

this issue:

Reform in prisoner education in  
Victoria: the legacy of Joseph Akeroyd  
by Ron Wilson

Literate environments, literacy  
demands and adult education  
courses: stories from PIAAC  
by Elizabeth Gunn

2020 vol: 43 # 3

*fine*  
print



valbec



a journal of adult english language and literacy education

## Publication Details

Fine Print is published by the Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council Inc. (VALBEC). The opinions expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Fine Print editorial group or VALBEC.

Fine Print is the registered journal of VALBEC:  
ISSN No: 0519-3978

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Cover image: Eel path at Birrarung Marr.  
Artwork by Vicki Couzens, Lee Darroch & Treahna Hamm.

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Layout: Sarah Tuke

Printing: Melbourne Polytechnic Printroom

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VALBEC acknowledges the financial support of the ACFE Board



# Editorial

Welcome to the final issue of *Fine Print* for 2020. This has been a year when we all experienced restrictions to our freedom of movement, some of us for the first time in our lives. Did this make us more empathetic towards incarcerated members of our community? In this issue, Ron Wilson delves into the history of prisoner education in Victoria and finds that rehabilitation was a much earlier focus than we might think.

Continuing the thread of prisoner education, in Practical Matters Eudi Blakeman offers an inspiring glimpse of her approach to educating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners and Ron Wilson returns in Open Forum to show how a play written and performed by prisoners, with the help of prison education staff and the Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company, enabled those prisoners to break free of the assumptions that had tethered them in place.

Also in this issue, Elizabeth Gunn interviews David Mallows about critically analysing large-scale datasets to reveal stories about literacy practices and environments which can, in turn, lead to better-informed course design. An example of such a course, designed to meet the needs of a specific cohort, is offered by Liane Hughes in Practical Matters and in Open Forum, Christine Wallis discusses a new approach to professional learning for educators in the pre-accredited sector.

The challenges and sometimes unexpected benefits of remote learning and teaching have been at the forefront of our minds this year. "The world is crazy time" is a suitable epitaph for 2020, coined by one of Dale Pobega's students. Dale shares his students' perceptions of online learning and prompts us to question how the experience might change our approach to education in the future. Susan Thompson shares some observations from student opinion surveys in Western Australia and Manalini Kane offers ideas for using cooking as the focus of online learning.

In What's Out There, Linno Rhodes and Amelia Trompf offer reviews of two very different texts and the *Fine Print* editorial committee make recommendations for your summer reading, listening and viewing.

Thank you for travelling with us through 2020. We wish you all the best for a healthy and happy summer break and look forward to joining you for new adventures in 2021.

As always, please contact me to comment on this issue of *Fine Print* or to propose a future article: [fineprintvalbec@gmail.com](mailto:fineprintvalbec@gmail.com)

Deryn Mansell

**The Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council (VALBEC) aims to lead the adult literacy field through identifying issues of importance to practitioners and facilitating positive change. This is achieved through networking, professional support, the sharing of information and the promotion of best practice.**

# Reform in prisoner education in Victoria: the legacy of Joseph Akeroyd

by Ron Wilson

Victoria has often been lauded for its unique approach to implementing and managing education programs within its state prisons. While the formalisation of the state's prison and juvenile justice education services were recorded from the start of 1954, the initiative commenced many years before under the inspiration of Joseph Akeroyd, Inspector General of Victoria's penal system (1924–1947). This article will survey the key phases in Victoria's prisoner education reforms through history with a particular focus on the legacy of Joseph Akeroyd.

Braithwaite (1999) and Semmens (1992) noted a lack of clear delineation at any one time showing a definitive transition from one stage or one era into another. In fact, analysis revealed that distinctive themes emerged then faded before re-emerging over time. Each analyst – Blake (1973) for the education perspective, Gehring (1993) for the world-wide corrections education perspective and Semmens and Braithwaite for the prison-focused perspectives – held slightly different views on the emergence and receding of particular themes with questions remaining about any one specific theme ever disappearing. However, five broad phases can be identified: retribution; reformation; rehabilitation; reintegration and restorative justice.

## 1. Retribution

The role and practice of delivering education and training programs in Australia, and particularly Victoria, battled with the prevailing struggle of understanding the role and function of the prison ever since prisons were first established. Both Braithwaite (1999) and Semmens (1992), albeit independently, sought to classify the dominant themes describing the perceived prevailing function of the justice system in Australia, including the role of prisons, over time. They both adopted a similar framework to emphasise the roles expected of prison at given times throughout history with both mapping the evolution of the prison function (and hence the transition) through reform from one era to another.

The first era both Braithwaite and Semmens regarded was the era of retribution. During this period in the mid 1800s, the function of the prison was primarily seen as a symbolic and actual tool of punishment for criminal behaviour.

According to Braithwaite and Semmens, the era was characterised by regular hangings and flogging. This era contrasted markedly with the subsequent era of reformation where prisoners were put to work as a form of punishment. The intent was to expose criminals to people of good example in an effort to facilitate change in the individual.

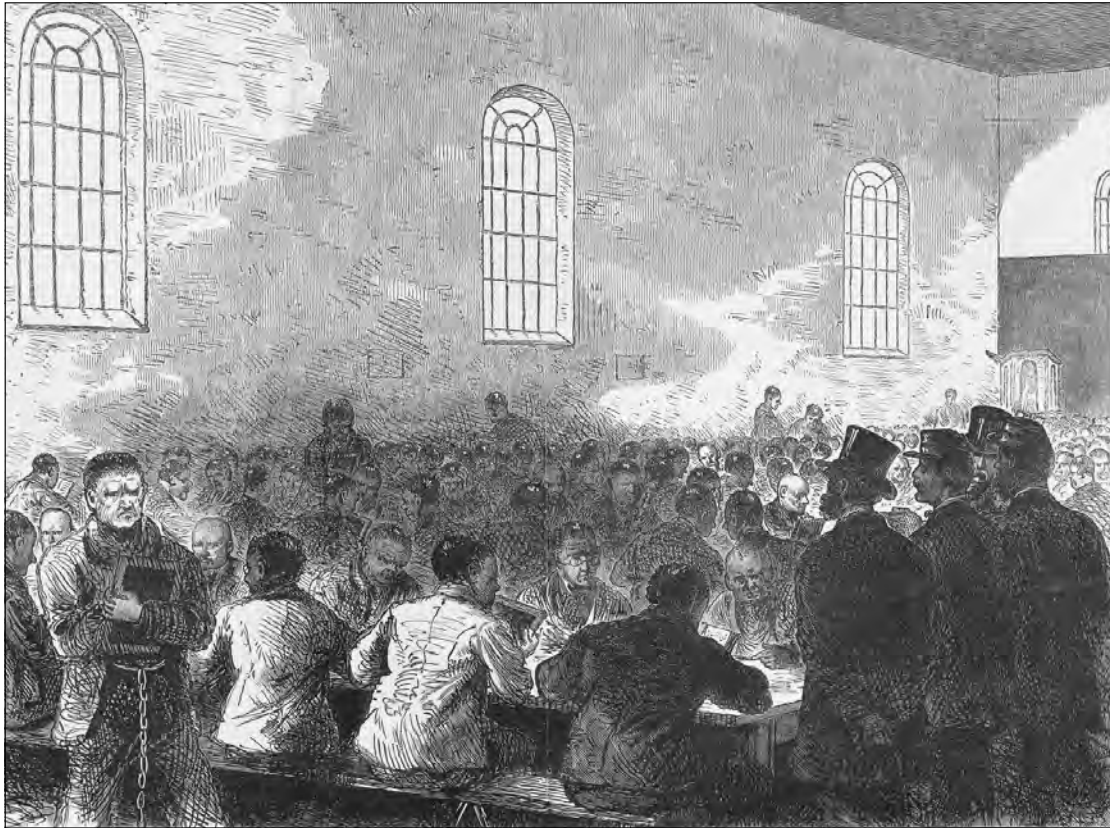
In his book *Vision and Realisation*, Blake (1973) identified three phases of prison education development in the Victorian prison system from 1858 until the late 1940s. The first phase marked the American Pentonvillian's great influence on the early Melbourne penal programs (1844–1853) indicated by the emergence of the penitence and reformatory approach. Prisoners were physically separated from peers and exposed to "good influence and regular worship" (Armstrong, 1980). From 1857 until 1924, prison education delivered by chaplains failed to elicit any recorded debate within education, prisons or public arenas. In fact, funding was completely withdrawn for teachers after 1890 due to the depression (Blake, 1973). It is recorded that allowances were made in the prison budgets for books and some secular instruction provided by the chaplains. The emphasis on prisoner education in Victoria reflected the international trends identified by Gehring (1993) regarding prisoner education entering a hiatus in terms of activity, funding and debate.

## 2. Reformation

unlike the trends in the United States and the United Kingdom, the second phase commenced in 1924 when the significance of prisoner education enjoyed a resurgence following Joseph Akeroyd's appointment as Inspector General in Victoria.

Lynn and Armstrong (1996) identified that the second phase under Akeroyd's administration witnessed a new focus on prisoner education and training. They found that "...if prisoners could be reformed, it would be through reformatory treatment of which education was the cornerstone" (Lynn & Armstrong, 1996, p.231).

It is important to note the commitment to prisoner education or training was enacted in legislation in Victoria during this period. In 1928, the Victorian State Government



**"The Prisoners' School" a wood engraving in *The Australasian Sketcher*, 1873.**  
State Library Victoria [www.slv.vic.gov.au](http://www.slv.vic.gov.au)

reinforced the commitment to prisoner education and training in the *Gaols Act of 1928* which authorised the Inspector General to provide trade or vocational training for prisoners. Prisoner training was implemented with an expectation that prisoners would conform by establishing good work habits that would see them returned to the community as reformed characters.

### **Who was Joseph Akeroyd?**

Joseph Akeroyd was appointed Inspector General of Victoria's penal system in January 1924 after an illustrious career as a teacher and inspector in the Victorian school system. He also served in the Australian Infantry Forces in France in the First World War. His appointment, which finished in 1947 and is still regarded as the longest serving senior bureaucrat term in Victoria's corrections system, spanned the tumultuous period between two world wars and included the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Examination of Akeroyd's diaries, private papers, official reports and newspaper articles of the time expose a legacy of remarkable yet unheralded prisoner education reforms introducing a treatment-based approach to prison and prisoner management<sup>1</sup>. While history attributes many

prison education reforms to his successors (particularly Alex Whatmore), it was revolutionary planning at the time represented through Akeroyd's private and public battles that set the platforms for many reforms that are still enshrined in contemporary practice (Wilson, 2014).

### **Akeroyd's reforms**

#### **Education for prisoners**

The first area of reform was the formalisation of education programs for prisoners. Akeroyd focused on identifying the educational, social and employability needs of prisoners (particularly young prisoners) and introduced structured schooling experiences to help address these needs. Akeroyd introduced initiatives prioritising prisoner access to education and training programs within classroom settings as well as in the prison industry workplaces where he also ensured there was a focus on training aligned to prisoner case plans. While there has been evidence in earlier periods in Victoria's penal history of incidental and ad hoc schooling practices taking place, Akeroyd's approach provided the first formalised approach to planning and implementing prisoner education programs based on the needs of prisoners.

### **Education for staff**

The second area of reform was the formalisation of education for prison staff. This initiative was driven by Akeroyd's strong desire to ensure that all resources within prison operations were focused on the prison as an educational institution. Within this goal, Akeroyd believed in the need to have educated prison staff to carry out the roles he wanted them to play in supporting prisoner reform. While this drive to raise prison staff education standards caused conflict within staff and management relationships over the span of Akeroyd's appointment, it is evident that this is the first attempt within the Victorian prison system to formalise prison staff qualifications and set standards for promotion based on educational qualifications rather than on seniority.

### **Case planning**

Akeroyd also directly led reform in a range of prison management practices. This was particularly evident in the introduction of prisoner case studies and prisoner classification. The focus on positivist theory underpinned prison and prisoner management policy and practices that paved the way for these reforms. Akeroyd established and modelled the practice of writing detailed case studies including formal psychological testing and structured observations of male, female and young prisoners' behaviours in order to identify problems and map solutions to address these problems. Akeroyd regularly referred to what he considered to be the use of scientific methodologies to provide rigour in collecting and analysing data. To him, penology was based on the principles of teaching and the application of the "way of the psychologist" was the core to his approach to reform prison and prisoner management policy and practice from a punitive to a treatment orientation.

### **Classification**

The accumulation of this information assisted Akeroyd to further explore causes of criminality in individuals and Akeroyd's middle and later years witnessed his growing interest in classifying types of psychological attributes with particular criminal behaviours. The classification of the various behaviours gave an explanation to authorities, the public and prisoners alike of the reason for individual behaviours and hence further reinforced Akeroyd's authority to assert treatment regimens to address these behaviours. Through this process, Akeroyd extended his capability to inform and influence the thinking of government, community agencies and the community at large through his radio interviews with

the aim of reducing offending and supporting improved community understanding.

### **Allied reforms**

The establishment of the Melbourne University Centre for Criminology, the first such institution in the world which devoted itself to the study of criminology (Finnane, 2006), was of important assistance to Akeroyd's initiatives. This Centre authenticated the development of knowledge of crime, criminality and penology and provided an authoritative vehicle for carrying the positivist message through academic, government policy and public forums.

