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Editorial

This is the fourth edition for 2003 and completes the quartet of the new look *Fine Print*. With each edition there have been some alterations to format and design. Committee members and the commissioning editor have worked with Mick from *digital environs* in this process and we thank him for his patience and expertise.

We trust that the fine tuning has improved the readability and design elements that make *Fine Print* an outstanding publication in the national and international fields of adult literacy and basic education, and that *Fine Print* will have a long shelf life as it moves from desk to coffee table to bedside table to bookshelf!

This edition has the usual regular features with the diversity of ALBE represented from local, state, national and overseas perspectives. Our ongoing series of Practical Matters takes up some of the issues of working with adults with psychiatric disabilities, an area of concern for many teachers. In Policy Update, Louise Wignall provides an ANTA update on the new national VET strategy, while our Foreign Correspondent in Canada, Guy Ewing, provides an insight into links to the Australian context. AMEP research by Alan Williams and his colleagues illustrates how increasing numbers of Horn of Africa students are providing new challenges and opportunities in Beside the Whiteboard.

The feature articles take up issues of defining literacies and identity and the discourses of government and industries, including our own. Rob McCormack muses on ancient forms of rhetoric and how we define our field in these postmodern times in 'Adult literacy: towards a new paradigm'. Rob delivered this paper at the recent ACAL conference in Alice Springs, the context of which related to the oratory traditions of Indigenous communities. Rob challenges us to think and reflect on the past and future direction of adult literacy and reminds us that a community

of practice is not only a community of practice, nor even just a community of inquiry: it is also a community of memory and a community of hope. It reflects and keeps in touch with its past and it constantly reflects on its possible futures—it does not simply share cognitive practices.

Crina Virgona presented an engaging and interesting twilight forum in September that gave an overview of the research she has been conducting with Peter Waterhouse. This summary paper 'Two-dimensional work: the impact of changing literacies and work practices in aged care and call centre operations' provides a snapshot of the report that will soon appear on the NCVER website. She analyses the literacies of two different industries and the demands on casual workers in relation to generic skills and transferability in the new world of work.

In 'Critical literacy and the discourses of Centrelink', Terry Morris takes a critical look at the language of Centrelink forms using discourse analysis to highlight inherent power relationships. The 'ALBE outcomes/NCVER research' conducted by Helen Macrae, Allie Clemans and Robyn Hartley provides a strong case for recognition of ALBE that the forthcoming Victorian state consultations should take heed of and be guided by. The matrix of broad outcomes in ALBE is particularly well designed, and the recommendations make powerful statements for the future.

After coming on board as commissioning editor for the Winter 2002 edition, Jenni Oldfield will move on after this edition. We thank her for her dedication and commitment to *Fine Print* and commend her on the high level of editorial skills and expertise she brought to the position. We wish her luck and success in her future endeavours.

VALBEC would like to thank the 2003 *Fine Print* committee for working tirelessly throughout the year.

The Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council (VALBEC) aims to lead the adult literacy field through identifying issues of importance to practitioners and facilitating positive change. This is achieved through networking, professional support, the sharing of information and the promotion of best practice.

Adult literacy: towards a new paradigm

by Rob McCormack

Rob McCormack draws on the rhetorical teachings of the ancient Greeks to show how literacy—and the rich art of communication—is more than just reading and writing.

This paper was delivered by the author at the ACAL national literacy conference in Alice Springs, 19-20 September, 2003.

In odd moments over the last few weeks I have been mulling over what tenor or mood of discourse this speech should have. When I wrote the initial abstract it was with this angry thought:

I have deliberately kept away from the adult literacy field for eight years now because I fundamentally disagree with the direction in which ACAL has been taking it. Now that I am nearing retirement, perhaps I should take the opportunity to speak my mind?

A speech like this would, according to ancient rhetoric, be *forensic*. It would be making a case against someone or something. The mood or tenor would be what ancient rhetoric calls diatribe and it would be keyed in what they call the *high style*—lots of emotional pathos designed to communicate my feelings of frustration, anger and indignation at the social injustice the field seems blind to.

However, as I thought about it I realised the speech could also take on a quite opposite tenor and mood. It could be a cool and careful description of the larger social, political and educational context or landscape; of the conjuncture of social forces engulfing Australia as we enter a globalised multicultural world; a world of trade, refugees and human rights. And after expounding this big picture of the situation in which the field of adult literacy now finds itself, the speech could then evaluate how successfully it is addressing 'the new needs' brought on by this transformation in the social landscape. Such a speech would be much more expository, and its key would be what ancient rhetoric calls the *low style*. It would concentrate in describing the facts in a clear and rational light. The Royal Society called this kind of discourse *plain style*. It is a style that is careful not to use figures of speech or any text patterns that heighten emotional involvement. It is a discourse that is only answerable to telling the facts. Language as representation. Today we would call it *factual discourse*, or expository discourse and if it's turgid and technical enough and indexes itself to a body of theory in a systematic way then we call it *academic discourse*.

But the more I thought about it, the more I realised that the speech could adopt yet another tenor of discourse, what ancient rhetoricians call *deliberative discourse*—discourse dedicated to formulating an interpretation of the practical situation being faced by the community and then recommending a course of action to deal with that problem. In this case I would analyse the problems, dangers, opportunities and so on facing the field of adult literacy and suggest some solutions or directions. A speech of this tenor would be keyed to what rhetoric calls the *middle style*. That is, it would contain clear analysis and argument plus moderate levels of emotion, but this emotional charge would intensify towards the end of the speech to ensure that the suggestions carry adequate emotional and ethical weight.

The rhetoric of special occasions

However, there are still other ways of framing the rhetorical context of this speech. Rather than seeing it as attacking what is wrong as in forensic rhetoric, or as providing a theory of the field as in academic rhetoric, or formulating what is to be done as in deliberative rhetoric, there is another way of construing a speech such as this, a way that is vital for the health of human society, but a way that has been largely banished from the official curriculum of modern education, including adult education. This is *epideictic rhetoric*, the rhetoric of special occasions when a community is celebrating and intensifying its sense of itself.

Epideictic discourse is a discourse which calls on the audience to reconnect with the values, the history and the hopes that bind that community together into a fellowship of humanity. Without epideictic rhetoric a community inevitably becomes alienated from itself and falls into factionalism and routinisation that is unmindful of the spirit, of the horizon of meaning and ideals that give that community its soul and heart. Without epideictic discourse, a community—for example the field of adult education—tends to lose contact with its origins, its essence, its hopes, its aspirations, its loyalties and its ethics. Post 9/11 we have all, I am sure, experienced a heightened need and awareness of epideictic rhetoric and its importance. We all, I am sure,

despaired at the narrowness and lack of generosity of some epideictic rhetoric and on the other hand have been uplifted when our private emotions have been captured in epideictic discourse and attuned to public emotions that capture the occasion, its meanings and emotions.

**to jump straight to the
issue of genre is to
predetermine the definition
of the occasion**

Epideictic discourse is a discourse of memory, a discourse of hope and a discourse of witness. It is a call to fellowship, a gesture towards the laying or re-laying of a common ground, what ancient rhetoricians call a *sensus communis*—a sense, or feeling, of community, a basis for community, a feeling of friendship and respect sufficient to underpin the productive dialogue of difference and dispute as different voices articulate different ways of seeing and interpreting where we are, where we have been and come from, what we could do and what we should do. This *sensus communis* has been re-explored by contemporary theorists under such headings as ‘civil society’, ‘social trust’, ‘communicative reason’, and ‘dialogism’. Other educational theorists have also drawn on this ancient tradition of *sensus communis* with the term: community of practice. However it needs to be remembered that a community of practice is not only a community of practice, nor even just a community of inquiry: it is also a community of memory and a community of hope; it reflects and keeps in touch with its past and it constantly reflects on its possible futures; it does not simply share cognitive practices.

High style and ‘end stress’

As an exercise in epideictic discourse, this speech would have to be highly stylised in the manner first pedagogically defined and demonstrated by Isocrates and Gorgias. It would have to be written evocatively with carefully balanced *isocolons*, what today we would call ‘information units’ (Halliday), and carefully weighted *numerus*, what we today would call ‘end stress’.

Notice that this decision about mood or key, about the rhetoric of the situation, is not in any way determined by trying to define the genre of the speech. Defining the rhetorical context, that is the larger background or horizon of intentions against which the speech will be posited, has to take place before the question of genre. To jump straight to the issue of genre is to predetermine the definition of the occasion. The whole point of a rhetorical analysis of the

occasion of discourse is to explore the uniqueness of the occasion, the state of play, the things that are in the air, the uniqueness of the place and time of the text. Even when there are institutional parameters constraining a speech there is still room to move in keying it to different moods or modes. Take William Dean as Governor General appointed by Howard, and the way that he was able to use purely ceremonial occasions as occasions to raise uncomfortable questions about white Australia’s capacities to acknowledge and recognise the reality of Aboriginal Australia.

However, defining the rhetorical context is not enough to determine the speech as a whole. According to *inventio*, which is the part of ancient rhetoric that deals with matters of deciding what to say in a speech, as well as defining the rhetorical context you also need to define the key issue—the pivot on which your speech will hinge—and your claim or stance in relation to this key issue.

What am I talking about?

So, having decided that the occasion is epideictic what is the key issue to be addressed by this speech? What is the issue at the heart of what I want to say? This is what I would say. This speech is going to address the question: has the field of adult literacy lost its soul? Has the field of adult literacy lost contact with its underpinning wellsprings of cultural, spiritual, ethical and political energy and motivation? As we will see later, given my definition of literacy this question could be reframed as: has the field of adult literacy become illiterate?

Having decided what the key issue is, we now need to do what ancient rhetoric calls *partitio*. We need to divide it up somehow so that things can be dealt with one at a time in an order that makes sense logically and emotionally. This second area of preparation for a speech is called *dispositio*, disposing not in the sense of throwing away, but in the sense of putting things into their best place or position.

