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Editorial

Welcome to the first edition of *Fine Print* for 2003. VALBEC is proud of *Fine Print* as it continues to raise pertinent issues about language, literacy and numeracy practice and provision. Our aim is to provide a balanced perspective of theory and practice, showcasing examples of best practice and the practitioners and researchers who work so diligently to understand and meet the needs of an increasingly diverse group of adult LLN learners, balancing the demands of tendering, funding and audits with the need to provide rigorous, relevant and meaningful programs, recognising that we are all involved in a lifelong learning process.

In this autumn edition, Geraldine Castleton revisits the workplace in a debate about depictions of the workers' literacy skills and the (supposed) link with poor economic performance. Geraldine questions the value of measuring basic skills in the workplace as opposed to recognising workers' needs and examining the way work is actually done. Geraldine examines discourses of literacy at work along with current practices in workplace literacy training and poses alternative realities of workplace literacy, where the workplace is viewed as a socially vibrant 'community of practice'.

Liz Suda informs us of the ALNARC research project which aimed to revisit the interface between ALBE and ESL. Framed in a background of policy shifts and changes that have converged ALBE and ESL provision in a 'product-oriented, market-driven reform agenda' Liz examines the realities of the classroom where teachers encounter mixed groups of ESB and LBOTE learners. These classes are rich in diversity, but difficult to teach and Liz asks if it is even possible for teachers

to accommodate all the different nuances of the many cultures represented in our classrooms.

Helena Spyrou has visited The Island, an alternative education setting for young people. The Island was a trial site for the implementation of the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) in 2002. Helena describes her first impressions of The Island as a vibrant, busy place full of activity. The non-traditional nature of The Island means that students are actively involved in hands-on learning, and gives the staff the luxury of spontaneous decision making. Helena outlines the structure of the VCAL and takes us through some of the activities run at The Island, highlighting its success at providing quality education with real pathways for its young students.

Apart from these feature articles, this edition of *Fine Print* runs its regular features including Open Forum, Policy Update and Beside the Whiteboard, as well as the new liftout section, Practical Matters. We hope you enjoy and are stimulated by this edition of the new look *Fine Print*. What do you think of the new design?

Finally, we would like to thank the editor and the editorial committee for their ongoing and tireless work in putting *Fine Print* together and for the vision they show in bringing us the debates and issues, challenging us to think closely about our own goals and perspectives in adult education, and in particular in adult language, literacy and numeracy teaching and learning.

Robin Kenrick and Fran O'Neill

A kaleidoscope of diversity: the convergence of ESL and ALBE

Liz Suda

The past decade or so has seen significant changes in the policy and provision of ALBE and ESL with further blurring of the distinction between language proficiency and literacy capability. These changes have generated considerable debate within the fields of ESL and ALBE, in terms of pedagogy, the impact such policies might have on program provision, employment options for teachers and opportunities for adult learners. Drawing on research conducted for the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (ALNARC), completed in 2002, this paper hopes to highlight the positive benefits of looking into the kaleidoscope, with a clear eye, a taste for the complexity of diversity and a willingness to consider other perspectives.

The policy context

Recent initiatives by the Commonwealth Government in the area of language and literacy suggest that ESL and literacy are being conflated for ease and efficiency of implementation, possibly also economic expediency. The reasons for this amalgamation in policy terms are complex, and are addressed quite extensively in the book *Australian Policy Activism in Language and Literacy* (Lo Bianco & Wickert, 2001). The causes are both pedagogical and political.

One perspective suggests that the landscape of both the ESL and ALBE fields has been significantly altered by the appropriation of language and literacy into the Training Reform Agenda (Kell, 2001; Lo Bianco & Wickert, 2001; Wickert, 2001). This appropriation was however the result of a long campaign by literacy activists to gain policy attention for adult literacy, which was finally achieved within the climate of economic reform of the late 80s and early 90s. The ascendancy of the human capital theory and economic rationalism as the dominant ideology informing government policy resulted in policy reforms that were at first welcomed by literacy activists, but which had unforeseen consequences (Wickert, 2001).

These reforms have continued to impact on all aspects of education, particularly in relation to the allocation of resources and accountability and measurement procedures (Luke, 1992; Marginson, 1997; Black, 2002). The commodification and marketisation of adult education has meant that other stakeholders, particularly private providers and vocationally-

oriented programs, now influence the education agenda (Marginson, 1993; Jarvis, 1999). In this product-oriented, market-driven reform agenda, language and literacy programs are now required to produce measurable outcomes in return for funds received. Education is treated as a business operation (Kell, 2001) rather than the undeniable right of every citizen in a democratic country.

Such a change of focus will invariably impact on the way in which language and literacy programs are delivered and accounted for. If language and literacy are regarded as commodities or marketable skills there is a clear shift in focus away from the needs of the learner to the needs of the market.

In part, however, it can also be argued that the conflation of language and literacy has arisen because definitions of literacy within the field have been broadened to include the use of appropriate language for different contexts, oral communication, critical thinking skills and cultural knowledge. This has made the definition of literacy a rather tricky and slippery concept (Maushart, 1991). Baynham (1991), for example, challenges the view that language proficiency is a subset of literacy, arguing that it is language which contains literacy, and it is language that serves communication rather than literacy.

Literacy activists and theorists have therefore been preoccupied with these complex and sometimes esoteric discussions about the meaning of literacy (Gee, 1987; Cope & Kalantzis, 1997; Lo Bianco & Freebody, 2001; Baynham, 1991). Traditional conceptions of literacy as a skills-based functional process have been elevated to include broad, all-encompassing definitions of literacy, as social practice and critical analysis. The fluid nature of definitions of language and literacy has meant that there is not one commonly agreed-upon definition of language or literacy. Such multidimensional definitions of language and literacy do not necessarily sit comfortably within the theories of human capital that have gained ascendancy in recent years. In the face of the lack of consensus within the fields of ESL and ALBE, government has expediently sought to streamline the policy and provision of ALBE and ESL, hence the amalgamation of very different language and literacy programs under one umbrella (DETYA, 2001).

The learners context

Whilst clear definitions of the difference between language and literacy may be elusive, there are significant differences between the language and literacy needs of long-term residents of Australia from English speaking backgrounds (ESB) and newly arrived migrants with little English language. The needs of both ESB and LBOTE learners (language background other than English), are made more complex when the differences in their language, education, literacy and cultural backgrounds are considered. The newly arrived migrant cohort has different learning needs, and cannot be considered as a homogenous group. ESB learners similarly have different personal, cultural and linguistic backgrounds and therefore approaches to learning. There are additional complexities in relation to people from language backgrounds other than English (LBOTE), particularly when they are long-term residents of this country. Issues of Australian identity must be added to the variables which impact on the learners needs. For many long-term LBOTE residents, and often their offspring, identification with Australian society and culture is such that they no longer consider themselves migrants, even if they still have English language and literacy issues. Many of these people therefore feel more comfortable in an ALBE, rather than an ESL class.

The pedagogical relations between ALBE and ESL were the subject of significant research in the early nineties (Hammond, Wickert, Burns, Joyce & Miller, 1992), which was then followed by further work on ethnically inclusive practice within the ALBE classroom (Davison, Taylor & Hatcher, 1993; Rado & D'Cruz, 1994). Significant changes have occurred in both fields since this work was conducted, with the widespread adoption of competency-based accredited curricula. The landscape of both fields has also been significantly altered by the appropriation of language and literacy into the Training Reform Agenda (Lo Bianco, 2001; Kell, 2001; Wickert, 2001).

The teachers context

The context and purpose of teachers' work in the adult education field has also changed dramatically in the past ten years, and particularly with respect to language and literacy. Where once ALBE and ESL operated independently at the margins of the education sector, the past decade has seen both fields play a higher profile in mainstream education, particularly in the vocational education and training sector. ALBE and ESL professionals have been involved in vocational education and training over the past decade and have attempted to build in language literacy and numeracy competencies and foster best practice adult learning principles in workplaces. They have done this with varying degrees of success in an ever-changing environment (Waterhouse, 2001). Both fields now fear the possibility of their disciplines



(M. Hanrahan)

being conflated and absorbed into the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector as 'underpinning skills' of communication competencies required within training packages. These issues have been debated in a variety of forums within the field in recent years.

Further to this teachers have been required to undertake professional development and gain certificated qualifications in order to teach in what were once marginalised programs. Teacher competence and qualifications have therefore surfaced in the Training Reform Agenda as a contentious issue. Certificate IV in Assessment and Training is now regarded as a mandatory qualification for all teachers in the VET sector and this includes teachers with undergraduate degrees and teaching qualifications.

The ALNARC research

It is against this backdrop of changing definitions, perspectives, directions and contexts for adult education in general, and adult literacy and basic education and English as a second language in particular, that the research aimed to revisit the interface between ALBE and ESL. In particular it aimed to focus on situations where adult literacy teachers might encounter mixed groups of ESB native speaker and language background other than English (LBOTE) learners. The primary aim of the research was to investigate how literacy practitioners accommodate the needs of LBOTE learners with ESL needs in adult literacy settings. How does the integration of learners with ESL needs into ALBE provision impact on pedagogical practices? How does ALBE cater for the needs of LBOTE learners with ESL needs within

community, TAFE and industry settings? What are the advantages and disadvantages of such integration from the point of view of the learners and practitioners? How aware are adult literacy teachers of the different learning needs of ESB and LBOTE learners in these contexts? What are the implications for future policy that arise from the commonalities and differences of such learners?

In attempting to penetrate practitioner discourses, the research reveals that the underpinning values, beliefs and assumptions about the needs of learners are complicated. The focus group interviews and individual interviews demonstrate awareness amongst practitioners of the importance of understanding the complex sociocultural, linguistic, educational, motivational and individual factors which impact on learner needs. The research reveals that learners from language backgrounds other than English who have literacy needs have particular needs, which are not necessarily addressed in either ESL classrooms or ALBE classrooms. The views from the field, also emphasise concerns about the invisibility of learners from English speaking backgrounds who have literacy needs. The amalgamation of language and literacy in terms of policy and provision, may diminish an active strategy to engage ESB learners who have had negative experiences of schooling and who may lack confidence to revisit formal learning situations.

It is not possible within the scope of this paper to do justice to the richness of responses from the field and the depth of understanding which exists about the many variables which define learner needs. Perhaps the most contentious issue raised in the research was the question of the advantages and disadvantages of integrating learners from different language and educational backgrounds in the ALBE classroom.

Advantages and disadvantages of integrating learners

When the participants were asked to summarise the advantages and disadvantages of mixed ESL/Literacy classes, there appeared to be some confusion about the purpose of such a question. Most ALBE classes have some LBOTE learners but it is their level of acculturation that seems to be more important than even their oral language proficiency. Here the nebulousness of the concept of 'Australianess' was raised and overwhelmingly participants responded 'depends on the mix of the group'.

Some participants felt there was potential for cross-cultural communication with a diverse cultural mix, while others felt this was a 'big ask' for ALBE students struggling with their own learning needs. Others felt that it was too much for the teacher to accommodate. All said it 'depends on the mix, context, purpose

etc'. Donovan (1999), describes a community house classroom as an 'idealised public space in which differences can be expressed in relative safety' (p. 21). However she then goes on to describe an incident where cultural differences resulted in a breakdown of communication over the very contentious issue of the death penalty for heinous crimes (ibid). Cultural inclusiveness requires acceptance of different values, which can sometimes challenge both the teacher and the learners. Teachers were therefore careful in proclaiming the value of cross-cultural communication but felt that it was desirable in an ideal sense.

Participation in ALBE classes was perceived to be advantageous for ESL learners because they would be exposed to 'natural' language usage and Australian culture, but equally the student might develop non-standard and colloquial language that they might use inappropriately. A number of teachers cited the positive benefits a cross-cultural group would have for the self esteem of native speakers if they were given the opportunity to demonstrate knowledge of the culture, idiomatic language and so forth. They would be the experts on Australian language and culture.

Some teachers felt it was a positive thing that ESL learners raise issues of grammar rules and this could benefit the ALBE learner to begin to develop this meta-language. However teachers felt that ALBE students were generally resistant to acquiring the rules and did not absorb the concepts despite repetition and reinforcement of the definitions of parts of speech. This was seen to be a reflection of differences in previous educational experiences. On the other hand, some teachers felt that the ESL needs of students would not be systematically met in such a context.

Others suggested situations where ESB learners might be intimidated by educated ESL students in the ALBE classroom. The following comment from one participant sums up those concerns:

Well I wouldn't say that it doesn't have a benefit but it's more a question of how many students can you give that advantage to without disadvantaging others. It's like standing on a box at the footy to get a better view. If everyone does it then no one gets a better view.

Are some of the things we do in the ALBE classroom suitable for the university-educated ESL students? They can contribute a lot of knowledge to the class for example, but on the other hand, the ALBE students might be discouraged to go through the thinking process that we might like them to do if there are people who clearly know more than them. I've had this situation where the ALBE students don't want to say anything because they don't want to look stupid. (K1—teacher in one of the focus groups)

The point raised here by the teacher has to do with the complexities of accommodating the linguistic and cultural differences between ESB and LBOTE learners. It was generally felt that the vocabulary needs of LBOTE learners with ESL needs were different and the differences in cultural knowledge were difficult to accommodate. Given the complexity of issues at stake it was also very difficult to get a definitive statement on the advantages and disadvantages that all might agree upon. There was a considerable diversity of opinion and each point raised was accompanied by a qualification citing exceptions to the case. Even the teachers that thought it desirable to have a cultural mix, felt there were disadvantages for all learners. Ideal groupings where all learners might benefit seemed to be an intangible goal.

Despite these reservations and concerns, many teachers were positive about persevering with the struggle of accommodating the needs of a broad diversity of learners.