### **Influencing government and informing community**

While it was evident that Akeroyd was one of many involved in the consolidation of criminology as an important policy advisory channel to the Victorian Government at the time, it was also evident that Akeroyd was himself instrumental in connecting the wider community to the various criminological perspectives. He did this by bringing debate to the wider community through his annual reports, radio presentations and public discussion in the newspapers.

As an educationalist, Akeroyd used the annual reports to bring his own learning of criminological, psychological and sociological issues to the attention of government with the express purpose to inform and educate. Perhaps Akeroyd's strategy was to indirectly influence policy makers, judiciary and influential public servants through helping to sway public opinion. Regardless, it appears that Akeroyd was also keeping to his original calling as a school teacher by using every opportunity to educate not only his students and staff but also the community as a whole.

### **The treatment versus punishment paradox**

Akeroyd clearly founded his prison and prisoner management approach on his understanding of the principle of scientific inquiry and he applied this methodology at every opportunity. He actively encouraged a rigorous approach to all components of treatment of prisoners and he appeared to learn from the prisoners' life experiences to give him clues to understanding the phenomenon of criminality. It was through this practice that Akeroyd was recorded as being pro punishment (*Western Australian*, 17 March 1950). His diaries and personal papers clearly claimed his opposition to corporal punishment. However, as required in his role, he was expected to oversee the implementation of both corporal and capital punishments as sentenced by the courts.

Akeroyd could not overturn the political and legal pressures of the conservatist and classicist drivers' focus on punishment, so the only way he could accommodate these pressure was to turn these events into learning experiences. He exemplified this in his practice of personally interviewing prisoners at points throughout their sentences, and for those inflicted with corporal punishment, recording their reflections after the event. Akeroyd also interviewed some of the general prison population seeking their reflection after an execution took place. He used these interview processes to enhance his understanding of the nature of criminal thinking as well as using these experiences as a test of prisoner and young offender learning from key events in prison life.

### 3. Rehabilitation

The third phase emerged post-Akeroyd when former teachers Alex Whatmore and later Eric Shade were appointed Inspectors General of Prisons. Prisoner education remained a priority under their stewardship while, as Gehring argues, the prisoner education activity remained stagnant in the rest of the western world during the Second World War and the Cold War.

Whatmore, who was appointed Inspector General in 1947, built on the connections established by his predecessor, Akeroyd, by encouraging the formalisation of school operations within prisons which resulted in the state education authority assuming responsibility for education in prison settings. Semmens (1999) acknowledged Whatmore's era (the 1950s) as one of rehabilitation in Victoria's prison system. The priority was to enable prisoners to leave prison with more skills than when they entered.

In 1954 each prison and juvenile (or youth) justice facility was registered as a public school operating within and under the auspice of the Victorian Education Department. Programs and staffing were fully funded through the special services branch of the Education Department. This approach was not replicated anywhere else in Australia, let alone in the western world.

Whatmore appointed Eric Shade as the first Chief Education and Training Officer and he would later take over the role as Director of Prisons (the successor role to Inspector General). His succession cemented a period where educationalists took on strong leadership in prison organisation and prison management. This was an era which witnessed a concerted focus on rehabilitation in prisons as well as the interplay between an emphasis on

basic education skills on one hand and focus on work skills on the other. The resulting competition witnessed many conflicts of priority within prison management decision making from the 1950s until the 1990s (Biles, 1977).

In keeping with the directions commenced under Akeroyd, Biles reported that prisoners were administered a set of psychological tests upon arrival. "This is in accord with the principle of not only satisfying the needs for education but in also helping to indicate the range of needs that exists in each man" (Biles, 1977, p 205). However, not all parties appeared committed to the new directions or, at least, held widely differing views on how this accord would evolve. From 1925 until the 1960s, a conflicted understanding of the various roles and functions emerged between education staff and custodial staff, seemingly in response to ideological differences between their roles within the prison system. Indeed, many issues emanated from the second phase of correctional education reform which coincided with significant change in prison management reform initiated under Akeroyd's tenure.

### 4. Reintegration

Gaining prominence in the mid to late 1970s, the penultimate era, reintegration, considered prisoners as part of society and actively engaged prisoners in activities linking them to the broader community (Semmens, 1992).

It is noted that the Victorian approach to have each prison registered as a formal education institution and staffed and resourced through state education funds was unique in Australia. Biles (1978) outlined that in other Australian jurisdictions, teachers were generally seconded to the respective correction department to deliver programs in the various prisons. Biles provided an overview of different types of programs offered to prisoners (such as language, literacy and numeracy and other academic pursuits; vocational skills; recreation programs; and pre-release programs) he did provide an indirect reference which could indicate some criticism of the Victorian school-based approach at the time. Biles argued that it is important for prison education to be seen differently from school education on the basis that "...prison programs are not directly comparable to those provided for children in schools" (p94). Biles' sentiments were echoed in both the Collins Report (1984) and the Blackburn Report (1984) which recommended the move of responsibility and management of prisons education from the schools division of the Victorian Education

Department to the adult education TAFE (Technical and Further Education) sector and marked the evolution of a fourth phase.

This fourth phase landmarked the importance of education in prisons by framing the prisoner's right to access education under the *Corrections Act of 1986*. Again, Victoria held a unique position to all other states and territories of Australia by formalising prisoners' rights to access education under statute. The change also reflected a shift in focus from merely providing basic skills to aligning the education and training needs of prisoners with the emerging labour market requirements of the contemporary Victorian and Australian economy. It resulted in shifting the responsibility for prison education and training from the state school system to Victoria's TAFE system (Semmens, 1999; Simmons and Wilson; 1992; Penaluna, 1992; Wilson 1993). While the structural alignment has remained consistent until now, there were interesting shifts in focus on the purpose of providing education and training programs to addressing prisoner criminogenic behaviours as a critical function as well as supporting employability skills for release (Bearing Point Review, 2000).

## 5. Restorative justice

The final era is the era of restorative justice. Restorative justice views crime as more than breaking the law – it also causes harm to people, relationships, and the community. Under these terms a just response must address those harms as well as the wrongdoing.

The fifth and current phase witnessed a major policy shift from previous unique Victorian prisoner education management approaches by transferring the funding for adult offenders' programs from the education department to the Department of Justice (now Department of Justice and Community Safety), and the funding for youth justice programs to the Department of Human Services (now Department of Health and Human Services). This significant shift then facilitated the process for tendering for education and training services to be delivered to offenders. In the adult sector this shift transferred the responsibility for defining the types and scope of education and training programs required to the correctional services. This aligns practices to the other states in Australia and also to practices elsewhere in the western world, but it also breaks the unique Victorian model of prisoner education management established in 1954 (Wilson, 2014).

## Conclusion

History recorded several markers where Victoria provided a unique and world leading approach to planning, implementing and evaluating prisoner and offender education. These markers included legislative commitment to the rights of prisoners to access education, alignment of policy and practice with educational policy and practices available to the wider Victorian adult education community and the training of staff to teach and work in prison settings. The challenges remain clearly to maintain this impetus and ensure all prison education practitioners are kept apprised of emerging trends arising from current education and criminological research

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**Ron Wilson has been involved in education and vocational training for over 35 years with broad experience in a range of teaching and management positions. He completed a PhD in Management (RMIT), building on his master's degree in Educational Management and Leadership. Ron has undergraduate degrees in Arts (Social Sciences), Education (Physical Education), a Post Graduate Diploma in Special Education, and a Diploma in Teaching (Primary). He is a member of the Adult Community and Further Education Board and President of the Australasian Corrections Education Association.**

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> These sources include the diaries of Joseph Akeroyd held by the Public Records of Victoria (PROV) and the Annual Reports of the Inspector General of Penal Establishments. Full details are recorded in Wilson (2014).

# Literate environments, literacy demands and adult education courses: stories from PIAAC

by Elizabeth Gunn

**When was the last time you sat down for a coffee and chat with colleagues about the findings from the OECD PIAAC (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies) Survey of Adult Skills? What?! “Not lately”, I hear you say! Discussions about PIAAC don’t happen very often; we’re more likely to swap stories about students’ progress and the ever-changing literacy and numeracy (LN) patterns of everyday life.**

The [PIAAC] Survey measures adults’ proficiency in key information-processing skills – literacy, numeracy and problem solving – and gathers information and data on how adults use their skills at home, at work and in the wider community. This international survey is conducted in over 40 countries/economies and measures the key cognitive and workplace skills needed for individuals to participate in society and for economies to prosper (OECD, n.d.).

Reflecting on diverse LN practices is how educators engage with the field; it’s how we experience, imagine and understand increasing demands for LN skills in different literate environments. And, in the time of COVID-19, LN educators are having to respond to increasingly complex literacy demands alongside learners and other community members. Accordingly, we understand the necessity for relevant, professionally taught literacy courses. This is backed up by evidence that LN courses invigorate lifelong learning and stimulate uptake of further education (Reder, 2014a; 2014b; 2015).

Analysing large datasets such as PIAAC might be an unfathomable process to some. Nevertheless, PIAAC, like its predecessor IALS (International Adult Literacy Survey), wields significant influence on global LN policy landscapes. This influence has been criticised for skewing local education ecologies and curricula (Hamilton, 2001; 2017; Farrell, 2015; Evans, 2016). Farrell and Corbel (2017) find there is a gap between the literacy skills surveyed in PIAAC and the skills practised in contemporary workspaces. Nevertheless, despite the contentious nature of large-scale datasets, we cannot hide from the fact that they are ‘powerful knowledges’ (Evans, 2016) that, when scrutinised constructively, can influence the LN field in helpful ways.



**David Mallows is Principal Teaching Fellow in the Department of Culture, Communication and Media, Institute of Education, University College London and has published extensively on adult literacy and numeracy.**

## **An interview with David Mallows**

David Mallows is an adult literacy educator and researcher who has uncovered some interesting stories about literacy and numeracy practices from PIAAC data over the years. He was to be a keynote at the 2020 ACAL Conference in Canberra before COVID-19 put a halt to the proceedings. Although critical of PIAAC in some respects, David sees value in the stories it reveals when researchers consider its data thoughtfully. His method is to look at the data alongside qualitative research about what people do with literacy in everyday life (Mallows & Litster, 2016). He has come to realise that many everyday literacy ‘demands’ are missing from courses that focus on abstracted skills such

as doing a reading comprehension or solving an equation. Such tasks, while good for generating assessment data, are not useful in everyday life. It is *practices* – people’s everyday literacy demands – which are relevant in people’s literate lives. Literacy practices are part of large, ever-changing social movements and technological networks (Farrell, Newman & Corbel, 2020). All elements of LN – practices, environments and skills – should be given weight in literacy policy considerations.

In conversation with me earlier this year, David used the example of libraries as powerful contexts of adult literacy practices saying,

They’re part of the environment. So, if you take a library out of the environment, the literate environment is poorer. More importantly, your ability as a policy maker to intervene in that environment is greatly reduced. And you therefore have to just put on courses and desperately try to attract people to these courses because you’ve removed your more natural, organic route to learning by taking out the library.

With Anke Grotlüschen and Steve Reder (both former ACAL Conference keynote speakers), and John Sabatini, David wrote an OECD working paper (2016) which comprehensively analysed the PIAAC data on adults with low literacy and numeracy proficiency. Here David speaks about his collaboration with Grotlüschen and Reder, and the insights that PIAAC revealed to them about community literacy practices when they looked closely at the PIAAC data.

**To start our conversation, I asked David how he came to work on PIAAC data:**

I was working at the Institute of Education for the NRDC, which was the National Research and Development Centre for Literacy and Numeracy in the United Kingdom, which had been going since about 2002<sup>1</sup>. NRDC was the national body that carried out research and then tried to turn it into practice. The slogan was ‘Generating knowledge and turning it into practice’. So it was meant to connect practice, research and particularly policy – we were funded directly by the government – and so we were sort of responsible for engaging with PIAAC, even though we weren’t involved at all in the English development of PIAAC, of the questionnaire or the testing – there were other bodies that were seen as more influential on government at the time. So, we were *observers* of PIAAC. And because of the work we’d been doing at NRDC since 2002, we had a very strong European network.

**How did Stephen Reder’s focus on social literacy practices help you understand literacy skills?**

At NRDC we worked on large scale surveys around adult learning or adult literacy work together with European partners, one of whom was Anke Grotlüschen, who was with ACAL last year. And also, Professor Steve Reder of Portland State University whose work has become increasingly influential because he’s had a consistent idea for a long time, and he’s just found evidence everywhere to support this idea. And this idea is really simple; that we need to think much more about what people *do* with their literacy rather than what they *can* do. And that is the practices versus skills argument. And [Reder] gathered evidence from a longitudinal study<sup>2</sup> that showed that when people were in courses, that courses *did* improve their skills. But also, when people join courses and they left courses later on, they also [further] improved their skills. So, there was something happening that wasn’t within the course, and Reder hypothesized and then showed lots of evidence that it was the fact that people’s practices were changed by participation in the course and they were *maintained* when they left the course. So, if they moved to another city or left the course or got sick, they’d still changed the way they engage with literacy and therefore that, according to Reder, gave a boost to their literacy skills which is measurable in standardized tests. He was very keen on looking at practices.