The speech has to be both a whole yet made up of parts. In ancient rhetoric these parts are called headings. So, we need to divide the speech and its content into headings. There are many ways of doing this: we could divide the question into sub-questions; we could divide the topic into sub-topics; we could frame the topic as a space that we explore place by place; we could assemble positions or points of view around the key issue and deal with them one at a time, rejecting some, espousing others. We could construct a narrative history of the central issue and responses to it.

Genre games

In fact we have a whole range of genres to call on in deciding how to arrange or structure a speech. For example, and I am sure you’re aware of it, I have been playing genre games,

indulging in genre metaphor, in this introduction. My way of introducing this talk has been by telling you about the decision-making process I engaged in, but even worse my description of that decision-making process has been couched in terms of ancient rhetoric. So in fact I have been giving you a lesson in ancient rhetoric and how it goes about preparing a speech. This tactic of deviating from the straight and narrow, from the literal, of getting at something through something else is called by ancient rhetoric, *tropes*. Metaphor is a trope, irony is a trope. If you say something by saying something else—you are saying two things at once. Tropes speak with a forked tongue; they say two things at once, the text thus contains both a text and a subtext and even worse it is unclear which is which.

For example, am I just taking a long time to get started on this talk or have I all along been engaged in epideictic discourse, in trying to bring you back into contact with the wellsprings of the field of adult literacy? Perhaps the continual references to ancient rhetoric, which just seem like an annoying subtext, perhaps these are the real text—not just the subtext. Perhaps really what I'm saying is that the soul of adult literacy is ancient rhetoric? Or perhaps I'm saying that if adult literacy is to reconnect with its soul then it has to reconnect with the soul of ancient rhetoric? Perhaps I'm saying that ancient rhetoric is an essential interlocutor, a key dialogic partner, for any field of language education, especially a field committed to empowering adults. So, perhaps there's been method to my madness?

Many answers, one question

However, I have decided on genre, a way of unfolding the meanings I want to adduce in addressing the issues at the heart of this speech as a speech intent on calling us back into contact with the wellsprings, the sources, the energies, of our field as a community of adult second chance language educators. I will simply subdivide the central issue, 'has adult literacy as a field lost contact with its soul?' into a number of sub-issues or questions and arrange them in such a way that answering them will lead to an answer to the central question.

I will divide this speech into three headings, three questions—First, what is an adult? Second, what is literacy? And third, is the field of adult literacy itself literate?

But let me forewarn you: everything I say from now on will be provocative and preposterous. Yet if I succeed in my rhetoric, I hope it won't be only preposterous or outrageous. I hope it also sparks a sense of recognition, a sense of 'Yes! That's right!' For if I am right in thinking we have strayed a long way from our roots as a field, then although we need a shock to reawaken the memory of our roots and origins, we will also have a sense of homecoming

and recognition, even though we may not know what to do about it.

That completes what ancient rhetoric calls the *exordium*, what we call the introduction.

1. First question—What is an adult?

For those of us who have been involved in naming wars, it is noticeable that national governmental agencies have reverted to the older terminology for naming our field. During the early 90s we named ourselves ALBE—Adult Literacy and Basic Education. This was to signal a commitment to second chance general education. As this is the name I continue to use to name our field, which is a field of adult language and literacy second chance education, I will use the name 'adult literacy' with both reluctance and sadness.

**Tropes speak with a
forked tongue; they say
two things at once**

So, what is an adult? Here is my stab at a definition—An adult is someone who has to take responsibility for themselves, for others and for the state of the wider world they find themselves in.

Let me point out some features or implications of this definition. Notice it is a phenomenological definition, not a bureaucratic definition. It does not mention any measurable attributes or thresholds such as age, length of schooling, financial independence. Notice also that there is an ambiguity about 'having responsibility'. You may 'have responsibility' but not 'take it' or 'know it' or 'acknowledge it' or 'want it'. You may try to 'evade it', 'avoid it'. And so on. Notice also that who and what you have responsibility for is not a matter of choice. There is an element of fatedness, of thrownness as Heidegger called it. Your life and your responsibilities are not totally in your own hands, they are not a matter of choice. Notice also that taking responsibility means that you have to make decisions, high stakes decisions, without any assurances about what will come out of it. One of the tragic situations now endemic to our world is adults having to decide that they or some of their family need to flee their homeland, become refugees and try to establish a life in another country.

Praxis makes perfect

But let me say a little more about this issue of uncertainty of outcome. This realm, where the outcome is uncertain, was called the realm of *praxis* and the realm of the 'probable'

by ancient Greeks in order to distinguish it from the realm of theory, which dealt with the realm of the predictable and necessary. And for the Greeks only the world of the cosmos was predictable, the world of stars and planets. On this earth here below, you could not assume anything. Although something should happen, there can always be lots of glitches. For the Greeks, the world of human beings and human relationships are fundamentally unpredictable, subject to misunderstanding and breakdown, and always in need of repair and careful nurturing.

Now what this means is that language addressing this realm of the probable, this realm of social life, this realm of social relationships in all its unpredictability and uncertainty has to be different from language addressing mathematics or astronomy. For the Greeks, language attempting to bring order to human social relations is fundamentally rhetorical. The long 2300-year dominance of rhetoric as a pedagogy and cultural practice derives from the insight that language intent on bringing order to social life, reconciling difference, establishing a *sensus communis*, finding a voice that people feel at home with, straightening out the tangled emotions of conflict—all these uses of language require the ‘talking cure’ of rhetoric. Otherwise people will turn to physical violence and war. Throughout European history and I suspect for all other societies and cultures too, the choice is stark—rhetorical speech or physical violence. I believe that today this is still clearly the choice and it’s sad that the current leaders of the English-speaking world have chosen the path of military intervention rather than rhetorical discourse.

A forgotten practice

Now of course during modernity and until recently, rhetoric itself has been a rejected culture and practice. I cannot go into it fully here, but one way to define the modernity of the Enlightenment as opposed to the modernity of the Renaissance would be to say that whereas the modernity of the Renaissance was a rediscovery and revival of ancient rhetoric in opposition to the academic theory of the Medieval scholastics, the modernity of the Enlightenment was a renewal of academic theory as natural science and a rejection of rhetoric together with its ways of healing social conflicts and cultivating a *sensus communis*.

The modernity of the Enlightenment was thus committed to knowledge and believed that the knowledge discovered by the natural, social and psychological sciences would produce ways of making life predictable. We would be able to fix things up with cause and effect knowledge; we would be able to use magic bullets to straighten things out. We would be able to use logic and proof to make people all believe the same thing and thus wipe out conflict and difference. Religious differences and cultural difference will

all slide away. Linguistic differences will all slide away as we all come to speak the universal language of knowledge, fact and commerce. Oh, and I nearly forgot! ... And of course the language associated with a virtual monopoly on weapons of mass destruction. Don’t forget that Hobbes’ modern state is a Leviathan, and part of the definition of citizenship for him is that citizens agree to hand over all weapons of violence to the State. The state becomes a monstrous lion, the citizens become lambs. In fact, right before our very eyes in Afghanistan, Palestine, and Iraq we can see modernity attempting to enact its own theories of the social contract and the transition from the state of nature in which all war against each other, to the state of civilization where there is peace and security.

Childhood’s end

Now of course this secure world of modernity and its predicability based on the expertise of the social sciences has been losing legitimacy for about 30 years now. In one sense it is almost gone. The welfare state which held out the promise that one never ever need become an adult and make risky decisions or suffer the tragic effects of history is nearly gone. Now with the marketisation and globalisation of life our sense of risk has increased. We are forced to be adults and take responsibility for ourselves whether we want to or not.

**the failure of modernity
... underpins the
rhetorical power of
Pauline Hanson**

But of course, our students have always been adults because they have always lived at the mercy of poverty and the arbitrary power of social engineers, welfare agencies and other such agencies of the modern state. They have always lived in a world shot through with unpredictability and risk, and they have had to try to take responsibility for their lives and the lives of others ‘in a world not of their own choosing’ (as Karl Marx would put it). The postmodern world is forcing more of us into the ranks of this ‘reserve army’, and the risk economy we now live in makes many of us realise that we are only one turn of fate away from being cast into that world or having our children consigned to that world. This insight into the failure of modernity by the silent majority of Australians is what underpins the rhetorical power of Pauline Hanson. It was not just her racism, as some like to think. It was her sense that she cannot hand on a life of respectable trade in the railways or associated industries to her children. Her children are

unemployed, on the dole and into substance abuse, and she is powerless to offer them any better future. Her children are heading in the direction of the Indigenous ghetto—not moving up to the comfortable ranks of middle class free settlers.

**everyone is an adult now,
whereas in the past only a
small elite was**

Now I have another point to make about this definition of an adult. ‘Taking responsibility’ does not mean making just any sort of self-serving decision or trying to get things to go your own way or for the sake of sheer survival. Being responsible means what Aristotle called making a judgment based on a reflective sense of the situation, taking into account the background values and loyalties one is answerable to. Aristotle and the whole rhetorical tradition called this practical wisdom—*phronesis* or prudence—to distinguish it from certain theoretically-grounded knowledge on the one hand and skills-based know-how on the other. *Phronesis* is being able to discern the conflicting ethical imperatives and practical possibilities of a situation and find a way forward.

The heart of the matter

For the last 2000 years this education into and for *phronesis* has constituted the heart of secondary and higher education for forming the ethical substance and habitus of the ruling elite, so that they would make practically wise decisions. However in the era of democracy and human rights, it is not only leaders who have to make decisions—everyone has to. Everyone is an adult now, whereas in the past only a small elite was. The rest of the population were considered to be dependents and had no will of their own. The rest were only women, slaves or chattels—closer to animals than to free human beings who had to deal with tricky situations calling for fine judgment and political tact.

Notice another consequence of this definition of adulthood. It does not see the only duty of adulthood as consisting solely in being part of the paid workplace. Although the neoliberal government may see its primary responsibility as the maintenance of a globally competitive workplace and workforce, adults have many other things they are responsible for like family, like culture, like language, like the environment, like the local community, like political parties and so on and so on. Contemporary efforts to define adult education as basically reducible to vocational training in or for the workplace are absurd.

