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Features

Regulars

Editorial

Spring is in the air, and with this spring edition of *Fine Print* come both new ideas and old ideas revisited and revitalised. The adult literacy field is rich with well established theories and practices, and alive with innovation and extension, as this edition shows. The articles capture some of the complexity and diversity that make the field what it is.

Geraldine Castleton reflects on a well worn idea that literacy changes over time, and updates it with current thinking that we are all continuously in the process of 'becoming literate' as new literacies constantly emerge. She revisits the 'four resources model' (first put forward by Freebody and Luke in 1990) in light of the Queensland Education Department's New Basics Project, and concludes that these rich and broad views of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are essential for adult literacy practitioners today.

Sue Helme's article examines the centrality of language in any learning situation, and specifically within the context of a low level numeracy classroom. She clearly illustrates the importance of talking and listening in the learning process, and reinforces notions of the value of a rich curriculum in which students are actively engaged, rather than the recipients of information. Sue also includes some practical examples of her ideas in the new section Practical Matters.

Liz Suda takes up the practice of dialogue as a learning tool in her account of her visit to Spain to see the Dialogic Literary Circles in action. This is a fascinating account which puts to the test the principles of dialogic practice and examines the power and potential of this form of learning. We look forward to hearing more about these ideas as they are developed further in Australia.

The final feature article by Kate Rhodes describes an innovative program that was developed within the school sector, which implements the negotiated curriculum and project-based approaches familiar to adult literacy practitioners with at-risk students in a school setting. Again, we see old ideas being given a fresh life, and recognise the innovation which has always been a part of the adult literacy field.

Our regular sections bring you a range of perspectives and information this edition. Practical Matters has arrived, and we welcome both your feedback and your contributions to this new *Fine Print* feature. We also introduce Moira Hanrahan, who will be enhancing Practical Matters with regular drawings and cartoons. We look forward to her contributions.

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.

To be or not to be:

some thoughts on literacy in the 21st century

by Geraldine Castleton

The literacy debate must be extended to those who make the policies and decisions about how people are judged to be literate, and about what programs are available for those who don't make the grade. At present, the system fails to recognise the complexity of people's literacy needs.

Just over ten years ago Margaret Meek, a highly respected British literacy educator and researcher, produced a book *On Being Literate*. I read this book with great interest at the time, finding much that supported my own thinking about literacy and literacy education, but also deriving many valuable insights from it that informed my teaching of undergraduate and postgraduate teacher education students.

The book is based on what Meek described as two simple ideas. The first notion is that literacy is not natural, though Meek has argued that 'we act as if it were because we need to take it (literacy) for granted' (Meek, 1991, p.5). The second is the idea that literacy changes as societies change. No one who has been involved in formal or informal processes of literacy teaching and learning in contexts ranging from the home, school, workplace to various community settings, would argue with the truth of these statements. However, I would contend that the description of these ideas as simple can mask what are, in fact, very difficult, complex concepts to grasp, particularly in terms of how they might help us to understand what it means to be literate at the beginning of the 21st century.

The role of technology

The fact that she devotes a book to unpacking the meaning of these two ideas demonstrates, of course, that Meek did not take these notions lightly either. While discussing why and how the formal teaching of 'schooled literacy' (Meek's term) has changed over time, as well as strongly arguing for why it must continue to change, Meek noted that 'literacy is always in the making' (1991, p.134). Pondering on this thought and on the title of her original book, I can not help wondering that if Meek was to update her book at this point in time, she might not actually (re)title it 'On Becoming Literate'.

One of the most significant factors impacting on contemporary making(s) of literacy, or on what it now means to be literate, is the rapid expansion of information and communication technologies (ICT) and the increasing role

> ' one of the most significant factors … is the rapid expansion of information and communication technologies '

they play in our individual and collective daily lives. In following up what happens when we link contemporary conceptualisations of literacy (or literacies) with information and communication technologies, I have recently read two articles that work with such a distinction between 'being literate' and 'becoming literate'.

In the first, Leu and Kinzer (2000) argue that there is a transactional relationship between literacy and ICT—not only does the use of ICT change the nature of literacy, but literacy changes technology. They then contend that the transformations of the forms, functions and possibilities of literacy because of new forms of technologies as well as the ways in which evolving literacy practices impact on new technologies, create particular challenges for literacy teaching and learning. In responding to these challenges Leu and Kinzer (2002, p.120) note that the notion of 'being literate' has become an anachronism, arguing that becoming literate may be a more precise term as we are all be involved in a continuous learning process, acquiring new literacies as new technologies for literacy, and new literacy practices, emerge. In the second article, Unsworth (2002) discusses the changing dimensions of school literacies, and the need for teachers and learners to attend to new and emerging literacies, reasoning that notions of 'being literate must be seen as anachronistic', arguing instead that 'becoming literate is the more apposite description' (Unsworth's emphasis).

Not a natural state?

These predictions by Leu and Kinzer (2000) and Unsworth (2002) of what must be incorporated in evolving conceptualisations of literacy in these times capture the second of Meek's 'simple' notions, that literacy changes as societies change. But how does this thinking speak to her first point that literacy is not natural (that is, it does not come as part of our being in the way that being born with green eyes and brown hair does)? What does this mean for the ways in which we prepare our students, of any age, for effective engagement in that continuous learning process of working

towards the desired, highly-valued state of 'becoming literate'? If literacy is not natural, then it must be acquired, or is it learnt? Does it really matter which verb we choose, 'acquired' or 'learnt'? It does if we accept Gee's (1990) distinction between theses terms. He has contended that:

> acquisition is a process of acquiring something subconsciously by exposure to models, a process of trial and error, and practice within social groups, without formal teaching', and ascertained that 'learning is a process that involves conscious knowledge gained through teaching (though not necessarily from someone officially designated a teacher) (Gee, 1990, p.146).

The point of this differentiation, and one relevant to the argument I am presenting here, is that these terms describe differential sources of power: 'acquirers usually beat learners at performance, learners usually beat acquirers at talking about it, that is, at explication, explanation, analysis and criticism' (Gee, 1990, p. 146). I would argue that we must focus on both these processes in our practice, ensuring students learn the skills that form the basis of the varied uses of literacy, as well as focusing on enabling students to acquire the underpinning knowledge and understanding of literacy as practice so that they become independent, critical and effective users of literacy in all its myriad forms of use.

But still I haven't addressed the 'what' we teach. For me, the most useful way of responding to this question, particularly as it applies to adult literacy learners, comes from the work of Luke and Freebody, who recently described literacy as 'the flexible and sustainable mastery of a repertoire of practices with the texts of traditional and new communications technologies via: spoken language, print and multi-media' (Luke, Freebody & Land, 2000: 13). I find it beneficial to work with such notions as 'mastery', an idea that captures not just the need for basic skills, but also for an ongoing capability to acquire, extend, merge and exchange these skills for others throughout a lifetime; and with 'a repertoire of practices', an idea that incorporates a vision of literacy competence as expanding and maturing, much as a musician, for example, develops a repertoire in the face of new technologies, possibilities and problems in new contexts (Luke, et al 2000, p. 15).

The 'four resources' model

Some years ago Freebody and Luke (1990) devised a model that they now describe as the 'four resources model' (Luke et al, 2000, p.15), as a means of informing a systematic, theoretically-grounded approach to literacy acquisition and learning. They argue that its intent is to provide a plan of possible practices, and 'to shift the focus from trying to find the right method to whether the range of practices

> ' **acquirers usually beat learners at performance, learners usually beat acquirers at talking about it** '

emphasised in one's (literacy) program are indeed covering and integrating a broad repertoire of textual practices that are required in new economies and cultures' (Luke & Freebody, 1999, p.5).

According to this model, the repertoire of practices students must master can be broken into four broad roles:

1 Code breaker—the practices required to crack the codes and systems of written and spoken language and visual images

2 Meaning maker—the practices required to build and construct cultural meanings from texts

3 Text user—the practices required to use texts effectively in everyday face-to-face situations

4 Text analyst—the practices required to analyse, critique and second-guess texts
(Luke et al, 2000, p.16).

Elaborating further on the notion of literacy as a repertoire of practices, Luke and Freebody (1999, p.7) have argued that literacy can be understood as having three dimensions: 'the breadth of an individual's or a community's repertoire of literate practices; the depth or degree of control exercised by an individual or community in any given literacy activity and the extent to which there is some degree of transformation and redesign' (author's emphasis). As a plan of possible practices, the model provided by Luke and Freebody enables us to take up in our teaching the key points made by Meek in the first instance, but also those made by Leu and Kinzer and Unsworth.

Extending the repertoire

I think, in fact, that if we are to have any hope of truly assisting our students in becoming literate, then we must seriously take on board what it means in practical terms to address these four roles that represent literate competence as characteristic of an individual's capabilities but also as collective, jointly shared and constructed capabilities of groups, communities or societies. Furthermore, we must also ensure that we are extending our students' repertoires so that they are able to respond to, critique and work with more than the traditional print-based texts that have typically formed the basis of our teaching and assessment practices in the past.

So debate around the methodologies teachers employ in assisting students to become literate is never one about which is the best approach for, as Luke and Freebody (1999, p.8) note, 'it is not that some teaching methods work and others do not. They all shape and construct different literate repertoires'. Certainly programs such as Learning

Differently (discussed in Beside the Whiteboard, *Fine Print*, summer, 2001), with its focus on developing phonological awareness (sic), have a part to play in building up our students' literate, in particular code-breaking, competence. We must certainly also commend the valuable and important work practitioners do to improve their students' code breaking skills.

The importance of relevance

The need for a systematic approach to developing these skills reinforces, in part, Meek's (1991) point that literacy is not natural, as well as highlighting the importance of explicit teaching of these, and other skills, according to need. But, as Luke (2001, p.12) argues 'basic skills are necessary but not sufficient'. When making decisions about the resources and strategies we employ in our teaching, and keeping in mind the three dimensions of literacy mentioned earlier, we must constantly ask ourselves 'how will the acquisition of the skills my teaching is meant to develop in students equip them to become better connected to the world, enabling them to critically engage with, use and acquire different forms of knowledge?' In other words, a focus on code breaking must exist along with equal attention given to the other three roles that combine to make up the repertoire of practices we want individuals and groups to develop. Furthermore, their engagement with the world through the four roles must extend to include online media, visual and print texts, which we are often required to deal with simultaneously in today's world.

> ' ... changing the thinking of those who make the policies ... about how people are determined to be literate '

The cogency of this argument is reinforced through research recently reported by Purcell-Gates, Degeneger, Jacobson and Soler (2002). In an investigation of the relationship between adult literacy instruction and change in the literacy practices of adult literacy students, these researchers found that the literacy practices of adults can change in nature or in frequency in response to adult literacy instruction that is reflective of real-life literacy (Purcell-Gates et al, 2002, p. 90). Building on the recent work of a number of adult literacy researchers, their use of the term 'real-life' or 'authentic' is conceptualised as those literacy events that mediate people's social and cultural lives (Purcell-Gates et al, 2002, p.71). Purcell-Gates and colleagues (2002, p. 90) further note that 'despite the growing back to basics rhetoric, involving students in real-life or authentic literacy activities in the classroom is statistically significantly more related to growth and development of literacy practices than decontextualised skill work'. This finding reinforces the argument presented by Luke (2001, p.4) that what he has described as 'prepackaged curricular commodities which are being sold as universal cure-alls to literacy problems' will never, on their own and in isolation from other approaches with a broader focus, be sufficient or the magic solution we may be seeking.

The New Basics Project

The outcomes of the study of Purcell-Gates and her colleagues (2001) must also urge us to return again and again to a critical examination of the essential, reciprocal relationships that must exist between the curriculum on which we base our teaching and learning, the pedagogical choices through which we deliver this curriculum, and finally the assessment practices we employ to determine the effectiveness of our teaching. I know that these terms may be regarded by some as old hat—as no longer relevant in the age of commodified education exemplified through a training packages approach to vocational education and training. Education Queensland, however, is currently investing enormous sums of money in what it has called the New Basics Project designed specifically to get back to the basics of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, with a clear focus on improving student outcomes. This New Basics Project is about 'dealing with new student identities, new economies and workplaces, new technologies, diverse communities and complex cultures' (New Basics Project; 2000, p. 2). The new basics, that capture 'the interactive requirements of new life worlds and futures orientations' (New Basics Project, 2000, p.3), act as curriculum organisers designed to ensure that students engage critically with the ongoing change that characterises all aspects of our daily lives. These new basics necessitate the adoption of productive pedagogies that are dialogic in nature, focused on intellectual engagement, are connected to the world, create supportive environments for learners and recognise and value diversity. Students demonstrate what new knowledge they have gained and employed through 'rich tasks' that cover transdisciplinary fields of knowledge and draw on a repertoire of practices that include cognitive, cultural, linguistic and social skills. I would not think that the goals of the New Basics Project differ in any significant way from those that adult literacy practitioners would have for their students. Therefore, it follows that they will be equally concerned about, and engaged with the curriculum, pedagogical and assessment connections I have just discussed.

In conclusion, I argue that, just as our focus is on developing students' mastery over a repertoire of literacy capabilities, so too must it be on ensuring our own repertoire of teaching and learning strategies, including the different ways in which we assess students' progress, is broad, comprehensive and theoretically sound. This repertoire needs to have a futures orientation and reflect contemporary understandings and applications of literacy otherwise it will fall far short of ensuring we are equipping our students to develop mastery over different ways of knowing, understanding and acting in and on the world.

Rather, we should direct our efforts and debate to changing the thinking of those who make the policies and decisions

about how people are determined to be literate, and about what kinds of programs are offered to those who do not make the grade. In this country at present, as well as in others, practitioners find themselves having to work with a system that has recruited literacy 'as a unidimensional "standard" available for the surveillance of both the teaching profession and the inadequately schooled' (Freebody, 2001, p.114). Apart from the negative impact this kind of narrow, minimalistic, normalising stance has on students and practitioners, it goes no way towards capturing the complexity of the repertoire of literate capabilities people need and want for their todays, and for their tomorrows. This, I believe, is the debate we have to have!

