fine print magazine

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contents

Editorial

Welcome to the spring 2003 edition of *Fine Print.* Adult Literacy and Language teaching has never before existed in such a diversity of environments and contexts. Teachers in this field now work in Adult Community Education, TAFE or language centre classrooms, workplaces or workplace training providers. We teach within a range of curriculum models and training certificates that is just as wide. As well as providing tried and true resources and strategies for classroom practice, this issue of *Fine Print* features research that urges us to reflect on the influence of context—on our teaching and on students' learning.

In 'The ins and outs of context', Catherine Kell shines a more critical light on the practice of using 'real life' texts and contexts in adult literacy teaching as a way of empowering learners. She questions the interests that are at work when a 'real life' text is used within a particular curriculum for a particular purpose. While Kell's research was done in a shanty town in Cape Town, South Africa, it is relevant to all adult literacy and language teaching.

'Creating spaces for adult literacy in Papua New Guinea' by Glenys Waters, shows us three snapshots of the writer's experiences of adult literacy in PNG. Glenys emphasises the need to provide adult literacy programs that address the needs and the realities of PNG communities, rather than just accepting available literacy program designs.

Closer to home, Pauline O'Maley invites us to consider the initial assessment interview of participants in the Australian government's Literacy and Numeracy Training program (LANT)—now the LLNP. Pauline's article 'Literacy assessment, Mutual Obligation and performativity', gives us much food for thought about how an environment of 'performativity' has the power to compromise the all-important initial assessment interview of a potential adult literacy student. In the LLNP program, where students are obliged by Centrelink to attend, Pauline insists "…both possibility and choice have been compromised'. She then goes on to suggest strategies for creating a more '…enabling, collaborative process'.

As well as giving us these issues of context to ponder, the regular features in the spring edition of *Fine Print* show us what's happening (and working) in adult literacy classrooms. At the VALBEC Conference earlier this year, Julianne Krusche and Anna Morton gave a workshop on their program's approach to working with youth in Ballarat. In 'CGEA the Ballarat way—a fresh approach for young people', they show how working within the structures of the CGEA and their Code of Conduct provides young students (and their teachers) with the support they need to achieve success. This article will be a useful and affirming read to adult literacy teachers working with young people.

In Open Forum, Cathy Milesi showcases a new literacy and numeracy resource—online banking. This multimedia resource was a result of student queries about how to access online services. There are booklets and a website that give students the opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge needed to bank online.

In Beside the Whiteboard, Michael Chalk interviews Jo Camilleri about her work at Kimberley TAFE in Broome. This is a fascinating interview about a team-teaching approach between literacy and VET teachers in WA's Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills.

This issue of *Fine Print* is a tribute to the many ways in which adult literacy and language teachers and their students are taking up the challenges of teaching and learning in a wide world of environments. Thanks to all who have contributed to this edition.

Fine Print and VALBEC would love to hear from you! Send your comments and feedback to fineprint@VALBEC.org.au or visit the VALBEC website at www.valbec.org.au

That first interview: literacy assessment, mutual obligation and performativity

by Pauline O'Maley

The initial assessment interview—especially for those with no choice about attending classes—offers possibilities for prospective students to re-engage with education. However, both possibility and choice are compromised under the current system.

Introduction

This article focuses on the results of research conducted on the initial or placement assessment of prospective adult literacy students within Mutual Obligation programs. The main focus of the data collection was the LANT program. However, follow-up with teachers/assessors has made it clear that the results are pertinent also to the LLNP program.

Only a brief outline of the research is given here, and therefore the details of the conceptual framework, the design and the findings are all presented in a condensed manner. The aim of the study was to gain an understanding of the practices and articulated beliefs of the prospective students and assessors in the initial assessment interview process within Mutual Obligation programs, and further, to ask the question of in whose interests this assessment is conducted.

The choice of the initial assessment interview as a study focus relates to the significant link this interview plays between schooled literacy and further educational opportunity. As such, it is vital both in terms of its link to classroom practice, and its potential as a new departure point for literacy students unencumbered by the inter-discursive subject positions of schooled literacy practices. Furthermore, the impact of the assessment is heightened as the consequences of choosing not to attend class increasingly go beyond matters of literacy.

Framing the study

Changes to adult literacy provision have emerged from a broader political, social and economic context. Stuart Hall (1996) has called the changed world trends of the last twenty years 'new times'. He suggests they are paradoxical, contradictory and ambiguous; the changing terrain of 'new times' signals broader social and cultural changes as well as shifts in the way economic life is perceived.

Increasingly, in 'new times', education is conceived primarily in economic terms. Marginson (1992 p.7) points out that 'the combination of economic rationalism and education brings two different worlds into collision'. In this discourse education becomes a commodity and individuals become human capital (Lingard 1991; Lingard., O'Brien, & Knight 1993; Knight, Lingard & Porter 1993; Luke 1992; Marginson 1992, 1997), and market principles are unquestioningly accepted as it is seen as 'common sense' that education is one of the keys to economic prosperity. In the economisation of education it is seen only as a cost, never as a benefit (Marginson 1997). The education 'market' is driven by business principles. The complex imperatives of 'new times' which have foregrounded economics are an effective vehicle for a regime of performativity.

Performativity

Lyotard (1984) argues that modernist ideals of general education have been subsumed under the performativity principle, 'the principle of optimal performance: maximising output…and minimising input' (p.44), ' the endless optimisation of the cost/benefit ratio' (1993, p.25). Education has undergone a legitimisation change. The imperative is to be operational or disappear; education comes to be seamlessly aligned with business. The only legitimate outcomes are those that can be measured. Everything must be quantifiable in this process of measuring the incommensurable (Bartos 1990).

Educational institutions are 'dominated by a bureaucracy where goals are set in ever narrowing demands of reporting and where accountability is measured by outputs' (Marshall 1998, p.4). Performativity, with its emphasis on output, gives the illusion of objectivity, that these outputs are clearcut and therefore indisputable. No account is taken of the fallibility of this approach.

The role of literacy within the regime of performativity

Lankshear (1998) suggests that the role of literacy has been elevated from 'being mainly a marker of marginal spaces, used in relation to marginal people, to becoming a lofty mainstream educational ideal' (p.351). It has gained mainstream prominence and is seen as an essential economic tool. While it is evident that literacy has certainly come to prominence in recent years, its symbolic value—rather than its educational value—has brought it into this position.

Literacy has become a tool that can be used to play on collective emotions, to manipulate, to control, and to reward (Green, Hodgens & Luke 1997). Its conception is fluid. It can be manipulated to suit many purposes and is increasingly being used in Australia in an overtly political way.

The way in which literacy is conceived in 'new times' is complex, controversial and contradictory. Increasingly in recent years, literacy has become a public issue, and for the government in the last few years it has become a powerful political tool as they manipulate the notion of a literacy crisis manufactured out of fear, lack of knowledge and simplistic conceptions of literacy. Green, Hodgens and Luke (1997, p.11) suggest that the picture of literacy that has emerged from policy documents is 'a continually contested and unfinished concept, an empty canvas upon which anxieties and aspirations from the popular imagination and public morality are drawn'. Fears expressed about literacy are often code for other fears—fears about unemployment, fears about rapid change—and literacy can be used politically to fuel or quell those fears. Hence, Green, Hodgens and Luke make a salient point when they say 'the literacy debate is rarely about "literacy" in itself. It is tied up with the larger political and moral debates about the directions of communities and cultures, nation-states and economies' (p.15). In these uncertain times literacy debates are flourishing.

There is evidence, as Lankshear and Levett (1992) point out, that 'new times' have 'upped the ante' for literacy. All workers are expected to have higher-order literacy skills. For some, these skills are needed not to *do* the job but to *access* the job (Luke 1997; Lankshear & Levett 1992). Ironically, for many workers the actual literacy skills needed to do the job have decreased rather than increased (Gee, Hull and Lankshear 1996). Unemployed adult literacy students are marginalised in this way, not necessarily because they cannot do the job, but because increasingly they cannot access it. It is essential for these students that assessors and teachers have an enabling conceptualisation of literacy that opens up positions and possibilities for them.

Literacy as situated social practice

Street (1984, p.1) defines literacy as 'a shorthand for social practices and conceptions of reading and writing'. He contends that:

> what the particular practices and concepts of reading and writing are for a given society depends upon the context; that they are already embedded in an ideology and cannot be isolated or treated as 'neutral' or merely 'technical.

He calls this an ideological conception of literacy. It is now common practice to speak of literacies as multiple and

varied. Literacy remains a contested space. Nevertheless there is a growing acknowledgement of literacy as social, cultural, political and ideological.

literacy has become a tool that can be used to play on collective emotions
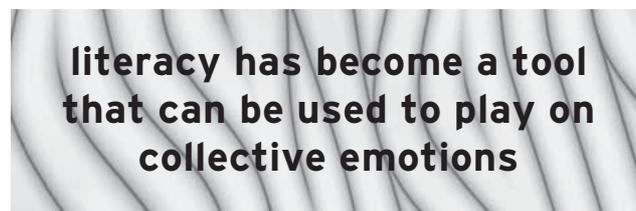
Still, there is much evidence in practice that literacy is understood as the acquisition of skills unrelated to the context in which they are embedded (Rockhill 1993). This 'autonomous' conception of literacy does not acknowledge literacy as 'a dynamic, evolving social and historical construction' (Luke 1992, p.3). Nor does it take account of the way in which subjectivities are shaped by literacy events and dominant practices. Literacy assessments and classes that are framed within an 'autonomous' model impact on the subject positions a student can take up. An impoverished conception of literacy impacts on possibilities for students and also on student motivation. When literacy is viewed as sociocultural discursive practice it is no longer possible to conceive literacy as the transmission of decontextualised skills.

The research highlights the way in which contradictory conceptions of literacy play out in the initial literacy assessment process. The way in which literacy is constructed in policy, in tender documents and in syllabi impacts on the ways in which these assessments can be enacted in Mutual Obligation courses. The initial assessment interview is influenced also by the way in which assessment is conceived.

Constructions of assessment

Cumming and van Kraayenoord (1996, p.8) base their research in adult literacy on the notion that '(a)ssessment is the process of making judgments of performance in a number of situations, using a variety of different techniques, over time'.

If we look at the specific field of competency-based assessment in adult education, the Vocational Education, Employment and Training Advisory Committee (VEETAC) defines assessment as:

> the process of collecting evidence and making judgments on the nature and extent of progress towards the performance requirement set in a standard, or a learning outline and, at the appropriate point making the judgment on whether the competency has been achieved (1993, p.13).
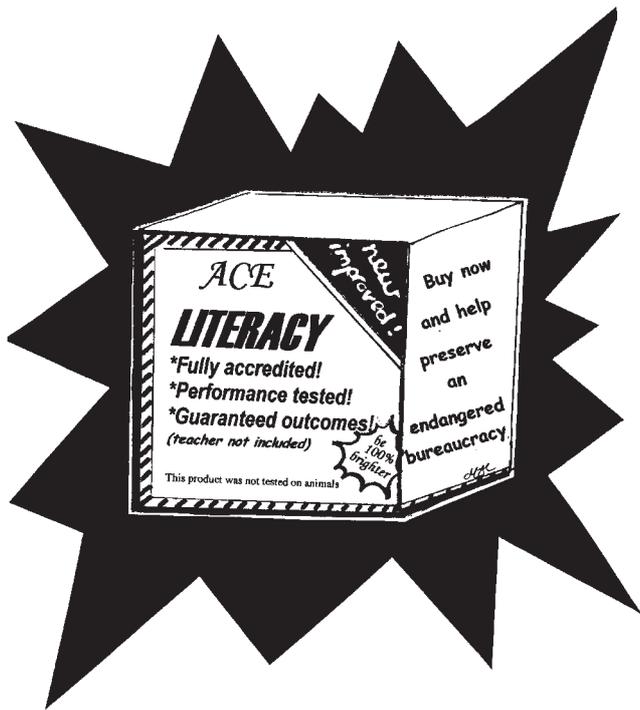
(M. Hanrahan)

The connecting thread between these definitions is the notion of *judgment*. In terms of this research, the problematic and complex notion of judgement is highly significant. Judgements are usually made on somebody, within a specific framework, at a particular time, with a particular purpose and, highly significantly, with specific results. Like literacy, assessment is neither a neutral nor a universal concept. It is also a contested term.

Historically, assessment has often been presented as a scientific, values-free representation of what students know, transmitted via the impartial conductor of a test that, because of variable control and attention to reliability and validity, is objective and judgment-free. It has been viewed as a neutral, unproblematic, technical and intrinsically good process (Gipps 1994). It is increasingly accepted that this construct of assessment is problematic. Broadfoot (1979) agues that objectivity is a myth. All assessment is subjective; it is reliant on the judgement of fallible humans. Further, the notion of assessment giving the whole picture of a student's skills and learning is unrealistic. As Resnick and Resnick (1992) argue, the only information the assessor receives relates to specific skills tested. Increasingly, views of validity and reliability as attainable and paramount have changed to the view that '…validity judgments are values judgments' (Messick 1989, p.10). Concepts of validity and reliability are changing and these terms are becoming increasingly problematic and contested (Eisenhart & Howe 1992, Anderson & Irvine 1993). For these reasons Gipps and Murphy (1994) assert there is no such thing as a fair test.

These researchers argue that educators must be aware of the personal consequences of assessments for students and prospective students.

Despite considerable agreement between theorists that a construct of assessment as objective and values-free is not a true picture of the assessment process, much assessment discourse and practice is premised on this continuing belief of assessment as neutral, objective and, as a consequence, fair. Educationalists and assessors need to acknowledge assessment as situated, context-specific (Harlen 1994) practice.

Teachers have long been able to use assessment in its capacity as a tool for regulation and compliance to help maintain student attention and classroom control. Broadfoot (1979, p.62) asserts that assessment mechanisms have been developed to operate as a series of checks and balances on the education system in order to ensure its major function of perpetuating the social, economic and political status quo. While the whole education system is thus controlled, the control is not equal. As Broadfoot (ibid) suggests, the control relates to the student's role in advanced industrial society. The roles for the unemployed in this society are limited. It is therefore instructive to see the increasingly overt way in which control is exercised over them.

As adult literacy provision has increasingly come to be seen exclusively in market terms and the unemployed have been strongly encouraged—sometimes by the subtle, and increasingly, not so subtle, threat of losing their unemployment benefits—to attend literacy classes, the notion of education and assessment as a means of control in this educational sector has been foregrounded. As education has come to be seen as an essential link in microeconomic reform (Lingard, O'Brien, and Knight 1993) the discourse of assessment for accountability has gained ascendancy. Like the technical discourse of assessment as an unproblematic good, this construction of assessment as a tool of accountability is premised on a very simplistic notion of assessment. It is one that assumes all students start on and maintain an equal educational footing, one that positions inadequacies in assessment results as personal inadequacies, the result of lack of application and/or of poor teaching. In this discourse no account is taken of the diverse sociocultural factors, and the dynamic interrelationship between assessment and social and economic forces that influence these results and account for markedly different outcomes in different educational institutions.

A major concern with this construction of assessment in the adult literacy field—and in particular in initial assessment interviews when judgements are made on the

basis of such a short connection—is the way in which the prescribed numerical representation on the assessment form can render the initial assessment 'high stakes', (Cope et al, 1994) an assessment that can have serious consequences for the life chances of the individuals concerned. Prospective students are rated against the NRS indicators of competence. The findings of Cope et al (1994), and my own practice and research indicate that numerical ratings are often misunderstood and misinterpreted. 'It is not so much the test score itself that matters but the inference that is made from it. Therefore it is imperative that educators ensure that it is reasonable to make inferences from scores' (Gipps 1994, p.76).
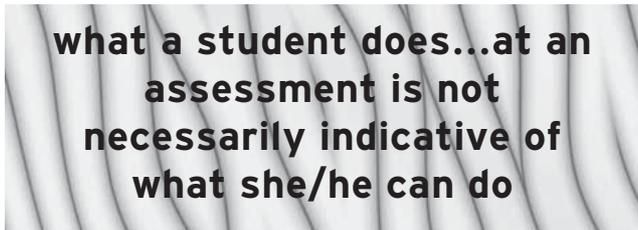
> ## what a student does...at an assessment is not necessarily indicative of what she/he can do

As this is a 'high stakes' assessment, accuracy becomes an issue

> ...given everything that we know about the role of context and personal state in performance and how this interacts with assessment mode, the suggestion that we can assess achievement, particularly of complex skills, 'accurately' is simply misleading (Gipps 1994; p.70–71).

