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Editorial

In the Chinese astrological calendar, this is the Year of the Snake—a time for shedding skins and reinventing ourselves. We've often heard it said that the most essential skill for any adult educator is the ability to adapt to change. *Fine Print* this year has decided to focus on the theme of change: changing contexts for and changing perceptions of literacy, changing curriculum documents and the changing professional development needs of ALBE practitioners.

Young people are entering adult education in greater numbers. The state government's post-compulsory review has led to the development of new collaborative organisations, known as the Local Learning and Employment Networks. English as a second language (ESL) and adult literacy and basic education (ALBE) are now no longer separately funded by Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE). Instead, we have the single 'language and literacy' funding category. The Certificates in General Education for Adults are up for reaccreditation. Learning technologies and online learning continue to be developed and debated. How will these changes affect the everyday working and learning lives of teachers and learners in adult literacy programs?

In this issue, we examine some of the changing contexts in which ALBE now takes place—programs for youth, the literacy and numeracy training program (LANT), and the space occupied by volunteers in 2001—the International Year of the Volunteer.

Carolyn Ovens' paper challenges us all to think about what sort of system we are creating for young people in education and training.

Many educators around the continent have found the recent influx of younger learners into adult literacy classrooms a huge challenge. *Fine Print* is delighted to print an extract from 'Life is respect', which is a discussion between adult educators in the northern region about what strategies and attitudes actually work when dealing with young people in the adult education classroom. This project was facilitated by Delia Bradshaw and Daniela Ibrido for the northern region of ACFE.

Pauline O'Maley gives us an overview of the context for the LANT program and describes some of the challenges and issues that are yet to be overcome.

ACAL's *Literacy Link* devoted its most recent edition to the issue of volunteers in adult literacy, and we have a couple of articles examining this. In Open Forum, Lynne Matheson describes the highly successful volunteer tutor training program at Carlton Reading and Writing, while in *Beside the Whiteboard*, Barbara MacFarlan tells us what it's like for the volunteer coordinator.

Our Foreign Correspondent, Nickie (Eunice) Askov, recently visited Australia on a fact-finding mission to learn what we are all doing about the online literacies. It's always interesting to read how an outsider's reflections on the way we are conducting ourselves.

Across all these contexts, the constant theme that emerges is of practitioners committed to producing good outcomes for learners. The challenges are many, but the pursuit of effective and innovative teaching and learning practices is as alive in the new millennium as ever.

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.

Giving young Victorians a good start: a role for literacy research and action

by Carolyn Ovens

This article is derived from a research project, funded by the Australian Council for Adult Literacy, titled 'The relevance of literacy: how can our respective policy responsibilities be realised through common concern for young people and the cause and effect role of literacy in their lives?' Many other questions are raised, including the relevance of performance indicators and the role of Mutual Obligation in the literacy field.

A change in perception

While economies such as Australia's have done moderately well over the past decade, an increasing number of young people are being excluded from participating in a range of socially-based activities and opportunities such as education, training and the labour market. These are activities we have come to expect as our right as citizens. With its focus on policy around youth issues, the above-mentioned paper is informed in the first instance by the work of Sherington and Irving (1989) who argue that the Australian youth policy arena has been dominated over the last two decades by three significant factors.

The first of these is the growing interventionist role of the Commonwealth, premised on government's interest in young people as future citizens, in issues previously regarded as state matters; secondly by an increasing emphasis of youth being constructed as a 'problem', and finally by the recognition of 'youth' as a social movement, principally aided by the developing role of youth workers.

International recognition of the significance of the move from initial education to working life as a key transition period in young people's lives, has led the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to devise a set of indicators for successful transition systems. Performance of member countries can be assessed against these indicators. Along with widespread adoption of these key indicators there has been increasing acknowledgment of the growing body of literature that takes up the theme of 'transition as socialisation'. The term 'transition' has been traditionally used to refer to the progress students make as they move from school to work. However, Lewis, Stone, Shipley and Madzar (1998: 274) have called for a broader recognition of transition as a 'means of socialising youth into the life stages that follow schooling'.

Reflecting reality

Furthermore, reconceptualisations of this important interval of time must move beyond traditional notions of 'pathways' and linear transitions from school via further study and then

into the world of work and an independent adult way of life. There is a view that terms such as 'pathways' do not reflect the actual experience of growing numbers of young people in our contemporary world. According to Cohen and Ainley (2000: 84), this period is better described as a typology of discontinuous life patterns, resulting in many young people being 'at risk' of not being able to participate in society in ways that are meaningful and purposeful for themselves or society in general.

This paper therefore explores the OECD's key features of effective transition systems to ensure youth's successful passage from school to work alongside a set of OECD-devised discussion points on what works best in policies for young people. It then returns to the key question driving this research to discuss the opportunities and challenges available to literacy practitioners, and to VALBEC, in the spaces made accessible in national and international debates around youth issues.

OECD-effective transition systems

According to the OECD (1999), an effective transition system in a healthy economy is marked by:

- Youth-friendly labour markets
- Well organised pathways
- Workplace experience combined with education
- Tightly knit safety nets
- Good career information and guidance
- Effective institutions and policy processes.

These features emerged from a review of six OECD member countries, including Australia, conducted in 1997. The six countries were selected because they provided representation of the diverse range of social and economic contexts as well as of policy approaches being taken across its member countries. In more detail, the characteristics of an effective transition system within a healthy economy are:

- Youth-friendly labour markets, characterised by :
 - ample training places within enterprises
 - widespread opportunities for students to be

employed part-time or during vacations

- limited barriers to new labour market entrants.
- well organised pathways connecting initial education's qualifications with jobs and further education so that young people's skills are well understood and valued by potential employers and society.

- Workplace experience combined with education. This serves to establish good links between students and local employers and improves skill development by making learning more applied. Apprenticeship is the best known form of such a pathway. Others include school-organised workplace experience, as in cooperative education and the part-time jobs held by students.
- Tightly knit safety nets. They pay attention to the needs of at-risk students, and quickly pick up and reinsert dropouts. They require education, employment and welfare policies to be coordinated in ways that increase incentives for active participation in education, training and employment. They require close individual follow-up and support through local delivery mechanisms to coordinate services across several policy domains and levels of government.
- Good career information and guidance. This aims to achieve universal access to high-quality information and guidance at an affordable cost.
- Effective institutions and policy processes. They involve key stakeholders in policy design and in ongoing management of transition frameworks. Partnerships at national and local levels are important. Effective policy processes include pilot projects, learning from local initiatives and monitoring and evaluation as integral parts of policy implementation. (OECD, 1999)

Pathways to where?

In conducting this review, the OECD identified a range of issues that are pertinent to the Australian context. The first of these concerns the usefulness of the concept of 'pathways', a term commonly being applied in many countries, including Australia (Dept of Family and Community Services), where it was used in year 2000 as a mechanism to undertake a national consultation for policy development. The question that immediately arises is: 'pathways to where?' In discussing the state of youth policy in Britain, Cohen and Ainley (2000: 83) have also questioned the usefulness of this term. They state that this metaphor 'displays a preoccupation with a career paradigm based on a definition of labour market participation as a consequence of participation in various forms of post-compulsory education'. For many young Australians such 'pathways' are a myth, having left school, for a whole range of reasons, long before opportunities to join such pathways can 'kick in'. In the case of Indigenous young Australians involvement in vocational education and

training (VET) for over a decade has not positioned participants into the labour market and a career according to Hunter and Schwab (1998).

The OECD research found that there is a general tendency across the countries reviewed for participation rates to fall in those pathways that do not lead to tertiary study (OECD, 1998: 6), so Australia is not alone in this regard.

Fewer opportunities

The seriousness of this situation is further heightened when we consider the predicament these early school leavers may face in trying to join the youth labour market. Figures from the 1996 Australian Bureau of Statistics census (ABS, 1997), and supported by more recent research (Curtain, 1999) show a decline in job opportunities for young people. Lewis and colleagues (1998) sum up the youth labour market in the United States in terms which may have resonance for Victoria. While there may be more jobs available in the US youth job market, Lewis et al question the point of creating a conduit to a youth labour market that is dysfunctional. They assert that there is low social commitment to employing young people, that the commitment to helping them establish long-term connectedness is weak, and that there is a virtual absence of trust in their capabilities (Lewis et al, 1998: 268). This situation is supported by a recent OECD (2000a) report that characterises economies such as Victoria's as providing a marginalised youth labour market marked by low skills, low pay and poor job prospects.

