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This, our last edition for the year, focuses on changing professional development issues in the field.

Peter Waterhouse, Crina Virgona and Ray Townsend—workplace practitioners for over a decade—talk shop on workplace purposes, practices and professional development. Acknowledging the multiple agendas that reflect a complex diversity of purposes in workplace practice, they look at how this impacts on both formal and informal PD issues.

Although formal PD has been important and relevant, the writers outline the ‘power’ of informal, incidental learning and important PD experiences where they’ve worked alongside others, and how these experiences have challenged their assumptions and practices.

Ray talks about the value of action research and action learning because it is ‘collaborative and action-oriented with a critical edge’. He goes on to say that ‘what these approaches do is create a dynamism and energy that can lead to change’.

An online discussion between four coordinators of ACE providers in four different regions raises many pertinent issues regarding professional development in Adult Community Education. The writers talk about the diverse PD needs in their regions (rural and metropolitan) and they highlight the need for PD to be accessible and relevant to practitioners. In PD there is a place for both theory and practice and it is in classroom-based research where theories need to be tested and new ones developed. PD also needs to serve a number of functions, such as opportunities to pursue new ideas and strategies for good language and literacy practice, and opportunities to network and give and receive support. A big concern for the ACE sector is providing payment for sessional staff to attend PD and appropriate time to utilise knowledge gained.

Although the discussion outlines the value and need for both regional and statewide PD, the writers emphasise that ‘well managed local projects that pick up on the needs of the tutors and foster skills development over time are highly effective’, especially because the needs of regions vary so much.

Josie Rose and Jan Aitcheson look at changing PD trends in ACE and outline an approach taken by one ACFE region to develop a model for a work-based learning project to assist teachers in understanding and integrating flexible delivery and online delivery techniques into their teaching. Dale Pobega, reviews the recent ACEWEB e-conference and discusses accessibility issues and the effectiveness of e-conferencing.

Christine Riddell looks at why enrolments in postgraduate literacy programs have reduced dramatically since 1997. Janis Knuckey looks at the PD needs of interpreters for deaf students.

In *Beside the Whiteboard*, Ros Butcher talks about her work at Donvale Living and Learning Centre and her involvement in the ‘Learning Differently’ project.

In *Policy Update*, Cathy Donovan outlines the new Victorian Qualifications Authority, and talks about the new qualification for youth in Victoria, the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning.

In *Foreign Correspondent* Mark Merrell talks about literacy trends in East Timor and finally, in *Open Forum*, Rosa McKenna presents her response to accreditation issues highlighted in the 2001 Spring edition of *Fine Print*.

**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.**

# Talking shop: a discussion on workplace purposes, practices and professional development

When literacy experts Peter Waterhouse, Ray Townsend and Crina Virgona—all colleagues at Workplace Learning Initiatives—got together to talk about professional development, not a word was wasted.

**PW:** In responding to an invitation to write for on issues of professional development for the workplace or for workplace practitioners, I'm compelled to ask: for workplace practice, or for what kind of workplace practice?

The purposes of workplace education and training are often considered to be self-evident. Yet obvious truths inevitably conceal as much as they reveal. When we begin to consider critically the purposes for learning in a workplace we soon find there are multiple agendas reflecting a complex diversity of purposes. Can I ask you, Ray and Crina, as language/literacy practitioners who went into the industry over a decade ago (sorry to age you both like that)—how do you see your educational purposes in industry? Have your perceptions and your purposes changed since those early days? If so, how?

**RT:** There has been a dramatic change in my understanding and acknowledgement of the context in which I operate. How I approach the learning process has probably consolidated and deepened. I was naive. Over ten years ago I was learning about learning in a new environment. For me, literacy and language is now firmly situated within a complex web of diverse and at times competing, contradictory, but equally important agendas. To be effective I need to engage with, and to embrace, all of that complexity.

So I guess one message to the readers is that when you come to look at your PD needs, ask yourself if you understand the 'terrain' and its inhabitants. I think it's fundamental. Subject your own notions about literacies, and what is possible to some criticism.

**CV:** I don't know whether menopause has anything to do with it, but yes, the world seems a very different place to the one I ventured into when I commenced industry training. The greatest shift seems to me to be about that very question you ask Peter, 'whose workplace practice?' When industry training was new it was all about the learner. We had the learner-centred curriculum and we entered into a confidential contract with our learners to develop skills as we (the learner and the teacher) saw fit.

“ literacy and language is now firmly situated within a complex web of diverse...but equally important agendas ”

These days, learners are somewhere near the bottom of the authorised list of those that need to be satisfied. The client is the employer not the learner. In workplaces (as apart from other learning organisations), employers demand that their very specific outcomes be met. And they are watching carefully for their return on investment, which is fair enough except their expectations are often quite unrealistic (that hasn't changed, they've always expected miracles). The others who have loomed larger and larger have been the funding bodies and accrediting authorities. They have muscled in to the point that the learner is obscured behind their bulk.

**PW:** Are we thinking here about the way concepts such as language and literacy are defined and enacted in workplace programs? I have always been uncomfortable with the suggestion that Vocational Education and Training (VET) is just about skills, industry competencies and narrow task-specific objectives. Whilst much workplace training does fall well short of what I would call critical education, I am offended by the suggestion that workplace practice this way.

Elsewhere we have written about how vocational education does not have to be characterised by functional reductionism. Even a workplace context-based program critical, expansive and richly educational in a broader more critical sense (Virgona, 1996; Virgona et al 1998; Virgona, Waterhouse & Sefton 1998; Sefton, Waterhouse & Deakin, (eds) 1994; Waterhouse 1999, 1996; Waterhouse & Sefton 1997; Waterhouse, Townsend & McGregor 2000).

**RT:** Unfortunately we, as one group of practitioners, do not control key aspects of the learning agenda, if we ever did. As guests we can be ejected at anytime. So that our struggles for what we as professionals think is important, they need to occur in the most appropriate of places, with those who wield the power and control the agenda. I think you're right Crina, the constraints placed upon us are greater than ever. How do you push, what is these days a subversive agenda, with employers? So extending the negotiation of curriculum to include all those who have a stake is important. Otherwise our integrity is at stake. So relationship building with stakeholders is absolutely crucial.

This is nothing new. What is different I think is that when you operate in workplaces you get changed by the experience. So that while language and literacy becomes just one of a number of aspects in the learning program, the whole notion is much broader.

**CV:** Language and literacy teaching used to be a powerful vehicle whereby teachers could give learners the skills to exchange ideas about their world and who they want to be within it. Even in workplaces we could get away with a fair bit of that, but over the years, accountability came to mean teaching testable pieces of language and literacy content that could be charted onto tables and measured at the beginning and end of a program. Knowledge of workplace culture and how to survive within it did not register on the chart and so we busied ourselves with those things that could be measured. This is how workplace language and literacy learning has been constructed and how we have been defined within it.

**PW:** It's interesting to note that for Crina there seems to have been a narrowing or a constriction of possibilities whilst for Ray the field now seems to be broader, more complex, more challenging but also more expansive. There may be something of a paradox here. Both of these perspectives reflect our experiences. It seems to me there is increasing complexity, ambiguity and even contradiction in the worlds we inhabit. Kegan (1994) talks about the common phenomenon of being *in this so-called postmodern world*. Handy suggests that 'The acceptance of paradox as a feature of life is the first step towards living with it and managing it' (Handy 1995, p17). Harris and Simons (1999) amongst others highlight the increasing diversity and complexity of practice in which workplace 'trainers' might be engaged—our workplace practice is correspondingly more demanding. However the challenge is still shaped by the purpose(s) of our work. For whom, or to what, do we want to make a difference?

**CV:** Peter these are the questions I wrestle with every day. What are we doing as language and literacy teachers and trainers? Are we providing succour or workplace skills to the disadvantaged, are we supporting workers who are the front line creative profit makers of an organisation, are we driving a social justice agenda? Are we 'in service' to customers defined narrowly as the management or are we an educative resource there to help the organisation understand learning and personnel development? And who makes the decisions about these questions? If we surveyed workplace programs throughout the nation we could probably find examples of every type.

The language we use and others use in talking about ourselves, our learners and the role of training within industry shapes our identity and our practice. The current workplace environment is somewhat 'customer-servile'. Our product is training and we have to sell it to industry. It seems

there are few opportunities to challenge the status quo. We often find ourselves meeting the demands of industry rather than influencing the demands.

**PW:** Crina, your comments remind me that the questions that Gribble raised over a decade ago when she talked about the 'hijack and seduction' of education and adult literacy (1990) are still real, aren't they? Yet I believe it is still possible to practice with integrity, don't you? Surely we are not going to concede that we are merely plasticine in others' hands? I am not suggesting that it is easy but your own practice in several different programs demonstrates how educational creativity and innovative strategies can address multiple agendas so that various stakeholders can claim 'ownership' of a program and benefit from its outcomes.

**CV:** You are right Peter. It all depends on who is making the decisions at the workplace and whether there are spaces in our negotiations for cooperation and creativity whereby all stakeholders can have their objectives met.

**RT:** I think we can still practice with integrity, although it often takes reframing and it is not always possible to do the things we would like to do. For instance, 'lean production' methods make it much more difficult to get hold of people for training and development in workplaces these days. So yes, we are prisoners to the system in a way. But like most prison situations, it is impossible to control all sorts of activity, which escapes the notice of the warders. That's where opportunities exist for us.

Our other purpose is to demonstrate and articulate alternatives to the present mechanistic direction, which government is driving. I guess the other reality, is that training and learning are not the priority of the people for whom we work, the production imperative is their priority. If we want to change that in any way we have to be convincing.

**PW:** Yes, if it is our intention to make a difference in the workplace we have to be both convincing and helpful. Given this commitment to making a difference—and being mindful of the increasing complexity, the multiple roles, purposes and stakeholders—what does our history and experience say to us about professional development for this work? Recent documentation of staff development profiles by the Office of Employment, Training and Tertiary Education (OETTE) notes:

The learning experiences described in these profiles are not new, either in concept or practice. They represent and reflect what has been collectively known about adult learning for a very long time. They do, however, emphasise the individuality of learning, which draws into question any over-reliance on formal courses or workshops and teacher or expert-led mode (OETTE, 2001).

accountability came to mean teaching testable pieces of language and literacy

My research (Waterhouse 1999) has also highlighted the individuality of learning. Yet when we think of 'professional development' we tend often to think of courses, programs—or perhaps even negotiated professional development contracts. As I reflected upon and analysed my learning and development experiences it seemed to me that some of the most important and significant learnings were not things I set out to learn at all. They were contingent, consequential and often unexpected. They were indirect outcomes of decisions (including decisions made by others), consequences of engagements, involvements, relationships and responsibilities that were sometimes thrust upon me, sometimes embraced, sometimes not—yet the learnings were no less important for all of that.

I'm not going to argue that there is no value in formal PD programs or courses. I know I have certainly benefited from both. However I think that we have greatly underestimated the significance and the power of informal, experiential learning. We haven't paid sufficient attention to how these processes form part of the developmental pathways for teachers, trainers, assessors and so on. As you reflect on your experience and developmental pathways what would you want to highlight about PD to support the kind of work we do?

**CV:** The most important PD experiences for me have been where I have worked alongside others. In these situations I believe I have done my most exciting work. Having an opportunity to look through someone else's eyes and to do things in a somewhat different way challenges our assumptions and practices. Sharing the workload also allows you to do things that are more adventurous and demanding. I love it when you get fired on some crazy notion and the cross-fertilisation in a training team allows for unforeseen adventures.

**RT:** My learning has been fractured, formal, informal, embarrassing, funny. I've learned primarily by listening and talking with 'the tribe' around me and by creating different viewpoints that I can subject to critical scrutiny. And then of course, good old trial and error. Cultural and political blunders in workplaces have been a cornerstone of my rise to measured muddled action. So a mix of 'doing', consistent discussion about practice with colleagues, and knowledge of theoretical perspectives, is essential.

**PW:** Your emphasis on the role of the 'tribe' and the importance of looking through others' eyes to facilitate your own learning suggests the value of collaborative professional development. I am also thinking of how we learn from the stuffups, projects and experiences that take unexpected (even unwelcome) directions. All of which suggests the need for innovative approaches to professional development; approaches that harness the potential of learning-by-doing and reflecting critically on experience.

we have greatly underestimated the significance and the power of informal, experiential learning

**RT:** What you're saying is not new—we know from the adult learning stuff that these things are crucial. Formal programmatic learning may be part of the solution but it is not going to prepare people for the messy, unpredictability of real-world practice. We still need to be adopting practices like action-research and action-learning—which are heavily collaborative and action oriented with a critical edge. Many people seem beaten by the system or just accept it as a given: unchangeable. What these approaches do is create a dynamism and energy that can lead to change. There are educators, unionists and employers out there who are dissatisfied with current practices. Perhaps our purpose is to bring some focus to possibilities created by alternatives.

**PW:** Ray, I would like to close with your point about changing the system. It is not easy but I agree, as we've said before, we can 'make the path by walking it'. You have both been walking this path for some time now. Do you still believe you can continue to make a difference? Is it still possible to believe this after more than a decade of resistance and struggle?

**RT:** Well, history shows us that nothing is permanent—regimes and ideologies come and go. Walls go up and down. It also teaches us that those who do not reflect and act critically on their behaviour are bound to repeat it. These two truths suggest that the system will change, but not without the effort and action of practitioners articulating new inclusive methods of learning and doing. Patience and perspective are keys. If we stop trying to make a difference, who will?

