contents

This issue: ALBE in the community

Features

3 **Literacy and Community: social capital and its production of human capital**
by Ian Falk
Literacy makes a valuable contribution to our 'social capital.' But what is social capital, and how does it benefit from a higher literacy rate?

11 **Reframing the mother in family literacy**
by Kirsten Hutchison
Kirsten Hutchison discusses how family literacy programmes need to take in to account the literacy needs of mothers as well as children.

17 **Electronic communities**
by Ian Falk, with Sue Kilpatrick and Christine Owen
Electronic mail and the Internet are not as intimidating as some might think. The authors examine how email discussion groups involve similar dynamics to traditional methods.

20 **Culture, community and learning: a look at one community house**
by Cathy Donovan
A community house literacy programme can be more than an intellectual exercise. It can offer social and emotional support, which is invaluable in a multicultural society.

Regulars

25 **Foreign Correspondence**
Literacy programmes in Ontario may be weakened by new government standardisation measures.

28 **Open Forum**
Laila Fanebust talks about the Whittlesea Youth Commitment, and Michael Chalk shows how one Adult Community Education group discovered email.

32 **Policy Update**
A look at two new state government initiatives for adult and community education.

34 **Beside the Whiteboard**
Jan Kindler talks to *Fine Print* about Sweden's unique Folk High Schools.

Publication Details

Editor: Bob Keith

Fine Print Editorial Group: Libby Barker, Chris Anderson, Fran O'Neill, Alan Brooker, Alana Brennan.

Subscription and Advertising Inquiries:
VALBEC
34 O'Farrell St,
Yarraville, Vic, 3013
Telephone: (03) 9687 3927
Facsimile: (03) 9689 0470
Email: rkeith@melbpc.org.au

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mick@digitalenvirons.com

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Editorial

Welcome to the first edition of the new millennium! Throughout 2000, *Fine Print* will be considering four key areas of adult education identified by ACFE: the idea of Community; the learning of science; Koori education; and the development of pathways in adult education.

In this edition we tackle the 'Community'. There has been a lot of discussion recently about the idea of community and we suspect that this is because of a sense that communities are under threat. Just how the ALBE field engages with this tension is the key question we seek to raise here.

For Ian Falk, community and literacy are inextricably linked—community *is* interaction and interaction *is* literacy (and numeracy). Literacy is a crucial part of the 'social capital' that leads to the development of 'trust, social cohesion, economic outcomes and the common good'. Central to the interaction that leads to a sense of community is the concept of 'purpose'. It is that sense of shared purpose that ALBE teachers are constantly seeking—we are daily engaged in the building of trusting communities.

However, Falk argues that there needs to be concerted action to achieve trusting communities. He maintains that there needs to be genuine partnerships between 'communities, governments and the private sector to establish, document and promote the literacies and numeracies demanded by a lifelong learning society'. Hopefully ACFE's projects, *Learning Towns* and *Support for Neighbourhood Houses & Community Providers*, discussed in this edition's Policy Update section, will provide some of that direction.

Kirsten Hutchison's article on family literacy is a case study of a developing 'community' of women (parents of children at a cluster of local schools and kindergartens) in the western suburbs of Melbourne. Hutchison's account presents a group with a very clear sense of shared purpose which incorporates both the literacy needs of the parents and children. Indeed, the classroom and the 'community' come together as they conduct a local community study which identifies the need for a secondary school in the area. Literacy and the community are very clearly connected here.

The third feature article discusses a recurring theme of *Fine Print*—the affect on literacy learning of the New Learning Technologies. Ian Falk, with colleagues Sue Kilpatrick and Christine Owen, seeks to analyse whether or not electronic networks can really be called 'communities'. The authors ask us to consider three questions when thinking about this issue: whether or not the online communication is 'rich in *interaction*'; whether or not there is a clearly delineated *territory* or shared purpose; and whether or not there is a shared *identity* that acts as 'bonding device' for the group. They suggest that if the answer to these questions is 'yes' (and for youth in particular it seems this is often the case) that there may be little difference between the intensity of the interactions in these and face-to-face 'communities'.

In the final article, Cathy Donovan provides an account of a community house as a microcosm of the broader community. Donovan presents a liberal-multicultural community which celebrates difference—even where this difference might be uncomfortable. Again, the necessity of building a trusting community is emphasised. There is a suggestion however, that due to funding shortfalls, the House relies on people volunteering a certain amount of their time. This is a reflection of the strength of the 'community' that is established there, but also represents a breach of the broader commitment from government and business that Falk suggests is necessary for enduring social capital. We look forward to such a commitment.

Just how we connect what happens in the classroom with the broader community is a constant of teaching. We hope that this edition of *Fine Print* provides some stimulating discussion about how the two can be brought closer together.

The Editorial Group

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.

a journal of adult english language and literacy education

Literacy and Community:

Social capital and its production of human capital

By Ian Falk

Literacy and the concept of community are mutually dependent, says Ian Falk. In this article he points out how higher literacy standards increase a community's 'social capital'.

The best laid plans …

The general theme of this paper is 'literacy, community and social capital'. The question I will address is how does the idea of 'community' relate to literacy—and learning in general—as a community activity and resource? In order to answer the question, I will start with a short commentary on existing views of 'community'. Then I will show how literacy fits into these ideas. Following this, I will broaden the discussion to talk a little about human and social capital, and show how the differences between human and social capital are embedded in society at present by reference to some research into learning and literacies in a rural community. The paper concludes with a discussion about the points the research makes about the relationship between people, their places and their literacy needs in the new millennium.

Community, place and the ether

In the gloss caused by the electronic age's dazzling array of new technological artefacts, and in pursuit of establishing a distinction between 'old worlds' and the new, fast capitalist (Gee et al, 1997) society of instant global communication, it tends to be forgotten that people still live and work in *places,* and these places are geographic communities. Our networks may be more extensive, diverse and fast than before, but our bodies are always and irretrievably in one place at a time. Our identities are defined by who and what we come in contact with, and through what medium. Whether we are interacting in a group at our local sports club on a Sunday afternoon, whether we are an anonymous face interacting via specialised forms of language and text in a chat room on the Web, or whether we are pressing a point in a staff meeting at work, we are located and interacting in a place, at a particular time, about something, and using various texts and technologies to do so.

Our identities are linked to communities of place

As Wilkinson (1991) puts it, ' … social interaction defines territory, and not the opposite' (p.23).

Networks only happen through interaction—talking, listening, non-verbal communication, reading and writing. Literacies of interaction occur in all facets of our lives—workplaces, homes, sporting grounds, public forums, clubs and associations and so on. Matthews (1999), says that:

> No tribe, people or nation can even begin to come to an understanding of itself, its identity and its place in the world if it doesn't first know its own stories. (p.19)

They are woven through our community literacy practices as threads through fabric. But how can we get a handle on this elusive term 'community'?

In the final analysis, Wilkinson's (1991) definition of community is probably the most useful, since it relates community to interaction—and interaction *is* literacy in various forms:

> Sociological definitions emphasize interpersonal bonds such as shared territory, a common life, collective actions, and mutual identity. The essential ingredient is social interaction. Social interaction delineates a territory as the community locale; it provides the associations that comprise the local society; it gives structure and direction to processes of collective action; and it is the source of community identity … The substance of community is social interaction. (p.13)

The point to be made from the discussions of 'community' is its character as a field of social interactions between people and their identities as members of various groups. Their interactions are always and inevitably communicative, and the communication always involves verbal and non-verbal texts (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). These literate interactions are at the core of successful communication within and across groups and networks in society.

How does literacy fit?

Literacy (and yes, I include numeracy wherever I say literacy) is a fundamentally important resource in all kinds of social interactions. In Western society, to be literate and numerate involves much more than the basic skills associated with being able to read, write and calculate. There are many different contexts in which literacy skills are drawn on, in

workplaces and industry, communities, public life and for leisure. In each of these varied contexts, the literacy demands are equally as varied. In each context, the vocational education and training applications are equally important. The nature of the literate skills and knowledge required to access funds at an automatic teller machine differs in a wide variety of ways from those required to chair a business meeting.

To be literate and numerate in the world of today and tomorrow requires different and additional skills from the world of the 1900s. Managing employment, training and careers development in a rapidly changing and technologically-oriented world requires learning that diverges markedly in quality, duration and intensity from the traditions of schooling, education, training and learning of yesteryear. A particular form of lifelong learning society for Australia will be required. To achieve this learning society, genuine partnerships need to flourish between communities, governments and the private sector to establish, document and promote learning of the literacies and numeracies demanded by a lifelong learning society.

> 'the resources required for a community to build social capital are associated with knowledge and identity'

The forms of resources needed for effective interaction

The main forms of literacy entrenched in policy in Australia presently are components of *human* capital, simply 'basic skills', which, like other forms of capital, can be utilised without reference to their effects on the overall common good. Given our recognition both of the importance of physical capital (such as tools, place and technologies), and of our society's more recent flirtation with human capital, we seem to have missed on recognising the significance of the *social* capital required for effective social interaction and participation. People need to have the multiple resources to engage in critical social learning. And it is critical social learning that impacts directly on the development of trust, social cohesion, economic outcomes and the common good.

The word 'social' here is used not in the sense of socialising, but in the sense of people interacting in social groups in all aspects of life—work, leisure and public life. This is a crucial point to bear in mind as the ensuing discussion of research outcomes unfolds, since networks operationalise information and put it into circulation for others to access. In the case of the data reported later in this paper, it is the role of literate interactions in community activities that is seen to 'broker' the social capital resources of the community members. It is these literate resources that bring the knowledge resources (human capital) and identity resources together in the moments of interaction between people.

Social capital, learning and literacy

Bourdieu introduced the term 'social capital' to the sociological world in 1983 in his paper called 'Economic Capital, Cultural Capital, Social Capital' and it is now located in every major discipline that relates to social science, economics and sociology.

Portes (1998) observes that, '(W)hereas economic capital is in people's bank accounts and human capital is inside their heads, social capital inheres in the structure of their relationships' (p.7). These relationships are found in formal and informal associations—from the formal and informal clubs and associations, to the implicit networks encapsulated by 'old school tie', the hospital auxiliary, the email chat groups, to the neighbours over the fence and people we meet in the park. We are also talking about every other group, formal and informal, that we all belong to. It's not whether some of us belong to more or fewer networks that counts, it's the nature of those networks that seems to be important.

Our findings (Falk & Harrison, 1998; Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000) about the categories of resources that people draw on in their interactions as they make sense of their worlds include no real surprises. The two main groups are encompassed by the headings 'knowledge' and 'identity' resources. The identity resources encompass identity of self, others, groups, community, region, country and so on. They are the personal and social resources that participants draw on so as they may act in new roles, change their behaviour, be self-confident and willing to act for the common good of their communities. This research shows that knowledge and identity resources are crucial for the development of social capital.

The concept of 'purpose' was central both to our discoveries of the nature of social capital and its very definition. The purpose of the social project in hand defined the knowledges and identity resources which were drawn on and hence then valued as important. While Gee's (1996) 'Discourse' is held together by 'values', we find that these values are only given meaning by the purpose of project. That is, the values upon which the Discourse is premised are only called values because they are both shared by the participants in the ecology and clustered around a purpose. In the Discourse of, say, 'basketball', the shared values are associated with the purpose of 'doing' basketball.