The possibilities of pedagogy—ideals and action

You mean what would I do if I were god? I would make sure that there was a diversity of provision with different kinds of groupings. Some groups that are based on gender, some on shared interests, some specifically for ESL learners, some specifically for ALBE learners, some mixed, some with a particular content focus and in a range of contexts. The full range of further education provision and lot more of it. (IM—teacher interview)

The literature and the contributions from participants in this research reveal that pedagogical practice is critical to the identification and accommodation of the diversity of needs in the classroom. Idealised notions of good practice exist, which, if followed, should lead to successful outcomes. The question that really needs to be asked however, is: to what extent can teachers be expected to meet individual needs as opposed to the demands of the whole group? Is it even possible for teachers to accommodate all the different nuances of the many cultures represented in their classrooms? Ethnic, linguistic, educational, personal, family, cognitive, class and motivational factors provide a challenging task for practitioners. The individual needs of any given learner are complex, but what does the teacher do once they understand the learner profile? How might they make a difference? What kinds of strategies might they employ? And what kind of support would they require to effect such processes?

A number of pedagogical approaches were named in the data from the field, and in the literature reviewed. A brief summary of each will be mentioned here to indicate its potential in addressing the case of the ALBE and ESL interface.

Critical literacy

The concept of critical literacy draws on insights from systemic functional linguistics and critical theory. A critical reading of spoken and written texts involves an understanding of how language is used to construct meaning and how different values and relations of power are enacted in the texts. This provides scope for interrogating cultural and linguistic diversity and the hidden meanings of texts (Giroux, 1989, Campbell & Green, 2000).

Action learning

Such approaches advocate a problem-solving approach in the development of shared products, using collaborative teamwork approaches which are enacted through a systematic process of naming the problem, developing a plan and working together to develop the knowledge and skills to create the solution. Peer learning is an integral part of such a process so that a diversity of learners can be accommodated. Such approaches require facilitators (teachers) who understand the concept of underpinning skills. An action learning approach to working with LBOTE learners in ALBE settings was used in the curriculum developed by Millin (1994) There were also numerous examples cited by teachers in workplaces of this kind of approach (Spyrou, 1993).

Development of knowledge

This approach uses the development of critical knowledge as the goal of language and literacy learning. The purpose is to acquire language competency while exploring issues or bodies of knowledge that are of interest to the learner. The choice of what is important knowledge and for whom would be a matter for negotiation. This process engages learners in the process of knowledge production (Whitty, 1985).

Learning to learn strategies

This process is embedded in other practices where the learner develops a meta-language on learning. Such an approach would make explicit the cognitive and behavioral processes that interact in effective learning (McCormack & Pancini, 1990). An exploration of different learning styles—for example, visual, aural, sensual, action, would be included in this strategy. Such approaches acknowledge learner agency and provide learners with insights into how they might direct their own learning.

Cross-cultural communication

Developing a sense of community in the classroom is an important element of developing an effective learning environment (Falk,

2000). A conscious process of including ethnically inclusive materials and making cultural differences explicit provides for the diversity of backgrounds in the group (Davison et al, 1993). Learners are given the opportunity to be cultural experts by naming the values and practices of their culture.

Dialogic practice

Dialogic practice underpins many of the practices advocated by practitioners and included in the list of strategies above. Dialogue is the process by which learners can make meaning of text (Freire, 1976; Flecha, 2000), say what they know (Puigvert et al, 1999), build knowledge (Suda, 1998), critique powerful discourses (Freire, 1976; Flecha, 2000; Fairclough, 1989;) and develop as lifelong learners (Suda, 2000). A sense of community can be developed in the classroom, which then contributes to an 'elemental' connection to the other. Each of the examples of practice identified, where difference and diversity were accommodated, was ultimately dependent on dialogic processes between the teacher and the group, and within the group. Through this process the teacher's knowledge and the student's knowledge interact to form communicative action.

Each of these pedagogical approaches assumes a high level of professionalism and competence on the teacher's part. Professional development is a recurring theme in the literature. What do ESL teachers need to know to teach ALBE students? What do ALBE teachers need to know to accommodate the needs of learners with ESL needs? And how might this knowledge best be developed? There are no simple answers, but there is good reason to continue debating the issues, developing innovative approaches, and continue the struggle of developing the most effective means of meeting the needs of learners within the kaleidoscope of diversity that is Australian society.

Liz Suda has worked in the adult education field for the past 12 years. She is manager of the Flemington Reading and Writing Program, a member of ALNARC and a sessional lecturer in literacy methodology at Victoria University.

The full text of Liz Suda's papers are at <http://www.staff.vu.edu.au/alnarc/index.html>.

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Workplace literacy: a contested area

by Geraldine Castleton

In recent years many industrialised nations have been involved in a process of substantial change to make industry more globally competitive. The resultant emerging globalised economy has placed the skills of current and future workers in these countries under scrutiny.

In the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia a range of official reports and reviews, referred to by Darrah (1992) as 'future workplace skills literature', have been united in their focus on a 'sense of urgency and crisis' (p. 264) caused by a poorly skilled workforce. A further feature of much of this literature is the representation of literacy as a functional, employment-related skill, with many workers identified as having inadequate literacy skills for today's workplaces (Carnevale, Gainer, & Meltzer, 1990; Harman & Lerche, 1988; Holland, 1998; Hull & Grubb, 1999; Wagner, 1998).

An issue of concern

Within the Australian context, the official government report *Words at Work: Literacy Needs in the Workplace* clearly identifies workers with poor literacy skills as 'an issue of serious concern...within a wide cross section of industries and workplaces' (Australia Parliament House of Representatives, Standing Committee on Employment, Education & Training, 1991, p. 9). This particular representation of workers predominates in Australia, the United States (Hull, 1997; Hull & Grubb, 1999; Wagner, 1998), and Britain. A report released by the British Government early in 1999 noted that country's high numbers of adults who are not functionally literate as 'one of the reasons for relatively low productivity in our economy' (Moser, 1999, p. 8). The depiction of workers' limited literacy skills as a prevailing cause of nations' poor economic performance has become a popular discourse on the role of literacy at work.

Workplace literacy is a recent and still-emerging site of educational activity. It has also become a contested site, as many literacy researchers and educators challenge the dominant discourse on workplace literacy that gives little recognition to workers' needs or to how work is actually performed. The predominant views of the relationship between literacy and work, found in much of the literature and in official accounts and reports, have been generated out of certain knowledge and

common sense notions that draw on the prevailing discourses on work and functional literacy.

A particular version of 'workplace literacy' has emerged from this mix and become institutionalised and accepted within policy contexts as well as among administrators and practitioners in workplace education sectors, as a natural or common sense way of knowing, understanding, and talking about the relationship between literacy and work. For example, the need for many workers to undertake 'basic skills training' is often presented as an argument for workplace literacy programs. These arguments are rarely accompanied by any critical analysis of what constitutes 'basic skills' in contemporary workplaces, or by what workers themselves perceive as their 'need.' The recently released United Kingdom national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills makes such a call, clearly tying the need for basic skills training in workplaces to national economic imperatives (see <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus>).

I begin this article by examining the nature and effects of these predominant understandings or formulations of this relationship between literacy and work before moving on to evaluate what workplace literacy programs have typically been designed to do. Finally I discuss possible ways for future programs to create real opportunities for all participants to be truly involved in the process of workplace reform and active citizenship.

Dominant discourses present work (and literacy) as skill

The traditional, socially-recognised ways of thinking about and representing literacy at work have given heavy emphasis to conceptions of skill as an attribute of individuals. A number of writers (Castleton, 1997, 2000; Darrah, 1997; Holland, 1998; Hull, 1997; Hull & Grubb, 1999) have contested the concept of skill requirements as a valid way of interpreting work, disputing whether work can be defined, or deconstructed, in terms of bundles of discrete characteristics or skills that are determined to be mutually exclusive, but collectively provide a comprehensive description of the job. Darrah (1997), for example, has argued that this focus directs attention to whether workers individually possess a particular array of skills rather than to how people, individually and collectively, actually

perform their jobs. Within a model that casts workers' skills as inherently individualistic, little attention is given to the reality of workplaces as communities of workers who possess a diverse range of skills that they use in complementary ways. Furthermore, this conceptualisation denies the realities of contemporary workplaces where increasing emphasis is placed on teams and shared responsibility. In describing work in a number of Australian manufacturing industries, one training provider noted, for example, that workers

have to be prepared to work in the team, they've got to do, do a lot more, er, problem solving, work out with other workers what's happening on the line, work out when things are going wrong, er, you know, in the past it's, it's been, well, that's been the responsibility of someone else.

Further disputing this limiting conceptualisation of work, a number of writers have noted how the literature typically presents the workplace as a monocultural, value-free, and neutral backdrop against which work is performed (for example Cope & Kalantzis, 1997; Darrah, 1992, 1997; O'Connor, 1994). Consequentially, various processes that are internal to the factory floor, and are always involved in generating and reproducing the context in which work takes place, may not be acknowledged. Drawing on his work among computer assembly line workers in the United States, Darrah (1997) found that although many of the production floor tasks workers were required to perform were standard for the industry, they were often accomplished in slightly different ways. This variation was due to a range of factors that included workers' different interpretations of procedures outlined in factory floor manuals and workers' 'differing combinations of reasoning, memory, playfulness, cooperativeness and communication in order to perform their tasks' (p.257), as well as to other workplace realities such as interruptions to work caused by lack of essential parts or failures of machinery or technology.

Writers have also warned that the simplistic exercise of listing skill requirements within discourses on work highlights an inherent unequal distribution of power in this practice. Darrah (1997) has stated that the whole edifice of skill requirements 'situates blame or responsibility in people and their (lack of) skills, instead of in organisational contexts' (p. 267). An informant to a study of policy and practices in workplace literacy in Australia observed:

a lot of the time really it's probably not much about skills, some of the things could really be dealt with by better organisation of workplaces, or actually rewriting the forms, or rewriting the procedures.

Hull and Grubb (1999) have also noted that 'the acquisition of skills does not necessarily imply an increase in autonomy or control over work processes' (p. 312). Once workers 'upskill' according to some predetermined—usually by management—list of skills, they may still find themselves constrained by company values as they are prescribed in work practices set out in company manuals, memos, and other documentation.

Examining discourses of literacy at work

The functional literacy discourse predominates in contemporary understandings of the relationship between literacy and work (Castleton, 1997, 2000; Holland, 1998; Hull & Grubb, 1999). Advocates of this position argue that it is possible to define literacy at work purely as the individual skills necessary to complete particular tasks. The research of Hull and colleagues (Hull, 1997; Hull & Grubb, 1999) at a computer industry site refuted this claim, identifying complex ways in which literacy is woven throughout the fabric of circuit board assembly work. Hull and Grubb (1999) described how, within this industry, workers are 'expected to operate expensive and complex machinery, to conduct their work in conformity with international standards, and even to participate in 'self-directed work teams' on which they set and monitor their own goals for increasing productivity and maintaining high quality' (p. 311).

A straightforward representation of workers as possessing inadequate literacy skills for current and future jobs, however, remains most pervasive among the commonly held beliefs on literacy and work (Freebody & Welch, 1993; Gowen, 1994; Green, Hodgens, & Luke, 1997; Hull, 1993, 1997; Hull & Grubb, 1999). In accounting for concerns about literacy among workers in US industries for example, Hull and Grubb (1999) noted that the 'growing concern is that many workers and prospective workers are not up to the task, having been poorly or insufficiently educated and having grown accustomed to jobs that do not expect much' (p. 311). In explanations such as these, it is the skills of workers that are found wanting, with other workplace participants, namely supervisors or managers, credited with the necessary attributes to meet and surmount the challenges of contemporary and future work.

This depiction draws on a deficit representation of individuals' literacy skills that assumes a causal relationship between such deficiencies and people's ability to perform at work. In addition, these accounts have taken on an undisputed official status, presented in government-funded reports such as *Workplace basics: the skills employers want* (Carnevale, Gainer, & Meltzer, 1990) in the United States, *Workforce literacy: an economic challenge for Canada* (Drouin, 1990) in Canada, *Words at work: literacy needs in the workplace* (Australia Parliament, 1991) and *Literacy at work*

(National Board of Employment, Education and Training, 1996) in Australia, and, more recently, *A fresh start: improving literacy and numeracy* (Moser, 1999) in the UK. An Australian report claimed:

there is now general agreement that Australia needs a more flexible and highly skilled workforce capable of maximising its productivity, producing quality goods and innovatively exploiting both new technologies and market opportunities. In the drive to achieve these results it has become apparent that poor literacy, numeracy and English language skills of a significant number of adults and youth is an impediment to this occurring (Australia Parliament, 1991, p. 5).

This report went on to situate the majority of this 'significant number' in workplaces, stating that:

workers with inadequate literacy, numeracy and language skills have been identified in a wide cross section of industries and workplaces. While the full extent of the problem is not known the available evidence demonstrates that it is an issue of serious concern (Australia Parliament, 1991, p. 9).

By focusing on skill or competence as an individual attribute, these discourses allow workers who do not possess the prescribed levels of skill to be viewed as inadequate for the task. From this position workers with poor literacy skills are then held accountable for poor economic performance at an industry and national level. Although *Words at work* was released in 1991 at a time when the full effect of globalisation was yet to be felt, it is interesting to note that similar concerns are still being voiced in official reports coming out of countries such as the UK (Department for Education & Skills, 2001; Moser, 1999). These later reports, products of the age of globalisation and of the increasing use of technology in the workplace, continue to cite workers' poor literacy skills as major contributors to nations' poor economic performance. To date, there has been little discussion of the new forms of literate practices that have emerged from the various applications of technology in workplaces.

Doing new work and being new workers

Contemporary discourses on work, labelled as a 'new work order' (Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996), mark an important shift from the traditional industry-based economy to the knowledge-based service and information economies of the present day. These discourses privilege a particular account of work that creates new social realities and identities in workplaces, delineating new ways of being a worker.

