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Editorial

Summer 2002 is filled with the conflicts between accountability, market forces, and the need to provide challenging and engaging learning experiences for our 'client base'. We also have strategies to help you on your way towards providing those experiences.

In this edition we have a marvellous tale of an encounter with an auditor. Thank you Liz Suda for sharing your experience with the AQTF. What do you do when confronted with the nightmare of an audit—'refuse to be audited by feigning a nervous breakdown'?

Liz Suda's article captures the enigma of 2002—the year we were asked to be compliant. One could also be forgiven for thinking the local equivalent of a Borg Cube[1] is headed our way—'you will comply'. To prove our worth to the Australian education system, along with everyone else—but will this general upgrade in quality lead to an upgrade in the quality of learning?

Liz draws our attention to how vital relationships are in the contexts and communities of learning—compared to the endless checklists hanging from every door. Read Liz and then ready yourself with 'plastic sheet protectors'.

Also for you this edition we have Allan Luke, a writer and editor who does so much in this article that I entreat you to just get stuck into it. Luke explains what you've wanted to know about the Queensland New Basics project, and reflects on a field driven by diversity and complex understandings. Find out more about literacy as social construction, having a 'reading of the world in our toolkits', and the need for 'a critical literacy education that generates visions of new worlds'.

Robyn Broadbent outlines the whole story about TAFE and its public role. Robyn has developed this paper with the Education for Work Coalition. The paper argues that we need 'a coherent VET policy' in line with 'an industry and labour policy that are coherent and linked to education, training and funding and investment'. Note her advice that:

> Because the Howard government has refused to subsidise industry R&D on the scale required, market failure has kicked in. There is now a major resource crisis in all three public sectors—public schooling, TAFE and higher education, while Research & Development is also going backwards (Marginson 2001).

Robyn documents the decline in funding for TAFE during the 1990s, at the same time as student numbers and teaching efforts were growing, warning that 'if there is much more of this, some institutions will simply close'. Debbie Prescott brings you the latest research into good practice in flexible delivery: flexible does not mean purely online; flexible does not mean abandoning the paper versions of important texts; flexible means exploring a range of options and providing learning that is 'tailor-made for each situation'. Find out more about how she learned to combat the challenge of a high dropout rate among students enrolling in distance mode.

We also have an update on union issues from Pat Forward, plenty of practical strategies for you in our Practical Matters, Foreign Correspondence from Uganda, a fascinating read from Christine Hayes about a project developing literacy skills in collaboration with the Country Fire Authority, and more.

Let's echo Liz Suda's reminder that in the face of bureaucracy, in the pursuit of excellence in teaching and learning, relationships between people are vital. This takes us into the theme of 2003 for VALBEC—Make Connections: connect with people, connect with ideas, connect with your communities.

We are blessed in the adult literacy field to have so many people who are also great writers and challenging thinkers. A huge thank-you to all who have contributed in 2002. Here's a date for your next year's diary, 16 May 2003 for the VALBEC Conference—Make connections: people, partnerships, pathways and possibilities! See you next year!

As always, *Fine Print* and VALBEC welcome your comments and feedback. Visit the VALBEC website at *valbec.org.au* or send feedback direct to *fineprint@valbec.org.au*

The Fine Print Editorial Committee

1 For those not familiar with the cultural reference, the Borg is an all-powerful technological collective from Star Trek. They exist by forcibly assimilating other species into their fold. 'You will be assimilated. You will comply. Resistance is futile'. (The Cube is their travel vehicle.)

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.

A democratic right:

towards a critical, worldly literacy

by Allan Luke

This is an abridged and revised version of an editorial published in the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* (JAAL) in 2002. John Elkins and I edited that journal from 1997 to 2002, the first time a journal of the International Reading Association was steered from outside of the United States.

Editing the International Reading Association journal was an eye-opening experience for both of us, asking us to directly engage with American educational perspectives and issues. It taught us a great deal about our own context, about that which we take for granted about Australian literacy and education—longstanding commitments to social justice and a universally accessible state system, commonwealth commitments and traditions of equitable funding for all regardless of the socio-demographics and taxation bases of their communities and—importantly for *Fine Print* readers—very strong traditions of treating cultural and linguistic diversity as focal issues and resources rather than as deficits, critical literacy as a right and an entitlement and our own sophisticated and advanced ways of teaching grammatical meta-languages, genre and writing. These developments should be the backbone of Victorian and Australian literacy education, yet they are still news in North America. As the comments below suggest, they also are under threat should Australian governments follow the marketisation and managerialist strategies and neglect strong foci on pedagogy, teacher professionalism and futures-oriented approaches to curriculum and assessment.

In the last year, I've spent some time reconsidering the significance of the project of critical literacy in the face of cultural and economic globalisation (Luke, in press; Luke & Carrington, 2002). For as much as the innovations of the 1980s and 1990s still might have salience, as I argued above, things have changed. One of our gains was the making explicit of how literacy education can contribute to socioeconomic advantage and disadvantage. While it would appear to many that conditions are unchanged, both the lived experiences of many of our students and policy auspices and institutional conditions have become more complex. At the same time, Australian education is about to undergo the largest scale generational turnover of educators since the postwar period.

"Australian education is about to undergo the largest scale generational turnover of educators since the postwar period"

We face at least three basic challenges:

1. First, the forms of risk among our students have spread. As regional and local economic structures have shifted in response to transnational flows of capital, labor, goods and information, there has been a new spatialisation of poverty in Australia and elsewhere. Some communities and groups who had enjoyed historical economic privilege and insulation against poverty are doing it tough. This will mean, if anything, increased demand for adult literacy education, upskilling and retraining across the board, both among indigenous peoples and new migrants and second language speakers, but also among the new working and rural poor.

2. Second, policy interventions are in transition. The most difficult educational issues are the changed school-to-work to retraining pathways. There is a demonstrable delinearisation of school-to-work pathways, with the new employment volatility, population mobility and the economic conditions described above requiring multiple exits and entries into education and training—not as default modes but as real requisites for learners/workers. Victoria, Queensland and other states have begun to come to grips with the fact that senior schooling, as it is presently configured, realistically only serves the optimal educational needs of less than half of our students, with almost a quarter leaving school after the compulsory years. The Victorian reforms in vocational education and alternative forms of certification to the VCE are important first steps in recognising this. Yet there needs to be a much more seamless, blended and comprehensive set of provisions of mixes of school-based, TAFE, university, workplace and alternative education where communities can access various forms of education conveniently, with optimal transferability and flexibility as required. More industry training boards and competency scales will not solve these problems and a much broader exchange among educational planners, administrators and adult educators will be required. These new conditions mean that different educational sectors and providers that historically have competed for government funding—and now, market share—will have to come out of their protective silos.

3. Third, governments have just begun the complex task of modelling the economic, social and, indeed, educational consequences of the aging of the population, with over

half the labor force in some key sectors retiring in the next decade and half. This will both require some serious succession planning and passing of wisdom amongst all of our educational institutions. But as well, we will need an analysis of the educational requirements and potentials of an aging population. As prototypical work by Barbara Kamler of Deakin University and by Francis Kazemak at St. Cloud University in Minnesota indicates, literacy can and does play a significant part in the lives of retired people. This is a very different challenge than the whole push to credential youth noted above. It also means that governments will need to think of education once again in terms other than how credentialed human capital will lead to economic growth.

Having written these notes, I'm not sure that this original piece actually takes up any of these challenges. It was initially designed to address for a predominantly school-based audience of about 12,000 American secondary and middle school teachers dealing with the Bush versions of 'evidence-based social' policy in the 'No Child Left Behind Education Act'. The original version is largely intact, leaving it to you to make those practical and policy links to your work with adult learners in Victoria and other states. However, for those who might find its lessons self evident or old news, you might wish to take it as an explanation of things that must be defended, reinvented and rearticulated continually against a backdrop of new policy and pedagogic environments. It also offers a somewhat opaque commentary on the events of September 11 and the new imperatives for teacher professionalism—a stronger, more cosmopolitan sense of our work as literacy educators, and a renewed version of critical literacy. I've added some new concluding comments—

> We began our editorship … five years ago with two invitations to our fellow literacy educators, researchers and teacher educators. First, we observed that our cultural and social, economic and political worlds were changing in fundamental, complex and unprecedented ways. Second, we argued for the need to re-envision a literacy education that would enable us and our students, our schools and communities to navigate our way through these changes.
>
> The first is a descriptive claim that we as a research community need to debate on scientific and interpretive grounds. But we need a description not just of the 'state of the art' of cognition and behaviour, classroom practice and method—we need to re-examine the very worlds and communities where we teach, learn, and use literacy. To teach English and language arts, reading and writing, literacies and multiliteracies, in order to engage with linguistic features, behaviours and cognitive processes—requires that we have a 'reading of the world' in our toolkits. Teaching requires a social and cultural description of the changing processes and practices and contexts of literacy. Call it what you will—new times, postmodernity, fast-capitalism, globalisation—the life worlds, the forms of life and the discourses of everyday social and economic interaction are in flux. And the ostrich response is no response at all.

' we need to re-examine the very worlds and communities where we teach, learn, and use literacy '

It is in this context that we want to critically reappraise the international push towards 'evidence-based' policy and intervention programs. Having worked extensively with governments and education systems in Queens-land, many Australian states, and several Asian countries—we agree that there is a compelling case for 'data-driven' decisions about schools and programs. We need solid information and analysis to make decisions about the development and tracking of programs, to allocate funds to schools equitably and effectively, and to ensure the recognition of those schools and teachers who are making a difference. However, given the complexity of literacy in new times, it is our position that to mortgage school systems' futures and precious resources, and to judge teachers' and students' work on the basis of single shot test data is both scientifically naïve and, simply, bad educational governance. As one Australian senior policy analyst commented to us, the more one relies on a single source of data without triangulating and weighing it against as rich a field of data as possible—the more likely one is to make a policy mistake.

If we are going to assess the efficacy of school-based literacy education, we need to do so on the basis of a broad range of indicators and types of evidence. These include due consideration of what children bring to schools, their blended linguistic and cultural stocks of knowledge, the economic infrastructure and social capital in their communities, and a much stronger understanding of the emergent life pathways and prospects of these children as they and their families move across a changing economic landscape. At the same time, we need to look at a host of indicators of the social and cultural outcomes of education, not just restricting ourselves to test scores.

These data in turn need to be laid against some the highly instructive lessons about cycles of sustainable leadership and change from the school improvement and renewal literature. Don't misconstrue this position as denial or a defense of the status quo. What we propose is highly demanding of teachers and principals—perhaps more demanding than just reacting to test scores. It also requires a more sophisticated approach from researchers, planners and policy makers, bureaucrats and politicians. Rigorous data analysis and planning is needed at the school level and at the system level. But our simple point stands:

there's more to life, to teaching and to running educational systems than test scores.

To cite an example, we have been working with one Aboriginal community school that has begun a complex journey to turn around three decades of poor literacy performance. Three years ago, this school began by appointing its first indigenous principal, who immediately negotiated a community compact with indigenous elders and parents. He began working with staff to build a strong culturally-based curriculum and a community sanctioned approach to behaviour management and Aboriginal 'pride'. Trust has been rebuilt through the committed leadership of the school's first indigenous principal and staff. The result over a two year period has been nothing short of remarkable: a doubling in attendance, visible improvement in student physical and mental health, a radical reduction in incidents of violence and behavioural disruption, stronger and improved retention in the transition to the local secondary school, and a visible commitment to the school by community and kids.

This year the school has begun to redevelop its literacy program, with staff adapting mainstream pedagogies and an effective Australian transitional program designed for second dialect speakers of Creole and Aboriginal English. The school has invested in professional development programs and set distance travelled targets for the reduction of the number of children caught in the second grade diagnostic net (a face-to-face individual reading and language development assessment that every Queensland child takes in lieu of large scale testing in the first two years of school), and for Years 3 and 6 state testing. You might ask: Why didn't they start with literacy? Well, they could have. But as the school reform literature tells us, you can't do everything at once without generating disorientation, backlash and change fatigue. For change to be substantial and sustainable, communities, parents, new and older staff, systems bureaucrats and local politicians need to brought to the party.

> 'school improvement literature tells us that sustainable school renewal and reform can take four or five years'

The story is far from complete—many of the foundations for significant and sustainable improvement of student outcomes have been put in place: a culturally powerful curriculum, a language and literacy-focused school leadership, community elders' and parents' support, a dialogue and realignment between home and school linguistic and textual practices, a diverse and well-trained staff who understand the students and the technical challenges faced by all, and conscientious, informed program construction and materials choice. But there's another part of the mix that is as crucial: a supportive state system that sets out the conditions for this particular community to make a difference.

To fill in the picture, consider the conventional wisdom of literacy policy: the mandating of a universal basal-style program (regardless of community culture or children's linguistic diversity), the shoveling in of short-term funding under threat of withdrawal unless scores improved within 24–36 months, and the immediate tracking of the school's progress solely on the basis of short and medium term test scores. Even if such an approach yields short term gains—as it does where it creates order out of chaos—questions of depth and sustainability remain. The school improvement literature tells us that sustainable school renewal and reform can take four or five years. Newmann, King and Ringdon's (1997) work in the University of Wisconsin CORS project tells us that short term basic skills improvement only makes a difference when it is tied to across-the-board foci on intellectual engagement, higher order and critical practices and a curriculum with visible connections to the world.

Simply—if short term, single-indicator policy is educational governance it is poor governance, driven by electoral cycles. The purpose of the state literacy policy that we developed in Queensland was not to discipline schools like this one. Rather we set out the programmatic conditions for them to succeed, and then to generalise and build their success outwards to other schools and communities (Luke, Freebody & Land, 2000). It is a harder, more risky road, demanding of teachers' professionalism, principals' leadership, and politicians' patience, but then …

In Australian policy development, we have worked with government, parents' organisations, unions and professional organisations to make the case that to begin to improve literacy outcomes in ways that can reshape, enhance and build our students' navigation of new life pathways and trajectories—we need to look at a broad base of evidence. This evidence goes considerably beyond test scores and league tables to include: the spread and impacts of new patterns of poverty and socioeconomic exclusion that has emerged as a consequence of rapid economic change; the social facts of linguistic and cultural diversity, even in what were considered in a different era to be homogeneous communities; the emergence of new configurations and types of families, with diverse values and linguistic socialisation patterns; demographic data on student mobility and transience that is accelerated by these same economic changes; and, most importantly, the availability within communities of those other kinds of community and family resources that enable and enhance students' use, practice and agency with texts and discourses.