We also found that many of the interactions had all the features of what we define as learning. Learning, in fact, permeated their most routine activities. People set about their activities in associational and civic life to achieve something (a purpose), to solve a problem or find something out. We have called these purposeful and constructive interactions 'learning', and that it is these interactions which produce social capital. The community groups observed often displayed characteristics of what may be called a 'learning community', which resonates with 'learning organisation' and has similar features. It also resonates with 'community

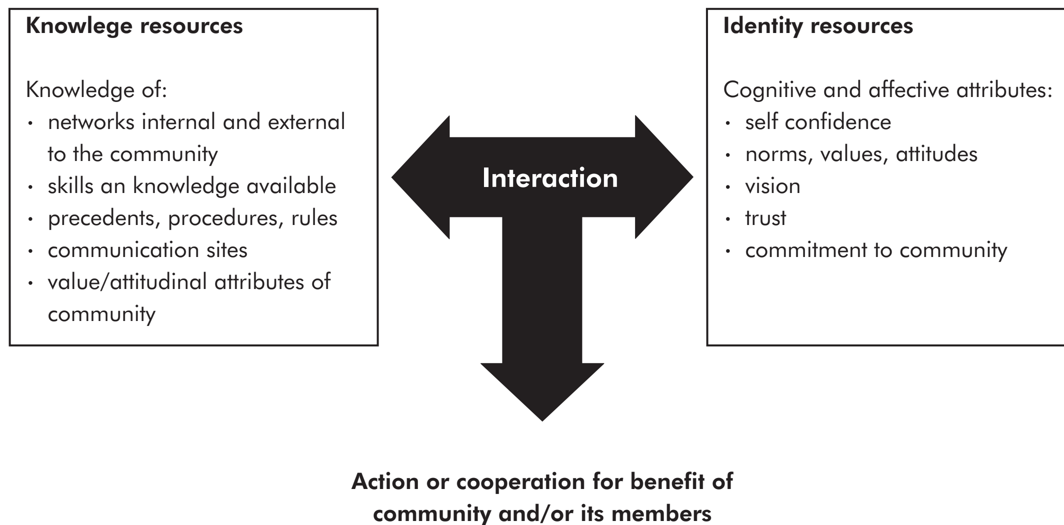

Figure 1: Building and using community social capital

of practice', and we have taken this generalisation further to call the groups in which this activity occurs 'communities of common-purpose', since it is the purpose which defines the knowledge/values of the group for purpose-related activity.

Therefore, we can argue that the resources required for a community to build social capital are associated with knowledge and identity, and that they require opportunities of different kinds to allow the verbal and non-verbal interactions to create the social capital. See figure 1.

Our research also tells us that the need to plan and provide for opportunities to interact, opportunities in which the appropriate (common purpose-related) knowledge and identity resources can be used, is often ignored or assumed. That is, without the interactions afforded by community events, activities, meetings and small and large interactions of all kinds, social capital simply cannot develop. Social capital is built as it is used.

Qualities of interaction

However, while the actual quantities of opportunities for interaction are vital, the qualities of those interactions are equally as important. For successful community learning to occur, not only do the resources need to come together in interactions (opportunities, events, activities), but the interactions need to have particular qualities, and these are the key ones:

Historicity and futuricity

Often unconscious, but crucial for decision-making and learning (Falk & Harrison, 1998), the use of historical memories of places, people (their skills and personality characteristics), and common resources are vital in making decisions about future courses of action. Historical knowledge enables new knowledge to be contextualised and applied.

Externality

Taking account of external information (including networks) and acting on it works for the common good. External networking also helps communities (actual and virtual) relate and adjust to broader social changes. Without the dimension of externality, closed communities have a greater likelihood of perpetuating local prejudices and other anti-social values.

Trust

Trust is an indicator of the presence of social capital. It develops as a by-product of the reciprocity and values, and in turn oils the production and use of social capital. Trust permeates all levels of our social world, and without it our society cannot achieve the social cohesion that many believe modern communities have lost (e.g., Kramer et al, 1996).

Social application of literacy and social capital

The networks, norms and trust of social interaction are given meaning and communicated through the literacy webs spun within a community (Falk & Balatti, 1999). Examples from both ends of the scale might help illustrate how social capital and literacy capacities of individuals and communities are interrelated.

We have drawn the data from one of the three communities referred to above which I called 'Together Town'. It is a predominantly white, middle class, conservative and Anglo-Saxon rural township. The township, as the focus of the surrounding community, is set in a picturesque river valley, and could be described as an historic village. There are many community activities and events, some of which attract national attention and patronage, and the local clubs and associations meet frequently and actively. The community is

vibrant—art and craft have become a significant cluster of activity in the community, having an annual focus in the craft fair. The town is also the recent winner of a prestigious national community award, and various tourism and numerous Tidy Town awards.

We now discuss interview data from two people living in Together Town whom I'll call Merle and Darren. They have very different formal education backgrounds, work histories and life experiences generally and they occupy different 'niches' in the community. But they hold similar positions of respect and power, influence and authority. Both Merle and Darren were participants in the research project because they had been nominated by at least three other community members as someone others would consider approachable and to whom they would go for information. In this sense they are valued community resources as knowledgeable and effective communicators. They were asked about how they had learned what they know.

> **'I go to someone else when I need a resource… and I have my people I go to, in my network to help me out as well'**

Merle is a 50 year-old businesswoman who has been living in the town for 25 years. For the last 20 years she has owned and worked in a health care business that is unrelated to the tertiary art history qualifications attained as a young woman. Since then she has completed other studies both for professional and personal enjoyment reasons. During her time in Together Town she has been an elected government representative, has been involved and continues to be involved in many community groups and organisations at local and state levels in both civic and professional capacities. She facilitated the formation of a local group 'a community of common-purpose' concerned with organic gardening and farming that has now become a state organisation with branches in many communities.

Merle talks about Together Town as follows:

> I like doing business here because I know my customers by name, and they trust me as I trust them. So they know if I say I will do this for you, I will do it, and the same with them, if they have something that I am interested in they will bring it in for me to read or they want to show me something, I know that I can trust they will do it, so that's good.

Darren is a 37 year-old man who works as a mechanic. He is one of a hundred or so Indigenous people in the community. His father is white and his mother is Indigenous. In Together Town Darren is sought out by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people for information, advice and opinion. His formal education ended before completing Year 9 and he explains that consequently he has had 'to take on learning ways of being able to live in this society'. Darren was born in this community as was his father. Both parents were community-minded people and Darren believes that his good standing in the community has its foundations in the community spirited history of his parents.

Words like 'learning' and 'learn' pepper his conversation and he is involved in schools as an educator in Aboriginal history and culture:

> I'm also … very involved with the Aboriginal Speakers Program which is actually going into schools, and that's a program that the Education Department has initiated over the last couple of years. And I was one of the people that they approached, and it's something that we feel that… by putting true blue… black fellas into the schools again we are still… we are very heavily governed by our Elders as to what we can teach and can't teach in the schools, and I've had extensive meetings with Elders as to what we are allowed to do, but… I think it can be a really good one. Children at a young age do not have a prejudiced set in their mind, and that's really great.

Darren goes on to talk about his strengths. It is interesting that the knowledge of language resources drawn on is so different from Merle's, yet their roles as social brokers, and their capacity to have an influence over their literacy practices, is so similar:

> What do I say was my strength? I definitely wasn't… a very educated man. I guess my strength had to come from within, from within my own personal self. And I guess the ability to learn quickly and adapt were always going to be handy when a guy was sort of low on the education part. If you can learn to adapt and learn new trades quickly I guess that helps. And I think just staying pretty practical and common-sense in my thinking.

We asked Darren and Merle what they thought their knowledge and skills were and how they went about sharing what they knew with others. In effect, these questions were asking Merle and Darren about their literacy practices and especially how their practices drew upon and generated social capital. Parts of their responses are reproduced below which are interwoven with a discussion in terms of the social capital model (Figure 1) presented earlier in this paper.

'I'm a purveyor of knowledge.' Social broker or knowledge broker?

1 Yeah. You get pinned down as being the person that's always there and 'She might know'. And in fact I probably do and I am a resourceful person. I have been trained to be resourceful because of the research work that I did in the past and still do. I have never lost that ability, and I like to pride myself on being a resource. This is the thing I am giving this community. If I went out of business selling

what I do today, I would still be the resource person. In fact I'd almost have to sit on that chair somewhere along the footpath and they'd say, 'She's still there, you can go and ask her if you want to'. But I don't mean to say that I'm a lynch pin it's just that because I've done a lot of things, read a lot things and am interested in so much, that it's there for people, and it's not mine to keep… That to me is the entire reward for being in the community like this. And heaven knows I go to someone else when I need a resource or need an answer and I have my people I go to, in my network to help me out as well.

2 I don't know everything but what I do have I will share with people, I have quite a large lending library here in the shop for various things people want to take home and learn about… and secondly you've got to listen, and you have to listen to what people want to know… by listening to them carefully you can usually find out 'what people want or need' and usually say, 'Hey, isn't this what you mean?'—'Yes, that's what I mean; you've got it'. And so you're just a wonderful person because you came up with a solution, but what you did is just turned their thoughts around and showed them what they knew, what they wanted in the end—they just didn't quite know how to say it, so I think that is what I do… I'm a purveyor of knowledge.

> 'this skill is not one of 'knowledge of what', but rather 'knowledge of who and how''

Merle is a good example of the social brokers that I found in these communities—those who broker knowledge through their own knowledge and identity resource-base. There is the explicit reference to the networks of social capital, which are cited as 'a resource' for information, the indications of reciprocity and commitment in the reference to sharing, and of course, the reliance on trust—'they trust me as I trust them' in the paragraph cited earlier. It is through these social brokers that the information required for particular valued purposes becomes focused as knowledge. But let us look more closely at what 'knowledges' are really being brokered.

The particular skill of being able to turn 'their thoughts around and showed them what they knew' indicates the interactive development of identity by putting what they knew into the words that they 'didn't quite know how to say'. Note, however, that this skill is not one of 'knowledge of what', but rather 'knowledge of who and how': Merle's brokering is in fact not the kind of 'knowledge broker' touted as being the worker of the future by Reich and others, whose use of the term implies a buying and selling of 'knowledge of what'. Rather, Merle is acting as a connector for two sets of literacy ecologies by the brokering of knowledge and identity resources that allow people to see themselves in a different role, as 'doers' of something new, of being prepared to take on a new task—that is, to take risks.

Such micro examples help show that the over-simplistic notion of 'knowledge broker' needs to be re-examined. They also help show how it is that the very acts of interaction, drawing on the knowledge and identity resources for the particular purpose in hand, are so woven into the 'literacy texts' of the occasion as to make their separation somewhat meaningless.

There is an argument that can be put that Merle is an exemplar of what a fine education and high levels of literacy can do for one. In one sense this is quite true. However, if one looks only at the literacy outcomes, and not also at the interactive resources, one could be deceived about the relationship between 'literacy-as-skills' and 'critical/sociocultural literacy'. Darren, it will be remembered, withdrew from school before the end of Year 9. Here is part of his story.

'Blessed with the gift of the gab.' School learning vs community learning

Darren talks about learning and school in the following extract. The discussion that follows it focuses on the ways in which formal learning and informal (or community) learning relate.

1 … my Dad used to often say I was blessed with the gift of the gab, you know, and my Mum… used to say it was the black fella in me, but… I share my skills in many ways.

2 I never classed myself as a guy with a whole lot of bloody skills, really, to share, I suppose… I've always thought my knowledge was quite limited due to my schooling education, but when I was probably 20 I would have said that I was low educated person, but at 37 I can sit back and have a look and say, well, I mightn't have achieved that academic status of passing Grade 10 and whatever, at that school, but I'm sure as hell I got through the 37 years old just as easy as what the next guy did, you know?

3 So 'pass on skills' is hard; I'd never classed myself as a guy that I've had to pass on a lot of skills. The only thing with my Aboriginal traditional culture—I do pass those on a lot. I've learnt a lot from my Elders, which was traditional, both traditional and contemporary… we tend to find that some of our traditional practices just are not possible any more because of the total difference… I learned a lot of those skills from my Elders and I do pass them down to our younger children and that's just done by Cultural Council, or being on the land, and they're shown those skills, taught them… and… passed through, in that manner.

4 I guess if you want to class football as a (set of) skills… I pass that on, I pass that on through the Together Town football club and in many years of involvement within the local community in football and cricket. We actually had a young fella who is now playing with the Brisbane Bears… He actually comes from my family as well, but not on the black fellas' side.

5 Pass those skills and knowledge down and I guess we do that in many ways, don't we? We can talk to them, and people can take the skills from that—with our tradition… you pass down those skills a lot by talking—but also by hands-on, showing the children and the young ones…

The difference between the white and black discursive worlds is a theme developed during this segment of text. The examples of perception of 'difference' shown here are evidenced in the use of pronouns (Paragraph 5, for example, the use of 'we' and 'our'). A person used to living in two cultures and therefore two sets of discourses and to drawing on different identity and knowledge resources in each will, it is presumed, have the capacity to reflect on the significance of the differences. This case demonstrates some of that reflection.

