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Editorial

In 1994 *Fine Print* devoted an entire edition to the CGEA, questioning its impact on the field. Since then, many new accredited curricula have been introduced and this edition questions their impact on teachers and students. To borrow a phrase from Liz Suda, how far have we moved in the 'Framed Accredited Certified' debate? In her article, 'The darker side of accreditation' (this edition) Helen Macrae explores the question 'In whose interests has accreditation been constructed?' She offers honest, courageous and critical argument that will hopefully generate further debate.

It seems that much time (and resources) have gone into dealing with accreditation for both teachers and policy makers. Three teachers interviewed by *Fine Print* on theories informing the CGEA and accreditation of 'low-level' literacy learners are also asking 'in whose interests...?' One of those teachers, Wendy Corvell, asks 'is having an accredited curriculum important to ('low-level') learners, teachers, funding bodies...and what purposes does it serve these players?'

In Policy Update, Jan Hagston outlines the reaccreditation process of the CGEA, which will now include amongst other expansions, the Certificate I in General Education for Adults (introductory). In the overview of the Certificate I in Initial Adult Literacy and Numeracy (CIALN), the Certificate I in Koori Education (Coorong Tongala) and the Diploma in Further Education the writers explore the value of these certificates for learners.

To quote Helen MacRae again 'the CGEA has lifted standards in adult literacy and numeracy education but not because it's accredited...(but) because it's an *excellent educational framework*. It gives teachers a strong pedagogical direction and a educational rationale for every lesson, and for every

learner they teach'. We hope that as much time and energy can go into supporting the pedagogic work of teachers as has gone into accreditation.

On the workplace front, the role of literacy in Training Packages has been hotly debated for some time. Peter Waterhouse presents us with an insightful and critical reflection on the issue. In Open Forum, Belinda Bold looks at how literacy is integrated into Training Packages, and in *Beside the Whiteboard* Natalie Nawrocki talks about her experiences in teaching both in a community-based adult literacy program and a WELL Program for garden workers with mild intellectual disabilities.

Also in Open Forum, Karen Manwaring explores teachers' views and experiences on the integration of Adult English as a Second Language and Adult Literacy Classes.

And finally, in Foreign Correspondent Liz Suda reviews one international trend in adult literacy and numeracy—the Dialogic Literary Circles in Spain, a group promoting the idea of reading classical literature using dialogic methods bringing both literacy and cultural power to those who have been excluded from education. And isn't this what good pedagogy is about?

Accreditation serves a useful purpose in providing formal recognition to learners for knowledge and skills gained, but has accreditation made 'what 's central to teaching and learning incidental?' (Macrae). This comment then leaves us wondering: Are teachers feeling exhausted by the accreditation process? Are they compromised? Are they unsupported and under-resourced in their task to continue engendering a passion in their students for lifelong learning?

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.

The dark side of accreditation: a system for the privileged?

by Helen Macrae

The accreditation system once opened up opportunities in life. Today, it is a system administered by the privileged to protect the interests of the privileged.

Two weeks ago I spent seven hours in the company of three other people on the 50th level of the Rialto North Tower. We interviewed five applicants for the position of executive officer of the Inner Northern Local Learning and Employment Network (INLLEN).

What weighting did we give to the formal qualifications held by the applicants on our short list? Everyone who applied had tertiary qualifications, and we wouldn't have shortlisted anyone without them. From an employer and employee perspective that's the bright side of accreditation.

Because of the way our society has constructed accreditation, a qualification tells you that someone has passed successfully through a specified set of controls and measures. The information from those controls and measures is of necessity so generalised you only know the individual has lasted the distance through a known process.

The closed gate

For all our interviewees, accreditation was once a gate—as it once was for me, and likely for you too. Twenty or thirty years ago the gate swung open and our applicants passed through it into a series of life experiences which might or might not have given them the skills the INLLEN was looking for.

In seven hours of close questioning and discussion, their qualifications were never mentioned by the panel, and that brings me right up against the darker side of accreditation for employers, which is that accreditation doesn't tell employers (or anyone else for that matter) most of the things they really need to know.

In whose interests has accreditation been constructed? I would have thought it was created to serve the needs of employers in a capitalist economy. Or have I got that wrong? Does anyone want to argue that accreditation serves the needs of the learner or the teacher in any other context than the labour market as we know it?

No guarantees

I'm an employer myself. I've employed dozens of people in my lifetime. I've never assumed that a Ph D or a VET certificate is any guarantee that the person can do the job I want done, whether that person's been a plumber, a pedagogue or policy officer.

Our hard headed and hard hearted Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) selection panel wanted to know what inside knowledge and understanding our applicants had about networking from the base of an incorporated organisation that's owned and managed by a local community. Were they good communicators? Did they have political nous embedded in a mature take on human nature? Did they have an ethic of old fashioned common sense, hard work, honesty, and respect for self and others? How did they go about connecting with other people? We framed questions that tried to get inside their resumes so we could sift and compare their ability to deal wisely with the issues confronting the LLEN.

Do you believe that academic and competency standards and moderation are worth all the energy and resources of time and money they soak up? Standards and moderation are modern urban myths. You can give me all the moderation under the sun, but no one will ever convince me that your CGEA or MBA is worth the same as mine. Especially if you got yours in Bangladesh and I got mine at the University of Melbourne. Why do most of the kids with the best marks want to get into places like the University of Melbourne rather than, say, Victoria University?

Is accreditation off target?

My first quarrel with accreditation then is the way it can mislead the very people it was created to help. For a range of reasons accreditation—by and large—doesn't reliably attest to standards, knowledge, skills, values, understanding and attitudes. My second quarrel with accreditation is the way it can divert attention from what is centrally important to the enterprise of teaching and learning.

“ a qualification tells you that someone has passed successfully through a specified set of controls and measures ”

Accreditation has the very bad habit of making what's central to teaching and learning incidental. On May 4 this year Raimond Gaita told the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English about a teacher who rescued him from expulsion. Accreditation was nowhere to be seen or heard in his account of how several transformative learning experiences were grounded in a personal relationship.

Raimond Gaita's German teacher was 'a strong, passionate personality' and 'more than a little daunting'. In Year 11 Gaita offended the headmaster of St Patrick's in Ballarat by openly advocating the views of Bertram Russell. The German teacher gave Gaita *Why I am not a Christian* to read so Gaita would understand why the headmaster thought he'd committed a sacking offence.

I found refuge each week in his study...(He) played Bach cantatas and talked about them to me. I was entranced by his untroubled confidence that he had revealed to me one of the great treasures of Western civilisation. It never occurred to me to ask why he did it because I knew, as everyone does, that people enjoy sharing what they love.

Because it can be catching, enthusiasm can be a pedagogical asset but it is neutral...Love on the other hand, as Plato was perhaps the first to see, is in complex ways related to the good...Even more than enthusiasm, love can be a ped-agogical device...it is sometimes an indispensable means to seeing the value of something. Often we see something as precious only in the light of someone's love.

Teaching that sees an individual need and responds to it in the context of a healthy relationship is often one of the most transformative experiences we can have in life. If accreditation becomes the central preoccupation of teaching and learning, much that is of central educational importance is at risk of falling away.

Standards before quality

Accreditation seems to have been too weak an incentive to spark significant private investment in training. Australian employers have not responded to the national training reform agenda (preoccupied as it is with standards and how to police them, rather than the highest quality of teaching) by increasing their investment in formal training. Learners haven't flocked to complete certificates. Modules, yes. But whole certificates, no. I've heard that relatively few VET certificates are completed. This might suggest that many VET learners are more interested in actual education outcomes, and less attached to the value of certificates than those who construct them.

My next three reservations about accreditation may be more serious. It may not be true that accreditation crushes

creativity and critical intelligence, but Amartya Sen seems to think it does.

The Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen thinks that having enough money in your pocket to buy food for yourself and your family, and to put a roof over their heads, bestows freedom. He wants to put food in the stomachs of the hungry to free people 'to do and to be'.

accreditation has the very bad habit of making what's central to teaching and learning incidental

Amartya Sen has been a big contributor to the United Nation's Human Development Index which measures the welfare of nations against much more than Gross National Product. His theory of economics is known as 'social choice theory' and pinpoints inequality in world trade and the distribution of world power, not globalisation, as the problem. Justice is central to his economic analysis. He is a critical thinker.

Amartya Sen went to a school in Bengal that valued curiosity over exam results. At his school, good exam results were a problem to overcome, not a badge of honour, as in: 'She is quite a serious thinker even though she has good exam results'. (*The Age*, 5 May, 2001)

Translated to VET this might go:

'She'll be a critical thinker in the child care sector, always asking "Why?" and "Who's benefiting?" and "How can we do this better?" She'll be a leader in her profession *even though she did well in her competencies assessment*'.

In a qualifications-driven system such as the one we work in, the teacher, the TAFE institute, the ACE agency has to make a conscious decision to value curiosity over assessment tasks. Do we?

Undue credit

My next concern about accreditation is that too many people seem to believe that accreditation means that the quality of educational content and method is lifted by the discipline of accreditation. The CGEA has lifted standards in adult literacy and numeracy education but not because it's accredited.

In my opinion the CGEA has lifted standards in adult literacy and basic education because it's an *excellent educational framework*. It gives teachers a strong pedagogical direction and an educational rationale for every lesson, and for every learner they teach. It gives them a common understanding of their professional responsibilities whilst allowing for infinite variations locally and in every teacher/learner transaction. If the conceptual framework developed by Delia Bradshaw is incorporated as part of the reaccreditation process, the CGEA should be a stunner.

The CGEA as a certificate is pitched too low to have much currency with employers. I never heard of a CGEA graduate who went to an employer and got a job by saying: 'I've got my CGEA. It's the adult equivalent of Year 10. Employ me'.

People in the employment business say to young people who want to leave school before the end of Year 10: 'It's no use saying "I've got Year 9". Employers want the VCE'. (Bradshaw et al, 2000 *Room to Move*, DEET, p 16)

In 1966 I was teaching at Rutherglen High School when the external exam for the Intermediate Certificate was being phased out of our school. Teachers would assess the abilities of kids in Year 10 to go on to Year 11 and there would be no certificate. What is the CGEA but a modern adult version of the old Intermediate Certificate—in accreditation terms? This is why the drive to accredit the CGEA has always puzzled me.

The CGEA is an educational pearl of great price because it gives shape and coherence to the best that we think and say about adult literacy and numeracy teaching. The certification of the CGEA is a distraction that eats up valuable funds, which are urgently needed for resource development.

Casual introductions

To conclude in the same vein, I can't see the point of accrediting a short course in *Introduction to (anything you care to name)* that's pitched at CGEA Level I or lower. Sometimes I think that the accrediting of short, previously informal, general, purely introductory, adult education courses is a form of collective madness. Worst of all accreditation can harden inequality and entrench unjust outcomes.

Most of the people I know who set up and support accreditation systems seem to be as well intentioned as I am, but they may also be as foolish and culpable. I shock myself when I write that. It's a terrible thing to say about good people who want a socially just education system. Bear in mind I've done as much to support and enforce accreditation as the next person all my working life.

I used to hope that accreditation would have the answers *if only we could get it right*. I've argued that accreditation is the great leveller, the system that puts everyone on an equal footing. In fact it's the dead opposite of that and I knew it all the time I was pressing through to get my own qualifications. That's why I was pressing through to get them.

A system for the privileged

Accreditation is created and administered by the privileged, for the privileged, and endlessly protects the interests of the privileged. I've been privileged by the

accreditation system I passed through. I continue to be privileged by it.

The Kirby Report recognises this. For example, one in five young people leave school by or before the end of Year 10, and of those who last to the end of Year 12, only 45 per cent get their preferred outcome from the VCE. That's a lot of disillusioned young people and most of them don't come from Geelong Grammar. That's the actual outcome of a common accreditation system that was set up to create a more level playing field. The high-minded best intentions of accreditation systems get twisted by privilege.

The Kirby Report proposes many solutions, only one of which is an accredited certificate to 'horizontally' connect young people with work. Expecting that a new vocational education certificate will open doors to employment for previously disadvantaged learners is a vain hope unless learners connect with very wise, very skillful, and very loving teachers.

Consider for a minute people you know who are part of:

- the 4.4 million Australian adults who haven't completed a secondary education (census data)
- the many thousands of young people who continue to drop out of our current accreditation processes
- the many thousands of workers who resist participating in formal accredited learning.

Only hard headed and hard hearted educational love will do, and even that won't always be enough.

'There has been a tendency to examine education through its segments and institutions, rather than through the needs of the community' (Kirby Report, p 26). Why do we do that? I think it's because the segments and institutions we construct give us the illusion of control and order. They give us security in a seemingly unreliable and disordered world.

Too often, people think that institutional structures, of which accreditation is merely one manifestation, are of themselves a solution to profoundly human problems.

