This issue: Culture and Learning

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Editorial

Teaching is a tricky business. We have to be sensitive to the subtle, individual needs and learning styles of each student. Of course, these individual needs are formed by a messy confluence of physical/chemical activity in the brain (as discussed in the winter edition of *Fine Print*) and broader environmental and cultural influences. This Spring issue looks outward, to explore the social and cultural contexts that surround us. It is a truism to say that in the last ten years these have changed drastically—change has been a common theme of *Fine Print* during the period. Some of these articles (Woods, Brown, Oldfield) consider the various contexts in which learners and teachers are embedded; others (O'Maley, Lewer) examine the context of the ALBE field itself, assessing the forces which have shaped it over the past ten years or so.

In the first article Nick Gadd provides a general survey of theories which emphasise the social world. The article provides the basis of a theoretical framework that seeks to explain why cultural and social contexts are so important, with particular emphasis on linguistics and language learning. He also seeks to suggest how such theories can be of use to teachers.

Davina Woods reports on how Aboriginal students are continually negotiating a series of complex questions regarding self, culture and identity. Although English literacy is essential to participate in the dominant Australian culture, Woods argues strongly that the most successful educational outcomes are achieved when the learners have a strong sense of their identity as Aboriginal people.

Jenni Oldfield provides us with a glimpse of the pressures brought to bear on teachers and prisoners in the corrections system. The culture of prison includes not only the predictable factors such as drug-dependence and violence but also ingrained stereotyping and feelings of hopelessness. For teachers in such a system, finding effective teaching strategies, knowing what to teach and, more fundamentally, why they are teaching it, poses enormous difficulties. Jenni doesn't claim to have all the answers, but her attempts to wrestle with this extremely challenging context of learning are

illuminating and raise issues of relevance for teachers in other contexts too.

Pauline O'Maley's article addresses the ways in which constructions of adult education itself have changed in recent times, with particular focus on placement assessments. O'Maley points out that public education is no longer driven by the aims, values and ideals that once sustained it, but by an economic obsession with increasing productivity and efficiency. Yet assessment itself is not such an exact science that it can easily fit into the discourse of continuous improvement. Similar points are made in Mike Brown's article, which provides a survey of recent theories and research relating to workplace learning. He is particularly interested in the notion of 'informal learning' and he highlights current literature that is addressing this sort of workplace learning.

The final feature article, by Damien Lewer, reports on the findings of a survey into how language and literacy teachers are coping with the demands of the revised CGEA and draws cautiously optimistic conclusions. One particularly interesting issue raised by the research Damien describes concerns the age and experience of teachers in the language and literacy field: it seems that there are very few with less than five years' experience. While experience is of course a good thing, Damien reasonably raises the question: where are the new young ALBE teachers?

In our regular columns, we hear about the state of ALBE in Boston, USA in *Foreign Correspondence*; in *Open Forum*, Sue Emmitt takes issue with Kerry Hempenstall's recent article on phonics; in *Policy Update*, Alistair Crombie provides some essential background to the possible affects of the GST on ALBE; and we hear from Chris Anderson in *Beside the Whiteboard*.

All in all, we hope you find this issue of *Fine Print* good springtime reading.

The Editorial Committee

VALBEC aims to lead the adult literacy field through identifying issues of importance to practitioners and facilitating positive change. This is achieved through networking, professional support, the sharing of information and the promotion of best practice.

Cultural theories of language

by Nick Gadd

In this discussion, Nick Gadd presents a historical overview of the relationship between culture and language.

Introduction

In this article I want to survey what is meant by social approaches to language. This will involve an outline of the ideas of key figures such as Malinowski, Saussure, Sapir, and Whorf, and a discussion of how their work influenced the work of Halliday, leading to a discussion of genre theory as it was developed by Martin and others. I am also going to attempt to indicate how these ideas are of relevance to teachers of language and literacy.

Social theories

The twentieth century has been characterised by the development of theories that interpret human beings in social terms. Of course, to interpret the world in such a way, you have to believe that society exists in the first place. For Bentham (quoted in Culler 1973) "society is a fictitious body, the sum of the several members who compose it." (Culler1973:71). Indeed it is still not an uncommon view that, as Margaret Thatcher famously asserted: "There is no such thing as society."

In contrast, social theories such as Durkheim's theory of society, or Saussure's of language, argued that individuals are part of much larger structures which shape and condition them. Adherence to social views tends to mean that one is sceptical of theories, on the one hand, which place the individual at the centre of things, and equally of those which place the abstraction 'humanity' at the centre. According to social theories, we act, speak and believe largely as we do because of the culture we belong to, not because to do so is inherently 'human' or because we make an individual choice to do so. Everything we do depends to a very large extent on who we are, where we are and what our culture tells us.

Summary of a social semiotic theory of language

Social theories of language, of which Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is one example, see language as a creation of the social world, and consider that individuals are apprenticed into the language rules and conventions of their social groups. Learning a language also entails the internalisation of the ideology embedded in that language and society. Language shapes individuals, and is then used by them in order to achieve certain goals in the social world.

A social theory of language can be contrasted with formalist theories. Chomsky's Transformative Generative Grammar is an example of such a theory. Chomsky distinguishes between language 'competence', the innate knowledge of language said to exist innately in the mind of every individual human being, and 'performance' which is the actual use of language by people. What interests him is competence, which he believes can tell us about the structures and processes at work in the human mind. In contrast, social theories of language, in particular SFL, focus attention on what people actually do with language in their own social contexts. Functional linguists are not terribly interested in universals.

SFL is also a semiotic theory. Semiotics is the study of systems of signs and the ways they create meanings. Linguistics is a branch of semiotics, and culture embraces the whole range of semiotic systems in existence in a society. SFL is concerned with the way meanings are created using language in its social and cultural contexts. Thus, SFL is often described as a social-semiotic theory of language.

The following sections outline the views of some of the intellectual antecedents of the theory. The purpose is to explain the meaning of three key aspects of the theory. These three aspects are:

- language is a system
- language has meaning in context
- language is used to achieve functions.

Antecedents: Saussure

Saussure directed the attention of linguists to the *synchronic* study of language. A synchronic approach involves the study of a language at a particular point in time, rather than its evolution through time, which was the traditional approach of philologists. Saussure asserted that a language is a system of signs. Each sign has two parts: the 'signifier', which in language is a word, and the 'signified' which is the thing referred to. Signs are arbitrary, that is, there is no particular reason why a sign should take the form it does. What matters is the relationships between the signs in the system. For example, in French the word 'fleuve' means a river which runs to the sea, while 'riviere' is a river that does not—a distinction which does not exist in English. It is the difference between the two that gives each sign its value, not the sign

itself. Thus, a language is to be understood as a network of relationships between signs, from which values emerge. The significance of this breakthrough by Saussure was that language could now be seen as a *system* of which all the parts are simultaneously available to the language user. This is an essential aspect of systemic approaches.

Malinowski

Another dimension was added by Malinowski (1923, 1935). Malinowski was an anthropologist who studied the language and life of Pacific Island peoples. He concluded that it was impossible to understand their language without also taking an ethnographic perspective, which included looking at all the salient features of a situation in which speech is uttered:

> "A statement, spoken in real life, is never detached from the situation in which it has been uttered … utterance and situation are bound up inextricably with each other and the context of situation is indispensable for the understanding of the words … a word without linguistic context is a mere figment and stands for nothing by itself." (Malinowski 1923 in Ogden and Richards 1949:307).

For example, language related to a ceremonial canoe journey cannot be understood without knowledge of the values and customs implicit within the culture, including the importance of competition, types of sailing done in different places, and the role of boasting.

Therefore, language can not be separated from human activities: it has to be regarded as part of a context, and as intended to achieve a function. Functions can be of various kinds: for example to accomplish a task such as fishing, or to maintain social relationships by means of small talk. Malinowski's view that language should be regarded as Function-in-Context is of great importance in the development of SFL.

Sapir and Whorf

The work of Sapir and Whorf is also of great importance in the development of social theories of language. In contrast to the popular view that people use language to express their own ideas, Sapir argued that language is the crucial factor that shapes the beliefs and perceptions of individuals. "The 'real world' is to a large extent built up on the language habits of the group … We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation." (Sapir, quoted in Whorf 1956:134). Whorf developed Sapir's view, providing hosts of examples to indicate that languages like Hopi have ways of talking about phenomena and concepts such as time and causality that are different from English. "Every language and every well-

'**language can not be separated from human activities**'

knit technical sublanguage incorporates certain points of view and certain patterned resistances to widely divergent points of view" (Whorf 1956:247). In particular, he argued, Western logic is a purely cultural and linguistic creation which regards itself as universal truth (1956:246-70).

Critics of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis raise a number of objections to it. They point out that it is possible to make effective translations from one language to another, for example concepts of time in Hopi can be adequately explained in English and vice versa. However it is important to recognise that the Sapir-Whorf view is not linguistic determinism but relativism—it asserts that people tend to perceive and interpret phenomena in a particular way dependent on the language they speak. When they learn another language there is no reason why they should not also learn the concepts associated with that language.

Consider Saussure's example of *fleuve* and *riviere*. Speakers of English do not, as a rule, distinguish between whether rivers are flowing to the sea or not: to them, a river is a river is a river. But that doesn't mean they are incapable of understanding the concept, or of using it themselves, should they learn French.

Halliday as a functional theorist

Halliday's theory is a systematic attempt to explain the ways in which meanings are created by texts. Its overall importance is that Halliday relates the functions people carry out using language to the contexts of culture and situation, and shows how resources of grammar are used to accomplish this. Unlike traditional grammar, which is content to assign names to bits of language, SFL attempts to explain how these bits of language carry out the functions that people want them to.

The following sections outline some of the key aspects of Halliday's theory.

Functions achieved by language

Language is used to achieve certain functions in the social world. As Halliday puts it:

> "People do different things with their language: that is, they expect to achieve by talking and writing, and by listening and reading, a large number of different aims and different purposes." (1985:15).

The scheme proposed by Halliday consists of three metafunctions: experiential, interpersonal, and textual.

- The experiential metafunction refers to "how we represent experience in language" (Eggins 1994:12). If we ask the question "What is this text about?"—for example, gardening, economics, how to make a table— we are asking about its experiential meaning.

- The interpersonal metafunction refers to the ways meanings are created between speaker/writer and listener/reader. These have to do with such matters as friendliness, formality, degrees of familiarity, politeness, roles and so on.
- The textual metafunction refers to the organisation of the text—"how what we're saying hangs together and relates to what was said before and to the context around us." (Eggins 1994:13).

Halliday states that all languages do these three things. This is the closest thing to a universal statement that can be found in his work.

Within a text, every item of language is multifunctional. Halliday has used the metaphor of musical polyphony to explain the way in which the metafunctions flow throughout a text. Halliday states that the linguist needs to "look at the whole thing simultaneously from a number of different angles." (Halliday and Hasan 1985:23).

The development of a theory of register

After Malinowski had shown that context was essential to the understanding of language, it was necessary to develop a theory of the means by which context is encapsulated in text, a text being defined as "any instance of living language that is playing some part in a context of situation" (Halliday and Hasan 1985:10). Halliday's account of register (Halliday and Hasan 1985:12) proposes three features:

- Field: what is happening; that which might be understood in a common sense description as the content. For example, in the context of a medical operation the field may include names of body parts, surgical instruments and procedures.
- Tenor: who is taking part, their roles, status and relationships. For example, who has authority, the closeness of the relationship.
- Mode: the part played by language in the text, including the channel (for example, is the text written or spoken, and is it mediated by technology) organisation, and rhetorical mode.

Halliday explains the role of register by stating that when a new participant enters a situation, they quickly assess these three aspects to make predictions that enable them to participate themselves. Most people are able to do this quite quickly in familiar situations, but when participants enter a situation in which any of the three features is unknown or unfamiliar, they are likely to be reticent and unwilling to take part. If they do plunge in regardless, they may make an obvious mistake.

The relationship of register and function

A major breakthrough of Halliday's was to observe the relationship between the context in which language was

used and the language systems used to realise particular functions. Halliday observed that "the register categories of field, mode and tenor … [have] striking parallels in the structure of languages" (Martin 1985:23).

This means that the components of register can be associated with the three metafunctions:

- The field of a text is associated with the experiential metafunction
- The tenor of a text is associated with the interpersonal metafunction
- The mode of a text is associated with the textual metafunction.

Halliday goes on to say that there are particular grammatical resources which are used for each of these three things. (There is no room here to go into detail about what these grammatical resources are: the reader is advised to consult Halliday's *Spoken and Written Language* and Halliday and Hasan's *Language, Context and Text: aspects of language in a social-semiotic perspective*.)

The consequence of this is that linguists can analyse how certain grammatical resources are used in order to realise certain types of meanings.

> "This makes it possible for systemic linguists to argue on the basis of grammatical evidence about the nature of field, mode and tenor at the same time as it gives them a way of explaining why language has the shape it does in terms of the way in which people use it to live." (Martin 1985:24).

Genre as an aspect of systemic functional theory

'Virtually everything you do involves your participating in one or another genre'

Genre as it is described here was developed by Martin, Rothery and their colleagues at the University of Sydney in the 1980s. They related the notion of genre to Malinowski's concept of context of culture. For Martin, a culture prescribes certain textual patterns which members of that culture use to do things. Martin defines genre as "a staged, goal oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture." (1985:25). Genres can be spoken or written, and the term covers not only traditional literary genres such as sonnets, novels and so on, but also school genres such as explanations and argumentative essays, and spoken interactions such as service encounters. "Virtually everything you do involves your participating in one or another genre." (Martin 1985:25).

