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

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Editorial

Welcome to the second edition of Fine Print for 1998. During this year, VALBEC's twentieth anniversary, we are striving to re-engage with central questions about the identity of the Adult Literacy and Basic Education field.

In this edition we tackle the second of ALBE's four terms, 'literacy'. Practitioners are often heard to describe themselves as "literacy teachers", but the very centrality of the term also means that it is the most disputed. This disputation occurs on at least three levels: firstly, the field has struggled to agree about what it means to be 'literate' in contemporary society; secondly, even where such agreement exists, there will be different methodological approaches to teaching 'literacy'; thirdly, there has always been a tension within the field between teaching English language skills and providing a broad-based induction into school-based fields of knowledge.

In the last ten years we have seen our understanding of literacy mushroom out from being just decoding and encoding texts on a grapho-phonemic level. Now the citizen's acts of interpretation and construction of meaning in texts takes place on other quite complex levels, such as the socio-functional and discursive, and is no longer just expressive of the self but also constructive of it. Moreover, as Dale Pobega and Robyn Logan illustrate in their contributions to this edition, the range of texts that confront citizens in their everyday lives is expanding dramatically as visual and multi-media forms of expression proliferate. As a result of both these trends, the job of teaching 'literacy' has similarly ballooned. It was a difficult enough brief before, but now it sometimes appears that we can never hope to do justice to it. But perhaps we never could hope to finish our work, for what, after all, is a literate person? When is the process of acquiring competence in the reading and production of text ever complete?

Although even the most commonsense understandings of English literacy emphasise reading and writing of English language text, many ALBE teachers have shied away from an explicit focus on language in their classroom practice. This edition of Fine Print asserts the centrality of language in adult literacy and basic education. Fran Christie begins the issue with a rejection of the language–content binary. She points out that while we seem to be "culturally and perhaps cognitively disposed to focus on content", it is our responsibility to ensure that the ways in which textual meaning is realised via a range of patterned linguistic choices is made explicit to our students. David Rose, Brian Gray and Wendy Cowey encourage us to question our own heart-felt, but vague and ultimately speculative, assumptions about the learning styles of our student groups. Instead, like Fran Christie, they see identifiable patterns and structures of language in specific contexts that can and should be made explicit in the teaching process.

These writers have an agreed understanding of the manner in which language and meaning work together in text and a vocabulary for describing it. The ALBE field, however, more often than not has no agreed metalanguage for speaking about these processes. How this ramifies throughout our field is well illustrated by Linda Edman in her contribution to this edition. Her article sees the Certificate of General Education for Adults back under the public gaze of Fine Print writers for the first time in some time. For Linda, the CGEA displays great confusion about language by drawing from two quite different theoretical frameworks with no regard for where they do and do not fit with each other. Arguably, the lack of an agreed way to speak about the processes by which meaning is realised in text has led to such contradictions in our key documents.

There are obvious reasons why second language educators have always been more comfortable with an explicit focus on language in the construction and interpretation of meaning. In their contribution to this edition Janice Knuckey and Veronica Pardo show that deaf English literacy education, premised on an understanding of signing as the students' first language, is best served by the adoption of language focused methodologies drawn from the ESL field fostering transfer of knowledge about language derived during the process of acquiring L1 to that of learning L2.

Surely, the linguistic demands on all adult literacy students is similar in that they move between different situations where often new and challenging communicative skills are required for active and effective participation. It seems only fair, therefore, that they be given the same chance to learn, discuss, apply and transfer knowledge of how language functions in texts to realise meaning in order to shift between all the varying contexts, registers and associated text types that confront them in their academic, working, personal and other lives.

Fine Print Editorial Group

Confronting the conduit metaphor

by Frances Christie

In this article, Professor Christie looks at the relationship between the teaching of language and content.

Introduction

In drawing attention to some problems in the ways English speakers use language, the linguist Reddy (1979) coined the term "conduit metaphor". By using this, he referred to the manner in which all kinds of dichotomies are well established in the ways we use language, and hence also the ways we construct and think about the world. Some obvious examples include "process and product", "form and function", or "form and content'. The metaphor arises because in each case, the one is seen as simply the conduit for the other. Thus, for example, "form" is seen as the conduit which serves in some neutral way to carry or even to "convey" "content". The tendency to create dichotomies is apparently well established in western traditions of thinking and scholarship, as well as very well established in the "commonsense" ways people talk and deal with experience. Since the tendency is so well established, we must assume that it has had some value, at least in the past, in helping to provide some kind of heuristic with which people might explain different phenomena. But whatever its past value, I would argue that the conduit metaphor is increasingly irrelevant, and that nowhere is this more the case than in language and literacy education.

In language and literacy education it has often been commonplace to draw a distinction between language and content. Language is merely the vehicle which carries the "content" or sometimes "the ideas" to be taught and learned, is the implication. Yet close scrutiny of the matter will suggest that "meaning", or "content" or "knowledge" or "ideas" can never be dissociated from the semiotic system (in this case the language system) in which it is *realised*. Consider by contrast the other semiotic systems that are familiarly part of our lives: music, dance, painting, photography, to name a few. Each of these constructs its meanings in ways particular to the system involved. We can of course talk about the meaning of a play, or a film, or a picture, and we often take pleasure in doing so, but this doesn't detract from the fact that the meaning is itself realised or made manifest in the particular complex set of symbols chosen to make the meaning. This is inescapably true of language. Language constructs meanings relevant to the particular text type, its social context, its social purposes and its ideologies. Language is never neutral, but fundamentally involved in the social processes in which humans negotiate relationships, build

experience, and organise and marshal information and experience.

All learning will involve some use of language, but the formal institutions of education - be they schools, TAFE colleges or universities - necessarily use language and literacy to accomplish a great deal of their teaching and learning. In a journal such as this one, it will come as no surprise to readers that I insist that all teachers are teachers of language and literacy, regardless of the "content" that is involved.

But how are we to capture the relationship involved in the proposition that language realises meaning or "content"? And what are the implications for pedagogy? Whether we are considering the safety notice on the workshop floor, a story in a children's book, a scientific explanation of photosynthesis, or a manual for assembling a new garden shed, the fact is that we draw upon the same linguistic system both to produce and to read and successfully interpret the text involved. In what senses then, can we usefully talk about the particularities of each text type or genre? How, for pedagogic purposes, can we acknowledge both the features common to the ways in which language is used, and the features giving each instance of text its distinctive character?

> **'language [is] a system, permitting the adoption of different sets of choice for making meaning'**

My answer to that question will involve firstly, some brief discussion of what it means to see language as a *system*, permitting the adoption of different sets of choice for making meaning, and secondly, a brief comment on the manner in which, when people make choices, they are constrained to make those choices in ways relevant to the *context of situation* and the *text type*.

Language as system and the text types it produces

Most of us, if we were taught any grammar at school at all, were taught it as a set of rules: there were rules to do with tense, subject and verb agreement, use of double negatives, rules for identification of parts of speech, and so on. Traditional school grammar was preoccupied with structure. It was always partly descriptive, in that it claimed to tell how language was, and also partly prescriptive, in that it prescribed what one could or couldn't say (as for example in the case of a double negative). A systemic functional (SF) grammar (Halliday 1994), while it

acknowledges and uses a great deal of the terminology of traditional grammar, differs from the latter in at least two important senses. Firstly, it differs in that its concern is not with rules, but with language as a resource, and the interest is to interpret how the resource of language is used. Secondly, it differs because it proposes that language is a meaning system, or more accurately, that it is *polysystemic*, or consisting of many systems. We draw upon the various systems of tense, number, mood, to name some obvious ones (though there are many others), to produce texts, and equally we draw upon our knowledge of these in order to hear or read texts. The particular choices (not conscious, of course) made at any time are a function of the context of situation.

Consider each of the text extracts in Table 1.

The brassert washer is the 2nd mechanism used in the No. 4 BF gas cleaning system. It is located between the dustcatcher and the electrostatic precipitators. The main function of the brassert is to cool down the blast furnace gas discharged from the furnace and to also partially remove dust and grit from the gas. To achieve this increased gas cleanliness, the gas must pass through the brassert at a reasonably slow velocity.

(Extract from BHP's No. 4 Blast Furnace Gas Cleaning System Manual, cited by Rose, 1997, 17)

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choices creates the meanings of the text, and fulfils its social function, in this case to provide advice to the worker. In the case of the opening of Malouf's novel, the language is less specialist, and in fact more likely to accord with the normal language behaviour of any native speaker of the language, at least, though that doesn't in itself explain why Malouf chose it. Malouf chose it, we must conclude, because it was part of creating the opening to his story: summoning a setting into being ("one day in the middle of the nineteenth century" and "in Queensland"), identifying some participants in that setting ("three children"), establishing some at least of their characteristics (the girls wore "patched gingham" and the boy "short pants and braces"; they were "not easily scared") and their activities (they saw "something extraordinary"). The ideal reader position here is that of one who responds to, and successfully interprets the story teller's efforts both to create

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One day in the middle of the nineteenth century, when settlement in Queensland had advanced little more than halfway up the coast, three children were playing at the edge of a paddock when they saw something extraordinary. They were two little girls in patched gingham and a boy, their cousin, in short pants and braces, all three barefooted farm children not easily scared.

(Extract from David Malouf's novel Remembering Babylon, 1993, 1)

Table 1

Each identifiably uses the English language, yet each constructs different meanings from the other. How are we to characterize the differences? One very obvious matter, commented on earlier, is that there are differences in the choices of significant vocabulary items. Another way to say this is to say that each draws upon, but also constructs, a different *field of experience*. While it is reasonable to comment on the differences of vocabulary, as we can also very clearly demonstrate, these alone don't account for the differences.

In the case of the BHP Manual, a considerable amount of specialist technical language is used; terms such as "brassert washer", "electrostatic precipitators", or "this increased gas cleanliness" are not familiarly part of the everyday speech of most people. The ideal reader the text attempts to contruct is one who both understands the technical language involved, but who also can interpret and presumably act upon the explanation involved in working with a brassert washer. This will be a skilled worker intending to carry out an aspect of a specialist job. To say even this much is to stray beyond an interpretation of the technical language used, and to comment, albeit very generally, on the ways the *total pattern of language*

an imagined world and to excite interest about the participants in that world. Once again, even to say this is to stray beyond consideration of particular vocabulary items (important though these clearly are) and to bring to the act of reading both a capacity to inform one's reading of the text by reference to the other stories one has heard or read before, and also to interpret all the other language choices that have been used to create the text.

Thus, we need to acknowledge, the language choices that build the two texts both create a particular writer-reader relationship (the *tenor*) and a particular pattern or linguistic organisation (the *mode*). (I should note, incidentally, that the BHP text was apparently accompanied by diagrams, and it is important to recognise that these were themselves part of the mode, though I am unable to reproduce these). Space will not permit detailed discussion of the sets of language choices drawn upon to create the two texts, so let me take one aspect of the ways the two are organised in order to demonstrate how considerable such choices are and how considerable are the different meanings realised. I shall select the aspect of Theme, identified in SF grammar

(Halliday 1994) as "the starting-point for the message" of the clause: "it is what the clause is about". As we shall see, what is made thematic across the series of clauses in a text tells us a lot about what is foregrounded, and what meanings are used to push the discourse forward. Unlike what is true in many other languages, Theme in English falls in first position in a clause, though this is not what defines it. I have underlined Themes in the following, though I have not stated the types of Themes. See Table 2.

In fact, the opening marked Theme actually displaces "three children" which would otherwise have been thematic in the opening (in "three children were playing at the edge of the paddock"). One might ask why this displacement occurs, and the answer, I think, will acknowledge that the opening Theme as given allows the writer to establish a sense of time and space necessary to the subsequent unfolding of the details of the story. It "packs in" a great deal of relevant information. The later Theme choices are

<u>The brassert washer</u> is the 2nd mechanism used in the No. 4 BF gas cleaning system.

 It is located between the dustcatcher and the electrostatic precipitators. <u>The main function of the brassert</u> is to cool down the blast furnace gas discharged from the furnace and to also partially remove dust and grit from the gas.

<u>To achieve this increased gas cleanliness,</u> the gas must pass through the brassert at a reasonably slow velocity.

(Extract from BHP's No. 4 Blast Furnace Gas Cleaning System Manual, cited by Rose, 1997, 17)

<u>One day in the middle of the nineteenth century, when settlement in Queensland had advanced little more than halfway up the coast</u>, three children were playing at the edge of a paddock <u>when they</u> saw something extraordinary. <u>They</u> were two little girls in patched gingham and a boy, their cousin, in short pants and braces, <u>all three barefooted farm children</u> not easily scared.