But, although many workplaces try to demand that workers leave their adulthood at the gate and become akin to slaves in exchange for a weekly wage, these same people on leaving the workplace then resume their responsibilities as adults for their own lives as a meaningful narrative, their families as an intergenerational community, their cultures, religions, and bodies of knowledge as communities and the earth itself.

2. Second question—What is literacy?

These days we literacy practitioners all know that literacy is more than decoding grapho-phonic symbols, but what that more is, is still a matter of contention. But once one has cut the term ‘literacy’ away from being focused on written English or from a focus on the bottom language strata, it is important to notice a fundamental ambiguity in the term ‘literacy’. Under one interpretation, it can be defined as mastery of the procedural semiotics of a medium of communication and so we get terms like information literacy, mathematical literacy, scientific literacy, graphic literacy and so on. In all of these cases it is being interpreted as mastery of a semiotic code. This is the view of literacy embodied in the current notion of ‘multiliteracies’. It relies on a structuralist metaphor which posits rules or conventions appropriate to the different semiotic media for making meaning.

However, my definition of literacy is different again. Here is my definition:

Literacy is the capacity to read and write the texts that express the cultural archive—the wellsprings— of a community. And by ‘read and write’ I mean perform and interpret.

Texts are where societies reflectively perform their ways of life and the horizons of value and meaning defining their ways of life. So, literacy is learning to participate in the interpretation and performance of these texts.

Texts take many forms. They can be inscribed in performance, in dance, in shadow-plays, in the land, in body art, in sand-paintings, in art, in music, in singing, in written literature, literature, orature, crying, and so on. In other words any semiotic medium can be used as a medium of cultural articulation and reflection. Literacy means coming into contact with the sources of self as a participant in a community, to use the phrase coined by the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor. Halliday calls this background dimension ‘the meaning potential of the context of culture’ which is instantiated in texts.

By defining literacy as performing and interpreting the texts that underwrite a way of life, I am insisting that literacy

means engaging with the substance, the wellsprings, of a way of life—not simply the conventions of a particular semiotic or form of representation. This more substantivist account of literacy which focuses on what Gadamer calls *Sache*—that is, the stuff or substance, the human being, of a culture—does not mean a submissive rote learning or recitation of the texts of a culture. Instead I would insist, again by drawing on Gadamer, that there is always a fundamental difference, dialogue and dialectic at work in any reading or writing. In reading a text we are always and inevitably creatively misreading it in terms of our current situation and agenda. We can't help projecting our own histories, concerns and realities into the text and our understanding of it. But the text is also projecting its meanings into us. This is why reading and writing, performing and interpreting, are ways of renewing, reawakening and transforming both ourselves and our cultures and ways of life.

So now let me put this definition of literacy together with my earlier definition of adult and this is what we get as a definition of adult literacy:

Adult literacy is learning to interpret and speak on behalf of one's culture and community in order to deal with an uncertain situation at hand requiring practical wisdom.

There you have it: my definition of adult literacy.

And notice that it does not even mention language as such, and certainly not written language. Certainly there is no way it could be aligned with the NRS or with levels of English language. The gradings of competence on this notion of literacy will depend on those authorised in the culture or tradition—let's call them cultural elders—to evaluate the depth of understanding and judgement, the practical wisdom, of students faced with dilemmas, conflicting interpretations and competing principles or values within or between cultures and ways of life. And these judgements are concerned with matters of cultural substance, not matters of linguistic form.

**in reading a text we are
always and inevitably
creatively misreading it**

In short, one of the advantages of my interpretation of literacy is that it reintegrates literacy back into the larger educational process. Literacy becomes what rhetoricians call a *synecdoche*, a way of capturing a larger whole in terms of a single element or part. It is not literacy that anyone really

cares about; literacy is just a sign of larger things. And what it signifies is how much education you have had. And this is how it should be.

The worst fate that can ever befall someone from this point of view is to be stolen from the grounds of ethical judgment. To be robbed of one's culture. To be brought up without any cultural horizons, without any education, without any contact with the wellsprings of a humane life. Such a person is condemned to illiteracy and can never become an adult and make their own decisions; they can never be really free or exercise self-determination. Colonialism tried its hardest to reduce millions to this condition, but failed. The failure of that attempt to ensure that people lost their cultures and forgot their ways of life is the reason why we now have had such an upsurge in the multicultural politics of recognition to complement the socialist politics of redistribution. The victims of centuries of colonialism managed to keep the memory of culture alive and relatively intact.

3. Third question—Is adult literacy as a field itself literate?

I now come to the third question—Is adult literacy as a field itself literate? Given that literacy means participating in the creation and interpretation of texts expressing the cultural archive of a community, the question is asking: is the field of adult literacy engaged in creating and interpreting texts that articulate its cultural archive? In short, is the field itself performing and interpreting its founding texts, its canonical texts? For that matter what are its founding, grounding texts, the texts that underpin the *sensus communis* holding the field together as a field? Political communities have their constitutions; religious communities have their sacred books; academic communities have their paradigmatic texts; but what does adult literacy have? What are the founding texts constituting us as a community, and where is the tradition of reflection and interpretation through which these texts are brought down onto the ground to help form practical wisdom in specific situations and contexts?

Some language pedagogies such as ESL see themselves as essentially modern. They mainly write to each other in the genre of research report, and thus construe themselves as creating new knowledge and new practices, rather than keeping true to canonical traditions of text or praxis.

A long pedigree

Although I have not the time to prove it here, what I am suggesting is that adult literacy stands heir to a long tradition of language pedagogy. Behind adult literacy stands the entire tradition of humanist practices and reflective texts concerned with using language education to shape the character and ethical attributes of people and the quality

of social life generally to be free, disciplined and responsible.

In my PhD, I was able to trace the history of this extensive but little-known tradition, which is concerned with the cultivation of wise persons and wise speech, a tradition known as *civile sciencia* or ‘practical philosophy’. The reason this tradition of practical philosophy connects with language pedagogy is that the education of and for *phronesis* actually took place through training in the powers and skills of oratory. I traced this tradition from ancient Greece, through the Byzantium Empire, through the Middle Ages, to a huge revival in the Renaissance, to its gradual demise at the hands of the Enlightenment, and then its recent resurgence across the whole spectrum of liberal arts and social sciences. I was able to look at Aristotle’s distinction between *episteme* (theoretical knowledge) and *phronesis* (political and ethical judgement), Vico’s concept of *sensus communis*, Kant’s distinction between determinant judgment and reflective judgement in his third critique, *Critique of Judgment*, Hegel’s notion of *Bildung*, Wittgenstein’s notion of ‘forms of life’ and ‘language games’. I finished up with Gadamer’s recovery and construal of this whole humanist tradition as philosophical hermeneutics.

An ideal outcome

In that thesis I argued that *phronesis*—the exercise of ethical and political responsibility and leadership—should be reinstated as a primary outcome of adult basic education, not just academic knowledge and technical skills. Such a reinstatement of *phronesis* would bring modern adult literacy education back more into line with the traditional *trivium* of grammar, dialectic and rhetoric, which embodied the language education component of the classical liberal arts degree.

It seems to me that, although largely forgotten, the cultivation of *phronesis* is historically and structurally a fundamental underpinning reality or background standing behind classical and modern European education, as well as European educational, political and cultural life. But the pedagogy for this cultivation of *phronesis* was not just grammar, nor just dialectical argument; it was a training into the power of language and the language of power through primarily a training into oratory—rhetoric.

Rhetoric is the education of orators, of citizens who can engage in that special kind of performative speech that calls a community to one mind. Probably, only the role of priest, ceremonial leader or the like would rival it in status. Because of its importance, its inherent powers of persuasion for good or bad, its power to lead the community along the right path or down a wrong track, societies have highly developed pedagogies for handing on the powers of oratory. For

example, for 2300 years the secondary and university education systems of Europe and the Middle East were dominated by rhetoric as the study and training in oratory. In fact the whole education system converges on producing orators who are highly skilled in their mastery of language and all its ways, deeply attuned to the traditions, the stories, the texts and themes of their culture, ethically mature and responsible, and politically astute, insightful and committed to justice, not simply the advancement of their own interests.

the skills of oratory underpin the skills of writing

Ancient European rhetoric was originally concerned with developing the oral skills of leadership and public speaking of small ancient city-states, which were not unlike many contemporary Indigenous communities in terms of size, diversity and family-based politics. There are, I suspect, deep analogies between the political exigencies confronting the ancient Greek *polis* and contemporary Indigenous communities. In my view, *sensus communis* is integrally bound up with regular gatherings for public speech, whereas the nation-state (despite parliament and media) is more bound up with regulation, codification, surveillance and policing.

An interesting comparison

It might occur to you that a focus on performative speech could result in a lack of attention to literacy. Let me assure you that the skills of oratory underpin the skills of writing. In fact the grammar of writing is a simplification of the grammar of oratory. The grammar of oratory is far richer and far more intricate than the grammar of writing. Even so, at the most basic level the principles at work in a written text are the same as those in oratory. The reason for the common view that the grammar of writing is radically different and more complicated than the grammar of speech, is that the sort of speech in question in this comparison is casual conversation, not the highly stylised oral performance of oratory. Apples are being compared with oranges.

When we compare oratory and writing we get a whole different story. What we are finding at Batchelor is that in fact there is no conflict between developing the powers of oratory and the powers of literacy. In fact my view is that oratory provides a deeply motivating context for engaging with language in all its aspects—both oral and literate.

My claim is that the wellsprings of adult literacy as a field lie largely in that long tradition of language pedagogy that

preceded the language pedagogies of modern mass schooling for children—the tradition of rhetoric. I suspect that child-centred pedagogies are designed to produce slavish domesticated populations, not citizens who are adult in the face of uncertainty and responsibilities.

adult literacy is a field dedicated to enabling people to be adult

Adult literacy, in its concern for education as reading and writing the world—not just the word, as Friere puts it—places people in the same active adult role as ancient rhetoric placed leaders and ruling elites, as citizens condemned to be free and to make judgements. Both are condemned to praxis, to action based on ethical judgement, not demonstrable knowledge or proof.