The study of genre involves a number of key aspects. The notion of staged structure is crucial: an example is the Orientation-Complication-Resolution structure that is an essential element of many narrative genres. At every stage in the production of a text, the speaker/writer makes choices

in their linguistic realisations of field, tenor and mode which enable the listeners/readers to recognise which genre and which element of the genre are involved. While individuals do have some freedom in the ways they realise their linguistic choices, they have to choose from a certain number of options which are culturally circumscribed, and to stray too far outside the bounds of what is culturally acceptable is to risk not being understood or not being taken seriously. For example, one does not begin a recipe "Once upon a time".

In analysing a genre, one key aspect is to ascertain the stages (also known as the schematic structure) in the genre. Additionally, it is necessary to identify the goal and purpose which the speakers have in mind. It is important to remember that genres can be flexible. Although a certain amount of stability is present definition, genres can evolve through time. A formal letter today is not the same as one from the eighteenth century, or even the 1950s.

> ' language is most effectively taught in a context, and that context needs to be something of significance to the students '

Over the last ten years considerable work has been done on identifying the structures and language choices associated with a range of genres. For example, Eggins and Slade (1997) have analysed casual conversation; Plum (1988) has analysed narrative genres; and Iedema (1994) has analysed the language of administration.

Critical language study

In the 1980s and 1990s a number of linguists, notably Fairclough, Hodge and Kress, have worked on demonstrating the links between power, ideology and language. The texts they have focussed on include television and radio interviews with politicians, and articles from the mass print media. Fairclough states: "Power in modern societies is increasingly achieved through ideology, and more particularly through the ideological workings of language" (Fairclough 1989:2). However, this ideology is not to be taken as monolithic, or only operating in one direction. Fairclough suggests that "Ideological struggle primarily takes place in language."(1989:88) He also maintains that "the relationship between discourse and social structure should be seen dialectically", that is, each is capable of acting on the other.

Thus in Fairclough's work the tradition of language as a social semiotic is being continued. But Fairclough has moved beyond the determinism of extreme structuralist views. He does not regard language as simply the means by which the social order reinforces itself, but also as something dynamic and creative, a site where struggles take place that can exert change on the social order. This suggests that you can change society by the way you talk about it. According to this view, for example, using non-discriminatory language may actually reduce discrimination.

Implications for teachers of language

In this brief final section I will suggest some of the implications of social theories for teachers of language.

One point to be made clearly is that we should be suspicious of views of language-learning which place excessive emphasis on 'innate capacities' of the mind. Social theorists regard such claims as often grandiose and ill-founded. This throws notions such as 'natural learning' into doubt. People do not learn languages because of the way their brains are wired, say social theorists, but because of the society they find themselves in. Even very young children, who appear to pick up language almost magically, are in fact being given constant unconscious modelling by their caregivers. This applies all the more to adults, who generally have less time to devote to language learning than young children do.

Another point that stands out clearly is that language is most effectively taught in a context, and that context needs to be something of significance to the students. So exercises which consist of multiple uncontextualised sentences or vocabulary items are something to be wary of, however much some students may like them. Teaching letters of complaint because they happen to come up in chapter 10 is likely to be less effective than teaching them when learners actually have something to complain about, and in a context which involves learning more about, say, the law or the rights of consumers.

Another implication that arises can be related to the conventional nature of language. That is, we do not use language in an infinitely novel and creative way: we use the norms of our culture and apply them appropriately. Different types of text are structured in particular significant ways. The ways language is used in texts enables them to achieve certain functions in the social world. Students, especially those who are not familiar with literate conventions or who come from another culture, need to be taught these structures explicitly if they are to gain mastery of them, for we can not expect people to simply 'pick them up' by common sense. This is the fundamental plank of the genre approach to teaching language.

Finally, I would say that there are three key questions that language teachers should ask about any kind of spoken or written text. These are social questions, based on Halliday's metafunctions:

- What is this text trying to achieve?
- Who is involved in this text—as speaker, writer, hearer, reader?
- How is the text constructed, how does it hang together?

If the students can be given a clear understanding of the answers to these three questions, they will be well on the

way to grasping and, ultimately, mastering its use. They will then be able to go out and use it to achieve their own goals in the world outside the classroom—which is what we are aiming at as language and literacy practitioners.

Nick Gadd is a member of the Fine Print editorial committee. He recently completed a Masters of Education at Melbourne University using Systemic Functional Linguistics to analyse the language of public debate.

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Coming issues
Fine Print in 1999

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

The autumn edition considered the essential question of where Theory and Practice meet.

The winter edition focussed on "the brain" and psychological perspectives on adult learning.

The spring edition then explored the broader questions of cultural perspectives on language and literacy.

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

Questions to be looked at could include:

What are the dominant trends in Language, Literacy and Numeracy at the end of the century?

Who are the 'top ten' figures in ALBE in the 20th Century?

What have been key moments in ALBE?

What is public policy on Language, Literacy and Numeracy aiming for in 2000?

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

Bran Nue Langwij*

by Ms Davina B Woods

Here, Davina Woods gives us an update on what's going on in indigenous ALBE.

Introduction

Research into the acquisition of Standard Australian English (SAE) and literacy in SAE by Aboriginal people has concentrated on the early childhood area. The research, which is necessary to write authoritatively on the pedagogy of Aboriginal adults, has not been undertaken. However, experience in adult education and training supports the proposal that the cultural identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will affect the learning of language and literacy in SAE. It is fair to suggest that the cultural identity of all people other than those of the dominant culture affects their ability to learn, under the auspices of the dominant culture. The difficulties are exacerbated when the focus of the learning is the learning of language and literacy in a language, which is not of the person's cultural identity.

The majority of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders are urban dwellers and our first or second language is Aboriginal English or Torres Strait Islander Kriol. The article will devote much of its text to Aboriginal English. Aboriginal English as well as classical Indigenous Australian languages and literacy in SAE have been the focus of some of the projects funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) under its Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP) funded Strategic Results Projects (SRPs). The SRPs will be discussed further in the article.

Language and Culture

The relationship between languages and cultures is symbiotic. It is a close association of two entities that are dependent on one another. Language is the way in which we as humans make sense of not only the world in which we live but also the world inhabited by our thoughts. It illustrates how we see the world and our place in it. It is a way to convey culture.

Different social groups or communities may base their identity on variants such as sexual preference, political allegiance, or religious affiliation. However, each will gain a sense of identity from their particular speech patterns.

> ‘ **the cultural identity of all people other than those of the dominant culture affects their ability to learn, under the auspices of the dominant culture** ’

Although within a group such as I have described there will be differences of language. The old will speak differently from the young, men from women and the worker will speak differently to the boss. Every situation in which we find ourselves seems to exert its own influence on the language we use. Our speech varies from our writing, and one utterance or piece of writing will be different from another.

In multicultural Australia an individual's cultural identity may not appear to be very different from many others. An Aboriginal person fluent in "Flash Language" (Aboriginal English for SAE) may not be immediately recognised as Aboriginal, however, the individual's ability to interact in Aboriginal English with another Aboriginal English speaker will signal the individual's membership of the Aboriginal community.

Murris, Koories, Pallawahs, Nyoongars, Nungas and all the other Indigenous peoples of Australia regard Aboriginal English and Torres Strait Islander Kriol as significant markers of our Indigenous identity. Aboriginal English and Torres Strait Islander Kriol support our identity rights, which are the rights to exist as distinct people with distinct cultures.

Aboriginal English & Culture

One of the major variants in an Aboriginal person or group's experiences is whether or not they or their immediate family were imprisoned on a mission or a reserve. Over generations, government authorities supported by missionaries actively worked against the passing on of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. The use of cultural markers such as language was banned and there are both written and oral reports of people being flogged or denied food if they were found speaking in the language of their ancestors—in the language of their birthright. At least in front of the mission or reserve staff the people used English as the lingua franca. Thus began the development of the brand new language Aboriginal English.

It must be acknowledged that those who have not managed the language of learning will be disadvantaged. In Australia, the language of learning—the language of power—is SAE.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have said for many decades that we wish for our children to be proud and expressive of their Aboriginality. However we also wish for them to be able to function in the dominant culture. Language as a marker of culture and a factor in educational success is thus a key to both our Aboriginality and successful learning.

However, the language, which supports Aboriginality, does not necessarily support successful learning. For Aboriginal adults who, for various reasons, have not been able to participate in appropriate and satisfactory education, achieving educational success can be a challenge. SAE literacy and the speaking of SAE needs to be supported by learning strategies and teaching methodologies which respect the culture and history of the individual person.

Professor Paul Hughes AM, FACE is a member of the National Consultation and Evaluation Project (NCEP) Team whose terms of reference include reporting on the IESIP SRPs. In the foreword to *Langwij comes to school* (McRrae, 1995), Professor Hughes states:

> "The language our students bring to the classroom is a valid form of communication and needs to be valued linguistically if they are to acquire a deep knowledge and understanding of the English language in all forms. This publication (Langwij) can provide ideas and inform teachers about pedagogy they might use to provide the best in language acquisition."

Teaching strategies, which can be used more effectively than others in the teaching of SAE and literacy in SAE to Aboriginal adults may be projected from the work done with Aboriginal adolescents. During the mid-90s, the project team of Howard Groome and Arthur Hamilton researched the needs of Aboriginal adolescents in schools. A major outcome of the research was that if Aboriginal students have a strong identity as an Indigenous person, their ability to succeed in their schoolwork was increased.

This is not to say that a simple 'one size fits all' approach is possible. The Groome-Hamilton report (1995), which relates to the current discussion on cultural identity and SAE language and literacy acquisition, found that:

> "Aboriginal people in Australia today are constructing extremely diverse cultures under the umbrella of Aboriginality. These cultures reflect the varying histories of individuals and groups, and different aspirations and strategies within contemporary experiences of Aboriginality. The constant background and modifier to this process is the individual experience of racism. Aboriginal adolescents are as fully engaged in this process of cultural construction as their older relatives". (11)

(An example of such regional diversity is the *Koorie English Literacy Project* funded by the National Professional Development Program in 1994, which is Victorian specific. An outcome of the project was the development by the Goulburn Valley Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated, of a kit. The kit is titled *Deadly Eh, Cuz!—Teaching Speakers of Koorie English.*)

Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP) funded Strategic Results Projects (SRPs) and SAE literacy

So, how are these complexities to be tackled? Eight IESIP SRPs have investigated a variety of strategies to develop effective bi-lingualism and bi-dialectalism. One central strategy has been to define and teach differences for example between light Kriols and Aboriginal English on the one hand and SAE on the other. Programmes designed to promote parity of esteem between languages have also been implemented with efforts made to develop text material in each relevant language/dialect. Some useful linguistic research is anticipated as an outcome of these projects.

'*Programmes designed to promote parity of esteem between languages have also been implemented*'

Another SRP is developing and delivering a course in vernacular and SAE literacy. The course has had a comparatively high completion rate with excellent employment rates for graduates. The maintenance or revival of classical Indigenous Australian languages has also been a concern of about 15% of IESIP SRP Projects. One project has developed course materials for the teaching and learning of two languages, which are currently in decline. A component of one project has provided teaching of two home languages—five of which are in active use, two less so. These materials are all to support teaching and learning which is currently occurring. The provision of a cultural record and a purely linguistically defined purpose are both catered for.

Many involved in Indigenous Australian education and training believe that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages need a strong, stand-alone focus not just an assumed inclusion in Studies of Society and the Environment (SOSE) under the euphemism "culture". Language maintenance and revival, bilingual education as a choice and a right, the importance of Aboriginal languages in LOTE programmes for language status must all take a higher priority with the policy makers, practitioners and the providers of funding and other resources.

Although Indigenous Australian languages and SAE are essential given particular contexts, teaching methodology differs from one to the other. Research into the methodology of vernacular literacy teaching needs to be done so such work can be improved. It is estimated that more then 15% of Indigenous Australian people do not speak English as their first language, and for many others SAE in the form required by formal education and training is a second or third dialect.

Conclusion

The interplay of cultures, languages and learning for Indigenous Australian adults is multi-faceted and in need of much more research. The research needs not just to look at the great variety of languages used by Indigenous Australians but also the extent of the use and the extent to which the speakers recognise the need for register/dialect change. Pedagogy for Indigenous Australian adults has not been developed to an extent where it is fully understood either as a subset of, or distinctly from, the area of adult education generally. Professional development in cultural understanding, pedagogical research and curriculum development are all areas which should be investigated more thoroughly if the education of Aboriginal adults in SAE language and literacy is to be truly successful.

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* *Langwij is one orthographic rendering of 'language' in Aboriginal English or Torres Strait Islander Kriol. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people often use the word 'language' to mean something like 'our language', or 'the language we use'.*

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The policies of both the federal and state governments have made literacy a priority across all educational sectors. Government reports such as the 1998 *Literacy for All: The Challenge for Australian Schools* and the 1997 release of the Australian Bureau of Statistics *Aspects of Literacy. Profiles and Perceptions Australia 1996*, have highlighted the need for teachers to be able to evaluate literacy needs in a range of settings and have a repertoire of appropriate teaching strategies to address such needs.