**CV:** Auditing and funding bodies exert extraordinary influence on our practice as they have been designed to do. Unfortunately they are preoccupied by measurement and so they can only see the measurable. Nothing else exists. But if it doesn't exist for them should it cease to exist for us? These debates have been going on for years and they will continue despite all the academic papers and demonstrations of educational contradiction. Perhaps this is healthy. It keeps us defining our purpose even though we succumb to sounding shrill, hysterical and repetitive at times. Some work has been done to describe the activity that goes on in the cracks between the bricks. Seddon and Modra (2000) talk about capacity building. This is what they are talking about I think—preserving educational integrity despite the battering of political and economic priorities. When it is impossible to live a life between the bricks, I'll give up on 'making a difference'.

**The authors of this dialogue practice together at Workplace Learning Initiatives.**

**Dr Peter Waterhouse has been a statewide and regional consultant on adult literacy and basic education issues and a teacher educator, workplace trainer and adult literacy practitioner.**

Ray Townsend is an experienced industry consultant/trainer with specialist skills in accelerated learning techniques and in catering to special needs students. Ray has also been a regional adult literacy/basic education consultant and a TAFE staff development officer.

Crina Virgona is completing her Ph D research investigating and documenting workplace learning and the key role of language in that learning. She has an extensive background and training in teaching ESL and in working with low-level English language/literacy learners.

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# It's no different for teachers, and it's (not always) easy (even) if you know how: changing professional development trends in ACE

by Josie Rose and Jan Aitcheson

**For teachers to establish an effective mix of face-to-face and online teaching methods, they must first have access to productive and positive online learning experiences. In the Adult Community and Further Education region of Southern Westernport, two dedicated people showed how it could be done.**

'Involvement of community centres, staff and volunteers in coaching, mentoring and providing technology to users will enhance the users' ability to access and succeed in online learning...A vision for learners with low levels of literacy needs to factor in personal contact to overcome anxiety and facilitate learning in a comfortable, supportive environment.

(From

Access and Equity Online Report 2000.)

In reading the above-quoted report on access and equity for online learners we were struck by the fact that this particular statement is equally applicable to teachers who are trying to understand and integrate flexible delivery and online delivery techniques into their teaching. This article aims to outline a particular approach taken by our region of ACE to address this need.

In order for teachers to become confident coaches and mentors—the guides by the side rather than the sage on the stage—they need to have accessible, productive and positive online learning experiences themselves. It is only then that we can realistically expect them to confidently start looking at what the optimum blend of face-to-face and online might be for them and their students.

For the past three years Josie has been fortunate to be involved in work-based learning projects funded by LearnScope. It was this technique that formed the basis of the professional development model developed in our region.

LearnScope defines work-based learning as the process of making work-related learning both conscious and deliberate. It is also about making links between the learning needs of the individual and the strategic needs of the organisation, and finding ways to apply the learning to our work.

## The value of work-based learning

Perhaps the most critical element of work-based learning is the application of the newly acquired skills or understandings. This is where the value of work-based learning is realised.

During the course of 2000 Josie had the wonderful opportunity to spend six months as a flexible learning leader. This opportunity allowed her the time to investigate online learning in particular, and flexible delivery in more general terms. Both of us work in the ACE sector and have for the past four years worked very closely with our regional council to support ACE organisations in our region of Victoria in the introduction of flexible learning techniques in their core programs.

With the support of the regional council, Josie was able to undertake the program and look at online delivery platforms, instructional design methodologies and production techniques—all in relation to creating accessible online content. As a trained and passionate language and literacy teacher this was a large part of her investigations, but she also discovered a great need for an accessible, supportive professional development model for teachers. In developing the model, which is still in the process of being refined, we wanted to ensure that it incorporated a number of what we considered essential elements.

The model had to:

- Allow teachers to learn and develop knowledge and skills specific to their individual needs and preferred learning styles, whilst at the same time developing materials that would be of immediate use to them, their centres and their students.
- Allow teachers to work collaboratively with others and their students to determine a blend of online and face-to-face that would work for them. This notion developed particularly strongly with the language and literacy teachers. They opted to work with a delivery platform specifically developed for language and literacy teaching called the Virtual Independent Learning Centre, ( ). This gave them opportunities to develop tasks that could be introduced much more quickly into their teaching practice and therefore allowed them to experiment with how much and how often they would introduce online into their classroom delivery.
- Allow teachers to determine the level they wanted to work at in terms of their own skill development and needs.
- Be collaborative and consultative and have at its core a coach and mentor that would not only support participants but also source and deliver the training that would support the model.

- Have the support of the management of the teachers' organisations.

For planning purposes we had to determine the mix of face-to-face and online that we would use for our own training delivery, but the underpinning philosophy was one of modelling and working with participants in experimenting with different formulae in determining the mix of face-to-face and online in their own training and eventually in their own delivery.

By focusing, in the first instance, on the teachers and making sure they were comfortable and confident in their own experience and skills, we were confident that change at the workplace would inevitably follow and result in increased opportunities for the students to be offered and be involved in a wider range of flexible delivery that in turn would meet their needs and skills.

In looking at the range of skills and experience of teachers across the region it was evident that they fell into three broad categories:

were those that could be defined as 'willing but perhaps not quite yet able'. This group was new to the whole area of online teaching and learning and was just starting off on that journey of discovery.

who were 'willing and reasonably able'. This group had a basic understanding of the area and its issues and was ready to explore new areas.

who were 'very willing and very able'. This group had been identified as reaching a stage where they needed to look outside the sector for their professional development needs or had a specific area related to flexible delivery that they wanted to explore. This could range from issues around capacity building to infrastructure support or specific communication media.

**So there was the theory: now how did it actually work?**

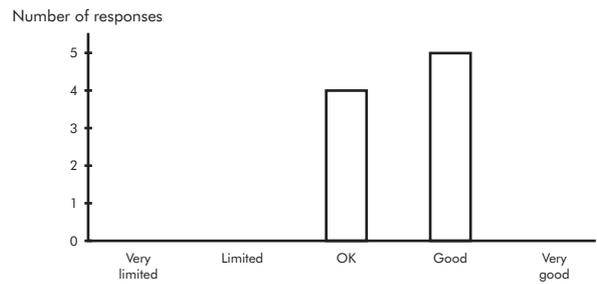
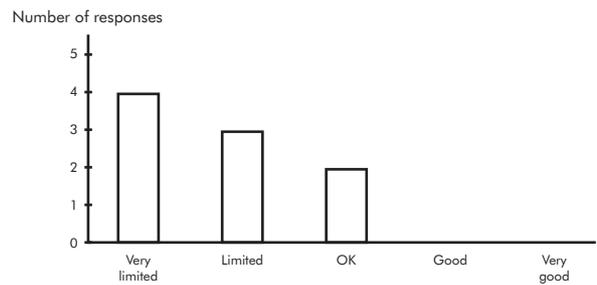
Firstly, we needed to ensure that the training on offer would be an appropriate match to suit all of the three skill levels.

**Signing up for skills**

We designed a 'spirit of agreement' document that doubled as a skills audit. Participants were asked to grade their own skill level against particular criteria. This would indicate the most appropriate level for them to enter into the training. The management of their ACE organisations also signed this document to ensure that they too were aware of the requirements and so would support the teacher throughout their training. Upon completion of the audit the participants had basically grouped themselves into common skill levels and so ensured they would be working with others at the same level.

Having established the three broad skill groupings, Josie then tailored the training to match. The were offered an opportunity to take part in an accredited program called

which was funded by the Office of Education, Training, and Tertiary Education. This training allowed them an opportunity to build on existing skills and examine how the creation of paper-based materials differed from the development of materials that would be primarily read online. The starter program was particularly successful as it allowed Josie to deliver the training and customise it to the needs and interests of the group. The result was that 50 per cent of the group opted to move on to the next (user) level, 80 per cent submitted for accreditation and everyone completed the course. In terms of their own perception of their skills developed, the following before and after graphs (taken from an independent evaluation report) tell it all:



The group was of particular interest. They covered a wide range of program delivery, including VET, traineeships, IT and language and literacy. Josie sourced a range of training options for them, which was presented to the group. Everyone in the group decided to work with a particular delivery platform.

Eight language and literacy teachers developed tasks for the Virtual ILC, eight participants (this also included language and literacy teachers) opted for the TAFE VC, and two opted for a fully online distance course in learning to develop materials for online delivery. The premise is that you never really fully understand what it is to be an online teacher or learner until you have done an online course yourself.

**Individual plans**

Each participant then developed an individual PD plan, which was presented to his or her manager and signed off by the participant, the manager, and the project team. The participants who opted for the Virtual ILC and the TAFE Virtual Campus ( ) had a very intensive face-to-face training program, in learning how to work productively within their chosen platform. As Josie delivered or participated in the training session herself, this made mentoring and support for the participants significantly more effective.

The submitted a much more detailed PD plan which outlined their course of study/research and what they hoped to achieve as a result, as well as some demonstrable outcomes for them, their centre and the region. One of the most significant outcomes of this level is the identification of future leaders within the region and our ACE community who will be able to take on a similar mentoring role in the future.

As already outlined earlier with the starter group, and interim evaluation of the project by an independent evaluator has indicated that the project has been successful in effecting positive and practical change at practitioner level, whilst also giving the managers some understanding of the complexities and advantages of online delivery techniques in a range of course offerings.

The participants listed the main success factors as follows:

- The financial support they recovered whilst participating in training. Whilst they were very appreciative of this they recognised that the time they had to put into the project was significantly more.
- The fact that they could access the training at a level suitable to their needs and interests.
- The accessibility of the mentor/project manager.
- The fact that they were developing course materials that would be of practical benefit for them and their students.
- Opportunities to work collaboratively with teachers within or outside their own centre.
- A sense of support and belonging for those at the cutting edge of ICT development. Often they feel very isolated in their particular workplace as they may not have a large enough pool of like-minded people to tap into.

The future of the program is unclear, as we await funding decisions for the coming year. We are, however, quietly optimistic that we will be able to continue to develop and

refine the model. We are particularly keen to develop an online community of practice within our region to help teachers support each other and continue to develop skills in the online teaching area. In terms of changing trends in professional development and giving teachers and managers an opportunity for sustained investigation into a very exciting and challenging delivery technique, we feel that we have achieved significantly.

In the words of two participants:

It will introduce a new layer of methodology with online delivery strategies. I intend to incorporate online teaching as part of the overall teaching strategy available to all tutors at our centre.

I believe that the program will enable me to include online teaching as a natural part of my general teaching. I see it as another tool, similar to using the media or cassettes or videos—that is another way to deliver interesting interactive and communicative learning.

This serves to underscore the premise that in the quest for lifelong learning opportunities for all, we need to ensure that we equip teachers with the skills and knowledge by giving them the time and opportunity to explore—they know it is (not always) easy (even) if you know how!

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**This edition of *Fine Print* has a focus on professional development. Tell us about some of the professional development activities/experiences/ or projects that you have found most valuable in your career and why**

For me professional development means growth, both personally and professionally.

One of the big issues facing us all is time! The balancing act we all perform in using our limited time efficiently is very real. The Eastern Region Language and Literacy Network values the time of its teachers. In planning this year's PD for providers, we all said, the PD must be meaningful, useful, relevant and provide the opportunity for teachers to communicate.

With the recent publication of 'Learning Differently', I was fortunate to attend ACER (educational resource producers) meetings, courses with the Neale Reading Team (Neale developed

a reading analysis system to improve children's reading), workshops at SPELD, De Bono seminars and Thrass training (Thrass is an Australian phonetically-based reading system).

Daryl Greaves' expertise, wisdom and willingness to share his knowledge and experience, in the area of learning difficulties, was fantastic, and I thank him. Talk about a learning curve!!

The Transforming Lives workshop, led by Delia Bradshaw was of great value in forming and transforming my curriculum for both ESL and ALBE teaching. Working on an Internet project to research literacy in Indonesia opened my eyes to the literacy problems faced by other cultures and countries.

All PD is invaluable. It shows teachers that they are part of a bigger picture, and that what they do is of value in empowering students with literacy skills for living. It allows them to be trained, supported and encouraged in their work.

# Professional development across the regions: some online input

During November, coordinators of ACE providers in four different regions contributed to an online discussion about professional development (PD) for language and literacy teachers in ACE. The postings begin with preliminary comments about professional development in each region, and then explore some of the issues and ideas raised. This article is an example of an increasingly common form of professional development in itself and a snapshot of what's happening in PD in some ACE regions around the state.

Participants:

- 1 Rachel Wilson, Olympic Adult Education, Northern Metropolitan Region
- 2 Alana Brennan, Campaspe College of Adult Education, Loddon Campaspe Mallee Region
- 3 Sarah Deasey, Carlton Adult Reading and Writing Program, Central Western Metropolitan Region
- 4 Karen Dymke, Donvale Living and Learning Centre, Eastern Metropolitan Region.

**RW:** The regional office has contracted Olympic Adult Education to run PD for language and literacy teachers in the Northern Metropolitan region since 1997, and I've been involved for the last three years. In that time I've noticed a shift in the expectations of the regional office in providing PD, in the ACFE environment generally, and in the capacities of language and literacy teachers working in ACE providers to take up professional development opportunities.

The regional office has increasingly asked for a move towards conferences and the use of centralised professional development programs, for example, the Adult Literacy Teaching course run by ARIS and some of the many learning technologies training programs on offer from places like AMES, RMIT and Chisholm TAFE. This has been at the expense of smaller, locally determined and organised workshops and has had mixed success.

Conferences can of course be very valuable, but it can be just too hard for teachers in ACE providers to set aside a whole day to attend one. There has been a noticeable lack of these teachers at the VALBEC conference in recent years, and also at our regional tutors' conference. Most people just come for the one workshop that they are the most interested in, which leaves me thinking that the one-off or series of workshops approach really is more appropriate for this sector.

