press.

The Post-primer phase takes the student through stage IV of carefully graded reading materials, which are four titles in each stage, chosen through interest by the student. A written test is given at the beginning of the course and at the end The post literacy curriculum is determined by the self-felt needs of the students who are asked during primer stage why they have been motivated to attend the classes regularly. What do they hope to read and what do they intend to write?

Follow-up programmes are introduced before the basic course is completed for the sake of continuity. Depending on the needs, interests, and facilities available, the local committee undertakes the running of libraries, health clinics, road building, sewing classes, and agriculture schemes. The ABES lends its help with some limited resources, loan schemes, box libraries, audio-visual aids, and training. The community feels that this is their own project, for their own benefit.

This second six months period occurs during the two harvest seasons, the scorching heat of summer and the monsoon rains, during which time classes in rural areas are most difficult to run regularly and efficiently.

Sources of funds

- Membership fees.
- Sale of reading and teaching materials.
- International aid for different projects from various church, community and welfare organisations based in Pakistan and overseas.

Cooperation with the Pakistan TV Corporation

In 1973, the Pakistan TV Corporation (PTV) created the Education Television Division (PTV) and was seeking a project for its first venture. Literacy was the big need of the people and this challenge led the PTV to begin cooperation with the ABES. The years of experience in training and administration were quickly adapted to the television medium and the setting up of community viewing centres (CVC) all over the country. Video cassettes were produced for the course books. In addition, 20

lessons were produced on video cassettes for the teacher training courses. The medium of television worked for literacy.

Difficulties using TV transmission

The difficulties of transmission over the one and only channel for television in the country were unsolved and had their telling effects on the drop-out rate, time schedule, and desired results. Transmission time was limited, lessons cancelled for sports events, speeches by government officials, and other national coverage. The best time for the men's classes interfered with prime time programmes and schedules were often changed. Often the most motivated students were in small numbers too low for a TV class or their free time was not the same as the time given by PTV. Any delay or postponement of literacy lessons can prove to be disastrous for the early stage of learning and keeping up the morale of students. There were also a number of problems with studio time for recording.

In the light of the above mentioned problems ABES decided to develop its own videos on the same lessons and by using video cassette players (VCP) have the programme in the villages. The cost of such equipment is becoming less and the VCR craze within the country has made this system familiar and accepted. In 1987, keeping in view of the above facts, ABES produced 75 video lessons. These programmes were recorded in Sydney. The project was partially financed by Canadian Organisation for Development through Education (CODE). From October 1987 to April 1988, these programmes were tested in ten different villages.

Production

The ABES has three departments for production of books, teaching aids, and audio-visual equipment. At the head office in Gujranwala, over 40,000 combination blackboards have been manufactured for its own use and sale to other organisations. The flash cards are plastic laminated and spiral bound to set in a special wire frame on top of the board. The branch office in Lahore publishes over 200 titles of literacy and follow-up books on subjects such as health education, civics, family, vocational, recipes, biographies, and religion.

In a communication kit form, flip charts, filmstrips, and script cassettes accompany the books on health education subjects. Filmstrip/slide projectors are produced locally to operate on a 12 volt battery. Cassette players are assembled locally to operate from the mains, batteries, or hand- wind with a built-in Generator. These and blank cassettes are assembled from parts by disabled people. Literacy songs have been produced on cassette for motivation. The integrated small media approach with small groups and discussion has been researched and proven effective for feed back and decision-making.

Research and evaluation

Research and evaluation is built into each project and becoming 'formative' along with post-project reports. Pre-testing with target audiences is routine. An overall objective evaluation of the Society was done in 1983 by Mr. Roger

Harrison who came from the British Open University. His attached report shows that the ABES compares favourably with literacy programmes in other parts of the world.

Projects and surveys for other organisations

In 1987 a primer was developed for teaching health components called Naya Din for Health, so in this year ABES has started an other project i.e., Health Education Adult Literacy (HEAL). In this project 60 classes were started in October 1988, enrolling 1,000 women. In the last week of April 1989, a test was given to these students with the following results:

- 70% of group members could answer correctly in writing or orally, according to class set books, cassettes and charts, 80% of questions on a number of topics relating to childcare;
- 82% of pregnant group members had been immunised at the appropriate time with anti- tetanus injections;
- 60% of group members children under the age of two years had been immunised against TB, Polio, whooping cough, diphtheria, tetanus and measles;
- 90% of group members could state correctly where is their nearest properly functioning Government or non-government curative institution , MCH centre and Family Planning Centre;
- 94% could read accurately from Grade four course books;
- 79% could write a simple letter accurately from dictation;
- 83% could work out accurately some simple addition, division subtraction and multiplication problems set;
- only 16.45% students dropped out during this project.