**So, why aren’t more people joining adult literacy courses?**

We’ve got the figures that show 5% of the population engage in these courses, a tiny proportion of those *needing* them. And then you’ve got the figures from PIAAC that say in the Netherlands for example, a country of 17 million, 1.4 million people in the Netherlands haven’t got the literacy necessary to function in society according to PIAAC, and the Netherlands was a top performer in PIAAC! And yet 1.4 million Dutch people are floundering! And this was Anke’s insight. If they’re floundering, why aren’t they coming and knocking on the door of the adult education centre? Why aren’t they demanding that they be taught, because PIAAC says they can’t function?

So, as part of that conversation, we were asked to do a paper for the OECD analysing what they call the low skilled population. I hate the expression ‘low-skilled’. It’s increasing in the discourse and it’s been used here during the coronavirus crisis to refer to the people who are now out there saving our lives and, you know, delivering food. All of these people are deemed low-skilled until their skills are very, very necessary. So, we were asked to do a

paper for the OECD<sup>3</sup>; Anke, Steve, John Sabatini and I. Steve looked at the skills use in this paper, Anke was looking at one of the reading components, and I was just asked to do the descriptive thing.

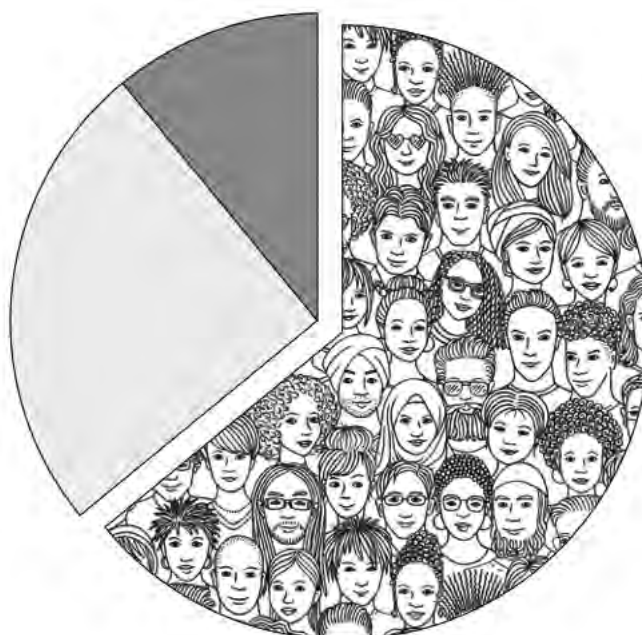
### **What can you predict about the indicators or characteristics of people in each level?**

I looked at the data through Anke's eyes thinking: 'What do we *know* about these people? What are my assumptions?' And if the model's correct and there's this lump of people who are without the skills they need, there must be *indicators*, there must be things that link them to each other. So, you start to look at the data and you find out that that group is not a homogenous group. It's a completely heterogeneous group.

Now there are similarities there; they're more likely to be unemployed, they're more likely to have a low level of education. Yeah, they're more *likely*. But 10% of the low skilled group here [in the UK] went to university. Ten percent! Now we know about skills decline<sup>4</sup> and therefore we know about lack of skill use and that means that group and our understanding of that group is completely erroneous.

Anke then did another very interesting thing when she took the data from the German adult education database; basically, who did adult basic education courses in Germany, and profiled that population. And then she said, 'Well who are these people in PIAAC?', and she profiled *that* population and found they're completely different. People who engage in adult education courses have certain characteristics, and the [PIAAC] group has got a much broader set of characteristics.

Now that could mean thousands of things, but one thing it can mean is we're designing the courses in the wrong way because we've got an idea of what people need and we're imposing that. And that is the neo-liberal approach to curriculum design. You decide what you need your workers to know and you make sure they get it. Now, that system's imposed. So, we're designing courses that, in *theory*, meet the needs that are lacking in those tests. Those people can't do these things. We'd better show them how to do these things. But maybe it just turns out they don't want to do those things. They don't *need* to do those things. So at that point, you've got to think, well, what we're doing at the moment is we're measuring skill level. All we're doing is measuring how much people can do. And you know, some really eminent and clever people have come up with these OECD international surveys that are very, very cleverly



conceptually designed. But actually, they just measure an arbitrary skill that someone can perform. They've got no relation at all to what people actually need to do with literacy in their lives, which must be very different because otherwise they'd all be floundering [and seeking courses to help them learn].

### **I guess also that in the workplace many literacy tasks are performed collaboratively. Have you found that literacy is often a collaborative process?**

Definitely. People's collaboration masks what the demands on people are because it's not visible what their literacy is. It's very interesting in some of the work you're referring to there (Mallows & Litster, 2016), which was a series of case studies in workplaces. It was not as deliberate as colleagues compensating for each other. Say, my mate is rubbish at this, so I'm going to help him. It really wasn't that deliberate. There was almost an implicit understanding that anything they produced was not just them, that in an office, they will work on sending out a letter, but the letter is from a template. It was going to be checked by somebody else. And that was a whole process and they didn't see it as, 'I'm not any good at writing'. They saw it as, 'this is our process for producing a letter'.

So, they were working within this. If you tested those three people in that process, I assume they would have different levels of literacy. But they produced a perfectly correct letter. And all of those systems of scaffolding – which is why it's important to think of them not as deliberate thought-

through processes – they're lazy processes and lazy actions. We're not really aware of people's lack of engagement with skills. Another example is in the supermarkets. It's a trite point that's made a lot, but in supermarkets cashiers used to have amazing mental maths, they just had to because they worked with numbers all day. And now they don't work with any numbers at all. They're personal customer relations and they do that job, but maths is no longer part of their job.

So those interfaces with machines which scaffold our usage also remove our need to use literacy and numeracy. Now that's got great consequences. Why are we teaching people a series of things in schools knowing that they're not going to use them and therefore those are going to decline. And at the same time, as a society, we *value* those skills. So we measure them and we measure our countries against them. But there's a real lack of logic in measuring something that we then never use.

#### **How can course designers increase enrolments in LN courses more generally?**

That's where the link to environment is important. If you go back again to Anke's point, people aren't turning up for courses, so they don't need courses or we're not designing courses that are useful for them and that's the big gap. Until we work out what sort of courses [are needed], we're not going to solve it by just randomly throwing out different courses, we'll have more or less the same result. You've got to do something different.

Then with Steve Reder's work you see that they actually engaged with education. But it wasn't education that made the difference, it was the *engagement* with it. But it was not going into a course every week, it was having *been* to a course and having the possibility of going back and having libraries and having colleagues. You start to stand outside the classroom and think, 'Well perhaps we don't need to analyse this in terms of education certification', which we would do in most other circumstances. But why would you do it when nobody's going to those courses and they don't want those courses and they're seemingly living their lives without literacy crises.

And what you're essentially describing there is a community approach to education in that you're going to environments and you're setting up in those environments, understanding them and then supporting people to make the most of them. But it's an incredibly different model compared to the top down model that says, I know what you need to learn, sit down there, learn

it, I'll test you. And then you've got a certificate and you can go out the door. They [the community approach and the certification approach] don't fit together because one is a top down, predefined model and the other is entirely bottom up and very, very local.

#### **Finally, in relation to the current situation, I have to ask you what sort of effect you think social distancing is going to have on literate environments and people's access to basic literacy and numeracy education?**

Well I think it's a very tricky one. I honestly don't know. I think what it probably will reveal is that there's something of a mismatch of digital skills between educators and students. We've got data here from England where it shows quite poor digital skills amongst educators. So that's a big learning opportunity and a big sharing opportunity too because suddenly the other problem we've always had with literacy educators is they work in isolation. They're not well connected because they're not well funded. So perhaps in a positive world there'll be more opportunities for linking together. And for students, they're not going to be able to go to the library and get the resources. It's going to need to be redesigned and it will be redesigned on the hoof. We'll make improvements in how to deliver online learning in this area, but I don't think we'll fix it. I hope there's not a whole series of national government committees sitting there working out how they can make all adult education go online and just forget about having to provide buildings and pieces of paper and teachers.

**Interesting times are ahead of us David. Thanks for sharing these insights about PIAAC and its relationship to LN policy and practice.**

#### **Reflection**

Indeed, it's important to bring these datasets more frequently and deliberately into the discourse of literacy and numeracy practitioner professional development. As Jeff Evans concludes in his chapter on 'What to look for in PIAAC results':

Powerful knowledges of all these kinds can empower on a broader social basis, through knowledge located in the disciplines, professional practice, or other established practices of adults' 'lived experience'. The aim of educational researchers must be to support the development of potentially powerful knowledge, like numeracy and literacy, and to prevent their being reduced to narrow competencies (Evans, 2016, p. 55).

In this way, LN practitioners rely on the work of critical researchers and practitioners like David Mallows, Anke Grotlüschen, Steve Reder and many others, to analyse PIAAC data and inform policy, curricula and workforce development in nuanced ways so that educators can better carry out the work of empowering adult literacy learners. We look forward to welcoming David Mallows to Australia soon to learn more about literacy practices, literate environments, and how targeted large-scale international skill surveys can better serve LN policy development.

Elizabeth Gunn is a language and literacy teacher who has worked with students of diverse ages and backgrounds. In her role on the ACAL Conference organising team this year, she invited David Mallows to speak at the conference. She decided to find out more about PIAAC so she could appear knowledgeable when he arrived. She's pleased to report that, after writing this article, her PIAAC anxiety index has reduced dramatically.

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## Endnotes

- 1 The NRDC was closed in December 2015.
- 2 Steve Reder presented his longitudinal research in a keynote at the ACAL Conference in 2014.
- 3 OECD Education Working Paper
- 4 Skills decline is a function of people not maintaining certain literacy and numeracy skills following earlier proficiency.

# Practical Matters

## Meet me at your learning threshold

By Eudi Blakeman

The *Mumgu-dhal tyama-tiyt* (Message stick of knowledge) curriculum is offered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners in some Victorian prisons. Eudi Blakeman describes the journey that led her to teach the course 'with a twist'.

### Explore my story

Introducing myself here might set the scene for why I love doing what I do.

As a bilingual immigrant, from a proudly strong culture of indigenous ethnicity, coming from a predominantly English-speaking nation with a similar climate to Australia, I found my initial experience of Australia, let me say, 'dauntingly interesting'. With kindness, I share that this beautiful, isolated island is virtually an entire planet of its own, even sporting its own colloquial vocabulary.

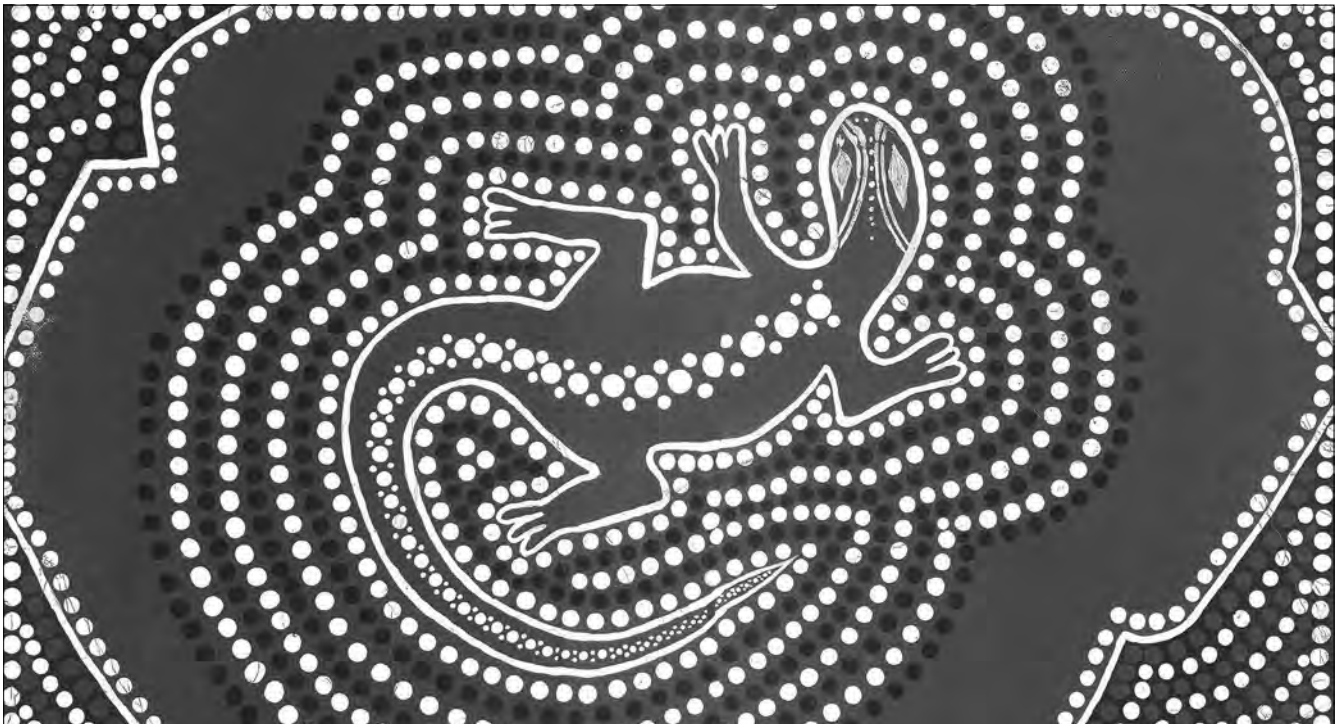
I realised early on that my pre-Aussie resumé meant little to nothing in my new world. Thankfully, my colourful experiences have allowed me to lean heavily on years of life and teaching knowledge which helped me to start again.