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Securing your Future

All Locked Up!

by Jenni Oldfield

Jenni Oldfield takes us on a journey inside ALBE in the corrections system.

It's the start of a typical day at the women's prison at Deer Park.

"Fuck off will ya!" someone shouts as I unlock the door to the education centre. The phone's ringing, it never seems to stop. "I need some paint, now!" Bang, bang, bang-"open the fuckin' door will ya?" I go into the kitchen to make a coffee. Someone's nicked our supplies! Damn. "Please can you make a phone call for me-someone's about to take my kids away." It's not yet nine o'clock.

Corrections education is a challenging, confronting, often heart-breaking, frustrating and sometimes rewarding field in which to work. I'd like to use this article to highlight some of the issues involved in teaching in the corrections area, particularly with women.

An Overview of Corrections Education in Victoria

Corrections education in Victoria provides for people in a variety of settings: adults in prisons; adults on community based orders; young offenders in juvenile justice centres; young offenders on community orders; adults in the Forensic Psychiatry Centre; and, adults within the State's Forensic Health (Intellectual Disabilities) Centre (Williams, 1999). It attempts to overcome the barriers that have been created by limited opportunities and low skill levels, so that people who have spent time in custody may have greater opportunities to participate in the workforce and mainstream society. Corrections education is also an attempt to create a safer community.

For many years, education for prisoners in Victoria was the responsibility of the Schools Division of the Department of Education, special education section. The responsibility was transferred to the TAFE sector in 1989. This shift allowed for prisoners to participate in recognised training programs, and programs that relied on adult learning principles. Shortly after this change, the State Training Board established a new industrial sector, the Corrections Industry. The aim here was to facilitate the training of prisoners in the same way as funds and services were provided to other actual industry sectors. Each year since 1991 the Corrections Industry Training Board (CITB) have produced a training plan. These training plans identify goals, program priorities and resource requirements for the future.

> ' Corrections education is also an attempt to create a safer community '

The 1992 training plan identified the need for formalised pathways for prisoners. This recognised the fact that as prisoners moved between locations, (as their security ratings changed), they could not necessarily continue with courses started at the previous location. It was also recognised that pathways could provide links to the workforce and to community colleges once the student was released, or paroled. (Penaluna, 1998)

To maintain consistency in the provision of accredited training programs, the CITB established the Corrections Education Management Consortium, which is a committee made-up of representatives from the TAFE institutions who provide programs in prisons, and includes representatives from the CITB and Commissioner's Office. The consortium also provides advice on policy and training to the Office of Training and Further Education (OTFE), and to the CITB.

The Corrections Education Management Consortium has developed several pathways for corrections: Adult Literacy, Horticulture, Hospitality, Engineering, Furnishing Studies and Information Technology. There is a also a "group pathway" which provides for Koorie prisoners—this was established to comply with the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1992), which identified that where possible, Aboriginal people need to be together in groups.

Outside the TAFE provision, there are also opportunities for prisoners to access tertiary courses, and VCE courses, through external studies programs. Prisoners access these programs of study in much the same way as other students, but the funding available for them is very limited so few get the opportunity to participate.

The culture of the prison

Most women in correctional centres have "manifold disadvantages, many through accumulated adverse life experiences". (Preamble to proposed National Strategy for VET in Corrections, 1998) Often the victim of circumstance, with little alternative but crime, women are generally in very low spirits by the time they end up in prison. They are often withdrawing from heroin (or other drugs of dependence), desperately worried about their families and often very depressed.

The Metropolitan Womens Correctional Centre (MWCC) at Deer Park has the capacity to take in 155 prisoners. Like most women's prisons throughout the world, it is a maximum-security centre to accommodate the needs of just a few. It's surrounded by two razor wire fences and houses women on charges that are often motivated by a dependence on drugs, but vary from driving offences to murder. Gambling-related crimes, though, are on the increase. The accommodation units are set-up for small groups where in most cases, women can order their own food to cook for themselves, and do their own washing. There is a small shop that opens for a few hours a day. Convicted prisoners are obliged to work and there are a few options for the women to choose from including: gardening, sewing, making director's chairs or wooden lattices, cleaning or working in the library.

Education in prisons

Education at MWCC is entirely voluntary, and all prisoners have the opportunity to access up to four, three-hour sessions per week. Prisoners participate for a variety of reasons: to do something constructive with their time; to improve their knowledge and skills, to avoid going to work; to avoid the politics and violence of the prison environment; or because the Prisoner Classification Board recommended it.

The educational needs of the women vary greatly. Some study external tertiary courses and some attend TAFE courses on day-release programs. Most have had limited opportunities in the educational system, bad memories of past experiences in school, low self-esteem and low motivation. Teachers in corrections spend a lot of time building student confidence and undoing negative attitudes towards education.

The classroom culture

With the average woman's sentence being three months, the student group is ever changing. There's always a mix of skill levels in any class. No class is ever the same and few classes run smoothly as personalities clash, medication levels rise and fall, and emotions run high and low. It's also quite common to have women who have serious psychiatric illnesses, as more and more of the psychiatric facilities in the community are closed down. To this mix of students, there are constant interruptions as women are called to collect property, called to see their visiting solicitor, or race off on unexplained missions.

The number of students in a class is partly determined by the funding. At MWCC we are required to have at least 14 students in adult basic education classes. It's interesting to note that classes in private prisons are expected to be more than twice the size of those in public prisons, and the funding per student contact hour is almost a third.

The physical layout of the education centre can have a huge impact upon teaching. In most prisons, education centres have

> ' The physical layout of the education centre can have a huge impact upon teaching ▪

half walls/half windows or walls with many windows, allowing anyone to see what is happening throughout the centre. At MWCC the classrooms are small and rooms are isolated from each other creating mini security risks—staff need to constantly look out for the safety of colleagues and students.

There are other constraints that impact on teachers in corrections. The need to be constantly aware of security leads to a teaching environment that includes: locked doors; restricted movement of students; restricting access to materials that can be dangerous or could be used as weapons; constantly watching out for unusual behaviour; trying to stay one step ahead of clever minds and potential disasters; and being keenly aware of a duty of care. And there are an odd set of 'dos and don'ts' connected to working in this environment: don't bring Vegemite sandwiches for lunch—they might get stolen and Vegemite can be used as a starter for a home brew (which can be fatal), or don't bring in Blutak to hang up your pictures—it's often used to bung up locks. Oh, and be careful where you leave your cup—I've unknowingly downed a coffee loaded with sleeping pills! (I left work early that day.)

How does the culture effect what's taught?

In Victoria, funding is allocated for vocational education in prisons. There is debate about whether this is the most appropriate direction for women. The Senate Inquiry into Education and Training in Correctional Facilities (1996) found that many women saw vocational programs as being of little relevance. One of the submissions to the inquiry suggested that courses in personal hygiene, how to budget on a supporting parent's fund and coping mechanisms for single parents would be useful. But there's evidence from America that suggests that these sorts of courses would reinforce stereotyping. (Winifred, 1996 cited in Pitman and Tregambe, 1996; Schram, 1998)

Schram (1998) examined stereotypes pertaining to educational programming, and after comparing the attitudes of four groups within the prison environment (female inmates, peer counsellors, correctional officers and prison program staff), she found that female prisoners had the most sexist attitudes about women, and were unlikely to perceive the need for women to work. This could also be the result of low self-esteem and self-confidence about being able to participate in the workforce. Whatever the reason, Schram suggests that courses in women's studies might be more effective than vocational education in raising the self-worth of many women prisoners.

At MWCC we offer a variety of sessions, that appeal to broad interests, and encourage the women into the education centre so that they might start to feel comfortable. From there, the women often pick up on courses that interest them, whether they are vocational, in literacy and numeracy, or both.

The literacy classroom allows for opportunities in many directions. Many students want to develop their literacy and numeracy skills for a specific purpose—to help them do their job in the storeroom, for example, to understand the food ordering forms, or to "learn about the computer so I can keep up with me kids". But it's also an opportunity to write a letter to a child, to express feelings through a poem, and to reflect on life through a journal.

For many, the literacy classroom allows an opportunity to focus on a world outside of drugs; it's an opportunity to become interested in mainstream society, even for a short time. How do we communicate with those around us? What does being a good parent mean? How can we budget our income? What does voting in an election really mean? Alternative health therapies, the role of women throughout time-these are a few of the popular topics.

> '*courses in women's studies might be more effective than vocational education*'

Teaching sessions last for two and a half to three hours to fit in with the prison routines. It's often very difficult for the women to concentrate for this length of time, so regular breaks are essential.

Teaching Methods

I encourage students to freely express their views and respect what others have to say. I also encourage them to take part in the decisions about what and how they learn, within each session and for the weeks ahead. Flexibility must be the basis of my approach. The best corrections practitioners have been told where they can 'shove' the best-made plans!

I also need to be adaptable to tap into the mood of the class and pick up on opportunities for teaching as they arise. If group-work looks like a possibility, then I'll run with it, if the students appear aggravated with each other, then we'll settle into individual programs (sometimes in different rooms!) that have been established through negotiation. Group sessions are usually self-contained sessions—it's difficult to do 'follow on' work when the group is constantly changing.

The students respond positively to being able to have a say in how their education program is structured; it's important in a setting where there aren't many opportunities to make choices.

Learner expectations are often quite specific and based on past experiences of learning. Requests like, "I want you to write on the board so I can take notes" or "Where's my homework?" remind me that meeting the needs a group where there are many different learning styles requires a mixture of teaching approaches.

What Curriculum Frameworks are used?

The essence of the Certificates in General Education for adults (CGEA) works well in the corrections setting. Its flexibility allows for a broad range of learning activities at a range of levels, and it allows for activities to be learner focussed. I find the General Curriculum Options stream particularly useful in introducing students to the classroom—an art-based activity can be far less threatening than a writing task, and slowly students build the confidence to move onto other areas.

The problem with the CGEA is the nominal eighty-hour modules. It is difficult for many students to complete all the learning outcomes of a module within their often short stay. We frequently award local certificates of attainment, but this is not helpful when funding is allocated on module completions. This issue will need to be addressed as more and more courses in correctional settings are funded this way.

There is a similar problem with the Coorong Tongala (Certificate 1 in Koorie Education) which is the curriculum framework used with Koorie students. The literacy, numeracy and oral communication modules of this course are closely linked to the CGEA, and also have a nominal eighty-hour duration. Despite this problem, this new course works well at MWCC—it's culturally specific and pitched at a lower level than what we've known before in Koorie education.

How is it measured?

Like most other fields of education, performance in corrections is measured by statistics that measure success in terms of completions and attendance. Teachers spend a lot of time each month keeping detailed records of which students spent how much time allocated to which module, and precise records of what they did during that time. These rigorous records are also demanded from a government keen to account for standards in a prison under private contract. Audits by the Commissioner's Office of the Department of Justice and the Office of Training and Further Education are very common.

My own personal measures are focussed on more day to day efforts. "Today Judy came to class!" Or "Lan read her journal entry to the class", "the ESL class is putting together a cookbook", "a couple of women are working through an *Introduction to Psychology package*", "Sue is making a vegetable garden".

Is it worth it?

It's difficult to know whether what we teach in corrections is valuable. Do we have an impact on people's lives or are we simply occupying their time while locked up? In academic literature about corrections education, recidivism is often used as a measure of the success of a program. But one wonders if this an appropriate measure when there are many factors that effect people's lives once released from prison—support networks, family support, income, drug rehabilitation

A Changing Culture:

Initial Placement Assessments within Language and Numeracy Training (LANT)

by Pauline O'Maley

Here, Pauline O'Maley explores the culture of the placement interview.

Simon Marginson (1997) prefaces his book *Educating Australia* by saying,

> "[f]or the narrative historian, time is like an ever flowing river, in which nothing is fixed, and everything is always becoming".

I think that as adult literacy and basic education practitioners we can identify with this metaphor, both policy and provision are in a state of ever-changing flux. Government responses appear to be reactive and unpredictable (an example of this is the government's response to the poor take up rate of LANT earlier this year). The adult literacy and basic education field is a particularly volatile one, because unlike other educational sectors it does not attract permanent, on-going funding.

In this article I would like to explore the way in which changes to literacy provision have impacted on the initial placement interview process. My focus is on the initial assessment interview because of the importance of the assessment as a 'bridge' between 'schooled' literacy experience and the opportunities of 'adult' literacy.

Several years ago when I first started to research the initial placement interview in adult and basic education I started with the question, 'In whose interest is this assessment interview?' Is it the prospective student, the assessor, the teacher or the funding body? I felt there was some confusion about the purpose of the interview. Increasingly it has become more overtly clear that the assessment is primarily about reporting. It is the beginning of the process of monitoring the progress of students (and teachers and providers).

The accountability demands have become more explicit. Students are now required to move up a National Reporting System (NRS) level within the life of their course. I do not believe this is a realistic teaching outcome for all students, however, as with many other areas, educational outcomes have been subsumed by administrative outcomes as a regime of performativity is established. A focus on inputs has been subsumed by a focus on outputs.

Performativity

In his seminal text *The Postmodern Condition* (1984) Lyotard argues that modernist ideals of general education have been subsumed under the performativity principle, "the principle of optimal performance: maximizing output … and minimizing input" (p.44), "the endless optimization of the cost/benefit ratio" (1993, p.25). Education has undergone a legitimation change.

