This issue: The Place of the 'Adult' in ALBE

Features

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Editorial

Welcome to the first edition of Fine print for 1998. We hope you have all had a satisfying and fruitful start to the new year.

The Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council (VALBEC) celebrates its 20th anniversary in 1998. The field of Adult Literacy and Basic Education has changed dramatically since 1978 when the organisation was founded as the Victorian Adult Literacy Council (VALC). We can discern even in the change of name from VALC to VALBEC a repositioning of the field in terms of the educational terrain that it strives to occupy. The addition of "Basic Education" signaled a changed perspective from a focus on language and literacy alone to one on the provision of a general education for adults. Lately we have heard many attempts to redefine the field again with the term "Adult English Language and Literacy", possibly signaling a shift back to stronger focus on language, but also hinting at the competitive tension between ESL and ALBE in the adult sector.

It's almost an obvious thing to suggest that processes of naming and renaming oneself are acts of self-definition and redefinition. But the fact that the name of the field in which we work has been so fluid in the past and remains so today, possibly indicates that the field itself has never really been certain about what it does and what areas of the wider domain of education and training it is supposed to cover. And this is completely understandable given the enormous breadth of educational activities and provider types within which our teachers work.

So now, in the 20th year of VALBEC, it is timely to grapple with this thorny issue of the identity of our field. Fine Print will devote its four issues to this purpose throughout the year. In each issue we will be examining one of the four terms that constitute the name ALBE : *adult*, *literacy*, *basic*, *education*. As we look at each term we will strive to explore and unravel the assumptions and conceptualisations that the term carries into our work and how we perceive ourselves. We will also attempt to look at how the meanings of the four terms can often conflict with each other and how they can carry the ALBE field into situations of conflicting or cooperative overlap with other fields adjacent to ourselves.

In this edition, a wide range of contributors tackle the term *adult* in ALBE from very different perspectives. In seeking these contributions, we were very mindful of the importance of the age of our students in distinguishing our work from the work of educators in other fields. In the early days of VALBEC, much discussion of a self-constituting nature revolved around the issues of adult learning and teaching processes and how they are different from those in the schools sector. Many practitioners had come from primary and secondary schools

and were confronted by the challenge of redefining themselves and their work within a new and exciting context that appeared to allow for more democratic, flexible and inclusive educational practices. This was also a time of rapid expansion of the further education and training field at a Commonwealth level in Australia, and new research into adult learning overseas. At the same time, there was a revival of interest in self-managing adult educational provision linked with the rise of organised industrial working class movements in the last century, particularly in Britain.

We saw in the 1970's and 1980's frequent propositions of a concept known as androgogy - a set of distinct educational methods for the teaching of adults. It is interesting to ask what has happened to the term, androgogy? Today, in the mid-to-late 1990's we rarely hear it used. Does this indicate a retreat from the focus on the adult in ALBE? Perhaps instead, it reflects an acknowledgment within the field of the complex nature of the adult in our work and in our social, cultural and political lives generally. Perhaps the extraordinary diversity of students taught in ALBE programs now makes it impossible to make any meaningful and coherent generalisations about how these students learn and the best methods of teaching them. Perhaps, the maturity of the field today is reflected in a new eschewal of the temptation to make easy and convenient summative statements about its client group.

Certainly, the various contributors to this edition of Fine Print look at the question of the adult in ALBE from a range of different perspectives. They look at adult learning theories, assessment of adult learners, training of adult learners in industry, teaching of young adults and aged adults in community programs, and the articulation of adulthood in new federal youth assistance programs.

This edition also comes at a time of quite dramatic changes to funding and policy affecting our field which has resulted in a significant number of colleagues losing employment and providers losing courses. In order to keep our readers informed about these very significant changes, we have sought contributions from a number of writers on the causes and effects of these changes.

The Editorial Group would also like to announce a change in our editor and publisher from this edition. We are very happy to welcome the new editor and publisher, Bob Keith. At the same time we would like to express our sincere appreciation of the work of Fragile Design and Louise Wignall for their very fine work on Fine Print over the last two years.

We hope you enjoy this edition of Fine Print as much as we enjoyed putting it together.

Why we teach the way we do:
influences on the practice of adult ESL and ALBE teaching

by Jane Perry

Jane Perry presents us with a broad overview of key influences under pinning teaching practice in both ALBE and ESL.

This article sets out to articulate the kinds of theoretical influences which have affected the practice of Australian adult ESL and ALBE practitioners . The scene that greets us in the late 1990s is in many ways less progressive than in the past. It is not that teachers have renounced their own high ideals and those echoed in teacher training programs around the country. Rather, it has become increasingly clear that teachers' knowledge of their students' needs is no longer the primary force shaping the adult learners' experience.

The difficulty that adult educators face in the 90s is that funding bodies are increasingly focusing on outcomes and that programs must conform to economically driven models of provision. Teachers are compelled to balance the often conflicting demands of competency based approaches with those of student centred approaches. Many feel that this is at the expense of the teacher's own educational philosophy.

In the past, the notion of a process syllabus often guided the development of courses. As learners and teachers worked together, needs were accommodated as they arose. Learners took a significant role in negotiating the focus that the course should take. Perhaps this was more prevalent in the area of ALBE which was historically a volunteer sector with less differentiated status in teacher and learner roles than those existing in mainstream providers. The downside of such curricula, however, is that they rarely lead to credentials and learners are at risk of remaining disadvantaged by their lack of qualifications.

Clearly, other factors also affect opportunities for joint shaping of the curriculum. There is little room for negotiation when curricula are centrally derived and disseminated to providers. It has taken some time since the introduction of competency based curricula such as the CSWE for teachers to develop ways of meeting learners' needs and demonstrating this in ways that funding bodies want. Initially, there was a focus on teaching to competencies which many teachers felt sat uneasily with their preference for a more integrated or holistic curriculum which could be flexible enough to deal with emerging needs among learners. Happily, many teachers now feel that the revised CGEA, in particular, is sufficiently flexible to accommodate learner needs and provide a credential.

There is, I believe, a prevailing approach which can be summarised as learner centred, but seen by teachers as essentially apolitical. It is driven by the need for ALBE and ESL clients to succeed in what is increasingly seen as a marketplace.

So, in order to further the best interests of learners, teachers are increasingly drawn into an economically driven paradigm.

Whereas learners were previously seen to know their own needs, and these might be defined by the contexts in which literacy or English language proficiency was required, their needs now tend to be viewed in economic terms. If the society were truly willing or able to meet these needs, the focus on outcomes might not be so problematic. However, with consistently high rates of unemployment the norm, there is an uneasy fit between many courses and the needs of learners who, for whatever reason, are unlikely to re-enter the paid workforce.

It can be difficult to trace the sources of influence in teachers' practice because their approaches are constantly evolving based on a sense of what works for them and for their learners. As teachers make something of their own and influence each other, the source of these ideas and practices can be obscured. So let us look first at some of the key influences in adult learning theory - the no doubt familiar names of Malcolm Knowles, Paulo Freire and Jack Mezirow. Each has contributed to the field in vastly different ways, though their specific contributions may not be fully recognised by the practitioners themselves.

In developing his theory of adult learning, Knowles reflected on, and drew deeply from, his own experiences. Early in his career, for example, he noticed dramatic differences in motivation and learning that arose when a traditionally organised astronomy class became learner centred. As a consequence, Knowles became committed to the notion of self directed learning. He stressed that learning is maximised by a focus on what the learner wants to learn and that this requires a profound shift in the way teachers see themselves and approach the task of educating others. This shift in perspective is reflected in his writing about the day that he changed from a teacher to a facilitator of learning.

Knowles was also profoundly influenced by psychologist Carl Rogers, and his approach reflects this through its focus on the growth and development of the individual. Knowles saw the task of the adult sector as helping 'grown-up' people to transform themselves into mature adults. In spelling out what teachers needed to do to bring about this transformation, he used the word "andragogy". Perhaps, strangely, he defined it as "an emerging technology for adult learning", yet his view was essentially that the adult educator is a guide and a manager of processes. It is through these processes that the content is approached and apprehended.

Many critics have disagreed with Knowles' distinction between pedagogy and andragogy on the basis that it creates a false separation between teaching and learning approaches for children and adults. His work has also been criticised for its emphasis on individual growth and transformation without attending to social and political issues affecting the learners. Knowles, unlike Freire, did not challenge the hierarchical, and sometimes exploitative, society in which learners live.

The Brazilian educator-activist Paulo Freire, was a pioneer of what is often termed liberatory education or education for social change. Since adult education has most often been directed at those disadvantaged by lack of educational opportunities, Freire was convinced that it must empower learners. The bottom up approach he developed relied on culture circles to create the foundations for literacy development. His approach links illiteracy to broader social problems, and so solutions are also viewed more broadly.

In Freire's view, it is not simply up to the individuals to transform themselves, because this does nothing to reduce the barriers to participation in society that illiterate people face. His view of education was that it should contribute to social change and that it could provide hope for the poor and powerless. Clearly, linking literacy to social reform is potentially disruptive because it threatens entrenched power structures. In Brazil, Freire's leadership of the radical National Literacy Campaign was sufficient to have him imprisoned. Ultimately, he was forced to flee the country.

Though the term "empower" is frequently used today, it is a far cry from the socially transformative experience that Freire envisaged. His practice was firmly rooted in the communal peasant cultures in which he worked. It seems impossible to reconcile liberatory education with a focus on the individual, 'top down' funding bodies and the push for market-driven outcomes.

Interestingly, in the American adult education field, there are current projects which support adult learners to become spokespeople and participants in the shaping of adult education. A recent example is the "Learn to Lead" project arising from the Highlander Centre. In this project, a committee of adult learners and adult education professionals has planned a series of adult learner leadership activities titled, the "Learn to Lead Initiative". It aims to develop the leadership capacities of former and current participants in adult basic skills programs, through group projects in which they solve problems of concern to them. The emphasis is less evident in current Australian adult education. However, it can be seen in the commitment of community based providers to committees of management which truly represent the community of adult learners.

Jack Mezirow is a more recent contributor the field. He sees reflection as an essential aspect of good teaching practice

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as it is from this reflection on action that good theory will arise. He argues that the relationship between theories of learning and the taught curriculum is not always a straightforward one. Mezirow views this discrepancy as a concern, and he expresses it thus:

> A disturbing fault line separates theories of adult learning from the practice of those who try to help adults learn.

He points out that a behaviourist approach is frequently promoted by government because it has many features, such as a focus on measurable outcomes and accountability, which make it amenable to bureaucratic control. Yet this behaviourist approach is at odds with the intuitive sense that many practitioners share, that the task of educating adults is more slippery and less predictable than those charged with the task of allocating funds amongst competing providers might like to believe.

Teachers of adults have long sought to understand the apparent differences in the ways their students learn. There have been a number of influential theorists in the field who have sought to understand and explain differences in the ways that people approach learning. David Kolb outlined four phases of the learning cycle, but pointed out that learners often had a preference for either concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation or active experimentation. Honey and Mumford reworked Kolb's ideas and created a learning inventory which has also gained some currency.

Less mainstream methods such as Neuro Linguistic Programming are sometimes cited by teachers as influences shaping their practice. NLP is based on the work of American linguists Bandler and Grinder who analysed communication patterns, and they have suggested that there are predominant senses which affect not only our most effective learning strategies, but our ways of perceiving the world. Psychological instruments such as the Myer Briggs Type Indicator are also used in an attempt to better understand learner strategies and approaches to learning. Bernice McCarthy has integrated and applied the material on learning styles and left/right brain dominance to come with the 4 Mat System which can be applied to the learning and teaching of both adults and children.

So far my focus has been on the influence of government adult education theorists on adult education practice. Yet the practice of both ESL and ALBE has also, not surprisingly, been substantially affected by input from leaders in the language field. For some, the vehicle of their influence has been theory, while for others it has been assessment tools, course documents and policy documents.

In ESL programs in Australia, the communicative approach is the prevailing orthodoxy. In fact, many young teachers have never encountered other approaches because it has constituted the mainstream for well over a decade now. It could be argued that it found favour with teachers as much because of its

adaptability to different programs, and the ease with which it could be customised, as for any theoretical justification.

David Ingram, who with Elizabeth Wylie created the ASLPR, argued in 1981 that curriculum should form a bridge between learners and the Australian community. This would be achieved through attending to learners' needs, stages of language development and aspirations while capitalising on their learning strategies. In this way, he believed, any sense of alienation is reduced. Ingram and Wylie's influence, through the ASLPR, has been immense, and to a large degree, this approach to program planning has been evident in the work of AMES and many other providers in Australia.

The 'language experience' approach derives the language to be learned from within the experience of the learners in much the same way that Freire situated literacy teaching. 'Language experience' is still commonly used with students at lower levels of proficiency , particularly those not literate in their first language. The approach is seen by many teachers to elicit from, or provide students with, a shared concrete experience around which the more abstract operations involved in literacy can be based.

James Gee and other proponents of critical literacy aim to assist learners to engage with, and critically examine, their world. They recognise the multiple literacies which are required for full participation in society and, "to do more than reproduce standard ways of thinking", as Ray Misson puts it. He sees it as teaching ways of understanding society that can lead learners to more informed decision making about the acceptance or rejection of others' views. In short, it can make people less manipulable and give them the power to critique their own society rather than accepting the labels that might be placed on the powerless.

Currently, the prevailing methodology in adult literacy circles, and increasingly in ESL, is what has become known as the genre approach. The original work of Michael Halliday and his colleagues in the field of systemic functional linguistics has been interpreted by teacher trainers and professional development providers because it is seen to demand high levels of grammatical knowledge from teachers. This means that the theory has a tendency to filter down to practitioners in a pre-digested form. Many teachers find it workable and worthwhile because it provides structured approaches to modelling, deconstructing and constructing texts with students. However, encountering the ideas second hand can mean that teachers, while committed to the approach, may be unsure of its origins and unable to evaluate the ideas for themselves.

Other sources of considerable influence are the curriculum credentials currently used by countless providers. The CSWE and the CGEA are competency based curricula with a pervasive focus on texts, whether written or oral. The CGEA also sets out four literacies which are reflected

throughout. They are: literacy for self expression, for practical purposes, for knowledge and for public debate. As with the ASLPR, which was frequently moderated both between teachers and centres, the centralised curricula are potentially very powerful normative forces.

The work of Dell Hymes has also been very influential, particularly in the teaching of ESL. Hymes was one of the first theorists who encouraged us to look beyond the language act itself to understand teaching language. His model for examining "communication events" is summarised in his much used acrostic:

- Situation and scene – where and when it happens
- Participants – who is involved
- Ends – what do participants want to achieve
- Act sequence –what happens and in what order
- Key – is it serious, light-hearted, satirical, etc.
- Instrumentality – is it writing, face-to-face, etc.
- Norms – who speaks first
- Genre – is it a poem, a recipe, etc.

Stephen Krashen's view that there could be a natural approach to language learning and teaching found favour with many teachers in the 1980s. He, among others, emphasised the importance of pitching language input at a level just above that at which learners can currently perform, to facilitate second language acquisition. His distinction between unconscious "acquisition" and conscious "learning", was much harder for teachers to apply and was soon dismissed.