For many years I have passionately shared my educator skills with students of all ages, across various education sectors and a broad selection of contexts, including teaching, hospitality, arts, retail, private tuition, and large-scale government staff training.

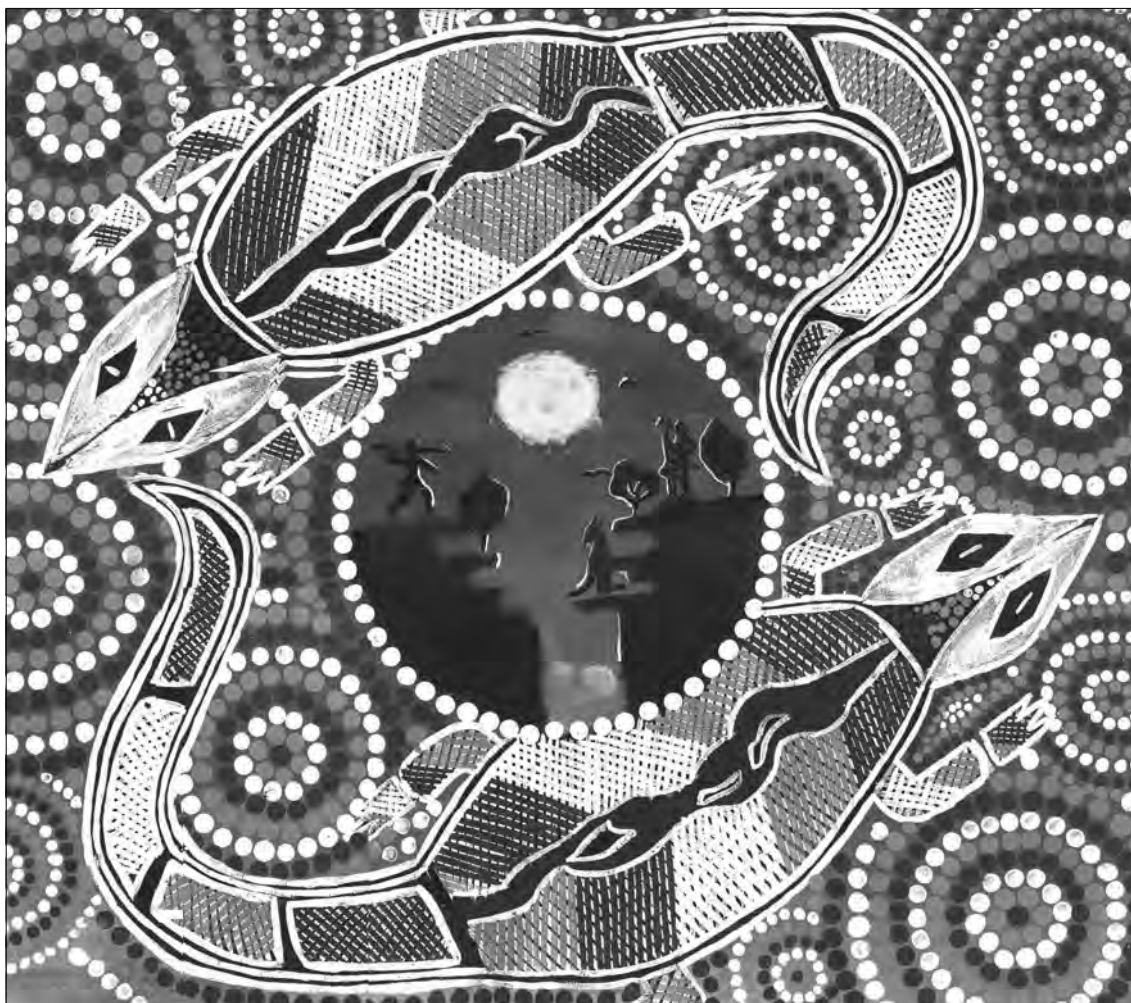
Through my continuous learning I endeavour to share my honesty, commitment, passion, and sincerity with each student who happens on my path, enthused for them to meet me at their own learning threshold.

### One foreigner to another

For the past 20 years, I have embraced Australia, her Indigenous people, and multitude of extended cultures as my home, applying myself to constant learning in order to pay learning forward.



A goanna family totem by a *Mumgu-dhal tyama-tiyt* participant Used with permission



**A family totem and heritage story canvas** Used with permission

Along with immersing myself in English teaching programs, I focused on treating my foreign students with empathy and understanding of some of their daunting challenges, such as their new home life in a predominantly English-speaking environment, as well as work and study pressures. I learned that foreign students, who might be highly educated individuals, on a daily basis experience 'language-foreigner-discrimination' only because they speak a form of broken 'travel-English'. This experience has taught me that, as an educator, I have to strive to understand and inspire those who I teach, wherever and however that teaching takes place.

As individuals we can never change the world. However, we educators can be a part of the change to at least one student.

### **From teaching foreigners to teaching Aboriginal Australians**

My journey to become involved in teaching Australian Aboriginal people started at a college I was privileged to

teach at in Queensland. My Lead Manager and mentor was an Aboriginal Australian and was utterly inspiring in the way she proudly embraced her own culture and ethnicity, allowing that compassion and empathy to spill over to the many foreign students at the college. She was professional and empathetic towards the foreign students and exhibited no discrimination at all. This, along with her constant guidance and motivation, inspired and encouraged me.

Another incredible opportunity presented itself to me: to work for Queensland Corrective Services teaching incarcerated women and men in Townsville, Rockhampton, and Brisbane, and also in the prison parole sector. I discovered that, contrary to the stereotype, many incarcerated people are 'hungry' to learn and keen to make the effort as long as the teacher is able to connect and encourage. Who would have thought that teaching on the 'inside' could be truly rewarding?



Having built a rapport with my students and the Aboriginal community, I was fortunate to be invited to share in very special NAIDOC celebrations and art exhibitions. At this time, I was teaching Business Certificate II and Foundations Skills (FSK) Certificate II. With permission from the Corrections Education Officer, along with ongoing encouragement and enthusiasm from my manager, I was able to strongly implement 'reasonable adjustment' which allowed me to incorporate arts, crafts and a 'life skills' program to the courses.

These classes were well received and, with full attendance, it was pretty obvious that the students were encouraged and enthusiastic, successfully achieving certification for their dedicated efforts. A number of these superstars even went on to enrol in external secondary school and university studies.

In my working life I also spent a couple of years working closely with Aboriginal primary school children. I saw the desperate lack of attention given to their own culture, as well as learning about their heritage or even being allowed to embrace their own individual skills, through arts, crafts or Dreaming stories. This led me to realise the desperate gap in meeting the innate need for Aboriginal people to feel connected to their own land and their heritage. We expect young adults to pass on knowledge of their heritage to the younger generation, yet this can only happen if the gap is addressed.

### Explore your story

In Victoria, I am once again privileged to be teaching within Corrections. However, this time my focus is with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people only. The curriculum, *Mumgu-dhal tyama-tiyt* translates as 'Message stick of knowledge' (State of Victoria, 2018). How apt, when my forever motto has been the one I quote from the poet Kahlil Gibran: "If [the teacher] is indeed wise, he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind" (Gibran, 1926/1980, p.67). This truly encompasses how I approach my teaching.

Although we start with 'Explore Your Story', there are many varied units that make up the *Mumgu-dhal* course. I am thankful to be able to draw on my prior knowledge and the use of reasonable adjustment to bring a twist to delivering this course.

Before adapting the delivery to meet every critical aspect and element of the course, I spend some time

enquiring from the students what would interest, inspire, and encourage them to embrace studying. Most of the students say that they are disheartened and near terrified of academic education. They share that their entire school career has been peppered with negative experiences such as being holed up at the back of class, left to their own devices, disciplined for being disruptive when they were actually bored or left to a teacher aide who was trying their best to make a difference, delivering more 'boring' information to already disheartened learners.

When I suggested incorporating arts and crafts into the curriculum, the news was welcomed with an overwhelmingly positive response. Many of the students agreed that they felt discouraged to sign up for academic studies because of their struggle with literacy and they are often embarrassed by their various literacy challenges.

The students who might struggle with literacy challenges are aware that when they are required to complete learner guides or assessments, their teacher, assessor, or teacher aide will be available to scribe while confirming through verbal acknowledgment their understanding of the unit. This empowers the students to feel that they have achieved the knowledge and understanding of the unit without shame. All students are able to effectively achieve success with sincere guidance and assistance from their teacher and other help. I am always extremely grateful for the opportunity to be able to incorporate reasonable adjustment, of course within reason and as long as all requirements and elements are met.

As we know, historically, Aboriginal people recorded and retold their Dreaming stories and histories through the medium of paintings, dance and song. The students understand that by incorporating arts and crafts into the unit, they can express themselves through some of the mediums their ancestors used.

The importance of sharing stories of the past so that they can be brought to the current and future generations has been an exciting journey to set in place.

The unit from the *Mumgu-dhal* curriculum, 'Explore Your Story', touches on enabling the student to use their skills and knowledge to investigate, collate, record and present information on the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that are relevant to them.

With this specific course I have encouraged the students to search for basic information about their parents and immediate families, and their own family stories. Of course, one needs to be mindful not to dig too deeply into memories that might be painful or sensitive.

Sadly, many of the incarcerated students have come from broken homes, been in foster care or been incarcerated from an early age, leaving them with little to no memories of their own that they wish to share.

I am mindful that with this specific course I am a facilitator and am therefore not implying that I am teaching them their own culture but supporting them to explore it for themselves.

I encourage the students to draw on their Dreaming stories, the knowledge or information they do have and with assistance we search for information of the area they were born and raised in, as well as learn more about their family and their own totem(s).

### Story and timeline canvas

If students do not wish to share information about their past family, they may share their present life story. Some students have partners, and many have children whom they can incorporate into their timeline canvas, making this story current and their own.

To bring the project together and once the students have enough information to present, they plan, draft, design and create a 'Timeline Canvas', using only symbols to tell the story without Western words. The students use the canvas as part of the presentation requirements for the assessment.

Over the past year, the numbers enrolled in *Mumgu-dhal* education has grown substantially, and the students are sharing their enthusiasm with each other. It is truly special to see how encouraged and excited the students are to come to class, work on their projects, learner guides and assessments.

It has been magnificent to see the many different approaches, layouts, and creative ways the students have shared their stories.

This project has been a joy to develop and I am truly grateful to my current manager who has embraced my enthusiasm, allowing me the freedom to bring *Mumgu-dhal* with a twist.

Finally. It does not matter who or where you teach. The only thing that truly matters is that you lead the student to the threshold of their own mind through your honesty, commitment, passion, and sincerity.

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Eudi Blakeman has taught English to foreign students, as well as language, literacy, and numeracy in a variety of settings around Australia. She has been part of a training team that helped launch a Microsoft upgrade and transition for a large city council in Queensland. For almost two years, Eudi successfully mentored a non-English-speaking Egyptian student and performed additional duties as a Teacher Aide at a primary school in Townsville. After spending six years teaching Business and Foundations Skills in various Correction facilities across Queensland, Eudi is currently teaching *Mumgu-dhal tyama-tiyt* in a Victorian prison.

### Note

The artworks accompanying this story are story and timeline canvasses created by *Mumgu-dhal tyama-tiyt* participants. The artists have given permission for their artwork to be published anonymously to protect their privacy.



An 'explore your story' timeline canvas featuring the artist's handprint, his blue wren family totem and two generations' family corroborees Used with permission

## A partnership to build skills for further study and work in food trades, hospitality and tourism

by Liane Hughes

In 2020, William Angliss Institute (henceforth 'Angliss') and Learn Local Westgate Community Initiatives Group (WCIG) formed a partnership to help those needing stronger foundation skills to gain entry to vocational courses in food trades, hospitality and tourism.

### The dilemma

Angliss is a specialist TAFE institute and does not deliver foundation skills courses such as English as an Additional Language or adult literacy. This means that when applicants apply for courses, and their foundation skills are too low, there is a dilemma: Angliss values all applicants and does not want to turn any away, but it cannot enrol people in courses that are not (yet) suitable for them. Currently, apart from referring them externally, there have been no options for students who do not have a good chance of succeeding in the lower level courses (e.g. Certificate III).