In my view, if the field is to become literate itself, if it is to perform and interpret the texts articulating its wellsprings, its fundamental concepts, themes and practices, then it needs to re-engage with the texts of ancient rhetoric. These texts form a major segment of the cultural horizon defining our field.

Not just reading and writing

Every adult has a right to participate in the discursive exchanges that articulate, formulate, transform and critique the world in which we live. This is the real meaning of democracy, as opposed to tyranny or authoritarianism. By the way, according to Quentin Skinner, the notion of democracy as the free and active participation of citizens in the articulation and formation of the common good and public good of the republic, is carried within this very same tradition of practical philosophy and rhetoric. So, like Friere, I believe that literacy is not just a matter of reading and writing the word or being able to decode a text, but a matter of reading and writing the world, being able to understand the conditions and contours shaping one's world and being able to participate in the discourses shaping how to act within and on these contours. This is why I still believe a *sententia* I coined many years ago—'what adult literacy students need is not something called literacy, what they need is an education'.

Second chance education

I believe that this second chance education must be accountable to emerging international human rights regarding cultural rights, linguistic rights and educational rights, especially for Indigenous peoples. I also believe that this second chance education should be planned and

delivered in close cooperation with the community and its definitions of appropriateness of time and place.

Let me conclude. In this paper, which is titled 'Adult literacy: towards a new paradigm', I have in fact been trying to bring back to mind, to perform and interpret, things that we have forgotten, things that we need to re-inherit. I have noted the lurching of modernity into what some call 'the risk society' and others 'post-modernity' and how this has renewed the relevance of older ancestral forbears of adult literacy.

Suddenly the distinction between the realm of theory and the realm of praxis has become real again, and this means that rhetoric as a form of communication concerned with generating agreement in uncertainty becomes relevant again, and because everyone must now live their own life, the attributes of *phronesis*, of wise judgment, is not just relevant for leaders or princes, but has become relevant for everyone. For the same reason an education into the grounds of their own cultures, ways of being and forms of community becomes the right of everyone, and this must include adults who were unable to make substantial contact with their cultural roots and/or the contours of their world in their initial schooling.

And so the new paradigm of adult literacy I am pointing to could be summarised thus:

Adult literacy is a second chance education which through performative and interpretative engagement with the canonical texts and textual performances of cultures and communities aims to cultivate *phronesis* for responsible adulthood.

In this way adult literacy is a field dedicated to enabling people to be adult. That is, enabling people who have responsibility for their own lives, for the lives of others around them and for the community or world they live in to do this more responsibly by bringing them into contact with the wellsprings of their community and way of life, the values and meanings, that provide the principles needed for practical wisdom in these uncertain post-modern times.

Dr Rob McCormack spent many years in Melbourne in the Language Development Centre at Footscray College of TAFE working towards the formulation of a theory and practice of Adult Basic Education as a substantive education for 'second chance adults'.

He now works at Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, NT, adapting ancient European rhetoric to form a ground where the different cultures of Australia can meet, dialogue, and exchange understandings.

Two-dimensional work: changing literacies and work practices in aged care and call centres

by Crina Virgona and Peter Waterhouse

Two particularly challenging (for want of a better adjective) work areas are in call centres and aged care homes, and as work practices change, so too does the need for relevant and effective literacies.

This article draws on the work of educators and researchers at Workplace Learning Initiatives (WLI), a registered training organisation, consultancy and research agency established in 1994. The project was funded by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER).

to be literate in a workplace means being a master of a complex set of rules

This was an adult literacy research project that we conducted throughout 2003. The project was a qualitative study designed to investigate the issues of literacy, casualisation and transferability in the new world of work.

We put forward the project proposal because we recognised the significant changes that had reshaped the face of the workforce with increased casualisation¹ and the increasing textualisation of the workforce (Jackson 2000). We wanted to know how the more vulnerable members of the 'old' workforce were faring, particularly those with English language and literacy needs. Therefore, we proposed a project set in two industries where we would look at casual work through the experience of casual employees and through the key organisations that influenced the working lives of casual employees. We selected aged care and call centres because they employed large numbers of casual workers.

Research questions

The research questions that guided our investigation led us to explore:

- the multiple literacies that each of the industries live out
- the strategies that casual workers use to manage those literacies
- how workers, workplace managers and trainers manage transferability

- the implications of the findings for VET policy makers, trainers, workplace managers and employers.

Defining literacy

In seeking a definition of literacy we were well aware that we were entering highly contested territory. Definitions put forward in this field tell us as much about social and political identity of the proponents as they do about the components of literacy itself.

No definition tells, with ontological or objective reliability, what literacy is, definitions only tell what some person or group—motivated by political commitments—wants or needs literacy to be (Knoblauch 1990, p.79).

We likewise have learned from our experience that literacy is highly contextualised and relational. We rejected definitions that were atomistic and claiming objectivity. However, we found an affinity with Hull's definition that recognises the political nature of the field that is grounded in experience.

To be literate in a workplace means being a master of a complex set of rules and strategies which govern who uses texts, and how, and for what purpose. (To be literate is to know)...when to speak, when to be quiet, when to write, when to reveal what was written, and when and whether and how to respond to texts already written (Hull 1995, p.19).

When it came to making sense of our research observations, Lankshear's (2000) three dimensions of literacy were also very useful. He suggests that literacy is comprised of:

- 1 An operational dimension, where functional communication tasks are fulfilled.
- 2 A cultural dimension, where workers understand communication goals and modify their practices in keeping with the organisation's purpose.

3 A critical dimension, where workers evaluate the function of the communication processes and respond by suggesting improvements or resisting communication processes.

We adopted these three dimensions as a framework for analysing the literacies we encountered in the two industries.

Methodology

We proposed a two-stage process which began with a communications 'audit' aimed at identifying the literacies required of competent operators in each of the two industries. We collected samples of literacy tasks, spoke to staff, management and trainers, observed and worked alongside workers, if possible, to develop a sense of the industry culture and a knowledge of the communication requirements in practice. In each industry, we visited one labour hire agency, two training organisations and three workplaces.

The second stage of the research consisted of interviews with target group members. To qualify as a member of the target group, employees needed to fit at least two of the following categories. They needed to be:

- casually employed
- working at Certificate III level or below
- have English language and/or literacy needs.

In total we conducted 41 interviews—half as part of the 'audit' research and half as target group members. As this was a qualitative study, our sample does not represent the industry as a whole, hence references to 'the industry' relate to that small sector of the industry we researched. Whilst we cannot speak for the industries in total, the project offered some useful insights drawn from a detailed analysis of work within the two industries. Such insights may well have wider implications, not only for these two industries, but for other workplaces—particularly those where increasing proceduralisation and textualisation are shaping the experience of work.

1. The literacies of aged care



We entered the aged care industry seeking to identify its literacy practices and the factors that shaped them. It did not take long to uncover the spectre of documentation that most employees see as a shadow of varying degrees of intensity, cast across the industry.

Documentation became an essential component of aged care work some five or so years ago², when the accreditation processes were set in place to regulate out exploitative and

unacceptable care practices in the industry. Documentation requirements are time-demanding and often duplicated. Many staff saw it as an unreasonable demand on their time and an inquisitorial imposition upon professional judgement and experience. Others saw it as a much needed accountability measure. Either way it has strongly influenced the identity of workers and the way they do their work.

Documentation is the lifeline of the industry. Funds are released to facilities on the basis of need and it is carers who establish the argument for the need through their documentation. As elderly residents decline in health and become more dependent, the facility qualifies for more money.

Carers report not only on the medical condition of residents but also on their social, emotional and spiritual condition, which are part of the funding formula. Most residents are said to have 'behaviours'. If an individual is seen to be manipulative, attention-seeking, isolated or depressed, interventions are put in place. Some conditions attract more money than others and it is Certificate III or IV PCAs (personal care attendant) who make the case. These judgements used to be made by nurses but now the industry has become deprofessionalised. While we need to bear in mind that there is a great deal that is routine in aged care work, the industry is asking for high levels of interpretation, knowledge and observation from these carers in reading symptoms.

It can just be the sideways remark, the grimace, the this, the that... 'it's not just what I say, it's what I do, it's how I get up, how I ease myself down, it's the things I do or don't eat which...it's not just that I'm not hungry that day so take my plate away'. You have to start looking at... 'do I have a problem with my teeth, do I have a mouth ulcer...am I depressed? What's contributing to the fact that I didn't eat?' We are asking so much of these carers. They are to be psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists, you name it (PCA trainer).

PCAs also carry a heavy responsibility in the way they report their observations. An uninitiated reporting of events will not assist the facility to gain funds.

...through training...the worker knows how to play the game. This is what industry would like, that we educate the worker...around this observation thing so that they can communicate the information in a language that catalyses the dollars (Aged Care trainer).

Where notes were kept in the past to record information for use within the facility, the documentation associated

with accreditation and funding now has a broad readership. It may involve medical, government and legal professionals. As a result informal notes have become medicalised and formalised in order to assert a professional tone. Words such as 'cerebral', 'self-initiated' and 'cognitive' have replaced more pedestrian forms of expression.

Instead of saying 'sorbolene is applied', you would say something like 'to maintain skin integrity'...There is a language in this...putting all those little details so that it means something in the overall assessment. Like you wouldn't just say 'I took, say Alice, to the toilet'. You'd say that you directed her to the toilet, assisted her with her clothing adjustment, helped her with her hygiene, and then escorted her to wherever she wanted to go (Carer).

The influence of government regulating bodies on the operational and cultural literacies in aged care has been quite profound. It has shaped the work experience of carers deciding what they should notice or ignore, what they should listen for and report, what they should say and how they should say it. It has strongly influenced the understanding of what constitutes competence in carers. It has established and privileged a particular type of reading and writing to the exclusion of others (Jackson 2000). It has also intervened to shift authority from the local site to the central authority. In the past, local experts—in this case nurses—decided the priorities, treatment regimes and the facility's values-in-action (Argyrsi 1991).

