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## Editorial

As the important issue of reconciliation comes under scrutiny during the first Christmas of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is appropriate that this issue of *Fine Print* focuses on Indigenous education and literacy. In a rapidly changing world where too many of us assume literacy is preceded by the word 'computer', it is easy to disregard or minimise the fact that Koori—or Aboriginal—and Islander people are probably the most severely disadvantaged members of Australian society.

A recurring theme in these contributions is empowerment. Health, housing and employment are major issues, but without free and equal access to education there can be no viable future, no sense of progress. For those of us who take literacy and numeracy for granted, the thoughts and experiences expressed here bring new lessons.

On Koori English, Esme Saunders points out how 'there is no recognition of the legitimacy of Koori English or of the fact that it is an evolved language'. Many Koori students speak Standard Australian English at school, and Koori English at home. Which one is the dialect?

What of the Koori programs at TAFE's? Who are the best teachers? How much of the content should be the realm of the teacher, and how much is best left to the tribal elders? Is there actually a divide between the academic and spiritual aspects? Terry Kildae and Linc Yow Yeh describe how success has many guises in the Koori Programs Unit of Kangan Batman TAFE.

Further to this, Cathy Sedunary and Damien Bell raise some issues about the role played by non-Indigenous with Koori students. In an interesting counterpoint to the mainstream concept of imparting knowledge, Kooris regard the student-teacher relationship as equally or even more important than the subject matter being taught. Strong emphasis is placed

on developing effective relationships. As Damien Bell notes, 'this is the Koori way of doing things'.

With recurring themes of empowerment, the need for flexibility, and the validity of Koori English, it comes as no great surprise that the Mullebar centre takes a holistic approach. At Mullebar, the first step to a new life could be operating a chainsaw as much as completing a short essay.

All the education and literacy providers in the vibrant and challenging field of Koori literacy and education talk about the value of knowledge being integrated with a sense of place as much as a sense of purpose.

Koori literacy and education is a wide-ranging subject, and for those wishing to read further material ARIS provided *Fine Print* with a comprehensive list of more than 60 resources including texts, collections of writings, reports and course materials.

Across the Tasman, our New Zealand colleagues feature in Foreign Correspondence to discuss the struggle to ensure equal Maori access to basic education. It is a similar story to Australia, but in the New Zealand case an actual treaty—the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi—exists as a point of reference. In Open Forum, the training package concept is unwrapped and a Queensland writer talks about a program on Stradbroke Island.

In Policy Update we present a summary of the Australian National Training Authority's report on its strategy to provide equal educational access for Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders, and this edition's *Beside the Whiteboard* features an interview with an inspiring Koori teacher and leader from Gippsland.

**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.**

# Koori English: a legitimate dialect

by Esme Saunders

**Koori English is the form of English used by Kooris in Southeast Australia. It is usually not recognised as a dialect by non-Kooris, who tend to label it 'bad' or 'incorrect' English. However, Koori English is as valid as any of the many forms of the language.**

## Language is power

In today's society, knowledge of language can be the instrument through which individuals are empowered. It is also true to say that the lack of knowledge of language can also disempower individuals in today's society. The language of power in Australia today is Standard Australian English.

Koori English is the dialect of English that is used by Kooris in Southeast Australia and yet is not recognised by non-Kooris as a dialect, most of whom believe that Koori English is just 'bad' or 'incorrect' English. There have been many instances where Kooris have been put down because they speak Koori English, even though this does not happen to other people who speak their own dialects of English. This put down over language also reflects a put down of Koori culture. 'Rejection, denigration or devaluing of these languages (Koori English) constitutes rejection of the cultural background of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' (Langwijn, p. 15).

It was not until quite recently that people have begun to see Koori English as a legitimate dialect of English. In the schooling system, the teaching of English as a Second Language has gained pre-eminence in the last twenty years. It is now clearly recognised that students who bring another language with them to school need to have this first language recognised so that they can then learn Standard Australian English.

This presents a difficulty for those Kooris who, while they do not have a traditional language that they are speaking, do however speak a different dialect of English. There is no recognition of the language that these Koori students are bringing with them from their home. As well as this, there is no recognition of the legitimacy of Koori English or of the fact that it is an evolved language. 'Koori English, the language, the dialect, has been part of this evolving cultural pattern, particularly in Victoria, where most of the original languages are now considered by most linguists to be extinct. There are two different perspectives of Koori English, which requires differentiating. Koori English has developed from the contact pidgin and the developing Creoles over the past 200 years and this can be generally described from an historical perspective. There is also a defined sociopolitical perspective

of Koori English through which many Kooris exert their identity and flex their cultural entity' (Enemburu, 1989: 1).

## A valid first language

Koori English is important because it affects the way that Kooris learn in the school situation. The literacy skills of Koori students have been very poor in the past, and how much of this can be directly attributed to a lack of acceptance that they have a first language, Koori English, is still under investigation. While it is important that Koori students are able to write in Standard Australian English because it is the accepted form of English in the economic world, it is equally important that Australian society accepts that Koori English is a valid form of English and one that culturally identifies Koori people with each other. It is also important for students that their first language is recognised and valued because then they will be able to learn other languages. 'The language our students bring to the classroom is a valid form of communication and needs to be valued linguistically if they are to acquire a deep knowledge and understanding of the English language in all forms' (Langwijn, back cover).

there is no recognition of the legitimacy of Koori English or of the fact that it is an evolved language

## Standard Australian English is a second dialect

Schools need to recognise that Koori English is the language that Koori students bring with them from home. Standard Australian English is a second dialect of English that Koori students will learn in the school system. Because the use of Standard Australian English in the school system is an important indicator for success, there have been many instances of academic failure for the Koori students in the school system. Koori children learn and acquire language in a different manner to other cultural groups. Studies suggest that the way Kooris view knowledge, and the attitudes they have about knowledge, will reflect the way in which the Koori speaker uses the language'.

Although the differences between Koori English and Standard Australian English may seem elusive to non-Kooris, there is a difference. This difference has to be treated with respect because both have linguistic patterns and both have their use for the speakers, depending on their audiences, where they are and what is happening in terms of communication

at the time. Eades writes: 'A dialect is a variety of language which can be understood by speakers of other varieties of the same language. Differs from other varieties of the same language in systematic ways' (Eades, 1993:1).

Koori English includes the use of silence. Silence is used by Koori speakers as part of the language. The total lack of response can indicate a deliberate intention to find out information or give the listener a rebuke for something that has occurred. 'With many urban Koori people from the north, a direct request is rarely ever made. Instead a Koori is likely to talk about all the difficulties which are related to the situation which prompts the request, and then remains silent' (Enemburu, 1989:4). The silence is then interpreted and appropriate responses made.

The use of courtesy language is not always appropriate in Koori families and therefore, Koori English does not always contain pleasantries such as 'thank you' and 'please'. In traditional communities the whole tribal group shared ownership of everything in their environment, and therefore, there was no need to say 'thank you' and 'please', because obligations were expected. In the same way, Koori children are not always expected to say please and thank you because they have an expectation that they will be looked after by their families.

#### Courtesy and communication

Koori children are more independent than non-Koori children at an earlier age. Children as young as six will be able to babysit their brothers and sisters (although not alone) and they often take the youngsters playing with them. They are capable of performing major tasks while babysitting their siblings. This independence can affect Koori students at school because they will not look directly at the teachers and they are used to doing things in their own independent way. They have also learned at an early age that looking at adults when being corrected is seen by their families as being cheeky, and they have more than likely paid the penalty for being cheeky on many occasions. Therefore, in some instances, Koori students will be unwilling to look the teacher directly in the eye.

The use of sarcasm and ridicule in language is particularly sensitive to Koori students. Kooris have their own form of send-up which they use to control each other, but this send up does not have any vindictiveness about it. On the other hand, sarcasm and ridicule are two methods of control in the non-Koori community that can be used against Koori students and can mean the end of their education. 'At a conference on Aboriginal Adult Education at Newcastle University in 1987, one adult Koori reported that he tolerated the thrashings constantly handed out by the teachers, but immediately left the school when he was ridiculed at a school assembly' (Enemburu, 1989:6). Kooris will stay silent rather than place themselves in a situation where they can be the

object of ridicule in a classroom. Even if they know the answer to a question, or if they want to ask the teacher a question, they will not do so if they are at risk of being ridiculed.

#### Speaking with silence

Kooris frequently use eye contact in their communication with each other. In some instances, there is no need for verbal communication because the eye contact will leave no room for doubt as to what the intentions of the person making the contact means. There is, however, protocol used in eye contact. Eye contact must be avoided if you are looking at your elders and when you are being rebuked for a deed. It is rude to look at your elders in this situation. However, if they command you to look at them, you must obey.

silence  
is used by  
Koori  
speakers  
as part of the  
language

Lip pursing is also an important part of Koori English because it is another method of communication. Lip pursing is used to let a person know something by looking in a certain direction. This is particularly so in a request for directions. Lip pursing can be used to denote directions. Gesture and hand signs are also important methods of communication. Sometimes, lightly touching someone's shoulder will indicate that there is a need to talk to or show them something. Children will often use this method with their parents and with teachers in the classroom situation.

Koori English is not non-Standard English. It is a viable form of English that is spoken by Kooris when they are in their own environment and when they feel comfortable and not threatened by using their own language. Even Kooris who are used to using Standard Australian English in their workplaces, may speak Koori English when they are around their own people.

There are some words used in Koori English that differ conceptually from Standard Australian English, although they are the same words. 'The issue critically in need of examination, however is not the existence of vernacular words, but an understanding of the conceptual framework, the level of meaning of English words, and the way these English words are used by the user of Koori English' (Enemburu, 1989:9). An example of this is the use of the words 'family' and 'mob'. To a Koori the word 'family' brings to mind all their close kin who could number in the hundreds, whereas to a non-Koori it may bring to mind seven or eight people. The word 'mob' to Kooris is a warm and healthy word because it means a large group of supportive people, more than likely your kin. However, to non-Kooris, the word 'mob' conjures up images of an ugly crowd that could turn on you at any moment.

#### Old grammar lives on

It appears that some of the grammar of Koori English is left over from traditional Aboriginal languages that were spoken

by Kooris before they learned to speak English. When Kooris want to use the plural form, they will often mark the noun rather than put an 's' on the end of a singular noun to mark this. An example of this is saying 'them dog' rather than 'those dogs'. Tense is also marked in the same way as Standard Australian English. In much the same way, there are words from traditional Aboriginal languages that are still used in Koori English.

Knowing about Koori English is important because it continues to be the language for Kooris. The school system is geared towards the perfection of Standard Australian English and therefore, expects Kooris to learn in exactly the same way as non-Kooris. Assessment is given on the correct use of Standard Australian English and the better you are at using this form of English, the better the assessment will be. The correction of Koori English as bad grammar can have devastating affects on the students because 'if the code (Koori English) is not recognised and understood as a fully developed linguistic system, attempts to correct it can have detrimental effects on the learner' (Enemburu, 1989:13). The failure of Koori students in the school system is indicative of these 'detrimental effects on the learner'.

Koori English contains within it the cultural values and norms of Kooris today. The use of gestures and sign languages are still a very important cultural tool. Concepts within the language differ from concepts within Standard Australian English and these differences are cultural markers.

#### Forced to choose

Many Kooris have been made to feel that education is about choosing between their own language, Koori English, or the language of academia, Standard Australian English. In choosing the language of academia, many Kooris have had

to forego their Koori English and in some cases cultural integrity. This choice does not have to be made. There are many people who retain their own dialects of English and yet are able to use the dialect of Standard Australian English in situations where it is warranted. The problem lies in the acceptance of the language by the wider community. Australia has to accept that Koori English is legitimate. When this happens, Koori students will be able to learn SAE, while keeping and maintaining their Koori English and therefore,

their culture. The use of Standard Australian English has empowered some speakers, while disempowering other speakers. The recognition of the validity of Koori English is long overdue and is very important for Kooris because they will feel that the language of their culture is valued and they themselves are therefore also valued.

**Esme Saunders is research manager of the Institute of Koori Education, Deakin University, Waurin Ponds campus.**

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“ Kooris frequently use eye contact in their communication with each other ”

# Empowering the people: when education is more than just words

*Fine Print* spoke to Terry Kildae and Linc Yow Yeh from the Koori Programs Unit at Kangan Batman TAFE. This is an edited account of that interesting and wide-ranging exchange.

**Fine Print:** How did the unit begin?

**Terry:** The unit has been going since 1994, and was established in response to a demand for a unit at what was called Broadmeadows TAFE. We have operated from various locations—at present we are in a portable classroom—but there are plans to develop the unit. We support Koori students doing mainstream course at Kangan Batman, and also provide courses in literacy and numeracy, Koori art and Design and a light engines motor mechanics course.