> **'Teachers of adults have long sought to understand the apparent differences in the ways their students learn'**

Mannfred Pienemann's multidimensional model of language learning argued that all learners go through consistent stages of acquisition which are characterised by the linguistic features they contain. Much of what they discovered is consistent with the experience of first language learners. Although learners will acquire many linguistic features in the same sequence, the rate at which they progress will vary according to a range of individual factors. His work suggested that a curriculum based on the stages of acquisition could be more 'learnable', but this proved very difficult for teachers to implement.

Pienemann's influence has been greater in the area of child ESL in that it informs key documents such as the *ESL Framework of Stages*. Courseware oriented to the adult learner is more inclined to be sequenced around the pressing need to function in the community than on stages of acquisition.

Most studies have failed to identify the features that characterise second language learning processes at different maturity levels. In fact, there has been much fruitless debate and superficial focusing on adult/child differences. The prevailing view in the community tends to assume that children acquire a second or subsequent language more easily. However, it is essential to consider the contexts in which

people learn, the availability of comprehensible input pitched at their needs, the time and resources available to them to learn, and the type of linguistic demands placed upon them.

Whereas children have to learn how to learn, adults have to find the already existing cognitive pegs on which to hang new knowledge. Some studies into language acquisition and the 'age factor' seem to suggest that adolescents learn better and that intelligence, aptitude, personality, motivational characteristics and learning styles all have an influence. However, it is difficult to tease these out because learner characteristics are not independent of each other. Researchers know little about the nature of these complex interactions according to Lightbown and Spada, so it is difficult to predict how an individual's characteristics might influence their success.

It is clear, though, that no age or stage is critical for all aspects of second language learning. Language learning may occur at different maturity levels and each stage of development might have advantages and disadvantages for second language learning. Phonology, vocabulary and syntax seem to affected little by age, while it is thought to be difficult to acquire unaccented speech after puberty. What is clear is that adults and children have some common strategies and stages in second language learning, many of which are common to first language acquisition.

It has also been suggested that children and adults have different psychological approaches to language learning - that children are social and communicative whereas older learners respond to cognitive and academic approaches. However, every teacher of a class made up of diverse individuals, whether children or adults, knows the fallacy of such generalisations.

In the search for effective teaching methodologies, attention has turned to research into learner behaviour in second language classrooms. Several studies suggest that more language can be encouraged if learners interact with their peers in small groups or on convergent tasks. From kindergarten learners to university students studying second languages, it seems that teachers' personalised speech to learners can positively influence second language acquisition, especially where the teacher is able to adjust her use of language to provide input just slightly above the level at which students can perform.

David Nunan has been another significant influence in Australia over the last decade, largely through his prolific writings. In the late 1980s, he led and researched large scale curriculum renewal projects within AMES, and this research formed the basis for professional development programs. The focus was on developing curricula which were learner centred, based on needs assessment, using the community as a resource and the design of task-based curriculum to reflect learners' real-world needs.

Stern says we can summarise the options for curriculum design as a spectrum - from narrow and unidimensional to broad and multidimensional. Real language encountered in the community is multidimensional, however, developing such broad curricula places great demands on teachers' skills. In 1985, Bartlett and Butler observed that AMES teachers trying to implement the learner centred curriculum needed: needs assessment skills, course planning skills, bilingual help in negotiating the curriculum, continuity in the program, educational counselling, conflict resolution skills, and teacher role specification.

With the advent of more centralised curricula, the only item which appears possible to be dispensed with is bilingual help in negotiating the curriculum. In fact, teachers' roles are growing ever more complex with the need for extra skills in areas such as technology, submission writing and competency based assessment.

At a time of considerable uncertainty over funding arrangements, it is interesting to note that a higher degree of control over outcomes is now required of teachers. A key question is how teachers can continue to reconcile the competing demands of their roles while assisting learners to take the risks required for real progress. As unprecedented numbers of teachers engage in reflective discourse and research, the answers will undoubtedly be found in their lived experience as teachers and adult learners. This will in turn inform theory.

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References

The extensive range of references throughout the article can be provided upon request from Bob Keith on 9687 3927.

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.

"So why are these kids in our class? Why aren't they at school?"

by Barb Lorey

Barb Lorey looks at the increasing presence of adolescent learners in ALBE classes.

The question in the title of this article greeted me from several of our older students during coffee break soon after two, fifteen year olds joined our full time adult literacy group. After an explanation that they were looking for an alternative to school, one of the older group said, "Sounds just like me when I was young 'cept for me there wasn't an alternative. For me it was straight out into a factory or into outdoor work. Somewhere I could use me hands not me head." In adult education providers there is a growing trend to see numbers of very young students, 14, 15 and 16 year olds, seeking entry to adult literacy classes. At the 1997 VALBEC conference, representatives from thirty providers from metropolitan and country Victoria joined a workshop dealing with the issues raised by this phenomenon. The workshop highlighted the changing nature of the student population being attracted to adult providers and some attendant problems with establishing either all-teenage groups or blending mature age and teenage students.

In this article I will explore the experiences within only one provider, Morrison House, in coming to terms with these changes, and I will discuss some of the reasons these students are accessing adult learning centres; the relevance of the CGEA to them; the learning styles of this learner group and the appropriateness of ALBE teaching methods; the ability of adult providers to meet their needs; integration issues; and pathways for this adolescent group.

And so a word about Morrison House. It is a community provider in Melbourne's outer east providing a wide range of adult education programs including craft, VET and VCE courses, and also catering for MID and ESL students. From its beginnings in 1981, Morrison House has attracted both male and female students, but industry restructuring, growing unemployment and DEETYA funding brought a large group of middle-aged males seeking literacy assistance.

During the last four years, Morrison House has become increasingly involved with adolescent education in a number of diverse ways. Initially, we were approached by a local secondary college to provide assistance, at the school, for a small number of year 11 VCE students who were having literacy and numeracy difficulties and were undertaking a modified VCE. Shortly after, a new project involving teaching staff from Morrison House working in tandem with two shire-employed youth workers, provided a 'shopfront' program for a small group of students, with both behavioural and literacy difficulties, drawn from several local secondary colleges. Since then, Morrison House staff have worked independently to provide pathways to employment or study programs for unemployed youth within the shire. These groups were all-teenage classes. During the

last two years, however, there has been a further shift. We have been approached by local schools, both private and state, by parents and by employment agencies, who are all seeking alternative education for teenagers. Because there are seldom enough young students to warrant an individual class, we have incorporated them into our existing adult literacy classes. Hence the opening remarks of the older student.

Why do teenage students want to move to the adult sector? Why do they perceive the school sector as unable to meet their needs?

From the outset, it is important to acknowledge that there is not a generic adolescent who is seeking the adult education experience. Their stories and their reasons are as varied as our mature age students. However, there are some patterns that seem to emerge. Some arrive with long histories of literacy/numeracy problems stemming from primary school. Others have disabilities such as chronic illness or intellectual disability that have made learning in a school setting very difficult. Yet others have been thankfully farewelled by schools (sometimes several schools!!) where they have caused havoc to varying degrees. Some arrive in an adult learning class only days after leaving a school situation and others after months or years away from a consistent year of education. There are those who remain angry and continue to play the same 'get-the-teacher' games, not quite realising that the scene has changed. Conversely, there are some who are so pleased to be away from problems with their peers and the pressure of the school situation that they flourish in the new environment. The extent to which enrolment is a matter of free choice is also of paramount importance. Any combination of these factors will have a crucial influence on the experience of the teenage student, on other members of the class in which they enrol and on the provider. The situation is complex, to say the least.

For the majority of teenage students, the school sector very adequately provides for their educational, social and emotional needs. But for the minority who experience learning difficulties, who for various reasons are not part of the in-group, who exhibit behavioural problems, who have learning styles that cannot be catered for, or, on occasions, those who do not achieve the expected academic standard of a school, an alternative is sought. Students themselves cite reasons for leaving the school sector as "looking for direction", "needing time out to work on reading, writing and spelling" and "not getting help because they (the teachers) are too busy". Many of the adolescent students also know that they didn't put in and didn't fulfil work requirements, and that a bad reputation, once established, is difficult to reverse. For these students there was often a feeling of everything moving too fast, of having too

many subjects to cope with and a sense of education having little relevance to their lives or their futures. Some of our older students remember hours of mowing school lawns or mending chairs when they were unable to cope. Alarmingly, a few of our younger students have stories that are not that dissimilar. It is heartening to hear that there are moves to introduce alternative experiences within some secondary schools where year 10 students have the opportunity to combine one day a week work experience with their studies. My concern is that many of the inquiries we receive are on behalf of year 8 and 9 students!

The recurrent theme, then, is that these students hope to find a direction and a space to consolidate the skills that they know they lack. Many of them can clearly elucidate their literacy and numeracy problems. They can often pinpoint when and where everything began to get difficult. Most of them have little idea of effective reading, writing or study techniques that good students seem to utilise. What they are looking for is time to learn these, to practice skills and to feel successful.

Are adult teaching methods appropriate to the learning styles of adolescents?

The principles guiding adult education are based on the premise that adult learners are a valuable learning resource, that they need to become increasingly self-directed, that the tutor and the student are in a collaborative and informal relationship, that experiential and problem centred learning is particularly effective and that there is collaborative evaluation of the program and the changing needs of students (Knowles: 1990). It makes a great deal of sense therefore that adult learning providers are able to provide a setting that allows greater independence, and less authority centred learning, suited to the minority of adolescent learners who are not comfortable in the school system. Adult providers and the accompanying teaching methods can allow young students a viable alternative: time-out to experience learning where they have to take some responsibility in a learning environment that is able to be flexible to accommodate their needs.

Students, however, whether mature age or teenage may not necessarily be able to take immediate advantage of this philosophy. Many may need more direct intervention and move slowly towards self-direction. So it is very likely that there will be an adjustment time as adolescents shift to independent learning and a less formal setting. To them it may look like a soft option, so it will be important that they are sufficiently challenged and engaged if they are to become involved in the learning.

We have run several problem-solving learning projects that were collaborative and discovery-based where the students were in the driver's seat, mainly because they knew more about the project than the teachers did! For instance, the students set up and ran a worm farm and a T-shirt printing enterprise. They also ran car maintenance demonstrations for other classes and they made eight billy carts for the Holiday Program. In all of these, the students researched the costs, techniques and production methods and evaluated outcomes. The beauty of a large 'project' is that individual talents can be used; that learning is real and moves beyond the classroom; and that there is a sense of individual and group achievement.

Since the outcomes are unknown at the beginning, and unforeseen problems arise along the way, there is a reality

and excitement that gives life to the learning and necessitates problem solving. For instance how do you get finance to build billy carts when as a group you don't have a cent to begin the business? How do you deal with customers when the first T-shirts off the production line lose their design after the first wash? Students of any age can participate meaningfully in learning of this nature. Perhaps it is too extreme to say that it is human nature to want to solve problems, but most students enjoy the challenge, which in turn makes learning real. There are also amazing outcomes when, for instance, an adult literacy student ploughs through and understands literature sent by the Agriculture Department concerning which species of worms are the most sexually active, but which will also make the best fishing bait!

Recent research has indicated that there are a variety of learning styles which affect how learners deal with the input, processing and output of information. *The Toolkit for Trainers* mentions that as tutors "we tend to facilitate in the learning style in which we learn which means that we are not catering to the needs of the …other styles." Not only is it important for tutors to know how they teach, but it is also important to show jaded young learners that there may be other ways to learn and strategies to utilise in order to become successful learners. Many of our students are unaware that individuals employ different methods to learn and find it a revelation that perhaps they have not been taught in a style that suited them. They find it very motivating to know that they can learn strategies to input, remember and process information.

Is the CGEA relevant in meeting the needs of young learner?

Since the CGEA is a framework of skills in the areas of literacy, numeracy and oracy, active listening and work related skills, I believe it is an extremely useful document in the assessment and skill development of teenage students who access adult learning providers. After all, young students seeking places in adult providers are generally not the high achievers. They are frequently students with literacy and numeracy problems who can benefit from specific skill based assistance through topics that are of interest to them. In our experience, young students benefited from being aware of the criteria, fulfilling these to achieve outcomes and ultimately achieving levels. These steps have the potential for creating focus and aiding concentration.

As a framework, the CGEA is not content specific and therefore provides flexibility of approach and topic which can be tailored to the needs of diverse groups and individuals within groups. This is a distinct advantage as students can gain credit for work that is completed in widely varying venues and in courses not specifically focused on literacy such as the film-making courses recently run by PRACE.

Integration Issues

There are many integration issues, but many of these can be grouped into three areas, namely: establishing a group cohesion, adolescent behaviour and its relationship to goals, and topic or activity choice.

The establishment of group cohesion is always a consideration in adult education but becomes increasingly so if there are disparate ages within a group. Paired or small group activities that mix the age groups, and seating that

does not emphasise 'them and us' can assist in building cohesion. Relocating the group outside the classroom for barbecues, activities and outings alleviates some of the pressures as students relate on a personal level which challenges stereotypical behaviour of age groups. For instance, perceived roles are often reviewed with the discovery that a granddad with a wicked sense of humour still rides motorbikes and that younger group members can have deep concern for world issues or perhaps take part in volunteer work. On good days, generation gaps close. On bad days, it can look like a family feud. Valuable learning takes place in both situations.

The most apparent and recurring issue is behaviour. Adolescents generally, though not always, have an exuberance that can seriously affect the concentration of others in confined spaces like classrooms and computer rooms, and their fruity language rolls almost uncontrollably off their tongues. Language, noisy behaviour and an inability to concentrate seem to be the factors constantly requiring a tutor's attention. Older students may not have the desired patience to cope. Consequently, the tutor's role can fluctuate from disciplinarian to mediator to facilitator. Therefore, establishing a group code of conduct early in the life of such a group pays great dividends. Having had the occasional experience of being caught on the hop with an unexpected punch-up or deliberately lit fire (small but effective!), I would suggest that it is worth having consequences in place for misdemeanours. Also, since some of the teenagers who are attracted to adult learning exited school as a result of ADD, it is also advantageous for tutors to be forearmed with some strategies to enhance the learning of these students.

Finally, since the interests of teenagers and mature age learners can be very different, it is well worth the time to negotiate either group or individual topics, activities and projects. If these can be based on problem solving principles as suggested earlier, and different learning styles can be catered for, then learning goals become a focus rather than an issue.

Pathways and Articulation

Teenage students who choose the alternative of adult learning providers have many paths open to them. Some young students use the adult provider as a time-out venue to improve their literacy, numeracy and study skills and then move back into the mainstream secondary system. Generally they begin at a new school.

Others move through the various levels of the CGEA and on achievement of level 4 can consider some subjects in VCE. Depending on their age and time away from school, they may be able to complete adult VCE at community providers without returning to the secondary sector.

For yet others, the pathways can lead onto various other courses in the adult arena. For instance, Skillshares, the TAFE system or courses at other community providers offer pathways to careers or further study.

So can adult providers meet the needs of teenage students?

The answer, I believe, is yes, depending on the needs and nature of both the individual student and the provider. Thus the provider would benefit from constructing a needs analysis which collects information about students who wish to move into the adult sector. It would be useful to know about their school and post-school experiences; literacy or numeracy problems; relationships with other students and teachers; short, medium and long term goals; expectations of the provider and parents (unlike mature age students, parents can feature significantly in the decision-making).

Similarly the provider needs to consider what the costs and benefits for them are with the inclusion of adolescents in programs; whether they are going to have an all-teenage group or a multi-age group; How they will challenge the jaded learner; what their code of acceptable behaviour is; how possible breaches will be dealt with; and who will make the decisions.