These local experts have been largely silenced. As the industry continues to be deprofessionalised, fewer nurses are employed. Those that remain in the industry are increasingly engaged in interpreting the compliance requirements and ensuring they are accurately reflected on the ground. In many facilities, the Director of Nursing is being replaced by a business manager whose job is to exercise principles of economic rationalism. Increasingly the operational and cultural literacies of the aged care have become those of compliance and regulation.

2. The literacies of call centres



Call centre literacies present a very different picture. Call centres represent a huge variety of industries and activities.

They provide services such as complaints departments, help lines, sales, surveys, bookings for events or tourism to name a few, and they vary in ethics and business style from sweatshops to institutions that pride themselves in their professionalism. It is a highly competitive industry driven by efficiencies interpreted as the capacity to deal with as many calls as possible as quickly as possible, at the same time as meeting the objectives of the call, consolidating and upholding the brand of the company and all the time keeping the customer happy.

This can be a significant challenge, particularly in centres like the debt collection service that we visited. In this service the operator's task was to convince the caller to pay their bill within a negotiated time. Operators could exercise discretion in waiving penalties to late payers but they had to return \$1400 per hour to the company and secure the continued patronage of the customer. Hence customers needed to believe they were given a 'fair go' while operators negotiated the politics of unknown gender, cultural and religious conflicts.



This photo, taken almost 100 years ago, demonstrates that this was a job for respectable women whose middle-class demeanour was a prerequisite for the work, but they were heavily supervised. The photograph is edited from a larger photograph which depicts a line of operators. It was supplied by a union organiser who pointed out that there was one supervisor to every ten or so workers. She maintained that high levels of supervision have always characterised the work and that is why call centre operators have accepted micro-management. Micro-management is intense supervision whereby every factor that contributes to performance is monitored. In the centres we visited, all operators receive regular fortnightly feedback on a full page of items which included tone of voice, ability to take control of the call, to establish rapport, to achieve the goal in minimum time, and so on.

Each item was scored and figures were compared over time and aggregated to compare the performance of teams. Time was the priority target. At one call centre operators were counselled to reduce their call time from 18 to 15 seconds. At another, operators were allowed only four per cent of

working time off-line. All the time the persona they were projecting over the phone was being honed and manicured. There was very little autonomy in choosing the words to use. A supervisor explained the level of variation allowed:

...when I say to them, you know, this is what you basically have to say...but you can word it how you want. When they've thought of the wording they'll come across and run it past you, they won't go cold...At the moment we are telling consultants that they must ask for a credit card. Now, on every call, if they're saying to a customer 'I can take that payment by credit card or can you pay by credit card?' 'Can you pay by credit card today?' is a little bit confronting to the customer. So quite a few of the consultants will say something like 'I can help you out by taking your credit card payment today'. Not so confronting. Um, you also have a couple that might say something like 'are you aware that I'm able to take your credit card payment today?' (call centre supervisor).

their written literacies, however, are coded and strongly influenced by Short Message Systems (SMS) texting

It was reported from many sources that verbal abuse is a frequent occurrence in this work. It can take a significant toll upon the wellbeing of operators.

People think you can say whatever you like on the phone. They can be very intimidating. They say things like 'what did you say your name was?' or 'you must be fucking blonde not to understand that'. It can be very difficult to keep your cool (call centre manager).

Emotional self-management is a major generic skill that operators practice. Operators learn to detach from any personal engagement with abuse, anger or distress, otherwise they cannot manage the work. However, operators have to communicate integrity and rapport.

You have to take on a different persona in this job. Those who can't, won't survive in the job (call centre manager).

The cultural and operational literacies of call centre operators are primarily oral, although most are also required to write notes and calculate costs. Their written literacies, however, are coded and strongly influenced by Short Message Systems (SMS) texting. Frequently-used sentences

are called up using 'hot keys' and the sentences they construct would be unreadable to the uninitiated. Reading is also highly specialised. While screens are busy with print, they are patterned and limited in number.

Call centre work is only for the 'stress hardy' and those willing to commit to the company aspirations. It is as if operators take on the oral and written literacies of the call centre with just a thin connecting thread to who they are and the literacies they use in the rest of their lives. Almost every aspect of their working identity is shaped by the enterprise.

Critical literacy

While the literacies of these industries are very different, they come together in that there is very little capacity within either of them to develop and apply Lankshear's third dimension of literacy—the critical dimension. Workers may absorb the operational and cultural dimensions—in order to enhance and extend compliance with the accredited system in aged care or the efficiency and effectiveness of call centre operations—but there is no space for the type of critical literacy that lets employees question the effect of cultural and communication practices, to influence their direction, to caution their intent or to evaluate their wider contribution to the community. As Waterhouse has noted elsewhere:

Notions of empowerment are reduced to conceptions of functional empowerment as employees are given only such authority as befits their circumscribed roles within the workplace. This is empowerment to serve more efficiently and productively rather than empowerment to question servitude (Waterhouse, in press).

The workplace constraints upon the essential critical dimension of literacy prompted us to suggest the notion of 'Two-dimensional work' in the title of our report.

Transferability

This study was particularly interested in transferability, since this is a fundamental tenet of casualisation. Casual work presumes that skills reside with the individual, are portable, and can be easily transferred between work sites. Proceduralisation is the tool that facilitates the process by defining standards and describing tasks³. It makes processes transparent and therefore apparently transferable, providing an important aid to casualisation. Both industries demonstrate high levels of proceduralisation and casualisation, however they understand the term 'transferability' in distinctly different ways.

Within aged care, industry standards established through the accreditation system have set best-practice benchmarks

which are regulated through the auditing practices. Competent carers internalise the standards and adapt their activities, maintaining the integrity of the standard regardless of where they are located. Transferability is seen to be a common-sense process within an industry where fidelity to standards is universal. Trainers have inherited a normalising role by default. When trainees worked on-site, trainers mediated the standards in discussions with facility staff and trainees. Together they negotiated towards the consistencies that auditors were looking for, and that institutions had come to accept as the hallmarks of competence. It is presumed that competent carers can transfer skills. They know how to shower a resident, recognise symptoms and conduct their work enacting values of respect and privacy...regardless of the facility where they are working.

**they were trained for
their enterprise
specialisation rather than
their transferability**

Call centres, on the other hand, were internally focused, always refining their practice in relation to their unique brand and the enterprise-based key performance indicators (KPIs). In the centres we visited, recruiters were wary of those with previous experience which needed to be undone before they could form the mould that was special to their organisation. They wanted people who would submit to micro-management and who had the adaptability to be sculpted to the enterprise form. Furthermore, untrained people gave them the opportunity to use Apprenticeship and Traineeship Training Program (ATTP) funds to train recruits to fit the mould. All new recruits were extensively trained by internal trainers whether they were casual or ongoing. The external trainer's challenge was therefore to demonstrate that their accredited training could add value to the KPIs and complement the internal system. In order to do business with the centre, they needed to demonstrate that they could further the commercial interests of the centre.

The differences between the industries are exemplified by the way in which casual work was organised. Aged care facilities depended upon agencies to provide emergency staff to facilities on a needs basis⁴. The call centres we visited used labour hire companies as part of their recruitment strategy. Casual staff were recruited for a particular promotion but they were not swapped between centres, as was the case in aged care. They were trained for their enterprise specialisation rather than their transferability.

Training was extensive, because these call centres recognised the costs to their brand and their customer service if employees projected a poor image or got the information wrong⁵.

Transferability was therefore viewed differently by the industries and the trainers. Neither group addressed transferability issues directly but since aged care trainees in some courses came together from different facilities, comparisons were inevitable. Anomalies, inconsistencies and the challenge of skills transfer came up naturally in discussion. However, despite the belief in the universals of the industry, our research demonstrated that aged care casual employees exercised considerable judgement in reading the cultural subtleties of each facility. They needed to ascertain whether today's assigned facility was one that expected a full checklist of tasks to be completed in double quick time, regardless of the contingencies that might arise, or was it an organisation where residents' needs were given priority over prescribed routines. The skills of fitting in, negotiating assistance and reading the stated and unstated rules of operation was a specialist skill of casual staff. Despite the high levels of proceduralisation, casual employees could not rely on a robotic transfer of skill, and yet in most cases there was very little consideration for supporting casual employees.

Conclusions

One of the marked findings of this project was that the most vulnerable workers were not those casually employed. The findings demonstrate that casual employees need to manage their own employability so they need good relationships skills, good networking skills and a capacity to learn quickly. They need to be able to read the workplace culture and to transfer their skills effectively, so they rely on a strong command of generic skills. English language and literacy difficulties were less significant than these generic skills. Some casual employees were successful in the workplace despite their English literacy limitations, provided they could compensate with well-developed generic skills. The most vulnerable workers were those who had limited English literacy *combined with* poorly developed generic skills in the domains of learning, adaptability, communication and relational skills. These were the workers whose employment prospects looked bleak, whereas casual employees who were managing their employment were the workers of the future. They were already working within the employability market of the current labour system.

The report gives extensive suggestions to policy makers, training providers and managers in considering the issues thrown up by the research. However, the message for literacy teachers relates in particular to the issue of

proceduralisation and the narrowing of discourses within the field.

In aged care, regulation processes have displaced those who had the authority to name and interpret what was happening in facilities. New knowledge now tends to be absorbed into refining compliance procedures. Diverse perspectives and the identity of individuals have been singularised in many facilities and the skills of compliance have overshadowed local discourses.

Literacy teachers can assist in enlivening the local discourses. With the support of facility managers, they can encourage group problem-solving and collaborative decision-making. They can assist in creating a learning environment where skills are exchanged and ideas debated. The continuous improvement maxim of the accreditation system can be used to nurture local discourses. However in call centres, local discourses are heavily guarded. There are opportunities for peer learning but diversity does not appear to be valued, and the centralised system does not allow variation. However, the report makes a number of suggestions to improve training and support for call centre workers.

This summary offers only a brief snap shot of the research. It is anticipated that the full report will be available on the NCVER website in the near future.