The locus of operation is no longer based on questions of educational aims and ideals in the old sense which drew on language-games involving values, aspirations, conceptions of and beliefs about humanity, potential, personal worth and autonomy, emancipation and dignity, and the like. Rather, attention has moved from aims, values, and ideals to be now focused on "means and techniques for obtaining [optimally] efficient outcomes". (Lankshear 1999, p24)

Lyotard (1984) explains the changing role of the educational institution in terms of the production of 'players'.

> "The transmission of knowledge is no longer designed to train an elite capable of guiding a nation towards its emancipation, but to supply the system with players capable of acceptably fulfilling their roles at the pragmatic posts required by its institutions." (p.48).

He theorises that this situation has evolved out of the legitimation crisis of an older modernist view and the emergence of postmodernism. He defines the postmodern as "incredulity towards metanarratives" (1984, p.xxiv). In the postmodern world we no longer have legitimating metanarratives but rather numerous language games, which Lyotard has called "a heterogeneity of elements" (1984, p.xxiv).

One of the difficulties for education under this regime is that public education has long been sustained by the metanarratives of modernity (Kiziltan, Bain, and Canizares, 1990). In their absence education has become economically driven by the new language game of performativity. Kiziltan, Bain and Canizares suggest that the significance of the "performativity principle" is that it is based on "a systematic image of society wherein economic, political, and educational

relations are all reduced to their operationality" (p.359). In an atmosphere where legitimising myths can no longer be sustained, power is held by those who are able to perform in an optimal way and "provide effective verification and good verdicts" (Lyotard, 1984; p.47). Further Lyotard suggests that knowledge and power are simply two sides of the same question. Those in power decide what knowledge will be legitimated. With this power comes a sense of infallibility, "since performativity increases the ability to produce proof, it also increases the ability to be right" (p.46).

As the imperative is to be operational or disappear, education comes to be seamlessly aligned with business. There is a transformation of the nature of knowledge, and we have what Lyotard calls the "mercantilazation of knowledge". The educational base has shifted and the only legitimate outcomes are those that can be measured. Everything must be quantifiable in this process of measuring the incommensurable (Bartos, 1990). Educational institutions are "dominated by a bureaucracy where goals are set in ever narrowing demands of reporting and where accountability is measured by outputs" (Marshall 1998, pp.4). Lyotard articulates the way in which institutions are managed and language games, here called "clouds of sociality" are harnessed.

> "The decision makers attempt to manage these clouds of sociality according to input/output matrices, following a logic which implies that their elements are commensurable and that the whole is determinable. They allocate our lives for the growth of power. In matters of social justice and of scientific truth alike, the legitimation of that power is based on its optimizing the system's performance-efficiency. The application of this criterion to all of our games entails a certain level of terror, whether soft or hard: be operational (that is commensurable) or disappear." (1984; p.xxiv)

I will like now to look briefly at how this regime of performativity impacts in practice.

LANT and performativity

Under LANT 18-24 year olds who have been targeted by Centrelink as in need of literacy and numeracy assistance are sent to assessed so that they can be put into a literacy class. The expectation is that, in this class, they will improve their literacy skills so that when they are retested they will be one level higher on the NRS. There are several aspects of the language game of performativity that I would like to highlight in relation to LANT.

The first aspect is the notion of language as a commodity. Lyotard (1993, p.27) suggests "the big deal of the past twenty years has been the transformation of language into a productive commodity". This transformation is pivotal to understanding why the basis for this mutual obligation

❛ a focus on inputs has been subsumed by a focus on outputs ❜

scheme could be literacy and numeracy. Literacy has become a highly sought after commodity. It has become a code and in many ways a weapon. Green, Hodgen and Luke (1994) suggest that fears expressed about literacy are often code for other fears; fears about unemployment, fears about rapid change and literacy can be used politically to fuel or quell those fears. They make the salient point when they say:

"the literacy debate is rarely about 'literacy' in itself. It is tied up with the larger political and moral debates about the directions of communities and cultures, nation-states and economies" (p.15).

In these uncertain times literacy debates are flourishing. Under the mutual obligation scheme literacy is used as a lever to have unemployed youth conform and 'contribute'.

Second, Lyotard's notion of terror is very bound up in this scheme. It is easy to see the way in which 'terror' is used to coerce youth into the scheme. This terror is apparent in the language of the press release that was issued by David Kemp at the announcement of successful tenderers.

> "All people aged between 18 and 24 who have been receiving unemployment benefits for six months or more *must now do more to help themselves find work or risk having their payments reduced or possibly withdrawn.*"

> "Those who are assessed as having *inadequate* literacy and numeracy skills *must* undertake the training. *Refusal* could lead to an initial reduction of unemployment benefits of 18% for 26 weeks." (Media release K63/98, emphasis added).

It may be soft terror but nevertheless the 'terror' is intentional; this is the discourse of literacy by coercion, as a means of control and surveillance.

Third, the emphasis is on outcomes, on achievement. There are very strict guidelines for acceptable student progress, there is no account taken of the simplistic and unrealistic nature of these outcomes. The assumption seems to be that students are an homogenous group and they can and will make a uniform and sequential progression within the specified time frame.

Fourth, Lyotard's metaphor of 'players' is apt here, the 'players', unemployed youth, are very much expected to play by the rules, the rigid rules devised by somebody else who has that sense of infallibility that has come from the ability to produce 'proof,' no matter how distorted. Naïve notions of a simplistic link between unemployment and literacy skills and/or laziness, about doing something to help oneself are very evident in this rhetoric.

Fifth, the discourse of social justice has been distorted, as Lyotard says, into the cause of 'optimizing the system's performance-efficiency'. Now the unemployed are expected to render something back to the community, 'do more to help themselves'. No account in this discourse is taken of the responsibilities of a society that cannot offer so many of its youth employment; the responsibility is with the unemployed youth.

This mutual obligation scheme is a telling example of the performativity principle at work. It illuminates clearly the government's attempts at 'constituting normalised and governable individuals for the march of performativity' (Marshall 1998, p.1).

'High Stakes' Assessment

The primary focus of the interview must be on reporting rather that student needs and comfort level. This is a 'high stakes' assessment. Cope et al (1994) assert that high stakes assessments are those assessments which can have serious consequences for the life chances of the individuals concerned. They suggest we ask the question, 'What are the social, cultural, and political implications of assessment for the 'life trajectories' of the clients?' (p.101). Ironically the stakes are high for the provider as well as the prospective student. The assessor needs to, at the end of the one hour assessment, confidently circle a numerical rating which represent NRS levels on the pre-training assessment form. I have many concerns about this expectation. First the judgement is made on the basis of one short connection. A second concern is the notion that it is possible and seen to be appropriate to collapse results, gained from testing with quite different tasks, into a single number. Third and more concerning is the assumption that this can be done across domains, such as reading and numeracy. The notion of 'rounding down' does not, I think, address this.

Even given that the teacher has the opportunity to make changes to the initial assessment results within the month, the assumption that these assessments can be used as a basis for expecting students to move up an NRS rating within the life of the course is premised on a very simplistic notion of assessment. This notion assumes all students start on, and maintain, an equal educational footing, and it positions inadequacies in assessment results as personal inadequacies, the result of lack of application, and/or of poor teaching. In this discourse no account is taken of the diverse sociocultural factors, and the dynamic interrelationship between assessment and social and economic forces that influence these results and account for markedly different outcomes in different settings and institutions. This is assessment as a tool of control (Broadfoot, 1979), it is not assessment that has student needs as a primary concern.

Researchers are increasingly moving towards the viewpoint that what a student *does do* at an assessment is not necessarily

> ' education comes to be seamlessly aligned with business '

indicative of what she/he *can do*. Further it is important to foreground the role of the assessor in this 'interpersonal exercise' and acknowledge that who the assessor is, how she/he thinks and feels, what she/he believes in and what she/he says will affect the assessment outcome.

Given these concerns Cope et al (1994) provide sound advice when they recommend that 'high stakes' assessment decisions involve more than one judge. Gifford (1992) reinforces this as he cautions avoidance of decisions being made about anyone's future "..solely on the basis of one imperfect instrument" (p.4). Gipps (1994) suggests varying approaches and reducing the stakes associated with any single one approach or occasion.

Views of assessment as complex, contingent and fragile are very much at odds with the discourse of accountability, control and performativity. They highlight the subjective and tentative nature of judgements. Assessment results can be very useful but they are fallible. Yet, it seems, once a rating has been given the result becomes set. Broadfoot (1996) believes not only do these judgments reflect values but they also reflect and solidify power relationships.

Evaluation of individual performance is legitimated in the language of scientific rationality, so that the criteria against which the evaluation is made, criteria which in practice embody the goals of the organisation or system are implicitly taken to be neutral or self evident while in reality they are arbitrary, reflecting existing power relations (p.230).

MacGintie (1993) points out that a "score typically has little meaning until someone makes a judgment about it" (p.556). Cope et al's (1994) research indicates that some judgments made are not accurate and not defensible. Again MacGintie's words seem apt:

> "Reflecting on the limits of assessment, we discover that no matter how careful we are, we will be biased in many of our judgments; that our assessment procedures, however realistic we try to make them, will have limited validity; and that we can never be sure what our assessments will mean to the students we have assessed. Since our assessments are fallible and limited, the decisions based on them should be tentative" (p.559).

Brown, Campione et al (1992) caution us to take seriously, as they do "the danger of reification of test scores into fixed cognitive entities" (p.189). The discourse of assessment as a tool of accountability is doing just this, reifying test scores into cognitive entities. It is apparent that we need to see assessment as we have come to see literacy, that is as situated social practice.

There is nothing tentative about the assessment process under the regime of performativity, a score is given, it is deemed to be infallible and students are expected to achieve the next NRS level within the life of the course. If this does not happen there are sanctions. Thus the performativity principle is entrenched, the outputs are easy to monitor and the inputs become irrelevant.

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Understanding learning at work— a review of recent literature

by Mike Brown

Mike Brown takes a look at some of the current thinking about the learning cultures in the workplace.

Some starting points

It is always good to review the ideas that are used to inform us as we go about our work. In this article I start off by tracing back over a selection of some of the literature that has framed my own understanding of learning at work. This moves through to the present where I consider some of the current ideas and issues that are being discussed.

It is over a decade since Victoria Marsick's book *Learning in the Workplace*. This publication provided a range of different approaches to learning at work and reviewed this learning within a framework derived from adult education. It opened up new and exciting ground as it planted seeds for others to dislodge workplace learning from the confining realms of training, productivity and management studies. Victoria Marsick referred to this rather ambitiously as "new paradigms for learning in the workplace".

This was an attempt on her part to acknowledge that far more was going on in this type of learning than the stricter acquisition of skills, knowledge and attitudes for the competent performance of job roles. Among the contributors to Marsick's edited collection was Gloria Pierce. She explored the use of workshops in management training, highlighting the fact that managers themselves did not restrict their own training opportunities by utilising the techniques and approaches which they generally advocated for the training of employees within their own organisations. Other chapters looked at worker perspectives, which at that time was innovative, ideas of self-directed learning in industry, mentoring and coaching. Her book closed with chapters on approaches to studying learning in the workplace and ways of applying these.

Sallie Westwood (1984) is another who has pushed out the idea of learning at work. She reports on an ethnographic study of work and life on the factory floor in a British hosiery company. She used an analytical framework of class, gender and ethnicity to explore the culture of the women workers at this factory and some of the different ways of knowing and learning the job. When the women first start in order to become operators or machinists they are given a short stint of training in a special section which concentrates on the operators' skills and 'getting productive'. Westwood explains

though, that once these trainees graduate the training section and are moved to production they are told by their colleagues not to do it 'the company way' and are instead get shown by the workers next to them how it is 'done on the shop floor'.

In another work, Marsick again teamed up with Karen Watkins—this time to concentrate specifically on informal and incidental learning within the workplace. They explain that 'informal and incidental learning' is learning from experience that takes place outside formally structured institutionally sponsored classroom based activities. These authors identified seven characteristics for informal and incidental learning as being: based on learning from experience; embedded in the organisational context; orientated to a focus on action; governed by non-routine conditions; concerned with tacit dimensions that must be made explicit; delimited by the nature of the tasks, the way in which problems are framed and the work capacity of the individual undertaking the task; enhanced by pro-activity, critical reflectivity and creativity. (287).

Some Australian perspectives

In recent times there have been a number of interesting Australian publications about learning in the workplace. Paul Hager, a prominent Sydney based academic, has recently undertaken a stocktake of the research on 'learning in the workplace' commissioned by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). In his report he notes that VET policies have been shifting the emphasis from the supply side of training to the demand side. The supply side is what TAFE and providers have on their profile of programs and areas where colleges and providers have built up particular program expertise, while the demand side focuses on what industry and enterprises require in terms of their skill formation. For Hager "learning in the workplace includes both formal on-the-job training and informal workplace learning". He notes that there can be important productive interactions between the two.

Billett, in his interviews with workers to ascertain how they believed that they learnt to do their work, identified on-the-job learning as a strong component and acknowledged the success of integrating on and off the job learning. The off-the-job training can be either in the training room on-

site at the enterprise or off-site at an educational institution. Off-the-job training in an educational institution is regarded as being formal learning for the workplace. In contrast, informal learning has a close relationship to the workplace and this is considered to be a very good thing. Informal learning in the workplace is situated within the actual workplace environment involving real work practices and authentic aspects of the learner's work. This makes informal learning a very powerful form of learning.