Another related issue pertains to the relevance of young people's education to the labour market. Australia is described as having an 'open labour market' (OECD, 1998:7), in which the transition phase is characterised by an emphasis upon the development and provision of core skills or key competencies, and of unified qualification frameworks aimed at encouraging individuals to develop personal learning routes and skill profiles. Furthermore, such countries are aiming to strengthen employer involvement in education and training through the development of school-enterprise partnerships and through industry bodies being responsible for defining changing skill requirements. A particular dilemma facing Victoria in this regard, however, is the volatile nature of the state/federal relationship in the education and training sectors. As we face a year of elections at the Commonwealth and state levels who knows how youth policy and education policy intersect in the new millennium?

More Federal intervention

The gradual introduction of the National Training Agenda by the federal government since the mid 1980s, has brought an increase in the kind of federal government intervention referred to by Sherington and Irving (1989) into domains

“ For many young Australians such ‘pathways’ are a myth ”

historically under the control of state governments. Across the nation, particular states are at varying stages in addressing the school–work relationship and the challenges for education systems that arise from bringing together general and vocational education in meaningful ways for students. School to work involves addressing a number of matters. These include curriculum content, pedagogy, certification and articulation arrangements, responding appropriately to the growing diversity of student needs, ensuring teachers have the appropriate skills and working conditions to implement new curricula, making wider use of the community and of workplaces to illustrate and make concrete to students the relevance of their education, ensuring that guidance and information services provided to students are appropriately connected to changing local and national labour markets, and negotiating effective partnerships between schools and key employer and community stakeholders.

The Australian federal government, following the lead of other countries, has invested in a ‘carrot and stick’ approach. They have directed this to both the compulsory schooling and the post-compulsory and training/employment sectors. Government policy has particularly targeted disadvantaged youths, tying funding to systems on outcomes-based performance, and applying sanctions to individuals through the withdrawal of unemployment benefits if they do not cooperate. One of the practical difficulties that emerges from such an approach is the potential conflict that arises, for example, from offering education, training and work opportunities to people at the same time as requiring them to actively search for work. Freeland (1999) has been particularly critical of Australia’s Mutual Obligation policy and its impacts on young people in this regard. For the adult literacy field, the issue that emerges is how effective such a punitive model, that requires many young people to take literacy and numeracy courses, is in bringing about effective learning with long-term, positive benefits to recipients.

Too many cooks?

The requirement for tightly knit safety nets raises further concerns in the Australian context, created, in part at least, by traditional federal/state bureaucratic divides and traditions, with each state and the Commonwealth department approaching policy development in different ways. According to the OECD description, attention to the needs of ‘at risk’ youth requires coordination across several policy domains and levels of government. A recent analysis of the Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy (Mitchell, 1998) demonstrates how this youth priority area was handled differently by states and territories. This analysis includes which government departments were or were not involved. It also notes a lack of coherence at a national level until a national advisory council was formed in 1998, several years

after some states had worked in the policy area and were quite well developed. This is also the case in the analysis of a strategy undertaken by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care around the early intervention in the mental health of young people (O’Hanlon et al, 2000). This strategy does not perform well against OECD requirements for coherence and accountability in policy development and implementation.

A further aspect of this concern is the general lack of acknowledgment of young people’s lives. This is emphasised in a range of literature around topics such as youth health issues (Beresford, 1993; Hazard & Lee, 1999), neighbourhood youth programs (Halpern et al, 2000, Jensen & Seltzer, 2000) and youth literacy programs (Castleton et al, 1999; Coare & Jones, 1996; Hamilton & Davies, 1996).

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The research suggests that the lack of due recognition given to the existing, though informal, networks that young people belong to and draw upon on a daily basis leads to poor and inappropriate programs. Building on these informal structures is a change from the ‘old’ safety net delivery mechanism and policy support model (Bentley & Guremurthy, 1999; Lewis et al, 1998; Raffo & Reeves, 2000) to ‘networks of safety’, which build cohesion and support into existing structures in which young people feel comfortable and have trust. Raffo and Reeves (2000: 147) warn, however, that the effectiveness of these networks is conditional on the quality of the material and symbolic resources available in these constellations. They note that many of the youth deemed to be ‘at risk’ in society have very limited and impoverished resources on which to draw. Furthermore, Nicholson (2000: 8-9) notes that the various stakeholders who would need to be involved in this process, including the public and private sector, may currently be incapable of meeting the requirements of this new paradigm.

What is appropriate?

This point leads to some consideration of the last two, related key features—good career information and guidance and effective institutions and policy processes. Taking up Raffo and Reeves’ (2000) contention that young people have varying access to material and symbolic resources reinforces the importance of ensuring information and guidance is readily and equally accessible to all young people. Gee (2000) analyses how teenagers from different social classes fashion themselves through language as different kinds of people. Each is oriented in distinctly different, and unequal ways to take up their roles as adults and as citizens, and further illustrates how significant it is for young people to have access to what Raffo and Reeves (2000: 153) call ‘authentic and culturally appropriate significant others and agencies’. They have demonstrated, through their study of ‘disaffected’ or ‘disadvantaged’ youth in Manchester in the

United Kingdom, that the young people often only have access to material and symbolic resources that are limited and culturally inappropriate, thereby denying them opportunities afforded to their more fortunate contemporaries.

An example pertinent to the Victorian context is the growing dependence of Australian government departments, at state and Commonwealth levels, on the reliance on the Web page as a means for them to 'speak' directly to their constituents and hear their views. Research is emerging around the diverse range of products and access points offered in this form as well as focusing on the capacity of disaffected and marginalised young people with issues and needs to access the Internet. This is a particularly potent element for young people with issues around literacy. Disquiet is growing in some circles about the efficacy of present marketing tools including newspapers and Internet in reaching groups of potential students of vocational courses including literacy classes (Youth Affairs Network, Queensland, 1999).

Inclusion in or exclusion from effective transition

Much of the discussion in this paper to date has dealt with ways in which young people may be excluded from, rather than included in, the process of effective transition from full-time education to the labour market and thence to a successful life as worker and citizen. The issue of social exclusion is beginning to emerge in research, particularly as it relates to education and training, and to growing interests in lifelong learning (Brynner, 1998; Cohen & Ainley, 2000; Preece, 2000; Francis & Humphreys, 2000; Raffo & Reeves, 2000; Schuller & Bamford, 2000).

According to Brynner (1998), many practices of the modern welfare state are founded on the principles of providing compensation, support and equity to those people who need to be compensated for material disadvantage. They are also aimed as safeguards against temporary situations of hardship and difficulty that may include unemployment, family breakdown and ill health. He argues, however, that useful conceptions of social exclusion must go further than this. The responsibility for disadvantaged circumstances should shift from a position of exclusively impeding individual development and restricting life chances in adulthood, to one that recognises society as erecting barriers in the way of the process of particular individuals and groups, and even to citizenship itself (Brynner, 1998: 2).

With regard to the role of education in social inclusion and exclusion, Preece (2000: 1) notes that while the new discourse of education recognises the problem of exclusion, it:

Makes some of the issues which constitute the problem invisible—for example, the issue of structural unemployment, the issue of age, the fact that some

people only indirectly contribute to the labour market. Other under-recognised issues relate to the nature of social values, institutional provision and what counts as worthwhile learning. This argument is particularly relevant to the adult literacy field, and worthy of serious attention.

New focus on youth

Youth exclusion has become the subject of OECD efforts, and the focus of two recent OECD Ministers' conferences on youth issues (Washington, 1999; London, 2000). At the latest of these conferences, the Ministers devoted a session to the topic of policy coherence for the social inclusion of youths. This session was premised on accepting that ensuring social inclusion required a package of measures that needed to include education, employment, social, family and tax policies. It acknowledged that the risk of social exclusion looms large for those young people who suffer from multiple disadvantages. These may include a mix of unstable or dysfunctional family backgrounds, poor performance in school including early departure and membership of communities with high unemployment sometimes characterised by an over-representation of ethnic minorities.

The Ministers also accepted that particular kinds of interventions, covering a range of policy areas could address some of these disadvantages, but that these interventions must be achieved through policy coherence. Along with this acceptance came recognition that much of the existing practice in member countries revealed many gaps in coherence. It was then acknowledged that there was a need for improved cooperation between government at central (federal) regional (state) and local levels, and between public and private sectors.