(Extract from David Malouf's novel Remembering Babylon, 1993, 1)

Table 2

The BHP text extract thematises the "brassert washer" itself, its function and how the function is achieved. One can see how focussed is the preoccupation with these matters, and also how the Themes push the discourse forward, even in the last case, in the presence of a dependent clause, which creates an atypical or "marked" Theme (shown in italics):

- The brassert washer
- It
- The main function of the brassert
- *To achieve this increased gas cleanliness*

This pattern of language choices in Theme position is quite characteristic of explanation of the kind involved here. Such a pattern is in fact one of the indices of the kind of text type involved, though it would be misleading to identify it as the only one.

The opening of the novel is thematically quite different in character, starting with a very long marked Theme (in italics):

- *One day in the middle of the nineteenth century, when settlement in Queensland had advanced little more than halfway up the coast*
- when they
- They
- all three barefooted farm children

unremarkable, in one case signalling time ("when") and otherwise identifying the children. The tendency to thematise time and place as a first step towards the unfolding a story is again a commonplace of the kind of text type involved, while the later Theme choices identifying participants are equally characteristic.

Both text extracts, as it happens, use one marked Theme, and they otherwise use unmarked Themes. It will be clear, however, that their respective roles in the two texts are quite different. In the cases of the marked Themes, one establishes a context for a story, while the other thematises a purpose - "to achieve this increased gas cleanliness" - which it is necessary to establish before the text proceeds.

I shall refer to two other grammatical points of difference only: firstly the tense choices differ, the explanation using the present tense, the story the past tense; secondly, the BHP manual makes one use of a modal, signalling a strong sense of compulsion upon the reader: "the gas must pass through the brassert at a reasonably slow velocity".

Tense choices, like modality, or indeed like any other linguistic choices, are not, in and of themselves, significant: their significance lies in the role they play together with the other linguistic choices drawn upon to create the text of concern. They function as elements in a total package of choices functioning to build the text. "Content" doesn't reside in any one element of a text, but rather it is

constructed in all the text, though one can nonetheless identify clusters of features that are more characteristic of one text rather than another.

Questions of "content" in the classroom

What does all this mean for pedagogy? To return to some points I made above in the opening of this paper, if we are to come to terms with the relationship of language and "content", the first thing we must recognise is that "content" is constructed in language. Language is not a neutral conveyor of information, but quite fun-damentally involved in the building of meanings, and hence of "content". What is at issue for teachers is to be able firstly, to identify at least some of the significant language features in which experience and information are realised, and secondly, to use this knowledge to guide students' learning. Guiding students' learning will in my view involve use of a metalanguage, because it is one aspect of facilitating students' capacity to learn to talk about the forms of literacy they are using. Apart from the older and more traditional notions of tense and of number, to which I have alluded, students can also be taught to use and reflect on notions of Theme and of modality, among other things.

The important pedagogic decisions for the teacher will always be: where shall I start? At what points in a total teaching cycle will it be important to foreground aspects of "content", and at what points will it be important to foreground aspects of the language choices in which it is realised? How will the interests in both be ultimately brought together in ways that are rewarding to the students?

We are, it seems, culturally and perhaps cognitively, disposed to focus on the "content" when it comes to a great deal of the reading and writing that we do. One turns to the daily newspaper in the morning for example, to check on the latest stage in the Wik debate, or perhaps the weekend's sporting results. One doesn't reflect consciously on the language used. As a teacher, one goes into the classroom intending to teach some aspect of the curriculum. Where the latter is some aspect of the English language program, language may in fact constitute an object of study. But this is not necessarily the case, while it is less likely to be true in the many other areas of learning that might be considered. Students, like teachers, will more typically think of the subject to be learned than of how it is realised. But it is the teacher's responsibility to bear in mind the language choices involved in the making of the various "contents" at issue, and to find ways to bring this to the conscious attention of students.

> **Language is not a neutral conveyor of information, but quite fundamentally involved in the building of meanings, and hence of "content"**

How one plans and approaches the teaching cycle will always depend in part on what has gone before, because good teaching will always draw on prior learning experiences where they can be exploited. Beyond that, I suggest that the most desirable point of departure will be the field of knowledge to be dealt with. Considerable immersion in talk and reflection on the information will always be important, facilitating the learning of a language relevant to the field and a corresponding understanding of the significance of that language. But the immersion in the field of knowledge will itself involve recourse to texts - be they oral or written, and be they found in textbook, newspaper, CD ROM or even video or film. As the processes of immersion in, and reflection on, the texts are promoted and sustained, a good teacher will make opportunities to point discussion towards how the texts are constructed, what features give them their particular character, and what kinds of differences they observe in different text types dealing with the same field.

Over a sustained period of teaching and learning, say for a year, the teacher can aim to build a shared knowledge of many language features, and with growing con-fidence, students can be encouraged to draw upon this knowledge when addressing new tasks with respect to new areas of knowledge.

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Providing access to academic-literate discourses for indigenous learners

by David Rose, Brian Gray & Wendy Cowey

David Rose, Brian Gray and Wendy Cowey look at some of the underlying reasons for literacy difficulties and provide a detailed discussion of an approach to teaching literacy that is working.

Introduction

The goal of this brief article is to present an approach to teaching reading and writing with indigenous students that is currently being trialled in schools in SA. We begin by framing the approach within the literacy needs of indigenous communities, and the cultural contexts in which literacy learning takes place, and then present a summary of the approach.

Over the last twenty five years the teaching profession in Australia has struggled to develop more appropriate and effective language pedagogies for indigenous students, trying out new approaches and taking students' cultural differences into account. However improvements in outcomes remain disappointingly slow, as both indigenous and non-indigenous leaders in the profession acknowledge. For example, a recent NT report found that the average literacy levels of indigenous secondary age school children in remote communities was six years behind their non-indigenous peers (Public Accounts Committee, NT, 1996), while the recent National Literacy Benchmarks assessments found that indigenous learners were generally four years behind their average age levels in reading and writing (DEETYA, 1997).

While there are many notable exceptions to these figures, for the overwhelming majority of indigenous learners these kinds of outcomes virtually rule out success in secondary or further education. The long term effects of these educational outcomes are having dreadful implications for indigenous communities, in terms of long term unemployment, poverty, and associated personal and social problems, which only threaten to become worse for the next generation. The overwhelming educational need in indigenous communities today is in the academic-literate discourses that provide access to vocational and professional training (Japangardi Poulson 1988, Lester1993, Nakata 1996, Rose 1996). We believe that there is no more urgent task for indigenous communities today than to meet this need for success in school and adult education. To begin to do so, we believe that is essential to turn the focus of ethnographic study in indigenous education away from so-called 'Aboriginal learning styles' or 'communication styles', and other presumed characteristics of indigenous learners, and onto the cultural contexts of education itself, in which literacy and literacy learning have evolved.

Cultural contexts of literacy learning

Formal education provides access to vocational and professional training by means of a set of discursive practices that are specialised to itself. These academic-literate discourses are realised in types of written texts and classroom interactions that become progressively more complex and abstract in a sequence from early primary school to senior secondary school (Rose 1997). The sequence ensures that those learners who do not acquire them in primary years will not have access to their more complex, abstract forms in later years, and so not be able to go on to higher education. Academic discourses, from early primary on, have evolved to apprentice learners into decontextualised ways of meaning (e.g. Olson 1994), enabling them to develop orientations to meanings that are abstracted from familiar local contexts, as described by Bernstein (1996). Formal education is in other words, a discourse about other discourses whose contexts lie beyond the walls of the classroom (Christie 1993). It involves learning to do more than interact discursively with elders and peers, but to interact with them around the construction of texts.

Indigenous learners, amongst many others, tend to fall behind the educational sequence by upper primary school, so that by the time they reach middle secondary school it is no longer possible to engage successfully with this stage in the sequence. For this reason, very few indigenous learners ever complete high school, and only a small minority go on to further or adult education. To understand why this is so we need to go back to the beginning of the sequence to look at the differences between the acculturation of the more successful students and other groups in cultures of literacy. We know that children from literate middle class families are generally already prepared to engage in discourse around written texts before they arrive at school, and as they progress through the sequence their discursive experiences of home and school tend to be mutually reinforced. This preparation for academic-literate discourse pervades the home experience of middle class children from their earliest years, in forms of spoken interactions and joint book readings with parents (Painter 1986).

The kinds of literacy teaching practices that most of us are trained in only pick up where the home experience of reading in literate families leaves off. These practices include

writing activities in which learners write texts from their own experience or from oral discussions, and reading activities in which the teacher may read to the class and learners select books that they read to themselves or to a teacher. These kinds of practices assume that literate forms of language are already a part of learners' experience - that they know how to recognise and interpret features of written texts in their reading, and how to use them in their own writing. This orientation towards features of written texts is precisely what parents provide to children as they read with them, discussing the events of stories, the roles of pictures that accompany them, the features of char-acters, their reactions to events, descriptions of things and places, and so on. Stories are typically read over and over again, with the child learning to identify more and more of their features on each reading. This process of the parent/teacher initially providing maximum support, and the learner gradually taking over responsibility for a task has been referred to as 'scaffolding' by Bruner (1986).

> **What is rarely made explicit in schooling is the knowledge about higher level literate language features**

So by the time they get to school these children are already thoroughly familiar, not only with the language features of written texts at their age level, but also with the ways that teachers talk about written texts. The early years of schooling then provide explicit information about the graphophonic features of writing - letter-sound relations, spelling and punctuation. What is rarely made explicit in schooling is the knowledge about higher level literate language features, and the metacognitive skills for recognising and employing them. As a result students who do not have this kind of home experience are immediately at a disadvantage, and gradually fall further and further behind. However these kinds of knowledge can be made explicit very easily. Parents do so when they read with young children, so there is no reason why teachers in school and adult education can't do so too. The fact that this is not a part of teacher training suggests that there may be an underlying socio-economic function in keeping these practices 'secret'; perhaps it is an unspoken component of the cultural capital that has evolved within the western middle class and the education systems it controls, from which other groups are implicitly excluded.

Reversing the literacy learning sequence

Making these kinds of knowledge explicit means reversing the typical literacy teaching sequence; instead of beginning with writing from personal experience, and trying to advance students from there, we need to begin with reading to provide a literate context to develop writing. In teaching reading, reversing the typical sequence means we should not begin with lower level texts limited to a few phrases or one or two sentences per page in the belief that these will be easier to read and then trying to advance learners in little steps. Instead, we need to begin with and support learners to read higher

level texts which are capable of providing access to important literate language features. Once a learner can read such a text fluently, it then becomes a powerful resource to develop the academic-literate writing skills they need in order to progress. A literacy teaching approach that does this, known as 'concentrated language encounters', was developed with indigenous children at Traeger Park school in Alice Springs during the 1980s (Gray 1986, 1990). This 'scaffolding' approach to reading and writing has subsequently been further developed with students from many backgrounds with literacy difficulties, at the Schools and Community Centre at Canberra University (Gray, Cowey & Graetz 1995, forthcoming, Rose in press). It is grounded in Vgotsky's (1978) model of proximal development - that a learner can achieve far more with the support of a teacher than they can do independently, and that this 'zone of proximal development' is where learning takes place.

How then can we teach learners with limited literacy skills to read a higher level text fluently? The answer to this question lies in the complex cognitive task of reading itself. Competent readers bring two sets of high order cognitive skills to reading: they automatically process the visual patterns of written words, without needing to translate them into spoken sounds, and they predict how a text is likely to unfold as a sequence of literate meanings. This differs from the low order reading skills that poorer readers bring to the task: they frequently attempt to decode words by sounding them out letter-by-letter, and the meaning prediction skills they bring to the task come from their commonsense experience of oral discourse. It is simply not possible to attend to sequences of literate meanings in written texts while attempting to sound out each word, which is one reason why they remain inaccessible to poorer readers. The key to enabling learners to read higher level texts is to prepare them adequately for predicting the unfolding of literate meanings, so that they are not overloaded using their limited graphophonic skills.

Currently teachers often do prepare their students for reading a text, by discussing the field or subject matter associated with it. They may even read the text to the class before expecting students to engage with it independently. However, for poorer readers this preparation is rarely sufficient. Teachers need to spend a lot more time than we currently do working on key texts. We need to identify and discuss not only the general concepts that the text is about, but also the language features of the text that express these concepts, particularly those that will present difficulties for our students. These include not only unfamiliar words, but also unfamiliar patterns of wording. For inexperienced readers, these unfamiliar patterns may include everything except the simple sequence of events in a story - including descriptions, reactions, dialogue, how and why things happen, qualities of things and events, metaphors, abstract relationships of cause and effect, and so on (see Martin

1990 for a fuller discussion of literate language features in the context of indigenous education).