One thing we tried this year with the encouragement of the regional office was to purchase four places for people in the ARIS Adult Literacy Teaching course. This was really successful—we ran some taster workshops before the course started and from there took applications from people who

wanted to do the whole course. Both the workshops and the whole course proved very popular, and as a result, four people went through and completed the course. I think this worked well because it was obviously very relevant, and provided a great opportunity for people to access a program that they may have been reluctant to otherwise because of the costs involved.

The centrally packaged learning technologies programs have had mixed success—some of them have been more relevant than others to the needs of this sector, and it can be difficult to maintain enthusiasm for the 'online component' back at the workplace when all people have for support is the email address of someone they don't know and who may or may not answer their email.

I think the ACFE environment generally has become more difficult to organise PD in. There are new target groups to cater for, notably young people and new curriculums, notably the CELL. The CELL has been particularly problematic, with everyone waiting and waiting for centrally organised PD on its implementation. That's what we were waiting for in the Northern Region anyway, but in the end we just went ahead and organised something ourselves, but there's still no word on moderation arrangements for it, or any information on credit transfer from the CSWE, the ACFE licence for which is due to expire at the end of next year.

I think it has worked really well to have tutor PD organised by a provider, and you definitely need to try new things, but the bottom line has to be about what's accessible and relevant to the needs of the people you are running it for. It's no good running all day conferences when people are employed sessionally and simply can't afford to take a whole day off work to attend when they won't be paid for it.

**AB:** Professional development in rural regions is difficult to organise because of the distances required to travel to access PD. In our region, Loddon Mallee, PD is usually combined with Moderation which seems to work well. Tutors need to attend Moderation so therefore you have a captive audience. Moderation in the morning, PD in the afternoon.

The other aspect to consider is the cost to organisations. Historically ACE centres are not flushed with money so finding the extra funds to pay tutors can be a deterrent. I

believe tutors should be paid to attend PD but the PD needs to be relevant to their area and the organisations must be able to utilise the knowledge acquired. So, obviously a win-win situation.

Also, sessional tutors are usually tutors who have other commitments (other employment, families) so finding the time available to be away from home is a problem. Often, an advertisement arrives for PD which looks to be really interesting but then you find it is Melbourne and the session may be of two hours duration. You have to weigh up the benefits of attending against six to eight hours driving. Usually the decision is 'forget it'.

The PD offered needs to be delivered in rural regions thus giving open access to training. Whether we admit it or not there is a difference between metropolitan areas and rural Victoria. Planners need to be mindful of country people when setting PD agendas.

**SD:** In my experience of five years as a coordinator in the Central Western Metropolitan Region the PD pendulum has swung from a centrally organised program, to localised provider-initiated sessions, with the maintenance of an annual regional conference in between. Centrally organised PD for a large region was difficult. Timing and placing of sessions, and gauging the professional development needs and interests of tutors and coordinators proved unwieldy on a region-wide level. Provider-organised PD in my experience has been more successful, but there are attendant risks of duplication and lack of management experience in organising sessions.

The advancement of good literacy practice professional development is at risk of disappearing into the flood of ICT learning opportunities that we have been encouraged to take up and been funded for.

One of our most successful PD experiences, however, was conceived at a local level, through using a developmental project model. The project, entitled 'New Learning Technologies into Classroom Practice', and funded by the Central Western Region, went for roughly two terms. Four teachers, each from a different local provider, were able to access a series of training sessions (run by a skilled teacher already in our program) so that they could begin to use the Internet with their classes. The teachers were paid to attend the training, and to keep a reflective journal (one hour per week) documenting their learning processes, successes and failures.

There was a growth in skill and implementation of those skills because:

- the sessions were customised to suit skill levels and the developing needs and interests of the participants
- session times could be planned to suit the group

- teachers developed a strong sense of collegiate identity and peer mentoring was a feature of the project
- the teachers were paid for their time (all put in many more hours than they were paid for, but the payment was at least some acknowledgment of their commitment).

I believe that well managed local projects that pick up on the needs of tutors and foster skills development over time are highly effective.

**SD:** Just an addition to my previous message: I neglected to add that this example of successful PD was meant to take up Rachel and Alana's points about the critical factors associated with PD for teachers—their time, and the importance of payment. Our PD policy at Carlton Adult Reading and Writing states that PD is a shared responsibility, and I think we all take up varying forms of PD in our own time. However, sessional teachers cannot be out of pocket, and if you look at training and PD opportunities in any other professional sphere, most of it takes place in paid time.

**KD:** The Eastern Region Language and Literacy Network has had a lot of fun with PD this year, with very strong attendances and interest in workshops and the conference. Although I agree that taking off a full day for sessional tutors is a big ask, we found that with plenty of notice and a program that is very specific to the interests of the region, people were more than willing to attend. We have approached it firstly from a networking point of view.

Because so many tutors are sessional and work in relative isolation they look for opportunities to just get together and chat as much as anything. So, what makes every one in a good mood? Food (and dare I say it, on occasion, wine!) By setting a conducive environment, and 'spoiling' our hard-pressed literacy tutors a little, the scene has been set for some excellent days (really, we've just been pretending to be corporate!).

It's refreshing to have a bit of fun. We've written plays, had an acapella group sing student songs and had yum cha for our Moderation lunch. And of course, being highly professional the whole time! By meeting with coordinators of programs within the region every term, we have been able to tune into what the issues are for tutors and try to address their needs. We also deliberately didn't plan any further than the first PD day so that we had the opportunity to survey tutors early in the year about what they wanted to know about.

I believe it is imperative that we offer PD on a local level, as the needs of the regions vary so much. Sure, there are commonalities, and these could be part of some great travelling show, but we need to be responsive to PD needs at the local level. Furthermore, we found tutors responded very well to 'stuff' they could take home. Because of the demands of a busy tutor's life, anything that is 'takeaway' is most appreciated. Theory is a fine and wonderful thing, but of limited interest in the daily struggle to get on with classes.

ACE centres are not flushed with money so finding the extra funds to pay tutors can be a deterrent

I think that the ongoing issue of whether tutors should be paid to attend PD is a vexing one. Of course they should, but with what? I find it rather interesting that we are required as part of quality management processes to ensure that staff have ongoing professional development (this is always checked in an audit) yet no funding support is available. Doesn't really add up does it? PD is vital to keep our tutors fresh, enthused and connected. It should be a high priority in the sector.

**SD:** I agree that tutors like the practical, the takeaway. To do this we need those strong, on-the-ground teachers who are always doing new and exciting things, backed up by strongly held principles and beliefs around language and literacy learning, who can present at conferences and PD sessions.

Without these teachers the field will not grow and develop. It's very important to foster those tutors in our programs—how do we do this?

**KD:** I couldn't agree more, Sarah. Tutors need the opportunity to get out there and pursue new ideas and strategies. I find that every tutor has a different strength, and our responsibility as managers is to keep an eye out for opportunities to develop these talents.

This may also mean looking beyond the cosy literacy field. There is some really interesting work being done in AREA (Australian Resource Educators' Association) as well as in schools. We can pick up great ideas from all over the place.

**SD:** What have been the particular needs and interests indicated by the teachers in the your regions, Karen/Rachel/Alana?

I know that there are sessions that always extremely popular at our regional conferences such as teaching Mixed Ability Groups (an indication of funding constraints as much as teaching practices). The ALBA/ESL intersection is another, and any locally-based curriculum developments seem popular. Another ongoing interest in our region is how to develop good practice literacy programs for those women from the Horn of Africa who have never had the chance to undertake formal schooling.

**KD:** We have had an overwhelming response to the project 'Learning Differently' which looks at assessing and developing literacy skills for adults and young people who present with a specific learning disability, for example, dyslexia. I think that this area has been quite overlooked and is something that tutors are very keen to get information on. This project has also been a fantastic opportunity for professional development as it instructs, with theoretical and practical outlines, on how to develop a literacy ability profile, assessing for specific processes such as comprehension, decoding and phonological awareness.

Perhaps the project exemplifies what tutors are looking for in PD: academic learning to extend current knowledge, practical

teaching strategies and ways to implement them both formally and informally.

**KD:** Jumping all over the place here! Of course, literacy for youth has been a big PD interest area as so many providers are being inundated with young people whose needs must be addressed. Curriculum, networking, strategies and support have been key areas that tutors have been after. These PD sessions have always been well attended and lively!

**RW:** I keep meaning to respond and then get sucked away into something else, which I think can be an important point to bear in mind when implementing work-based PD projects—there does need to be a clear time allocation for these as trying to fit them in around the edges of everything else often doesn't work too well.

**we tried...to have every second meeting online, and people...found them harder to attend than face-to-face meetings**

I remember in our language and literacy coordinators network, we tried one year to have every second meeting online, and people actually found them harder to attend than face-to-face meetings because they were still at their workplaces with everything still happening around them. They were often trying to do a million other things as well as participate in the meeting. It was easier to leave work, and be able to just focus on the meeting.

Projects that have worked really well for providers in this region have been learning technology implementation projects, where teachers are funded to develop their skills in using learning technologies and implementing them in their classes. This can also allow project teachers to go into other classes and work with other teachers in a team-teaching arrangement, so the skills can be passed on. Mentoring is a popular word these days, but I think it can be very effective in the area of learning technologies which requires the development of such a huge number of new skills. Attending the odd workshop just isn't going to achieve that much unless it's part of an overall and gradual skills development program.

We all seem to be saying that provider-based projects, and locally determined PD work the best, but I think there are times when centrally organised PD is called for, particularly around statewide accredited curriculums—what do you all think?

The other thing I wanted to pick up on was the issue of theory and practice which has been touched on slightly. I'm aware that there are different views on whether PD should focus more on theory or practice, and of course there's a place for both. But I do think that PD generally needs to have a theoretical base on which to hang the practical ideas and classroom activities. This doesn't need to be over the top, but I think that we do all need to be able to justify the approaches and activities we use with our students or within the programs we manage.

**KD:** I think that to get together on a state level is a wonderful opportunity. It is always very interesting to hear how other regions approach things and to pick up new ideas. I do think however that state conferences need to be made as accessible as possible. The cost of these functions is often a difficulty for providers, especially the smaller ones. Also, I have heard that sessional tutors often feel intimidated by the rhetoric and theory. I agree that theory is very important in underpinning practice but maybe we should work to make it more accessible and user-friendly. Is that possible?

Describing what we do and why, also gives a lot of validity and authenticity to our practice. I feel that this is vitally important in valuing the sector and helping to raise the profile of literacy teaching. It's time that we stopped feeling like the poor cousin in education!

**SD:** Statewide coordinated and designed PD has its place for two reasons:

- 1 Introduction of new curricula such as TLTC, the CELL, or back even further, the CGEA. It is important for quality and consistency of approach—we need that input and

“ PD generally needs to have a theoretical base on which to hang the practical ideas and classroom activities ”

discussion with the designers before we can go off and interpret for ourselves.

- 2 Statewide conferences bring bigger fish. We need to hear from these people about research and research into practice, so we can go and implement new ideas at a local level.

If we want to link theory and practice in more authentic ways as Karen suggests, I think classroom-based research is where we need to be testing the theories and developing new ones. What do we need to do to get such projects up and running? Link ACFE regions, universities and TAFEs? Fund more projects?

Karen makes a good point about the importance of looking beyond the adult literacy field to other professional organisations: I would include ALEA (the Australian Literacy Educators Association) or VATE (Victorian Association of Teachers of English) and their journals, websites, publications and conferences. If we want to look at developing theories of critical literacy for example, or the ideas on changing literacies we can learn much that will apply in the adult field.

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competence as a means for developing the literacies that adults need to negotiate these new forms of certification?

In conclusion, the pragmatic use of the repertoire of accreditation and certification processes available over the years has ensured the survival and growth of adult literacy and basic education. However, if we are to have a future role then we must continue to work within the vocational education framework. The continuation of this false distinction between adult community and further education and the broader vocational and training system is not productive. An investment in cooperation with RTOs engaged in delivering qualifications through training packages is more likely to deliver a higher level of access and equity than pursuing the old deficit models on which stand alone accredited curricula is based. The quality of the education delivered is entirely in our own hands.

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## Notes

1. Kangan is a person who produced significant reports on education in 70s. A TAFE is named after him.

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# Fees and funding: is there a future for postgraduate literacy studies?

by Christine Riddell

**The future looks grim for the continued professionalism of literacy teachers, and up-front fees must bear much of the blame.**

In 1998 the Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL) advocated the need for 'strategies for the continuing upgrading of the skills and knowledge of language, literacy and numeracy teachers and VET teachers and trainers' (p.7). Recently there has been concern expressed in the literacy field regarding the impact that federal educational funding policies is having on this stated need for increased professionalism within the sector. Much of this disquiet is based on anecdotal evidence and although there is a growing body of literature on the broad consequences of such successive policy shifts, little hard data exists regarding that for postgraduate discipline specific studies.

The research reported here was deliberately designed to provide a window on the repercussions being experienced at the micro-level in the literacy postgraduate sector. This paper outlines the major changes instigated by both the Labor and Coalition parties during the period 1987–2000. It then provides a brief description of the research methodology undertaken, some of the findings, and indicates other variables which have influenced these.

## Historical overview of university funding

In 1974 the Whitlam Labor party abolished all fees for university courses and for the next 13 years Australian tertiary students were able to access higher education based solely on their own merits. This altered in 1987 when the Hawke Labor government introduced the Higher Education Administration Scheme (HEAC) which required all local postgraduate students to pay a flat rate of \$250 in order to fund an additional 1000 university places.