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Endnotes

- 1 Non-standard employment said to be 24% for males and 30% for females in 2001, Watson 2002; according to Falk & Millar, 2002, only 59% of the workforce are permanently employed.
- 2 The Aged Care Act was passed in 1997. However, facilities were still undergoing their first audit in 2000.
- 3 Proceduralisation has been the most common response on the part of industry to quality control and efficiency measurement. It identifies processes and describes the associated tasks so that they are measurable and hence auditable and controllable. As a result workers and facilities can be compared.
- 4 Aged care facilities also kept a 'bank' of casual staff that they could call upon when required.
- 5 Many call centres that fit down the sweatshop end of the continuum do not put the same emphasis on training. They work on what was referred to as the 'churn and burn' principle of very high staff turnover.

An exercise in clear thinking? Critical literacy and the discourses of Centrelink

by Terry Morris

When a person has trouble with literacy, what is the point in offering them a 38-page booklet on the subject?

It is now widely accepted that literacy is a process which is more than a set of code-breaking skills. It is a set of social practices that vary according to context, text and purpose and which integrate language skills with thinking. For Lo Bianco (2001), the importance of critical literacy skills is based on the belief that people's lives are not just affected by the level of their literacy skills—as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics—but by the assumptions, values and aims of particular producers of texts. Not livelihoods only, but the way people understand themselves and how they identify themselves and their place, or position, in the society in which they live.

Discourse analysis

According to Luke (1992), critical literacy is a literacy that enables readers and writers to identify the manipulative intent and purposes of texts, and to recognise the defining and positioning of reader to writer (constructor of text) in a prescribed set of social relations. Competent readers and writers are those who are able to critically read from such an analytical perspective.

**critical literacy is more
than a clear thinking
exercise applied to texts**

Critical literacy is more than a clear thinking exercise applied to texts. It calls on readers to engage in a social, political and cultural analysis of what has been constructed within and behind the text, and to recognise that in the production of any one text a multitude of different texts were possible, yet a particular one has been produced. In discourse analysis readers learn to ask, 'why?' and in so doing learn to use the text as data for analysis.

In this view, language is seen to be more than a usage and comprehension of words that can be understood as carrying a meaning: it involves thinking about and observing language in terms of action or inaction.

Consider, for example, the texts that many adult literacy students are confronted with daily—the texts they are meant to read at Centrelink.

Discourse at Centrelink

Centrelink is the federal government agency that administers social security benefits to Australians and permanent residents eligible for such assistance. Its scope of activity includes the administration of health care cards, Work for the Dole, Newstart Allowance, Austudy, Abstudy, and among others, Mutual Obligation.

As is typical of large organisations, Centrelink has a colourful presentation, a logo, a collection of explanatory and promotional pamphlets, booklets and flyers, a website, a customer charter and a great many forms. For the purposes of this article, a preliminary analysis will be conducted of some of the Centrelink literature including that specific to the Literacy and Numeracy Training Program. The purpose is to see what a critical literacy approach, in the form of discourse analysis of these texts, reveals about the social world constructed in the texts.

Consider the following excerpts from the Centrelink (October 2002) publication, 'Are you in a crisis or needing special help?'

Community Work

Allows people to do community work with an approved volunteer organization and give something back to the community. (p.14)

The first word to notice is the first word 'allows'. Immediately, this tells the reader where he or she is in the relation between themselves and Centrelink. Centrelink has power over the reader and can exercise this power by permitting the reader to do something—in this case, community work. The message of the power relationship is furthered by the inclusion of the word 'approved' in the phrase, 'approved volunteer organization'. It is Centrelink that does the action of approving.

An interesting omission is the word, 'unemployed', which could have been the second word in the sentence—but it is not. This could be seen as an example of the text's construction of a possible world where 'people' naturally tend to volunteer to do community work and where the act of volunteering has nothing to do with the fact that people are unemployed. Of course, many people—many employed people—do voluntary work, voluntarily. It is arguable, however, whether the unemployed people, who are the target of the Centrelink publication, see voluntary work less as voluntary—more as a coerced choice.

**you have to be able to ask
for the document and then
read it to find out!**

Another observation is the use of the clause, 'and give something back to the community'. With this string of words Centrelink, the agency of the government, is simultaneously declaring its protestant values of admiration for the work ethic and giving a backhander to the unemployed receivers of social security benefits—you will work for the dole, even if it is by doing voluntary work, because you have taken something (social security benefits) from the community and must repay the community. Community is an assumed entity, taken as something to which we all belong and value because, after all, it is the community that is providing the unemployment benefits and the least you (unemployed) can do is repay the rest of us (employed taxpayers who are supporting you).

Passport to employment

Assistance and training to help job seekers prepare resumes, job applications and develop interview skills. (p.15)

A passport is a document that permits travel from one place to another. If you have a passport you can use it to reach your destination. Many people associate passports with positive events, with holiday travel and adventure. The way the term is used by Centrelink is disingenuous, because it implies arrival at a destination called employment through the development of resume and interview skills. It images a world where there are jobs for everyone—if only they can write good resumes and perform well at interviews. It totally disregards the reality that for every 100 job applicants, with resumes, less than 10 per cent will be read by employers as serious job matches and probably 50 per cent of those will not be invited to an interview. Eventually, one person will secure the job—arrive at the destination to which 100 people have journeyed.

Language, Literacy and Numeracy program

If you are an eligible job seeker who would like to improve your speaking, reading, writing or basic maths skills, to give you a better chance of finding work—ask Centrelink for a 'Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program' fact sheet. (p.14)

One has to wonder at what this is saying. Again it demonstrates the locus of power resting with Centrelink to determine whether you can undertake the program. The proviso to give you a better chance of finding work acknowledges Centrelink's values and the worth it puts on literacy: literacy serves functionally to help job seekers find work. It uses the words 'fact sheet', which conjures images of numbers and statements that refer to indisputable truths—facts. What these could be is anyone's guess—you have to be able to ask for the document and then read it to find out! The fact that the information on a program designed to help people with literacy difficulties is contained on page 14 of a 38-page booklet is interesting in itself, as it is highly improbable that individuals needing help with literacy are likely to read it.

The so-called 'fact sheet' is peculiarly short on facts. It is written in a caring way and is awash with 'motherhood' statements. Consider the tone of the following and the shift in the use of the personal pronoun.

We all have skills, but we don't always recognise that they are skills. Skills which we gain in all sorts of ways that we use to help us in our everyday lives.

Skills that help you with study, to manage a household and a budget, with interests and hobbies, and to find and keep a job.

Sometimes poor reading and writing or maths can stop you from doing what you really want to do.

If you are finding your literacy skills are making it difficult for you to get a job, Centrelink can help you get some free training. It's called Literacy and Numeracy Training.

This extract is written in the style of a children's story. It has a scene-setting opening in some far away land where everyone (we) has a good time (because we have skills, even though we might not know it). The story gets personal in the second paragraph, because it now talks to the individual reader (you) and this is good because it tells you that skills help you. But sometimes, bad things happen and (you) don't have the really important skills (reading, writing, maths). Luckily, there is a happy ending because the rescuer comes from the castle at Centrelink and gives you a free gift—Literacy and Numeracy Training.

The training 'helps you with everyday tasks—writing letters, resumes and filling in forms' and it 'make(s) it easier for you to get and keep a job.' Just ask Katrina who tells us she:

had been taking part in the JET program and Centrelink gave me some information about the Literacy and Numeracy Training. I was never much of a student, and decided I could do with some help to improve my reading and writing skills. I'm writing much better job applications, and I really think it's going to improve my chances of finding full-time work.

Here Centrelink defines everyday tasks as those that involve job hunting and interacting with Centrelink. It has in effect constructed a world where literacy and numeracy is seen to be indispensable in helping increase *your* chance of finding and keeping a job. People, like you, are the victims of their own inadequacies and failures—with poor reading, or like Katrina, poor students. It is a world where *you* learn to write better job applications (judged by whom?) and learn to think that it improves your job seeking chances. It is a world that says you have a good chance of keeping your job if you can read and write. It is a view of the world that some like to contest. A good place to start this process is in the classroom.

Terry Morris was a student in the literacy methodology course at Victoria University. This is an edited version of an essay, 'What can critical literacy offer teacher and learner?' (Edited by Liz Suda with writer's permission).

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ACE outcomes: the struggle for adult education

by Helen Macrae, Allie Clemans and Robyn Hartley

Adult Community Education (ACE) casts a nation-wide net across many programs and activities, and yet its efforts are not widely recognised or understood, according to the authors. To compile this report, 'ACE Outcomes', they examined key national reports on ACE and interviewed representatives of 40 ACE agencies across Australia as well as state and territory authorities. The report was funded by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER).

Our tightly written, 64-page study of Adult Community Education outcomes was prompted by lack of recognition for, and poor understanding of, the vast effort going into ACE.

If made explicit, the reasoning could go something like this: if only a way can be found to sum up what ACE actually does then:

- statisticians can count ACE activity better and set up a better basis for ACE policy development
- politicians can understand ACE better and may be more impressed by the value of ACE
- greater knowledge and understanding all round can then become the 'business case' for ACE—in certain circumstances.

This is our version of the rationale—not the NCVER's more formally worded and official rationale in the project brief.

But counting ACE is not easy. To set up the basis for an outcomes framework we sifted through key national reports on ACE and interviewed state and territory authorities, and representatives of 40 ACE agencies across Australia. Our interviews were almost all done over the phone.

ACE reaches the broad spectrum of Australia's population through a vast net of educational programs and activities. We summed participants up thus:

Across the 40 agencies, participants included people from their teens to their 90s; men and women; people who are poor and people who are relatively affluent; people seeking work skills and work qualifications and those following an interest; employed people, unemployed people and retired people; most likely people from all of the linguistic and cultural background groups in the Australian population; people with intellectual and/or physical disabilities; people who have primary education only and people who have tertiary qualifications; people living in urban, regional and rural areas, and people who pay for their courses and those

who do not. However, the local nature of adult community education means that 'the general community' is specific to each agency, and within this general (adult) provision, every agency tends to be unique in some way. It is also the reality that while agencies may aim to involve the 'general community', they attract certain groups of people more than others. (p. 17)

ACE Outcomes points out that:

ACE is an education sector where potential and actual participants are commonly described as 'the whole community' or 'all people in our community'. Yet ACE is also the sector where outcomes are commonly said to be particular to each individual learner. This is what people generally mean when they say ACE is learner-centred.