Scaffolding literacy learning

It is essential that texts are selected for reading that contain more language features than the learner can currently read without support, but not so many new features as to cause overload. A literacy program can then be constructed that advances students towards academic goals, in steps based on the complexity of the language features in reading texts.

The first stage in the program involves learners in thorough discussion of language features in their context in the text, and careful questioning to focus learners' attention on the wordings that express them. This prepares learners to read a text fluently - a high level text that is typically beyond anything they have been able to read before. They are able to do so by using their limited graphophonic skills to identify words in sequence, without needing to fully decode every word, because they can accurately predict the unfolding of the familiar meanings in the text.

The second stage in the program is to focus attention on exploring high level graphophonic relationships in words drawn from the text. Once learners can read a text fluently, they can practice recognising its difficult words in and out of context, and then learn to spell them by identifying important letter patterns and using these letter patterns to remember the words. Because these words are familiar and meaningful, learning to spell them is stress free, and not simply dependent on memorising strings of letters in lists of decontextualised words or attempting to build words out of limited sound symbol cor-respondences gained from initial phonics teaching. Breaking up words into their patterns of morphemes, syllables, and letter patterns facilitates the move from 'sounding-out' towards automatic visual processing.

> ' **instead of beginning with writing from personal experience, and trying to advance students from there, we need to begin with reading to provide a literate context to develop writing** '

The third stage of the program draws upon the developed spelling competence and familiarity with patterns of literate language to move into writing activity. Familiarity with the patterns of literate wording in the reading text becomes a basis for reconstructing it from a writing plan. The purpose of the plan is to remind learners of the overall structure of the text, and the sequence of significant meanings, so that they can focus on using the language features they have learnt to reconstruct it. This step provides maximum support for learning how to use written language features in writing. It gives an extra level of support to those provided in current genre approaches using model texts (e.g. Christie et al 1990-92), and infinitely more support than other mainstream 'retelling' and 'text modelling' approaches in which teachers'

intervention in the writing activity using such models is virtually non-existent.

The fourth stage of the program takes place when teachers support learners to use the features of texts they have read and already reconstructed in stage three to construct new texts (which all effective writers do of course). This scaffolded engagement in writing provides a base of literate resources from which learners can move on to plan and write different texts, initially with similar overall structures, but perhaps different events, characters or other subject matter. This 'text patterning' can be done jointly in a class or group, and then individually, as further supportive steps on the road to writing original high level texts independently.

Each of these stages in reading preparation, fluent reading, spelling and writing facilitates the development of the kinds of meta-cognitive skills that learners need to engage successfully with academic-literate discourses. They are not exclusively non-indigenous ways of learning, any more than literacy is an inherently non-indigenous cultural practice. They are designed to explicitly teach the kinds of skills that successful students acquire tacitly, in the home and in the classroom, but which are not typically made explicit in normal teaching practice. As such this 'scaffolded writing' sequence is ideally suited to the needs of indigenous learners, since unlike most mainstream teaching practices it does not depend on the learner acquiring an orientation to written text outside of the classroom, in their family or community.

Conclusion

Currently, the scaffolded writing approach outlined above is under trial in primary and secondary school programs in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara communities in SA, and in an annexe program for indigenous students in an Adelaide high school. To date the success of these trials has been remarkable, with secondary age students advancing from junior primary level writing skills (National Benchmark level 2) to upper primary (Benchmark level 4-5), in less than a school term. These results are all the more remarkable because these students had generally been attending school for at least eight years, and most had achieved only junior primary literacy skills in all this time. However, they have already shown us that, using the scaffolded writing approach, they have the potential to rapidly master the skills they need to reach their educational goals.

David Rose has worked as an educator with indigenous peoples since 1980. He worked for many years in traditional homeland communities in northern and central Australia, and has taught in Aboriginal education programs at school, vocational and university levels in SA and NSW.

David, Brian and Wendy are currently collaborating on a project with indigenous schools in SA and the Schools & Community Centre of Canberra University to develop and implement effective English literacy strategies for indigenous students.

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Language knowledge & e-literacies for ALBE

by Dale Pobega

Dale Pobega presents a compelling case for the use of new technologies in literacy teaching and shows how they can extend rather than replace other methods.

"Our private sphere has ceased to be the stage where the drama of the subject at odds with his objects and with his image is played out: we no longer exist as playwrights or actors but as terminals of multiple networks … the stage (which is no longer a stage) becomes that of the infinitesimal memory and the screen" (Baudrillard:1987).

There would be few questions asked of a teacher who included as a part of her Level One CGEA curriculum students learning to use an ATM or following instructions which enabled someone to be able to set a digital alarm clock or operate some other simple, electronic device. But what about writing an email and learning how to send it or navigating a hyper-linked text or web page? Would following a synchronous dialogue in a MOO with occasional input be too much to expect, or indeed, be of any benefit to an adult literacy student?

Do ALBE students really have a need to use email, the WWW or a virtual environment like MOO?

Teaching 'screen based reading and writing skills' is now a part our work as literacy teachers because the many types of text encountered at the electronic interface is commonplace. Computers will increasingly become the means by which we access, produce, store and distribute information. Anyone with vocational aspirations will be expected to possess some competence in the area. Indeed, competing for most jobs in the labour market without computing skills will become increasingly more difficult.

Regardless of the vocational area, whether it be 'blue' or 'white collar' work, a computer or some other electronic communicative device is nearly always required. Even hand-written texts (with the exception of personal notes or reminders) are destined in most instances to be computer mediated to become the final product for their intended audience.

You might suspect that I am side stepping the issue of email and the Internet and that my argument so far only proves the point that the more 'conventional' computer programs and their genres should be taught in the ALBE classroom. On the contrary, there is another aspect of this imperative to teach 'electronic literacies' which relates, not simply to the production of texts, but to the actual and likely media of their distribution or circulation.

> *Simply logging on and having a quick chat to another person provides plenty of opportunities for reading and writing*

Sending information over networks

Sending information over networks is already commonplace. Information in localised workplaces is circulated over intranets and information which needs to be distributed over dispersed or remote work-places is done via the Internet.

This communicative trend is accelerating, not just in the world of work, but also in people's public and private lives. Comm-unicating by email is not the preserve of middle class 'e-lites' and research suggests that the number of people with internet access world wide will grow 800% to 450 million in the next three years, up from 60 million today. It is predicted that 50% of the US population, or 135 million people, will communicate by email by 2001, and this figure may be even greater in the case of Australia given this nation's relatively higher rates of internet uptake to date. (Gray:1996 – 98)

Corresponding with remotely located family members, friends or members of a particular community to which one belongs or identifies on a regular basis is already much cheaper than using telephone or fax. Apart from this, the ability to correspond, dialogue or do business instantly, encourages the formation of close working relationships and community.

Email is also an intrinsic part of almost every site on the WWW. This facilitates direct communication from the page between the reader/consumer/customer and writer/producer/service provider of the WWW site. Banking, shopping and entertainment on the WWW and it's powerful uses as a tool for further education and private study mean that there is a role for Net-based literacies to be taught.

The explosion in popularity of free web based email services such as HOTMAIL, HELLO and USAnet means that one medium cannot be used without a knowledge of the other. Increasingly, checking your email means not only logging on but firing up your web browser.

Furthermore, hyperlinks within web pages can open up pathways into other virtual spaces on the Net which include MOOs and MUSHs. Checking your mail in a MUSH or MOO involves learning commands specific to that particular virtual environment in order to read and send 'moo' or 'mush-mail' to others within that community. The point is that the WWW, email and synchronous communicative spaces are converging or creating a inter-textal relationship which will shape the way we communicate over networks in the near future.

Knowing how to use email will increasingly become a basic skill. Participating in this form of communication will involve the explicit teaching of its generic features and possible uses within a repertoire of broader net based forms of communication. But this teaching is by no means unproblematical in a pedagogical sense.

Would the use of these new electronic media assist our students in their pursuit of employment and/or further education?

For all the technical and linguistic complications, the use of email and WWW in ALBE classrooms is an exciting and often less threatening introduction to computing and what appears to be, for the moment at least, the more 'practical' programs such as Word, Publisher and Excel. Indeed, Net based communicative technologies and the use of the 'conventional' software packages mentioned can be combined into well planned, collaborative projects that match the competencies outlined in the CGEA and the National Reporting System (NRS).

The 1998 Central Metropolitan region of ACFE Student conference, is a case in point (see the conference website at http://home.vicnet.net.au/~dukest/studwelc.htm). The conference is currently being organised by three groups of adult learners as a part of their CGEA at various levels. Students from two of these groups (Duke St and Flemington Reading and Writing) are using email, MOO, the WWW as well as Microsoft Office (Word, Publisher and Excel) to develop a range of practical literacy and numeracy skills. For example, see Mex Butler's WWW notes on "How to Run A Meeting" which are presently being used by students (in conjunction with other texts) as a resource for learning about the genre of meeting procedure (http://home.vicnet.net.au/~flemrw/meetings.html).

The organisational tasks in the project involve the application of many literacies which are transferable to a range of other contemporary practical, personal and public contexts of use. A curriculum outline I have designed for the Duke St group reads something like this:

Learning about organisation, processes of decision making, working in teams; How meetings work - formal procedure, preparing an agenda, keeping minutes, writing up and distributing documents; Writing and sending letters, emails and faxes; Email as a flexible medium for on-going communication between participants; Making telephone calls for organisational purposes; Creating fliers and conference registration forms using MS Word and/or Publisher; Creating a conference program using Publisher; Keeping simple registration and financial records using Excel; Using Netscape page composer for web pages, WSFTP for file transfer, Paint Shop Pro for graphics; Using a camera, using a scanner, using a digital camera, using video for recording the event.

The student groups must work cooperatively organising events, speakers, catering, entertainment and the housekeeping aspects of the conference. The students are also building a Conference website for broadcasting information and recording the event as well as learning to use other media - and naturally, the literacy skills attached to them.

Students will meet, not only in 'real life' to organise the conference, but in a MOO which is used as another channel of communication. All three classes have been organised to take place on the same day and this makes the organisation of the conference and 'conference curriculum' possible.

> '**Net based communicative technologies and the use of the 'conventional' software packages mentioned can be combined**'

So you can see the ways in which the use of the technology and traditional classroom pedagogy can be used in a complimentary and purposeful way. Teaching literacy and technical instruction do not have to fall into unrelated areas, indeed, that would defeat the fundamental purpose of the Writing and Technology program I have designed.

Do we need a special language knowledge to teach e-literacies?

From the point of view of teaching these 'screen literacies' (Selfe:1989), I draw heavily on a Genre based approach. Rothery's model of teaching a particular genre in various stages, or moving from demonstrative to constructive means has influenced my own approach within a computer mediated instruction of computing and composition skills. Admittedly, there are a few differences in developmental stages, but obvious similarities too.

Rothery's method involves (Martin, Christie, Rothery: 1987):

- Introducing a genre - i.e. modelling a genre implicitly
- Focusing on a genre - i.e. modelling genre explicitly by naming its stages
- Jointly negotiating a genre - i.e. teacher and class jointly compose the genre under focus, the teacher guides the composition of the text through questions and comments that provide scaffolding for the stages of the genre

- Researching - assembling information before attempting an independent construction, execution of the text
- Drafting and first independent attempt at creating the text
- Consultation with the teacher - helping the student to resolve any problems

In a recent ACFE project on NLTs (New Learning Technologies), I described my approach at the initial stages of developing a teaching strategy in my Writing and Technology class :

- [the teacher] demonstrates to students 'how to' use the editing program, has students observe and take their own notes of the procedure;
- students compare their own notes, discuss and produce a version they will apply to the learning task;
- students work in pairs or small groups attempting to complete the task, noting deficiencies, making necessary changes;
- the teacher has students demonstrate individual competence to one another and finally has them produce a page of their own unassisted.

This term the Duke St students are slowly producing a HOW TO USE THE INTERNET manual for other ALBE and language students based on this technique of observation, notetaking, trialling and editing which they plan to launch at the Second ACFE ALBE Student Conference in September. Students are taught the skills listed directly above in a couple of curriculum cycles over two terms.

They all take notes and must demonstrate competence in the target learning task. For each section of the book, a pair is designated to write up a list of 'HOW TO' instructions which they illustrate with screen shots. The book will be published using MS WORD or PUBLISHER and also in digital form at the ALBE E student website (Pobega:1998).