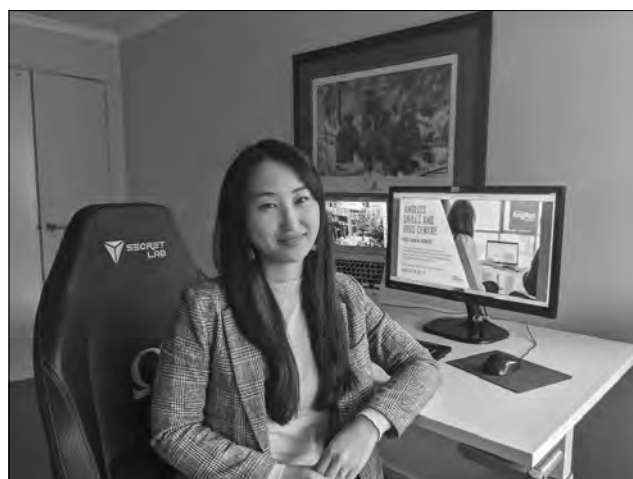
### The solution

To solve this problem, a partnership was sought with a Learn Local to deliver a course that would give students an opportunity to build the foundation skills they needed.

Jia Song, who works across both the Angliss Skills and Jobs Centre (SJC) and the Angliss Future Students marketing team, came up with the concept. SJs are State funded centres, based in TAFEs across Victoria, that provide advice on training and employment opportunities; they are expected to engage with local organisations. The solution was a way to meet those obligations and to address concern that Angliss was losing potential students because of their foundation skills levels.

Jia sought a partnership with a Learn Local that was relatively close to Angliss and that delivered language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) courses as well as some foundation food/hospitality related pre-accredited courses.

Other SCJs do refer students externally to Learn Locals, based on the student's location. However, the LLN courses delivered at different Learn Locals can be quite variable. Also, if the referral is simply providing the Learn Local's contact details to the student, it is hard for the SJC to track if the student contacts the Learn Local or enrolls in a course. This idea was for a customised course. As Jia described it, "Students were contacted and invited



Jia Song

to join a group of other prospective Angliss students. It really maintained the TAFE's brand".

### The course

The plan was for the course to be delivered by the Learn Local (WCIG) but take place on the city campus of Angliss. Angliss wanted the potential students to feel welcomed and to have the experience of studying there, and to get to know the facilities such as the training kitchens, restaurants, and bar.

Jia worked with Naomi Caruana of WCIG to plan a course. It was to start early in Semester 1, six hours per day, one day per week, with the goal of preparing students for study at Angliss in Semester 2, 2020. The course would focus on skills that are required in Angliss courses and related industries, such as food trades, hospitality and tourism. The aim was to improve students' foundation skills, such as reading, writing, numeracy, digital literacy, oral language (speaking and listening) and general learning skills. The specific focus would depend on where their skills gaps needed attention for their future study and would also prepare them for the literacy and numeracy assessment that

is part of the application process. Learning advisers from Angliss were able to provide guidance about the specifics of the foundations skills demands of Angliss courses.

WCIG based the course on a combination of two pre-accredited courses: Language Literacy and Numeracy for Further Study and Work; and Learn 2 Learn. These courses are often delivered to students working at lower Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) levels, but the flexibility of Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) funding allowed them to adapt it to the higher ACSF levels of the students.

### The students

The people invited to the course initially were prospective Angliss students who had applied for Certificate III in Commercial Cookery, Hospitality, Tourism and the very popular Certificate III in Aviation (Cabin Crew).

Twelve students confirmed their interest in participating in the course. Like many adult groups, they came from varied backgrounds and ages. Some had not been in formal education for some years, and/or had not finished secondary school. Some came from migrant backgrounds, such as one 60-year-old from Russia.

Branka Stevanovic, Manager and teacher at WCIG, delivered the course. She said:

The student cohort was mainly from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds and some of them had their final years of secondary education completed in Australia, while some had only completed language courses in Australia. In both cases it was obvious that the students lacked experience and strategies required in text analysis. The importance of understanding the questions was observed as being an obstacle when trying to attend to the questions and provide answers. This all could be due to lack of experience throughout their prior education as well as limited language skills.

Branka also commented, “When it comes to numeracy the gaps were also noted in particular areas (e.g. understanding graphs and working out percentages) and again, once they got a foundation concept and understanding of how to interpret, calculate and solve the problem, this issue was resolved”.



**Reiza, who gained entry to her chosen course, shows off the Certificate III in Aviation uniform.**

Some of the students agreed that their skills were a little rusty, as they had been out of formal education for a while. Reiza, who did not need to complete the whole course and successfully gained entry into Certificate III Aviation, said, “I enjoyed the class because I hadn’t studied for so long.” Similarly, Jude, who is now studying the same certificate, said, “It was a fantastic opportunity for me to develop my skills and confidence, especially as education is so different to Malaysia, or even when I studied Commercial Cookery here ten years ago.”

### The virus

Before the course could start, restrictions relating to COVID-19 came into place. Plans for delivering the course at the CBD were abandoned and the course was initially postponed, but then went fully online, with no opportunity for the teacher to meet the students face to face. This did, unfortunately, exclude at least two students, as they didn’t have adequate access to a device or wi-fi.

WCIG found that the seven students who commenced the course had higher levels of digital literacy than would be expected in many of their other courses, as it was quite a different cohort. Branka describes how “the challenges were in keeping motivation and also being able to engage online, having access to reliable internet and IT resources.”

The course ran for ten weeks for two hours per week. Branka explained how she managed the teaching:

All class activities were done and walked through together, with my facilitation only providing an example, and then letting them work through it online. I would project an activity through share screen function and everyone would provide an input while I would colour code responses. Activities provided were relevant to everyday life situations (e.g. email writing, letter writing, stories, budgeting and saving money, cooking). Even though we had no face-to-face meetings prior to the course commencement, we developed great rapport and the students were comfortable to send emails, to seek support and clarify regarding homework activities or any other support they thought I could have suggested or provided them with.

Some of the students were pleasantly surprised with how well the course went online. Reiza said, “At the start I thought online learning would be a bit slow, but it actually

ended up being better than I expected. The teacher and the students were really patient. The teacher really kept up with the communication, but it was actually pretty efficient.”

Jude said, “I gained not only the knowledge about literacy and numeracy but also the confidence. Doing the course online worked well for me. It is a new way of interacting with other students. I feel so comfortable now to commit to 9am–4pm online study.”

Interestingly though, although the course worked well online, the students are keen to get on campus for their vocational studies. One student, who started her Aviation course this semester, has considered deferring her study, as she is concerned about what she is missing out on by studying such a practical course online.

### The outcomes

Seven students started the course, and four stayed engaged for the full ten weeks. Of the seven who started, six have since been successful in their applications for TAFE courses, two of those at Angliss, doing Certificate III in Aviation

## Tips for getting started with partnerships

*by Jia Song*

I initially found it difficult to engage with Learn Locals for this project. In late 2019, after doing some research, I found about eight organisations that seemed to be suitable. I emailed and called these Learn Locals directly but received little response.

People may not pay attention to emails or phone calls from an unfamiliar organisation because they think it is spam or they don't see the value of the partnership.

I decided to seek assistance from Stephanie Rizzo, the Senior Project Officer and key contact in the Department of Education and Training for SJs. Stephanie put me in touch with some contacts in the Department of Education and Training for Learn Locals. Eventually I got in touch with Acting Regional Manager (current Senior Project Officer) David Harris, who oversees the Learn Locals in South Western Victoria. He sent an email to the Learn Local network in this area. In less than a week, I was contacted by more than five Learn Locals via email and phone.

Thanks to David's bridging role, our proposal was reviewed seriously by Learn Locals and we could build initial trust easily. Among the Learn Locals who got in touch, WCIG was the first one to contact me. They provided details of their programs that we could potentially use to work together. After analysing their centre location, delivery flexibility and course suitability, I chose to work with WCIG.

**TIP 1: Don't be shy to ask for help.**

**TIP 2: It is important to contact the right person to ensure trust is easily built.**

**TIP 3: In deciding the best partnership, consider a range of practical factors and shared goals.**

For more information about the role of an SJC see <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/pathways/skillsandjobscentres/Pages/default.aspx?Redirect=1>

(Cabin Crew). Four have decided to defer their study due to the COVID-19 restrictions.

Both Angliss and WCIG are pleased with these outcomes, especially considering the challenging circumstances, though clearly they would like to see more students participating and staying engaged. It seems very likely that having a highly skilled teacher was an important part of this course being successfully delivered online.

Angliss and WCIG are working together to improve communication with students (and prospective students) with faster response times and more consistent follow up. This is a reminder of the importance of having quality administrative support. They will also seek a greater sense of commitment from students, and make sure they understand their responsibilities.

## Zooming into the digital world

*By Manalini Kane*

Teaching instructional texts through recipes has wide appeal for English as an Additional Language (EAL) and Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) teachers alike. Recently however, demands for online teaching and learning are increasing day by day in every education sector. In addition, flexible teaching methods including synchronous, asynchronous and blended (or hybrid) teaching are used in many areas. On the surface, this environment would not seem suitable for using cooking to support EAL and LLN learning.

In this article, I will share my ideas and recent experiences of teaching an online vegetarian cooking course to adults. The unknown territory between teacher-driven digital literacy and EAL provision at one end and entirely learner-driven provision at the other end was to be challenging like many EAL teachers in the adult sector are facing lately. I hope this article might reduce teachers' pre- and post-teaching and assessing time too.

Many adult learners use a mobile phone for calling, sending or receiving messages in their native language on a daily basis. So, they have the capacity to extend this skill to use video conferencing platforms like Webex and learning management systems like Moodle. U3A

## The next step

The two organisations – Angliss and WCIG – have decided to continue with the course. A group of students has started preparing for vocational study at Angliss in 2021. WCIG is getting good feedback from the ACFE Board acknowledging their work with Angliss as well as encouraging more of such partnerships. Everyone is looking forward to a time when the course can be run at the Angliss campus.

**Liane Hughes is a Learning Adviser at William Angliss Institute. Jia Song is a Future Student Adviser in the Marketing & Communications department at William Angliss Institute. She oversees the operation of the Skills and Jobs Centre.**

Knox, where I have been teaching recently, provided me access to Zoom conferencing for 90 minutes a week so pre- and post-teaching proved to be quite time consuming. Nevertheless, I ventured into it as a worthwhile experience.

## Pre-teaching

I used the following applications for various purposes:

- **Fakebook** for class activities <https://www.classtools.net/FB/home-page>
- **Padlet** for Windows or iOS to organise class activities <http://padlet.com>
- **Google Drive** to easily upload, save and share photos or videos.
- **'Pictorial recipes'** to provide images of ingredients and steps <https://www.tes.com/teaching-resource/pictorial-cooking-recipes-6447944#>
- **Flashcard** generator for pair activities <https://quizlet.com/create-set>
- **Word search** generator to build and test contextual vocabulary <https://thewordsearch.com/maker/>
- **Macmillan Sounds Pronunciation App** <http://www.macmillanstraightforward.com/resources/sounds-pronunciation-app/>
- **Kahoot** for game-based learning on any topic, any device and for any age group [www.kahoot.com](http://www.kahoot.com)

## Banana raita

Prep time: 2 minutes

Cooking time: nil

Difficulty: simplest

Serves: 2

### Ingredients

1 banana

2 cups of natural yoghurt

4 tbsp cold milk

1 small green or red chilli, slit or

1/2 tsp paprika

Asafoetida (hing) - just a pinch

Salt to taste

1 tsp sugar (optional)

3 tbsp Coriander leaves, finely chopped

### Method

1. Peel and slice a banana

2. Put the sliced banana in a medium size bowl

3. Add natural yoghurt and cold milk

4. Add 1/2 tsp paprika or chilli

5. Add a pinch of asafoetida (hing)

6. Add salt to taste and sugar

7. Mix all the ingredients with a medium size spoon

8. Garnish with fresh, finely chopped coriander

And your Banana raita is ready to serve with cooked rice or an Indian bread, called chapati. The leftover raita should be covered and stored in a fridge and consumed within 24 hrs.

### Utensils required

- A medium size bowl
- A medium size serving spoon to mix and serve
- Measuring spoons and cup
- A cutting board
- A knife

Figure 1: Banana Raita

- **Loop** for continuous, real-time formative student feedback [www.loop.hq](http://www.loop.hq)
- **Knowmia** to create and share engaging content while encouraging discussions, and providing in-video quizzing for formative assessment <https://www.techsmith.com/knowmia-education.html>

### Digital literacy for adult beginners

The skills developed in the course included:

- How to use a camera to take a photo and reduce or enlarge the size
- How to add a caption or text to a photo
- How to email and send that photo as an attachment
- How to search or download bilingual dictionaries and language learning apps (e.g. Duolingo, Google Translate)
- How to join a Zoom meeting
- How to turn on or mute audio and stop/start video, while on Zoom.
- How to change video layout (e.g. gallery view) and choose a virtual background
- How to use videos and photos for communication

### Teaching LLN

Even though EAL Level 1 learners' English literacy or numeracy may be low, their understanding or experience with cooking can be higher, which makes it easy to teach an instructional text like a simple recipe.

It is a good idea to make a list of what you need to pre-teach, with spelling, pronunciation, tenses and so on. To do that, write down a complete recipe to begin with, and highlight words, acronyms and so on, that you need to pre-teach. As an illustration of this, see the recipe for Banana Raita (figure 1).