By providing support and access, the unit helps Koori students participate in education and training programs. This can be personal as well as educational support, because a holistic approach is often the best. We also try to create pathways to further education, training and employment.

**Fine Print:** What are some examples of those pathways?

**Terry:** We started with the basic art and design course, the Certificate III, but now we are doing Certificate IV, which is the advanced level. There is also a school leaver's program for students in both the compulsory schooling years as well as the non-compulsory years, including people as young as 13 and 14. We had one young lad who couldn't get into school at all, but after about a year and a half in the program he went back to school in New South Wales. We have several young fellas placed in apprenticeships, and others have gone through the unit and on to employment, becoming positive role models for other students.

One shining example is Arnold Davis who, at the age of 52, won the 1998 Harold C. Richards Award last year in his first experience with compulsory or formal education. The institute presents this award to an outstanding student who overcomes difficult circumstances to succeed in their studies.

Arnold went to work early, after his father died. He became an alcoholic and did time in gaol. Six years ago, Arnold got his life together and now he is involved in programs here. Arnold works for us on Tuesdays doing the Koori cultural training and mentoring at the Melbourne Assessment Prison, the Port Phillip Prison and the Juvenile Justice Centre at

Parkville. He tries to get a positive message across, and it's a real inspiration. We look at success in a lot of ways—it's not just a matter of saying the guys get a certificate and a job, because you have to understand where our students come from. Arnold Davis is an example of where our students come from.

“ we look at success in a lot of ways—it's not just a matter of ...a certificate and a job ”

In our trades experience course we have 13 year-olds that state schools will not take. Just to get those lads back into education on a regular basis is a huge success. Hopefully, with that program we can lead them into something positive, give them something for the future and lead them to a traineeship, apprenticeship or even a job.

**Fine Print:** You offer a diversity of programs, some of them to locations other than Kangan Batman TAFE.

**Terry:** We have a big involvement in corrections education including Port Phillip Prison, where we run art and design. There is the Coorong Tongala, Certificate I, which we run at the Melbourne Assessment Prison and at Deer Park women's prison. Coorong Tongala is an important course because it's Koori-specific. We can adapt it to a learner's needs and environment; we adapt it to the corrections education, and then we adapt it out here in the unit as well. We run it as a course in itself, where people come in and they're in the very first stages of learning to read and write. Literacy, numeracy and basic computers. We take them through Coorong Tongala Certificate I, and for some students it is the first success they have with formal education. It provides motivation for them to move on.

There are plans for a purpose-built unit which will reflect Koori culture in terms of space, colour, textures and design. That is really encouraging because most units like us are low paid, in a portable building on the peripheries of the universities and TAFEs. We want to raise the unit's profile and attract more students, and we have already quadrupled our student contact hours. We are also going to run a young mothers' program by adapting the Coorong Tongala to the right educational context. We also plan to introduce technology into our programs in prisons and corrections facilities, and to lead the way in online learning for our students.

**Fine Print:** Are different skills required in teaching Kooris? Is there a particular classroom culture?

**Terry:** A culturally appropriate environment is important, but is your question actually: why do they a specific unit? We were asked this question during the strategic planning process. Why do they want a unit and their own teachers? Why should they be different? We have had to argue very strongly and clearly in saying we are not like everybody else. If we are a diverse group, we are the most significant diverse group, being the first Australians in the first society and having a special place in Australian history.

We are asked this question all the time, so when you ask if there is a different system of knowledge for us, the answer is 'yes'. Koori people are more receptive to learning in their own cultural environment—a setting where they feel free, and know there are family and friends. The teachers know where the students are coming from and teach in a culturally inclusive way.

If we are doing something that is mainstream, we use teaching mechanisms to adapt it to a Victorian Koori cultural context, and if this is not possible it is related to the Aboriginal context of Australia. The other thing is to have Indigenous representation from teaching through to management. Without this, students don't feel so empowered to complete something.

It's a very inclusive approach, its not a matter of strictly being a computer class and that's all we are going to do. The borders are flexible, and we would still perform as a computer class while taking into account the cultural things that we know about our students, about access to a computer and the chance to get onto a computer and work through.

There are practical issues. Our students may have to pick the kids up from school, because they can't afford child care or it's not available. Also there are health issues and people have trouble with transport. There are all those barriers to education that you have to acknowledge.

So is it better to have separate Koori classes for effective learning? The answer is yes, at an appropriate level, but we hope that we empower our students to feel confident and skilled enough to do mainstream courses.

**Fine Print:** Once they have become familiar with the learning environment.

**Terry:** Yes, and confident about sitting in a mainstream class as the only Indigenous person there. For many of our people that is a big thing to overcome.

**Fine Print:** Are different skills required when teaching Kooris?

the most effective teaching methods are methods that all good teachers use

**Terry:** If you're talking about professional skills and knowledge, the answer is no, because I've had mainstream education and so has Linc. But cultural skills are required to ensure an understanding of our students' needs. We support and encourage them to move through and sometimes you feel some of that knowledge is passed on through Koori and Indigenous communities. It's something that is very hard to pick up; it's not really a skill. If you're not Indigenous you sometimes miss the point.

The matter of which teaching methods are most effective is a little bit dodgy because what we are saying here gets on to Aboriginal learning styles. That gets into a bit of a racist view of how we learn better by repetition by rote, by simple things, by drawing in the sand, and that's true.

**Fine Print:** That wasn't meant.

**Terry:** No, not for you, but I've heard people say that—these people learn best by rote, by continually going over it, by breaking it down, and making it simple, by step-by-step repetition.

There are some great Koori academics and high achievers, but at Broadmeadows our students are mainly people who have been disempowered and disadvantaged by the education system.

The most effective teaching methods are methods that all good teachers use to get the best out of their students, based on individual personal needs.

**Fine Print:** Is it possible for whites to teach Koori studies?

**Terry:** It is possible, but not appropriate.

**Linc:** A pretty hard call, I would think.

**Terry:** A lot of non-Indigenous people do. They think they can teach Koori studies out of a text book. Our position here is that we only get Indigenous people—community elders—for the cultural studies components of our courses, and we think that's basic integrity. Taking control of education means a return to learning about traditional cultural knowledge from the people who know best. While some non-Indigenous people may have spent a lot of time studying Koori culture, it still isn't appropriate for them to take it over.

If a non-Indigenous person found themselves in a position where they had to teach cultural studies, or Koori studies, or Aboriginal studies, the most effective way for them to go about it would be, where possible, to have an Indigenous person come in as a guest speaker or a sessional teacher. If you're up in Shepparton it would be a Yorta Yorta person, and here it would be a Wurundjeri person, and on all

occasions we try to get a Wurundjeri person to come in to teach local culture. Then you have the over-riding issues like Native Title and Aboriginal deaths in custody, which are on another level. Cultural studies have to be at a local level and should engage local community elders.

These days, because you find Indigenous people are more knowledgeable about those sorts of things, there will be a bit of resistance to Indigenous people actually sitting in a cultural class with a non-Indigenous person teaching. They may do it at a tertiary level at university, but I certainly wouldn't do it here at TAFE. People just wouldn't turn up. We've got non-Indigenous people teaching in the prisons, but we still get our community elders to go into to do the cultural component of those courses.

**Fine Print:** And if you are teaching literacy?

**Linc:** It is taught in the cultural context. The approach is culturally inclusive and sensitive but we leave out those specific cultural elements that are covered by our elders.

**Fine Print:** Is the unit state or federally funded?

**Terry:** It's a combination of both, and based on our student contact hours, how many students we can get through a program.

**Fine Print:** Do students come here from all over Melbourne?

**Terry:** At one stage we had students coming in from Geelong for one or two days a week, but most of the students are probably local within the Hume region.

**Fine Print:** Are there other institutions in Victoria doing this sort of work?

Most TAFEs have Koori units, and many have strong programs. Then there are the universities. Deakin has the Institute of Career Education at Geelong, there is the Centre for Australian Indigenous Studies at Monash, and I'm not sure what Melbourne University call theirs now, but it used to be in Bouverie Street. Swinburne has one, Northern Met out at Preston, Bundoora, RMIT, any of the regional areas as well. Warrnambool has an Indigenous unit, there is one at Bendigo, Albury, Shepparton. There is one down at Sale, Bairnsdale somewhere, one at Morwell.

**Fine Print:** Linc, you have done a lot of work in this field. Can you outline it for us?

**Linc:** I have been in Melbourne almost two years, and last year taught on a casual basis at the CAE while doing sessional teaching here, before being offered this full-time position. At CAE, I taught English II and an elective, Aboriginal Studies—Australian Studies to be exact—which looked at history and culture in a wider Australian

perspective, including all the Indigenous groups. We looked at different stages in various regions, rather than just the Victorian groups. Talking about Koori culture has its challenges—you know being from Queensland is Murra culture—and I have permission from them to talk on their behalf, but not in this country (Victoria).

**Fine Print:** So that's quite significant.

**Linc:** That's something that I think a lot of Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous Australians need to understand—that it's part of the concept of integrity of your particular group. It is part of the traditional line that only certain people can give away certain information at certain times. It is part of the traditional setting that not everyone can talk about certain issues, like spirituality or women's business. It is essential to be aware of your perimeters. I guess the important message is that if you're not sure, check with people in the area and find out what is appropriate

**Fine Print:** What is the nature of your work in literacy at Kangan Batman TAFE?

**Linc:** We tackle literacy and numeracy factors each time we set up a program, so even though we might be doing the Koori art and design studies, which is focused mainly on the visual arts and various mediums in the art world, we still relate things back to the basics of reading and writing.

The course Coorong Tongala is a module in our Certificate of General Adult Education. It has a reading and writing framework, but it's not a literacy course as such, where we teach phonetics and grammar.

**Fine Print:** What does Coorong Tongala mean?

**Linc:** Coorong is the mouth of the Murray River and Tongala is where it branches out into the sea. That's the pathway. The idea is to set up pathways.

**Fine Print:** Like a river delta, where the mouth of the river branches out into many streams of knowledge?

**Linc:** Yes, very similar to that. The idea is that student start from a certain area and end up finding a direction, a pathway. A right of way into the sea. That's my understanding of it.

**Fine Print:** Tell us something of your work at the CAE.

**Linc:** I taught English II, mainly as part of the CGA. I did not have any Koori students in that class, or in the Indigenous Australian studies class.

**Fine Print:** How did you find teaching Indigenous studies?

the approach is culturally inclusive...but we leave out those... elements that are covered by our elders

**Linc:** I was a nice sort of comparison, and provided a bit of variety in the week, teaching Koori students here at Kangan, then teaching non-Koori students in CAE. Working at the CAE and with Indigenous students here, I have found the major social issues affecting them are very similar. Probably the main difference was that many of the students in the Koori unit start out with very little skill, in comparison to CAE students.

**Fine Print:** How receptive are white people who take up Aboriginal studies?

**Linc:** Very receptive, the number of students probably didn't indicate that receptiveness. There were probably only eight students in the group, but during class sessions they were very keen to learn and understand. There was a great willingness to understand.

**Fine Print:** Terry mentioned working at the Melbourne Assessment Prison, are you involved with that as well?

**Linc:** I have very little involvement with corrections at present.

**Fine Print:** Do you find Melbourne's Kooris are aware of their cultural background?

**Linc:** I was surprised, coming from the north—where most Murra fellas have got an understanding of where they are from—to discover students down here either know a lot or very little about their background. But once somebody gets an understanding about their cultural background and history, there is this urgent need to find out more. This is frustrating for our students because they then want to learn very quickly.

**Fine Print:** They get a thirst for it.

**Linc:** They get a thirst for it and they want to seek that information out, seek their relatives out. But it was surprising to me, coming from the north down here for the first time, not realising that these people were actually cousins. Realising that they had no understanding that they may have been related in a way. If you take one example—two people in the classroom, and all of a sudden they find out that they are related. It changes things; it changes the dynamics of the classroom setting and it changes how you teach positively or negatively. Like, if cousins don't get on because maybe they're traditional rivals, it creates many problems.

**Fine Print:** Even if they were not aware of it before they found out?

**Linc:** Yes, and once they do find out, that's when the problems arise. Ignorance is bliss so to speak.

**Fine Print:** Are there particular ways of getting information across?

**Linc:** At the moment we are involved in developing TAFE Koori cultural Indigenous training packages. This concerns people presenting information to non-Indigenous audiences within Kangan's other departments, as well as outside the institute. Our staff goes to secondary schools and we find they are crying out for information regarding cultural training for teachers. They know which issues they need to be aware of when they work with Indigenous students, and want to know how to go about it effectively.