In conclusion then, there are inevitably costs and benefits for any individual within any group. In adult education there are always diversities within the groups that are created: male and female, people with different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, differing interests and abilities. Young students can benefit from entering a classroom where adults learn because they want to, and where the classroom is a broader reflection of society than they may have experienced in their previous education. Older students can benefit from the greater technological expertise of young students and, perhaps, their new solutions to old problems. By adding in teenage students who basically have the same needs as the existing individuals, the soup just becomes richer and more interesting.

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Coming issues of *Fine Print* in 1998

In 1998 *Fine Print* focuses on how the Adult Literacy and Basic Education teachers define themselves as a distinct field of education.

To this end, each issue is devoted to one of the four terms by which we identify ourselves in our collective name, ALBE.

This edition considers the place of the 'Adult' in ALBE.

The second edition will focus on the centrality of 'Literacy' in ALBE. It will address such questions as:

1. How and why has our understanding of literacy competence expanded so dramatically in the past decade?

2. In what ways is this affecting how and what we as practitioners teach students?

The third edition will explore the concept of 'Basic' in ALBE. It will raise issues such as:

1. What is a basic education and is it the same as a general education?

2. Is the aim of providing a general education for adults realisable within the everyday constraints faced by students, teachers and providers today?

3. How do teachers marry the requirements for providing a basic or general education with the brief of increasing the language and literacy competence of the students?

The final edition will tackle the 'E' in ALBE. It will draw in the various themes explored in the previous three editions, promoting dialogue between writers and looking at how these questions are creatively tackled across the diverse range of sites and contexts in which ALBE practitioners can be found at work.

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

Testing and Assessment in Adult Basic Education

by Patrick Griffin

In this article, Patrick Griffin tackles the thorny question of what sort of assessment is suitable in the adult learning context.

It has become fashionable, and perhaps even a canon of adult education these days, to criticise testing and structured, formalised assessment. Moreover, when the assessment is linked to continua or growth or progressions, the criticisms take on a more strident tone. "Tests are bad", we are told, and yet most of the time we will emphasise the importance of assessment to the success of a basic education program. Elsewhere, competency assessment brings even greater importance to ways of obtaining evidence for developing skills. It has also emphasised the role of performance assessment, but seems to have diminished the importance of assessing underlying knowledge.

This discussion is not an apology for formalised, standardised assessment or tests. I propose to discuss some ways in which more structured assessment can be used in making meaningful judgements about learner progress in adult education and how these might differ from those that apply to school-based assessment.

> *... gains in self-esteem, while important, are a temporary phenomenon in adult basic education in the absence of learning*

First, what are the purposes in adult education?

Perhaps we can divide the purposes into five categories. First, we need to understand where we are at the beginning of instruction. That is, we need to understand what 'raw materials' we are dealing with in the classroom or training context and what we have got going for us as a trainer-learner combination. This involves an initial assessment which is usually of two kinds: an attempt to understand the person as an individual - that is, their background, motivation, personality, etc.; and an evaluation of their current educational level and achievement.

Second, we need to determine how to proceed. This step may include placement within a structured adult education program and/or decisions regarding an individually tailored instructional program for the learner.

The third goal of the assessment is, in many cases, related to a reasoned guess about the chances of success in a specific learner's case. Of course, each program has a different set of goals for its students and therefore different criteria for success. It may be a need to predict speed or rate of progress through the program, to judge how long it may take this person to achieve a specified level of reading (perhaps defined by the national standards), or to predict success within a vocational training program, and so on.

Fourth, a frequent goal of assessment is to answer the question about how well we are doing. We need to know whether or not the learner is making gains and where they are having trouble. These may all be grouped within the category of growth perhaps. To answer this question, we need to know the direction, extent and nature of the growth continuum. That is, we need to know how to recognise growth when we see it and we must be able to describe it to the learner and, sometimes, to other teachers.

Finally, assessment is necessary in determining a point at which the learner and program may say that the job is completed and that the purposes for which we were striving have been accomplished. Call this success, achievement or promotion. It may be the case that the student has completed the equivalent of Year 10 education and is ready to proceed to the final years of adult secondary education or they may be ready to be employed as a driver, and so on.

Who are the people for whom these assessments are intended - who wants to know these things?

The teacher needs to be able to use the results of the assessment in day-to-day work with the student. In particular, the teacher must be able to use whatever information is available to gear instruction to the learner. The kinds of assessments which are useful to the teacher are not necessarily those which concern the next group of people for whom assessment is important - the administrators of the various adult basic education programs. Although they are also concerned with the individual, administrators need group information. Their primary responsibility requires that they know how to develop classes, what materials to order, how classes are progressing, how many students will complete the course, etc. The administrator needs to plan and carry out research and must report all sorts of summary statistics to the supervisor and funding bodies.

Finally, assessment is important to the learners themselves. This kind of feedback is very important, especially in adult learning programs. The student or client needs to know how they are doing. They need assurance that they are in fact getting ahead. Naturally, the facts and figures which are useful to teachers and administrators have only marginal interest, value or meaning for the students. The results the learner needs and wants to know about are intensely personal, and any assessment will have to be of this kind before the learner will care about it and use the information to motivate learning. Impersonal assessments are next to useless for the learner.

What sort of assessment?

It may sound as if we should be doing nothing but assessing the student in adult education programs, and this is not too far from the truth. Any good educational program includes, in one way or another, very frequent continuous assessment for one or another of the purposes or groups we have mentioned.

But things are not as bad, or as assessment-obsessed, as it may seem. Though all the formal assessment requires systematic data collection that is reliable and valid (and not just declarative reliability and validity), not all assessment needs to be so formalised. Every teacher, every day, observes and intuitively records judgements and inferences about learners. This information, when linked to more formal assessments, makes a formidable data base from which to meet the needs of the audiences and purposes described above.

Tests can be used. They can be formalised, standardised or informal teacher made tests. However, much information that is needed cannot be obtained with tests.

Interviewing or counselling on a one-to-one basis is a source of a great deal of information valuable to the instructional program. This applies in particular to the initial assessment, which must be made as rapidly as possible and with as little anxiety as possible for the student. The 'personal touch' is extremely important in this aspect of assessment.

Informal testing plays an important role in the assessment for placement, curriculum planning and evaluation for progress placement or completion. Such assessment includes work samples, teacher-made tests and exercises and observations The list could be extended as far as creative program-people wish to stretch it. However, we come then to the role of formal testing in adult education.

What makes for good formal assessment for adults?

Our research in assessment in training and adult education contexts has convinced us that the motivations and reactions of the typical adults in basic education programs are very different from those of the primary or secondary school pupils with whom they are so often compared. Those who work with adults are familiar with the need for relevant teaching materials, approaches and assessment methods when working with adult learners. In particular, they are familiar with the response of adult learners to testing. Adult learners do not 'take well' to being tested. Let us consider for a moment why this is the case.

For a start, the adults are not used to paper and pencil tests. They have been out of school for some time and the art or skills involved in taking tests are new to them. Often, tests

> **'it is important that the adult understands why the test is being given, that is, that there is a personal reason for the test and that it is to identify ways to help and not to judge'**

remind them of school, a place in which they probably felt very threatened and uncomfortable and where they felt they were required to do the impossible and then penalised for not doing it. Also, they might be threatened by the feeling for being measured. They have been bombarded with employment forms and assessments, and they sometimes feel the teacher or placement person is 'out to get them'. They have failed before and don't wish to repeat the experience. They have built up defences against anyone finding out that they do not read or write and they may not want to admit to you, in the basic education program, the extent of their difficulties. It is also often the case that many learners are not used to following a rigid format or to the discipline of following directions or working to set time limits.

Add to these possibilities the fact that they might speak a foreign language. Even if the students are native English speakers, the 'school English' employed in many tests may well seem to be a foreign language. There is also the real possibility that very few of these students will ever have used one of the common forms of scannable answer sheets with its tiny spaces and high-density format. Further, sometimes adult learners seem to lack motivation and they don't seem to care what happens. They have been conditioned not to expect any progress and they won't try to put their 'best foot forward'. This could have the unfortunate result that they will give up when the going gets tough. This is exacerbated when the teacher or administrator has little faith in testing and makes comments like, "we have to do this, but don't worry about the results."

In developing tests for adults we need to be aware of several things. First, the order of the items is extremely important, even in a dictated test. Many adults, especially those with the most severe difficulties in literacy, will simply stop at the first question they cannot answer. Many adults leave out questions they could answer, simply because they are 'turned off' by a single hard question.

Second, many adults in basic education programs simply will not 'guess' at multiple choice items. They will either answer correctly or omit the question. At present we don't know why this happens with adults but not with school students. Of course we can guess, and possibly many adult educators would agree on a reason, but the research simply has not been done. It could be that the adult would prefer to remain 'mute' rather than be shown to be wrong. Silence does not demonstrate guilt and psychologically this ambiguity seems more desirable than the possibility that they might even guess correctly. It also shows the basic conservatism of adult basic education students - they hesitate to take the risk of being wrong.

What can be done to minimise these stumbling blocks to the effective use of tests with adult basis education students?

One possibility is to minimise the mechanics of test taking. If possible, eliminate answer sheets or other forms of recording responses to make the format and the timing, etc. as informal as possible. Be sure that the test administrator is thoroughly familiar with the test, follows instructions exactly and provides an atmosphere for testing that is calm, unhurried and non-threatening. It is important to make the test count and to be sure that the teacher and the learner are both getting what is wanted and needed out of every test. When selecting or making up a test, be sure that it is intended for adults - that is, its content has interest for adults and it measures skills they might readily recognise as important to their every day lives. We can expect less information through lack of motivation when an adult is faced with a test full of questions about marbles, balloons and visits to the zoo.

To prepare students pre-test, it is important that the adult understands why the test is being given, that is, that there is a personal reason for the test and that it is to identify ways to help and not to judge. It is also important to make sure the 'job' is clearly understood by giving plenty of practice before the testing begins. It is useful to warn them not to expect to know all the answers so that they don't 'stew' over any specific question. Try to keep them going – answering all the questions they know and leaving others out – at least the first time through. Also, encourage them to guess. It is rare that a guess is a pure guess. Many times alternatives are eliminated using partial knowledge and the guess is limited to fewer alternatives. After the test, be sure that the student gets feedback. It must be clear that the test is useful to the student, otherwise the test will be, rightly, rejected next time.

When the test is administered and scored, the job is far from over. Test scores must be translated into some useful way of making decisions about prescriptions for action. The teacher needs to figure out what the test scores and data mean. This is the hardest part of any assessment, whether it is based on test data or on observation. It is also the most important. It may be comforting (or sometimes confusing) to have neatly typed pages of figures, however, if we cannot make sense of the data and make decisions or take sensible action as a result of testing, it will not have been of any use at all.

Before we go any further, we need to remind ourselves that no form of assessment, including tests is a perfect method. No matter how well a test is prepared or how high its reported reliability and validity is reported to be, the score and the test data is only an indication or an estimate. It may only be used to provide guidelines, clues or indications of the situation. It does not, and never can, define the amount of learning or whatever. The test should never be used in isolation or be treated as an infallible revelation of truth. Good assessment comes from many sources, including tests, to help make reasoned judgements, to proceed with some action, and to make an evaluation of the action taken.

Let's go back to the purposes of assessment. What kinds of decisions are we trying to make?

Put simply, we want clues that will aid us in comparing the effectiveness of delivery with the program goals, and determining if the learner is developing. We also said that the assessment should be useful to the students and should give the teacher useful information that can be used to provide feedback for them. One obvious way to accomplish this is to go over the test with the students - discuss questions, rework problems, help them to see and understand any errors and successes. Such feedback is an important instructional device – a 'learning experience'. However, we must also help the students to self assess against some meaningful criterion.

Note that we are deliberately avoiding the use of 'norm' or 'standard'. School level norms do not represent meaningful comparisons for adult tests. No adult will find it meaningful to be told they are "just about matching third graders" in some skill. It would seem self evident, however, that an adult student would wish to compare achievement against that of other adults, perhaps against those with a similar background, and perhaps even against those who have achieved the things that caused the adult to return to education. Such an exercise would help to motivate the learner and provide a target or benchmark for them. This applies to any form of assessment. Who and where are these groups that we can use for benchmarking? Perhaps it is 'all adults currently enrolled in adult basic education classes throughout Australia' - the national literacy study might provide some of this type of information. However, as yet, the resources needed to make such a comprehensive comparison do not exist. Also, the average performances of drivers, receptionists, cleaners and others may be impossible to measure. It is a huge task to get data on the expected performances of all of the groups represented by adult basic education students.

But there are some meaningful alternative ways of comparing student achievement available to those who interpret test scores for adult education students. Even a small program can make use of ranking as a way of explaining scores to students. Ranking is not always an unpalatable or useless thing to do: "You are doing quite well in some arithmetic compared to other students, but you need to work on spelling. We will do some exercises to help improve this area". Showing the student the test questions or discussing their pieces of writing, can help the explanation: " You are one of the best in the group in word use, but your reading is not as good as many others. We might be able to remedy this by working through this workbook or set of worksheets."

> **"Tests are bad", we are told, and yet most of the time we will emphasise the importance of assessment to the success of a basic education program**

Larger groups and/or those with some trained staff member could develop test analysis statistics such as stanines or percentiles over a number of years to establish local norms for comparisons. There is nothing inherently wrong with norms, it is the way we use them that is important. We all, as teachers, use this kind of information intuitively through experience built up over time. Using test data over time simple adds to our repertoire of interpretative skills.

The use of data over time gives the possibility of growth with the student: "Remember the last time you did this kind of test, you were at the 20th level (percentile), now you are operating at the 50th level". However, these are relative assessments of growth and don't mean a lot other than improvement in terms of numbers. It does nothing to indicate the nature of the improvement. For this, the teacher needs to be skilled in analysing the test performances to show where the improvement has been made and how more improvement can be attained.

A test developer has the responsibility to help in providing meaningful criteria or reference groups for the teacher to more fully interpret scores. The test needs to be administered to many groups of adults in many different kinds of programs and the results analysed to determine how the different groups could be expected to score on the test. Some of this should be in an administration handbook. Other should be collected over time and provided in newsletters and discussion groups among teachers. Now the teacher should be able to say things like: "Your score is similar to people who are employed as [waiters in restaurants], and who have a similar background to you"; or "You need to improve to a level of XXX in order to be compared to waiters". It goes without saying that the category 'waiter in restaurants' needs to be matched against the aspirations and target group of the specific adult learner.

Criterion referenced scales are also important, although these have been avoided in adult basic education in Australia. Interpreting test scores against criterion referenced scales can give the learner a real sense of progress in terms of what they can do, where they are in terms of learning and how they might be expected to progress in the future. Test scores calibrated in terms of criterion referenced continua are especially useful because of these capabilities.

Finally we need to return to the administrative use of test scores. This means that it is necessary to combine test scores with a reporting framework. In Australia this would have to be the national reporting framework, although other alternatives such as the adult literacy and numeracy scales exist for direct criterion referenced interpretation. Program administrators and teachers need to identify the program niche into which the student can be placed and which will help achieve the most gain with the most comfort and success. Remember that most of these adults do not rise to a challenge.