Furthermore, the significance of input from a broad range of stakeholders in youth issues, including families, communities, teachers, social and youth workers was recognised, along with consideration of the involvement of stakeholders beyond the stages of policy conceptualisation and design to including the monitoring of the implementation of programs. The Ministers also accepted as a given the importance of integrated and individualised local delivery mechanisms in reaching disadvantaged young people, many of whom fall outside existing systems of social protection and may have little association with or connection to formal institutions. (OECD, 2000b)

A role for VALBEC?

The questions for discussion used in that session in February 2000 by OECD Ministers are used here to focus discussion on what VALBEC practitioners and researchers in the adult literacy field may need to consider if they want to place

many practices of the modern welfare state are founded on the principles of providing compensation, support and equity

themselves in debates at national and international levels, thereby helping to fill in some of the gaps already identified, or yet to be found. These questions may help to focus attention away from where we know we do not see the field—in the isolated delivery of context-free basic skills, onto more productive contexts of engagement that may exist beyond current concerns.

- Is there agreement among Ministers that an approach of early and sustained intervention can ensure social inclusion for disadvantaged young people? Are there examples of 'best practice' in this area, particularly on how to reach out effectively to this group and what to offer?
- Are there any lessons that can be drawn about the importance of integrated and individualised local delivery mechanisms?
- How important is the involvement of public authorities, employers, trade unions, local communities, and other actors and stakeholders to ensure greater coherence? What sort of arrangements are needed to bring them together in a sustained and effective manner?

Due, in part, to its historical beginnings and to its commitment to the values of equity and social justice, VALBEC is well placed to participate in the debates that must be had around the relationship between education and training and social exclusion. With regard to the first OECD Ministers' discussion point, for example, it is important to problematise the nature of connections between 'early and sustained intervention' and 'inclusion'. There are, no doubt, many positive ways of making early and sustained interventions into the lives of 'at risk' young people, and there are adult literacy practitioners currently involved in this area.

However, it may cause reflection on whether current practices of fining young people with limited literacy skills for breaching a Mutual Obligation agreement is actually assisting them in becoming included, or is it a form of intervention that may actually lead to exclusion? This is not to deny the importance for accountability of public funding but rather to argue for more debate around what constitutes 'mutual obligation' for all parties involved.

A proper understanding

Among adult literacy practitioners and researchers, there is wide support for a sociocultural understanding of literacy and literacy competence. For this reason, the field is well placed to lead discussion away from youth being construed as a 'problem' and young people 'at risk' as 'dysfunctional' to more useful dialogue around the many different ways that people engage with literacy in their everyday lives. Currently there is little understanding of the relevance of literacy in young people's lives, including among young

people themselves. It is therefore up to the field to demonstrate this relevance, through effective involvement in policy debates and consultations and through ongoing dissemination of well documented examples of the role of literacy in everyday lives.

There are many examples from the adult literacy field of what may constitute 'good practice' in early and sustained interventions, and it is the responsibility of VALBEC and of practitioners themselves to ensure that these examples are carefully documented and disseminated. The VALBEC publication *Fine Print* and the ACAL's *Literacy Link* already perform this role, but there is opportunity and indeed need, to broaden this work to include other forums both in Australia and overseas.

Making it work

VALBEC is also aware of, and many of its members are involved in, the kinds of integrated and individualised local delivery mechanisms that are effective in working with young people. It knows, however, that some of these initiatives happen not because of effective policies and practices at the national, state, local and sectoral level, but rather in spite of them. The highly casualised workforce that makes up the adult literacy field works daily with such realities as unrealistically short funding cycles that prevent effective long-term planning in this area and unreasonable cost expectations with regard to delivery. The current privatised nature of literacy provision, especially to the most disadvantaged, discourages a community of resources and development for practitioners as resources constitute a competitive advantage in such environments.

An initiative reported by the OECD (2000b) to be effectively used in some Nordic countries for example, involves close coordination of education, labour market and welfare measures at the local level, with a personal action plan devised for each 'at risk' teenager. There are numerous examples of inter-agency work happening in the Australian context too, with adult literacy practitioners actively involved in many instances. However, initiatives that evolve from these networks often do so in an informal way rather than through any coordinated, formal mechanisms instituted by states or the Commonwealth.

Again, because adult literacy practitioners are at the 'coal face', they understand the importance of the informal networks that young people move in. These existing links can be capitalised on and used not only for dissemination of information but also in the actual delivery of services. The effectiveness and importance of these networks are important lessons that governments can learn from and build on, emphasising the potential for community development in this work. In this way programs can leave something behind rather than being 'one-off' projects that often only work to

adult literacy practitioners are at the 'coal face', they understand the importance of the informal networks that young people move in

raise people's expectations, then leave them disillusioned and dissatisfied when the funding runs out and the program is shut down.

It is also imperative for VALBEC to be involved in the emerging debate around lifelong learning. A number of contributors to the recent Lifelong Learning Global Colloquium (<http://www.open.ac.uk.lifelong-learning>) wrote of their concerns about how lifelong learning in the United Kingdom has become tied to purely economic outcomes, with one contributor (Griffin, 2000) posing that it could be regarded as a form of economic or employment policy. There is need, therefore to ensure that principles and practices around lifelong learning are broad enough to encompass active citizenry and do not become too narrowly focused on training and employment.

Emerging research agendas

Hamilton (2000: 2) has called for a more active and explicit empirical research agenda that would develop a more extensive research base on the detail of literacy learning and use in local communities. She argues that this research should focus not only on individual learning histories, but also on literacy practices within and between groups and communities. VALBEC too, should lobby for a broad, well funded research agenda that will take up Hamilton's concerns as well as address issues that will extend current limited understandings of outcomes-based education and training. Again, Hamilton (2000: 2) has argued for the need for greater clarification of notions of learning and knowing (at individual and group level). Her work also argues for better understanding of the relationship of learning to the forms of knowing that are currently privileged in institutions including education, government and work. Her work calls for more critical attention being paid to the institutional processes whereby 'truths' about literacy become translated into policy and practice.

It is important that VALBEC continue to use networks of practitioners and research centres while acknowledging the considerable barriers, contradictions and discontinuities in their own practice and policy environment. ACAL and VALBEC have already made a beginning and should become more active in understanding and acting to achieve a much better start for young people in Victoria. The international benchmarks offer a framework, VALBEC's interpretation within what is possible for better coherence across portfolios and levels of government will emerge as a way of informing the benchmarks and improving the quality of life of young people in Australia.

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VALBEC
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Life is respect

extending and implementing early learnings

by Delia Bradshaw

The issue of 'youth' has always been a big political hot potato. However, what many literacy practitioners want to know is how to adapt their teaching techniques to this different client group.

In 1999, ACFE Northern commissioned a project to investigate what strategies and attitudes teachers are finding most successful when dealing with younger students. What emerged when Delia Bradshaw and Daniela Ibrido brought some Northern Region teachers together was a wide-ranging discussion, the sort that only happens when people are given the time to explore the issues.

The discussion was framed around a series of key questions and scenarios. The first section of the report is called 'Four Key Questions'. Fine Print is delighted to present the results of the first key question.

The report has not been published in hard copy, but can be found on the web (see details below the article).

Question 1: 'If asked, what does a teacher need to work with youth, what would you say?'