That we should approach literacy planning and policy in this way doesn't seem particularly new or novel. Almost two decades ago, the first wave of ethnographies of literacy in the US and UK offered the fundamental insight that who teaches and learns what from literacy education is as much about context, social field, power, identity, culture and economy, as it might be about psychological processes and linguistic practice. Specifically, to decide how to 'shape' literacy—a normative enterprise—we need to understand both the sociocultural and economic contexts where growing up, where being 'literate' and 'adolescent' occurs. We are teaching to and at, within around and in those contexts—their complex discourses, practices, capitals, patterns of exchange. These contexts enable the variable uptake and, in instances, refusal of what we might deem 'best practice'.

Even during our short editorial tenure … we've found that what counts as a scientific and the theoretical view of literacy has become less stable, less certain and more diverse. Of course, researchers from ethnography, applied linguistics, literary and cultural studies, sociology and sociolinguistics have been in the 'literacy club' for several decades now. Though indeed, the narrowness of many US states' versions of 'evidence' threatens to force them back out. In graduate schools internationally, novice and experienced researchers are mixing and matching a host of disciplinary techniques, models and methods. This is apparent … also in other major … national literacy journals and monographs.

That research is moving so quickly that the old 'qualitative' versus 'quantitative' debate hopefully has been left in the dust. What we're seeing is research that is increasingly methodologically blended and, with more minority, multilingual, and international researchers coming onto the scene, multi-voiced. There is an increase in mixed-method studies where survey and interview work, narrative, observational work, transcript analysis, critical discourse analysis of textbooks and student work might sit beside or within traditional pre/post-test experimental design. Literacy research has begun to set the boundaries of what might count as a 'case study' in various ways, inspecting and holding up to disciplined scrutiny not just classrooms, schools, methods and programs, communities and individuals, but single lessons, teachers' and students' life histories, multimodal texts and new literary genres. At the same time, the units of analyses that literacy researchers use have shifted to include not just behaviours, cognitive processes, linguistic features—but also texts and inter-texts, discourses and ideologies, interactional exchanges and sequences, indeed, identities and life pathways.

> **'what does it mean to say that literacy is a 'social construction'?'**

What does it mean to say that literacy is a 'social construction'? When we say that literacy consists of peoples' everyday 'ways with words', their social interactions and practices, habits of mind and dispositions, with texts of all kinds—we can begin from several points. One is the universal potential and power of literacies and multiliteracies. As communications media, all forms of writing and inscription—print, digital, visual, aural—have the capacity to record, preserve and pass on cultural practices and habits, archives and traditions, both secular and non-secular. In fact, the emergence of the technologies of writing marked out the transition from 'religions of the word' to 'religions of the book' (Kapitzke, 1995). In this way, different readings, different textual practices, and different interpretations for many centuries have acted as the divining rods, the boundaries between communities. We participate in communities, real and imagined, virtual and corporeal, in part because of our sharing of knowledge, discourses and textual practices.

In this light, it shouldn't be surprising that there has been an expansion in what researchers and teachers might consider the conventional 'objects' of literacy research. … We noticed that the field historically had been split into various camps: adolescence versus adult, middle versus secondary versus college. English as a Second Language and special education research was seen as belonging in other journals—despite the fact that most JAAL readers contend with linguistic and cultural diversity, and mainstreaming and normalisation issues in their classrooms as a matter of course.

… Our view is that the single biggest challenge is actually understanding the new forms of life pathways that youth are taking from and through communities, schools, workplaces, back to further study, and, indeed as Francis Kazemak's contributions on literacy, age and generation remind us, towards sustainable, ethical adult lives. All of the OECD and international data tells us that the stable life pathways from home to school to further study and to work that we took for granted in postwar economies and societies have been disrupted. These are different kids than we were, facing some similar but some radically different traditions and challenges, routinely acquiring and using technical and aesthetic practices that didn't exist in our childhoods. As Bill Green and Chris Bigum (1993) reminded us: there are 'aliens in the classroom' and they aren't the students.

… [D]iversity, hybridity and heterogeneity of culture, identity and literate practice are the norm and not the exception. Many of the papers we've published and reviewed are not about generic 'students' or 'people', but now speak into existence diverse kinds of peoples, not just about cultures, but about the blended, shifted

heterogeneous, world communities we live in; and, finally, are not just about 'reading' or 'writing' per se, but are engaging with multiliteracies, the complex designs of everyday life that bring together the spoken and the written, the visual and the aural, the analogue and the digital. Albeit slowly, the arts and sciences of literacy research and education are in transition.

Regardless of where you stand on these matters, they bear debate, discussion and elaboration … particularly in a world where it is so tempting to react to the new, to the complex, and to the difficult from positions of nostalgia for schooling past. It is all too easy, sociologist Manual Castells (1996) reminds us, to respond to cultural and economic globalisation by an unbridled affection for a simpler, more fundamental, more 'basic' world, uncoupled from the complexities and uncertainties many communities face. We would say the same of literacy. It is all too easy to respond to the challenges of diversity and complexity with pleas for 'basics'. And it is all to easy to respond to the complexities and difficulties of adolescence and early adulthood by wanting to repair and fix early childhood, through an agenda that aims, however unintentionally, to restore a pre-digital, monocultural print sensibility in the early years (Luke & Luke, 2001).

> **it is all too easy to respond to the challenges of diversity and complexity with pleas for 'basics'**

These are issues that we who work in Australian education and many of our colleagues in neighboring Asian and South Pacific countries have begun working through in the last decade—perhaps because many of us believe that our search for sustainable educational futures turns on teachers' and students' critical engagement with the ebbs and flows of economic and cultural globalisation (Luke & Carrington, 2002). Perhaps it is rooted also in a strong sense that the everyday educational problems that we face—many students struggling with language and literacy, persistent patterns of community inequality, new forms of student identity, the demands of new technologies, workplaces and risky life pathways, uncertainty about how and where to put precious educational resources—are quite resistant to the apparently straightforward answers tabled by state systems and IMF structural adjustment policies: more testing, increased control of teachers and teachers' work, standardisation of curriculum and instruction.

But five years ago, we didn't know that what we had put on the table would be as provocative and polemical, engaging and controversial as it has turned out to be. Nor could we have known that recent events would catch up with this agenda so dramatically.

There is a need now as much as ever for a critical literacy education that generates visions of new worlds, that encourages our students to transform the intellectual, disciplinary fields and everyday texts that they encounter, that engenders complex and critical and thoughtful analyses of the events, contexts, institutions and worlds that we live in. We would hope that this rings true to our wide range of readers and their communities. Taken together, the imagined community of literacy educators is not of a piece: we bring together diverse and conflicting life histories, cultural, religious and political beliefs and practices, we represent diverse political interests and traditions, and we work in what, appearances aside, are quite varied institutional conditions and educational systems. For any who doubted it and for those who would struggle against it, this is the challenge of life in globalised, digitalised and transcultural lifeworlds—it is the challenge of learning to 'live together in difference', as Ien Ang (2001) puts it, however strong the drives are for us to eradicate, deny or overwrite these differences.

This is where the original text ends. As this piece goes to press, I am in the US and have just received word of the events in Bali, albeit through the filters of American media. I'm sure that by the time this piece is published in *Fine Print* there will be more considered accounts of the educational implications. I was born and raised in Los Angeles but have not lived in the US since 1973, having spent almost all of my working life in Canada and Australia. As a visitor and outsider to American political and educational culture, what is striking is the degree to which the optics from the centre to the margins is one of parochialism and localism. In one television news report Indonesia was described as 'a small island nation', devoting a few cursory minutes to the matter before returning to its focus on domestic crime and weekend football. In Australia we have done slightly better at developing a broader, more cos-mopolitan, reading of the world and its complex geopolitical and economic relations than this, but much remains to be done.

A global failure?

There has been a major failure by governments, media and education systems to provide an education about, for, against, within, and around cultural and economic globalisation. In the last year, what has been striking has been the degree to which, post 9/11, in the face of a events such as the Tampa incident and the incarceration of refugees and migrants, our schools, our curriculum and our education systems have continued to busy themselves with the deployment of standardised tests and thick, extensive lists of curriculum outcomes. One could walk into classrooms and not know that anything was different in the world. As we've pointed out in relation to the Queensland New Basics project, while the cultural and economic landscape of communities' lives is actually foregrounding new knowledges, new communications technologies, media and messages, new competences and new

Continued on page 24 …

The public role of TAFE:
a position paper by the Education for Work Coalition

by Robyn Broadbent

This paper was developed by the Education for Work Coalition (EFWC), in partnership with the Victorian Trades Hall Council Vet Committee (VTHC VET). It outlines the key issues identified by these committees on the public role of TAFE in Victoria.

The Education for Work Coalition, with the support of the VTHC VET, has held two conference days in 2001–2002. The conference days centred on the future of vocational education, training and employment in Victoria with the most recent day being used by Education Minister Lynne Kosky to announce the state government's statement on Knowledge and Skills for an Innovation Economy.

The conference days were a definitive step in the process of identifying some of the key components to the current debates in this area as seen by the range of union, education and community sector key stakeholders who have been in attendance and watch the government's progress and at times lack of progress on the range of issues impacting vocational education, employment and training in Victoria.

To that end the EFWC has complemented the conference outcomes by producing a series of papers on specific issues. The issues contained in this paper were highlighted by conference speakers and participants and subsequently drawn from the conference papers. This paper, as is the commitment by the EFWC to the fundamental role of TAFE in our communities, was seen as an integral building block to the renewal of vocational education, training and employment in Victoria. In the year of the conferences we have seen a review of TAFE in Victoria and monies dedicated to new innovation centres. However, some of the fundamental issues remain. Noonan (2002) notes the importance of TAFE within the context of the government's policy of post-compulsory education and training. However, he goes on to outline that there are also major resourcing issues at both a state and national level involved in terms of the potential for cost shifting from schools to the TAFE sector without a commensurate transfer of resources. The government focus on the VET system is seen as critical to assisting government, industry, community and education and training providers to grapple with key questions about the construction of a vibrant, dynamic and responsive vocational, education, training and employment system in Victoria, and as Kaye Schofield (Schofield, 2002) would say protecting and rejuvenating our tangible and intangible VET assets.

Funding the key component to a viable TAFE sector

Between 1990 and 1999, the number of students in publicly funded VET institutions in Australia grew from 966,000 to 1,647,200. At the same time, government funding per course hour fell from $9.34 to $7.73, a decline of 17.3 per cent in real terms (when inflation is included the decline is much more dramatic). Teaching efforts continued to increase during this time, measured either by the trend in student numbers (an increase of 11.9 per cent) or teaching hours (9.6 per cent). The result of this was a major decline in total income per course hour, from $11.03 to $9.82—a fall of 11 per cent in less than two years. Simon Marginson goes on to comment on this grim picture:

> Trends like this are unsustainable in the medium term. Not only are VET institutions thereby rendered unable to play there appropriate roles in a knowledge economy … if there is much more of this, some institutions will simply close.

This year's Victorian Auditor-General's report into the financial viability of public vocational education and training providers substantiated Marginson's concerns. On December 31, 1999 the Auditor-General had reported six out of the 22 public TAFE providers in Victoria as operating under financial difficulty (Auditor-General's Report, 3.1.85). By this year, the number of Victorian TAFEs in difficulty had been reduced to four, probably as a result of a rescue package mounted by the incoming Bracks Government at the end of 1999. However the facts are clear: funding for Victorian TAFE is the lowest in the country—only 70 per cent of the national average. TAFE teachers in Victoria have close to the lowest wages in the country (Forward, 2001).

However, as Marginson points out, neither TAFE nor other educational institutions are funded at an adequate level. In 1998 we invested 5.5 per cent of GDP in education and training (E&T)—below the OECD average of 5.7 per cent. However, public investment, once above average, had fallen to only 4.3 per cent of GDP compared with the OECD average of 5 per cent. In public investment in E&T, Australia is 21st out of 28 OECD countries, some of which are much weaker economically. It would take an extra $4.5 billion per annum to restore Australian investment to the OECD average level. Private investment is higher than the OECD average. This is not because of relatively high industry funding in a knowledge economy—it is because we charge fees that are well above average OECD levels, especially in higher education. In research and development (R&D) the Australian performance is again well below OECD average. Because the Howard government has

refused to subsidise industry R&D on the scale required, market failure has kicked in. There is now a major resource crisis in all three public sectors—public schooling, TAFE and higher education, while R&D is also going backwards. (Marginson 2001).

A conflicted role—the public role of TAFE

Today, TAFE is expected to provide the vocational education and training (VET) needs of industry, the entry-level VET requirements of 15–19 year-olds, the special needs of disadvantaged groups within society and the retraining needs of those who wish to re-enter the workforce after an absence or as a result of redundancy. Whilst the other two sectors of education have clearly defined roles—the schools by age and the universities by awards—TAFE, throughout its long history, has been required to fill all the other educational needs of the community and industry (Goozee, 2001).

Noonan (2002) notes that TAFE is likely to be asked to provide more workplace-oriented environments to accommodate this cohort while at the same time helping them improve their skills, particularly literacy, numeracy and interpersonal skills, so that they can move on to some form of pre-employment type training. Once this group leave formal education and training they will be difficult to get back and risk becoming a burden on the welfare and justice systems. They are however resource-intensive in the TAFE system and demand counselling and welfare support beyond the means of most institutes at present (Noonan, 2002, p37).