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Dialogic literary circles:
a practice matching the theory

by Liz Suda

In Spain, a movement is taking place where people with little literacy can meet to discuss such literary classics as Shakespeare, Joyce, Kafka and Lorca. In these groups—Dialogic Literacy Circles—every opinion is valued and there is no right or wrong response.

My imagination was captured by the promotional information on the Dialogic Literary Circles (DLC), or La Tertulia, in Spain. Here was a group who claimed to have a method that enabled ordinary people, who have little education and often little literacy, to read and discuss classical literature. Traditionally the domain of the educated elite, literary discussions have generally required a high level of literacy and an appreciation of language as art. Here was a group that claimed that people with little literacy could access literary classics such as Shakespeare, Joyce, Kafka and Lorca through a process of egalitarian dialogue where all opinions are valued and there is no right or wrong response. The work of Freire has demonstrated the power of dialogue in the development of literacy, particularly for those who have been excluded from active participation in the political process due to limited literacy and schooling. He is often referred to within the adult literacy field as a key influence on people's teaching practice. It came as no surprise therefore, to learn that this group is very influenced by the work of Paolo Freire.
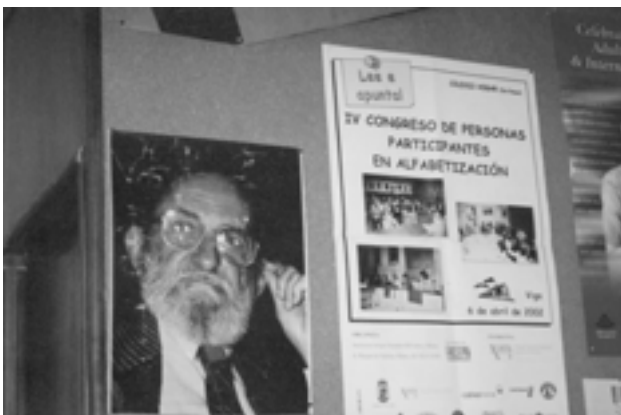
Freire visited FACEPA and applauded their work.

My own work in both secondary schools and within adult education has focused on the importance of dialogic practice for powerful and emancipatory learning. In the course of my research for the Adult literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (ALNARC) I learned more about this group and developed a case study on the DLCs (Suda 2001), adding to the argument that dialogic practice is integral to the development of literacy for the 21st century. The case study drew very heavily on the work of Flecha (2000) whose theory of the seven principles of dialogic practice can be summarised as follows:

1 Egalitarian dialogue: All the contributions must be equally listened to and considered. No opinion can be imposed as the right answer irrespective of educational background or social position.

2 Cultural intelligence: Everybody has cultural intelligence, regardless of their educational or cultural background. All people learn things in the course of their lives, which can be applied to different contexts.

3 Transformation: Learning through egalitarian dialogue leads to transformation in the everyday lives of many people through the practice of reading and sharing ideas and experience.

4 Instrumental dimension: The process of reading and sharing ideas increases the participant's capacity to learn and develop new knowledge and skills, which facilitates further learning.

5 Creation of meaning: Participants in La Tertulia demonstrate that through dialogic learning, meaning is created through the relationships between people in the sharing of ideas and dialogue. People relate to each other, decide together what they want to learn, and what they want to research.

6 Solidarity: La Tertulia is open to everybody and there are no economic or academic barriers to participation. The group always gives priority to people with the lower educational levels. Cooperative learning builds solidarity.

7 Equality of differences: All the participants in La Tertulia are equal and different. One of the most important principles is equality among all the people, which means that everybody has the right to live differently.

It is, of course, relatively easy to write beautiful words about literacy as liberation and hold idealistic notions of education as emancipation, but much more challenging to actually achieve it. As a teacher who has struggled to implement dialogic processes in my own practice, I felt it was very important to see how the process actually worked. Was it as ideal as it sounded, or was it a case of wishful thinking and self-promotion? Was it a practice that suited the particular

sociocultural and political history of Spain, or one that could equally be applied here in Australia? What kind of people participated in these groups? Who were the facilitators? How often did they meet? What sort of approach did they adopt? How are the seven principles of dialogic learning put into practice? What are some of the pitfalls and problems? Most importantly, how did the participants view this experience?

By the people, for the people

What was even more interesting was that the organisation responsible for promoting this movement was in fact run for and by the participants, according to the seven principles of practice applied in the circles. The organization, FACEPA, is a federation of a whole range of adult education associations that operate throughout the region of Catalunya of which Barcelona is the major city. The group had drafted a Declaration of Rights for adult learners, which essentially advocated for equal access to lifelong learning for all; learning that is directed 'by the people for the people' according to the democratic and egalitarian notions espoused by the DLCs. How did the reading of classical literature using dialogic methods lead to such an organisation which such high ideals?

The trip in Spain from Barcelona to Madrid to Valladolid

It was with these questions in mind that I applied to the TAFE Travelling Scholarship Scheme for funds to visit Spain and see this movement in action, and apply critical research methods to examining the implementation of this process in a range of settings. From the moment I emerged from the airport at Barcelona and was greeted by the workers at FACEPA, I knew that it would be very difficult to maintain the critical distance of a researcher, given the colour, movement and passion of the people and the place. The following account describes that experience and tries to capture the cultural context of the circles. A more detailed photo essay with links to relevant sites is available on the Flemington Reading and Writing Program website: *http://home.vicnet. net.au/~flemrw*

'You ask for the word'—how the circles work

After a 26 hour journey from Australia to Barcelona I was welcomed by workers from FACEPA, who had organised a

preliminary briefing with three long-term participants of the literary circle—Juan, Rosa and Ana Lebron (president of FACEPA). It is clear from the outset that the people who are to introduce me to the organisation are themselves participants in the groups. The participants felt it important that I understand the principles underpinning the circles and the organisation. Itxaso, a student at Barcelona University and a part-time worker at FACEPA, acted as the translator.

Juan said that the most important thing about the circles is that everyone is equal and this gives the participants the confidence to express their opinions. The first step is for the participants to feel equal with the teacher. Everybody is the same. All opinions are valid. The circles are completely democratic which means that no one will laugh at an opinion and everyone feels safe to speak. People who cannot read can freely express opinions about ideas and this gives them the confidence to read. There are different ways to read a book. He said that what he learned in the circle was that he has an 'interpretation' and other people in the group might have another.

Tolerance and respect

Ana reinforced this view by saying that in the circle nobody has the truth. You listen to different opinions. The basis is respect for others. Many people do not speak in public for many different reasons. They are not motivated to speak. The circle gives value to the people's feelings. These circles are for people who have little education. University-educated people have other places to go to discuss ideas.

Juan then talked about cultural intelligence, another of the seven dialogic principles. Adults have cultural intelligence because they work, even if they don't read or write. Some university-educated people think that if you can't read and write then you don't know anything. University paradigms of what knowledge is are broken down through egalitarian dialogue and democracy.

Ana was a participant in the first dialogic literary circle, which began more than 20 years ago. She was motivated to read because she had very little formal education and did not read

CASM Group in Madrid. An all women group who were very interested in studying the authors of books.

well. She wanted to expand her vocabulary and develop knowledge. The first time she attended she didn't realise that she would be able to express an opinion. She thought she would be too frightened to speak. This is why she says 'the facilitator has to make sure the quiet ones are included'.

Rosa talked about different kinds of circles. One is where the group reads a book and another is whether the group researches and reads about a particular author and shares their ideas about the author. This can help people to understand the books written by different authors.

Rosa, Juan and Ana offered a great deal of information about how the circle works and the role of the facilitator. They in effect demonstrated how the seven principles are put into practice and provided me with invaluable information for the visits I was to make to the many different tertulias throughout Spain. Juan summed up this whole discussion with the following comment: 'Even if you are the best academic person you can't know everything. A literary circle person may be able to explain things from their own experience which the academic person hasn't thought of'.

Dialogic learning—an idea that springboards into collective action

FACEPA was initially established to provide links between the different organisations that hold DLCs. The spirit of solidarity and commitment to egalitarian dialogue has infused the work of the organisation. Whilst the study of classical literature is the ostensible aim of the DLCs, their ultimate aims are much broader and encompass collective action in a political sense.

This group in Valladolid organised activities and further study. Sense of solidarity is very powerful.

FACEPA is involved in a number of projects with other countries in Europe. These projects are funded by the European Union as part of its commitment to lifelong learning, adult education, cultural development and a multicultural Europe. There are different categories, under which organisations such as FACEPA can apply.

The Socrates project (*http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/socrates/comenius/*) focuses on education, with programs that focus on all sectors of education—primary, secondary,

adult and higher education. Facepa is involved in some of these particularly the Grundtvig project which focuses on adult education and cooperation projects that might link different adult learning organisations in different countries throughout Europe.

Facepa has received funding to conduct a number of projects which are coordinated by FACEPA and are managed through democratic processes with the participants of the organisation actively involved in the shaping and development of the projects. In particular, the European Union supports projects that are governed by democratic and participatory models. The congress held by FACEPA is a case in point. Participants from adult learning associations throughout Europe gather to share their experience of dialogic learning. The is process resulted in the declaration of rights for adult learners, *http://www.neskes.net/facepa/rights.htm*

FACEPA has grown the idea of adult learners' participation in shaping their own learning. The application of the seven principles of dialogic learning has therefore led to increased participation in decision making and active involvement by participants in shaping the course of their own education. This participation on a local level has given rise to the desire to share their experiences with other adult learners and work towards a situation where all adults, throughout the European community and then the globe, have the opportunity to participate in equal dialogic learning. The outcome of the dialogic learning process is therefore emancipatory. La Terlulias therefore act as a springboard to collective action. This collective action takes different forms from the local tertulia to regionally-based collectives, to country wide collectives, to collaborations with adult education groups in other European countries. I was fortunate to attend a number of such groups, the first being the assembly.

The assembly—democracy in action

The assembly was made up of representatives from different associations and circles. They came together to discuss their latest project and report on their work in recruiting and developing new groups and participants. A major item on the agenda was that the group had to decide on the books that would be read in their new European project where groups from other European countries were to share their experiences with the groups participating in Spain. There was a very lengthy, and at times heated, discussion about which books should be chosen. The group operates on consensus so everyone had to agree. This meant that many different points of view were given about appropriate books to read for this project.

It was generally agreed that the books should be representative of classical writers from different parts of Europe, that is the north, south, east and west, and that they should have a strong political and social message. They should address racism and class and inequality so the groups could gain the perspectives of people from other European cultures about these issues. 'This is a multicultural project so we have to have one book

that deals with the issue of racism. I think Shakespeare's Othello would be very good for this', said one participant.

The discussion was extraordinary as people argued the merits of different authors and books. Shakespeare or Joyce for the west? Kafka or Dostoyevsky for the east? Lorca or Cervantes for the south, and so on. The participants of this group had not only a very broad knowledge of classic literature but also the social and political issues they felt contributed to a better society.

It was almost impossible to maintain scientific objectivity in the face of this passionate and heated discussion, where the participants demonstrated what they had learned through their involvement in La Tertulias over many years. One could only conclude that for these people, the tertulias had been truly transformative. But on another level the whole concept of 'scientific objectivity' or 'truth' is anathema to this group. The research program of CREA, (Centre for Social and Education Research) at Barcelona University, for example, is committed to dialogic research methods which enable participants to both shape the questions to be research but also to input into the analysis of the data gathered. This kind of inclusive approach means that the DLCs maintain their ideals in giving power to the participants to tell their own stories.

Egalitarian dialogue—the power of the circles

I visited fourteen different tertulias from Madrid to Vallodolid to Vitoria and then back to Barcelona, where I finally visited the school where the very first DLC was started—La Verneda, 'the school that dares to dream' (Aroca 1999) and also CREA who have strong research links with FACEPA and the associations. Every group I visited was different and reflected the unique personalities and life experiences of their participants. There were regional differences, different age groups and gender mixes, differences in the choice of books, different approaches by the facilitators, different group dynamics determined by participants and so on. However one thing was consistent, the group was always circular and the equality of all opinions was emphasised. The principles of the dialogic process are consistently reinforced and

La Vernedu—The place where people dare to dream. The first DLC started here.

explicity practiced. When I completed the tour I was convinced that the practice of the circles was very effective and very implementable in adult education programs in Australia. How these principles can be adapted to the Australian context is entirely dependent on how the participants conceive of the possibilities.

Hopefully you will hear more of the Dialogic Literary Circles in Australia as the project at Flemington proceeds. One of the facilitators, Miguel argued that the only way to learn how to be a good facilitator in a DLC is to be a participant. This is the approach we will adopt at Flemington where the first DLC will commence soon. We have a lot to learn from the participants of the DLCs in Spain and the other European countries (Czech Republic, France, Denmark and Italy) and I believe there is enormous potential in developing an adult education movement here in Australia. Much of the rhetoric of lifelong learning seems to neglect the importance of participation and engagement.

Miguel: 'the best way to learn to be a facilitator is to be a participant'.

Egalitarian dialogue, as practised in the DLCs is a very positive place to start with adults who may be reluctant to go back to school or who are yet to experience the joys of transformative learning.

Liz Suda travelled to Spain and the Czech Republic earlier this year as a recipient of a TAFE Travelling Scholarship to investigate the Dialogic Literary Circles. She is manager of the Flemington Reading and Writing Program and has worked in the adult education field since 1990.

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The words to say it:

language issues in adult numeracy

by Sue Helme

This article explores the relationship between language and numeracy. It discusses some of the ways in which low level literacy and LBOTE students are challenged by the language demands of their numeracy classes, and outlines some practical classroom strategies that focus on students' language development in the context of numeracy learning.