Learner-centred does not mean that the individual learner is the sole arbiter of what is learnt and how it is learnt. It does not mean that broad educational values and understandings are ignored in shaping curriculum, or that teachers have no role in shaping curriculum to widen horizons or take individuals along pathways they had no idea of before they engaged in learning. Rather, it means that ACE outcomes are not determined exclusively or predominantly by the needs of the economy or some other large social imperative. They derive from the imperatives of individuals who live in particular local communities. (p. 28)

The imperatives of individuals generate a great multitude of outcomes. This is a huge challenge for those who try to single out and categorise ACE outcomes.

The task is made even harder because there are many in ACE who detest segmentation and consciously take a holistic view of their work.

For us ACE as a concept siphons, segments and segregates our work... We work against this compartmentalisation by taking a holistic approach. The idea of ACE takes me into

TAFE cultural classes—personal development rather than community development. The historical idea of ACE in these parts is connected to an approach where someone decides to put things on for others to attend. They predetermine what's to be learnt. (Small rural ACE agency) (p. 28)

We kept this admonishment in the forefront of our thinking. It's very common for a single adult education activity to have at least as many outcomes as there are participants:

Members of the same 10-week, 20-hour long tree kangaroo study program in Far North Queensland might be there for: professional development outcomes (current national park employee); income generation outcomes (part preparation by a person wishing to establish a tourist guide business); growth in personal knowledge (a retiree with an interest in flora and fauna); a stronger basis for community action to protect rainforest (environmentalist); social interaction and connection (lonely young person). Each of these participants may also take away an outcome they had no notion of achieving when they enrolled. (p. 28)

Another challenge comes from the tangle of individual educational outcomes and pathways in and through community settings that are often not manifest immediately, and will often not bear fruit until much later in time.

...it's a long process. For example, people do get jobs and create work for themselves. We had a new settler who came here with her husband for his work. He had his job and his friends. She had the children and knew no-one. She came to craft at first, then she began to teach cooking, then she went to design school at TAFE and now she has her own design outlet, quite a long way from here. But that's not the work of a moment. (Small metropolitan organisation) (p. 29)

One of the ACE personnel we interviewed gave us a key tip for how we might identify and arrange a useful set of ACE outcomes. She said:

I understand ACE to mean the full range of learning to be, to do, to know and to live together. We used that framework in my graduate studies course at the University of South Australia. It appears on the South Australian Government's ACE website too. From those four strands you can tease out all that ACE does. (Small metropolitan organisation) (p. 29)

Learning to know, to do, to be, and to live together. These are the four UNESCO pillars of education that came from the deep thought of many international forums and many

of the world's best educational thinkers. In addition, ACE Outcomes argues that for a fully-fledged individual life we all need knowledge, understanding, skills, connections and respect in three domains:

- 1 The private domain of family and friendships and personal interests.
- 2 The public domain of citizenship, community participation, community debate and community action.
- 3 The world of work, both paid and unpaid.

We continually move amongst and between all three domains, almost always using skills and knowledge gained from one domain to improve our contribution and participation in the other two, interchangeably. We are likely to be at our happiest when we achieve congruence between all three domains; when our skills and knowledge are neither over-stretched nor under-utilised in any or all of the three domains. ACE Outcomes identifies 12 overarching outcomes for individual learners. But the ACE sector has outcomes that go beyond individuals, and ACE Outcomes identifies eight such outcomes, making a total of 20 broad outcomes all up.

Conceptual development and the ability to ask questions are two educational cornerstones for all 20 development outcome areas listed in the table 'Recognising ACE'.

Can such outcomes be measured? Not at the present time. Because ACE has no clear and agreed national identity or scope, disparate funding policy and administrative arrangements exist across all states and territories, and most local agencies are averse to collecting data because of too few resources and their perception that data collection is not worth their while. The report tackles these difficulties and outlines a possible performance management framework for use by ACE agencies and funding authorities.

We argue that the two necessary conditions for an effective national ACE data collection process are:

1. An agreed national definition

Only half of the agencies we interviewed see themselves as belonging to ACE even though they identify as agencies undertaking adult education in community settings. Lack of a national definition or statement about the scope of ACE may prove an intractable barrier towards national data collection. After our interviews we saw that a national definition would need to:

- step around, but respect and perhaps leave in place, the different definitions, terminology, funding policy and

Recognising ACE: Summary of ACE Outcome areas (Ace Outcomes, p. 39)

	Learning to know Breadth and depth of content and subject knowledge understanding	Learning to do Enhanced skills for taking action	Learning to be Growth in wellbeing and self-awareness	Learning to live together Strong and harmonious social relationships
Individual Development Outcomes				
Personal Domain	1. Knowledge of self, the world, and how to learn	2. Skills for living in the private domain of family, friends and personal interests	3. A healthy, mature self concept in private life	4. Supportive connections in personal settings
Public Domain	5. Knowledge of democratic community life	6. Skills for democratic participation in the public domain	7. A healthy, mature self concept in public life	8. Supportive connections in community settings
Work Domain	9. Knowledge of work and work places	10. Skills for finding and sustaining voluntary and/or paid work	11. A healthy, mature self concept in workplaces	12. Supportive connections in workplace settings
Community Development Outcomes				
	13. Collective knowledge and understanding of community life	14. Skills for joint action to develop community life	15. A purposeful local community with a strong identity	16. A community that values and embodies diversity, trust and reciprocity
Economic Development Outcomes				
	17. Local knowledge and understanding of economic life	18. Skills to develop local economies	19. An innovative and sustainable local economy	20. A confident local economy that prospers by making the most of its diversity

administrative arrangements of states and territories concerning ACE

- include accredited and non-accredited courses
- avoid the territory of schools and universities but allow TAFE institutes to identify their community programs as a part of ACE
- be unaffected by the wide range of funding sources used to support adult learning in community settings
- allow the sector to grow a national identity over time by placing the initiative with the local not-for-profit agency to identify as ACE
- avoid locally problematic language and concepts
- be lucid, unambiguous and brief
- be as broadly inclusive as possible of adult learning in community settings.

(Ace Outcomes, pp. 44–45)

That might sound impossible and yet we think a simple definition like adult education programs and activities in community settings meets all these requirements. This particular definition does not appear in our study as a proposed definition, but something very like it would be an option.

2. A national ACE negotiating structure

We believe that collection of national data on ACE outcomes is a complex task that can only be achieved with the active cooperation of ACE agencies on the ground. Our belief did not come directly from our research data, but from our thinking about how to overcome the barriers we identified.

We envisage an agency able to work productively with the diversity inherent in ACE towards a system of national data

collection. We know, from other comparable sectors in Australia, that such a body could play a pivotal role as a trusted and representative negotiating structure to carry forward discussions about developing a national performance measurement framework. Without it, developments seem unlikely to emerge or succeed...Incentives are needed for a national organisation of this kind to grow into a respected, representative agency, with transparent mechanisms to educate and consult with its members, trusted by them to undertake negotiations on their behalf with governments.

The key incentive for the national body could be a grant-in-aid with a payment—effectively a membership fee—tied to each member. For example, the national body might receive a grant per ACE agency member to undertake the required research, and to support regular consultative processes. Over time, a substantial membership, perhaps many more than 2000 agencies, is not out of the question. (ACE Outcomes, pp. 50–51)

In our final chapter we propose five ways national data collection can be carried more lightly at the local level, yet tell a coherent national story.

Option 1—Augment the existing AVETMISS data collection

Like any other education sector, what ACE does can never be measured exactly or even adequately. But all of the 20 outcomes (above) have indicators that can be quantified. In our report we provide a set of measures to show how existing AVETMISS measures could be modified or augmented to capture a fuller, rounder national picture of ACE over time. We provided them as a way of demonstrating, not what a quantitative data collection system

would eventually look like in detail, but to show that quantitative data collection for the broad outcome areas we propose is feasible.

Current national data collection instruments such as the AVETMISS standard and student outcomes survey could be broadened to include outcomes that relate to ACE or supplemented for the purposes of ACE. At the very least, changes to course categories would be necessary. It would also require that the purpose(s) of local curriculum be specified, using this outcomes framework. A single course might be counted several times in this system. The system may need to account for certificates and non-certificated courses under each category. The student outcomes survey would also need to be reformed to include items relevant to ACE. (p. 53)

Option 2—Annual ACE Business Activity Statements (BAS)

It is feasible to propose that each self-identifying, participating ACE agency is paid to provide an annual single page return of core statistics that they might also report to their annual general meetings. This would be the ACE equivalent of the Australian Tax Office's Business Activity Statements.

These annual activity statements might comprise, for example:

- Total number of participants (by age, sex and place of birth/ or expressed as primary target groups).
- Total number of courses, possibly categorised in much the same way as the AVETMISS standard.
- Estimated total number of student contact hours.
- Total number of formal partnerships with other agencies, perhaps categorised as education, community and business organisations.
- Total income, also expressed in terms of amount per source.
- Tabulated notations concerning special features.

It may be that ACE agencies would consider it a fair exchange to submit these one-page annual returns together with a copy of their annual report, in return for membership of a national body and access to a regular, free, national good practice magazine. This attitude could be tested by a survey. (p. 57)

Option 3—Limited annual sampling

The quantitative data on ACE could be extrapolated on an annual basis using limited representative sampling of self-identifying ACE agencies. (p. 57)

Option 4—Longitudinal qualitative studies

Qualitative data about ACE could be collected over time in ways that identify standard practice and features, and which monitor change. A longitudinal study of ACE could take many forms.

For example, it would be feasible to select a number of representative agencies across each state and territory, say a total of 20, and undertake an annual detailed study of each one over a period of time. Through such a national project, the agencies could be paid annually to work with a research body to describe and evaluate their work in terms of an agreed set of outcomes for ACE nationally. This process would add research skills in a systematic way to the ACE sector and would be a source of information that could be used for policy development, program planning and advocacy.