In Paragraphs 2 and 3, the talk focuses on the differences between formal ('schooling education') and informal or community learning ('learning a lot from my Elders'). There is explicit commentary on formal education: 'I mightn't have achieved that academic status of passing Grade 10 and whatever, at that school'. This is counterpoised immediately with a reference to his learning since school—his informal or community learning: 'but I'm sure as hell I got through the 37 years old just as easy as what the next guy did'. The phrase 'at that school' holds some tone of mild accusation in the use of 'that'. The counterpoising acts as a contrasting device, positioning formal and informal education as two opposites or binaries. Binaries form the groups of meaning-resources that conversationalist participants draw on as they jointly construct meaning in their interactions.

The language in the third paragraph shows a reflective transformation from the answer expected of his white world (paras 1 and 2), to the 'other' world of his traditional Indigenous community: 'I'd never classed myself as a guy that I've had to pass on a lot of skills' stems from the same discourse as the 'I never classed myself as a guy with… skills… I've always thought my knowledge was quite limited due to my schooling education' in Paragraph 2. The white and black worlds share discursive proximity in this talk which allows a transfer of discourse items embedded in white discourse (the 'skills' and 'knowledge' from formal education) to the Indigenous discourse: 'The only thing with my Aboriginal traditional culture—I do pass those on a lot'. Once again, this case reaffirms the deep divisions between the two literacy worlds of black and white, apparently created by the white culture's version of formally acquired skills. Once the transfer from one discourse to the other is made, the discourse items ('skills', 'knowledge') are seen to rapidly recontextualise and be colonised by the white world's language. For example, 'I've learnt a lot from my Elders' and 'they've shown me those skills'.

‘knowledge and identity resources are displayed at the point of communicative interaction in all social engagements’

The final paragraph, Paragraph 5, provides an explicit recognition of the role of oral tradition (talk) in the transmission of skills and knowledge, framed in the first few words by the now integrated 'white' discursive items 'skills' and 'knowledge': 'Pass those skills and knowledge down…' The word 'skills' appears twice more in this sentence, as if to demonstrate that the speaker has recognised how the two discourses have come together and is practising the elements. The role of talking is once again emphasised, and then counterpoised with the 'hands-on showing the children and the young ones'. The contrast between the 'real life' (informal, community) learning and formal education parallels the 'hands-on' informal discourse with the 'skills' and 'knowledge' of formal education.

How can Merle and Darren be compared on the dimension of 'literacy'? Darren also facilitates people to cross the boundaries of their literacy worlds, as he does himself between white and black discourses. He is 'uneducated' yet apparently as adept as Merle at using knowledge and identity resources to his purpose for action. His use of historicity layers traditional Indigenous culture through the Elders with his white heritage. What, then, can be said about literacy as used as a resource by these two community members, and its relationship to social capital in a community?

Discussion

The paper has raised a discussion about literacy, community and social capital. It has not tried to suggest anything but tentative conclusions about the relationship between these three ideas. However, there are some interesting points concerning people, their places and their literate resources that emerge as a result of the previous section.

First, knowledge and identity resources are displayed at the point of communicative interaction in all social engagements. These 'texts of interaction' are, by definition, social. The resources of knowledge and identity seen in these texts of Merle and Darren are therefore the reserves of capital drawn on and replenished in the course of their production. As in any form of capital, its value is as a resource. Social capital is seen to be a critical resource for productive interactivity.

Second, because social capital draws on knowledge (as well as identity) resources, social capital *includes* human capital in its resources base. The on-going series of social interactions are shown to embed literate knowledge resources in the co-construction and re-construction of identities. Knowledge (of skills, literate resources, people, community and place) and identity resources (such as cultural norms and expectations, self-efficacy, roles in clubs, associations and families) come together in an indistinguishable fusion as the literate act. Knowledge and identity resources only exist through the unifying act of the co-production of literate texts that are

appropriate to the purpose in hand. That is, the capacity of human capital (skills and knowledge) is only released through the processes that build and use social capital.

Third, there is in community life, as well as in work and public life, always a purpose for interaction. These purposes may not be made explicit, but they are nevertheless important for the building of social capital and therefore strong learning communities. Among other effects, Darren and Merle's stories have shown:

- Cultural identity formation and reformation;
- Responsiveness to and facilitating change in the community;
- Changes in identities that enable the adoption of new roles in the process of building strong communities;
- Shaping and re-shaping the character and purpose of the community, its associations and institutional life.

'how does the idea of 'community' relate to literacy—and learning in general—as a community activity and resource?'

Implications and conclusion

I began this paper by asking the question, how does the idea of 'community' relate to literacy—and learning in general—as a community activity and resource? I have used community here as the setting in which people engage in their work, leisure and public lives. Conception of place is rooted in Merle and Darren's assumption of a locality-based community. These ideas of a locality-based community have been used to explore what is involved in producing texts of interaction in informal community settings. However, a by-product of this exploration has shown the role of social processes in facilitating learning through unleashing its associated literate and identity resources.

There are interesting implications for learning and literacy education in the conclusion that the capacity of human capital is only released in the process of forming and using social capital. The most basic form of social capital is the social capital element of trust between adult educator and learner as they take the first tentative steps in developing the self-confidence that comes from a trusting interaction. Participation in education and training depends on these processes that encourage participation in adult learning activity, and without participation, there can be no advance to the goal of achieving lifelong learning and a 'learning society' (Young, 1995), so the relationship between social capital and learning is strong. Participation in learning has been seen to be fundamental not just to the pursuit of formal education and training, but also of the informal learning that occurs in daily interactions at community level.

The community members whose texts of interaction are referred to in this paper are living, breathing people. They draw on complex configurations of resources *appropriate* to the purpose in hand. For example, Darren draws on his resources of cultural identity to illustrate some culturally disjunctive aspects of his past learning. He does *not* draw on his resources related to 'being a father', or 'being a motor-biker', for example, as these are not selected by him as appropriate to the purpose in hand. These on-the-run texts of interaction selectively and discriminatingly draw on and develop appropriate 'bits' of Darren's knowledge and identity resources as they relate to the purpose of the interaction, which is about his learning and education. Merle's role as an informal social broker of knowledge is achieved through her self-perception—her deliberately cultivated identity as a facilitator of the networks of social capital.

The punchline is, of course, that the success of any learning interaction in meeting its purpose depends on the nature and qualities of the knowledge and identity resources available to the interactants. We know a great deal about the nature of the skills and knowledge (human capital) involved in producing literate texts of interactivity. However, we do not know a great deal about the nature and qualities of the social capital upon which the effective use of skills and knowledge is based. The use and building of social capital in learning communities—wherever these are located, and through whatever modes—is the precursor of appropriate skills and knowledge. The next step in the research agenda, working hand-in-hand with adult educators who know instinctively about the crucial role of social capital already, is to learn more about the nature and qualities of social capital.

Associate Professor Ian Falk is Director of the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia (CRLRA) at the University of Tasmania

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Reframing the mother in family literacy

by Kirsten Hutchison

Literacy programs should highlight mothers' literacy needs as well as their childrens. Here, the author reports on a community literacy program that looks at the work of mothers within and beyond families.

Introduction

In Australia and internationally, media representations of literacy in 'crisis' occur cyclically (Freebody, 1993). In recent times, there has been a shifting locus of blame for this 'crisis' in literacy attainment, from schools to teachers and from teachers to parents and families. Duncan Stalker, the President of the Australian Secondary Principals Association, argued in 1997 that 'the most significant factor in improving literacy was the role of the family in showing interest in education and encouraging reading' (The Age, 10 September 1997, p.2).

'family literacy is a field of practice receiving increasing interest from adult literacy practitioners'

While parental involvement has always been a crucial component of successful child literacy acquisition, the identification of the family as the institution *ultimately* responsible for child literacy relocates the responsibility for educational success, and literacy in particular, from governments to families, and conveniently moves the blame from inadequate government education funding to inadequate families.

Governments are increasingly foregrounding the importance of parent education as a means of ensuring effective parent–school partnerships. Parent education is a growth industry and amongst the burgeoning range of programs now available, family literacy is a field of practice receiving increasing interest from adult literacy practitioners.

In this article I argue that family literacy cannot be adopted uncritically as a panacea for all reading difficulties, and that programs need to foreground the labour of the mother as a literacy worker and offer a more complex view of literacy than simply the skill of learning to read. I report on a family literacy program which addresses the issue of gender and literacy within families and makes visible the work done by mothers within and beyond families. I suggest ways in which adult literacy practitioners may reconceptualise family literacy using a feminist perspective. I argue that those educators offering family literacy programs should be aware of their potential to reinforce gendered literacy responsibilities and assume that mothers are willing to act as unpaid literacy workers in schools and families.

Family literacy programs which ignore women's desires for intellectual expansion independent of their children's needs, or ignore women's desires for recognition in the public sphere as paid workers, confine women to a domestic sphere. In family literacy, where the boundaries between adult and child learning blur and the mother's desires for learning may be obscured, it becomes even more critical that educators take into consideration the powerful influence of dominant discourses of motherhood.

Context

In 1996 the Community Education Department of the former Victoria University's TAFE Division was allocated government funding to establish family literacy programs in the university's catchment area. In collaboration with a cluster of local schools and kindergartens, I began a course, entitled *Multiple Literacies for Parents,* at a community venue adjacent to the kindergarten. The classes were scheduled parallel with the kindergarten sessions to minimise the number of children the participants were responsible for during class time, as all had more than one child and six students had four-year-old children attending the kindergarten.

The venue appeared to be ideal in that it offered a safe outdoor play area for the children, a shed full of bikes, a plentiful supply of toys and kitchen facilities. The students, eleven women and one man (who left the course due to the ill health of his disabled son), had diverse education and work histories prior to becoming parents. All had between nine and eleven years of education and had predominantly worked in office administration and textile industries. Three students were from LOTE backgrounds and had previously attended English as a Second Language classes but had not been employed in Australia. All participants were providing full-time care for their children and were united in their desire to support their children's education more effectively than they felt equipped to do with their current set of understandings about literacy.

The course was located within the Certificate in General Education for Adults (Further Study) and the curriculum integrated the three subjects taught—Reading and Writing, Oral Communication and General Curriculum Option. The modules covered theories of literacy and learning, understanding reading and writing at home and at school, children's literature, gender and literacy, mathematical

literacy, computer literacy, public literacy and home-school communications.

This content was taught over the course of a year, in two three-hour sessions per week. My aim in each module was to provide students with a very brief summary of the key principles informing the teaching of reading, writing, mathematics and computer literacy, etc in schools, so they were able to understand current educational contexts in schools. In addition, I aimed to draw out sets of practical strategies they could use at home in order to support their children's learning. Some of these strategies derived from research into teaching and parental support for child literacy and some home activities drew on the concept of the mother as researcher and ethnographer of her family's literacy practices.

Typically, the class would begin with a discussion of an aspect of literacy, usually based on a short reading or a key question. This would be followed by a shared activity with the pre-school children, illustrating an aspect of the earlier discussion. After morning tea, the children played outside, weather permitting, while the students concentrated on writing activities. I was fortunate to attract the assistance of a volunteer, a part-time kindergarten assistant interested in family literacy, who supervised the children's outside play and read them stories to conclude the session.

'As the students came to experience pleasure in their learning, they repositioned themselves as the primary learners'

As the students became more established and enthusiastic learners, the presence of the children came to be perceived as an impediment to their learning, and they began to express frustration with the frequent interruptions necessitated by ministering to their children's needs. This change in priorities represented a significant shift in their understandings of themselves as learners.

Initially, participants were motivated to join the course out of a desire to help their children's learning and the program was promoted to evoke that altruistic desire in parents. As the students came to experience pleasure in their learning, they repositioned *themselves* as the primary learners, rather than their children, or perhaps as learners simultaneously *with* their children. Their need for a quiet space in which to concentrate emerged and consequently we relocated our classes to a community centre offering low cost childcare and scheduled our classes to operate parallel to the occasional childcare service.

A contested field

I was aware when I began my work in family literacy that it constitutes a complex field of literacy practice. The term 'family literacy', first used by Denny Taylor (1983) to refer to the rich and diverse uses of literacy within homes and communities, has been widely adopted but has to date eluded clear definition. Family literacy draws on multiple academic traditions, including adult literacy and English as a Second Language education; child literacy education, in particular the fields of emergent literacy and special education; early childhood development; cognitive psychology and parent education (Saracho, 1997).