This new order is typically found in what Gee, Hull, and Lankshear (1996) described as 'fast capitalist texts' (for example

Boyett & Conn, 1992; Hammer, 1996; Hammer & Champy, 1993). These texts convey the 'quality management' discourse that privileges particular kinds of workers over others. Hammer (1996), for example, described two kinds of workers—the 'traditional' worker who operates as a kind of robot remotely controlled by a manager, and the 'professional', characterised as being an independent human being within the new knowledge-based economy. The essential purpose of the 'fast capitalist texts' and the discourses they frame, then, is the material and conceptual redesign of social relations in the workplace. The apparent common sense logic of this rhetoric frequently serves to mask the phasing out of many workers who may not have the skills required to participate in the new workplaces, those who remain Hammer's (1996) 'traditional' workers. More insidiously, this logic may disguise the reality—faced by workers in many countries—of fewer jobs to go around, particularly for those deemed to be least skilled (that is, 'traditional' workers).

The literature of the 'new work order', and of the ensuing relationship between work and literacy relies heavily on our culturally-shared understandings and acceptance of accounts of how work is done. Along with these understandings come various norms, rights, capabilities, and social and moral responsibilities attributed to people defined as fitting the category of 'worker'. 'Fast capitalist texts' make a strong case for workers to be innovative, flexible, and highly skilled (Boyett & Conn, 1992; Hammer, 1996; Hammer & Champy, 1993). Workers must be able to participate in a range of practices involving not only technical and interpersonal skills, but also intellectual skills that give their companies the 'critical edge' over their local and international competitors. Underpinning the new work order is a particular conception of 'human capital' in which human aspects of work dominate over more traditional technical and mechanical features. Hammer and Champy claimed that there are rewards for workers for the increased efforts they are expected to put into their work, when '(after reengineering work becomes more satisfying, (because) people's jobs have a greater component of growth and learning' (1993, p.66). The new work culture is credited with providing 'membership, purposefulness, belonging, and meaning' that, according to Boyett and Conn (1992, pp. 3–4), had been missing from workers' lives under prior models of work arrangements.

The 'new work order' discourse also establishes a particular version of knowledge about the place of literacy in the workplace. This discourse sees workers, in very particular ways, contributing to nations' inability to compete effectively in the international marketplace. What is consequently assembled is a picture of 'workers' who are operating outside the parameters of what it means to be 'good workers', including possessing adequate levels of functional literacy skills. Castleton's (2000) study of workplace

literacy in Australia found that accounts given by workplace personnel, including training and human resource managers and training deliverers, resonated with this version. Such people frequently talked of how workers' skill levels 'used to be okay', but now, under new working arrangements, these same workers' skills were framed as 'not okay'. For example, in describing why workers from a non-English-speaking background with limited literacy skills—once defined as 'good' workers with work practices that 'used to be okay'—had become a problem, one training manager noted:

Now in the past the Vietnamese and some of the others that used hand signals, well, we want to get away from that, I mean, erm...with, with the mills and when the stuff's forming, er, steel product, if product starts coming out of the end and it's poor we want to be able to [stop it] (Castleton, 2000, p. 98).

What is frequently missing from accounts such as this is how the workers, now deemed to be performing 'poorly', perceive the transition from being the 'good' workers of the past to being the unacceptable employees of the present.

Realities of new discourses of (and at) work

The new discourses on work name those experiences considered to be important to contemporary society, establishing differentially valued discursive practices as they are displayed by some workers. Within today's increasingly segregated workplace, such formulations define some workers as winners and others as losers, that is, there is more on offer for the 'professional' rather than the 'traditional' worker. Farrell (2000) has suggested that this development is welcomed, even seen as inevitable, by management, as corporations put more focus on the generation of new knowledge and less on the production of goods and services where 'traditional' workers were historically located. These workers now find themselves particularly vulnerable in changing workplaces that are responding to globalisation through practices such as downsizing, 'offshore' production, and a project-based approach to work. The naming and privileging of certain kinds of workers, however, denies credibility and validity to the experiences of others, thus bearing out Boyett and Conn's comment that 'the world itself is changing in respect to how and what type of human effort is valued' (1992, p.277).

Significant silences

The dominant discourse on the role of literacy at work can, however, be found to contain significant omissions and silences, relying as it does on limited understandings of literacy. This discourse also does not present workers' understandings (or voices) of work or of literacy at work. The definitive report on

literacy and work in Australia, *Words at Work* (Australia Parliament, 1991), for example, contained only three instances of workers' voices, compared with more than 100 submissions from government, business organisations, industries, and literacy providers. Interestingly, the more recent report from Britain (Department for Education & Skills, 2001) contained a number of personal stories from individuals who benefited from basic skills training, but did not include any from the workplace even though the strategy targeted low-skilled employees.

Within texts such as *Words at Work* (Australia Parliament, 1991) and *Skills for Life* (Department for Education & Skills, 2001) 'the workplace' is presented as a homogeneous, monocultural site that could be described in essentially monolithic terms as having a particular 'culture'. While denying the actuality of industries as multicultural, multilingual sites, this point highlights the contention that contemporary workplaces attempt to create a culture of 'sameness' from a reality of difference (Cope & Kalantzis, 1997, p. 14). This process masks any within- and cross-cultural variations that may be explained by membership in different social or cultural groups—being a female worker, for example, as opposed to being a male.

The strong emphasis given to the functional literacy discourse in descriptions of workers' literacy competence relies heavily on binary oppositional structures to accomplish its descriptions. Workers are typically categorised as 'skilled' ('professional') or 'unskilled' ('traditional'), with all the rewards on offer in the 'enchanted workplace' (Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996) available to the skilled, and a bleak future for the 'other'—the unskilled or 'traditional' worker. The prevalent workplace literacy discourse therefore offers limited understandings of the interrelationships existing between literacy and work, but also works to constitute and strengthen particular power relations within work settings and beyond. Power relations within workplaces remain asymmetrical, and workers are held accountable for social and economic outcomes that fall far outside their realms of experience or influence.

According to Street (1995), the common practice of relying on the functional discourse to explain literacy at work also 'disguises and effectively naturalises the ideological role of literacy in contemporary society' (p. 125). This act allows for certain conceptualisations of worker identity to carry with them particular moral implications. Literacy, in this mechanistic and 'technicist' sense, becomes a representation of many of contemporary society's most serious problems—workers with limited literacy skills can be held responsible for poor economic performance at an enterprise, industry, and national level. From this perspective, blame is located in individuals and explanations are framed in terms of ethnicity ('they can't speak English'),

workers' disposition ('they won't work hard enough'), and socioeconomic circumstance ('they didn't get enough schooling, they don't value education'), not in institutional justifications of fiscal difficulties, organisational mismanagement, or market declines. These predominant explanations succeed in masking the complexities of contemporary social, economic, and political life, such as the consequences on individuals, families, and communities of a declining labour market for people with low levels of skills. therefore they deflect attention away from institutional solutions to such problems. In the meantime literacy takes on a significance that far outweighs what features of social life can adequately and appropriately explain in terms of its actual role in people's lives.

Current practices in workplace literacy training

The field of workplace literacy training has emerged from the coupling of new discourses about work and workers' skills with the functional literacy discourse (Drouin, 1990; Gowen, 1994; Hull, 1993, 1997; Hull & Grubb, 1999; Pearson et al., 1996; Schultz, 1997). This is a disturbing trend when considered with the realisation that the pedagogy of workplace literacy teaching has, to date, largely gone unchallenged. Research from both the U.S. (Hull & Grubb, 1999; Kalman & Losey, 1997; Schultz, 1997) and Australia (Falk, 1994) has found that adult literacy programs, including those offered in workplaces, as a rule 'fall back on traditional ways of teaching, ones that replicate the ways children are taught in school' (Schultz, 1997, p. 62). Workplace teachers typically assume traditional directive roles in front of workers, using materials and assessment techniques reminiscent of conventional notions of schooling, while workers take up the passive, conforming roles of school-based students (Falk, 1994). The mere use of the term *teacher* becomes problematic in an environment where the teacher cannot profess to have detailed understanding of the knowledge, skills, and work practices of individual worksites. Many such programs may actually assist in sustaining inappropriate roles and relationships for workplace teachers and participants (students), founded as they are on school-based discourses.

Such practices are not only inappropriate for adult learners but also may succeed in maintaining existing power structures in society that work to sustain the socioeconomic status quo, denying equal opportunities to participants (Lankshear, 1998). These programs can therefore reinforce negative school-based notions of teaching and learning, inherited from school days for many of the participants, so that they remain passive recipients of the knowledge determined and passed onto them by the workplace teachers. The pervasive influence of the functional literacy discourse applied to work also means that workers are held back by inappropriate approaches to teaching and learning

that reinforce autonomous views of literacy and particular social identities, values, and beliefs.

Existing models are not enough

The disquieting consequences of this situation become evident in an environment where 'school(ed) literacy' (Cook-Gumperz, 1986) pedagogy has itself been critiqued and challenged (Freebody, Ludwig, & Gunn, 1995; Green, Hodgens, & Luke, 1997; Luke, Lingard, Green, & Comber, in press; Street, 1995). There can be no doubt that workplace literacy practices founded on existing models of 'school(ed) literacy' will not fully prepare workers for newly organised workplaces. While the value and importance of including texts drawn from actual occupational settings cannot be understated, there is cause for concern about programs that 'do not consciously change the other assumptions underlying [their] teaching methods' (Grubb, 1997, p. 172). Though applauding the use of 'authentic' workplace texts in workplace literacy programs, O'Connor (1994) has noted that in such contexts 'we seldom take the time to learn about the layers of authenticity or meaning that may reside in these texts and their uses' (p. 279). Workplace texts as discourses establish and maintain certain categories of people, with specific attributions, as well as particular systems of knowledge and beliefs. Therefore any effort to assist workers in accessing workplace texts must view them 'as discourse and speculate about the ways writers and readers both construct meaning and are constructed as meaningful by the operation of discourse' (Jolliffe, 1997, p. 340).



Inclusive language

This point can be clearly demonstrated when considering the nature and purpose of texts such as vision or mission statements and core values that are derived from the quality management discourse and typically found in company offices and staff areas. One such core values text, on display in an Australian factory staff lunchroom, begins with the declaration: 'Our core values guide our behaviour'. It then lists a further ten statements that begin with the inclusive pronoun *we*, such as: 'We foster a team approach...', 'We embrace change...', 'We are fair in our dealings...' The use of inclusive pronouns such as *our* and *we* is

commonplace in such texts that are designed to affect how workers see themselves and experience their lives as workers. The workers at the factory in question, however, reported that they were not involved or consulted in the development of these core values. Nonetheless, it is clear by the use of inclusive language and by the placement of the text in the lunchroom that the workers are meant to find themselves represented in these core values and to take them up in their work. In her studies of workplace training in the United States, Hull reported similar instances where the values and beliefs presented to workers were overtly tied to the interests of the company (Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996, p. 102).

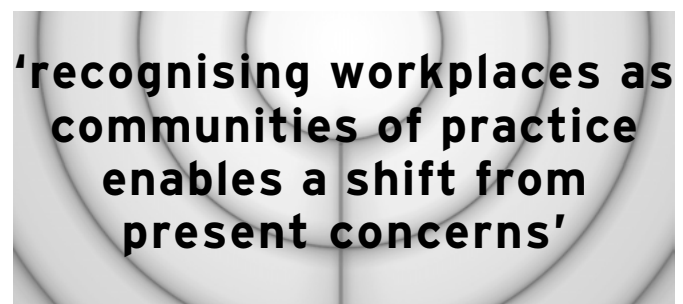
An outcome of inappropriate workplace training practices in the lives of many people may be that instead of, or in addition to, the schooling system determining if they can be characterised as 'literate' or 'illiterate', employers and others working on their behalf are now setting the standards by which some people are pronounced 'illiterate.' In addition these people are also deciding on the content and skills that determine what is necessary to 'become literate' (Schultz, 1997, p. 51). Such findings reinforce Limage's assertion that 'workplace literacy programs...tend to respond to agendas other than those that reflect a learner's aspirations or reality' (1993, p. 25). These issues impel reflection on where and how workers' existing literate practice are considered in workplace literacy training, as well as on how the effectiveness of workplace literacy programs is determined.

An Australian study, for instance, argued a strong case for demonstrated 'significant gains in productivity, efficiency and economic competitiveness linked directly to workplace English language, literacy and numeracy inclusive training' (Pearson et al., 1996, p.3). However, the authors acknowledged difficulty in acquiring quantitative proof of the success of workplace literacy training and noted that '(t)he time-consuming aspect of such measurement appears to be based on the well-founded assumption that it is a very difficult thing to do' (p.39). They observed that:

(a)part from the logistics of the exercise, the impact in the workplace of any sort of training was seen in general to be too intertwined with a constellation of other workplace variables for it to be considered practicable. In other words, the 'impact of training' variable could not reliably be measured in isolation from the influences of others (p.39).

The 'constellation of other workplace variables' that made it difficult to quantitatively determine the effects of workplace literacy training did not appear to offer any barrier to identifying a succinct list of isolated, neutral literacy skills, or to regarding workplace documents in a 'value-empty, ideologically neutral fashion' (Jolliffe, 1997, p. 340). In trying to determine the

economic returns from investments in workplace literacy programs, Hollenbeck (1993) concluded that it is difficult in the first instance to reach agreement on outcomes, and then to find consensus on effective means of measurement. Profit levels, the primary concern of employers, are dependent on too many variables, both internal and external to a company, to be used as a performance indicator. Furthermore, Hollenbeck maintained that attempts to evaluate workplace literacy programs focused on upgrading individual workers' skill levels not the 'problem of trying to disentangle an individual's contribution to productivity or quality when in fact output is often a joint product of many workers plus capital equipment' (1993, p 64). Such a claim reinforces the importance of acknowledging work as social activity, and workplaces as 'communities of practice', made up of workers from diverse backgrounds with differing and complementary skills.



Alternative realities of workplace literacy 'work'

There is a growing need to develop distinctive workplace literacy pedagogy that gives a truer appreciation of the role literacy plays both for workers and for work. Such a pedagogy needs to be informed by far richer, more meaningful formulations of literacy than those offered in the functional literacy discourse that currently underpins workplace literacy. Recent studies reported by Farrell (2000), Hull (see Hull, 1997, 2000), and others demonstrate the rich interplay of communicative practices that do exist in workplaces, though they are not often given the legitimacy they deserve. Farrell (2000), for example, described how workers participated in an Action Learning Team meeting intended to induct them into the work practices of team-based problem solving mandated in the company's quality manual. She noted that, in meeting the demands outlined in the quality manual, the five workers in question variously incorporated the values and ideological positions available to them but, at the same time, still accommodated their knowledge of how the workplace operated in the past as well as their perspectives of themselves as workers.