It was a man who saw a boy's need, taught him to love Bach, showed him how to deal with ideological boundaries, and kept Raimond Gaita at school when he was at risk of expulsion. The boy went on to do very well out of the accreditation system. But how many other boys and girls, and men and women, don't have their needs recognised and met, and as a consequence are hurt by this blunt instrument we call accreditation?

Helen Macrae was foundation president of VALBEC and is currently Chair of the Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre. She edits an online newspaper for Women in Adult and Vocational Education at www.converse.com.au

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Accreditation and low-level learners: another look at the CGEA

In an examination of the theories behind the Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA), with a look at purpose and critique at low levels, *Fine Print* conducted an email interview with three teachers—Wendy Corvell, Jacinta Agostinelli and Anne Dunn.

Fine Print: What do you see as the main issues around accreditation for those learners who are at the very beginning stages of literacy?

Corvell: Accreditation requires a relatively static set of criteria and documentation of students' demonstrated competency. The Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA) for instance has, even at Level 1 Reading and Writing, five required criteria for each of the eight learning outcomes. To achieve at the lowest level of Reading and Writing a student must be deemed competent in 40 assessment criteria! For beginners each step, no matter how small, needs to be recognised, valued and celebrated to encourage the learner's and teacher's enthusiasm and momentum in the learning partnership. The challenge is whether it is possible to provide varied and interesting learning situations within the constraints of static criteria.

A barrier faced by students with very low literacy levels is the need to maintain their newly acquired, as well as existing skills. Ongoing revision is required in order for the retention of skills to occur. The reality of many in the client group is that although a skill may be demonstrated, it is unlikely to be remembered without maintenance work through representing, relearning, rehearsing and revising. These requirements are not a part of the accreditation process and are certainly not a part of competency-based learning.

Due to this need for maintenance, assessment presents ethical dilemmas for teachers. Knowing maintenance of skills is required for retention, many teachers feel unable to deem a student competent.

Education providers are then placed in a tug-o-war between catering realistically to student needs and satisfying funding bodies, not to mention initially acquiring funding for programs for learners with very low literacy.

Agostinelli: I teach the CGEA to a very mixed group ranging from students who will achieve their Level 1 in Reading and Writing this year to a couple who are working at Level 3/4. However, there is a core group for whom the CGEA is problematic. Or at least, the nominal hours are problematic. These are the ones who experience, or have experienced some or all of the following: learning difficulties, mental health problems, a degree of intellectual disability and the social isolation and low self esteem that accompany these conditions. Most of them have got through Level 2 but Level

3 demands reading and writing skills that they have not acquired because of minimal exposure to written texts. Accreditation is a problem for these students because there are not enough nominal hours for them to develop reading and writing skills that express abstract thought.

Dunn: For me, the main issue is how do you balance the needs, interests and desires of the students with the need to complete CGEA requirements, when the two do not coincide? The CGEA structure assumes a gradual build-up to academic study, which is excellent; we all want our students to have pathways of opportunity—if they want them. However many students have not the slightest interest in going on to any further study. They just want to learn to read the paper and a few day-to-day things, manage their everyday affairs without having to rely on someone else, or improve their spelling. This latter type of student is particularly common in the adult community sector, where they do part-time courses of a few hours a week and leave after two or three years, once they can do what they want to. And yet, the funding is tied to the CGEA, so teachers are obliged to make the students endure the rigours of CGEA tasks. I'll go out on a limb here and suggest that if all the community sector teachers only taught to the CGEA and taught all streams of the CGEA, they would have no students within a few weeks. The students who have a clear goal of study or further education will often gain their literacy grounding in a community class, and then be encouraged to take on a more study-focussed TAFE course. In that situation, the CGEA is much more useful and appropriate.

Fine Print: Does the CGEA meet the needs of those learners who are at the very beginning stages of literacy? If not how could it be changed to better meet those needs?

Corvell: There are many students who cannot reach the required criteria of the CGEA even at Level 1 and yet they have many skills that can be recognised, documented and appraised. For example, there is much that students at the beginning stages of literacy achieve before they are able to 'write one or two sentences'. (Reading and Writing Level 1, CGEA, 1996).

Skills such as:

- recognising letters in the context of whole words
- identifying signs and symbols relating to personal details and immediate environment

- identifying specific information in personally relevant text
- copying letters of the alphabet, dates, numbers in order to convey personally relevant details
- writing personal details
- using non-textual cues for prediction
- indicating own immediate learning needs and preferred strategies

are but a few of the demonstrable skills of beginning readers and writers, deserving recognition, for which the current CGEA does not provide.

As with Reading and Writing, the remaining three streams of the CGEA also have demonstrable skills that are pre-Level 1. (For example, in Oral Communication the use of eye contact can determine whether a student is actively engaged in listening). *Perhaps a level before the current Level 1, with suitable task analysis, would allow for recognition of these learnt skills.*

Additionally, the separation of Reading from Writing in the CGEA would allow for greater recognition of achievement for learners. As many students' writing skills do not match their reading skills, achievement of the level is slowed down and in some cases prevented. With the separation of the stream into a Reading Stream and a Writing Stream, learners would be freed up to receive recognition of their skills in some cases more quickly and in other cases a recognition that would not have happened if dependent on writing ability.

An issue that teachers need to be aware of is the temptation to devise assessment tasks dependent on written responses. *Teachers need to be empowered to be creative when assessing and be satisfied with documenting verbal and physically demonstrated competency that satisfies their professional judgement when assessment is not in the Writing Stream.* Students with low literacy often have more highly developed skills, some of which can be recognised in the General Curriculum Options Stream and teachers can utilise these strengths by developing integrated tasks that span several streams.

Ideally a learning situation that blends literacy with meaningful activities that are engaging and incorporate all learning styles will provide opportunities for the literacy required for a variety of purposes.

For this to take place a framework is required that allows and encourages:

- recognition of mini-skills identified by task analysis
- reading and writing as separate streams for assessment
- teachers to be confident and flexible assessors, encouraged to depend on their professional judgement.

Agostinelli: With the CGEA structured as it is, the students referred to (in question 1) will find it very difficult to move beyond Level 2. I find that interpretation of the question,

and the identification of purpose and critique has to be teacher led to the point where students' work ceases to be their own. The thinking process is the teacher's. I believe this group can learn to read and write about abstract ideas, but not within the nominal hours, and not within the scope of the CGEA. *I suggest there be a branch of Level 2 or 3 that provides extra time and experience of abstract thinking and its linguistic equivalent, nominalisation.*

Another consideration at this point is the lack of texts available for students who are at Level 2/3. Texts need to be presented in adult format, have adult themes and issues, and be both comprehensible yet challenging. They need to combine concrete and abstract language. It is difficult to teach the CGEA without a heap of model texts at your disposal. A continually updated source of texts would be a reliable and valuable resource for teachers.

Dunn: In my opinion, real beginning literacy students should not be involved with accreditation such as in the CGEA as it is at present. When students are just learning the letters and sounds and learning to recognise words and copy them successfully, they are at a fragile and delicate stage where confidence building and success is the main priority. Focussing on work directed towards Level 1 tasks is not appropriate yet.

For many students at this stage, there is a whole world of learning taking place—not just literacy—it's learning how to learn, it's learning the language of the classroom, it's learning not to fear mistakes. Many adult literacy students are often damaged students, students with severely negative experience of schooling in the past. And students with long histories of failure and humiliation.

All of this takes time to overcome. Teachers need to be able to allow time for copying, time for playing with sounds and syllables, time for repetition and often seemingly dull tasks, not always related to real life authentic tasks. I create lots of texts with learners where they tell me stories or opinions and I write them down and then we might read them over and over, copy them, then change parts of the text—doing all sorts of things to 'recycle' the basic text. These kinds of activities can go on for long periods of time before some learners are ready to start putting pen to paper independently. Others will dive in and have a go from the start, but they are the rare ones. For a variety of reasons, many adult learners learn slowly. Some of these reasons relate to age, negative experience of schooling, negative patterns of learning which have been long established, fear of failure, learning disabilities, and the fact that if you only work on reading and writing for two or four hours a week and your life is otherwise full and often stressful, it will take time.

To get to the point where a learner is able to complete a Level 1 task successfully, there is an iceberg of knowledge and skills which has been slowly taken on—the task reflects only the tip.

And in a course where accreditation is tied to the CGEA, students who have worked hard all year, made wonderful learning progress, but who have not yet reached the stage where they can complete a Level 1 task, are deemed to have achieved...nothing! This is so unjust.

Fine Print: Some practitioners feel that identifying purpose and critique are too difficult for low levels. What is your view on this and why?

Corvell: 'Identifying purpose' can be overcomplicated by practitioners. Apart from students whose intellectual disability prevents them, the majority of learners with low literacy skills can verbalise their opinion on why the text was written and for what it could be used. If a teacher is satisfied with such a response and documents it anecdotally, the assessment criteria have been met.

'Critique' becomes inherent in the assessment criteria in Reading at Level 2 of the CGEA. As with 'Purpose', a documented simple verbal response should be sufficient to indicate a student's opinion on a text, a subject, characters and an author's opinion or ability to differentiate between fact and opinion. Sometimes the fact that all criteria need to be met in the one assessment task/activity is restrictive for teachers. Perhaps the ability to use more than one task to meet all criteria, as with the Numeracy and Mathematics Stream, would simplify the process.

The assessment criteria 'Application' is also introduced at Level 2, CGEA in the Reading and Writing Stream, appearing in the Reading Learning Outcomes (2.5 to 2.8 inclusive). Many teachers have expressed their feelings that 'Application', namely comparing text with similar text types or on similar subjects is difficult for students working at Level 2, CGEA. With some texts this criteria can be easily met through discussion but in other cases is difficult to meet. The search for comparative material can be time consuming for teachers but without a comparative text an otherwise effective assessment text cannot be used. Allowing more than one task to satisfy criteria would alleviate this restriction, as in the case of 'Critique', discussed earlier.

Agostinelli: My observations of the group in question suggest they are concrete thinkers who struggle to engage in abstract and conceptual thinking. Interpretation of facts, discussion of writer's point of view, underlying themes, inferred purpose, all require abstract thinking processes. Students who think in terms of fact and information are frustrated by the demands of conceptual thinking, without more time and opportunity to acquire it. It is also difficult for them to develop learning strategies and follow written instructions. Yet these are the language and literacy skills required by students to progress to CGEA 2/3.

This same group also seems to have limited exposure to the world outside their own personal boundaries. Their information and outlook is shaped substantially by the television. This is possibly due to the sense of exclusion from wider community that has resulted from their mental health status. It could also be due to the fact that other forms of informing oneself require the use of, and ability to understand, abstract language.

Dunn: I'm not sure what you mean by identifying critique. I'm assuming you mean being able to make critical comments about particular texts.

In my opinion, it depends on the student, their interests and where they are in their learning curve. In general, I try to encourage students to think in terms of audience and purpose—but only when they have reached a certain level of proficiency. Or when I read something to them aloud and we talk about it. But I don't do it religiously, because it's not all that interesting or relevant to many students—they are still focusing on the nuts and bolts and learning to put them together and take them apart. Focussing on purpose, and so on, is more like assessing the design. You need to learn to drive the car and then drive a lot of different cars before you can sound like Peter Wherret. And even then, (to pursue the analogy) most of my students couldn't care less what sort of car it is and how it works, as long as it gets them from A to B with the weekly shopping and the kids.

A concluding thought

Corvell: There appears to be two 'camps' of educators at moderation meetings: those who use the CGEA as a framework to guide practice and those who view it as a prescriptive tool to be followed to the letter—and many a heated discussion can be witnessed when the two camps meet!

I think we need to ask 'why' when discussing accreditation of low-level literacy curricula. Is having an accredited curriculum important to learners, teachers, funding bodies...and what purposes does it serve these players?

Wendy Corvell is the Education Coordinator at Morrison House in Mt Evelyn.

Jacinta Agostinelli teaches English language and literacy, from literacy for students with an intellectual disability to creative writing at Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre.

Anne Dunn teaches English as a Second Language and adult literacy with Preston Reservoir Adult Community Education and teaches writing part-time at Chisholm Institute.

Reflections on literacy, workplaces and training packages: hearing many voices

by Peter Waterhouse

Not everyone believes in literacy. This means we may need to curb the urge to teach, while we cultivate the capacity to listen and learn from the many voices and tales of the workplace.

I want to begin by noting that literacy is important to me. I've just completed ten years on a Ph. D. that has explored the place of literacy in my life and professional practice. I've looked at how my identity—or my identities—have been shaped by (if I may borrow from Shirley Brice-Heath (1986) my 'ways with words' and the 'ways with words' of the many others that have influenced me through personal association and through the printed word. I still think of myself as a teacher and adult education practitioner. I am also a manager, a researcher, a writer and a poet. Words and written words in particular, are a very important part of my life. They are important personally as well as professionally. So I value literacy and I carry this value (along with many others) into all of my interactions as an industry training consultant and training provider.