Following on from this, Hager notes four main points that are coming from recent research in this area: that simple notions of transfer of skills learnt in the workplace are dubious; that the best kinds of learning in the workplace involve appropriate links between formal training and informal workplace learning; that proper account needs to be taken of the diversity of variables in the workplace environment/culture, language, numeracy and literacy capable of being addressed in a holistic way, along with other changes as workplace reform is implemented; and that there is much confusion about 'the recognition of prior learning' (RPL) even though it enjoys wide support, (pg. 8)

In some of my own recent work, (Brown 1999), I have been involved in analysing a number of programs that are generally considered to be examples of innovative enterprise based vocational training programs. In these I have identified six key factors with regard to educational effectiveness:

Integrated training
This is a term that is used in numerous ways, three of these are listed here. Firstly it can mean the integration of modules, where the learning outcomes of two or more modules are mixed together (ie. Integrated) and assessed through the completion of some more holistic task such as a project. Secondly, it can involve the thoughtful integration of work and the on-the-job learning with training and learning done off the job. Thirdly, it can refer to the way that training is integrated with workplace change.

Embedded English language and literacy
Refers to the way that English language and literacy is learnt as needed, in this case within a VET program. This language and literacy learning occurs incidentally and secondary to skill development.

Authentic learning
Involves the worker/learner considering and learning from content derived from their actual work. Consideration of real work situations, practices and issues is the basis of the training. Hence the learning is not simulated or generalised but is instead real, authentic and specific.

Situated learning
Refers to the way that the skills, knowledge and attitudes that are learnt are connected with the specific environment,

> ❛there is no one proper or right way to view learning in the workplace ❜

situations, and practices where they occur and where the worker/learner encounters them; the learning of embedded knowledge.

Customised curriculum
Refers to the way in which educational practitioners re-interpret learning outcomes or competencies to fine-tune them to the particular situation and environment in which the learners will be working.

Contextualised curriculum
Takes its meaning from the way that situations and conditions familiar to the experience of the worker/learners are used to contextualise the content of the curriculum. This can be done in two ways. At the macro level this refers to the way that the VET sector is located within dominant and competing discourses. The influences of these discourses shape the structure and the design of programs, their curriculum and the curriculum development process. At the micro level, contextualisation refers to what has been called the development of an 'indigenous' workplace curriculum or program, which is driven by the specific requirements of a specific site and returns to, accredited curriculum and pre-specified learning outcomes only as a secondary or final concern.

Of course, this is just one framework for analysing these programs—the industrial and political frameworks that recognise and reward the learning in such courses can be even more important.

Reconceptualising informal learning

In recent work, John Garrick (1998), and David Boud and Garrick, (1999) have begun a project of re-conceptualising informal learning. It is to the second of these that I now turn and in this section of the paper, I want to map out and review some of the ideas put forward in their book *Understanding Learning at Work*.

The editors distinguish this collection when they write:

> "an understanding of workplace learning means recognising its complexities, its competing interests and the personal, political and institutional influences that affect it. We argue that it is imperative that learning at work be regarded as considerably more than techniques and strategies designed to improve performance or commercially exploit knowledge. It must always entail a consideration of situated ethics of what is being learned and who is doing the learning" (3).

The 16 contributors acknowledge that learning in the workplace is multifaceted and inter-disciplinary. They argue that there is no one proper or right way to view learning in the workplace.

After a short introduction the book is divided into four sections. The first section has two chapters that set out the context. The first of these is by Catherine Casey and it outlines the changing context of work. She begins with the effects of technological change and describes a skill shift that is occurring along with the rise of employment and prominence in the service sector. Casey acknowledges that critical questions are raised about the efficacy of claims for transformed workplaces and 'empowered' workers.

The second chapter in this section is by Ronald Barnett who argues that we live in an age of supercomplexity which involves "the challenge of multiple, conflicting and ever emerging frames of understanding and action" which requires continual critical reflection to occur. According to Barnett, supercomplexity repudiates boundaries of learning. He describes three forces he believes to be influencing learning at work: globalisation; the changing role of the state; and the information technology revolution.

The second section of the book has four chapters. Judith Matthews and Philip Candy look at "New dimensions and dynamics of learning and knowledge". In this they use Marton and Ramsden's (1988) definition of learning, where they state:

> "learning should be seen as a qualitative change in a person's way of seeing, experiencing, understanding, conceptualising something in the real world" (Marton & Ramsden, 1988: 271)

For these theorists, learning is a process of participation in a community of practice. This has significant implications for learning in the workplace. This chapter lays the groundwork for two subsequent chapters in the following section of the book.

The three remaining chapters in this second section are by Paul Hager, David Beckett and Belinda Probert. Hager's work is on finding a good theory of workplace learning. In this chapter his focus is more upon 'finding a good theory' as opposed to workplace learning. David Beckett's writing is on 'organic learning' for management and Belinda Probert is on gendered work and its implications for workplace learning. In this she outlines some of the employment patterns associated with gender segregated work. She asks if work and workplaces are segregated and gendered, and if men are more likely than women to have access to structured training, does this mean that workplace learning is a gendered activity. The conclusions being drawn by researchers is that we don't need more facts and more research, instead we need the political will to act on these findings.

The third section is on Issues in Practice. In the first chapter on culture and difference in workplace learning, Nicky Solomon problematises these notions of culture and

'**it is through everyday activities in the workplace that individuals learn**'

difference and asks that workplace educators engage with their own conceptualisations of culture and difference and the associated practices by considering three areas: recognition of one's own cultural identity and assumptions about culture and difference; recognition of the culture of the workplace and its assumptions about culture and difference; and recognition of the cultural dimensions of workplace learning.

Next, Elaine Butler discusses the technologising of equity. She names some dozen or so versions of equity discourses as these have been constructed within equity policy and practices. Here the reader is left to ask, "What have we got left?", and, "What has been achieved through the very real struggles that have occurred over equity?". This could be a book on its own.

In the next chapter, Stephen Billett outlines his ideas on 'guided learning at work'. As mentioned earlier, Billett has built up a coherent research program, findings from which have been published in the VET literature since about 1992. In this chapter, he bases his work on two premises. The first is that the kinds of activities that individuals engage in determine what they learn. The second is that the kinds of guidance they access when engaged in that learning will determine the quality of the learning. He sets out to advance understanding as part of everyday thinking and acting as portrayed by the comments above; to review the various strengths and weaknesses in this approach; and to provide a model for organising learning.

Billett argues that it is through everyday activities in the workplace that individuals learn. He has explained this elsewhere as learning through 'microgenetic activities'. He has shown that workplace contributions to learning are held to be different in kind to those furnished by educational settings. These are not necessarily better or worse but they are different. As the work activities that individual's learn from are important to the workplace then they should not be considered and named as being incidental, ad hoc or informal.

Billett takes a step that has not been very explicit in his previous work when he writes:

> "knowledge gained goes beyond the immediate scope of vocational activities to include knowledge about power relations and divisions of labour. So there is a 'hidden curriculum' in workplaces just as there is in educational institutions" (155).

No doubt Sallie Westwood would agree.

Billett states, that the workplace offers the opportunity for vocational development to many workers who would otherwise be denied. Furthermore the workplace setting provides a form of direct and indirect guidance for learning.

The workplace curriculum that he outlines has four points. The first component of his workplace curriculum is that it needs to provide "movement towards full participation in workplace activities". This involves identifying a developmental pathway of activities to encourage the learner to move from participation in peripheral activities to full participation. This developmental pathway needs to have a logical sequence that gradually increases in complexity and accountability. The pathway also has to enable learners to access procedures, processes and importantly the outcomes and products of the workplace activities.

The second component is "access to the product (goals) of workplace activities". This is access to the outcomes and may even involve visits to different work sites.

The third component consists of "direct guidance from more expert others". This guidance must come from a person considered to be expert by the learner. Direct guidance will involve questioning, direct instruction, modelling and coaching and the monitoring of progress.

The final component is "indirect guidance provided by others and the physical environment". Amongst other things this involves listening and observing other workers. Learners also get indirect guidance by seeing models of practice from which they can gauge their progress. Likewise, they can gain much from the cues and clues offered by the physical environment.

Billett concludes by stating that in order to realise the full potential of workplace learning-environments, experiences have to be structured and guidance provided to learners in ways that provide access for them and press them into problem solving (thinking and acting) and collaborative and guided approaches to learning. He argues that for effective learning to occur, the learner needs to be doing the work.

Tennant follows on and clarifies a point that has been raised by previous contributors Matthews and Candy and then by Billett: if knowledge is embedded in specific situations, circumstances and environments (contexts) then just how transferable will these skills and knowledge be to other situations and contexts and can learners be expected to be able to do this kind of transfer?

Next, Andrew Gonczi provides a chapter on competency-based training. In this he provides a sketch of what he calls an integrated approach to competency based training. He provides the main advantage of a holistic or integrated competency based approach. This is an approach that provides a curriculum and training framework which links practice to theory in more coherent ways than currently exist.

The book rounds off with a final section of two chapters in a section on Futures. Here, Marsick and Watkins explain the work that they are doing in the USA at the moment. Their

> **' for effective learning to occur, the learner needs to be doing the work '**

efforts are associated with action learning and 'envisioning new organisations for learning'. In this they move on from the rhetoric of the learning organisation to explore a relatively new aspect of workplace learning the notion of 'intellectual capital'. For working people who have experienced downsizing and increased stress from restructuring and work intensification, this concept may hold some potential for working people to gain some power as we enter the knowledge era.

Intellectual capital is the idea that a workplace or organisation's major resource is in the heads of the people that work there and that all this intellectual capital, the know-how associated with things like, work practices in an organisation, the culture of the organisation, walks out (leaves) through the front gate each night. This final section of the book closes with a chapter from John Garrick who attempts to draw some aspects of the discussions and debates together. Garrick argues that there are four influential discourses identifiable as impacting upon workplace learning these are human capital theory, experience-based learning, cognition and expertise, generic skills, capabilities and competence. He goes on to say that overarching discourse that centres markets is in turn influencing these. Hence the four discourses he lists can be considered sub discourses of that associated with the importance and prominence of the market.

Clearly there is much here to be considered—the challenge of our job is to work out what it all means for our daily practice.

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Innovation and change in language education—a survey of the revised CGEA and curriculum development

by Damien Lewer

In this article, Damien Lewer provides us with some insights into what teachers think about the CGEA seven years since its introduction.

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to survey teachers using the Certificates of General Education for Adults (CGEA) to find out what they thought was its impact on their curriculum development. Studies published prior to the release of the re-accredited CGEA (1996), suggested teachers felt constrained by the competence statements, especially in the Numeracy stream. (Sanguinetti:1994; McCormack:1994; Adult Basic Education Resource and Information Service [ARIS]:1995) This research was designed to find out how teachers were managing with the re-accredited document and whether they still felt their practice was being impeded by the competence statements.

A written survey was used to look at the impact of the 1996 CGEA competencies on curriculum development within the ALBE department of a Melbourne TAFE college. The main focus of the research was on how teachers developed their curriculum and whether or not they felt they were constrained in this by the CGEA competencies. They were also asked if they felt that the CGEA prevented them from following good teaching practice.

Results

The first two questions were used to ensure that teachers were in fact teaching the CGEA and in which streams. Most of the teachers were quite familiar with the CGEA and experienced in its use.

Questions 3 and 4 asked how many years they had been teaching and the nature of their teacher training.
The surprising results amongst these were the number of years teaching experience. Four categories were provided: up to 2; 3–5; 6–10 and 10+. There were none at all in the first two categories, seven teachers having 6–10 years and thirteen having taught for 10+ years. The interesting question that this raises is where are the new, less experienced teachers? While this was not a concern of this research, it is nonetheless an important question.

Question 5 was: How do the competence statements of the CGEA affect what you teach?
Surprisingly, none of the twenty responses were critical of the CGEA. Here are some representative comments from the surveys: (Note: the survey questionnaires were numbered 1-20)

"Provides a framework which gives you a direction …"[19]

"They give a focus to my assessment … They are just one of the things that affect what I teach …"[15]

"They do not restrict activities in any way. Rather activities can be slotted against competency statements to achieve outcomes."[18]

Question 6 asked: Do they assist you in developing your curriculum or do they prevent you from following good teaching practice?
teachers were again mostly positive with very few noting any complaints:

"They assist me; they give me a framework within which to operate but sometimes they are not part of my teaching practice. I teach these literacy students what they require alongside the CGEA criteria."[14]

"They can be very useful, if not they can be ignored …"[11]

"Nothing prevents me from following good teaching practice. Competence statements are a guide—in our situation student needs determine what is taught."[3]

These responses appear to contrast sharply with a lot of what was reported earlier in Sanguinetti's (1994) study and the ARIS review (1995). This group of teachers reported that they were very much on top of the CGEA competence statements and they were selecting their curriculum as they have always done: with students' needs paramount, guided by the teacher, the trained professional educator.

Several issues must be noted here, firstly that this survey has been done five years after Sanguinetti's research and

the ARIS review, and teachers may well have found ways to work within the constraints of the CGEA.

Secondly the CGEA was rewritten for re-accreditation in 1996 and problems previously identified were taken into account. Marr, in her Research Project into the Numerical Stream (1998) suggests that teachers generally regard this as a more workable document. (Marr 1998:29).