Given the fallible and subjective nature of the score it is important that it be acknowledged as such. Once a score is given its status seems to change; it becomes set and absolute, '...clusters of numbers give the illusion of precision in situations that might otherwise admit uncertainty' (Gifford and O'Connor 1992, p.2).

Researchers (such as Gardner 1992; Gifford & O'Connor 1992; Resnick & Resnick 1992; Gipps 1994; Harlen 1994; Broadfoot 1996), are increasingly moving towards the viewpoint that what a student does do at an assessment is not necessarily indicative of what she/he *can* do. In light of these concerns, Cope et al (1994) provide sound comment when they recommend that 'high stakes' assessment decisions involve more than one judge. Gifford and O'Connor (1992) reinforces this as he cautions avoiding making decisions about anyone's future '...solely on the basis of one imperfect instrument' (p.4). Gipps (1994) suggests varying approaches and reducing the stakes associated with any single approach or occasion. Another way of reducing the stakes is to no longer report the results of a single, stressful assessment in this manner. Brown, Campione, Webber and McGilly (1992) caution educators

to take seriously, as they do, 'the danger of reification of test scores into fixed cognitive entities' (p.189).

These views of assessment as complex, contingent and fragile are very much at odds with the discourses of accountability, control and performativity. Assessment can be very useful in terms of gauging understanding, but they are fallible. Yet it seems that under the current system, this is not recognised. It is apparent that we need to understand assessment as we have come to understand literacy, as *situated social practice.*

Assessment as situated social practice

What then, are the implications for the situated practice of initial assessments? Lave and Wenger (1991) believe students are, in situated practice, learning ways of being. If this is so, then the initial interview is the first indication that the practice of adult literacy implies that this way of being is a reproduced, schooled, institutionalised way of being. Apple (1993) claims that current assessment processes place too high a value on certainty and assessors need to see others not as objects but rather as 'co-responsible subjects'. From this perspective the assessment practice can be conceptualised as a dialectic process. Initial interviews that are conceived as life history narratives (Prinsloo and Breier, 1996) are a way of gaining some insight into the lived realities of the prospective students, their communities of practice, their cultural values and their individual contextualised literacy experiences. This approach could be a starting point for addressing appropriate curricula as well as establishing an atmosphere for prospective students that may encourage them to follow up and attend classes. The work of Prinsloo et al (1996) is instructive in this regard. They suggest that researchers need to

> suspend judgement as to what constitutes literacy among the people they are working with until they are able to understand what it means to the people themselves and from which social contexts reading and writing derive their meaning (p.2).

Susan Lytle and colleagues (1989,1990) have produced groundbreaking work in assessment in the adult literacy field in the USA. They have demonstrated an enabling rather than a limiting approach to assessment with their quite different conception of the initial assessment interview. Lytle and Schultz (1990) suggest that the initial assessment should be more like an extended interview than a test situation, that initial assessments should be 'efforts to uncover the learner's own understandings of or meaning about literacy in practice' (p.373). This approach changes the balance of power in the interview, offers the prospective student a change of subject position and 'makes it possible

for adults to assume the roles of experts on their own learning' (ibid, p.374).

The research suggests that it is not necessary to conduct stressful tasks in order to ascertain students' needs, competencies and practices. It sounds rather simplistic stated thus, but adult students can tell us what they know and what they want to know. There is only one 'expert' on the prospective student's knowledge, skills and life history: the person herself/himself. The initial interview must be conceived not as a way of 'testing' specific discrete skills related to schooled literacy, but as a way of gaining some insight into the lived realities of prospective students' lives, their cultural processes and their individual literacy experiences.

Research design

With these considerations in mind, the study was designed as a single case, holistic, historic, evaluate case study. Of interest was the initial assessment of prospective adult literacy students. The *case* was the initial assessment interview itself. The focus of the case study was evaluation, but it also had elements of an historical study because it gave details of institutional programs and practices as they evolved over time. It looked back at LANT to see what we could learn for the present and the future.
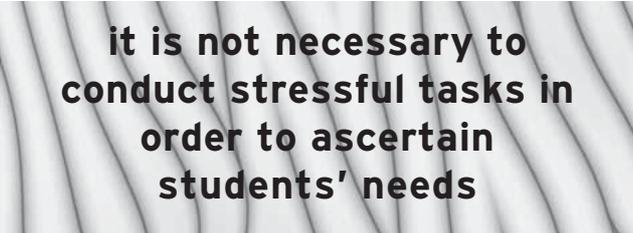
> **it is not necessary to conduct stressful tasks in order to ascertain students' needs**

The aims of the study were to: analyse and describe the practice of initial assessment interviews in specific settings; identify and explicate the historical, social, institutional, political, and economic contingencies that have helped to shape this practice; and finally, to judge whether this process is indeed in the best interests of the prospective students. In keeping with Yin's (1994) approach to case-study, propositions were used to direct 'attention to something that should be examined within the scope of the study' (p.21).

The propositions allow the case to be examined from a specific point of view. The usefulness of propositions is in framing and guiding a study. They do not have to be proven true—rather, their purpose is to contain and focus the study. The following five propositions were used.

• Within the official governmental discourse of Mutual Obligation, literacy is primarily a tool of compliance.

• Performativity requirements have been the dominant focus in the LANT initial assessment interview.
• Assessors' beliefs and values as they relate to the initial assessment interview have been made subordinate to performativity requirements.
• Both assessment and literacy in LANT initial assessment have been narrowly conceived.
• The educational discourse of 'new times', with its emphasis on competitive tendering and performativity requirements, has served to erode teacher collegiality and confidence.

Data collection and analysis

Data was collected at four sites in two states. In each state the data was collected at both a TAFE college and a private provider—in one state in the city and in the other in a non-urban environment. Seventeen initial assessment interviews were either observed or taped, of these 11 were LANT interviews.[1] Twenty-seven post-assessment semi-structured interviews were conducted, 17 with prospective students and ten with assessors. Additionally, three interviews were held, each with a representative of the three verification groups; two of these interviews were by email, one teacher was interviewed with questions and a tape, all other interviews were face-to-face. In addition to the observation and interviews, the other pertinent source of data was documentary evidence. The value of documentary evidence is the manner in which an analysis of pertinent documents gives a greater understanding of the macro context.

Three methods of analysis were used. This choice was influenced by my interest in capturing the complex, dynamic and situated elements of the culture under study. The first method of analysis—which served an organisational as well as an analytical purpose—was coding, based on the work of Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Carspecken (1996). The second approach emerged from a desire to understand the culture of the initial assessment interview process. Spradley's (1979, 1980) influential work in understanding culture guided this process. Spradley uses three forms of analysis, and like the coding this approach to analysis is sequential. The first step is a *domain analysis*, the second a *taxonomic analysis* and finally a *componential analysis*.

The third approach emerged from a desire to analyse the pertinent documents in a way that acknowledged the context they emerged from. This interest in context led to critical discourse analysis which emphasises the situated nature of texts. Norman Fairclough (1995, p.9) suggests an analysis of texts 'should not be artificially isolated from analysis of institutional and discourse practice within which the texts are embedded'.

Findings

The results of the research suggest the coercive governmental discourse of Mutual Obligation has had a negative impact on the provision of adult literacy services in Australia. The imposition of the compulsory Mutual Obligation literacy scheme onto existing practice has brought about a cultural change. The discourse of Mutual Obligation, with its emphasis on compliance and accountability, is at odds with beliefs articulated by assessors that the initial assessment interview should be low-key and student-focused. The impact of the new discourse of literacy and literacy assessment under Mutual Obligation has been felt by both prospective students and assessors.
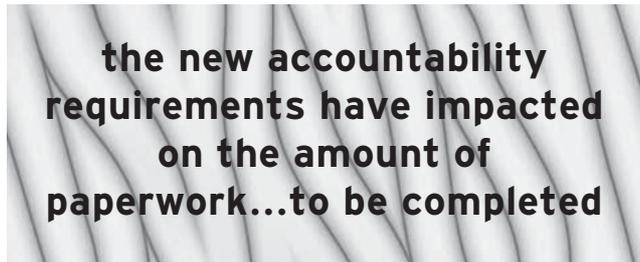
> **the new accountability requirements have impacted on the amount of paperwork...to be completed**

Assessors are under pressure to do more in less time. Accountability requirements are foregrounded in assessments. There has been no evaluation of the interview process and purpose. A new approach has been layered onto a quite different former approach. As a result, the assessment interviews have lengthened from the one hour allotted (the average time taken was one and a half hours—I sat through several that were two hours long). The interviews also have two distinct phases that sit uncomfortably together—the informal, relaxed part of the interview and the formal process where the assessment takes place. Assessors feel increasingly under surveillance as a result of the verification process and the needs of the prospective student inevitably become a secondary focus. Further, the new accountability requirements have impacted on the amount of paperwork that needs to be completed and this, in turn, impacts on all aspects of assessors' practice as time becomes an increasing constraint.

There has been an increasing breakdown of teacher and assessor supports, and a loss of confidence and increasing sense of isolation has accompanied this. Themes related to the breakdown of collegial ties, isolation, the dearth of resources for those working for private providers and the lack of professional development for all assessors consistently came through the analysis. The stress associated with the additional paperwork, increased pressure on time, increased surveillance and decreasing opportunities to focus on prospective students and their needs appears to have taken its toll, particularly for those assessors who worked alone. None of the assessors I interviewed from private providers

are still in their jobs. They have left, and for the most part their expertise is lost.

For prospective students, choice has also been eroded. They must attend an interview if directed by Centrelink to do so, or face financial penalties. Many are baffled by the process and the part they must play in it. They understand the need to be compliant and go along with what they are expected to do. Only one student resisted the subject position of deficit subject. This is a subject position that is hard to avoid, because the narrow conceptualisation of both literacy and assessment does not allow room for prospective students to show their literacy repertoires in the initial assessment interviews, given the interview structure. The introduction of the LLNP has alleviated none of these pressures.

Possibilities for the future

Assessors unfailingly indicated that the important focus of the initial assessment should be the prospective student. In Mutual Obligation programs, the focus becomes completion of the pre-training assessment form, with its NRS indicators of competence, and documentation for verification. However, this clearly causes tensions for assessors and, as a result, for prospective students. My observation was that assessor confidence diminished as the accountability requirements associated with Mutual Obligation programs came to dominate the assessment process. There was a distinct values clash between assessors' articulated beliefs about what an assessment interview should be—forum for allowing prospective students to talk about and demonstrate their literacy skills and practices and discuss their future literacy needs, and accountability needs and procedures. A reliance on a form filled with numerals which are representative of NRS indicators gives the false impression of objective precision to a complex, contingent, often difficult and sometimes questionable process. Verification has resulted in an emergent pattern of assessing to the verification requirements, and this pressure on the assessor has had the effect of further destabilising an already asymmetrical interview relationship.

Under these circumstances, assessment becomes a vehicle for control and a tool of performativity, where measurable outputs are the only indicator of success. Contrary to assessors' articulated beliefs about what constitutes a 'good' interview, these interviews are pressured and uneven, and do not allow room for prospective students to present themselves in a manner directed by themselves. This approach is fraught with difficulties for both the prospective student and the assessor. Assessors indicated a sensitivity to the stress the prospective student may be feeling under the circumstances and understood that this one-off assessment did not necessarily reflect what prospective students could do, what their literacy practices were, or even what they may wish to

do. This is the case partly because of the restrictions imposed by accountability and time constraints and partly because the asymmetrical nature of assessments and interviews privilege certain discourses over others. Assessors indicated an understanding of the necessarily partial view that the 'one-off' assessment gives, and the problems this presented when they had to judge the prospective students' performance with imprecise instruments. Yet, despite this understanding, they gave the prospective students a rating against the NRS indicators of competence, which did not reflect the subjective and tentative nature of the results. The prospective student, who has no choice but to attend the interview, must respond to the process that is formulated to elicit a rating compatible with the NRS indicators of competence, rather than one that allows him/her to direct the process, to decide what he or she conceives literacy to be.

No collaboration

Under the current arrangements, despite assessors' attempts to relax and engage prospective students, the initial assessment interview is not a collaborative exercise. Indeed, it cannot be collaborative while there is an element of coercion associated with attendance. A performative approach creates a need for prospective students to be characterised in this manner in order for designated outcomes to be perceived as both reasonable and attainable. Street (1996) reminds us that as educators we need 'a proper sensitivity to multiple voices and practices' (p.8), in order to develop a 'complex understanding of the variation and interconnectedness of contemporary communicative practices' (ibid, p.9). Assessors may shake their heads and ask, 'isn't the increasingly lengthy assessment interview complex enough?' It is not. It is a reductive process that is narrowly conceptualised to elicit quantifiable information to ensure that the DETYA and DEST regime of per-formativity is enacted to the department's satisfaction. The answer is not to make the lengthy assessment interview more intense or longer, but to acknowledge that a one-off high stakes assessment cannot elicit the surety the department wants from it. Ironically, the assessor does not need quasi-'precise' measures on a reporting instrument to know which class the student would be best suited to. This absurdity is highlighted in the situation where, in three out of the five sites I observed, the provider only has one class anyway and this is where the prospective student is destined to go, regardless of the assessment results.

It is the lack of choice for both prospective students and assessors that makes these assessments so problematic. It is this coercive premise that contextualises LLNP as a program not about literacy but about control. In such a program, I believe, both students and teachers will struggle to gain optimal benefit. This is not to say nothing good has come out of the program (see O'Maley 2000). It is to say,

however, that a program that was not built on a coercive approach—one that allowed students and teachers latitude to negotiate their own discursive space—would open up the possibilities for engagement and success in whatever way they choose to define it.
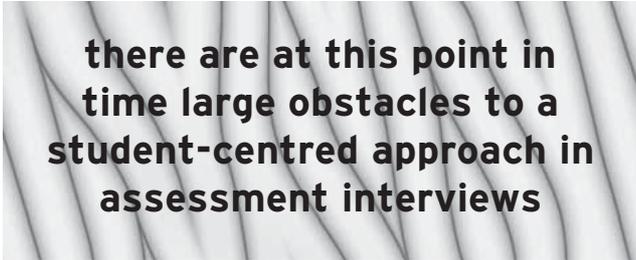
> **there are at this point in time large obstacles to a student-centred approach in assessment interviews**

How could these positive aspects of the program be maximised? One way would be to have an initial assessment process that gave prospective students a glimpse of the possibilities a dynamic and student-centred program could offer. Until the government broadens its narrow focus on accountability, notions of assessment as a co-investigative venture which attempt to uncover and explore the learner's own skills, understandings and practices will be hampered.

However, while there are at this point in time large obstacles to a student-centred approach in assessment interviews at a macro level, there are still opportunities at a micro level for assessors to create a more enabling collaborative process. They can short-circuit the tension between the informal part of the assessment and the longer, formal part of the interview which discursively reproduces a school test situation—in other words, that part of the interview which is devoted to the gathering of information for accountability purposes.

What are the ways in which this short-circuiting is done? Ironically, in ways the assessors know—in ways they have articulated, but in ways the data indicates they have lost their confidence in. For example, they can:

- Ensure they use the informal part of the interview to gauge enough about the prospective student's literacy competence, through conversation, to be able to choose a task that will most probably not be far too easy or far too hard for them. This approach would eliminate the practice of starting prospective students at tasks that are designated at level one and working through a series of tasks until they either go beyond their level of competence or prove their competency to be beyond the level for eligibility for DEST programs.
- Try to use fewer tasks; integrated tasks help to reduce stress.
- Give the prospective student choice in the tasks they are asked to do.