Moreover, gains in self-esteem, while important, are a temporary phenomenon in adult basic education classes in the absence of learning or subsequent employment or vocational skills acquisition. Our research has shown that self-esteem is not only lost, but is severely damaged if progress in learning does not occur. It is important to chart progress, to analyse early learner growth in the program and to judge the effectiveness of the curriculum in preparing the student for whatever goals they or the program might have. But charting growth has its own difficulties.

Assessments of growth based on grade level equivalents are especially tenuous for adult programs and should be avoided. The adult's past learning has not been as structured or as formalised as those of school pupils. Although the adult may be functioning on a level above the primary school grades, the adult has been, in everyday life, exposed to information, skills, and techniques quite outside the realm of a child's experience. In particular, the things an adult has managed to pick up along the way were not likely to be learned in the same order that they are taught in the school curriculum.

Low achieving adults have oral vocabulary quite different from that of the typical school pupil of the same general test measured achievement level (grade equivalent). The adult is more likely to recognise the meaning of words heard in the media news broadcast, whereas a school pupil tends to be more familiar with a school oriented vocabulary. An adult test of vocabulary needs to sample words from the media, newspapers, and everyday adult conversation as well as that found in workbooks. For this reason alone the adult will encounter difficulty when faced with texts written for children, even though the (empirical) readability level may be low. Further, there may be additional difficulty when the adult is faced with texts written for public consumption unless the readability levels are lowered. An adult can, however, read many things a school student cannot. Adults with grade equivalent scores as low as year 2 have been able to read maps, ads, and sometimes even certain sections of a newspaper. A reading test score based on grade equivalents therefore may seriously underestimate the functional literacy performance of adults.

Tests for adults need to help to develop rapport with the adult. This applies especially in numeracy, as the rapport is generally very difficult to achieve in arithmetic. It is generally socially acceptable to be bad at maths but there is a stigma attached to reading difficulties. Assessing numeracy therefore has even more difficulties attached to it than literacy assessment. Numeracy and literacy tests therefore need to use the types of problems that adults normally encounter in order to provide a valid measure of functional literacy or numeracy.

Patterns of arithmetic in low achieving adults are more individualistic than are their achievements in other learning

'feedback is very important, especially in adult learning programs. The student or client needs to know how they are doing. They need assurance that they are in fact getting ahead'

areas. Adult low-achievers' arithmetic knowledge is marked by its great specificity. They are often able to solve complex money problems, whereas similar mathematics problems cast in unfamiliar contexts may prove far too difficult. Thus, an adult may be able to solve income tax related problems, but have great difficulty with simple arithmetic, even using the same numbers. There is also considerable evidence that at the lower achievement levels, basic arithmetic skills are easier to learn in out-of-school contexts than are reading skills. This reverses as the overall achievement level rises where arithmetic skills such as percents, fractions and decimals appear to be unlikely to be learned without specific instruction.

No test is accurate enough to measure tiny amounts of growth, nor is any observer skilled enough to quantify extremely small changes. The evidence seems to support a generalisation that learning at the lower achievement levels for adults is slower than at the higher levels. This is the reverse for children in general. Thus, tests and other formalised assessments cannot, and should not, be expected to show significant growth over short periods of time at the lower achievement levels. Informal measures might be used at this stage and direct observation and counts of the highly specific skill acquisitions may be the best approach.

Tests should not be used to measure a teacher's success or failure. There is no way of knowing what variable is causing or preventing learner growth, and teachers must not be made to feel that they are being evaluated when the test results are being analysed. Other types of evaluation are much better for this purpose.

One of the truly important evaluations which teachers and administrators must make is that of learner readiness for the next step; that is, progress to a higher level on the program. These decisions cannot, and should not, be made on the basis of test scores alone, but a good program of testing can help the decision making process.

The level of difficulty in maintaining a meaningful program of assessment in adult basic education cannot be overestimated. I have not by any means covered the subject I started out to discuss. Part of the failure is deliberate and part is unavoidable. I don't know all the answers. I can only help to set the stage for a discussion.

Someone said to me recently that it was time that adult basic education assessment research should stop laying the foundation for improvement and should start building on the foundations. Assessments are foundations. A superstructure is needed. Whatever types of assessments are employed, we have to learn to use the results creatively and make them serve the purposes of the learner and the teacher. If you can't find a good use for the data, don't collect it. On the other hand, don't make decisions about people in the absence of defensible data.

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What is Futures For Young Adults?

by Juliet Gavens

Juliet Gavens is a coordinator of a Futures For Young Adults program. Here she introduces the program and discusses what options exist for adults with disabilities.

Futures For Young Adults (FFYA) is a joint initiative of the Department of Education and the Department of Human Services, and it was launched in November 1996. It was designed to enable adult students with disabilities, aged eighteen years and over, to move from schools to adult education, training, supported vocational settings or open employment. In the first year of the program, 1,270 students were supported to move into more appropriate adult options across the state.

The Futures For Young Adults process for transition from school to adult services is basically managed by a Transition Facilitator, employed through Department of Human Services, who works through the school-based Program Support Group. The Program Support Group is in place in schools for each student receiving disability funding, and usually consists of the parent/s or carer, and relevant teacher/s and support staff. The members of the group do a Support Needs Assessment to establish appropriate funding level, and then follow the transition process through. The involvement of the Transition Facilitator varies enormously in these groups, depending on the adult plans of the student. Where a student intends to continue with tertiary study, either through V.T.A.C. or T.A.F.E. direct entry, the process is completed by relevant school staff - therefore, not creating a separate system for tertiary entry students simply because they have a disability.

The history of training provision for this student/client group

Historically this student/client group has been catered for in a variety of ways, often predicated by the predominant disability of the client. For people with an intellectual disability, the primary service provider has been Adult Training Support Services. The programming delivered by these services was very much facility-based and segregated in their early days, but most have increasingly moved to a community access model which takes the needs of the individual into account much more, as identified in each client's Individual Program Plan. In an attempt to make sure that a full range of options are available, Adult Training Support Services are developing close links with a range of community providers including Neighbourhood Houses, Adult Community and Further Education providers, and Recreation and Leisure providers.

In 1992, the Department of Education and the Department of Human Services collaborated in a project called "18 Plus" which saw the one-off movement of students over 18 into adult services. As part of this movement, the Department of Human Services funded the development of the Certificate of Work Education within the T.A.F.E. sector, providing a pre-vocational option for people with an intellectual disability.

For people with physical disabilities, the training options have varied enormously. For most people in this category who had very high support needs, the traditional services like the Spastic Society were the major providers. For others with physical (or sensory) support needs, but with the capacity to go on to higher education, this was only possible where the funding to meet their needs was available through the tertiary institution. The training options for people with Acquired Brain Injury have been a lot less defined and there is a large variation in the options.

The other training option for people with disabilities has historically been the school sector, some remaining well beyond the age of eighteen - some students with disabilities have remained in the special school sector until 29 or 30 years of age.

How the new policy distinguishes between 'adult' and 'child'

The whole thrust of the Futures For Young Adults project is to strengthen the commitment to people with disabilities to ensure that they are involved in the decision making affecting their own lives, and to ensure that they have access to the same post-school options as those without a disability. For students with disabilities completing V.C.E. in mainstream schools, the exit age may be up to 21 (as with all students), while for those not doing VCE, 18 is considered the appropriate age to move on to adult options.

The whole transition process under FFYA is a lot more client-focused than in the past, particularly in trying to ensure that the student is fully aware of the options and supports available to move to the service provider of their choice. The primary factor in increasing the ability of FFYA clients to make choices for themselves as adults, is that recurrent funding for their placement is for them to use as they see fit, rather than being tied to any one service. As their needs and aspirations change, they can choose to change to the most appropriate service/s in the adult service sector.

The shift in emphasis from education for life to education for work

The major reason for this shift in emphasis is, thankfully, a reflection of the way society views those with a disability. Historically the emphasis has been on educating people with disabilities to function on the fringes of society, rather than to contribute to, and be a part of, the community. The basic premise of FFYA is that ALL people leaving school aspire to be part of the paid workforce and that people with disabilities are no different. Under FFYA, there has been a large increase in the

number of people doing Certificate of Work Education at TAFE, or one of the number of new pre-vocational courses developed. The fact that FFYA funding can purchase from a wide variety of providers, including Commonwealth employment services and support in the open workplace, has greatly increased people's options.

Difficulties with the idea of 'client choice'

The whole VET sector is moving towards an emphasis on student/client choice and this creates problems in a field where the interests of carers and parents needs to be acknowledged as well. I won't shy away from the fact that this probably remains the greatest challenge for all of us working with the FFYA project. There is no doubt that parents/carers' responsibility for the decision-making affecting people with disabilities (particularly those with profound disabilities) is still very strongly supported; however, having acknowledged that, we need to work closely with the Department of Education to ensure that all students are fully aware of the services most appropriate to their needs and aspirations, and that they are fully supported so they can access them.

The place of literacy and numeracy skills development and ESL needs within the program

As FFYA is not a service delivery in it's own right, we don't give any priority to numeracy, literacy and ESL needs - this is totally up to the client, family/carer and service provider when they are negotiating the client's program. However, we are very well aware that most students coming through the education sector now are far more literate, numerate and computer literate than they probably were 10 years ago and we are very keen to support the maintenance and development of these skills. There are a number of strategies in place to achieve this.

One of these is the development of a comprehensive Transition Report identifying areas of strength, areas needing development, prior learning and future direction. This information forms the basis of negotiations around individual program planning between the client and the service provider.

As well as this there is funding of both 'primary' and 'secondary' agencies for equipment to meet the learning needs of FFYA clients.' Primary' agencies are those receiving direct funding support from D.H.S. and 'secondary' agencies are those such as Neighbourhood Houses and ACFE providers who are providing for FFYA clients via Adult Training Support Services. In the Northern Region we are currently developing a Day Services Network to address the need for flexibility of service delivery, including the issue of funds transfer from one agency to another.

The learning needs of people from ESL background are also approached in the same way. In some cases, additional funding has been provided to develop learning materials in languages other than English and to purchase consultancy in specific language areas.

The D.H.S. has used the advent of FFYA to greatly encourage the development of partnerships and consortia amongst service providers to greatly increase the range of programs available to people with disabilities. This is particularly relevant to learning areas such as literacy and numeracy where clients/families/carers are choosing the general programming of an Adult Training Support Service, but with the addition of externally provided academic learning very often delivered in an integrated setting.

The relevance of Adult Literacy and Basic Education to the needs of adults with disabilities

I believe there is enormous relevance for the above for FFYA clients; however, I have also found that there is limited understanding of the ACE sector amongst schools. In the first two rounds of FFYA placements in the Northern Region in 1997, most clients and their families/carers chose very traditional placements. We have put energy and time into encouraging clients to request ACE programs outside their primary agency that may meet their needs, but I think this understanding of options will be a slow process. There was a significant increase in the number of clients going into the TAFE sector, but almost all were doing the Certificate of Work Education.

I think that if more people understood the delivery methods of ALBE and CGEA, and the pathways possible with these accredited courses, the interest and uptake rate would be much higher. One of the difficulties we experience as Human Service workers is that we only begin to work with students and their families in the year in which they turn 18, and in many cases choices have already been made. There is a real need for services to get their information across to schools well before we get there, but I fully understand that for many community providers this becomes yet another task to fit into an already over-stretched, under-resourced timetable.

So, where to from here for FFYA ?

I think it's very important that all involved (or wishing to be involved) in the development of FFYA should keep in mind that it is a program very much in its infancy. 1998 is actually the first full year of implementation, following a year where two groups of students were placed (in the case of Northern Region, approx. 330 clients).

It is only now that we are realistically developing processes, protocols and a better understanding of the needs of all involved in the FFYA transition process. The greater right of individuals to control funds enables the development and partnerships of services that should be able to offer an enormous diversity of programs far beyond what we can currently envisage.

If you have suggestions about how ACE providers can be better mainstreamed into FFYA service provision, please don't hesitate to contact your regional DHS FFYA Coordinator - I, for one, would be delighted to hear from you.

(The views expressed in this article are the personal ones of one FFYA Coordinator, and do not necessarily reflect the views of everybody involved in the project).

Juliet Gavens is the Coordinator of the Futures For Young Adults program in the Northern Metropolitan Region.

Contextualising the Workplace Curriculum

by Mike Brown

Mike Brown asks teachers to consider the broader forces which seek to define adult learners in the workplace.

This edition of Fine Print looks at the way 'Adults' are defined within ALBE programs and more generally within the ALBE field. To even contemplate undertaking such a task stands as an indicator of critical and analytical educators at work and needs to be applauded. It also offers an opportunity to reflect and take stock of one's pedagogical practices. As my experience has predominantly been in regard to work-related learning, it is in that field that I take up this challenge. The article sets out an argument that the workplace is a site that by its very nature is characterised by competing interests and often adversarial power relations. Therefore, as you might expect, the dominant approach to curriculum development in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector goes a long way in reflecting the interests of the more powerful parties involved. To draw from social theory, the VET curriculum is an excellent site in which to investigate Foucault's concept of power/knowledge; or to put this another way, power/knowledge is a useful concept for beginning to understand curriculum development as it occurs within the VET sector.

To see how 'adults' are defined within government funded VET programs, the paper begins by locating these activities within powerful discourses. As an example, consider the previous government's policy package entitled *Working Nation*. This leaves little doubt about how they were attempting to position people. Such discourses had people view themselves in a way that emphasised their productive potential and capacities. These discourses can be described as contextualising education and training programs.

Part of being in this world, at this time, means that all of us are likely to be subjected to, and influenced by, multiple and competing discourses. This paper attempts to deconstruct or uncover some of the values and beliefs which underpin some of these as they impact upon pedagogical practice. A good place to start such an endeavour is to ensure a shared meaning of what is meant by the term 'Discourse'. For this, James Gee (1990) is very helpful when he explains:

> A Discourse is a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network', or to signal [that one is playing] a socially meaningful 'role'. (143)

It is important to understand and appreciate the power which can be tied to a Discourse. Notice from James Gee's words that a Discourse goes far beyond being just a way of using language. It involves a way of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting. It is recognisable by others as situating a participant within a particular social group. This suggests that, not only are people influenced by discourses, but that people's very identities might be bound up with them. These features may even point towards the formation of identity.

The argument that follows puts forward the line that adult learners, educators, curriculum developers and their pedagogical practices are situated within, and therefore influenced by, very powerful Discourses. Their work can be described as being contextualised by these powerful Discourses, some would even say they are within 'dominant Discourses'. Again Gee explains,

> Let us call Discourses that lead to social goods in a society 'dominant Discourses', and let us refer to those groups that have the fewest conflicts when using them as 'dominant groups'. (143)

The questions which immediately arise are: what are the dominant Discourses that influence workplace curriculum? Who are the dominant groups? What are their agendas? How does this effect educators, curriculum developers and the workers/learners participating in the programs? These questions make up the focus of this article which proceeds with a review of what contextualising curriculum means in relation to vocational education and training (VET). This is followed by very brief outlines of three very different programs. The three programs are in many ways exemplary. They all involve the integration of literacy and/or language with work-related learning. The first program is from the Food Processing industry, the second involves the vehicle manufacturing industry and the third is more generic on 'the future of work'. The two VET programs utilise a top-down approach while the third is indicative of a bottom-up approach to pedagogy. The brevity of this article means that the discussion and conclusion which follow are by necessity selective. The reader is encouraged to identify and draw out other points of interest from the three programs beyond those which get directly addressed.