Thirdly, this research is limited in its ability to provide conclusive information (this is discussed in more detail later) and it might be that the differences are caused by differences in the survey methodology. The Sanguinetti (1994) research consisted of 14 teachers keeping diaries over a number of weeks and 11 additional teachers being interviewed in depth. These teachers were selected from a range of providers, both urban and rural, from TAFE and community-based settings, and provided a broad representation of the field. The Marr (1998) research similarly was broad based to survey a representative sample and involved personal taped interviews.

> ' [teachers] were quite capable of using what was good in a curriculum and leaving aside what was not needed '

The scope of this research however, was limited to a brief 10–15 minute written response and it was restricted to twenty teachers, all within an urban TAFE setting. Notwithstanding this, the findings are still significant and demonstrate an encouraging degree of teacher satisfaction working with the CGEA and even positive benefits in some cases.

Question 7 asked teachers if the competence statements of the CGEA assisted them in developing curriculum or if they prevented them from following good teaching practice.
On five of the twenty surveys this answer was left blank, but of the remainder all were positive. Here is a representative selection:

"They provide generally well-balanced outcomes."[6]

"I make sure that I develop activities that are varied. It is easy to slip into regular activities and overlook the competencies."[8]

"I suppose the different domains in R and W … (illegible) … teachers to focus on a variety of texts, rather than simply, say, self-expression."[13]

It must be said that many of these responses from teachers show a depth of understanding of this area being surveyed and a thoughtfulness which suggests that a good deal of importance can be attributed to the views expressed. It is important to point this out in light of the writings of Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) that this type of small-scale survey may not produce the best research data compared with the structured interview due to " … greater flexibility and ability to extract more detailed information from respondents." (Hitchcock and Hughes 1995:154)

Question 8 asked: What do you use for a curriculum?
A selection of responses:

"I have a plethora of appropriate materials in a graded collection"[1]

"Produce my own through negotiation with the students."[8]

"All sorts of realia, literacy resources etc. too numerous to mention."[12]

"We have developed various short courses under GCO, R + W, Oral Comm. etc…"[20]

Question 9 asked: Do you think the CGEA should also provide a curriculum?
There were nineteen responses to this question and twelve of them said 'no'. The five 'yes' responses were each cautiously qualified. (Two of the responses said both 'yes' and 'no' and one said 'n/a', steadfastly believing the CGEA to be the curriculum.)

"Yes—for consistency. No—by whom—for whom?"[4]

"No—It should be broad enough so as to be adaptable to a range of students—age, ability, background, aspirations— and courses—topics/areas, outcomes, justifications (what students hope to achieve from their course)"[10]

"Absolutely not. No curriculum could provide for the varied needs of literacy students. Teachers must have professional autonomy to decide course content."[13]

"Yes and no, sometimes good role models encourage people to mimic effectively, however it can also make people lazy and unimaginative …"[19]

Question 10 asked: Is it possible for you to teach what you want and fit it into the learning outcomes?
Nineteen teachers answered 'yes' to this with one answering 'no'. This was really a pivotal question in this research and does indicate that the teachers surveyed have reached a level of accommodation and ease working with the CGEA.

"Yes, because the learning outcomes are broad and fit many life skills."[2]

"Yes … the learning outcomes give you a standard not content."[5]

"Yes, the L.O.'s are pertinent and realistic to the language needs of the students."[14]

"Only to a certain extent, some things covered in the classroom are not covered in the l.o.'s but are necessary."[16]

"Yes, because it's only a framework not a curriculum."[18]

This is in stark contrast with the views expressed earlier by teachers working with the 1992 version of the CGEA:

"The problem with this is that every lesson had to fit the criteria of the Certificate … The students found producing these pieces of work patronising and useless."

"… it is impossible to fulfil the requirements of the frameworks without contriving the most unreal of tasks."

"One teacher referred to the process of 'rushing through' material that otherwise would have required more time spent on it, in order to meet performance criteria." (Sanguinetti 1994: 18-19)

Comparing the markedly different responses of these two surveys it is also apparent that the rewrite of the CGEA that produced the current 1996 version has made the CGEA a much more workable document, combined with teachers' experience with both versions of the CGEA over the past five years.

Question 11 was: What do you like about the CGEA: for teachers; for students; for coordinators?
The recurring themes that came up here were flexibility, framework and guideline. All twenty responses were favourable, and some were quite enthusiastic about working with the CGEA.

"It's flexibility - it can be interpreted to suit many different needs … "[2]

"It takes into account different abilities. It gives all students a chance at success … lot of freedom to move …"[5]

"Provides a framework/structure for the course and helps with planning lessons."[9]

"For teachers: Standardisation of process and task via moderation … For students: Attainments carried across institutes."[12]

"Teachers have to become more accountable in their teaching practices. … Students receive accreditation that is recognised in the workplace."[20]

Question 12 asked: What do you dislike about the CGEA: for teachers; for students; for coordinators?
Some teachers felt constrained by the CGEA, some commented that it was not suitable for low level students and there were several individual concerns.

"Not enough suggestions for interpretation of competencies."[4]

"For teachers—very restrictive, problems of moderation (time-consuming) … Students—doesn't always meet their needs … Co-ordinators—problems with record-keeping"[9]

"… doesn't allow for lower ability or extension activities."[10]

"Students: how long can attainment be valid e.g. low literacy students may not retain competencies. Teachers and coordinators: some students will not move for a long time—do courses reflect this?"[12]

"Teachers—sometimes you can get caught up in teaching the document and forget your learners needs. Not everything I need to teach fits into the CGEA" .[16]

"Modules are too long for our clients to complete. 80 hours is out of reach for many. This can inhibit interest from the onset of instruction."[17]

Question 13: Put yourself in the position of a new teacher, inexperienced in ALBE. Do you think the CGEA is a helpful framework to assist a new teacher or not? What are your reasons?
Some representative answers:

"No. Even as an experienced teacher it was not helpful … Need to work with it a while—to sort out how to use it effectively."[3]

"… new teachers (need) to be supported by experienced teachers … Some new teachers feel daunted by the framework and have difficulty understanding how to use it."[7]

"Yes … It provides a helpful framework to a program whilst allowing for a fair amount of teacher independence and creativity. It's not overly prescriptive and new teachers should be encouraged to develop their own ideas about literacy teaching, with the support of colleagues, whilst getting some guidance from the framework."[13]

"Yes it is. I am unaccustomed to prescriptive curriculum. It allows for teachers' creativity and colleagues should provide guidance and suggest material that will suit the client group…It's not enough for inexperienced teachers but then most people who come to ALBE do so after a good length of time in some other sort of teaching."[15]

Question 14 asked teachers if they had any other comments they wanted to make about how the CGEA affects their curriculum development.
Only half of the teachers responded to this question, many commenting that they had covered everything in their earlier responses:

"… the certificate allows me to cater for every student … the certificate encourages students to start from where they are at …"[1]

"Again, I think it's an excellent curriculum because of its flexibility and the broad variety of learning activities that it allows."[2]

> 'there is a high level of satisfaction for teachers who are currently working with the CGEA'

"Students are enrolled in level … according to their needs —thus curriculum developed according to needs of students." [4]

"I develop my curriculum thematically so I try to tie the CGEA in with that planning. I try to include the learning outcomes." [8]

"The majority of the l.o.'s are easy to develop curriculum around. A minority are challenging and cause me to be innovative and creative in developing curriculum. Overall a satisfactory framework to teach within." [14]

"… I use the CGEA to provide me with a more detailed focus on, for example, the features of text … It has encouraged me to teach language with attention to detail and to consider the application of things such as systemic functional linguistics and genre as opposed to process writing which coloured my days in Secondary." [15]

Conclusions and recommendations

Sanguinetti found in her research into the 1992 CGEA that:

> "The introduction of the CGEA has contributed positively to the development of adult literacy and basic education in Victoria notwithstanding a number of difficulties experienced by participants in this project."

> "… The discourses with which the majority of project participants (including myself) identify and which are reflected most strongly in this report are those of pedagogical good practice, learner-centredness and student needs."

> "The CGEA has "brought ALBE in from the margins". It has raised its profile by giving it a coherent framework and a greater role in public educational policy … increased professional awareness … [and] … Students now have … a recognised credential … (and) pathways … (in) the wider educational system … [It has] introduced greater rigour into curriculum planning … Moderation processes have been very successful … [and] … teachers have been through a phase of intensive reflection on their practice …" (Sanguinetti 1994:46-47)

Marr found in her 1998 research into the CGEA (with a focus on numeracy):

> " … the satisfaction of the respondents with the revised document

> …a variety of approaches to teaching and learning allowed by the revised document…

> …the revised document enhancing teaching practice…

> …the importance of moderation…" (Marr 1998:29)

The conclusions drawn from this research do support those of Sanguinetti (1994), Marr (1998) and ARIS (1995). The degree of teacher satisfaction in working with the CGEA is quite high and has certainly improved since the Sanguinetti (1994) research. There were many comments from teachers showing that they were quite enthusiastic about working with the CGEA.

It must be borne in mind however, that all of the teachers surveyed had 6–10 or 10+ years of teaching experience. The cautionary comments made by these teachers about the level of support and mentoring that new inexperienced teachers require must be considered.

Question 9 which asked: Do you think the CGEA should also provide a curriculum? remains an important one. Teachers were overwhelmingly against the CGEA providing a curriculum. The evidence of the CGEA from its inception in 1992 up to the present day shows what has become of an innovation that was very poorly introduced. It was a 'second-order' change at introduction (that is, it was introduced 'cold' to the field) and then was substantially rewritten in 1996 (Fullan 1991:29) and is now widely regarded as a good framework in the ALBE field. Teachers have stated that they are well able to work within its limitations and at the same time benefit from its good points.

Perhaps the same would be true if some curriculum materials were made available alongside the CGEA. Perhaps 'curriculum' is the wrong word here. Marr, in her conclusions section, "Suggestions for Improvement" said:

> "There were many requests for more examples of assessment and learning tasks, perhaps in the form of an addendum to the document. Teachers said that those already in the document were very helpful and called for more in order to provide variety for their students." (Marr 1998:32)

It is very clear from the reading of the responses to this survey that teachers were managing very well with the CGEA and were quite capable of using what was good in a curriculum and leaving aside what was not needed.

It seemed, when talking to teachers while distributing the surveys, that there was a tiredness and a lack of fight amongst teachers to continue to argue the case against the CGEA. This could be the reason that very little had been published about the revised CGEA since its introduction at the end of 1996. The overall shrinking of the numbers of teachers working in the ALBE field would also play a part here too. But the clear message that has come out of this survey is that there is a high level of satisfaction for teachers who are currently working with the CGEA.

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Foreign Correspondence

In this edition, we catch a glimpse of ALBE in the United States.

Adult Basic Education in Boston, Massachusetts, USA

by David Rosen and Steve Reuys

Some background

Boston, Massachusetts, is a city of approximately half a million people, immediately surrounded by a large number of other cities and towns that bring the population of the metropolitan area to around 2.75 million. The Adult Literacy Resource Institute (A.L.R.I.), where we work, is one of five Regional Support Centres in the Massachusetts System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES), with our centre serving specifically Boston and a small number of the surrounding communities

Boston is atypical of the rest of this country with regard to adult basic education services (which also includes classes for high school equivalency and English for speakers of other languages). Rather than providing the range of ABE services mostly through a single large agency or even a single type of agency (for example, the local school systems or the community college system), in the greater Boston area we can point to the diversity of our ABE provider system as one of our primary strengths. Here, most adult basic education classes are held at a large number of community-based organizations (CBO's). These organizations build on their ties to various neighborhoods and populations to provide services using a wide range of approaches, methods, and materials. On the other hand, there is one primary funding source for ABE programs-the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE), which has established certain standards that the programs which it funds must maintain. The intent is to take advantage of the benefits of both worlds: the creativity and community-connectedness of a diverse network of providers operating within a system that mandates certain common goals and quality standards.

In addition to the 50 programs in our region funded by the state DOE, there are also at least 100 other Boston area entities of one sort or another providing some sort of services in adult basic education. Some of them may receive funding from alternative sources, such as other government agencies, private corporations, foundations, etc., while some may be operating essentially without funding, using volunteers.

The students who attend these programs are fairly evenly divided between native English speakers, who are working on literacy, basic education, and high school equivalency, and immigrants and refugees, who are primarily focusing on learning English, with the latter constituting a slight majority. The teachers and other staff at programs come into this field on many, many different paths, with a wide variety of backgrounds, since there are now no specific requirements for who may work in the field. Consequently, in-service staff development is a major priority. The A.L.R.I., where we work, was first set up to meet this need as part of an Adult Literacy Initiative established by the city of Boston in 1983, and in 1989 it became part of the new statewide SABES system of staff and program development.

Issues Facing the Adult Literacy Field in Boston

One of the major issues for most teachers and administrators is funding. Adult literacy education in Boston—and throughout the country—has been under-funded for years. Recently, however, through astute advocacy from the field, and solid leadership and support within our state's Department of Education, we have brought about significant increases in state adult literacy funding. While adult literacy education resources are still far below those of public elementary, secondary and higher education, and there are still too few full-time positions with decent salaries and benefits, we have made some progress. In Massachusetts the cost per student has risen from a ridiculous level of $44 per student per year in 1982 to nearly $2,000 per student per year today, which is a quarter to a third of the cost per student for children in public schools. But low salaries, a frequent lack of health insurance and other benefits, insufficient job security, and a paucity of full-time jobs still mean that many excellent teachers leave the field. When staff experience the financial obligations which come with raising a family in Boston, where the cost of living is very high, they often have no other choice. This has led to an on-going and disappointingly high turnover of well-qualified teachers and other staff.