Believing in literacy

I make this point as a preface (or preamble) to my first substantive point, which is that not everyone else values literacy the way that I do. One of the dangers with believing passionately about something is that it is then easy to fall into thinking that everyone else believes the same; or thinking that at least they ought to. Surprisingly, not everyone believes in literacy. For Believers, like some Believers in God, it is difficult to imagine that there are some (perhaps many) people who seem to lead quite happy and fulfilling lives despite (or perhaps even because of) their disbelief.

That not everyone believes in literacy (or education for that matter) is an important point when we begin to explore the place of literacy in workplaces—or training packages. Despite our belief, our conviction, despite what we know to be true about the importance of literacy in workplaces (or training packages) others may not share our belief. Our 'truth' is not the same as theirs.

Multiple words, multiple literacies

Secondly, I want to lend support to the notion that there are many different literacies. What we know (and believe in) as literacy may be quite different to what other people know. Certainly we find in our workplace practice that each workplace has its own literacies—and they are rich and subtle and complex all at once. They are also multiple, even within

one workplace there are multiple 'ways with words', multiple literacies; the engineers talk a different language to the trades. The trades people have a different language and a different culture to the non-trades workers. The accountant and the accounts clerk may share a literacy that is different to those of others in the workplace but even within their discourse there are significant differences. The clerk, after all, is not an accountant (she's not a CPA). And so on it goes, there are multiple languages and multiple literacies even before we begin to consider the diversity of multiple ethnicities and nation-cultures we find in many Australian workplaces.

Our experience has been that it is important to be respectful of these local literacies. What we do in our training needs to engage with, value, and enrich these literacies. Back in 1992 I wrote a poem about Workplace Literacy, I'd like to share it with you here.

On Workplace Literacy

Scene: At the job-site workers are engaged in collective problem solving.

George: (peering anxiously at the job)
I haven't seen one like this before.

Wally: No, me neither.

George: What about you Wazza? You seen one of these before?

Wazza: Yeah, I seen one like that at Rutherglen Road. A bit different but. Ya need a proper literacy for them.

George: Ah shit! I haven't got a literacy on me.
You got one?

Wally: I've never had one!

Wazza: My ol' lady had a homemade one.

George: Well she's not here is she? We better bloody get one.
(leaning away from the job and shouting)
Macka! Have a look in the blue tool box and chuck us up a literacy will ya...What do ya mean I've gotta come down? It took me fifteen years to get up here!
Ah, bullshit, haven't ya got one ready, pre-bored?
Yeah, in twelve mill...

Yeah, in stainless...

Yeah, give us a look...

No! That's no bloody good, it won't fit!

The final point about the 'fit' is only partly tongue in cheek. If it doesn't 'fit' literacy won't be perceived or embraced as relevant or worthwhile (regardless of how important we think it is). The danger here is that we can't really teach what we don't really know and we tend to teach that which we know best. Often our most important teaching is wrapped up in the things we do unconsciously, the language we use, the texts we create and value, the 'hidden curriculum' that can be so much more powerful than what we think we are teaching. My point here is that 'we' as adult educators, as trainers, as 'literacy people' or 'language teachers' or 'communication facilitators'—whatever 'tribe' we may claim membership of—we also have our ways with words and (for the most part) they are different ways to those of industry and workplaces. When our own 'ways with words', our culture, class and identity are different to those of the people with whom we are engaging we can be giving powerful demonstrations which can be all the more powerful if they are also unconscious.

Languages in context

The language of educators, is not, for the most part, the language of industry. Nor would I suggest that the language of training and training packages is the language of industry. Indeed it seems to me that much of the peculiar acronym rich language of the training industry in Australia—a kind of TAFE-ese—is pretty much restricted to the training industry and its own bureaucracy. It is certainly not the language of any workplace where we have been engaged. As my colleague Crina Virgona has noted:

the industry standards weight skills, prioritise processes and profile elements using some generic dip stick based on the way things usually happen in industry. But nowhere ever seems to be usual. (Virgona 1996:25)

The generic language of packages, competencies and standards needs to be made meaningful in each particular industry or workplace context. We know from our study of language and discourse that meaning grows out of context and social interaction. This is also how meaningful curriculum and learning programs evolve—through engagement with people in a genuine context, with real issues to address and challenging problems to solve.

Relating to the workplace

In our workplace programs we don't teach 'literacy' or 'language' per se. We are teaching manufacturing and warehousing processes, and occupational health and safety and frontline management skills, all sorts of things. For the most part the focus isn't on language and literacy—or even workplace 'communication'. The interest is in engaging with

people to address the particular interests and concerns that they have in that workplace. There are inevitably multiple agendas, tensions and contradictions between the stakeholders involved. I need to note here that (in our experience) a shared commitment to literacy is *not* the thing that binds them together. As I have said, they might not have much faith in 'literacy' at all (and even less in our particular literacy).

However if we can identify questions, issues, concerns and problems that are important to the people involved (even when the stakeholders have different points of view) then we have the seeds to grow a learning program. As we investigate, clarify, question and explore the issues we find ourselves using language, 'doing' language, and 'doing' literacy as well. Through engagement with genuine purposes and with practice the skills develop. With sensitivity, patience, craft and persistence we can cultivate the voices, strengthen the tongues and also, most importantly, fine-tune some of the ears. We want to get the multiple literacies engaged with one another, listening to and learning from one another, enriching one another.

This approach situates our practice deeply within the workplace context. The curriculum is 'home-grown', tailored to the particularities of each circumstance and what 'counts' as competence, or 'literacy', or excellence, is shaped by the context. However this work is not characterised by functional reductionism. The approach is grounded and pragmatic but it is not without vision or ideals. Engaging with workers on genuine issues of concern, to themselves and to their managers, provides plenty of opportunities for broadening horizons, stretching comfort zones and challenging tacit assumptions.

A need for versatility

This kind of educational practice is not easy. It is challenging virtually all of the time and daunting on occasions. It calls for a sophisticated repertoire of professional skills and aptitudes on the part of teachers/trainers. There is not the scope in this paper to explore these issues although we have written about them elsewhere (see Sefton 1993, Waterhouse & Deakin 1995, Waterhouse 1996, Virgona 1996, Sefton & Waterhouse 1997, Waterhouse & Sefton 1997, Virgona, Waterhouse & Sefton 1998). In particular, the ANTA funded 'best practice' documentation on the *Opening Doors* project (Virgona et al 1998) and the earlier WELL funded report, *Breathing Life into Training* (Sefton, Waterhouse & Deakin 1994), provide detailed accounts of this type of educational practice. We believe it is worth striving to 'open doors' and to 'breathe life into training'.

I want to close by making specific reference to the new training packages and their scope for the type of approach I am advocating. The real value and impact of training packages will be determined, not so much by what they specify, include, or leave out. Their true value will be determined by the ways educators, and the other stakeholders involved, choose to use them. For the most part it is up to the educators to take the lead and show what might be possible. Like any document, a training package can be read in multiple ways. Recently

(with Bruce Wilson and Peter Ewer) I wrote a review of research for the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). In that review we reported the need for a paradigm shift in vocational education in Australia. We summarised the required shift as a move from 'a focus on predetermined content for delivery' towards 'dialogue with the stakeholders on design for effective learning'.

The relevance of training packages

In some respects the training packages provide greater flexibility and scope for educational innovation and creative program design than was the case with the former accredited modular curriculums. The training packages specify endpoints, in terms of endorsed competencies and standards, but they do not specify educational methods, or the multiple ways the goals may be reached. The training packages can be read as creating the space for innovative educators to explore and colonise. There is plenty of scope for dialogue on design and there is also scope for exploring languages and literacies but they may not be the languages and literacies we are most used to. We may need to restrain (and retrain) our urge to teach and cultivate our capacity to listen and to learn from the multiple voices and tales of the workplace.

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Stories from the field:

views on some current accredited curricula

While the CGE(A) is used to meet a wide range of learning needs, the Diploma in Further Education, the Certificate I in Koori Education (Coorong Tongala) and the Certificate I in Initial Adult Literacy and Numeracy were developed to meet the needs of specific groups of learners.

Diploma in Further Education

by Meg Curlewis

Instead of making negative assumptions about the seemingly polar oppositions of accredited and non-accredited courses, why not try the new accredited Diploma in Further Education (FE) an 'alternate entry' course that takes a holistic approach to adult education. While the CGEA creates a pathway directly into this new course, so do adult VCE, General Preparatory courses, accredited and unaccredited computer classes, and any—and every—vocational course providers may chose to deliver the Diploma in FE as part of student-centred, flexible, negotiated learning.

Because of the number of alternate tertiary entry courses that exist, providers tend to evaluate them against the needs of their students and existing delivery to ensure successful and relevant outcomes. Although most adult education providers could develop the course around their existing delivery, providers who may find the Diploma in FE particularly useful are those with enrolment profiles showing high numbers of people who:

- have language and literacy needs
- are unemployed
- have lower expectations of tertiary education
- have a range of personal, familial and social needs requiring additional support and counselling
- need flexible delivery due to time and family constraints.

The course

The Diploma in FE began in 1999 as a pilot project conducted by six agencies with Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) as the lead agency. (Palmieri, 2000). It was developed as a response to the report by Teese (1998) on seamless pathways which evaluated the problems of adult students attempting to gain tertiary entry using mainstream

methods. Since its inception, the course has been delivered by a small but steadily increasing group of Training and Further Education (TAFE) and Adult Community Education (ACE) providers. The Diploma in FE (including a nested Certificate IV in FE) was accredited by the Adult Community and Further Education Board (ACFEB) in January 2000.

The Diploma in FE is different from other alternate-entry courses in that its main mode of delivery is by mentoring, although this is blended with both directed and open-access small groups. It also differs from a number of other alternate-entry courses in that its aims can assist with career planning and more qualitative outcomes such as building autonomy, increasing technology skills and proposing an endless variety of personal, work and study goals and aims.

The course is grounded in the Conceptual Framework for Further Education (Bradshaw, 1997) which documents the four aspects and four principles leading to outcomes relating to lifelong learning concepts (Longworth, 1996). These are built on the four pillars of learning: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live with others and learning to be (Delors, 1996). Yet the Diploma course is more than the sum of its parts, because its delivery can encompass a variety of providers such as RMIT, the Council of Adult Education (CAE) and a range of urban and rural ACE providers with very different student groups.

The course can be adapted to suit organisational timetables, delivered flexibly with a large online component and adjusted financially by controlling the proportional mix of small group and one-to-one which is negotiated between the mentor and participants. Time allocations can increase in accordance with the degree of autonomy and intensity of support needed. For example, during the initial weeks, during application periods and tertiary interviews and open days. Time can also reduce with the increasing autonomy of the participants, although organisations should consider staffing issues and may need to shift the mentor's payment to include hours for supported-access mentoring or risk losing effective mentors.

Level	Core	Nominal Hours	With Elective Hours
Certificate IV	RLP: 1A and 1B	140 (70 hrs each)	Total of 420 to gain the accreditation
Diploma	RLP: 2A and 2 B	120 (60 hrs each)	Total of 600 to gain the accreditation

The Diploma in FE (ACFEB, 2000) has four core modules called Reflective Learning and Planning (RL&P). See the table below left.

To complete the accreditation at each level, there are also vocational electives at Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) level 4 or above. Although this initially appears complex when promoting it, the course's very flexibility provides enormous benefits to its participants because it encapsulates all that is most effective and relevant in adult education, maintains the integrity of an organisation's core values yet delivers both personal and measurable outcomes and pathways.

Adults of all ages and cultures can participate. At Moreland Adult Education (MAE) alone, the age range of people enrolled in the course since 1999 has been between 21 and 83 years, with participants entering from CGEA streams, VCE units 1 and 2, a range of life and work experiences and possessing an enormous range of goals. People enrolled have come from English, Italian, Maltese, Persian, Turkish/Kurdish backgrounds.

At Moreland, the Diploma in FE was successfully delivered to Work for the Dole participants (Curlewis, 1999). Enrolments of participants under 21 is an option for youth-specific programs, although mentors at MAE discovered that the younger the participants the greater the shift of focus along the planning continuum of Past (Recognition of Prior Learning) and Future (career planning). Initially, younger participants also had higher expectations of instructional teaching, requiring a more intensive mentoring role during the introductory stages of the course. However, of the younger Work for the Dole participants enrolled at MAE, it was found that a preconception held at secondary-school that TAFE was 'second-choice' in status (Kirby, August, 2000:70) compared with universities, was negated after training in the AQF (AQF, 2000) and demonstration of cross-sectoral courses into higher education.