One of the general rules of thumb used for developing curriculum for the workplace is to think that it is a matter of 'horses for courses'. Adult literacy practitioners who are involved in workplace programs may already be in no doubt about the importance of matching up the most appropriately conceived program to the needs of the learners and, seemingly of just as much importance, to the expectations of other various stakeholders and powerbrokers. This process of aligning the curriculum development with the expectations and needs of participants and stakeholders is a very political one.

Within the VET sector at the moment, it is popular to advocate that curriculum be contextualised. Contextualisation is when learning outcomes or competencies need to be re-interpreted and fine-tuned to the particular situation and environment in which the learners will be working. Educators doing this curriculum development work must make interpretations and decisions about what the documented competencies will actually mean in the context of where the workers/learners will perform their work.

The methodology for developing VET curriculum documents involves an industry wide analysis of a particular occupation. From this, a developmental program is devised and documented as the Curriculum. In this process, specifics become generalised. Contextualising curriculum is about putting the specifics that are meaningful for the learners back into the program. Through contextualising curriculum, the work of transferring meaning from the general and more abstract sense expressed through the curriculum document, to that of the more concrete, specific and, hopefully, more familiar, becomes more that of the educator and less that of the learner.

When educators make these interpretations and decisions about the curriculum, and how it is to be contextualised, far more is at stake than 'the efficient delivery of training programs'. Instead, it actually goes to the core of education and curriculum. When you begin to plan a curriculum, you are also engaging with larger questions about what sort of society you want to live in and what sort of people are going to be in it. The task then of defining the adult in ALBE, or any other field, is about looking at policies, programs and practices and at the discourses and assumptions which frame and contextualise these endeavours.

Using Dominant Discourses to Contextualise Curriculum

Even a preliminary glance will confirm that the two VET programs below fit snugly within government policy as it stood at that time, in particular, the discourses referred to as 'the workplace reform agenda' and what can be considered as a sub division of this, 'the national training reform agenda', (or the NTRA). These agendas relate dialectically with other discourses at both more macro and micro levels. Dominant amongst the industry policies brought forward by these agendas was an emphasis on the need for workplaces to change. Importantly, this represented a convergence of opinion between governments, employers and unions. It was therefore a less contentious way of describing this context. However, exactly what was required and how it was meant to come about continues to have far less agreement. Above these national agendas is the global context - or globalisation. In this realm, globalisation continues to be driven by de-regulation.

Globalisation is usually presented as involving the compression of space and time. This is graphically illustrated by consideration of the time it took the first fleet to sail from England to Australia. They left on May 13, 1787 and arrived some 37 weeks later on January 26th 1788. This same distance is today traversed routinely by commercial passenger aircraft in 26 hours. Yet even this kind of physical movement is blitzed by the speed of the global shuffling of electronic information. These technologies and networks enable a company to set up its managerial headquarters in one country and the resources and manufacturing centres in another. Such companies can use this to seek out competitive advantage by locating in countries which have lower wages and production costs than others. These countries often have less organised and less militant workforces, consequently they are much cheaper than those where labour has struggled with their employers and managed to lever somewhat better working conditions. Video links mean that company directors are not even required to visit these production sites. Instead, they can make all their decisions based on abstract information and computer generated data.

It is important to note that these discourses are not often placed before workers and educators for them to consider. Instead, they hear reductions like those put forward by advocates like Laurie Carmichael, about a convergence between academic and vocational education, about how Australia needs to become more internationally competitive, and how workers need to embrace multiskilling and lifelong learning. As stated above, these statements are tied to the need for workplaces to change. This is a need all workers would support. However, in which direction, and in what form these changes are to be, seems another matter. By supporting workplace reform, governments, unions and employers all seem to be getting what they want. Yet this is a surface appearance only and it is one that ends in disillusionment. It really boils down to a power struggle, and which respective parties have what power in any given set of circumstances and situation is under ongoing negotiation.

Working for wages is generally taken to involve a disparity in power relations with employers, the difference fluctuating in line with other economic conditions. Unions and employers use the fluctuating conditions to obtain relative advantage in their primary struggle for their share of the profits. Employers are wanting to do their job and provide increased return on investment, whereas the unions see their job as involving the distribution of the profits amongst those who did the work to produce it. Surprisingly, employers and managers, in the main, have been able to dictate the terms of workplace restructuring because unions, being affiliated to the Labor party who were in government at the time, have backed themselves into a corner and have been working in damage control ever since.

Many use language like 'downsizing' or even 'right-sizing', but in the end this makes little difference. For some, their experience of restructuring has been unemployment; for those still in work it has become synonymous with fewer workers doing more for longer. Contrary to these trends, the discourses of workplace change emphasised increased participation in workplace decisions through consultative committees, and opportunities for promotion and advancement through the implementation of skill based awards.

The rhetoric of 'multiskilling' and 'career paths' surrounded the implementation of skill based awards. These awards acted as a catalyst for increased training. Successful completion of training is taken to represent increased skills and knowledge which equate with increased capacity to do work of a higher order. This leads to pay rises. For workers/learners, training is a pathway to increased monetary rewards. This new emphasis on training was more of an industrial matter than any belief in providing access to lifelong learning. Likewise, the training needed to occur within an industrial relations framework. The much needed link occurred through the institutionalisation of competencies and competency based training, (CBT). CBT was brought in as part of a complete overhaul of the VET training system and this occurred as part of the national training reform agenda, (NTRA). The primary objective was to develop a system that was compatible with the skill based awards and the espoused industrial changes. Significantly, governments no longer wanted to carry the responsibility for changes that went sour, and to this end they implemented a system which placed employers, the purchasers of labour, at the centre of determining what and how training should take place. Under the federal Labor government, the unions also won representation. As a result, semi-government bodies, Industry Training Boards, and workplace consultative committees were created which reflected this representation. VET was no longer the responsibility of educators, instead it was handed over to the industrial parties. (This point is easily corroborated by perusal of the membership listings of Steering committees in any VET document or project reports from this time).

In summary, the contextualisation of adult learners within workplace curriculum occurs through situating them within powerful Discourses drawn from political economy. Training is located within a range of discourses relating to the economy, industrial relations, workplace change and national industry policies. It is possible to imagine these Discourses as a series of rings. At the centre is a large dot representing the adult worker/learner. Five different sized concentric circles can be drawn around this dot. Working from largest to smallest, the outside circle might represent, globalisation or the global economy, the next, national industry policy. Inside this, the next one represents the workplace reform agenda, the next is the national training reform agenda, while the smallest circle represents the workplace curriculum. Another way of labeling the same diagram might be to represent (from largest to smallest): the workplace reform agenda, the national training reform agenda (NTRA), the national VET system and the smallest, competencies and competency based training (CBT).

These comments are intended to preface the brief descriptions of the three programs that follow. In my mind the first two programs are bracketed together as examples of enterprise based VET programs. The third though is qualitatively different.

> '**Training is located within a range of discourses relating to the economy, industrial relations, workplace change and national industry policies**'

Triform Training in the Food Industry

In 1992, the National Food Industry Training Council (NFITC) had Competency Standards endorsed. Closely following this, a competency based curriculum for the Certificate in Food Processing was developed and accredited. In accordance with one of the key aims of the national training reform agenda (NTRA), this marked the first accredited training for Operators and Production workers in that industry.

Due in part to having no previous training in this industry, the work was recognised at the most as being semi-skilled and involved a large percentage of NESB workers. As part of the implementation of the Certificate, the National Food Industry Training Council (NFITC) applied for and obtained WELL funding to develop and pilot a range of different delivery strategies, resources and curriculum materials. Triform training was one of five such strategies piloted. All strategies involved the same module. This was Hygiene and Sanitation Module A which had a nominal duration of 20 hours.

Triform training is described as being a combination of three forms of structured training: a group session, a one-to-one session and a self-paced project. Each week the participants attended a one hour group lesson; a half hour individual lesson; and they completed a half hour individual project, where they were required to observe procedures and collect information from the workplace. The program was integrated in that it embedded language and literacy within the training program. In many ways the program was educationally very progressive. It was integrated and involved situated and authentic learning. It was drawing from the actual environment and the specific practices of the workers/learners and their workplace.

The company where the pilot occurred already conducted two, four-hour workplace English language and literacy programs. The company had an established training culture, was supportive of workplace reforms and had a consultative committee already in place. The consultative committee had four management and nine employee representatives, three of whom were shop stewards. The Production manager and the other participants were enthusiastic towards the program. (For more details on this project readers are directed to the NFITC publication *Triform Training*, which is the third in the *Fine Food* series).

Integrated Training in the vehicle manufacturing industry

In 1993-94, the National Automotive Language and Literacy Coordination Unit (NALLCU) developed integrated training to implement the Vehicle Industry Certificate (VIC). They reported on implementation in six workplaces across the industry. Each case study involved different strategies as dictated by the needs and expectations of the particular

workplaces. This is published in an aptly named report *Breathing Life into Training*. The VIC was an accredited competency based curriculum developed to offer training to operators and production workers. From this report we can gain insight into the contextualising discourses that prevailed.

This project was conducted in the vehicle manufacturing sector of the automotive industry at a time of massive restructure and industry change. The need for international competitiveness was well recognised and government plans for the industry included reductions in tariffs and rationalisation of the industry.

The project arose from a proposal that a model of training which integrated key elements of the training, would provide a more effective strategy for addressing not only the literacy and language issues, but also other issues of workplace reform, (Sefton et. al.:1994:7).

The report clearly places the training within the context of industry restructure and workplace change. In this case, this was highly influenced by the Button plan, and in a somewhat different direction by the national training reform agenda.

Workplace change is described in the report as being tripartite with support from industry, unions and government, with an agreed agenda reached on the ways in which reform would be introduced, based on the interests of the parties. Changes in work practices are also detailed with one example being the move to the Japanese 'lean production system'. The report uses a diagram to illustrate the contextualisation of integrated training with four other areas which it names as the Global Context, Enterprise Strategies and Directions, National Directions & Policies and Union Strategies and Directions, (pg. 16). This approach to training also cleverly involves integrating and mediating these influences and agendas.

Women Shaping the Future: The Future of Work Project

This program has been trialed in a number of different places and in a number of different ways. Most notably it has been conducted as part of the CGEA Generic Stream in a number of Neighbourhood Houses. This program is based on a discussion kit which has been written by Janet Pine, Sue Jackson and Kate MacNeill and produced by the Brotherhood of St Laurence. It is part of a much larger project which has produced numerous publications focusing upon the future of work. This particular kit provides specific details for a three hour workshop that takes the participants through six steps. These progress through, Welcome and Introduction, Thinking about Work, Changes in work, Looking to the Future, Shaping the Future, and Winding Up. Interestingly, it also provides background

materials that are easily adapted to develop a longer and somewhat more detailed program. The materials in the kit can be easily adapted and used flexibly at different levels and for different groups of learners.

The workshop kit explains that:

> Some very big changes are re-shaping work and how it is distributed. High levels of unemployment are one symptom of these changes. The changes which are taking place pose huge challenges for the Australian community as we move forward into the next century. The way in which we respond to these challenges will determine not only how we will work, but also more broadly how we will live and the kind of society which we will create for ourselves, our children and our grandchildren.

> The future of work is an important issue which will effect all of us. It is not something which should be left only to politicians or 'experts'. We should all play a part in shaping our shared future …

The pedagogy utilised in the kit acknowledges the Australian Association of Adult & Community Education (AAACE), *Hints for Facilitators Guide* from the kit for the Aboriginal Reconciliation learning circle. (A brief review of *The Future of Work* kit appeared in Literacy Update No 8 Nov/Dec 1997 for those seeking further description).

Conclusion

These descriptions are very brief but it is enough to begin an archaeology of the Discourses which inform them. It needs to be emphasised that the educators and curriculum developers associated with each of these programs are amongst the best in their fields. Yet, despite the obvious expertise of the educators, this comparison shows up limitations and constraints which fence off and focus (some might even say hijack) VET programs on developing workers with the objective of maximising profits. It shows also that workers too can share in the distribution of profits. Yet nothing appears that raises questions about the extent to which this might be a narrow vision aiding only short term interests. Governance of curriculum, and decisions about what constitutes useful knowledge, has been taken over by employers. Further questions could be asked about whether this represents 'a corporate capture of curriculum' along with what might similarly be named as the rise and institutionalisation of corporate pedagogy. In contrast, the *Future of Work* program shows the importance of the third sector as a potentially democratic space.

In response to the fundamental questions about education and curriculum raised earlier about what kind of society are we hoping to achieve, as educators we need to continue to

> 'questions could be asked about whether this represents 'a corporate capture of curriculum' along with what might similarly be named as the rise and institutionalisation of corporate pedagogy'

work for one that allows for any number of different lifestyles and beliefs. Finally, it is suggested that further to these fundamental question, there is another we can ask about our work on an ongoing basis which is derived from bell hooks (1994 and 1995) and her work on revolutionary feminism. This involves directly confronting the connection between our pedagogical practices and power relations. One version would have us consider in what ways our approach to education (and curriculum) challenge or change power relations. Another version would ask in what ways does our work challenge the white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchy? These questions begin to engage with power relations around race, class and gender - critical educators may like to add others.

For those that remain less than convinced by this line, they may be more comfortable with an alternative construction such as Robert Burns and his book *The Adult Learner at Work*. This is described as a comprehensive guide to the context, psychology and methods of learning for the workplace. The work edited by Glenda Hull, *Changing Work, Changing Workers: critical perspectives on language, literacy, and skills* is a further step up from this as it begins to go beyond the theories and methods associated with workplace education which see these programs as an opportunity to offer workers/ learners the chance to address their deficiencies as defined by their employers. For those readers who are interested in developing and applying a popular education framework to work-related learning, the work of Kim Moody, *Workers in a Lean World*, or even the work of Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello, *Global Village or Global Pillage: Economic Reconstruction from the Bottom up*, are highly recommended as references to explore.

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Fine Print invites contributions to the June issue

Call for contributions

See back page details for contributing to Fine Print

Readers are invited to submit short articles and letters on any topic of interest for publication in *Open Forum*, practical teaching ideas for *In Practice*, or reflections on their wider reading for *Further Afield*.

Teaching Older Migrants English

by Robyn Raleigh

The following article has been taken from a report written by Mary Nicholls and Robyn Raleigh for the project *English for Older Migrants*. The report is currently being edited by the Adult Community and Further Education Board and should be published later this year.

Limitations imposed by poor English skills can influence the elderly migrant's experience of life in Australia. Communication between generations, community participation and access to information can be severely hampered without adequate English language skills. This can result in isolation, dissatisfaction and embarrassment. For some, access to even the basic necessities such as health services and shopping for daily requirements is limited because of poor English.

In August 1996, a consortium of service providers won the tender to develop an innovative project for providing English language programmes to older migrants in Victoria. The project was funded by the Adult Community and Further Education Board for twelve months.

The aims of the project were to develop a successful and appropriate delivery model, curricula and materials for elderly people to enable them to appreciate the customs of our multicultural Australian society and to facilitate the breaking down of communication barriers within families from non-English speaking backgrounds.