On the same pattern, in 1989–90 and 1990–91 we launched 65 and 90 classes respectively, achieving almost the same results as in 1989 project.

Principles

ABES learned from its mistakes and formed the following principles to launch a successful literacy campaign:

Start the project in the area where there is an atmosphere of literacy and greater demand Opportunities for reading and obtaining literature are much greater.

Start in one small community and aim for 100 per cent literacy. Concentrate all efforts in a small community in order to gain success and to demonstrate the method to the staff it self, the leaders and visitors from other communities.

The local leaders should be involved right at the start of the programme with their recommendations, suggestions, approval and advice taken seriously. Opinion leaders rather than "Official" or government leaders should be chosen. Those leaders who have definite interest in such a programme and are willing to give time for its proper implementation should be included in some type of local committee or advisory group.

Practical, functional programmes that meet the needs of the neo-literates should be planned before the literacy campaign

ever begins. Definite written commitments should be obtained from the various nation building agencies and departments that will provide the facilities for literacy graduates to improve and increase their vocational and economic standards.

For adults small classes are more successful and will have fewer dropouts. The number should be between 15–20 students to one class if it is face-to-face teaching and 30–35 students if it is video teaching.

In all programmes, women will be more successful than men in regard to leadership, teaching and learning. For an initial high rate of success and high standard of results, it is suggested to involve them in the beginning stage. In women's programmes, concentrate on the Mother-in-law who is the most influential member of the family.

Close and regular supervision should be made available to each class at least once in a week by a trained and experienced staff member. Besides furnishing materials, books, and other necessary supplies, he checks the progress and problems of students, observes the teaching method, and offers advice to teachers and local leaders.

The books and pamphlets should be attractive, short in length, in clear print, illustrated if possible, and should follow the proven methods of writing for neo-literates. These books should be for sale and not distributed free.

Always choose the best and tested primers, books, and teaching materials for successful literacy programme. Improvement and revision may be made later, but the programme should not be delayed by starting another new primer and method.

The functional subjects like vocational training, general knowledge, current events, health and other subjects of personal interest should be included in literacy courses because illiterates want to learn about their daily problems.

A new readers' library should be organised by the local committee. The titles should be collected, prepared for use and made available to the community through a method of distribution that reaches the readers easily, cheaply and at their convenience.

Formal school teachers can be successful in teaching adults the skills of literacy if they are carefully selected; well trained; equipped with full sets of teaching aids; regularly supervised; and given monthly refresher courses.

They should teach a class where they live and preferably where they also teach in the formal school for children.

The timings for teaching should be set with the consent of students. Mostly the late evenings for men classes and afternoons for female classes are found best.

If you would like to find out more about adult literacy and basic education in Pakistan you can contact Mr Vincent David at: vad@gwaabes.brain.net.pk

Open Forum

In this Open Forum, Alan Brooker takes a hard look at the idea of mutual obligation literacy classes for young people — and he's not so sure it will work.

Mandatory literacy training — a simplistic response to a complex problem?

When the Prime Minister announced in his 'Federation' speech on January 29th that young unemployed people who failed basic literacy testing would be attending 'remedial' classes as a matter of imperative rather than choice, and that failure to do so would incur financial penalties in the form of reduced 'dole' benefits, the welfare sector responded, if not with collective and resounding condemnation, then at the very least with significant concern.

John Howard's purpose for such a proposal can be measured in strategic-political terms, for there has always been public support (and this means votes) for any government that has the spirit to challenge 'dole bludging'. But in this instance there is also an indisputable connection between the Prime Minister's proposal and the overwhelming failure of the Federal Government's LANT scheme (Literacy and Numeracy) that was initiated as a part of the Mutual Obligation 'package' for young people in 1998.

It was recently reported in *The Age* (30–1–99) that although the Government had predicted that nationally 12,000 young unemployed people would undertake mutual obligation literacy courses each year, only 15% of this number had actually enrolled in one. It also reported that of the 69 organizations that had been contracted to supply this service (as a result of a competitive tendering process) some had actually received NO referrals into the program. This fact has certainly confirmed what many education and welfare professionals were saying from the start - that for many young adults who have experienced failure within mainstream schooling the offer of a 'return visit' to a similar environment has little appeal. Making this offer mandatory might boost the class numbers, but it will hardly enhance the attraction.