- You've got to want to do it. Most of all, as teachers working with young people, we need to have 'heart', love and respect. I don't mean in a missionary sort of way. I mean respect for who a young person is, where she or he has come from, where she or he wants to go. We must really care for young people. The young person needs to feel that you are on their side.
- I think it's disastrous to think: '*Oh, young people, here's trouble*'. It's vital to see each one as an individual, a young adult, yet not expecting too much independence or too fast. Approach each person, treat each person, without prejudice. Don't pigeon-hole them. Each person has a unique story, a good reason (in their eyes) for being the way they are.
- From my point of view, students are so often given the label 'problem behaviour'. I feel strongly that it's important to lose this way of seeing young people and to accept them as they are. Classes are places to learn about healthy relationships: the teacher is modelling this. For example, young people, especially young women, need to learn their right to say 'No', to learn that it's OK to say 'No' if you can't or don't want to do it. For the teacher, this means that when students say 'No', it's important to follow through so the young people concerned don't feel a failure or ashamed. Remind yourself what you're

there for: '*I'm a teacher despite what I presently feel about this.*'

- We need to remember that many students come from confrontational, aggressive lives. I see ACE classes as a place where they can learn different ways of dealing with things apart from confrontation and aggression. They can learn there are different, healthier and safer, ways of getting through things. Teachers model this by example, by resisting the temptation to control and punish, by drawing attention to what students are feeling and discussing alternatives.
- I feel that you need to be non-judgmental, open-minded and prepared to continue as best as possible despite things that may shock or offend you. An ability to live with the uncomfortable. It is in those uncomfortable times, I find, that relationships can be very genuine. Not everything has to be neat. In this work, we have to be able to live with ambiguity, discomfort, loose ends. This means modelling how healthy relationships work, how to get through conflict. This requires an ability to tolerate difference, to listen, to perceive difficulties students may have but not be able to express. A desire to do what is right by the students, not what you would like.
- In my opinion, tolerance and empathy for the student means the ability to change plans at a moment's notice, the ability to work with the unpredictable in a fluid, dynamic, ever shifting environment, to move with the group. For example, the other day, with a group of young Koories, 16 young people plus three children turned up for the excursion. I'd only booked one small bus so I immediately went to find another bus rather than change plans for the day, rather than disappoint those who'd come or send the children home. This ability to put the student at the centre of the learning experience hinges on experiential learning that is relevant to the students' lives and what they want to know, means seizing the moment, grabbing opportunities for teaching, finding the avenues into change.
- For me, above all, it's flexibility! In plan and personality. You can't go in with a set, definite view of what you are going to deliver, no matter what. The ability to ditch what you thought you were going to do because only two turned up and still provide a valuable learning experience for those who did come.

- I see it the same as all adult teaching and learning: allowing students a sense of ownership means negotiation over curriculum, being clear about 'What do you want to go away with?' I believe that a tolerance of a wide range of behaviours is vital. It is important not to take things personally; things that happen are not always directed against you. It's about seeing undesirable behaviours as a potential source of learning, not an assault, and using their actions as an educational tool. Equally important is to know and declare your own boundaries: 'I will accept this—but I draw the line here'.
- I'd highlight the following. A sense of humour. An ability to go with the flow. An ability to let things wash over you. Not letting them stick. A solid sense of self and your own belief systems, of who you are in the classroom and what environment you want to create. I feel strongly that it's important not to judge students for their behaviour, for example, swearing, but you don't have to share in it yourself. A respect for youth and young people. Being pre-pared to form relationships with young people, to hear what they have to say. Above all, for me, it means bearing witness to their stories.
- Young people, I believe, deserve that we key in to where they are now, trying hard to be relevant to that, being sensitive to their feelings, providing the support that leads to growing independence, liking them.
- I think that issues around dependence and independence are very important. It is our responsibility to discourage the view that the teacher is 'the spiritual glue stick that can fix anything'. The ability to judge how close or how distant to be—not too close, not too far, but just right. That's the art. For me, the teacher is not a 'parent', but an educator, though I do feel that many of the qualities that make for good parenting also make a good teacher—caring (with boundaries); knowing how and where to set boundaries with your students and when to expect initiative and independence; discerning when to question and to what degree; needing to know your own boundaries, for your sake as well as theirs; giving young people the space and respect to be themselves; emphasizing ownership, so young people know it's their decision and their work. This work is definitely not about 'rescuing' though determining when and where to refer is vital. There are no universal rules about balance and boundaries—each teacher not only will, but must, determine her own.
- I think an essential quality is being able to be diplomatic when handling difficult situations, for example, there's the issue of what to wear or not wear to job interviews. Are earrings in the nose OK? What to do about people who discriminate against women in traditional Muslim dress? We list some of the conventions to do with interviews. I say that they or I may not agree with many of the conventions practised,

allowing students a sense of ownership means negotiation over curriculum

however, I see it as my job to discuss the consequences of ignoring or challenging them. I concentrate on the group finding solutions to the difficulties perceived or experienced by the young person.

- I'd say, above all, a desire to form strong relationships with young people. Students want a relationship with their teachers. I've often heard: 'I like this place because the teachers here are like my friends.' Of course, as with all social relationships, it's OK to set boundaries, for example, how much you want to disclose about yourself and your out-of-class life, whether you are available outside of class and if so for what, whether you want to give your home phone number or not, whether you wish to socialise outside of class, what classroom behaviours are OK and what not, both for yourself and for others.
 - For me, the key thing is being genuine and that you are true to your own values system. This is where the importance of centredness as a person comes in. Students 'sniff' you out. They hang around. They test you. Wanting to know if you are genuine.
 - My boundaries are to be there 100% during class. I keep to time. If people come for individual sessions, I keep it professional/friendly, not engaging in long personal discussions unless that has been arranged or there's an obvious need. With regards self-disclosure, that's usually when illustrating a current issue.
- I'd stress that what teachers working with young people need is a knowledge of issues affecting young people (housing, health, employment, education and training, violence and abuse) and of good networks for referral purposes. Knowledge of pathways is essential. Knowing where to get the right help and information. Referrals are very important. You don't want to do the wrong thing. Above all, this requires a sympathetic ear.
- The way I'd express this is: to listen with compassion. I'd urge people to slow down, slow down. ACE is a good setting for listening—it allows the time and scope to take the time. Getting to the crux of the young person's views on things, for example, with unemployment, how they feel and why they feel that. To be patient, tolerant, non-judgmental, to understand cultural differences as well as psychological needs. For me, it's so important not to pre-judge, not to jump to conclusions about what looking down or hiding behind hair means. You may not be judging their external appearance but then be judging their internal selves, their attitudes, for example, if someone is always late, assuming things about that person. I do lots of communication and team building exercises.
- I use analogies a lot. I think young people relate well to them. Talking of potential, I say things like: 'We're all diamonds. We're all special. We simply need to be cut and polished. With new skills, you'll become a sparkling diamond' or 'Think of a garden. You have to

plant, nurture and water. As it blooms, you take such pride. It means time and effort, but what results!'. When it comes to purpose, I say something like: 'You're going to the milk bar and you're going to get milk. You might come out with chocolate as well but you know you definitely want the milk. That's like knowing why you want to come here, what you want to learn.'

- For me, knowing what a student wants requires close listening. Close listening means assessment of the student's needs, negotiation of suitable activities, careful monitoring of the suitability of those activities, sensing if the person is 'not ready' or 'in difficulty', re-evaluating the original plan, and, always, always, the follow-up.
- In my experience, having a little background knowledge of students helps, for example, arranging a one-to-one pre-course interview so as to establish a minimal relationship before classes begin. On the other hand, having too much can lead to preconceived ideas. In class, it's important to be able to read students' behaviours in different circumstances, to spot any unsafe or unhealthy tendencies, so as to be prepared how to tackle dangerous situations should they arise.
- We must remember that for many young people they are not choosing to come. They are here because they are obliged to. This means recognising that no matter how much we work for some young people, they are only paying lip service. We can't force them to learn but we can do our best to offer lots of reasons why. In these situations, I stress the value of the transferable skills, communication skills, presentation skills, that they'll learn. I say it fills in two days a week. I point out that they'll be meeting new people and learning to take responsibility. But, always, the choice is ultimately the young person's.
- There are other issues working with students with disabilities. I find it easier working with students with intellectual disabilities than students with psychiatric disabilities. Students with intellectual disabilities tend to be quite predictable and reliable. Students with psychiatric disabilities I find are more episodic and erratic. This is why, with their permission, an initial good assessment is vital. It gives you the chance to track down as much information as possible about earlier learnings and places they have been. It's important to find out what triggers unwanted and unusual behaviours as a basis for planning. For example, if a student feels the horoscope rules his life, it's good to talk about that, to see if that's what they want and what can be done about this state of affairs. Providing safety is a paramount issue working with students with psychiatric disabilities. If they've

“ I feel that anyone contemplating working with young people, ... must know that it is hard, difficult and stressful work ”

not taken their medication, if they are sleepy, you can't do much. It's best if they are sleepy that there's a place they can go to sleep. Many young people don't have support mechanisms outside but this is much more

obvious with students with disabilities whose needs are often so dramatically immediate. A final caution: don't expect that what was learnt last year will still be there in the next. Repetition is vital, especially with students with intellectual disabilities.