**Fine Print:** So this would be a case of education for the educator.

**Linc:** Yes. There is a growing awareness, though. I saw something in the news the other day in relation to the death of Charles Perkins. Every time there was visual footage of Charles they would make a statement at the beginning of the story, warning that it might cause offence to some viewers because he has passed on. It is traditional that images of the deceased are not displayed until the mourning period is completed.

I think that is a perfect example of being sensitive to the issues at hand and to the culture and respect.

**Fine Print:** Do you find there is much opposition, or criticism of what you are doing?

**Linc:** I would be lying if I said that everybody is happy. There is a definite resistance but it is more the underhand tactics that are stressful than if people were just up-front about their opinions on our having a Koori unit. There was resistance at one stage during the strategic planning process, but it was sorted out on the same day. People were very upset that it might be divisive because other minority or ethnic groups might have claimed they also deserved something as well. We basically had our argument—it is about our ancestors first and foremost, and this is an issue that has been going on for a very long time. But overall there is support for Kooris having their own programs and staff.

**Fine Print:** Is there likely to be an amalgamated, distinct Koori TAFE?

**Linc:** I would like to think that in the future there would be. I guess there would be a push for that amongst all communities to force their energies onto the one project. There could be resistance, even amongst Koori communities, to have just the one because you'd be looking at representing a whole range of Koori cultures.

**Fine Print:** You came here from Queensland. In an Indigenous context, is that comparable to—say, in a European context—someone going from Denmark to teach in Holland?

**Linc:** Could be. It's probably as accurate as you can get. After federation, with creation of the states and what have

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# Non-Indigenous teachers with Koori students: some issues discussed

by Cathy Sedunary and Damein Bell

The Koori Services Centre at Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (Preston campus) was established in the mid 1980s to provide vocational education and training to the Victorian Koori community. Today it offers courses in basic education, business, welfare studies, tourism and care and management of Aboriginal and Islander materials. Students vary from young adults to mature age, and come from Indigenous communities throughout Australia.

As a department belonging to the Faculty of Further Education, we have three full time staff, two part time and a number of sessional teachers. We have an Indigenous manager and an Indigenous student support worker. In order to ensure the cultural and educational validity of our service delivery we have close links with Koori education organisations and local community consultancy groups, who provide us with direction and advice through the NMIT Koori Advisory Committee.

In a mainstream educational setting where the majority of teachers are non-Indigenous, providing education and training to Indigenous people is a complex task that requires ongoing evaluation. Since its beginning, staff at the Koori Services Centre have been focussing their efforts on devising ways of how best to teach Indigenous students. We have been involved in program evaluations and research, and we have published on this very subject.

Yet, teachers continue to approach the classroom with a certain amount of ambivalence and hesitancy. Despite our collective knowledge and skills we have gained over the years, we are still very much a work-in-progress. What follows is a discussion of some of the issues confronting non-Indigenous teachers who teach Indigenous students. This is not a definitive paper on this subject, and we acknowledge that every teacher has a unique story to tell.

## The Koori way of doing this

Indigenous students belong to their respective communities, who as a result of European invasion are now the most socially, politically, and economically disadvantaged group in Australian society. They are far less likely to complete their secondary education, or to participate successfully in tertiary or vocational training than their non-Indigenous counterparts. This fact provides for a complex and often

problematic educational environment, particularly where non-Indigenous teachers and Indigenous students meet.

There is material available focussing on pedagogical or theoretical frameworks which prepares a teacher for teaching Indigenous students in the classroom. In order to gain much better understanding of how best to teach Indigenous students, teachers need to be guided by the wisdom and expertise that exists within the Koori community.

In reality this means shifting from formal approaches to group teaching to taking on more pragmatic perspectives. As teachers, we are placed in the position of being told what to do, and to be receptive to the Koori way of doing things. The challenge remains how to do this on a personal level, and how to do this in a setting with often rigid with inflexible demands.

Indigenous students are far less interested in what they are being taught than who is teaching them

Indigenous students are far less interested in what they are being taught than who is teaching them. Therefore, a critical feature then of teaching Indigenous people is the nature of the relationships between the teachers and students. We know that the quality of our relationships with students will determine the success or failure of anything we do in the classroom. An Indigenous student will not attend class if he or she doesn't like the teacher, and may drop out of a course as a result.

A lot of energy needs to be spent developing good relationships with students, this is more valuable than spending time on anything else. This is the Koori way of doing things.

## The importance of communication

Establishing good relationships with students takes a long time as does understanding the different forms of communication that exist in and outside of the classroom. The most dominant form of communication amongst the students and staff is Koori English. The use of Koori English amongst the students invariably shapes their interactions with each other and with the teaching staff.

Koori English is a product of European invasion whereby Indigenous people were denied the practice of speaking their own languages particularly on missions and reserves.

Today Koori English is a mixture of Australian Standard English and a Creole of different Indigenous languages. For many of our students Koori English is their first language and a means of authentic cultural expression.

Koori English is more than a verbal form of communication. It shapes non-verbal behaviour in the classroom as well. Facial gestures and eye contact or often the lack of it, plays an important part of this. Teachers need to have the skills to be able to read this and interact according.

Indigenous students often feel 'shame' in the classroom, particularly if they are singled out by a teacher. Indigenous students will avoid drawing attention to themselves and will not readily answer questions or participate in group activities. This sets up an awkward dynamic if the teacher is reliant on group participation as a learning experience.

As a written language, Koori English is gaining acceptance in our classroom. Teachers are more readily moving to find ways of integrating Koori English into assessment tasks that also require competencies in Australian Standard English.

Critical then to establishing good relationships with students is an understanding and acknowledgment of the validity of Koori English as their first language.

### Conclusion

Change and flexibility is the Koori way of doing things. Moving away from standard forms of classroom interaction to accommodate ways of behaving that are different is sometimes difficult to do. For many teachers, we are dealing with a prevailing sense of cultural dissonance. Some teachers can deal with this, others do not and move on.

The process of evaluating and improving upon our teaching practice is a dynamic one. We do so in response to the changing needs and perceptions of the Koori community, which provides us with the most challenging direction yet for how best to teach Indigenous students.

Cathy Sedunary has worked at NMIT's Koori Services Centre for the past five years. She is a non-Indigenous teacher in the Associate Diploma in Social Science (Aboriginal Welfare Studies).

Damein Bell is a member of the Gourditch Mara nation of South West Victoria and has been involved in Indigenous education and training for the past 10 years. Damein is manager of NMIT's Koori Services Centre.

## Coming issues *Fine Print* in 2001

In 2001, *Fine Print* seeks to examine a number of different perspectives on Adult Literacy and Basic Education.

Issues we will examine, but are yet to be finalised, include:

- a review/evaluation of the CGEA (due for reaccreditation in 2001)
- curriculum issues
- professional development.

If you have ideas related to these themes 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*.

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# Mullebar:

## Indigenous tertiary training and education for tomorrow

by Brett Westblade

**While literacy is an important element in the Mullebar program, the centre avoids a narrow focus in order to make sure the needs of individual students come first.**

Literacy is an important element of our program, but we have the luxury of not being forced into a stance of delivering literacy training as the main objective. Our objective is to combat the problem rather than the symptoms. Our success is based upon meaningful experiential work that takes into account cultural differences arising from Indigenous cultural concepts and the culture that arises from lower socioeconomic and the suburban environment. Initial stages endeavour to develop rapport and a pleasant supportive environment with fun and vibrancy as a key to breaking down barriers, such as anxiety and lack of self confidence.

Indigenous students are an extremely diverse group shaped by culture, location, socio-economic circumstances, gender, education and intelligence. The very clever study law or medicine on the Parkville campus, or attend any of six other campuses belonging to the Institute of Land and Food Resources (ILFR) within the University of Melbourne. The ILFR is the largest land management institution in Australia, and Glenormiston College decided eight years ago that more should be done to provide advice, training and education to Indigenous participants, so an Indigenous Rural Education Centre was developed to assist students and Indigenous issues in general. Glenormiston is about three hours from Melbourne.

The centre and programs use the name Mullebar, which means 'tomorrow' and it provides the students with an area where they can relax, 'speak in their normal fashion' away from disconcerting stares. Our programs operate on three levels—on campus courses, online distance education or flexible learning and outreach programs delivered in communities

The latter is the most demanding component, requiring extensive negotiations with communities to establish groups, constant travelling and extended stays as well as transporting staff and equipment to the Indigenous site, which can often be as rudimentary as a shearing shed.

A fair and equitable process, strategies and policies regarding equal opportunity and anti-discrimination are incorporated,

endeavouring to achieve outcome percentages that reflect the equivalent performance of the mainstream community.

This is achieved through a process whereby ideas are ratified by an indigenous partnership committee made up of members from a number of local communities.

### On campus courses

On campus mainstream courses with Indigenous students are often management lessons, based around horses. Some Indigenous students can gain entry to the course through a special equity system because they have had a limited formal education. They may find the theory sessions daunting, but are provided with tutors and the facilitator also helps when on campus. The embarrassment arising from difficulties with theory sessions is balanced out by their

success with applied tasks, which is due to tremendous innate skills and extensive experience with animals.

After a few months, their literacy and assignment writing skills develop quickly and the course becomes more enjoyable and easier. We have also run management courses specifically for Indigenous students who would stay on campus for a week before returning home for two weeks to continue their work experience. They were taken on many tours and once to work on an emu farm in Queensland, where the Indigenous manager repeated the same content that had been delivered by lecturers. The participants were far more attentive because it was an Aboriginal person providing the advice.

Another exchange trip involved taking elders from many communities to a remote site in Arnhem Land, where they camped on the local beach and learnt about the local culture. Most courses and trips are videotaped and booklets produced so the participants can revise past lessons and experiences.

### Outreach programs

Communities contact us when they have acquired funding for special projects. The funding goes further if they can

“Mullebar... means 'tomorrow' and it provides the students with an area where they can relax, 'speak in their normal fashion' away from disconcerting stares”

incorporate training, which is funded under our profile hours. Farms have been purchased near Sale, Horsham and Warrnambool, and houses built in Robinvale, gardens created at Heywood and a nursery at Macedon. The program may consist of modules from three courses, and we use only modules that are meaningful and relevant to avoid participants sidling out the door, never to return.

The primary objective is not to allow the lack of literacy skills to hinder the acquisition of skills and knowledge in other disciplines, which could result in a lack of self worth. Initial endeavours often revolve around achieving success in a new area such as tree climbing or the use of chainsaws, which have a sense of danger and excitement. When the participant with a history of failures suddenly acquires a certificate based on merit, they are often overjoyed. This helps to establish opportunities to incorporate more hidden literacy sessions that can be applied to a real life experiential situation such as reading the fuel/oil ratio and mixing the compound. Mechanics is popular, it is self motivating with participants keen to know more about technical details that can be presented verbally, graphically and in print.

Initial endeavours often revolve around achieving success in a new area such as tree climbing or the use of chainsaws

As the program progresses the participants desire more knowledge and recognition of their abilities. Indigenous people often do not see the point of practicing—they prefer to be involved in real events and mimic the skilled person, or their uncle. Some institutions will teach bricklaying by building a wall that is then demolished in preparation for the next group, infuriating the Indigenous students because it demeans their efforts and time.

The degree to which Indigenous students will apply themselves to a task, often correlates to how much they respect the person who is teaching, so involvement of an uncle or community elder can often streamline the process and other staff should endeavour to establish and maintain a personal relationship with the participants as quickly as possible. Group vibrancy can be enhanced through football repartee, outside in a circle so that the instructor is not the 'tall poppy' up the front. Other techniques include tours to local sites, barbecues and challenging sessions. Videos of previous Indigenous groups are very useful in the introductory sessions to break down the sense of distrust when they first meet strangers. Scenes depicting fun and cousins and uncles doing the various modules result in the new participants relaxing and being more acceptable of ideas.

At the Macedon nursery the group wasn't very keen on learning Latin names, so Indigenous bilingual readers from Arnhem Land were brought in to make the comparison between Latin and Aboriginal words. Many Indigenous languages have enormous words with the language being rated as some of the most complex languages in the world, because of the numerous suffixes and prefixes attached to

the word (for example, *wibbara barrabaladjorrkka*—they brought them home).

### Learning with teamwork

When we discussed how they had no problem remembering the names of numerous footballers, a football team was drawn up with Rhododendron in the back pocket and Azalea in the ruck. The homework consisted of learning the back line and they made a video of 'The Footy Show' where they discussed the performance of plant players in the native team and the exotic team. A day often starts with bingo, using Latin names and horses races involving the rolling of dice after the pronunciation of the jockey, who may be called *Poa poiformis* (a grass used for weaving by Kooris).