- Focus on the prospective students' strengths rather than their weaknesses; the talk that is done in the interview is most important in relation to this. The focus is on building and expanding rather than on deficit.
- Not spend countless hours at home devising tasks but rather develop or rekindle networks whereby tasks can be shared, critiqued and upgraded. The internet could be used as a vehicle for such networks.
- Refocus on what is possible in a one-off, high-stress, limited time assessment. This is not, and can never be, an objective, neutral and definitive assessment. It is, rather, a best impression using credible means.
- Understand verification to be one aspect of the assessment process and not its driving force.
- Acknowledge their own skills and experience as literacy educators and use them confidently.

The net result of assessors doing this exercise of pausing and refocusing is that the interviews will be shorter. Prospective students will consequently not be so perplexed and daunted by the number of tasks they have to complete, and assessors will have more time to concentrate on the prospective students and their needs. While this approach will relieve some of the pressure on assessors it will not change the focus of the interview. Currently the assessment interview remains a vehicle for fulfilling governmental performativity requirements.

Conclusion

In a climate of competitive tendering—as long as the discourse of performativity dominates the adult education field—those disadvantaged will be students and prospective students, in particular those who have no choice about attending class. The initial assessment interview, ideally, offers a space for prospective students to re-engage with education. It is an important bridge between what has been, in relation to their experiences with education, and what could be. It is the beginning of possibility. Under the current system, however, both possibility and choice have been compromised.

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Note
1. The non-LANT interviews were used by way of contrast with the LANT interviews to see if the content and the time of were similar or different.

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Everything has a place: the ins and outs of context

by Catherine Kell

If we claim that empowerment can be gained simply by contextualising our literacy teaching, we might set up learners for failure, or for the denigration of their existing practices. This may then lead to questions about the future of literacy teaching and the role of teachers.

In this article, I explore the implications of the notion of context and contextualisation in relation, directly or indirectly, to literacy teaching. Drawing on data from different ethnographic research projects which I have undertaken on literacy learning and literacy practices in South Africa, I will argue that there are some problems with the notion of contextualisation, and will try to address two in particular. The first is the fact that contextualising everyday texts into literacy curricula is not as simple as it may seem. Second is the fact that real everyday texts are not simply contextualised in one location, but their material forms and meanings are constantly transformed as they move and carry meaning across contexts. I will argue that by thinking about texts as being constantly recontextualised we may be able to offer our learners more feasible and productive forms of engagement with texts.

Contextualising literacy learning is closely linked to the issue of 'relevance', which has held much currency for literacy practitioners over many years—one way in which literacy learning is seen as being made relevant to learners is to 'situate' it in a real-life context with real-life texts. The Freirean approach to literacy teaching enshrined aspects of this by ensuring that the initial words to be read and written by adults were drawn directly from their immediate life circumstances and were represented visually as congruent with the life-world of the learners. Functional, genre-based and critical-cultural approaches have also developed their curricula in ways which have attempted to put the learners' real-life context at the centre, including their experiences, wishes, needs and texts. Recently, Condelli (2003) has reported that progress in achievement in adult literacy learning is closely related to three factors, the central one being that instructional strategies connect the content of what is taught to the real lives of the learners.

Meaning in contexts

Research involving ethnographies of literacy practices has added impetus to arguments about the need for literacy teaching and learning to be contextualised. This research shows that texts have meaning only in contexts, and that deciphering the meaning draws on understandings of the context. When transferred to another context, texts take on other meanings, requiring other abilities to 'read' context. The emphasis in much of this work has been on the social uses of literacy, and these uses take shape in highly specific ways.

Advances in learning theory have drawn attention to what is called a 'practice approach' or 'situated learning', where learning occurs in a process of apprenticeship and socialisation within what has been called a community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). This type of learning is able to take account of what is called tacit knowledge in addition to explicit or codified knowledge and is highly context-dependent.

The terms relevance and contextualisation have also been important in research into language, and the history of these concepts is closely linked with changing understandings of language itself and ways of researching it. The major shift occurred here in the move from the study of texts to the analysis of the emergence of texts in contexts, with the emphasis falling on the study of language use or function. In a further shift from context to contextualisation, writers like Gumperz and Goffman have suggested that communicative contexts are not dictated by the social and physical environment, but emerge in negotiations between speaking participants in social interactions through slow and subtle processes of turn-taking in conversational exchanges. Each turn in a conversation creates and develops a context for the turn to follow, and for the preceding turn. Others, however, have drawn attention to the role played by non-discursive elements like the organisation of space in the construction of communicative contexts.

So contextualisation has emerged as a focus in our understandings of literacy learning, literacy practices, learning theory and applied language research. Advances in each of these areas have had influences on the other areas. The main problem which I will try to address in what follows is the fact that in coming to believe that contextualisation is necessary and important for literacy learning and for learning in general, we (as practitioners

and researchers) may have come to neglect understanding the social dynamics of how written texts emerge from these communicative contexts, carry their meanings across contexts, and become recontextualised in new contexts, enabling or constraining communication and the flow of discourse. Another way of saying this is that we may sometimes forget that there are broader or 'forgotten contexts to texts' (Blommaert, 2001:20).
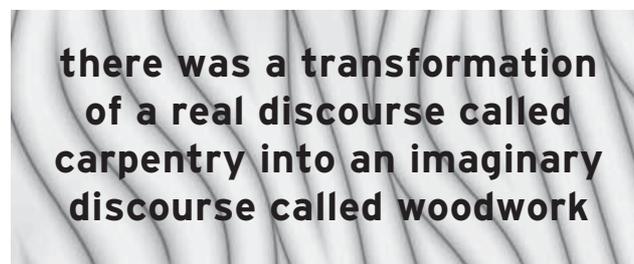
Classroom stories

The first time I started to think about what exactly this might all mean was when I was doing ethnographic research on literacy in a shanty town in Cape Town, South Africa. On my first night at the literacy class, I observed a class attended by five middle-aged women who had each had two or three years of schooling in a rural area many years before. The teacher was working from black and white photocopied and stapled English materials on the topic of 'Why did people have to leave school?' The lesson opened with a typed story and a photograph on a worksheet in the materials:

> I never went to school because my father did not care for education. I helped my parents to plough and look after sheep and cattle. The water was very far. I woke up very early to go and fetch water. Before, education was not like nowadays. People did not like it. They just liked cattle. By Betty Sesedi.

This was followed by instructions in the materials to have first verbal and then written comprehension questions on the issue of causation, like 'Betty never went to school because…(fill in)'. Then listing things that Betty did to help her parents—both verbally and in written form— followed by looking deeper into Betty's story and discussing questions like 'Why were cattle important when Betty was young?' and 'When did school education become important to you?' The learners were then supposed to brainstorm and draw a mind map of different reasons for why people didn't go to school, talk about their own problems with schooling, and write simple sentences about this (probably ending up with a story much like Betty Sesedi's). I observed that the learners found each of these tasks extremely difficult, and were unable to complete any of them.

In Kell (1996), I argued that there was a contradiction between the introduction of a story like Betty's and the tasks that the learners were required to complete in relation to the story. Betty's story can be seen as an attempt at contextualising the curriculum in relation to the learners' life worlds. It was a real story written by another real learner in another place. It was therefore written in the kind of language that beginner learners use in South Africa. The content of the story would be very familiar to the learners

who were in the class I was observing, many of them would have come from exactly the same kind of life experiences as Betty. Yet the learners were absolutely nonplussed by the tasks, they were unable to recognise the nature of the task, nor realise the demands of the task. I argued that this was because the pedagogical practices required were very new to the learners (since my research showed that they had had no

there was a transformation of a real discourse called carpentry into an imaginary discourse called woodwork

opportunities to be socialised into these practices in other domains of their lives). The comprehension task, for example, made a set of assumptions about learning that were not yet shared by the learners. The idea of a written comprehension was probably unintelligible to those learners who had never done one before, for example, the idea of writing down what is already in the text in full sentences. The curriculum tried to introduce these new practices to the learners through the choice of a story that was supposedly contextualised. But the text on the page of the learners' workbook was already a reworking of the real Betty Sesedi's story in that she constructed this story within the expectations of a different transaction, somewhere else, at some other time. The simple act of typing the story and illustrating it with a photograph rather than presenting it as a handwritten text is a form of reworking it. The style, tone and topic of the text were supposed to render it accessible to the learners. However, although the relations between the sentences were not typically logical, the learners were being asked to accomplish logical, exacting and analytical tasks about the text. A more accurate way of seeing Betty's story is as a recontextualisation of the earlier story into the schooled literacy practices of the curriculum.

The concept of recontextualisation is central to Bernstein's sociology of education (1996). Bernstein makes the case that what he calls 'pedagogic discourse' is 'constructed by a recontextualising principle which selectively appropriates, relocates, refocuses and relates other discourses to constitute its own order' (p.47). He gives the example of the three years he spent in school chipping away at blocks of wood. Outside school there was something called 'carpentry' and inside school there was something called 'woodwork'. In other words, there was a transformation of a real discourse called carpentry into an imaginary discourse called woodwork. Practices are picked out of one domain and dropped into another and in the process they are

transformed. When one looks at the work of physicists 'sometimes it is difficult to believe that what everyone is doing is physics. This is not the case with physics as a pedagogic discourse. A textbook says what physics is and it is obvious that it has an author' (p.48). There is a process of selecting, relating, sequencing and pacing, but the selections are not derived from the logic of the discourse of physics but from the logic of the discourse of curriculum.

Letter writing in and out of the classroom

The second piece of data presented also deals with the problem of recontextualising everyday material into the curriculum. It is drawn from a study on letter writing which I conducted in Cape Town (Kell in Barton and Hall, 2000). I became interested in this after observing a beginners' literacy lesson with a small group of middle-aged migrant workers who were learning how to write personal letters. The focus in this lesson was on what were called the 'elements' of letters—the address, the date, the greeting, the opening sentence, the body of the letter, the 'acknowledgment', and so on.

The learners discussed letter writing and were advised by the materials in no uncertain terms that it was best to post their letters home and that this required a certain format. They then read a letter, looked at the elements and then tried to write their own letters (in groups) to their own families. The teacher (who came from the same cultural and language group as the learners) was insisting that they included all the elements in the letter they were trying to compose, even though they seemed to conflict with long-established patterns of communication. So in the final acknowledgment she said they had to close by saying (in a letter to a wife) 'with love from your dear husband Sipho'. But the learners resisted that and it became clear to me later that there was a cultural tradition called 'hlonipha' which disallowed husbands and wives from expressing affection. They then seemed to go through a moment of conflict, laughing at their recognition of the absence of this element in their attempts, and some of them then wrote it in. Unlike the learners with Betty's story they could recognise the nature of the task, but they were not sure if they wanted to realise the demands of the task.

This set of lessons was repeated in the most popular curriculum materials used widely in South Africa, and also in examinations that were set for the learners at Level One Adult Basic Education and Training. Most of the materials were highly illustrated with black and white line drawings and simple typed texts. The lessons included a picture of a solitary worker sitting at a table and looking pensively into the distance with a pen and writing pad at his hands. The letters used as exemplars included the above formats and elements.

I then compared what was happening in this letter writing session with the letter writing practices of unschooled migrant railway workers communicating with their families living in rural areas up to 1000 miles away. About three or four letters per month passed between each of these migrant workers in the urban areas and their families. Those who could not write themselves drew on a complex range of

> **there was a cultural tradition called 'hlonipha' which disallowed husbands and wives from expressing affection**

networks and mediators to help them, and there was little sense of stigma in this. The letters were often written on a page torn out of a school exercise book, folded over, and stuck down with a piece of sticking tape. They were written in long strings with no formatting. Most interestingly, none of the letters shown to me used any of the elements which the literacy teacher had been at such pains to teach, and the railway workers had a strong rationale for why each element was not necessary. The greeting was always 'dear' in English with no name attached to it. The workers said there was no need to write the name because the recipient would know that it was for them. The same applied to the final acknowledgment. The address was not necessary because the letters were always hand-delivered and did not enter into the postal service but went with bus drivers. The dates were not necessary because delivery was coordinated exactly with the days on which the buses departed and returned.

What I saw here was the recontextualisation of what was supposedly an everyday practice—personal letter writing—into the curriculum. In the transformation of the practice that took place as the text was recontextualised, the 'elements' took on the standardised Western form which overwrote existing practices that had developed as part of the migrant labour system over the past two centuries.

Bernstein claims that as the text is moved from the original discourse into pedagogic discourse a gap or a space is created. 'Every time a discourse moves from one position to another there is a space in which ideology can play' (p.47). In the letter writing research I suggested that the ideology at play was that of modernisation, in which the teachers thought of the existing practices as 'traditional ways' needing to be replaced by the new standards introduced in the outcomes-based approaches of the new national qualifications framework.

Parallel systems

It seemed to me that there were two parallel systems of letter writing going on, and they were actually insulated from each other. The literacy teachers did not admit to the existing practices of unschooled workers, and the migrant workers were probably drawing on hybridised and localised forms of social practice that had developed over decades. Yet the pedagogic letter writing makes claims that it empowers learners to deal more effectively with everyday demands in their lives. The literacy providers would not recognise that their systems are parallel, but would have it that learners take a loop out of everyday life within the institution of the family and into pedagogical life within the institution of education. After that they will go back into everyday life and the family, supposedly as more effective family members; the 'modernist discourse of educational reform' (Green 1993:196) is here at play. They will go back with a changed subjectivity but whether it can be called 'empowered' is highly questionable.

As I said above, recontextualisation is the transformation of discourses and texts involving selecting, relating, sequencing and pacing. As this transformation occurs when texts move from discourse to discourse, specialised identities (for example, curriculum developers, teachers and learners) emerge and are realised. The space in which ideology plays is also a space for the exercise of power and control.

I have tried to apply aspects of this type of analysis to understand, not only the recontextualisation process in the formation of pedagogic discourse, but also the way in which everyday texts are constantly recontextualised as they carry meaning between contexts. This is presented as a slice of a life history of a set of events which can be called a trajectory (Blommaert, Silverstein & Urban). Examining issues of power and identity at each recontextualisation in the trajectory moves us closer to an understanding of the relation between language and social structure.

The research from which the data is drawn is a study of the literacy practices of 'homeless' members of two savings clubs operating in the black townships of Cape Town, South Africa. The clubs that I have called Tulandivile 1 and Tulandivile 2 (Tndv) are affiliated to a national organisation that I have called HASSOC (Housing Association) and serviced by an NGO. Through the process of daily saving of money, the members are brought together into groups which identify and purchase land, and then build houses accessing a new government subsidy for first-time homeowners. By the time the events described below occurred some house building had already begun, sites were being allocated and processes were being set up. Each of the following three examples is drawn from three longer

and more detailed trajectories of events in which texts were entextualised and recontextualised in different ways with different effects. The act of reading and writing in each case is closely linked with the social relations at play in each case.

Ordering building materials

I went with Mama S, a 55-year-old domestic worker and single head of household, on a Thursday to the building supply shop 'Build-O-Rama', roughly six kilometres away from Tulandivile. She had a cheque from the bank that had been signed that morning by two members of Tulandivile (Tndv) who had been appointed as 'book keepers', for R2650. She needed to buy various items for her house that was due to be built within the next few days. Monde (a fieldworker) and I walked with her to await the builder, Matiti. Eventually he arrived in his truck and she managed to call him over to ask him what else she needed. He found a small scrap of paper and a carpenter's pencil which he had in his pocket and wrote down on the paper:

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lenters 9
cement 17 bags
brickforce 3
Door 2 stable
3 inside door frames
2 outside door frames

Funeka
HASSOC

Earlier that morning, Mama S had visited the bookkeeper who had told her to speak to Funeka ('she will understand everything') when she got to Build-O-Rama, and had advised her to get the number of her neighbour's house so that the materials could be delivered. 'The number is usually written on the electricity board, and it's in Hlubi Street'. Mama S had got the neighbour to write down her number and it was then that we drove to the shop where she asked immediately for Funeka, who came forward willingly, clarifying in isiXhosa that Mama S was from HASSOC and had her cheque ready to pay for the supplies. Funeka checked the scrap of paper on which the builder had written and together she, Mama S and Monde went through each item—9 lintels, 17 bags of cement, brickforce. Then there was a long discussion about doors and whether she wanted stable doors. Eventually she decided and they were ordered. All of these proceedings took place in isiXhosa. At that point she was taken by Funeka to the payment counter, where the proceedings switched to English (partly translated by Monde and Funeka in lengthy discussions at each turn with Mama S in both isiXhosa and a bit of Afrikaans) while one of the clerks started to tally up her purchases. First he asked her what branch of the

association she was from, and she indicated that she had been told that she would get the usual discount. The invoice was printed out, and Mama S was told to take it to the cashier. The cashier asked her for her name, took the cheque and then wrote her English first name on the back of the
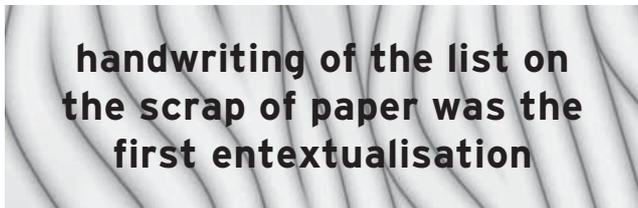
handwriting of the list on the scrap of paper was the first entextualisation

cheque (I had never heard her use this name). She printed out a receipt and gave it to Mama S, taking down the details for delivery—number 243 Hlubi Street, Tulandivile. The receipt was then taken over to the delivery counter. On the way back Mama S explained that she was going to stick all her receipts into her book and get the book keeper to help her fill in her expenditure sheet.