- I feel that anyone contemplating working with young people, in whatever context, must know that it is hard, difficult and stressful work. It means persevering despite little or no feedback in class, knowing how to find opportunities for debriefing, feedback, support and encouragement. Maybe through writing, meditation or rituals such as regular meetings with peers. Peer support is vital when it comes to learning how to let the traumatic stories, and there are so many of them, wash off. No one else understands the pain of this work, learning to live with what you can't do, the ones you can't reach, the ones who never come back. Then, after having given 110%, it's important to be able to detach, to 'go home', to have a separate life.
- I warn people that this work can be all-consuming. You need to have time for yourself—to go for a swim, take a walk, go to the pub or whatever. 'Switching off' is not easy. The students' dramas are real. It is absolutely vital to know when you need a break, when you've had enough. Tell your family colleagues and your family. When making your own boundaries, talk about this with your co-workers, with people who know the students. I say: 'Cry together. Laugh together. Solve together'.
- I've found it makes all the difference to have someone to talk to, especially someone who knows the jargon, who really understands the situation and the unrealistic expectations. It's not appropriate to always expect family and friends to be there.
- I'd like to make one last point. Never underestimate your students. They have morals too. Appreciate that they have a very highly developed sense of right and wrong. This work is not one-way traffic: our young students are active contributors, participants willing to take responsibility and to demonstrate loyalty.

Delia Bradshaw has worked in adult education for over twenty years as a teacher, researcher and writer in women's, multicultural, community and adult basic education.

This extract is published with the permission of ACFE Northern Region. Find out more by reading the complete report, which can be found on their website: www.acfenmr.vic.edu.au—look under Regional Projects > Youth. The report is also presented on the WAVE website (Women in Adult and Vocational Education) www.converse.com.au

The Literacy and Numeracy Training program: the journey thus far

by Karen Manwaring and Pauline O'Maley

The LANT program is brings with it time constraints, a suggestion of coercion and administrative burdens. All of these factors affect student motivation and behaviour, classroom practice and the morale of teachers and students. With this in mind, the authors call for a review of LANT before new tendering arrangements are finalised.

Background

This article evolved from a session at the March 2001 VALBEC conference. We decided that rather than just give a paper at the conference, it would be useful if we included discussion and feedback from teachers and coordinators of the Literacy and Numeracy Training Program (LANT) who participated. We also, in the weeks leading up to the conference, contacted several providers of the LANT program about their experiences of the program.

We begin by giving an overview of the LANT program in 'big picture' terms—its political, social and educational contexts: why it came about when it did, why it is the kind of program it is, how it has been marketed, and its relation to labour market literacy programs that have preceded it. We then give details of the feedback we received, both leading up to and at the VALBEC conference, from teachers and coordinators of LANT.

This is a critical time for LANT and we believe, an apt time for reflection on its progress. New tenders are due out later this year and the Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) is preparing a discussion paper to be presented before that time. So that we can place LANT within the context of its times, reflect on its track record, and look forward to how it might be improved, it is necessary to examine the broader political, economic and social context within which it sits. Such an analysis will also help us to understand why, at this point in time, provision of Commonwealth adult literacy services in Australia is framed within the government's Mutual Obligation scheme.

The political and social context of LANT

The past 20 years have seen enormous shifts within and impacts on society—from the level of government and policy to that of work and educational environments. What Hall (1996) has called 'New Times' has seen a shift in the complex

interrelationship between the political, social, cultural and ethical aspects of society.

Economics has come increasingly to dominate as social democratic perspectives have been backgrounded. Education is now another economic marketplace and is controlled by an emphasis on efficiency, effectiveness, performance and measurable and observable outcomes: what David Kemp has termed 'accountability'. Lyotard (1984) argues that ideals of general education have been subsumed under the performativity principle, 'the principle of optimal performance: maximising output...and minimising input' (p.44).

One significant consequence of this new performance and accountability-driven environment is that government is stepping back from taking responsibility for its citizens' social and educational development. Increasingly, responsibility for each citizen's social and educational support and development is being passed to that individual. It is no longer the government that must be seen to be providing the support and resources that a person requires if he or she is to participate in society. Responsibility now lies with the individual to 'prove' the he or she is 'doing the right thing' by society.

The message is that each person can choose to 'participate'. Not participating in society (for example, by not working or by not being able to read and write adequately) becomes a matter of choice rather than, for example, a consequence of inadequacy on the part of social systems, like education or welfare. If the choice to participate in society is not 'taken up' then the individual is to blame and government may appear justified in coercing an individual into 'participation' and punishing them if they do not. To quote David Kemp:

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

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inadequate literacy or numeracy skills *must* undertake the training. *Refusal* could lead to an initial reduction of unemployment benefits of 18 per cent for 26 weeks. (Media release K63/98, emphasis added).

Placing the blame

The first public announcement of LANT was in the Federation Address given by Prime Minister Howard in 1999. It is a clear argument for the current government's location of adult literacy provision within labour market programs—and within the ethical and often emotional discourse of individual deficit, choice and blame. Adult literacy is conceptualised in this and other government publications and speeches in simplistic and narrow terms and the adult literacy learner is close to being equated with the 'dole bludger':

The dole system that we inherited sent the worst possible message to young Australians. It told them that dropping out of school, out of their communities, escaping personal responsibility, was acceptable and that the taxpayer would foot the bill...I commit my government to requiring unemployed young people who fail basic literacy and numeracy tests to undertake appropriate remedial courses if they are to continue to receive their full dole...this government will require young people who lack basic literacy and numeracy skills to undertake training in those areas as a condition of receiving their full unemployment benefit. Refusing to learn how to read and write will deny young unemployed the full dole. (Prime Minister Howard 1999).

While it has located Commonwealth provision for adult literacy exclusively within the domain of unemployment and unemployment benefits (the deficit column of the economic budget), the current government has not produced any policy document specific to, or inclusive of, adult literacy provision. Since the media release of January 1999 that announced the tightening of literacy requirements for those receiving unemployment benefits, there has only been one press release specific to adult literacy. It occurred in April 1999 to promote the release of the *Never Too Late Show*—an adult literacy show for television. In all government statements, the literacy debate is presented as relating specifically to literacy in the first three years of schooling—literacy for adults is framed exclusively in the punitive and compulsory frame of Mutual Obligation. Once in train, LANT has attracted no further response from government.

LANT continues to operate within a policy vacuum (Kirby, 2000; Lingard & Blackmore, 1997). The last policy document pertinent to adult literacy was the previous Labour government's influential *Australia's Language: Australian Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP)* (Dawkins, 1991).

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Luke (1997) suggests this lack of policy is a deliberate choice by the government and that the effect is to stifle debate. Debate is certainly made extremely difficult by the government's choice not to publicly articulate and document any educational philosophy or overarching policy framework. As there is no documented current policy we can only look at the speeches and press releases of Dr Kemp and the Prime Minister to understand something of the government's attitudes and intentions. As has been demonstrated above, these present literacy in narrow and punitive terms.

The history of LANT's implementation

The election of the Coalition Government in 1996 saw the hasty abolition of Labour's Special Intervention Program (SIP) funding as well as the merging of the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) and the Department of Social Security (DSS) into one body, Centrelink. The phasing out of SIP was complete by April 1998, and there was a gap in Commonwealth provision before the tenders for the new Mutual Obligation LANT program went out.

LANT tenders closed in May 1998 and provision commenced gradually later that year. Only a very small number of eligible clients (jobseekers aged 18–24 years) took up LANT as an option under the Mutual Obligation arrangements. LANT was introduced after a period of no Commonwealth-funded adult literacy provision and consequently there were very few referrals from Centrelink.

Kell (1999) suggests, and several providers confirmed, that the initial entry rates to the program were 'nothing short of a spectacular failure' (p.8). The loss and movement of experienced personnel and the extra administration, assessment and placement responsibilities placed on Centrelink staff (many of whom were experienced only in administration carried out by the old DSS) meant that services like individual assessment and placement often went by the wayside.

Removal of choice

In January 1999, the Prime Minister announced changes to the provision of LANT—eligibility was opened up to include all jobseekers (not just 18–24yrs) and the element of choice was removed. Anecdotal reports of Centrelink's methods for identifying clients in need of literacy classes have been sometimes questionable (for example, making a decision based on the way a client had filled out a Centrelink form, having never interviewed and assessed that client) and clearly there is pressure on Centrelink staff to fill the program. Rather than choosing to enrol in an adult literacy program, clients were told to attend by the same government department responsible for their welfare payments.