Despite a seeming disparity of age, educational, cultural and language backgrounds, participants enrolled in the core modules at MAE have supported each other, engaged in both teamwork and independent study, and advanced to achieve their goals.

The pathways

The Diploma in FE melds into the delivery of most providers because it builds on existing courses, encourages enrolment in a range of preparatory courses, permits cross-sectoral enrolments and includes vocational education. Participants and mentors negotiate within a mix of unaccredited courses, work or volunteer experience and accredited vocational competency-based training. Participants can be enrolled at a number of organisations such as migrant centres, an ACE provider and TAFE at the same time. Or they can undertake all core and elective modules at any organisation which offers a wide range of vocational courses or access to online modules.

Although smaller programs may not conduct any AQF 4 courses, many other models for successful delivery exist. These include:

- the choice to only deliver core modules as preparatory studies
- cross-sectoral enrolments
- cooperative pathway arrangements developed with TAFEs, the CAE or larger ACE providers (participants enrolling in core modules at ACE then the Diploma level at TAFE)
- online modules can be accessed through the TAFE Virtual Campus (www.tafevc.com.au) or other online platforms
- providers may gain scope to deliver a cross-industry AQF course, such as BSZ98 Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training and offer a single 'taster' module.

Examples of planning models are provided on the next page.

All participants develop a career/study portfolio of work which may contain resumes, references, course selection, preparatory exercises, online psychology activities, a SWOT analysis, CGEA/CSWE/VCE, awards, examples of computer work and writing, and other return to study activities. As part of reinforcing the equality of contract, many mentors find this a valuable shared experience as well.

Significantly, none of the above examples completed the requirements to gain the accreditation, yet all were successful in entering the course which was their first choice.

Although pathways into, through and beyond accredited courses provide quantitative evidence of successful outcomes, the qualitative outcomes which many providers fear are being lost within the burgeoning of vocational courses, quickly become evident to organisations delivering, and participants enrolling in, this course. Some of these include:

- the emphasis on autonomy which is exemplified by the participant's development of a range of self-selected skills and knowledge, and their ability to monitor their own progress
- formal and informal recognition of existing skills and competencies
- confidence which is enhanced by working both independently, in groups and with a mentor
- the ability to interact confidently with tertiary systems, such as completing applications and personnel, such as selection officers
- the terminology and systems of education and training, such as RPL/RCC, AQF.
- enhanced technological skills which may be accredited or unaccredited
- personal, familial and social support and counselling
- mutual support benefits of working with a mentor.

Preparatory CGEA R/W 3 CGEA GCO I.T. 4 VCE English 1/2 Cert 2 in I.T. RMIT online (<i>all at ACE</i>) VTAC/Alternate Entry	Core 1A & 1B	Elective Enrolment in the elective modules at a TAFE were this student's primary goal.	Goals Cert IV/Diploma in I.T. (<i>TAFE</i>) Employment in I.T.
Preparatory Cert 3 in English (<i>AMES</i>) CGEA R/W 3 (<i>ACE</i>) Volunteer work-reference (<i>ACE</i>) VTAC/Alternate Entry	Core 1A & 1B	Elective Cert IV/Dip in I.T. (<i>TAFE</i>)	Goals Degree in I.T (<i>TAFE</i>) (programming) Employment
Preparatory/Support CGEA Cert 2 VCE English 3 & 4 VTAC/Alternate Entry Referencing Computer Access Report Writing	Core 1A & 1B 2A & 2B	Elective Cert IV in Assessment & Workplace Training (210 hrs)	Goals Degree in Accounting at Open Learning Employment
Preparatory Unaccredited Computer Volunteer tutoring VCE (adult) (<i>ACE</i>) VTAC Entry	Core 1A & 1B	Elective Cert IV modules selection available locally and in other ACE providers due to family restrictions	Goals Diploma in Education Employment

Mentoring

The role of the mentor is clearly articulated in C. Down's learning mentor section of the curriculum document (ACFE, 2000, 49–52), which lists 17 desirable attributes of a mentor, some of which are: advocate, assessor, co-learner, critical friend, supporter and enabler. Each attribute does, however, work to reinforce the eight lifelong learning goals which ACFE derived from Delors' (1996) four pillars of learning, and are documented in Bradshaw (1997).

Because of the diversity of participants and their different goals, entry and exit points, mentors must possess a range of qualifications, expertise and life/employment skills and knowledge best suited to the student profile and values of the organisation. Knowledge of adult, secondary and tertiary education sectors, CGEA/CSWE, AQF, competency-based training, some expertise with technology and RPL/RCC are helpful. Some organisations prefer mentors with counselling backgrounds, others with formal teaching or training qualifications. Motivational skills and a sense of humour can be extremely helpful.

As Palmieri (2000:10) states, many participants in foundation studies at ACE or TAFE lack the confidence—but not the skills—to undertake tertiary studies. The mentor's role as supportive friend and counsellor smooths this pathway and continues to offer support, and fills gaps in knowledge of

the academic system during the first crucial period when the experience may be at its most alienating.

The Diploma course is not for all adult students, but because of its flexibility, its adaptable approach to alternate modules of delivery and its ability to build on existing delivery to create successful pathways, its introduction into a program is well worth considering.

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Certificate I in Koori Education (Coorong Tongala)

by Cathy Sedunary

In the past, the delivery of teaching programs to Kooris in the vocational education and training sector has been complex. Despite a growing recognition that Koori students have distinct ways of learning, there have been few examples of curriculums that have met the needs of Koori students. Historically, teachers have had to deconstruct or customise mainstream curriculums as a way of making content more 'culturally appropriate' for the students. The success of these efforts has been questionable given the relatively low rate of participation of Kooris in TAFE settings.

More recently however, there have been some changes to the landscape of Koori education. Now more clearly embedded in policy are the notions of Koori control of a self determination in their education, through partnerships they have formed with governments and TAFE institutions. As a result, TAFEs must be more responsive to the Koori community and the directions they have set for their own educational service delivery.

It is this context of Koori control and self direction of education which has seen the development and implementation of teaching programs that have been developed by Koori people specifically for Koori students. Such is the case of Coorong Tongala Certificate I in Koori Education which is in its second year of delivery at the Koori Services Centre, Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (NMIT). Coorong Tongala represents a significant change in how Koori students are perceived and dealt with in the TAFE environment.

This article includes a brief overview of Coorong Tongala and describes how it provides an effective framework for teaching Koori students. It also describes that as a Koori specific curriculum, Coorong Tongala provides a mechanism of strengthening Koori identity and ultimately Koori self direction in education.

Coorong Tongala—an overview

Coorong Tongala was developed by Phil Egan, Management Services for Accreditation by the Adult Community and Further Education Board Victoria in 1998. Coorong Tongala is a general adult education course designed specifically to meet the needs of Koori students at an Australian Qualifications Framework Level I (AQF I).

The aims of Coorong Tongala are to provide Kooris with the skills required to access further training, education or employment all of which have been as identified as training priorities by the Koori community. The course focuses on basic literacy, numeracy, identifying and developing pathways to further study and exploring career options.

Coorong Tongala also focuses on developing the self esteem and cultural identity of its participants which is as equally significant to the Koori community, as is employment or education. As Phil Egan notes:

Coorong Tongala was designed to be not just another certificate course, but one which draws on the cultural strengths of individual and groups, and also acts as a tool to help one regenerate their spirituality and identity. (*ACE Practice*, 1999, No 3, p. 3).

Coorong Tongala consists of seven modules, five core modules and two electives (modules six and seven). Students are required to complete six out of the seven modules, in order to complete the course. Students can however complete as many modules as they choose by enrolling, exiting, and returning to the course at any stage. Of the two elective modules, students and teachers are to negotiate which one they choose to work on.

The Coorong Tongala modules are:

- Stand Up You Fellas!
Individual Management Skills
- Where are You Going?
Career Pathways
- Talk Up, Listen Up!
Koori Cultural Studies 1 and Reading and Writing Skills
- What's the Story?
Koori Cultural Studies 2 and Oral Communication Skills
- What's Your Number?
Numeracy Skills

- So What's Doin'?
Focus activity selected and developed according to community needs
- Who's the Boss?
Leadership Politics & Land Rights

Learning and Koori culture

As evidenced by its module titles, Coorong Tongala has two important themes—skills development and Koori cultural identity. In the acquisition of skills, students are expected to explore and apply concepts in the practice of their daily lives. Their daily lives are however inextricably linked to their cultural identity and therefore learning activities have been deliberately constructed to take this into account.

For example, when undertaking the *Talk up, listen up* module which focuses on the development of oral communication skills, students are required to:

- listen to a speaker on Koori history, and ask relevant questions
- locate through recorded information and given direction any local Koori sites
- identify through recorded or oral information the uses of indigenous flora and fauna.

For our students (Koori Services Centre, NMIT) this particular module involved excursions with Koori teacher Ron Johnson to Bunjilaka Living Aboriginal Centre at the Melbourne Museum, Dights Falls, (the site of a Port Phillip Protectorate Mission and Native Policy Barracks) and to the Aboriginal Community Elders Services in Brunswick, where students listened to and painted with Koori community elders.

The involvement of the local Koori community is inherent in the delivery of all Coorong Tongala's modules. The Koori community is regarded as a source of wisdom and knowledge that may not necessarily be found in the classroom. Koori elders and community leaders are regarded as role models and have legitimate status as 'teachers' for Koori students. The ongoing involvement of the Koori community is regarded as critical to the successful delivery of Coorong Tongala, as it ensures the courses cultural unique and local reference to the students.

Indigenous pedagogy—community self direction

The notions of the reproduction of cultural identity through formalised learning and the promotion of formalised learning through cultural identity, are at the heart of Indigenous pedagogy and are made evident in the design and implementation of Coorong Tongala.

Coorong Tongala clearly reflects the understanding that Koori students will only engage in and value formalised learning when their cultural identity is explicitly recognized and validated. It demonstrates the need to involve the Koori

community in the delivery of educational programs as a way of providing relevance to Koori students.

The extent to which this and other Koori designed curriculums are now being embraced by the vocational education and training sector is an indication that Koori participation in education service delivery is now a reality, not just rhetoric.

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Certificate 1 in Initial Adult Literacy and Numeracy (CIALN)

by Brian Donovan and Ron McGlynn

Some people are less likely to access and participate in adult literacy opportunities. In particular these are people at the initial levels. Why this is happening in large part relates to having the will and making this a priority. This article outlines the development and design of the Certificate I of Initial Adult Literacy and Numeracy (CIALN) and ways in which Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE) as a whole has yet to give priority to people at initial literacy levels.

In 1986 Karingal in Geelong established a literacy program to support adults at the most basic literacy levels. The focus was on literacy as the 'lived word' or 'voice' in Paulo Freire's terminology. The notion of 'the word' as lived and not just object or functional was at the essence of supporting empowerment. Literacy classes operated during the daytime and in 1987 commenced in the evening. By 1990, there were over 100 adults enrolled who chose from a range of literacy programs operating in the mornings, afternoons, late afternoons or evenings on five days a week throughout the year. Funding for day classes was from the Department of Community Services and evening classes were funded from the Barwon South Western Regional Council of ACFE.

The introduction of the Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA) in 1993 appeared to hold opportunities within a literacy framework for these students. There was no formal entry requirement and people were not required to have had any prior schooling or training, but only competence in oral English at Level 1 of the National Reporting System (NRS). It quickly became apparent that the nominal hours ('pulled out of the air' as one of the developers described them), the large clustering of competencies in foundation modules, and inadequate teacher and provider support at Level 1 meant that most of the students who had been demonstrating their interest in accessing literacy at the most basic level would not be able to participate in the CGEA.

The CIALN was developed privately over 1994 to 1996 by a committed Karingal teacher and his family, under the title McGlynn Educational Media (MEM), to provide a competency based pathway. It was accredited in June 1996 with some support and promotion from Karingal and the Barwon South Western Regional Council of ACFE. It is now taught in over 100 locations throughout Australia including Ministries of Justice in West Australia and Northern Territory, ACE providers, Institutes of TAFE, disability organizations, private further education providers, Job Net providers and a number of West Australian secondary schools. Course commendations have been received from peak educational and disability authorities such as the Victorian ACFE Board, Victorian Department of Education, State Training Board, Barwon South Western Council of ACFE, and Victorian Advocacy League for Individuals with Disabilities (VALID). Out of 50 nominations, the CIALN was also one of three finalists for the 1996 Victorian State Training Awards for Excellence in Curriculum Development.

The design

The CIALN has been designed to support a wide range of teenage and adult learners who are at the most basic literacy level and likely to have had significant learning difficulties.

It consists of two State-accredited, nationally recognised courses of study and seven 'best practice' attachments. It contains 31 core modules of study, each including a learning outcome from the personal, functional, informative and cooperative domains.