Can the incorporation of electronic literacies into the curriculum enhance traditional, print-based literacy learning?

Returning to my initial concern at the beginning of this paper about how we judge the Levels of difficulty related to New Learning Technologies and fit them within our literacy frameworks, a study of MOO would make for some interesting research. Superficially the textually dense and rapid moving quality of dialogue occurring synchronously, has led a few (often ignorant) critics to dismiss this virtual environment as overly difficult for a Level One or Two adult learner to participate in. Butler (1997) has, I think, put paid to that theory in her on-going work with adult literacy learners in this electronic environment. She argues:

'the use of the technology and traditional classroom pedagogy can be used in a complimentary and purposeful way'

"Simply logging on and having a quick chat to another person provides plenty of opportunities for reading and writing for self expression at the first two levels of the CGEA, where description, narrative and recount are the major genres. Simple MOO programming, the creation of objects and rooms, offers excellent opportunities to expand from basic writing into more complex and sustained writing. Room descriptions vary from just a few words to complex recreations of historical events or whole geographical regions, as in Shield's des-cription of a series of spaces at schMOOze University, recreating the Northumberland village of Bamburgh" (Butler:1997).

A point to be made here is that ALBE students have never before been presented with such exciting and potentially powerful educational opportunities. These students are increasing general knowledge while improving their screen literacy skills, establishing friendships through MOO and email, and feeling part of a community of learners on the Net without losing their 'real life' sense of connectedness as they work on the 1998 CWM ACFE student conference project with its practical orientation. They are also organising much of their own study outside class hours.

It comes as no surprise to me that these two students who a year and half ago were hovering around Level 2 of the CGEA are now capable of most Level 4 tasks.

Conclusion

I hope that what I have shown in this article, scotches the line that these new technologies cannot be used creatively and in an empowering, group oriented manner. A great deal of innovative work is being conducted locally and I would argue that electronic networks provide not only greater communicative possibilities in a virtual or remote sense, but also can be used for bringing together students in real life.

I have also observed that publishing on the web with students leads them, not away from print-based texts or books, (or 'straight' computing programs such as Word or Excel for that matter) but back towards them with greater confidence. Ironically, my students, having had their first experiences using Hotmail and Netscape, seem better equipped to learn programs such as Word and Excel rather than the reverse.

In concluding, I would like to quote Stager who contends:

The difficult part of the innovation is not learning the technology, but thinking about thinking and learning, reflecting on the nature of the curricula and clearly articulating a collegiate strategy for implementing change. (Ward and Lee:1995)

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A longer version of this essay is available at Dale's website as a part of iO-zine #3, 'Community Computing', to appear in June.

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Reflections on the past, implications for the future:

Approaches to teaching deaf adult literacy.

by Janice Knuckey and Veronica Pardo

In this article, Janice Knuckey and Veronica Pardo examine the particular literacy issues for the Deaf community and argue that a bilingual approach to teaching is the preferred option.

Linguistic human rights

The majority of texts dealing with issues of English language literacy have as a starting point, a definition of literacy that encompasses the general theme of 'abilities' in four macro skills; reading, writing, listening and speaking. Just as with other minority groups, attainment of 'literacy' in the language of the majority is a significant factor in ensuring equality of opportunity in all facets of life. This view, coupled with an appreciation of the significance and role of an individual's native language and culture, is a path towards recognition of that individual's linguistic human rights.

In order to begin considering the linguistic human rights of deaf students in Victorian schools, we must acknowledge that deaf population is best characterised by tremendous linguistic and cultural diversity. No one approach to language teaching will suit all learners. However, it is incumbent upon educators and policy makers to consider issues of linguistic human rights as fundamental when making decisions of this nature. Issues of literacy must be viewed within this context. Definitions of literacy (as a combination of speaking, listening, reading and writing) which are themselves discriminatory in nature with regard to deaf people must be reviewed.

The recurring theme across deaf communities is that literacy in the majority language is inextricably linked to Auslan, the native language of the Australian Deaf Community. Bilingual approaches to education, where Auslan is taught/acquired as a first language and English is taught as a second language appears to be the key to ensuring the linguistic human rights of this population.

Before we can explore the issue of linguistic human rights for deaf people, we must look back at deaf education and how different methodologies and philosophies have impacted on literacy levels of deaf adults today. Language acquisition in deaf children must be the focal point in a discussion of adult literacy because the deaf children of the past are the very adult learners we are dealing with today in ALBE programs.

> ' **An important assumption which underlies much of the research into bilingual education and second language acquisition relates to the transfer of skills** '

A brief history of Deaf education

In Victoria, education of the deaf began with the arrival of F.J. Rose, a deaf man from England who established a school for deaf children in Windsor in 1860. Common to world wide education trends, the communication mode used in the school was no different to what deaf adults were using in their daily lives. Students were taught to be fluent in their natural sign language for communications and fluent in English for reading and writing. The children were bilingual.

It was only after the Milan Congress in 1890, a conference for educators of the deaf throughout the world that things began to change. The congress was established to decide once and for all, which education method was best for the deaf: speech or sign. Because deaf teachers of the deaf were barred from the conference, participants voted to ban the use of signing in schools and to concentrate on teaching deaf students to speak.

The Victorian Deaf and Dumb Institute never forbade sign totally and continued to provide sign to those students who were considered to need manual supplements, but at the same time there developed a climate where the 'oral' students were deemed to be the successes and the 'manual' students the failures. Profoundly deaf students, because of their greater lack of access to speech, were seen as uneducable and were delegated to the trade areas of the school (Branson and Miller 1991).

Technological advances came to dominate more and more in deaf people's lives as medical experts sought to "cure" deafness through amplification and in 1953, the Australian Association of Teachers of the Deaf voted to ban signing in schools (Branson and Miller 1991:143). A visit by Professor and Lady Ewing, eminent British teachers of the deaf led to the establishment of 'oral schools' in 1953 in Victoria which further cemented the oralist hold over the education of the deaf in Victoria.

Sign languages during this time were not seen as true languages even by deaf people (Sacks 1990:76) and as a result sign language was suppressed by hearing educators.

By the 1960s concerns about the oral and academic achievement of many deaf school leavers led to concern about the validity of using an exclusively 'oral' method to educate the deaf (Sacks 1990; Conrad 1979). Studies in America in the 1960s found that "30% of the deaf student population were illiterate, 60% achieved at a fifth grade or below" (Strong 1988:89). Changes began in the 1960s when researchers in the United States and Britain began groundbreaking work on the structure of sign languages of the deaf. These researchers began to show that sign languages were indeed true examples of human language with their own rules of grammar distinct from those of the spoken languages of the host speech communities. This discovery proved to be a turning point for the deaf around the world. Also at this time other factors such as evidence that deaf children of deaf parents were more academically successful than those of hearing families, the exposure of deaf people on television, the rise of strong Deaf leaders and the Deaf Civil Rights movement all contributed to a change in the status of sign language in America.

> **Profoundly deaf students, because of their greater lack of access to speech, were seen as uneducable**

Sign Languages, however, were still not accepted as a means of instruction in the classroom. In the 1970s, following trends emanating primarily from the United States, Australia devised its own manual code for representing English grammar. This system was called Signed English. Branson and Miller (1991) emphasise that Signed English is a signed 'code', rather than a sign language. Signed English was initially created to improve deaf children's use of English. The use of speech with Signed English is called Total Communication and is still used throughout Australia by most teachers of the deaf (Hyde, Power and Cliffe 1993).

Researchers around the world are now questioning the validity of using manual codes in the education of the deaf, and Deaf Communities have openly voiced their opposition to the use of sign codes in place of sign languages within educational contexts.

There has been limited research in Australia of the reading levels of Deaf school leavers, but research around the world indicates that the deaf children who already have an established sign language read better than other deaf children (Conrad 1979) because they have better linguistic and cognitive development. Around the world, the use of native sign languages in the education of the deaf is slowly developing, with bilingual programs for the deaf being established. Any such program recognises the validity of both the natural sign language and English in the classroom. In Australia, several schools have adopted a bilingual approach to education.

Bilingual Education and Deafness

The term 'bilingual education' is used to denote a variety of different philosophies and approaches where:

"…two languages are used as media of instruction. The content of instruction includes some of the curriculum in both languages over time." (Lo Bianco 1987:155).

As previously mentioned, one of the principal motivating factors for the implementation of bilingual programs for the Deaf is the recognition that previous and current educational philosophies have resulted in severe educational disadvantage for deaf children in that they only provide limited access to literacy in the majority language. Moreover, contemporary research has strongly indicated that with regard to minority education, the attainment of linguistic competence in one's first language is often the key to the development of literacy skills in a second.

This attitude has not always prevailed. There are several factors which may account for the apparent lack of interest shown in bilingual education for deaf children. They are: the negative views people hold in general about bilingual education; the paucity of appropriately trained teachers; concerns about the linguistic status of sign languages of the deaf and the fact that they have no written form; and the number of children who actually have access to sign language at home.

Attitudes to these factors play a very significant role in determining the successful implementation of bilingual programs for deaf children. A common misconception is that given the difficulty of speech development and vocalisation, children who are allowed to sign will never attempt to speak. Coupled with this is the fear that to encourage sign language as the principal language amongst the deaf is to marginalise and isolate the deaf population from mainstream society. Bilingual education for the deaf can challenge these myths.

Bilingual education for the deaf is not only focused on deaf children with deaf, signing parents, but any child who has sustained a hearing loss which places him/her at an educational disadvantage in a monolingual, oral environment. Studies have indicated that deaf children of hearing parents have as much chance of acquiring and benefiting from sign language within a bilingual context as deaf children of deaf parents (Strong 1985; Barnum 1984).

Transfer of skills

An important assumption which underlies much of the research into bilingual education and second language acquisition relates to the *transfer of skills*. This assumption holds that linguistic skills in one's first language are subsequently transferred to one's second language. Therefore, having learned a particular skill in L1, there is no need to relearn that same skill in L2. The relationship between the two languages in a bilingual environment is not one of mutual exclusivity but rather complementarity. Cummins (1978, 1980, 1981) has done extensive research

in the area of bilingual education and has produced significant results.

He began by examining the notion of linguistic and communicative competence or as he labels it, language proficiency. Cummins uses the term *cognitive/academic language proficiency* or *CALP* to denote those aspects of language proficiency which are related to the development of literacy skills in first and second languages. This is differentiated with *basic interpersonal communicative skills* or *BICS* which refers to skills such as accent, oral fluency and sociolinguistic competence which are seen as independent of cognitive or academic abilities. According to Cummins' model, it is possible to empirically distinguish between interpersonal communicative skills which are demonstrated by all people and language proficiency in L1 which is strongly linked to cognitive abilities.

Cummins goes on to argue that there is an inter-dependent relationship between CALP in L1 and L2. That in fact, the development of proficiency in L2 is in part dependent on the level of CALP in L1 when L2 is introduced. Cummins states that:

"because L1 and L2 CALP are manifestations of the same underlying dimension, previous learning of literacy-related functions of language (in L1) will predict future learning of these functions (in L2)," (Cummins 1980;179).

Previously, educators had suggested that knowledge of English prior to school entry would benefit the ability of the deaf child to learn in a predominantly English speaking/ signing environment. Cummins' holds that 'fluency' in L1 will not necessarily determine an individual's ability to learn through L1. Rather, it is the previous learning of literacy related functions in L1 which will determine the extent to which these same functions can be learnt in L2. Consequently, in a bilingual education environment, the extent to which CALP will be acquired in L2 will depend on the extent to which the bilingual methodology has enabled the acquisition of CALP in L1. Thus, in an ideal environment, the deaf individual will acquire a satisfactory cognitive/academic language proficiency in L1 on which to base the acquisition of these same skills in L2.

The challenge for educators in a bilingual program is to explore the impact of modality. What is the nature of competency in a sign language? What skills are developed in a sign language and what is the relationship between those skills and the skills needed for proficiency in a spoken language with a literate form? That a relationship exists is clear. Studies of deaf children of deaf, signing parents indicate that children who begin their schooling with an already established linguistic foundation will experience greater advantage than those children whose L1 language proficiency is poor. In terms

of academic achievement, this advantage appears to be maintained throughout their school years (Bockmiller 1981). Deaf children with strong first language skills often demonstrate greater command of both first and second languages. Literacy skills such as reading and writing tend to be superior as well as speech reading skills. Furthermore, bilingual American Sign Language (ASL)/English children tend to attain more higher educational achievements, i.e. more tend to continue with post-secondary education.