An ensuing review of higher education funding conducted by Wran recommended the replacement of HEAC with the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) which was introduced in 1989 under the 1988 Higher Education Funding Act. The rhetoric that accompanied this was that those who completed tertiary studies would be among the higher earners in the community and therefore they should partially contribute to their own education. Most significantly this Act also introduced the principle that fees could be charged for a specific type of postgraduate studies (specialised upgrading courses), though this was limited to students who were already in employment and quarantined those moving directly from undergraduate studies. No minimum cost was set and as local fee-paying students could be counted within the university's funded load, this meant that the institutions could claim both the fee and the federal funding allocated per

EFTSU (Equivalent Full Time Student Unit), an inducement for universities to pursue the fee-paying path.

The following years saw amendments to these parameters. In 1991 the need for prospective postgraduate students to be in employment was removed, while 1993 witnessed the prohibition of the imposition of fees for initial qualifications in teaching or nursing and a 20 per cent ceiling placed on local fee-paying students being counted in funded places.

## Further changes

In 1993 Labor's Minister for Employment, Education and Training, Kim Beazley, foreshadowed even more radical reforms to the funding formula for universities when he stated that 'higher education institutions will be free to charge fees for both coursework and research degrees and the level of fees charged will not be regulated' (Beazley 1993, p.35). Only initial teaching and nursing courses were again protected from fees. This principle came into force in 1994 and basically it deregulated the funding of all postgraduate programs.

The election of a Coalition federal government meant little change to the monetary problems for universities. The ruling parties initiated differential liabilities for HECS payments in 1998, introducing three bands of payment. Education was included in Band 1, which in 2000 involved an annual contribution of \$3463 for a full time course. It also removed the 20 per cent cap previously imposed on counting local fee-paying students as part of the university's student load, an additional incentive for higher education to increasingly apply fees to postgraduate coursework programs. Kemp (1997, p.14) espoused his government's philosophy when he stated 'this measure will create greater opportunities for study at university, and greater equity, as all potential higher education students will now be able to invest in themselves by purchasing a fee-paying place at university'. This contradicted the OECD Report (1997), which presented an overview of Australian government educational 'initiatives', that stated children from wealthy families were twice as likely to enrol in universities than those from lower socioeconomic groups.

## More income from fees

In the year 2000 universities could no longer count local fee-paying students as part of their HECS load and this thus 'eliminate (d) the...cross-subsidisation of fee-paying places at postgraduate level' (Kemp 1997, p.75). This was quite significant. Since tertiary institutions receive greater weighting,

that is higher financial reimbursement for research students, it is most likely that they will decide to move the remaining postgraduate HECS places to this area. The ramifications of this would be that postgraduate coursework programs are likely to be structured on a full cost recovery basis. The increasing reliance on the income derived from fee-paying postgraduate courses to enable the system to continue to function, is truly worrying. 1995 saw \$76.74 million recouped by this means, \$95.9 million in 1996 and a projected \$160.9 million in 2000 (Kemp 1997, p.5), an increase of 81 per cent over the 1996 figure. It is unlikely that either major political party will endeavour to reverse this lucrative trend if there is not some groundswell from the people it is negatively affecting.

The push for deregulation was also accompanied by a steady reduction in government spending on higher education phased in between 1997–2000. This amounted to a 6 per cent loss from the 1996 funding base. The Coalition advised the institutions to make adjustments to the reduced student load at the postgraduate coursework level. Smith (2000) maintains that this translated into a cut in HECS-liable funded places of 25,000 EFTSUs, the equivalent of closing a large Australian university. At the same time the government reneged on the 1993 agreement to contribute to tertiary salary increases, stating that they were 'not the employer of persons working in the higher education sector' (Vanstone 1996, p.35) and advising institutions to cover the gap by seeking additional monies from outside sources. Meyenn (1999) points out that education faculties are amongst the least likely to be able to supplement their incomes through such means. Several reports (Meyenn 1999, Ramsey 2000) make references to the generally low status which education faculties are accorded by other sectors of the universities. Their programs are viewed as expensive because of the essential teaching practicum and the fact that they are more vocationally oriented than many alternative higher degree studies.

**The risk to postgrad courses**

It follows that those institutions which are struggling financially may make education the scapegoat for future cutbacks and that the postgraduate coursework programs will be the target. There is little indication that this situation will alter. The decreasing federal investment in tertiary education appears to be a basic tenet of the current government's future plans (Kemp 1999) and although the Opposition has promised a review of the funding basis for universities, the details for this appear vague (Transcript of Insight Interview 2001).

It was in light of these developments that a research project was undertaken. Discussion with members of the literacy field provided anecdotal evidence as to the detrimental effect such policies were having on their professional development opportunities. The profession was eager to obtain hard data regarding such impacts.

**Research**

An Internet search revealed that in 2000 there were 13 universities across Australia offering 24 tagged postgraduate literacy programs at Certificate, Diploma or Master levels.

(Tagged means the nomenclature contains reference to the specialisation. Some delivered at multiple levels while others were restricted to one or two. In 2000, the following were offered:

- Certificate: 8 programs at 6 universities
- Diploma: 9 programs at 9 universities
- Master: 7 programs at 7 universities

An examination of the funding basis for these programs showed a steady move in the years 1996–2000 from HECS-based programs to dual mode (a limited number of HECS places and when these are filled, candidates are offered a full fee entrance) to full fees only. Table 2 illustrates the situation in the year 2000.

	Certificate	Diploma	Master
HECS	1	4	2
Dual	0	1	0
Fees	7	4	5

This data indicates the increasing shrinkage of HECS funded places in higher education in for the literacy field, which is generally characterised by short term contract or sessional employment conditions. As an already marginalised sector, there is little incentive for practitioners to pursue postgraduate studies to enhance their skills to meet the more complicated requirements of delivery.

An additional factor for concern is, of course, the cost of such programs. Resulting from the fact that each university is allowed to regulate its own fees, a range is charged across the various institutions. Table 3 demonstrates this and indicates where the majority is banded.

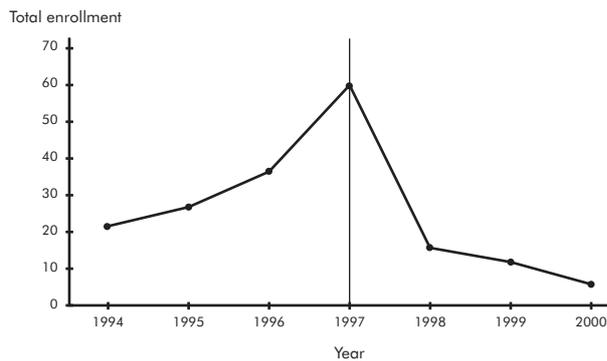
Certificate:	\$2,850–\$3,960 (majority \$3,000–\$3,200)
Diploma:	\$5,080–\$6,600 (majority \$6,000–\$6,600)
Master:	\$6,600–\$8,970 (majority \$6,600–\$6,800)

When it is noted that a full-time Certificate program is normally of one semester duration, a Diploma two and a Master three and contrast the above charges with the HECS annual payment of \$3463 (2000) for a full-time course, it would hardly be surprising if such rates did not impinge adversely on enrolment figures.

To ascertain what impact such policies were having, a national email questionnaire was developed, trialed and distributed for the period 1994–2000. It was deliberately targeted at course coordinators of literacy programs as it was believed that they would have personal interest in the

results. Responses received so far involved six universities offering 10 literacy programs. Although these numbers are not large, they can still provide some interesting indications.

Several of the initial returns appeared to confirm the working hypothesis of the negative influence of these federal policies. Figure 1 is an example. This university introduced their Postgraduate Certificate in Education (Adult Literacy and Numeracy) in 1994 and had a steady increase in enrolments until it peaked in 1997 with 60 participants. In 1997 (indicated by the vertical line) it was decided to adopt a dual mode of funding, moving their HECS places to other areas.



From 1998 to 2000 enrolments plummeted to five students, not a viable situation for the continuation of the program. In 2000 full fees were imposed with a cost for the Certificate amounting to \$3200 for a semester's study. From such cases a distinct causal relationship could be drawn between the mode of payment and the subsequent reduction in enrolments.

Subsequent questionnaire returns indicated that there were additional forces prevailing. These will be explored later in this paper. The institution depicted in Figure 2 commenced its Diploma in 1994 with 22 participants. This number dipped to 15 in the following year, rose back to 16 in 1996 but then fell steadily to a mere 1 in 2000. As this decline commenced prior to the 1997 announcement of an up front fee of \$5080, other variables were also influencing practitioners' decisions to embark on higher studies. Similar situations were reported by other institutions.

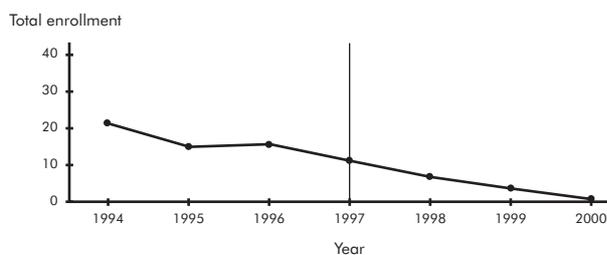
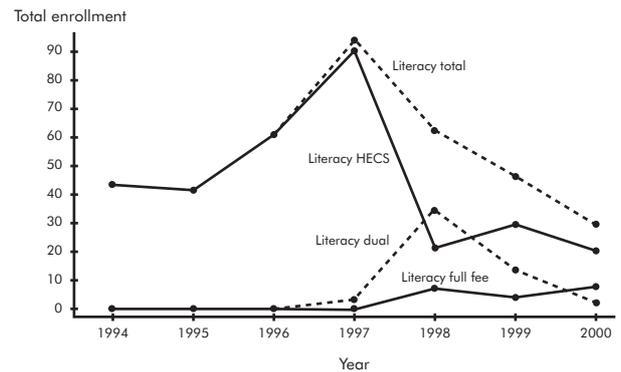


Figure 3 below summarises the total responses received from the national questionnaire regarding enrolments, as well as a breakdown of their associated funding basis for the period 1994–2000. It is notable that total enrolments peaked in 1997, the year when the first 1 per cent reduction in operating grants to universities came into operation and

when administrators were still, in many cases, considering their options. The disquieting total decline began in 1998, coinciding with the year when universities were forced to grapple with an additional 3 per cent cut in funds. Many followed the federal government's advice, referred to above, in either adopting dual or full-fee charges for postgraduate coursework programs. The fall in enrolments continued steadily over the years towards the end of the millennium, when the number of participants in the year 2000 represented approximately only one third of the 1997 level.



It must be pointed out that although there is a strong casual link between federal funding policies and the decline in enrolments, it would be inaccurate to attribute this as the sole reason. Other factors should also be considered.

#### Other variables which have impacted on enrolments

A survey of current research, government and educational reports, newspaper investigations and practitioner feedback indicated some of these.

The following is a brief highlight of the major areas:

#### Age of current teachers

It is widely acknowledged that education is an ageing profession. Crowley in 1998 reported that over 9682 teachers (4.3 per cent) in Australia were over 55 and that within 10 years (2008), approximately 42,000 current teachers (18.6 per cent) would be within this age bracket. She also pointed out that 'more teachers take early retirement than any other profession' (1998, p.240). It is understandable that this group would be unlikely to undertake higher studies, especially if it involved increased fiscal liability, without any monetary reimbursement.

Similarly, younger teachers exiting from initial training programs already face the repayment of their acquired HECS burden. Many are at that stage of their lives when they are contemplating permanent relationships, buying a house and establishing a financial base for future security. They too may be reluctant to assume any additional debt through participation in upgrading programs.

### Lack of incentives

Although classroom teachers commence on a relatively good salary, within nine years most have reached the top scale where they will remain until they decide to either retire or are promoted into administration. In fact, across Australia very few educational systems provide any salary increases for postgraduate studies. The Australian Council of Deans of Education succinctly summed up the situation when they stated 'in...1996 there were...about 20,000 teachers involved in graduate coursework programs... in an industry that provides no incentive in terms of salaries for people pursuing higher qualifications. These same people now are going to have to pay the equivalent of \$10,000 a year...They will simply not do it' (cited in Crowley 1998, p.224).

### Fluctuations in federal funding for the provision of local programs

It is logical that professions which rely largely on federal funds to deliver their local programs are at the whim of government policy. The impact of national decisions can be quite devastating. This occurred in mid-1996, when it was announced that all funds for Special Intervention Programs were frozen in Melbourne's Western Region. At a stroke, over 140 equivalent full-time positions in adult literacy and TESOL were summarily abolished (Riddell 1996). It took two months to claw back a minimum amount of funding but in that hiatus many of these teachers disappeared completely from the system. Such fluctuations in program funding and the short-term nature of the government-implemented tendering processes contribute to the insecurity felt within the—and to the increasing reliance on sessional work.

### Demoralisation

Compounding the situation is the general demoralisation of the teaching profession. The last seven years have seen the profession reeling from unprovoked attacks and increased pressures on provision.

Crowley (1998) refers to the often vocal teacher-bashing that emanates from politicians has impacted on teacher morale. The Federal Minister, Dr David Kemp, blamed teachers for the low literacy and numeracy levels across Australia, while the Victorian Liberal Premier, Jeff Kennett's infamous statement, that teachers have 'never done a day's work in their lives', are prime examples of this.

Recent years have also witnessed heightened demands placed on teachers, resulting in extended hours of work, usually unpaid. Submissions to the 2000 Ramsey Teacher Review commented on the growing complexity of the teacher's role, including such things as greater public scrutiny, the need to grapple with changing technologies, a crowded curriculum and a wider range of student academic abilities and behavioural problems, the latter the result of 'inclusion' policies.

### Implications of findings

It has been established that postgraduate local enrolments

in literacy programs have reduced dramatically since 1997. Although federal funding policy shifts are not the sole cause, it is clear that the move by higher education to an environment marked by full fees is a strong disincentive for potential candidates. The viability of such programs is seriously under scrutiny by university administrators who are coping with reduced finances and greater accountability. One program coordinator remarked 'we were forced to go full fee, despite making all the arguments (against it). Suicidal, but all they see is dollar signs'.