In the UK, Pat Morgan-Webb identified a particular affliction that may also be attributable to the further education sector in Australia. The further education sector in the UK has always been the 'Cinderella' sector—unnoticed and unregarded and the one nobody could understand. Few politicians and fewer bureaucrats have visited let alone been educated in colleges. Until recent years, education legislation tended to ignore further education or treated it as an afterthought. This weakness has now, however, become an issue as the UK needs a vibrant further education system to support lifelong learning and remedy the deficiencies of the past (Morgan-Webb, 2001).

TAFE on a mission?

Current debate about the role of TAFE in Australia, and VET in general, is, it is fair to say, surrounded by considerable confusion and conflict. Much of the confusion arises from the lack of a clear and coherent mission for TAFE that recognises its diverse and multifaceted role in national social and economic development. In large part, this lack of vision is directly attributable to policy makers who for the past decade or more have been transfixed by the illusion of competition and market 'solutions' as a panacea for our many social and economic ills and it may be suggested to any funding issues that have arisen in the VET sector (Anderson, 2001).

Anderson goes on to point out that the market reform agenda in VET, initially introduced to support a greater funding mix of private and public funding, is now hotly contested and is by no means the product of general consensus. Although views are diverse, debate about TAFE's role is essentially polarised around two divergent ideological perspectives, simply characterised as the 'economic utility' and 'social service' views.

'debate about TAFE's role is essentially polarised around … the 'economic utility' and 'social service' views'

At one end of the spectrum are those who ascribe to the new orthodoxy of neoliberal economics and corporatism. In the interests of economic growth and dynamism, they contend that the principal role of TAFE is to satisfy the needs of business and industry for a highly skilled and flexible workforce. By extension, they argue that such an approach will enhance the 'employability' of TAFE graduates, thereby meeting the social obligation to promote access and equity. Hence much weight is placed on the purported convergence of employer and student/ apprentice needs. This perspective has been the dominant framework within which the role of TAFE has been reconstructed over the past decade or so.

At the other end of the spectrum are those who consider that TAFE's primary responsibility is to respond to the needs of the wider community, with employers being only one of many stakeholders. This group argues that an imbalance has emerged in the VET policy agenda between the goals of economic efficiency and social equity with adverse consequences for social cohesion, cultural inclusiveness and democratic accountability. Consequently they argue that the role of TAFE should be conceived within a broad frame of social service rather than just economic utility.

A mission that includes industry and economic responsiveness and social equity

Social service—an essential role for TAFE

TAFE has an obligation to equip its students and apprentices with knowledge, skills and attitudes to enable them to realise their vocational goals. It also has a responsibility to ensure that the knowledge, skills and attitudes that it imparts are those required by industry and the wider community. This includes small business and the not-for-profit community sector whose needs have generally been submerged by those of big business (Anderson 2001).

Anderson's view, it is noted, was extended and supported by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training in 1998. The report said that institutes of TAFE play special roles which other providers of further education generally do not fulfil. It identified TAFE's primary role as the delivery of VET but 'strives to meet this role while monitoring social equity objectives. It is this unique aspect of TAFE that is its defining quality'. The report identified several special roles for TAFE.

- The first was the important role TAFE plays in the education, training and general life of regional

communities and the fact that the existence of post-secondary institutions in regional areas also reduced the movement of young people to larger centres.
- The second was the valuable role TAFE played in the provision of opportunities for people who did not complete their secondary education and who may not otherwise pursue further education.
- The third was the provision of secondary education through TAFE for school age young people whose needs are not met in a traditional secondary school learning environment.

An important issue identified was that of community service obligations. The report said that:

> If institutes of TAFE are to continue to play a key role in community service, it is vital that community service obligations such as providing second chance education, employment training and education for people with disabilities are recognised and funded appropriately. This is particularly an issue for TAFE institutes that teach a large proportion of disadvantaged students. It is important that there is continued support from all levels of government for TAFE to continue to fulfil its community service obligations. (as cited in Goozee, 2001)

In effect, preparation for paid employment is only one of many different roles and responsibilities that TAFE must fulfil in the wider community. And for growing numbers of people it is of diminishing relevance. But due to the overriding emphasis on the need for TAFE to respond to industry needs and increase the 'employability' of individuals, much of what now passes for vocational education is often just a narrow form of job training. Consequently TAFE is not effectively responding to the full range of needs and aspirations among its students and the wider community.

The clear implication is that TAFE should be concerned with developing not only economic but also social and cultural competence for life beyond the workplace. This means equipping students/apprentices with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to cope with periods of unemployment/under-employment, rapid technological change, cultural diversity and social dislocation. Students/apprentices need broad-based transferable skills for a range of occupations, together with the personal and social skills to enable them to adapt to change and contribute to community development (Anderson, 2001). This is a view that is wholeheartedly supported by the Apprenticeship Rights Working Group—a sub-committee of the VTHC VET and the Victorian TAFE Students Network. Both groups have been outspoken on this issue as they have witnessed the enormous loss of apprentices and trainees often as a result of a lack of life skills to manage the complexity of training, work and life at what is commonly a relatively young age.

How vocational should Vocational Education and Training be?

The above question is a challenge to the present narrow approach to the delivery of vocational education and training in Victoria. That is, education and training validity can only be gained if it has an industry partner that is able to dictate the type of skill formation that they require, regardless of any evidence of their transferability or importance of the development of what may be termed high skilled employees. For many young people we are moving to a point where you must have a job to access training (Wheelahan, 2001). Many companies, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, are planning on a short-term basis and do not know their needs in the future. Not all companies are innovators: their needs may be formed by old technologies and traditional forms of work organisation (Bosch, 2001).

According to Schofield, TAFE, in the current contestable and entrepreneurial environments, has been forced to abandon what she terms as the three logics of skill—T+B+C—Technical + Behavioural + Cognitive (Alain Mounier 2001 as cited in Schofield 2001) in favour of narrow industry-defined skill formations based on competencies. Schofield refers to it as the social construction of skill and goes on to make the following points:

- Skill now means whatever employers and policy-makers want it to mean.
- Worker representatives have allowed employers and government to redefine skill, to the detriment of the bargaining power of workers, all in the name of flexibility, and using competency-based training as the vehicle which decontextualises and atomises skill and ignores tacit knowledge of workers.

There is a need to challenge a sectoral division of skill, with schools and higher education addressing cognitive skills and VET addressing technical. All sectors need to integrate T+B+C in its provision, citing the point that the T+B+C metaphor challenges existing definitions of competence within VET, reminding us that adult literacy, adult learning and lifelong learning are all part of the VET story and requiring us to think more carefully about the position VET takes on generic skills.

Schofield reminds us that our submission to the market, or the demand side of vocational training and education, as the dictator of the vocational education and training needs of the economy has not delivered greater employment outcomes, stability or higher wages. Schofield points out that despite more flexible markets, flexible industrial relations and a flexible skills formation system there is little evidence of shift to a high skill economy. It has, however, delivered the following:

- most job creation in low skill areas
- employer demand for structured training amongst low skill occupations growing faster than in high skill areas such as IT
- flexibility achieved through casualisation, outsourcing and labour hire, not skill formation
- increased labour market inequality/polarisation, fragmented hours of work and non-standard work
- wage earners' welfare state ➜ personal responsibility for skills development and education as welfare (Schofield 2001).

Stemming the social divide—the role of Vocational Education and Training

The point is not that education and training are unimportant because they have always been good ideas. However, they are not enough. The recent growth in inequality does not have its origins in the growth of a gap between worker skills and job skill requirements and inequality is unlikely to be reduced by skill development initiatives alone. A decline in inequality requires macro policies to maintain growth and full employment and minimum wage and labour policies that directly support wages in the lower part of the wage distribution (Handel, M. 2000 as cited in Schofield 2001).

We need a proactive supply side approach of identifying future needs and translating these needs into curricula. Improving educational attainment is the best instrument to avoid social polarisation and to make a more equal income distribution economically efficient (Bosch 2001).

Skills formation is not about economic growth or social equity but about BOTH—in equal measure. Neither economic growth nor social equity can be achieved through education and training alone and as such VET policies are not a substitute for full employment and income distribution policies. VET policies must be part of a larger political package that addresses the question of labour mobility, rising inequality and diminished work and family life. This does not relieve VET of its obligations to make a practical difference in communities; it increases them (Schofield 2001).

The opportunities and potential of the UK further education system (read Victorian TAFE sector) are enormous and are enormously important. I believe that colleges are the backbone of a national framework for lifelong learning and social inclusion. Colleges have always reached beyond social class in our education system. They are vital components of the success of the present government's reforms for global competitiveness. Further Education can and must transform the lives of people and communities in the 21st century wherever they are (Morgan-Webb, 2001).

Principles to guide the development of TAFE in Australia:

The role of TAFE is to:

- facilitate the development of autonomous, adaptable and socially responsible learners, workers and citizens capable of enlightened self-management and cooperation
- promote the development of a democratic, inclusive and equitable learning environment, workplace and society
- promote a balanced and integrated approach to skills formation for social, economic and cultural development within a framework of ecological sustainability
- provide industry and the wider community with access to highly skilled and flexible individuals capable of contributing to economic productivity, technological innovation, community development and environmental preservation.

To realise these goals, TAFE should aim to:

- promote equitable access to, and outcomes from, lifelong learning and recurrent education
- equip students/apprentices with generic skills for participation in work and other forms of socially useful activity
- promote the development of social, economic, cultural and ecological competence in a balanced and integrated manner
- develop policies, programs and services which are relevant and responsive to the diverse needs, aspirations and backgrounds of students/apprentices and other clients, including industry
- equip students/apprentices with personal, social and vocational skills to enable them to respond to change and take control of their individual and collective destinies
- facilitate participation in decisions about TAFE governance and curriculum by key stakeholders including students/apprentices, teachers, industry and the wider community
- develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes to enable students/apprentices to participate in decision making in TAFE, the workplace and the wider community
- assist students/apprentices to develop confidence, self-esteem and shared responsibility for decisions which affect their learning, work, community and natural environment
- utilise public funds in an efficient, effective and ethical manner to promote the above goals (Anderson 2001).

Schofield, however, would note that such a future as Anderson (2001) envisages is not possible unless there is serious attention focused on the infrastructure of our VET system.

TAFE 2002 and beyond

The EFW Coalition has utilised this section of the paper to raise the range of issues that have been substantiated by the dialogue that the conferences have supported, and also through the range of other forums in which the coalition as a whole and also its members participate.

Regionalisation of education, training and employment

The Kirby Report noted the range of regional approaches to education that are already in place in Australia and provided a snapshot of the drive for regionalisation on a global level. Post-compulsory education and training is delivered on a municipal basis in Sweden, the UK is to establish a set of regional learning and Employment Skills Councils to coordinate delivery at the post-16 age level and Denmark has organised its post-compulsory education and training through regional social partnerships (Kirby, 2000). Regional approaches require further exploration and policy development. However, it is feasible that education and training—which is planned at a regional level—will have a better chance at responding to the region, particularly in identifying 'thin markets' for education and training and addressing them, tracking young people who leave education or training and contributing to future planning for the economic and social development of the region. It is also conceivable that a regional approach will be better equipped

to develop public private partnerships and centres of excellence that are discussed below.

Casualisation of the workforce

In my view, it is not sufficient for the purchaser, who is also usually the owner, to say that they are only interested in purchasing outcomes, without regard to the long term health of the public provider (Forward, 2001). It is clear that the type of growth that has occurred in the public system has not created sustainable permanent employment. There has been enormous casualisation of the workforce in TAFE which is not conducive to the long term health (or even the short term health) of the system. This is a criterion of future development that must be implemented.

Public/private partnerships

The funding mechanisms that are available to government and community to fund the public sector are limited. Education requires much greater initiative if we are to secure a more educated and equitable future for all. Besides the government formulas presently in existence there are a small number of initiatives that require further exploration as a part of a review of the future of public vocational education training and employment.

> ‘centres of excellence can incorporate public/private partnerships and respond to the regional workforce’

Marginson is a supporter of an education levy. He recently stated that to secure adequate public support for increased public expenditure, we need a form of revenue collection that will target expenditures on education and training. This suggests that a dedicated education-related income tax akin to the Medicare levy would be a better way to go. The Medicare levy is popular (Marginson, 2001).

Training levies in some form have been in existence previous to Marginson’s idea of a universal tax. Before the average worker is asked to pay for education again (besides the use of their PAYE tax), it is reasonable to explore the range of possible funding mechanisms that are available and, most importantly, determine who are some of the key beneficiaries of the present system.

Employers benefit extensively from a public vocational education and training system. Some employers, it may be argued, benefit too much having successfully transferred the bulk of their (often very specific) employee training from the private dollar to the public dollar. The ability to do this has become more accessible through the use of traineeships and for many enterprises, acting as a private provider of training funded by the public purse. There must be greater investment by the private sector in the future of their workforce. Levies, public/private training partnerships or centres of excellence are all such opportunities to be further explored.

Regionally developed centres of excellence in training must be at the forefront of a review of funding mechanisms. Centres of excellence can incorporate public/private partnerships and respond to the regional workforce. Food technology in the Goulburn Valley is a case in point. They can also be a practical mechanism to trigger greater participation by a more diverse funding base than is often presently applied to education in Australia.

User pays —the weakest link in public TAFE funding

With a downturn of the economy almost certain to embed itself in 2002, government, industry and community should be concerned about what that will mean to public TAFE systems that have been forced to be dependent on the private training dollar through user pays. Anecdotally, it has been reported that up to 30 per cent of some TAFE budgets are dependent on the user pays dollar. In a recession, training is the first item of expenditure to feel the pressure. It is, therefore, logical that the service provider of that item of expenditure will also be under stress when the item is no longer in demand. It is of grave concern that our public providers have become so vulnerable, due to, one could suggest, this environment of contestability and competition.