It is interesting to note that bilingual ASL/English deaf children perform in very similar ways to other non-English speaking students on exercises designed to teach English to speakers of languages other than English. This would suggest that an appropriate strategy for teaching English to deaf children is that employed for teaching English as a Second Language (ESL). A bilingual program for the deaf is the ideal environment for ESL teaching. Children develop a strong first language foundation on which to base the acquisition of second language skills.

An enlightened approach to adult literacy amongst deaf people is one that is sensitive to the linguistic and cultural experiences of deaf people, that reflects on the impact of past and current educational methodologies within a linguistic human rights framework. A bilingual methodology enables issues in literacy to be dealt with in a culturally appropriate environment where deaf people are viewed as competent learners with a rich cultural and linguistic heritage. Teaching English through English as a Second Language methodologies acknowledges this cultural and linguistic heritage and values the role of the learner in the learning process.

'**an appropriate strategy for teaching English to deaf children is that employed for teaching English as a Second Language (ESL)**'

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The ABS Survey Aspects of Literacy:
some answers and questions

by Beverley Campbell and Professor John Dewar Wilson

Beverley Campbell and John Wilson raise some important questions about the latest literacy survey.

Mention the words 'adult literacy' and a frequent response is "Are there really adults in Australia who can't read and write? How many?" Or mention the words 'adult literacy' and the response is often, "Yes we do have a lot of migrants in Australia, don't we?" And then surely questions which lead on from this statement are: "How do you define the boundaries?"; "How do you mark those who can from those who can't, from those who have ESL needs from those who have adult literacy needs?"

In Australia these distinctions are not as simple when different target groups in adult literacy and language programs include people of English speaking background who are schooled, people of non-English speaking background whose level of literacy in their first language might be high and people of non-English speaking background who have no literacy in their first language. And let's not forget those who are long term residents who received all their schooling in Australia but are of non-English speaking background. Is it a question of learning needs or language needs or literacy needs? Or is it different combinations of all these?

In 1996, a national survey, called Aspects of Literacy, was conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics across all states of Australia. Its stated aims were to:

- identify 'at risk' groups with low literacy and numeracy skills;
- help evaluate literacy and numeracy assistance programs;
- identify barriers to individuals achieving skill levels sufficient for daily life and work, and
- provide statistical support for planning and decision making.

The results of the Survey go some way towards providing the answer to the question 'how many?' but fall short of asking other questions and consequently of providing satisfactory answers to these questions.

In February 1998 ALRNNV held a seminar on the ABS Survey. Some of the issues raised in this paper were voiced as concerns at the seminar. This article looks at the ABS Survey and describes what its intentions were, it then describes what the Survey is able to tell us from the data and

> **'What did the Survey not do and what are the gaps in information gathered using such a large scale survey?'**

finishes with a discussion of issues prompted by the questions the Survey raises.

The Survey

Firstly a look at what the Survey did. The Survey was developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Statistics Canada and was carried out by many OECD countries over a four year period in the late 1990s. Divided into two parts, Part 1 was an interview in which respondents were asked to fill out a personal profile and to rate their reading, writing and basic mathematical skills for the demands of daily life and for their main job. This was followed up with Part 2, a survey in which 9,302 respondents (87%) were asked to undertake a set of tasks to provide an objective assessment of their literacy and numeracy abilities in three designated areas - prose, document and quantitative literacy. Respondents were asked to complete six relatively simple literacy-related tasks. Those who completed two or more correctly were given a much larger variety of tasks in a separate booklet which contained, on average, 46 tasks drawn from a pool of 108.

The introduction to the report states that the Survey "covered people aged 15-74 across Australia, but excluded those living in remote and sparsely populated areas". The data was analysed into literacy ability at five levels in each of the three categories with Level 1 being the lowest performing level. Level 5 was a comparatively small group so for the purposes of the analysis Levels 4 and 5 were combined.

What Did The Survey Find?

It is difficult to summarise the detail and complexities of the findings of the Survey in the space of this short article and readers are urged to read the two reports. Chapter headings show how the data has been analysed: "Australians' Literacy Skills", "Literacy and Education", "Literacy and Labour Force Status", "Literacy and Activities in Daily Life", "Literacy and Language Everyday in Life". International comparisons have been made. Readings are given in each instance for the three designated areas of prose, document and quantitative literacy. The Survey found
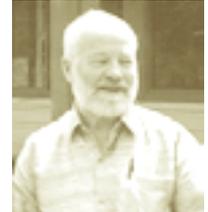
that the skill level distribution was similar on each of the prose, document and quantitative scales. State differences are drawn from the data as well as Skill Level by Industry, amongst other things.

Levels of response

If we accept at face value that the Survey set out to assess individual reading performance on selected tasks in the categories of prose, document and quantitative texts, it is then possible to read the data in a variety of ways to give a range of results. Below are what we have identified as at least three levels of response to the data.

Within the data

Further analysis could be undertaken on the data as a whole, or of the Victorian data in comparison with Australia as a whole, or in comparison with other states. Further analysis could use the results to show comparisons between metropolitan and rural respondents, or English-speaking background and non-English speaking respondents or between men and women and age bands.

Across the data

A second level of response is cross-cultural. As already mentioned, the Survey has been carried out in OECD countries such as Canada, Germany, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, USA and UK. There is scope for comparative studies of performance, but of more significance might be analysis of national and international responses to the findings. What policies have been developed? What programs have been put in place?

Beyond the data

A third level of response involves going beyond the data and identifying a range of research questions which can illuminate the issues uncovered by the Survey. These include:

- Identifying how adults with the weakest literacy skills cope with the of our print and technology based culture?
- The Survey identified certain sectors of industry such as agriculture, forestry and fishing and construction with high proportions of respondents at Levels 1&2. Geoff Pearson's (1996) study showed that literacy training can improve workers' participation in an enterprise, and both enable and motivate them to participate in training. What might be attempted are studies which follow through from their entry to literacy training to its completion.
- While there is a need for research into how people with limited literacy skills cope, equally important issues for research relate to recruitment to adult literacy classes, retention within classes, and literacy development through classes.

- The effectiveness of current adult literacy provision is likely to be linked to the professional skills of adult literacy teachers. Studies have identified the competencies they require (Scheeres 1993), but there have been few attempts to research the practice of adult literacy teachers themselves.

Some questions the survey raises

Although the Survey included a large number of respondents and obtained a large amount of data for interpretation, questions still remain. What did the Survey *not* do and what are the gaps in information gathered using such a large scale survey as *Aspects of Literacy*?

The Survey adopted as its operating definition of literacy what it calls:

"functional literacy and numeracy - those skills necessary to understand and use information from material which is printed in English and found in everyday life".

In adopting this framing definition of literacy, the complexities of the term are not addressed. Gee (1990) says that "literacy is a socially contested term" and Kress (1994) that "literacy has become a political issue". Literacy studies have shown that, although there are commonalities between different discourses of literacy there is also different content for each discourse. These differences can be used to promote the agendas of opposing groups and political interests such as are represented by the media, various parts of the education sector and including political parties themselves. Functional literacy is just one of these prevailing discourses.

> 'It is no longer sufficient to say that literacy is the ability to read and write'

Increasingly literacy is being defined and understood as social practice. It is no longer sufficient to say that literacy is the ability to read and write; it is increasingly perceived to be the ability to read and write particular texts in particular social and cultural contexts. Literacy is then understood as something that is learnt through participation and apprenticeship in different social contexts.

Aspects of Literacy was a survey of individual performance. We have referred to the concept of 'pooled competence' elsewhere (Wilson and Campbell 1997) which describes the coping strategies of adults in unfamiliar situations. The term derives from studies in New South Wales (Childs 1997) and could be applied to the Social Uses of Literacy (SoUL) project (Prinsloo & Breier 1996). These studies suggest that those with literacy problems often operate in supportive social contexts where different skills, including literacy, are pooled to assist the disadvantaged to cope with bureaucracy or to 'read' political events.

Street (1984) coined the phrases 'the autonomous model of literacy' and 'the ideological model of literacy'. This seemed to signal the beginning of changes in thinking about the concept of the term 'literacy' from one 'Literacy' to many 'literacies'. Cross-cultural studies on uses of literacy in everyday life (Scribner a & Cole 1981, Rockhill 1987, Barton & Ivanic 1987, Prinsloo & Breier) have been carried out which reflect this understanding of multiple literacies. From these have emerged now familiar terms such as 'literacy event', 'literacy practices', 'literacies and multi-literacies'. Further research could identify the sort of literacy practices and the social networks in which people participate which contribute to their wider participation in society and which reflect the notions of 'pooled competence' and that of literacy as social practice. These were aspects of literacy not able to be measured in the Survey, which focused only on individual performance as assessed under stringent 'test' conditions.

There are many working definitions of literacy which emphasise the integration of reading and writing, speaking and listening. *Aspects of Literacy* was a survey of respondents' reading ability; it did not assess their writing ability or other facets of literacy ability. Generalisations, then, about respondents' performance in these other areas would be difficult to make based only on the results of the *Aspects of Literacy* Survey. There is a need to replicate the Survey by looking at peoples' writing ability.

This was a Survey of adults and their ability to deal with certain sorts of prose, document and quantitative literacy; it was not a survey of adults in receipt of assistance from adult literacy agencies. The five levels of the survey are not to be confused with the levels of any adult basic education certificate at which adult learners are assessed and into which they are placed. The concept of literacy as social practice is different from adult literacy education. Hopefully one informs the other in pedagogy and practice but that may not necessarily always be the case. There is a need to investigate the discourses of adult literacy practice and to explore the extent to which a theoretical understanding of literacy as social practice shapes adult literacy classroom practice.

The Survey essentially targeted English usage ability. Respondents were asked about their language background but no allowance was made for their non-English speaking background in performing the tasks. Poor performance in English may not have been replicated for a certain percentage of respondents if they had been able to respond in their own language. Sweden performed significantly better than most other countries at Levels 1&2 . This then raises the question as to whether these results reflect a monolingual society or a high standard of schooling in the Swedish education system. Is it possible to make comparisons between predominantly monolingual countries and countries, such as Australia, with

> **'Further research could identify the sort of literacy practices and the social networks in which people participate'**

a relatively large proportion of the population speaking languages other than English?

Response to the survey in other countries has been interesting. France refused to publish its results; in the UK the Major government delayed their publication as they were seen to reflect badly on the education system. In Australia, the results of the Survey will be read in many different ways and will be used for many different purposes. Undoubtedly *Aspects of Literacy* was a major survey with challenging results in terms of respondents' reading levels, but there are qualifications which will have a bearing on any interpretation of the data. There remains a need for research into how policy is being influenced by the Survey results, both nationally and internationally. It is hoped that the interpretation of the data from a survey such as *Aspects of Literacy* might have positive outcomes in terms of policy directions with initiatives and funding flowing from those decisions, but it is difficult to remain optimistic about this at a time when funding cuts for adult literacy and adult ESL have resulted in reduced provision and further undermining of a casualised workforce in a vulnerable sector of education. The *Aspects of Literacy* survey with its methodology, results and analysis will certainly prompt many debates which hopefully will contribute towards giving new content to the concept of 'literacy'.

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(Parts of this article appear in the paper The ABS Surveys: Research Questions Within, Across and Beyond the Data, by Professor John Wilson and Beverley Campbell. The paper will be published in the next issue of Network Notes.)

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Riding the Wave:

Keeping Afloat in Changing Tides - Literacies within the CGEA

by Linda Edman

In this article, Linda Edman takes a close look at the competing discourses at work behind the Certificates of General Education for Adults.

Teaching literacy to adults over the past ten years or so, I've seen many changes: the introduction of accredited curricula, with assessment, moderation and certificates; the focus on competency-based training, rather than education; and the shift from discussion of 'literacy' as a single, though wide-reaching, entity to the multifaceted notion of 'literacies'. As wave after wave of new policies, teaching approaches and curriculum and certificate documents has hit, I've found myself feeling somewhat battered, struggling to come up for air, and wondering just where all these new ideas have come from, and why they often leave me confused, as well as giving me new insights. To regain my balance and ride the wave, I've needed to track back through some of the documents that preceded the current Certificates in General Education for Adults. Revisiting the original CGEA (1993) and the Adult Basic Education Accreditation Framework (1992) has helped me make sense of the complex theoretical constructs embedded in the CGEA (1996).