These changes mean that if Centrelink personnel deem a client to be in need of literacy and/or numeracy training,

that client has no alternative but to attend LANT. The alternative is to have their benefits suspended. These changes to the LANT program and indeed the public announcement of the program itself, were part of the Prime Minister's 1999 Address to the Nation, nationalistically and emotively titled *The Australian Way*.

O'Connor (1994) suggests that policy is a statement of aims and ideals. In the absence of an articulated adult education policy from the current government, we are unable to critique its 'aims and ideals'. However it is clear that current provision indicates a reactive rather than a proactive approach to provision (the changes to LANT provision are evidence of this); a return to the subject as deficit (Luke, 1997); a narrow conceptualisation of literacy as skills; a framework based on the simplistic equation of literacy = jobs (Black, 1995); funding cuts and a more rigid and punitive approach.

Language as commodity

Liotard (1993, p.27) suggests 'the big deal of the past twenty years has been the transformation of language into a productive commodity' where literacy has become a highly sought after commodity. Green, Hogden and Luke (1994) explain that fears expressed about literacy are often code for other fears—fears about unemployment, or about rapid change. Literacy can be used politically to quell or fuel those fears. They make a salient point when they say 'the literacy debate is rarely about "literacy" itself. It is tied up with the larger political and moral debates about the directions of communities and cultures, nation-states and economies' (p.15).

The current provision of adult literacy in Australia is certainly as much about limiting the payment of unemployment benefits as it is about encouraging adults to take up studies in adult literacy. LANT the program, as conceived by the Coalition, does not seem to have been about literacy but rather about 'mutual obligation' and control. Reflection on how this has played out in LANT classrooms is extremely important in terms of LANT's success as a program and the future opportunities it offers students.

The following feedback received from those working within the LANT program gives some indication of how LANT is operating both in its administration and its classrooms.

The data—issues raised by teachers and coordinators

Difficulty accessing online system

This was a source of frustration for the majority of participants in our conference session. They described problems with data entry since Internet entry for LANT client data was introduced in June/July 2000. Many found they were unable to log on, and providers have been forced to upgrade equipment in order to carry out this data entry. However,

this equipment upgrade was not mooted in the original contract and so extra costs were not included in the tender. This is a significant extra cost, especially for smaller providers.

'We can't log on unless we're in really early in the morning or late at night'.

'The system is so slow'.

'We were told by DETYA that our bandwidth was the problem, so we installed a modem just for that computer to access LANT but it's still very slow'.

“ it really is up to the whim of Centrelink as to when it gets done ”

LANT clients' data not entered by Centrelink

Providers reported problems with data entered by Centrelink. For some, up to 50–60 per cent of clients had not been entered by Centrelink, so the providers can't enter the data about their clients. This has huge implications for funding (for example, the final 20 per cent of funding for each client is not sent to the provider by DETYA until that client has been entered as having advanced a level). Funding is tied individually to each client, not given to the provider in one 'chunk'. This failure to enter data also has implications for providers in terms of time management as a provider can't complete online administrative work if a client

is not on the database.

'It really is up to the whim of Centrelink as to when it gets done. You get the feeling that Centrelink don't know what they're doing'.

Assessment and referral by Centrelink staff

The means by which Centrelink staff identify and refer clients to the LANT program was questioned by many providers.

'Centrelink needs to be trained in adult literacy'.

'Centrelink staff need training so that they can encourage students to go to a provider for an assessment, not force them. At the moment it's just got the 'work for the dole' and the 'dumb' label on it'.

Coercive element of the program

A former student related her experiences in a classroom where many students were reluctant participants and the negative effect this attitude had on the educational environment and opportunities for other students in the class. She reported being greatly hindered in her studies by students who were unmotivated and continually disruptive.

Teachers expressed concern at the manner in which participants in the program were labelled, and the detrimental nature of this labelling, particularly as many students were not willing participants in the program.

Professional development

Coordinators in particular talked about working in a professional 'vacuum' with regard to LANT and its administration. They expressed a need for professional development from DETYA and with Centrelink.

'Who will PD me?' asked one of the coordinators/trainers.

'Whenever I ask for help with anything, DETYA responds with, "You won the tender, you should know what you're doing". They offered me no support at all.'

Some providers also reported that they had developed some good professional networks in response to the lack of LANT networks. In this way, they had transformed negatives into positives.

Industrial issues

Teachers raised the issue of disparity with regard to pay scales and conditions—for example, assessors and teachers being paid at different rates for the same work depending on where and who they worked for.

Teachers also called attention to the difficulty of wearing various 'hats' and moving between roles and providers. They gave details of the difficult task they have in needing to 'sell' the LANT program, particularly given its coercive element.

High-needs clients in LANT

Many teachers and coordinators reported that they were being called on to give (and were often unable to give) extensive support to LANT clients. They said that LANT clients were usually in need of far more support than 'usual' ALBE students. The kinds of needs identified were psychiatric, medical, housing, substance abuse, behavioural and others—what one coordinator called 'hamburgers with the lot'.

'There is a fragility with ALBE students generally. With LANT students, this is quadrupled. The sorts of students who are sent by Centrelink, compulsorily, are the kind of students who need a huge amount of support'.

'Almost all our clients need one-to-one but we haven't got the resources to give it'.

When these high needs in (and out of) the classroom were combined with the heavy administrative load demanded by LANT, teachers and coordinators reported that they were unable to make ends meet.

Assessment

One coordinator emphasised the importance of the initial assessment of a client—both to ensure that they were placed

in an appropriate class and to 'establish a bond and some sense of understanding with that student...that usually happens when you do a thorough assessment'.

However, the time needed to complete an adequate assessment was seen as prohibitive, particularly because of the 'on call' environment in which clients are referred.

'LANT assessments take up to one and a half hours—we put in a low rate for assessments when we tendered—there's not any gap funding to help us out and assessors are hard to come by on an ad hoc basis'.

Size of areas covered, particularly in rural areas

Coordinators in rural areas pointed out that large distances were a drain on resources and made travelling for PD almost impossible.

'The area we were given is huge. We're having to travel long distances a lot. It's really hard to stay in touch with everyone and to make sure things are running as they should. They should break the areas down more'.

The high level of movement and recruitment within all stakeholder groups

Centrelink, trainers and students all have a high turnover, so there is a lot of 'reinventing the wheel'.

'We're constantly having to train staff, especially when it comes to record keeping and admin'.

'Students are referred in a roll-on, roll-off fashion so it's hard to get any kind of classroom atmosphere'.

Verification

Evidence suggested that providers experienced inconsistency regarding verification in the early period of LANT, but that most have adapted to the verification process. Some providers suggested that verifiers were the closest thing they got to professional development as well.

Conclusion

The macro-context in which LANT is played out is, as we have demonstrated, both complex and fragile, and affects classroom practice and program administration.

It is clear to us from our discussions with teachers that they, and their students, are getting on with the job of trying to make classrooms productive, positive places where students can learn in a flexible, innovative and supported manner. They do this often under difficult conditions including time constraints, the coercive nature of the program and its impact on student motivation and behaviour, and administrative burdens that impact on classroom practice and on teacher and student morale.

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We consider it extremely important that there is a review of LANT before new tendering arrangements are finalised. Mary Rogers, contract manager for literacy and numeracy at DETYA, has expressed an interest in teacher feedback and our data and wishes to have the chance to reply in the next edition of *Fine Print*. We welcome this dialogue and consultation with providers, teachers and students about new tenders in the near future.

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Coming issues

Fine Print in 2001

In 2001, *Fine Print* will be looking at changes in the field—this edition examines changing contexts of literacy, while the next one will cover changing literacies and changing perceptions of literacy. Spring 2001 will investigate change in accreditation and accredited documents such as the CGEA and the new Certificate of English Language and Literacy (CELL), and the Summer edition will scrutinise changes in professional development for the ALBE field.

2001

Autumn: changing contexts of literacy

Winter: changing literacies and changing perceptions of literacy

Spring: change in accreditation and accredited documents

Summer: changes in professional development

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

Foreign Correspondence

There is much information to share about online education from both sides of the Pacific. However, while the new tools will benefit literacy and distance learning, it is important to bridge the 'digital divide' between those who can and can't use computer technology.