Core modules in Reading, Writing and General Communication (oracy/alternative communication) relate to a study of words and items/pictures, single words, phrases and simple sentences. Core numeracy modules relate to number recognition, digital time, familiar fractions, money recognition, counting, initial and basic addition and subtraction, and simple metric weights and measures. As the handling and use of money is considered essential for coping in everyday society, specific money skills training is incorporated into most core numeracy modules.

CIALN learning outcomes are consistent with the National Reporting System (NRS) Level 1, Australian Standards Framework (ASF) Level 1, and Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Certificate I.

CIALN Foundation level course contains 18 core literacy and numeracy modules of study and has a nominal course duration of 690 hours. The higher level CIALN course contains an additional 13 core modules of study and has a nominal duration of 760 hours. The total nominal combined course duration is 1450 hours. This was based on trials relating to average completion times for students at the initial literacy level.

Core modules of study may be presented in an integrated form or as separate units of work. To support this flexibility in delivery the first course attachment contains literally hundreds of 'sample learning outcomes in action' covering all 31 core CIALN modules of study. CIALN may be delivered as a general studies or vocational education program. Sample learning outcomes relate to both the workplace and general community. For example, see the table below.

Personal reading task—phrases

Workplace

Reads a personal phrase.

For example: words on a personal list of job tasks or activities, words from a favourite work magazine or personal work manual, words on a personal identification tag, a written feeling or opinion as expressed by a fellow worker.

Responds to a simply written phrase type personal message, instruction, question.

For example: Message for you. Ring home! You're wanted!, Good job!

Community

Reads a personal phrase.

For example: words from a personal diary or journal, own name and address, a phrase from a personal letter, a phrase from a favourite book or magazine, a phrase from a personal bill or account, a written feeling or opinion expressed by another.

Responds to a simply written phrase type personal message, instruction, question.

For example: Miss you!, Purchases personal items from a list. Ring Sam! Sue will ring.

Multimedia student resources

Students working at the initial literacy level are often dependent on the teacher for intensive individualised support. The total absence of relevant multimedia educational resources at this level is keeping these students in a state of dependency. Access to high quality multimedia resources would empower students to take more control over their own learning both in and out of the classroom. Teachers would be much better equipped to meet the wide ranging educational needs of a diverse student population at these fundamental levels.

In 1998 with funding support from Cinemedia Victoria, MEM successfully developed a high quality Proof of Concept for the future production of a comprehensive set of CIALN compatible student multimedia software. The production will be a non-profit venture but will require significant Government funding support and commitment if it is to be realised.

Course outcomes and pathways

On completion of the CIALN participants will possess essential literacy and numeracy skills required for coping with everyday life in the general community or workplace. CIALN graduates are also well prepared to undertake higher level literacy courses such as the CGEA, Certificate in Work Education (CWE) and Certificate in Transition Education (CTE) higher level literacy and numeracy modules.

In practice many CIALN level students may be concurrently developing both CIALN and CGEA literacy and numeracy skills. For example, a particular student may be working at the CGEA Foundation level of reading complex sentences while, concurrently studying at the CIALN single word writing level. Many CIALN providers therefore deliver CIALN in conjunction with the CGEA within each basic literacy class.

CIALN—where to?

CIALN was developed for teenagers and adults, who generally have learning difficulties, at the most basic literacy levels. But the intention of the developers has always been to support these learners in inclusive ways where appropriate. Current evidence suggests there is not a will by ACFE to ensure initial literacy needs are equitably met. The CGEA framework incorporates the relevant competencies (although these are not well defined), is licensed

by the State with no license fee to providers, and through ACFE is maintained, marketed and further developed. CIALN enjoys none of these supports. There are ACE providers who are not delivering initial literacy because they would be required to pay a fee. The license fee paid by others barely meets course maintenance expenses and has not met any of the development costs.

The ACFE Division has been aware of the need to better support initial literacy learners since 1993 but there continues to be no substantive effort to address this need. One year ago there was cause for optimism when a senior officer with the ACFE Division met with a deputation from the Barwon South Western Region of ACFE, Karingal and MEM and suggested the CGEA reaccreditation process was an appropriate forum to take up these issues. The optimism was further supported when as part of the reaccreditation consideration was to be given to 'the expansion of the CGEA to address the educational needs of people for whom level 1 of the CGEA is too high'. It is now clear that there has been no serious effort to examine the needs of initial literacy learners in the process. More shameful is the appearance of addressing these needs when that is not happening. Disappointingly there has not been genuine engagement about this with key stakeholders. It is made more pointed when one considers the mission of ACFE to 'adults who have yet to realise their power as learners', particularly those at most basic literacy levels who strive to develop their 'voice' and exercise more control over their own lives.

In spite of challenges with high needs and few resources, CIALN has been extraordinarily successful. It very much runs on the goodwill and commitment of a small group of people who daily witness the difference developing a 'voice' through literacy can make. In the interests of the people for whom it was developed, it is to be hoped that the stamina, creativity and networking of those making CIALN work does not diminish.

CIALN has been granted a further 12 month extension to the current course accreditation period for course rewriting and reaccreditation purposes. The CIALN courses are now accredited to the July 2002.

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Foreign Correspondence

Liz Suda talks about an innovative and inclusive reading program in Spain.



Barcelona: where dialogue and the classics complete the circle

In the course of conducting a review of international trends in adult literacy and numeracy for the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Consortium, I learned of a group in Spain who were promoting the idea of reading classical literature using dialogic methods. The promotional materials of the group suggested that people with little education and limited literacy could read the classics of literature through a process of egalitarian dialogue. The success of the dialogic circles in bringing both literacy and cultural power to those who have been excluded from education resonates strongly with literacy practices advocated within the field here in Australia. The following account might therefore be of some interest to those interested in the place of dialogue in adult education programs

Transformations

La Verneda Sant Marti is a school for adults in Barcelona, Spain. The philosophical approaches underpinning the pedagogy of the school are aimed at meeting the needs of the people they call 'the excluded'—people with little or no formal learning who therefore do not have the skills or confidence to participate effectively in the life of the community.

The school has been operating for 20 years, and in that time participants have been involved in developing networks with other adult education and community organisations. The networks have extended throughout Spain.

A few years ago, participants' associations began meeting to organise discussions about the effects of the new Spanish educational reform in the field of adult education and created the Federation of Adults' Cultural and Educational Associations (FACEPA) which set out to make the voices of all the people involved in adult education heard (Aroca, 1999:333).

The members have 'neither a university degree nor remuneration from adult education institutions' (Puigvert, 2000), but they are strongly committed to developing community based, adult education programs in Spain.

FACEPA has drafted a Declaration of Adult Education Participants Rights, which was presented to UNESCO's Fifth International Conference on Adult Education. FACEPA is overtly political in its commitment to promoting the ideas of the movement. These activities suggest that increased literacy capabilities have enabled participants to participate more effectively in social and political activities.

Dialogic literacy circles

The dialogic literary circles originally began in La Verneda Sant Marti. The dialogic process give people who often have little reading capability the opportunity to read the classics of literature from Frederico Garcia Lorca, Franz Kafka, James Joyce and Emile Zola. This literature is generally the domain of the middle and upper classes and inaccessible to excluded working people with little education (Puigvert, Sorde and Soler, 1999).

The dialogic literary circles (La Tertulia Literaria) are defined by three main characteristics: the program targets adult learners with low literacy skills, the readings are universal classics, and the process is based on dialogic learning (Puigvert et al, 1999). The process enabled people who began with limited reading skills to demonstrate that they had knowledge and intellectual capacity for learning, reflection and discussion.

Participants have reported that they had found their voice in other aspects of their lives, both in their personal and civic *lifeworlds*. The dialogic movement is based on the theoretical perspectives of Habermas, Beck and Freire, who view engagement in education in the classical sense as having the potential to be transformative for the individual and society.

The reading is collaborative and dialogic, guided by seven main principles:

- 1 Egalitarian dialogue—All members of the group are equal and their opinions equally shared. This draws on Habermas' theory of communicative action where participants build their own interpretations from the arguments made. Contributions are valued according to the validity of those arguments rather than the status or authority of the person holding the view.
- 2 Cultural intelligence—As Freire argued, all people, whatever their age, share the capabilities of language

and action, which can be developed further through interaction.

- 3 Transformation—Dialogic learning transforms interpersonal, familiar or work relations. All learning can be transformative.
- 4 Instrumental dimension—The development of skills and knowledge is more intense when it takes place in a dialogic framework.
- 5 Creation of meaning—Meaning re-emerges when interaction among people is guided by themselves.
- 6 Solidarity—Collaborative work develops a sense of solidarity and support.
- 7 Equality of differences—People who come from diverse economic and cultural backgrounds should have the right to hold their own views and be treated as equal partners in collaborative learning (Puigvert, 2000).

Dialogic pedagogy

The group is formed through an organic process of word of mouth or recruitment from established literacy classes. The group is given a theoretical overview of what the process entails so that the participants are familiar with the theories underpinning the practice.

The group selects a text, which is drawn from the classics of literature, that is, books that have influenced cultural history and which also explore the lives of the 'excluded' people. The group then slowly builds its reading of the text, either by listening to others read or reading small sections themselves. The facilitator asks each participant to read aloud a section that they liked and discuss the story and characters. 'The book becomes the centre of the person's life for that week, as they discuss the story and ideas with family members and friends between classes' (Puigvert, 2000).

The dialogic process is used to enable participants to equally express their opinions and analysis of the text. Participants are encouraged to actively contest 'literary' and 'academic' interpretations of the text. The facilitator has no literary authority in this context, as the participants are free to interpret the text according to their own experience. Flecha (2000) maintains that this process enables the participants to place themselves at the centre of the learning.

The dialogic method is based on the belief that participants bring knowledge, values, and personal experience from their own lives to the reading of a text. Dialogue is a social practice, which engages participants in 'transformative' learning.

The development of the dialogic literary circles has been documented in the book *Sharing Words* (Flecha, 2000). Each

of the seven principles underpinning dialogic learning is illustrated with examples from the experiences of seven individuals who have developed literacy through reading classical literature. Their engagement has been stimulated by the desire to experience a life that has previously been inaccessible to them (Puigvert et al, 1999).

The process of achieving literacy in this context is therefore both a deeply personal experience and an act of solidarity, one which is closely connected to one's position in the society, one's educational experience, work experience and engagement in the political process.

It was difficult as a researcher to get an objective sense of what actually happens in this classroom, based on the available literature. Outcomes are not measured according to competency standards, but rather, according to the pursuit of belief in the power of words to transform people's lives. Much of the evidence for the success of this process is anecdotal, based on the reflections and observations of teachers.

The success of the dialogic literary circles in Spain has aroused a great deal of interest. However, it is unclear how strongly the particular cultural setting impacts on the effectiveness of the process. The movement appears to have taken on a life of its own and is not necessarily impacted upon by government policy.

Dialogic literary circles for Australia?

The literary circles of Spain are similar to 'book clubs' in Australia, where 8–10 people gather in homes, libraries, or community settings and discuss a prescribed book. The central difference is that generally people who participate in book clubs can read. The other difference is that one person does not necessarily take on the role of the facilitator/teacher. These groups usually only meet once a month and participants are meant to have read the book beforehand. A book club is therefore a possible means to incorporating the ideas of the dialogic literary circles.

Learners read books in adult literacy classes as well, but these are often linked to other activities such as book reports, vocabulary and comprehension exercises and so forth. The dialogic process would change 'classroom' reading of texts because the aim is to discuss and interpret rather than answer comprehension questions correctly or complete an assessment task on the book.

Talking texts into meaning

To be literate one must be able to understand and communicate ideas through the four macro-skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. The principles underpinning the dialogic literary circles talk about the dialectical relationship between spoken and written language in a social and political sense but the effect is the same—dialogue brings greater meaning to the text.

These ideas are not essentially new. Freire's approach to teaching illiterate peasants in South America was to build literacy from the spoken words of the participants. This is how children learn to read in the initial stages also, through listening and absorbing the language of written language. Lemke (1992) argues that we think in spoken language forms and that reading is a process of translating the written form into spoken language (thought) and then back into the written form. This process of translation, if made explicit to readers, through a process of discussion, facilitates a deeper understanding of the text and also builds an intuitive understanding of the difference between spoken and written language.

There is, however, another powerful dimension to the literary circles and this is their emphasis on the literary classics. Hirsch (1987) argued for a return to a study of the classics. His argument was that Americans could not be truly literate unless they were familiar with the classical literature of their culture. His ideas were widely criticised by those who argued that the literature of the dominant culture was not representative of the experience of the lower uneducated classes and that such literature was inaccessible. Hirsch, however, maintained that familiarity with these classics (for example, Shakespeare, Faulkner, Whitman) was 'the translinguistic knowledge upon which literacy' depends (Hirsch, 1987). Translinguistic knowledge refers to the many references to classical literature embedded in much contemporary writing. The true meaning of many texts can not be fully penetrated unless one is familiar with the cultural traditions and concepts, underpinning the text. The term 'brave new world', for example, is widely used by journalists and public analysts, but the source of that concept (such as Aldous Huxley's futuristic novel, or the original quote from Shakespeare) is rarely cited. In short Hirsch argued that literature would provide disadvantaged Americans with the 'cultural capital' they required to participate effectively in the different 'lifeworlds'.