Allocation of tasks

So Matiti's handwriting of the list on the scrap of paper was the first entextualisation. Matiti had the knowledge and authority to produce the list but Mama S had the authority to commission him to do so. The conversation took place in isiXhosa, which was the first language of both participants, and Monde also participated, clarifying and confirming items as they were written. As an observer, the exchange was not so easy for me as I am not very fluent in isiXhosa.

This little text was then physically transported (or recontextualised) from Tulandivile to Build-O-Rama, where it then formed the basis for a verbal discussion and set of transactions between Mama S, Monde and Funeka. Monde and Funeka assumed roles of authority in relation to Mama S in the shop, as they mediated her purchasing of materials, code-switching between English and isiXhosa. At none of these points did Mama S read or write any of the words. The items on the scrap of paper went through a further process of recontextualisation (involving formalisation and translation) when they became items on the computer-generated list which the clerk drew up, regulated through the financial transactions. The financial transactions worked in two ways through a process of addition on the computer, accompanied by a process of subtraction from the total amount of the cheque on the calculator. The computer-generated list then became materialised as doors, cement, a toilet, which were later delivered to and stored in Mama D's house. The receipt which Mama S received after the delivery was later glued into her notebook, and the amounts were entered into her expenditure sheet, in an interaction mediated again by the bookkeepers but with

Mama S's participation and ratification. (This had followed a long process of conflict in the organisation where members did not fill in or have easy access to their own expenditure sheets as this was done by the previous book keepers. It was clear that there had been corruption in this process which had reached explosive proportions. I had been involved in trying to make sure that the process was managed by each individual house builder with the support of the new bookkeepers. Unfortunately the trajectory of Mama S stops at that point, as a result of other trajectories which had stalled, and so the items were not transformed into a house, this particular trajectory did not result in the production of more durable meanings (the house) or achieve closure.

Recording 'activeness'

In the next example, the recontextualising processes occurred within a more problematic set of social relations. One day quite early on in the building process, I observed a ragged group of elderly women arriving on the site. I watched two of them ask for Nomhle, who was the committee member on duty for block-making that day. When they found her they each took a rolled up handkerchief with tiny scrap of twisted paper inside it out of their shirts, carefully untwisted it and handed it over to Nomhle. Nomhle then read the names written on the paper, (the elderly women were not able to read them) and clarified that the two women had come to work on behalf of Busi and Nomi, who were both members of Tndv. Nomhle wrote down the full names of Busi and Nomi on her list which was kept in the back pages of an A4 notebook every day, or on a scrap of paper, the details of which were later transferred into the book. Having one's name recorded in the book meant that one qualified in terms of 'activeness', and would therefore stand in line for a site and a house. Busi and Nomi were both working at their jobs that day so they were employing the two elderly women to stand in for 'activeness' for them.

People's names were then supposedly collated into groups of those who 'had activeness' and those who did not by committee members. At a later date, the management committee attempted to develop a list of those in the 'active' group and these people were to be allocated sites at a particular meeting. On that day people gathered slowly from lunchtime for the 2pm meeting, and there was an air of nervousness and anticipation. However, there were all sorts of delays. The HASSOC officials only arrived at 4pm with no apologies and no allocation list, but a set of what were called 'enumeration forms'. It seems that there was a misunderstanding and this prior step in the process had been omitted. The HASSOC official explained that they hadn't come to a decision about the allocation because the books of Tndv2 (apparently this meant the register) had not been kept properly and they would have to go through

them again. Also activeness (meaning the attendance at meetings and at daily working sessions on site) had been very bad. People were asked to make four queues to the four officials who then filled the enumeration forms in by interviewing each person briefly. They were then told that they would have to wait until these forms were processed. People left with a sense of disappointment and anger.

Teamwork

I will now analyse these events in terms of how texts were recontextualised at each point in the trajectory and what issues of identity, power and control came into play. Busi and Nomi presumably recruited the two elderly women to stand in for them in showing 'activeness', and paid them to do this. The first literacy event in this trajectory would have taken place in the context of the women's shacks where Busi and Nomi's names would have been written down on the paper (a text produced) and payment agreed. That little key text itself was then physically transported to Tndv. The second literacy event involved the recontextualising of the text at Tndv, when Nomhle—acting as a kind of gatekeeper for 'activeness'—then read out the names, wrote them down in her book and set the two elderly women to work. Nomhle's list then got collated with the other roll calls, which presumably showed how many times the names of Busi and Nomi had appeared at daily sessions, as well as how many Tndv meetings, and the extent of the savings they had made in the club. The exact way in which this occurred was not specified and Busi and Nomi had no way of checking the accuracy of this, other than their trust in Nomhle and their management committee. The record was then taken over to HASSOC, whose officials checked it. The social relations at each of these points were quite distant and hierarchical in comparison with the relations in Mama S's trajectory.

In the next recontextualisation, the HASSOC official explained that there were problems with the list and that the 'books' had not been kept properly. This may not have been the real reason for the delay in allocation, but it was presented as the reason, and the HASSOC officials were possibly demonstrating their power by delaying the process. It was the absence of the list that carried power and a kind of mystique. However, there were no means by which people like Busi and Nomi could challenge this.

What starts to become evident in this example is that the fragility of the textually-mediated processes allows for the excess play of power, and for the identity of certain individuals at each moment in the trajectory to be consolidated on spurious bases. Unlike what seems to happen in many other organisational procedures, at Tndv each moment in the 'recording activeness' trajectory involved greater degrees of instability and less closure.

In Tndv, recontextualising often involved physically carrying the material artefacts that were central in the literacy practices from one place to another—the notebooks, lists, plans and twisted scraps of paper wrapped up in handkerchiefs. It also involved the costs (in the form of bus fares, minibus taxi fares and walking in often difficult and dangerous conditions) of physically carrying papers from place to place, for example, from Tndv to the bank 12 kilometres away. In other cases, processes were characterised by the absence of the material artefact—the text—even though the process depended on it. The absence conveyed a mystique which increased authority and therefore the power and control of those who could refer to the absent text.
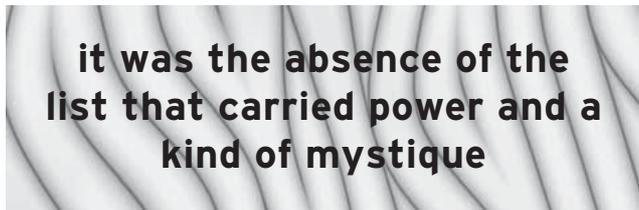
> **it was the absence of the list that carried power and a kind of mystique**

I have chosen to present this example from the data which only shows the actions of some of the full range of organisations involved in the Tndv development, mainly because this data was more reliable. However, many other organisations were involved—the city council, architects, the engineers, the housing board and so on. In this constant interplay of institutions, organisations and individuals, meanings were carried across 'communities of practices' (Wenger 1998), which drew on conflicting discourses and practices, a sense of a multiplicity of worlds (and words) at work in the same process.

Story writing outside the classroom

The final example occurred in the context of even more conflicting social relations. Nomathamsanqa, who was a member of Tndv, lived alone with her two small children. She had been allocated what was supposedly a 'show house'. But straight after moving in she appeared to be very distraught, showing me that her house was badly built, there was no ridge piece on the roof and the rain poured in there, the sheets of roofing iron were not firmly attached to the walls and there were large gaps between the window frames and the walls. Nomathamsanqa, on numerous occasions over many months, raised these problems verbally at meetings in a very emotional tone, often breaking into tears and appearing almost hysterical.

I had managed to pull together a group of about eight people who were interested in reading and writing. In a fairly radical attempt at contextualising literacy learning I was determined that there would be no curriculum and that whatever needed to be written or read would be a

direct part of the house building process at Tndv. I had suggested that individuals could write or dictate stories about the building process at Tndv. The minutes of the first meeting state that Nomathamsanqa was the first to say that she was:

> …very happy to be part of this process. She would love to be photographed with her children, and to write the story of the building. She is aware that the project is a historical and prestigious one, and that it is important to document it and to share that with others beyond the project.

There was some discussion about whether there would be any benefits from writing the stories but Nomathamsanqa said that she did not need individual benefit, it was benefit enough to carry the story abroad, and she was 'proud of the project itself and carries the story close to (her) heart'.

Over the next few days she wrote her story in isiXhosa with a ballpoint pen in a small school exercise book covered in wrapping paper. It was about ten pages long, and as she read it to me I could see that there was no sense of pride—only an overwhelming sense of the hurt, anguish and anger that she had had to endure living in this house for so long. As she read she gestured again to me the places where the gaps were and the roof leaked. Some neighbours came in and peered over her shoulder at the book and looked at the house and tried to calm her down. A few days later I was called to meet with a member of the committee. They had decided that Nomathamsanqa needed to take her story to a meeting of the national organisation and read it out.

A week or two later I was told that everyone was reading the story, that 'this thing had spread all over', and that 'everyone was coming and looking at her house and the problems'. Nomathamsanqa said that 'this writing is good, because now everyone can see my problem. Every night now when I wake up I want to write and I look for that book and light the candle and then I write'.

The group had another meeting to talk about writing the stories, and in this meeting the minutes showed that some anxiety was expressed about stories and possible critiques of the organisation. Someone mentioned that maybe there was a need for some guidelines about how to write. Another member said that there are tensions but that rules may not help and that we should be free. Nomathamsanqa said that she was also sharing the sentiments, and that she had problems with the idea of sifting what is there. 'The reality is that people have been through joyful and through bitter times and these should be included. It can help others. I have finalised my story now, now I am waiting for the happy ending'.

The power of words

I was then told that she had been asked to take the story to a provincial meeting and that people were worried about the story. She was later asked to go to the national meeting where she was asked to tell the story again (not to read it this time). At that meeting a decision was made that her house needed to be rebuilt.

Monde told me later that ' people had always thought that Nomathamsanqa was someone that couldn't say anything, but now they have seen this book and now they have respect for her'. The irony of this is that I had watched over many months as Nomathamsanqa tried to raise her problems verbally in meetings but was never listened to, her spoken words never had any effect.

In relation to the overall argument of this article Nomathamsanqa's story shows that trajectories can draw on many modes of meaning-making. As meanings are recontextualised they may shift between different communicative modes, from the oral to the written, to the spatial, to the gestural, and so on. As each mode comes into play in each recontextualisation, it has different affordances or potentials and it connects with the participants in each recontextualisation in different ways, according to their linguistic resources and social relations. While the spoken mode did not achieve Nomathamsanqa's aims, she was able to mobilise the affordances of the written mode superbly and use its recontextualisation from a local meeting to a provincial meeting to win her case.

Implications for literacy learning and teaching

So many claims are made about literacy and empowerment. I have challenged these claims by reporting on ethnographic evidence to the contrary—that literacy by itself does not necessarily empower (Kell,). As writers like Green, Luke and Freebody and Lo Bianco have indicated, there are four dimensions involved in being competent readers and writers. People need to be able to:

- decode texts
- use texts functionally
- participate in the meanings of texts
- be critical of texts.

I hope that the evidence provided in the above examples shows that it is often very difficult for learners to operate in these four dimensions if the text that they are dealing with is separated from a broader trajectory, and is reified in the written form in a transaction which is determined by the logic of curriculum rather than the logic of everyday practices. Addressing this requires that we take account of how texts arrive in contexts and how they move beyond

contexts. It requires a careful analysis of the moment at which the text is stabilised and its meaning fixed in order for learning to occur—but at the same time it requires the awareness of how that meaning will very quickly become unstable as the text moves into further recontextualisations. It also requires that more attention be paid to the interaction between communicative modes; that the written text and the visual text almost always emerge from a context of spoken language and gestural and bodily communication, and that the relations between participants in each context construct the text in certain ways.

If the idea of contextualisation is to be followed through, and takes account of the above issues, the possibility of quite dramatic and unanticipated outcomes presents itself. This was certainly the case in Tndv, where once we realised that control over their own expenditure sheets was central to the process, or that writing a story to challenge an unfair case was possible, all sorts of new power relations arose, sometimes quite explosive ones. But if we claim that simply contextualising our literacy teaching will lead to empowerment, we may run the risk of setting our learners up for failure or for the denigration of their existing practices, like the learners reading Betty's story or the learners in the letter writing class. This may lead to quite difficult questions about the role of literacy teachers and the future of literacy teaching.

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A new point of view, a new person: how writing makes a difference

by Nancy Sugarman

There is great power in self-representation through autobiographical writing, and the making and remaking of social identity has many social implications.

A student wrote an email to me about her emerging identity as a writer as a result of a writing workshop I taught. 'Oh yeah, Mom's writing a story', she wrote, referring to the less than enthusiastic comments of her adult children, who had heard it all before.

But you were hanging on our every word—such enormous flattery. I don't think any of us had experienced that in years. Well suddenly our writing actually meant something to someone other than ourselves. When I went to Mexico this summer, and people asked me what I did, I said I was a writer. I was not carried off to be pilloried in the town square for lying. People believed me and took me seriously and that was very nice indeed.

The student, Joan is a 70-year-old woman, a thinning bottle blond with, as she puts it, 'lousy arteries'. Writing makes a difference in her life. She was one of 17 participants in an eight-week community-based older women's writing class I taught in the US. I've now completed some research about their writing. Most of the participants were over 70, (Joan was the youngest at the time, at 66) and had never written publicly before. Their stories, the workshops and the pedagogy, formed the basis for my research.

The images and characters produced in these writing workshops hooked me. I read their stories with greedy eyes. The characters and images were enigmatic and fascinating and thrust me into their lived experience. My pleasure in reading their stories came from several places—I felt compelled to examine my own identity, the writers' and their character's identities, and I felt privileged by 'being allowed to enter into a personal relationship with them' (Miller, 1991:6). I was swept up into their narratives and identified with the writers:

- An unmarried 35-year-old woman teaches her much younger niece about femininity at the Coney Island Baths in New York.
- The daughter of a Holocaust survivor prays with her mother in the usually locked living room, to the 'dead pictures' in their Brooklyn apartment every Friday night.
- A domineering mother mourns her daughter's divorce on a purple love seat, dressed in black, day after day, refusing to answer the phone. 'How could you do this to me?' she cries to her daughter.
- A diet club of women meet weekly for 25 years, to weigh themselves, talk and eat.
- A silver samovar sits in the centre of a tiny overcrowded Brooklyn living room, a representation of home, culture and identity.
- A young girl is kidnapped by gypsies in Rumania and then followed on the streets of New York because of her overwhelming beauty.

I recognised the images and characters in the stories—they could be mine as well. I could collaborate with them, experiment, and examine them for alternative stories. I could write my own stories about lived encounters with meddling mothers, comic large aunts, angry fathers, demanding and nurturing grandmothers, and the sexual and rebellious cousin. These are not isolated family plots but collective social stories that could be read and written in multiple ways. The women made stories with these images; stories that described and then questioned their experiences. I, in turn, analysed their stories and used them to make a research story about one group of older women.