The project's brief was to set up three pilot classes for older migrants from diverse language and cultural backgrounds. The first class was recruited during the initial action research and it was comprised of members of an existing Chinese social club. They expressed interest in learning English as a group and used their club rooms for classes. The second class was made up of long term residents (over 15 years in Australia), of a single gender (women) from European background. The classes were located at the Fitzroy Learning Network neighbourhood house. The third class had mixed genders and language backgrounds, and no limits were placed on length of residence in Australia. The classes were held at Fitzroy Adult Multicultural Education Services.

Geographically, the study was confined to the City of Yarra where one third (17,260) of all residents come from non-English speaking backgrounds. The major countries of origin are: Vietnam, Turkey, the former Yugoslavia and East Timor. The major languages spoken at home are: Greek, Vietnamese, Chinese languages, Italian and Turkish. The 1991 census revealed that the City of Yarra is one of the Victorian Local Government Areas with the highest number of residents aged 65 and over born in non-English speaking countries (there were 2,127 residents in this category).

Before classes commenced, the students' needs had to be ascertained. Needs differed depending on the student's language and literacy levels, their level of education in their own country and their length of residence in Australia. The needs had to be determined before a curriculum could be developed.

Students had initial interviews and then completed a needs analysis questionnaire once classes began. Both times, interpreters were used to assist the students. The needs analysis questionnaire included questions concerning both the social and language needs of the learners. Learning relates to a lifelong process of personal and intellectual growth, increased confidence and sense of self esteem. Learning outcomes encompass both increased language competency and non-language outcomes which contribute to the empowerment of the individual within society.

The project found that the students wanted to focus on conversation, listening ("street English") and pronunciation. They needed to develop confidence in their ability to understand and be understood when speaking English. This was encouraged throughout the project by firstly tapping into the School Community Program in which children from a local high school (in this case, Melbourne High School) came and participated in conversation groups. These classes were magical. The M.H.S. boys were inspired by the older migrants' lives, their sense of humour and gentle manner. The older learners loved talking to the boys who were in many cases of similar age to their grandchildren. In the end, a local ethnic radio station (3ZZZ) arranged for the M.H.S. boys to interview the older learners and have the interview aired on a programme called, "The Golden Years".

As well as this, guest speakers came and spoke on topics such as, what services and opportunities are available to senior citizens and the advantages of a healthy diet. Also, volunteer tutors came and participated in conversation groups, and morning teas were arranged with other older learner groups.

These activities helped to promote confidence in the older learner's ability to communicate using English. This is clearly an important step, and, as Green (1987:5) says:

The goal of communication must not be confused with an ability to use the language with accuracy or fluency. If the correct form is not attained but the message is

understood, and this is felt to be a reasonable achievement for a student, language in single words or phrases should be acceptable.

The older learners had strategies for learning that they had been using for more than half a century and it was therefore important for the teacher to convey why certain techniques were used. It was also important to slowly introduce new teaching techniques so the students did not feel alienated, anxious or confused. Students were generally not used to the communicative approach to teaching and it took time for them to feel comfortable and appreciate this method.

The older learners needed to be taught in a spiral rather than a linear form. Work had to be constantly revised and new concepts had to be introduced gradually. This was done with the use of individual tapes that were updated regularly as new language was covered in class. In this way, students had access to all the dialogues and vocabulary studied in class. Older learners often have an already busy life with family and social commitments, and poor health often requires frequent visits to doctors or hospitals. For these reasons, older learners are not able to commit themselves to regular class attendance and the tapes became a very helpful aid to keeping up with what had been taught the week before. The cassettes gave the students time to revise and remember at their own pace, without pressure, and the keener students were able to feel a sense of achievement when the language was practised the next lesson.

We also found that more exposure to all visual and aural stimuli was necessary because many of the older learners had significant sight and/or hearing loss. The older learners needed large, clear writing, and blue and black white board markers were used because red and green were harder to see.

Teachers had to be flexible in their approach and draw on their students' life experiences for, "Unless learners can be involved in activities which have meaning and interest for them, and in which they can invest something of themselves, the foreign language becomes just another body of language to be acquired." (Grellet, Mahay and Wesley:1982:2). To achieve this, a unit of work in which students reflected on their past was developed. With the help of their children and grandchildren, the students documented their lives through family trees, timelines, written description and discussion. This had the added benefit of strengthening family ties by giving the older learners an opportunity to share their past with the younger generation.

Older students were made to feel comfortable in the classroom. The rooms were well lit, warm, accessible and they had generally good acoustics. The classes were non-threatening and supportive to help reduce anxiety. To achieve this, the teachers had to have a good relationship with the students and a relaxed atmosphere prevailed in all classes, with coffee, tea and snacks provided. The use of Certificate courses was also avoided because the tests for competency were seen to add to unnecessary stress and they did not meet students' needs.

The project was a learning experience for teachers as well as learners. They were taken on a special journey into the many life experiences that the students had encountered in their long, rich and varied lives. It made the teachers aware of the frustration that the older learners feel when unable to express themselves and thus gain access to the structures that operate in the Australian community. It led to a realisation that to be old does not mean that someone is unable to learn, and there was a feeling amongst teachers that the older learners achieved cultural empowerment by sharing, discussing and absorbing information about attitudes, values and customs found in their adopted country.

The teachers believed that the English classes for older migrants were successful in both language and non-language outcomes. The classes were a means of breaking down barriers, reducing isolation, increasing students' sense of self, assisting with service delivery and, most importantly, increasing the older learners' identification with the society in which they have chosen to live.

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Open Forum

We would like to see your response to the material appearing in *Fine Print*. Short articles and individual expressions of interest are welcome.

The first three articles from Pat Forward, Joanne Goodman and Daryl Evans present different perspectives on the recent changes to funding in ALBE and ESL.

ALBE and Adult ESL Funding: the impact on teachers and students

In its first budget in 1996, the newly elected Howard government outlined a series of major changes to Labour Market Programs which, combined with changes to funding allocation in a number of publicly-funded education institutions, were to have a significant effect on ALBE and Adult ESL fields. The 1996-7 budget slashed LMP funding by $1.8 million over four years, including a cut of $574.7 million in 1996-7 and $956.3 million in 1997-8.

The growth in ALBE, Adult ESL and ESL literacy programs since the early 1990s had led to the establishment of large language and literacy departments in many TAFE institutes. In addition, programs were being delivered in community settings, and increasingly, by private providers. The field of ALBE and Adult ESL had benefited from the interest in language and literacy generated by reforms by the Labor government to the labour market, through the period of the International Year of Literacy in 1989 and the Working Nation initiatives in the early 1990s.

The Howard cutbacks to these programs have resulted in progressive loss of jobs for language and literacy teachers over the past two years, and loss of programs for students. Finally, after almost two years, for TAFE institutes, the end of 1997 represented a decimation of many ALBE and Language Studies departments. The irony for these departments is that, despite almost eight or nine years of tenuous funding cutbacks and threats of job and program losses, the end, when it came for many teachers, was no less tragic. The reality for most ALBE and ESL teachers is that their employment has never been secure and that they have been, over extended periods, denied access to decent working conditions, professional development and probably most importantly, a professional relationship with their employer where they are treated equally and with respect. Most ALBE and ESL teachers employed anywhere through the nineties grew used to annual employment at very best, and annual threats to that employment. At the end of 1997, most teachers finally lost their jobs.

Initiatives by the Labor government in the late 1980s led to funding for ALBE and ESL programs. Even through the massive growth in funding which occurred during the early 1990s, precarious forms of employment for teachers were always the norm. The funding for these programs was itself always precarious, and this gave employers, whether private providers, community providers or TAFE institutes, the excuse to employ teachers on an hourly basis, or on short-term contracts. Even when, in the last round of SIP tenders in the mid-nineties, three year tenders were being signed, most employers were only offering teachers 6 - 12 month contracts. These employers must have felt vindicated when, only a short time later, the newly elected Howard government slashed these funds and appeared ready to dishonour these tenders.

Herein lies the root of the problem. Whilst there is little doubt that the draconian measures of the Howard government can justifiably be blamed for the recent cuts to literacy and language programs, and whilst equally the growth in these programs experienced during the early nineties gave the impression of a genuine commitment from a socially aware government to the literacy needs of all people in society, what the Labor government did not commit itself to was ongoing structural funding to really make a difference to society. Most people involved in the ALBE and ESL fields were very aware of the tenuous nature of the government's commitment. This was no less irksome because the ALBE and ESL fields themselves became the arena of intense governmental scrutiny and intrusion. The link between ALBE and ESL programs and SIP funding required a close relationship between teachers and the CES workers, as students' 'progress' was monitored, and their attendance reported on. In addition, throughout this period, the insistence upon vocational outcomes for ALBE and ESL literacy programs, whilst appropriate for some students, was intrusive and irksome for others. In particular, older, retrenched migrant workers, whose employment prospects were minimal because society had no work for them, found some of the requirements of courses insulting.

ALBE and ESL programs under the Labor government were seen as an integral part of reducing long and short-term unemployment. Whilst practitioners in the field had always known, and had always argued that the 'problem' of literacy existed in Australian society, the interest of the government in the problem was essentially opportunist. Nonetheless, the funding, when it came, led to a growth in programs, and despite some reservations about the connection between the development of courses, the qualification (especially the

> **'Australia itself faces critical debates about the nature of our society'**

CGEA) and the requirements of the government, there was also a growth in critical debate within the field.

The major issue was that the lack of long-term commitment to ALBE and ESL, combined with an economic rationalist government's penchant for allowing the forces of the market into every aspect of educational life, meant that teachers and students themselves endured a tenuous existence. Students were allocated funding for a particular period to 'fix' their problem. If their 'problem' was not fixed in that time, continued funding was often not available. For teachers, the effect of the tenuous nature of their employment, combined with a more recent aggressive anti-union agenda from the Howard government, has been devastating.

Teachers in the ALBE and ESL field are overwhelmingly contract or sessionally employed. A large number of them have recently lost their jobs as a result of the final impact of cuts to the SIP program, progressive tendering out of programs to private providers, and a tendering process whose only intention has been to cut the student contact hour funding to a bare minimum. In the case of a recent round of tenders in AMES, AMES were 'successful' in winning all the tenders, something which resulted in a loss of some long-established TAFE programs. At the same time, however, within AMES, the workforce was forced to endure a humiliating 'ranking' process as AMES management argued that it needed to downsize and re-organise its operation. In addition, many AMES contract teachers found themselves without work, or curiously, with only sessional work.

As programs have been cut over the past few months, several critical points need to be made. The need for ALBE and ESL programs within society has not diminished. The demonstrated need - students to go into courses - is there. The political need has never been more intense, as Australia itself faces critical debates about the nature of our society. Issues of access and equity, of class division, of the investment in education (and other human services) as against the stripping of precious public assets - all these debates are debates that require a literate and informed population. They are also debates which all members of society have a right to participate in. For these reasons, as much as for vocational and other reasons, publicly funded, freely accessible ALBE and ESL classes must be the right of all citizens in our society.

At the moment, instead, we have inadequate provision of these classes and an unemployed, or under-employed, highly skilled, but severely demoralised teaching workforce. The combined experience and expertise of these teachers, many of whom will simply have to leave the field because they cannot find work, will be lost to our society. It is a price that we, as a society, cannot afford to pay.

Pat Forward is the Vice President, TAFE and Adult Provision, of the Australian Education Union.

The funding reality is far from a dance

Just as we thought our organisation might start to get on our feet financially, in come the cuts to adult community provision.

At North Melbourne we call it 'Dancing on the Moving Carpet'. There's hope that one day the carpet will stop moving and we can all dance on more confidently, catering for the very substantial learning needs of our community. The reality, however, is far from a dance.

Basic logic suggests that organisations that operate on relatively small budgets cannot cope with huge fluctuations in funding. The logic may be there, but somehow it's not a significant factor in the decision making process for many funding bodies.

The impact of constant change on all concerned is significant. Students in North Melbourne, many of whom visit our centre regularly in hope of classes recommencing, are not happy to be sent two, or even one, suburb away for classes. They want local classes because it's there that they feel happy and secure.

There are many reasons for this strong preference for local classes. For some it's simply because they like to learn on the same site as there is childcare. For others it's the fact that they are not long in the country and they still feel uncertain about getting around. Local classes develop their confidence and assist some of them on a pathway to further study. Other groups of students have interrupted or negative schooling experiences and seek non-formal, and thus non-threatening environments in which to recommence learning. This needy group often thrive in community classes.

Many students are currently waiting, and the wait is indefinite. We are only able to say to them that we hope things will change.

It has now become the job of coordinators and managers to absorb the changes and make quick decisions that ensure the viability of organisations. Quick decisions and quick changes allow little time to think deeply. An environment where speed of thought is valued over depth of thought will not be one in which organisations prosper. Staff uncertainty is the unavoidable consequence of such an environment, and when staff feel uncertain, the quality of provision is invariably affected.

Community teachers are very often a dedicated lot who have few work conditions and give many unpaid hours. In the current environment, management is placed in the position of rewarding this dedication by having to cut teachers working hours.

The question that looms constantly in the sector is, "Exactly what are the priorities of funding providers?" Reasons given for the denial of funding often defy logic and give tender and submission writers no clues as to how 'they went wrong'.

Surely, in the interest of quality provision, funding bodies should at least consider making decreases or increases in funding a gradual process, allowing downsizing or upsizing to happen at a manageable pace.

In a year when DEETYA funding appears to be going into an extended hiatus, small organisations, which have also lost their OTFE funding, are experiencing great uncertainty. Some significant questions are emerging. Is the current 'lottery style' of granting funds in the best interest of all concerned? How are students ever to become 'work ready' when there are such enormous gaps in their learning pathways? Why aren't funding bodies liaising and consulting more closely with providers to identify needs?

So, as we 'dance' through yet another uncertain period, the hope is that the funding bodies will allow time to get out into the community and become more aware of the impact of their decisions. This awareness may then have a hope of filtering back to those who decide the level of funds to this struggling sector.

Joanne Goodman is Manager of North Melbourne Language and Literacy

Changes in funding in ALBE: some personal comments

I have been asked to describe the impact on ALBE of changes in funding. These brief comments are personal and they draw upon experience in the field beyond my teaching and administrative work in the TAFE system. However, they will be perceived by some as (at best) *mea culpa* or (at worst) something timid, pious or unfair.

Secondly, readers should know in advance of my tendency to divide the history of ALBE in Victoria into three eras, namely: Era I, *enthusiasm* – dating roughly from the early 70s to the mid-80s; Era II, *professionalisation* – from the mid-80s to the mid-90s; and Era III, *reductionism* – from the mid-90s onward. Therefore, when I now raise some issues of concern, I request that we pause and check whether those same issues were important during the previous two eras as well. And, if so, is it possible to avoid repeating our earlier mistakes? After all, some of those mistakes (for example, how long it usually takes for student X to move from level Y to level Z) later come back to haunt us.

Hence, for me personally, the following discussion *begins* a process of using snapshots of the *past* to help cope

strategically with the *present*. (I feel a similar urge to re-visit the teaching methodologies of the past too – but at some other time?). Therefore, what follows is an impression only, and I would need to collect and analyse a lot of hard data before feeling confident that these comments are not naïve. I also suspect that the article includes too many assumptions not substantiated, for example, that *diversity in methodology* is good.