Recognising workplaces as communities of practice enables a shift from present concerns for workers' individual skill levels to a more relevant focus on the social nature of work and literacy.

While there is some evidence that approaches to workplace literacy grounded in a functional literacy discourse may result in improved performance in the short term (for example, Pearson et al., 1996), Gowen has warned that they do little to help organisations 'restructure themselves into more humane and democratic workplaces' (1994, p.134).

A sociocultural understanding of literacy and of new-capitalist business would argue that learning for performance requires the acquisition of tacit knowledge through immersion in communities of practice (Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996, p.158). However, Gee and colleagues further maintained that there is a need to 'go beyond simple immersion to gain the ability both to reflect on one's tacit knowledge and to critique the communities within which one has achieved it' (Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996, p.158), a practice Farrell (2000) observed in action. Similarly, Hull (2000) has reported on one worker's performance in a high-tech Silicon Valley workplace in which a conventional, school-like learning situation, under the control of a higher-qualified supervisor, was modified for the worker's own purposes. The worker in question deliberately created his own forum in which to highlight a problem that his company had, to that time, chosen to ignore though there were significant consequences for front line workers, then set about identifying a solution to that problem. According to Hull, this worker determinedly took on a particular kind of identity for himself, one that enabled him to participate in a required work team on his own terms, thereby denoting what Hull has labelled 'critical literacy at work' (2000, p.651). A further part of this worker's self-imposed identity was that of 'advocate' for his colleagues, a characteristic of workplace learning often overlooked or not acknowledged as a feature of how workers work and learn.

The following excerpt, taken from a workplace literacy teacher's account of one of her classes with labourers in a service industry, further exemplifies potential opportunities for workplace literacy programs that work with workers' agendas.

One of the things...we're working on at the moment, by definition of what they do, they wear a bright orange shirt. They were absolutely passionate about getting out of their shirts, and to me the culture is unreal. They actually (asked if I could) come back and see if they could come out of their orange shirts. It was simply a matter of asking (the Area Manager)...They say they stand out like beacons and they saw themselves as...different from the rest of the workforce...I feel to take them out of those (orange) shirts gives them dignity.

These kinds of perspectives move workplace literacy programs beyond a functional-context approach and signify how workplace literacy training could focus on identifying and recognising the

actual culture of the workplace, including the workers' own texts and the textual and contextual cues they employ in getting the work done, thereby giving workers a voice in determining and shaping work practices.

Within the Australian worker's perspective, the 'texts' of most importance are the content and context of enterprise bargaining agreements that legalise the conditions and wages of employees. The existing legislation at both federal and state levels argues for and recognises the value of effective worker participation within industry. These 'texts', including workplace documents such as the vision and mission statements and core values referred to earlier, are enacted differently at the enterprise level, but provide the platform from which workplace literacy programs can be developed. By their very nature, enterprise agreements are meant to be arrived at collaboratively and they offer the potential for active involvement of workers in examining workplace practices and for better informed, cooperative approaches that lead to improved conditions and outcomes for all stakeholders.

In Farrell's (2000, p.20) terms, workplace literacy education can be a 'strategic intervention' in the social practices and relationships of work and workplaces. In this way distinctive pedagogy and curriculum for workplace literacy training can be developed that focuses less on what we all have been socialised to think of in terms of traditional education, and more on articulating the value of literacy in the lives of the workers to whom it is addressed. The challenge is to develop authentic pedagogy that engages workers in critical, rich communicative workplace-based tasks that explore the link between these tasks and the (potential) roles and identities that are available to all participants in workplaces.

Such an approach would extend the 'fast capitalist texts' of worker emancipation to give workers an authentic and authoritative say in their own destinies. Rather than working to establish the cultural conformity implicit in new discourses of work, workplace literacy programs will then attend more closely to the realities of difference and to the benefits of 'productive diversity' that '(focus) on the dynamic relationship of differences in the establishment of common ground' (Cope & Kalantzis, 1997, p.6).

Meeting the challenge

Opportunities do exist for workplace literacy practitioners to be part of the pressing need for debate about the future of literacy in the globalised, networked, intercultural economies of the next century (Luke et al., in press). Hull has described how new forms of work organisation 'can sometimes provide a hybrid space in

which employees are able to advocate for improvements in the conditions of work, while companies can simultaneously press for improvements in quality and productivity' (2000, p.650). Workplace literacy practitioners can therefore help workers find these spaces and help workers and management push their boundaries to achieve more positive outcomes for all participants.

Workplace literacy 'work' must fulfill real purposes for all stakeholders. As discussed by Gee, Hull, and Lankshear in their critique of the 'new work order', learning and education 'become always and everywhere about being in, about comparing and contrasting, reflecting on and critiquing, Discourses about the kinds of people we are, are becoming, and want to be' (1996, p.166). Such critiquing and contesting is essential to ensure that workplace literacy does not run the risk of becoming, in Foucault's (1980) terms, a disciplinary discourse that sets out to legitimate and sustain certain forms of power and knowledge.

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The Island: a place of peace and learning

by Helena Spyrrou

In October 2002 I visited The Island to see how their Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) trial was going. The Island is the work education and training unit of Collingwood College, based in a large red brick warehouse in North Fitzroy and, for the past 30 years, has assisted vulnerable and at risk young people aged 15–17 who do not want to stay on at school and are looking for early entry into the workforce.

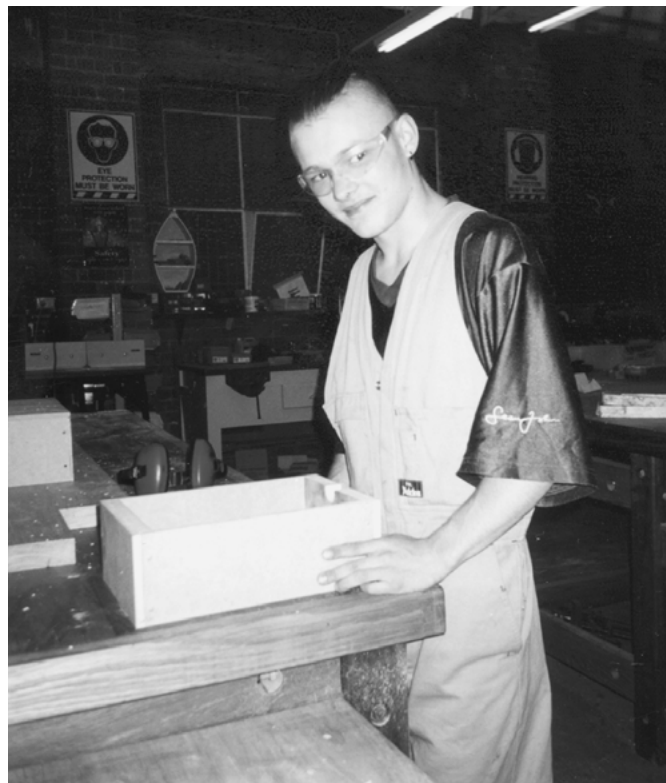
Reminiscent of Ivan Illich's 1970 classic *Deschooling Society*, The Island model of education is successful in engaging young people in learning that is relevant and meaningful by providing a work education program based on principles of lifelong and adult learning in a context that exists outside a traditional school system. Most learning happens outside a classroom, in the community, in industry workshop areas and on personal development camps.

In 2002, The Island was one of the 22 sites across Victoria (15 state secondary schools, five Catholic secondary schools and two TAFE institutes) involved in trailing the VCAL. In 2003, The Island is one of over 200 schools, 18 TAFE institutes and four ACE organisations implementing the VCAL. The Bracks Government in its 2002/03 Victorian Budget has committed \$47.7 million over the next four years for the state rollout of the VCAL and further pilots (<http://www.vqa.vic.gov.au>).

The Island is structured as a 'workplace', where students participate in a range of industry skill areas and are encouraged to see themselves as coming to work, not to school. Students work in small groups in a flexible, minimally structured environment and negotiate aspects of their curriculum and strategies for learning. All staff recognise that students who attend have had numerous experiences of school and personal 'failure', so The Island model also includes a lot of support and pastoral care, ensuring every person can experience some success on a daily basis.

First impressions—October 2002

I arrive at The Island in the afternoon and Tracey Henderson (the then VCAL coordinator) is there to show me around. As I walk through this large open plan building, I'm struck by the vibrancy—the place is busy and filled with activity. There are



Casey, one of the woodworking students

bold and colourful murals and a calendar that displays the term's events. The radio plays, and dozens of conversations are heard simultaneously. Newspapers and notebooks cover the surface of a large table in the centre of the room. In the kitchen, Samuel is singing as he and his mates mop up the floor. The menu on the wall shows today's lunch cooked by the hospitality group—spring rolls, Asian coleslaw and fruit. 'We have lunch together every day', says Tracey. Michele, the literacy/numeracy teacher, sits with six students around a smaller table as they write in their journals—a daily ritual. Tracey then takes me through to another section of the building to see the other workshop areas. Neil and Sean work on a faulty carburettor of a customer's car. A mini bus, donated by Lynall Hall Community School in Richmond, is jacked up waiting for repairs. I'm introduced to Bernie the metal work instructor, who takes me to meet Rebecca and I look on as she solders the parts that will make up a windmill. Another four completed mini-windmills are ready to be picked up by customers who have purchased them. Beyond there, Phil, the woodworking instructor helps two students glue together strips of

wood for a piece of outdoor furniture they're making for a community agency. On the next bench, Aidan shows Jayden how to engrave The Island logo on a wooden sign. Today some of the landscaping students are putting in sprinkling systems at the Salvos. A couple of others are mowing the lawns at Finbar House, a community centre and refuge. One student is on work experience at the Homestead Hotel across the road. Of the 48 students enrolled, there are 16 students on site today. 'They're in and out', says Tracey, 'no one day is the same for them...Kids are not made accountable in a traditional way and we have to be flexible here to make it work...They work on real jobs and get to talk to people in the community, find out what they need, get quotes for jobs and work out selling strategies'. Next week a group of ten will go surfing at Anglesea for five days and today Casey, a woodwork student, has just come back from an industry breakfast where he gave a talk to employers about the VCAL.

The VCAL

The VCAL is a new qualification designed for young people in Years 11 and 12 who are interested in vocational pathways or who want to start working. It sits alongside the VCE and is based on applied learning. The interim evaluation report that came out in July 2002 (<http://www.vqa.vic.gov.au/vqa/vcal/trial.htm>) defines applied learning as 'generally taken to mean practical, hands-on, on-the-job type learning activities. It suggests a form of learning for which the relevance is more readily apparent and applicable than it is for other, perhaps more 'academic' forms of learning' (p. 25).

Curriculum selected for study in the VCAL is within four strands: literacy and numeracy skills; work-related skills; industry-specific skills; and personal development skills. There are three VCAL certificates at three levels: foundation, intermediate or senior. Students can enrol in the level most appropriate to their skills and abilities and can complete one or more award levels. Stakeholders include parents, students, teachers, community-based service agencies, employers and representatives of participating Local Learning and Employment Networks (LENs)

The VCAL came out of a recommendation in the Kirby Review—The Ministerial Review of Post-Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria commissioned by the Victorian Government in 2000. The review found that the two factors most frequently cited by students for their decision to leave school were the 'desire for work and the lack of interest in school work' (Kirby Review, p. 54).

The VCAL accreditation submission (<http://www.vqa.vic.gov.au>) states that the VCAL is designed to 'build resilience, confidence, self worth and employability skills. It provides opportunities for

experiential learning and skill development and encourages student decision-making regarding future pathways to work and further education' (part B:4).

The Island's VCAL trial in 2002

The Island is a very small organisation. All students are enrolled in the VCAL, with the majority studying at foundation level. 'The Island's size and their philosophy', says Tracey, 'gives the luxury of things happening more spontaneously. We don't have timetabling or release problems and so decisions can be made more quickly. For example, an instructor can take a couple of kids down to the local timber yard to get quotes or we can drive a group in the mini bus for a gardening job'.

Students choose from the following industry-specific skill areas: hospitality, automotive, engineering and construction, carpentry and landscaping. literacy and numeracy skills (2 credits) and personal development skills (2 credits) are integrated with work-related skills (3 credits) and industry-specific skills (3 credits). To get the VCAL certificate each student needs to accumulate 10 credits—100 nominal hours of scheduled and unscheduled study for each credit.

In the work-related skills strand, they accumulate three credits—one for quality and planning for employment and training, another for work experience where they get a CV together, write a journal, and become work-ready, and the third for their studio work. The studio work is an orientation to every industry-specific skill area. For the first six months, each student will spend two weeks in each area before they decide which one they wish to pursue. The rationale behind this process, says Tracey, is that 'kids might come in thinking they might want to be a mechanic and they go around the different industry areas and then end up wanting to be in the kitchen or vice versa'. The outcomes that need to be met for work-related skills can be done during this time—working as a team member, using mathematical skills, collecting and analysing information, working in a work environment. After the six months, they can opt into a certificate and in the second half of the year each student begins the industry-specific skills strand. When that's completed they get another three credits.

Personal development

Personal development skills are addressed in an integrated way. To complete unit one (one credit) at foundation level of this strand, students attend a range of camps in small groups of 10–12 students and 'because kids come at all different times of the year there's always different camps to go on like horse riding, surfing, snorkelling, sailing and canoeing—they have to go at



Rebecca soldering together parts of a windmill

least once. On the camps they learn organisational and team skills, they learn about themselves and about their environment ...For unit two (one credit) at foundation level of the strand we just combine the team building and sport activities, the work students do out in the community, the community lunches they organise; and the industry days where students go out and talk to employers and customers and give speeches at various industry functions’.

Throughout the program students are developing their literacy and numeracy skills (two credits are allocated for this strand, one for literacy and one for numeracy). Literacy and numeracy are integrated into the other three strands and addressed more explicitly in small group sessions weekly.