The Four Literacies

The Victorian categorisation of *Four Literacies*, which is fundamental to the organisation of the Reading and Writing streams of the CGEA and the Adult Basic Education Accreditation Framework (ABEAF), was largely due to Rob McCormack, a key member of the ABEAF Project Committee and at that time a teacher at Footscray TAFE college. McCormack's formal academic version of his ideas is written in somewhat different terms to those used in the CGEA, but the basic categories remain similar. These are :

- *Epistemic Literacy* - the uses of written text in the production, distribution and application of modern knowledges (CGEA equivalent: Literacy for Knowledge)
- *Technical Literacy* - the uses of written and electronic text in enacting the procedural sequences necessary for practical action whether in everyday life and more specifically in the workplace (CGEA equivalent: Literacy for Practical Purposes)
- *Humanist Literacy* - the use of forms of reading and writing to inculcate ethical schemas centred on the aporias of the self within modernity (CGEA equivalent: Literacy for Self Expression)
- *Public Literacy* - the forms of written interchange used to debate and negotiate social and political differences through public discourse within a modern polity (CGEA equivalent: Literacy for Public Debate) (McCormack 1991)

It is important to note that, for McCormack, these four areas are first of all domains of social life, which in turn give rise to "regions of meaning-making". Although these domains have particular writing genres and particular pedagogies which are commonly associated with them, the fundamental organising principle is based on Foucault's notion that it is the domain of social life which constitutes and gives rise to particular fields of knowledge (Foucault, 1972).

In presenting his analysis McCormack acknowledges that "there are many ways to classify differing literacies" and that the *Four Literacies* are:

"not intended to be absolute, but rather a … provisional way of pointing to four clusterings of aporias, theories, practices, pedagogic orientations, contexts, institutional locations, assumptions, values and normative genres". (McCormack, 1991)

Genre

The term 'genre' is widely used and has somewhat different definitions in different contexts and different academic disciplines. In Australian Literacy studies, 'genre' is usually associated with the work of Jim Martin, a Canadian-born linguist, now based in New South Wales, and a long-standing student and colleague of Michael Halliday, the founder of both the Linguistics Department at Sydney University and the functional approach to grammar known as *systemic functional linguistics* (SFL).

In SFL, language use is viewed as a system of choices, which are determined by a number of primarily social factors, the key ones being the purpose of the text and the situation. Within any particular culture, there are a number of commonly recurring situations and purposes, for which standard patterns of spoken and written language responses and interactions have developed over time. It is these routinised uses of language which can be identified and classified as genres. In Martin's model, the term *genre* is specifically associated with the social variable 'purpose' which determines the overall schematic structure (the organisation into stages or sections) of a text. Each stage of the text also serves a particular purpose within the whole and has typical, characteristic language features in both grammatical structures and choice of vocabulary.

The Adult Basic Education Accreditation Framework

The Adult Basic Education Accreditation Framework incorporates these notions of *genre* and *text type* within the overarching framework of the *Four Literacies*. It is founded on the notion that literacy should not be viewed as a "monolithic undifferentiated whole", but instead needs to be seen as:

"an amalgam of distinctive literacies, requiring a range of capacities to read and write texts that have been constructed for quite particular social purposes". (Bradshaw 1992a:7).

Within the ABEAF, the Four Literacies (literacy for self-expression, literacy for practical purposes, literacy for knowledge and literacy for participation in public debate) are defined as being needed for active participation in the four key social contexts of family and social life, workplace and institutional settings, education and training contexts, and comm-unity and civic life. The framework further divides the Four Literacies into four levels, in order to provide a developmental pathway for teaching and learning purposes, with the key criteria for progress along this continuum being both cognitive and linguistic, a pro-gression from ideas, analysis and language that is familiar, concrete and simple to that which is unfamiliar, abstract and complex.

> ' theories about human performance, are not always compatible with the complex nature of language learning and use '

Bradshaw's theoretical discussion makes it very clear that the relationship between the Four Literacies, common genres and representative text types is a complex one, as is the relationship between the four language areas of reading, writing, speaking and listening. However, in translating these ideas into discrete statements of separately observable competencies in order to meet state and national requirements for accreditation, these intricate relationships become simplified.

There is no doubt that the ABEAF project report was a ground-breaking document for Adult Literacy in Victoria. However, the forced marriage of literacy and educational principles with the assessment requirements of competency-based curriculum and accreditation was, and continues to be, an uneasy partnership.

The Certificates of General Education for Adults (1993)

The *Certificates of General Education for Adults* built on the framework developed in the ABEAF. The Reading and Writing competencies of the ABEAF were adapted to become the Reading and Writing stream of the CGEA. To meet requirements for accreditation, competencies were required to be "demonstrable and assessable" and to be grouped into "modules", a module being defined as:

"a specific learning segment, complete in itself, which deals with one or a number of aspects of learning at a

given level of understanding or skill performance" (CGEA 1993:15).

Each competency was further sub-divided into "elements", each of which had to be "able to be assessed separately and … complete in itself" (CGEA 1993:15). In this transformation, the text characteristics which helped to *describe* the competencies at each level in the ABEAF became mandatory "performance criteria" within the CGEA, where *all* of the performance criteria listed for any one element *must* be demonstrated in one task for satisfactory performance of that element.

The theoretical principles enshrined in the ABEAF document continued to inform the CGEA document, but were renamed as the *Victorian Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Accreditation Framework* (VAELLNAF) and included towards the end of the CGEA document, as "Background Works", rather than foregrounded within the discussion and description of the com-petencies which forms the main part of this document. Thus the 1993 CGEA document reinforces the perception of separate and discrete competencies, as opposed to the continuum of learning enshrined in the background principles.

The Certificates in General Education for Adults (1996)

The implementation of the CGEA in its original version posed many challenges to teachers. Whilst many of us welcomed the opportunity to award students formally accredited certificates, there were inherent problems with the document, which were analysed within an action research project commissioned by the Victorian node of the Adult Literacy Research Network (Sanguinetti 1995). The results gave support to the arguments for a major review, which led to a substantial rewriting of the Certificate before its reaccreditation in 1996/7. The Reading and Writing stream of the revised document retains the same modular structure with the same four domains and four levels, but both the statements of the competencies (now renamed "Learning Outcomes") and the sections of the text constituting supporting guidelines and indications of underpinning theoretical principles have been radically rewritten.

Within the revised 1996 version of the CGEA, the underlying theory for the Reading and Writing section is presented in two ways: a short prose overview/introduction, at the beginning of this section, and a point-form summary of "content underpinning knowledge" presented with each statement of a particular competence or "learning outcome". In the introduction/overview literacy is defined as focussing on "the capacity to make social meaning out of texts" (attributed to McCormack 1994) and to "read and write, speak, listen and think critically". The four domains or

"areas of literacy practice" are described in terms of "four main social contexts", in essentially the same way as defined by Bradshaw in the ABEAF documents. However, the actual statements of competence are framed quite clearly in terms of specific genres. This is exemplified here by looking at the competency statements which summarise the eight learning outcomes for Level 2:

Writing
Write:
2.1   Self Expression
      a short recount, narrative or expressive text
2.2   Practical Purposes
      a short instructional or transactional text
2.3   Knowledge
      a short report or explanatory text
2.4   Public Debate
      a short argumentative text expressing a point of view

Reading
Demonstrate that meaning has been gained from reading:
2.3   Self Expression
      a simple narrative, recount or expressive text
2.4   Practical Purposes
      a simple instructional or transactional text
2.5   Knowledge
      a simple explanatory or informative text
2.6   Public Debate
      a simple persuasive text

Within a competency-based certificate, such as the CGEA, it is these statements of competency which are critical. It is this that students are required to demonstrate in order to receive the certificate.

Conflicting categorisations - genre vs social context

So what is the problem? After all genre is a social theory of language, which sets language use in its social context and explains shifts in structure and language features in terms of social purpose. However the categorisation used is not the same as the "four social contexts" underpinning the Four Literacies. This blending of different theoretical frameworks, without clear identification of their sources, creates ambiguities in allocating texts to specific domains and may encourage us to ignore those texts that do not fit easily and so not make best use of either the framework of the Four Literacies or the notion of genre. It can also create problems for recognition of reading and writing tasks for moderation and assessment.

How do we deal with the fact that our key genres do not belong exclusively to the spheres of human activity suggested by the terms Self-Expression, Practical Purposes, Public Debate and Knowledge? A Recount may be Personal (retelling an individual's real experiences), Imaginary (telling the experiences of an imaginary or fictitious person) or Factual (the chronological report of a science experiment, a police report, a newspaper report or a historical account)

(Derewianka:1990:15). Whilst it is quite clear that both Personal and Imaginary Recounts belong in the CGEA domain of Self-Expression, the Factual Recount, when used in workplace reporting such as hand-over notes in hospitals and nursing homes or health and safety accident reports, seems more appropriately part of Practical Purposes. McCormack's original categorisation of "Technical Literacy" was intended to encompass all forms of workplace procedural texts, but was reduced in the 1993 CGEA Literacy for Practical Purposes to reading and writing instructions and, at some levels, formal letters, and redefined in the 1996 CGEA as comprising Instructional and Transactional texts.

Recount structure used within newspaper reports and historical accounts presents further problems for CGEA categorisation. If these stories are told about particular people, then there is an argument for their classification as personal stories, within the domain of Self Expression. But sometimes these personal incidents are being used to draw the reader's attention to a wider issue of concern, and are, in their context, simply providing anecdotal evidence within an on-going Public Debate. For that matter, where do newspaper articles fit? Some are quite clearly controversial (Public Debate), whereas others can be, and often are, construed as simply 'giving the facts' and therefore contributing to our Knowledge base.

McCormack's original conceptualisation of "Epistemic Literacy" took a different perspective, acknowledging the role of argument and debate in the construction of academic knowledge. The simplistic view of Knowledge as 'just telling the facts' was seen as a misconstrual caused by not understanding that "modern knowledge is framed in disciplines which are … constituted by a cluster of competing theories and positions". However, within the CGEA, the Knowledge domain has been generally interpreted as factual writing, and all arguments, discussions and opinions have been allocated to the category Public Debate, whereas for McCormack the domain of "Public Literacy" was defined in terms of the arena of political and public discourse and the negotiation of social and political differences.

Only the domain of Self Expression remains consistent with McCormack's original conceptualisation of "Humanist Literacy", but we still need reminding that this is not just about writing recounts and narratives per se, but is concerned with exploring 'the world of the self' in all its aspects, through both factual and fictional personal writing, and so using language instruction as "a scene for instituting practices of self-reflection" and "cultivating a sensibility and sense of self".

Where to from here?

McCormack's original framing of the Four Literacies was an attempt to classify "the principal contexts, fields and uses of written text" within "contemporary adult life", whereas the genres incorporated into the CGEA are mostly key genres identified in literacy projects in NSW schools. These are two different, though sometimes overlapping,

approaches to the organisation, categorisation and use of texts. The additional requirements of Competency-Based Training and Assessment add another layer of theories, about human performance, which are not always compatible with the complex nature of language learning and use.

It seems to me that the notions of competency and of genre are both very useful ones. We need to move our students on from just writing recounts (in their many variations) and expose them to reading and writing a wide variety of texts and text types, constructed for a range of social purposes, in as close to a real application as we can approximate, recognising the strengths and limitations of the classroom. We also need a common language to describe what our students are achieving and a way of giving formal credit to those students who want this. However, the overlaying of different theoretical frameworks without sufficient exploration of their differences causes many problems. As literacy educators, we need to continue to unravel what Threadgold describes as "the tangled threads that constitute every curriculum document" (1994:26).

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Visual Literacy:
about as Sophisticated as ALBE Gets

by Robyn Logan

In this article, Robyn Logan gives a brief introduction to some key ideas behind the teaching of visual literacy and takes us inside her classroom.

The era of print text domination is coming to a close, and in its place comes the age of multimedia. "In Western Society at least, the last few centuries have seen a momentous shift from a text-based to a visually dependant culture" (Woodrow:1998). In this new age, the visual is positioned as a predominant carrier of meaning whilst the status of print seems to losing ground - or perhaps it is a case of saying more with less.

At the 1996 VALBEC conference, Gunther Kress demonstrated the shrinkage of print in school text books over the last 50 years or so. He showed the audience a 1955 textbook which was full of unbroken small font text, followed by a recent textbook featuring lots of diagrams, visuals, larger font and more white space. The Melbourne broadsheet newspaper, The Age, has implemented a new format which looks suspiciously like an internet webpage; it has a menu down the left hand side, lots of nice big photos and of course lots of lovely white space. Many other publications are following suit - less words, more (and larger) pictures.