The increase in cost per student, however, has led to improved quality of programs. It has allowed, for example, a greater intensity of services (more hours of classes or tutorials per week) and to higher rates of retention/persistence among students. We believe that the large investment in program and staff development which our state has made over the past decade has had an impact on

teacher and program quality, although this is very difficult to measure.

Another issue is a tension between government-driven initiatives which hope to address such social problems as welfare-to-work or upgrading workforce skills and many practitioners' interest in participatory, empowerment, social change and community-based approaches to adult learning. With government funding come services targeted to specific populations, increased accountability (including problematic automated management information systems) and in some cases, standardization. These can be at odds with a practitioner's desire to meet the needs of adult learners as learners and teachers see them. Employment-related funding, for example, cannot be used to support adult learners' goals of reading books to their children or grandchildren, supporting them more in school, reading the Bible, or getting a high school diploma simply to be able to hold their heads up high. One particularly painful issue is that women who are "transitioning from welfare to work" are actively discouraged from pursuing education until they are working. Many then have no time to fit in classes or tutorials between work and family responsibilities. Although they are off the dole—for the time being at least—without a high school diploma and some post-secondary learning or training they are trapped in working poverty.

> **Another issue is a tension between government-driven initiatives ... and community-based approaches to adult learning**

Rising standards also raise a number of issues. Almost no one would disagree that we should hold high (but reasonable) standards for adults as well as children in school. The standards for K-12 public school education are rising in Massachusetts through state Education Reform legislation and its curriculum reform effort, and the standards for adult basic education are also being raised. It will soon be considerably more difficult for adults—and children—to obtain a high school diploma in Massachusetts. One significant concern is that, in order to meet these higher standards, we need to figure out how to enable adults, who often have work and family responsibilities which prevent them from coming to classes more than six-to-eight hours per week, to spend more time on task outside of class. As one part of the solution to this, several programs in Massachusetts are exploring the possibilities for "anywhere/anytime" education, which uses television broadcast, computer, Internet and other technologies to make learning available to students whenever and wherever they want.

Teacher certification also continues to be an issue. After two decades of debating about whether or not to have teacher certification specifically for adult basic education teachers, the field has finally reached a compromise that certification should be available but not mandatory. The Massachusetts Department of Education is now in the process of developing a certification option.

Teaching and Learning: Current Methodologies

Not surprisingly, given the diversity of the adult basic education provider network, Boston area programs demonstrate and employ a wide variety of teaching philosophies, curricula, methodologies, and materials. Some are largely skills-based or competency-based, while others are highly learner-centreed or holistic in approach. Some efforts toward standardization are currently underway in Massachusetts, as part of the Education Reform process, through the development of overall "frameworks," or guidelines, for adult basic education curricula. However, each program (and, in many cases, each teacher) remains generally free to develop the specifics of its own curriculum.

In one sense, goals for the ABE system have not changed dramatically; students still want to learn to read, write, and do math better, to pass the GED (the high school equivalency exam), to learn English. But at the same time, curricula have been broadening, and new approaches to achieving these goals are being developed. Many teachers are using more content-based and project-based approaches—that is, developing basic skills within the context of working on a particular content focus, such as history, or a particular project, such as writing anti-smoking materials for the community. Also emerging as a particular challenge is how to teach more interactive science, given very limited budgets and virtually no access for adult basic education students to science labs and equipment.

In another sense, however, student goals are beginning to change, at least for some. As our economy moves increasingly toward a situation where decent jobs require higher and higher levels of basic skills, many students are now realising that getting a GED or other type of alternative high school diploma may no longer be sufficient as a final goal and are therefore hoping to continue their education into college or vocational training programs. ABE programs are beginning to work together with these post-secondary institutions to develop classes that will help students prepare for and successfully make these transitions.

What's considered a possible setting for learning is also being expanded. Family literacy—the idea that adults and children can work together on reading and writing and provide support for one another—is a concept being implemented in a variety of ways. Although there is something of a standard approach being promoted at the federal and state level (which includes the four components of adult education, children's education, parenting education, and parent-and-child-together time), there are many variations on this theme, and a number of ABE programs are developing innovative ways to build on the strengths of families. The workplace is another arena that can be used, and some funding support has been available

to businesses and unions to provide workplace education. However, getting long-term buy-in from businesses—such that they are willing to devote their own resources to continuing these programs when public funding runs out—is often difficult.

Teachers are also struggling with how to better serve certain populations which have particular needs. More training for teachers on assessing and teaching students with learning disabilities is now available. Native language literacy—that is, helping non-literate immigrants develop reading and writing skills in their native languages before transferring these abilities to English—is an approach being developed at a number of ESOL programs working with students who speak Spanish as well as other languages. Some students may need particular types of counselling support, related, for example, to domestic violence, yet many programs do not have staff with training and experience in dealing with these sorts of difficult issues.

Other factors are also having an influence on ABE here. Technology, of course, is having a huge impact. In large part this means computers, which are being employed as tools for using educational software, for working on writing, for accessing the Internet, for doing desktop and electronic

publishing, and in a number of other applications. Technology can also mean something other than computers, as teachers, for example, encourage students' use (both viewing and production) of video. A number of teachers are also beginning to explore the implications for adult basic education of the theory of 'multiple intelligences'—a relatively new concept promoted by psychologist Howard Gardner which says that, instead of there being a single type and a single measure of intelligence, there are actually seven or eight (or more?) distinctly different forms of intelligence that people manifest in varying degrees.

We've tried to describe in these pages what the field of adult literacy and adult basic education is like here in the small corner of the United States called Boston, Massachusetts. Of course, it's very difficult to know just would be most likely to capture the interest of a related audience half-way around the world, but we do hope we've at least partially succeeded in doing that for our Australian colleagues.

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Open Forum

In this edition's Open Forum, Marie Emmitt responds to Kerry Hempenstall.

A response to Kerry Hempenstall

Introduction

I believe in the importance of knowledge of letter-sound patterns (phonics) for learning to read but I was perturbed by many aspects of Dr Kerry Hempenstall's article ("The role of phonics in learning to read: what does recent research say?") in *Fine Print*, Vol.22, No. 1, 1999. The article falls into the trap of many articles that derive from narrow ideological viewpoints where claims are frequently made calling on research as evidence but the research details are not provided or research is selectively chosen.

I could comment on the distorted claims made about the nature of Whole Language and accusations levelled against the philosophy with no evidence provided but I will limit myself to comments about:

- the danger of uncritically accepting the directions of the different state legislation in USA;
- the validity of some of the research re phonemic awareness, and
- recent research on phonics and whole language classrooms.

The dangers of uncritically accepting international trends

Hempenstall refers to the USA Reading Excellence Act (1999) and policy changes that are occurring in many states of America and in the UK. The policy changes in some instances have lead to the mandating of curriculum in schools and teacher education courses. Much of this has occurred as a result of concerns about test scores in the different states plus astute lobbying by certain groups. California for example obtained the lowest test scores so there has been an outcry and criticism of whole language which had previously been mandated. But you need to look below the surface. During the time that test scores declined, funding was reduced to schools and libraries, class sizes increased and minimal Professional Development was provided for teachers to become conversant with the mandated curriculum. In addition, California has a very mixed multicultural student population. At the same time there has been minimal publicity or examination of what factors operate in the successful states. Over the last fifteen years

> **' many who argue for phonics ... ignore a whole history of research into early literacy instruction '**

in Maine for example, which was one of the top achieving states, schools have been changing their reading programs and raising their test scores through three statewide initiatives:

- a change from using reading textbooks to literature based instruction
- a movement towards daily instruction in writing
- the implementation of Reading Recovery as an intervention program. (Power, 1999).

None of this is mandated. "Maine has a long and rich history of local control" (Power, 1999, p.20). What is happening in the two states is very different! We need to determine what the real causes are of reading failure.

What is of grave concern is that the Reading Excellence Act (1999) acted on recommendations from research that had not been peer reviewed. Other researchers experienced great difficulties in accessing information for this purpose (Taylor, 1998). As a result, the major literacy associations signed a joint statement condemning the notion of the Bill; the establishment of a single definition of reading or research in funding criteria for preservice or inservice teacher education and professional development programs; the establishment of a national reading curriculum/program; the imposition of a research agenda that restricts investigation to any single definition of reading or any single definition of research; the bypassing of traditional standards and procedures for peer review, or the framing of a law or program that would in effect provide substantial advantage to any commercial reading program; and the holding by any person of an advisory position with any agency or Congress which could personally profit from the legislation or regulation. What is of concern here is that three of the key researchers of the projects that underlie the Act are also authors of commercial reading programs such as Open Court and Reading Mastery—a reinvention of DISTAR (Taylor, 1998).

The validity of the research

Questions can be levelled at the validity and reliability of the research that supposedly underpins the claims about the specific methods and programs for teaching phonics, in particular phonemic awareness. Taylor (1998) in a very detailed and scientific analysis of the research into phonemic awareness shows that:

"the contention that phonemic awareness must be taught directly and that children need explicit instruction in phonics is less of a scientific 'fact' than an exercise in political persuasion" (Taylor, 1998, p.xxii).

She demonstrates how most of the studies supporting early phonemic awareness training are interconnected, with one study building on another.

A cites B in support of her rigorous scientific procedures; B cites C. C cites D; D cites B; and B then cites them all, including himself, in support of his arguments. Thus if the research studies of A and B are fundamentally flawed, so must the research of C and D. (Taylor, 1998, p.6).

Taylor found that only a small number of studies (Stanovich 1986, Stanovich et al 1984, 1995, Adams, 1990, Foorman et al, 1998) are central to the idea that we should specifically teach phonemic awareness skills to young children. She was able to analyse these studies and she certainly found that each referenced each other and used misleading citations. She also found that much of the research was not scientifically rigorous, it did not respond to the social, cultural and intellectual lives of the children, the hypotheses were not properly tested, there were confusions between correlation and causation, and there are alternative explanations for the results. Allington and Woodside-Jiron (1998) also examined much of the same research and reached similar conclusions. In addition they claim that there is no research evidence to support the primacy of decodable texts.

Recent research about phonics and whole language

Many who argue for phonics first and explicit instruction of phonemic awareness tend to ignore a whole history of research into early literacy instruction (such as Clay, Dyson, Ferreiro, Y. Goodman, Hanna, Strickland). However I want to focus on two recent pertinent studies. One is a study of innercity children's interpretations of reading and writing instruction in the early grades in skills-based classrooms and whole language classrooms (Dahl and Freppon, 1995). One of the findings in this study was that children from both types of classrooms knew a similar amount of phonics, but that the children in the whole language classrooms were more strategic in how they used the phonic knowledge. To me this is a significant finding. Phonics is not an end in itself but knowledge to be used for word recognition in reading and spelling for writing. It is useless having sophisticated phonic knowledge if you do not know how to use it. In addition, the children in the whole language classrooms enjoyed reading and writing more.

The other study examined phonics instruction and student achievement in whole language first grade classrooms (Dahl,

> the children in ‘ the whole language classrooms were more strategic in how they used the phonic knowledge ’

Scharer, Lawson and Grogan, 1999). This study examined the nature of phonics teaching in whole language classrooms. Two outside auditors reviewed and monitored site selection, data collection and data analysis procedures. One auditor was a prominent phonics researcher, the other an equally prominent whole language researcher. The results demonstrated that a wide range of skills and strategies dealing with phonics was taught in a systematic way. That is, the instruction was deliberate, planned and intensive in at least two ways. First, phonics teaching was intensive in its frequency of occurrence, amount of attention from the teacher, and inclusion across a variety of instructional events during every day of observed instruction. Intensity was also demonstrated as teachers provided individual instruction based upon the students' current reading and writing projects and their specific patterns of development. The achievement outcomes for this study supported the efficacy of the kind of phonics instruction that the children received in these whole language classrooms with children across the range of entering knowledge made considerable gains on measures of decoding and encoding knowledge. This finding contrasted strongly with the study by Foorman, Francis, Fletcher, Schatschneider & Mehta (1998). The work of Foorman and others has been influential in providing evidence for phonics first types of programs and the policy changes in the Reading Excellence Act. Hence the findings of this study throw doubt on Foorman's recommendations and the resultant policy changes.

Conclusion

As I commented at the beginning I do believe in the importance of phonics for early literacy. But we do have to consider what phonic knowledge beginning readers need and what we can best do to help them acquire this knowledge. This does not mean some packaged commercial program. For me it is essential that teachers possess a sophisticated knowledge of the relationship between letters and sounds. Then they will be in the best position to determine what assistance their students need. Not all beginning readers (adults or young children) will need the same assistance. We need to be sceptical about much so called research evidence and put some faith in our own professional knowledge and expertise.

There seems to be a correlation between phonemic awareness and reading success but the research does not clearly demonstrate that early explicit teaching is necessary for all students. In fact some research indicates that phonemic awareness may be a result of learning to read (Goswani & Bryant, 1990; Perfetti, Beck, Bell & Hughes, 1987).