The CGEA is chosen to meet the requirements of the literacy and numeracy strand of the VCAL. As Tracey points out, ‘...it suits our kids and is based on adult learning principles which are an important aspect of the VCAL delivery approach. Michele takes what they do in the workshops and brings it into the CGEA program so that it is meaningful. They also get withdrawn out of their industry-specific skills strand for a couple of hours a week for short sharp lessons. Still they don’t want to sit down there (in the classroom)—they want to be in the workshop working with their hands, but if they’re doing stuff related to their industry area, then that’s their thing, fantastic, doing invoicing, doing calculations, talking about workers conditions, talking about business ideas’.

The Island has also made links with union organisers from the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Engineering Union and considers it a ‘good relationship’. Union organisers provide professional development and support to industry instructors, advice on occupational health and safety issues, worker rights and conditions and inroads into the industry.

The Island staff

‘Essentially’, said Tracey, ‘our staff like kids and want to see them succeed, really, we’re setting kids up for their life, setting them up to be independent. Most importantly, our staff are able to take a step back from a kid’s behaviour and ask what has happened to this kid last night or on their way here. So you’ve got to have some sort of understanding of where the kids have come from and what’s going on for them. What also helps is that we have strict guidelines and are consistent, making sure we provide good role models for the kids. If something goes wrong or when we have to deal with conflict between students or between staff and students, we try to initially diffuse the situation with humour before we tackle the issue...these kids don’t get a lot of support in their home lives, so we all need to provide a supportive environment and when we go out to organise work experience, we need to brief potential employers about the kids we’re sending to them’.

In our conversation, Tracey outlined her concern that students need to have functional literacy in order to meet the demands of the VCAL program. She suggested that ACE providers could be integral in working with young people at earlier stages of literacy and numeracy development.

Issues and considerations

I’d like here to highlight just a few concerns that will hopefully be addressed in future discussions about the VCAL.

The first critical issue concerns the way young people will be supported in the workforce. In my work with young people in the workplace, and as a telephone legal advice counsellor on workplace issues at Jobwatch for three years from 1998 to 2000, I believe that the current labour market does not support young



Neil at work on a car engine

people and for this reason it is important that organisations undertaking the VCAL ensure that they don't focus solely on employer needs but work with young people and unions to address issues such as worker rights, pay and conditions, health and safety (in particular workplace bullying and violence issues), support and accreditation for work placement and part-time work. If the VCAL is to truly have an industry focus, then unions, need to be involved in the process as legitimate stakeholders.

Secondly, as someone who has worked in a technical school in the early 80s, I understand that issues regarding what constitutes applied and academic learning are complex and young people's needs, particularly at that vulnerable 15–17 year age group, may be contradictory. Since the dismantling of the technical school system in the late 80s, VCE has been taken over by academia and the knowledge and resources for teaching in the 'trades' professions has virtually been lost. Young people who may not want to pursue an academic path and who don't feel supported within the current school system have had few options. So, there is a need to bring back a form of applied learning and to validate the 'trades' professions. But I'm concerned that there still exists a myth that young people are trained to work either with their head or their hands. It is important that we learn from past failures and ensure that we dispel this myth.

The challenge, therefore, is to ensure that all students undertaking the VCAL are supported to develop their general education knowledge and skills and that literacy and numeracy is not watered down because workers of the future will need sophisticated literacy, numeracy and information skills. This requires that the literacy and numeracy strand, as well as being integrated into the other strands of the VCAL, be explicitly and rigorously addressed. In addition, providers who use the CGEA will need to address all the four literacy domains of the CGEA—knowledge, public debate, practical purpose and self expression. Young people who do not yet have 'functioning' literacy will need to be supported. Providers will therefore need to be appropriately funded and resourced to meet this need. Further, adequate funding must be allocated for the professional development of both industry instructors and teachers

Finally, we need to provide genuine alternatives to a traditional classroom-based school system for young people. Schools and TAFE institutes will need to restructure their VCAL programs to provide such an environment.

Little Islands

The Island provides an excellent model for those seeking to develop innovative alternatives along these lines. The Island, has had much success with vulnerable and at-risk young people

primarily because the programs it runs are underpinned by curriculum principles and an educational philosophy that teaches young people to become active and independent agents in their learning, life and work process and respects and meets their diverse needs. Perhaps it is not for ACE, TAFE institutes or schools in their current structures to pick up the VCAL. Perhaps the VCAL is best suited in little Islands that have an educational philosophy that is student-centred, holistic and offers engagement with the real world and real life work experiences. Perhaps we need little Islands where a small team of experienced teachers can work in an organic way to identify and meet the needs of young people without too many bureaucratic restrictions. Little Islands where strong links to the community, unions and the workforce can be developed; and where the industry specific skills area can function in a multidisciplinary manner allowing easy integration with literacy and numeracy and personal development.

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Open Forum

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

Pualine Morrow and Susan Healey discuss a project where students locate the best language and literacy sites on the internet.

The web we weave— supporting online learning

The Language Studies Department at Kangan Batman TAFE was successful in obtaining Learnscope funding to develop an online directory of useful websites and TAFEVC modules to be used in the context of a language and literacy classroom.

Why did the department commit to the project?

At Kangan Batman TAFE computer skills have been taught in language and literacy classes for ten years. Initially, computer skills were taught to higher level students only. Later, students with lower levels skills were targeted, especially in the era of the Special Intervention Program (SIP). This was the era when industry was restructuring and textile, clothing and footwear jobs were shed and there was a need for vocational skills in addition to language and literacy skills. Students were excited about technology. Microsoft Word was taught to those with lower level literacy skills and programs such as Excel, Internet and Power Point was offered at higher levels.

Times have moved on and many students' positions in relation to technology have altered. Many students have computers at home. Most students have a basic familiarity with computer technology and are demanding more as learners. No longer are learners happy to spend 18 weeks reproducing Word documents. They want to use communication tools such as email and the internet and to solve technology problems that they encounter outside the classroom. And at the same time there are those who have no access at all to computer technology! Meanwhile, pressure is being put on educational institutions to implement online learning for educational, entertainment, economic and social reasons.

The initial rush of enthusiasm for technology in language and literacy classes subsided as teachers became disillusioned with the monotony of teaching word processing. Teachers began to question the relevance of formatting skills and tables, in the context of the struggle with oral and literacy competence. Computer classes were discontinued in favour of more reading,

writing and oracy and in some cases, especially in community settings, funding was only received for stand-alone classes.

Technology has recently re-entered the language classroom with virtual learning taking the form of The Virtual Independent Learning Centre (ILC), the TAFE Virtual Campus (TAFEVC) and the internet. The Virtual ILC and the TAFEVC provide learning materials that are relevant to learner interests and needs and which are comprehensive and aligned to accredited curriculum and levels. The internet houses a plethora of language and literacy sites, some of which are useful. This project was an attempt to define which language and literacy sites are useful.

What did the project consist of?

The project consisted of two parts. Firstly, the production of a directory of online English language teaching and learning resources. Secondly, the provision of professional development for language and literacy teachers that would support them in incorporating information communication technology (ICT) skills in the classroom.

This project began with the idea to look at and analyse the online resources available for language and literacy students, as there seemed to be a disorganised mass of resources that were not evaluated or categorised. The directory's aim was to encourage both staff and students to use the internet, and also to encourage computer literacy.

The procedure that was followed was to sort and vet a number of sites, and then compile them into a user-friendly directory sorted into four levels.

Each site was assessed against five criteria—useability, currency, age relevance, cultural appropriateness and relevance. It was then categorised into the macro skills of reading, writing, speaking, listening and grammar. Each selected site was then written up in the directory with a summary, general comments including strengths and weaknesses, and suggestions for use. For example see the illustration on the next page.

Website	Level 1					Level 2					Level 3					Level 4				
	Grammar	Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing	Grammar	Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing	Grammar	Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing	Grammar	Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing
http://home.t-online.de/home/toni.goeller/idiom_wm											✓					✓				
http://eleaston.com/writing.html															✓					✓
http://homepage.powerup.com.au/~ozes/											✓			✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
http://www.polyu.edu.hk											✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
http://www.rice.edu/projects/topics/Electronic/Magazine.html														✓	✓				✓	✓
http://international.ouc.bc.ca/takako/index.html											✓		✓	✓	✓					
www.aris.com.nu/121/index.htm											✓		✓	✓	✓					
http://members.attcanada.ca/~the2imps/tuesl.html											✓			✓	✓					
http://www.eslus.com/eslcenter.htm											✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
http://www.esradio.net/radio.htm																		✓	✓	
http://a4esl.org					✓						✓					✓				
http://planeta.terra.com.br/lazer/TemporalGames/leonard.htm			✓		✓			✓		✓										
http://www.marlodge.supanet.com/listen/index.html								✓					✓							
http://www.pdictionary.com				✓																
http://www.comenius.com/fables/					✓				✓	✓										

User-friendly directory sorted into four levels

The directory was then produced in print form and put onto the intranet for teachers' use. It was presented and demonstrated at a staff development session held for language and literacy teachers. We identified many sites with useful information and activities for use in the literacy classroom.

The follow-on was that we then needed to encourage teachers to use the technology themselves and to create a template for classes to access on the TAFEVC.

Where to from here?

Every literacy class has been allocated a computer room for one hour a week in 2003 and the students upon enrolment are automatically enrolled in the TAFEVC. All literacy teachers have been in serviced on the TAFEVC including looking at some of the recommended modules. There are also some basic templates for each class on the TAFEVC where teachers can upload their own files and then customise existing resources for their class needs.

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website address	http://www.virtualiilc.com
Summary	<p>Virtual Independent Learning Centre</p> <p>This site is one of Australia's most popular sites of online content for language learning.</p> <p>It consists of three sections.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Realweb: this is a collection of hundreds of language learning tasks linked to web pages that link to ELT curriculums 2. EasyNews: this is a collection of language learning listening tasks at 3 levels that are prepared by newsreaders 3. Checkout: this is a collection of specially prepared language learning resources eg. parking signs.
General Comments	<p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the resources are written by language teachers familiar with the curriculum • Australian content and context • topics are current and are updated regularly. <p>NOTE: to use this site you must be a subscriber</p>
Suggestions for use	For use as independent study or as a classroom exercise

Example write-up of site

Practical Matters

The Federation Square's architectural features and interesting venues provide an excellent focus for a unit of work. Elaine Cannard and Helen Keane show how.

Federation Square—planning an integrated CGEA unit of work

This unit of work emerged from a professional development workshop held by the Faculty of Further Education, Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (NMIT). It is designed for students in adult literacy and basic education in courses, using the Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA) curriculum.

An integrated unit of work

The unit was devised as an integrated program. It incorporates learning outcomes from the CGEA reading and writing, oral communication, general curriculum options (GCO), and numeracy and maths streams. The CGEA curriculum is premised on the integration of streams, reflecting

the integration of skills and competencies in social and work activities... (It) recognises the connections between curriculum areas and provides a structure for an integrated approach (CGEA p. 22).

Integration of the curriculum facilitates flexible learning practices, provides a diverse range of related activities, assists in providing for students' differing learning styles and enables active student involvement in selection and development of content. Furthermore, as preferred by the CGEA, it assists the development of integrated assessment tasks.

A planning strategy

At the workshop teachers divided into three groups, planning units of work for: Certificate 1 (Introductory), Certificate 1 and Certificate 2 and 3 (new CGEA levels). Planning was facilitated by the use of a large grid, with the learning outcomes for reading and writing, oral communication, general curriculum options and maths and numeracy as column headings.

The use of a grid enables teachers to quickly see how the tasks and activities in the unit of study relate to the CGEA streams. It can also provide students with information on how the tasks and activities planned relate to the learning outcomes required for the CGEA.

A group planning activity such as this provides teachers with the opportunity to bounce ideas off each other, to see how each activity fits into the CGEA and importantly to plan for GCO and maths integration into literacy and oracy activities.

While the chance to have a couple of hours in a group—where the sole activity is to plan one unit of work is extremely rare—this method can still be used by a teacher on their own, or by a couple of teachers working together (for example, a literacy and a maths teacher). Once you have a grid drawn up it is relatively easy to start throwing ideas onto it...one idea rapidly leads to another!

It is not essential that a unit of work covers all learning outcomes, but this method enables you to see at a glance whether you are devoting enough time to all areas. When gaps are spotted, you can ensure they are included in the next unit of work.

Activities were planned around: building the context, planning the event excursion (day trip to Federation Square) and post-excursion activities. The activities listed below combine ideas from *all* the certificate levels. Teachers can select or modify activities.

Reading and writing for self-expression

Building the context

- Display brochures and pictures on notice boards to generate interest about Federation Square.
- Read and discuss expectations, impressions from pictures and hearsay.

Skills

Audience and purpose, identifying main idea, and identifying means used to achieve purpose.

Excursion

- Students encouraged to be observant (using all their senses), take notes, photographs and videos, and collect brochures.
- Students encouraged to chat to other visitors about their impressions of Federation Square—what they like, dislike, think should be changed/improved, etc.

Planning grid for Federation Square

Task/activity	Building the context	Planning	Excursion	Post-excursion
R&W: Self expression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read descriptions of the square 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recount of day Wall poster, commentary on photos Use setting for creative story
R&W: Prac purposes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read info Write planning instructions Create poster for excursion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note taking on talk by guide, and/or at Ian Potter Art Gallery 	
R&W: Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read info on building of square Research history of Australian federation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Devise list of factual information to find out on excursion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow up above list 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write up survey of square visitors, include graphs, tables, commentary
R&W: Public debate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read and analyse letters, editorials on debate over design 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critically view square, in preparation for writing opinion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write opinion of the square (letter to editor/ editorial), Use survey results in support of a view
Oral comm'n: Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In small groups share existing knowledge re square 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct survey 	
Oral comm'n: Prac purposes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Giving directions Make announcements re plans for day 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss problems or successes of survey design
Oral comm'n: Explore issues & problem		Survey of visitors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Devise introduction Strategies for interviewing Report back 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students discuss their reactions Discuss results of visitor survey Presentations on aspects of the square
Numeracy & Maths 1–8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Site maps, location, route Shape 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Timetables, costs Devise survey How to analyse survey results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use site maps: Follow directions to locate features Identify range of shapes Conduct survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyse map's effectiveness Create 3D model Collate survey results, graphs tables Analyse data using % etc
GCO 1–8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Devise survey of visitors response to the design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan and organise event Work in teams to plan Survey issues, student needs on day Poster to advertise event, survey form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carry out event plans Conduct survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyse survey Display presentation Review excursion

Post-excursion

- Write about the day from a personal point of view (this can be in a diary format, narrative, essay).
- Write about a particular aspect of the day (their favourite or least favourite part of Federation Square, something they really enjoyed/hated).
- Publish the writing in a newsletter or on a wall newspaper or add to the brochure/picture display.
- Write a creative story based around the visual impact of Federation Square.
- Use excursion photos, brochures collected, etc, to create a wall poster.
- Students write captions/commentary for the photos from the day.