### Conclusion

This paper has outlined recent federal government funding policy changes for higher education and indicated the implications of these for the functioning of Australian public universities and on potential candidates for postgraduate coursework study. It then discussed the results of a national survey aimed at ascertaining the range of tagged adult postgraduate programs offered in the field of literacy, the funding basis upon which they rest and the variation in costs imposed for fee-paying places. It clearly established that there has been a critical decline in enrolments in the field for these programs since 1997, but concluded that deregulation was not the sole cause for these falling numbers, though a decided factor in the equation. Other variables that impinge on this situation were indicated for consideration. Two facts are clear: the future for the enhanced professionalism of teachers in the literacy field appears grim and that data suggests that 'up front fees have a cancerous influence...in public education' Clark in Woolf and Quarmly 1999, p.iv).

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awareness that words are made up of smaller segments, or phonemes. For example, p-i-n has three phonemes. It is an oral skill, which is communicated via writing. Students who have the ability to hear sounds and manipulate or play with them, have a lighter cognitive load.

Research shows that the absence of phonological awareness is the major cause of reading failure. In reading, units of print must correspond with units of sound. With PA reading becomes a of being able to work out unknown, unseen words rather than relying on word memory.

Phonic decoding plus whole word teaching should work in harmony. The 'Look, Cover, Write, Say, Check' method relies on the visual and auditory memory. Adults who struggle with reading need to develop or redevelop phonological awareness and phonological processing skills. These include manipulation of sounds—blending/sorting/selecting, and the ability to attach a visual form to sounds (words).

For many students phonic strategies are overdone, and each word is sounded out causing overload on the working memory and the tracking of meaning or content of the text is lost. As PA develops students are encouraged to break the text into meaningful chunks, to skim and scan rather than decode each individual word. PA is the vital ingredient in reading. It frees the student's memory load, and brings confidence and enjoyment and encourages a positive attitude to the task.

**How do you develop the other ingredients to reading: that is the semantic and syntactic strategies, with this learner group?**

In teaching reading we want the reader not only to be able to decode but to gain meaning from the text, this involves comprehension skills. Comprehension skills involve working

memory, the reader's knowledge and prediction about the subject, and also syntax.

**Syntax**

Words change meaning according to the sentence structure. The word 'stand' used in the sentence 'stand still' has a different meaning from the word 'stand' in the sentence 'I work in the big stand at the football'.

Students need explicit teaching with repeated practice and positive feedback about their performance. Modelling of both oral and written activities is important to extend word knowledge and understanding. These could include cloze exercises, grammar dictation or games of sentence completion or extension.

**Prior knowledge**

Some students automatically use this skill while others need to be taught. This is the ability to use and integrate old knowledge with new information. A reader can assist this process by asking questions mentally—what/why who/when, and so on. Clarification, prediction and identification of main ideas, are also part of this self-checking and self-questioning skill. Another strategy is for the student to imagine they are in the story, to visualise the scene.

**Working memory**

Working memory is the ability to hold onto and keep the thread of a story or a conversation. This ability to concentrate and maintain the thread, while manipulating sounds, words, sentences and paragraphs, is vital in reading comprehension. Strategies to improve this skill include rereading, summarising, story mapping and writing notes.

I find that with this group of students teaching needs to be specific, repetitious, organised but mostly fun!

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# Community and connectedness: a review of the inaugural ACEWEB e-conference, 2001

by Dale Pobega

**With electronic conferencing (e-conferencing) is there still a place for the good old face-to-face meeting? Of course there is!**

'Community, after all, is how we begin to learn, how we become what we are. An Internet community not only clears the ground for learning about itself, but also clears the ground for learning about its members and other things such as language development'. (Ann Parsons, Enabling Support Foundation (USA), keynote chat, ACEWEB e-conference, 2001)

I would like to have had 'a virtual camcorder'—the sort of object available in Ann Parson's Grassroots MOO<sup>1</sup>—to film the action and capture the sense of energy generated at the inaugural ACEWEB e-conference held on the TAFE Virtual Campus from October 22–25.

Twenty seven online workshops were held across the four days of the e-conference with morning, afternoon and evening sessions attended by 300 conference participants from around Australia. Participants and presenters also logged in from Israel, the USA, the UK and Thailand. Transcripts of all e-conference sessions can be found at

The event capped off a year of professional development which I had been conducting with seven Adult Community Education (ACE) providers from metropolitan and rural Victoria as a part of the ACEWEB Cluster Project—the cluster project scheme being a relatively new strategy by Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE) to form ACE providers into 'collectives' where activities promoting collaborative educational provision and professional development are facilitated. The seven providers who made up the cluster presented net-based projects they had been developing over the year and also hosted sessions by other ACE practitioners.

A number of practitioners from the ACENET Flexible Learning Network and E Learning Communities Flexible Learning Networks also presented several workshops testifying to the significant increase in expertise in the area of flexible delivery across these two ACE-based organisations, especially in the areas of English Language, Literacy and Numeracy. ACENET and E Learning Communities provided a boost to the e-conference by contributing much needed administration and systems support by way of time release of its managers.

## Overview and keynote

There were also practitioners from other flexible learning networks other than the two mentioned above, Non-

Government Organisations, TAFE colleges and private industry who presented on an amazing variety of topics ranging across such areas as disability, literacy and language, working with seniors, adult VCE, languages other than English, ACE teacher training online, genealogy and family history writing on the WWW, vocational education and training and the Internet as a source for 're-democratising' politics.

The keynote presentation and paper entitled, '...' was delivered by Ann Parsons from the US-based Enabling Support Foundation. She related her own story as a blind person working in the educational field. Ann's story was a moving one and placed a strong emphasis on the power of virtual environments, especially MOO, to foster valuable communities of belonging and educational innovation.

In her paper Ann argued:

'(In a community)...Those who look or act different are still rejected and forced to play the role of the outsider, the marginal community member. Immigrants get the most offensive and heaviest labour. Persons with physical disabilities are unemployed or underemployed. Kids with learning disabilities find themselves rejected by schools and family and turn to crime and a life of scrounging and scratching. Persons of colour find themselves rejected because they do not look like the dominant members of the culture. This segregation of the different is a fact of life in all communities except in one arena, that of the virtual community' (ACEWEB e-conference proceedings,

).

ACE practitioners had no problems relating to what Ann had to say about the marginalised groups she has been working with for the last decade or more—in her case, online within text-based virtual realities. The last point, however, about virtual community being exceptional and necessarily more inclusive, needs some interrogation.

My experience of being a member of several 'online communities' leads me to conclude that social and 'class' hierarchies in environments like MOO are at best based on what I would call a 'meritocracy of skill'. All participants enter these communities at 'player level' and can only make

their way up the social hierarchy (from player to builder to programmer and wizard) by demonstrating constant skill development and application. Grassroots, the community to which both Ann and I belong, is very receptive to those who wish to develop skills and establish educational projects. It has a loose governmental structure, is very welcoming of newcomers to the community and provides lots of opportunities for teachers and students to develop skills quickly. Other MOO communities, however, operate like fiefdoms. Democratic structures are almost non-existent. Community policy is decided totally by one or two wizards (the upper class) who maintain the server and 'oversee' the community. Advancing in those communities, more often involves currying favour with the one or two individuals who rule rather than gaining social power by demonstrated application of skill and enthusiasm or by showing capacity to collaborate with others productively.

Communities that form around mailing lists, Internet relay chat, bulletin board services and other sorts of Internet forums are similarly characterised by power relations in which the most active members often control the discourse and even censor those who raise issues which challenge the ruling group in some way. There is extensive research literature (see references) to support this and almost anyone who has participated in some kind of Internet forum for some time will have witnessed it first hand.

Ann also provided some interesting perspectives on difference, fear, peace and communication in response to a variety of panel member questions:

**Delia Bradshaw:** On a broader scale, Ann, how do you see online communication contributing to a sense of global peace and citizenship, particularly right now, in these times of uncertainty and fear?

**Ann Parsons:** The more we talk with each other and discover that we are really not so different from each other at all, the better chance we have for global peace and understanding...Fear comes from not knowing or from misunderstood ideas or from prejudice. It is dispelled by communication with those you fear...for example, many people are afraid of persons who are blind. Somehow, they think that if they associate with us, they will themselves become blind, or they figure that blindness is such a horrible thing, that someone who experiences it, cannot be at all like them.

**Michael Gwyther:** Yes, we often underplay the immense learning benefits from communicating, as opposed to accessing course content.

**Dale Pobega:** Good point! That fear of the disabled is so palpable in so-called real life (Please note: In order to manage the large number of people present in the chat room, a panel of ACE practitioners held a dialogue with Ann for the first half hour of the session and then opened up questions from the floor).

### Accessibility issues

Some accessibility issues for blind and visually-impaired people wanting to use the TAFE VC were identified. For example, the front-end design needs to allow synthesisers to decode HTML. This has been conveyed to the TAFE VC development team and I understand that they are undertaking a redevelopment of the TAFE VC portal in 2002 with accessibility issues being addressed as part of the review. Our keynote speaker, Ann Parsons, had a great deal of trouble getting to the scheduled session on the TAFE Virtual Campus. The lack of adequate HTML design at the front end of the Virtual Campus presented problems for Ann's synthesiser to decode (due mainly to the lack of 'alt tagging' of images and image buttons as well as over reliance on Java scripting for navigation). Secondly, Ann needed to use a sighted reader to do her typing into the Java-based chat room client which is part of the Canadian-based 'Web Course Tools' (WEBCT) package chosen by TAFEVC for course delivery purposes.

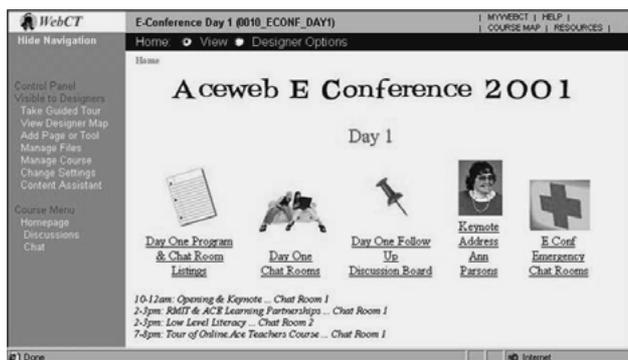
The accessibility issue was of valid concern to those practitioners attending with the blind or sight-impaired and one wonders how a product such as WEBCT

can be fully embraced when it fails the most important accessibility test of all—that of blind practitioners and students themselves. The TAFE VC development team advises, however, that WEBCT 3.6, the recently released version of WEBCT, complies with accessibility requirements outlined in Section 508 of the American Disabilities Act. The TAFE VC is currently using version 3.5.2 and is investigating an upgrade.

At present, blind students cannot access all of WEBCT's inbuilt tools due to the over reliance of the package on Java scripting. WEBCT is being strongly promoted through the VET sector across Australia as an easy-to-use 'delivery solution' for teachers. The package is indeed very flexible and straightforward for most teachers and students to use, but its Canadian authors and overly enthusiastic clients need to look closer at the issue of accessibility to avoid the exclusion of actual and potential student users.

### Designing the virtual e-conference environment

With that said, the WEBCT package did show itself very adaptable from a design point of view for creating a virtual conference environment which could cater to the needs of most (albeit 'sighted') participants. The environment I created consisted of a number of 'WEBCT conference day shells' linked from a central 'entrance shell or foyer' where participants logged on. WebCT Chat was used as the main conferencing tool and logs of all sessions were kept and posted to a discussion board dedicated to each session presented across the four days. A mailing list generously set up by community-based Internet Service Provider, Yarranet, was used to send out 'e-conference news flashes', session updates, pre-readings and browsing details for sessions as well as housekeeping details.



## Language and literacy highlights

I cannot describe or showcase all of the sessions presented at the e-conference within the confines of this article, but what will perhaps be of greatest interest to the readers of *Journal of Adult English Language and Literacy Education* are the number of presentations that were dedicated to exploring issues to do with English language, literacy and technology.

Michael Chalk, presenting on behalf of RMIT and ACE Learning Partnerships Flexible Learning Network, guided participants through a number of fascinating web-based materials produced by teachers for English as a Second Language (ESL) students.

Michael also raised issues of design, appropriateness of some materials and time management concerns regarding the introduction of net-based resources into the ALBE and ESL classroom:

**Michael Chalk:** Another issue in making online materials for ESL classes in ACE, for example, is fitting the lesson into a two-hour slot.

**Dale Pobega:** Yes.

**Dale Pobega:** So little time and it means organising week to week activities that have some sense of continuity I suppose.

**Michael Chalk:** You have your text, or topic, a few

activities that individuals do with the machine, then you want to have an online discussion phase as well.

**Dale Pobega:** Yes, and you can't spend the whole two hours on the computer—that would be very irresponsible.

**Michael Chalk:** Yes, it could lend well to project work between groups in different locations, so that people have a more genuine reason to be chatting online.

**Michael Chalk:** My favourite way of reading texts with an ESL group is actually to read it together on paper, in a circle, before getting anywhere near the machine.

**Michael Chalk:** Well, several spring to mind...time to search online before class, funding for teacher-learning time, technical issues such as getting access that works for your class...One of the best sessions at the e-conference was Lynne Matheson's, 'Creative Ways of Working Online with Low Level Literacy and Language Learners'. Lynne shared a number of sites and teaching ideas including the use of Power Point to create group-authored online readers for students. She talked about the various stages teachers need to pass through on their journey towards becoming confident online practitioners:

**Lynne Matheson:** With each new stage in your online learning there is that sense of fear and challenges to overcome. We need to remember this for our students too.