> What one truly understands clearly articulates itself,
> and the words to say it come easily.
> Nicolas Boileau, *L'Art Poetique*

These words, penned over 300 years ago, reflect current views about the intimate relationship between language and understanding, and remind us that a central aspect of our job as literacy and numeracy practitioners is to help our students find the words they need to participate and succeed in learning. In numeracy, learning occurs initially through the informal language of students' prior experiences. With continued exposure to the language of numeracy and mathematics students increase their spoken and written use of this register, including the procedural and explanatory language needed to describe and explain their problem solving methods. Thus language is an important mediator of learning.

Language competencies are clearly recognised and firmly embedded in curriculum frameworks currently used in adult numeracy teaching. The CGEA (Butcher et al, 2002) actively promotes and assesses the development of appropriate mathematical language. Within all learning outcomes of the CGEA there are several assessment criteria that specify language-related competencies.

Language competence in numeracy is also embedded in the numeracy indicators of competence outlined in the National Reporting System (Coates et al, 1995). The wording varies slightly according to the level, but each level contains a version of the following four competencies:

- selecting appropriate mathematical information embedded in a real-life activity, item or text
- selecting and applying a range of mathematical strategies to solve problems in a number of contexts
- reflecting on and questioning reasonableness and appropriateness of the purpose, process and outcomes of a mathematical activity
- using oral and written informal and formal language and representation including symbols and diagrams to communicate mathematically.

Note that three of the four indicators of numeracy competence specify language-related competencies—locating mathematical information within a text; using the language of questioning, reflection, and explanation; and appropriate use of terminology and forms of mathematical representation.

Clearly, language, literacy and numeracy interact within the learning situation. The remainder of this article explores this interaction in more detail.

The language of numeracy: some problems and issues

Difficulties with the English language are often magnified in numeracy classes due to the complexities of the language structure and terminology of numeracy and mathematics. Often students say, 'I know what to do, but I can't explain it'. Or sometimes students can verbalise, but do not have the confidence or skills to write down the steps in their thinking. Outlined below are some of the problems and issues that others and I have observed in adult numeracy classes.

Terminology

The terminology used in numeracy and mathematics includes many polysyllabic words that are difficult to pronounce and spell, such as *numerator*, *denominator*, *parallelogram, diagonal, cylindrical, hexagonal*. Many words used in numeracy have been borrowed from natural language but have a different meaning in the context of mathematics. Examples are *improper* and *proper* as used with fractions, and *volume* meaning size, not loudness.

Most of the words used for operations have another meaning when used in everyday discourse. Examples are *times, into, over, sum, from, difference, is, by*. All these words have a meaning in the context of numeracy that is different to their meaning in everyday discourse.

A further problem is that there are many words in numeracy that have the one meaning. Think of all the different ways to express the operation of addition. Examples are *plus, sum, total, more than, increase*. This is extremely

challenging for LBOTE students, for whom there may be only a single word in their own language for this operation.

Syntax

The structure of the language in which numeracy information and concepts is embedded often presents difficulties for students.

Short phrases in mathematics often carry a lot of meaning, which has to be 'unpacked' to be understood. Consider the amount of meaning packed into phrases such as *population density* or *two-party-preferred vote*.

The choice and placement of prepositions are crucial to meaning in numeracy and many students have difficulty with this. For example, compare the meaning of the following pairs of statements:

12 divided *by* 4	vs	12 divided *into* 4
Reduced *by* 10%	vs	Reduced *to* 10%
Increased *by* 400	vs	Increased *to* 400

Just recently several of my LBOE students mistook '10 past 7' to mean '7 minutes past 10' and thus appeared to miscalculate a time interval. This situation is a more subtle example of how the order in which information is presented affects the outcome of a calculation. Here are two more examples:

$$6 \text{ from } 7 = 7 - 6 = 1 \text{ but} \quad 7 \text{ from } 6 \text{ is } 6 - 7 = -1$$

$$10 \text{ into } 4 = 4/10 \text{ or } 0.4 \quad \text{but } 4 \text{ into } 10 = 10/4 = 2.5$$

Visual and auditory confusion

Expressions that look very similar can have very different meanings. For example,

'How many 5s in 25?' looks very similar to 'how many is 5 and 25?' but the answers differ considerably. Similar sounding words can be difficult to discriminate. This is a problem for LBOTE students, who may also have difficulty with pronunciation. Examples are fifteen vs fifty, ten vs tenth and off vs of. Also, words that sound the same can have different meanings. The English language abounds with homonyms. Examples in the context of numeracy include: sum vs some and third (place) vs $1/_3$.

The words to say it: language competence and numeracy

There are a number of language-related skills that are important in students' construction of numeracy concepts. This collection of skills and knowledge includes language for thinking, naming and communicating, and, most importantly for learning, through talking.

Language for thinking

As discussed above, we use language to think and learn. Students need to use language to think and refine ideas, to ask questions, to predict or explain causal relationships, and communicate their ideas and results to others. This 'thinking' language is often referred to as *cognitive and metacognitive discourse*. This means putting thoughts into words (for example, describing how a problem was solved) and being able to critique one's own or another's ideas.

The sentences one uses to do this are often complex (containing two main verbs) and usually involve conjunctions such as because, so, if … then. Here is an example of student self-talk in response to a problem solving task set in the context of shopping for a party:

> When I bought cocktail frankfurts for my daughter's birthday party I said to the butcher, 'I'll have 62 thanks. That's 4 for each child plus 6 extra ones'. How many children were coming to the party?

Response:

> Well, um 62 divided by 4 equals 15.5? Aha, well we take 62 and we reduce it by the six extra and then divide by 4 and we should get 14 children. How many children were coming to the party? I'll say it's 14.
> (Helme 1994, p. 52)

This student was able to articulate her thinking, and critically evaluated her initial answer using the context to realise that it did not make sense. She then rethought her solution to reach a more appropriate answer.

Language for naming and communicating
Listening skills

Making sense of what others are saying is of course crucial to learning. Students need to be able to identify key information, ask clarifying questions, and evaluate the reasonableness of others people's arguments and ideas. Listening skills also include the ability to reflect back the thoughts and ideas of others as a way of making sense of their ideas, as well as giving them feedback.

Talking

Many researchers argue that being able to formulate thoughts and put them into sentences may be the most important contributor to student learning. For instance, Pimm (1987) argues that by talking 'thoughts are externalised to a considerable extent, which makes them more readily accessible to the speaker's own, and other people's observations. The presence of another person may encourage reflection by the speaker on what has been said (Pimm 1987, p.23).

Forman and Cazden (1985) stress the importance of having an audience:

> One force of talking aloud is that it requires the use of words, whereas merely thinking to oneself allows words to be bypassed. It may only when you discover difficulty in expressing what you want to say, that you realise that things are not quite as you thought (Forman & Cazden 1985, p.329).

Recognising and resolving this 'state of uncertainty' is central to the process of learning. David Clarke and I (Clarke & Helme 1997) observed many hours of videotaped junior secondary mathematics classes, documenting various forms of uncertainty and the means by which students attempted to resolve it. We were struck by the extent to which students resolved uncertainty through peer interaction. Holton and Thomas (2001), in analysing the same data set, referred to this process as 'reciprocal scaffolding' (p.100). They concluded that groups are probably the best setting in which to practice this scaffolding process.

The next section looks more closely at strategies for promoting mathematical talk.

Promoting mathematical talk

During her Masters research, Beth Marr spent time in an adult numeracy class where the teacher taught in a relaxed but traditional way. Most of the teaching was undertaken through demonstration on the board and individual help with worksheets.

Despite the friendly and supportive atmosphere, Beth found that the students had few opportunities to interact in a way that promoted learning. When they did speak they found it difficult to express their ideas because they did not have the necessary language. She then introduced some intervention activities designed to serve two purposes:

1 To explore mathematical concepts through small group interactions using hands-on materials, discussion, reflection and sometimes writing.

2 To encourage students to engage with the vocabulary of the topics they were studying.

She reported on changes in students' talk according to two main categories:

1 The opportunity to speak: This refers to the space, and invitation, given for students to articulate and modify their thoughts. It includes consideration of both speaking and being heard by responsive others.

2 The means to speak: This refers to students' access to mathematical language and terminology. It is concerned with the quality of the talk, and the confident use of mathematical language.

Beth discovered some very interesting differences in the use of language between the traditional classroom setup and during the intervention activities.

One important difference was in the nature of student-to-student interactions. Whereas previously these were mostly in the form of procedural information stripped of explanations, they became much richer. Students explored ideas collaboratively and explained their discoveries to each other. Students were more able to explain their ideas to the whole class after rehearsing explanations in pairs. Teacher–student interactions also changed. The teacher became the audience for student explanations rather than the other way around.

Tasks addressing specific language issues also had an impact. Beth found that after doing a cloze exercise, students then used these terms in later collaborative learning tasks.

These approaches complemented each other. Beth concluded that tasks that gave students greater *opportunity to speak* also awakened an interest in acquiring language with which to express themselves, the *means to speak*. A summary of Beth's research is reported in Marr (2000).

Creating the opportunity and the means to speak

There are many strategies for creating the opportunity to speak. The most commonly used strategies include structured group/pair work, hands-on, practical activities, the use of authentic 'texts' and embedding numeracy within contexts meaningful or familiar to students. Many of these approaches have become standard practice in the field because practitioners recognise the value of increased student talk (and less teacher talk) in learning, through engagement with a variety of meaningful and realistic classroom activities. Examples of strategies that create *the means to speak* are described below:

Cloze exercises

This approach involves students filling in missing words or phrases, usually by selecting them from a given list. These activities enable students to focus on key terminology which they can draw upon for later use in problem solving. If done in pairs or small groups, cloze exercises provide students with the opportunity to compare and discuss their responses.

Cooperative problem solving

In these activities, students work in small groups to solve a shared problem where the information needed to solve it is spread across several clue cards, which are distributed amongst the group members. An important rule that ensures equal participation is that members must read their clue card aloud and must not show their card to anyone else. This rule can be relaxed for low level literacy students, as long as the best reader does not monopolise the information.

Examples of cooperative logic tasks appear in *Mathematics: a new beginning* (Marr & Helme, eds, 1987), *Breaking the maths barrier* (Marr & Helme (1991) and *Strength in numbers* (Goddard, Marr & Martin, 1991).

Mix 'n' match

In these tasks, students sort cards into pairs or logical groupings according to the information on the cards, such as quantities expressed in different formats (for example, decimals, percents, diagrams). Examples of this approach can be found in *Breaking the maths barrier* (Marr & Helme, 1991) and *Numeracy on the line* (Marr, Anderson & Tout, 1994).

Open-ended extensions of mix 'n' match tasks

Removing some cards and inserting blanks in their place encourages students to formulate their own responses as well as respond to ready-made solutions. This can generate a great of discussion as students negotiate ideas and solutions that emerge from their own experience. For more details of this approach see Marr (1996).

'Hear it right' activities

These tasks have questions written on cards that students in pairs take turns to read aloud to each other. These activities give students practice saying, and listening to, numerical expressions. For examples of these tasks, and similar tasks, see *Numeracy on the line.*

In this issue's new section, Practical Matters, you will find two activities that create the opportunity to speak and encourage the use of appropriate language and terminology. I welcome feedback on these activities and the contents of the article.

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Working Community:
a flexible approach to teaching literacy

by Kate Rhodes

An innovative program called *Working Community* is based on a pedagogy that is different to what is traditionally used in schools. It incorporates a negotiated curriculum approach and caters to flexible learning styles based on student needs rather than program content. It is a program that develops general skills and uses many of the teaching pedagogies familiar to teachers working in the ACE and TAFE sectors.

Working Community was piloted from 2000 to 2001 in secondary schools in the Western Metropolitan Region of Melbourne—four schools in the first year, and seven in the second. It slotted in at the Year 10 level under the Curriculum Standards Framework banner within the traditional school curriculum, as a Studies of Society and the Environment study or as an English study. The pilot schools ran the program over three terms, or a semester.

Working Community is not specifically a literacy program, but is used to teach literacy, and though it was piloted with Year 10 students, it would be very appropriate for young people working through an ACE or TAFE provider.

The ideas for *Working Community* were developed by Dave Turner who adopted the program from material that he developed in the UK, which targeted students either at risk, or who had left school early. Dave now works in Australia.

How it works

Working Community focuses on what Dave identifies as teamwork, leadership and communication (TLC) skills. It's a program about life skills or enterprise skills—skills that were defined by the 2001 UK Government Review into Enterprise and the Economy in Education as 'the capacity to handle uncertainty and respond positively to change, to create and implement new ideas and new ways of doing things to make a reasonable risk/reward assessments and to act upon them in one's personal and working life'.

In *Working Community*, enterprise skills link to 14 specific generic skills that are:

- Assess strengths and weaknesses
- Seek information and advice
- Decision making
- Carrying through an agreed responsibility
- Planning time and energy
- Negotiation skills
- Dealing with power and authority
- Problem solving
- Resolving conflict
- Coping with stress and tension
- Evaluating one's performance
- Giving and taking feedback
- Teamwork
- Presentation.

To achieve these aims *Working Community* uses a project-based approach that engages the emotions of the young people and increases their motivation to learn. The program requires that the students work in teams to support and motivate each other, so the completion of the project becomes something they are doing for themselves and the rest of the team, not for the teacher. This peer support is an essential feature of *Working Community*.

Specifically the objectives of the program are for the young people to:

- Develop the enterprising, personal or soft skills that are so valued in the world of work and in the life of a community. Focus is placed teamwork, leadership and communication (TLC).
- Develop confidence and self esteem.
- Develop a sense of social responsibility through community involvement.
- More fully understand the work of work and to more fully realise the expectations of employers. Focus on relevance of TLC to their chosen career preferences.
- Learn about how they can support each other in their learning and transition to adulthood and its accompanying state of interdependence.
- Further learning, whether that be in the academic *or* vocational curriculum.

Structure of the program—the five phases

Working Community is structured around a five-phase program that leads students to develop projects that link them to the community sector. Schools, community agencies and employers work in partnership to support young people to engage with their community and take increasing responsibility for their learning. The model requires the active involvement of a community partnership to not only

support young people, but to challenge them to take greater responsibility for supporting each other.