Family literacy programs are usually collaborations between providers of early childhood, adult literacy or parenting education. Programs are diverse in terms of their emphases and organisation, according to whose literacy development is to be fore-grounded: that of parents, children or a combination of parent and child focused literacy (Nickse, 1993). The term intergenerational family literacy (IGFL) is also used (Toomey, 1995), to refer to programs with a dual focus on adult and child literacy.

There is, however, heated debate over appropriate pedagogies and content in family literacy programs. Some critics argue that a 'theoretical vacuum' exists in family literacy provision in terms of identification of the most effective ways for parents to support their children's education and enhance their own understandings about learning (Hannon, 1995; Saracho, 1997). Others critique family literacy programs for their assumption of homogenous and simplistic notions of both 'family' and 'literacy' (Bates, Taylor and Tomlin, 1994).

Since family literacy programs often target and attract women, they have been critiqued for their potential to reinforce powerful existing gendered discourses of literacy work within families (Cairney, 1995; Freebody, 1996). Further critiques of family literacy centre on the assumption that low income families are deficient in both literacy practices and parenting skills, and require regulation and education to ensure that the literacy work of the school is successful (Auerbach, 1994). These critics question the tendency to attribute poor literacy achievement to deficiencies in the home environment, rather than to school practices (Freebody, 1996, Auerbach, 1994).

My approach to the development of a family literacy program was influenced by this debate and was also fuelled by disquiet at some of the assumptions evident in references to family literacy in government policy and curriculum documents. Although family literacy provision in Australian is embedded within adult literacy generally and appears to be practiced in more diverse ways than the large, centralised and generously funded US programs, my sense was that many family literacy programs were based on a deficit model of parent and home literacies—a critique that Auerbach (1989, 1992, 1994, 1995) has leveled at dominant models of family literacy provision in America.

Further, it appeared to me that curriculum content in family literacy programs tended to equate literacy with reading and emphasised the requirements of schools in focusing on

a skills-based model of reading support, while ignoring the broader sociocultural contexts of literacy. The proscribed role for parents in family literacy programs appeared to be that of reading tutor: serious intent, little obvious pleasure for either child or adult and an hierarchical distribution of power over the text based on different degrees of reading expertise. I felt that to ignore the role of mutual pleasure in parent/child storybook reading inevitably impoverished the experience of reading and therefore adult pleasure and delight in reading with children should be foregrounded in any family literacy curriculum.

As well, my research in planning the course revealed that few documented family literacy programs included any discussion of electronic media, with the notable exception of the Parents and Literacy Program (Spreadbury, 1994). This absence may be due to the high cost of resourcing programs with the requisite technology and raises questions regarding the access of particular communities to these powerful technologies.

I named the course *Multiple Literacies for Parents*, in order to foreground the key principle that literacy is complex, layered, diverse and much more than the ability to read and write. At the time I was planning the course, a class set of laptop computers became available within our department. I decided to incorporate into the course an introductory unit on word processing and electronic communication, on the assumption that the students would be interested in new technologies, as a critical and possibly unfamiliar component of their children's education and also as an area of skill development in preparation for re-entry into paid work. None of the participating families owned computers, and access to a portable computer and the inclusion of electronic literacy proved to be a significant factor in the students' reconceptualisation of literacy and learning.

I was also mindful of the fact that family literacy programs may unwittingly reinforce a gendered division of labour within families, in attributing to mothers responsibility for the literacy development of their children and in subsuming women's desires for an expanded 'literacy of their own', within a child-focused curriculum. Further, family literacy programs may normalise the concept of volunteerism, in characterising participants' increased skill and willingness to volunteer their time in classrooms as a positive educational outcome, when in fact the provision of unpaid labour may be viewed by participants as an interim and unsatisfactory substitute for paid work.

In America, family literacy policies historically target low-income families such as single parent and LOTE background families and have been critiqued for their role in normalising the parenting and literacy practices of non-mainstream communities (Auerbach, 1989). Implicit in intergenerational literacy programs, whether adult or child literacy focused, is the attempt to impose a set of attitudes and behaviours that support existing class and gender relationships within families.

' family literacy programs may unwittingly reinforce a gendered division of labour within families '

I felt that a more complex pedagogical response was required in order to make visible the largely unrecognised work of the women as mothers. They were responsible for providing the foundations of early literacy, maintaining home-school communications and supporting the various educational institutions their children attended, through their volunteer labour both at home and in schools. However, as with so much of women's work, no formal recognition of these labours was ever provided. Their enrolment in an accredited course became a way of acknowledging the significance of the work they were doing with their children.

In particular, the complexity and the situatedness of the mothers' work in developing the literacy of their children interested me as I came to work closely with them. I began to wonder how I, as teacher and curriculum developer, could build on their existing knowledge of their children's learning behaviours and foreground the social and cultural context of their work as mothers. The following section details an activity which illustrates one such attempt to simultaneously maintain a focus on mother, child and family literacies within a broader social, historical and cultural context.

Literacy Anecdotes

Whilst numerous activities were undertaken throughout the course to examine the nexus between families, literacy and gender, I will describe here one writing activity to illustrate the way in which course content was used to reveal and examine the mothers' literacy work and maintain a dual focus on adult and child literacy.

Using Brodkey's (1992) concept of 'literacy anecdotes', I asked the women to write two short personal reflections on their experiences of literacy: one an early memory of themselves as readers or writers, and the other a recent literacy event involving themselves and their children. The literacy anecdotes were a way of exploring the mothers' histories and existing literacy practices, and I predicted that their stories would provide rich material for discussion of family literacy practices and enable the women to identify some of the cultural and social influences shaping their concepts of literacy.

This was also a point from which we could begin to collaboratively examine the discursive constitution of gender and motherhood. Following Haug (1987), I suggested they write in the third person as a device for distancing themselves from the action they described, and that they provide fictional names for themselves and their children. Some students asked me to read and correct spelling and

grammatical mistakes in their anecdotes, which they then rewrote. Once written to the writer's satisfaction, the anecdotes were copied, read aloud, discussed and compared.

Two anecdotes are reproduced here, followed by a summary of the commentaries, which arose from reading and discussing the anecdotes. These commentaries derive from my notes of the discussion, made during the class. We analysed these anecdotes in terms of the discursive constitution of girls and mothers present in these textualised accounts of the women's experiences.

> 'we discussed our recollections of first being able to read independently… and the association between reading and 'good girls''

Sonya: An early memory of reading

> She was seven or eight years old and now she could read alone. Before this her brother and sister read to her. She lived in five-storey building where there was a basement library. Almost every day she borrowed a book and was very happy to be reading by herself. The librarian noticed her because she came in every day and began to find books for her. Most she liked, but not all. She had a long friendship with the librarian. She would give her books for her age but she wouldn't let her read sexy books because she said they were unsuitable. She visited the library from the age of seven till she left school. Reading kept her out of trouble, away from bad company, said her mother. She wanted to be a librarian as a child, and she played library games with children in the building.

Together we discussed our recollections of first being able to read independently, access to books and the association between reading and 'good girls'. In this anecdote the practice of reading is encouraged by the mother, who views her daughter's reading habits as protective. The librarian censors her reading material, and shapes the child's career aspirations. Reading is here culturally and morally sanctioned as a gender appropriate pursuit, safe and solitary. Under the watchful gaze of the librarian, reading is a form of regulation, which keeps the girl chaste and under the mother's control. The women felt that reading was an activity that identified a girl as ladylike and intellectual, a practice lauded in their families as a suitable past-time for a girl, conducted as it often was, silently, inside the home.

The following text was produced as the second anecdote and recounts a recent family literacy event:

Sonya: Clever Christina

> One day, Christina's mother was washing dishes in the kitchen when her daughter said, 'Come here Mum. It's the letter P.'
>
> Christina's mother came over to look at Christina's writing. She didn't believe her daughter could write because she hadn't taught her. Christina's mother looked at the page. Christina had written a P and she knew the name of it. She wrote a letter C, and said, 'That's in my name.'
>
> Christina's mother thought maybe Christina had learnt the letters from watching Sesame Street and sometimes tracing letters. Christina loves Sesame Street and asks to see it, even on Saturday and Sunday.
>
> She said to her mother,'We have to buy a video cassette of Sesame Street.'
>
> Sometimes Christina's mother sees her daughter tracing letters in colouring books. Maybe this too helps her to learn how to write the letters.
>
> Christina's mother is surprised because she couldn't remember being able to write letters when she was Christina's age. She didn't learn to write until she went to school. Christina's mother thinks that if she wasn't so lazy and didn't take so much time looking after the children, that she could teach Christina more about reading and writing, and maybe teach her to read.

This literacy event is located in the domestic realm of the kitchen. The women commented on the importance of the kitchen table as a site for literacy within the family. Striking is the mother's surprise at the daughter's revelation that she is able to both form letters and identify the first letter of her name without being explicitly taught by her mother, who attributes the child's success to repeatedly watching *Sesame Street* and tracing letters in colouring books. Many women shared this belief that *Sesame Street* had taught their children the alphabet. The mother in this text makes no mention of the books she has read to her daughter, the conversations they have shared: the mother's contributions to her daughter's ability to write are invisible in the daily routine of care she is responsible for. The child's cleverness is foregrounded and contrasted with the mother's inability to write at the same age. The contemporary range of resources for literacy learning: TV, videos, books, is incidental.

The mother's pride at her daughter's achievement is short-lived however, and swiftly transposes into guilt, that she is not doing enough in the literacy education of her clever daughter. She is 'lazy' and inefficient in her organisation of the domestic sphere and this inadequacy prevents her from taking on the additional task of teaching her daughter to read. This self-castigation provoked an empathetic response from the group, who pointed out their daily conflict between 'stimulating' their children: reading them books, playing games with them and taking them to structured developmental

activities and keeping up with time consuming routine domestic tasks.

The women identified discourses of 'the good mother as teacher' in this text. This mother is clearly aware of her inadequacies as a teacher, but the impossible conflicts between teacher and mother and the multiple ways she shapes her child's learning are invisible to her. She views her 'inadequacies' as personal failings, rather than structurally produced by the division of labour within her household, and discursively produced by the patterns of desire she is subject to.

'family literacy programs are underpinned by an assumption of parental deficit in skills and knowledge'

This kind of writing and analysis was central to my pedagogy, because it maintained a dual focus on adult and child literacy and allowed for a complex analysis of literacy as a lived, gender experience. We discussed the anecdotes as cultural autobiographies, comparing and contrasting the material, social and historical conditions which shaped them. We questioned the writers for further information, noted absences in the texts and contributed corresponding and contrasting memories, newly drawn to conscious memory. We acknowledged the diversity of experience manifested in the stories and also acknowledged that the act of shaping experiences into written anecdotes imposes an order on experience and allows a scrutiny of the stories behind the story, an exploration of the discourses operating within it.

One way we did this was to conduct simple linguistic analyses of word repetitions in order to draw out common themes within the texts. The process of writing and discussing the literacy anecdotes with the women highlighted the complex social, historical and cultural forces shaping each individual's concept of literacy. A reading for discourses of gender revealed that literacy work within families was largely carried out by women and yet was both invisible and under-rated.

Through this activity, and many others throughout the course, it became evident to the women that perceived personal inadequacies were actually cultural manifestations of patriarchal and sexist ideologies of motherhood which could not simply be explained as personal failure. Through such activities, a space was created for the women to reconceptualise themselves as mothers, as literacy workers within their families and as members of literate communities.

Conclusion

My work in family literacy suggests that a number of revisions to dominant theory and practice in family literacy provision are required, in order to create an approach that takes greater cognizance of the needs of parent learners. An alternate pedagogy for family literacy firstly challenges unitary conceptions of literacy and proposes a socioculturally located pedagogy of multiple, critical literacies. An awareness of the ideological work of literacy education is critical in the development of family literacy programs.

Secondly, an alternate pedagogy for family literacy foregrounds gender as a critical element of the curriculum. Family literacy can be critiqued as part of a gendered discourse of women's work. The mothers I worked with readily viewed themselves as deficient: as literacy partners with their children, as writers and as mothers. The feminist pedagogy created multiple discursive positions from which to analyse motherhood and literacy in order to achieve a reconceptualisation of motherhood and its associated literacy work, in part through an acknowledgment of the women's multiple subjectivities. A central aspect of any alternate pedagogy will be a repositioning of the mother in family literacy.