With emotion often running high, there is potential within the mutual obligation debate—it is one that is basically a rights versus responsibilities issue—to preclude the initial premise upon which literacy training for the unemployed was founded, and one that actually draws consensus of opinion. This is the fact that for a person to be regarded as employable, they need to have basic literacy. No one disputes the worth of being able to read and write, and few would challenge any government's desire to increase the opportunities for the most educationally marginalised people in our community. Hence a national

program financed to the tune of $143 million seems a reasonable response. So why the opposition from key welfare bodies?

There is not a blanket disapproval of the mutual obligation policy. Whereas there is concern for 16–17 year-olds who are threatened with a loss of benefits if they are not in education or training, this concern stems from the fact that there are so few options outside of mainstream schooling. But throughout the nation, welfare agencies have come to terms with new employment programs, indicated by the fact that they already operate programs such as Work for the Dole, JPET, and LANT.

Rather, the strong criticism from this group to the new development in the fledgling practice of mutual obligation is foremost a response to what they view as the punitive nature that accompanies a policy of reciprocity based upon indebtedness and blame. Offering optional services as a means to improve work-related skills is one thing, but when the rhetoric suggests a 'you owe us' disposition, a fundamental change has occurred. As the Reverend Peter Hollingworth implied in the inaugural Hollingworth Trust Lecture, the concept of government support for the disadvantaged has undergone a radical value shift, from one that espoused equality and basic human rights as a matter of course to one in which the government now poses the question "what are people doing to deserve this support?" (Peter Hollingworth, "Going the Full Monty - Youth Employment Options and Opportunities").

By denying choice, the integrity of the user-group, who are already low in self-esteem and feel a sense of disempowerment, is further diminished, and is compounded by this 'not overt but not entirely hidden' accusation of blame.

Under the heading of "Welfare groups attack plan" (*The Age* 29–1–99), several tangential issues about compulsory literacy training come to the fore, and include the lack of unskilled jobs, the disintegration of the youth labour market, the need for pre-emptive and early intervention strategies, and the challenge of a government's constitutional responsibilities to its constituents. But perhaps the most pertinent of all is the implication that unless all the needs of the learner are addressed, then program efficacy will be severely compromised.

Within the adult learning environment there is considerable support for holistic pedagogy. Peter Dwyer, in *Opting Out— Early School Leavers and the Degeneration of Youth Policy* (NCYS) makes the point that for anyone to resume an education program after a period of non-participation, there needs to be a structured re-entry plan that "takes into account the post-

school experience of the participants, the other commitments they now have in their lives, and the fact that their education has been interrupted for a considerable period of time" (p77). For potential LANT participants, the 'other commitments' could include court appearances, finding accommodation, attending some form of counselling (personal development, grief, drug or alcohol, anger management) and so on.

So, even supposing 'punitive action' does lead to 'class' attendance, this will not guarantee results; a basic instruction will not suffice. In its three years of providing an education service to disassociated young people for whom traditional schooling had simply not worked, The Salvation Army's BEAT (Bridging Education And Training) program engaged young people through a process that catered for not only their learning needs, but their many and significant other demands that arose as a consequence of homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse, offending behaviour, school exclusion and social isolation. This type of model, inclusive and case-planned, has been discussed at length in educational circles, and is in part an adaptation of 'full-service' schooling in which the education of students is not offered in isolation from other needs e.g. health, social, family and so on.

With the Prime Minister himself acknowledging that the cause of illiteracy "… is due to a whole lot of other factors" (radio interview, 3AW, 29 January 1999), the welfare sector would no doubt like to see these 'other factors' addressed—in both the pre- and post-intervention stages. But it is doubtful that within LANT they could be, given the low funding margins that are determined from the process of 'contestability'.

For welfare agencies, the significant concerns of the punitive nature of the current edict of compulsory participation and the ensuing practice that all too often reflects a piecemeal approach, will result in an on-going commentary on the literacy-as-a-part-of mutual-obligation debate.

With a state of flux upon us, bureaucrats and practitioners are still becoming more familiar with the many changes that are a result of the restructures to our employment and social services. As performance evaluation processes gradually provide analyses that in turn will ameliorate policy decisions, we will no doubt see improvement. Meanwhile, when advocating for a better deal on behalf of its clients, the education/training sector should not ignore that it has a formidable ally - that of the welfare sector. United and informed, a planned and successful approach to education access for those people that are disadvantaged in our community can be achieved.