TAFE and young people

Discussions about the retention of young people in education has moved from discussion to action with initiatives such as the establishment of Local Learning and Employment Networks, the Victorian Applied Learning Certificate and the Managed Individual Program. However, it must be clear by now that for some young people the school environment will not provide the solution. On that basis, we must strengthen the ability of the adult learning environment at TAFE to actively engage young people past the compulsory school age. In a review of the United Kingdom system of an education maintenance allowance, the evaluation noted that though financial reasons were a major factor in the decisions by young people not to continue post-16 education, other reasons included poor exam results, a dislike of their previous school and difficulties in accessing courses or a suitable institution. The evaluation noted that financial incentives need to be supplemented by other policy responses (Ashwood, 2001).

To do this successfully will take not only a shift in culture but funding and a greater role in developing collaborative working partnerships with stakeholders at the regional level. What is important, however, is that this role for TAFE is considered seriously in the discussion of its future and the future of many young people who are on the fringe of formal secondary education.

Young people and a successful journey

We do not only need to ensure that young people gain access to further education and training; we also need to ensure that the journey is successful and, more importantly, completed. Young people often participate in further education and training, but not as commonly do they complete their course. There is clearly a wide range of reasons for this. However, the EFWC believes that the destruction of student services through a lack of funding is a key factor in these non-completion rates. Young people need to be supported to complete education and training, and

TAFE has an important role in providing adequate student services to improve the completion rates of young people.

Conclusion—a view from the bridge (Marron 2001)

In the new economy it is my view that there are solutions to meeting the challenges, so don't panic but don't delay either.

The VET challenges—what is required?

- Firstly a coherent VET policy, which recognises the place of VET in the firmament of education and is able to support the broad partnerships that are essential for TAFE/VET to achieve its mission. These partnerships need to embrace the individual learner, the school sector, higher education, TAFE practitioners, industry, the community and government.
- The conference messages have been clear—we need an industry and labour policy that is coherent and linked to education, training, funding and investment. The most recent statement by the Minister (Kosky, 2002) on skills and knowledge for an innovation economy should be applauded as progress. Real progress will only be made in the future, however, when the range of work that underpins this statement (please refer to *http://www.otte.vic.gov.au/publications/KnowledgeandSkills/*) is followed through by an industry policy and funding commitment that links monies, industry and VET.
- The policy needs to also recognise the often critical role TAFE plays in people's educational life and acknowledge that to participate in fully in our working, personal and community life we need 'to be educated in a way that is both liberal and vocational' (Hert, 2001).
- Industry needs to be given some incentive to make a realistic investment in VET and this requires a statement from government in relation to the size and conditions of the public investment. At the moment, the disbursement of public VET funds results in haphazard subsidies to some enterprises whilst others may get nothing. There are not enough public funds to subsidise every enterprise equally, within any industry.
- For the TAFE institutes there is an urgent need to replace the recurrent funding mechanisms and for the replacement to build on current and anticipated conditions. The current model of allocation is based on the conditions of ten years ago. Access to training and education should not be predicated on having a job agreement.
- A realistic public price for VET.
- Curriculum constructs also require attention, and the shape of curriculum or competency sets have to be further developed to reflect the attributes that learners will require for future employment and citizenship.
- More appropriate use of technology—less deterministic. Technology is not a panacea (Marron, 2001).

The Kirby review has revealed a lot about the shortcomings of the Victorian education system, and it attempted to focus attention on the problems of Victorian TAFE. The Bracks Government's response—the setting of goals and targets to ensure higher retention rates and a more responsive education and training system—is laudable, but will only work if the government is prepared to make a long term commitment to its TAFE system.

We all know that money is short, but logic also tells us that:

- when TAFEs are falling over financially,
- when industry is saying that it is not getting what it wants from the system,
- when students are not getting proper time and access to qualified and experienced and properly remunerated TAFE teachers,
- when teachers are saying they are simply overworked,
- when TAFEs continue to pass on costs to students, and most damning of all,
- when the system continues to be funded at only 70 per cent of the national average, *something is wrong*.

Most importantly, the value of intangible assets, and especially the value of the TAFE workforce, internal business processes, systems, structures and TAFE leadership and management and relationships with external clients and stakeholders, has not been fully appreciated. As a result, there has been a degree of under-investment in them. Given the future challenges facing the state training system and the TAFE system what is now needed is a more effective and comprehensive approach to future public asset management that integrates tangible and intangible assets in order to produce better public outcomes for Victoria and a more robust and sustainable level of performance improvement within TAFE (Schofield, 2002).

TAFE is a public asset, a community asset. It plays a vital role in the social cohesion of many communities, particularly in regional areas. It is a real place, where people work and learn and talk and discuss. It must be reclaimed from the bureaucrats and politicians as simply a tool of government or industry, and all its stakeholders must be allowed to have a say in its future (Forward, 2001).

The Education for Work Coalition began with a group of committed activists from the education, trade union and community sectors who were keen to put discussion and dialogue about key vocational education, training and employment issues on the table between government and all stakeholders, a situation that seemed to be distinctly lacking in the political landscape of 1999, when we began meeting.

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From defiance to compliance:

How the AQTF put quality on hold at Flemington

by Liz Suda

Is it possible to survive as an over-worked, under-paid education provider while keeping the bean-counters happy? More important, can *you* remain happy?

My first reaction to the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) was mild bemusement. They can't possibly be serious, I chortled. How do they expect community providers to provide this level of record keeping and accountability on the limited resources they have? Surely ACFE will advocate on our behalf and assure the powers that be that they have adequate safeguards for quality provision in the ACE sector here in Victoria. We are after all generally under-resourced, over-worked, underpaid, and completely devoted to the cause of providing further education for the most disadvantaged people in the community. Hardly likely candidates for shonky assessment processes, or the maltreatment of trainees. Hey, we're the good guys—you don't need to bombard us with bureaucratic paperwork to keep us honest. Even our state Minister of Education, the Honorable Lyn Kosky, thinks we're great guys for doing so much with so little. Besides, the idea of a one-size-fits-all set of standards is a bit unreal given the diversity of provision in the education and training sector.

The comedy of compliance and the politics of resistance

Call me naïve, but I was still laughing after the first briefing where we were told that the fireproof cabinet for housing student records for 30 years was mandatory for all registered training organisations irrespective of the ranking of the credentials they offer. And surely someone would point out that Certificate 1V in Workplace Training and Assessment is an unnecessary qualification for an experienced professionally-trained teacher with a degree and teacher training. I strode out into the sunshine confident that sanity would prevail and someone would finally confess that they'd simply watched one too many Monty Python sketches and had thought they were working in Fawlty Towers rather than head office of ANTA.

The AQTF standards and evidence guide is an example of information overload at its best. One could be forgiven for thinking that it's somebody's idea of a joke. Just reading the dot points of one standard made one want to lie down and have a nice rest. On every page there was a reference to a person who had responsibility for ensuring a particular standard was met. I quickly realised that in a small organisation such as ours, in almost every case that person was me. My brain trembled at the thought of having to take it all in, let alone produce the documentation. Besides, I was already overloaded and about to leave the country, in a month or so, on the famed travelling scholarship to visit the dialogic literary circles in Spain and the Czech Republic (Suda 2002). There was much to be getting on with, without doing a complete review of the policies and procedures of the organisation to make sure it was AQTF-compliant.

Backing the odds and fronting the reality

I justified my defiance with a gambler's bad luck as it turns out, and punted on the fact that the community sector would not be audited in 2002. I put the AQTF on hold while I got on with the business of the continuous-quality improvement of our program. When I returned to work on the 8th of July, after an eight-week absence, many of my cluster colleagues were bemoaning the huge workload involved with the AQTF review. Even then I shrugged it off—it will have to wait till I catch up on the backlog of work and get the scholarship report happening, the website in action, articles written and all the other pressing and important plans for the program. This to me was far more important work than justifying ourselves to a supposed higher authority. My first commitment is to FRWP and the students, I argued. I was full of enthusiasm for dialogic learning, democratic participation and putting into practice some of what I had learned on my travels. Rumours were circulating that 20 ACE organisations would be audited in Victoria before the end of the year, but I was still in denial and determined to pursue innovation and experimentation rather than worry about the possibility of an audit. I assumed I had the laws of probability on my side but unfortunately the luck of the Irish was with us.

In the first week of September, the letter from the Office of Training Technical Education arrived on my desk announcing that we were one of the lucky 20. My defiance turned into a huge block of ice that numbed my innards. There were a few options available:

- I could resign, which was the strongest impulse
- I could refuse to be audited by feigning a nervous breakdown, which was a pathetic impulse
- I could cooperate with the audit but not prepare for it and argue our own definition of quality provision, which was a more rational and political impulse
- Or, and this was the least favoured option, I could conduct a thorough and complete review of the organisation's policies and procedures and assess them against the AQTF standards.

I spent the rest of the day pacing up and down, defiantly arguing with the imaginary auditor as to what quality really means in

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an organisation such as ours. I began devising my own standards of quality in an educational sense, in a community sense, in an organisational sense. I mounted argument after argument, about how the AQTF standards say very little about the things that I think really demonstrate quality provision. I wanted to make him understand that our teachers work on a sessional basis, that the organisation does not receive any funding to meet these new accountability requirements. By the end of the day however, I knew that resistance and defiance would probably be misunderstood and ultimately counter-productive. Rather than demonstrate the real quality of our program, resistance would make it seem that we in the community really were the 'Cinderella' of the education system, the poor cousins who couldn't quite match it. Worse still, whingers who endlessly complain about a lack of resources, and the unreasonable demands of funding bodies; a group not to be taken seriously as quality providers of education for adults. It was then that I rang Ray, our office supplies wholesaler, and ordered a pile of new ring binder folders, lever arch files and two boxes of plastic sheet protectors.

The road to compliance is paved with plastic sheet protectors

I decided that I would have to switch off the rolling screen saver on my computer that read 'Flemington Reading and Writing Program … Lighting fires in the imagination'. Put the imagination on hold. What was called for was lever arch folders full of evidence to support our quality practice. Documentation to prove we have principles, integrity, professionalism, ideals, a philosophy of education, a respect for our students, committed professionally-qualified staff, sound management systems and, above all, procedures to ensure that our records are secure from fire. Mind-numbing busy work, assembly line computer process work, creating version-controlled evidence to prove that we provide a quality, risk-managed service that meets the uniform standards of the AQTF.

The next few weeks were a frenzy of motherhood statements and rhetoric. I ploughed through sample policy and procedure after sample policy and procedure to see how it could be adapted to suit our organisation. I had to decide what needed to be added to existing policies or what new procedures might be necessary to satisfy the requirements of each standard. I would wake up at five in the morning with solutions to another piece of the puzzle. I dreamed that I was drowning in plastic sheet protectors. It seemed that the only way we could really satisfy the AQTF's obsession with checklists was to have a clipboard hanging off every door with various checklists of compliance. We would have to document every interaction that might demonstrate that the staff talked to each other, talked to students, taught their classes. Why not just plaster the walls with checklists that we can just tick off every minute of the day I thought, but no—that might represent a breach of confidentiality. Alternatively, we could simply become record keepers, armed with clipboards and checklists, rather than teachers bearing ideas, direction and inspiration. I started counting ticks in boxes to put myself to sleep each night.

And all the while the students kept coming to class, and the phone kept ringing, and new students were interviewed and the teachers tried to talk to me about quality improvements to the program, the website, curriculum innovations, new resources we might buy. My response invariably was: 'Sounds good but can't think about that now, I'm reviewing quality standards at FRWP. Could you put that idea in writing though, so we can use it as evidence of business planning?' And so it

went on until the day of the audit. It was like preparing the house for the mother-in-law's first visit. Everything had to be just right and nothing would ever be the same again.

The great ticked box in the sky—the AQTF's holy grail

I was pleasantly surprised to find that the auditor was a decent human being who, whilst inexperienced in the area of community provision and language and literacy programs, was genuinely open to discussion and argument about appropriate interpretations of the standards for our particular context. Over a period of two days the policies and procedures of FRWP were measured against the AQTF standards. The process was a dialogic one where the auditor was happy to explore the philosophical underpinnings of our procedures. He was extremely rigorous and focused on the standards, but there was scope for me to air some of the defiant arguments I had rehearsed pacing up and down all those weeks before. The process was concluded with a visit to one of our classes, an ESL conversation class, where 13 students spoke enthusiastically about their studies, and provided the best evidence one could produce that quality provision occurs at Flemington. The auditor noted, with a touch of surprise, that the men and women who came from eight different countries and cultures all participated equally in the discussion. It occurred to me later that he may have suspected that we'd enlisted the services of trained actors to construct a checklist-perfect group to demonstrate our commitment egalitarian dialogue and cultural inclusiveness. Tick, tick.

The program was deemed as having a high level of compliance with the AQTF standards with only two minor areas to rectify—one being to address the fireproof issue. At the end of the day, however, I felt strangely disappointed despite the pages of ticked boxes and the stimulating and lively discussions with the auditor. What had really been measured and verified at Flemington through this process? Was it a rigorous evaluation of the quality of our provision of further education for adults? Not really. Did it validate our track record as a place of imagination, inspiration and innovation? Not at all. Did it evaluate the positive relationships developed in classes, the impact that delivery had had on learners' lives and the community? Not really, although the auditor did write some comments outside of the ticked boxes to explain the evidence provided.

Trained compliance or educated defiance?

The AQTF does not really address the quality provision of education and training. Rather it appears to be more concerned with the documentation of policies, procedures and records to safeguard against unethical and unprofessional providers. Whilst this might seem desirable and reasonable in many respects, one can't help but question the efficacy of this means to an end. The process I went through was in large part an academic literacy exercise: one which required the understanding and absorption of a new language—the language of accountability, risk management and version control. Some of the language and concepts were familiar, and some were not. Our capacity to meet the requirements of the standards was entirely dependent on the ability to reproduce the language, address every standard and stick with it to the last dot point. One could view it as an example of Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest. It's not surprising then that I missed the second last dot point of the final standard, which states that one must have the written, rather than merely verbal, permission of any people who are photographed for publicity or promotional purposes. Strike two!