The five phases are:

- Induction
- Community visits
- Skills workshops
- Young person-led community projects
- Presentations and celebration.

More details about each phase, as well as the program, can be found on the website *www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/voced/working_community*

The process that underpins *Working Community* is about transferring greater degrees of leadership and responsibility to young people, without removing the necessary support. In the first three phases adults organise activities for students, whilst in the latter two phases teachers facilitate the projects of young people, and adults from the community (employers and others) respond to and then debrief the learning, which has been led by young people.

Literacy and *Working Community*

The development of literacy skills happens throughout the *Working Community* program, but it's most prominent in phase two. In this phase the teacher is still directing the learning activity so it is possible to introduce specific literary-based activities. But in *Working Community* activities are only introduced according to the needs of the student group, when it is relevant to the work they are doing.

The main aim of phase two is for the students to work in groups to find out about a range of community organisations in the local area and to develop a list of possible project ideas that might be taken up in phase four when they implement their own projects. For example, the students might need to use the phone, so the teacher could use the opportunity to teach telephone skills, or how to phrase questions for an interview. What is important is that the students are learning the skills because it is necessary for a specific task, not because the teacher says this is an important skill to learn.

This approach may well be more familiar to educators in the ACE sector where providers are less constrained by a set curriculum framework; but the difference with *Working Community* is that the need comes from a more generic-based curriculum. An ACE program, for example, might develop a course designed around the acquisition of a learner's permit to teach literacy skills because learning to drive reflects the needs of the young person. With *Working Community* however, the literary skills taught relate to the needs for a team of young people to complete a task.

> ' **develop a course designed around the acquisition of a learner's permit to teach literacy skills** '

Evaluation

Dave Turner wrote evaluations for both years the program was piloted in the Western Metropolitan Region where he summarised the findings and assessments of both the students and their teachers. The importance of these evaluations cannot be overestimated, though it is important to note that with a program like *Working Community* such an evaluation is complex … it is difficult to measure the development of life skills, and the results of this type of learning may not be immediately apparent.

Students were assessed both at the start and at the end of the program, and teachers from within the program, and teachers who knew the students outside the program, were asked to participate in this process.

Teachers scored each student from one to ten on the following eight criteria:

- Achieving learning and exam results to full potential
- Self-confidence and esteem
- Levels of motivation
- Social, enterprising and employability skills
- Working with others (adults and young people)
- Behaviour
- Attendance and punctuality
- Connection to community and sense of purpose.

Last year the overall improvement indicated by the teachers was 11 per cent. However two classes had improvement scores of 18.7 per cent and 20.4 per cent. The 20.4 per cent result was a particularly positive result—it came from an all-boys Catholic class of extremely at risk students. The *Working Community* program was chosen for this group because of their lack of success with the traditional curriculum.

The most significant improvements attributed to the students by the teachers overall were in the following criteria:

- Self confidence and esteem   15.3%
- Levels of motivation   14.7%
- Social, enterprising/employability skills   13.11%
- Working with others   12.5%
- Connection to community   16.1%

The students were also asked to complete before and after evaluations. Their assessments were linked to the TLC specific skills that form the basis of the program. Specifically they were asked about how they felt regarding the following eight skills:

- Teamwork
- Organising things and leading projects
- Communication
- Getting to know myself and building confidence

- Finding out about my community and how I can contribute
- Understanding more about the world of work
- Giving and getting support to each other
- Taking responsibility for my leaning.

The overall improvement for the participating students was 8.4 per cent last year, yet they rated their improvement in their understanding of the community and how they might make a contribution (number 5) at 44.1 per cent. Also, the most at risk group had an overall improvement of 35.3 per cent—way above the average.

Celebration

Anecdotal evidence from both the teachers and the students was even more positive. As part of phase five the schools last year were involved in a joint celebration event. All the participating schools including 130 students, their teachers, and a range of key stakeholders attended. Even though it was a Friday afternoon late in term four, only three students were absent. The students developed a youth statement to reflect all their feelings that was presented publicly by a group. Some of the comments from this statement were:

> We found the *Working Community* project very different, we learnt skills through a real life situation rather than textbooks—we just got in there and did it.

> Every project was and is a new adventure for students and teachers—we found support from friends, group members, teachers and from sponsors, newspapers, family and the community. To get this support we need people to trust us.

In addition four visitors (principals and community stakeholders) were asked to contribute a written testimonial as part of the evaluation. They spoke on the celebration day to the students and teachers about how they felt about the program. Some of the key excerpts from these testimonials are as follows:

> The program was successful, the students could demonstrate their learning and the program provides a basis for business to become involved with students. (Employer)

> *Working Community* provides students with a pedagogical model that gives them the opportunity to be active participants in their learning—the projects are real, the experiences authentic and students see validity in the learning—it is touching on a model that fosters the building of social capacity in students as well as developing the key competencies. (Principal)

' we learnt skills through a real life situation rather than textbooks— we just got in there and did it '

Conclusion

The evaluation of *Working Community* cannot claim a definite cause and effect relationship between the program and the positive development of the participating students. However the evaluation clearly shows that the students enjoyed participating in the program and found it beneficial. As the coordinator of this exciting initiative I believe *Working Community* is undoubtedly worth continuing and expanding, yet there are a number of obstacles to this implementation.

Working Community will succeed only if it is supported by coordination at the local level, funding, and government policy. Any policy developed needs to allow for flexibility. For example, *Working Community* could possibly fit into the VCAL framework; this might solve the issue of legitimacy and guarantee the necessary coordination support. It would probably also result in more schools considering the program and would enable it to be implemented in the senior years of schooling as was done in the UK. But if the program becomes part of VCAL, it must not loose the potential for innovation and flexibility. A delicate balance needs to be maintained between incorporating a new program into the mainstream curriculum without losing its radical elements.

If *Working Community* was adopted by ACE providers, some of the difficulties related to government acceptance might be less relevant. There is the possibility for more flexibility in the ACE sector and a cluster of ACE providers might be able to work with their regional ACFE offices and possibly the LLENs to access coordination support.

Finally, the issue of literacy and evaluation needs to be addressed within the Education Department. The departmental definition of literacy is 'decoding of print'. This definition makes it easy to collect data quantifying the learning process and the acquisition of specific literary skills. Data that relates to acquisition of life skills, the skills essential to becoming a social citizen and surviving in the work place, is not considered. Within *Working Community* I believe we teach literacy skills at the same time as life skills. The students may not be learning how to decode print, and it may not be possible to prove in pure statistical terms that they have acquired a specific skill, but the fact is that as a result of this program they have become more confident responsible members of their community. They have developed skills that will support them for a lifetime and become active engaged learners. This is hard to resist.

Practical matters

This is the first of a new regular section in *Fine Print*. Linked to Sue Helme's feature 'The words to say it: language issues in adult numeracy', here are two activities that encourage the use of appropriate language and terminology, and Ida Kaplan presents strategies to deal with survivors of torture in the ESL classroom.

Numeracy activities— promoting student talk

1   House plan and photo match

This activity was originally devised by Di Young from Swinburne TAFE. It uses the glossy A4 fliers that real estate agents produce to sell houses and apartments. On one side is a photo (or collection of photos) of the house, often accompanied with a brief description. On the other side is a plan of the house.

Obtain two copies of several fliers (or photocopy the plan on the back of each). Paste the plans and the photo of each house onto separate pieces of A4 card. Sort the cards into collections of between four and six pairs. Mix up the pairs

and present each collection of cards to groups of students. Their task is to match the photo and plan of each house. This requires carefully reading the descriptions and taking note of the size and position of features (such as walls, windows, doors, porches, paths and driveways) and forming a relationship between two-dimensional and three-dimensional representations. You can increase the challenge by including a set of very similar houses (such as all being single-fronted). However it is important to start with housing types that are familiar to your students.

When students have finalised their pairings it is important to get them to explain the rationale for their decisions. This gives them the opportunity to use the language of space and measurement, as well as engage in the language of explanation.

2   Playing with a hundred

This activity focuses on the language of operations. It is based on the Hear it Right activities in *Numeracy on the line* (Marr, Anderson and Tout, 1994).

It gives students practice speaking and listening to the language of operations, using the familiar number 100.

Each pair of students is given a pack of 'Playing with 100' cards (see overleaf). The cards should be shuffled and placed face down between the two students. Each student takes it in turns to pick up a card and read out the question on the card.

The other student is to:

- calculate the answer
- say the answer aloud
- write out an appropriate equation using numbers and symbols.

The student with the card:

- listens and compares the given answer with the answer on the card
- compares the written equation with the equation on the card.

If they agree, they then move on to the next card, taking turns picking up and reading the cards. If not, both students should look at the card together and attempt to resolve any uncertainties.

Extensions

- ask students to try the activity again with different numbers or quantities (for example, amounts of money or metric measures)
- include some blank cards for students to make up their own questions to add to the activity.

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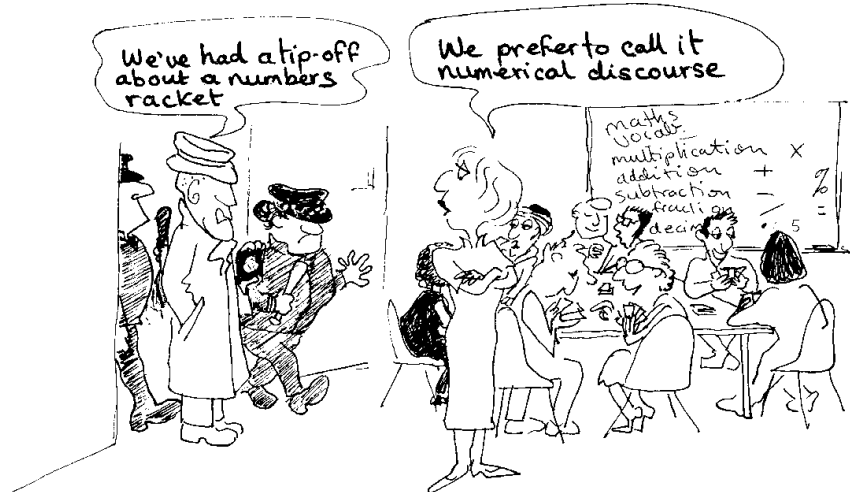
Double 100	Half of 100
Answer = 200	*Answer = 50*
$2 \times 100 = 200$	$100 \div 2 = 50$
Add on 50 to 100	Subtract 30 from 100
Answer = 150	*Answer = 70*
$100 + 50 = 150$	$100 - 30 = 70$
Multiply 100 by 3	20 less than 100
Answer = 300	*Answer = 80*
$100 \times 3 = 300$	$100 - 20 = 80$
60 more than 100	Divide 100 by 4
Answer = 160	*Answer = 25*
$100 + 60 = 160$	$100 \div 4 = 25$

100 take away 6	500 increased by 100
Answer = 94	*Answer = 600*
$100 - 6 = 94$	$500 + 100 = 600$
4 multiplied by 100	200 subtract 100
Answer = 400	*Answer = 100*
$4 \times 100 = 400$	$200 - 100 = 100$
6 times 100 equals?	Divide 10 into 100
Answer = 600	*Answer = 10*
$6 \times 100 = 600$	$100 \div 10 = 10$
The total of 30, 40 and 100	100 reduced by 10
Answer = 170	*Answer = 90*
$30 + 40 + 100 = 170$	$100 - 10 = 90$

100 reduced by 25	100 increased by 25
Answer = 75	*Answer = 125*
$100 - 25 = 75$	$100 + 25 = 125$
100 minus 20	400 take away 100
Answer = 80	*Answer = 300*
$100 - 20 = 80$	$400 - 100 = 300$
200 plus 100	The sum of 75 and 100
Answer = 300	*Answer = 175*
$200 + 100 = 300$	$75 + 100 = 175$
How many 20s in 100?	5 lots of 100
Answer = 5	*Answer = 500*
$100 \div 20 = 5$	$5 \times 100 = 500$

Take 15 off 100	10 times 100
Answer = 85	*Answer = 1000*
$100 - 15 = 85$	$10 \times 100 = 1000$
Twice 100	A quarter of 100
Answer = 200	*Answer = 25*
$2 \times 100 = 200$	$100 \div 4 = 25$
Triple 100	Increase 100 by 10
Answer = 300	*Answer = 110*
$3 \times 100 = 300$	$100 + 10 = 110$
One tenth of 100	The difference between 100 and 120
Answer = 10	*Answer = 20*
$100 \div 10 = 10$	$120 - 100 = 20$

Kindness in the classroom— when deeds mean more than words

Information for this article came from Rebuilding Shattered Lives, a training manual produced by the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture.

The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (VFST) was established in 1987 to provide services to survivors of torture and trauma now residing in Victoria. Since its inception the VFST has developed a holistic approach to service provision, thereby ensuring the psychological, physical and social needs of people receiving assistance are fully addressed. The crucial role played by ESL teachers in recovery has long been recognised by all organisations working with refugees.

ESL teachers working with adult students

Every migrant and refugee has the opportunity to attend English classes over an extended period. As a result, ESL teachers are the professional group which has the highest amount of contact time with newly arrived refugees. Over the years, teachers have observed first hand both the disruptive effects of trauma on cognitive, emotional and social functioning, and the courage of survivors struggling to meet the demands of settlement, the learning of English being a paramount task. As a result of these observations, teachers have expressed the desire to facilitate language acquisition and enhance the capacity of their students to adjust to a new country.

Blocks to the learning process and classroom participation

It is recognised that there are blocks to learning and classroom participation which are the result of experiences of torture and trauma, and any one block can have a number of causes. Poor concentration, for example, can be the result of being disturbed by intrusive memories of traumatic events, feeling depressed, being numbed, feeling anxious or brain damage. It is not critical to know the precise cause of a difficulty in order to deal with it. In fact, it is often impossible to determine the cause. If a student is obviously tense and looks worried it is reasonable to think that they are anxious. But if he or she is having concentration or memory difficulties it could be for any one of several reasons.