In this article, I will look at these changes within four ALBE teaching contexts: *the immediate and anecdotal* – teachers talking at the photocopier; *teaching a course for a number of weeks* – teaching as deliberate craft; *the emergence of ALBE as an entity* – ALBE teaching as a profession; and ALBE *as a formal part of government policy* – ALBE as political participant. (With apologies to Phelps, 1991:1)

The immediate and anecdotal - teachers talking at the photocopier

The apparent impact of funding change in Era III sees teachers exhausted by day-to-day delivery, heavily influenced by the paperwork of reporting requirements (which is completed in addition to individual student crisis management). However, similar manifestations may be seen, perhaps, in Era I and/or Era II when there was comparable emphasis on teacher effort to respond to student welfare/crisis needs. (Note: teaching ratios of 1:15 *did* exist in the 1970s).

Also in Era III, teachers find that more and more jobs seem to be short term and casual, and yet there is also documented evidence from Eras I and II that ALBE staffing was predominantly offered to 'women in casual employment' (this has professional and political implications too of course). Are there people looking at this issue today? I assume that such studies continue.

Teaching a course for a number of weeks - teaching as deliberate craft

Funding changes in Era III could lead to a reluctance to accept students who will require a program much longer than that which is acknowledged by funding arrangements, but it is important to acknowledge that in previous eras there was sometimes a temptation to report the progress of 'slow students' in euphemistic terms. In this instance, funding authorities began to believe to excess what we have claimed, or at least, can write it in their policies - as has happened in recent weeks in the initiative, *Literacy and Numeracy Training for Unemployed Job Seekers Aged 18 to 24 Years*.

Also in recent years, funding policies lead to prescriptive ALBE courses with an over-whelming pressure for outcomes inappropriately defined by the funding agency. This pressure, in turn, can stifle diversity in methodology because there has not been reconciliation between those outcomes and teaching

realities. At the same time however, uncertain funding in the past, in other ways, meant that most teachers could operate only within existing folk wisdom rather than experiment with new approaches - there was little chance to build on extensive theory and practice.

Emergence of ALBE as an entity - ALBE teaching as a profession

In this recent era, we have seen the replacement of many aging teachers (with much accumulated experience) by staff desperately busy trying to integrate work experience, professional development and personal life. In the past, young staff become middle-aged whilst trying to integrate!

In Era III, the professional association is distracted by the effort required for its own survival which compromises its role as advocate whereas in early days, young teachers and tutors initially used enthusiasm to bolster their voluntary role in establishing and operating a professional association that became an adviser to, and critic of, government. Perhaps there has been some complacency (though not by committee members!) in assuming that VALBEC would continue to receive funding.

Currently, the government agencies most immediately relevant to ALBE have become distant and perhaps oppositional whereas, in the past, they included people with extensive experience in, and empathy with, the ALBE field; a partnership (with associated responsibilities) developed. But now - unequal partners?

Increasingly, participation in professional development becomes problematic today because of funding/ratio pressures on university courses, and on staff development committees, and what were once quantum leaps in professionalisation of the field have become mere flares of activity. In previous eras, ALBE teachers attempted to ensure that staff development was a funded part of their employment. They also used events such as the International Literacy Year to commit governments to more and more multiple levels of professional development – which were recognised in employment arrangements.

A formal part of government policy - ALBE as political participant

In Era III we have seen a diversion of ALBE from its potential function of basic/lifelong education for all (for example, online literacy) to second chance education or remediation. This difficulty has antecedents in past eras when the field had to overcome community prejudice about ALBE (for example, the stigma of illiteracy) and then find time to broaden definitions and understandings.

The new environment could unfortunately lead to safe, unadventurous delivery of ALBE programs in order to avoid problems within a more litigious society, when students make trouble, or even sue, for not being taught to an advertised, though possibly unrealistic, outcome. Comparable worries

arose in the past when teachers had to grapple with some examples of workplace delivery which they found to be too functionalist and narrow.

A conclusion?

Clearly, many working in ALBE at the moment are feeling the strain brought about by recent changes, and it is important to work in all of the contexts above to avoid insidious acceptance of standards that ALBE people do not share.

I am vitally interested in the potential value of flexible delivery. However, in ALBE (and elsewhere?) this opportunity may deteriorate into arrangements of geographic and time convenience - with little more than extended homework sheets (on paper or screen). If I accept that trend, and if I do not argue for materials development time that is appropriately funded, and for programs that are truly a response to diverse, and conflicting, learning styles, then again I have unwittingly endorsed unacceptable standards which will determine 1999 and beyond.

Therefore, I think there is a place for debate about longer term issues in order to develop fully thought out responses to the compromises, which today, govern delivery some years into the future.

Daryl Evans has been working in the ALBE field since the 1970s.

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Ongoing expectations: a response to Nick Gadd

I cannot resist the temptation of replying, very briefly, to Nick Gadd's response to my article, "Modest Expectations: What training and knowledge of language do teachers need?", because his response provides such a telling example of my general point. Exclusively linguistic accounts of language are presently under challenge; even some of our most influential linguists are arguing that they provide an incomplete, and sometimes misleadingly simplistic, account of how language works and, therefore, an incomplete account of what constitutes a robust basis for language and literacy education.

Like Nick, I have found that the work of both Gunther Kress and Norman Fairclough provide powerful insights into the social, cultural and political practice of language. With Halliday, they have been foundational to my thinking about language. However, it seems cheeky of Nick to fail to acknowledge that neither of these authors presently relies exclusively on linguistic accounts of language and literacy

practice. In fact, Gunther Kress and Norman Fairclough are co-authors (under the umbrella authorship of 'The New London group') of the most elaborated account of the 'multiliteracies' project - "A pedagogy of multiliteracies: designing social futures", published in *The Harvard Review* - the very project that Nick derides as "eclectic".

Indeed, that article gives only a rough indication of the direction that their individual work is taking. Gunther Kress has been writing for some time now about the notion of 'design', a concept which he believes captures something of the complexity and interrelatedness of language and representation, and subjectivity and identity. He argues that,

On the one hand language has to be treated as just one element in the broad range of communicational means; on the other hand, the new aim has to be to move from competent use to the capacity to be innovative through design. (Kress:p44).

Norman Fairclough's recent work takes post modern critiques of critical discourse analysis seriously, working to bring critical discourse analysis into conversation with other social theories concerned with language, especially feminist and post colonial theories about identity and difference. Neither of these linguists discount the value of linguistics, they argue that linguistic accounts of language can no longer be isolated from other theoretical accounts of language or from newly emerging modes of communication associated with multimedia. These insights, not only about how the language presently works, but also about the new ways language is beginning to work in new technological environments, seem especially valuable to educators like us.

Lesley Farrell teaches at Monash University

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The New London Group, 1996, "A pedagogy of multiliteracies: designing social futures", *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 66, No.1

Coming up in the winter issue
The centrality of 'Literacy' in ALBE.

It will address such questions as:

- **How and why has our understanding of literacy competence expanded so dramatically in the past decade?**
- **In what ways is this affecting how and what we as practitioners teach students?**
- **What does it mean to be 'literate' now?**
- **Is it possible to read the future of ALBE?**

All this plus our regular sections:

- **Open forum,**
- **In practice,**
- **Further afield,**
- **Policy update and Beside the whiteboard!**

**Contributions are welcomed by Monday 4 May.
See contact details on the back cover.**

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR ADULT LITERACY

21st NATIONAL CONFERENCE

24 - 27 September 1998, Adelaide, South Australia

Call for presentations and papers

The South Australian Council for Adult Literacy (SACAL) invites you to put yourself "on the line" for the SACAL/ACAL National Conference in 1998. Offer a conference paper or presentation related to your practice but pegged to the theme of Literacy on the line. For many people 'on the line' foregrounds ideas of technology, and this conference will use technology as a vehicle for communicating preconference events across Australia and internationally, as well as providing remote communities with access to conference activities. The theme is wider than this though.

Possibilities for presentations at the conference include the following:

Literacy in the HEADLINES: the public interest in adult literacy; issues of accountability, funding and public policy; public expectations of literacy.

Literacy at the FRONTLINE: teachers putting their practice on the line; exploring new possibilities for adult learners; conceptualising new partnerships; literacy in the lives of people under threat from economic and political disadvantage.

Literacy and LIFELINES: the meanings and practices associated with everyday life; how literacy is used at home, in the workplace, and for pleasure; family and inter-generational literacy; literacy and the economic welfare of people in society.

Literacy on the PRODUCTION LINE: literacy for workers; literacy and National Training Packages; literacy and vocational training.

Literacy ONLINE: relationships between literacy learning, teaching and technology; who needs access and who has it?; how do we use technology and what do we use it for?; technology and its influence on learning partnerships?

Literacy on the Line will bring together practitioners, industry partners, administrators, learners and policy makers to share insights about the needs and demands of learning in the information age. There are many orientations conference participants may choose to explore. The conference organisers simply ask that you consider the theme of the conference in developing your submissions.

Deadline for submissions is as follows:

Abstracts due by 1st April 1998.

Confirmation of acceptance of abstracts by end of April 1998.

Final papers or summaries of workshop content for conference proceedings due by 15 July 1998 (optional).

Revised papers for external publication will be due 15 October 1998 (refereed).

In the first instance short abstracts of presentations should be emailed, faxed or posted (by 1st April 1998) to:

**Ms Karen English, Conference Manager
Enterprise Development, University of South Australia
GPO Box 2471, Adelaide, SA 5001
Telephone: 08 8302 0732   Fax: 08 8302 0733
email karen.english@unisa.edu.au**

The first phase of submissions

You are invited to submit an outline of a presentation of 200-300 words using any of the following forms:

- interactive workshop with activities for participants
- seminar presentation
- performance
- panel usually no more than three speakers
- lecture
- another form which you describe in your submission

Submissions on disk (preferably Word 6) and in hard copy format should include:

- your title and name
- address for correspondence
- phone, fax and email contact details
- a title for the presentation "pegged" to the theme of the conference
- a description of the style of presentation
- a three line bio for inclusion in the conference program

The above information should be submitted on a separate cover page together with the outline of the presentation. This outline will assist conference organisers to select presentations, provide information to delegates and structure the conference program.

Conference Proceedings (second phase)

Once presentations have been selected you will be invited to submit a paper for the conference proceedings. This phase is optional however we would encourage you to consider documenting the ideas you wish to present at the conference. You may choose to submit a paper of no more than 6 pages or develop a summary of the issues you wish to discuss in your session. Detailed guidelines for submission of papers and workshop summaries will be provided after conference sessions have been identified.

The third phase of submission (refereed)

A selection of papers from the conference proceedings will be chosen for inclusion in a separate publication for wider distribution. Authors will be contacted after submission of papers to invite them to further develop their papers for external publication.

Attention to deadlines will enable the conference organisers to provide early advertising of the overall conference program.

Participants will be notified of acceptance of their presentation by the end of April and will be asked to forward a paper or 2 page summary of their workshop by 15 July 1998, for inclusion in the conference proceedings. Participants wishing to submit a paper for the conference proceedings will be provided with details of submission and formatting requirements. Authors will be responsible for the final editing and proofing of their papers.

Conference proceedings will be available at the conference and included in the conference registration.

Policy Update

In this expanded Policy Update, Rosa McKenna and Heather Stewart discuss how a range of policy changes could affect the ALBE field.

Rosa McKenna has been involved in ALBE policy with Language Australia and through the Australian Council for Adult Literacy. Here she suggests that recent policy changes require teachers to reconsider their practice.

The field, at the moment, is completely riddled with angst and emotive responses to the current shrinkage of adult literacy. There is a pervasive and highly emotionally charged need to blame someone for the changes within the provision of adult literacy and ESL occurring within workplaces, institutions and systems. This emotional 'waving about' might make people feel better in the short term, but it is unlikely to bring about any productive dialogue which might produce a strategic or productive response to the situation. The first step to action is to understand what is actually happening.

Adult literacy funding and policy has always been a complicated affair, with inputs from local, state and commonwealth governments forming part of a complex equation of funding at the provider level. There are also a plethora of government departments from each tier of government involved in the management of these programs.

1991 to 1996 will be remembered as the climax of attention to adult literacy in this country. The Australian Language and Literacy Policy, and the programs it supported, represented the most overt and clear direction on adult literacy education to date, and through the adult English Sub-Committee of the Ministerial Council for Employment Education Training and Youth affairs, it spelt out the various contributions from each government participant. The National Collaborative Adult English Language and Literacy Strategy is the documentary evidence of such cooperation.

During this period, Commonwealth funding for adult literacy was provided in the following ways:

From 1994, ANTA provided VET funding based on State profiles and strategic plans growth funds, administered through State Training Systems; ANTA also designated funds for adult literacy programs, mainly covering community and ACE sector provision, likewise administered through State Training Systems; DIMA funded AMEP with fund allocated according to migration figures to States; DEETYA provided for Labour Market Programs such as the Special Intervention Program and the Advanced English for Migrants, which were administered through tender by CES Areas direct to providers; the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) Program, also funded by DEETYA, was administered through the Adult Literacy Policy and Programs Section, DEETYA and a network of state coordinators by competitive tender.

There was also State funding, through ACFE, for Adult Literacy and ESL Programs, the funding being largely distributed through regional ACFE Councils, but increasingly through tender.

This administrative web of programs meant that huge variations could exist between the states, CES areas, and local

regions, so there is no clear picture of all the inputs over this period. Nor is it possible to get clear information on outcomes of programs, with each funding agency generally targeting specific groups for their own policy objectives. For example, the Special Intervention Program was a literacy and ESL program funded after the provider successfully tendered. The program was targeted at the unemployed with students being directly referred through the CES. A successful outcome was placement in employment, not any literacy or numeracy learning by the individual.

A typical TAFE College or reasonably sized Community Based Provider was probably receiving and reporting on funding from:

- the Adult Community and Further Education Council for coordination and provision;
- the regional CES for particular courses for unemployed adults;
- OTFE to run accredited courses e.g. CGE(A), vocational certificates and integrated provision;
- the Adult Literacy Program Section, DEETYA, to conduct industry or enterprise based programs;
- local government to support child care for participants, or fund programs for disability groups.

In 1996, with a new federal government, there was a complete ideological shift, as well as policy change, that has begun to permeate the adult literacy field (along with every publicly funded enterprise).

As promised in the lead up to the election, all labour market programs were completely cut. The Special Intervention Program was phased out despite positive evaluations. However, under a new name, the CES continued to fund some program places, honouring some of the contracts outstanding until the end of 1997. $250m of program funding has thus been gradually withdrawn from the system. This particular program supported a large number of contract teachers in TAFE Colleges, the AMES and in Community Based Providers.

Competitive tendering is now the norm in all publicly funded education programs, whether through the VET and employment systems or AMES. This has had the effect of driving costs per student contact hour down and forcing productivity improvements. Providers are getting less money to do the same, or more, with. Understandably, employers cannot expose themselves to costs beyond the terms of their contracts and so short term contract employment and sessional work provides a way of reducing these costs. Many teachers have found their employment, or their time reduced, or they have simply been offered sessional teaching. Some new providers have entered the market through this process, but they generally offer conditions below the previously existing norms in the system.

Funding in the ACE sector has remained fairly static, but this sector will clearly be unable to meet the increasing demand for places that will emerge as SIP winds down.

The new system

New government policies do not explicitly recognise that literacy education is needed for adults, except second language programs for newly arriving migrants and literacy programs for young people. This government recognises that people in the labour market may have barriers to employment,

and they are prepared to offer a range of assistance to overcome those barriers. Their approach is directed at getting individuals to take responsibility for themselves in the labour market. They do not recognise that some groups are structurally disadvantaged in the system, hence, reduction and likely abolition of Abstudy and other targeted programs. Any new programs will be individually targeted rather than target group specific.