**Lynne Matheson:** It is important to have an understanding of where you are and where you would like to be and what you need to do to get there. After considering your own skills think about those of your students. When planning activities you can think about what level of support is needed and how you can challenge them to become more autonomous learners.

**Lynne Matheson:** I like to think of the collaborative learning model where you aim to develop a community of learners and that using computers and the Internet becomes a natural and integrated part of language and literacy learning.

When reading the e-conference session 'logs' on ACEWEB, the sense of excitement, energy—and in cases wild humour—which characterised many of the online workshops, seems to be missing. Perhaps the situation is not very different to the exhilaration one sometimes experiences attending a good face-to-face-conference as opposed to reading conference proceedings in isolation from the event.

It is near impossible to recreate the sense of personal interaction around the presentation of sessions that were buzzing with participant input and debate. Conferences are often most valuable for the socialising and networking which takes place around the official presentations and workshops. This conference was a good example with follow-up messages being posted by participants to one another on discussion boards and lots of swapping of email addresses in chat rooms.

### How effective is e-conferencing?

Is it likely that e-conferences will replace face to face-conferences as effective and serious forums for exchange of ideas, professional development and learning? Depending on the choice of synchronous and asynchronous media deployed, the communication challenge is in itself less of a problem than many people would imagine. The following issues, however, need to be taken into careful consideration:

- a) Ensuring good, simple, accessible design of a virtual environment which caters to participants with varying skill levels and familiarity with online media such as chat, discussion boards, mailing lists. Keeping the environment and structure simple means having organisational and design staff who are highly skilled and sensitive to the issue of participant skill levels and capacity to cope in an online environment.
- b) Organisation and administration. There is as much organisation involved, if not more, than organising a face-to-face conference. Logins for each individual need to be created, allocation of individuals to various parts of the environment and mailing lists needs to be done, clear instructions on how to access the environment need to be prepared and distributed, and lots of subsequent email communication and trouble shooting needs to be done between participants and organisers/administrators.

Apart from this, the organisers must have ready access to servers on which the environment is based as well as ease of communication with server/ISP technical support staff. There is also lots of communication and preparation that needs to be done between the organisers, presenters and chat hosts, to ensure smooth delivery of sessions. There is follow up that also needs to be done such as collecting and posting of logs, replying to bulletin board postings, fielding questions and pushing messages to participants about housekeeping issues via email.

- c) Backup strategies. What will you do if the technology fails on the day? ACEWEB was in a fortunate situation of having an alternative platform of chat rooms and boards to use if the WebCT, or parts of it, failed to operate. This is perhaps the area in which face-to-face conferencing has obvious advantages.

Small organisations like VALBEC should not, however, be deterred from considering e-conferencing options as a part of their activities. E-conferencing can complement face to face-conference and professional development events, if organised, in the first instance, on a modest scale. For example, publishing key note addresses and organising 'a keynote speaker chat' for remotely located members—or for those who cannot afford registration fees—is an inclusive gesture that can also be used as a promotional tool as part of a membership drive. E-conferencing components can be grown as experience and expertise in such endeavours increases. Such activities also provide an organisation such

as VALBEC which is, after all, dedicated to promoting literacies—electronic and print-based—with a forward-looking image

In conclusion, what the e-conference did prove to many participants (many of whom had never experienced a virtual event of this kind before) was that an online conference provides a valuable channel for exchange in the conventional manner plus a significant bonus—all interaction is recorded and made available for reference and research later on via logs, discussion board postings and email list messages which can be kept (or discarded). Feedback also seems to suggest the valuable sense of 'connectedness' participants experience online.

I leave you with one participant's feedback which I hope conveys to readers who could not attend, the excitement and valuable professional development which occurred:

My participation in the workshops over the past four days has been inspirational and very empowering to say the least. It has reinforced my view that effective online adult education is not merely dependent upon individual learning but rather the collective experience.

It is this 'connectedness' that makes our quest for knowledge so worthwhile and facilitates the educational process as a vital collaborative learning enterprise.

My heartfelt thanks to D. for inviting me to come along and together with M. for their unfailing courage, guidance and support throughout my journey from 'online observer' to 'online participant'. Special thanks also to each and every one of you for enabling me to experience citizenship and online sight. My pulse rate hasn't come down since we first met on Day One, as evidenced by the fact that I am supposed to be studying for my end of year law exams and not writing this postscript at the ungodly hour of 3.30 am!

As to the guest speakers thank you for your thorough preparation and free sharing of ideas. I am hopeful that your good practices will inspire others involved in the delivery of adult education, to realise the importance of forging new alliances across the multidisciplinary educational community. Your commitment and innovative programs will teleport online users to a magical journey as they learn and play on virtual flying carpets.

Funding bodies will also one day realise that the long term benefits of collaborative online learning cannot be resourced at basement prices if they are to remain economically viable in our rapidly changing hi-tech global market.

I salute the 2001 ACEWEB e-conference for its breath of fresh air.

**Dale Pobega manages ACEWEB, a site for Adult Community Education in Australia, <http://www.yarranet.net.au/aceweb>**

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# Seeing is believing: interpreting for Deaf students in tertiary education

by Janis Knuckey and Teresa Cumpston Bird

**Before the 1992 Disability Discrimination Act, few Deaf<sup>1</sup> students were able to gain a tertiary education. Today, a shortage of Auslan interpreters means education institutions are employing unqualified people with varying degrees of proficiency, raising questions about Deaf students' equality of education.**

## Historical context

For Deaf people in Australia, interpreting services grew from welfare services provided by Deaf Societies and was paid for with Government funding and money raised through charity. Usually the welfare services would 'speak for' the Deaf person and Deaf people themselves had very limited interaction with the various institutions (Ozolins & Bridge, 1999). The welfare officers provided both welfare and interpreting support.

The break away from a welfare model of interpreting for Deaf people started in the 1960s with a move to differentiate between the roles of the welfare officer and the interpreter. In early 1982, the then Victorian Deaf Society organised for the National Accreditation Authority of Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) to place sign language interpreting on its register of languages for accreditation for interpreting. By the late 1980s interpreters were paid a fee to provide interpreting services.

## Interpreting in tertiary education

Prior to the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) it was almost unheard of for a Deaf student to utilise an interpreter in their tertiary education. This meant that Deaf Auslan users rarely obtained an education beyond that gained at the special schools for the Deaf. Prior to the 1992 Disability Discrimination Act, post-secondary education in Australia was inaccessible to Deaf people (Byers, 1982; Winn, 1986, in Burnip, 1989; Mitchell, 1986). Any Deaf student who did attend tertiary education usually did so because of strong parental support and any help by individual schoolteachers of the Deaf, usually via the Visiting Teacher Service. The few signing Deaf who did attempt further education most commonly used the apprenticeship system and often did not gain full accreditation because they were unable to complete the theoretical side of their apprenticeship.

Since the introduction of the DDA (1992) it is now a well accepted practice to provide Auslan interpreters to enable Deaf students to access tertiary education. Auslan interpreters have their own professional body, the Australian Sign Language

Interpreters Association (ASLIA) and are qualified at the para-professional or professional level. The accreditation body is the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) which accredits all spoken language interpreters.

## The interpreting process in tertiary education

Many questions and issues remain in relation to whether Deaf students who use interpreters to access tertiary education are actually receiving an education equal to their hearing peers. The interpreter's involvement raises issues relating to the interpreting process as well as individual characteristics of the interpreters themselves.

Educating a Deaf person in a hearing context via an interpreter is unique. In no other educational setting are the concepts and the language of instruction, as well as classroom interaction, filtered through a third party who may or may not be familiar with the subject content. In no other educational setting do the teacher and learner have direct communication and contact, thus rendering it difficult for the teacher to directly assess gaps in the student's learning process.

To understand the dynamics of educational interpreting it is necessary to understand the interpreting process itself. This is a process whereby meaning (words or signs) is taken in the original language (source language) rapidly deconstructed to its conceptual meaning and then just as rapidly reconstructed into meaning (words or signs) in the second language or 'target language' (Fishberg, 1986). This is a process of approximating meaning between two languages; by definition, it is imprecise. This is due to the swiftness by which the process must occur as well as due to the nature of imprecision between any two given languages and cultures. This is true for both spoken and signed language. We are all well aware of the phrase 'it lost something in the translation' by which we mean that what had made sense in the source language no longer conveys sense in the target language.

Auslan is not a visual representation of English, but rather a language in and of itself (Branson & Miller, 1991). This fact is often confusing to people who assume that because Auslan

Deaf Auslan users rarely obtained an education beyond that gained at the special schools for the Deaf

is occurring in a country in which the majority spoken language is English, it somehow represents English. This is most definitely not the case. This is supported by the fact that the sign languages of Australia, England, Ireland, the USA, New Zealand and South Africa, all English speaking countries, are separate and distinct from each other (Bellugi, 1989). It is perhaps useful to consider that a sign represents a concept in the same way as a word represents a concept.

A sign does not represent an English word. In fact, it is possible for an Auslan user to know a sign and have no idea what the corresponding English word(s) might be. The job of an interpreter is to find the corresponding meanings between two languages.

It is further the interpreter's role to convey the emotional and non-verbal content of any given spoken/signed text. In accordance with their code of ethics<sup>2</sup>, an interpreter must complete this process as faithfully and completely as possible. They are not in a position to edit or correct text as this would breach the code of ethics. They are not permitted to alter the conceptual meaning of the text. The other major tenet of the code of ethics is confidentiality regarding personal details of all parties involved as well as the text content. Adherence to these strict professional boundaries is to engender an environment where all parties involved may feel able to speak freely.

### Characteristics of an interpreter

The characteristics of an interpreter also form an important aspect of the dynamics. To be a successful interpreter it is necessary to have a number of personal attributes as well as professional qualifications. A person able to successfully render an accurate and appropriate interpretation needs to have:

- excellent concentration skills
- well developed short and long term memory
- the ability to accurately extract meaning from text
- the ability to think rapidly and laterally and
- the ability to shift between a number of tasks nearly simultaneously.

To summarise, the ability is to 'multitask'. An interpreter is much more than a person who is bilingual. Only some people who are bilingual possess the skills necessary to become successful interpreters (Grosjean, 1997). In addition to these skills, a successful interpreter needs to be well educated and well informed in a broad range of subject and topic areas. Whilst specifically noting legal interpreting, the following is applicable to all levels of interpreting including educational interpreting:

The better the educational level of the interpreter, the more exposure they have to (legal) interpreting and the better their knowledge of Australian and (foreign legal systems), the more accurate their interpreting is likely to be (Taylor, 1994, p.118).

“ an interpreter  
is  
much more  
than a person  
who is  
bilingual ”

The interpreter will be working hard to ensure the full participation of the Deaf student in the classroom. But for all of this effort, is it successful? How does going through a third party impact on, even interfere with or limit the learning process? What is the impact of the interpreter becoming the language model? Who is actually teaching the student; the teacher or the interpreter? These are all questions that need to be addressed.

### Training issues for educational interpreters

If an interpreter does not possess these personal and educational attributes there will be an inequitable and unjust outcome. The Deaf person(s) for whom they interpret will be held back not by their own limits, but by the limits of their interpreter. This concern is a worldwide one held by many members of the international Deaf community (Cluver: 1991). As more and more Deaf people are achieving in high levels of education, finding appropriately qualified interpreters able to work at that level becomes increasingly more difficult (Ozolins and Bridge, 1999).

In Australia there is 'no stipulation that interpreters in tertiary (or school) education must be NAATI qualified' (Ozolins and Bridge, 1999). Training for an NAATI para-professional in Auslan interpreter is through a part time TAFE diploma course. The bulk of educational interpreters are para-professional level. (Centre of Excellence for Students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing, 2000). Currently there is no course to attain NAATI professional level interpreter. Most Australian interpreters working in tertiary education do not have additional tertiary qualifications themselves because it is neither an expected nor necessary part of gaining NAATI accreditation (Centre of Excellence for Students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing, 2000).

### Issues for interpreters and Deaf students in tertiary education

Educational interpreting is one of the fastest growing areas of interpreting for Deaf people. Increasing numbers of Deaf people are seeking tertiary education but the actual provision and meeting of the interpreter's needs still varies from state to state. The resulting lack of policies and planning leaves the educational interpreter vulnerable to the attitudes and forces of any particular institution (Ozolins & Bridge, 1999).

There is a chronic and ongoing serious shortage of educational interpreters in Victoria (Centre of Excellence for Students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing, 2000; Final Report of the Statewide Consultation on Disability Support Services for Deaf and Hearing Impaired People, 1995) and anecdotal evidence shows a similar shortage in other states and territories. The demand is likely to increase rather than decrease. (Ozolins & Bridge, 1999). Many tertiary education institutions are forced to employ unaccredited and unqualified 'interpreters'. These people can be friends of the Deaf students or other people who have completed or partially completed Auslan language acquisition courses and

there are many concerns of the capabilities of these people to interpret effectively. Ozolins and Bridge (1999), argue that this actually is a barrier to the Deaf community because it 'serves to endorse an inequitable system which undermines the cultural and linguistic achievements and aspirations of the Deaf community' (p.50). Ozolins and Bridge (1999) also state that in actual fact no access is better than poor access because if messages are misinterpreted and communication breaks down, the Deaf person is the one who appears to be less intelligent and less capable, not the interpreter.

Auslan interpreters are employed as sessional staff within the majority of tertiary education institutions in Australia. This could be the main reason for the current serious and ongoing shortage. Interpreters find they simply cannot make a sufficient wage for their daily living expenses and may leave the interpreting profession to find other, full time ongoing employment. Other industrial issues, such as lack of support, no provision for professional development and poor recognition of their qualifications, expertise and role by other staff within the institute are all factors which are adding to the current situation (Centre of Excellence for Students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing, 2000). This may be leaving many Deaf students with inequalities of access to tertiary education.