Whilst the principles underlying the dialogic circles primarily relate to theories of literacy as social practice, the effectiveness of the method can also be explained in linguistic terms. This idea is explored in some depth in the case study *Oral language, a window on thought: talking texts into meaning* (Suda, 1994), which documents the implementation of such theories with a group of adult learners from diverse backgrounds.

Dialogic practice

Dialogic approaches have underpinned much theorising about literacy both here and abroad. Dialogue is seen as an essential part of the process of learning to learn. It is the means by which the learner can reason and think, ask questions and refine the concepts required to absorb new knowledge and skills.

Dialogic literary circles offer a non-formal alternative to the mainstream classroom where assessment and measurable

outcomes predominate. The Conceptual Framework for Further Education (Bradshaw, 1999) here in Victoria lends itself very well to dialogic practice with its emphasis of critical intelligence, connectedness, multiplicity and transformation.

These principles correspond closely with the practices of the dialogic literary circles in Spain. Implicit in such approaches are literacy practices which build upon the formal and informal experiences of constructing literacy capability through active engagement in the learning process. The Spanish approach to dialogue is very much a product of the social, political, economic and cultural practices and history of that country. It would be fascinating to explore how such approaches might be adapted to meet the needs of adult learners in this country.

Liz Suda works for the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium and the Flemington Reading and Writing Program. This article is drawn from her report *Policies and Pedagogies for Lifelong Literacy: International perspectives for the 21st Century* (available from Language Australia).

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Open forum

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Placing Adult ESL and Adult Literacy students in one classroom should be a decision based on educational factors, not a situation imposed through low funding or competitive tendering, writes Karen Manwaring, and Belinda Bold looks at the integration of literacy into training packages.

Mixed adult ESL/adult literacy classes—issues and experiences

The differing educational profiles and needs of Adult English as a Second Language (ESL) and Adult Literacy students, and the ways in which those needs are most effectively met, has re-emerged as an important issue in the provision of adult education.

Recent federal funding guidelines seek to collapse what were two distinct programs into the one area of 'literacy', asking single providers to tender across both fields. The two programs are the Literacy and Numeracy Program (LNP) and the Advanced English for Migrants Program (AEMP). In Victoria, funding for Adult ESL and Adult Literacy provision has already been collapsed into the one bucket. This has raised the concern that the important distinctions between the two fields are being overlooked and that yet another precedent will be set for seeing Adult ESL and Adult Literacy as being more similar than they are different.

Cost efficiency, particularly in terms of administration, would welcome research and documented practice that acknowledges the factors that the two fields have in common. Most Adult ESL and Adult Literacy teachers would agree that there are important areas of commonality between the two fields and that there are specific circumstances when mixed classes are effective. Many would also insist that a clear definition and recognition of the different needs of each group of students is crucial to effective provision. It has also been argued that it is the simplistic neatness of the Adult ESL and Adult Literacy 'divide' that masks the many other distinctions that can be applied to adult education students, so opening the way for a resolution into sameness.

Aims of this article

The purpose of this article is to raise some issues and experiences that emerge in considering when it is, and when it is not effective to combine Adult ESL and Adult Literacy students in the same classroom.

This article attempts to address the questions:

- What differentiates Adult ESL students and Adult Literacy students?
- What do the two groups of students share?
- What factors must we take into account when deciding when it is effective to combine Adult ESL and Adult Literacy students in the one class?
- What factors tell us it is not?
- Then if the decision is made to place Adult ESL and Adult Literacy students in the same class, what are the characteristics of a 'good' Adult ESL/Literacy class and of 'good' Adult ESL/Literacy teaching?
- What are some of the issues that may arise?

Teachers who were interviewed for this paper¹ were asked to give their views and experiences around these issues. They were also asked to identify what they considered to be the generic factors for success for adult students.

Defining the two groups

Seeking to form a definition or profile of an Adult ESL or an Adult Literacy student inevitably points to the importance of maintaining recognition of the diversity of students in each field. The students themselves do not fit into neat definitions that would make it easy to place them in one 'box' (or area of provision) or the other.

The definition of the Adult ESL student is necessarily exclusive of the Adult Literacy student, but it does not follow that the opposite is true. Hammond et al set out on the process of defining an Adult ESL student: 'It is self-evident that students attending ESL programs will all be from a non-English speaking background' (1992:41). While it would seem to logically follow that English-speaking background students would make up the Adult Literacy student group, this either/or definition is not really useful when it comes to actual Adult Literacy classrooms. While there has been research that has excluded Adult ESL students from the Adult Literacy profile, many others have recognized the fact that Adult Literacy classes are attended by some proportion of Adult ESL students, and that Adult ESL and Adult Literacy students may have some educational, vocational or other goals in common (Davison, Taylor & Hatcher 1994).

¹ The teachers who contributed to this research are not identified by name but I would like to thank them for their time and interest in this project—KM.

The basis of the Adult ESL student profile has centered on language acquisition. Adult ESL students educational needs center on learning English language. Adult ESL students also need to become familiar with the social and cultural practices of the wider Australian community. For those who are relatively recent arrivals, settlement issues are also present. An Adult ESL teacher interviewed for this article said:

In my CSWE (Certificate in Spoken and Written English) 3 class, not only is there a need to teach language in terms of pronunciation, grammar and understanding different genres, there is also a need to create an understanding of the wider community. For example, students want to know how to respond to a neighbour when they say hello, what to take if they are invited to a barbecue, what the games of cricket and football are and their significance in the Melbourne culture. So ESL teaching goes beyond the parameters of language teaching and into learning about Australian society.

The student profile around which Adult Literacy provision and pedagogy have grown is more concerned with the educational history the student brings to the classroom. Edman describes Adult Literacy students as:

students who have had incomplete schooling at secondary (and sometimes also primary) level, whether this is because they missed parts of the school curriculum (for example through illness or changes of school), they left school early or they attended but were low-achievers. (1995:8)

The philosophy that has historically underpinned Adult Literacy teaching values an understanding by the practitioner of the student's relationship with education and with literacy in general. Adult Literacy teaching then, seeks to provide the opportunity for the student to develop a more positive sense of self as a student, reader, writer and communicator. In Adult Literacy education, the development of self esteem and confidence is integral to, rather than an outcome of, learning to read and write. An Adult Literacy teacher interviewed for this paper commented:

Adult Literacy students have a critical need to experience success. This is directly related to many Adult Literacy students' previous negative experiences of reading writing and/or numeracy. Adult Literacy students often translate mistakes into 'failure' and experience such failure on a personal level.

While Adult ESL students may have anxieties about making mistakes in the classroom, they are often more open to having their mistakes 'corrected' as a part of their 'experimenting' with language. Making mistakes is a part of learning a language. Adult Literacy students tend to be more vulnerable to being corrected, particularly as they are using their mother tongue. An experienced Adult Literacy teacher commented:

It's not that we don't correct ALBE (Adult Literacy and Basic Education) students, it's that their vulnerability needs to be matched by a sensitivity about what we correct and how and when we correct.

What do the two groups have in common?

While Adult ESL and Adult Literacy students differ in language background, they may have many things in common when it comes to their educational profile. An Adult ESL and an Adult Literacy student may both have a history of disrupted schooling and of 'failure' in the school system; they may be of similar ages; they may follow the same religion; they may share the same educational or vocational goals; they may have similar interests. In reporting against the National Reporting System (NRS), they may share the same levels for some macro skills (for example, reading or writing).

In terms of the imperatives of language (Adult ESL classes) and self esteem (Adult Literacy classes), one may question whether the need to learn the skills of language *and* to raise self esteem are not common to both groups of students, and indeed to all adult students. Surely Adult ESL students have a need to experience success just as Adult Literacy students require language and literacy skills. Broadly speaking the answer is 'yes'. Both groups of students need both kinds of learning experiences and outcomes. However, because of their different language backgrounds, Adult ESL and Adult literacy students, particularly those at the early levels of competence, have different 'starting points' and a different focus.

In addition, there are a variety of factors that students bring to their learning and which, as far as possible, need to be considered when placing and teaching each student. These factors may include:

- previous educational history
- disrupted schooling or no schooling
- educational and other goals
- length of time in Australia
- socioeconomic background
- urban or rural background
- personal history (for example, disability, illness, trauma, refugee status)
- cultural history
- dialect diversity
- religious background
- motivation
- level of value placed on education
- beliefs about 'good' and 'bad' teaching
- ability to work with both concrete/familiar and abstract learning approaches.

When Adult ESL and Adult Literacy students are at similar levels of proficiency in terms of reading, writing, listening and speaking, these other factors will be more apparent and may contribute either positively or negatively to a

student's learning. It is these factors that impact most on an Adult ESL/Literacy mixed class. A 'good' teacher will take them into account when planning curriculum, choosing texts and resources, and in the methodology she or he employs in day to day teaching.

When is it effective to mix Adult ESL and Adult Literacy students?

Most teachers would agree that it is at the lower levels of Adult ESL and Adult Literacy proficiency that the distinct needs between the two groups of students are clearest. There is no doubt that a beginner level Adult ESL and Adult Literacy student will be more likely to have their needs met in an Adult ESL and Adult Literacy class respectively. Here, distinction is more important than commonality.

Once students have achieved higher levels of proficiency, particularly in speaking and listening for Adult ESL students, it is more likely that their needs may begin to look a lot more alike and therefore may be met in the same class. Many teachers have emphasised the benefits of the mixed Adult ESL/Literacy class:

Perhaps one of the very real benefits of an integrated class of ESB (English Speaking Background) and NESB (non- English Speaking Background) students is that, as many ESB students have indicated...they develop an appreciation of their own language and an awareness of the difficulties faced by second language students. (Dixon, 1995:24)

Teachers have also noted the benefits to Adult Literacy students who are able to draw on the knowledge many Adult ESL students have of more formal written genres such as letter writing. At the same time Adult ESL students are able to practise their speaking skills in a class with Adult Literacy students. The Adult ESL students can draw on the model of the Adult Literacy students' oral contributions to class discussions.

Workplace education programs have been highlighted as one area of provision where a mix of Adult ESL/Literacy students is likely to be effective, provided the class is work context driven. Workplace programs have a strong context that is shared and familiar to the workers/students. In addition, worker/student motivation and goals are likely to be similar. Vocabulary and texts, such as signs and forms, are likely to be familiar and relevant to the students' day to day working lives. All of these factors contribute to the effectiveness of classroom activities and student learning.

Generic factors for successful student outcomes

Teachers who were interviewed for this paper were asked to list what they believed to be the 'generic factors critical for successful outcomes for students' in an Adult ESL/Literacy class. Successful outcomes were discussed as falling within one of the broad areas:

- personal
- civic
- further education
- employment.

Teachers suggested, with a high degree of agreement, the following factors:

- comfortable atmosphere
- course objectives or learning outcomes that are supported by the setting of short and long-term goals
- course content class activities—topics and materials that are relevant to students' lives, needs and 'literacy world' and language, texts and resources that are accessible to students
- teacher a professional teacher who has a theoretical and practical understanding of good practice
- recognition and acknowledgment
- motivation—student's incentive for completing the course.

Almost without exception, the first factor listed was a supportive and comfortable environment. Clearly this condition covers a number of elements. Perhaps one of the most important is that of tolerance and respect, on the part of students and teachers, for the diversity that exists in such a classroom.

Given the right classroom atmosphere students from these different language and educational backgrounds can and do work harmoniously and profitably together, each drawing on the strengths of the other (Yates, 1993:12).

One teacher commented:

Teachers must encourage a certain kind of classroom behaviour, by modelling it themselves or by making it explicit in the form of classroom 'rules' or student 'rights and responsibilities' booklets.

Another generic factor that teachers identified as critical to successful outcomes was that of appropriate and relevant class activities and resources. Teachers focused on the importance of taking all students in the class into account when preparing activities and choosing materials. This meant considering students' cultural, religious and educational backgrounds and experiences, as well as their learning styles and their goals. In addition, such classes demand that a teacher is knowledgeable in both Adult ESL and Adult Literacy teaching methodologies and is able to integrate the two when teaching:

To deal with all this teachers need not only a strong sense of the student and the student's personal development; they will also need an awareness of language and, to meet the needs of LBOTE (Language Background Other Than English) students in particular, they will need ways of actively teaching it. (Yates, 1993:12)

Goal setting was considered important by a number of teachers. Some students need both short-term and long-term goals, so that they can stay 'on track' and have more of a sense of responsibility for their own learning.