An alternate model of family literacy is based on three central principles:

1 Challenging deficits

Family literacy programs are underpinned by an assumption of parental deficit in the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively support the development of child literacy. I challenge this assumption in framing parents, and in the context of this work, mothers, as possessing expert knowledge about their children, which can be described and built on in family literacy programs.

I have argued that family literacy programs based solely on cognitive models of reading and schooled literacies offer an impoverished literacy curriculum to their participants. Literacy educators have long acknowledged the complex and multiple dimensions of literacy and family literacy programs must therefore problematise commonsense definitions of literacy and develop programs based on reading of recent research literature into parental support of child literacy and a situated knowledge of home and community literacy practices.

2 Ensuring good practice in adult literacy education

Family literacy is a complex area of practice. The dual participation of adults and children presents challenges for program developers in determining who the primary learners are and selecting appropriate content. There is a danger that family literacy programs may foreground child literacy development at the expense of the adult learner and hence it is essential that a dual focus be maintained on both child and adult literacy. Continual vigilance is required in order to develop meaningful contexts for adult learners within family literacy and ensure principles of good practice in adult literacy are followed. This includes the development of a learner subjectivity for participants and identification of pathways into further study.

3 Feminism: a reconfiguration of motherhood

This article has referred to the invisibility of mothers' labours in relation to the education of children and has located this invisibility within gendered discourses of good mothering. An alternate pedagogy makes visible the mother's literacy work and reconceptualises it in the light of feminist understandings of motherhood. Thus mothers' vital contributions to their children's literacy education are credentialled and given public value, rather than assuming that their value lies within the selfless and altruistic domain of good mothering.

As a consequence of acknowledging the mothers' literacy work, they experienced a greater sense of agency. They were able to act more effectively as advocates for their children in critical and active participation with teachers, schools and local communities. A feminist pedagogy of family literacy may provide a supported pathway into more active engagement with public literacies; the women in this program began to use the family literacy course as a platform for their participation in new discourse communities of political action. They conducted a community needs study in the local area which identified a need for a secondary school in the area and began the process of lobbying politicians to hear their demands.

Through the use of explicitly feminist content, which focused on themes and issues arising out of the women's experiences, the women shifted from passively observing their own, individualised circumstances, to a more critical, collaborative analysis of their community and their potential to change it.

Finally, a feminist pedagogy of family literacy may serve to recruit non-traditional users of adult literacy into further education. Participants are exploring literacy initially as a way of enhancing their children's literacy: it is not necessary to identify as having 'low-literacy' in order to join family literacy classes. It is through a desire for their children to be successful learners that parents may discover that they too can be effective, adult learners.

Family literacy programs may hence be a fertile growth area in adult literacy education and offer a context within which women can expand their resources for supporting their children's learning and simultaneously validate a desire for an expanded self as learner, mother and literacy practitioner.

Kirsten Hutchison is a teacher in the Arts and Preparatory Programs Department of Victoria University of Technology.

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Electronic communities

by Ian Falk (with Sue Kilpatrick and Christine Owen)

Are technologies such as email and the Internet creating distinct communities, or do they simply supplement what is already in existence? The difference between a formal and an email discussion group may be less than you think, according to the authors.

What makes an 'electronic community'?

How do electronic learning communities and differ from other notions of 'community'? As discussed in the first article in this edition on literacy and community, the word 'community' is used to cover a multitude of sins these days. However, it might help if we take our definition from Wilkinson (1991), which relates community to interaction—and interaction *is* literacy in various forms:

> The essential ingredient is social interaction. Social interaction delineates a territory as the community locale ... it is the source of community identity ... The substance of community is social interaction. (p. 13)

The three key words in this for me are *interaction, territory* and *identity*. In relation to these three terms, in the paper on literacy in the community, I ended up by suggesting that, 'the use and building of social capital in learning communities—wherever these are located, and through whatever modes—is the precursor of appropriate skills and knowledge'. I noted that 'the most basic form of social capital is the social capital element of trust between adult educator and learner as they take the first tentative steps in developing the self-confidence that comes from a trusting interaction'.

'sharing ideas and interaction (through electronic learning) helps learners test possible changes to attitudes and values with peers'

Here is an activity for the reader. Think of your electronic networks—email groups and on-line experiences. Mentally run through these three words (*interaction, territory* and *identity*) and evaluate each of your networks against these three terms:

- Which of your experiences with email groups and on-line learning are rich in *interaction?*
- Which most clearly delineate the *territory* (sphere of activity) of the groups' purpose?
- Which form a shared *identity* through these activities that act as a bonding device for the group?
- How was it that these three sets of activities were achieved?

Finally, ask yourself how these answers about electronic learning communities differ from the attributes of face-to-face networking. This is the hard question, and leads to its consideration in more detail in the next section. Hold your thoughts on the above questions in mind as you read on.

What is particular to such 'communities' (that differentiates them from general notions of 'community')?

That which might distinguish electronic communities from face-to-face ones can be examined best by referring to the social capital framework in the discussion of literacy and community in the previous edition of *Fine Print*, and by drawing on Sue and Christine's draft paper.

The elements of social capital that I will refer to are:

a bonding (group solidarity forming around common values) and bridging networks (networks to outside the group)
b trust, and
c networks—and I will say a few words about electronic communities under each of those headings.

a Bonding and bridging

The role of bonding ties lies in the delineation of territory and purpose, and in the support for transferring learning outside the group or community.

According to Sue and Christine's draft paper, 'sharing ideas and interaction (through electronic learning) helps learners test possible changes to attitudes and values with peers. This has been identified as a prerequisite to behaviour change following learning'. This finding illustrates the significance of the bonding ties in the earlier stages of 'forming community' and how this supports the learners' confidence in applying (transferring, bridging) the learning outside the immediate group.

b Trust

The electronic community acts as a builder of trust; the trust builds confidence and the confidence promotes risk-taking

in applying the learning outside the context in which the learning occurred. But how does this answer the question of what is *particular* about electronic communities? Well, it doesn't directly. But it does let us examine the components of any group's interactions to see if they fit the purpose.

What is most likely to be different lies in the debate about face-to-face versus virtual communities. Many electronic communities do have a face-to-face component to their networks. For example, in adult language, literacy and numeracy our electronic discussions are supplemented by the face-to-face opportunities for interaction at conferences and meetings.

‘the bottom line about ‘what's different about electronic communities’ is that there may be very little difference’

c Networks

Many electronic networks do not have a face-to-face component, and it is this element that might well be a significant difference in defining these electronic networks as communities. Frequency of interaction is shown in Sue and Chris' research to be important. Their comments such as ‘the sense of community was strongest in the group where most respondents were contributors’, ‘learning using multiple sources’, and ‘creating new knowledge together’, are underscored by the need for a relatively high frequency of interactions. I include ‘lurkers’ as interactants here, since they are interacting with the list, though they may not interact with the individuals. They are building trust and confidence and are likely, as Sue and Christine say, to ‘… become active contributors’.

Indeed, there may be reasons for these networks of literacy to be off-putting to many users. Sue and Christine find that:

> Most people also find it more difficult to express themselves in writing than orally … participants may not speak English as a first language.

In spite of these possible barriers to accessing electronic networks, Sue and Christine's main findings relate to the interactions that are afforded by the electronic networks:

> The main strengths of the … email discussion groups appear to be their interactivity, their ability to promote networking in a relatively informal manner, and the speed of responses and interchange of ideas.

The bottom line about ‘what's different about electronic communities’ is that there may be very little difference depending on the features of the bonding and bridging ties, the building of trusting interactions and the intensity of interactions of those communities.

What are the particular language/literacies that learners/teachers need to fully participate in such communities?

I am coming to believe that the part this question about ‘language/literacies’ is not as important as the part of the question about ‘learners *need* to participate’. The answer to the question can be found by observing the ways youth manages its electronic games, learning and accompanying literacies. Their needs are identified by their sub-cultures, and social forces, such as unemployment, that we barely understand as adults (speaking for myself!) raised in the Menzies era.

Youth-literate responses to new social imperatives demonstrate two key points: (a) how flexible this tool ‘literacy-for-learning’ is, and (b) that it *is* a tool, and it *is* used for other tasks, such as electronic learning. Literacy does not exist as a separate entity. It has no life apart from the activities involved in learning, community, work, public and leisure pursuits. When learning is the object, formal or informal, then the literate requirements of that task will be accessed, deftly or not so deftly.

This is why it is essential for practitioners to be ‘action researchers’ in the learning partnership. By observing and documenting learners engaged in the activities that embed the literacies they need—in this case, in electronic learning communities—and by finding out from the learners what it is they need and how they need it (how best they learn), we are putting into practice the adult literacy established practice of ‘responding to needs’. This means their demonstrable needs, not our perceptions of what the learners need. And not, it needs to be stressed, their *interpretations* of their needs for literacy, which are so often reflections of the wider society's construction about ‘their problem’. This construction is so often expressed by the learners in our introductory interviews with them in words such as, ‘I just need to spell better, read and write better’.

The crucial question, of course, is ‘spell, read and write better *for what?’*

When is a network a community?

It seems to me, then, that any community can be a ‘good’ or ‘not-so-good’ community, depending on the richness of the interactions, the support the bonding aspects lend to trust and confidence in risk-taking, and the purposefulness of the interactions in fulfilling individual and group needs. This applies if it is a face-to-face community, such as a suburb or township, or a classroom of learners. It applies also in the case of virtual or electronic communities. The *medium* of the network (electronic, face-to-face) does not seem as important as the qualities of the interaction related to intensity, duration and purposefulness.

Having said this, it needs to be emphasised that electronic learning is not the answer for everyone. Many people seem to find it impossible to learn in any medium except face-to-face. While this may be a learned response and might well decrease as electronic learning becomes more familiar, it is nevertheless true for a large number of people. This is

especially the case for many those whose previous experiences with learning have been marred by negativity of some kind. However, electronic learning also provides a value-neutral, non-judgemental means for those with negative experiences of learning to access information and acquire confidence in themselves.

Readers may have noted that there has been a slippage in my reference to either 'electronic communities' or 'electronic networks'. It raises the question, when is a network not a network, and when is it a community? The answer I believe is that an electronic *network* is the simple device whereby communication occurs—'list', 'discussion group' or virtual conference. An electronic *community*, however, is the richness of the communication that take place around the *interaction, territory* and *identity* of the network, by using the available technologies. That is, a network is the technical facility that may provide access for communication, while a community is defined by the quality and quantity of the interactions that occur using that technical facility.

'it needs to be emphasised that electronic learning is not the answer for everyone'

As a comment on the importance of common values and identity-building in effective learning (electronic or otherwise) communities, consider Sue and Christine's words: 'The sense of community was strongest in the group where most respondents were contributors'. Further to this, they say, 'as an adjunct to other resources such as books, videos, web sites and journal articles, however, most of our respondents rate the discussion group highly'. That is, electronic learning, like literacy, is a tool for a particular purpose, and seems to be most used and useful when that learning uses multiple sources to fill needs, not just the one source.

I have some final questions in relation to the groups we are or may *not* be connecting with in our adult literacy practice. Are we really reaching the youth whose needs I am suggesting we respond to, or have we grown apart from them partly *because* of the electronic age? Are we really reaching the increasing number of 'poor' (growing divide between rich and poor) people, or are such matters as reduced resources and our own limits restricting access for these groups? What are the implications of these answers for future practice, and the future of our society and its social cohesion?

I suppose the moral of the story is to pay more attention to the tasks that actively engage people (especially youth?) in learning, and work back to the literate requirements of the tasks from there. Let the learners tell us what literacies they need to know. Let us stand back and not impose our views of what kinds of literacies are 'best for them'.

But you know all that ...

Associate Professor Ian Falk is Director of the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia (CRLRA) at the University of Tasmania, Launceston.

Dr Sue Kilpatrick is Associate Director of the Centre, and Dr Christine Owen is Program Manager for the theme of 'Change' at the Centre.

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Culture, community and learning:
a look at one community house

By Cathy Donovan

A community house can become the anchor point for new arrivals in Australia. Cathy Donovan shows how the Hawthorn Community House celebrates difference while encouraging unity.

A long time ago, it feels now, I attended a VALBEC Conference where Mary Kalantzis talked about being 'Australian in her difference'. She was talking about multiculturalism and dominant genres, which excluded the voices of all those who weren't born Anglo-Saxon. Since then, terms such as valuing and managing diversity have become commonplace descriptors of promoting cultural pluralism.