(Web)surfin' USA

by Eunice N. Askov

I have been on a sabbatical leave from Pennsylvania State University in the USA to study applications of Web-based instruction to literacy and/or workforce development. I selected Australia for a visit because of its history in both literacy and distance education (I had also met many fantastic and knowledgeable people during my previous five visits to Australia!).

I have been based at Flinders University's School of Education in their Institute of International Education in Adelaide. Accompanied by my husband Warren, I have also managed to make site visits and meet wonderful people in Melbourne, Tasmania, and Perth. I have been delighted to make presentations at four conferences about Penn State's online World Campus, and specifically about our Master's Degree in Adult Education, in which I was both lead faculty member and professor of the first online course.

As I have met with a variety of people involved in using Web-based instruction in literacy programs, I have come to some initial conclusions. I hope to continue my explorations and keep in touch with the 'pioneers' of these efforts. It seems evident to me that a worldwide 'digital divide' is increasing between the 'haves' and 'have nots' of computer technology, including access to the Internet. Social justice issues compel us to provide computer and Internet instruction to literacy students to help bridge this increasing divide. Remote students may also move into the modern world through access to technology while their isolation is removed through the formation of online learning communities.

Learning must be reconceptualised so that it is based on constructivist and social learning theories. Online learning communities are established through interacting not only with the instructor but also with other students. Students are practicing their literacy skills while they work with others on group project work. Communication tools (bulletin board discussions, email exchanges, chatrooms, etc) may become more important than actually delivering content on the web especially for literacy and ESL students.

Refining online learning

Since many teachers also lack knowledge of computer and Internet technology, they must be included as an essential part of any plan. I am interested to see the results of the LearnScope, which seems to be an innovative way of increasing teacher competence in online instruction (we don't have a similar plan for staff development in the USA).

Time and money are required to build the infrastructure to support online learning. These issues need to be worked out as programs move forward in developing and delivering first modules, later followed by entire courses. Some instructors, however, believe that online instruction (primarily the communication tools) is most appropriate for reinforcement and practice for face-to-face students rather than for distance education literacy students. Perhaps a certain level of literacy needs to be attained before online distance education becomes an effective option.

Research is needed to document learning in online instruction. We also need to know the important characteristics of effective Web sites for literacy students. Some of this research may best be conducted by creating online materials to be used as components of classroom instruction so that students can provide input into the development and evaluation of web-based materials.

Thanks to all the people who have been so generous with their time and expertise in meeting with me and sharing their online materials. I hope that I will be able to pull together this wisdom to share with others and provide some guidance in a future publication. I also hope to keep in contact with those who are leading the way in developing online instruction for literacy students. Please keep me updated as new ventures are launched.

Eunice N. Askov is Professor of Education and Director of the Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy at Pennsylvania State University, USA (email: ena1@psu.edu).

Open Forum

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

In this edition of *Fine Print*, Lynne Matheson talks about the Carlton Adult Reading and Writing Program's volunteer tutor scheme, which has gone from strength to strength over 15 years.

Volunteer tutoring— celebrating success

This year is the International Year of Volunteers. Worldwide celebrations will recognise the outstanding contributions made by volunteers to the community.

The Carlton Adult Reading and Writing Program (CARWP) has conducted a volunteer tutor program since its inception more than 15 years ago, when volunteer tutors worked with students in a classroom at the local primary school. The CARWP currently offers daytime and evening classes in literacy, numeracy, ESL, special needs and computers at the Carlton Contact Neighbourhood House.

The volunteer tutor program is funded by Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE) for three hours per week of coordination and the seven-week training course. The program forms a core to the overall program by developing pathways for students and tutors alike. A focus on lifelong learning enables people from a range of backgrounds and age groups to participate.

Since 1997, 44 participants have attended the training course with an age range between 22 and 70, the majority aged between 22–32. Participants have been 72 per cent female and 28 per cent male. Work backgrounds have been in related fields such as university students, writers, teachers, social workers or people working in universities (the proximity to Melbourne University is a factor in this). Others come from totally unrelated work backgrounds in professional fields, administrative or clerical work, or retired.

Pathways for our students are important and one-to-one tuition has resulted in students joining a class or taking up a course at TAFE. For others, it has meant developing the confidence to achieve their literacy goals in work, travel or family life. Equally so, for some tutors becoming involved in the program has led them to taking on other roles such as membership of the CARWP committee of management or making a change in their career direction or taking on further study in related fields.

Reasons given for taking on volunteer tutoring have been mostly personal with participants most frequently expressing a desire to 'share the love of reading with another person'. Other reasons have been related to career change, enhancement of existing skills and knowledge or to 'put something back into the community'.

A sense of community engendered in the program encourages tutors to feel a connection between what they do with their student and the community of CARWP through tutor meetings, the newsletter and social events.

Volunteer tutor training course

The training course is conducted in first semester to bring new tutors into the program. The seven-week course aims to provide participants with a range of skills and knowledge so that they can confidently work with a student upon completion. The course was developed over a number of years with input from a range of adult literacy and ESL teachers.

Principles of adult learning are implicit in the pedagogical methods used to deliver the course. The seven pedagogical principles of context, interest, modelling, scaffolding, metacognition, responsibility and community devised by Jennie Bickmore-Brand¹ underpin the course and apply to the tutoring situation. The course is flexible and elements are updated to incorporate changes with ongoing reference to real students. The document, *Transforming lives, transforming communities: a conceptual framework for further education*² has been used to provide a theoretical framework for the course.

An information night is held to give prospective tutors an overview of the course and the commitment required. Since the introduction of the information night the attrition rate has dropped. The seven sessions of the course are delivered by the coordinator and specialist teachers, over consecutive

weeks in the evening for two and a half hours' duration. The group size may vary between ten and fifteen.

The course is organised in a sequential manner to introduce key concepts and theories while working from participants' own experience and knowledge.

Session 1: Adult literacy and adult learning—bringing the two together

Introduces participants to some of the current definitions of adult literacy and their implications for teaching and learning.

Session 2: Reading—learning and teaching strategies

Aims to develop an understanding of the reading process and the participants' own reading strategies and relate them to psycholinguistic learning theories.

Session 3: Writing and spelling—learning and teaching strategies

Aims to develop an understanding of writing processes and spelling strategies and the inter-relatedness of literacy skills and the importance placed on speaking and listening in the learning process.

Session 4: Everyday numeracy and basic computers

A 'hands on' session looking at numeracy in everyday contexts and useful computer software.

Session 5: Teaching an ESL/literacy student—ESL teaching and learning strategies

Aims to develop a critical appreciation and understanding of the possible similarities and differences between an ESL, ESL literacy and ESB literacy student and teaching strategies.

Session 6: Spelling and student profiles/case studies

This session has a practical focus on student needs and planning.

Session 7: Starting out/social and cultural issues

The final session provides information regarding procedures and policies of the program and an understanding of some of the social and cultural issues involved in volunteer tutoring and current tutors speak about their students and experiences.

Tutors are presented with a certificate upon completion of the course with a celebratory dinner held at a nearby restaurant. It is expected that tutors will be prepared to begin work with a student and commit to a minimum of twenty weeks.

The volunteer tutor coordinator and the CARWP coordinator take particular care to match tutors and students. Availability, gender, personal styles and age are taken into account to best achieve a compatible match. An interview is arranged with the student and tutor and time is spent talking with the student about their needs and experiences. The coordinator then assists the tutor in planning the first session. Regular communication and term meetings are held to support tutors in their work.

Generally there are between eight and 12 pairs working at any one time, but due to the fluctuations in the program it is very difficult to describe a typical tutor/student relationship. Some students have worked with a tutor for a stable period of one to two years. Some matches do not work out and after two or three attempts have been abandoned.

The student may have other issues in their lives so that it takes some time to establish a regular pattern of attendance. In some cases, the tutor has had changes in their lives so that the tutor/student relationship has been halted abruptly and another tutor must then be found. For others, the time that was available may have become pressured by work or study demands so that they are forced to withdraw from the program.

From a coordination point of view, it is quite a high maintenance program but the rewards are evident for both students and tutors. The Carlton Adult Reading and Writing Program has maintained its strong commitment to the local community's needs in conducting the volunteer tutor program and the success of the program is well worth celebrating.