Skills

Using the writing process of planning, drafting and editing to publication standards (whether wall poster or account) and using language appropriate to the purpose.

Reading and writing for practical purposes

Planning

- Read information required, then write instructions for the excursion: how to get to Federation Square, where to meet, what to bring, safety instructions for the day (what to do if lost, sensible shoes, sunscreen, etc).
- Look at maps and diagrams of Federation Square.
- Create a poster advertising the excursion.
- Create a notice inviting students to participate in the excursion (when, where, times, dates, what to bring, etc).
- Develop text for a survey to see what other visitors think about Federation Square (see maths).

Skills

Language features appropriate to giving instructions and directions and survey questions.

Excursion

- Students take notes to help recall the events or impressions of the day.
- Conduct the survey as planned.

Skills

Note taking, abbreviations and form filling.

Post-excursion

- Write a pamphlet that would be helpful for visitors to Federation Square (current pamphlets are quite detailed, small print and contain a lot of information).
- Rewrite current pamphlets for different audiences (for example, pamphlet for families with young children).

Skills

Language features appropriate for differing purposes and audiences and layout of a pamphlet.

Reading and writing for knowledge

Building the context

- Read leaflets/pamphlets about Federation Square.
- Investigate links between Australian federation and Federation Square.
- Research history—why was it built, what was there before, who was involved?
- Research design and construction issues—newspaper articles, websites, etc (some of this will be useful in Public Debate).
- Read and discuss construction details, design, occupiers of the spaces, etc.

Planning

- Make a list of questions to ask or find information about on the excursion.
- Research facilities and entertainment venues.

Skills

Research skills, identifying factual information, internet web site research skills and note taking.

Excursion

- Collect pamphlets and information from the site.



(M. Hanrahan)

- Ask guides about the buildings, history, etc.
- Take notes on the information you find out.
- Students familiarise themselves with and/or attend facilities and venues (ACMI, art gallery, shops, cafes and restaurants, outdoor spaces, information centre, etc).

Post-excursion

- Write an article for a tourist newspaper outlining the history and current use of Federation Square.
- Write up the results of the survey.
- Use graphic language to report on the survey (cross-over with maths).

Skills

Language appropriate to the purpose and audience and structure of a factual article. Using statistics graphs/tables in factual writing.

Reading and writing for public debate

Building the context

- Read internet or newspaper articles and letters about the controversy over the design originally proposed for the square.
- Analyse the content.
- Critique material.

Skills

Audience and purpose, identifying main idea, distinguishing facts and opinions and persuasive devices.

Post-excursion

- Students write a letter to the editor giving their opinion of Federation Square, considering both the architecture and purpose of the square.
- Write a discussion essay on the Federation Square project and outcomes.
- Write a promotional tourist article or pamphlet on the square.

Skills

Vocabulary for critique and style and structure of persuasive and opinionative writing.

Oracy for exploring issues and problem solving

Planning

- Work in small groups to devise statement to introduce self or pair to possible survey participants.
- Record results and report back to class.
- Discuss strategies for conducting survey of visitors to the square without causing a nuisance, report back to class.

Skills

Awareness of purpose and audience, allocating tasks in group (scribe, proof reading, reporting to class), turn taking, explaining ideas, responding to ideas, using questions to clarify, restating and expressing agreement and/or disagreement.

Post-excursion

- In small groups, discuss survey results.
- Comment on results against students' own reaction.

Oracy for knowledge

Building the context

Discussion on history of Federation Square.

Excursion

Conduct survey of visitors to Federation Square.

Skills

Identify the gist of spoken information, questioning to clarify responses and explaining information.

Post-excursion

Some students make short presentations on the excursion or features of the square.

Oracy for practical purposes

Post-excursion

- In pairs or small groups, discuss the experience of conducting the survey (problems, successes).
- Report back to class.

Addressing the class

- Using the above activities, throughout the unit all students could have an opportunity to address the class (announcements, reporting back, brief presentations).
- Use a checklist to ensure all students have an opportunity to participate.

General curriculum options

Many of the activities outlined in the foregoing give students opportunities to apply the key competencies on which the GCO learning outcomes are based. As each student group has different levels of experience and/or competence the activities suggested could provide skills and experience development, required to prepare for a GCO assessment task. Where applicable assessment tasks could be devised for small groups or in some cases for the whole class.

Aspects of the following GCO learning outcomes are embedded in many of the activities.

Planning and organising activities

Transport, costs, lunch arrangements, organisational instructions for students, researching and planning activities at the square, establishing deadlines.

Working with others in teams

Individuals/small groups take responsibility for researching options, organising bookings, notification needs in house, meeting a time frame, reporting back to the team/class.

Using mathematical ideas and techniques

- Design and analyse survey of opinions.
- Costing the event.

Solving problems

Develop strategies for overcoming problems encountered—transport and toileting of wheelchair students, managing surveying of visitors by assigning pairs to certain entrances, allocating times to pairs, etc.

Using technology

Word processing, internet, interactive activities at the Australian Centre for the Moving image.

Numeracy and maths

Planning

Numeracy for practical purposes—design:

- Brainstorm what students already know in terms of location, shapes of the buildings.

Numeracy for personal organisation: Location:

- Working with maps to locate Federation Square.
- Directions as to how to get there.

Numeracy for personal organisation: Money and Time:

- Using timetables to work out how to get to Federation Square by train, bus or tram.
- Costs of tickets and other costs which might be involved (lunch, etc).

Numeracy for interpreting society: Data:

- Development of a survey—depending on level of students could range from how people got to the site (transport used), where they came from (suburb or home town, state or country) and opinions of the development.

Excursion

- Students locate features from a map of Federation Square.
- Locate specified art works from written or oral directions.
- Locate other buildings of interest nearby (for example, MCG, Yarra River, Victorian Arts Centre) on maps.
- Conduct the survey.
- Note shapes of buildings at the site.

Post-excursion

Numeracy for personal organisation: Location:

- Discuss map activities.
- Analyse features of different types of maps (what makes some maps easier to use on such a site).

Numeracy for practical purposes: Design:

- Design and construct a 3D shape based on one of the Federation Square buildings seen.
- Diagrams of aspects of the site from different vantage points.
- Tessellation activities.
- Research the pinwheel and aperiodic tiling.

Numeracy for interpreting society: Data:

- Collate and analyse the survey results.
- Use percentages to graph the results in a variety of ways and publish these as part of the wall poster.

Final comment

The activities suggested relating to the controversy over the original Federation Square design may become a little dated as time goes on. However, considering its striking architectural features and interesting venues, the square will remain an excellent focus for a unit of work. Student participation in organisational activities required for the excursion are fairly generic in nature and could be used for many other destinations.

Useful websites

www.federationsquare.com.au/

www.walkingmelbourne.com/news.php

www.theage.com.au/issues/fedsquare/

www.ma.utexas.edu/users/radin/federation/

www.labyrinth.net.au/~lerma/federationsquare.htm

Elaine Cannard has been an ALBE teacher and is currently working in the themed VCAL programs offered by the Youth Unit, NMIT.

Helen Keane is a teacher in ALBE programs offered by the Foundation Studies Department, NMIT.

Policy Update

Business Services Training Australia (BSTA), National Assessors and Workplace Trainers (NAWT) division is developing the new Training and Assessment (TAA) Training Package, which will replace the current Training Package for Assessment and Workplace Training. Communication in Education and Training Pty Ltd (Commet) has responsibility for the language, literacy and numeracy components of the new training package. Lynne Fitzpatrick explains.

The Training and Assessment Training Package—integrating language, literacy and numeracy

When the editor of *Fine Print* approached me to write an article on this project, I asked if the members of the editorial committee could submit questions they wanted the article to answer. These questions form the basis of this article and are:

- Why is the Certificate IV (Assessment and Workplace Training) being redeveloped?
- What is your project about?
- How will literacy be addressed in the new Certificate IV? Will there be specific qualifications for literacy teachers above Certificate IV?
- Will this qualification be compulsory for literacy teachers?
- What is the feedback you have had from literacy teachers about the project?
- What are the broader implications for literacy teachers?

Why is the Certificate IV (Assessment and Workplace Training) being redeveloped?

The short answer to this question is that all training packages must be reviewed every three years. This is necessary to take into account changes which may have affected the industry since the last package was developed, and changes in training requirements/philosophy. These can include changes in technology used by the industry, industry-relevant legislation and/or accreditation requirements, and ANTA/AQTF/NTF requirements. The review also addresses perceived weaknesses in the original document.

The National Assessors and Workplace Trainers (NAWT) which is part of BSTA, has been carrying out a lengthy and comprehensive review of the current training package (BSZ98) which includes the ubiquitous Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training. There is a detailed account of the review process and the recommendations on the website <http://www.nawt.com.au/>

The four key areas for investigation in the review of training package BSZ98 can be summarised under the following headings:

- role of the training package in VET

- adequacy and appropriateness of the endorsed components of the training package
- adequacy and appropriateness of publicly available resources
- implementation issues.

The report made 17 recommendations, a number of which have relevance for the language, literacy and numeracy field.

Recommendation 1—training package scope

That the scope of the training package be defined as follows:

This training package establishes the competencies and qualifications for personnel involved in the provision of nationally recognised vocational education, training and assessment carried out by enterprise/industry, institutional, community, private and public RTOs. The training package addresses the needs of personnel involved in a range of roles and functions, including:

- part-time workplace trainers/assessors/mentors operating in workplace contexts
- sessional/casual staff in institutional contexts
- entry level/inexperienced full time trainers/assessors
- experienced VET practitioners
- specialist VET practitioners
- coordinators of VET/training
- managers of VET/training.

Recommendation 4—mapping of existing VET courses

As part of Stage 2 of the review, a mapping exercise should be undertaken to examine the content of relevant, accredited, publicly funded, VET courses against the identified competencies and competency gaps within the training package with the intent of adapting any relevant material.

As part of this exercise, the findings of the DETYA-funded mapping project of adult literacy and basic education courses and professional development programs should be incorporated into proposed new specialist VET practitioner/trainer competencies and possible qualification streams in adult language, literacy and numeracy teaching within this training package.¹

Self assessment

How familiar are you with current initiatives, acronyms and policies which are integral to VET?

- In Australia, which organisations/ authorities have responsibility for implementation of training, for example, nominal hours, accrediting courses, signing off on training packages?
- What is the acronym for the framework which sets out the standards for training provision which apply to all RTOs nationally, and includes a number of standards which relate to language, literacy and numeracy?
- Which organisation/ authority has responsibility for overall management of training policy nationally?
- What is the name of the training package which has the code BSZ98?
- What is VET? Is literacy part of VET?
- The key competencies in training packages are known by another name in the CGEA. These are the...?
- The acronym NAWT stands for...?
- What is the acronym which stands for the body which develops training packages for a particular industry area?
- Is it part of ANTA policy that language, literacy and numeracy be integrated implicitly or explicitly into training packages?
- Are there any VET acronyms we haven't mentioned?

Recommendation 5—revision of current units of competency

That the existing units of competency be thoroughly edited and revised in plain English. As part of this editing process the following issues are to be addressed:

- (i) complex language is replaced to facilitate understanding by a wide audience
- (ii) technical language is used consistently and defined in the training package glossary
- (v) key competencies are more clearly integrated within units
- (vii) LL&N requirements to be further evaluated and clearly specified.

Recommendation 9—qualifications restructure

That as a means of meeting the needs of different users and effectively representing the scope of coverage, the existing structure of qualifications be revised and broadened in the following ways:

- (iv) the revision of the Certificate IV to ensure a core based on edited existing units and a range of electives from some of the new competency areas to be developed
- (v) the complete redevelopment of the existing diploma with establishment of two qualification streams—a higher level practitioner stream and a coordinator/management stream ...

Recommendation 13—implementation guidelines

In recognition that this training package underpins the VET system and to support improved quality of implementation, the assessment guidelines should be broadened and renamed 'implementation guidelines'. These guidelines should include advice relevant to assessment requirements and additional guidance on other key aspects of quality implementation including possessing relevant technical expertise/competency in the vocational area of delivery, if working for an RTO

(xvi) language, literacy and numeracy (LL&N) entry requirements/ expectations.

Recommendation 10—further research on additional qualifications

That as part of stage 2 further consideration be given to the following:

- (vii) developing specialist practitioner qualifications to meet the needs of equity groups
- (viii) developing graduate-level qualifications, should the AQF guidelines be revised to enable such development.

What is your project about?

Commet's part of this project relates to the recommendations from stage 1 mentioned above and the recommendations of the report 'Know the trade, not only the tricks of the trade'. We are integrating 'adult English language, literacy and numeracy' into the new TAA training package in the following ways:

- Building in language, literacy and numeracy as appropriate in the core units of the training package.
- Developing specialist units related to teaching language, literacy and numeracy in the VET sector. Where possible these build on existing professional development courses such as ALT and ANT. In the current draft there are 11 specialist units. See below.
- Monitoring the language of the document to promote readability, and ensuring scaffolding for likely users of the training package.

How will literacy be addressed and will there be specific qualifications for literacy teachers above Certificate IV?