Given that this shift, or "pictorial turn" (Mitchell:1998) is occurring, it is essential that language and literacy teachers look very closely at the sorts of texts we introduce to students and the sorts of skills we aim to teach. If we follow the principle that learning must be relevant to the society in which the students exist, then as that society changes, so must its educators. It is clearly not enough any more for students to be able to turn out a solid argu-mentative essay, or write three paragraphs of self expression. Just as we teach students to read and write print text we should teach them to construct and deconstruct the whole range of media texts. We need to embrace the 'multiliteracies' and develop strategies to integrate them into the traditional ALBE curriculum.

So what is visual literacy?

We are surrounded by visual images (billboards, company logos, television etc.), which on the one hand makes them an easy and accessible text to study and on the other hand creates problems in that they are so closely integrated into our lives that we don't always see them as being culturally and historically constructed forms of communication. This can, and in my experience does, have implications in the classroom. First you have to convince students that there is some worth in studying the soap, Home and Away, or the image chosen by

The Age to accompany the latest political story. I spend a good deal of time at the beginning of each visual literacy course or lesson explaining to students what skills they will learn and how they will be able to apply them to their lives. Often this is harder than teaching the skills themselves.

Showing how an image-text is representational can be unsettling to students' common-sense-perception. Literacy students can be inclined to believe the world is presented to them and they simply engage in an act of reception. Advertising is useful here because at some level students are prepared to be suspicious of advertisers, but It becomes more problematic when you move into 'realist' genres like documentary news and so on.

Some starting points

Generally speaking, two approaches to the image-text have been popular over the years: the visual as a transparent and independent maker of meaning, and the visual as a kind of language comparable to a spoken or written language. The idea that representation resembles a pre-existing 'natural reality' is the preferred way of viewing the world for many of my students, and documentary film genres exploit the idea of film making as a 'window on the world'. For many film and TV theorists however, the idea that visual representations are a complex form of communication runs counter to this view. For these film theorists, the cinema is thought to be structured like a language. To simplify their argument, film creates and organises meaning in much the same way as certain literary and grammatical devices do in print text. In this schema there is an equivalence between films and written language where elements of the image act as morphemes, the shot like a sentence, the scene like a paragraph and the sequence like a chapter.

It seems to me that there is a danger in trying to force all images into a linguistic framework; meaning is made up in much more complex ways than a simple reading analogy suggests. For one thing, the features of a visual linguistic system are not always consistent and their meanings not always fixed The use of fades are a good example . They do not always signify the same thing - they may refer to hallucinations or dreams, time elapsing, the movement of objects (as in Star Trek) and so on.

Stella Artois. About as sophisticated as a beer can get.

Also, the role of audiences as resistant readers suggests that there is often more going on than meets the eye. Some reader response theorists posit ideas about the resistant role of the reader and the contested relationship between the reader, the text and meaning. These theorists have also been applied in the study of film and television. John Fiske's article "Women and Quiz Shows: Con-sumerism, Patriarchy and Resisting Pleasures", (Fiske 1990) is one such example. Fiske argues that the tele-vision show, *The Price is Right* not only plays a pleasurable, active role in women's culture but also validates women's knowledge and challenges the notions of femininity and demure respectability. The audience, he argues, plays a major role in constructing this meaning. Without trivialising the pot-ential influence the media can have, it seems it is untrue to say that the media entirely controls the message and the way it is received.

My own approach to teaching visual literacy is a semiological one within a cultural and ideological framework. In his book *Teaching the Visual Media (*1991), Peter Greenaway talks about semiotics as being more about understanding how individuals arrive at certain meanings rather that finding a "correct meaning". He does warn, however, that "a pure semiological approach to analysis usually excludes non-textual information". It is important when taking this approach to make sure you allow for readings influenced by class, education, cultural capital, subculture, ethnicity, age, gender, region, country, etc.

Before using any visual text in the classroom, I first remove all print and sound. This encourages students to treat the

visual as a carrier of meaning in its own right. If, for example, I was using a video clip or a television ad I would turn the sound right down and structure all activities around 'reading' the image only. When I then play the tape with sound, students start to think about the relationship between the image and the sound and the reasons behind those particular selections. In this way I challenge the idea of 'natural meaning' as the text is presented as the sum of its separate parts. In the case of magazine ads, I not only cover any print text, I also cover the product. Students can then analyse the images in terms of their relationship to the product, the advertisers and the audience.

A case study

In 1995 Stella Artois launched an advertising campaign featuring two women with ear to ear grins holding a designer beer with the slogan "About as sophisticated as a beer can get." These ads are a perfect example of print and visual texts working together to produce a message. In this case the meaning is produced through the contradiction of supposedly unsophisticated women drinking what is generally considered to be a specialist beer. The advertisers are hoping to broaden their market, appeal to people's sense of humour and generally create a good feeling about the beer. To get students to this stage of analysis can take varying amounts of time de-pending on their age (television is a fairly recent phenomenon), their exposure to visual images, and how long ago they left school (those students who left school recently will have possibly studied the media).

The following activity, which I did with a level 2 (CGEA) literacy group at Northern Institute's Collingwood campus shows the importance of context sensitive analysis. After covering both the print text and the product I begin by getting students to discuss the image as a group and complete a table. See Table 1 below.

What do you know about these women?	How do you know this?
They are poor	They are wearing old clothes
They are farmers	They have missing teeth
They are happy	They are working on the land
They are friends or sisters	They are smiling and laughing They are standing close together

Table 1

You will notice that the table has the signifier in the right hand column and the signified in the left. As students get more sophisticated at articulating the meanings made from visual images these columns can be reversed. However, initially students are much more skilled at proclaiming *what* they know from reading a visual image, but less skilled at articulating *how* they know that. Much of my teaching of the image-text is in fact concerned with making the seemingly implicit, explicit.

In this particular class however, the 'usual' reading was interrupted. To 'Maria', from Bosnia, the signifiers in the right hand column had an entirely different meaning, which illustrates the point I made earlier about the perils of ignoring cultural context. Debate raged in this particular class as 'Maria' explained to us that when you work on the land you always wear clothes like that; if you get a hole you mend it - it is the norm and it neither signifies rich nor poor. Similarly, missing teeth do not signify difference and a rugged complexion means only that you work on the land and nothing else. For the next fifteen minutes the class questioned 'Maria' about her notions of rich and poor – she would not concede that anyone was poor in Australia. For 'Maria' there is only 'normal' (Bosnia) and 'filthy rich' (Australia). Admittedly 'Maria' does have a very black and white perspective on life. I found her two weeks ago in the library crossing out all references to Serbia in the Encyclopaedia Britannica. (Ironically this proves to be a good example of 'Maria's' print literacy skills - being able to find the reference and then literally deconstruct the knowledge context of encyclopedic taxonomies).

A conclusion

Art history and appreciation aside, the image has a history of neglect within the school system and similarly adult education programs. It has been largely ignored as a valid carrier of meaning and if used at all, designed merely to support or add to the main carrier of meaning, the print text. New ways of analysing and delivering meaning are becoming increasingly accessible. I know of one university department (RMIT Media Studies Department) that actively encourages its students to submit hypermedia essays that use text, image and sound to explore and convey meaning. In the coming years this will become standard practice.

As with the inextricable link between reading and writing, there exists a link between deconstructing and constructing visual texts. To teach visual literacy without giving students the chance to create their own image-texts leaves them with a very distant understanding of images. In the low-tech classroom student newsletters or magazines are an excellent way for students to develop their visual literacy skills. However, a brief visit to any primary school in the state will show you that the future lies in the use of hypermedia as a classroom tool – allowing students to manipulate and navigate the same media they are being taught to analyse. It follows then that the relationship between pictures and words will become one of the key issues in ALBE program design and curriculum dev-elopment and influence, if not challenge, existing theories of language and communication.

Robyn Logan is a literacy and media educator at Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE. She is currently the Treasurer of the Australian Council for Adult Literacy and is completing a Masters in Vocational Education and Training.

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Open Forum

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

These two contributions from Colleen Lindner and Bill Daly take a strong stand on funding changes and suggest possible responses.

PEPE, EPE, FLEX: new acronyms looming on our horizons

The philosophy embedded in the theory and practice of economic rationalism (let the market forces decide then pop on your steel capped or hobnailed boots and go in for it, alone!) has already left a horrendous legacy and served to further delineate between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' in Australian society. Workers in the areas of Adult Literacy and Basic Education and English as a Second Language will surely testify that the 'have nots' today have far less now than they did ten years ago.

The policies of Social Justice that once gave us courage and direction, and the philosophy that literacy is a basic human right that once bonded us as workers, whether salaried or not, have all but disappeared. Our adult learners have become *clients* or *customers* and many of us have had our titles of teacher or tutor abolished and replaced with *trainer*.

The italics above aim to express the major significance of linguistic shifts in which the relationship between the learner, the teacher/tutor and the process of facilitating literacy and language have been reconstructed and 'reformed'.

The struggle to establish Adult Literacy as a legitimate field of education began in Victoria in 1970. Fifteen years later the struggle appeared to be over. Adult Literacy and Basic Education and English as a Second Language programs were part of mainstream post compulsory education rather than the marginalised, poorly funded fringe dweller of the seventies and early eighties. Consequently the stigma of being 'illiterate' in English began to dissipate. Programs in large institutions and within urban and rural community adult learning centres were always filled because they met the literacy and language needs of citizens.

From humble but dignified beginnings operated by committed volunteers with no teaching or learning resources, ALBE and ESL programs grew, as they had to, to meet demand. Through national political agitation and ensuing positive legislative changes, policies both at state and federal levels ensured that governments allocated some money so that ALBE and ESL programs could be co-ordinated, learning resources

be purchased and developed, tutor training provided and some payments made to workers.

Over the years, funding allocations increased. Today, after the Costello budget of 1998/99, government spending is at $10 billion of which $170 million is allocated to literacy education. Out of this $170 million, $25 million has been set aside to develop the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan. The remaining $145 million is further reduced when the $37 million targeted for new training projects for 18-24 year old unemployed people is subtracted. As the Treasurer reiterated in The Age (13/5/98) this allocation "paves the way for the first round of school literacy tests" and also is to "provide extra training for teachers to help them identify children in need." At a guess I would suggest that the $100 million remaining will barely be enough to set Dr Kemp's national plans in motion. (There seems to be little comfort gained from suggesting that the Victorian State government may play a possible role).

There is no guessing needed when it comes to literacy and language program provision for people over the age of twenty four however. In May 1998, the struggle appears again to loom before us - but do we have the energy to take it on?

Whilst the Public Employment Placement Enterprises (PEPE) may temporarily maintain strong links with ALBE and ESL program providers as its predecessor, the CES, had learned to do, the majority of unemployed people will end up with the new private Employment Placement Enterprise (EPE) agencies. PEPE agencies are possibly only an interim stage before this public service is phased out. Consequently, EPE agencies will have sole responsibility for deciding the training needs of people seeking work. Because of the time required to improve literacy, language and maths skills so that life and employment opportunities are enhanced, it would seem that even the 18-24 year old group targeted by Minister Kemp may have limited access to ALBE and ESL programs as there is no guarantee that EPE agencies will risk the potential loss of profit by accepting people who need language, literacy and numeracy. A 'Catch 22' situation arises. The PEPE agency will accept them and so may end up with the majority who are in need. PEPE agencies will arrange for appropriate ALBE or ESL education, lose money when compared to EPE agency 'success' and be rapidly defunded and rendered as 'failed' because PEPE agencies are too expensive. So history repeats itself.

The Special Intervention Program (SIP) was an outstanding national endeavour, clearly improving adult literacy and language for thousands of people, but given the economic climate (high business profit, no increases in jobs) did not really effect the unemployment statistics significantly.

Over the years there has been a host of similar programs with similar results, but in an epoch of immediacy, time for learning is now a luxury. If the learner cannot read, write and compute within an established time frame at a cost of 'X' dollars, then too bad. Hence the person for whom ALBE and ESL programs were intended, is relegated to the fringe - a victim, a failure.

Consequently, the Flex 3 level of the New Labour Exchange (Flex) Services may well drop off the plan, and EPE agencies will only provide general employment placement (Flex 1) and job skills training services (Flex 2) for unemployed people.

The mad competition tendering process for literacy and language provision, as well as restructuring within TAFE, particularly in Victoria, has dissipated and threatens to destroy the skilled workforce of professional ALBE and ESL teachers who have contributed so much over the past fifteen to twenty years.