Lynne Matheson is volunteer tutor coordinator for the Carlton Adult Reading and Writing Program. She has been involved in adult education since 1989, and has worked with Kew Community House, NMIT and CARWP as an ALBE teacher and coordinator

End notes

- 1 Bickmore-Brand J (1996), in *Stepping Out: Professional Development Material*. Perth: WAED.
- 2 Bradshaw D (1999). *Transforming Lives Transforming Communities, A Conceptual Framework for Further Education (2nd edition)*. Victoria: ACFE.

Policy Update

Local Learning and Employment Networks are springing up across the state, as Marilyn Gander explains.

Local Learning and Employment Networks

The establishment of networks which bring together stakeholders with an interest in supporting young people as they negotiate their future options, including the transition from school to employment, has come about following the ministerial review of post-compulsory education and training pathways in Victoria. This review was undertaken in 2000 and chaired by Mr Peter Kirby.

The report emphasised the benefits to be gained by a local cooperative approach to planning and acknowledged the community and industry shared responsibility and ownership of post-compulsory education and training.

Each Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) will become an incorporated association which will respond to the leadership and governance provided by a committee of management in consultation with the broader community.

Membership of a LLEN is open to any individual or organisation with an interest in post-compulsory education, training and employment in the area covered by the LLEN. The LLENs will work to develop local partnerships to improve outcomes for young people.

LLENs are being phased in so that they will cover all areas of the State. During 2001 the following LLENs will be established:

- 1 Greater Dandenong/Casey/Cardinia
- 2 Banyule/Nillimbuk
- 3 Darebin/Moreland/Yarra
- 4 East Gippsland/Wellington
- 5 Geelong/Surf Coast/Queenscliff/Golden Plains
- 6 Wyndham/Hobson's Bay
- 7 Ballarat/Hepburn/Moorabool/Pyrenees/Golden Plains
- 8 Mildura/Swan Hill (Robinvale)
- 9 South Gippsland/Bass Coast
- 10 Greater Bendigo/Central Goldfields/Mt Alexander
- 11 Frankston/Mornington Peninsula
- 12 Latrobe/Baw Baw
- 13 Maribyrnong/Moonee Valley
- 14 Shepparton/Moira/Strathbogie
- 15 Hume/Whittlesea.

Marilyn Gander has worked in adult education for many years with a major interest in adult literacy and ESL issues. She is currently the project officer for the Inner Northern LLEN, which covers the local government area for Moreland, Darebin and Yarra.

Further information on the LLEN initiative can be found at <http://www.deet.vic.gov.au/postcomp/llens.htm>

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Beside the Whiteboard

Volunteer tutors come from all walks of life, bringing with them a wealth of experience. As Barbara Macfarlan tells *Fine Print* reporter Michael Chalk, it is a rewarding two-way learning path for both student and tutor, and often a strong bond is forged.

Barbara teaches English and Computers at Swinburne TAFE, where she also coordinates the volunteer tutor program. Michael Chalk is a member of the *Fine Print* editorial committee.



For a start, I'm interested to learn how you got into adult education, and particularly adult literacy education.

I started in Adult education as a volunteer tutor in 1993. My youngest child had started school, and things in primary schools were pretty grim (I trained as a primary teacher) so I was looking at other options. A volunteer tutor program had just started at Swinburne and I was in the first group. The CGE-A course was growing and expanding, the coordinator was looking for teachers, and I think that my students had said nice things about me and I was offered a job. My first class was a literacy class at night with people who were working, and halfway through the year I was offered a contract at Swinburne where I took on classes during the day that were a combination of literacy/ESL. I have been there ever since.

You're a sessional teacher, and you're coordinating a volunteer program for adult literacy learners. Could you tell us about that? Where are you working and what does your work involve?

I am on contract at Swinburne TAFE's access department, where I teach English and computers for beginners in the CGEA. My contract is for two and a half days and I have one of those days to coordinate the volunteer tutor program. In my role as VTP coordinator, I train people from the community to help our literacy and ESL students with their language learning needs. I handle all aspects of that—advertising, delivering the training program, matching the tutors and students, supporting the tutors in their tutoring role (which can include designing a program of study for the tutor and student to follow), timetabling, delivering professional development for the tutors in the form of workshops (twice a term) and sending out a newsletter to about 70 tutors (also twice a term).

I also teach at Donvale Living and Learning centre (one and a half days, sessional), and this year I have taken on the role of CGEA coordinator at Yarrunga Community Centre (one day, sessional) where we are establishing classes to meet the needs of those wanting to return to work or study.

What range of people come through your doors wanting to volunteer?

All sorts of people want to volunteer. Mostly they are people whose children are becoming independent—either at school or left home and who have some time to spare. The volunteers range in age from uni students through to people who have been retired for many years. There is no typical profile because each person has an individual style and talent that can be valuable to a student. Each one of the volunteers has a strong sense of wanting to give something back to the community or has a genuine interest in helping someone else improve their skills and function effectively in society.

What sort of responses do you get from volunteers and from the literacy learners about the program?

The volunteers all comment on how much they learn from their students. It is an unexpected bonus for them. They are delighted to find that learning is a two-way process and that an individual can make a difference in many aspects of living and learning.

The students love working with tutors because a one-to-one situation is a perfect supplement to the wider classroom style. In a tutoring situation, a student can ask questions that he/she may be too shy to ask in class; can follow up on work or check homework; can get help with things outside the classroom sphere like banking, dealing with schools, and so on. Many students need to practice everyday conversation skills because they get lost in group conversations or don't have the appropriate language to contribute. The tutors offer a cultural link to the community that the student wishes to participate in.

What is the most enjoyable aspect of your work?

I really enjoy meeting and working with tutors who have many different interests and fields of expertise. The most enjoyable aspect is seeing tutors and students working together happily and watching the student developing

confidence and understanding. That sounds a bit twee, but I try to match the tutors and students carefully, watching for things like similar interests, and it is lovely to see that the match is successful. It is really important that both the tutor and the student are happy in the match, because a one-to-one situation can be difficult if there is a personality clash. Effective learning can only take place in a relaxed and happy atmosphere.

And what's the most challenging part of it?

The most challenging aspect is maintaining contact with the tutors and students. I keep in contact with the tutors via the newsletters and workshops but it is also important to maintain a more personal contact by phone (and lately by email) to make sure that the tutors are feeling good about their tutoring experience. This gives them chance to discuss aspects of tutoring specifically about their student or to get some ideas for a new direction to try in the sessions.

I see many of the students in the classroom and can ask them about their tutors after class. It is important that the students feel that they can talk to me about their tutors and the sessions so that I can monitor the situation and help with issues like timetabling and course content where necessary.

What do you consider the most important issues facing the adult literacy field at the moment?

Computer technology and working on-line are opening up new learning opportunities and experiences. More and more our society is becoming dependent on technology and as teachers we need to incorporate this into our classroom practice.

What are the key issues in volunteer coordination?

In order to maintain a volunteer program I think that it is important to remind the volunteers of the valuable work that they are doing for the students or organisation and to thank them for it. It seems like a simple thing but it is important to publicly recognise that the work undertaken by the volunteers would not be possible under any other circumstances. Many organisations would not be as effective as they are without the time and energy donated by members of the community who collectively and individually have a formidable resource of skills and expertise. If these

individuals do not feel appreciated and effective members of a team or group then they could lose interest.

There are many ways of doing this—organising social get-togethers in the form of morning/afternoon teas, offering workshops and training opportunities, developing certificates of recognition, putting a thank you notice in the local paper (usually free during Volunteers Week in May), a personal 'thank you' is often effective.

It is important to maintain contact with the volunteers. A newsletter can be an effective forum. Through the newsletter you can keep the volunteers up to date with what's happening in your organisation (they will feel more a part of the team), they can be informed about training opportunities offered by you or the local council, or you can highlight an idea or contribution from an individual. In the newsletter to my tutors, I sometimes include a five-minute word game or reading activity found by me or contributed by a tutor.

Is there any advice you would offer someone starting a volunteer program in adult literacy?

Be organised and realistic about the amount of time that it will take to manage a volunteer program

Set up systems to maintain a database of the volunteers and establish communication channels

If you are part-time then you need the support of your colleagues to help the volunteers when you aren't there

If you have one-to-one tutoring you need a room that can be timetabled for this

Establish contact with the local Volunteers Resource Centre who will refer people to you and offer training for volunteers

Run a training program for literacy and ESL tutors to give them an overview of adult learning and some strategies to help them when working with a student

Be clear about what it is you want from your volunteers, the amount of time and energy the tutoring might require.

Thanks for your time.