'one could view it as an example of Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest'

Having a bit of a laugh and poking fun at bureaucracy is all very well, and writing this article has certainly been good post-audit therapy for me. There is however a more serious side to this whole discussion and it has a lot to do with the dilemma facing those of us who consider ourselves to be educators rather than trainers. Compliance is all very well but does it detract from the real and challenging task of education in the ideal sense. Education is a process that addresses the needs of the individual and draws out their potential. Education encourages critical, analytical thinking and the ability to transfer knowledge and skill from one context to another. An educated person can be taught to do many things. One can train animals to perform tricks but one can't educate them to make decisions, analyse, imagine new possibilities or adapt knowledge and skills from one context to another. Helen McRae deals with this issue in her article 'The Darker Side of Accreditation' (McRae 2001) when she talks about the gift that good teachers can pass onto their students, that is, a love of learning.

Flemington has always been and will always be a quality provider of education whether it has an AQTF audit annually or triannually. It is not the documented processes and procedures that make the organisation what it is, but rather the quality of the relationships that the staff have with each other, their students and the community, and the educational philosophy which underpins that practice. That philosophy ensures that the teachers who work there are always looking for new and better ways of drawing out the potential of their students, of offering them new ways of seeing the world, the knowledge and skills necessary for effective participation in work, family and community life. That educational process might often involve a degree of training, particularly with some language and computing skills. A multiplicity of skills, knowledge and experiences interact to achieve quality education. In an adult education context those connections can best be achieved through a process of egalitarian dialogue, as Freire and others have advocated. This requires showing respect for what students know by giving them some control over what and how they learn. It is through these debates and discussion that the staff at FRWP struggle to maintain quality and demonstrate best practice. The holy grail of quality education is not achieved through folders of

version-controlled documents neatly ordered in plastic sheet protectors, but rather through action and reflection and a sound philosophical base.

The comfort of busy work—dangerous illusions

My concern is that in trying to maintain the AQTF standards, we will have to establish more bureaucratic ways of operating which are antithetical to the kind of education discussed above. It is all very well to be cynical and suggest that one can merely 'tidy up' before each audit and put the AQTF on hold in between, but that is not really possible given the detailed natured of the records that are meant to be kept, stored and available for inspection, theoretically, at the drop of a hat. And I'm not convinced that one can simply be a little more bureaucratic, given the same level of resources, and simply pay a little more attention to policies, procedures and accountability without compromising the ideals of education in some way. There is a false sense of progress in this kind of busy work, where one is lulled by the certainty and achievablity of the task. And it all seems so reasonable in the end, to have every 'i' dotted and every't' crossed, all contingencies accounted for and nothing left to chance or judgement or professionalism. Compliance is a much easier path to take than defiance. One just follows one prescribed dot point after another and there's no need to worry if one is really making a difference or not.

This is the challenge, and this is where we have to be ever-vigilant in determining our priorities given the current level of resources and the limitations of time. This is where we have to adopt the principles of quality education in our work. It is important to question, challenge and critique the texts we are asked to obey and thereby apply the principles of critical literacy to our own work. Otherwise, there is a danger that the joke will be on us and our students.

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The flexible delivery of literacy and numeracy: what is best practice?

by Debbie Prescott

While flexible delivery is a viable means of teaching literacy, each situation demands its own particular solution.

This research took place in 2001 when I was coordinating the Commonwealth Government's Department of Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) contract for distance delivery of language, literacy and numeracy for the South East Institute of TAFE (Training and Further Education) South Australia. The Spencer Foundation funded the research for literacy and numeracy teachers. The local project managers and mentors were Lyn Wilkinson from Flinders University and Pat Grant from the University of South Australia.

I was concerned about the high dropout rate from the Certificate I in Preparatory Education (Literacy and Numeracy) by students who asked to enrol in the distance mode. There were similar dropout rates in other programs, such as Horticulture and Community Services, which offer many of their modules via flexible delivery. Bernard et al (2000) confirms 'high average rates of dropout and low quality of learning attainment'.

The students I worked with lived in an area spanning 200 kilometres in the south-east of South Australia. They were all reported to be NRS levels 1 and 2. There was one deaf student and one with a severe back injury from a motorcycle accident. Five were unemployed, one was a full-time casual employee who chose to continue with the program and another was employed part-time. Two had a police record. Their ages ranged from 18 to 37 and all had English-speaking backgrounds. Almost all started or completed Year 9 at school. Three students had no phone or transport. Two students without phones or cars were dependent on friends to drive them the 20-30 minutes to a learning centre or campus, so their attendance was irregular and they couldn't communicate to the lecturer that they would be late or absent. Although this isn't 'remote' in the sense of outback distances, it was isolating nonetheless.

My aim in this research project was to find out the best ways to support students in their literacy studies so that they would be successful.

Recommendations

Flexible learning is not a cheap way to cater for a lot of students with minimum staffing and a minimum of resources (Wiltshire, 2001). 'There is no one best practice for the flexible delivery of adult literacy education to remote communities' (Singh, 1997, p.159).

1. Explore quality resource options

Paper-based learning packages based on curriculum modules were the most common resources used in this program. I used WebCT (Web Course Tools, an online program for some TAFE subjects), video conferencing and face-to-face sessions but they weren't as versatile as the stand-alone learning packages. 'The use of media-based learning materials can impose constraints' (Kirkwood, 2000, p251). For the students in the south-east most of the constraints were transport problems in getting to the learning centre.

> 'flexible learning is not a cheap way to cater for a lot of students with minimum staffing and a minimum of resources'

Learning packages need to be of a high professional standard, organised logically, clearly showing rules, answers and assessments so that students can find answers to their questions without frustration. These professionally published learning packages are becoming more common but there is a continual need for new learning packages as modules are added to curricula. This means that funding should be made available regularly to allow literacy practitioners to write these learning packages. I estimate my time at about 40 hours to write one numeracy package of 20 nominal hours. It may be an opportunity for teams to recuperate some of the costs involved by selling the product to other providers. They are in demand as they don't cost as much as a more extensive text and they conform directly to the curriculum.

I think the idea of study or learning guides should be explored more. Alison Thompson (1992) documents her experience with open learning using customised guides. She wrote handwritten lists of specific pages of resources on site which she wanted the students to use. This technique encourages students to be more learning-independent and uses a wide variety of texts. Some distance students, however, would still need to access a learning centre which has the texts available. Another solution is learning packages which have all the activities included in their entirety. I wrote a learning package in which the prescribed activities required the student to go to their local library to use the

computer catalogue to answer a specific question, for example to collect shopping dockets or to call their local council for information on rates. These may be 'parallel but equivalent' (Kirkwood, 2000, p.256) activities and may be negotiated depending on the student's circumstances. Features such as face-to-face and video conferencing sessions, phone calls and deadlines could be included in these activities. 'Courses with fixed time scales and specified objectives seemed to provide students with the best chance of success' (Abell, 1991, p.10).

2. Maintain close liaison with other local organisations

When a customer (prospective student) was asked by Centrelink to attend a literacy and numeracy assessment the procedure was clear. While the customer was at Centrelink, the officer calls the literacy provider and makes an appointment. The date, time and place of the assessment is given to the customer who signs the agreement. Immediately Centrelink faxes the name, address and contact number to the provider. Many times, however, the customer did not show up at the interview. Then the onus was on the provider to make two more appointments with the customer before telling Centrelink they didn't show up. Often the phone number was disconnected, mobiles not paid up, the customer wasn't home, had a job interview, was sick or simply forgot.

To partially address this problem, the Mount Gambier Centrelink trialled a new initiative that was very promising. They invited three or four young people each week to a youth allowance panel. These youth were most at risk of not fulfilling their agreements under Mutual Obligation. Also invited were three or four specialists in the community representing organisations which could support these young people, such as the literacy provider, high school counsellor, housing representative, drug and alcohol counsellor, single parent support worker. The atmosphere of the meeting was set with nibbles and soft drinks and casual conversation. The presentation briefly set out the obligations and consequences clearly and then offered the customers choices. The specialists in the room could then talk informally with the customer to say what support they could offer. The customer had to pick three choices before they left the room and computers were set up in the room so the customers could be signed up for the programs on the spot. This opportunity to offer choice, I think, is very important.

The youth allowance panel served to put names and faces to the community organisations and the customers were more likely then to take advantage of the support available and turn up to the interviews. It was a very positive step in dealing with Mutual Obligation clients and I recommend that other areas try something similar.

In order to liaise more closely with the community, I also offered literacy and numeracy awareness workshops to all the job network member organisations in the area. Workshops included information about why people have literacy problems, clues to literacy needs, strategies when approaching clients about literacy, non-threatening questions to ask and ways to encourage clients to choose literacy options. Rosemary Wood and I (1998) compiled a booklet so Centrelink staff could refer to it. Job network staff greeted these workshops well and it was especially enlightening for me to go to their workplaces to see and hear first hand the problems they face.

3. Provide dedicated staff support

> There are signs of a renewed interest in student support … driven by concern with student dropout and, in an increasingly competitive (training) world, student retention … Support is most needed early in the first year of study … Higher course completion rates seem to correlate with … reminders from tutors to complete work … short turn-around for the completed assignment … telephone tuition. (Rumble, 2000, p.221).

There should be a full-time 'distance' teacher and a toll-free line direct to the teacher so the student is encouraged to make the calls. For further encouragement, alternate fortnightly phone calls with newsletters or short, warmup activities or games sent by post. Provide a form that will encourage students to keep a record of the calls made and received and work sent and received. This serves as a double check for lost work and also gives valuable practice in keeping records. It would also provide data about how many hours students spend on their work, as this is most difficult to estimate for Centrelink purposes. The form could also be used for making comments on successes and progress.

Administration staff could help with the increased record keeping and reporting requirements for quality and moderation. They can fax, keep costing records and do some photocopying. The trainer must do most reporting tasks because they need to make professional judgements.

> Flexible learning is broadly characterised by … the deployment of multiskilled teams. Rather than the (assessor/trainer) responsible undertaking all stages … other professionals are often required to provide specific skills in … desktop publication … administration and maintenance of programs.
> (2000, *www.cfl.mq.edu.au/cfl/flexible/cflflex1.html*).

> If you avoid the trap of cutting costs by reducing the human element in the learning environment, effective flexible learning programs are possible for most potential students. (Wiltshire, 2001).

Flexible learning programs must be staff-rich.

4. Analyse learning styles

> Academic language skills can be taught with activities that cater to a variety of learning styles. Students should be encouraged to learn in their preferred style but also be challenged to stretch their ability to learn in different ways. (Turton et al).

Once the lecturer has a better idea of the preferred learning style/s of the student, they can negotiate more specifically the kinds of activities and assessment that will suit the student best. Lecturers can show students how they 'can process the same (academic) information in a new way that complements their preferred learning style' (Turton et al).

I gave each student a questionnaire to help pinpoint their preferred learning styles but only received four completed ones back. Even this required constant reminders because it wasn't part of a maths or writing module. I recommend that one of the first modules to be given out is 'Different learning styles' in the Certificate I in Preparatory Education including the questionnaire. This could have been neglected in the past because 'learning strategies' was not a 'macro-skill' that had to show improvement on the National Reporting System in order for DETYA to make payment. In this contract, however, learning strategies takes on an important formal role.

'the accreditation process may give authority to the curriculum but what authority will it give our students'

5. Include oral communication as an assessable skill

> Think about the importance of the voice, how so much of our communication is oral and yet we put so little thought into developing and improving our oral skills. (Russell, 1994).

In the Certificate I in Preparatory Education, there are several modules which could be used to assess oral communication over the phone. Because 'oral language helps build reading and writing skills' (Cassidy), the practice over the phone should not be minimised. The 'it's over to you' English as second language instructors call their students for as much as an hour every fortnight to build their proficiency in conversation.

Liz Suda (1995) says her 'students generally learn a lot better if they are given the opportunity to talk in collaborative and individual situations about their learning. The accreditation process may give authority to the curriculum but what authority will it give our students?' We need to give the authority to our students: the authority and the opportunity to talk, to experiment, to engage in critical analysis. I believe one of the best (and cheapest) ways is video conferencing but the logistics of setting it up and making it work continues to elude me.

Conclusion

Learning literacy by flexible delivery does work for students and teachers but it needs to be tailor made for each situation. Here in my new position in the Torres Strait, Queensland, air fares, accommodation and meal allowances are necessarily built in for both students and teachers when visiting other islands for intensive sessions.

I was very pleased to have the chance to review my practice in delivering distance literacy. Examining practice should be a compulsory part of every practitioner's development.

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Practical matters

It is one thing to have a theoretical or academic grasp of literacy, but the relationship between talking and learning must not be under-estimated, as CAE teacher Katrina Lyle points out. And when staff at West Heidelberg's Olympic Adult Education met to discuss common problems in language and literacy classes, a selection of practical solutions was presented.

Spreading the word—sharing discourse in the classroom

The centrality of talk to learning is widely acknowledged within our field and incorporated into our teaching practice. In the last edition of *Fine Print*, Sue Helme wrote of the intimate relationship between language and understanding and of the responsibility of teachers to help students 'find the words to say it'. This is true of numeracy classes and also of language classes where engaged class discussion helps our students to find the inner reflective voice necessary for growth as writers.

Yet language, particularly spoken language, is also the means through which we connect our ideas, thoughts and feelings to the wider world and its multiple social contexts, each with its own subtle yet distinct and powerful language. Speaking and listening are integral aspects of literacy, and as literacy teachers we are challenged to strengthen our students' ability to use language to operate effectively in the world.

The value of language as an active process of negotiating meaning—as a medium where ideas are shared and tested—has always been recognised in the CGEA, and the new oral communication document further consolidates this perspective. The learning outcomes in all four levels in the new document reflect the following trends:

A greater emphasis on listening skills

While there is no longer a separate column for active listening, it has been integrated with learning outcomes across the streams, with a greater emphasis on critical and reflective listening at levels II and III. Of the ten learning outcomes at level II, six focus entirely on listening skills in a range of contexts and for a variety of purposes.