Issues that may arise

Placement of students into mixed classes is not always straightforward. Even the most experienced teachers may find that their expectations for the student are not met. An ESL/Literacy qualified teacher who works within a program that provides separate Adult ESL and Adult Literacy classes, as well as topic-based subjects open to both, commented:

There are many factors that might determine a student's placement within the ESL or ALBE part of the program. Uppermost in the minds of teachers and programmers are the questions 'What are the needs of the student?' and 'Where will these needs be best met?' Even after careful consideration it's not always easy to get it right.

Some of these teachers' experiences attest to the difficulty of 'getting it right' when it comes to placing students and teaching mixed Adult ESL/Literacy classes.

The following narrative from an Adult ESL/Literacy teacher describes what happened when she placed one of her ESL students into a CGEA class as well as in his usual ESL class. The teacher commented that in the ESL class:

I employ the usual tried and true ESL methods which include dictagloss, pronunciation practice, control of grammar, vocabulary, short texts, idiomatic language and cultural understandings.

This teacher's Adult ESL and Adult Literacy classes are both informed by similar language development theories of genre and real language, use of community issues and topics, and similar adult learning principles. The teacher based her decision to invite the Adult ESL student into the Adult Literacy class on the fact that the student's reading and writing were at a level 'equivalent' to CGEA 2. The teacher commented:

Over the last weeks in the CGEA class we have been using the topic of the dingo attack on Fraser Island to develop the four macro skills and the domains of Knowledge and Public Debate. Discussion has been spirited with recalled memories of Azaria Chamberlain, and emotions running high. We have used newspaper articles, using headlines to predict possible content and vocabulary, to distinguish between journalist reporting and opinions of competing interests of people and groups involved. We have used visual material from the *Herald Sun* and *Behind the News* (BTN) to look at emotional responses created by the image of a cowering dingo with a gun at its head and dingoes prowling the beaches. At different points in these activities, each

student has made a contribution. However, in assessing how each student gained from this unit of work I must say that Ali did not benefit. Each time I looked at him he had a confused frown on his face. I could see he was totally lost in all this. He could not participate in the activities.

The issue of language and cultural background is a crucial one, and leads to a number of less obvious factors that affect the educational profile of students.

Despite the diversity within these two groups of students, the fact that one draws on English as their mother tongue and the other does not is important. Students who were born in Australia and whose mother tongue is English have grown up in the same country, and, as a result, draw on shared common cultural knowledge...they also draw on some shared attitudes and values (Hammond and Derewianka, 1999:30).

The teacher who placed Ali in the CGEA 2 class went on to comment:

Ali did not have the shared cultural knowledge the other students had, nor the range of vocabulary to keep up with the reading or discussion.

She then reflected on Ali's educational needs arising from the fact the English is not his first language, and that Australian culture is relatively new to him:

Ali needs to have texts presented in a way where the language is 'controlled'—where small texts are used with a focus on pre-teaching vocabulary and on comprehension. In my ESL class the students have grammar sheets and verb lists to refer to as well.

Another issue that may arise in a mixed Adult ESL/Literacy class concerns that of mixed skills in the areas of abstract thinking and vocabulary. For example, Adult ESL students may have a high level of abstract thinking skills from their education in their country but not a highly developed vocabulary in English. Adult Literacy students in the same class will have a strong command of vocabulary and some variety of registers in English, but may not have developed abstract thinking and learning to learn skills. These students may also have different levels of skills and confidence when it comes to being in an educational setting.

An Adult ESL teacher further commented on the subtle differences that Adult ESL and Adult Literacy students may bring to the same classroom:

While the Adult Literacy student may have negative experiences of the education system, the ESL student, whether they are highly educated in their first language or not, need to learn the educational culture that operates in Australia.

These are just a few illustrations of the complex and sometimes fragile 'mixes' that are possible in Adult ESL/Literacy classes. When providers are large enough they can provide the range of classes necessary to meet the needs of such a diverse range of students. However, many providers do not have this luxury of resources. Teachers in these programs must work with the tensions and difficulties that mixed level and mixed ability classes can present and must also employ strategies and classroom resources that suit their range of students.

To 'add to the mix' of this Adult ESL/Literacy discussion, is the issue of provider and program profile. A teacher who is interviewing and assessing a prospective student has a lot more options to choose from if they are looking to place the student in a program that has the resources to cater to a diverse range of needs across both Adult ESL and Adult Literacy areas. Smaller providers may not have the classrooms or trained and qualified teachers to offer any more than one or two general classes. In this case they will really have no choice about offering a mixed Adult ESL/Literacy class. At most, they may be able to offer a beginners and an advanced level but may not be able to cater any further for the diversity of student needs. If such a small provider is also geographically isolated they may not have the option of referring the student to a more appropriate provider.

Conclusion

Adult ESL students and Adult Literacy students have diverse needs. Simplistically this may sound as if the groups themselves differ but that all members of each group are the same. The two groups are not homogenous—there is no typical Adult ESL or Adult Literacy student. The ongoing discussion about if and when it is effective to combine members of the two groups in the one class, is complex enough. But we must also take into account the fact that Adult ESL students differ from each other, as do Adult Literacy students.

This diversity across and within student groups requires:

- a level of funding and resources that will allow teachers and program coordinators to design programs that meet these diverse student needs
- Adult ESL and Adult Literacy teachers who are aware of student needs and the teaching methodologies appropriate to them
- resources that are appropriate to different students and different levels.

Adult student diversity also advises against competitive tendering and the resulting loss of diverse provision by a greater number of providers (some of which may specialise in providing for a particular student group's needs, for example, youth or Koori students). It is essential that Adult Education provision reflects the diverse needs of adult students.

Clearly, the placing of Adult ESL and Adult Literacy students in the one classroom is a decision that should be based on

educational considerations, not one that is imposed because of a lack of funding or the imperative of competitive tendering. The provision of separate Adult ESL and Adult Literacy classes at an appropriate stage of learning is essential to the later success of students in mixed Adult ESL/Literacy classes.

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Integrating literacy into training packages—strategies in a WELL project

The introduction of competency-based training and training packages by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) during the 1990s has caused teachers to rethink the way they deliver and assess literacy and numeracy in industry settings.

Prior to training packages, most literacy and numeracy teaching for workers happened in classrooms, removed from the workplace environment. Although there was some vocational literacy being delivered in the workplace, this was often limited and in many cases unrelated to the literacy requirements of the work.

To enable Australian industry to meet demanding global challenges, the Australian government became aware of

the need to change the training system. Traditional curriculum-based delivery was inflexible and limited in both its content and its ability to meet the changing needs of different learners and workplaces. Many curricula also assumed a quite high level of literacy and often numeracy for learners to access the training and training resources, without having the teaching of literacy and numeracy or literacy and numeracy learning strategies included.

New models

Competency-based training has encouraged industry and training providers to collaborate on new models of training delivery and conducting assessment. This has not been an easy process, but has produced some innovative and effective training and assessment models.

Within the implementation of training packages can be built the framework of improved learning opportunities for workers who require literacy and numeracy support. Training packages can allow this flexibility in delivery without removing the vocational skills focus. Learners in competency-based training come from varied skill levels and backgrounds, including both English speaking and non-English speaking. This naturally puts extra demands on the enterprise-based teacher (EBT) or workplace trainer, particularly if they lack training or experience in literacy or English as a second language (ESL).

The challenge

Policy developers and practitioners alike have accepted that workers' skills in the (Meyer) key competencies need to be developed and applied in vocational education and training, and recognised in assessment, in order to ensure the flexibility and adaptability of the workers and enable them to respond effectively to current and future directions and challenges that face Australian workplaces.

In a workplace that is a true learning environment, the key competencies will naturally be embedded in the training—both formal and informal—and will recognise amongst other things, the language, literacy or numeracy skills that may be required to ensure that the all criteria within the unit, including the relevant key competencies, can be fully met. With the recent introduction of the new Australian Qualifications Training Framework (AQTF), auditing requirements of the evidence collected for the assessment of competencies, including key competencies, will take on a new emphasis.

Ensuring that a workplace-based teaching and learning program incorporates the appropriate elements of the key competencies and adequately supports all of the learners' language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) requirements can be quite time consuming and therefore costly. It may also take the skills of more than one teacher/trainer to ensure the breadth of expertise can be covered. This is not always possible for many reasons, not just the reason of economy, therefore some compromises need to be made to design an effective workplace-based training program.

One company's experience

Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) programs are designed to target the teaching and learning of the LLN requirements of program participants within a vocational training setting. One such WELL program conducted by Victoria University in a furniture manufacturing company in 2000 illustrates this. The unit of competency providing the focus of the training was *'Participate in, lead and facilitate work teams'* from Frontline Management Initiatives (FMI). This unit was aimed at workers who either held team leader positions, or were next in line for team leader positions. Their national reporting system (NRS) levels ranged between 1 and 3.

During preliminary discussions, the company managing director felt that the workers needed to develop their own management structure and communication system, and to do this they needed to develop their communication skills (including literacy) considerably.

The enterprise-based teachers (EBTs) discussed the current company training needs, existing training that staff may have been involved in and qualifications that staff already had. They also discussed company plans for the future, including plans for expansion or downsizing, production diversification, quality assurance and occupational health and safety obligations, as well as current procedural systems.

The training outline and goals drafted were broad and review points were built in, recognising that the training would need to be responsive to the constantly emerging needs of the learners and possible changes to the overall goals. Due to both funding and company time restrictions, face-to-face time with the EBT was limited to two hours per week. This placed an added demand on the EBT to ensure that learning strategies were in place and that learners would remain motivated.

The EBT felt it was important that the companies were aware that the training would not achieve miracles, nor even very obvious or quantifiable results in short time spans, but strategies needed to be put in place to encourage continuous acquisition of language and literacy skills in a changing workplace environment. The EBT also wanted to keep management informed and involved as much as possible so that the smaller achievements of individuals and the group were noticed and acknowledged.

Methodology

During planning, the EBT needed to look at learning strategies that could be taught in the short time available and would continue when participants were back on the job. Successful strategies would be reinforced in subsequent meetings. Very basic and simple strategies were initially implemented, such as having dictionaries available in several places around the workplace and creating dictionary usage exercises for the learners to do.

Learners from non-English speaking backgrounds were encouraged to use a bilingual dictionary as well as an English dictionary. One particular group of learners who were struggling with spelling, including some from non-English speaking backgrounds, were shown letter clusters and their sounds, supported by a simple handout that could be referred to when consulting a dictionary.

Many of the workplace learners, once comfortable with the whole concept of meetings with the EBT, specifically requested that grammar and spelling be taught. They often seemed to respond best to the teaching that most resembled classroom-based, chalk and talk type teaching, with the teacher explaining the rules, with examples, on the white board whilst the learners tried to take it in, writing down as much as possible. This traditional form of teaching was made a (small) part of the meeting agenda and attempted to address issues that were raised on the day. It did not take away from the rest of the business that was to be discussed.

The EBT used participants' examples where possible, as she couldn't rely on access to the usual teaching resources and didn't have time to develop learning materials. Most questions came from something participants were working on. She used the example, correct or incorrect, showed what it should be (if incorrect), and other possibilities. If possible, giving some similar examples. Once they felt comfortable with the explanation and examples, they were often able to come up with some of their own. These problems were followed up the next week, as follow up is as important as repetition. Highlighting the same problem in subsequent exercises helps move the skill from short term into the long term memory.

Combining teaching methods

In line with the principles of adult learning—moving from what you know (the system of learning, ie 'chalk and talk') into the new (competency-based, using the new skill in a real context), the EBT combined the old teaching, passive learning style with encouraging learners to use these new skills in workplace tasks that were real, highlighting the skill that had been taught and explaining the possible contextual confusions or errors. Some good and bad examples of the skills were sought in the workplace, or quickly developed as examples and comparisons.

The main strategy used for encouraging learning was responding to learners' inquiries as they arose. A similar strategy to the enterprise's manufacturing ethos of 'just in time and just enough'. As with newly produced pieces of furniture, learners did not want to 'hold' a new skill until it was required. Asking the learners for tasks that they were required to do that week helped identify areas that needed to be addressed.

Looking at what they had done, as well as what they had not done (but could have) often produced the teaching and learning topics for that week and perhaps the next, with a

task that may be a logical follow on. For example, a supervisor had developed a simple, hand written list of maintenance jobs that need to be done in his/her area. This list was used as a spelling exercise and could be developed further into an action plan, including columns for what needed to be done, by whom, and included the order of priority.

A source of pride

At this furniture manufacturer, when an exercise like this has been absorbed into a meeting, the writer of the list was often initially reluctant to put the list to the scrutiny of the group. Once they had been given the opportunity to fix up errors and improve the layout and therefore function, their embarrassment often turned to pride and they eventually became more confident about bringing tasks to the group and then distributing the end product to other team members or even management.