While older women were the subjects of my research, its concerns are broader. I am also an ESL and literacy teacher and spend much of my time reading and writing and rewriting with students—questioning their texts, using them as models for further writing, as markers of their achievement, and as representations of their identity. How might writing make a difference in their lives? By questioning and examining students' autobiographical stories in the classroom for their gendered meanings, for representations of class, of culture and of self, we can learn about how they are positioned in the dominant culture through their texts. If students also see their stories as representations to be shaped and selected, then the 'I' who writes becomes a complex identity. Who is the 'I' that writes this time? Which self is being represented? The possibility of rewriting themselves, as a different version, might prove

to be as important an activity as the more functional genres that our curriculum demands we teach. Here I explore the common threads between the older women's writing group and the ESL students I teach and in the pedagogies used.

Locating the teacher/researcher

When I read the women's texts, I was struck by the difficulties of knowing what to look at, and where I was located with this group. How could I maintain my cool judgment of the stories, both as a researcher and a teacher, and at the same time acknowledge the intimacy of the material and the relationships? 'The dilemma of this burden is finding somewhere to stand…' (St. Pierre, 1997b: 368).

Once positioned, when I read the stories of the women writers and of the writers in our ESL classes, I wondered what it is I should look at first—what is the central image, the focus? Who is writing and from what place?

The women in the writing group and our students are also looking. They are looking at their families in their stories, their bodies, and their sexuality. They are being looked at by society and me, and I am being observed by them, looking. Who is looking at whom and from what place?

The writing workshops

The first few weeks established the framework for the class and I introduced a writing manifesto, providing a list of strong and affirming reasons and directions for writing and a list of reading and listening rules. The manifesto charged them with a mission to rethink themselves as writers:

- Writing is fun. It expands our attitudes and understanding about others and ourselves.
- Writing makes public the events in our lives.
- Write in your own voice, as you speak.
- Stop seeing yourself through the eyes of others.
- Don't be afraid to make mistakes and lie.

In a further handout, I offered them suggestions for retrieving their memories, thanks to Frigga Haug (1987) and Barbara Kamler (2001).

- Write in the third person, as a stranger watching another stranger.
- Concentrate on one particular situation rather than the big picture. Focus on details.
- Find a key image.
- Sometimes smells, sounds, raw emotions draw us back into the past.
- Practice, practice, practice. This is a kind of archeology.
- First drafts are full of gaps, inconsistencies. Sometimes what is not said is the most interesting part of all.
- Clichés get in the way of concrete and rich storytelling.

I used many techniques to encourage students' sense of creativity and flexibility in the writing of their lives. In the first two workshop sessions, I asked the women to brainstorm some adjectives that described them as older women. The women contributed words as I wrote and mapped their definitions on butchers' paper. I questioned their initially overly positive contributions, not because I wanted to deny their enthusiasm, but I wanted to draw out the opposing forces and model ways to construct their rich and complex identities.
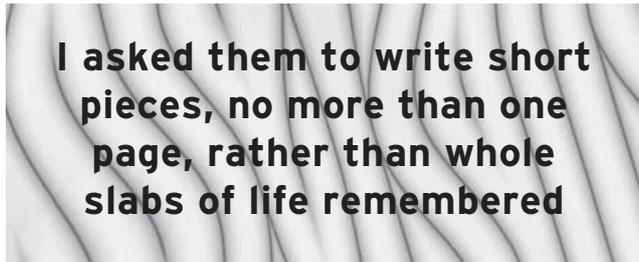
I asked them to write short pieces, no more than one page, rather than whole slabs of life remembered

I asked them to write short pieces, no more than one page, rather than whole slabs of life remembered. The participants focused on fragments of their lives, like a film might present small details to represent the whole. They wrote their lives as remembered details, not because their memories were less than whole or uninteresting, but because the details were rich and expressed more honestly their fragmented and changing selves and experiences.

We searched in their writing for those fragments or images that fascinated us. Images that challenged the traditional notions of who they were supposed to be and how they should write. I encouraged the women to write about the details in their lives and the everyday episodes from their lives, rather than a chronicle of 'a journey towards their polished, unified and authoritative self, shapeless as a mist' (Woolf, 1929:104).

- Describe your front door at 15.
- Write about a photograph. By writing many possible versions from just one snapshot from a life, I could emphasise how their stories were constructions, not truths out there to be caught, but a version they were in control of.
- Food for thought—a favourite food story.
- A gift your grandmother gave you.
- A portrait of a favourite relative.
- A portrait of a hated relative.
- A cultural joke.
- Write a letter to a dead relative.
- Write a letter to a great-grandchild.
- Your first love.
- Tell a lie about a family story.
- A time you felt powerful.

- A time you felt powerless.
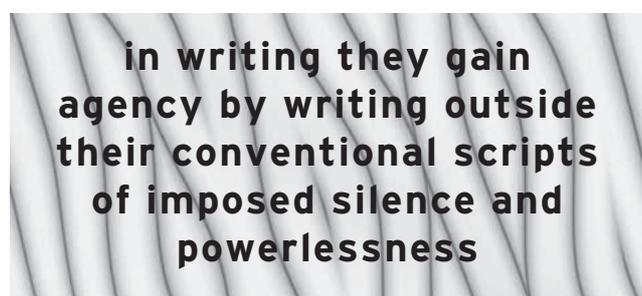- A place you've loved.
- A pet in your life.

The students needed to develop skills to listen critically and to offer suggestions to the other writers. The guidelines I offered to students are also useful for the ESL and literacy students I work with today:

- Be respectful and supportive of each other's writing.
- Listen well and be non-judgemental.
- Ask about the points of view in the story. Who is speaking?
- What is missing? Is it too general?
- What do you especially like? What image was the strongest, the most powerful?
- Focus on the text itself. Look at how it was written, the language, and the images. The content is secondary.
- What sounds are in the text?
- How did the text begin and end?
- Offer two suggestions for the writer.

What did I find in this research?

First, the theoretical writing about autobiography, representation and memory were enormously useful. Nancy Miller (1991), Ruth Behar (1996), Barbara Kamler (1995, 1999, 2001) and Elizabeth St. Pierre (1997) helped me to locate the women's autobiographical writing, the teaching and my writing about them. Second, the writing process enabled the writers an awareness and control over their place in the story. Finally, the writing workshops gave women authority, safety, and a sense of power. It made a difference in their lives.

The women are still meeting and writing, four years later. The fact that they continue to meet even without a teacher surely indicates the power of writing for them. The group has re-formed, adding new members, losing others.

> **in writing they gain agency by writing outside their conventional scripts of imposed silence and powerlessness**

The most relevant outcome for our students perhaps, is that in writing they gain agency by writing outside their conventional scripts of imposed silence and powerlessness. Autobiographical writing calls attention to the duality they live—marginalised in society, yet in a writing classroom, they have authority. Their authority is in their storytelling.

ESL students and stories—common threads

How does writing make a difference for ESL students? What are the common threads between the stories and writers such as the older women's group and the students I teach? How do teachers help shape their texts? How do we stimulate students as writers?

Firstly, both groups are describing lives across cultures with the common experiences of relocation and other-ness. They are not only migrants or old women, but people who are composing new selves. They do this in the social setting of the classroom—in a safe space for the shared telling and retelling of family stories.

The women in the Florida writing group were privileged, middle-class women, native speakers and the relocation they experienced was voluntary, for the most part. Their relocation and new status as old women had changed all of that. One of the enduring cultural paradigms about older women is the image of them as dependent, silent and nearly invisible. So too, for many of our ESL students who have identified their new public status in similar terms. How can we reconcile their public, English-speaking student selves with their thriving, competent and complex inner selves? Because they now represent themselves in a language not their own—their storied selves are often hidden under a stranger's mask. The dichotomy is very potent for our students. It is in the classroom then, that they can have authority through their writing. Here they are positioned, like the women in the writing group, to reject their invisibility and powerlessness.

Another place of commonality is in the writing topics we choose. One of the predominant themes in the women's writing was the relationship between themselves, their childhood homes and their mothers. Their stories present memories of home as a complex site, not just of nostalgic longing, or of privilege and comfort. Home is depicted as a site that supported and yet has also imprisoned these women and their mothers. Their stories also show that although their homes might have been sites of much pain and conflict, it's in the writing of home that it becomes a more fluid and expressive place of identity.

Home, the past and changing lives are themes that begin in the first English class our ESL students take. Their homes are written as places of great nostalgia but surely also of great violence and risk. They have abandoned homes, been exiled, homes have been destroyed and co-opted. Here they rebuild and remake their sense of home, of self and belonging. Their memories, like the memories of the women in the older women's writing group, depict places, relations and homes as sites of comfort and pain—of confrontation and loss, risky, multidimensional.

Here's an example:

Banana Cake, by H

As you know, banana has always been a popular fruit around the world. I remember when I was a little girl, I lived in Binh Chanh a small town near Saigon and around my village people grew bananas. It became a part of our normal life…It is very cheap as well. Therefore my grandmother used to buy a lot of it from the market. Then my mother cooked banana for my family. I remember I used to tell my mother, 'cook banana cake for me' and slowly slowly I learned how I can cook it…

Today I live in Australia where I am without my grandmother. My mother imitates my grandmother and buys a lot of bananas when she goes to the market. I am now the person who cooks banana for my family. Then when I am old, I will buy a lot of bananas when I go to the market like my mother. My grandchild will cook banana cake too. I hope this culture keeps going for many generations of my big family.

Banana cake is a compelling story about H's feelings and identity. She writes about family roles, belonging, security, community and possibility. She writes a 'positive nostalgia' (Hage, 1997:106) about the preservation of a tradition of intergenerational importance. Her grandmother was the provider of bananas—a symbol of H's 'normal life' (a life in a small village near Saigon, before coming to Australia) and the cake recipe she hoped to pass onto the generations of family after her. 'Migrant home-building is often associated with food…The yearning for home parallels the yearning for a mouthful' (Hage: 1997:100). Banana cake-making in her new Australian home is endowed with a living meaning. It helps her feel at home and is a material marker of her identity, her relationship to her family, her past and her culture.

The last paragraph contains the key images of her family script of loss and longing, 'where I am without my grandmother', of a desire to continue the female tradition and of deep connection. She identifies with her grandmother and mother and has internalised the culturally determined roles. Her mother fills in for the absent grandmother, although H recognises the inadequate 'imitation'. By choosing to write this story and representing herself as a woman obedient and unquestioning, the story reproduces a dominant cultural narrative.

The H who lives and studies English in Australia is absent from the story. H lives at home, dutifully looking after her aging parents, bound by family and cultural tradition, with little hope of having children to pass the recipe to. She is profoundly restricted by the demands on an unmarried, nearly 40-year-old daughter in a traditional Vietnamese family. The items she holds—the recipe, the memory of her grandmother, the village surrounded by banana trees and the imperative to pass the cooking of it onto the next generation—anchor her and yet also oppress her. H's identity is written into the piece, although she makes no mention of her dilemma in the story. The story then, represents a way of writing her experience and is a deliberate fiction at the same time.

> the story, …represents a way of writing her experience and is a deliberate fiction at the same time
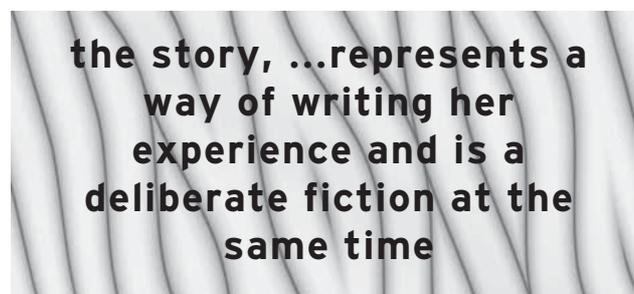
H is 'located within a series of binary oppositions' (Kamler 2001:87): female to male, truth to fiction, child to parent, unmarried to married, passive to active, connected to lonely, nurturing to nurtured, student to teacher, accepting to resisting, obedient to disobedient, dependent to independent, belonging to estranged, Vietnamese traditional culture to Australian contemporary culture, Vietnamese to English, extended family to isolated family.

The 'I' H writes is 'changing, contradictory and gendered… her subjectivity made and remade…' (Kamler, 2001:61). The 'I' she writes is multiple—there's an imagined 'I' as a prospective mother and grandmother, 'the 'I' who lived the experience, the 'I' who is written into the text, and the 'I' who writes 'I' (Gilmore, 1994:93).

Creating new narratives

Writing can be a very isolating and solitary experience, especially for new writers. The intimate and yet limited conversation between a teacher and a student is often defined by the need to satisfy specific learning outcome criteria. It is rare for me to work with a student text in the classroom, except perhaps to work on grammar correction together. When students read their work aloud though, it constitutes an important and engaging step towards seeing themselves as writers. It is then through the questioning of their stories in the safety of the classroom—by offering new ideas, fictions, and challenges to the dominant narratives that have shaped them—that the class begins to see themselves as writers too and that is powerful and relocating indeed.

In light of this gap in my own teaching, I've tried to come up with some strategies for using a text in class to draw out other stories and to engage the whole class in reading and listening critically and playfully. The questions used

in the older women's workshops are useful and relevant here for our students—locating powerful key images and language, gaps, absences, points of view, and finding the opening and closing images of the story.

These are not new questions at all for teachers of writing, but perhaps are not used enough in the ESL and literacy classroom. Asking these sorts of questions of a text, and having the whole class reshaping the stories in the following ways, keeps the focus on language and on the representations as versions of experience, rather than the truth itself.

- Brainstorm together—images, words, descriptions, emotions, missing pieces, characters, details from the story.
- Choose one of the generated words or phrases and write one sentence.
- Extend that to one paragraph. Read aloud.
- Choose a point of view to write from, for example, as the father, the youngest boy, the dog, the closest neighbour, the mother, the family doctor, an old boyfriend.
- Rewrite the ending, rewrite the beginning.
- Rewrite in the style of a particular genre—thriller, soapie, hospital drama, romance.

The goal of classroom reading and writing is to invite the class into the narrative and into the process of writing. The writer initially chooses from where to speak and how to speak. They decide which story to tell, so are in partial control of their story. When we question their images and language and offer new possibilities with our own writing, we are attempting to find a new point of view and a new way of representing the past and self.

My research has strengthened my resolve to teach students to write. There is great power in self-representation, surely. The social implications are enormous. Autobiographical writing is also a discourse of power, embodying a social purpose both critical and basic, that of making and remaking identity.

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Practical Matters

CGEA the Ballarat way—a fresh approach for young people

Having another try at education is a challenge for anyone, but for teenagers who left school before completing Year 10, it can be a daunting prospect. In Ballarat, Julianne Krusche and Anna Morton have developed a special approach.

The Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA) youth program is delivered through the Department of Further Education within the TAFE Division of the University of Ballarat. This program has been evolving over the past seven years and is designed to cater for students aged 15–19 years who left school before completing Year 10. Students are given the opportunity to improve their general education skills of literacy and numeracy as well as develop confidence and social skills.

During the VALBEC Conference in 2003, we presented our approach in a workshop and as a follow-up we were invited to write down the essence of this presentation. The workshop highlighted some commonly asked questions and concerns about youth delivery in general. Due to this, the article focuses on the following:

- integrated delivery of the streams in the CGEA
- the creation and implementation of a Code of Conduct
- student attendance
- student behaviour and attitudes
- encouraging students to become responsible for their own behaviour
- overall approaches that do and don't work.

Our aims include:

- breaking down those,'Oh no, not maths!…I'm not going to that!' class reactions
- exposing those 'it's everyone else's fault' responses
- breaking down the 'teachers are our enemy' mentality
- re-establishing each student's belief in themselves.

Accredited curriculum

Students work at their own pace towards attaining Certificates I and/or II of the CGEA. Students initially enrol for a semester and generally re-enrol to complete a year in the program. Occasionally there are some students who study in this program for a longer period of time. The main approach used is to work thematically, integrating all aspects of the CGEA—reading and writing, numeracy and mathematics, oral communication and general curriculum options. Most students who complete the program obtain Certificate I while some also complete Certificate II.