A Koori-specific group is very important because it allows the instructors to adapt the delivery process to complement Koori needs and culture with participants progressing as a group. Many participants have often grown up with very few life experiences. They didn't have the space, funds or people to take them places, or tools to make things, and attended schools where the teacher didn't understand and recognise cultural clashes. Some examples of this are: the group should be praised rather than individuals being praised, otherwise that person could be ostracised; in traditional societies it is rude to look an elder in the eye, and some people grow a long fringe to avoid eye contact; when a job is to be done you should wait until older people have a chance to do it or until someone asks, but often people perceive their lack of involvement as being lazy rather than polite.

### Experience and training is vital

Schools keep failing these people until they leave, and without work experience they have no concept of a proper day's work. Long term unemployed become despondent and untrained, resorting to substance abuse to beat the depression, creating more problems and even mental illness. Our website [www.vicnet.net.au/~ruraled/](http://www.vicnet.net.au/~ruraled/) highlights many cultural strategies that may not be applicable to most places but will assist development of lateral concepts.

Our courses are delivered over a number of years whenever possible. This permits the achievement of so much more than six month courses, but at a far greater cost to our institution because it will not receive the required remuneration. A tremendous impact can be made upon negative attitudes, academic results and the work ethic. Apart from the positive aspects arising directly from training, the group dynamics also have a great impact, with strangers being brought together for a course which leads to friendships, supporting each other in their work and their personal lives, helping to communicate to trainers when individuals are going through a difficult patch.

Results are recorded as 'passed' or 'not yet passed', with the knowledge that they can keep coming back until they acquire all the necessary modules. Two days are spent on theory and two days doing production. Workplace assessments are also taken into account for final assessments. When they finish the course, they can do other modules while their mates catch up.

### Strength in diversity

The more diverse the group the more productive it becomes, if there are men and women of varying ages it will be far better than just a group with young males. Quite a few participants, especially the older ones, have always worked and are motivated and extremely keen to complete the course. They will often work seven days a week, although they are only paid to do four, because the nursery belongs to their community. The classroom has moved from the tea room to a shed that has been painted, fitted out with big windows and garden beds established to enhance the location. When teaching in the tea room, it was difficult to move from the social conversations back into the academic sessions.

The horticultural instructor delivers the main content, the facilitator maintains a consistency to the program despite the changing instructors, and a tutor is available to help with any need such as assignments, car licences, reading novels, resumes, letters or forms dealing with personal needs. While the participants are prompted to be on time, the whole course is based upon the premise that it is their choice. We will even stop sessions, if they have had enough, but over time they have increased the pace as they settle into the course.

The University of Melbourne and Institute of Land and Food Resources is endeavouring to enhance the quality of the Indigenous lifestyle to produce outcomes such as employment, enterprises, safety, skills, efficiency and increased pride.

The college is also involved in sessions that are delivered to the general public with presentations to APEX, Rotary, NEXUS and many other groups. This helps the reconciliation process and the general understanding of Indigenous people. The public can sometimes be resentful of the extra funds allocated to Indigenous groups, but when there is a specific faction of our community being disadvantaged and that group becomes poorer as a result, with the consequences possibly leading to substance abuse or even suicide, then something must be done. The initiatives, strategies and economic support have enabled positive and effective programs to be implemented. The result has been thousands of Indigenous people acquiring higher education and greater numbers being employed. In addition, the strategies and programs devised are often of benefit to other members of the

community. In our Indigenous courses, we often include non-Indigenous participants who also benefit from the training.

Networking is important, and we have had visitors from the Kimberleys and Arnhem Land over the years, including the Sunrize band, Indigenous crocodile farmers and teachers. The teachers explained how the children use digital cameras to record rock art, which is then put on to computers with the story and the computers can read the sentences back in English or a local language. Internationally we exchange emails with the Ktunaxa in Canada and the Zulus of Southern Africa are considering starting a hydroponics project. Participants enjoy the interactive messages, because the Canadians also have a nursery, producing plants to revegetate the pipe lines and planting the trees into permafrost.

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### Online education

Some students have not been able to access outreach or campus courses due to their remote location, so they enrolled in distance education or flexible learning courses, which is an extremely difficult mode of learning. It is a text-based process of learning with very little interaction between students and staff. It is hoped that in the future the attributes of the online delivery mode will be improved to include a computer mediated process, incorporating visual and auditory components so that Indigenous people don't have to leave their friends, family or employment to study. The online service offers a lifelong learning process.

The Consortium of Affordable and Accessible Distance Education (CAADE) is delivering such a service to groups in remote third world communities. The participants can click on real time live videos of lectures, or stored video and audio as well as text files and they can network with other students through email, forums or live computer conferencing<sup>1</sup>.

Literacy within our programs is developed through ongoing flexible recurrent experiential training and theory for Koori-specific groups—in conjunction with meaningful projects and appropriate pedagogical strategies delivered by a respected elder or instructors—which develop a quality rapport with participants. Using technological communication with audiovisual capabilities, we reduce the reliance upon text to increase understanding within a pleasant familiar environment that takes the student from the known to the unknown.

continued on p33...

1 • <http://www.friends-partners.org/GLOSAS/>  
• <http://www.rboston.com>  
• <http://www.teched.org/>  
• <http://www.hccs.cc.tx.us>

## Special texts: A selection of reading resources

*Fine Print* asked ARIS for a list of reading resources on Koori literacy and education. As with our recent Science issue, ARIS promptly came back with a list of suggested reading. Contact details for ARIS are at the end of this article.

### **Tunapi: about Aborigines in Tasmania. ALBE Resources Unit, Tas., 1992.**

Tunapi is a collection of writings from students of a teletutoring program covering Aboriginal studies, literacy and numeracy. It is a clear, strong and moving collection of poems and essays which express the pride as well as the problems of being an Aboriginal Tasmanian today.

### **Tunapi two: Aborigines in Tasmania past and present. ALBE Resources Unit, Tas., 1993.**

This second Tunapi book is a collection of student writings from a teletutoring program which offers adults in isolated areas around Tasmania a chance to learn Aboriginal studies, reading, writing and maths, using the telephone as a link with the tutor. The writings provide a glimpse of past and present struggles and reinforces the growing pride of Aborigines in Tasmania.

### **Tunapi three: from family to community. ALBE Resources Unit, Tas., 1994.**

This third Tunapi book is a collection of student writings from a teletutoring program which offers adults in isolated areas around Tasmania a chance to learn Aboriginal studies, reading, writing and maths, using the telephone as a link with the tutor. The writings in Tunapi three show the process of exploring links with family and community and personal identity.

### **Tunapi four: the children's stories. Rosemary Ransom (ed), ALBE Resources Unit, Tas., 1996.**

This collection of stories from a group of Tasmanian Aboriginal women explores the reactions of Aboriginal children to the threats and changes to their culture. The women use their knowledge of their families and their ancestors' ways of living to describe the life of tribal Aborigines from past times. Some stories describe the reactions of children to the arrival of Europeans and some stories explore the consequences of this for Aboriginal culture. This collection of stories gives the modern day reader an insight into Australia's cultural past and could be used effectively in an Australian studies or literacy classroom.

### **Growing up in the outback. Jane Fernando Smith, WEA Adult Literacy Program, 1994.**

An engaging personal story of growing up in the Murri community in Mungindi in the 1950s. This book is easy to

read and incorporates aspects of personal writing with history and social history. Issues such as racism, education, health care and land rights are woven throughout the personal narrative of humorous, yet at times poignant experiences. This book would be suitable for use with level 2/3/4 CGEA classes either as an Australian history text or as stimulus material for personal writing.

### **Making a difference: a collection of reports from small scale adult literacy and numeracy research projects from WA. National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia (NLLIA), Adult Literacy Research Network (ALRN WA), 1996.**

Papers included are:

- An investigation into the sensible use of calculators in developing functional numeracy with adults—Swan and Sparrow
- Perspectives from women participants in a special intervention literacy program—Mitchell
- An evaluation of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal approaches to the delivery of an adult literacy program—Moussalli, Hansen, Pickett
- An investigation into the benefits of incorporating a numeracy computer-assessed program into the ESL access and bridging program at Swanbourne Senior High School—Ewing.

### **Certificate II in Koori Education, Training and Employment. Barbara Goulborn, Rick Henderson, Matt Nicholls, John Tregambe, Chris Tully, and Margery Webster, Kangan Institute of TAFE, 1996.**

The Certificate in Koori Education, Training and Employment (CKETE) was first accredited in 1991 and re-accredited in 1996. Reviewed and adjusted in line with feedback from the field, the Certificate II has new reading, writing and speaking modules, strengthening its basic education content, as well as maintaining its links with vocational programs with the inclusion of several National Office Skills modules. The overall aim of the course is to provide Aboriginal students with literacy and numeracy skills in an Aboriginal context, to develop employment-related skills and to foster self confidence in order to facilitate access to further study and/or employment.

The modules include: Preparing for Study and Training, Talking and Listening, Effective Reading and Writing, Aboriginal Studies, Work Environment and Essentials,

Personal Management and Job Seeking Skills, Everyday Numeracy, Computer Operations and Word Processing.

**Reinventing literacy: the multicultural imperative. David Myers (ed), Phaedrus Books, 1995.**

This text examines the cultural literacy of Australia. Cultural literacy is what gives a nation/community its identity, its cohesiveness and its sense of unique mission. Cultural literacy is the celebration by a nation of its own special history, literature, philosophy, environment, religious lore, art and entertainment. We have belatedly come to realise that our Aboriginal communities and the multicultural communities are a vital part of a redefined Australia. This book is a collection of essays by academic specialists who discuss the ways literacy has served to work against minority groups in Australia, and stimulates thought about how that situation can be rectified. It addresses Aboriginal cultural literacy particularly well.

**Coorong Tongala course: Certificate I in Koori education. Phil Egan Management Services, Victoria. Adult, Community and Further Education Board (ACFE), 1998.**

This course aims to provide accredited training for Koori people wishing to develop skills for accessing further training, education or employment. Currently, there is no accredited general adult education course designed specifically to meet the needs of Koori people at AQF 1. This has proved to be a significant barrier to accessing other accredited courses designed to meet the needs of Kooris that are at AQF 2. The course aims to provide this pathway.

There are five core electives, plus one (of two) electives for a total of 400 hours. Modules are:

- Stand up you fellas!—Individual management skills
- Where are you goin'?—Career pathways
- Talk up, listen up!—Koori cultural studies 1 and oral communication skills
- What's the story?—Koori cultural studies 2 and reading and writing skills
- What's your number?—Life skills numeracy
- So what's doin'?—Focus activity selected and developed according to community needs (elective)
- Who's the boss?—Leadership, politics and land rights (elective).

**Coorong Tongala resource kit 2000. Australand Investments and Company Pty Ltd.**

This folder of materials has been prepared for teachers of Coorong Tongala: Certificate I in Koori Education. The folder was prepared for professional development but contains information and resources useful to any teacher of Coorong Tongala. The materials include ideas for teaching the different modules, information about teaching adult and youth Koori students, assessment material and information about other useful resources.

**General curriculum options for the CGEA: ten multi-level units for use in Aboriginal programs. Denise Gillies, Adult Literacy Services Bureau, 1997.**

One of the objectives of this Western Australian project was to take the existing content from Aboriginal Certificate courses (for example, Aboriginal Access Certificate of Foundation Education) and to rework them as examples for the GCO of the CGEA. The rationale for content inclusion was that it should offer Aboriginal people an opportunity to stay in touch with, or be introduced to, their cultural heritage. Other content was included because of its capacity to empower the learner (for example, legal studies or community resources).

The electives chosen were:

- Aboriginal visual arts
- Aboriginal contemporary issues
- Aborigines and race relations
- Legal studies
- Community resources
- Aboriginal communities
- Aboriginal law and kinship
- Health education—Introduction to health and hygiene
- Aboriginal performing arts.

The assessment tasks listed cover the four levels of the CGEA, reflecting the reality of mixed level classes. The tasks are based primarily around Mayer key competencies 1, 3 and 4. Each of the electives is set out clearly making good use of a thematic web graphic which details how the issues and content within the elective are organised for program delivery. The assessment tasks are varied and relevant. NB: These units or parts of them could be used very effectively by mainstream classes.

**Double power: English literacy and indigenous education. Peter Wignell (ed), Language Australia, 1999.**

This collection of articles about literacy, and English and Indigenous Australians, covers both practical and political issues. It was written by practitioners in the field and all of the papers document actual practice.

The collection includes case studies from a number of contexts, which vary in both their circumstances and locations. They include adult workplace literacy in Western Australia, literacy for adults in tertiary education (Northern Territory) and primary and secondary schooling (Arnhem Land and Central Australia). Mandawuy Yunupingu describes his personal experience of becoming a person who is literate across two cultures. He argues persuasively that being literate in English has added to the resources he has at his disposal in negotiating with the dominant culture. Martin Nakata, in 'History, cultural diversity and English language teaching', presents an impassioned case for English literacy in schools in the Torres Strait Islands.