> ‘terms such as valuing and managing diversity have become descriptors of promoting cultural pluralism’

Hawthorn Community House is a place where many nationalities are present and active in the interface between educational programs, support programs, friendship and neighbourhood activities. We are multicultural, and not only in the sense that we address ethnic difference; we also aim to address the cultural diversity of such things as gender, socioeconomic class, age and disability.

We aim to have an organisation-wide effort to address and include the diversity of all cultural groups. This means the creation of a curriculum with inclusive teaching practices, professional development and links to the broader community. Inclusiveness is also important when recruiting and retaining students, paid staff and volunteers.

When they first arrive, students who are of speakers of English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL) often want to focus on language learning and improving speaking and listening skills. A number feel that they are lesser than others because they cannot articulate in the same way as they have been used to in their first language. Self-esteem issues are common, and students are often lonely and feel a loss of identity.

As they grow in confidence and feel a sense of belonging to the Hawthorn Community House, it is typical for students to want to contribute back to the community, and to view themselves as having some 'power' within the community.

Recently, teachers at the house have recognised that a changed educational pedagogy is needed to address new understandings of culture and its relationship to learning styles. Rather than broaden the number of subjects and topics we offer—which would only stress such objective aspects of culture as social customs, history, political structures and arts—we have focussed on the themes that emphasise more subjective aspects of culture. These include discussing issues that explore difference and similarities in assumptions, values, and the thinking and behavioural patterns of different social groups.

Our approach to ethnicity aims to raise the awareness of those born in Australia, who may be oblivious to notions of cultural heritage due to a belief that ethnicity only refers to those who deviate from the dominant culture. These implicit assumptions can sometimes lead to cultural misunderstanding.

An example of our approach to ethnicity occurs in practice within personal development programs or themes. Traditionally, courses with a confidence-building component include assertiveness training, identification of personal rights, negotiation skills and conflict resolution topics.

We found that many of the students from an ESOL background enrolled in such courses and then dropped out. One reason given was because the women from English-speaking backgrounds (ESB) spoke too fast and the discussion had moved on by the time they had reflected and were ready to respond. We researched this further, and found that there was more to it: these students felt they were in a minority position in the classroom.

Students born in Australia tended to respond from an individualist perspective to meeting their self-esteem needs. They positioned themselves as having been victims of a patriarchal society, of being a minority with little power and little voice. The women from other cultures (mostly Southeast Asian) identified with this feeling, but their solutions were very different. They often had a value system that expressed identity as arising from social connection. That is, the individual may be important, but takes second place to family or to society.

For example, Kanako came to the course with concerns about her teenage daughter who had said that if she died,

she would leave her 'things' to her best friend. Kanako was devastated about this and felt that it was an example of how her child did not care for the family or have respect for her parents.

The women from English-speaking backgrounds found it hard to see the issue. They tended to think that people can leave their possessions to whomever they like. To talk about how to be assertive and respect her daughter in this touchy situation, where many angry exchanges had already taken place, required a complete mental shift for most in the class.

It became obvious with this example, and others like it, that the language of power even extends to the language we offer as empowerment tools for those lacking confidence. The dominant genre of liberal feminist approaches, which tend to emphasise individual liberation, marginalises those cultural values that do not centre the individual within decisions about needs, rights, ethics and morality.

These issues underlie all our planning for literacy learning. Language and literacy are the forum where these cultural differences come together to be negotiated. We teachers and planners of the curriculum work hard to create an active learning environment which emphasises the principle of 'learning to learn', critical literacy and transformative experiences that are open to difference. Exploring the social purposes of texts by examining the writers' structural and language choices makes language meaningful. Through examining the underlying textual choices, we hope to bring to light some of the assumptions of our students (and ourselves). Only when they are made public can they be addressed.

' Language and literacy are the forum where these cultural differences come together to be negotiated '

We mostly address this through looking at newspaper texts or visual texts from the television for source reading material and discussion. The media assumes schemata of knowledge and culture will be brought to the text, and is never culturally neutral. The media issues and articles provide an excellent source for applying the critical literacy principles of questioning the text, looking beyond the text, identifying the purpose of the text, determining what is not in the text, and so on. It can also be used to help develop the students' language skills.

A recent class looked at several newspaper reports, published on the same day, about a survey of 'what causes divorce'. Students were reluctant to express opinions before the teacher had spoken. They felt it would be impolite to debate and argue the issue with the teacher. However, the teacher told them anything they said would be of interest to the group. Assurances were made about there being no single correct view.

As the class warmed to the topic, students who had never spoken before had their say. In the class, about eight different cultures were represented, and all had different views about what caused marriages breakdowns in their countries of origin.

Because the lesson focused on reading the tables in the articles, students were able to appreciate and discuss the differences by constructing comparative tables of their own. The activity allowed students to share ideas, gather information and ask questions without feeling they were focussing on the notion of difference as being isolating.

In a way, the English learning classroom is an idealised free public space in which differences can be expressed in relative safety. Of course, as in the wider community, there are times when communication virtually breaks down altogether. I daresay most teachers have had similar experiences to the following one, in which a class of ESB and ESOL students were discussing the death penalty.

Naturally, some students felt the particular convicted murderer should not be given the death penalty for human rights reasons. One student, from Iran, expressed the same view. When pressed for the reasons behind his view, he unexpectedly said that they should not be given the death penalty as it was too soft. The person should be strung up and have one limb severed each day as an example to others.

Needless to say, many of us in the room were flabbergasted as to how to respond to this view. Does the teacher in this case impose cultural and social dominance with a 'right' view? The teacher did not know, and just let it go. Just how these moments are played out is as central to the creation of 'community' as the more 'polite', positive experiences that classes generally share. And just how teachers, as representatives of authority, cope with these moments is at the heart of what sort of 'community' we are trying to imagine.

Many of the students who come to Hawthorn Community House are struggling to express themselves, their thoughts and everyday communication needs in English. Students see coming to the house as providing them with acceptance and friendships as well as with greater fluency and control over the dominant language of Australia.

We address the students' desire for explicit teaching of grammar and spelling, but much more goes on besides the teaching of grammar exercises and word knowledge. Our aim is to meet a multitude of needs, for which students come back to learn relevant skills. However, students are also looking for a place to belong, for personal growth, friendship and human contact and for an atmosphere where they can freely express ideas. Students often develop a different sense of self through the process of engaging actively as a 'constructing agent' with the ideas and concepts shared in the classes.

The experience of participating in the house is important to the learning process, and much of this learning is informal, incidental and embedded in the open acceptance and caring atmosphere. The flexibility and involvement of staff beyond the role of teacher (and beyond the class room), the friendships made, and the house's social life are also important factors.

Hawthorn Community House is a collective of ideas and approaches. The needs of the individual do not take precedence above the needs of the community of the house. This collectivist approach is comfortable for students (many of whom are from Southeast Asia), who are often oriented toward collective responsibility as opposed to individualism. They are pleased to work in groups and not have competitive gradings, and they are generally happy to help each other in peer learning contexts.

Having said this, when funding is tied to formal results, we clearly have to follow broader curriculum. We work to the CGEA and keep a record sheet that summarises student progress against the CGEA learning objectives. The students take great pride during the annual graduation ceremony, when the mayor and councillors present Certificates or Statements of Attainment, and the students make acceptance speeches. It is a celebration of their achievements and of the community of the house, and it is a reaching out the wider community.

As Hawthorn Community House is attended mostly by women, a collective approach is preferred because it values equal contributions and emphasises personal development, family support and caring—all of which are integral to our community. Teachers are all sessional, as community houses do not have the funding base for permanent staff.

Teachers describe Hawthorn Community House as a 'home away from home'. Personal lives and friendships blend. Students often become committee members or do voluntary or paid work at the house. Teachers join the committee and do coordination work. Committee members become students.

I have talked about the classroom and I have talked about the house. We try to address the multiple identities that students bring to the house and classes. We try to work with the everyday realities students face, raising an awareness of alternative views and possibilities, and hopefully helping to facilitate confidence and courage. We try to provide students with tools to enable analysing and criticising, and to articulate points of view. We provide models for stating ideas and beliefs that value the personal and model ways of viewing society and alternative views of society. We value inclusiveness that rejects exclusiveness.

The culture of the house is the culture of the classroom.

Cathy Donovan is co-ordinator of Hawthorn Community House.

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Contents

Open For Business: The Market, The State and Adult Literacy in Australia and beyond 2000
Peter Kell 1

Global and local literacies: Standards and situated practice
Mastin Prinsloo 10

Reclaim our rights: remake, reshape, reconcile
Davina Woods 18

Seizing the moment: opportunities and challenges at the intersection of literacy and youth policy
Nicole Gilding 24

Adult Literacy as a Discourse
Jean Searle 29

ALBE and the Youth Polemic
Alan Brooker 36

(No)Bodies Learning: Embodiment, Experience and Literacy Education
Gayle Morris 39

Street kids' English!
Mark Le 44

Language practices as social practices in the classroom context of situation
Jennifer Clancy 48

Multiliteracies of migrant professionals in discourse acquisition
Snezana Dabic 56

Marching to our own beat
Delia Bradshaw and Helen Macrae 60

Foreign Correspondence

The effectiveness of Ontario's literacy workers is threatened by governmental plans to link standardised programs to training and employment schemes, according to Guy Ewing

Ontario, Canada: living in a dangerous time

by Guy Ewing

I write this foreign correspondence from the perspective of a classroom support person at the Toronto District School Board in Ontario, Canada. My job is to provide professional development and practical support for about 25 adult literacy classes located in elementary schools, community centres and adult learning centres. I have been doing literacy work for about 15 years, as a volunteer tutor, a staff person in a community literacy program and a school board adult basic literacy instructor. I am active in literacy networks and I am a founding member of the Toronto Advocacy Council for Adult Literacy.

For literacy workers in Ontario, this is a dangerous and confusing time. The provincial Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities is trying to implement a standard framework for adult literacy work throughout Ontario. This push to standardise is coming at a time when the Tory provincial government is trying to narrow the scope of literacy work to meet right-wing policy objectives. Many literacy workers are concerned that standardization and right-wing policy will converge to diminish literacy work in this province where innovative literacy work has flourished.

> ‘This push to standardise is coming at a time when the provincial government is trying to narrow the scope of literacy work to meet policy objectives’

Since the mid-19th century, when Mechanics' Institutes provided education for urban workers, adult literacy programs in Ontario have developed from a diversity of individual and community concerns. At the turn of the century, Frontier College began organizing volunteers to work in the lumber camps by day and teach reading and writing by night. By the 1970s, community settlement programs were providing basic literacy instruction to new immigrants.

In Toronto, literacy workers who had been trained in Freirian methodology in Brazil were applying this methodology in the their work with Portuguese immigrants. Boards of education were providing reading and writing classes at night, as part of their continuing education programs. Some public libraries supported literacy tutoring by volunteer tutors. In the 1980s, the Ontario Federation of Labour became involved in literacy work through a program that trained union activists to work as tutors. Organizations like the Canadian National Institute for the Blind organized literacy programs for people with special needs. Frontier College began to take on urban issues with programs like Beat the Street, a literacy program for street youth.

The 1980s saw the rapid growth of community literacy programs. At first, these programs were funded by a combination of federal government grants and local funding, including funding by municipalities and boards of education. There were also Laubach programs, dedicated to a phonics-based approach developed by Frank Laubach, and supported by the Laubach organization in Syracuse, New York. Then, in 1986, the Liberal government of Ontario began funding community literacy programs. Workers from community programs were hired by the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture to help establish community literacy programs around the province.

This initial involvement in adult literacy work by the provincial government led to increased funding for community literacy programs and their umbrella groups. Funding was provided with minimal provincial control. The provincial guidelines focussed on the need for programs to be learner-centred and to be responsible to community boards of directors.

But in the mid-1990s, first under a nominally socialist New Democratic government and then under a right-wing Tory government, more provincial control was introduced. Both the New Democrats and the Tories have tried to use adult literacy programs as instruments of government policy. For the New Democrats, adult literacy programs were to be instruments of ‘labour readjustment’, the creation of a more educated labour force that could be competitive in the Global Economy. For the current Tory government, adult literacy programs are to be instruments of Workfare, a program designed to ‘break the cycle of dependency’ on the public dole by means of training and work programs for the poor.