This recipe can be used to teach:

- Language of cuts (slice, finely chopped) adverb and a verb in past tense
- **Measurements and acronyms:** 2 cups, a pinch, a tsp, a tbsp
- **Verbs:** peel, add, garnish (present tense) and cooked, covered, stored and consumed (past tense)
- **Pronunciation:** food and cooking equipment terms in context
- **Basic numeracy:** addition and multiplication

## Post-teaching assessment

Recap after every session with small vocabulary activities. Two suggestions are shown below.

Unscramble the following letters to make a word, learned recently in a recipe:

1. Chinp, Turnaal, Umdiem, Condemus, Stulenis
2. Label these items learned recently in a recipe:



Add a **numeracy task** by posing a problem to teach and assess addition/multiplication and volume: This recipe is for two adults. If you need to make it for six adults, then how would you increase the quantity of each ingredient and use what kind of utensil/s to fit the total quantity? Provide a list.

**Test** digital literacy by asking students to take and download a photo of their favourite food, add a caption and send it to you via email.

A **word search** activity works well at the end of the unit and is quick to make with the help of an online word search generator such as <https://thewordsearch.com/maker/>

To conclude, I hope my Zooming into the digital world will motivate some EAL teachers to test this instructional text and design one of their own depending on the mix of your own cohort.

If not, banana raita would be at least easy and healthy dish to make at home for everyone!

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# Open Forum

## The *MALWAYS* experience and its significance for prison educators

by Ron Wilson

In 1998 the Melbourne-based community theatre company, Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company<sup>1</sup> performed a play titled *MALWAYS* at what is now called the Dame Phyllis Frost Corrections Centre. This play was written by the women prisoners in concert with the prison education staff and Somebody's Daughter directors Maud Clark and Kharen Harper.

As is the intent of community theatre, there are many takeaway points of enlightenment, learning and challenge for the participants and the audience to reflect on. For me, as general manager of a TAFE institute that managed all the education and training services for Melbourne metropolitan adult corrections and juvenile justice facilities at the time, the *MALWAYS* experience provided some of the most critical and enduring messages to all prison educators regarding the content and delivery challenges faced every day in these unique, and often bizarre, learning environments. As indeed intended through community theatre the reflections and learnings are completely subjective – everyone takes their own meanings from the experience. However, the essential challenge, as T.S. Eliot dared us all in *Four Quartets*, is to ensure we drive to gain our own meaning from our experiences.

### The *MALWAYS* story

The *MALWAYS* experience enabled some prisoners to articulate their understanding of their life journey to the point of ending in prison. The play's title was a deliberate play on words in which each of the women mapped her life and experiences onto a social map based on the Melbourne street directory known as 'Melways'<sup>2</sup> The women chose to replace the 'Mel' (for Melbourne) with 'mal', the French term for bad. The underpinning structure of the Melways street directory emerges as a grid overlaid on the streetscapes of Melbourne's suburbs. The top axis of the grid is referenced by the letters A to K while the vertical axis is represented by the numbers 1 to 12. Each map connects with adjoining suburbs along the vertical and horizontal with, roughly, a suburb per page. Each map shows the interconnection of roads, streets and lanes, and also includes symbols for landmarks

such as railway lines, stations, parks, reserves and other significant local features.

Throughout the play, each woman expressed her individual journey to her point of incarceration in song, verse and/or monologue. While each journey was unique, this play produced a metaphorical map to illustrate the social and cultural parameters shaping the options available for life decisions they made along this journey. Without going into the intricacies of each woman's journey, the themes of the journeys could be paraphrased as described below.

### Defined by G5

In this play, the women likened their lives as being symbolically bounded by the grid on this map. For illustration's sake, this grid is referred as the grid G5 on a particular page of the Melways road map. Emerging from the women's collective stories was a commonality that related to the options they believed they had available to them for decision making. This was symbolised by seeing that the boundaries of G5 encased and encompassed life as they knew it. All the options they believed were available for their decision making were framed by the experiences they had in their G5. All their social contacts, family contacts, education (formal and informal) and their history were those bounded by the perceived walls surrounding this grid. There was not an appreciation or awareness there was a G6 or an H5 let alone another page in which there were other grids!

As bounded in their respective G5s, the women told the stories, interpreted through the features within their social map, along with their own experiences and what they had learned from the experiences of others (family, friends, etc.). For example, one woman explained that the traffic lights on the edge of her G5 were always red. She did not know that the lights could be green, nor associate with the licence that a green light afforded to go further. Hence, figuratively, she did not countenance the option of making a decision to travel across this road. Another explained there was a railway station in her G5. To her this railway station was a social meeting point.

She knew that trains came through the station and that she could get on a train to go somewhere. However, she also did not consider that the train tracks connected with other train tracks further down the line and these tracks led to different stations which linked with other tracks (i.e. other G5s on other pages of her Melways). The key message was that G5 symbolised the defined scope of life options available and the scope of behaviours available to them.

### Critiquing G5

It was through engaging with writing this play and telling their stories that the women realised the symbols could also represent opportunities to do something else rather than reflecting a limited option bounded by the culture of G5. Each told her story, in her own way, through which she started to realise that she had a choice to explore the various meanings behind the symbolic representations within her life grid and then seek to understand the opportunities presented through this expanded awareness. To each of them (as each explained), the exposure to education programs helped them to gain an alternate viewpoint and awareness of the options and then an awareness of the capabilities to capitalise on these opportunities.

While their exposure to alternatives available for their own decision making emerged, the women also expressed critical insights into options available. This critical learning identified factors in our community which worked to ensure that those living in G5 stayed in G5. For example, some women related stories of previous releases from prison when they were subjected to extra scrutiny from police or justice agencies while on restrictive parole orders.

Others perceived that having offenders in our society served other, less obvious benefits to society. For example, one woman was able to see herself in a much broader social context when she expressed a critical perception that governments provided a substantial financial commitment to operating prisons and prisons need prisoners to give the prisons meaning for existence. This raised the question of what this insight meant to her. She replied that she now had a broader context to understand the options in which she makes her decisions.

### The takeaways

The meanings arising from this experience are manifold and varied for each person exposed to the play.



Set design for *MALWAYS* Image courtesy of Maud Clark

Firstly, this play challenges prison educators to consider the significant impact they can have on offenders' lives by ensuring that each educator is well prepared to work in a secure custodial environment. There are no national standards supporting the expectations of skills and knowledge for prison educators.

Secondly, the *MALWAYS* experience demonstrates the critical roles that language, literacy, numeracy, employability and now digital skills play in supporting prisoner decision making skills. For example, the development of literacy capabilities assisted the *MALWAYS* women to more effectively articulate their various social, emotional and even financial matters to others.

Thirdly, coordinating services and programs across prison operations leads to more effective outcomes for incarcerated students. In this case the interrelation between community programs and education services complemented each other to provide a learning environment conducive to productive learning.

Fourthly, and importantly, the *MALWAYS* experience raises the importance of ensuring the prisoner / offender voice is included in planning effective education and training programs to be delivered in prison. All too often funded education programs have been directed by



Set design for MALWAYS Image courtesy of Maud Clark

authoritative agencies with benevolent intent but with little input from the student cohort.

## Conclusion

The MALWAYS experience provided a great example of contextualised language, literacy and numeracy programs embedded within a community drama program which provided benefits way beyond expectations. These benefits resulted in:

- Increasing prisoners' personal capacity to view their own life experience, and develop the language, literacy and numeracy skills (albeit limited in the numeracy space) to negotiate their individual next steps towards living in the broader community

- Demonstrating the synergies of connecting and coordinating programs across separate operational sectors within the prison community
- Raising the importance of including the prisoner voice in planning educational programs reflective of prisoner student needs
- Reflecting on the knowledge, attributes and skills needed for prison educators to effectively deliver programs in custodial settings.
- I wonder, now that navigation apps have made the Melways virtually redundant, what an updated approach to the MALWAYS project might look like. The success of the original suggests that it is worth imagining.

Ron Wilson has been involved in education and vocational training for over 35 years with broad experience in a range of teaching and management positions. He completed a PhD in Management (RMIT), building on his master's degree in educational management and Leadership. Ron has undergraduate degrees in Arts (Social Sciences), Education (Physical Education), a Post Graduate Diploma in Special Education, and a Diploma in Teaching (Primary). He is a member of the Adult Community and Further Education Board and President of the Australasian Corrections Education Association.

## Endnotes

1 Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company had its beginnings at Fairlea Women's Prison in 1980 when Maud Clark, a drama student at Victorian College of the Arts, arranged to take the play, *Female Transport*, into the prison. It was a play about women being brought to Australia on convict ships. The Company continues to work with the most powerless in our society including women in prison and post release; young men and women in secure welfare; and marginalised young people in rural communities. <https://www.somebodysdaughtertheatre.com/>

2 Melway is a registered brand name for a street directory published annually by Melway Publishing Pty Ltd. It is commonly referred to by consumers as 'Melways'

## ALNPP: a practitioner's perspective

by *Christine Wallis*

The Adult Literacy and Numeracy Practitioners Program (ALNPP) is a professional development program for educators who teach pre-accredited courses. It demonstrates a commitment to the Ministerial Statement 2020–2025 and implements an important part of the Adult Community and Further Education Board's Strategy 2020–2025.

The ALNPP was developed by Adult Learning Australia and Adult and Community Education Victoria. From May to June, 19 practitioners completed Phase 1 training to deliver the ALNPP to their peers in Learn Local providers across the state. Phase 2 followed, from August to November, with 19 separately run programs delivered and involving a further 200+ teachers.

The ALNPP comprises a series of linked modules, recorded presentations and tutorial Zoom groups. It was originally designed to be online with some optional face-to-face meetings. In the current COVID-19 restrictions, the online environment has increased flexibility with the program mixing together practitioners from across metropolitan and regional Victoria. As well as enabling participants to engage in professional development (PD), the program provides the opportunity for practitioners to meet, form connections and build practice units in new and exciting ways.

The ALNPP has been designed for pre-accredited teachers keen to improve their knowledge and skills in adult literacy and numeracy practice. The PD covers adult literacy and numeracy theory, using the Pre-accredited Quality

Framework and Australian Core Skills Framework, and addressing learning difficulties, all within the context of putting adult learning theory into practice. In Phase 2 I have experienced the program as a facilitator. The key message from the practitioner group has been the high level of need and 'thirst for PD'. The program provides a refresh of knowledge that has been stored and filed away, fills in gaps, highlights best practice and stimulates the sharing of experience.

The ALNPP is an investment in the future of the pre-accredited sector. As a training package it can provide a base and step towards consistency in PD. The selection of the delivery mode, practitioner-to-practitioner, is multiplying the investment and will provide diversity as the practitioners take the package forward using their own style, emphasis and experience. The dividends of the investment will be for the benefit of our learners.

As I reflect on the ALNPP I see it as an example of adult learning in action. It has been an invaluable experience to be in the learner's seat and remember what it feels like. As a facilitator in Phase 2, I have enjoyed meeting many new practitioners and appreciated the insights they have contributed to the program. I am looking forward to an important outcome of the program being the connection of colleagues from across the state participating in an initiative to build a stronger sector.

**Christine Wallis is Planning and Development Manager at Kew Neighbourhood Learning Centre.**

# Surveying student opinion of course delivery changes during the COVID-19 pandemic

by Susan Thompson

In May 2020, Client Services at North Metropolitan TAFE in Perth, Western Australia emailed surveys to around 15,000 enrolled students to gain an understanding of their learning experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Close to 40% of those surveyed responded. Some responses confirmed expectations, others were surprising.

## Disclaimer

I do not intend to convey any definitive findings via this article, or to be available for peer review in the context of academic research. The article is simply a summary of observations made from the perspective of working in Client Services at a large TAFE college.

## Rationale

We conducted the survey because we wanted to know how students found any changes made to course delivery in response to the pandemic restrictions in WA (i.e.: lockdown, social distancing). Our overall Mission and Values at North Metropolitan TAFE mean that we hope student experiences will be positive, so we were keen to check in with learners to try to avoid adding

to their burden from the pandemic and provide them with continuity. The survey questions are shown in Table 1.

We were comfortable that the results would have strong validity overall, assuming a response rate of around 20%. In fact, our overall response rate was closer to 40%. In terms of specific course cohorts, where the response rate per qualification was much less than 50%, we are not so confident that the responses could justify longer-term decision making. In these areas – which included General Education and English as a Second Language (ESL) courses – academic Portfolios (study areas) will further canvass views about appropriate adjustments, should we need to reinstate social distancing.

**Table 1: Survey questions**

- 
1. Please select the qualification you are studying at NMTAFE [Drop down menu]
  2. Have any changes been made to the delivery or assessment of your qualification during the COVID-19 pandemic? [Yes / No / Unsure]
  3. If there was a change, what was it? Please tick all that apply.
    - Changed to online delivery using Blackboard
    - Changed to online delivery using 'TEAMS' or 'Collaborate'
    - Changed to hard copy worksheets or workbooks
    - Other (please specify) [free text response]
  4. How do you feel about these changes?
    - Very satisfied
    - Satisfied
    - Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
    - Dissatisfied
    - Very dissatisfied
  5. Do you see value in the Portfolio retaining these changes after the Pandemic? [Yes / No / Unsure]
  6. In the future, which style of learning would you prefer to see?
    - Face to face only
    - Face to face & online interaction
    - Online interaction only
  7. We really want to know what you think of these changes: please add any comments you think will help NMTAFE. [Free text response]
-

## Summary observations

During the initial lockdown period (Term 2), academic Portfolios moved almost all study to remote/flexible delivery, including online (Blackboard); live streaming (Blackboard Collaborate, Microsoft Teams and Zoom) and even old-fashioned printed study packs sent by mail (mainly for lower level ESL qualifications). Central coordination of technical support to lecturers via our Quality & Development Team was very helpful because everyone knew who to ask for help and where to go to ask. Respondents to our survey were generally satisfied with their course experience, including when the changes meant a move to online or other remote delivery.