Class size

Although the funding is based on a ratio of one teacher to 14 students, commonly we operate with two classes with 18 students in each. This seems to be an ideal number of students, enabling sufficient personalities for most students to find a niche friendship. This number also allows for more individual assistance for students than is possible in the much larger classes that operate (by necessity) in secondary schools.

Code of conduct

Although it is common for teachers to negotiate with students the needs and expectations for individual classes, further insight into this process was gained at a 'Tackling Tough Behaviours' workshop run by Jo Lange[1], an educational consultant specialising in behavioural management in the educational sector. The concept of the code of conduct is first introduced to students during their initial interview where discussion is centred on what did or didn't work previously. The main aim of the code is to help all students learn and feel comfortable and safe.

Most of the students enter the program not knowing each other. Some have reading difficulties, and most are hesitant to speak out in group discussion at this stage. It is also important to keep in mind that some students will have

had past experiences of being bullied, and may be loath to honestly say what they think for fear of retribution.

As suggested by Jo Lange, it works best to begin the process with a simply written, anonymous survey (1.1 p.27) to ascertain what students think. This is presented to, and gone over with, all students as a group to minimise the possibility that the statements are not understood. Students then respond to each statement in the survey by ticking one of the options—Agree, Not Sure, Disagree. The statements cover the following aspects of their interaction with each other and us:

- Attendance and punctuality.
- Classroom behaviour and attitudes.
- Supporting learning and teaching.

Survey results are collated, from which the Code of Conduct is formulated (1.2 p.29). This is all discussed in class the next day. Students, if they agree with the code, sign and date it, and then it is filed in their records. Over the years one or two students have questioned some statement in the code, but have agreed to try it out given that the majority of opinion was in its favour. The agreed Code of Conduct applies equally to the teaching staff and the students.

Timetabling

Over time, several approaches to timetabling have been trialled. The most successful format so far is daily attendance from 9am until 12.30pm, together with one timetabled study support class which students attend on a needs basis. It works far better for the students to attend daily, establishing the routine of continual attendance. Conducting classes in the morning has tapped into the most productive time, together with eliminating the problem of students not returning after lunch. No matter how well-intentioned, students can be distracted during breaks and not return. Regular breaks are timetabled into the program, which requires students, as agreed to in the Code of Conduct, to return on time.

Curriculum materials

This material is written based on the interests of our students, together with things we believe they would benefit from exposure to, such as visits to the art gallery, the town hall, and other places of historical significance in our town. This approach to learning can be applied to suit the interests and skills of any student group. An 'integrated themes' approach is used covering all the learning outcomes of the CGEA. Often the theme's work requires the students to work out of the classroom and out into the township, thus actively

participating in their own learning. Some examples of themes include Finding your way around, Natural disasters, Heroes, Community services and Recreation.

In addition, it is necessary to devote some time to skill development. The skills covered are determined to a large degree by the literacy and numeracy gaps identified when observing student work. The first hour of every class is assigned to skills activities.

Each term the students are invited to complete a negotiated study. This means that they select a topic of interest, negotiate how they will research it and then finish with both a written and an oral presentation.

Students are encouraged to hand in drafts of their work throughout the term for feedback. At the end of each term the students hand in a folio containing all of their term's work where every item of work is formally assessed and linked to specific learning outcomes of the CGEA.

Staffing—the team approach

A major secret of success lies with the staff working in the youth program. It is essential to have staff who enjoy working with, and have an interest in, young people, and who are also able to work as part of a team. Weekly team meetings are conducted amongst the staff. During the meeting, time is given to planning the next week's or month's curriculum, determining who will design the worksheets, and discussing any issues that have arisen since the last meeting. These meetings form an integral part of the success of our program. Once a decision has been made, all staff support that process and follow through with it. This staff support is crucial at all times both for teacher welfare and for dealing individually with students. Any issues that arise in class are discussed outside the classroom, and a united approach is presented to the

1.1 Code of Conduct student survey

What do *you* think?

We would like to ask for your ideas on:
- the things that help you learn in the classroom
- those that prevent you from learning.

	Agree	Not sure	Disagree
1. Attendance and Punctuality			
It disturbs and annoys me when other students arrive late to class	❏	❏	❏
Students who arrive late should wait outside until signalled to come in by the teacher	❏	❏	❏
Students who arrive late should unpack their books outside the class	❏	❏	❏
Students who arrive late or who are absent should take responsibility for catching up with any work that has been missed	❏	❏	❏
Students who arrive more than 10 minutes late, without notifying the teacher in advance, should wait until the first break to join the class	❏	❏	❏
Students, who know they are going to be late, should ring in	❏	❏	❏

Comments:

....

....

	Agree	Not sure	Disagree
2. Classroom Behaviour and attitudes			
I am offended when students make racist or sexist comments	❏	❏	❏
I am annoyed when students talk to one another while someone else is talking to the class	❏	❏	❏
I feel uncomfortable when students swear	❏	❏	❏
It is rude and disrespectful when students talk while someone is talking to the class	❏	❏	❏
I don't need to listen to other people's opinions	❏	❏	❏
I feel left out when other students whisper around me	❏	❏	❏
I am uncomfortable when yelled at by someone who disagrees with my opinions	❏	❏	❏
I am upset by personal comments and put-downs by other people	❏	❏	❏
I don't like hearing negative gossip about other people	❏	❏	❏
I expect people to listen to my opinions	❏	❏	❏
I am responsible for my own behaviour	❏	❏	❏
I should only consider myself in class	❏	❏	❏
Logging into internet chats during class time, when I am meant to be doing other work, distracts me from my learning	❏	❏	❏
I should turn off my mobile phone before I come into class	❏	❏	❏

Comments:

....

....

	Agree	Not sure	Disagree
3. Supporting learning and teaching			
Students should not interfere with the teacher's right to teach	❏	❏	❏
Students should not interfere with other students' learning opportunities	❏	❏	❏
Students who disrupt other student's learning should be told, in private by the teacher, that their behaviour is disturbing others	❏	❏	❏
Students who have been told their behaviour is disturbing others, and who have had a second warning, should be requested to leave by the teacher	❏	❏	❏
If a student is asked to leave it is important that they have a follow-up meeting with the teacher about their behaviour	❏	❏	❏
Angry outbursts are never appropriate to deal with problems with others	❏	❏	❏
Malicious and mean gossip or comments are not acceptable	❏	❏	❏
Students with problems handling their feelings should not take them into the classroom situation	❏	❏	❏
Students with ongoing problems should see a teacher about getting some support	❏	❏	❏
I would feel very supported if students who can do the work would help me if I am stuck	❏	❏	❏
I would be willing to help other students when they have difficulties with the work and I know what to do	❏	❏	❏
I should ask questions or seek help if I am stuck	❏	❏	❏
I need to have attempted the work myself to do what parts of it I can before I ask for help	❏	❏	❏
It is the teacher's job to make me learn	❏	❏	❏
It is important for students to deal with problems between them with respect	❏	❏	❏

Are there any other comments you would like to make? Please write them down.

....

....

Thanks for your time!

students. As one staff member aptly defined it, 'the teaching styles of each teacher are different but they complement each other'. It is critical to the success of the program to have teachers who all support the extra time and effort required to make the team approach work.

Sense of belonging

The program aims to foster a sense of belonging to the group and having each student believe that they are an important person within the program. This starts with the physical environment. Classes are located within the main campus rather than being relegated to a portable somewhere on the fringes of the campus. Fortunately, facilities at SMB campus offer a comfortable, light-foyer area that is wonderful for the students to relax in.

Over the years, the young students have earned their own credibility with other staff by the manner in which they learn to conduct themselves whilst they are here. This is achieved largely through the emphasis on developing self respect, responsibility and appropriate behaviours, all related to the Code of Conduct. The youth program is fully supported by colleagues in the department that is led by an extremely supportive department manager and has an administrative assistant who provides encouragement and support to the students.

Youth worker

As part of the Youth Pathways Program (YPP) funding, a trained youth worker has been employed to complement the program. This support enables us to more satisfactorily deal with the very difficult issues which are beyond most teachers' training, such as possible self-harm, domestic violence and drug-related issues. The youth worker is available at all times, which is absolutely essential for assisting young people as their issues usually need immediate attention.

Follow-up and old habits

The Code of Conduct needs to be an ongoing working document around which issues are handled as they arise. It is approached by talking issues through with individual students. They have agreed to a particular way of operating and that is what is expected of them. In this way, the process is started whereby students take responsibility for their own behaviour and efforts. Follow-up is not approached from an authoritarian viewpoint, but instead issues are discussed privately with each student to determine what is making it hard for them to abide by the conduct they have agreed to. Students are usually coming to the youth program following an unsuccessful attempt at secondary schooling, and they bring their old school habits with them. Students are encouraged to recognise their old habits. The analogy of the 'horse going round in circles pulling the grindstone, without thinking about it' is used as the first step to changing their behaviour.

Boundaries

Many of the students are missing boundaries within which they can lead their lives. It is very hard to be in control of your life, when there are only open-ended options and no guidelines given for appropriate behaviour. The Code of Conduct clearly defines for the students the boundaries in place for them to work within whilst at the university, and hopefully to put in place in their daily lives. Thus the aim is to teach responsibility and appropriateness, by recognising and dealing with old habits, and breaking down the 'them and us' mentality that often comes from their secondary schooling experiences.

Responsibility

The first focus for learning self-responsibility involves punctuality. The emphasis is that students have given their commitment to attend classes on time by signing the Code of Conduct and then it is up to them to keep

1.2 Code of Conduct

What *you* think?

I agree that for our Code of Conduct we follow the opinion of the majority of students in our class within the guidelines of university policy.

Every student has the right to learn and every teacher has the right to teach.

1. **Attendance and Punctuality**
    - I understand that I am expected to arrive for class on time.
    - If I am late after a break, I will wait outside until signalled to come in by the teacher.
    - If I am late or absent I will catch up on any work I have missed.
    - I will ring Carmel if I am going to be late or am not able to attend.
    - I agree to come into class quietly, unpack and be ready for work
    - I agree that if I am more than 10 minutes late, at the start of the day and have not rung in, I will let the teacher know I have arrived, then wait until the next break to join the class.

2. **Classroom Behaviour and attitudes**
    - I will bring my equipment into every class.
    - I agree to turn off my mobile phone before I come into class.
    - I agree not to make racist and sexist comments.
    - I will be quiet and listen when someone else is talking to the class.
    - I agree to listen to the opinions of others.
    - I agree to keep personal comments and put downs out of my conversations.
    - I agree to keep malicious comments and gossip out of my conversation.
    - I agree to take responsibility for my own behaviour.
    - I agree that everyone in our class has equal rights.
    - I agree that angry outbursts are not appropriate.

3. **Supporting learning and teaching**
    - I understand that if I have been told that my behaviour is disturbing others, and I have had a second warning, I will be asked to leave by the teacher.
    - If I have been asked to leave class I will agree to meet with the teacher to discuss my behaviour.
    - I agree to seek support if I have an ongoing or urgent problem which makes it hard for me to work in class.
    - I agree to help other students if I know what to do.
    - I agree to ask questions and seek help if I am stuck.
    - I agree to try and do what I can before I ask for help.
    - I agree to treat other students and teachers with respect at all times.
    - I agree to take full responsibility for my learning.
    - I agree to only access internet sites when I have permission to do so.

Signed: _____   Date: _____

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their word. The Code of Conduct generally states that students who are late wait until after the first break to join class, and students who do not return are marked absent. This is later discussed with them before they attend the next class, working towards agreement that they will attend regularly in future. Most students respond very well to this approach, working as a team to help them succeed in their schooling. Students also take responsibility for keeping all their work, including drafts and final copies submitting a folio at the end of each term.

Keeping students busy

The themes run for a maximum of two weeks and involve many activities. It is important to keep the students actively engaged, and given more time we find that they lose interest and tend to be less productive. A week at the end of each term is devoted to completing final copies and putting together folders of work.

Computer access

Use of the computer is made to allow students to type final copies, and jazz up their work, whilst at the same time teaching them valuable computer skills, assessable within general curriculum options. This in particular assists students who have writing difficulties—they complete first drafts by hand, and can then gain more immediate success by completing final copies on the computer. Where possible, daily computer access is timetabled, allowing each student to print off their work for assessment prior to the next lesson.

Regular progress interviews

Progress interviews are conducted midway through each term, giving students the opportunity to discuss such issues as how they are finding the program, concerns, completion of work, etc. The prime focus, however, is to make positive comments to the student on their progress. These interviews often uncover important issues and assist

greatly with keeping the students focused on their progress.

Gradual introduction of academic challenges

The initial focus is to try and reconnect students with education and to provide them with positive educational experiences. Once the students feel comfortable in the program, and are comfortable with working as a team to assist with their progress, they start to gain more confidence in their abilities, and the focus can gradually centre more on their academic progress and the attainment of the appropriate certificate.

Summary

In concluding, it seems important to mention what does not work. Such aspects as inconsistency, the 'school maa'm' or 'wishy-washy' approaches, no follow-up of issues, and working in isolation all act against a successful program. Teachers need to be firm yet fair and be part of the students' team, working with them towards positive outcomes. For the students it is important to be aware of old habits, not to blame others, and to take responsibility for themselves. Students don't respond well in confined spaces, so it is important to have lots of active hands-on learning out of the classroom. In an adult education setting it is important to deal directly with the student rather than with the parents, and only discuss a student's progress with their permission.

Realistically, teachers cannot be everything to everybody, and need to set up and utilise assistance networks to deal with issues for which they are not trained. Good working relationships have been developed with local agencies that provide services to youth. However, considerable time and energy is spent 'corridor teaching', being available to the students and following up issues that have arisen.

It is at times very exhausting work, but at the same time is very rewarding and at the end, seeing the positive outcomes for so many young people encourages continued working in this field.

Julianne Krusche and Anna Morton are teachers in the CGEA youth program at the University of Ballarat. They have considerable experience in the development and delivery of further education courses, including those specific to the 15–19 age group.

Note

1. Jo Lange (educational consultant), *Promoting positive places to live, learn and work,* (03) 9314 8355, email *jolangeedtrain@ozemail.com.au*

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Open Forum

In this issue, Cathy Milesi shows how a keen team from Olympic Adult Education developed a scheme to help adults learn about that mysterious form of money management, online banking. And in tropical Queensland, Mary Brodie talks about the Peer Tutor Community Literacy Program, which provides the infrastructure for long-term, community-focused and culturally engaging literacy and numeracy support.

It figures—online banking as a literacy and numeracy resource

Background

Over the past 12 months a team of creative and very energetic people from Olympic Adult Education has been developing a resource for adult learners around the topic of online banking. The Online Banking Resource is an Adult Literacy Innovative Project funded by ANTA (Australian National Training Authority).

The idea for the resource resulted from student queries about online services, and in particular, online banking. Students had a range of questions on the topic. Was online banking safe to use? How did they go about banking online? What services are offered with online banking?

Many people reading this article might have similar questions. For people with literacy needs, the issues associated with banking online are even more complex. Not only do they require the technical skills to navigate a sophisticated banking website, but they also have to deal with copious amounts of text, advertisements, instructional material, and financial language. The online banking resource aims to empower adult literacy learners to make informed decisions about online banking and to give learners the skills and knowledge to bank online.

The resource

The resource includes both print and web-based components. There is a set of six booklets and a website at *www.onlinebanking.org.au*. The booklets and website can be used together or as stand-alone resources.

Both components of the resource cover the following topics:

- What is online banking?
- Getting started with online banking
- Security
- How to bank online
- Online banking—your rights
- Online banking—for and against.

Each topic is characterised by photos of a person who features in both the booklets and website. This provides a link between the two components of the resource and gives a human element to the very technical skill of online banking.

The booklets contain information about complex material written in simplified language appropriate for adult literacy learners. The content is presented under headings to assist reading and each booklet has a glossary of terms at the back. The booklets are suitable for CGEA Certificate I (2002–2006) or NRS level 3. They are an excellent introduction to the website and also come with a set of teacher notes.