So funding for adult literacy programs has become contingent on the delivery of predetermined outcomes by

these programs. The current government wants to see their investment in literacy programs pay off by getting people off the dole and into jobs (or, in the case of people with disabilities or severe problems of various kinds, living more independently, with less need for government assistance.)

The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (the new ministry responsible for funding adult literacy programs) has started to put accountability mechanisms in place that will allow the government to put its policy stamp on literacy work. In particular, it is developing a system for tracking the progress of every adult literacy learner in the province, both in literacy programs and after they leave literacy programs.

If these mechanisms work the way the government would like, the current diversity of literacy work in the province will be narrowed to serve policy objectives which many literacy workers find wrong-headed, and which most agree are not responsive to the full range of adult literacy learners' needs. The idea that literacy programs can, in themselves, get people off welfare and into jobs seems incredibly simplistic to many experienced literacy workers. Moreover, many literacy learners do not receive welfare or any other kind of social assistance. Some work (usually at low-paying jobs), some are retired, some live on the streets, some hunt and trap for a living, some are incarcerated. People want to improve their reading and writing for many reasons. To be responsive, literacy programs cannot serve narrow policy objectives.

"The idea that literacy programs can, in themselves, get people off welfare and into jobs seems incredibly simplistic"

But will the Ministry's accountability mechanisms work the way the government would like? My own view is that they will not. Literacy workers are an honest and stubborn lot. Faced with learners who need help but do not fit the government's notions of marketable success, most literacy workers will respond by trying to meet the learners' actual needs. When they do, the accountability mechanisms will start producing statistics that show that learners who need and benefit from literacy instruction may not progress quickly, may not enter the workforce directly from literacy programs, and may still need government assistance of various kinds.

Faced with these realities, the government might declare that literacy programs are not working, and reduce or eliminate provincial funding to literacy programs. On the other hand, they might make accommodations to the realities of literacy work, in effect broadening their policy objectives. This might be politically easier than cutting back or shutting down literacy programs, particularly if we have kept the public informed about adult literacy issues, and about the dreams and achievements of adult literacy learners.

So, as I said at the beginning of this correspondence, these are dangerous times for literacy workers. If we abandon our principles, and make literacy programs less responsive to learners to suit the government's Workfare agenda, we will have diminished literacy work. If we stick to our principles, and keep our programs responsive to learners' real needs, we risk losing provincial funding for our programs, but we also keep alive the possibility that responsive literacy work will continue. As I have said already, my prediction is that most literacy workers will choose the latter course. In these times, the most effective strategy against bad policy may be good practice.

I also said that it is a confusing time for literacy workers. The reality that the government wants to create is not the reality in which we live. Welfare workers send people to our programs, having either succeeded or failed at convincing them that literacy is their ticket to get off welfare. The learners who are convinced are often unrealistic in their expectations. The learners who are not convinced are often cynical and bitter. Meanwhile, many of the learners who come to our programs of their own accord, without the advice of welfare workers, do not fit the government's mold of what a literacy learner should be. We work in many possible worlds, some of them more possible than others.

It is an important time which will determine the future of literacy work in Ontario, as well as what kind of society we are.

Guy Ewing has been involved in literacy work for 15 years as a volunteer tutor, a staff member in a community literacy program and a school board adult basic literacy instructor. He is a founding member of the Toronto Advocacy Council for Adult Literacy.

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Open Forum

Please feel free to respond to the stories featured in *Fine Print*. See the back cover for contact details.

In the articles presented here, Laila Fanebust describes The Whittlesea Youth Commitment—a bold new venture involving community groups, government agencies and local businesses—and its potential to offer real change to young people, and Michael Chalk wonders if email is a matter of second language or second-guessing.

The Whittlesea Youth Commitment: moving into the 21st century

In 1998 the Northern Area Consultative Committee (NACC) commissioned Northern Interactive Education Coordinated Area Program (NIECAP) RMIT, to undertake an action research project to investigate the impact on young people of introduction of the Youth Allowance. The NACC actively promotes improved links between school students, school curriculum and local employers.

The project identified a lack of connection between the various agencies working with young people (schools, TAFE institutes, Adult Community Education Providers, Whittlesea Council, community support agencies, Centrelink and Job Network).

Once young people leave school, there is no agency responsible for ensuring that each receives the assistance that is available to them to access further education, employment or training. This lack of connection at a time of major change to employment referral and placement services means that there are now more barriers to a smooth transition between school and work.

At the instigation of the NACC and Dusseldorp Skills Forum, key stakeholders in the City of Whittlesea met in late 1998. Dusseldorp Skills Forum provided the group with results of important new research commissioned by the forum which shows that, across Australia, significant numbers of young people are not in work or education or are in part time work with no training.

> ‘70% of those at risk of long-term unemployment are early school leavers’

It also showed that 70% of those at risk of long-term unemployment are early school leavers. The group also considered research undertaken by the Youth Allowance Project, which showed 35% of students who left without completing Year 12 in the City of Whittlesea, had no known destination.

These stakeholders, including the mayor of Whittlesea, two secondary school principals, a Job Network provider, TAFE and a major employer decided to canvass interest in developing a local, community response to the issues raised by the research. The goal was to investigate the possibility of forging new links between school, further education and work, which would provide a community safety net for all young people in the City of Whittlesea.

There was immediate support for the idea of a Youth Commitment. Further meetings had strong support from all school and agencies with young people. Throughout 1999, working groups met around four key issues:

1. Youth voice (engaging young people in development of the youth commitment)
2. Jobs brokerage (addressing high unemployment levels amongst early school leavers)
3. Equivalence in learning (how can we meet the learning and employment needs of all young people in the city)
4. Developing a framework (what ongoing structure will sustain the Youth Commitment?)

Participating organisations devoted considerable staffing and time resources to each of these groups, and the results were both tangible and intangible.

A tangible result was the Spirit of Co-operation Agreement, developed out of the working group discussions, which outlines the philosophy, objectives and plans for the Youth Commitment. An intangible result was the improvement in trust between staff in different organisations. This has led to collaboration on projects and improved links between young people and available services, jobs and training.

There is an optimism that this project will have lasting benefits for young people through these improved connections, which would develop new arrangements between agencies—particularly within schools—to reduce the incidence of students leaving school without a job or training place secured. Discussion continued through 1999, involving all key stakeholders and Dusseldorp Skills Forum. At the end of that year, the Whittlesea Youth Commitment Spirit of Co-operation Agreement was endorsed.

The objectives of the Youth Commitment are to:

- provide all young people with the opportunity and support to complete Year 12 or its equivalent
- be flexible about the nature of this equivalence, which will be defined by the needs and aspirations of young people themselves
- develop new learning, training, employment and further education options for young people to achieve their goals
- explore new work placement, work opportunities, skill development, and community support structures for young people to achieve their goals
- establish a school and community-based mediating structure that will assist young people, as teenagers and as young adults, to meet their needs in terms of knowledge, learning, the labour market and the transition to adulthood
- develop and customise the curriculum provision of schools, TAFE and other training providers to better support the aspirations of young people
- develop innovative and collaborative arrangements between key providers of employment, education, training and personal support services.

'an Education to Employment Passport will provide information for a resume, referral information and an action plan'

Plans for 2000

- Active involvement of all secondary schools (including the catholic college) in the City of Whittlesea, Job Network agencies, Whittlesea Council, community support agencies, Centrelink and Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE—thus providing comprehensive coverage of the agencies working directly with young people on school to work transition.
- Involvement of employers through the Whittlesea Business Link—a network of over 60 local employers—and commitment from a number of major employers such as Tieman Industries and Bostik Australia.
- Review of school exit procedures so that a comprehensive, common exit form is completed by all students in the City to identify those students exiting without a clear plan.
- Students without a plan, or a training or employment place, will be referred to a member of the school's transition team for a discussion about post-school options and reasons for leaving school.
- Supporting and extending the School Leavers Destination Project, a pilot project that models the role of a transition broker. This now comprises one person available to the eight schools for individual referral of students considering leaving school before completing Year 12. The project is financed by the Victorian Department of Education and Department of Human Services, and the schools themselves.
- Introduction of an Education to Employment Passport providing information for a resume, referral information and an action plan. This is particularly relevant to those leaving without a job or training place.
- Follow-up of every early school leaver for twelve months to see if they need more support and to confirm their destination after leaving school.
- Introduction of a community team comprising all youth agencies and schools to facilitate professional collaboration and to begin case conferencing about the needs of particular students.
- Involvement of young people in ongoing development of the Youth Commitment.
- Gathering baseline data at the beginning of 2000 which will assist in measuring progress over time (e.g. data on early school leavers, referral to agencies, numbers of young people in part-time employment or education, or not in employment).

The Whittlesea Youth Commitment is a pioneering venture that has the potential to secure real change for the benefit of young people, and has attracted financial support from state and federal governments, Whittlesea Council, Dusseldorp Skills Forum and schools themselves.

In particular, the development of a collaborative model was supported by a Regional Assistance Program project grant through the Northern Area Consultative Committee with funds available from the Federal Department of Employment Workplace Relations and Small Business.

Founding members of the Whittlesea Youth Commitment February 2000

Employers:

- Bostik Australia
- Tieman Industries
- Graphics Unlimited
- Inner Northern Group Training
- Whittlesea Business Link
- Furniture Industry Association
- Apprenticeships Victoria

Job Network:

- WorkPlacement
- RMIT Priority Employment

Commonwealth Government:

- Epping Centrelink
- Northern Area Consultative Committee

State and Local Government:

- Dept of Education Northern Region
- Adult Community and Further Education (Northern Region)
- City of Whittlesea

Universities, TAFEs and Schools:

- Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT)
- Northern Melbourne Institute of Technology (NMIT)
- Epping Secondary College
- Lalor Secondary College
- Lalor North Secondary College
- Mill Park Secondary College
- Peter Lalor Secondary College
- St Monica's College
- Thomastown Secondary College
- Whittlesea Secondary College

Community Agencies:

- Kildonan Child and Family Services
- Plenty Valley Community Health Centre

For further information please contact Laila Fanebust or Ian Harrison at NIECAP RMIT on (03) 9925 7774.

Laila Fanebust is a project officer with the Whittlesea Youth Commitment.

Email as a Second Language

Term one, Y2K, and Preston/Reservoir Adult Community Education (PRACE) is entering the trial stage of an exciting ACFE project to examine new learning technologies (NLT) in ESL provision. Other providers on the project are Olympic, Meadow Heights, and Lalor Living and Learning.

Michael Chalk, the PRACE project worker, is lucky enough to be also working at Olympic, where Cathy Milesi is working on her plan to introduce email to ESL learners at levels two and three of the certificate of spoken and written English (CSWE).

As part of the Olympic trial, Cathy and Michael end up team-teaching a class at Olympic for the duration of term one.

Team-teaching

Team-teaching is great. You get to bounce curriculum ideas off each other, there's always someone to support you in the classroom; and, particularly in the computer room, the extra person can also take off a bit of the pressure. It's also a wonderful method of professional development, because you're constantly learning from your co-teacher.

So, Michael is teaching very similar classes in two locations. An ideal situation, he's thinking, for setting up some *inter-class communication*. We're trialling email—let's get these two classes to email each other! Cathy thinks it's a great idea; we ask the learners in both locations, and they're reasonably open to the idea as well.

Teaching Journal

From here, I'll let you into a bit of my teaching journal (mildly edited). Let's begin on day one of the *inter-class communication* trial, where the learners at Olympic are writing their first introductory letters to the learners at Preston.

@ Olympic, Thursday, 16th March
What a great day! All the learners (only eight this week) settled in to write to the Preston class; some in fact ended up writing massive tracts; Cathy gave a wonderful intro, setting the scene for introducing each other; and then people just wrote and wrote, pausing only to seek assistance with the technology and the language.

However…

'I'm finding this very demoralising', said M, genuinely frustrated, as she wrestled with the email sign-up procedures, which had given her error message after error message. I sat with her, knowing how important it was to find some success at that point.

When she finally got herself an email account, the letter M sent her partner in the other group was very inspiring, urging the other woman to believe in herself and to not give up.

@ Preston, Wednesday, 22nd March
Okay; I was looking forward to this class; I really was.

However, at 9am, I was getting worried as only one learner had turned up. By 9.30 we had three learners and I decided to start with the email: task for the day 'check your email'.