Institutions, governed by the dollar, reconstituted as businesses rather than not-for-profit public places of learning and training, do not want to pay for professional services. As a result experienced, skilled teachers may not be employed in any future ALBE and ESL program in such institutions. Casual, untenured, uncontracted and perhaps unskilled, unqualified and uncommitted people will be used to replace them. It's already happening.

So what if we still have commitment to social justice and equity? So what if we still have the passion and the fire in our bellies that the great Paolo Friere helped to instil by his fine example as champion of the oppressed.

These days such passion and fire and humanitarian strivings are met with the 'D responses' - disbelief, disgust, despair and derision.

People with passion and fire are 'naive ideologues', 'pie-in-the-sky do-gooders', 'loony lefties', 'out of touch', or have 'gone feral'.

You know, being described as any of the above is not so bad. If we are young enough, just bide our time, the wheel will turn again and we will be there - waiting. If we are skilled, experienced and qualified, remember that we have a better chance of gaining alternative employment than our learners ever had. We must stay passionate and keep the fire burning.

If we are older, we can do all of the above, but with a great deal more confidence because we have seen it all before.

We can support our colleagues who are feeling abused, bruised and disappointed right now.

Finally, we can exercise our right of franchise when the time comes, always hopeful that somewhere within an increasingly bizarre political arena there is at least one other feral lurking, disguised as a 'politician' perhaps.

Colleen Lindner is in the Learning Skills Unit at Gordon Institute of TAFE. She has had thirty one years experience with ALBE programs both as a volunteer, and as a paid employee with the Ministry of Education and TAFE.

Teacher Action on Funding Cuts

It is often remarked that the ALBE and adult ESL fields are in a constant state of flux. I saw an amusing response to this situation in a notice on a staff room wall the other day. It depicted Clint Eastwood as Dirty Harry with gun drawn challenging his adversary to, "Go ahead … Make one more change".

The changes of the early to mid 90s saw increased funding and an overall expansion of the sector. This resulted in increased employment, albeit mostly in the form of short-term or casual jobs. It certainly meant increased access to adult English language and literacy classes for the community.

However, over the last two years we have been the unhappy witnesses of rapid contraction, rather than expansion, highlighted by the demise of the former labour market assistance programs of the Keating era and the tendering out of the Adult Migrant English Program. As a result, the fields of adult ESL and ALBE have been thoroughly shaken with a large (but not yet quantified) number of jobs lost.

A range of responses are available to the teacher in these circumstances. Firstly, there is the "I am a Flexible Enterprise in Itself" response where the individual, engaged in perpetual self-improvement, shifts from one position to another, one job type to another, all the while chanting, "Those who can't keep up get left behind", to her or himself and to colleagues. While this approach offers some promise of individual salvation, it ultimately promotes passivity as it is the self, not the environment which is the object of change. Secondly, as we have seen, there is the Dirty Harry response which is obviously attractive and likely to have some considerable immediate impact on the environment but probably won't change much in the long-term.

A third way has been taken up by a group of adult ESL and ALBE teachers from the TAFE, community and private sectors here in Melbourne recently. Under the banner of Teacher Action on Funding Cuts, the group has been

a journal of adult english language and literacy education

planning and executing a campaign to publicise the problems with the new Commonwealth Flexible Labour Exchange (FLEX) services system relating to lack of guarantees of essential language and literacy training for long term unemployed people. The group prepared a briefing paper and a press release for the introduction of the new system on May 1 which has been widely distributed. Over May the group has been lobbying local members of parliament, writing to newspapers, inviting the press out to providers, phoning talk-back radio and so on with some very pleasing success.

All in all, the group has decided that while the new FLEX system is not likely to be dropped in the short term, we cannot afford to let this dangerous situation pass without loud public comment. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, we believe we have a responsibility not to allow any erosion of the principle of government responsibility for provision of high quality English language and literacy skills training to the community. Nor will we sit back and passively watch that responsibility being left to the vagaries of abstract and unaccountable market 'forces'. Secondly, we believe that a forceful response at this stage will help prevent further reductions in commitment to this principle and will help galvanise a shaken and somewhat shell-shocked field to take up its defence.

We intend to review our objectives and strategies at the end of our month of action. At that time, we will be looking at other areas of concern for further action, among them increasing teacher casualisation and effects on quality of unrealistic unit costs quoted in competitive tenders.

The group will be meeting again at the Australian Education Union Office, 112 Trennery Crescent, Abbottsford at 7.00 pm on June 2. Please consider yourself invited.

For further information contact Bill Daly by phone: 9216 8243, email: BillDaly@vut.edu.au, World Wide Web: http://cougar.vut.edu.au/~dalbj/action.html

Bill Daly has been teaching in ALBE for almost ten years and is currently at VUT TAFE.

Policy Update

ACAL's response to the DEETYA Mutual Obligation Task Force's Consultation Paper on literacy and numeracy training for unemployed job seekers aged 18-24. This article also appears in *Literacy Now*.

"Literacy and Numeracy Training for Unemployed Job Seekers Aged 18-24," a result of the DEETYA Mutual Obligation Task Force, signals an injection of government funds into the language and literacy field. The following is ACAL's (Australian Council for Adult Literacy) response to the February 1998 Consultation Paper. After a national teleconference with delegates from around Australia, the ACAL executive met with DEETYA representatives in Melbourne. Topics discussed at this meeting ranged from the consultation process, the professional development of DEETYA workers implementing the program, and issues concerning the program itself.

The program is aimed at people aged between 18-24 who have been on income support for six months and have literacy and numeracy skills up to National Reporting System Level 3. They must be assessed as having the ability to achieve a gain in literacy /numeracy the equivalent of one NRS level within two semesters of training. They must also have no substantial barriers which would inhibit their capacity to enhance their literacy and numeracy skills with training.

Underlying the mutual obligation initiative is the assumption that young people will supplement their jobseeking endeavours with an additional activity that earns them the right to continued receipt of their unemployment allowance. This additional activity could include community work, volunteer work, or language and literacy training. If unemployed young people are seen to be in breach of this agreement, they could face an 18 per cent reduction of their allowance for 26 weeks.

Some reservations

While ACAL welcomes the provision of language and literacy funds in a climate of cutbacks, there are some reservations about the process of jobseeker referral and the implementation of the program:

- The compulsory nature of the program may not be the best environment in which young people are able to learn new and important skills.
- The limitation of the program to 18-24 year olds discriminates against many adults in other stages of their lives with valid reasons for improving their literacy skills. Neither does this promote a culture of life long learning.
- The expectation that a person will move up a level in an allotted time is problematic. The prescribed 10 hours a week may not be enough for some learners and too much for others.

- It is ambitious to assume that a teacher can attach an accurate time-frame to a given student's ability to improve. Most adult literacy students have a range of things going on in their lives that can and do affect their progress. In addition, people learn different skills at different paces and it is virtually impossible to be accurate about this 100 per cent of the time. If a person does not move up a level in the allotted time, who or what will be deemed unsuccessful?
- The identification of barriers is the most problematic aspect of the initiative. What constitutes a barrier? If a student is deaf does that mean they cannot improve their literacy and numeracy? Who identifies these barriers and what training do they have in this area? There is insufficient information concerning the flags in the flow chart to be clear about what happens to those job seekers who are identified as having additional barriers?
- Assessment issues need greater attention. Who does the assessment and what expertise do they have in literacy and numeracy assessment. In what ways is assessment linked to the provider.
- The relationship with Flex 123 program is unclear. It would seem likely that the job seekers would already have been identified with a literacy need during the initial registration interview and been offered employment assistance.
- It does not seem apparent that the screening instrument used at the registration interview has a numeracy factor.

Possible solutions

The following are a number of suggestions which may rectify some of the problems identified above and improve the selection process for participants:

Assessment

- Research on specific target groups for factors relating to progress from Level 1 to Level 2 of the NRS is needed to inform the initial assessment process.
- A range of context-specific initial assessment tasks and guidelines related to the NRS could be developed, particularly if assessment is to be carried out by providers other than those familiar with the NRS (psychologists and case managers for example).
- It is recommended that assessment be separated from provision.

The tender process

- Methods need to be developed to identify quality providers.
- Selectors need independent, professional advice on quality provision within the tender process.
- Program outcomes are likely to be improved if the length of the tender was extended to three years to allow continuity, stability and planning.

ACAL's input to the DEETYA Mutual Obligation Task Force

At the last ACAL executive meeting, tender guidelines and strategies for the professional development of prospective staff working in the program were developed. DEETYA personnel have liaised with ACAL and will continue to do so to gain policy and procedures advice. These consultations have already brought about some changes to the program:

- Minister Kemp has agreed to report against indicators of competence. The emphasis however, will be on reading, writing and numeracy. There will be an expectation of gaining all indicators of a level in at least one of these macro areas and at least some indictors in the other two areas.
- The program will accommodate ESL (details still to come).
- Priority will be given to those at Level 1 and 2 with a little more flexibility to meet assessed needs.
- There will be four components in the tender specification: delivery; assessment; audit; projects.
- Moderation is being built into the requirements of the tender.

These developments show promising changes for the adult literacy field. It is encouraging to see the fruits of successful consultation at the national level. The work currently being done by ACAL and DEETYA will benefit the program, service providers and most importantly, the participants.

If you have any comments on the 18-24 year old program you can do so by emailing bickbran@wantree.com.au or faxing to 08 9272 3805 and your opinions will be registered on the ACAL discussion list.

Erratum

In this edition we include the bibliographical notes for Jane Perry's article from the autumn edition: "Why we teach the way we do: influences on the practice of adult ESL and ALBE teaching". Jane is a Lecturer in TESOL & Industry Training at RMIT University

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Beside the Whiteboard

Elizabeth Darling has been working in AMES in a variety of positions for many years. She talks here with Libby Barker about her personal experiences and challenges.

What kind of work are you doing at the moment?

I am teaching a stage III Mixed Focus, DIMA (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs) and practical placement, as well as inducting teachers.

Could you explain what you mean by "mixed focus"?

Mixed focus means I teach everything as the students are new arrivals and want to be able to function. We established a syllabus together, which includes reading, writing, computing and particularly listening.

I'm also responsible for finding them jobs. I liaise with employers, who are very responsive and kind and employed some students following the practicum.

How did you arrive at this point in your career?

Ever since I arrived in Australia I've wanted to help newly arrived migrants settle in, become an integral part of this country. I did a degree with the aim of helping migrants, in English, social science and French and then a Dip. Ed. Being in a new country I didn't know what I'd do until someone suggested I teach adults and to apply at the AMES. Later I became Assistant to the Workplace Principal and then became Principal myself. For the last eight months I've been running job club and have just returned to an L2 position.

How would you describe your students?

They are in the whole newly arrived, happy to be here, enthusiastic and very eager to learn English and join the workforce. The students want to be able to understand everything: for shopping, listening to the TV.

Some of the students are highly educated in their own language and some are too young to have completed their education but are eager to further their studies. And so they are eager to learn and very hard working. Being unfamiliar with Roman script can complicate matters though they seem to manage.

What do you see as your personal challenges?

Helping clients feel confident in their ability to learn, encouraging them to learn new things; helping them overcome their difficulties in order to become active members of our community.

So how do you meet this challenge?

Using a lot of visuals, acting, using tapes (role-play), up to date news articles pertinent to their settlement, authentic stories. And lots of practice, including homework to back it all, even conversation with members of the community via the Home Tutor Program.

What do you think are the pressures faced by language and literacy teachers today?

Illiteracy is a wide spread problem in the adult world in Australia, however the problem non-English speaking people have, due to their unfamiliarity with the Roman script is different to those native Australian's face. Some may also be illiterate in their own language and age is another factor slowing the learning process.

How does this affect teachers of the English Language?

Through different pace of the learner. In other words, I vary the program to suit the needs of the client. Also, follow their progress, provide more individual attention to cater for special needs. ESL teachers have to be sensitive and juggle change ideas to suit the clients. We have to be flexible in our delivery and keep abreast with the changes in ESL.

Can you outline some of the advantages of working in an organisation such as the AMES?

AMES has given me the opportunity to use my talents and assist clients in the areas of need. I have had the opportunity to learn much about teaching ESL through professional development sessions, and working closely with colleagues.

And working within a large organisation has meant I have been able to work in a range of teaching and support positions.

It seems the AMES has been undergoing a number of changes. Could you describe some of these changes and the effects these are having?

The changes in AMES have caused some discomfort for the staff in general, with the displacement of teachers and the general disruption to students. The changes however were necessary due to cuts in the DEETYA funding, the reduced number of immigrants to the country, and the higher level of English language required for entry to Australia.

I must add that the staff in the organisation are among the best qualified ESL teachers in the country.