The website complements the booklets and has interactive literacy and numeracy activities. The site has colourful graphics to maintain interest and clear navigation. Some text is accompanied by sound to help learners with their reading skills. Interactive language activities include true/false quizzes, a word find, a gap-fill exercise and jumbled words activity. There is also a bulletin board for students to post their thoughts about online banking and an email facility to send messages or feedback about the website.

The centrepiece of the site is the Simbank, or practice bank, where students can carry out simulated online transactions. The Simbank gives immediate response to transactions and balances are updated as in real life. Students can experiment with different income levels and types of bank accounts. The Simbank provides an excellent opportunity to practise numeracy skills and the site also has a special section for 'Maths for Banking'.
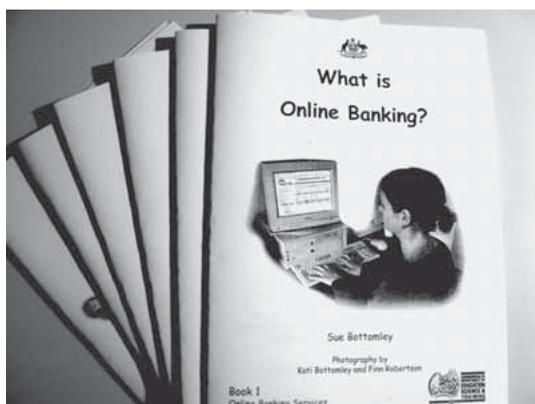
The website is suitable for CGEA Certificate 2 (2002–2006) or NRS level 3/4. The site also has links to teacher and learner resources.

The project team

The team consisted of three project workers:

- Sue Bottomley was the content writer for the booklets series. Sue is a well-known author in the field of adult literacy and her previous writing includes low-level literacy readers such as 'Sports', 'Spiders', 'Nature's Fury' and 'Gambling Matters'.
- Sue Chamberlain was the content writer for the website and the instructional designer. Sue has worked in adult literacy for many years and has extensive experience in online learning from both a teaching and learning aspect.
- Rachael Tempest was the multimedia designer for the website. Rachael has experience in website design for adult learners and has worked in both the ACE and tertiary sectors.

The development of the resource was a collaborative process involving intricate understanding of the project workers roles and their interdependence. There were many critical stages in the project when one worker could only proceed after another had completed a task. This meant regular and effective communication was essential. Project workers used email and phone calls to keep in touch, and in the earlier stages a web log was used by the website content writer and the multimedia designer. Project worker meetings were held monthly to keep the project on track.

A steering committee of four members directed the project and a reference group gave expert advice and guidance as the resource was developed. Members of the reference group included a representative from the National Australia Bank, a planning and marketing person from the Maroondah Credit Union, a financial counsellor from the northern region of Gambler's Help, a representative from the Consumer and Tenant Advice Service and an adult literacy consultant.

The website address for the Online Banking resource is *www.onlinebanking.org.au*. Booklets are available from Olympic Adult Education, phone (03) 9458 2711 or email *olympic@oae.vic.edu.au*

Cathy Milesi, who managed this project, is the e-learning coordinator at Olympic Adult Education. She has worked in adult education for 10 years, is an ESL teacher and also teaches adult language and literacy online. Cathy has been involved in several learning technology projects including Learnscope, NetOnline (a flexible learning network) and ACFE-funded projects.

Sharing the word—the Peer Tutor Community Literacy Program

Being literate gives an individual access to political and social power. Not being literate can exclude an individual from full participation in a community. This was the initial impetus for the Peer Tutor Community Literacy Program in Queensland.

Ongoing consultation within selected Indigenous communities, Indigenous representative bodies, registered training organisations, teachers and tertiary education groups in Queensland has reinforced this statement, and it is becoming increasingly relevant today, where so much of our communication requires a certain level of competence in Standard Australian English.

The current approach to adult literacy and numeracy programs in Queensland lacks coordination that effectively

supports the programs delivered by training providers to Indigenous communities, and does not cater for the communities' own specific adult literacy and numeracy needs. In most Indigenous communities, the individual training providers, other institutions, and industry all deal with the literacy needs of their community-based students/employees/clients as it applies to their own individual programs and organisations. They see this as the way to provide their clients with literacy and numeracy support.

However, this requires inputting human and material resources, much of which has to be brought in from outside the community. As a result of this approach, organisations are duplicating resources to achieve similar outcomes. Consultation regarding the effectiveness of the development and implementation of current adult literacy and numeracy

programs in Indigenous communities emphasises the need for ongoing, community-owned literacy and numeracy programs that will provide Indigenous communities with the opportunity to access, and control, their own numeracy and literacy requirements within a supportive framework.

An inclusive approach

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been subject to a systemic exclusion from literacy and educational opportunities, and a solution demands a similar systemic approach. By this, we mean developing a literacy infrastructure that supports learning. The Peer Tutor Community Literacy Program provides an infrastructure for long-term, community-focused and culturally engaging literacy and numeracy support, and proposes a network of peer tutors in remote, rural and urban townships throughout mainland Queensland and the Torres Strait Islands. For such an infrastructure to be successful, the local community needs to have real ownership of their learning site.

The National Indigenous English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (NIELLNS) has funded the Indigenous Studies Product Development Unit (ISPDU) at Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE to work with Indigenous communities and delivery teams across Queensland to implement this program.

The basis of this literacy and numeracy support program is the training of a pool of interested volunteers to tutor in the areas of literacy and numeracy. After training a pool of tutors, it is then possible to apply for additional private or public sector money to run literacy and numeracy activities,

depending on the needs of the community. The community owns the means to help their people achieve success. To achieve this, peer tutors need to be recruited and trained to develop a sustained presence within the community. The tutors need training, support and continued professional development. This would ensure that the learning was done locally and is supported by local people.

There are various models of implementation being trialled, and initially the peer tutor program will be imported into the community, but with increasing access to flexible delivery, peer tutors will begin to export individual experiences within the peer tutor network.

Model of the Peer Tutor Community Literacy Program

Communities select people who would like to be trained and supported as literacy tutors. The training will occur and can be ongoing and flexible (this needs to be negotiated between the community organisation and the training provider). These tutors then become the literacy support people in the community. They are the ones people can approach for guidance, support and literacy or numeracy tutoring. The tutors will also undergo professional development and be support by a centrally located coordinator.

An integral part of the support provided by the Indigenous Studies Product Development Unit (ISPDU) is the development of culturally engaging support material. Due to geographical remoteness, literacy and numeracy workers are not always able to observe literacy and numeracy tutoring strategies in practice.

Indigenous communities

Community-based tutors

Community-based tutor coordinator

Literacy teacher to provide ongoing professional development and support to the community-based tutor coordinator and to sit in a neutral organisation
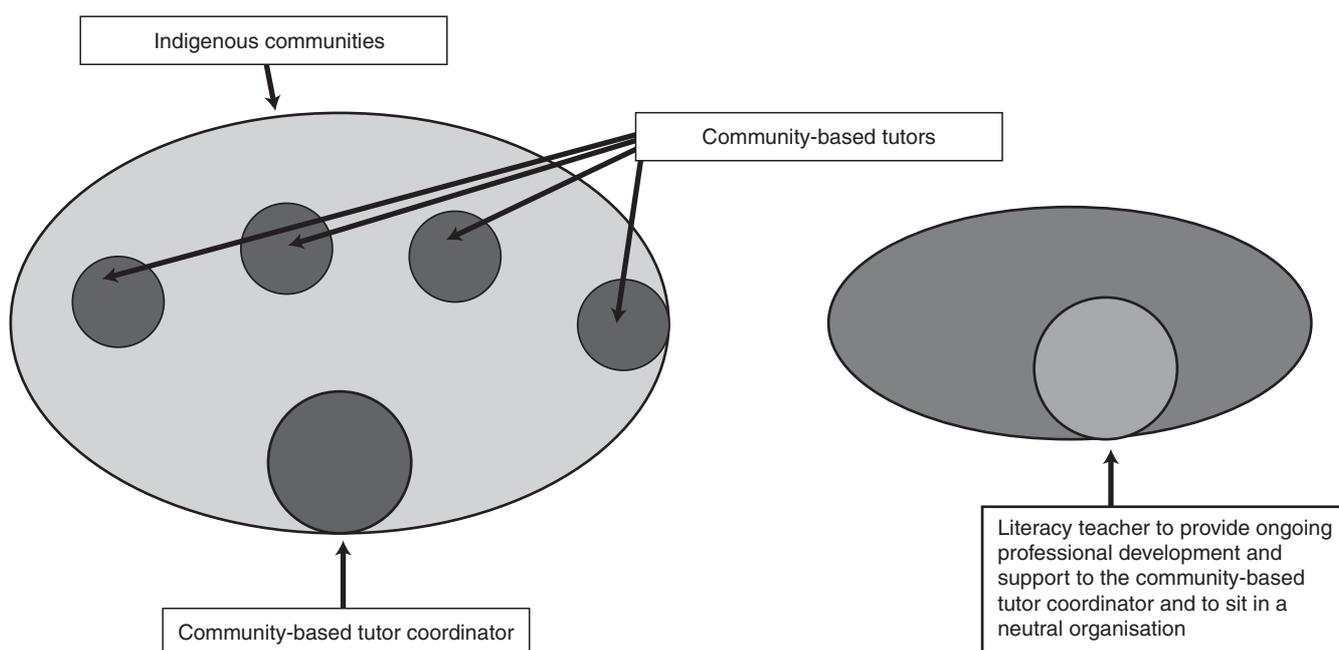
Foreign Correspondence

In Papua New Guinea, English is one of 820 languages. But as Glenys Waters and Audrey Grant explain, a multitude of languages is not the first challenge in spreading literacy.

Room to think—creating spaces for adult literacy in Papua New Guinea

In Papua New Guinea (PNG) for at least the past decade, a preoccupation with developing and implementing vernacular literacy programs in elementary school contexts—in both formal and non-formal settings—has taken attention away from adult literacy work. This is quite understandable given the cultural and linguistic diversity that exists in PNG, the massive work required to begin to implement the government's education reform instituted in the early 90s, and the fact that severely limited resources can only be spread so far. This paper gives three snapshots of starting points for reconceptualising literacy programming practices, thereby to focus on creating the spaces so desperately needed for adult literacy work in PNG, where 51.9 percent of the population is considered print illiterate.

Introduction

PNG is one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse nations in the world, with over 820 languages within its borders. The National Language Policy recognises English as the national language, and *Tok Pisin* and *Hiri Motu* as languages of wider communication. Since the early 90s education department language policies have also recognised the rights of children to undertake the first three years of their elementary schooling in the language of the community. This has not always been the case. From 1955 to 1991, policy dictated that the language of formal schooling was English and the use of community languages in classrooms or schoolyards was prohibited.

However, not all schooling in the past was in English. Some early mission schools and more recently community-based *tok ples* schools did develop and implement education programs that were conducted in the vernaculars. Also, in early colonial times many of the adult literacy programs run by Non Government Organisations were conducted in the vernacular. This was because missions and educators recognised the importance and effectiveness of teaching people to read and write in a language that they already spoke before expecting them to read and write in English, a foreign language.

Now that the initial push of getting communities to focus on developing materials, classrooms and teachers for vernacular elementary schools is lessening, some groups are again turning their attention back to the needs of the adults, because illiteracy rates remain worryingly high. But in the first decade of the 21st century, what should adult literacy programs look like? Let's consider this issue from three perspectives—learners' needs and aspirations, literacy and sustainable development, and literacies in an oral society.

1. Learners' needs and aspirations

In 1993, Felicitas Yagama felt burdened about the lifestyles of the women in the squatter settlements in Madang town. She shared her vision with her husband and a close friend and together they developed a program.

They successfully tendered and were allocated a big section of the town area on the foreshore to clear and clean. They invited the women to meet and discuss the project. The young, the old, the illiterate and the literate came. They divided into groups and did the work. Felicitas continues the story:

> Now the big question was, what to do with the money? We suggested a lot of things but one thing that always came to their mind as we were talking about it was, 'Can we go overseas?' A few days later after lots of talk they decided that we would go to the Philippines. So we made plans.

Felicitas didn't realise that most of these women couldn't read or write because she didn't know them well, and the women had found ways to cover this over and cope without print literacy. But when she distributed the passport forms they became troubled.

> They came to my house and I asked them, 'What's the problem?' And they said to me, 'Josie sent us to you because we can't sign our forms on the passport'. And I looked at them—their heads were down and I saw tears in their eyes. They were really frustrated that this was the thing they couldn't do.

So Felicitas helped them, one by one, to learn how to write their names and they went on their trip. Before we left PNG, at the airport…The grandchildren cried and hugged their mamas and their grandmothers. The best part of it was, these children, even the husbands and the relatives, they had never experienced traveling overseas. Yet, here were their illiterate grandmothers and mothers going! It was a big thing for them.

In the Philippines we visited the slums because the women were from the settlements themselves. We wanted to bring them out to see something of another country and then compare it to their country. God has blessed us with a beautiful country. But we do not appreciate it. The point I was trying to bring to them was that you leave your beautiful homes in the village, you come and settle in the urban settlements and then your children grow up and they go with the rascals (gangs), all these types of things. But you have been blessed with this country, with so many things we can use. So this was the purpose behind this trip.

They went through the trip. They saw poverty at its worst. They saw how the people lived. The children digging for food among the rubbish. And it really broke their hearts. The experience of the trip opened their eyes and their minds. It brought in the knowledge, that because they are blessed in this beautiful country, they can do something for themselves to raise the standard of their living within the community. It helped them to be industrious, generating income to raise their standard of living.

And because of their travel overseas, out of the country, they wanted to know how to read and write. That broke a barrier, the taboos that they have, their thinking that 'Oh, I'm too old, I'm a granny, it's too late to worry about reading and writing'.

When we went back home they said to me, 'And now we want to do school and learn to read and write. And I said, 'OK, the door's open, that's what I want'. The husbands didn't believe them, that they wanted to start a school. So the women hired this big truck to fill in the swamps at the settlement so that they could put up their own school building. They made the first classroom with big strong cardboard bought from the tobacco factory. They said, 'OK, we will make the building ourselves'. When they started doing it, the sons and the husbands came and helped them.

So they came and we started to teach them. They had a literacy committee that they elected themselves, and they paid for their own teachers because when they come to school they put 50 toea in the tin. That's for anything that is needed. So they did it themselves. Today these women are reading the Word of God. And they are enjoying it.

And they don't want to stop there. They want to learn to speak and read English. (July 2000, Waters 2001)
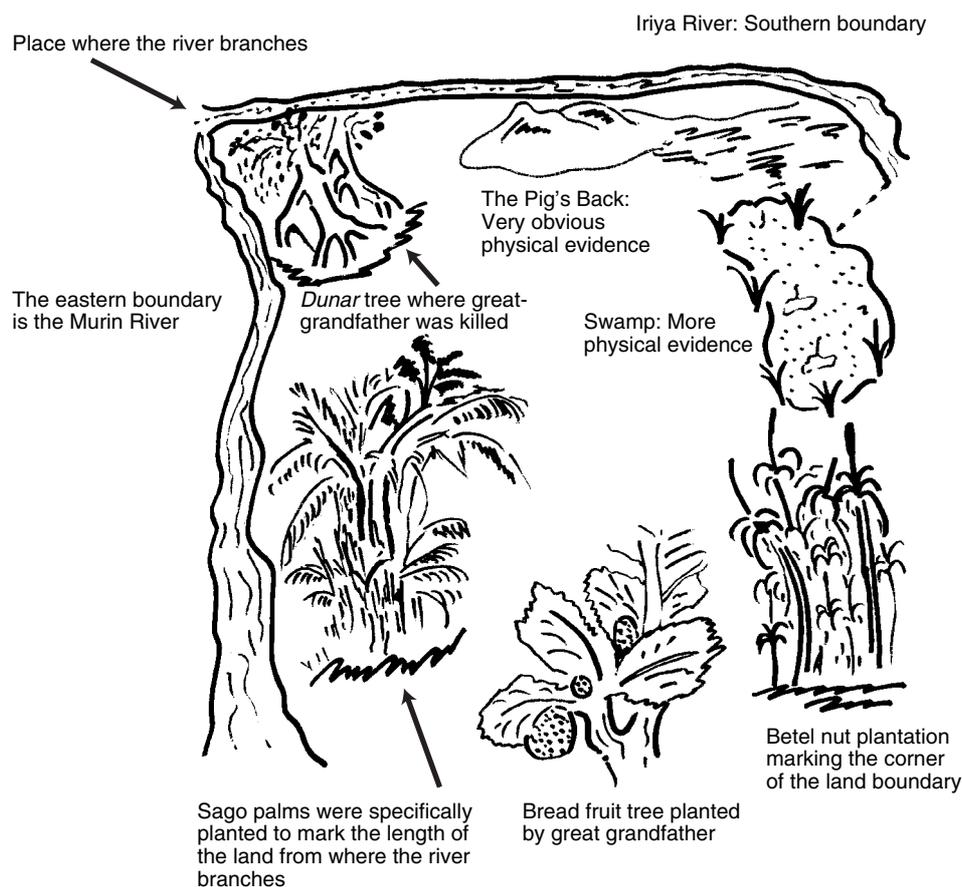
Felicitas's story demonstrates that in order for illiterate older women in PNG to see the need for making space for literacy in their lives, in this case both time spaces as well as a physical space, they need to become aware of where literacy can take them. And the literacies that they acquire need to become tools that can help them not only fulfil their initial aspirations but also spur them on to new places, opening up new aspirations. These aspirations are quite different to what has been traditionally considered good reasons why women should want to learn to read—reasons such as to improve family health, improve economic productivity, gain equality and democratic participation in local and national governance. It is important that literacy programs developed now allow learners' voices to determine the types of literacies and literacy practices they want to access and what will come first.