Instead, they have developed a whole structure, to be handled in the private sector, to assist individuals find work. They have also introduced incentives for employers to take on new workers. These include changes to the Industrial Relations Act in relation to employment contracts and wages, and arrangements for combinations of work and training. Implicit in this policy and its implementation is that basic education is provided by schools and that industry will largely be responsible for developing the skills of their employees. It is therefore not surprising that there is little or no direct program funding for catch up education such as stand alone ESL, literacy and numeracy programs which is not tied to other social policy outcomes such as employment.

Employment Assistance

A screening device, the Jobseeker Classification Screening Instrument (JSCI) will be used by Centrelink staff to identify individuals with barriers to employment, and to determine what level of assistance will be funded. Literacy and oral communications skill is one of the factors to be evaluated in this process. Weightings are also given to indigenous people, people born overseas, people in remote areas etc. The scores on the JCSI will be used to determine access to Flex 1, Flex 2 or Flex 3. These programs offer varying services through Employment Placement Enterprises, publicly funded private employment agencies to assist individuals find work. Literacy and numeracy training is one option offered.

DEETYA announced the successful tenderers for this service on March 4. The provision of ESL, literacy and numeracy training will be at the discretion of the these agencies. They will now be recruiting staff, thus providing some employment opportunities for practitioners as case managers or trainers in companies undertaking all services in-house. It is likely that some companies will subcontract specialist services. Providers, therefore should be developing relationships with these companies to subcontract expert assessment and training services.

Following the release of the Australian Bureau of Statistics survey in September 1997, the Minister has announced a new Literacy and Numeracy Program linked to the idea of mutual obligation arrangements for the unemployed. This program promises $139m over three years. The program is targeted at young people aged between 18 and 24 who have very poor literacy and numeracy skills. Access to the program will be possible after six months of unemployment. Identification of clients and reporting of literacy and numeracy skills will be done using the National Reporting System. The program will offer part-time tuition with an expectation that participants can still engage in job search activities. This program will be tendered out in April 1998 and it provides new opportunities for funding for literacy and numeracy providers.

National Training Framework

This government is also reintroducing the apprenticeship scheme and extending traineeships. These schemes were previously limited to declared trades. The notion of combining training and work has now been opened up to every industry. Industry will have access to public funds for training by linking all training to industry standards which, in turn, are linked to qualifications. Through the National Training Framework developed by ANTA, the achievement of these competencies will be recognised throughout the system.

Training Packages developed by each Industry Training Advisory Board, and endorsed by ANTA, will effectively drive vocational and education and training. Resources for training will no longer be tied to the delivery of accredited modularised courses.

If resources for training are to be tied to achieving industry determined competencies, where will the resources for supporting ESL, literacy and numeracy students come from? The short answer is that literacy and numeracy needs will have to be identified in those standards and training strategies provided in the Training Packages to ensure that access. If this is successful, there will be increasing demands from workplaces for assistance in the development of integrated approaches to literacy and numeracy within industry training, and new opportunities available to practitioners to either become enterprise teachers or, through relationships with a Recognised Training Organisation, to provide specialist services such as support, training and assessment. To engage in these activities, practitioners will need to have appropriate background relevant to that industry. The professional development needs and assessment structures for each industry are contained in the non-endorsed components of the Training Packages.

In conclusion:

There is no future for teachers complacently thinking that they can continue teaching CGEA in stand-alone provision in a provider. Such provision in on its way out. Teachers need to position themselves to take up new opportunities, however, individuals will need to start mapping their career opportunities more carefully and invest in forms of professional development that will prepare them for new roles. Your current employer is not likely to invest in your development unless you are able to show them that you can contribute to their success in the new systems. Secondly, I think that it will be essential that the professional associations, VALBEC at the local level and ACAL at the national level, be supported to develop professional standards and to advocate strongly to government bodies on issues of quality provision. They will, in return, have to provide to that professional membership, services that assist both individuals and providers manage this change.

The Common Youth Allowance

Heather Stewart is Policy Officer with the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and in this report, she gives an account of the new Common Youth Allowance and how it could have an impact on the make-up of ALBE classes.

In this article I will outline the proposed changes to youth income support programs, most of which are tabled to be introduced from July 1st of this year. I will then detail some of the key concerns with the proposal which have emerged from the field, and the principles which we feel should underpin this new allowance. I will conclude by considering the likely success of the proposal, as the legislation is dependent upon parliamentary support.

The proposed changes

The Common Youth Allowance aims to replace five income support payments for young people: Youth Training Allowance; Newstart Allowance and Sickness Allowance for under 21 year olds; AUSTUDY and more than minimum rate of Family Payment for 16 - 18 years olds. ABSTUDY is not included.

Rates of pay will be reduced from 13 different levels to five levels. The Allowance will be administered by the Department of Social Security and delivered by the new Commonwealth Service Delivery Agency: Centrelink.

Unemployed young people under 21 years of age and students under 25 years of age will be categorised as 'dependent' on their parents, and a means test on parental income will apply where combined gross parental income reaches $23,500. Young people with parents who earn more than $41,000 will not be eligible for assistance at all. All payments for under 18 year olds will be paid to parents rather than the young person.

Single young unemployed people's eligibility for the allowance will be based on their parents incomes and assets. This will apply to both young people living at home and away from home, unless independence can be established. The criteria for independence has been tightened, making it more difficult to establish eligibility.

Young people aged 16 -17 who have not completed Year 12 will have to be in full time education or training in order to receive the Youth Allowance. There will be temporary exemptions for circumstances recognised as making it unreasonable for a young person to undertake full time study. These include: illness, homelessness, substance abuse, traumatic home situation, and lack of an appropriate education place, amongst others. Activity testing for 16 and 17 year olds, however, is not expected to be introduced until January 1999.

One of the biggest benefits of the proposed new allowance is that young people moving between education, training and unemployment will no longer have to deal with two different departments and this will hopefully ease the heartache which many young people faced in the past when they inadvertently fell between two not necessarily compatible systems.

Also, the new allowance offers increased financial assistance for those young people who need to live away from home in order to study, participate in training or look for a job in a location with better employment prospects. However, young people who are not assessed as needing to live away from home for study, training or job search will receive a lower 'at home' rate.

Key concerns

The Government often gets into difficulties when it tries to develop public policy based on a desire to 'not offer incentives'. Such policy initiatives are often based on problematic assumptions about how young people make decisions about leaving or staying in the family home, or leaving or entering education. Unfortunately such policy initiatives often grossly ignore the complexity of real young people's lives which can leave some young people vulnerable to receiving no income at all.

The allowance raises concerns for young people at risk who cannot return home but can't jump the through the hoops to prove eligibility for an independent allowance. The Council are keen to receive further information on how eligibility for independent rate for homeless young people will work.

There is also the fear of the possibility of increased family conflict because the allowance could increase pressures on families who may now see young people living at home simply in order to obtain income support.

There are also implications for the education system. The allowance raises compulsory school age across the board, but doesn't address the issue of why young people choose to leave school early. Nor does it address the lack of sufficient training placements needed to met the newly created demand. The allowance doesn't address the need to make school relevant to young people.

There may well be increased pressures on schools as well. The allowance appears likely to increase classroom sizes and put more pressure on already limited human and financial resources within schools. Schools will have to cater for the needs of students who are not planning to enter tertiary education, and who may need additional support to continue within the education system. Young people under 18 who are at risk of becoming an early school-leaver, or of being dismissed or expelled from school are at risk of losing their income completely.

Education workers may have to consider what kind of attendance records will need to be kept; who might fall between the gaps; what kinds of education and training positions will be recognised; whether or not young people have to be in full time positions in order to receive the

allowance; whether or not a student is eligible for income while they are waiting to get into a short-term, fixed-period course; and whether or not their income ends as soon as they have completed the course.

There are also real questions about whether or not the education system will be able to keep up with the demand. The allowance raises the need for both secondary and TAFE education positions for young people. Currently young people's demand for education positions is higher than the supply. The question of young people who have been expelled from all local schools becomes more crucial when income support is tied to participation in education.

There is a seeming abandonment of the Welfare State's obligations for youth unemployment. Changes to our income security system proposed by this Government reinforce the message that families should support young people until they have reached financial independence. Such changes constitute a radical shift in the notion of the welfare state. This raises some interesting questions about when a young person is considered an adult: i.e. how can the state decide that a young person over 18 (who is to all other extents considered an adult) is not eligible to be recognised as independent?

We also have concerns about the payment of Youth Allowance for 16 and 17 year olds to parent/s. Where 16 and 17 year olds are eligible for Youth allowance, the allowance is paid to parent. This means that there is no guarantee that young people will actually receive any money. This also raises the question about who is responsible for meeting the condition of reciprocal obligation: the parent or the young person? What happens to young people who are without a clear significant adult, i.e. newly arrived migrants or refugees who do not live with an adult support person?

Basic Principles

The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria support the contention of our national peak, AYPAC, that the Allowance should be premised on the following principles:

- The Youth Allowance should build on the existing social security system where ever possible;
- Social Security homeless provisions should be maintained, which includes the definition of homeless for eligibility purposes as well as maintaining access to DSS social workers;

- Simplification must not result in young people being penalised for participation in some activities as opposed to others;
- Nor should income support be used as a lever to force young people to participate in specific activities, such as family mediation;
- Reforms should not force young people to be dependent, nor force parents to be responsible for their adult children when parents are unable or unwilling to do so;
- Young people should not lose any of the social wage entitlements they currently receive under the separate program;
- The Government can only enforce activity testing for the payment of common Youth Allowance if viable education options are provided for all young people.

Timetable for Implementation

The original timetable for the proposed changes has shifted. As the Government was unable to get the proposals passed by parliament during the last sitting for 1997, it will now need to be referred to the first sitting of Parliament this year. At this stage both Labor and the Democrats are saying that they will oppose compulsory activity testing for eligibility for financial support for young people under 18, the means testing of single unemployed young people aged 18- 20, and the proposed removal of rent assistance from those people who are not required to live away from home. The decision to defer the introduction of the activity testing for 16 and 17 year olds is probably of some relief to education workers, who would have found it a very confusing policy to begin working with mid-way through a school year. However, there are still some significant creases which need to be ironed out before we can expect the education system to run with the proposal by 1999.

For more information you can ring the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, on (03) 9419 9122.

Beside the Whiteboard

Angela Tsotsos was a secondary teacher, but she now teaches in ALBE and ESL in the Northern Region of Melbourne. She talks here to Libby Barker about her experiences teaching ESL and literacy in both sectors.

What teaching background do you come from?

I come from a secondary background. I've got a Dip. Ed. in English/ESL. I taught in a high school - 15 years in the same high school - and basically taught English and ESL. And my expertise is in the ESL/literacy side.

How would you describe the students and classes you are teaching now?

I'm working for the Northcote Library and through them I'm at Roytals two mornings a week teaching literacy skills to students with a mild intellectual disability. It's an interesting class because their abilities are amazing, from people who've never had a chance to learn to people who've had wonderful experience in education, through parents or institutions that they've been at. They're really community spirited and there's a real sense of achievement in the class. And then there's literacy based in the workplace area and what I'm trying to do is get them to be aware of safety, not just signs but words, and to reach achievable goals. The other one is an Arts Project and it's animated film and we're putting words to the artist's animation. It's not just artistic value, there's a literacy side to it.

I also teach English as a Second Language, a class called Using English; and they're are just so motivated. Their four hour class just goes so quickly. The students range from women who've been in Australia for a very long time who've hardly been outside the family home to women who are teachers in their own field, pediatricians. They're people who really want to learn. We're reading *A town like Alice*, and from that I take the grammar, language, writing, related history. And it's getting them to tell me what they want, like the first session was setting goals; what do they want from this class; what are achievable goals; and how do they want to go about doing it. And it was a really great experience, because putting it on the board, each one of them wanted something very different, but in the end we all came to the same achievable goals.

When you moved into teaching adults, what adjustments (if any) did you have to make to your teaching practices?

My expectations were different. The pressure wasn't the same. Having a VCE English class or a VCE ESL class is a lot more demanding in that you've got work requirements, you've got exams and a lot of the students are young people who want to go on to bigger and better things

In adult ed. there are no discipline problems in the class. There's none in a VCE class, but its a bit different, you've got to motivate them. You've got to push a high school student, whereas you're not pushing an adult. An adult's there because they want to be there. They're there on their own time and they're very professional. And I think that's the difference. My approach has been different in that respect. I don't feel the pressure as much. I think I'm more motivated because of their eagerness and their willingness to learn and their willingness to come back and say, "We tried this and it didn't work" or, "Sorry we haven't spoken English all week do you mind if we go over that again?". And they're not afraid to question you in that respect.

What parts of your understanding of teaching and learning processes gained in the secondary sector did you find relevant to the needs of the adult classroom and what parts needed to be changed?

Some of it was, some of it wasn't. You're not dealing with puberty or anything like that. The problems of just growing up aren't there. I've had to find things that I think are much more suitable for adults. My homework has to be quite good, especially when I first started, in that you're not the expert. You've got people in the room that have experience and understandings of stuff that show you as the teacher to be very narrow.

The honesty you bring to the class though is the same. I've always been honest: if I don't know, I don't know, regardless of age.

There's more continuity in the secondary system because you get to see the students every day. In a high school situation you're actually in a fenced in area and they're your domain, they're your responsibility for eight hours a day for five days a week, whereas in the adult sector they're not. I miss that. All of my current classes I'd like to see more often, but as adults a lot of them have commitments if you look at it realistically. But this can be a bit frustrating at times in terms of the learning process.

Are you happy that you made the move into the adult education sector. Why/ Why not?

Yeah I am. It's new and it's different . I've always loved teaching, but I spent a long time in high schools and I just wanted a change.

Which sector provides the most opportunity for professional and personal development for teachers in your experience: the secondary sector or the adult sector?

Can I say neither? I haven't been in the adult sector long enough to know what opportunities are available and in the high school sector the government has cut funds to the point where curriculum days are a rarity. You used to get two days a term to work on curriculum issues, to meet with people. And I'd say in the last two years of my teaching we did it on the weekend or on holidays. PD's just so hard to organise. You teach a full day, then you've got meetings from 4 to 6 then PD from six to eight. You just don't have a life.

In the adult sector, the information and the PD seem to be there but the problem is getting that information. Because I work in five different spots I might go to the office once a fortnight and so if I'm interested I may miss it. But the ones that I have been to I think have been really informative, knowledgeable and you get to meet other people in your area. Again it's on your time but the avenues are there though.

In terms of the development of literacy skills amongst students, which sector appears to demonstrate the most effective outcomes in the fastest time, in your experience? Can you explain why you think this?

I'd have to say adult, (though I'm referring to the class where most of the students have a professional, a tertiary qualification) in that they have already developed a range of skills related to learning. They do their own work, own research and are interested. Year 7 and 8 students may be interested, but there are a whole range of other things going on around them: sexuality, football.

Though this is different if students are not literate in their first language. The methodology I used in secondary teaching works in the adult sector too. I was very aware of the things I do and worried they were not appropriate in the adult sector, but after attending several PD sessions I realised I was on track. Having that secondary school background in language acquisition is really important to me, it means I don't feel lost with adults.

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