The courses with practical placements and the need for ‘hands on’ skills development and assessment were the ones with the greatest challenges (e.g.: Health, Nursing, Aged Care, Trades, Beauty, Massage and Hospitality). In some instances, Portfolios had to defer or delay units until later in the academic year when restrictions were lifted, and employers and members of the public were able to interact directly with students again. (Writing this in August, most restrictions in Perth have lifted and practical units are running as they were pre-COVID, albeit with social distancing in place.)

Anecdotal feedback (including a decrease in the number of complaints received) and feedback from the survey suggests that students are generally satisfied with their courses including practical courses, and in some instances, more satisfied than previously.

In response to the survey findings, North Metropolitan TAFE hopes to retain much of the flexibility and innovation that have been happening over the last few months in an ongoing way. We think that we may end up offering some qualifications in ‘dual’ mode whereby a student might be able to choose to attend face-to-face *or* remotely but as part of the same group/cohort.

Because the survey responses indicated this was attractive to some cohorts, some areas are considering the possibility of separating delivery from assessment: students could undertake their learning remotely but come onto campus for assessment.

The survey responses did confirm that the biggest challenge for the organisation was getting organised and helping students to organise themselves accordingly. The biggest challenges for the learners confirmed through the survey were lack of authentic and safe social interaction to aid their

**Table 2: Summary of positives and negatives of online learning**

Positive	Negative
Greater access to lecturer	Less group learning
Greater access to classmates/discussion boards	Social skills aren't developed as well
No time spent on travel	Hands-on courses are neglected
More frequent assessments reinforce learning and take pressure off exams	Cheating may increase
Environmental benefits	Higher screen time may be bad for students' overall wellbeing
Greater attendance ratings, no excuse for bad weather or having a cold	Unfocussed students are easier to become distracted
More comfortable for introverted students to participate	Students from troubled homes may have nowhere to learn
TAFE can access more people, including those who can't travel to campus	Slow/no internet may exclude a large portion of students

learning; problems with access to technology, including decent Internet speeds; and lack of confidence about taking greater responsibility for their learning.

A small number of students reached out for help via the survey, which we did not anticipate. Some felt that they were being left behind and lecturers sought them out and helped them where they could. Some students were overwhelmed by their personal situations and simply dropped out, but this did not occur in the numbers we were expecting.

The survey responses reinforced the feeling that we all learned more about the possibilities, as well as the limitations, of technology and other approaches.

### **Student observations**

Observations made by students in the surveys provided insights into the student experience of online learning. These included:

- Distance learning allowed you to avoid being in the same room as people you find it difficult to be with in class – but can cope with ‘remotely’.
- You receive a more equitable level of service than you would get in a large class group when one or two people can hog the lecturer’s time and attention.

- Remote learning provides everyone with an opportunity to grow and develop – and to take responsibility for what we achieve.
- People’s communications and interactions (including negative behaviours) were more visible during remote delivery – this may lead to greater accountability in the future.
- Many students said that they were learning to manage their time better – at TAFE and personally.
- There were plenty of comments about enjoying wearing their pyjamas or track pants to TAFE when studying online.
- Poor Internet speeds or interruptions to internet service seemed quite common
- Many students expressed worries about the use of tools such as Zoom or Facebook citing community experiences such as ‘Zoom bombing’.

A summary of the pros and cons of online learning reported by survey respondents is shown in Table 2.

**Susan Thompson is Director of Client Services at North Metropolitan TAFE, Perth, Western Australia.**

# In Conversation

## “The world is crazy time.” Adult learners speak for themselves about studying online

by Dale Pobega

This article was originally published on Dale Pobega’s blog, *A Second Crack*, for Adult Learners Week (1-5 September 2020). It is reprinted here with kind permission. To view the original post and more of Dale’s writing, visit <https://dalepobegateaching.blogspot.com/>

Why is it assumed that older learners with very basic digital, language and literacy skills are incapable of studying online?

“They can barely organise a folder of work let alone use technology,” someone at a webinar I recently attended stated with dismissive certainty. “We really need to get back to the classroom.”

How jarring that pronouncement seemed to me when I compare it to the experience of my own Australian Core Skills Framework Foundation Level 2 learners who, for 17 weeks now, have been adapting well to the online environment. It was revealed in the course of that webinar, by the way, that those learners unable to organise a folder were working at Foundation Level 3 – draw your own conclusions.

Moreover, it is frustrating for those of us who have always integrated technology and the teaching of digital literacies into our practice that we are still being confronted by resistance. There is an obvious and timely need to initiate adult basic education students into ways of learning mediated by technology. These skills and literacies – that first step of learning to operate in a digital world – are those increasingly required in the workforce as well as other domains of social and civic life.

Throughout this article I want you to hear the voices of my adult learners. I want you to read what they have to say about the migration of their class online, their own experiences, challenges, discoveries, fears and preferences.

### Student surveys

These surveys were conducted at the end of June after ten straight weeks of their learning online from home. I have already documented [on the blog] the very basic face-to-face training the students received in Term 1 prior

to the periods of restriction. I have also documented the evolving strategies and approach I have taken to initiating the students online elsewhere.

The surveys are a part of the students’ Individual Learning Plan Reviews. The reviews were conducted using a Google Docs template which was cloned for each individual student, thus allowing me to comment and elicit further information in near ‘real-time’ conditions as they worked on the document through a typical school day.

In the surveys, students were asked:

- How was studying online for you this term? Tell me about your experience.
- Did you learn something new studying online?
- Did you have any problems studying online this term? Tell me about your experience.
- Would you like to continue studying online? Would you rather study in the classroom? Would you like to study online and in the classroom in Term 3?
- Is there something else you would like to tell me about your experience this term?

### Student voices

Below are extracts from individual surveys and my observations. To see the full survey responses, visit the 29 August 2020 post of *A Second Crack*.

**“You can look more than one time”**



This student understands that working online can potentially provide a better mechanism and time for review than it normally would in a classroom setting.



She refers to assistance sought and negotiated in the set-up phase which improves her ability to work with others: "At first it was a bit problem. Ivan helped me computer a little bit. I can find your website myself now. I can do everything."

The student refers to her own emerging capacity for problem solving: "If I don't understand I look and look again and I work out myself. My learning better."

The student is appreciative of the time savings she has to dedicate to study alongside other daily responsibilities: "If I go to school with my daughter I have to wait 50 minutes to pick me up Travel is a problem. Not online."



**"I can do exercises anytime when I am free"**

This student is aware of the advantages online study affords her because it is flexible: "I can housework and study at the same time."

The student recognises the power, plasticity and immediacy of the tools she is using online to learn... "Google docs, Video Rooms and Google Video [YouTube] too. I liked Google Docs because I can do anything in that and send it straight away to my teacher. It was very fast."

The student does, however, feel (at this point at least) that activities involving speaking and listening are better suited to the classroom, whereas reading, writing and grammar are better learned online.



**"At first I was finding it hard"**

The student expresses her frustrations learning online at home where she has to share a laptop with other family members during the lock down: "At first I was finding it

hard. Because everyone home at the same time... I [wish] I have my own laptop."

The student is becoming more organised as an online student, she is managing her learning better: "I learn to check email and follow lesson every day. So much and you have to keep an eye on it."

The student misses her classmates and teacher but is developing an appreciation that social contact can still be made and sustained through synchronous online means: "I miss my friend in class but maybe we meet again. Sometime I talk with my class friend in video chat and you too. That's nice."



**"I slowly learned to be online student"**

This student was slow to start and initially found the experience of going online overwhelming. He refers to the difficulty of studying with just a mobile phone (I refer to this at greater length in my previous posting). At a certain point he was able to get access to a computer and a friend helped him to set up. Arranging to get access to a computer and connecting to the internet must have been difficult (and I suspect expensive for him) considering restrictions, his material situation and limited ability to speak English. By the end of the term, however, his skills had developed substantially. The student would prefer to go back to class but points out that he "learned a lot and can do so much with computer now. IT was good experience."



**"I want to go to classroom"**

Here is a student who would prefer to go back to the classroom. What I notice in his response is a desire for connection, something he feels is missing by not being able to come to school and learn among friends. This student is the youngest in the class and lives alone. I am

sad that there was not much I could do to help him sort his problems: “No one helping me at home.”

I later discovered that like the other (male) student above, this student still only has a mobile to work from. He liked the video chat and he and I used this a lot to communicate throughout the term because I knew he needed extra contact and attention. Interestingly, he liked the assessments – unlike most of the other students!



### **“I am enjoying everything”**

This student is receptive to and appreciative of the frequent teacher communication required to keep up class enthusiasm and to keep learners on track while being mindful of the need to always be patient and kind in such stressful times: “You are nice teacher to me always ringing always every day teach us online.”

Again, there is mention of kids being used as a resource and support to learning: “... kids practise with me. My kids help me to set up now I can do myself.”

This student likes both the classroom and studying online and it occurs to me that most students are capable of deciding for themselves what they think is the right balance for them when it comes to a choice between studying in a classroom, online or a blend of both. It really does depend on their individual circumstances – and yet we insist on endlessly pursuing the one-size-fits-all arrangements of scheduled, classes in four-walled classrooms.



### **“It was fun. A new way learning”**

This student is positive about online learning and notes that “this way learning better for me and I less tired” but on the question of whether learning in a classroom or online is preferred: “together is the best way.” The student goes on to say: “I had good time teacher and the world is crazy time. We are students and continue study we are lucky thank to you.”

## **What now?**

For me, this period of teaching and learning raises some questions:

What arrangements will providers make – if any – for those learners uncomfortable or unwilling to return to the classroom even when the health situation is presumed to be safe? Nearly all older and vulnerable students surveyed expressed their fear of COVID-19 and did not want to return to an unsafe situation.

Will providers continue to offer online study as an option to those who prefer it?

Are traditional classrooms really the most effective, efficient or flexible learning environments? Scheduling long days of instruction – often six hours a day for most of the week – is a huge imposition on the time of adult students also searching for work and having a range of other responsibilities such as families to attend to.

Does this questionable use of time in which most of the day is dedicated to attendance make for more learning? What are its impacts on quality teaching practice? Would some of this time be better spent planning lessons and following student progress? Would some of the time be better spent by students completing work at home instead of struggling through a long day and returning home exhausted?

How prepared and willing would providers be to continue online delivery for adult basic education and English as an Additional Language students? I suspect this could be a very marketable and strategic point of difference for those who can – there would definitely be a demand. The question of whether most providers have staff equal to the challenge of providing the service, and are sufficiently capable or willing to change administrative and management practices to the degree that is required, is another question.

How prepared and willing are funding bodies to facilitate new arrangements and ways of delivering? This too would entail a revolution in thinking about models of provision, compliance, administration and management.

The world certainly “is crazy time” and I think there is a heavy responsibility weighing on all of us in the field to ensure our adult learners continue to receive an uninterrupted, quality education. That this education may

need to be delivered differently should not be considered an impediment.

The sample survey returns convince me the way forward is not too hard and that students themselves are looking for more flexible, convenient and relevant ways to learn in any case.

Reading back over the students' reflections I feel deeply moved. It has been – and continues to be for me as a teacher – a long, hard slog where things in the virtual classroom sometimes go wrong, just as they do in the bricks and mortar classroom, but mostly go right. There is a lot more work required at the level of preparation and assessing progress than usual and there has to be an enthusiasm for experimenting and developing new techniques appropriate to the varying virtual spaces in which teacher and students find themselves. But this sea change in thinking, practice and organisation is not impossible.

I hope these student voices make an impression.

These are the words of my fabulous, resilient adult learners who take their education just as seriously as you or I. I have no doubt they will continue to soar.

I wonder how long it will take others involved in adult literacy and language education to catch up with them?

**Dale Pobega was *Fine Print* editor from 1993 to 1995. He now teaches at Wyndham Community Education Centre as well as doing consulting and project work for many other local community-based organisations on a range of language and technology projects. Dale's teaching blog, *A Second Crack*, is at <https://dalepobegateaching.blogspot.com/>. His Free ESL Club blog is at <https://dalepobega.blogspot.com/>**

# What's Out There

## ***Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* by bell hooks**

*reviewed by Linno Rhodes*

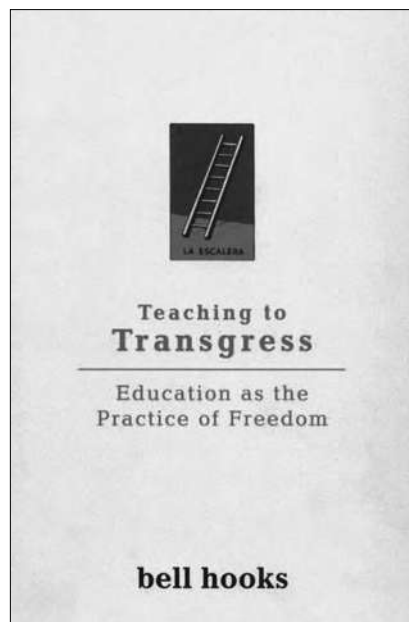
bell hooks is a professor of English at City College in New York. As an academic, she is widely published and highly regarded for her work, which largely centres around race, gender and class politics in academia and in education more broadly.