Alan is currently working as the Education and Training Advisor for The Salvation Army (Southern Territory).

teachers will know that there are other contexts that can be used. In this manner some pedagogical persuasion is created for students and teachers to make meaning through a wide and deep reading. The practice which should always be avoided in Critical Literacy classes is the closing down of questions because of some 'special pleading' for the just and moral case or because of a blindness associated with comfort zones and the norm.

As already suggested, the outcomes of Critical Literacy should always been borne in mind. These are not knowledge-based qualitative outcomes but ability based and qualitative, and related to each of the seven contexts. Thus openness, empathy and tolerance of diverse and multiple meanings are the essential attributes that students need to display in Critical Literacy programs.

Andrew Lohrey is at the University of Tasmania.

References

Fogarty, R., 1997, "Enhancing Transfer", A. Costa & R. Liebmann, (Eds.), *Supporting the Spirit of Learning*, New York, Sage.

Fraser, H., (Ed.), 1995, *Challenging the Text*, Townsville: James Cook University.

Lohrey, A., 1997, *The Meaning of Consciousness*, Ann Arbor, Michigan University Press.

Lohrey, A., 1998, *Critical Literacy: a professional development resource*, Canberra, National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia.

Morgan, W., Gilbert, P. et al., 1996, *Critical Literacy: Readings and Resources*, Norwood South Australia, Australian Association for the Teaching of English.

Perkins, D., 1986, *Knowledge as Design*, Hildale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Perkins, D. & Salomon, G., 1988, "Teaching for Transfer", *Educational Leadership*, 46, (1), pp 22-32.

Wignell, P., 1997, *Critical Literacy: A Linguistic Perspective*, Canberra, National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia.

Policy Update

The lack of clear language and literacy policy from Canberra makes it difficult to see just where we are heading. These two contributions from Rosa McKenna of ACAL and Sally Thompson of VALBEC, seek to foreground some of the issues that both organisations see as key areas of concern in the field. More developed responses will appear in future editions of Fine Print.

Adult Literacy and Numeracy Provision: the facts

A most bizarre phenomenon has recently occurred. The Government has generated a crisis in the community about literacy standards and then announced initiatives which are neither new nor generous.

From 1990, the International Year of Literacy, until March 1996, Australia had a coordinated national response to providing literacy and numeracy education. Through the Australian Language and Literacy Policy all governments, state, territory and federal, cooperated to reach a set of national goals towards improving language, literacy and numeracy in the Australian community. Measures to provide access for adults to literacy and numeracy programs were explicitly addressed.

The Federal government's input to these goals was primarily through a labour market initiative designed to overcome barriers to employment for the long term unemployed called the Special Intervention Program (SIP). By 1996, the Federal Government was spending $250m annually on this program. When it was introduced it significantly changed the administration and delivery of adult literacy and numeracy. For example, funds were allocated through national competitive tendering directly through the CES network rather than allocating resources to TAFE providers through the state and territory authorities. Eligibility was strictly targeted and managed through a referral system managed by the CES. Payments were based on individual placement, attendance and outcomes not student contact hours or curriculum. Participation by job seekers was mandatory under their Newstart agreements with the potential to affect benefits if they failed to attend. Participants were subject to pre and post training assessment and final payment to the provider was on the basis of the further education or employment outcomes achieved.

The Liberal/National Party Coalition when elected in March 1996 abolished all labour market programs in line with their electoral promises although contracts for the Special Intervention Program, ran their course for another year until the Government legislated employment assistance and industrial relations policies were implemented. While Ministerial agreement towards meeting national literacy and numeracy goals have continued in the schools sector all mechanisms for cooperation between the commonwealth and state/territory authorities on measures for adult literacy and numeracy provision ceased.

The ABS Aspects of Literacy Survey was published in 1997 and demonstrated that the Governments early literacy intervention policy was not sufficient to address the literacy and numeracy education needs of the community particularly in a climate of growing youth unemployment.

The government responded by announcing a new literacy and numeracy program targeting 18 to 24 year olds administered as part of the Mutual Obligation set of initiatives. $39m was to be available from July 1997 to June 1998. Sixty-nine providers were selected through public tender to provide assessment and training services. Another three providers were selected to audit the service. Young people unemployed for six months were identified by Centrelink staff and offered a range of Mutual Obligation programs. If they chose the literacy and numeracy program a pre training assessment established their literacy and numeracy competence using a national reporting system and determined the number of hours of tuition. Outcomes and payment was based on improvement of literacy and numeracy competence using the reporting system. The program was implemented in August 1998.