Strategies to deal with commonly occurring blocks

Without knowing the precise cause of torture and trauma-related difficulties, it can be assumed that blocks are likely to be due to the effects of anxiety, depression, anger or distrust. Each of these emotions has visible signs, some of which are readily interpreted, other signs cannot be easily interpreted.

Anxiety

There are several causes of anxiety. Images of past traumatic events, the receipt of bad news from the country of origin, family conflict, ill health of a child, the physical characteristics of the classroom which may remind the person of a dangerous situation they were in and numerous other factors can all lead to high levels of anxiety. But it is possible to do something about avoiding predictable triggers such as individually-focused questioning, pressure for personal disclosure and an overly authoritative manner.

The effects of anxiety can also be accommodated. Strategies to accommodate high levels of anxiety include being flexible about attendance, possibly extending the program for people very badly affected and utilising a variety of teaching tasks, some of which are less demanding of concentration. One centre rearranged classes to offer two language classes for students who would normally be in one. One class was for students with a low educational background and one for students with a high educational background who were likely to learn slowly due to emotional blocks.

Because poor concentration and memory difficulties are common problems for recently arrived migrants it is helpful to provide information on this, together with setting achievable tasks and explaining as much as possible about the purpose of activities to reduce uncertainty. A central principle to follow in reducing anxiety is to assist students in approaching difficult activities and tasks, including social interaction, in a gradual manner so that they have some experience of control, safety and achievement. In cases where anxiety is very high, this is not possible and other solutions need to be considered—such as an exemption from sitting an exam, or home-based tuition.

The classroom situation provides an excellent setting for providing information about the expectations and demands of the educational and employment systems in Australia. Without such information, uncertainty about what is expected can maintain anxiety and feelings of helplessness. Where students are accustomed to school systems which emphasise discipline and compliance, they may actually devalue more flexible and open approaches to learning as not serious. It is worthwhile acknowledging such differences with students. Permission to express an opinion or disagree with someone may also need to be actively encouraged as students might associate the expression of a dissenting opinion with danger. Cautiousness would have been an adaptive strategy in previous school systems operating in oppressive and undemocratic political environments. Clarity about permissible ways to behave has significant benefits for enhancing control and thereby reducing anxiety.

Asking questions directly to a student can also provoke anxiety. Guidelines for doing this sensitively have been described and an explanation of teaching style can also be helpful. It is preferable to address questions to the group rather than any one individual. This allows those who are more comfortable with answering to do so and gives anxious students an opportunity to observe the process.

Strategies for dealing with anxiety in the classroom:

- acknowledge frustration
- set achievable tasks
- offer praise
- allow avoidance of tasks and activities which are too difficult
- plan for avoidance, for example provision of quiet area
- give explanations of what you are doing
- give clear expectations about goals for achievement
- acknowledge effort.

Depression and grief

Much can be done in the classroom setting to accommodate the effects of depression and grief and to foster connections, while recognising that the adjustment to loss is a very long process. Strategies include:

- showing genuine interest in wellbeing of students
- forming appropriate working pairs
- use of group activities
- inviting bilingual guest speakers
- providing information about clubs and activities
- having excursions to enable students in different classes to get together
- creating opportunities for students to get together, such as different classes meeting for morning tea
- enabling student presentations and participation using non-verbal tasks such as demonstrations of a skill
- using a variety of 'family' material which requires little personal disclosure, for example use sketch figures, dolls, lego
- giving students as much choice as possible with respect to disclosing personal family information or background history is optimal
- allowing time out.

Fostering opportunities for connections with others' needs to allow for fear and the need to avoid too much contact. The students themselves will choose what they are ready for if there is sufficient flexibility about whether to work with others or not. If the student is provided with choices, then it is not necessary to take excessive responsibility by being overly cautious and tentative in making suggestions.

Anger

Anger in the classroom is especially problematic because it is disruptive for other students and the teacher but may not seem to be a problem to the student showing aggressive behaviour. Before anger can be dealt with, it is important to be clear about what is considered unacceptable behaviour in the classroom. Recognising that anger may be an understandable response to grief, shame or frustration about the inability to learn should not preclude setting limits on inappropriate behaviour.

In isolation, however, setting limits may not be sufficient to manage recurrent anger. In such situations, it is useful to make some time to talk to a student to ascertain if there is something bothering them which is causing anger in the classroom. This can lead to the identification of a problem which may be solved with the assistance of the teacher.

In one such situation a student revealed that he was angry about the stupid questions which people asked him about his country and the ignorance he felt that some people showed when they confused Iraq with Iran. After saying what he felt, and the teacher replying that this seemed to happen often, thereby acknowledging the frustration, the student stopped being angry in class.

Strategies to deal with anger:

- discuss anger in a one-to-one situation
- listen to complaint
- understand the cause of anger and validate if appropriate
- indicate who might be an appropriate person to talk about it further
- use an intermediary if there is conflict between teacher and student
- set limits on unacceptable behaviour
- harness anger, direct student to appropriate expression of dealing with a perceived violation such as making a complaint.

Accommodating anger which does not necessarily lead to unacceptable behaviour is also important. People who have been violated readily perceive injustices and interpret minor provocations as serious threats. Being prepared to acknowledge deviations from otherwise high standards, and provocations on the part of other students or workers, can moderate anger. As for anxiety, where anger is persistently disruptive and the student also recognises it as a problem, a referral would need to be facilitated.

Distrust

Distrust is emotionally close to anger and the same strategies for dealing with it apply. Further, it can be helpful to:

- encourage participants with positive reinforcement
- not apply pressure to participate
- allow for withdrawal and time out
- allow for practising conversation in small groups
- provide continuity of staff
- provide a noticeboard for students.

The quality of the relationship between teacher and student is important in fostering trust. A genuine interest in the wellbeing of students is an attitude which is conveyed in everyday behaviour and does not require the implementation of specific strategies. When further reflected in organisational attitudes and policies, students derive a sense of feeling valued and accepted. This

represents an important contribution to the recovery process.

Dealing with highly problematic situations

Where problems of anxiety, grief, depression, anger and distrust are persistent and severely disrupt the student's capacity to attend classes, learn or participate, a referral to the VFST, or another service which can offer help, may be necessary.

To determine a student's suitability for referral and their interest in obtaining further assistance, time needs to be made to discuss the problem. Concern has been expressed by teachers in regard to conducting such a discussion, mainly because they anticipate hearing about difficulties about which they can do nothing, or they fear that it is intrusive to probe. The following suggestions are very general but they can be used in most situations to discuss problems sensitively and to ensure that undue responsibility is not taken for a student's emotional reactions.

1 In a one-to-one setting, share with the student your observations about what you have noticed in the classroom, for example, 'I have noticed that you are leaving the classroom quite often and not returning'.

2 Ask if what you have noticed has anything to do with the tasks being set, other students' behaviour or if it has anything to do with what you are doing. At this stage, the student may reveal their concern or indicate, in some way, such as saying they are fine, that they do not want to discuss it further. In this way, the student is given an opportunity to control the amount of self disclosure.

3 Should they indicate directly or indirectly that they do not want to discuss it, one can let them know that other students in the past have shown similar behaviour (such as having to leave the room). Even if the discussion goes no further, it is an opportunity to convey that there can be difficulties for the newly arrived in the classroom situation, especially if they have experienced hardships before coming to Australia.

Time can be offered to speak with them again, should there be anything that would make things easier in the classroom.

Should the student say what the problem is, it has to be determined whether it is something that can be solved in the classroom situation or not. If it is not a problem which can be solved in the classroom, you are in a position to assess their interest in receiving assistance from another source such as the VFST, or from a counsellor at the centre.

Essentially, listening and acknowledgment are usually sufficient as a response when terrible experiences are disclosed. It is tempting to undo or compensate for the fear and loss which has resulted. This reaction can mirror the survivor's desire to be free of the legacy of

their trauma. Recovery, however, requires a gradual assimilation of what has happened and premature attempts to begin again usually lead to disappointment and self-blame. As witness to another's trauma, the importance of allowing time for the survivor to forge a new future needs to be embraced

4 It is possible to assist in the many ways which have been described. This includes recognising the difference between a person disclosing in order to have further assistance and someone telling in order to share something of their predicament so that they can be understood and believed. In order to know whether more should be offered in the face of disclosure, it is best to ask the student. It is certainly useful to indicate that if they continue to be troubled in a way which makes everyday functioning difficult, they can obtain further assistance from people who work with survivors of torture and trauma.

There may be strong indications of the need for referral, although the student may not be ready to pursue it. Offering to help with a referral can lead to acceptance of further assistance. On occasions students may disclose some of their experiences to the class. Acknowledgment is sufficient in this context as well, with follow up in private about whether further assistance is wanted.

5 A student may not be interested in talking further about their difficulties, but needs, and consequently be more interested in receiving medical or dental assistance. This is best established by asking if the behaviour you have noticed in the classroom may be connected to any physical ailment. Whatever the response, you can enquire whether the student has a GP they can go to should they need to, and if not, appropriate information could be provided. Some centres have compiled information sheets regarding medical, dental and optometry services.

Core recovery processes in the classroom

Apart from effectively dealing with emotional blocks to learning and highly problematic situations, teachers can enhance recovery in many ways. Facilitating language acquisition is a very important pathway to recovery. Apart from the obvious access language provides to employment, further education and a range of services, language acquisition is fundamental to forming connections with people, enabling control and restoring self-respect and dignity.

The learning of a new language, while using and experiencing the familiar language of one's home, can create conflict and confusion. It reflects the struggle for identity, adaptation, and integration of the old and the new. In the early stages of settlement, when the opportunity for learning English is most freely available, students are in the throes of a struggle which will show itself in the classroom. Some will need to stay with what they know and forestall the new, while others will hurry towards the new.

Open Forum

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

In this issue, Maria Santburn discusses scientific literacy, and brightens what for many of us is a forbidding area, while Michael Clyne looks at the words that hurt—how language is used to influence public opinion on asylum seekers.

The Certificates in Science for Adults—reflections on the new framework

The journey for bringing science to the people is a marathon relay. The torch needs to be passed on regularly as the participants run their leg of the race. They pass on their wisdom, share experiences and take the torch one step further to its destination.

Early bearers of the torch established the need for greater science literacy, education and discussion in our community. Funded by ACFE, a team of five people from CAE, ARIS and NMIT (Leonie Barber, Barbara Gleeson, Jan Hagston, Dave Tout and myself) came together to achieve the next leg of the journey—the mammoth task of setting up a science framework for adults. The view of science incorporated into the curriculum framework was to cater for four purposes of adult learning— personal, civic, employment and further study-related needs. As a member of this team the torch came into my hands in June 2001.

Structure of the Certificates in Science for Adults

The name of the science certificates is Certificates in Science for Adults, distinguishing it from the Certificates III and IV in Science, which are the existing certificates in the VET sector. The framework has a series of modules at each of the first three levels of the AQF.

The science modules at each of the three levels are:

- Science in the Community
- Exploring Science
- Reading and Writing for Science (from the CGEA)
- Numeracy and Maths for Science (from the CGEA).

The aim is that science content be taught in a holistic manner, where aspects of learning outcomes from across all the modules are integrated. In this way the Reading and Writing and Numeracy and Maths modules are seen as underpinning the learning of the scientific content. Exploring Science modules give the scientific explanation of much of the science content that will be covered through the Science in the Community modules.

The main emphases behind the curriculum, as expressed in the framework (p. xii), are that:

- scientific questions, issues and investigations should be derived from curiosity about everyday experiences
- adults should be able to read with understanding articles about science in the popular press
- adults should be able to identify scientific issues and activities within their own personal and local communities, including at work, as well as on a national and international basis
- adults should be able to express opinions that are scientifically and technologically informed and to engage in social conversation about scientific issues
- adults should be able to think about and question the quality of scientific information on the basis of its source and the methods used to generate it

Structure of the Certificates in Science for Adults

Cert I in Science for Adults 400 hrs	Reading and Writing I (from CGEA) 100 hrs	Numeracy and Maths I (from CGEA) 100 hrs	Science in the Community I 100 hrs	Exploring Science I 100 hrs	
Cert II in Science for Adults 400 hours	Reading and Writing II (from CGEA) 100 hrs	Numeracy and Maths II (from CGEA) 100 hrs	Science in the Community II 100 hrs	Exploring Science II 100 hrs	
Cert III in Science for Adults 500 hours	Reading and Writing III (from CGEA) 100 hrs	Numeracy and Maths III (from CGEA) 100 hrs	Science in the Community III 100 hrs	*Exploring Science III. (Module 1) 100 hours	*Exploring Science III. (Module 2) 100 hours

*Exploring science level III has five modules from which the providers/learners choose two.

- adults should know and understand scientific concepts and processes at the level needed for their everyday lives and experiences.

Inside the certificates—the science modules

Science in the Community is about the concepts, processes and skills that are needed to understand and be critical about how science has impacted on our way of life, and, as individuals and communities, to engage in debate on scientific issues.

Exploring Science is about the concepts and processes of science and using appropriate scientific language to express their understanding. At all levels the aim in these modules is to investigate science in context, not in isolation or out of context. It is meant to encourage the understanding and use of science in our everyday lives. At the top level of the certificate, AQF level III, five Exploring Science modules are offered, namely Earth and Space, Biodiversity and the Environment, Matter, Motion and Energy, Physical and Chemical Reactions, and The Living World. Learners/providers choose two of the five.

The learning outcomes in each module, cover a range of purposes and areas of scientific literacy and science content, and allow for a number of possible contexts to be investigated.

The assessment criteria within each learning outcome have been deliberately designed to describe what is required to be learned, in a way that emphasises the concept of scientific literacy described earlier. The assessment criteria in each learning outcome are organised into four categories:

1 Scientific thinking and/or ethics
2 Language and representation
3 Practical scientific skills
4 Scientific knowledge and understanding.

The first of these (scientific thinking and/or ethics) is what sets the different tone of these certificates. The focus is on interpreting and questioning the meaning and relevance of science—its personal and community implications and social or ethical responsibilities and consequences. These criteria incorporate the ability to develop arguments, and participate in discussions surrounding scientific issues.