Other papers are:

- Scaffolding: reading and writing for Indigenous children in school—David Rose, Brian Gray and Wendy Cowey
- Literacy teaching and learning in a bilingual classroom—Marrchila Class, Colleen Bowman, Lily Pascoe and Trish Joy
- Rough diamonds: a case study of workplace literacy and training for Indigenous workers in the mining industry—Peter Wignell
- Digging deeper: using text analysis to develop the English literacy of Indigenous students—Patricia Beattie.

It is an enlightening and revealing window to diverse educational innovations in Indigenous communities and settings, as well as an exposition of some of the complex issues that underpin the co-development of literacy in English and Indigenous education.

**Taking ACE to the year 2000: Koori participation implementation plan 1999–2000. Adult, Community and Further Education Board (ACFE), Victoria, 1999.**

This paper outlines the ACFE Board's implementation plan to increase the access, participation and outcomes of Koori adult learners in the Victorian ACE sector. The strategies developed to achieve this are set out in terms of program promotion, marketing, professional development, technology, pathways and funding. This plan was informed by the National Aboriginal Education Policy and includes input from the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc.

**Learning together: a handbook for Aboriginal facilitators. Jenny Zed and Gail Yarran, Western Australian Department of Training, Aboriginal Services Unit, 1995.**

This manual is designed for use by Aboriginal facilitators in community and TAFE courses. It provides basic tips and guidelines on creating a valuable learning experience for both participants and facilitators. The manual works from the cultural base of Indigenous Australians, and builds a framework for facilitators within this base.

The chapters cover:

Aboriginal learning styles—covering traditional ways of learning and current applications, and 'walking in two cultures'

- you as the facilitator—roles and responsibilities, knowing your subject, working with different learning styles
- planning your sessions—making it happen, group introductions, presenting outlines and outcomes
- assessment and evaluation—resources (in this manual and elsewhere).

The kit includes photocopyable masters and handouts.

**Murra: guidelines for the evaluation of indigenous content on the WWW. Victorian Aboriginal Education Association (VAEAI), 2000.**

This excellent resource provides a brief and concise guide to finding indigenous websites that are useful, reliable, unbiased, current and accessible.

Its three sections cover:

- how to find Indigenous content on the web, including search engines and search strategies
- key questions to ask in evaluating the credibility and validity of sites, such as who are the publishers and developers, their background, who is the intended audience, what point of view is being conveyed, and how to identify these pieces of information
- using a range of non-web-based material in conjunction with online materials.

The book is clearly laid out and written in an approachable style. For anyone using the web, it can act as a very useful check list for evaluating the content and validity of sites.

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This resource is accompanied by the 'Implementation guide: utilising the database to develop meaningful learning programs for remote Indigenous learners', copied from the record for the hard copy.

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VALBEC: Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education

**CALL FOR PAPERS**

2001 VALBEC Conference

**Literacy for Sale?**

Melbourne, Australia

22<sup>nd</sup> & 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2001Deadline for submissions first call: December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2000*Fine Print* readers: January 13<sup>th</sup>

Expressions of interest are currently being sought for the forthcoming VALBEC Conference '*Literacy for Sale?*' Proposals reflecting *practice* and *research* from a diversity of teaching and learning contexts are especially encouraged. Submissions are welcome from teachers and researchers and may be in either paper or workshop format.

The conference theme has been chosen to stimulate debate on the following issues:

- adult literacy practitioners' work
- comparison of literacy interventions and strategies in the school sector and in a lifelong learning framework
- reconciling good practice within administrative processes.

To register your interest please complete the details on the following proforma and forward to VALBEC (mailing address/ email below) as soon as you can for consideration by the conference committee. You will be contacted early in the new year to confirm the session.

Please note that VALBEC is a non-profit, voluntary, professional organisation and cannot reimburse participants for travel and/or accommodation expenses. Presenters must register for the conference and pay their own fees. We request that the concept of the session not be changed after acceptance.

Thank you.

**ACAL/VALBEC Conference**

**DEADLINE FOR RECEIPT: 13<sup>th</sup> December, 2000  
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The conference program has both 90 minute and 50 minute sessions

Type of Session (tick ONE box only)  Paper ( \_\_\_ mins)  Workshop ( \_\_\_ mins)

Please note that a 'paper' is most effectively presented as an oral summary with occasional reference to notes or a text. It describes and discusses something that the presenter is doing or has done in relation to either theory or practice. The presenter often has handouts and may also use audiovisual aids. A workshop has very little 'lecturing' by the

presenter—the emphasis is on the participant's activity, which is carefully structured by the presenter. This is a useful way for modeling teaching practice and evaluating resources.

Choose the time to ensure that the session will be affective.

**Audiovisual****Requirements:** Overhead projector/screen Computer equipment hardware and software Flipchart with markers Other—Please specify \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Paper/Workshop: \_\_\_\_\_

Abstract: (100–150 words)

Biography: (50 words)

## Foreign Correspondence

*Literacy Aotearoa inc* was established in 1982 as the Adult Reading and Learning Assistance (ARLA) Federation. It has 65 member groups and links with associated providers. This paper outlines a submission by *Literacy Aotearoa* on the development of a national adult literacy strategy for New Zealand. The term *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* refers to the Maori text of the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi.



## Terms of the treaty: towards a national literacy strategy

by Bronwyn Yates and Peter Isaacs

The changes in the composition of society mean that we will have to prepare to widen our horizons, think laterally and operate differently. No longer will we be able to say that those who 'don't make it' simply cannot be good enough. This research shows that even when they are 'good enough', they cannot always break through the barriers to their full participation. (The EEO Trust November newsletter re: Diversity Index 99)

New Zealand's Ministry of Education is developing a comprehensive national adult literacy strategy that includes consultation with community literacy providers and other providers of vocational and workplace literacy.

Key elements of the strategy are:

- encouraging a wide range of provision to meet the diverse needs of learners
- improving quality of provision and of the literacy gains made by learners
- building the capability of providers to meet the scale of literacy need revealed by the IALS survey
- modelling and promoting best practice, and spreading that information so quality provision can follow these models
- improving coordination and cooperation across the sector and between all stakeholders with an interest in adult literacy.

*Literacy Aotearoa* noted that such a strategy offered opportunities including:

- addressing current literacy levels of adult New Zealanders and working to achieve a fully literate population
- establishing a national adult literacy framework based on *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* and enshrining principles of partnership, protection of cultural heritage and values, and equality within literacy programs

- addressing the issue of under-achievement of certain sectors of the community, and thereby contributing to the educational achievement for all.

*Literacy Aotearoa* said the Ministry of Education, acting on behalf of the Crown and therefore in accordance with *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*, had a responsibility to promote, support and fund literacy learning at all levels. The organisation has also sought to broaden the notion of lifelong learning, quoting Jacques Delors, 1996:

There is a need to rethink and broaden the notion of lifelong education. Not only must it adapt to changes in the nature of work, but it must also constitute a continuous process of forming whole human being—their knowledge and aptitude, as well as the critical faculty and ability to act. It should enable people to develop awareness of themselves and their environment and encourage them to play their social role at work and in the community.

*Literacy Aotearoa* argued that because difficulties are usually the result of inequalities in social and economic systems, they should not be the individual's problem alone. Furthermore, literacy services should involve learners becoming more aware of the world and creating an understanding of its power relations and influences.

We therefore took the view that in addressing the issues of developing a comprehensive adult literacy strategy, key components should include:

- description of the New Zealand context
- background to the strategy development
- definitions of literacy, and specifically adult literacy
- current responses to literacy needs: an overview of who is doing what in the area
- objectives for the strategy and the fit with educational and wider social service delivery (including that provided in prisons)
- framework
- targets and policies for meeting the needs
- standards and evaluation processes for and of literacy programs
- issues of participation, including retention/non completion factors
- program development and delivery

- resourcing
- research issues
- time frame for implementation.

### The New Zealand context

Some of the truths of New Zealand's history are only now beginning to be revealed through tribunals held to address issues of grievance between the Indigenous peoples of this country and their colonisers.

In general, Te Tiriti o Waitangi is seen as the founding document of New Zealand. Signed in 1840 between two sovereign nations, the Maori tribes and Britain, it has two texts—one in Maori, the other in English—and there are inconsistencies between the two. According to international law, any ambiguity of meaning must be resolved according to the principle of *Contra Proferentem*—the Indigenous language text takes precedence.

Since 1840, Maori have sought maintenance of their rightful status within New Zealand and continue to pursue ratification of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Furthermore, New Zealand governments have exercised their power of definition by redefining the terms and clauses of the Treaty.

For Maori, marginalisation and domination have developed from the rejection of Te Tiriti o Waitangi through a series of laws and legal rulings made during the past 156 years. (Trotter, 1995)

Insufficient information regarding Te Tiriti o Waitangi means many people are unaware of the benefits in addressing issues related to the treaty. Progress in giving effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi has been slow. Labour has promised to build capacity in whanau, hapu, iwi, to build capacity in communities and to address anomalies of social disadvantage.

Education policy outlined in various Ministry of Education documents states that the government's objectives are to build a system which:

- strives to improve education outcomes for all students
- enhances both personal development and employment opportunities
- contributes to a highly skilled, adaptable and motivated workforce by promoting lifelong learning
- focuses on the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- fosters fairness, tolerance, self reliance and informed participation in society.

In 1997 the International Adult Literacy Survey identified more than a million adults in New Zealand with literacy levels below what would let them fully participate in society. The survey identified significant gaps between specific community groups— notably lower achievement in the Maori

and Pacific Islands populations, compared with Pakeha and Asian populations.

At the same time Nga Poupu (members) of *Literacy Aotearoa* reported increased demand for literacy services. The discontinuation of effective and longstanding adult learning programs, because of funding loss when government agencies' policies or regional boundaries change is another problem.

‘ some of the truths of New Zealand's history are only now beginning to be revealed through tribunals ’

Literacy is increasingly being seen as part of the 'upskilling' process rather than an output (usually transition to paid employment). This reduces the availability of contract funding to Nga Poupu for literacy provision, and increases pressure from fully funded agencies to seek literacy assistance from Nga Poupu to meet their output.

Funders are reluctant to continue helping programs they consider to be the responsibility of government, particularly the Ministry of Education, thus reducing the capacity of the membership to develop services. There is an increase in students with immediate needs—what they require 'now'. Some members believe that it is their 'hand to mouth' lifestyle and the lack of capital available to these students that contribute to this trend. Retention of personnel—volunteer, paid and part-time—is difficult when they are offered employment elsewhere, as is attracting skilled people who are prepared to deal with the paperwork and policy nature of committee-level management.

Other problems include:

- the increased literacy and numeracy needs of an adult community struggling to obtain or keep a job
- an emerging generation of parents who struggle with their own literacy needs and are now faced with children who want mum, dad, nana, or auntie to read to them, help with homework or write a note to school about a school trip
- the need to have bases for literacy provision that are quiet, private and accessible, especially in the rural communities
- trying to keep waiting lists at a manageable level
- the right of New Zealanders to be literate, and therefore to literacy services at no direct cost.

An effective adult literacy strategy must include New Zealand's social, educational, historical, political and economic situation. Its development could refer in the first instance to indigenous education strategies, where many lessons can be learned from successful Maori initiatives.

### Background to the strategy development

There is no comprehensive policy for adult literacy, but there have been a number of responses by various government

departments. These responses varied in terms of the definition of literacy and the way those groups responded to the need.

Many responses have been to provide short-term courses designed to help people enter the workforce, which was seen as a way to reduce unemployment levels. Research provides no direct support of this assumption. These responses do not recognise the differences of people in terms of culture, gender and socioeconomic groupings. Recognition of pedagogical issues of readiness to learn, cultural affirmation through practice and environment, development of confidence, and learning to learn processes is varied and sometimes non-existent.

*Literacy Aotearoa* advocates a comprehensive strategy involving the various government departments and organisations involved in the field of literacy. This should identify the extent of the need, set goals to ensure the increase in literacy levels of those in need, provide a time frame, identify providers and allocate realistic resources to meet the objectives.

The strategy development and consultation should include service providers as well as *iwi* as partners to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Consultation with groups who represent significantly within the IALS should be sought.

### Definitions of adult literacy

Definitions of literacy are notoriously difficult to compose. Literacy is a social construct, a complex idea that means different things to different cultural groups at different times. Therefore, literacy is a relative term and dynamic. While literacy is popularly understood to denote the ability to read and write prose and other print texts, it is an integrated complex of language and thinking processes and skills, incorporating a range of habits, attitudes, interests and knowledge serving a range of purposes in different contexts. (DSE/CEOV 1994: 329 cited in Lo Blanca and Freebody, 1998)

For New Zealand, the definition of literacy must specifically refer to literacy in Te Reo Maori and English, as well as the mother tongue.