An emphasis on talk as a collaborative activity

There is an implicit acknowledgement of the social value of collaborative speech as learning outcomes in problem solving and negotiating skills are gradually built up through the levels. Participating in an 'oral exchange requiring some negotiation' at level I becomes, 'use spoken language to work in collaboration with others to meet an agreed objective' at level III.

Effective talk must take into account the listeners and their needs

The two learning outcomes per level which focus on speech production firmly ground these skills in the context of audience. For example, 'give an oral presentation, answering questions if appropriate' (level II) or, 'give complex instructions, including difficulties to be avoided, when explaining a procedure to others' (level III).

What are the implications of these learning outcomes for our teaching practice? How can we most effectively foster the development of these skills in our students? Establishing a nurturing learning environment is important in all aspects of literacy but perhaps especially so in developing oral competency, with its inherent risk of social exposure. Students need to feel that they are doing well and feel that they are seen to be doing well. The CGEA document suggests the development of 'a group learning culture, where discussion, collaboration and negotiation can evolve. Establishment of consensus on guidelines for group discussions, listening to and respecting others and conflict resolution'.

Many of us would argue that as adult literacy teachers, we are already well aware of the need to create a safe learning environment for all our students. Yet as the social dynamics of the classroom unfold and we support our students in the active engagement in dialogue, our ability to do this is often tested. Much of our energy is directed into ensuring participants take turns effectively: we provide time for the careful thinker or the hesitant speaker, we return the tangential thinker back to the issue and we try to pull back the verbose non-listener. Our role is often that of discussion facilitator as we model effective interaction in a way that accommodates a diversity of thinking and language styles. We create the social environment where negotiation and collaboration can grow and we hope that our students carry these skills with them into their own social and community life.

We can further foster the development of these skills by stepping back from the role as discussion facilitator and consciously give our students the skills to take control of the discourse. A good way to begin this process is to raise students' awareness of oral texts and their variety of purposes and stages. Asking students to reflect on the class discussions that they have participated in can be illuminating for students and teachers.

- How do you feel class discussions generally go?
- What makes one discussion work well and another less productive?
- What do you find frustrating or enjoyable as a discussion participant?
- What do you like/would you like to change about the way that you interact with others?
- What do you like/would you like to change about the way others interact with you?

Questions such as these provide a good starting point for the development of reflective analysis, and for meeting the learning outcomes at levels II and III of the new CGEA which focus on critical appraisal of oral text. Recognising our own styles of interaction is an important step in being able to step outside them to shape and change them.

Such reflection also heightens students' awareness of the staging of collaborative discourse and its characteristic phases of interaction. Initiating a viewpoint, acknowledging those of others, adding, refining, questioning and qualifying information, shifting the focus, and returning to a main point are some of the phases of discourse in collaborative speech. Shifts in the phasing of discourse are effectively signaled by the use of words and phrases which act as conversational markers or gambits. Once students can identify the phases of discourse they can develop a repertoire of such markers to more effectively shape the unfolding of dialogue and negotiate a pathway through spoken text in a collaborative rather than confrontational way.

Here are some examples of conversational markers and the role that they play in shaping discourse.

Prefacing opinions
The way I look at it/the way I see it/as far as I can tell/to the best of my knowledge. These opening markers emphasise that the statement to follow expresses the speakers own perspective, thus implicitly acknowledging the right of others to express a different view—the foundation of collaborative rather than confrontational dialogue.

Breaking into existing dialogue
May I interrupt you?/I have something to say on that.

Not allowing yourself to be ambushed
I just want to add/just let me say this/wait just a second.

Using these signals your need for more time and also lets others know that you will then give the speaking role to someone else.

Clarifying the views of others
So what you're saying is/if I understand you/so you think.

Refining your own views
What I meant to say was/what I really mean is/what I now think.

Returning to the main focus
The main thing is/in any case/the real problem is/to get back to.

Responding to a view which challenges your own position
Yes, but consider/on the other hand/mind you though/but then again/but the problem is.

Such gambits help keep participants on side, so that they will at least listen to another point of view.

These are just a few examples of a set of phrases that are deeply embedded in our oral culture. ESB students will know many more of them, and a good way of making students aware of the power of these words to shape dialogue is to ask them what gambits they could use in response to challenging discourse features. For example, what would you say to someone if they're going on and on without getting to the point? Or if someone interrupts you before you've finished your point? Or if you want to add something to support another speaker? If you want to question the speaker? Or disagree with them? If you thought the speaker was being too general? Or taking the discussion away from important issues? Very soon you will have a whiteboard full of useful gambits to draw upon in your next discussion class.

A conscious and purposeful use of these framing phrases supports students in becoming free of dependence on our discourse management skills and encourages the development of collaboration and negotiation. So leave off your role of discussion facilitator and take on the role of encouraging and recording the use of gambits for several sessions. There are many possibilities for using them in extended discussion, such as role play scenarios where students take on the perspective of a specific role and negotiate solutions to a given problem. This offers opportunities for the development of collaborative dialogue in a very focused way.

Removed from direct involvement in shaping discussion, teachers are freer to analyse the participants' engagement in the discourse and to provide useful feedback. Where oral text is created in a shared way, it is sometimes hard for teachers to find the space to assess whether learning outcomes are being met by individuals. Stepping back from the unfolding dialogue enables teachers to see their students' skills in a different and perhaps more objective manner. Most importantly, using discourse markers or gambits helps students to listen to each other and really share in the unfolding of language and meaning.

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Language and literacy classes—common problems and suggested solutions

The following are notes from a language and literacy teachers' meeting at Olympic Adult Education, where staff brainstormed common problems that occur in language and literacy classes and then presented possible solutions.

We divided the topic into two headings: teacher-centred/related problems and solutions, and student-centred/related problems and solutions.

Teacher-centred/related problems and solutions

Problem
In the early weeks it is difficult to teach a new group whose interests and skills level is not known.

Solution
Spend time in the first few lessons discussing students' interests, life experience and reasons for attending.

Problem
Teachers have difficulty in timing lessons: how long students will spend completing each activity.

Solution
Teachers should always have extra activities planned.

Problem
Topic choice: students may not engage with a particular topic.

Solution
Students have ownership of the learning and topics should therefore be negotiated with students.

Problem
Teachers being late for class.

Solution
Teachers need to be organised with their time and on the odd occasion of car breakdown or family crisis they should be honest with students and apologise.

Problem
Classroom organisation and the need to teach a certain amount of material within a specific time frame.

Solution
Remind students that they are responsible for their own learning. Put up the plan for the day's lesson—what is going to be covered that day?

Problem
Poor planning and preparation.

Solution
Teachers need to put in the necessary time to organise and sequence lessons.

Problem
Resources for adult education.

Solution
Teachers can bring their own resources, for example tape recorder, video and stationery, or request the organisation to purchase what is needed.

Student-centred/related problems and solutions

Problem
Late arrivers mean that the teacher has to give directions for the activity repeatedly for each new arrival.

Solution
Review the Code of Conduct with the group explaining the expectations that students come on time because of the disruption caused for the group by late arrivers. Also plan that the first activity is a short, fun activity and that more important and lengthy activities commence 15 minutes into the lesson.

Problem
One student does not want to participate in the topic or activity that the other students are happily engaged in doing.

Solution
First, try and sell the topic—especially if it involves a language skill—by explaining the benefits and reasons for setting the particular topic. If this is not successful, teachers should remember that we are teaching adults and allow the student to do an alternative topic. We should always be mindful of cultural sensitivity and gender interests when setting topics or themes for students to study.

Problem
Absenteeism and inconsistent attendance makes it difficult for teachers to ensure students learn the required skills.

Solution
Adults come by choice to class and often our students have difficulties in their personal lives that affect attendance. To counteract the problem of inconsistent attendance, teachers should strive to constantly revise skills through a variety of topics. This acts as a consolidation for others who attend consistently and means that inconsistent attendees have a better opportunity to learn important skills.

Problem
Many of our students have a short concentration span.

Solution
Vary activities and content. Have a mixture of short and longer activities. Ensure students have a formal break in class time.

Problem
Some students present with personality problems such as loud, disruptive behaviour or avoidance of participating in activities.

Solution
Review the Code of Conduct with offending students. Teachers should also be aware that many of our students have a fear of failure which is quite ingrained and could explain a student's poor class attitude. To counteract this fear of failure, teachers should break down activities into small steps so students are more likely to regularly achieve. If students continue to be disruptive, private counselling between student and teacher or student and manager may alleviate the problem.

Problem
Some students are unwilling to interact with others in the group and only wish to communicate with the teacher.

Solution
Set group or pair activities where students are actively placed in a situation of needing to interact with each other.

Olympic Adult Education is an ACE organisation providing language and literacy classes to the local and surrounding communities in West Heidelberg. Teachers meet on a regular basis to discuss the theory and practice of their work.

… continued from page 7

life worlds, our students continue to busy themselves with more projects on, for instance, bushrangers. This curriculum question isn't a matter of political correctness but a question of how we begin the long and difficult process of rethinking how schools can contribute to and build educational futures, of how we shift and prepare these systems for not just the new economies of so-called 'smart states', 'intelligent isles', 'knowledge nations' and so forth, but as well for the critical understandings necessary for to deal with the complex ethical and cultural, political and environmental problems.

This is a matter of literacy. Umberto Eco (1980) once commented that texts are a machinery for constructing 'possible worlds'. The technology of writing, whether in print or online, is one of the oldest technologies of globalisation, a space/time compression machine of great elegance and analytic power that can, quite literally, take us somewhere other than the local. Yet too often we use and direct that machinery towards the trivial, towards fantasy, towards narrow and parochial versions of the local. Reworking a critical literacy for 'reading' and engaging with the ebbs and flows of knowledge in globalising economies and cultures is long overdue. We have both the technology and the infrastructure, and the time and curricular 'space' to do so—more than our over regulated and surveilled professional counterparts in other countries. Whether we have the generational will, intellectual energy and educational vision is the matter.

Professor Allan Luke is head of the School of Education at the University of Queensland. He specialises in the field of language and literacy, with a focus on how social and cultural theory can be used to examine practical issues of literacy learning and use in classroom, community and workplace contexts.

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Open forum

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

In this issue, Christine Hayes talks about working with the Country Fire Authority, where literacy is becoming a hot topic.

Making connections—developing a community network model of training delivery

Swinburne University of Technology's workplace skills access team members have been developing their map-reading skills travelling across Victoria this year as part of two projects being undertaken with the Country Fire Authority of Victoria (CFA). With an old battered copy of VicRoads, a packed lunch and their not-often-in-range mobile phones, they have been working to connect Regional CFA training teams with literacy training providers across the state.

These projects have been funded with the support of the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training's Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program.

The year started with a resource project to develop a community network model of literacy training delivery that could be applied across the public safety industry. Using CFA as the case study, the aim was to develop strategies and resources to raise awareness of the need for supported literacy training among key personnel in a public safety organisation, identify quality literacy training providers in the communities where training was likely to take place, and make the necessary connections so that sustainable literacy training partnerships could develop at the local level. Once these connections were in place, the real excitement began—piloting literacy training programs across the state. As Margaret Fraser, the manager of the two projects said, 'It's like managing 18 separate WELL projects all at the same time'.

Over 60 students across 12 training locations have been involved in the projects, as well as 13 trainers, 8 training providers and 11 CFA regional training managers and their teams. The projects are also being overseen by a central steering committee made up of representatives from the CFA, the Swinburne project team, Ballarat University TAFE, Goulbourn Ovens TAFE and the Public Safety Industry Training Advisory Body (PSITAB). Local steering committees have also been established for each of the training programs which involve the CFA regional training manager, a member of the Swinburne team and the local training partner. All told, there are more than 140 people involved in these projects.

The word we are receiving back from the programs is that a lot of worthwhile and interesting work is being done by the local trainers and participants.

Each of the 12 training programs is different and focuses on the specific needs of its local participants and their regional training priorities. As with all WELL-funded projects, the literacy support is being provided in the context of accredited training. The CFA is a registered training organisation in its own right and provides high quality emergency service training to its members, most of whom are volunteers. The training being provided under the WELL program is designed to develop the participants' underpinning communication and numeracy skills while working toward specific modules from the Certificate II in Firefighting (Operations)—such as workplace communication, writing skills for work, or communication systems. The other spin-off is that participants develop confidence and study skills they can use in their other training.

One of the project team's early tasks was to work with the managers responsible for training in each of the CFA's 20 regions to identify how the WELL-funded training could best be used to support their firefighters. This is when the team learned first hand the need for map reading skills when working with CFA. Most directions to CFA offices involved something like 'go past the park, take the first turn right, second left, and then left at the third roundabout'. Of course, these directions work well if you notice the park on your way in! If you don't, all is lost. The best direction we got was 'if all else fails, light a fire in a rubbish bin and follow the fire truck that comes to put it out back home'.

It was well worth the effort to find the right office, however. Each CFA training manager the team spoke to was enthusiastic about having the opportunity to, as one manager said, 'give something back to our volunteers'. We started out on the projects thinking all the training programs would be basically similar and focus on the basic communication modules from the Certificate II, with perhaps some minor

Chris Hayes taking a break at Mortlake

differences in how much computing or map reading skills would be required. Interestingly, after the negotiations with the training managers a whole host of other opportunities and ideas arose for how the training could best meet the CFA's local needs. These program ideas included general workplace communication skills, specific training for communications officers in the effective use of radio communications, basic administration skills for brigade management teams and providing support to firefighters wanting to participate in crew leader training which in many cases heavily relies on working through quite difficult written material and undertaking high intensity training over a short period.

Needless to say, the Swinburne team learnt a lot during these early negotiations. The CFA personnel involved have been exceedingly generous with their time and very willing to help us 'greenhorns' learn about their organisation. One of the highlights of the early trips occurred at the Morwell Fire Station when Margaret Fraser tentatively asked if it would be possible to have a look at the sort of paperwork a firefighter would typically need to read and/or fill in on the fire truck. What followed was a thoroughly fascinating and informative one and a half hour tour of the appliances at the Morwell fire station—Margaret and Christine Hayes, the other Swinburne team member there on the day, are now experts at distinguishing a pumper from a tanker or a specialised appliance. These observation skills were put to good use when we passed a fire on our way home from the trip and were able to sound informed about the trucks whizzing by.