A range of supporting ideas to assist teachers is provided beside each learning outcome. This includes descriptions of possible assessment tasks, and more ideas for content and contexts that could be used in teaching the certificates. This section became affectionately known as 'the right-hand stuff' as it sits on the right hand page of all the officialdom.

Aspects of science

It was important to have very clear aims and to visualise the outcomes we were hoping for. While writing the certificates, my folder had on the inside of its front cover, the phrase 'A more understanding partner to nature'. As well as acknowledging the

requirements of the society and culture we live in, I felt this was a good guide to what would be incorporated into the certificates.

To ensure that the teaching, learning and discovering that took place using the framework would provide rich experiences for adult learners, certain aspects of science were to be addressed and included. The accompanying diagram (which also appears in the flyers available for the CSA) is the visual representation we used. It acted as the checklist against which we tested the learning outcomes and the assessment criteria. These aspects are therefore reflected in the structure and organisation of the assessment criteria.
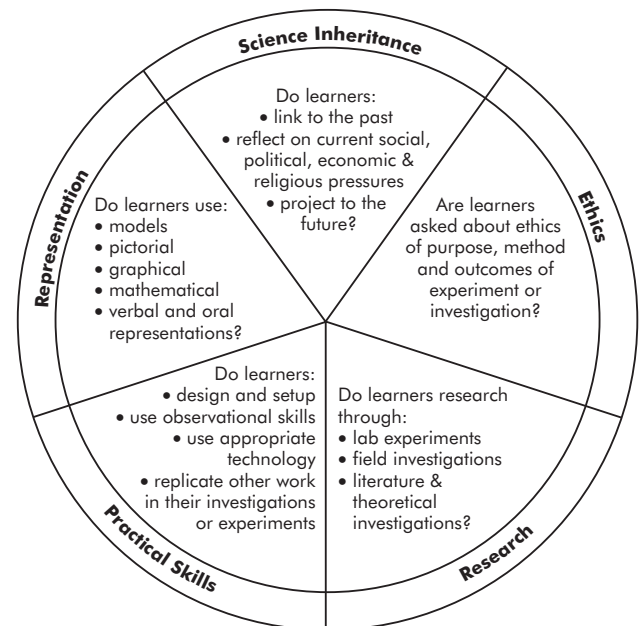
Science talk

One of the very clear intentions was to find a way of ensuring that the expectation, directive and the opportunity for discussion of science thinking and ethics was part of the certificates. The result of much deliberation is that the first assessment criteria in each and every learning outcome directs teachers to provide time and opportunity to discuss, argue and debate as well as assess the competency involved in doing so.

Science, mathematics and technology

We look at these separately and take them in small doses to help us understand them, but it would be misleading to believe that these three should be thought of as unrelated. The gestalt of science lies in accepting these three disciplines as parts of an interrelated whole, forming a network that needs to be accepted both in the way we teach and learn about science.

Certificate III

In Certificate III there needed to be a balance between the needs of further study and those of personal interest. I remember thinking of the concept of a dynamic equilibrium between the industry and the community needs and the very

fine line I would need to tread. In hindsight I realise that that is a balance we all struggle with in our lives. When I scribbled and played around with the letters and concepts, the arrow and the anchor came to mind—'dynamic stability'.

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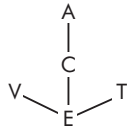
Dynamic stability

An invitation

Writing this article is my way of passing on the torch. I will keep on teaching and spreading the love and enjoyment of science and now there is a framework, a structure, to help. Now there is national recognition in these certificates. It is time for science teachers, enthusiasts and experts to find resources, partners and opportunities in their own community and join the journey. ARIS has the framework document as well as five introductory fliers available for people to see. The CSA team and I invite you to familiarise yourself with and use the framework and enjoy putting it into action.

Maria Santburn has worked in TAFE adult education for the past eight years, including the NMIT numeracy centre and teaching maths and science at Certificate I, II and III levels in the CGEA and Bridging Science. For further information about the Certificates of Science, contact ARIS on (03) 9612 2600.

The discourse on asylum seekers: have we been brainwashed? [1]

What is lacking in our education system that means people don't know when they are being manipulated through language? The past few months in Australia should make us even more determined to equip our students linguistically for their role as citizens of this nation and of the world.

A means of exclusion

There are many instances in the present and the past of politicians developing a discourse to encourage the population to exclude a particular group in the alleged national interest. The most notorious example was the treatment of people of Jewish descent in Nazi Germany, but a similar discourse has been developed against ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities in many parts of the world. The way in which asylum seekers have been represented in this country by our political leaders, the positive popular response to the government's treatment of asylum seekers, and the unquestioning acceptance of the discourse leaves open many questions about how the population needs to be educated to be wary of misuse of language. Even when 55 per cent of respondents in a public opinion poll believed that the Prime Minister was not telling the truth about children being thrown overboard by their parents, 23 per cent said that this made them support mandatory detention of asylum seekers more![2]

When the Tampa was turned back from Australian waters in August 2001, there was little opportunity to refer to the people on board for they were completely dehumanised. They were simply a boatload, or cargo. The story about parents throwing their children overboard gave an opportunity to introduce a discourse of 'us' and 'them' which, being on an emotive issue, enabled politicians of both the (agreeing) major parties sides to get the people on-side. When prime minister John Howard said: 'I don't want people like that in Australia! Genuine refugees don't do that!' [3] he was excluding certain people from the category of refugees before their case had been heard.

Refugee status is determined on evidence of experienced or likely persecution, not on whether the prime minister likes a particular group. Support for the actual exclusion of the asylum seekers was also promoted by the use of the designations 'illegals', 'illegal refugees', 'illegal immigrants', or 'illegal arrivals' in general use in parliament and in the media to refer to the asylum seekers. Of course, no people can be 'illegal' and there are no legal and illegal refugees. One member of parliament even described them as 'occasional tourists'[4]. The prime minister's words echo a statement repeated numerous times by Pauline Hanson in the 1998 election campaign 'We don't want *them* here' the 'them' then referring to Asians, who she claimed were swamping Australia and other migrants who didn't 'forget' were they had come from[5]. While Hanson was speaking in the plural in solidarity with like-minded Australians, Howard was presumably giving leadership through a considered position.

Keywords

It may have been important at the time to declare that the asylum seekers were not refugees by some imaginary criterion at this time: there was international condemnation for Australia's treatment of potential refugees. Immigration and reconciliation minister Philip Ruddock described his policy as 'compassionate'. Howard was also introducing a behavioural attribute into the us–them dichotomy. This line was continued by Downer when he implied that the asylum seekers depicted were 'uncivilised' and presumably not eligible to be in a civilised country. 'Any civilised people would never dream of treating their own children that way'[6]. This aspect was taken up by the popular press with the Melbourne *Herald-Sun*, for instance, running a poll on October 8 with the question 'Should boat people who throw children into the sea be accepted into Australia as refugees?' The condemnation of asylum seekers' un-Australian behaviour ensured that there was no danger of their being

confused with 'battlers'. The behavioural basis for exclusion is also expressed by other keywords.

The term 'queue-jumpers' is as misleading as it is emotive[7]. Not only does it wrongly presume that there is a queue that the asylum seekers could have joined. It sets off against them two large groups within the community—those for whom the queue is a cultural and moral imperative for all matters involving competition, and those who are waiting for relatives to be admitted on the family reunion scheme. It certainly doesn't acknowledge that the humanitarian quota wasn't nearly reached last year, or that family reunion has a separate quota. According to *The Australian* (21 November 2001), 73 per cent of non-English-speaking migrants in a survey conducted by the Liberal Party taken after the November 10 selection supported the Howard Government's position on asylum seekers.

Distorting the image

The 'cruelty to their own children' and 'public morality' issues are combined in the 'bully' image propagated in defence minister Peter Reith's description of the asylum seekers' alleged practice of throwing their children overboard as a 'premeditated attempt to force their way into the country'[8]. Philip Ruddock also referred to it as 'carefully planned and premeditated'[9]. In contrast to those people already in Australia and especially those running the country, the asylum seekers were nasty bullies.

Demonising people on the basis of behavioural attributes takes advantage of their helpless status of requiring protection and gives the government the power of autocratic primary school headmasters in bygone days. However, in all this discussion, it wasn't altogether clear if we wanted to exclude the asylum seekers or deter the 'people-smugglers' who had brought or sent them here. Who was opposition leader Kim Beazley referring to when, defending the bipartisan approach to asylum seekers, he declared 'It is not unhumanitarian (sic) to try to deter criminals'[10]. Or is the term criminal used loosely so that the hearer or reader can choose that on the basis of the accumulated information? Could that mean punishing victims to stop their exploiters?

Basic to the continuing discussion on asylum seekers and the way in which it was projected as a danger to our national interests is the term border protection, which was prominent in the election campaigns of both major parties. In view of the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, safety against terrorism from outside became an issue in Australia, and the loose use of 'border protection' confuses two groups of people, terrorists and asylum seekers, many of whom were probably fleeing from the very regimes that harbour terrorists. The term takes us back to a longstanding source of Australian xenophobia—the belief that there are masses of unwanted people who will invade Australia from the north. This thinking was very much alive in a poster published by the neo-nazi organisation National Action in

1995 at the time of arrival of Vietnamese refugees. It is entitled 'Sink them Shoot them out of the water', and the text reads 'If Australia were ever to be a victim of a military Asian invasion the present "boat people" invasion would be its prelude'.

Reviving an old debate

The asylum seeker issue resumes the debate on who can come and live here, over 30 years after the dismantling of the White Australia Policy and a century after Federation. The original version of *Advance Australia Fair* (which began 'When gallant Cook from Albion sailed') was clear about who was invited here ('*For loyal sons* across the seas we've boundless plains to share'). When *Advance Australia Fair* became the national anthem, the line was changed to 'For those who've come across the seas, we've boundless plains to share'. If we still believe that, we need to be more vigilant about what our leader's language is doing to our inclusive national identity!

The discourse on asylum seekers has been characterised by a callous reversal of perceived roles. It is the asylum seekers who are seeking Australia's protection and we are ganging up behind our political leaders against them in the conviction that it is 'us' that need protection from 'them'. Also, we are being conned into believing that 'they' are being unfair to 'us' and that 'they' are depriving our nation of its sovereignty. The idea that Australia is under siege from overseas is reinforced by statements such as Philip Ruddock's that the US, Sweden and Norway 'had tried to trick Australia into taking the Tampa asylum seekers'[11]. That is, they would take refugees after they had been processed in Australia, not in Nauru, when the processing in Nauru was designed to ensure that Australia had no obligation to take them if afforded refugee status. There is nothing like a fear of the rest of the world conspiring against you to gain national support.

And what of the asylum seekers who get refugee status and may end up in Australia? How will Australians feel about them then? And how will the asylum seekers feel in their everyday interaction with the wider Australian population, knowing the kinds of things that have been said about them?

The 'Pacific solution'

Considering the strong us–them dichotomy in the debate, there is something uncomfortable about the phrase 'Pacific solution' for the arrangement with Pacific neighbours to them to process our asylum seekers in return for payments or increased development aid to avoid letting them enter our (revised) national boundaries. It began with Howard's description of this as a 'truly Pacific solution'. While some of the media (and some spokespeople such as Julia Gillard, post-election shadow minister for immigration) have simply called it 'the Pacific solution' (with inverted commas) or preceded it by 'so-called', government ministers (such as the prime minister and the minister for immigration) are unashamedly saying 'the Pacific solution', seemingly unaware of the almost inescapable association with Hitler's term 'final solution' for genocide. This

association is particularly unfortunate with reports that some asylum seekers had contracted a serious illness due to lack of vaccination in a Pacific detention camp.

This brief analysis should not suggest that there was no opposition to his dominant discourse. There have been compassionate and well-reasoned contributions within parliament from the Australian Democrats, Greens senator Bob Brown, and independent senator Brian Harradine. There have been powerful statements from former prime ministers Malcolm Fraser (Liberal) and Paul Keating (Labor), former Liberal ministers John Hewson, Ian McPhee and Fred Chaney, several Labor state premiers, and some present Labor parliamentarians (notably Carmen Lawrence) speaking as it were out of turn. Leaders of the Anglican, Baptist, Catholic and Uniting Churches have warned about the moral consequences to the nation of our treatment of the asylum seekers. A former head of the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, John Menadue, described the 'attack (on) some of the world's most vulnerable people' as 'cowardice' and 'leading us into shame'[12]. They were joined by Queen's Counsels, academic commentators like Richard Manne, Neville Roach—who resigned as chair of the Council of Multicultural Australia, and writers such as Peter Carey.

Media comments

Some newspapers, such as the Melbourne *Age* have questioned the position of government and opposition, and electronic media such as the ABC and SBS have allowed an alternative point of view to be presented. Why then is the discourse of hatred, dehumanisation and demonisation drowning out everything else? Could things have been different if the 'alternative government' had taken it upon itself to showing reality in a different way instead of trying in vain to share the xenophobic vote? These are points on which we can only speculate. However, it is difficult to imagine there being material for an article such as this when Gough Whitlam was prime minister and Malcolm Fraser leader of the opposition. John Howard promised when he became prime minister to rid Australia of 'political correctness'[13]. He has certainly lived up to this 'core promise'[14]. In the process, some of the vulnerable and powerless have been condemned and further marginalised.

In recent years, those who speak out on controversial issues have tended to be referred to by the collective term 'elite'. This word, which includes in its semantic components privileged/wealthy/educated/bossy/unpractical, builds on the Australian tradition of distrusting 'tall poppies' except sporting heroes. That is, elites should not be taken seriously by ordinary people. By contrast, the journalist Liz Porter (herself an honours graduate in German and English Literature)[15] comments on the contribution of the German equivalent of these elites to Germany's postwar moral recovery and renewed international status.