Without any demo at the start, or any group activity, I had a room full of individual learners for the rest of the day. Whoops! After my experience team-teaching with Cathy, I had forgotten how challenging that could be.

C (a student) had obviously forgotten her password, although I'm sure I had seen her write it down, two weeks before.

Not all was lost, however, as I know there was some written interaction between learners. While I persevered with C, other learners sent email to each other and found messages from the other group.

If only I'd thought to put people in groups to check their mail! Fortunately, they're a supportive group, never shy to ask each other for help, or share resources.

@ Olympic Thursday, 23rd March

Well, after the Wednesday at Preston, I wasn't expecting much, I can tell you; our lesson plan was to get them to email replies. Unfortunately, the Internet wasn't working when we arrived, and it wasn't looking like connecting at all, so we had a quick change of plan.

'What about that emotions exercise?' I asked Cathy as we huddled next to the malfunctioning server. 'The one where we elicit and brainstorm words for emotions and they format each one differently on the screen?'

'Oh that one', Cathy replied, 'Sure, let's do it'. So Cathy headed for the board and started engaging the learners. A delight to watch, and before we knew it, (after a quick demo) we had a room full of people busily learning—and teaching each other—how to format in a word processor.

Phew! Good thing we remembered to always have a backup plan, when dealing with the Internet.

In fact, a few people did eventually check their email, and a couple were *delighted* to receive messages from the other group.

Outcomes

Well, I've given you a glimpse of how things can go wrong on some days, (and right on others) and of a teacher's panicky end-of-the day reflections.

Where are we heading with all this? In fact, these two groups of learners are picking up a range of computer skills very quickly. The aim is to have some task- and topic-based discussion between the classes, using a Web-based bulletin board, as well as the email.

Judging from the courage that many learners have shown, in persevering with technology that can be frustrating (signing up for an email account especially), I would say we're in for a very interesting year.

Michael Chalk is a project worker with Preston/Reservoir Adult Community Education (PRACE).

Coming issues *Fine Print* in 2000

In 2000, *Fine Print* seeks to examine a number of different perspectives on Adult Literacy and Education.

This autumn edition has considered the question of just what a community is and how language and literacy help to create and sustain that sense of community.

The winter edition will focus on the place of science in ALBE. We suspect that science is relatively uncommon in ALBE classrooms and we are keen to examine why. That ACFE have made this an area of priority suggests that there is going to be a good deal more heard about science in future.

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

The spring edition will then explore issues surrounding Indigenous literacy and, as the end of the year approaches, the summer edition will look at what pathways exist within ALBE.

Policy Update

Two new initiatives for adult and community education were announced recently. *Fine Print* presents a slightly edited version of Libby Barker's discussion of these initiatives, and their emphasis on collaborative partnerships.

New Plans and Programmes = Partnerships

On March 7, at 10.30 a.m, the Minister for the Department of Post-Compulsory Education Training and Employment, Lynne Kosky, announced two new initiatives directed at the adult and community education sector. These initiatives, *Learning Towns* and *Support for Neighbourhood Houses and Community Providers* stem from the Victorian Labor Government's Pathways and Standards policy, a key document in the election campaign of the then Labor Opposition.

Although the Adult Community Education provider I work for is located in Metropolitan Melbourne, Learning Towns represents the general direction of our current state government. While regional providers have been downloading research information from the Internet and writing tender applications, I have been accessing the same Web sites in order to get an idea of what this trend actually means for the rest of us.

The key terms running through the Learning Towns Network Overview and Policy context are terms that we in the adult literacy and associated fields are familiar with. They include collaborative learning partnerships, learner-centred, lifelong learning, access, portability and transition—the underlying principles of Adult Community Education.

In this article I particularly want to explore the main theme or principle of the Learning Towns Network, which seems to be that of collaborative partnerships. At the VALBEC conference last November, partnerships were a feature of several workshops and even that of the keynote address by Nicole Gilding.

The workshops that come to mind include the partnerships between Northern Metropolitan Institute of TAFE and JPET in delivering programs to young adults and the workshops I did myself, which related to developing partnerships with local government. The aims of such partnerships generally centred around the pooling of resources—including money, time, student contacts, physical resources and expertise—as a means of meeting students' needs and providing the best possible service.

The focus on partnerships in the literacy field and the ACE sector has developed naturally as a means of providing quality education with limited resources, but has also been encouraged by the Liberal state government under Mr Jeff Kennett and now the Labour state government headed by Mr Steve Bracks.

One example of this has been the Learning Networks initiative under the previous state government. This resulted in the development of eight collaborative partnerships between community providers and TAFE Institutes. These partnerships undertook research and shared resources, skills and information about communities and appropriate delivery strategies and learning materials.

Recently I was told that these Learning Networks would only receive funding under the Bracks Government in 2000/2001 if they work as a consortium with another Learning Network. Information about the TAFE VC and the Learning networks can be found at http://www.tafevc.com.

In the Learning Towns Network, the building of collaborative partnerships—also referred to throughout the document as strategic linkages—coalitions, and collaborative relationships is encouraged as a means of maximising resources. Also important is the integration of 'social and economic development' and broadening education, training and employment options for students.

According to the funding guidelines, this will be achieved through cross-sectoral partnerships, working with industry and involving local government. Thus, strategic relationships or partnerships are not only those that can be fostered within the different education sectors but can also involve local government, industry and communities as a whole.

This trend towards collaboration is not limited to Australia. The Learning Towns initiative is similar to the Learning Partnerships initiative currently employed in the United Kingdom (http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/ is the Web site detailed on the Learning Network funding guidelines).

From the brief research I have done to date, Learning Partnerships differs from the Learning Towns initiative in that it is a federally co-ordinated project that is supported by 'central government and the representative bodies of the Further Education, Training and Enterprise Council, Careers Service and local government sectors'. I am not sure how these bodies would translate into an Australian context.

This overarching body incorporates local partnerships that may already be in existence to form 'single strategic bodies'. It also provides a forum for education and training providers to identify gaps in local education groups, avoid duplication, curriculum planning and encourage professional development for staff.

Like Learning Towns, the key to Learning Partnerships is that they are based and directed by the local community, the principle being that local communities are best able to determine local issues and conditions, and apply local

solutions to local problems. An example on the UK Web site was the Wiltshire and Swindon approach, which was termed the Learning Gateway model.

The partnership included experts in such fields as careers, TEC, local authorities, probation service, police and youth service. It developed a database to provide information relating to Lifeskills options provided by approved suppliers, an incentive scheme that aimed to encourage young people back into education and a training program. Alternatively, the Oxfordshire Learning Partnership studied the feasibility of 'introducing a joint database to track young people's inclusion and transition between learning opportunities'.

One of the reasons the government of the United Kingdom decided to fund and promote the Learning Partnerships initiative relates to the following excerpt taken from the White Paper:

> The existing framework for post-16 education and training does not support these goals. Too many people drop out at 16. Too little support and guidance is offered to young people as they face the most critical career decisions of their lives. The range and quality of opportunities available to those who stay on—or proceed to work based training—are too often insufficient. For adults, there remain barriers to returning to education and training and similar problems of insufficient information, advice and opportunity. We have started to tackle these problems and there are examples of imaginative responses to the challenge by employers, further education and the TEC system. But much more remains to be done.

Sound familiar?

By the time this article is published, a proposal for the Learning Towns will have been submitted and co-ordinators of Neighbourhood House and community education providers will be writing, or may have submitted, proposals for support for Neighbourhood Houses and community providers. New partnerships will have been developed or existing ones reinvigorated/reinvented.

Finally, I would like to say that I don't think it will finish there. The Communities that Care program was first looked into by the Kennett Government and is being considered by Christine Campbell, the Minister for Community Services. This program brings together community stakeholders to look at risk factors in the local community and find ways to reduce negative factors.

So make sure you keep this one word in mind as you plan, develop and implement new programs and projects—partnerships, partnerships, partnerships.

Libby Barker worded as an ESL and literacy teacher in adult community education before taking on the role of manager of Preston Reservoir Adult Community Education (PRACE) three years ago. She spent three and a half years on the VALBEC executive and is currently a member of the *Fine Print* editorial group.

Beside the whiteboard

Language Australia's Jan Kindler recently returned from a tour of Scandinavia. Here, she speaks to *Fine Print* about her observations of Sweden's unique folk high schools.

What is a folk high school, and are these establishments common in Sweden?

A folk high school is rather like a community centre, but with better facilities. Staff members at these schools see themselves as aligned with the community rather than the TAFE equivalent. Students are able to study full time for up to three years, and while there is no set curriculum all students generally study Swedish, Mathematics and English along with a selection from the other subjects offered, ranging from computing and science to boat building.

Some short courses and fee-for-service courses are also offered through these schools. The indigenous Sami people are responsible for some folk high schools where subjects pertaining to their own culture are offered. There are approximately 140 folk high schools throughout the country, and I only had time to visit a small number, one of which was for women only and another with a women's migrant centre attached to it.

How are these centres funded?

Funding is available for general education courses as well as courses in Swedish for migrants. The government will also purchase courses to meet particular needs. Participants in courses may also be funded. For example, people in low-paid employment wishing to complete their secondary education are entitled to receive 70–80% of their working salary while studying.

Unemployment benefits are higher in Sweden than in Australia. At some folk high schools country students may choose to live in and, in some cases, bring their family along as well.

What took place within the classroom?

I was struck by the feel of the classes in that they were similar to classes here. The teachers seemed to be using similar techniques where work was structured around a context and there was a mixture of formal and informal learning.

However, there was no concept of integrating literacy and numeracy. There appeared to be no Swedish word equivalent to numeracy. Most mathematics was taught in a more formal and traditional manner with little emphasis on context. A few people were endeavouring to change this practice.

What did you observe in the folk high school for women only?

I had the opportunity to observe migrant classes where 12–15 students were learning Swedish and participating in activity based electives such as woodwork and textiles. Hands-on courses were seen to be important in helping to learn new skills and gain confidence. Refugees did Swedish and basic mathematics with some also learning English.

The hands-on aspect extended to food preparation where each person helped create meals that were provided free at lunch time. Eating together is seen to be very important in allowing discussion and informal learning. Health and food handling techniques were also emphasized. Child care was also provided. Migrants were from such places as Iran, Iraq, Turkey, China plus a number of African countries and were usually in their twenties and thirties, ambitious and with a sense of direction.

Those responsible for setting up the facility and those currently working there had strong philosophical reasons for making it women-only. A lot of the present students are Muslim, which is seen as another reason for having it gender-specific.

Were these students similar to those at the migrant women's centre?

Yes—in terms of their cultural backgrounds—but those in the women's centre were generally older, poorer and more disadvantaged. The centre was in a housing commission area and the facilities were of a lower standard through a lack of funding. There was no child care and but lunch was provided, and people were asked to give a donation if it could be afforded.

A range of classes was available such as Swedish and sewing, and basic mathematics skills were taught through the hands-on classes. The Centre saw its role as introducing these women to Swedish life. Unfortunately, there was nowhere for the students to advance to on the completion of their time. Prospects for these migrants were more bleak. As compensation the centre allowed current and former students to use the facilities, sewing machines, exercise equipment, when not required for classes.

The centre also offered two study circles for ex-students to maintain social contact, practice Swedish and provide intellectual stimulation.

What are study circles?

Study circles are big in Sweden—like book clubs here, but even more so. They offer a vast range of topics. Each circle has its own topic and a finite time, usually a semester, in which it is discussed. People meet once a week for two hours with a facilitator, who could be a member of the group with some expertise. These circles have a peer rather than a teacher/student focus. The government provides some funding for study circles.

Is there a TAFE equivalent?

Municipal colleges are similar to TAFE where a set curriculum like a 'CGEA' course is delivered in a set time. These colleges have a vocational focus but I did not have a chance to observe or glean any further information about these colleges.

Finally, what would you say about the state of adult education in Sweden?

Adult education is seen as being beneficial for everyone to access, as it is not just vocational and skills-based. It is seen as being liberal and philosophical education. A majority of the adult population take part in some form of education annually. Many people identify as being adult learners; teachers in adult education also class themselves as learners. It caters for a broad spectrum of participants from all walks of life.

As a measure of the success of the programmes offered and the importance attached to on-going education, it should be acknowledged folk high schools have more applicants than places available.

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