I became interested in reading bell hooks' work after seeing her referenced in scholarly articles about Paulo Freire, and was thrilled to have found in hooks' work, words and ideas that challenged me and seemed to wake me up from a lazy ideological slumber.

'bell hooks' is a nom de plume. I don't know why she doesn't capitalise her name but I can guess that it is a challenge – a dare – to think about why we do anything automatically. It is a good reminder that without questioning and challenging, we accept the status quo and sometimes that really doesn't do us any favours.

The subtitle of the book, *Education as the Practice of Freedom*, is more than a nod to Paulo Freire, as one of his books is titled *Education, the Practice of Freedom*. Freire influences and informs her thinking and is cited multiple times. bell hooks is an avid reader and follower of Paulo Freire; when Freire gave a lecture at a university where she worked, an attempt was made to prevent her from attending because the institution was concerned that she would challenge the sexism in his writings. She did end up attending the lecture and did end up challenging his sexism which he welcomed and thereby began an exchange of ideas and personal correspondence between the two that lasted for years.

In the chapter 'Building a Teaching Community' hooks presents ideas through a written conversational exchange with a white male academic with whom she regularly meets. They both identify as working class and their conversation refers time and again to their individual cultural identity(ies) as seen through the gender/race/class lens. They both reflect on the way class can stunt your growth: being a college professor was a dream they dared not dream. The silver lining in this is that they both felt free from the ascribed attributes of a college professor.



Ostensibly they were free to challenge the paradigm of the college professor by practicing 'engaged teaching' – where teaching is a dynamic experience that challenges the preconceived notions of who has the power in the classroom and who is allowed to challenge that power.

This collection of essays reflects on the liberatory possibilities within pedagogy. While the discussion that takes place in this text is situated in the university setting, there are some important and relevant parallels with the adult literacy and language (adult education) classrooms that are worth considering.

The multicultural classroom, for example, in the Australian context, is one where educators try to create a learning space that is peaceful and harmonious. Yet hooks challenges this need to create a 'safe' learning environment because it might challenge "truths and biases in the classroom [which] often created confusion and chaos" (p.30). She says there is a danger in homogenising culture when everyone is seen through one lens – we must value difference, not only by celebrating it and inviting discussion about it, but by using cultural differences to inform our teaching and learning. I know this is not a new concept of celebrating difference,

but I do wonder how much we allow those differences to make us uncomfortable enough to really be able to learn from each other's experiences.

This book is challenging – it is brilliantly anti-racist, challenges class assumptions and all through a feminist framework. hooks welcomes exchanges from everyone and values contributions to pedagogical conversations and critiques of the conservative canon.

You don't have to identify as a marginalised person to relate to this book, and it doesn't matter where and at what level you teach. This book speaks to us all and is the spark that can rekindle the fire that perhaps set us out to be teachers in the first place.

I found it to be exciting reading and it is a book that I think would make a good focus for a discussion group. It is important to challenge our assumptions and ideas of what good teaching consists of, and especially to continue to challenge our own ideas of political structures as they may present themselves in workplaces and educational settings.

I really recommend that others read this text and discuss it with friends and colleagues. It is disruptive and thought provoking – just the kind of book I like.

*Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994) is published by Routledge. ISBN: 9780415908085

## Carringbush Reading Series by Carringbush Adult Education

*reviewed by Amelia Trompf*



The Carringbush Reading Series is an excellent resource for adult learners of English as an Additional Language. It is apparent from the titles: *Amal can't go to class*, *A visit to the doctor*, *My English class*, *A busy Saturday* and *Kim volunteers*, that the Carringbush reader topics are highly relevant to the target audience.

From my years as a primary school teacher and more recently as a teacher of adults, I have learned that relevant content and relatable images are essential for engagement and motivation when learning to read. But nothing has brought this home to me more than my most recent experience of home-schooling my son (in Foundation)

during lockdown. For his age, he has an excellent knowledge of letters and sounds and can recall many sight words. However, a couple of months ago he became very resistant to reading. He would squirm and yawn and one morning he literally banged his head on the table while reading.

Although we have a variety of readers at home with beautiful photos and illustrations that would appeal to many children and the level of reader was appropriate, I realised that the content and images were completely inappropriate for him. He was not only bored but also irritated by them. He is currently obsessed with non-fiction

books about wild animals and spends hours poring over the pages, begging me to read to him. So, I have recently made him a series of readers about various wild animals, and almost overnight he has started to read quite fluently and is using a range of reading strategies.

In a similar way, the Carringbush Reading Series is written specifically for the students with images of people not unlike themselves doing real life activities that they would also do themselves in places that they would be familiar with and relate to. Therefore, the readers are both meaningful and purposeful.

It is exciting to see that Carringbush Adult Education has created an app where learners can listen to the sentences read by speakers for whom English is an additional language like themselves and that they can listen to both language chunks and individual words, which provides extra support.

I would love to see additional resources to accompany the Carringbush Reading Series for teachers and volunteers to use. Perhaps lesson plans that include pre-reading discussion questions and vocabulary exercises and post-reading exercises to enhance comprehension and extend thinking around the topic. As the topics are relevant to

all students, I wonder if the series could be varied to suit different levels perhaps by using the same photographs but making the text gradually more difficult?

The Carringbush Reading Series pays enormous respect to the students. I don't know the process the producers undertook but it is apparent that a great deal of thought went into what the students would like to read about and what images they would relate to. I feel inspired myself to one day write some readers based on life at Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre or aspects of life in the suburbs and immediate environment of our students.

The Carringbush Reading Series can be downloaded for free from <https://www.carringbush.org.au/carringbush-reading-series>

The Carringbooks app is available for free from Apple App Store or Google Play.

**Amelia Trompf began teaching English as an Additional Language in Scotland and Canada and now teaches at Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre (currently on maternity leave). She was a primary school teacher for six years before completing a Master of Education (TESOL) at Deakin University.**

## Read / view / listen to this

This summer, we at *Fine Print* are undertaking to becoming better informed about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's histories and perspectives. We asked Rhiannon Madden, Koorie Liaison Officer at William Angliss Institute, for some suggestions and she also shared a selection offered by Jimmy Kyle, who ran a Cultural Competency course at William Angliss Institute.

When we started checking current availability of the titles they suggested, we fell down an internet-rabbit-hole of "You might also like..." – you can see where this ends (or doesn't).

Here we offer a taste of what we discovered, for you to add to your summer reading, viewing and listening lists. We've tried to focus on the recent and readily available, with a classic or two for good measure – it is by no means an exhaustive list! Big thanks to Rhiannon and Jimmy for getting us started.

### Read ...



***Welcome to Country: a travel guide to Indigenous Australia* by Marcia Langton**  
Hardie Grant Travel, 2018. ISBN: 9781741175431

Professor Marcia Langton is an anthropologist and geographer and since 2000 has held the Foundation Chair of Australian Indigenous Studies at the University of Melbourne. According to the Hardie Grant Publishing website, this title offers "fascinating insights into Indigenous languages and customs, history, native title, art and dance, storytelling, and cultural awareness and etiquette for visitors."

A youth edition of this title was published in 2019: *Welcome to Country youth edition: An introduction to our First Peoples for Young Australians*.

***Growing up Aboriginal in Australia* edited by Anita Heiss**  
Black Inc., 2019. ISBN: 9781863959810

Winner of the Small Publisher Adult Book of the Year Award at the 2019 Australian Book Industry Awards, this anthology, compiled by award-winning author Anita Heiss, showcases diverse voices, experiences and stories in order to answer the question: What is it like to grow up Aboriginal in Australia?

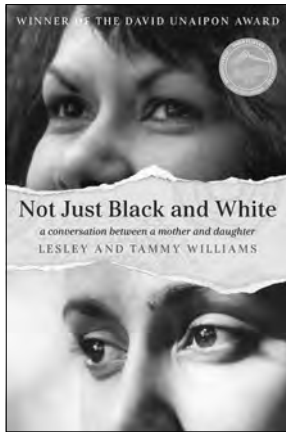


***Australia Day* by Stan Grant**  
HarperCollins, 2019. ISBN: 9781460753187

A follow-up to his critically acclaimed, Walkley Award-winning, bestselling memoir *Talking to My Country* (2016), in *Australia Day*, Stan Grant talks about reconciliation and the indigenous struggle for belonging and identity in Australia, and about what it means to be Australian.

***Taboo* by Kim Scott**  
Picador, 2017. ISBN: 9781925483741

*Taboo* tells the story of a group of Noongar people who revisit, for the first time in many decades, a taboo place: the site of a massacre that followed the assassination, by these Noongar's descendants, of a white man who had stolen a black woman.



***Not Just Black and White: A Conversation Between a Mother and Daughter* by Lesley Williams and Tammy Williams**

University of Queensland Press, 2015. ISBN: 9780702253843

Lesley Williams instigated the domestic and international Justice for Aboriginal Workers campaign seeking the return of stolen wages after her own experience of being removed from Cherbourg Aboriginal Settlement to work as a domestic servant. In 2003 she was awarded the Centenary Medal for her distinguished services to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Her daughter, Tammy Williams, was admitted as a barrister in 2002 and was included in the International Women's Day Power of 100, a list of one hundred women who have helped to shape Australia. This is their memoir.

**View ...**



***In My Blood It Runs* directed by Maya Newell (2019)**

Shot in Mparntwe (Alice Springs), Sandy Bore Homeland and Borroloola Community, Northern Territory, over three and a half years, this is the story of 10-year-old

Dujan and his family. The film was made collaboratively with Arrernte and Garrwa families and advisers. The film's website, <https://inmyblooditruns.com/>, offers much more information as well as links to rent or buy the film. Lily Brown's discussion of *In My Blood It Runs* in *The Conversation* is also well worth a look: <https://theconversation.com/in-my-blood-it-runs-challenges-the-inevitability-of-indigenous-youth-incarceration-140624>

***First Australians* directed by Beck Cole and Rachel Perkins (2008)**

This is a documentary in seven episodes that starts in 1788 and ends in 1993 after the Mabo judgement overturned the notion that Australia was terra nullius at the time of British settlement.

For streaming and download options visit: <http://blackfellafilms.com.au/project/first-australians/>



***Rabbit-Proof Fence* directed by Phillip Noyce (2002)**

A classic of Australian cinema, this film tells the story of three Aboriginal girls who, in 1931, walked 1,600 kilometres to escape a government settlement after being forcibly removed from their families. The film was adapted from the book *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* by Doris Pilkington, the daughter of one of the three protagonists.

If you have a public library card you can stream this film for free on the streaming service, Kanopy: <https://www.kanopy.com/product/rabbit-proof-fence-10>



There were many more suggestions on Jimmy's list than we have room for here, but SBS On Demand and ABC iView are both good places to find old and new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories. Also worth a look for teaching resources is the recently refreshed SBS Learn website. For example: <https://www.sbs.com.au/learn/resources/exploring-australian-narratives/teacher-resource>

## Listen ...

*The White Girl*, Tony Birch's most recent novel, was on Rhiannon's list. Tony Birch is also a great speaker. Listen to him on The Wheeler Centre's *Books and Ideas at Montalto* podcast in January 2020, talking about writing, research and the politics of prejudice – then and now: <https://www.wheelercentre.com/broadcasts/podcasts/books-and-ideas-at-montalto/tony-birch> For an immersive experience, listen to Birch's *Ghost River* on the bank of the Yarra River: <https://www.overdrive.com/media/2883890/ghost-river>

No doubt, Miles Franklin Award winner, *The Yield*, is already on your reading list. You can listen to the author, Tara June Winch, on SBS *Take it Blak* podcast recorded in July 2020: <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/audiotrack/take-it-blak-podcast-short-blak-tara-june-winch>

We mentioned Kim Scott's *Taboo* earlier. You can also listen to Kim Scott reading stories for the *Wirlomin*



*Noongar Language and Stories Project* at <http://wirlomin.com.au/>. This is a project that produced illustrated books in Noongar language. Audio versions of the stories are available in Noongar and English on the website.

Finally – to music! Baker Boy (Danzal Baker) is a Yolngu man who now lives in Bendigo. He won Best Artist, Song of the Year and Best Video Clip for the track *Meditjin* at the 2020 National Indigenous Music Awards. Watch the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=myKF9mxAJ70> if you need a summertime pick-me-up.

And Jimmy Kyle, who set the ball rolling on this list, is a Melbourne-based storyteller and musician. You can find out more about his band, *Chasing Ghosts*, and listen to some tracks on the Triple J Unearthed website: <https://www.triplejearthed.com/artist/chasing-ghosts>



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