It is important to re-establish Maori language literacy in order that Maori recreate and achieve the cultural basis of their political, social and cultural existence. It is imperative that the new learning of Maori language literacy be directed by a critical approach to learning.

An important consideration not to be left aside in the Maori struggle for critical or 'proper' literacy is the

need to struggle for knowledge and understanding of the language and practices of the coloniser.

The strength of one's literacy is then left open to the challenge of knowing how to maintain one's cultural roots within the dual relationship and working out a strategy of resistance to any attempts by one of the groups to undermine or corrupt the other. Within the struggle of working out political and social relationships it is crucial to Maori power and control that their critical literacy is at a level that will cope with the pressure of any challenge from colonising forces. (Jenkins, 1992).

Literacy is a crucial tool, and an accurate definition is critical. Discussion of literacy needs to expand the emphasis on literacy skills to the processes and ongoing improvement in levels of being literate. Discussion of literacy needs to give greater consideration to the issue of literacy 'as a highly political process used to disempower *iwi Maori*' (Jenkins, 1992) in order

to ensure the strategy for adult literacy can act as a tool of empowerment for all New Zealand.

It is a process where people develop abilities when becoming a parent, learning to drive, following workplace instructions, applying for a job or undertaking study. It includes the ability to use written, and/or audiovisual material to express oneself, to learn and to communicate so that the individual can participate in society. It includes the ability to integrate reading, writing, spelling and numeracy in such a way as to be understood by others and to understand what others are communicating.

Being literate is a creative set of social practices, variable according to context, text and purpose. It should have meaning, integrate language skills with thinking and empower people.

The framework, targets and policies

A comprehensive understanding of the meaning of literacy, and response to needs, will draw on an informed understanding of reasons for literacy problems. These include:

- structural social disadvantage to particular sectors of New Zealand
- monocultural provision of education
- social and emotional difficulties in childhood
- physical problems
- inadequate schooling
- negative school experiences
- specific learning difficulties
- English as a second or other language (being discouraged from maintaining first language)
- disrupted schooling.

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The need has been quantified by the IALS research as a minimum level, given that it does not include literacy in Te Reo Maori, nor does it include writing in its terms of reference within the framework of literacy in English. It does not recognise the issues of confidence or of critical thinking. However the IALS research provides a useful benchmark because it shows that a minimum of one million adults have literacy needs (in English) below Level Three and 20 per cent of those adults have very basic needs at Level One.

*Literacy Aotearoa*, using No School Qualifications as an indicator, estimated that 1,026,864 adults have some literacy needs in English. Half the Maori population has no school qualifications and, proportionally, this is significantly higher than the general population.

*Literacy Aotearoa*, has facilitated its own structural change, adopted under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, to ensure Maori participation in all levels and operations of the organisation. Structural changes have provided an increasing capacity to meet the needs of Maori, with increased access for the wider community.

The activities of *Literacy Aotearoa* operate within a treaty-based framework. From this position, we have argued that the national adult literacy strategy should provide a framework whereby adults with literacy needs can:

- choose from a range of accessible and appropriate services so programs can be delivered within the context of students' lives
- access the service confidentially, at no direct cost, with quality assessment and advice, and can receive referral to other services
- receive quality provision that develops the literacy levels that they identify are necessary for their current circumstances
- be involved in the development of their learning program.

The strategy would need to complement the literacy campaign for school children. Further, the development of the strategy needs to work in with the reviews undertaken by the Ministry of Education in 1998, as well as the themes identified for the Education Strategy for Maori.

Working under a national definition of adult literacy, the strategy would determine clear targets and policies that, in encompassing literacy in Te Reo Maori and English, address the number of adults the strategy will seek to help. Given the findings as listed above, examples of the target number could be all those at Level Three (IALS) or below, or Level One (IALS) only. Within this figure, specific targets could be set for those groups identified by the report as having a more significant need. Further work regarding incidence of literacy need may be required to ascertain levels for Te Reo Maori.

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### Standards, evaluation processes, program development and delivery

*Literacy Aotearoa* supports the establishment of a national set of standards to protect students and practitioners by giving clear guidelines and expectations of practice, rights and responsibilities.

Delivery of services requires a range of programs for the variety of needs and contexts within which a person uses literacy. In 1999, *Literacy Aotearoa* provided a fund to encourage innovative approaches to literacy provision that addressed local circumstances, the scale of need, students' social and cultural needs and the different approaches required for urban and rural provision.

There is still much to be done, and *Literacy Aotearoa* is committed to working with the Ministry of Education, other government departments and stakeholders to develop a comprehensive strategy.

A ministerial working group for adult education and community learning has been set up, with extensive terms of reference. The first report will be presented to Lianne Dalziel, associate Minister of Education, early next year.

**Bronwyn Yates and Peter Isaacs work as Nga Tumauaki (joint CEOs) for *Literacy Aotearoa inc.*, a national literacy organisation in Aotearoa, New Zealand.**

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## Open Forum

We welcome your responses to the articles featured in *Fine Print*. See the back cover for details.

In this edition's Open Forum, Rosa McKenna and Lynne Fitzpatrick investigate the concept of training packages with reference to a recent ALNARC report, and Robyn Nutt discusses the development of an Indigenous program on Queensland's Stradbroke Island.

### Flogging a dead horse

Training packages have come in for a bit of stick lately. They have been interpreted as continuing the trend towards instrumental forms of competency-based training (CBT), and are perceived as being industry-driven at the expense of education values, replacing the positions of educators with trainers through workplace-based assessment.

As with all innovation, the shift from curriculum-based CBT models to training packages has brought some improvements along with possibly less welcome changes. It is important, however, that a discussion around training packages does not overlook what appears to many as presenting a major opportunity for people wanting to access employment and training opportunities. The inclusion of underpinning skills in all training packages at all certificate levels means that any person working or training for employment in a particular industry has access to training in communication skills as part of their normal training, not just tacked on as additional support.

Because communication skills are integral to all work, literacy is no longer an issue which can be confined to those at the lowest end of the work spectrum. Communication skills are described in the context of a particular work task, be it completing a tally sheet on a work line, serving a customer or writing a report evaluating a range of written texts and evidence, and arguing for a particular view within a team. This obviously represents a major improvement from the very narrowly based modules which are now being phased out, and which, if they included communication skills at all, did so in a non-contextualised, isolated way.

The decision by the Ministerial Council—a committee made up of the Ministers of Education and Training from all Australian governments—that underpinning skills be built into all industry standards in all new training packages developed after 1997, has been met by each industry in different ways depending on the web of industrial, economic, political, educational and historical factors influencing each Industry Training Advisory Body. Rather than decree a

particular one-size-fits-all approach—which has been the approach in the UK—the Australian National Training Authority, through the *Workplace Communication in Training packages* project provided a multi-pronged approach to support the process. Guidelines to Industry Training Advisory Boards about how to write workplace communication into

standards, a consultancy service, and project funding to address emerging issues were provided over a period of 18 months. The model adopted was one drawn from the report *Literacy at Work*, National Board of Employment Education and Training, 1996, which recommended the explicit incorporation of literacy and numeracy throughout the components of the standards.

While this individualised industry-by-industry approach has been quite cumbersome, it has meant that each Industry Training Advisory Board has had to consider issues to do with literacy and numeracy as relevant to people working in their particular industry. This has had the effect of raising awareness about literacy issues across all areas of training,

regardless of industry sector. Many Industry Training Advisory Boards have endorsed this approach and are implementing strategic plans to support the integration of workplace communication in all training to the benefit of workers who have previously been unable to access training and qualifications.

Since the conclusion of this project in 1999, ANTA and DETYA have funded a number of projects exploring the impact of the integration of language, literacy and numeracy in training packages. Among these initiatives was a national project 'to investigate the effects of the inclusion of literacy and numeracy standards in Training packages' conducted by a consortium of Australian universities operating under the banner of the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (ALNARC). The ALNARC has recently published the reports from six state-based studies as well as a synthesis report prepared and edited by Dr Jill Sanguinetti and Robyn Hartley, *Building Literacy and Numeracy into Training: A synthesis of recent research into the effects of integrating literacy and numeracy into training packages* (see ALNARC home page at <http://www.staff.vu.edu.au/alnarc/> for more details).

‘ because communication skills are integral to all work, literacy...no longer...can be confined to those at the lowest end of the work spectrum ’

The findings of this research have been disseminated through a series of publications and at a number of national conferences and forums.

Scrutiny of the reports reveals serious methodological inadequacies. The researchers favoured a case study approach and many of the studies are merely anecdotal accounts of outcomes of discussions with one or two teachers in a work site. Given that only six of a possible 57 training packages were referred to, that the studies were conducted at a very limited number of work sites and that there is no methodology offered for comparison of the varied and discrete projects, it is difficult to see how any conclusions about 'language, literacy and numeracy in Training packages' could be validly drawn from the research. Reading each of the reports confirms that it cannot. It is difficult for the reader to know why a particular site was chosen or what was the theoretical frame for the cue questions, interview schedules or the analyses. Were evaluations of the training packages in question undertaken? What was the approach to the integration of language, literacy and numeracy taken in that particular package, and so on?

This conclusion of the ALNARC that language, literacy and numeracy is not visible in training packages seems to be at odds with findings from other research such as the preliminary research for a Workplace Language and Literacy Program National Project and other research commissioned, but not published, by ANTA. This research uses a specific tool to discuss the micro features of literacy and numeracy.

It concluded that:

- There has been improvement since 1997 in the way Training packages have dealt with underpinning knowledge and skills
- Language, literacy and numeracy are explicitly articulated or embedded in technical and core units of most Training packages
- ITABs have shown willingness to address literacy and numeracy in training packages and in implementation processes
- Trainers have found ANTA products from the Workplace Communication Project helpful.

Training packages are a new development and if they are to deliver the benefits promised, all education jurisdictions will need to work together on implementation issues that will in part be based on sound research. ALNARC's research simply flogs a dead horse and distracts the vocational education and training community away from the real problems in the system. Language, literacy and numeracy have been explicitly embedded in the development of industry standards. What is needed now is realisation by the state training authorities that new funding formulas and modification to curricula to accommodate integrated approaches to workplace communication is now required.

**Rosa McKenna and Lynne Fitzpatrick are directors of Communication in Education and Training Pty Ltd.**

## Designing sustainable Indigenous programs

Historically, Moreton Institute of TAFE, previously known as a community college, had close ties with the Indigenous community of Stradbroke Island. Over the years, this contact was severed due to the college's amalgamation as well as changes of staff and committees. In 1998 the literacy team obtained a research grant to respond to future training needs of the community. Because of this initiative a successful computer class was started. Last year our institute won a competitive tender for community programs, and I was asked to develop a variety of programs to meet the needs of the Indigenous community on the island.

Although only a 20 minute water taxi ride from Brisbane, Stradbroke Island is an isolated community. High costs of transport, restrictive transport timetabling and the time involved travelling to the mainland are challenges for ongoing study and consistent employment on the mainland, especially outside normal working days. For the 300 Indigenous population, the best employment prospects are self employment or employment through community directed projects.

Designing a sustainable program (ongoing courses for 2001 as well as 2000) was a lengthy process, involving months of consultation. A new training needs analysis was undertaken with the changeover of the cooperative committee, meetings were organised with elders, prospective vocational coordinators, and advertising and conducting information sessions for recruitment. Time was needed to establish a network of trust between TAFE management, staff and Indigenous committees, and to realise that we were on the island for the 'long haul' rather than for the 'quick fix'.

Time is a precious commodity now TAFE is in the open competitive arena. As the budget for community language, literacy and numeracy programs shrinks, economic demands like student targets, competency-based outcomes and restricted time frames override the human elements of education. The ongoing support of institute management, culturally sensitive staff and a commitment to maintain the communication links is vital for the success and continued support to the future courses. We are fortunate to have a dynamic ASTIC field officer and a supportive program manager who has worked in the area of literacy for many years. I was given the time needed to set up the programs and to attend special events such as NAIDOC Week celebrations where the students coordinated their display of work. The range of programs in 2000 was funded through various funding sources. Prior knowledge and experience with these funding sources proved valuable and allowed me to offer diverse learning opportunities.

The range of programs included:

- Workplace health and safety.
- Food handling and hygiene.

- Optional support classes to assist students through their training booklets for the above modules.
- Strategies for adults to assist their community with reading, writing, computers and numeracy demands at school, work or home. Two classes have been filled to date, with a third in the pipeline.
- The Personal Development Course for Women. This was a mixed program for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and included guest speakers, for example a female doctor from the island to discuss women's health issues and field trips to government agencies like the Women's Infolink to establish networks off the island.