### Conclusion

Interpreting as a profession has grown from a social welfare model to fully qualified professional interpreters, accredited through the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters. There are increasing numbers of Deaf students who use interpreters in tertiary education to access their courses but there is little research to investigate the impact of the interpreting process on the student's learning process and the impact of the teacher's ability to relate to and assess the student. Due to a current chronic shortage of interpreters, tertiary education institutions are employing unqualified people with varying degrees of proficiency in signing to interpret. This raises questions about Deaf students' equality of education. Deaf people are not only entitled to an education equal to their hearing peers, they are guaranteed it under the Disability Discrimination Act. Further research is urgently required to explore the impact on the use of an interpreter as an education vehicle as well as to address strategies to ensure highly qualified interpreters are used in tertiary education and these interpreters employed find it rewarding enough to stay in the profession.

**Janice Knuckey is coordinator of the Centre of Excellence for Students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (NMIT).**

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Interpreters  
find they  
simply cannot  
make a  
sufficient wage  
for their daily  
living  
expenses

### Notes

1. This article follows the accepted norm of capitalisation of 'Deaf' to indicate those people who use a sign language and identify as members of a Deaf community (Ozolins & Bridge, 1999; Woodward, 1972; Power, 1992).

2. The Code of Ethics is published by the Australian Sign Language Interpreter's Association (ASLIA).

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# Foreign Correspondence

Mark Merrell describes developments in the new nation to Australia's north.



Following the election of the first democratic assembly in the history of the country on August 30, East Timor looks forward to full independence in May 2002. However, many people are restricted in their access to information, since an estimated 45 per cent of men and 60 per cent of women are illiterate. Many of the women in this group are over the age of 40. They never had the opportunity to go to primary school, since under the Portuguese—who ruled the country prior to 1975—primary education was limited to a tiny minority. In fact, at that time the rate of illiteracy was a staggering 90 per cent.

In response to that situation, in December 1974 activists in the FRETILIN party launched a literacy campaign using the Paolo Freire method. It was in October 1975 that Indonesia invaded and launched a brutal occupation and campaign of genocide that resulted in an estimated 200,000 deaths. FRETILIN literacy work continued in areas that remained free of Indonesian control.

After the vote for independence in August 1999, militias organised by the Indonesian army went on a spree of killing and destruction and 90 per cent of facilities in the education sector were destroyed. In response to this disaster, in the period since October 1999, the United Nations (UN) transitional government has prioritised rehabilitation of school buildings and provision of furniture and textbooks for the education sector. The UN has been criticised by civil society organisations (CSOs) for failing to mobilise the population to take action to support basic education for children and adults. However, the government has argued that given the acute shortage of capable and experienced staff at its disposal it has no choice but to put physical rehabilitation first.

In the field of adult literacy and community education, CSOs have taken the lead. However, coordination is weak between CSOs and between the government and CSOs. When a donor (the funding body) mission led by the World Bank arrived in East Timor in November 2001 to devise a medium term strategy for education, including literacy, civil society organisations were not informed of the event.

The government's efforts in this area focus on a literacy program in the Portuguese language supported by the Brazilian government. The program promotes literacy in

Portuguese, although only 11 per cent of the population speak Portuguese. It should be noted that there is a consensus among leading political parties of the need to promote Portuguese as the official language of the new nation. Of course, under Indonesian rule, bahasa Indonesia was the official language and it is now spoken by 67 per cent of the population. Civil society organisations argue that the Indonesian language remains important as a means of democratic participation.

The women's organisations, OMT (Organisacao Mulheres Timorese) and OPMT (Organisacao Popular de Mulheres Timorese) are the most active CSOs in literacy. They run groups in about half of the districts in East Timor. Some of the women coordinators and facilitators have experience of the FRETILIN literacy work that started in 1975. In Bobonaro district in the west, OMT runs 27 groups—this may be the most active area.

These organisations receive assistance from UNICEF and Oxfam in the form of financial resources and training support. OMT and OPMT teach literacy in local languages, predominantly Tetun, which is spoken by more than 80 per cent of the population. There has been no proper evaluation of this work, but the groups tend to be well supported because the facilitators are local activists who are known and trusted by the community.

Family ties are important to the cohesion of the groups (of course this can also lead to exclusion of outsiders). Also, the groups meet at suitable times according to the needs of the community. The facilitators tend to rely on the methods learned under Indonesian rule. They begin by teaching the names of the letters of the alphabet, then proceed to introducing syllables. Eventually, participants learn how to write their names. OMT and OPMT are actually in a state of flux at the moment due to the political transformations going on in the country—new local organisations are emerging from their membership.

In addition, there are several small-scale projects run by local NGOs. These organisations were formed by independence activists and draw their membership from the student community. In the tradition of Paolo Freire, they promote literacy in local languages as part of the process of empowering local communities. Members of these organisations attended a training event in popular education methods in Brazil earlier this year, funded by the Brazilian government. On their return, they proposed the creation of an East Timor Popular Education Network. However, the network has yet to be activated due to the extraordinary multiple demands being made on a small number of organisations that have the capacity to undertake educational, research and advocacy activities in East Timor. One example of those demands is the fact that CSOs are

currently participating in the process of deciding the constitution for their independent nation. Nevertheless, it will probably be only a matter of time before the Popular Education Network is established. For the moment, shared learning on methodology is limited.

Participation in literacy groups is one aspect of the revolution in women's lives since the Indonesian army and militia left East Timor. At a village on the border with West Timor one facilitator at a literacy circle remarked that for 25 years women had been unable to leave their homes to meet together for fear of the violence they would face.

### Oxfam's REFLECT project

This year, Oxfam has introduced the REFLECT active learning methodology to a group of 20 women facilitators.

Adults can learn to read and write when the words they use are their own. This is the starting point for the REFLECT literacy learning process that Oxfam explored with the women's organisations OPMT and OMT at a workshop in East Timor in March this year. The 20 women who participated now facilitate literacy circles in six districts and the island of Atauro.

The REFLECT approach (developed by Action Aid in the early 90s) is currently being used in more than 30 countries. An international network of practitioners called the Circle of International REFLECT Action and Communication (CIRAC) has been established.

REFLECT combines two processes—literacy and empowerment. It fuses the social theories of Paolo Freire with the participatory techniques of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). It also draws on the conceptual framework of gender analysis. Action Aid Bangladesh shared their seven year experience of REFLECT with Oxfam to prepare the East Timor pilot project and sent a facilitator to the March workshop.

REFLECT is a structured but flexible approach that is shaped according to people's specific needs. Therefore, one of the aims of the workshop was to 'use the knowledge and abilities of participants so that the REFLECT method can be adapted to the East Timor situation'. Several of the women who attended the REFLECT workshop had been active in the FRETILIN literacy programs of the 1970s. They were delighted to recognise the continuities between REFLECT and Freire and were enthusiastic about the new possibilities opened up by the use of graphics and the introduction of gender analysis.

The basic method used in REFLECT learning activities, and derived from PRA, is to make visual materials through collaborative group work. The first item made at the East Timor workshop was a map of the local community. Working in small groups, participants began by making a map on the ground using sticks and stones. The facilitator encouraged the participants to talk about the significance of the things shown. Then the participants designed symbols for the items on the map. The facilitator introduced words to go with the symbols and a key was created. It was then possible to transfer



the map onto a sheet of paper. The participants copied the map and the key into their exercise books. The words could be broken up into component syllables for use as building blocks to make more words.

In the workshop, participants were introduced to other group work activities that involved the production of visual materials. Participants produced a graph showing the work done by women and men in a 24 hour period; a calendar showing the illnesses prevalent at different times of the year; and a timeline showing important events in East Timor's history. In each case the sequence was the same: first the participants drew pictures, then designed symbols, finally the facilitator introduced a word to describe the symbol.

Oxfam is very aware that the process of introducing an active learning methodology is a challenging one for all concerned. The current facilitators tend to fall back on the methods they are familiar with from their own schooling. The degree of participation in the groups varies and there is a need to clarify the different motivations that literacy participants have and modify the program in order to meet them. This means that the women's organisations will also need to reflect on their own aims.

With all this in mind, Oxfam is now working with the women who attended the workshop in their communities to assist them with the literacy circles. It is a process of learning by doing for everyone involved. Our hope is that this small-scale pilot project will produce a pool of skilled facilitators who can train others in REFLECT and a set of learning activities that are appropriate for local communities.

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# Open Forum

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

**The false distinction between adult community and further education and the broader vocational and training system is counter-productive. As Rosa McKenna writes, cooperation with RTOs who deliver qualifications through training packages will deliver more access and equity than the old models on which accredited curricula are based.**

The 2001 Spring edition of *Journal of Adult English Language and Literacy Education* contained a number of articles on the theme of accreditation. In the editorial one question asked was, 'how far have we moved in the 'framed, accredited and certified' debate?' I would like to take up this debate in the context of discussing the location of literacy and numeracy in the re-accreditation of the CGEA and the Australian Quality Training Framework.

It seems to me that we have a national system known as the Australian Quality Training Framework that is not well understood and is complicated by the particular approach taken in Victoria. My assessment is that we have come an enormous distance in professionalising the field of adult literacy and numeracy and expanding the diversity of provision, but we have done so pragmatically and for reasons that do not always serve us well in the long term. In my view we are not taking advantage of the integration of language, literacy and numeracy in the broader context of vocational training and possibly denying benefits to many adults in our community.

When I began in this field, a chance offer of a part time job after the birth of my first child in 1978, there was no one to turn to for support or information. The Victorian Adult Literacy Council (VALC) had just been formed and I had just missed the first national conference on adult literacy conducted in Melbourne. I gradually became aware of other programs scattered around Melbourne such as the ones at the Council of Adult Education (CAE), Footscray TAFE College and Caulfield CAE and the support for some volunteer groups through the Education Department's curriculum unit. I immediately did a volunteer tutor course at the CAE and when I joined the Victorian Adult Literacy Council I found myself among people trying to cobble together materials and approaches to the teaching of reading and writing suitable for adults.

The notion of adult literacy was being formed in response to grass roots demand. This demand was created by the policy reforms by Kangan<sup>1</sup> as well as by changes to the eligibility criteria for the Adult Migrant Education Program. The general

opening of access to education to a broader range of the population revealed the equity question. The proliferation of adult literacy and numeracy classes and other 'access' courses were generated to cater for the many adults who needed to develop the 'basics' or pre-requisites before they could successfully embark on formal education and qualifications. The influences of the British adult literacy campaign, 'On the Move', was being closely watched and the visit Paolo Freire was being translated to fit an Australian context.

It was inevitable that this burgeoning activity would attract greater levels of support in the form of government funding and in response to the need for public accountability professional practices emerge. VALBEC carried this role of lobbying for government funding and providing professional development in tandem with the use of Commonwealth seed funding during the late 70s and 80s. The state government was a late entrant in supporting adult literacy education and, when it did contribute, it placed adult literacy and basic education firmly in the adult, community box of access and informal education and not within vocational education and training.

Helen Macrae engaged in a lengthy discussion of the 'dark side of accreditation' as a system of privilege in the Spring 2001 edition of *Journal of Adult English Language and Literacy Education* but her analysis disguises the most powerful function of accreditation, that is, as an instrument of bureaucracy to control curriculum and funding. What she says in her article is somewhat ironic. In her role as a senior manager within the Division of Further Education and Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE) for over a decade, she has wielded enormous power over the administration of adult literacy and basic education provision in this state and overseen the certification of adult literacy and basic education, and a number of small and informal courses. The major accredited course sponsored by ACFE has been the Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA).

The introduction of the CGEA came amidst great debate as well as considerable resistance. The resistance, for the most part, was centred on the use of a competency-based model. Its development coincided with a desire by the field to have a more formal and consistent curriculum framework at a time vocational courses were moving from institutional Board of Study approval to a state system of accreditation based on a modularised competency model. I would argue that

the certification of adult literacy and basic education has served the field well. Not, as Macrae says, because 'it is an excellent education framework', but because in the consultation about its development the field came to a broad agreement about what an adult literacy and basic education curriculum should contain and more importantly its widespread adoption has stabilised funding for the field. Engaging in accreditation was a question of the survival of the field rather than one of real choice. The 'privilege' of access to adult education was made possible for many.

On the other hand the ownership by ACFE has also served to ensure the perpetuation of a separation between adult community and further education and other forms of education, particularly qualifications related to employment. The accreditation process for the CGEA served to consolidate the power of the ACFE bureaucracy.

The CGEA is only one of many accredited courses developed in Australia and if they are compared they are relatively similar in structure, and based on similar theoretical understandings of language and education. It is ironic that in Victoria the CGEA has become so pervasive that teachers no longer locate themselves in the field of adult literacy and basic education but as teachers of the CGEA. The success of the CGEA is that it has delivered stability and ongoing funding for adult literacy and basic education and is a story of our pragmatism but it is now in danger of being an instrument threatening the long term survival of the adult literacy field.

Other articles in the spring 2001 edition of articulate continuing issues with the CGEA's educational value to learners. By pursuing accreditation and the re-accreditation of specific adult literacy and basic education certificates like the CGEA in Victoria, are we missing another pragmatic opportunity to further extend adult literacy education to those who could most benefit? I was struck by the positive representation of workplace learning provided in the articles 'Reflection on literacy, workplace and training packages: hearing many voices' by Peter Waterhouse, 'Integrating literacy into training packages—strategies in a WELL project' by Belinda Bold and 'Beside the Whiteboard' with Natalie Nawrocki. These articles were in marked contrast to the other articles on the CGEA where the discourse was about dilemmas and problems. These articles focused on questions such as: Is there enough time to practice new skills? Is the CGEA reaching those with learning disabilities and other disadvantages? How are teachers dealing with the documentation of assessment and finding resources, texts and assessment tasks at the right level?