If education is one of the criteria differentiating the elites ('them') from the rest of the country ('us'), then, with rising

participation in Year 12 and tertiary education over the past decades, the gulf between 'us' and 'them' ought to be diminishing. What in our education content is failing to provide people with the ability to recognise that they are being manipulated through language? The past few months in Australia should make us even more determined to equip our students linguistically for their role as citizens of this nation and of the world. For the time being, this unfortunate episode in our history will give us plenty of material to analyse with students, far more thoroughly and effectively than I have been able to do here.

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This article was first published in *Australian Language Matters*, vol. 10, no. 1, Jan/Feb/Mar 2002.

Notes

1 I thank Felicity Grey for helping me to track down appropriate quotations.

2 *Sunday Age*, 24 February 2002.

3 *Herald-Sun*, 8 October 2001.

4 Gary Hardgrave, House of Representatives, 30 August.

5 The language of exclusion and inclusion, *Australian Language Matters*, 6(4), 3, 10, 1998.

6 *The Age*, 8 October 2001.

7 Used for instance in parliamentary debate (Senator Ron Boswell, Mrs Kay Elison, 29 August 2001). See Hansard for that day: Kay Elison contrasts 'queue jumpers' with 'genuine refugees' who wait their turns in refugee camps.

8 Cited in *The Age*, 14 February 2002.

9 *The Age*, 8 August 2001.

10 *The Age*, 8 November, 2001.

11 *The Age*, 23 October, 2001.

12 *The Age*, 8 November 2001.

13 See A. Markus, (1997), John Howard and the re-naturalisation of bigotry, in G. Gray and C. Winter (eds.), *The Resurgence of Racism: Howard, Hanson and the Race Debate,* Clayton: Monash University Department of History, pp. 79–86.

Policy update

Pay increases and the new hourly rate are key points in the campaign to improve teachers' conditions, but as Michael Pegg indicates there are other issues to be resolved.

The fight for better conditions for staff in ACE— a progress report

The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) is the union which represents the interests of staff employed in adult and community education in Victoria. This includes the thousands of casual teachers employed in the sector, including coordinators and other PACCT (professional, administrative, clerical, computing and technical) staff employed by some 500 ACE providers across Victoria, as well as at the Centre for Adult Education (CAE). Most of these skilled professionals are employed in relation to programs funded by the state government through ACFE, although a growing number of centres are obtaining funding for adult education from other sources.

As anyone who works in the sector knows, conditions for staff are very poor compared to similar work in TAFE or elsewhere. With the exception of an enterprise agreement at the CAE which provided a 14.3 per cent pay increase over two years and improved conditions, very little has improved since the Kennett Government abolished the state award for adult education in 1992.

Over the past two years, the NTEU has been engaged in an extensive process of consultation with members as a prelude to the current campaign to improve conditions. From discussions with our members, and a survey, the key issues are clear.

The issues

1 Low pay—Since the election of the Bracks Government in 1998, Victorian public sector workers have been able to gain pay increases through enterprise bargaining of at least three per cent per annum, and in some cases more. However, in ACE, PACCT staff members have had to rely on safety net 'living wage' pay increases through the award system, following the creation of a new federal award for PACCT staff in 1996. This has left PACCT staff salaries around 21 per cent lower than they would have been had wage movements since 1992 kept pace with TAFE and other public sector workers. The situation for teachers is even worse. Teacher pay rates are unregulated—there is no award covering teachers. The result has been an effective wage freeze since 1992. Some individual centres have attempted

provide increases in pay for teachers, but these have been isolated and the increases small.

2 Casualisation—The teaching workforce in ACE is almost entirely casualised. Outside of the CAE, the few teachers who are not casual are mostly on 12 month fixed term contracts and so have no real job security. Our survey showed that many teachers have been employed on a casual basis for as much as five to ten years. This means five to ten years with no access to paid annual leave, paid sick leave or other basic conditions which teachers in any other sector take for granted.

3 Workloads—To add insult to injury, on top of the low rates of pay and lack of job security, there is a widespread expectation that both teachers and PACCT staff will do unpaid work outside their formal hours. This culture stems from the very real commitment that everyone in the sector has to serving their community, and the historical willingness of all concerned to make the meagre funding from government stretch as far as possible. The problem is that this is becoming unsustainable. It relies on goodwill all around and some kind of *quid pro quo* for staff in the form of flexibility and a sense of being valued. As the gap in conditions for ACE staff compared to colleagues in other sectors widens and the environment gets harsher, that *quid pro quo* is no longer being delivered.

Towards a better deal

In late 2001, the NTEU served a log of claims on hundreds of ACE providers across Victoria. The aim was to commence negotiations on a multi-employer certified Agreement (MECA) which would apply at all providers who agreed to be bound by it. The employers would be represented by their peak body, ACE (Vic). In addition, those providers which were not currently respondents to the Adult and Community Education (PACCT) award were asked to agree to being roped in to that award which would provide the safety net underpinning the MECA.

Under the current system, enterprise bargaining is the only way to deliver real improvements in wages and conditions. However, with hundreds of providers across Victoria, it makes little sense to replicate the same negotiations at every place. Not only is this wasteful of time and resources, most committees of management cannot be expected to have the expertise or time needed to engage with such a process. The logical and practical solution is to centralise the negotiations through the MECA process.

The log of claims served by the NTEU is reproduced below. A key feature was a claim for a 21 per cent pay increase which would allow PACCT staff to catch up with their counterparts elsewhere, and a new hourly rate for teachers of $44 per hour plus seven per cent increases in each the next two years. In addition there were claims designed to address the lack of job security for staff. Existing conditions were to be protected and in many areas improved to reflect public sector standards in general.

NTEU log of claims
Pay and classification

1 That the salary rates for all NTEU members be increased by seven per cent per annum on 1 August 2001, a further seven per cent on 1 August 2002 and a further seven per cent on 1 August 2003.

2 That a classification system which recognises skills used and encourages skills formation be introduced which covers all employees. That the classification of positions be determined by a joint union employer committee at a central level for the sector.

3 That the hourly casual teaching rate be set at a minimum of $44 per hour from 1 August 2001, and increased by seven per cent on 1 August 2002 and a further seven per cent on 1 August 2003.

4 That loadings apply which recognise relevant qualifications for teaching staff.

5 That the employer contribution to superannuation be increased to 15 per cent.

6 That in relation to casual staff the loading be increased to 30 per cent and that there be a minimum payment of four (4) hours work on any day the casual member is employed.

7 That all staff be covered by this Agreement and receive the same salary increases.

8 That the salary structure provide for automatic annual increments.

Job security

9 That all employment will be ongoing and that fixed term contracts and casual employment will be used only in agreed, defined circumstances.

10 That on appointment casual staff will receive written advice as to their duties, hours of work and entitlements.

11 That casual staff have the option of converting to permanent at the appropriate time fraction where their duties continue for more than six months.

12 That there be no forced redundancies or contracting out for the life of the Agreement.

13 That there be no termination of employment other than in accordance with the provisions of the Agreement.

Conditions of employment

14 That the provisions of the Adult and Community Education Professional Administrative Clerical Computing and Technical (PACCT) Staff Award 1996, as they existed on 29 June 1998, be incorporated into this Agreement.

15 That 48/52 provisions be available to staff.

16 That parental leave provisions be improved including:

- twelve weeks paid maternity leave and one week's paid leave for an employee whose partner gives birth
- a total of 52 weeks parental leave (including leave taken by the employee's spouse/partner)
- option of returning to work on a reduced time fraction for an agreed period of time.

17 That there be an agreed limit on the number of class contact hours per week for teachers, and a limit of four hours of consecutive class contact.

18 That the employer pay all costs associated with work-related travel.

19 That there be an anti-discrimination clause in the agreement.

20 That the provisions of this Agreement apply equally to all employees regardless of marital status or sexual orientation and in particular that the Agreement provide for family friendly provisions which apply to both heterosexual and same-sex relationships.

21 That childcare costs be fully reimbursed.

22 That the specific needs of indigenous employees be recognised and addressed.

23 That the Agreement recognise and protect the moral and intellectual property rights of all staff.

24 That accident make-up pay be available for 52 weeks at 100 per cent of actual pre-injury earnings.

Agreement-making processes

25 That Australian Workplace Agreements will not be entered into or apply.

26 That no employee shall suffer any loss of terms and conditions as a result of the Agreement.

27 That the Agreement include dispute settling and grievance procedures, including access to conciliation and arbitration in the Australian Industrial Relations Commission.

28 That a Joint Consultative Committee with equal union and employer representation be established to oversee implementation of the Agreement and act as an initial forum for preventing and settling disputes.

29 That there be organisational change provisions which ensure no organisational change will be introduced without consultation and the Agreement of the Union and the affected employees.

30 That the Agreement provide rights for union delegates including provision of facilities and recognition that union responsibilities are part of normal paid duties.

Progress of negotiations

Of course, the serving of a log of claims by any union is simply an expression of the aspirations of its members—it does not necessarily represent the outcome. Negotiations have commenced between the NTEU and ACE (Vic) and it is clear that any agreement that is reached will not deliver everything that has been claimed. At the time of writing, in principle agreement has been reached on most of the issues, although detailed drafting of clauses in the agreement remains to be finalised. There is further work to be done in developing a proper classification structure for teachers. Some proposals for conditions trade-offs which have been put forward by ACE (Vic) have not been accepted by the NTEU.

However, by far the biggest single sticking point in the negotiations is the issue of pay increases and the new hourly rate for teachers. The position of ACE (Vic), understandably, is that in the absence of realistic funding by government, ACE providers simply cannot afford anywhere near the amount of money being claimed by the NTEU. There is agreement that staff deserve significant pay increases, and also an acknowledgement that if pay and conditions are not improved the ability of the sector to continue to attract and retain high quality staff will be seriously undermined. Furthermore, an agreement which does not provide some sort of genuine redress for the low pay of staff in ACE will be unacceptable to NTEU members.

This puts the issue squarely at the feet of the Department of Training and Tertiary Education. With a state election in the wind, the time has come for a concerted, and hopefully bipartisan, campaign around proper funding for the ACE sector.

To support our campaign for a quality ACE sector, staff of ACE providers are encouraged to get involved in the local NTEU network or to start one if it doesn't exist yet. Joining the NTEU costs 0.87 per cent of gross salary for full-time and part-time staff, and is between $55 and $110 pa (includes GST) for casual staff depending on income levels. Union fees are tax deductible. For more information, contact the Victorian Division of the NTEU on (03) 9254 1930, email *office@vic.nteu.org.au*, or write to PO Box 1324, South Melbourne, Vic 3205.

Michael Pegg is secretary of the National Tertiary Education Union (Victorian division).

The next edition of *Fine Print* will include an update of issues from the Australian Education Union.

Foreign Correspondence

In Kerala, children don't ask a visitor for money: they request a pen.

Political empowerment for literacy and social development: the case of Kerala, India

Kerala State in southwest India describes itself as 'God's Own Country'. It is a land of high mountains and fast flowing rivers, fertile hillsides with tea and coffee plantations, extensive rubber estates and a vast network of lush backwaters and canals. Kerala is the largest Indian exporter of spices—basil, cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, ginger, nutmeg, peppers and many more—that lured 15th Century Europeans on voyages of discovery. The towering Western Ghats separate the state from drought-stricken Tamil Nadu on the eastern side. It is green, clean and relatively plastic-free, though it is the most densely populated state in India next to West Bengal with 750 people per square kilometre (Lonely Planet 2000).

> ' *… Kerala is even more remarkable for its level of social development* '

The majority religion is Hindu, followed by Muslim. It was to Kerala that St Thomas brought Christianity in 52 CE. A Syrian church established in 350 CE maintains links with Antioch (Damascus). The Portugese explorer Vasco da Gama arrived in 1498, marking the beginning of Portuguese influence and the introduction of western Christianity. He died and was buried there in 1524. A Jewish community settled after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE, though most families emigrated to Israel after 1948. Thus Kerala has been a meeting place of Indian, Arab and European cultures across the centuries so that it is less traditional and more cosmopolitan than any other state in India, and more politically aware.

But Kerala is even more remarkable for its level of social development. It is more like a western country in terms of its achievement of near universal literacy, enrolments in primary and secondary education, standards of spoken and written English, life expectancy and infant mortality levels. These achievements were discussed at an international conference held in Trivandrum between 13–15 August 2002 on Lifelong Learning for Social Development attended by nearly 250 participants, including 28 from 15 foreign countries such as USA, Canada, Taiwan, South Africa, Norway, Thailand, and Slovakia.

I attended the conference as the culmination of a week's discovery journey of my own that had taken me by rail and road from Chennai (Madras) in Tamil Nadu. My seven travelling companions were adult educators and social workers, the majority from the United States. We met officials from government and non-government organisations (NGOs), academics, and women from tribal and disadvantaged rural communities to discuss a range of issues. These included the nature of Indian society, the relevance of Gandhi's philosophy of parsimony and self-help for living in the modern world, the factors affecting social development and the acquisition of literacies of a variety of kinds. We also stayed for one night as the guest of a small farmer and his family in an impoverished flood-prone island community in central Kerala.

Kerala's achievements reflect the realisation of policies pursued since 1956 by a series of democratically elected governments, many of which were communist-led. These policies have promoted decentralisation of decision-making to local communities or Panchayats, and land redistribution in favour of the poorest sections of mainstream society. At the conference it was put to us that those developments empowered people, and prompted them to take advantage of an educational, health and social infrastructure that had been generously funded by the state government. However, Kerala's achievements in social development had not been matched by corresponding economic growth, leading to doubts being expressed as to how long they could be sustained.

India and Kerala—a comparison

The United Nations Development Program's (2002) Human Development Index places India at 124 out of 174 countries and in the bottom third of those countries achieving 'medium human development'. India's population in 2000 was just over one billion, and the annual population growth rate in the period 1975–2000 was 1.9 per cent. Its GDP per capita was US$2,358. Eighty six percent of the population survived on less than US$2 per day between 1983 and 2000. Life expectancy at birth for someone born in 2000 is 63.3, with women on average living one year longer than men. The adult literacy rate for those aged 15 and above was 57.2 per cent (68.4 per cent for men and 45.4 per cent for women). Infant mortality in 2000 was 69 per 1000 live births.