The other key community network partners we met on those early trips were the local literacy training providers. Once again, the managers responsible for literacy and/or communication skills training were enthusiastic and generous with their time, particularly given that during these early negotiations there was no guarantee of work coming out of the discussions. Because the main object of the development of the community network model is to develop locally sustainable partnerships, the main criteria for selecting a potential literacy provider were that they were providers of high quality literacy training, acceptable to the local CFA training team and local to where the training was most likely to take place. This meant that a range of providers became involved, including large regional TAFEs, local Adult and Community and Further Education providers and, in one case, a small one-person private provider.

The main challenge for the training providers in those early days was that we were asking them to identify a suitable trainer for training at a yet-to-be-determined location, on days and times not yet finalised but probably weekday evenings or Sunday mornings, and delivering content that had still not been completely decided. This required quite a bit of flexibility by all concerned! The willingness of the training providers to become involved in the program, provide budget estimates, and identify and partially induct trainers into the program was remarkable.

The biggest challenge for all concerned in the projects was the identification and recruiting of participants. There were several issues that had an impact on this: the widespread but outdated notion that literacy support is only for people who can't read and write at all; the reticence of people to raise literacy as an issue with their colleagues; the limited time volunteers have available for additional training, given that they may be working full-time and already committing considerable time to the fire brigade and other community organisations; the 'tyranny of distance' that means that 'local' may still be more than 50km away, and an individual's perfectly reasonable uncertainty about whether this training would be of any use to them, particularly if they had negative experiences with formal education in the past.

Various strategies were tried to overcome these obstacles. CFA regional training teams were given suggestions on how to advertise the programs and approach selected individuals, the idea of literacy as a continuum was discussed with those involved in recruitment, and training venues, dates, days and times were open to negotiation. We were aiming to pilot one training group each of 18 of the CFA regions (two of the 20 regions already had programs with Swinburne successfully in place). In fact, we ended up with

Margaret Fraser undertaking initial consultation with CFA Training Manager at Wangaratta

CFA administrative headquarters office at Kerang, where we met the CFA personnel involved with project planning

12 groups going ahead this year. One of these groups is operating across two regions.

The main feedback the team has received about the recruitment is that a very long lead time is needed to raise awareness about a new program such as this and to encourage people to take part. It was also felt that it would be valuable if a more detailed recruitment package could be developed to help those in the field when they are marketing the program. Certainly, interest in continuing the programs into next year is strong, even in those regions where training did not proceed this year.

Interestingly, the participants who were recruited into the program appear to have been well identified as people who could benefit from additional support in their training. National Reporting System (NRS) levels have been mostly at level 2 for reading and writing (and numeracy where it was measured), with much higher levels of oracy, although there have been some individuals with higher levels of skills attending the programs to develop particular skills, such as speaking in public.

Apart from the participants, who are clearly the focus of these projects, the other key people in terms of ensuring the programs' success are the trainers. The Swinburne team has been impressed, but not surprised, by the flexibility and dedication of the experienced literacy and communication skills practitioners who have become involved. As these trainers are all locals, they are acutely aware of the important role CFA plays in the community and many are involved with CFA in some way, either personally or through relatives or friends. No matter what their experience, however, they have all shown a willingness to research the needs of their participants and to develop training programs that are directly applicable to their work as firefighters.

Each trainer was provided with a trainer's induction pack, developed by the Swinburne team, that introduced them to work in the public safety industry in general and CFA in particular and provided background information to the Swinburne CFA projects. They then attended one of several one and a half hour induction sessions held across the state. Given the training program outline developed by CFA and the Swinburne team for their region, and the suggested starting date, time and venue, it was then up to the individual trainer to develop the details of the program and the most suitable method of delivery with the participants and the regional training team. Reports so far suggest this process worked well and has meant the training programs have developed to suit the needs of those involved.

Throughout the year, the Swinburne project team, made up of Margaret Fraser, Margaret Regan and Christine Hayes, has been given considerable support and encouragement from our project partners at CFA headquarters, Penny Dunstan and Stuart Croom, Gary Lyttle from Ballarat University TAFE (also a volunteer member of CFA) and Rosa McKenna. Rosa, the WELL coordinator at the PSITAB, has been particularly involved in helping make connections between the Swinburne CFA projects and two other similar but smaller-scale community network model literacy projects being undertaken with the State Emergency Service (SES) in Queensland.

The first pilot training programs began in July and the last is expected to finish in early December. Feedback from all those involved is being gathered and a complete evaluation of the model and the pilot training will take place at the end of the year. This evaluation will also look at the projects in New South Wales and Queensland. Information on all these projects and their evaluations can be found on the PSITAB website at *www.psitab.org.au*.

Many parts of Victoria have been in the grip of a very dry spell this year, and the fire season has already begun in some regions. It is to be hoped that these programs have contributed, albeit in a small way, to helping the CFA and its firefighters in their work of 'Creating a Safer Community'.

Christine Hayes is one of the members of the Swinburne Workplace Skills Access team working on the Developing a Community Network Model of Training Delivery project. She can be contacted at *CHayes@groupwise.swin.edu.au*

Policy Update

The Australian Education Union continues to play an active role in debates about the character of TAFE, and argues that TAFE's broader role as a second-chance education setting is the only way it can develop in response to social changes. AEU official Pat Forward outlines the current round of award and conditions bargaining within this context.

Enterprise bargaining in TAFE—a new round

The Australian Education Union is the union which represents TAFE teachers in Victoria. The AEU is a national union, with more than 160,000 members across the public education sector. The AEU covers education workers in school, TAFEs and kindergartens. The AEU campaigns around public education issues broadly across all sectors. It also works in international forums to support the work of teachers in many other countries of the world, and to raise awareness of a range of social and political issues. The AEU is a member of Education International.

The current situation in TAFE is the product of almost a decade of rapid and ideologically-driven change across the sector. These changes have altered the character of the sector in a profound and arguably permanent way. They are changes which have been reflected in society more broadly, and they present very serious threats to the future of the trade union movement.

A new round of bargaining

Victorian TAFE is about to enter into another round of enterprise bargaining. The aim of the AEU during this round of bargaining is to achieve a wage increase, and improvements in the working conditions of its members. In this article, I intend to give a quick summary of the last decade of Victorian TAFE's industrial history and then focus on the current round of bargaining.

Despite the contested nature of the 1980s for the union movement, most would acknowledge that unions emerged from that decade significantly changed—often larger, but usually politically and industrially strong. The education unions in Victoria were no different. Well advanced down the path of a single amalgamated education union, the TAFE sector of the then FTUV had achieved wage rates that were greater than its schools sector colleagues, and consolidated regulation of teachers' working conditions.

The election of the Kennett Government in late 1992 changed forever the face of unionism in Victoria. Abolition of the state industrial relations system, and therefore of award regulation of working conditions was the most obvious outward sign of an ideological push by the Kennett Government to deregulate the industrial relations system. In Kennett's world, the aim was to focus on relations between individual workers and their bosses in the workplace. Under the banner of individual freedom, Kennett created anarchy overnight in thousands of workplaces across Victoria.

Lost budgets, lost members

Like many Victorian unions, the AEU was particularly hard hit by Kennett's attack. Kennett abolished automatic deduction of union dues at the end of 1992, and overnight, the education unions in Victoria lost their budgets. In TAFE, the situation was particularly desperate as the formation of a breakaway TAFE union, the result of simmering tensions within the union, led to further fragmentation. The union 'lost' thousands of members overnight.

The next few years were desperately hard work. The FTUV, later the AEU, was able to achieve federal award regulation for all of its members across all sectors of education. This protected the workload regulation of TAFE members, as the union worked to recruit those who had initially been lost during the first few months of the Kennett Government. The federal interim award of 1994 remained until recent times the single industrial instrument for TAFE teachers in Victoria. But the achievement of federal award regulation, significant as it was, left the union vulnerable when the Howard Government won the 1995 federal election. Howard appeared impressed with many of the Kennett changes in Victoria, and changes wrought by the Workplace Relations Act in 1996 threatened to further undermine the working conditions of those many hundreds of thousands of Victorian workers who had been forced to flee the destroyed state industrial relations system.

A changed role for TAFEs

In a sense industrial, the second half of the 1990s in TAFE was more anarchic than the first. The AEU worked hard under often impossible conditions to cement workload regulation and to try to achieve wage rises for TAFE teachers. The TAFE system had itself been deregulated. Each individual TAFE in Victoria had become an employer, and TAFE had been recast as autonomous businesses competing with each other for increasingly scarce state and federal funding. Many TAFE directors acted

opportunistically, undermining teachers' conditions, and employing teachers casually.

Some attempted to bypass the union, buy out award conditions and force teachers onto individual contracts. During the period, several TAFE institutes, with government encouragement and support, attempted to negotiate non-union agreements directly with teachers at the institute. On each occasion, the vast majority of these teachers voted against non-union agreements and in favour of the AEU negotiating on their behalf.

The decade took its toll. Several attempts at negotiating a statewide certified agreement failed as TAFE employers and the government could not get as much as they wanted from the union. The most defining feature of these negotiations were attempts to increase face-to-face teaching hours, or get rid of workload regulation, including regulation of attendance at the workplace. Frequently, employers attempted to open the span of ordinary working hours to make 8am to 10pm the normal working pattern of TAFE teachers, and all in the name of the infamous 'flexibility'. In 1997, after a failed attempt at a centralised enterprise bargaining agreement, the AEU took its case for a wage increase for Victorian TAFE teachers to the AIRC. Many thousands of dollars and more than 12 months later, the commission brought down an 8.5 per cent increase for all TAFE teachers in Victoria. Despite the fact that this increase involved no trade off of conditions, there was universal disappointment in the system.

Surprise rescue

The surprise election of the Bracks Government in Victoria in 1999 signalled a new period for TAFE. But the damage had been profound. The public Victorian TAFE system was almost unrecognisable. Its funding was only 70 per cent of the national average, it had been exposed to unrealistic levels of competition. At the time of the state election, more than five institutes were struggling financially, including the ill-conceived Chisholm. Resources were run down, equipment non-existent in some areas. Facilities were sub-standard. Most could have been forgiven for believing that the Kennett Government had wanted to destroy the public TAFE system, and replace it with a network of government funded and supported private providers.

The Bracks Government 'rescued' TAFE with an initial injection of funds, but the sector was forced immediately into a round of institute-by-institute enterprise bargaining, where the catch-cry for employers again was a question about what teachers were prepared to give up for their wage increase. That round of bargaining, for a 13.6 per cent wage increase, was protracted and damaging for the sector. It revealed that a small number of TAFE employers had not grasped the fact that there had been a change of government, but it also revealed the level of damage the Kennett Government had done to the system. Many TAFE teachers could have been forgiven for wondering how much had changed.

Centralised bargaining

But of course, things have changed. Midway through 2002, six months out from the end of the eighteen agreements negotiated by the AEU throughout 2000, TAFE directors and the government agreed with the union that centralised bargaining should be the mechanism for dealing with the next round of agreements. The system is currently awaiting the release of a bargaining framework for TAFE so that the process can commence.

The AEU has spent the period since the last round of agreements consolidating its claim. Like our schools colleagues in Victoria, the TAFE sector will bargain around a national wage claim which would see a top of the scale wage rate for teachers of about $78,000 over the next two years. The AEU TAFE sector has argued consistently that lack of equity with school teachers in Victoria, and interstate TAFE teachers has rendered the Victorian TAFE system vulnerable. In a period when generational change will see a significant turnover in the workforce in the next few years, TAFE will not be able to compete with other education sectors or industry unless the issue of wage rates is tackled seriously.

Of equal concern to teachers, particularly in areas like adult literacy and basic education, is the issue of casualisation and excessive workload. There has been only marginal improvement in the levels of ongoing employment—a clear result of the failure to lift overall funding. Work intensification has reached crisis proportions in some areas—again a result of too much casual employment, and too little money.

The AEU bargaining position has been consolidated over the past few months once a decision to bargain centrally rather than on an institute-by-institute basis was made. Whilst improved wages and conditions for teachers remain the cornerstone of the union's bargaining position, other considerations include the need to find ways of regulating teachers' work in areas like workplace and online and flexible delivery. The pressure to regulate this area derives from pressures teachers are currently experiencing in their workplaces as a result of under-funding. It is not uncommon for teachers to be employed to do workplace teaching on short-term contracts, or casually, with little or no workload guidelines. Their employment mode makes it difficult for them to argue about either their working conditions or their employment mode. The response of some TAFE employers has been to demand that the union accept a new sub-teacher classification—a cheap workplace trainer with significantly different workload regulation than classroom teachers. This position has emerged recently in a Victorian TAFE Association (VTA—the TAFE peak employer body)

discussion paper prepared by Gerry Griffin. The move to training packages across TAFE would make most teachers work in the future easy to define as workplace delivery as many teachers currently work in simulated workplaces! The AEU has rejected a sub-teaching, or 'trainer' classification in the new classification structure to be negotiated in this round of bargaining.

More than wages and conditions

Issues for bargaining are not confined to wages and conditions. The AQTF has seen an entirely inadequate so-called minimum standard—the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training imposed on the system, and this has been compounded by an insistence that fully tertiary qualified TAFE teachers have to complete the Certificate IV to work in TAFE. This highlights the work that needs to be done around TAFE teacher qualifications and the status. Whilst TAFE teachers were excluded from the Victorian Institute of Teaching, despite a very vigorous campaign by the TAFE sector of the AEU and TAFE teachers individually, the recently announced initiative of the Bracks Government will see the establishment of a TAFE Development Centre early in 2003. The AEU will be one of the 'stakeholders' involved in the establishment of the centre. The brief of the centre is broad, and it will cover all people working in TAFE, including managers. There is enormous opportunity in this initiative to undo some of the damage of the past few years.