2. Literacy and sustainable development

The impact of global agendas is increasing in the local communities of PNG. Geographical remoteness and membership of the marginalised world no longer protects these communities because they are custodians of resources that fast capitalistic societies want—particularly rainforest resources and mineral resources. Thus conversations at the Pacific Area Literacy Consultation (July 2000, see note 1) kept returning to discussions of issues such as the impact of logging and mining on communities. How had community groups dealt with the issues and what role did literacy practices play in these processes? Were literacy practices being used in awareness-raising programs and in the interactions needed with outside systems and organisations?

The low level of community print literacies has meant that many communities and families are accessing the information they need to know through local literacy brokers—educated members of their language group who work in town but maintain strong links with and regularly visit their communities. Such people access the needed information using their literacy practices and in turn inform and educate the village community through quite powerful oral communication networks.

But participants at the consultation were hopeful that as a result of the education reform and the increased valuing of the learners community language, the literacy profile of PNG would change over the next 20 years as it has changed over the past 20 years. So the question became, what might literacy practices look like in the future? What literacy practices will be used and in what languages?

Pictorial evidence of land boundaries   © Caine Ruruk 2000

Labels within figure:
- Place where the river branches
- Iriya River: Southern boundary
- The Pig's Back: Very obvious physical evidence
- The eastern boundary is the Murin River
- *Dunar* tree where great-grandfather was killed
- Swamp: More physical evidence
- Betel nut plantation marking the corner of the land boundary
- Bread fruit tree planted by great grandfather
- Sago palms were specifically planted to mark the length of the land from where the river branches

Communities are realising that sustainable development of their resources will only occur if they take the responsibility away from outside companies and hold the reins themselves. In order to do this, conference participants agreed that a variety of literacies would be needed to plan and manage community-based enterprises. For planning purposes, for example, literacies would be needed for the writing and reading of funding proposals, obtaining licences, knowing about and adhering to government mining and logging polices. A range of economic literacies would be necessary to handle banking, payment of costs, investment of profits and so forth. Watchdog and arbitration committees would also use literacies to ensure that correct accountability practices had been followed and to resolve conflicts as to land ownership, sustainable environmental practices and in the case of forests—that patents and ownership rights would be retained by the owners of the land.

Caine Ruruk also demonstrated to the consultation how literacies could be used to record oral and geographical information in support of land ownership registrations. Above is a visual mapping of the oral stories of a particular area in his community. Each particular story could also be recorded and connections between this type of mapping and government maps could be explored.

The sustainable development contextual issues then, are putting a different face on literacy and demonstrate the need to open up different spaces for multiliteracies agendas. In these contexts it is not just a matter of people becoming literate or being proficient code breakers; it is vital that they are encouraged to read and write their life worlds, asking questions of it all, and working with their knowledge designs to redesign and transform situations that confront them and their communities.

3. Literacies in an oral society

The Pacific Area Literacy consultation spent much time discussing logging and sustainable development issues to a point where some expatriate practitioners were questioning whether this was development or literacy. They were looking for the explicit literacy connections. This was particularly the case during the discussions with the Angor men (from the Sepik Province, PNG) about their desire to start their own sawmill project rather than allow logging companies into their localities. 'Joe' had read a pamphlet on how to do this and was planning to return home and discuss the project with the community. But the spaces for literacy work in this potential project were unclear, and that was unsettling for some expatriates.

After the consultation I raised this issue with Rambai Keruwa, one of the PNG consultation participants. At the time we were discussing literacy practices in Kaugel communities. He commented:

> (Kaugel people) would communicate that information orally to others but they cannot go out there and read in front of others. It is something that you just don't do, except in church when the pastor reads from the scriptures.

If you read as part of a group discussion in the village, people would feel that you would not get enough participation on the part of the group. Their thinking is not focused just on what you are reading. They don't make the meaning in their heads as you read along. People are more comfortable if the presenter reads the information in his or her own time, digests it and then explains, in his own ways, the information that they want the people to know about.

There are probably other reasons we don't read out loud.

- You would shame those who can't read.
- They would think you were trying to show off your abilities to read when they cannot.
- The atmosphere does not permit that to happen, it is not normally done in the community.
- The group would not believe that what you read was necessarily something that was written on the page, but maybe it is coming out of your own thinking and they would question 'Is that what you say? Or did somebody else say it?'
- There is more credibility in discussing, explaining and interpreting something rather than just reading from a page (Keruwa, 2001).

Social factors limited how a literate person could use a printed text in order to inform a community and the place of the text would be quite different from similar events in Western contexts. In Western contexts we would expect the text to be central to a discussion of it, but for the Kaugel and the Angor this is not essential.

> When pastors…are reading the Scriptures either in *tokples* or in *Tok Pisin*, they will…read the passage, close the book and then talk around the issue and some minutes later they will come back to the points from the reading, trying to say it in the same words as they read it to the congregation. At that point, the congregation says he knows how to read and is able to interpret or tell us what is exactly in the book (Keruwa, 2001).

This snapshot challenges conceptions of what is a literacy event and what isn't, and how literacy would be realised and encouraged in oral societies. Expatriate literacy workers generally wish to see overt uses of literacy in people's daily lives. They tend to focus on what literacy can be for each individual and measure 'successful' literacy projects by how many individuals 'come through to literacy' or by the number of literacy instruction programs continuing for how many. Such things are seen as measures of a facilitative climate for the acquisition and retention of literacy (Street, 1995).

However, the constraints of predominantly oral societies mean that literacy practices will be different and more covert. Initially they will be facilitated by literacy brokers until there is a critical mass of semi-literate people in communities. 'Success' in such communities would be determined by evaluating how well literacy practices have been embedded into the culture, what people actually do with literacy, how extensive is the range of purposeful uses and how well literacy events are socially constructed.

Creating spaces for multiliteracies

The three snapshots discussed above come from the writer's experiences in PNG. They challenge literacy programmers in PNG to reconceptualise adult literacy work. They foreground the importance of developing programs with communities to create spaces for projects that address community needs and realities, and to do so in ways that build aspirations in participants and embed literacy practices in other significant community practices in relevant ways. While we can work with available designs of what adult literacy programs are like, there is also a need to work with communities and promote a redesigning of what adult literacy programming should be like in PNG today.

Spaces for the reconceptualisation of adult literacy are opening up. Having recognised the extreme urgency in PNG for adult literacy projects to be established, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), with the assistance of the Asia Development Bank (ADB), is currently implementing a pilot project to address the adult literacy needs in PNG. The ADB project design encourages the development of new links between literacy and DSWD personnel in order to evaluate existing adult literacy programs, envisage what adult literacy programs might be like in the future, and to identify and plan for the provision and development of essential resources. The project is creating a unique opportunity for the redesigning of how adult literacy work is done in PNG. It provides an opportunity to examine past adult literacy practice and to think about what places and spaces literacies do and can occupy in local communities in PNG, which are increasingly effected by global interests and externally imposed agendas.

It remains to be seen if this project's very narrow time constraints will allow the in-depth reconceptualising that

is needed in order to take seriously the issues raised in this paper, or if the default position, the way things have always been done, will stand unchallenged. A related challenge will be to enable adult literacy workers in PNG to find the potential spaces, and create the actual spaces, that involve people in literacy-related activities that are most useful in the various domains of their lives, sustaining the transformative actions they wish to undertake in their communities and in their changing worlds.

Glenys Waters has worked in vernacular literacy education in the Northern Territory (1978–1986) and in Papua New Guinea (1988–2003). She has helped various communities develop vernacular literacy programs for adults and children, worked as a literacy consultant within the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), taught vernacular literacy courses at provincial and national levels and conducted a research project to survey and evaluate the status of vernacular education programming in PNG. She has also been active in mentoring and conducting professional development workshops and courses for fellow literacy practitioners.

Dr Audrey Grant teaches and researches in literacy and adult education, and coordinates the Graduate Diploma ALBE and Master of Adult Education courses at La Trobe University. Her research interests include narrative practices, biography and literacy, experiential and transformative learning in multi-storeyed contexts— personal, social, cross-cultural and global contexts. Audrey has conducted interview-based research in China, Papua New Guinea, and Africa, as well as in England, America and Australia.

Note
The consultation was led by Shirley Brice Heath, Audrey Grant and Glenys Waters and was held at Ukarumpa in the Eastern Highlands Province of PNG. There were over 40 participants representing 14 nationalities who were working in PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu in vernacular literacy with NGOs and government organisations.

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Beside the Whiteboard

Australia-wide, educators are grappling with the new training packages and seeking ways to help students to improve language, literacy and numeracy skills while they are studying. In Western Australia, VET teachers and adult literacy teachers have been given the opportunity to combine their talents in a team-teaching program called Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills (CAVSS).

Michael Chalk, from *Fine Print*, talks to Jo Camilleri, who worked at Kimberley TAFE in Broome until recently. While there, Jo began one of these progams with Richard Agar.

How did you come to be involved with the CAVSS project? And how did you feel when you were first offered the role?
When training packages were first rolled out I, like other adult literacy teachers, became increasingly concerned about the added literacy demands looming for vocational programs. The WA Department of Training developed this initiative at the time to support the literacy needs of vocational learners. I jumped at the chance to take part in the pilot when the course came out.

What was your focus area and where were you both working?
Richard was one of the first VET teachers to take up the offer to pilot the program. He was teaching tourism (Cultural Guiding—ATSI) at remote Indigenous out-stations. He'd already developed the program in a way that it didn't rely too heavily on literacy and was based on an action-learning model. He summed up his learners' biggest challenge as communication—especially engaging with tourists! English was a second or third language to his students who mainly spoke Kriol and Aboriginal English so this was the area we focused the program.

This was quite a unique situation. The learners were remote Aboriginal family groups who were interested in establishing their own tourism ventures. They had a fountain of knowledge about their country, culture and heritage and had the most pristine locations to work with so you'd think Richard's job was already done before he started. The thing was, not many of them had ever been on a holiday or experienced tourism first hand. The learning process needed a complete paradigm shift before the concept of tourism could really be explored.

Richard had established his training program based around bringing his students in from their remote stations for blocks of holiday, where they could experience first hand what the tourism game was all about. The classroom became the BBQ area at the resort or the campfire at the homestead where the experiences of the day were unpacked and related back to the desired outcomes of the training program.

Back at their communities, he would bring 'volunteer tourists' (friends, relatives, backpackers) for the learners to engage with and practice their products—a crabbing tour, damper making, a bushwalk in search of natural foods, whatever!

I tagged along on the holidays and delivered my program concurrently with Richard's.

My focus was to work on increasing each individual's oral communication skills and to unpack the typical communication style of guides. We also worked through critical literacy of tourism marketing material.

Tell us a bit about how your team-teaching worked? How did you manage the processes of working together—what did you both learn from the whole experience?
The main thing to keep in mind was it wasn't my program—I was there to assist Richard's program. Richard used to plan blocks ahead of time and always had a focus that he wanted reinforced. The first block was just about getting used to being a tourist—the next a focus on the behind the scenes of tourism products, next an introduction to the industry as a whole and the agencies that support tourism, and so on. Together we'd also set goals for individual learners that had to do with refining their interpersonal and communications skills, and mainly their confidence overall to participate in the program and engage with tourists.

Once our goals were set, it was a manner of unfolding the action learning process. Delivering reality-based training means you often need to change plans and go with the flow. Add the complexities of accommodating the varied traditional and cultural needs of the students and we were basically making things up as we went along. This regular cycle of reflection, planning, injection of new material and action soon became everyone's business with learners engaged in shaping the path of their training. I love that 'think and react quickly' stuff you can do when your ideas can bounce off someone else on the go.

I guess the biggest thing I learnt was as an observer to the learning process—the complexities of what's going on behind the scenes and how constantly learners can be grappling with language or cultural challenges.

What about the learners—who were they and what did they get out of it?

The learners were really appreciative of the extra support to get through the program. Although at times I focused more attention on particular learners, my role was viewed as being there to support the whole program. The learners were a really mixed bunch made up from two family outstations from the Dampier Peninsula. There was an age range from 15 to 55 and quite varied levels of previous training and employment. Virtually all of the participants were related to each other and lived on one of the two remote settings.

What were your overall impressions of the project? Did you achieve what you expected?

The project was a great success—well, we completed it—and we all enjoyed ourselves, and the tourism ventures are up and running. Our training expectations were achieved but as for the bigger picture, it's hard to say if we did achieve what we expected because things kept changing along the way.

What was the best aspect of working together?

Sharing…really! In a remote teaching setting, you are usually the only trainer out there and you have nobody.

What was the most challenging part of the program?

Getting to know the learners so well meant you were also aware of the bigger issues they face daily and it's hard not to get caught up.

Would you recommend any changes to the scheme?

Some programs need more support than is allowed for at present.

Would you recommend other states take up similar schemes for dealing with literacy issues in VET delivery?

Yeah—I think CAVSS was the best VET program I was involved in. It was real engagement with learners, addressing basic education needs without compromise. It also addresses the adult literacy stigma—acknowledging that we all have varied learning needs, and providing a mechanism to address them.

Thanks very much, Jo!

To ensure Indigenous people, particularly in remote and rural areas, have equal access to these models of literacy and numeracy tutoring strategies, the ISPDU has developed three videos to support Indigenous people's aspirations to break down the literacy and numeracy barriers in their communities. These videos have been funded by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) Adult Literacy National Project funding, and are packed full of learning strategies and information essential for literacy and numeracy workers. They are demonstrated in detail by Indigenous actors and all videos follow four sets of tutors and their students to discover the many different strategies you can apply to increase literacy and numeracy skills. The videos cover activities such as map reading, making telephone calls and writing letters, role playing, reading the newspaper and making posters. Strategies include skimming, scanning, cloze activities, code-switching, brainstorming, estimation, mind mapping, measurement, calculations and numbers, to mention just a few of the dozens of strategies that are performed in an easy to follow, step-by-step process. Based on principles of best practice, the videos are designed to support people undertaking tutor training, but they can be used by anybody supporting the literacy needs of students.

The Peer Tutor Community Literacy Program is aimed at developing and implementing within Indigenous communities an explicit pedagogy for inclusion and access that enhances competencies in numeracy and literacy genres for personal, scholastic and vocational uses.

Mary Brodie has worked at the Indigenous Studies Product Development Unit at Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE for the past four years. Much of her time has been spent investigating literacy and numeracy development and access to quality literacy support for Indigenous peoples. Before coming to the ISPDU Mary lived and worked in rural and remote Aboriginal communities in Northwest Queensland.