Between August and January 1999 only a handful of clients entered the program. Contracted providers were unable to financially sustain the program at minimal levels and the Government faced the embarrassment of paying out contracts by June 1999.

The complex screening devise and referral processes through Centrelink saw potential clients being referred for intensive employment assistance before the literacy and numeracy option was available. For the few who were the literacy and numeracy option was the least attractive to a young person, it required the longest time commitment in terms of both weekly attendance and length of course. Other job seekers were excluded from the program.

On returning from the summer break, the Prime Minister announced the Literacy and Numeracy Program in the Federation Address in February, 1999, giving the impression that this was a new initiative, that there was to be a national test, and that the program was to become mandatory.

In fact the assessment or 'testing' arrangements remains unchanged. Providers carry out professional pre and post training assessments and report them using a common national reporting system in which they have been trained. The mandatory component universally denounced as a regressive step is directed at 18 - 24 year olds unemployed for six months, who have been assessed with low levels of literacy and numeracy. All other job seekers who have to comply with an activity test (such as Youth Allowance and Newstart recipients) and sole parents participating in the Jobs, Education and

Training (JET) programme can now access the literacy and numeracy training programme.

What we have is a modified version of the Special Intervention Program, a huge withdrawal of resources, growing demands on other funded programs and still no coherent national literacy and numeracy policy linked to initiatives in employment, training and general education.

Rosa McKenna, Hon. Secretary, Australian Council of Adult Literacy. For further information about adult literacy and numeracy and the activities of the Council: Phone - 03 9326 8988; Fax - 03 9326 8670; Email - acal@mira.net

Literacy in Victoria — the State of Play

VALBEC is currently in the process of developing a broad based research/position paper about adult literacy provision in Victoria. The idea for developing the paper came about for a number of reasons. The main one was the rapid changes that have overcome the administration, funding and delivery of adult literacy in the last few years and the havoc that these changes have wreaked on many VALBEC members and their students. Members have reported to us that not only is their ability to plan and provide quality adult literacy education becoming increasingly difficult, but these changes come from so many directions, through such complicated systems of arrangements that it is often hard to pinpoint the exact source responsible for the change in order to engage them in debate. Even when providers are clear about the lines of responsibility for administration and funding, they have to maintain so many complex funding relationships that it is difficult to concentrate efforts on influencing any one body.

The results of these factors on the field as a cohesive discipline and VALBEC as its peak organisation have also been quite destructive. VALBEC has been called on to provide leadership through increasingly complex times while simultaneously having to deal with changed perceptions from funding bodies about its role, removal of its core grant, and hostility to its traditional role of providing policy advice and lobbying. The pressure to make money to keep basic services running has, at times, left the organisation open to accusations of having lost touch with its core purpose and lacking in determination to lobby government for change. The membership of VALBEC has also changed. The shifting boundaries between government and private provision of adult literacy has meant that VALBEC is now made up of community based providers registered as private providers, private providers undertaking training for both government and private enterprises and TAFE providers whose jobs depend on their ability to undercut their competitors (both government and private) to win the next tender.

Rather than responding to the general lack of cohesive planning from funding bodies with a determination to

communicate through our differences and plan collaboratively ourselves, too often teachers and providers have engaged in energy wasting and ultimately destructive games of blaming other sectors for having taken all the money or blaming VALBEC for not doing enough to affect government policy.

The purpose of a broad based position paper is to map the information that members are giving us about the current policy environment and to publicly state a position about how VALBEC believes adult literacy should be planned, funded and administered in Victoria. Such a paper could then be used as a basis for educating the broader community, developing strategy, and prioritizing lobbying energy.