Finally, though, the real challenge for the AEU, as for many contemporary unions, is the challenge to recruit. As a union, we face both the old problems—which include things like being unable to limit the benefits of our work only to our members, and even just getting people to part with money, to newer challenges like competing with discourses of individualism. Ultimately, unions stand for collectivism and shared views of how to achieve improved conditions for their members, and —in the case of education—improved learning conditions for students. TAFE really has taken a battering in recent times, Victorian TAFE doubly so. Whilst I have spent no time in this article talking about how the very character of TAFE has been altered over the last decade, teachers who work in TAFE know how profoundly damaging competition and narrow vocationalism has been to the teaching and learning environment. Whilst a union must of necessity focus on the industrial work of its members, the AEU has played and must continue to play an active role in debates about the character of TAFE. Narrow vocationalism will destroy the sector. Arguing for TAFE's broader role as a second chance education setting is the only way to sustain its broader character, and allow it to continue to develop in response to changes in society.

Pat Forward has worked at the Australian Education Union for six years. She is vice president of the TAFE and adult provision sector. Prior to working at the union she taught adult literacy and basic education to students at Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE and Footscray TAFE.

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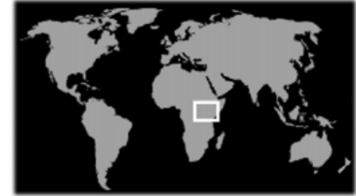
Foreign correspondence



Reading and writing were never regarded as priorities for Ugandan women, who were seen mainly as a source of wealth through being married off young. Today, 85 per cent of people in literacy classes are women. However, this does not mean there are no men with low literacy levels, most of whom are unwilling to be identified as someone who has never attended school.

Adult literacy in Uganda

The literacy rate in Uganda is only 25 per cent, according to the United Nation's Human Development Report 2000. It has the lowest literacy rate amongst East African countries, lower than Kenya and Tanzania. Of the estimated seven million people that are illiterate in Uganda, 69 per cent are women while 31 per cent are men.

Two years ago, the government realised that in order to fight poverty, the people must be literate. For any program to succeed, the people must know how to read, write and count.

With a little assistance from the government, non-government organisations set up adult literacy centres to encourage adult literacy activities, helping those who have been disadvantaged by not going to school.

In the adult literacy classes, the majority of the learners are women. This is because in Africa as a whole and Uganda in particular, women are the most disadvantaged. Education for the girl-child was never considered important. Girls were always left at home and parents looked at them as a source of wealth. They could be married off as soon as breasts developed in exchange for bride-price in the form of cows, goats and money.

I also vividly recall, while in high school some of my classmates (girls) saying, that there was no need for them to struggle because they knew some men were reading for them (future husbands). But this is no longer the case—women now find themselves doing what they originally thought to be men's roles, and men have an expectation that they will be literate. They are now engaged in various businesses and these cannot be run properly if one does not know how to read, write or count.

The Ugandan political leadership has encouraged both men and women to participate in the leadership roles right down to the grassroots village level. In order to be an able leader, one must have attained a certain level of education, and one needs to be able to read and write before they can take on formal education.

Many women, and some men, are now embracing the adult literacy classes. Around 85 per cent of the people in adult literacy classes are women. This does not mean that there are no illiterate men. The majority of men are scared to come out and be identified with those who have never been to school. And many men do not see the reason why they should let their wives attend literacy classes. They feel insecure thinking their wives may progress beyond them.

We also have many stereotypes to overcome. One stereotype sees that all men are educated. One woman is reported to have divorced her husband after seeing him seated in a primary four class. She said her husband was embarrassing her and therefore she left the home and the marriage!

The struggle for literacy in Uganda is still big. But we have made a start, and many people are very enthusiastic. Since I started work with Literacy Aid Uganda around three years ago, I have seen very dedicated students. Some people walk eight kilometres daily to come to learn how to read, and write!

We have made a positive beginning and people are recognising the value of literacy. Literacy is important to have a well-informed society where people can communicate well and move on. There is still much which needs to be done. We need everybody's support so that we can be able to reach a bigger percentage of the population, and without funds we cannot go far.

Irene Mondo is the Executive Director/Founder of Literacy Aid Uganda, a non-government organisation founded in 2000 and based about 21 kilometers from Kampala. She has a Bachelor of Divinity degree from Makerere University (Kampala), a Master of Communication degree from Daystar University (Nairobi-Kenya) and several certificates in adult literacy. Irene can be contacted at *literacyaiduganda@yahoo.com*

Beside the whiteboard

The Island is the work education and training unit of Collingwood College. Since the 1980s it has assisted young people who are seeking early entry into the workforce rather than remain at school. It is one of 22 pilot sites involved in trialling the new Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), which is based on practical learning and sits alongside the VCE with subjects covering literacy and numeracy, work-related skills, industry-specific skills and personal development. There are foundation, intermediate and senior levels.

Most of The Island's 48 students are studying at foundation level. Michele Giordano, the Island's literacy and numeracy teacher, talks with Helena Spyrou.

Could you talk about your background and your work at The Island?

I'm trained as a secondary school teacher in LOTE and ESL and have had opportunities to teach in just about all language settings—primary, secondary, AMES and ACE centres. I'm sure that my interests and strengths stem from my own education in a technical school. That setting gave me lots of real-life learning opportunities that would have been more directly related to hands-on work skills and preparation. The rest could be characterised by experiences as a process worker in factories—low skilled jobs, pressing and packing, laundry hand, adult education, university as a mature age student and lots of globetrotting in between.

My role at The Island is primarily to teach literacy/numeracy and respond to a myriad of situations and conditions which may disconnect and preclude young people from successfully making a transition from negative experiences of school failure to positive experiences of vocational training and employment. I also see my role as supporting the rest of the program which enters students into making career choices.

I do work hard in encouraging students to avoid the trap of treating their literacy/numeracy from a deficit point of view. Although students who have had negative school experiences may tell of a history of behavioural shortcomings in the maths, English or science class at school, this is not indicative of their academic level in those areas. Once you provide students with a tangible and supportive learning context beyond the school setting, it's amazing how young people can rekindle their desire to learn, to perform and to become more socially resilient. That's why I like working here—participating in a valid context makes happy learners and happy learners are good learners.

What are some of the issues faced by the young people you teach?

Where does it start? Sibling rivalry, parental abuse, substance abuse, homelessness, bullying, unsuitable teaching approaches … the list goes on. If young people miss a beat and if they don't have the supporting structures then a little hiccup can become a complete failure.

Understanding and overcoming barriers to learning and finding ways to engage young people requires concerted effort from all stakeholders in the program. Sometimes the scope of the program needs to be extended to ensure the inclusion of pastoral care and support for young people who are in a very vulnerable transitional phase in their lives. Therefore, I think it's important that we do establish a position based on honesty and realistic goals when students enter the program. Providing that we always recognise issues that young people face and discuss with them ways of addressing them, I believe that young people will take ownership of and address their issues and perceived shortcomings. This is a great way of recognising that there are choices that they can make.

How do you assist young people you work with to engage in learning?

As in every other setting I've taught in, people who join the program work toward accumulating skills and developing the behaviours and attitudes that will prepare them for making considered choices and realising their dreams. It is not difficult to establish a case for why literacy/numeracy is a linchpin for preparing for the adult world. There is a plethora of opportunities for the literacy/numeracy program to have meaning.

Here at The Island we have chosen to use the Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA) for our literacy numeracy program. I find the CGEA is the most flexible document I can apply to our situation and the different needs of the students. It also works well in a setting where you are trying to apply adult learning principles and work with a range of literacies. These are some locations which validate literacy/numeracy in their work preparation—plan for jobs, resume writing, evaluation sheets, journal writing, applications/interview preparation, learner's permits, drug education, occupational health and safety practice (OH & S) protocols, worker conditions, industry workshop literacies, critical thinking, problem solving,

meaning-making, explaining ideas and concepts and instructions, both orally and verbally. But, in order to meet the demands of the other parts of the VCAL program, all our students need to have functioning literacy.

What happens to young people who have really low levels of literacy and what avenues are available for them?

Within Collingwood College we have an intensive literacy/numeracy program at our Richmond No. 1 annexe. Also ACE providers could be working with young people at those earlier stages before they come to us.

What makes The Island a unique learning environment for young people?

What makes The Island so appealing to young people that aren't really cutting it at school is how they can experience success on a daily basis. Providing young people with real-life learning in areas of their choice re-establishes their desire to succeed within a context—be that work, social life, home life or personal life. Let's not forget that the stigma of failure in whatever context seems to resonate much louder with young people particularly while they are in a transitional phase.

The Island is an open learning environment where students work in small groups, on real jobs, dealing with customers and the community and negotiate their learning with their teachers and instructors. As well as participating in workshops in the different industry areas such as hospitality, metal trades, wood studio, automotive, building and construction, students attend a range of camps where they do team building activities such as, horse riding, snorkelling, surfing, and canoeing. They also get involved in community activities and sport. Personal development and social skills, work experience and literacy and numeracy are learned through all these activities.

How does The Island function differently from a school?

Young people are always given the opportunity to voice their opinions, concerns, and teachers make sure they act as good role models. Also we try to reflect the workplace as much as we can without sacking them if they act up. For example, we have a designated smoking area but we don't provide them with the cigarettes. We pretty much tell it the way it is. We work in small groups, and there's a lot of peer learning.

At The Island we work hard on helping young people realise that they can create a lot more options and opportunities in their lives than they actually believe they have, and also helping them to take responsibility for the decisions and choices that they make.

Adult learning principles provide the flexibility message and help young people understand what the real world requires of you and what civic life existence is all about. But the picture is a lot bigger than just work. We can't get the work preparation sorted out if we can't get that other stuff sorted out. It's amazing how small successes in their trade workshops have all of a sudden brought meaning into using texts and then from there recognising what writing a journal is about and how it is going to empower them into developing a vocabulary. It all has meaning all of a sudden. Not too long ago, anything that had a hint of putting pen to paper was considered bullshit and our job is about breaking that perception and giving it a new context.

How can young people be given a voice?

If we provide young people with opportunities to partake in meaningful learning then the process of learning to learn (again) becomes a gratifying experience. Young people are very protective of things they may value and this translates itself into a particular culture. The way task-setting is negotiated with instructors and learners provides opportunities to recognise the democratic nature of The Island program. That is, anyone who undertakes a trial will be made aware of a Code of Conduct (I consider it our 10 commandments) and OH&S rules and regulations. These are standard industry-based requirements that provide young people with some cognition of the world of work. We also ask kids to turn up every day and on time. By doing this, they develop a sense of continuity.

The nature of our enrolment process speaks for itself. For the first six months each student spends two weeks in every industry specific area to 'taste' what we have to offer. During this time they and we look at how they respond in the workshop demands and other aspects of the program through their actions and behaviour and comments. With that, young people recognise the imperatives of work preparation (OH&S, code of conduct, preparation, evaluation) and they can actively work toward modifying behaviours that would otherwise exclude them from the program. Once the students see themselves as stakeholders in the program they actively work towards having their voices heard—how things could be done, how things shouldn't be done, how things could be done differently. I believe that what is essential is that young people recognise that they need not be coerced into becoming work-ready, rather they need to just be asked how they can be assisted. That's how they make their voices heard.

How has The Island changed since the introduction of the VCAL?

In various ways. Once upon a time The Island kid came from juvenile justice or was between the gaps of school and work. These kids had no system in place for them and they were unready and unprepared for work. The Island would take them in. We had no time limit and it was more about kids picking up tools and applying them and developing successes in general.

Now we have the certificates and qualifications. But we still pick up kids who don't have any idea of what they want to do and we provide mechanisms for students to go through that developmental learning process to identify what they want to do. The two weeks students spend in every industry workshop area is one way for them to orient themselves to the different options.

Also, we still need to provide students with pastoral care, look after their welfare while they are working for much more concrete goals. Now we can accredit the skills they are picking up at The Island. The VCAL has certainly been a long time coming because now young people are able to see themselves as pursuing an alternative pathway and may not feel as pressured to undertake VCE when they don't want to. Before the VCAL the skills young people gained here at The Island never translated much to employers. The business community needs to start recognising that there is a place for VCAL, otherwise it won't work.

What philosophy underpins the literacy/numeracy work you do?

I would say that I challenge the perception that young people are addressing deficits in learning. My role is to give literacy/numeracy a valid stake in young people's lives and provide learning that is meaningful, learner-centred and negotiated so that as they develop their literacy/numeracy skills they then have a range of meaningful tools toward any activity they may engage in either in work or in their social, civic and personal lives. For me there is also the intrinsic belief that literacy/numeracy can be a tool for transformation and liberation. The process of transformation is slow. Many of our students come from marginalised, insular and isolated backgrounds where dialogue does not happen. They need time to understand and contextualise the wider social world and behaviours unfamiliar to them. Then they need time to reflect before they can even begin to critique their society. I also like the analogy of the scaffolding being slowly dismounted. I can't remember who coined it.

I think it's important that there are more choices for young people to learn in a range of ways and in a range of educational settings before the damage is done. I can recognise the thrust behind the last government's Knowledge Nation document but we also need to recognise that the more we buy into strictly performance and outcomes-based education the more exposed we are leaving vulnerable members of the community. What we need is a more holistic education process that celebrates and recognises difference in real terms, not just in rhetoric. Young people need more resources and provisions for support. I also believe that as the education domain is being increasingly subjected to economic rationalism, the less we'll consider people who are defined as round holes that won't fit into square holes (sic).

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Title of paper/workshop	
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100- 150 word outline of workshop	
Presentation setting	(Please indicate the seating arrangements that you would prefer.)
Short biographical information for the introduction to your workshop	
Audio visual requirements:	[ ] White board [ ] Overhead Projector [ ] Video player / Monitor [ ] Computer lab Please note that it is preferred that data projectors and laptops be provided by presenters to minimise risk of malfunction.

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