As indicated in recommendation 9 above, the proposed structure of the new training package is more complex than the current BSZ98. The proposed structure is of three levels (Certificate IV, Diploma, and Advanced Diploma), with two streams at each level (training and assessment, and coordination/management).

Certificate IV

In the new Certificate IV we are proposing two approaches to addressing language, literacy and numeracy. The first is integration of language, literacy and numeracy across the units; the second involves the development of one specialist unit at this level.

In the proposed training package there will be a number of core units at Certificate IV which are then nested at higher AQF levels. We will be integrating language, literacy and numeracy into these core units. The advantage of building language, literacy and numeracy into the core is that these units must be achieved by all persons undertaking the qualification. Accordingly language, literacy and numeracy becomes part of core competence. This approach both reinforces and provides a mechanism for meeting the AQTF which requires all trainers and assessors show that they can identify learners who may need language, literacy and numeracy support. Part of this generic competence includes the capacity to develop strategies to support learners with different language, literacy and numeracy learning needs and to identify and ensure the language, literacy and numeracy requirements built into industry training packages, training programs or courses are met.

We are proposing only one stand-alone language, literacy and numeracy unit in the Certificate IV—tutor adults in English language, literacy and numeracy. This is an elective unit, and builds on the volunteer tutor training courses. It has application for volunteer literacy tutor training programs, ESL home tutors, volunteer agencies, peer tutoring and in a specific workplace context. It will provide strategies for trainers and assessors to assist learners with language, literacy and numeracy, but it will not qualify a person as a language, literacy and numeracy specialist.

Diploma/Advanced Diploma

The majority of the specialist units in language, literacy and numeracy practice have been packaged as electives at the Diploma and Advanced Diploma level. The first draft of these units were

available for comment from mid-November 2002 until mid-January 2003. As a result of the consultations and feedback, the units have been redrafted.

The proposed units presently (February 2003) are:

- design an adult English language, literacy, numeracy, and general education program
- design an adult English language, literacy, numeracy program for workplace delivery
- deliver adult English language, literacy, numeracy in an on-the-job learning environment
- deliver adult English language, literacy and numeracy support in an off-the-job learning environment
- deliver an adult literacy program (based on ALT)
- deliver an adult numeracy program (based on ANT)
- deliver an adult general education program
- deliver an adult English language program
- coordinate tutors delivering an adult English language, literacy and numeracy program.
- Place learner in an adult English language, literacy and numeracy program

The full units and qualification packaging arrangements will be available for further comment and feedback from mid-March to

Answers

- 1 State Training Authorities (in Victoria, ACFE, OTTE, VQA)
- 2 AQTF (Australian Quality Training Framework)
- 3 ANTA (Australian National Training Authority)
- 4 Certificate IV in Workplace Assessment and Training
- 5 Vocational Education and Training. Yes.
- 6 General Curriculum Options
- 7 National Assessors and Workplace Trainers
- 8 ITAB (Industry Training Advisory Board)
- 9 Explicitly
- 10 We have only just begun to scratch the surface! If you want more on VET bodies, policies, and, of course, FLAs (four letter acronyms), look at the following websites:
 - www.anta.gov.au
 - <http://www.otfe.vic.gov.au/>

mid-April. Follow the links at the NAWT website <http://www.nawt.com.au/>

One of the key outcomes from the development of these units is that there is now clear definition of the subject matter expertise of language, literacy and numeracy practitioners making compliance with the AQTF clearer. The units also provide a unique model within VET by defining two layers of competence—that which you need to deliver as a language, literacy and numeracy practitioner, and that which defines your area of expertise, as defined in the knowledge requirements of the units.

Will this qualification be compulsory for literacy teachers?

The purpose of the training package is to support effective vocational education and training. The issue of teacher qualifications, and what is compulsory, and who decides this, is complex, and outside the scope of this project.

Under current arrangements tied to the AQTF, the Certificate IV or equivalence is presently compulsory for practitioners, including language, literacy and numeracy teachers.

Teachers of accredited adult English language, literacy and numeracy courses will know that the qualifications they need to teach those courses are described in the curriculum document usually in the Human Resource (HR) statement, and that these are signed off by STAs. The stringency of these statements varies enormously from state to state. Read the HR statement of the CGEA...who is qualified to teach it presently? What skills and knowledge are required?

Another agency which is important in deciding which qualifications are compulsory are the employing bodies—in some states, the STAs, and in other states, local colleges or councils—and the bodies which represent the workforce, that is, the unions.

The last group of agencies are the funding bodies. In Australia, programs receive funding through Commonwealth as well as state departments, and qualifications are established in tendering arrangements.

What is the feedback you've had from literacy teachers about the project?

There is a reference group advising us on the development of the language, literacy and numeracy specialist units. Professional associations and people with ESL and adult literacy and numeracy expertise are represented on this group and have advised on the

draft units, the qualification structure and the consultation process. There is also a group of critical friends who have been asked to provide specific feedback on the units from particular perspectives.

Information about the project has gone to all the literacy organisations, websites and list servers I can think of. Some people may have received the information a number of times for which I apologise, but then I think it is an important project with long-term implications.

The website <http://nawt.bsitab.net/> has all the information on it, qualifications packaging, and all the draft units, plus a feedback mechanism. People can read the comments that have been made. The feedback we have had generally acknowledges that the draft units do capture the required knowledge and skills.

What are the broader implications for literacy teachers?

Many literacy teachers are well qualified with degrees, and post-graduate qualifications in teaching. However there is a need to ensure that language, literacy and numeracy is addressed at every level of VET practice, and this begins with the revised training package which aims to provide a range of VET-based qualifications from Certificate IV to Advanced Diploma. Each level of the qualification is designed to provide an increasing level of knowledge and expertise, which in turn may be extended further through higher education, if that is desired. For others, the proposed specialist focus on language, literacy and numeracy within the training package may represent a level of knowledge and skill that is appropriate for the work being undertaken.

The new Certificate IV is designed to ensure that all trainers and assessors have some knowledge around literacy and training issues, and have strategies to make their own training accessible to all. This level of competence represents a very different order to having the depth of knowledge and skill required in a specialist role. In this project we have set out to try to define where that specialisation lies, and to define required knowledge and skills for inclusion in the training package, primarily in the Advanced Diploma.

The issue of qualifications has long been discussed in the literacy field. There is no one way, no one minimum qualification to be a literacy teacher. Practitioners talk about the qualifications they have, and where and how they learned to be literacy teachers. For most, this has been far from a linear process, but rather a dynamic synthesis of knowledge and skills gained through higher education courses, teaching courses, the volunteer tutor training program, reading, professional development sessions, other

colleagues, and learning from students in our programs. I would like to think that this sort of theoretical/ practical, pure and applied collaboration will continue in the future.

Including language, literacy and numeracy in the training package is another manifestation of this broader developmental process. The intent is not to replace higher education qualifications with the training package, but to provide a vehicle which enables VET practitioners to develop a range of language, literacy and numeracy skills and knowledge appropriate to their role and operating context, and to provide the means for those coming into the field to undertake relevant training.

Project timeline

September 2002: members of VALBEC and ACAL were notified about the project through VALBEC's e-news, ACAL's email system, the adult literacy Listserv and Literacy Link. In addition, ACFE circulated information to all its RTOs. Questionnaires were distributed to elicit information to assist with the project.

November 2002: first draft of the training package, including the language, literacy and numeracy units, on the website for consultation <http://nawt.bsitab.net/>

November and December 2002: Face-to-face consultations in all states and territories.

January and February 2003: Training package redrafted.

Mid-March to mid-April 2003: Second and final draft of materials on website for comment <http://www.nawt.com.au/>

May 2003: final changes made.

June 2003: sign-off processes.

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Note

1 This report was written by Wing-Yin Chan Lee and Meryl Thompson. The two volume report 'Know the trade, not only the tricks of the trade' mapped, analysed and compared the content and outcomes of existing adult literacy and numeracy professional development courses across Australia. AQF levels, key strength and weaknesses of the courses within the current National Training Framework were analysed. Recommendations relating to addressing the language, literacy and numeracy issues within the Training Package for Assessment and Workplace Training and long-term strategies for adult literacy and numeracy professional development were made. The report is located on the DEST website <http://www.detya.gov.au/ty/litnet/resources.htm>

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Foreign Correspondence

If the media influences public and private opinions, how far does it affect literacy and numeracy? Iffat Shahnaz and Mary Hamilton discuss the situation in England.

The English mass media: its contribution to adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL (ALNE) policy, 1970–2000

The research study on which this article is based is called 'Changing faces of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL: a critical history of policy and practice 1970–2000'. The study is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and is a collaboration between Lancaster University, City University and the Centre for Longitudinal Studies, Institution of Education, London. It has run from January 2002 and will finish in June 2004.

The aim of the project is to track policy initiatives stemming from the 1970s adult literacy campaign up to the launch, in 2000, of a new Adult Basic Skills campaign (Skills for Life). The study is underpinned by an approach to literacy and numeracy as part of everyday social practice. We are using the National Child Development Survey cohort to explore the relevance of ALNE policy to the lives of people identified as having basic skills needs, many of whom have not participated in formal education or training provision. This will enable us to compare policy rationales and everyday practices related to literacy, numeracy and ESOL, both within and outside of educational settings. At the end of the study, we hope to be able to identify the key issues and mechanisms that have driven change in the field. By assessing the relevance of the policies to the changing context of basic skills in everyday life, this research will contribute to the effectiveness of future policy and practice in ALNE.

The role of the mass media in the development of policy and practice in adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL

We have chosen to report here on a specific aspect of our project: the role that the mass media has played in developing policy and practice in the field of ALNE. This is important for at least two reasons. Firstly, as in any field of contemporary social policy, we believe that the mass media plays a significant role in framing policy issues and promoting public awareness and debate. Within

the field of educational policy this role is generally acknowledged but very few research studies address it directly. Of particular interest to the Changing Faces Project are the ways in which images of the learners and teachers are constructed in media messages, how the teaching-learning process is represented and how the goals of adult literacy are articulated. Since 'illiteracy' has frequently been perceived as a stigmatised state, presenting positive images of potential learners and breaking down negative stereotypes has always been a challenge for those creating publicity in the field. In our project, we are gaining access to some accounts of the debates around this that have taken place within media organisations themselves.

Secondly, in the original adult literacy campaign in the mid-1970s, the British Broadcasting Association (a state-funded agency) took a major role. Published accounts describe how a political campaign, led by The British Association of Settlements and championed by an individual member of parliament, worked closely with the BBC to bring adult literacy into the mainstream of local authority adult education provision (see BAS, 1974; Withnall, 1994, Hamilton 1996; Hamilton and Merrifield, 2000). In particular, when it developed the 'On the Move' programs in 1975, the BBC pioneered media strategies that have since been used more widely. These include the idea of linking broadcast programming to a hotline referral service and follow up support, including paper-based materials (Hargreaves, 1980).

The television series 'On The Move', starring Bob Hoskins, was shown at Sunday teatime with day time repeats. A parallel set of radio programs aimed to recruit volunteer tutors. By December of 1975, 10,000 people had contacted the national helpline. By 1978, 75,000 volunteers had been trained to take part in the adult literacy campaign from national referrals. Many worked on a one-to-one basis in the home.

'On the Move' aimed to break down the stigma and stereotypes of adults not being able to read and write. David Hargreaves has written a detailed diary account of this process (Hargreaves, 1980) and describes how it took a long time to arrive at the formula that was eventually broadcast and how the process of piloting the scripts was fraught and difficult. The final result was the 'everyman' character embodied by Bob Hoskins, televised at peak viewing times, rather than in the 'public education' time

slots, in the privacy of the viewer's own home. Testimonials from adults with literacy difficulties were increasingly broadcast alongside humorous episodes of the program. Viewers were encouraged to think 'that's me!' not to feel embarrassed or ashamed and also to request and receive support as discreetly as they wished. The importance of this approach is confirmed in the interviews and group discussions we have carried out. The images used in this campaign were very different from the 'horror' tactics used in the current Gremlins campaign publicising the Skills for Life strategy (and parallel anti-smoking advertising campaigns). (See Barnes, 2003 for the advertising agency's account of this approach). Perhaps 'On the Move' represents a different, more innocent era of public broadcasting and advertising.

However the issues are approached, the social construction of the man or woman who needs help in improving reading and writing remains full of contradictions. There is an unproven assumption that if you could read and write better then your life will improve. The idea of an individualistic, meritocratic society, where you can improve everything by your own efforts is very strong. In the present day, information and communication technologies are seen as being the main conduits for these efforts and are a major focus of funding initiatives; for example, UK Online and Learn Direct (Shahnaz, 2001). The Government regards a more literate population as leading to a more economically and knowledge-rich society. However to have a literate and digitally literate population is not a guarantee of a more equal society.

Issues emerging so far from our research about the use of mass media

The resourcing issue: coordinating demand and supply

The interviews we have so far carried out have highlighted resourcing issues. Right from the start of the 'On the Move' campaign tensions emerged from the challenge of needing more services in place to meet the anticipated increase in demand. Similar tensions are resurfacing now with the sudden policy and media activity of the Skills for Life campaign. The mass media have enormous power to raise public expectations that may be difficult to respond to since an infrastructure of trained support and facilities can only be built up gradually. Getting sufficient funds and support to practitioners within the right time frame is a huge challenge.

Media campaigns always build on work that is already going on, encouraging more local, regional and national coordination, and making the issues and the people involved more visible, affording them the recognition they deserve. The campaign that best

captures this and to this day sets the precedent is the 'On the Move'. The evidence from the 1970s clearly shows that many practitioners were starting from scratch in terms of teaching materials and resources. Although there was expertise in voluntary organisations, especially in the field of ESOL, provision was ad hoc and practitioners were isolated. One interviewee talked about having set something up in her living room to deal with the demand. Another interviewee, a practitioner at the time, described her experience in Kirby, Liverpool. She received a consultation document on what became 'On the Move' and also a phone call from the new national Adult Literacy Resource Agency (ALRA) asking:

'Are you ready to meet this demand? We are expecting a huge response, can you cope? People responded: I don't know whether I can cope or not, but we should take it anyway...we'll have to develop systems that result from that. It was a wake up call, there was going to have to be more provision because there would be huge demand through the broadcasts'.