A subgroup of VALBEC members met in October of last year to make a start. Some of the significant changes that they identified in the current environment were the following:

- ACFE has relinquished its traditional role as coordinating body for albe across the state. This can be measured in a number of ways such as the lack of mention of ALBE in ACFE's current strategic plan, de-funding of inter-regional moderation of the CGEA, and withdrawal from the CGEA Monitoring and Implementation Committee. This needs to be seen in the context of a state wide push for devolution of government responsibilities and outsourcing of traditional government activities.
- Expansion of ACFE funding to non-community providers and expansion of OTFE funding to non-TAFE sectors has left two competing funding bodies with little/no overall communication and planning for literacy, leaving gaps and overlaps.
- Death of Special Implementation Group has exacerbated this situation and means that state and federal funding is no longer coordinated also leaving overlap and gaps.
- Quality indicators in tenders are very low and often not related to educational theory or methodology and not informed by the field or peak bodies representing the field.
- Tenders are being won by providers with no literacy knowledge, expertise, or commitment to adult literacy principles. Literacy knowledge is being marginalised, leading to low morale in traditional providers and lack of opportunities for collegiate support and mentoring in new providers. Literacy money is being used for non-literacy programs.
- Tenuous funding situations make it difficult for providers to plan to meet needs of students and there is a resulting destruction of infrastructure.
- ACFE no longer funds VALBEC to offer policy advice on how literacy can be administered across the state.
- VALBEC is no longer funded as a general information and referral service for the state.

The above points were published in November VALBEC News with a call for contributions from providers about

additional issues affecting their providers after which the following were added:

- Devolution of responsibility to regional ACFE offices for "business development", provider accreditation and administration of OTFE tenders has meant that ACFE regional staff have less time to support community providers with adult literacy provision. At the same time, ACFE regional offices have been forced to outsource some of their own core functions leading to less staff overall. Some ACFE regional offices now have no staff with a background or expertise in adult literacy.
- Many providers are having to take on a stream of referrals from FLEX 3 providers who are under no obligation from government to pay for training.

The sub-group outlined the following factors that should form the basis of our policy platform:

1 Coordination amongst funding bodies to meet the literacy needs of all Victorians.
2 Quality indicators of teaching and delivery based on educational principles coming from the ALBE field.
3 Development of centres of excellence for literacy.
4 Indicators of literacy proficiency permeating VET sector provision and included in all registered VET curriculum.

Any position paper is only useful if it represents the views of the broadest possible group of interested providers. We would love to hear from providers about factors that they think need to be included in the paper.

Sally Thompson is the immediate past president of VALBEC.

Beside the whiteboard

Margaret Armstrong has been involved with the Loddon Neighbourhood House in Wedderburn since 1991. She talks here with Bob Keith about her experience teaching ALBE in the bush.

Can you describe your background in adult literacy - when and how you became involved; what you were doing before; etc.?

Our neighbourhood house has been in operation since 1991 and I've been a committee member with it since the inaugural meeting—except for 3 years when I was coordinator. It was when I was on the committee that I began to look at the educational parts of our programs.

My interest in adult literacy was really sparked when I took part in several learning courses through distance education - I enjoyed them immensely. Since then I've followed up with other courses through Open Learning, and at the moment I'm attempting an editing course—hopefully to improve my creative writing.

I really started to become directly involved in adult literacy when our CEO (Owen Wilson) asked for expressions of interest to undertake tutor training for adult literacy. I had a background in 'gentle teaching', that is, activities such as parenting four children, five years as a religious education instructor in schools and seven years as a cub leader—so I felt able to cope with nervous adults. I like the 'softly softly' approach.

So, after completing the tutor training course, a workplace trainer course and some day workshops to get a wider knowledge of adult lit. methods, I felt ready to begin. My work in adult lit. doesn't cover o long period yet, but hopefully it will continue on into the future.

Where are you now and can you describe your work now? What are some of the key issues facing literacy learners and teachers in your region and rural providers in general?

The class I have at Wedderburn now (three students) are all at different levels of learning. They're all hoping to get their CGEA. Adult litereacy has an obvious place in our community, and because of my involvement with the neighbourhood house at the 'grass roots' level, I'm very aware of the need for adult lit. programs.

Distance is a difficulty—for tutors and students alike. For example, the Loddon shire is the second largest in the state, yet it has the smallest population. Distance is also a problem for attending training programs—perhaps workshops, etc. could be brought further out into the rural areas. It would be good too if teaching aids and materials could be made more available - maybe through catalogues or mobile display vans.

Travel costs for students are also discouraging. Our community and surrounding districts suffer a high rate of unemployment—the average male income is $220 a week, while in Macedon it's something like $420.

What are some of the key particular local developments/ innovations in ALBE?

Our future plans include using computers to update the students' skills. We are also planning to run regular district meetings to give support to our tutors. I believe that people must enjoy their learning—with interesting materials and methods to create enthusiasm for knowledge. The stigma of 'illiteracy' is a hard barrier to overcome. I've been coordinator for our group for just a few months and I feel confident that there is a future for adult literacy in our area.