Women from a village near Medurai

The academics we met with attributed India's abysmal literacy record to such factors as:

- traditionalism, reflected in continuing, though illegal, practices such as caste discrimination and sati (suttee)—a case was reported in the press during our visit
- population growth that ate into available resources
- a culture of complacency within the establishment and society as a whole
- bureaucratic and ineffective governments at national and state levels that were reluctant to empower communities through decentralisation, so that most development was through NGOs
- lack of commitment to fulfilling the government pledge of 1950 to provide primary education for all, as reflected in lack of central funding
- relative ineffectiveness of a series of national literacy campaigns, and of university extension programs as the main vehicle for bringing literacy to adults in the community.

In addition it was my perception that, at least in the state of Tamil Nadu, NGO effectiveness was limited because of the tendency to balkanise communities rather than treating community development holistically on the model of Community Learning Centres in Thailand (Wilson 2001). An example of this was provided when our group met wives of low-income fishermen.

By contrast Kerala, with a population of 32 million, has infant mortality of 13 per 1000, and life expectancy at birth of 70-plus for men and 76-plus for women. The adult literacy rate was considered to have reached over 90 per cent in 1990, though literacy is defined very narrowly as the ability to read and write one's name. Its annual population growth rate of 1.34 per cent will not be achieved in India as a whole on present projections until 2015. Almost all children are enrolled in primary and secondary school.

Achievement of literacies

Kerala's welfare-based model of social development has provoked great interest but its continued viability is questioned. State government policies since the mid-1950s have attempted to provide for the social and educational needs of the community. As a result there has been high, indiscriminate subsidy for the range of mainly non-government agencies that provide primary and secondary education, as well as a state-wide health service, unemployment benefit for those out of work, and pensions for old people. Stimulus to adult literacy has come from the political changes described earlier. Decentralisation and land redistribution to the poorest sections of the community led people to recognise that they needed literacy and numeracy to discharge their new responsibilities.

These policies have led to the creation of a society in which the majority is highly literate and the standard of spoken and written English is impressive.

With regard to health literacy the conference heard from Dr C.R. Soman (Health Action by People, India) that Kerala's achievements stemmed from health campaigns that focussed on non-formal education for women and children. Parents were encouraged to join a network of child care health centres. By 1980, 20,000 were set up, each catering for 200 families. Each held a monthly meeting on some topic, with discussion led by doctors or paramedics. This was an important means of motivating women to change their behaviour. Another factor was the role of media, and in particular of radio. Radio had high penetration across the state, and publicly provided centres made it accessible to persons who did not own a radio receiver. Broadcasters promoted animated discussion on issues of health, family planning, and child care. Health awareness led to improved childbirth practices. For example, hospital deliveries rose from 20 per cent to 90 per cent. The role of government in promoting change was marginal, although primary health care facilities were accessible to most communities.

Kerala's success in social development has in turn created new demands on the services. Life expectancy is increasing steadily, and about 70 per cent of old people are estimated to suffer from cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, and

Children at a school near Chennai (Madras)

John wilson (right) with a host family in Kerala

neural disturbances. Lifestyle diseases are now the primary sources of death as in developed countries: heart attacks, high blood pressure, traffic accidents, and stress-induced mortality such as family suicide, now running at 31 per 1000. Radio is less effective for reaching communities and commercial domination of TV militates against health promotion. Dr Soman castigated TV for promoting unhealthy diet and images of a self gratificatory life style beyond the reach of most people, thus contributing to mental ill health. He also perceived the promotion of condoms as a means to safe sex in relation to HIV/AIDS as unrealistic. Informal health education is now mainly provided through self help village groups.

Challenges facing Kerala

Kerala faces a number of challenges in maintaining and enhancing its level of social development. First is reaching the communities that missed out in the general improvement of living standards and literacy levels. These include the fisher folk, tribal groups and the floating population, particularly the Tamils. Second is the lack of economic development. Governor Sikander Bakht referred to this when he opened the conference. Related to this is the third problem of chronic unemployment, currently at 40 per cent, and including many recent high school graduates. Fourth is the vulnerability of Kerala's cash crop economy to the lower natural resource prices that have accompanied globalisation. For many years Kerala has been unable to balance its budget and has relied on help to do so from central government in Delhi.

With regard to those who missed out, a paper by Father M.K. George (George 2002) reviewed research on the fisher folk communities. These number around 150,000 persons and comprise three per cent of the population. Their socioeconomic conditions are poor compared to the rest of the community: most live in shabby housing and access to drinking water is very restricted while their sanitary facilities and lighting are abysmal. A study in 2000 reported 26.5 per cent illiteracy overall—25.9 per cent males and 27.3 per cent females. George sees three factors that explain these low figures:

- Low level of politicisation of the fisher-folk community.
- Lack of a culture specific approach to literacy provision, so that the curriculum is perceived as irrelevant.
- Commercialisation of the fishing economy not creating a demand for literacy.

The last is because the benefits of commercialisation are drained by outside global forces—particularly in the shape of depleted fish stocks in the traditional fishing grounds—owing to overfishing by large foreign boats. Though not literate in the conventional sense the fisher folk have been found to have 'a system of learning intricate methods of identifying and locating fish directions, navigation and so on which helped them survive for years. This sort of knowledge was transferred and is being transferred in quite non-formal ways even today'.

Conclusion

In Kerala children do not ask a visitor for money: they request a pen! But although almost all complete several years of schooling, and many qualify for admission to higher education, some commentators (for example, George 1999) allege that the education system lacks quality, and fails to develop modern competencies and specialist knowledge. The state is investing progressively less in education. The rate of growth in real per capita expenditure on education reduced from 3.18 per cent during the period 1974–85 to 1.11 per cent during 1985–92. Both these rates are the lowest amongst 15 major states. Equally the percentage of students in higher education is only 13 per cent of the total number of students enrolled in grades 6–12, again a comparatively poor figure. Achievement of skills relevant for the 21st century is important if Kerala is to develop its economy, and maintain its traditional role as an exporter of educated manpower. This source of income for many families also makes a major contribution to the economy of the state.

The government of Kerala recognises the need for economic development. The moot question is whether those who manage its economy have acquired economic literacy for the contemporary global context. The challenge that they face is to redefine the role of the state from that of main social welfare provider to that of investor in human capital that is capable of developing Kerala's economy to compete in the often hostile, globalised, high-tech world of the 21st century. Such refocusing seems to be essential if the literacies developed over the past 40 years are to be maintained and enhanced in the years ahead.

Dr John Dewar Wilson was director of Language Australia's Adult Literacy Research Network Node for Victoria at Victoria University of Technology between 1993 and 1998. He is now director of Dewar Wilson and Associates, a consultancy firm based in Melbourne, email *ozpair@hotmail.com*

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Dr Ida Kaplan is Director of Clinical Services, Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc. This article was adapted for publication by Therese Meehan.

The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (VFST) is an independent non-profit organisation providing support for both adults and children who have fled persecution, torture and war-related trauma in order to find safety in Australia. The VFST runs a range of training modules tailored to specific needs of learners. Contact Ros Leary by phone on 93880022 or *learyr@survivorsvic.org.au*. For more information on the VFST go to *www.survivorsvic.org.au*

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Beside the Whiteboard

Maree Gaffney has worked in the Kimberley region of Western Australia for more than 16 years. With an interest in how language works for people who do not speak English as a first language, she has developed a passion for devising ways to help indigenous people cope with ever increasing literacy requirements in order to manage life issues. Maree can be contacted at: *mareegaff@bigpond.com.* **She talks with Michael Chalk about her experiences.**

What sort of work have you been doing in recent years?

I came to the Kimberley 16 years ago to work at Karrayili Adult Education Centre in Fitzroy Crossing. I taught at an annex of the centre at Bayulu Community, 18 km from the town. My initial work involved teaching indigenous people who had not had an opportunity to access formal education in their lifetime. The age range of students at Karrayili at the time was 30 to 80. Karrayili is a Walmajarri word meaning a gathering of middle aged people.

What needed to be done at the centre in the early days was to establish some decent, appropriate reading resources that suited adult learners. This was done by bush trips with people illustrating reading books. I would make all sorts of resources around the books. My first years were pre-ATSIC, which meant there was little infrastructure at the community to assist with community developments. Much of my teaching involved analysing letters sent by government departments, preparing pre-reading exercises around the visits of bureaucrats and debriefing people about what these people said to them at meetings. Language was and remains a barrier with many standard English speakers erroneously believing themselves to be good communicators with indigenous people who speak traditional languages as a first language.

I helped people establish a cottage industry silk screening business which ran for several years and which was popular with younger community members. People sold printed T-shirts at retail outlets in town. Many people spent some time at the silk screening house, learned some skills, had good fun and earned some extra money.

A project I was involved with which has had a lasting affect on students' lives was helping to exhibit work at Tandanya Art Gallery in Adelaide. People were being faced with the situation of being asked by visiting art dealers to paint for very little money. Isolation had meant that people had not experienced any other selling situations like galleries or shops.

Art shops were not big business in the region as they are today. At a council meeting we discussed the fact that people were at a disadvantage in not knowing more about the selling world of art, and people agreed to build up a body of work to display at an exhibition. The principal and myself didn't know how we were going to do this but luckily a person came to town who helped put the exhibition together. That person has stayed in Fitzroy Crossing and helped develop Mangkaja Arts Centre which is controlled by an Aboriginal committee.

We developed a teaching programme around being in a big city which most of the students had not experienced. We practiced ordering food at a restaurant and a cafe, buying goods, catching trams, speaking at the opening of the art exhibition, and so on. It was great fun. We sold second hand clothes so we could raise money to go to local food outlets, the roadhouse and the lodge, where we practiced our new skills. None of the students had previously sat in the restaurant sections of these establishments prior to working on the project. The rest is history—the exhibition was a success with another another being held last year as the ten-years-on event. All of the artists are recognised internationally, their paintings are held in important collections and they are world travellers.

I worked at Bayulu for about eight years and then moved to town. What was happening at the time was that some younger members of the community were interested in undertaking tertiary studies at Batchelor College. They had problems accessing tutors and they really needed support in the early stages of their course in relation to literacy and numeracy requirements needed to work on their courses. I took on the position of tertiary support coordinator for two years which involved tutoring people, helping them to find courses suitable to their needs and generally promoting the idea that people could undertake tertiary studies. This position was not longer viable after the introduction of outcomes-based performance with funding tied to specific VET courses. Over the two years 20 people accessed the service. Many worked at certificate level in Community Development, Art and Craft. One student achieved a Diploma in Adult Education and two received a Batchelor in Community Development from Curtin University.

After the VET system came into being in its present form I was involved in developing resources appropriate to indigenous students who had issues pertaining to literacy and numeracy. I developed resources for the Certificate II in Office Skills and the Certificate II in Retail Operations. I was involved in mentoring staff who had industry specific knowledge but who did not have a background in teaching

or in managing VET programmes. Then I left to come to Broome where I am doing casual work at Kimberley College of TAFE teaching CGEA to a range of students—ESL, Australian, indigenous, students with disabilities.

Could you tell me about the range of learners you have encountered in your program, or even in a single class? What's the most diverse group you've had to teach?

As I have explained my early years involved teaching a wide age group of indigenous people with no previous formal education.

I have taught VET courses in Fitzroy Crossing and at remote communities which involves often teaching from a vehicle under a suitably shady tree. The class I taught last semester was quite diverse with Brazilian, German, Turkish and Thai students, indigenous students, non-indigenous English as First Language speakers, and students with disabilities. Reasons for attending class were different. Many of the ESL students want to be able to manage better in an English speaking society, one student is studying Certificate III in Youth Studies and needed assistance with the written requirements of the course, one ESL woman has recently opened a business in Broome and wanted to work on her oral skills, one student wanted to prepare for a talk she was to give at a conference arranged by Disability Services.

What do you consider the most important issues for practitioners, and for learners, in your region?

It is a fact that indigenous people are under-represented in higher certificate courses with over-representation in preparatory and Certificate I and II courses. Work needs to be done on the language of delivery for indigenous people. Mainstream materials which are being used are not useful and I suspect give indigenous people yet another bad learning experience. Indigenous people need to be included in real dialogue at all levels of the education game, from the policy making, to planning to delivery. This is not happening.

People who work in education the Kimberley need to be aware of cultural issues pertaining to indigenous clients. Approaches to this are ad hoc and probably dependent on local managers who may or may not see it as an issue.

The fact that literacy programmes are often managed using casual staff sends a message to me as a practitioner about the lack of importance the system gives to literacy needs of students which is extremely pertinent in an area that caters for a large indigenous population. Professional isolation is an issue which is exacerbated by relying on casual staff to deliver courses, and overdoing accounting-type paperwork takes time away from getting on with the job of client focus programmes and can be very frustrating.

What's it like working in the Kimberley area?

I have had enough of opening gates on dusty roads and delivering training in all sorts of places. While my community experiences have been fantastic, I just need a rest from it for a while. I am sure I'll miss those roads some time in the future and may want to get back on them. The Kimberley has become my home. I have met very down to earth, honest people in my time in the Kimberley who have a very good nose for bullshit. These are the sort of people I like and with whom I am pleased to have company. Indigenous people have been so generous to me in my years here, sharing their culture, telling me when I am doing something wrong and teaching me about their world. I have been very privileged to have had entry to the culture of indigenous people of the Kimberley region. The country is fantastic and ever changing.

Some frustrations in terms of working in the Kimberley are that often polices and programmes generated in cities by people with little knowledge of the region or its people often do not work but we are made to fit it in somehow. There have been countless times when I have felt like the square peg in the round hole.

What's the most enjoyable part of your work?

Nice people.

And the most challenging?

At the moment, people who don't play fair and who obstruct programmes that are so needed to give people a chance to be good literacy practitioners to help students achieve their goals.