A new skill needs to be used over and over again, if possible, until it becomes almost instinctive. Relying solely on workplace documents may not provide the repetition required to assist the learning process. It may therefore be necessary for the teacher to invent tasks that might replicate workplace tasks or could possibly be useful in the workplace. Team noticeboards can be established where memos, occupational health and safety notices, current jobs or tasks, tool lists (including repairs), even jokes could be placed regularly, and all team members would be encouraged to check the board regularly and even contribute from time to time.

Learn about the learner

Developing a relationship with the learners is vital to the success of their learning. The EBT needs should try to get to know each learner's job, their learning style and perhaps some of their outside interests. Even though the teaching and learning topics are ostensibly vocational, involving personal interests, where appropriate, can assist greatly, particularly in motivating a learner to practice and progress outside of the allocated learning time. Encouraging a learner to pursue their interest in fast cars through reading more widely on the topic and perhaps writing a piece, can only assist their learning as well as their personal satisfaction.

As well as encouraging further personal reading and writing, the more an EBT knows about the LLN demands in a learner's job, the more s/he will be able to relate the learning to real experience. The written requirements of a particular workplace task can also provide a wealth of teaching and learning materials, as well as generating questions and inquiries from the learners. Assisting a learner to improve their workplace tasks, such as setting out a computer-generated document using tables to list jobs, can help improve their confidence in presenting these documents to colleagues and management.

Conducting assessment of a person's skills needs to be addressed with sensitivity. In some cases, care needs to

be taken to ensure that management clears workplace documents developed during the training if it is to be collected by the assessor as part of the required evidence.

Assessment issues are complex and should be discussed in more space than is available in this essay. However, these issues should be identified and clarified with both management and learners at the beginning of the program, alongside the training plan.

Literacy teaching and learning in competency-based training can help a workplace-based training program to be both effective and rewarding for the learners, the company and the enterprise-based teacher. There are currently many ways of approaching and conducting literacy supported, vocational learning, but there is still a long way to go.

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attending literacy classes for a long period of time and have made little progress because they have a learning disability. These students are frustrated because they are not progressing and this only leads to further low self-esteem. I believe literacy teaching for these students needs to take a new approach where they can acquire skills and self-esteem through

alternative literacy classes that may be in the form of music, sound, visuals, arts, crafts, smells and physical activity. I believe the funding bodies need to consider funding these alternative programs rather than just the ones that support curricula such as the CGEA (Certificates in General Education for Adults), and the CSWE (Certificate in Spoken and Written English), as well as the NRS (National Reporting System).

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The proposal also overcomes a number of issues raised in the review and consultation stage of the project, in particular how the CGEA could better meet the needs of CGEA Level 1 learners and English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. For example, for learners with a non-English speaking background it may be more appropriate to use oral communication modules from the Certificates in English Language Literacies or other accredited certificates than the Oral communication Modules from the CGEA.

For learners with an intellectual disability or specific learning disability, elective modules may be literacy and numeracy modules or life skills modules from other courses such as Certificate I in Work Education, Certificate I in Initial Adult Literacy and Numeracy or Certificate I in Transition Education. These modules would support the CGEA core modules (Reading and Writing and Numeracy and Maths).

At Certificate III level, the proposed new structure would also allow learners to undertake modules from other curriculum that strengthened their pathways. For example, CGEA III learners wishing to follow a science or engineering pathway may do the Numeracy and Mathematics module from the CGEA, and a Science module and another

Mathematics module from other further education courses thus preparing them more fully for their proposed pathway.

Work being undertaken

Now that the review has been completed, the project team are looking at the details of the modules such as, the module purpose, learning outcomes, assessment criteria, conditions of assessment. Work is also being undertaken on the types of modules and units of competence that could be used within the CGEA framework. This work will continue through to the end of October when a draft will be presented for consultation.

You will also be able to have your say about the draft document by going to the CGEA Reaccreditation Bulletin Board. You can access the Bulletin Board from the

ARIS homepage <http://sunsite.anu.edu/language-australia/aris> or the CGEA homepage <http://sunsite.anu.edu/language-australia/cgea>

Jan Hagston is project manager for Language Australia. If you have any questions about the CGEA project please contact her at jhagston@la.ames.vic.edu.au

Policy Update

A review of the Certificates in General Education for Adults is due for completion by the end of this year. Jan Hagston discusses the issues, which include the types of modules and units of competence that could be used within the CGEA framework.

Reaccreditation of the CGEA —extending and expanding for better outcomes

The Adult Community and Further Education Board (ACFEB) has funded a number of curriculum projects. One of the projects is the review and reaccreditation of the Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA). The project, being undertaken by ARIS–Language Australia is due to be completed by the end of the year.

ACFEB have asked that consideration be given to:

- the expansion of the CGEA to include a broad general education focus, for example, science, technology, civics, work preparation, creative/hybrid arts, reflective living skills
- the expansion of the CGEA to address a perceived gap in accredited Further Education (FE) pathways at the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Level III
- the expansion of the CGEA to address the educational needs of people for whom Level 1 of the CGEA is too high
- the role of the CGEA within a broad general education framework
- the relationship of the CGEA to the Diploma of Further Education.

Project to date

Widespread consultation to review the current CGEA occurred. Responses were summarised and a paper prepared (see the CGEA Discussion Board to obtain a copy of the paper).

In response to the review and the factors that the ACFEB asked the project to consider, a proposal for the CGEA framework structure was developed. This proposal was taken to another set of consultations.

The findings from the review and feedback to the proposed CGEA framework structure were taken to the project's reference group. The following proposal is based on feedback from the CGEA review, feedback from the second round of consultations and the reference group meeting and is informed by the requirements of the project brief.

Proposed 'new' CGEA framework

AQF levels

It is proposed to align the CGEA levels directly with the AQF levels. This differs from the current situation where the levels do not correspond. See the table below.

*Certificate III in General Education for Adults

The extension of the CGEA to include an AQF III level was, in general, welcomed. It will allow stronger pathways between the CGEA and courses such as the Diploma of Further Education.

#Certificate I in General Education for Adults (Introductory) and Certificate I in General Education for Adults

Two AQF 1 level certificates are proposed. The project team received numerous submissions relating to the appropriateness of the current CGEA for many low level learners. Submissions noted that such students required more time to achieve the learning outcomes and many were unlikely to progress to the next level of the CGEA and were, therefore, unable to attain recognition for their progress.

Proposed Certificates	Proposed CGEA levels	Proposed AQF levels	Current Certificates	Current CGEA levels	Current AQF levels
Certificate III in General Education for Adults*	3	3	Certificate II in General Education for Adults (Further Study)	4	2
Certificate II in General Education for Adults	2	2	Certificate II in General Education for Adults	3	2
Certificate I in General Education for Adults#	1	1	Certificate I in General Education for Adults (Foundation)	2	1
Certificate I in General Education for Adults (Introductory)#	1	1		1	
	(Introductory)				

This suggested the need for two Certificate I CGEA certificates in order to provide alternative exit points and broader pathways. Certificate I (Introductory) would enable learners with very low levels of literacy to access a range of other courses including the Certificate I in General Education for Adults and to gain recognition for achievement where previously they would have encountered barriers.

Course structure

The CGEA is a nested course meaning that for students to enter the CGEA at any level they must have attained (through

RPL or completion) the previous CGEA Certificate course requirements at the lower levels. See table below.

Elective modules

The inclusion of elective modules including those from other accredited curriculum or appropriate units of competence from Training Packages was, in general, welcomed by practitioners and providers as providing greater flexibility, better meeting the needs of learners and providing stronger pathways to Vocational Education and Training (VET) and other further education courses.

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Proposed structure

Certificate III in General Education for Adults

Core modules:

- Reading and Writing or
- Numeracy and Mathematics

Elective modules chosen from:

- Oral Communication
- General Curriculum Options
- Reading and Writing or Numeracy and Mathematics (if not done as a core)
- Modules from other accredited curriculum or units of competence from Training Packages¹

Certificate II in General Education for Adults

Core modules:

- Reading and Writing
- Numeracy and Mathematics

Elective modules chosen from:

- Oral Communication
- General Curriculum Options
- Modules from other accredited curriculum or units of competence from Training Packages¹

Certificate I in General Education for Adults

Core modules:

- Reading and Writing
- Numeracy and Mathematics

Elective modules chosen from:

- Oral Communication
- General Curriculum Options
- Modules from other accredited curriculum or units of competence from Training Packages¹

Certificate I in General Education for Adults (Introductory)

Core modules:

- Reading and Writing
- Numeracy and Mathematics

Elective modules chosen from:

- Oral Communication
- General Curriculum Options
- Modules from other accredited curriculum or units of competence from Training Packages¹

Current structure

Certificate II in General Education for Adults (Further Study)

Any two modules at CGEA Level 4 plus:

- module in another stream at Level 3
- module in fourth stream at Level 2

Certificate II in General Education for Adults

Any three modules at CGEA Level 3 plus:

- a module in fourth stream at Level 2.

Certificate I in General Education for Adults (Foundation)

All eight modules at CGEA Levels 1 and 2:

- Reading and Writing
- Numeracy and Maths
- Oral Communication
- General Curriculum Options

¹ This is dependent on prerequisite and corequisite of module and units of competence and required assessment methods.

Beside the Whiteboard

Natalie Nawrocki works at Olympic Adult Education in Melbourne's north. She talks to Rachel Wilson about community-based adult literacy, and her WELL program for garden workers with mild intellectual disabilities. Rachel Wilson also works at Olympic Adult Education and is on the VALBEC *Fine Print* editorial committee.

How did you get into teaching adult language and literacy?

I had been working as a community worker for ten years when I decided that I wanted to change my career and teach adult language and literacy. I believed that you can have more of an impact in people's lives and make changes through teaching them. I found community work and social work a band-aid service and what these people really needed was education. This is why I got into adult language and literacy. As well as teaching people literacy I am opening a new world to them on how to better themselves, gain self confidence, acquire information on their rights, help them to heal the past hurts of negative experiences of school, and to acquire a better quality of life.

Can you describe your experience in general adult literacy programs?

Adult literacy is an exciting and challenging area to work in. Not only am I teaching adults to read and write, I am building their self-esteem and confidence. I am empowering them to help themselves and not rely on others to fill out their forms, and read their mail. I am teaching them to be part of the community where they have for so long been seen as outcasts. I am giving them information and knowledge that is not reachable because our society does not cater for those who have low literacy. It is assumed that everyone has this skill. I am helping them heal the hurt, disappointment, and frustration of the past. That is why I find it so exciting.

How do these compare to working in a WELL program?

WELL is even more exciting than a classroom literacy program. Teaching literacy on the job with what's familiar means that participants can continuously revise what they learnt in the classroom. For example, learning what certain signs mean, then seeing them on the job keeps reinforcing what they have learnt. WELL helps participants to take more pride in their job and what they do know. *Hi-city*, where I have been teaching, the gardeners have proven this. The gardeners express verbally all the knowledge they have about their job, and this promotes pride and a realisation that they have skills and knowledge that they took for granted. On-site visits are perfect places to learn. At first I was stuck and I thought what am I going to teach these guys on a piece of lawn? Then I discovered that work sites have valuable visual and physical learning tools. For example:

What are those warning signs saying? What happens if a child comes running out when you are cutting the lawn? How do you cut the lawn to get a professional finish? What are those signs saying around the school? What happens if I don't read those warning signs around the factory with chemicals? We learn about measurements—how high is five centimetres, and so on. It goes on and on.

What are the difficulties associated with delivering a literacy program in the workplace?

The difficulties associated with delivering a literacy program is that firstly you are accountable to two agencies—the adult education provider and the industry. This means that you need to communicate constantly to both parties and ensure you are not stepping on anyone's toes. A further difficulty with any literacy program is that you are introducing change. When you are teaching you are constantly imparting knowledge, and information, that participants with low literacy would not otherwise have access to. Once they become aware of this they are actually becoming aware of their rights and the employer's responsibilities. Employers may have been able to get away from their responsibilities in the past because workers may not have been aware of their rights or entitlements. As they say knowledge is power and those with low literacy sometimes lack such knowledge.

Has your experience in a WELL program changed your approach to teaching literacy?

My experience with the WELL program has made me see how students who have low literacy have amazing skills and knowledge that is missed from just what you see in the classroom. On the sites I witnessed these students undertaking incredibly complicated tasks, which they don't see as complicated—they, in fact, underestimate their abilities. The classroom can reduce their confidence despite the fact that these students have abilities. Students' negative experiences at school impact on the way they perform in the classroom, and inhibit their learning. Subsequently, I have learnt to adapt literacy with performing practical tasks in the classroom.

What needs to change in Adult Community Education (ACE)?

I believe what needs to change in ACE is to consider an alternative literacy program for those who have been

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