The careful selection and stability of staff were critical for student retention. With limited Murri teachers available, I looked for staff with an Indigenous background, for example the hospitality teacher or those who were familiar with the people of the island. Having three contact people—Emily (ATSIC Field Officer), Aaron (a teacher, and once a 'Straddie' butcher) and myself—we were able to send the most appropriate person to promote courses. For example, Aaron promoted courses to Indigenous youth groups, especially males. These groups were encouraged to contact the person with whom they felt most comfortable.

As I delivered many of the courses, the students had the chance to get to know me. Classes became relaxed and positive, and students were comfortable to approach me with questions about courses, support services and extension of skills. Promotion of new courses became easier as word

spread. Students telephoned me to join courses! Course evaluation determined new directions and courses. A goal setting session resulted in the students organising a tutor through the Indigenous Education Unit to practise and enhance their computer knowledge and skills. The tutor had been a volunteer with another program and they all felt comfortable with her.

Other positive aspects included:

“ the careful selection and stability of staff were critical for student retention ”

- Familiarity of surroundings and peers encouraged a relaxed, informal learning environment
- Peer tutoring was easier to establish and promoted confidence
- Students were encouraged to discuss their needs, course content and expectations
- Courses were flexible, relaxed and relevant to students' needs
- There was a high attendance rate
- Elders supported youth with problems
- Some students have had an attitudinal shift from 'too dumb' to 'able to learn'
- Students are now confident to pursue their own goals and enrol in mainstream courses.

A firm partnership has been established over this year. It is expected that relevant and appropriate programs will continue in 2001.

**Robyn Nutt works in adult education and has a special interest in Indigenous education. She is coordinating a community literacy project on Stradbroke Island for Moreton Institute of TAFE.**

## Policy Update

**Recognising the disadvantaged status of Indigenous Australians, the Australian National Training Authority has embarked on a strategy to give Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders equal access to vocational education and training. *Fine Print* presents an edited version of the Authority's report.**

## Partners in a Learning Culture: national strategy from 2000 until 2005

### Disadvantaging factors

It is widely accepted today that Indigenous people are more likely than other Australians to be subject to a wider range of disadvantaging factors, and therefore experience multiple disadvantages in education and employment.

Educational problems are endemic in Indigenous communities. In 1996, only 14 per cent of Indigenous Australians had a post-school qualification, which leads to less employment, compared to 34 per cent of all Australians. By May 1997, only 52 per cent of Indigenous VET (vocational and educational training) 1996 graduates had jobs, compared to 71 per cent of non-Indigenous graduates.

Indigenous Australians are more likely to face broader socioeconomic disadvantaging factors that reduce their ability to successfully undertake VET. These include lower income, removal from families of origin (though less today than in previous years), speaking English as a second language and having poor English language and numeracy skills.

Geographical and social isolation must also be taken into account (only 30.4 per cent of the Indigenous population resides in major urban areas, and thus close to educational institutions, compared with 62.7 per cent of the total Australian population). Poorer health, lower living standards, higher imprisonment rates and the Indigenous community's relatively low life expectancy add to the disadvantage that affects vocational education and training for Indigenous people.

Against this background, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander National Strategy of the Australian National Training Authority is a vocational education and training system that renews and shares an Indigenous learning culture with all Australians.

### A shared vision

This vision can be shared by all Australians who support the aspirations of Indigenous people in Australia. It is a vision for cultural affirmation and community choice enabled by equal opportunity and affirmative action. This, in turn, will lead to flexible delivery, equitable outcomes and lifelong learning, resulting in community economic development and sustainability. The causes of reconciliation and justice will thus be served.

The strategy aims to achieve this vision, through a partnership between Indigenous Australian communities, governments, industry and training/education providers.

*Partners in a Learning Culture* has been developed in consultation with a wide range of Indigenous and other stakeholders in order to identify the key VET issues and activities that are most important for Indigenous community development.

It includes the perspectives of Indigenous people in current and future VET policy and programs at all levels and aims to ensure that VET results in better outcomes. Another important goal is the creation of measurable objectives to improve outcomes for Indigenous Australians in VET and employment. The strategy complements a number of existing VET policies at the national, State and Territory levels, including the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy*.

This strategy seeks to increase the involvement of Indigenous people in decision making to wider Australian community levels. Increased culturally appropriate and flexibly delivered training, including use of IT, will also add to these goals of renewal and sharing. Vital to this process is the development of closer links between VET outcomes for Indigenous people, industry and employment.

These objectives for Indigenous Australians aim to complement and enhance a series of objectives contained within VET sector strategies, which include: *A Bridge to the Future* (Australia's national strategy for vocational education and training 1998-2003), and the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy*, as well as a number of State and Territory-based strategies.

### Increasing Indigenous people's involvement in VET

The first objective of this strategy is to foster the involvement of Indigenous people in VET. The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* advocates that Indigenous people must be involved in making decisions at all levels of the VET system and with bodies that make decisions about policy, planning, resource allocation and service delivery.

Partnerships with key Indigenous bodies need to be systemically developed. Currently, Indigenous people are involved in VET mostly as advisors, rather than as decision makers.

Given the enormous geographical, cultural and linguistic diversity of Indigenous Australians, it is particularly important that Indigenous people be well represented at the local and community level, and that they help shape decisions about the provision of training and assessment products and services to individuals and local communities.

This strategy acknowledges that the proportion of Indigenous people in employment at all levels of VET administration, including in senior VET positions, is far too low and needs to increase.

### Ensuring cultural inclusion

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians recognise a strong and continuing tie between their culture, land, identity, language and sense of self. The loss of one or more of these things excludes many Indigenous people from lifelong learning, the wider society, and the world of work.

Language remains an important part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Approximately 13 per cent of Indigenous Australians speak an Aboriginal/Islander language at home. Consequently, Indigenous Australians look to the VET system to cater for varying levels of proficiency in literacy, numeracy and the English language, and to embrace Indigenous languages. They look to VET providers to offer products and services that are sensitive to Indigenous cultures and languages.

Indigenous Australians should be involved in developing and implementing training packages, and in the design and delivery of professional development activities and materials that will lead providers to develop culturally appropriate training and assessment. State and Territory quality and recognition arrangements, which affect training package implementation, also need to support learning styles that are sensitive to cultural issues.

The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation has identified 'cultural inclusivity' as a key element in benchmarking the delivery of public services, including education and training, to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is important that quality performance measures include culture as a quality measure.

Partnerships are now recognised as the key to successful vocational education and training programs for Indigenous Australians because they allow benchmarking between spheres of government and community sectors to promote efficiencies and involve a wide range of stakeholders in the continuing process of Australian reconciliation. This strategy sees Indigenous people as equal partners in VET,

and lead to better learning pathways and employment outcomes.

The most successful outcomes in VET (including in New Apprenticeships, group training and VET in schools) have been built from the foundations of partnerships between equal stakeholders. Partnerships have been shown to produce benefits for individuals, such as increased skill levels and increased access to employment, as well as greater mobility in the labour market and more supportive and rounded learning environments.

### Indigenous staff

Indigenous people are under-represented in VET systems. The VET sector needs to increase employment opportunities and develop marketing and recruitment strategies, as well as professional development strategies and opportunities for Indigenous people so that VET outcomes for Indigenous people reflect the needs of the community.

There is a need to increase the participation of Indigenous people in decision making at national, state and territory and local level, so that issues of importance to the Indigenous population can be included in policy decisions.

Many Indigenous people live in areas of Australia that are isolated, and there is limited knowledge of the skills and training needs of these communities. To provide appropriate training, there is a need to have data about the needs and capacity of communities. This in turn will lead to better decision making and will maximise the value of VET expenditure. A comprehensive skills audit will inform VET decision-making and inform community development plans.

### VET participation levels

A second objective is to achieve VET participation levels that are as high for the Indigenous community as for the Australian community as a whole.

Poor retention rates in secondary school are a key factor in the disadvantage of Indigenous Australians, a factor that reduces lifelong learning and therefore economic and social opportunity.

In 1996, 71 per cent of Indigenous secondary students had dropped out of school before Year 12. This compares to just 26 per cent for all students. This inequality flows on into VET, and indeed into all post-secondary qualifications.

VET in schools helps Indigenous students stay at school, by increasing the relevance of schooling and providing opportunities for work-based learning that might not otherwise be available to them. The promotion of VET to Indigenous students needs to be improved.

School-based and work-based learning and assessment

approaches must match the cultural, linguistic and community context of students. Indigenous students in VET in schools might also need special assistance to help them with cultural difference, or low levels of English literacy and numeracy. Better links between schools and the post-secondary sectors will generate mechanisms to help people overcome cultural and educational barriers.

The vocational education and training sector is increasingly the sector of choice in post-compulsory education and training for Indigenous people in Australia. The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* has resulted in increased access by Indigenous people to vocational education and training, especially through Technical and Further Education (TAFE). However, there has been a skewing of that access towards the lower end of the qualifications spectrum: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do a more limited range of courses, at lower levels, than the Australian average. Further, Indigenous completion rates are below the Australian average. For example, Indigenous students comprise a small proportion of business, engineering and science students.

#### **Participation rates in further education**

Similarly, participation rates for Indigenous Australians in higher-level courses, apprenticeships and traineeships are significantly lower than for other Australians. Higher-level courses, apprenticeships and traineeships must be properly marketed to Indigenous Australians, through effective partnerships between communities, employers and providers.

Support services providers must be funded to supply Indigenous students' needs in order to do higher-level VET courses, apprenticeships and traineeships. These services include numeracy and literacy skills support and development, customised to suit Indigenous learning styles. They should either be delivered by Indigenous people, or people with a sensitivity to Indigenous people and cultures.

Providers who actively market to Indigenous people, and who provide the support services that Indigenous students need, are likely to incur additional costs. Incentives should be given to providers and employers to make this investment. Outcomes need to be measured quantitatively and qualitatively.

Vocational education and training have a central role to play in redressing the disproportionately high rate of Indigenous peoples' arrest and detention—more than 80 per cent of Indigenous prisoners in the early 1990s were unemployed at the time of arrest. Action to improve Indigenous prisoners' access to VET will reduce the possibility of recidivism. Specialised employment and training programs to help them make the transition from prison to work must be developed, supported and expanded.

#### **Culturally appropriate training and IT**

The third objective of this strategy is the achievement of increased culturally appropriate and flexibly delivered training, including the use of information technology (IT), for Indigenous people.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have always been widely dispersed throughout Australia, and often have strong ties to place, culture, land and family. This results in a population skewed towards particular regions and localities associated with their places of origin.

The widespread dispersal of Indigenous people, particularly as it affects proximity to educational opportunities, has important implications for VET and calls for VET that is responsive and flexible.

New IT offers some potential to improve learning opportunities in remote areas. However, new technology will not, by itself, be useful unless individuals and communities are supported in their use of that technology.

VET systems need to help reduce the gap between the digital 'haves' and 'have-nots'. However, IT learning must start in the early school years. The goal of widespread IT learning for Indigenous Australians will require coordinated, strategic, and long-term effort. It requires flexible delivery networks and Indigenous training centres and extra professional development for providers of Indigenous training. This strategy calls for partnerships between communities, schools, VET and higher education providers and industry. For Indigenous people, IT can complement human 'face to face' teaching and learning—but it will not replace it.

Flexible delivery is not just about new technology and other modes of delivery, but also about giving individuals and communities far greater control over what training is provided. Indigenous people need courses that cover a broad range of rural and remote industries, and which are culturally appropriate and accompanied by support.

#### **Linking VET outcomes, industry and employment**

The fourth objective is to develop closer links between VET outcomes for Indigenous people and industry and employment.

Vocational education and training can lead to jobs. In 1996, 80 per cent of Indigenous Australians with vocational qualifications were working, compared with only 49 per cent of those without a qualification. Improving access to VET would dramatically improve the job prospects of Indigenous people.

Indeed, the job prospects of Indigenous people need dramatic improvement (23 per cent unemployment in 1996 compared to nine per cent for all Australians). This rate

would be significantly higher if participants in the Community Development and Employment Program (the 'work for the dole' scheme) were statistically defined as 'unemployed'.

'One-stop training and employment shops', based in Indigenous communities or in relevant regions and staffed by Indigenous people, could be an important means of promoting training opportunities linked to work.

#### **Apprenticeship opportunities and training needs**

Although participation rates by Indigenous VET students are good when compared with the national average, participation tends to be in lower-level courses with less direct connection to work opportunities. Research is needed to identify the barriers to involvement by Indigenous people in apprenticeships and traineeships, particularly in industries that have significant potential to provide employment and VET opportunities. This research should form the basis for workable solutions, to be applied nationally.