It struck me too, that the re-accreditation of the CGEA has moved from being about adult literacy, numeracy and basic education to being about an alternative general education. The CGEA is trying to fit to so many agendas—increasing learning time by increasing nominal hours, linking to training by extending across higher levels of the AQF and incorporating units of competence from Training Packages as General Curriculum Options. How many learners

currently complete a certificate as apposed to a statement of attainment? By making it bigger and longer are you further disadvantaging those you most desire to assist?

Like Peter Waterhouse, can I suggest that we should be looking at training packages 'as creating a space for innovative educators to explore and colonise'? (p.11) If we are wishing to create pathways for our learners to genuine qualifications, which bring access to further education and training or to employment then are we helping or hindering them by putting them through unnecessary accreditation hurdles? Do we need accredited bridging courses to reach Year 10 equivalence or as pre requisites to employment related qualifications?

The Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) is another framework that sets out the general rules for the recognition of qualifications. It is a framework because each of the states will implement it. It sets out the registration processes determining who can deliver vocational education and training using public funds and issuing national recognised qualifications. This framework now provides standards, which Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) must reach to gain registration but also be audited against. It is the next phase in the accreditation, certification game being scripted now to reach national agendas but it offers great opportunities for the adult literacy and basic education field to continue the tradition of tailoring education to ensure access and equity.

'...the view that literacy and numeracy problems affect only a limited number of people involved in entry-level training, and in limited industries in the workplace, can no longer be sustained (ABS 1997a). The relevance of literacy and numeracy support, at all levels of training, and across all sectors, needs to be examined and adequately catered for. There will need to be an extension of the application of literacy and numeracy support to a wider range of fields and at higher level vocational and education courses.'<sup>1</sup>

It is in this new understanding of literacy in vocational education and training that we may find the spaces for innovative teaching. Firstly, the structure of training packages has assured that the underpinning language, literacy and numeracy skills are explicitly addressed in each unit of competency and through the key competencies attributed to each unit. That is, that equity is built into each unit of competency. Secondly, if the newly released standards and evidence guides for the registration and quality auditing of RTOs are interpreted broadly then every provider will have to demonstrate the processes, assessment and training resources to support learners achieve competence, in other words, build in equity to assessment and training. Thirdly, as Peter Waterhouse rightly points out, 'the training packages specify endpoint but they do not specify educational methods, or the multiple ways that goals may be reached' (p11). Is this an opportunity to return to a learner-centred approach in which the learner is supported to reach the endpoint? Should we, for example, be providing innovative ways of documenting learners existing skills and knowledge through processes of recognition of current

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# Policy Update

**The Kirby Report looks at the 20 per cent of school students who don't finish Year 12 and the 45 per cent who don't get a desired VCE outcome. Cathy Donovan explains.**

## The Victorian Qualifications Authority

Changes in the world economy, work, and school participation rates, have diversified community characteristics and needs calling for a wider range of curriculum for youth that includes knowledge, skills and experiences that aren't traditionally provided by academic programs, so that education meets the needs of all.

'The decision not to continue studying is related to the sense of failure among students. Poor results at school are likely to discourage early leavers from continuing in some form of education or training'.

Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria, 2000 (The Kirby Report), p. 58.

The Victorian Qualifications Authority Act 2000 (the Act) was passed by the Victorian Parliament in November 2000. One of the VQA Board key priorities will be to provide for a complementary range of post-compulsory options for young people whose needs are not adequately being met by the VCE.

The Act established the VQA as the Authority responsible for safeguarding the standards of qualifications in Victoria and for ensuring they are of the highest level. The VQA role also ensures that qualifications work for our economic future by linking courses and qualifications to emerging employment needs. A comprehensive range of course and qualification options enable community members to pursue both career and personal ambitions.

The objectives of the VQA are to:

- develop and monitor standards for education and training normally undertaken, or designed to be undertaken in the post-compulsory years
- ensure and support appropriate linkages between qualifications
- facilitate procedures that make it easier for people to re-enter education and training and acquire qualifications throughout their lives.

The VQA develops policies, criteria and standards for:

- the accreditation of courses
- the recognition of qualifications
- the quality assurance for qualifications issued in accordance with the Act
- the registration of courses, qualifications and education and training organisations.

## The Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning

The flexible design of the VCAL reflects the recommendations

of the Ministerial Review of Post-compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria (The Kirby Review) regarding the needs of some students to undertake a program of learning outside of the current VCE. The Kirby Review states that 'there is evidence that diversity in upper secondary education is a key factor in higher participation' (p. 88) and that 'collaboration at the local level is more likely to bring about better results, particularly where there is the capacity and delegation for local initiative' (p. 140). The ACE and TAFE sectors have, in partnership with schools, played a significant role in expanding options for young people at the local level.

The trial of the VCAL in 2002 is for an initial period of one year and will be conducted in a number of selected sites across the state in partnership with a number of key stakeholder and community-based organisations including the Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs), employers and industry. Information on the progress of the trials will be regularly communicated to the participating schools, other providers, local industry and community-based organisations. The VQA is responsible for managing the trial and its evaluation in 2002.

## Maintaining good practice

The VCAL design recognises good practice that is already occurring in many parts of the state. This good practice will be drawn together so that student needs can be met within an overall set of curriculum design principles and requirements which are consistent across the state and which will attract VQA certification.

There is evidence from programs undertaken over the past two to three years that some young people disengage from school education when they have low self esteem and see themselves as failures. However when they are offered programs that include applied studies together with practical learning experiences and support they are generally motivated to continue in education.

Teachers and young people involved in the research for the Successful Learning Publications tell us what creates successful learning experiences:

'Opportunities offered by local TAFE for taster programs...Employer contributions through work experience and a willingness of job providers to provide assistance' is a key influence in the success of programs for youth.

'Students have enjoyed the opportunity to participate in outsourced courses at the local TAFE, defensive driving school and leisure centre. Confidence has improved; students no longer feel that they aren't clever enough to do further education'.

'You're actually learning but it's fun. You're learning but you don't realise it!'

'They (the students) say, "I'm not academic. I tinker at home making things". You can hear the passion for mathematical and technical detail when they tell you about the billy cart they made for their little brother'.

'The transition from Year 10 to Year 11 under the VCE is a quantum leap for kids at the bottom end of assessment—that disturbed us (the school). We had 40 to 50 kids who just went missing each year after Year 10. That was a gaping hole in our school'.

'We accepted that school was still an option but not the only one. We had to find a way of linking what we already did, and use the new connections to forge something new as well'.

'Why did I learn from ballooning and not from a classroom? In a classroom you sit learning things you don't need, and writing down what's on the board. Trigonometry, Indonesian. You learn percentages, and times, and do calculations. All things I don't need for the everyday'.

'What I need is the room to do everything. With the woodwork you decide what you'll make yourself. It's open. There's freedom'.

'Kids on the edge, too bright for the system...filled with energy, initiative. They have matured quickly, bearing heavy adult responsibilities at an early age'.

'The school needs to acknowledge and harness their life beyond the school...listen and create a space for their voices'.

The ABS School to Work Transition Survey (unpublished data) found that of the 18,274 students who left school in 1998 and who did not complete Year 12, there were 11,073 who were not engaged in any further education or training in the following year. The school leaving figures for 1999 are more startling. In that year 24,729 young people left school without completing Year 12. Of these young people there were 14,038 who were not at school or in further education and training in the following year. The Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning framework

is intended to engage young people in continuing their education, reverse the trend for them to leave early and provide pathways into further learning and into employment.

The VCAL qualification framework will incorporate a progression of skills and achievements in a number of learning strands. It will provide the design requirements for each certificate so that the learning program can be developed to ensure standards are consistent for the awarding of the credentials.

#### **Flexibility for local needs**

A flexible set of design rules will enable local needs to be met within a learning program. The learning program will enable the achievement of the Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria. Students will receive recognition and/or credentials where they successfully complete additional accredited Vocational Education and Training or Further Education qualifications or VCE units.

The decision about curriculum choices for inclusion in the learning program will be made at the local level to comply with the overall VCAL framework and curriculum principles. It will be made up of existing accredited curriculum contexts. The learning program curriculum will be designed so that students can meet the Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria for each of the strands of the qualification.

The qualification requirements make explicit a coherent curriculum, challenging targets, and pathways to further learning and/or employment. The learning program will provide contexts in which the students can develop and apply personal, social skills and work-related skills to foster a commitment to learning and to prepare them for the world of work.

**Cathy Donovan is Senior Policy Officer with the Victorian Qualifications Authority. You can contact her via email: [donovan.cathy.l@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:donovan.cathy.l@edumail.vic.gov.au)**

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and co-manages the ACENET Flexible Learning Network <http://www.vicnet.net.au/~acenet>. He also runs a consultancy, Daws and Pobega E Literacy Solutions at <http://www.vicnet.net.au/~twf>

With the assistance of Michael Gwyther from E-Learning Communities Flexible Learning Network <http://www.yarranet.net.au/e-learning>, Dale designed, organised and administered the ACEWEB e-conference.

#### **Notes**

1. MOO—Multi User Object Oriented Domain, a text-based virtual reality space like 'Grassroots', is located on a server in New York. It is a virtual community where students, teachers and others meet to participate in a wide range of educational and cross-cultural projects as well as to socialise and network. The environment is object-oriented, meaning a number of virtual rooms and tools such as 'camcorders',

'recorders', 'blackboards', even programmed 'robot objects' can be used by teachers to facilitate learning. Information about Grassroots and MOO and how to connect can be found at

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All of the links, logs and papers mentioned throughout this article can be accessed from the ACEWEB site.

# Beside the Whiteboard

**Ros Butcher works as a teacher and ALBE/ESL coordinator at Donvale Living and Learning Centre in Melbourne's Eastern Region. Since 2000 she has been involved in a project funded by the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council of Adult Community and Further Education developing an assessment resource for literacy teachers called 'Learning Differently'. Ros recently received the Victorian Outstanding Tutor of the Year award for National Adult Learners Week. She talks here with Sarah Deasey (Sarah coordinates the Carlton Adult Reading and Writing Program)**

## **Tell us about your teaching background, and how you came to the adult literacy field.**

I studied primary teaching, specialising in infant education. After working for the Victorian Education Department and in the UK, family commitments followed.

It had always concerned me why so many children and adults appeared to have literacy problems. The International Year of Literacy, 1990, focused on this issue. I volunteered as a literacy tutor at Donvale Living and Learning Centre at this time. Rob McCormack, Daryl Evans and Geraldine Pancini were my lecturers for the Adult Literacy Teaching Course conducted at Footscray TAFE. Their enthusiasm and passion for the profession was an inspiration. I have been working at Donvale since that time, as well as Box Hill Skillshare for a few years.

Winning the Tutor of the Year award was an exciting yet a humbling experience. You can't imagine the feeling in being rewarded for doing the thing you really love. When I look at the abilities and talents of teachers in this field I feel ... golly!! Adult Community Education (ACE) is in a really unique position in being able to make a difference in education. It is available to all, and fills the gaps left by other educational providers.

## **Describe Donvale Living and Learning Centre, (DLLC) and your student groups.**

In 1976 DLLC, a small committee, investigated the possibility of establishing a Neighbourhood Learning Centre. In 1977 two HSC English classes were held per week. Today, over 70 different classes are held weekly for more than 600 students over 200 of these being in the literacy area. The ALBE Program includes classes for young people at-risk, mature writers, Chinese senior citizens, and classes in oral communication, reading and writing, learning to learn, numeracy and computers.

DLLC, together with ACE has worked to move beyond the 'community house' limitations, to provide diverse and quality programs. Links have been established with TAFE, Melbourne University, health organisations, employment agencies and the local council.

Karen Dymke is the coordinator. I assist her with coordination and teach in many of our program areas. Karen encourages teachers to develop their strengths, ideas, talents and abilities, while working with their students. We are indeed fortunate to work under such a leader of vision.

Donvale Literacy Team also won the Victorian Training Awards, Outstanding Teacher/Trainer of the Year award ...another win! But there's still more!!! Karen Dymke won a scholarship with Cate Thompson from Swinburne TAFE. They toured the UK researching Youth at Risk projects. Unfortunately this tour clashed with our other award wins, but their screams were heard from Scotland!!

## **How did the project 'Learning Differently' develop?**

Most teachers have had or have students who, despite good teaching practice, make little or no progress. Reading, writing, spelling and work skills fail to improve with these students. Why does this happen and how can I enable these students to reach their full potential?

Karen Dymke had also taught similar students and has a son with learning difficulties. Assessment for her son was expensive, lengthy and told Karen nothing she did not already know. Daryl Greaves is a senior lecturer at Melbourne University. His work as an educational psychologist with students who have literacy learning difficulties is well known. His contribution and writing for the 'Learning Differently' resource was invaluable, particularly in developing a user-friendly assessment profile. Judy Geiger-Jennings is a special education teacher and friend from the USA. She too brought years of experience, and great expertise from her literacy and special education background, into the project.

An innovations grant from the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council of Adult Community and Further Education offered the opportunity to combine the expertise of these people and myself to develop a resource which would provide teachers with an Initial Screening Tool, an Ability Profile and Teaching Strategies.

The publication was designed to assist teachers in matching instruction and strategies with student needs. Research indicates that up to 70 per cent of students who access adult literacy programs have a specific learning difficulty. These learning difficulties are sometimes called dyslexia.

## **'Learning Differently' places a lot of emphasis on phonemic awareness in literacy teaching. What do you see as the place of phonemic awareness as a means to improving reading and writing skills?**

To read efficiently a reader needs to be able to turn print into words (decode) and also turn words into meaning/learning (comprehension). Phonological Awareness (PA) is the

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