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to name but a few. There have been no studies conducted in Australia that look at the long-term effects that education programs in prison have on prisoners after release. Until such investigations are carried out, we will never really know whether we're on the right track, or not!

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Policy update

While reasonable steps have been taken to check all of the information in the document, it should not be relied on as the basis for making bookkeeping or accounting decisions in relation to the forthcoming GST. References to authoritative sources of information are listed at the end of the complete document which is available on the ACAL web site - www.acal.edu.au

Implications of the GST for ACAL & other Community Sector Organisations

1   An ABC of the GST

Organisational status generally irrelevant In the GST system 'charities', 'not for profit organisations' or 'public benefit institutions' are subject to the GST in respect to those of their activities which are deemed to be 'commercial' activities, and which have not been made subject to GST exemption (eg. most education and health delivery).

One of the underlying issues of concern to the community sector as a whole is that the new tax system undermines the standing of public benevolent institutions and fails to recognise appropriately the role of such 'civil society' organisations in building and maintaining social capital.

Hence the precise legal status of bodies such as ACAL is of less importance under the GST system than the actual activities carried out. Although a major effort was made during the Senate Inquiry process to have educational organisations as such exempted from the GST, this has been resisted. The Government argues that some activities of some educational organisations could, if this concession were made, compete unfairly with private providers who would not be eligible for any exemption.

A tax on the supply of goods and services

Existing indirect taxes have been levied mainly on the sales of goods, at a variety of different rates, which are in general not known or understood by the public. This wholesale sales tax system (WST) has included a range of exemptions for particular categories of organisation. Charities, and organisations providing education, for example, have in general been free of sales tax.

The GST by contrast, levies taxes on the supply of both goods and services, thereby significantly 'broadening the

base' of tax collection. Services now account for some two thirds of GDP. At the core of the GST system is the concept of 'taxable activities' - essentially the supply of goods and services by any enterprise 'for a consideration'. The type of organisation involved in the supply of goods and services is essentially irrelevant.

The GST model that the Government has chosen is the Value Added Tax (VAT) model, in which tax is paid at each stage of the value adding chain. Registered GST entities in this chain can, however, reclaim the full GST paid on their inputs, and must pass on to the Tax Office all GST collected on their sales. In this system it is the end-users, the final purchasers of goods and services, who actually pay the tax. It is a tax on private consumption, with the responsibility for its collection imposed on business entities.

'Input' and 'output' tax

GST registered entities will pay GST on their purchases—generally referred to as input tax, and charge GST on their sales—generally referred to as output tax.

The kinds of purchases that non-profit community associations make might include such things as communications and information technology equipment and software, office cleaning, maintenance of equipment, stationery, graphic design and printing, insurances, rent, staff, and vehicles. Employment costs are exempt from GST, as tax is levied on incomes through the PAYE system. GST at 10% will be payable on most other items.

The kinds of sales that non-profit community associations make might include such things as memberships, conferences enrolments, publications, professional development enrolments, and research results. All such sales by a registered entity will include a 10% GST.

GST Registration

Businesses with total annual sales of more than $50,000, and non-profit organisations with total sales of more than $100,000 are required to register with the Australian Tax Office (ATO) for GST purposes.

'Non-profits' with total sales of less than $100,000 may opt to register. If they do not, they will not have to charge GST on their sales, and they will not be able to claim back the GST paid on their purchases. They will effectively be treated as final consumers.

Why would an organisation choose to register?

The most compelling reason would arise in a situation in which the amount of GST paid on purchases would be greater than the amount that the organisation would collect on its sales. This is likely to be the case for those organisations, such as education providers, whose sales are substantially GST-free. In any such situation a GST refund can be claimed. If, however, the amount of GST paid on purchases were less than that collected on sales then the

organisation would incur all the compliance costs associated with the GST, without the benefit of a refund.

Complexities will arise for organisations that have annual turnover close to the $100,000 threshold. Organisations in this situation may decide to register.

Government 'grants' and government 'purchases'
Some confusion persists in relation to the components to be included in the assessment of 'total sales'. It includes membership fees and purchases of services by governments, but excludes donations and government grants. The distinction between a government grant and a government purchase of services (or goods) seems still to lack clear definition.

Governments have been moving away from disbursing financial support to organisations by means of grants. Such arrangements are being replaced increasingly by contracts for supply of specified services. This is the case for example with the long-standing 'Grant-in-aid' paid to Adult Learning Australia (formerly AAACE); an annual global grant amount has now been 're-packaged' as a fixed term contract (three years) for the delivery of certain agreed services. Any contract associated with a government purchase of services should make clear by reference to 'deliverables' that purchase is involved. The supply of such services will be taxable activity.

Presumably other forms of government disbursements to associations to support their operations, which are not purchases, will be 'grants', which are not subject to GST.

In other words, when government agencies purchase goods or services (from GST registered bodies) they will have to pay GST. The organisation from which the goods or services are purchased will record the GST paid, and remit it to the Tax Office. The purchasing government agency will claim a refund of the amount of GST paid. Transactions of this type, between two registered entities, therefore have no net GST effect. There is a marginal 'cash flow' benefit to the supplier, who can hold the GST collected for up to 110 days before having to remit it to the ATO.

Invoice based administration
For those entities which are either required, or choose to register, the GST system will be invoice based. All GST bearing transactions will require an invoice recording GST paid, and these invoices will constitute the basis for making and substantiating GST remittances or refund claims. Accounting systems, manual or electronic, will have to be adapted to handle this. Records will have to be kept for five years.

It can be expected that a significant proportion of the $500 million that has been allocated to assist with transition to the new tax system will be invested in the development of software and educational resources to facilitate the introduction and adoption of new accounting practices.

Honorary Treasurers and Auditors will of course need to have a good understanding of the GST system.

The Australian Business Number
All entities which register with the ATO for GST purposes will be assigned an Australian Business Number (ABN). The ABN will be a unique identifier for all Commonwealth Government compliance and registration requirements.

GST Returns
If ACAL becomes a registered entity, because its total sales exceed $100,000, or because it chooses to register, the organisation will be required to maintain records of all input tax paid, and all output tax collected. By the due reporting date the total of input tax paid will be subtracted from the total output tax collected, and the balance remitted to the tax office. If, as may be the case, input tax paid exceeds output tax collected, a refund can be claimed.

Two types of exemptions
In an economically 'pure' or 'ideal' GST system, goods and services of every conceivable type are subject to GST. This creates the widest possible base for collecting tax, and minimises administrative complexity. In practice, and for a variety of reasons, it is a typical characteristic of GST systems that some goods and services are declared to be GST-free, or 'zero-rated' (ie, not taxed at the standard 10%, but at 0%). This is often the case with respect to the 'essential of life'.

The Government always proposed that most education and health provision and charitable activities would be GST-free. As a result of the agreement with the Democrats, basic food will now also be GST-free, as will most adult and community education. The intensive lobbying during the Senate Inquiry process to have books added to the list of GST-free items has so far, however, failed.

2   Issues of particular relevance to ACAL

Professional development
The existing legislation differentiates 'professional or trade courses necessary for entry into the practice of a profession or trade' (which may be delivered by a professional association) from 'on-going professional development undertaken outside the formal accredited education and training system'. The former are GST-free, the latter are not.

It has been pointed out however, that in the case of continuing professional education, it is probable that either the relevant fees will be paid by an employer, or the fee expense will be a legitimate 'self education' personal income deduction - for those who pay income tax.

Adult and community education courses
The present Bill uses accreditation by state/territory recognition authorities as the criterion for identifying those course which qualify as GST-free. The great majority of adult and community education (ACE) courses are non-accredited. The Democrats have secured Government agreement to

widen the scope of GST-free courses to include adult and community education courses conducted by recognised providers which are likely to lead to employment outcomes.

With strong support from the sector, the Democrats sought blanket GST-free status for educational organisations. This was resisted, leaving universities, colleges and schools having to deal with substantial compliance costs and administering a mix of GST-free, GST-liable, and GST-exempt activities.

Private tuition
Private tutors will have to include GST on their fees—unless they are engaged by a recognised educational institution to provide tuition in a GST-free course on behalf of the institution.

In practice most private tutors are likely to have few taxable inputs, and will generally have incomes from tutoring below the registration threshold of $50,000. In such a case they will not need to register, or, therefore, to levy GST.

Books
The failure of the Democrats to secure GST-free status for books has been a major source of surprise, and anger. The government has agreed to a Book Bounty scheme which will lower some book prices, and a new writers grants scheme In addition schools, libraries universities, professional bodies and businesses buying books will all get tax refunds.(The Australian June 2nd 1999).

Fund-raising
In the existing Bill fund-raising activities of registered bodies—such as fetes, lotteries, or the conduct of a school canteen—are GST liable. Input tax paid in relation to such activities can therefore be claimed back.

Membership fees
Membership fees are the price paid for the provision of goods and services by an association or club. They are to be GST liable. Associations such as ACAL remain free of course to adjust their membership fee levels, but at whatever levels fees are set, GST at 10% must be applied.

The particular complication arising for associations is when and how to introduce new fees schedules. In advising members of the changes required it should be borne in mind that organisational and associational members of a peak body, such as ACOSS for example, will be able (if they are registered bodies) to reclaim GST paid. Many individual members will continue to be able to obtain personal income tax deductions for membership fees paid to professional associations.

Recognition of prior learning
Under the existing Bill, assessment costs associated with RPL are to be GST free—so long as the assessment is carried out by an approved body (these have been specified), and the assessment is for the purposes of 'access to education, membership of a professional or trade association, registration or licensing for a particular occupation, or employment'

Research work
In the existing Bill there is no reference to academic research and scholarship. The scholarly work undertaken by academic staff as part of their normal duties does not constitute 'supply' and is not therefore a 'taxable activity'.

This is not the case however when research is undertaken under contract as part of a commercial transaction—by a university or by any other organisation. In such case the contractor, which may be a government agency, private business or community organisation, will normally be able to reclaim GST paid. The body undertaking the research will be able to reclaim associated input tax.

3   GST implementation planning guidelines

A set of general issues that should be addressed concerning ACAL's and other similar organisation's response to the introduction of the GST is in the complete version of this paper, on the ACAL website—www.acal.edu.au.

Alastair Crombie has been Executive Director of Adult Learning Australia for six years, and wrote Adult Learning Australia's submission to the Senate Inquiry into the GST.

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Beside the whiteboard

Chris Anderson is a numeracy teacher at Holmesglen Institute of TAFE. He talks here to Nick Gadd about his background and his thoughts on adult education.

What is your teaching experience?

I taught Mathematics, Chemistry and Computer Science for ten years in secondary schools, both rural and city, before commencing in my present position in 1989. Since then I've taught numeracy and computer studies in general education classes, mathematics and computing electives to E.S.L. students, and some computing modules in hospitality and tourism courses.

How did you become involved in Adult Education?

I was nearing the end of family leave and Dave Tout, numeracy guru, was looking to job share. We worked together for a semester before Dave moved on.

Has the opportunity to teach adults broadened your teaching skills?

Definitely. Although I'd taken a small number of non-traditional maths classes during my secondary teaching days, I mostly used a "chalk and talk" teaching style. Luckily I was able to attend some excellent professional development soon after beginning in adult ed. I also had Dave as a mentor.

Giving a meaningful context to the work, relating the work to past experiences, encouraging students to discuss problems and solutions, and making numeracy fun to help overcome maths anxiety, are some of the many valuable skills gleaned from this input.

As others have said previously, you also learn so much from your students and I've certainly found this is the case with adults. The many methods used to perform "in the head" calculations that people have told me has in itself been an education.

Am I right in saying that you enjoy your work and if so why?

I am pleased to be involved in adult education as it is extremely worthwhile and the wider community is increasingly valuing it. Seeing the joy in students when they experience success, become less hesitant and have their opinions considered seriously by others is rewarding. It is also rewarding when students value what they are offered.

My colleagues have considerable experience in adult education and each contributes generously to a team atmosphere. The funding sources for our programmes are relatively stable and hence there is less concern about job security. Those involved in our field who have less job security through inconsistent and inappropriate levels of funding are to be admired.

I've had many positive experiences through my work.

How are courses structured at your provider?

We have full-time classes (18 hours per week), part-time classes (10 hours per week.), evening classes (4 hours per week.) and weekend classes (4 and 10 hours per week.). Students enrolling for 4 hours per week usually undertake the Reading and Writing, and Oral Communications modules of the CGEA. Those in classes of longer duration study all four modules of the CGEA. We also offer classes for people with hearing impairment or for those who are mildly intellectually disabled (MID). Hearing impaired students study modules in the CGEA and the Certificate in Initial Adult Literacy and Numeracy is used to provide a structure for the MID class.

What makes adult education important?

This can be considered on many levels and from various angles.

Adult education is responsive, dynamic, pro-active, relevant and a leader in numerous ways. Needs-based learning is a given in this field. Whilst the term numeracy has long been a part of general education programmes it's only recently made an appearance in other educational arenas. The development, moderation and re-development of the CsGEA was impressive.

Adult ed. caters for the individual and allows educational access. It's able to address and service a wide range of abilities. It is a vital part of a society that considers itself to be democratic and sophisticated. More and more frequently the notion that people will become either information rich or information poor is taking hold as global changes to work patterns appear set to continue and the pace of technological change is ever quickening.

A strong vibrant adult education sector is important and will continue to be so.

Thanks for giving us your time Chris.