Training packages have the potential to be adapted and customised to meet the needs of individual communities and to include culturally-specific themes. Indigenous communities have specific training needs relating to areas of disadvantage such as health, education and training as well as in culturally-specific areas.

VET can enhance the employment outcomes for 31,000 Community Development and Employment Program (CDEP) participants through specially tailored arrangements in locations that lack viable labour markets, particularly in isolated locations. This may require a whole-of-government approach that links the delivery of training and employment services, with economic and infrastructure development.

Group training companies, because of their nature, can provide many employment and training opportunities for Indigenous people; they should be held accountable for public expenditure.

Funds are provided by government to training centres to increase industry involvement in the development of a broader, more competitive training market. Government funds are also provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander training providers to assist them in the expansion or refurbishment of training facilities. By expanding opportunities in this area, the future needs of Indigenous students can be met by providers.

VET has a major role to play in providing the skills required to take advantage of economic and business opportunities. In turn, economic development can create job and training opportunities. In addition, economic and enterprise development can expand opportunities for Indigenous people in VET, particularly through *New Apprenticeship* initiatives.

Small business training programs for Indigenous people should be tailored to include self-paced, small business management courses, support networks and mentoring programs, delivered by training providers that specialise in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

#### **Key Performance Measures (KPMs)**

The seven national key performance measures (KPMs) contained within *A bridge to the future* will measure outcomes for Indigenous peoples and Australians. To further measure the success of this strategy, specific KPMs for the four objectives outlined above have been identified.

KPMs for the first objective ('Increasing the involvement of Indigenous people in decision making about policy, planning, resources and delivery') include the number of Indigenous people in decision-making and advisory roles; the number of training packages that specifically refer to Indigenous people and their training needs; and the number and type of training packages that have entry-level qualifications and appropriate content. KPMs also include an increase in employment of Indigenous people in key areas of VET; an increased number of Indigenous people on decision-making bodies; the number of RTOS meeting audit requirements against guidelines; and an increased number of Indigenous Training Organisations.

#### **Equal participation**

KPMs for the second objective ('Achieving participation in VET for Indigenous people equal to those of the rest of the Australian community') include participation of Indigenous students in VET in schools programs by AQF level and ANTA Industry group; participation of Indigenous students in higher-level VET courses; participation of Indigenous students in VET by AQF; module/unit of competence pass rates for Indigenous VET in Schools; and module/units of competency pass rates for Indigenous VET students. Further KPMs are: the proportion of Indigenous people awarded a module through RPL and RCC; the proportion of qualifications completed by AQF level under VET in schools programs; and the proportion of qualifications completed by AQF level and geographic location, (by capital city, other metropolitan and rural and remote) for all Indigenous VET students.

The third objective ('Achieving increased culturally appropriate, and flexibly delivered training, including use of IT, for Indigenous people') has the following KPMs: participation of Indigenous students in IT VET programs; pass rates for Indigenous students in IT VET modules/units of competency; and the proportion of Indigenous people in information-based industries accessing training.

Finally, the fourth objective of *Partners in a Learning Culture* ('Developing closer links between VET outcomes for Indigenous people and industry and employment') has as its KPMs: the number of Indigenous commencements, in

training, and completions, by AQF level, in New Apprenticeships; the number and percentage of Indigenous people in the workforce participating in training; employment rates for Indigenous VET graduates and VET module completers; and the proportion of Indigenous VET graduates who go on to further study. Other KPMs include Indigenous commencements, in training, and completions

by AQF level, in New Apprenticeships, where the employer is a Group Training Company; and the number of people on CDEP undertaking accredited training and area/field of study. ITABs have specific actions for improving opportunities for Indigenous people in their strategic plan and marketing plans.

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you, it was convenient to coin the term Koori in Victoria, Murra for the north, and so on. It is based on state borders using the traditional words that represent Aboriginal people for that region.

**Fine Print:** So they are not so artificial as in Africa, where the European powers drew borders across tribal lands if it suited their interests?

**Linc:** No, they're not. For example, the word Koori is used in Victoria across many different tribal groups to mean an Aboriginal person. So I guess it's an appropriate term for a Victorian Aboriginal person. However, I am a visitor here to Koori country as much as any non-Indigenous person is.

**Fine Print:** But you have been accepted.

**Linc:** Definitely, I am very happy to say that.

Terry Kildae is general manager of the Koori Programs Unit at Kangan Batman TAFE, Broadmeadows campus.

Linc Yow Yeh teaches Koori studies, English and computers with the unit.

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It is hoped that a cultural partnership can be instigated in the near future with a commercial enterprise that is willing to become directly and financially involved in developments to enhance delivery by improving the quality and extent of equipment as well as providing experiential projects that will have a greater impact upon motivating participants. Tours and exchanges to remote locations, and interaction between various cultural groups while doing short courses in remote locations, could be used to make televised episodes combining virtual visitors on the web, and be of interest to the public. This type of presentation would also attract more Indigenous students.

Brett Westblade has been a facilitator for Kooris at the University of Melbourne for the past eight years. Prior to that he worked in the Northern Territory in positions that included managing a bilingual classroom and the Outstation Section at Maningrida, where he serviced remote camps by truck, boat and plane.

## Change of address

The new VALBEC contact address is:

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## Beside the Whiteboard

**Doris Paton is the program coordinator of the Koori Unit at Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE, based in Morwell. However, Doris is more than an educator. She knows life and how it can be enriched through literacy. *Fine Print's* Katrina Lyle talked with Doris about dedication and compassion, triumph and sadness.**

### Could you tell me a little about your family background and how you became involved in Koori education?

I come from a family of eight children. We grew up in Club Terrace and Cann River. My father was a timber worker and my mother looked after the home. You could say we were the average family for that time—eight children, working parent and stable family environment. My maternal grandparents, and my mother's brothers, sisters and their families all lived in Club Terrace or Cann River as well. We all went to school at the top of the hill.

My mother grew up with her aunts, parents and extended family in an environment of work and family, despite living on the fringes of town. She was home-schooled for many years by my Nan and grandfather who did seasonal work or cut sleepers for the railway.

My father's family was more itinerant. He rarely attended school and lived in many places as a young boy. At about six he went to live with his aunt and uncle who were seasonal workers and he travelled and worked hard picking fruit and vegetables. As a very young man he went his own way and lived around with many relatives and learnt much from his uncles and great uncles about his people and they taught him many cultural activities.

As children we always went to school and our parents encouraged and supported us by being involved on school councils and in everyday school activities. My parents valued learning and my father always told us we could be anything we wanted to be and that we needed to go school because he believed that education was the way for us and our future generations.

I have always been interested in learning. As a young girl I was a prolific reader and enjoyed the experience of learning. I continued my learning—despite the obstacles such as having a child in year 11. I continued to go to night school, working toward a year 12. I went back to school and my mother looked after my daughter but I ended up married at 17 and not fulfilling that dream.

I worked as a Koori educator and didn't like the assigned role of administration work in the office and being the tea lady. I liked working in the library where I could pursue my love of reading. I asked to work with the Koori children and helped with reading and small group work, and eventually I became a teaching assistant rather than the dogsbody.

I could see that there was a real need to change the perception teachers had of Koori children and their ability to learn. They had no real understanding of the issues the children faced in the school and the issues at home. I also felt that the curriculum was exclusive and still had the Captain Cook approach to it, which I had at school and knew that there was another history and story. Koori people's lives and community were totally disregarded. I wanted to have greater input and to be in a position of teacher to address the gaps.

I have been involved in Koori education for over 26 years, beginning as the Koori educator. I decided that I wanted to train for teaching for two reasons. Firstly, I found myself a widow at the age of 22, with two children to care and provide for; secondly, I was already teaching at school as a student teacher under an employment program and it was my opportunity to fulfil my dream.

I completed most of a primary teaching degree and later, due to personal circumstances, I converted to a Bachelor of Arts which I completed part time. I then moved to Melbourne where I secured employment in the Department of Finance. I was gained a position in the Aboriginal Education section as a field officer and was then promoted to more senior positions in policy and management. All the time I continued to study for a BA part time.

My goal was always to move into positions of responsibility where I had the ability to change the way things were done in guidelines and process and to make a difference in policy. I then followed my father's lessons of bringing home to our community the skills and knowledge to our people. I applied for a lecturing position at Monash University (Gippsland) and stayed four years. In that time I started a Graduate Diploma of Education (secondary) and went on to a Masters in Education Studies with the goal of completing a Masters in Education specialising in Indigenous education. This is where I am at now. I am aiming to complete and graduate in 2001. Over this time I have managed to have full time work positions, raise four children, two of whom completed VCE and gone on to university. I have one son going into VCE and the other in year eight.

### What is your current role in Koori education?

Over the years I have maintained my role in creating change through my involvement in local Koori education. I am currently the program coordinator of the Koori Unit at Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE at Morwell and have been an

active member of the LAECGs for several years. I have been a committee member of the committee of management at the KODE school since its establishment six years ago.

In my current position as coordinator of the Koori Unit at Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE, my focus has changed to adult learners who range in age from 16 to 60-plus. The unit acts mostly as access to learning for many Koori community members who want to learn and have been absent from a learning environment due to circumstances or have not found the mainstream system meeting their needs. Many older and young people come to TAFE to learn the basics of learning to read and write because they missed out or struggled in the education system.

#### **What do you see as key issues in Koori education?**

The key issue in adult Koori education has to be literacy and numeracy. These two elements have become the focal points of adult learners at TAFE. Once established and built to a level where people feel confidence and self-esteem, they provide ingredients that engage Koori people in learning and fuel the flame to further study. Koori adult learners need the right environment, skilled teaching staff with whom they can develop working relationships, an approach to learning that accommodates them and is flexible to encourage confidence and self-esteem.

#### **How does your program create this environment?**

The program at Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE is made of elements that provide the ingredients that create opportunities for these students to value education and to feel safe.

The Koori Unit at TAFE is self-managed, and makes educational and financial decisions. It is supported by Koori teaching staff and has a Koori support person for the students. Koori staff and non-Koori teaching staff work well with the students and within the unit, creating an environment that is non-threatening and flexible to accommodate competing demands of students. The curriculum is encouraging, flexible and culturally supportive, while also supporting skill development. This has proved a sound basis for building a learning environment.

Creating a learning pathway for individuals has become the key focus of our work. We offer courses in general education and art which provide access and allow students to work on individual skill development. For this to happen each student is interviewed and together a learning pathway evolves, developing further as individual needs develop. The students choose to participate in 'Coorong Tongala' a general education program that has an added element of intensive literacy and numeracy skills as well as the subject content of the course. The intensive literacy and numeracy element has been a key factor in building the confidence of individual students to complete other work and to learn to read better, to write better, to complete written work and

sometimes to learn the alphabet so that they can move on. There is the 'shame' factor of not being able to read and write, but in the current environment and with a skilled teacher who can begin at the basics, the confidence and self-esteem is increased.

Other students have chosen to learn to spell/learn maths through Open Learning supported by a tutor and the Koori unit staff. This has proven to be successful for those who are a little bit 'shamed' or because they are working and feel exposed. While the focus has been on literacy and numeracy, the way in which Koori adult learners have accessed education to meet their individual needs has been their choice and it is the support provided to them that will achieve the appropriate outcome.

#### **Can you recall any specific incidents that have given you a great deal of satisfaction?**

Over the years I have many very satisfying experiences of teaching Koori children and adults. One that is planted firmly in my mind and really had an impact was an adult woman student who had been mostly a drinker all her life, lived an itinerant lifestyle and came to TAFE last year because she had turned her life around. Part of doing so was that she wanted to learn to read and write. She didn't even know the alphabet and could only write her name from practice. She began to learn the sounds of the alphabet and could recognise the letters. A significant step included learning the keys on the keyboard without a template of lower case letters.

Other key stages followed: taking home a book and being able to read a sentence, building up enough confidence to join a journey to Central Australia—and always she made us hurry because we were talking and wasting her learning time. She couldn't get enough of learning and was so excited at learning new words and reading to us. That student passed on in the eight month of her course, and we will never forget her as our inspiration for adult learners. We have adult male students who were 'parkies' and who, since attending TAFE, no longer drink. I have nothing but sheer admiration for these people because they deserve to be noticed.

Because Koori people have not had positive experiences of education their confidence in access education needs to be encouraged. There are many alternative opportunities to achieving goals and meeting needs through adult learning environments. I believe also that education environments need to understand how best they can offer education and to promote access in relevant ways. A great deal of work is achieved through changes to policies, and there are new educational initiatives in primary and secondary schooling.

I believe if Koori adult learners have positive learning experiences in appropriate learning environments, and are able to access different methods of delivery with supportive mechanisms in place, this will impact significantly on the value Koori adults place on education for themselves and for their children.