There was very little infrastructure to support the practice that was being developed for the first time on a large scale. Resources had to be created. New partnerships, training and ways of working were developed. This was the foundation for future services, policy and practice. It was also a ground-breaking period in terms of raising public awareness.

Over the years the BBC campaigns were considered to be too successful and agencies could not cope with the demands. David Hargreaves has suggested that this was the issue that eventually slowed down the national media campaign, replacing it with more limited and carefully targeted local publicity.

The thrust of current Skills for Life policy initiatives is that many of the adults most in need of basic skills help will be difficult to reach and that it will be important to 'drive up' demand for courses. This seems to be in contradiction to the experience of past media campaigns where the response overwhelmed available provision and publicity needed to be fine tuned to appeal to particular target groups that the government wanted to reach.

The impact of changing media technologies

Huge changes have taken place in available information and communication technologies since the 1970s. There are several implications of this for our study. Firstly, history confronts you with the changing modalities of storage, reproduction, circulation of information in very graphic and material ways—from the quality of reproductions of teaching and learning materials, the purple ink of 'banda' machines in the early 1970s, unevenly typewritten memos, old fashioned seals, signatures and crests on

official documents, grainy videos and black and white photographs.

Secondly, such changes also confront us with storage issues. It is not just a matter of archiving documents, but of having the equipment to access them especially where these are electronically stored or visual materials such as film and video.

Thirdly, the definitions of literacy itself are called into question by the technological changes that have taken place. Are electronic literacies an extension of print literacies or are they a different area of knowledge and expertise? Is email communication or text messaging a new 'hybrid' form of communication, not identical with either writing or speaking? How should the different technologies be linked together in teaching and learning practice? Current policy in ALNE places great store on the new ICTs, with information and communication technologies being seen as the conduits for improved literacy and numeracy. Yet there is ambivalence about including electronic-based literacies as part of reading and writing as opposed to using them as a vehicle for teaching traditionally defined skills.

Numbers games: assessing need and impact

Numbers have always been of central importance in establishing policy targets in adult literacy and numeracy, in calculating the need and measuring the response. In the early 1970's a figure of 'two million adults in need' was used by the British Association of Settlements promote their campaign. In 1999 the Moser Report quoted from the International Adult Literacy Survey (OECD 1997) to give a new estimate of seven million adults with basic skills needs.

This *increase* in the estimated numbers in need of ALNE over the years from 1970s to the present raises some interesting questions. Has the unique work in publicising and addressing adult needs in ESOL, literacy, numeracy been successful? In particular, how should the impact of media campaigns be monitored and evaluated? Perhaps the increase indicates the success of the media in raising public awareness and breaking down stigma around literacy enabling the extent of ALNE to be ever more visible. Or perhaps these estimates are moving in response to some other, political agenda, in a more complicated relationship to media activities.

Apart from the unusual evidence assembled by David Hargreaves in his 1980 book about 'On the Move', we have been surprised at the lack of evidence in the public domain about the impact of media campaigns. This lack of evidence points to a bigger issue mentioned in the interviews: that there has been little systematic

effort to track learners in the field to identify their progression routes, where they have come from and where they move on to.

The most common monitoring activity associated with media campaigns is to estimate numbers watching programs via audience panel surveys, and to report the numbers using referral hotlines as a gauge of public response. Much of this evidence is collected by broadcasters themselves. The numbers responding are typically of an order many times the rate generated by local outreach activities. As an example of this, we know that the first series of the 'Gremlins' advertisements resulted in a huge demand for information. ('50,000 people have phoned the hotline in the one year since Sept last'—source TUG Learning Services website, accessed Sept 2002).

Beyond this basic monitoring exercise, little effort appears to have been made, even during the current campaign, to pursue the research opportunity offered by this surge of interest and find out more about who the callers are and where they end up. Which groups of people respond and who do not? Do phone calls translate into people taking up learning opportunities? Where do people go if local service providers are not able to cope with the demand generated by media campaigns? And should we call a campaign 'successful' if existing provision cannot cope with the demand it generates? This is a question of coordinating the media campaign and the policy and practice response. Our research, therefore points to the need to think through the assessment of media impact in general: on whose terms, within what parameters and policy agenda can we consider a public media campaign in the field of ALNE to be successful?

Conclusion

We are still at the point of filling gaps in our timelines, and of thinking through the issues that are emerging from the accounts we are collecting. Even so, we have been amazed so far at the richness of the information generated by our research—especially when we put together both documentary evidence and oral history interviews. The immediate challenge for us is to avoid getting overwhelmed by the data and the many possible directions we could pursue. The archive that we build from this project will, we hope, be a resource for the future, enabling researchers and others involved in professional development courses to explore some of the many issues that we will not be able to do justice to ourselves in the life of the project.

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Beside the Whiteboard

Karen Dymke has worked in adult community education (ACE) for 15 years in positions ranging from teaching and training to project worker and coordinator. She is currently working as a consultant to the ACE field. She talks with Jenni Oldfield about her work. Karen can be contacted at dymke@optusnet.com.au.

Tell us about how you came to be working in the adult literacy field

I have always enjoyed working in adult community education for a variety of reasons. Like many, I started in the field when I first had children. Feeling committed to staying home, but not really cut out for the 'Mike Walsh set' as it was then, the opportunity to spend a couple of hours a week working in the literacy field was a wonderful escape and reprieve from the tedium of nappies. Not only that, it was an opportunity to extend my teaching experience into a dynamic new field that was flexible and innovative. Returning to the commitment of teaching in a school was a long way off, and so my path into adult literacy started. It has been one I have valued highly and continues to be the road on which I tread.

Many stories and memories remain with me of shared learning moments with other adults. I will never forget the proud tears of the gigantic, gruff workplace student as he dared to give a speech to his class for the first time. Of the tractor roaring towards the classroom as a student came to demonstrate his skill on the machine. The delicately illustrated and beautifully written poetry book created by the lady who did her work at 2am for fear of her husband's criticism. The young man singing his own song at a professional development conference to share his learning experience. What a privilege to facilitate and lead such learning. It is equal only in respect to how much I have learnt from my students, such as about culture and courage, language and learning, courage and perseverance.

Learning as a teacher was both informal and formal. Adult literacy provided many opportunities for further professional development. The development of adult literacy training (ALT) courses acknowledged the special knowledge and skills required for teaching in an adult environment. The introduction of the CGEA gave recognised validity and formality to the informal 'gut feeling' literacy teaching we had been doing from week to week. Opportunities were given to come up with innovative teaching ideas and strategies, such as to write humorous books about spiders and snakes (full of double entendres!), aiming to make reading interesting to long-term non-readers. And what an overwhelming privilege working with students from a wide variety of backgrounds and paths to facilitate and share

knowledge through the lens of literacy. And all while I could be the primary carer for my family; this was the career path for me!

What were the rewards?

I've often said that I think many literacy teachers may have been missionaries in a previous life. We have worked in basic conditions with very ordinary pay, achieving exciting results on the smell of an oily rag, or should I say chalky duster? How many fabulous projects went through as 'love' jobs! But the satisfaction of supporting students from all walks of life to achieve and find new pathways, transforming lives and connecting communities (we love you Delia!) far outweighed the negatives. All learning, but perhaps learning differently. The flexible hours, supportive environment and social justice aspects of working in the field meant it was worth it. I had many an argument with my partner about how social capital was, to me, more important than making money. Our work in adult literacy hopes to enable our students to become more productive and active members of the community. The aim is to give this access and opportunity to all, regardless of race, income or ability. Students' outcomes may be many and varied; some lead on to further study whilst others may return to be connected to their community with enhanced skills and self esteem. It is about building people power. And I was lucky enough that he made the money while I pursued what to me was a vocation not just a job.

Has your adult literacy work always been in the ACE sector?

A brief foray into the TAFE sector was interesting and stimulating. TAFE has a very important role to play in providing quality education and a multiplicity of pathways for students to pursue. Better pay, challenging project opportunities and a more corporate environment was fun for a while, however it was not long before I missed the community environment as a base. In the Kirby Report the ACE sector is described as innovative, with a unique ability to respond quickly to needs in the community. The bureaucracy of TAFE and necessary requirements from above to move students through in a set period was not an environment I felt comfortable in. It was ok to have great ideas but sometimes

the politics involved between departments wasn't worth it! Take me back to lunch around the kitchen table, with students dropping in to say hi and the opportunity to spend time scheming how to get just a few more dollars out of ACFE for the next idea! TAFE is a very valuable part of our system for ongoing learning but I preferred to get dirty sliding on first base, ready to run for the next opportunity. I'm not an academic type, as you can tell by this article, but just happy working with ideas at the grass roots.

What are the achievements that you've witnessed in ACE?

Over the years I have seen many changes to the ACE sector. Little cottages painted purple have become thriving community centres, child-care provision has become much more professional and accountable and staff professional development opportunities have expanded to see literacy recognised as a specialist field in itself rather than just be a volunteer driven drop-in bandaid.

The expertise of literacy teachers has been acknowledged in the wider field. I was highly amused and interested to hear the story of a literacy teacher doing a Certificate IV course along with trainers from a variety of fields. One of these included a gentleman with a rather corporate image of himself and his teaching to match. However it was not long before his condescension turned to respect as he learnt of the diversity and challenges to be found in a literacy classroom, which may include older learners, youth, ESL students, learning disabilities and empowered divorcees! 'I could never do what you do!' he confessed to the humble literacy teacher at the end of the course. Ah yes, we have a lot to offer!

ACE has been a wonderful environment in which to provide flexibility and pursue innovation in literacy. It has been listening at the reception desk as people come in with ideas about what they want to learn. The drop-in nature of many community providers has meant that responses to what is happening in the community, what is needed in education, is often on a day-to-day basis. Young people at risk, people with disabilities, petrified mothers who feel their brains have gone dead...people who don't readily fit into a big system. ACE has been able to meet these learners where they are at. The word community is an integral part of who ACE is; working closely with local government, clubs and organisations in the local area, responding to emerging needs. ACE has also been able to quickly put together partnerships to enhance learning opportunities and expertise to best meet the needs of our students (and as a way to stretch the dollar further!) Partnerships with health organisations, schools, senior citizen groups and youth centres are just some of the ways in which ACE has proactively moved in the community.

ACE was accustomed to a challenge! Even the arrival of the feared AQTF didn't seem a huge issue initially. We had good systems in place and many of these reflected the given requirements, so with a bit of tweaking the AQTF requirements didn't need to be massive drama. Over the years we have coped with all sorts of anxieties including moderation and verification, audits and wondering if your contract was going to be renewed next year depending on whether the funding came through!

So why is it then, that despite managing obstacles and challenges for years that suddenly so much of the sector is experiencing such a low trough? Why are so many good teachers leaving the field? Our teaching population is aging and is desperately in need of new blood. Where are the graduates? Where have the innovators and creators gone? Why do we hear of regional council staff on stress leave? Why are so many people pulling out of what has been a vibrant, innovative and supportive field? Has ACE lost its face?

How do you see the ACE sector now?

A sense of despair has settled over much of the field. Many teachers have retired or moved on. The friendly, casual environment we cherished has been the scene of tears. Even students have noticed the tension. 'Tick boxing', form filling and 'sample saving' have gone mad! Time for creating creative classrooms is depleted by other such tasks. The stress of managing these environments has also been telling. Teachers have been thrust into managing businesses. At times it seems that authoritarianism has replaced facilitation and cooperation. Constraints imposed by systems have smothered creativity as so clearly pointed out by Liz Suda in her article, 'From defiance to compliance' (*Fine Print*, vol. 25).

Competition has strangled much of the fabulous generosity that has marked the field. If people have not left the sector they have learnt to keep their heads down and play the game, whilst quietly storing away the bricks and foundations that built the ACE sector that we knew and loved.

Operators of successful businesses would point out that structure and procedure need to be balanced by people who are encouraged to have the vision and passion to drive organisations into the future. So what is happening to ACE?

What are these bricks that ACE was built on? Innovation, flexibility and cooperation. Trusting in the instincts of those who are in the field. Putting the needs of students first. Acknowledging the worth of social capital before counting beans. Providing equity of access before collecting fees.

Recognising the variety of paths that students need to take rather than squeezing them into a formatted outcome.

It has been identified that ACE has done and continues to have a very valuable role in the literacy field. We are not a TAFE and should not aspire to become one. TAFE has an important but different role, meeting different needs and audiences. ACE does a fantastic job of providing a place for those students not yet ready to take this big step. Taking away the unique stepping stone of ACE would leave a lot of people floundering.

How do you see the future?

Developing and improving systems needs to be balanced by a better understanding of what is happening in the field and how it is different from other sectors. An understanding that not all students and courses fit neatly into a proforma and set hours and requirements. Flexible guidelines should reflect the nature of the field. We should be documenting good practice in all of its diversity. People on the ground floor, such as teachers and students, should be given the chance to profile what they are doing and why it works. This would enhance an appreciation of the need for flexibility. We also need an encouragement of innovation, rather than limiting innovation to selected tenders and projects.

Positive management training needs to be provided for people thrust into management positions to better equip them to deal with the pressures of growing organisations. Administrative and increased record-keeping expectations should be not expected but acknowledged by paying teachers for their time. 'We can't afford it' should not be an excuse if these things are audited requirements! Pay rates for teachers need to be on a par with TAFE to enable ACE to continue to provide the quality delivery that they are so well known for. Not all teachers have the luxury of having a partner to support them!

These are just some thoughts which may lead to a more progressive and positive environment in ACE whilst holding on to the sure foundations it has been built on. There are still people around committed to ACE and all it stands for. There is even talk of starting an underground movement! Let's hold on to these passionate people in ACE by acknowledging what they are doing and the importance of being different, through papers, research, funding, acknowledgment and encouragement. The ACE sector has an enormous amount to offer education that is unique and invaluable. Let's celebrate its difference and recognise its value. Now I *am* sounding like a preacher!