The detailed studies could explore how success can be measured and reported locally to increase understanding of the important contribution ACE outcomes make to communities. (pp. 57–58)

Option 5—Thematic 10-year research program

A 10-year plan to systematically identify, understand and promote the broad national ACE contribution to individual, community and economic development could be implemented. This research could take a detailed look at key ideas confirmed by the 40 interviews we conducted for this project. For example, a study of the connection between participation in ACE and growth in self-esteem would assist practitioners and would inform policy makers. (p. 58)

Our study does not make firm recommendations. We opted for a set of suggestions with potential to move the sector forward.

State, territory and national authorities may wish to consult thoroughly and transparently with agencies on the ground, with a view to:

1. Adopting an agreed national framework which captures the rich and comprehensive education outcomes from organised adult learning in community settings, using the framework in this report as a starting point for further consultation.
2. Investigating the merits of options put forward in this report, and any other options forthcoming from stakeholders, to measure outcomes from adult learning in community settings, through a data collection process which is:

- supported by agencies on the ground
- cost effective
- useful.

3. Considering unifying strategies to broaden the number of agencies delivering adult learning in community settings that identify with the sector for the purposes of data collection about outcomes.

4. Considering the positive role a national body representative of ACE could play to negotiate on behalf of member agencies at the national level concerning the identification and measurement of ACE outcomes.

5. Undertaking a planned professional development program to assist agencies to use the outcomes framework as an aid to planning, data collection, and evaluation. (pp. 59–60)

Our research found that organised adult learning in community settings is widespread in all local Australian communities. It is known as ACE in only about half of the agencies where it takes place. Each agency is unique because individuals, responding to local imperatives, mould all ACE agencies. Their ACE work serves the interests of local communities and the nation. The willingness of ACE-type agencies to participate in this study showed that ACE people want increased recognition for the ACE work they do and the outcomes they achieve. A consultative, democratic process is needed to bind this sector and forge a stronger identity for, and better understanding of, the contribution of adult learning in community settings.

ACE Outcomes emphasises that a national performance measurement system for ACE will have to be carefully constructed, with the full cooperation of ACE agencies, and only arrived at after extensive negotiation. Without a doubt, if such a system could be agreed, there would be ramifications for adult literacy—good ramifications, I hope.

You can obtain the publication from NCVER for \$27.50, or read it and/or download it at www.ncver.edu.au/cgi-bin/srchCat.pl?list=1379&action=show

The report shows how we arrived at the 20 outcomes, using what was said by the 40 ACE agencies. A large part of the text is direct quotes from ACE workers, and we think their voices give this report freshness and immediacy.

The way ACE Outcomes frames the goals of ACE may not be the best or last word on the subject, but it is a comprehensive start.

Helen Macrae has worked in the adult and community education sector for 28 years, including seven years as adult literacy coordinator at the CAE. She was the foundation president of VALBEC and is chairperson of the Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre committee of management and edits an online newspaper for Women in Adult and Vocational Education

Allie Clemans teaches in the Bachelor of Adult Learning and Development, an innovative degree program offered by the Faculty of Education at Monash University. Allie has extensive experience of ACE in Victoria at local, regional and statewide levels. She is a former member of the ACFE Board and has undertaken several other ACE research projects.

Robyn Hartley has extensive experience of research in fields related to education and social policy, in institutional settings and as a freelance consultant since 1995. Her research interests and experience cover secondary, higher and community-based education, apprenticeship and vocational training, young people and families, and community-based initiatives. Before 1995 Robyn was a research fellow at the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Peace in mind—helping students with mental health issues

Students with mental health problems are frequently part of an adult literacy class. Fine Print asked VICSERV for information that will help teachers in classroom situations.

In reading the following information from VICSERV, it is important to remember that many people who experience an episode of mental health difficulties do make a full recovery. One of the most important normalising and confidence building aspects of returning to learning is that we see them as 'learners' and not as 'consumers of mental health services'. Just like any adult language and literacy learner, a person living with a serious mental health issue is coming to us as an adult with a whole range of life issues. It is important to note that two of the greatest impacts of mental illness are stigma and poverty.

It is important that we provide learning environments that are flexible by allowing people to move in and out of activities at their own pace. A relapse of mental health difficulties may mean that an individual has to withdraw from learning for a while. In addition, we need to remember that when a person is going through a difficult period with their mental illness it is the illness, not the person that may be causing them to be difficult.

About VICSERV

VICSERV is the peak body for non-government Psychiatric Disability Rehabilitation and Support Services (PDRS) in Victoria. Its services include housing support, home-based outreach, psychosocial and pre-vocational day programs, residential rehabilitation, mutual support and self help, employment, training and support, carer education, respite and advocacy.

The VICSERV library resource centre holds a comprehensive and specialist range of books, journals, articles and videos relevant to the PDRS sector and can be accessed by members and associate members. It is also linked with the mental health library at Royal Melbourne Hospital. A comprehensive range of specialist training is available to all sectors of the community.

For further information, please visit the VICSERV web site at www.vicserv.org.au for more details about services offered or phone (03) 9482 7111.

The following is from the psychiatric disability service of Victoria—VICSERV training manual *Introduction to*

working with people with a psychiatric disability. (Copyright VICSERV Training and Professional Development.)

The major psychiatric illnesses

1. Psychotic illness

- Most common forms of this illness are schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.
- During a psychotic episode, the person can lose touch with reality or is unable to distinguish between what is real and what is fantasy.

a) Schizophrenia

- One person in 100 will be affected by schizophrenia.
- Often begins in adolescence or early adult life.
- 20–30 per cent have only one or two psychotic episodes in their lives.

b) Bipolar disorder (manic depression)

- One per cent of the population suffers from bipolar disorder.
- Affects moods and emotions to an exaggerated extent.
- Mood swings from one extreme to another are a typical characteristic.
- The person has feelings of being extremely 'high' (mania) and extremely 'low' (depression).

2. Non-psychotic illnesses

- Used to be called neuroses, include anxiety disorders and serious depression.
- Cause considerable distress to people suffering them and can affect every part of their lives including work, relationships and leisure.

a) Anxiety disorders

- About five per cent of Australians suffer from anxiety disorders.
- Triggered by significant life events.
- Can cause physical symptoms such as heart palpitations, sweating, hyperventilation, dizziness, headaches, nausea, indigestion and loss of sexual pleasure.
- Person may think that these symptoms are the

Practical Matters

sign of a serious health problem, which only makes their anxiety worse.

- Anxiety disorders include phobias, obsessive-compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, agoraphobia, panic disorder and general anxiety disorder.

b) Depression

- Serious depression is different from the emotional ups and downs associated with everyday life.
- It is much more than unhappiness and is a clinical illness in the psychiatric sense.
- Three main types of serious depression: major depression, post-natal depression, reactive depression (reacting to a distressing situation).

Symptoms of mental illness and impacts

Positive symptoms (acute/active)

Alterations in thinking

- In order of relationship of thoughts (appears confused).
- Changes in speed of thought (slows down, speeds up).
- Thoughts may stop (thought blocking).
- Difficulty in concentration.
- Thoughts controlled by outside influences.
- Thought broadcasting (others can hear or read thoughts).
- Delusional thoughts—a false belief which a person holds with unshakeable conviction but not shared by other people with similar belief systems, or may be someone trying to kill them.

Alterations in perception

- Changes in sensory awareness (sounds and colours become louder or more muted—no filtering of sounds).
- Hallucinations—a sensory perception of something that is not there in the external world—auditory, hearing voices, sight, touch, smell, taste.

Alterations in emotions

- Anxiety and fear about the voices and other experiences.
- Abrupt changes in mood for no apparent reason.
- Ambivalence, experience conflicting emotions about the same thing at the same time.
- Unusual emotional responses, laughing at tragic situations.
- Severe extended depression.

Alterations in behaviour

- Loss of energy, spontaneity and initiative.
- Day/night reversal.
- Restlessness, agitation, odd bizarre actions.

Negative symptoms (deficits/loss)

- Blunting, flattening of emotions.
- Loss of conversational capacity.
- Unmanageable anxiety.
- Impaired ability for new learning.
- Some level of memory loss.
- Marked withdrawal.

Some impacts of the symptoms

- Poor concentration.
- Inability to carry out tasks unaided, for any length of time.
- Difficulty following instructions.
- Difficulty making decisions.
- Impaired judgements because of misinterpretation of reality.
- Deficient problem-solving skills.
- Emotional fragility.
- Withdrawal from social contact.
- Unpredictable behaviour.
- Difficult to engage in activities or conversation.
- Suicidal thoughts and desires.

Continued on page 40...

Communication when a person is distressed or experiencing symptoms of mental illness

Helpful	Unhelpful
Use clear and straightforward language	Use of jargon
Check understanding	Talking louder than the client or over the client
Repeat in different words if necessary	Generalising or talking down to the client
Take seriously the emotional concerns the person is presenting	Getting too personal
Recognise the stress level and try to help the person calm down	Agreeing with the person's delusions
Assure the person of their safety	Failing to acknowledge the stress of the delusions
Be clear about the function or role of your service	Trying to talk the person out of their delusion
Eliminate physical or sensory barriers which may be causing a problem	Intellectualising on delusions
If possible try to remove the person from an area of onlookers	Getting too many people involved
If the request is beyond your control, ask the person how you can best help	Fobbing the client off

Open Forum

We welcome your responses to the articles featured in *Fine Print*. Our contact details are on the back cover.

In this issue of *Fine Print*, Jacinta Agostinelli writes of a paradox that arises when she considers the marginalisation of people with low literacy and at the same time identifies a connectedness that links learners and agencies in a network of empathy and trust. And Ann Haynes and Elaine Cannard reflect on their experiences with the youth unit at Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE, where they teach the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning.

Alone no more—a family of learners

I have decided that in present time we always hold the tension between our past actions and future possibilities.

I am a literacy teacher at Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre. Some months ago I was at the Lord Newry Hotel in North Fitzroy, in a room that trapped some of that interior dimness from the early 1900s. I was with a group of literacy teachers and administrators discussing literacy and women in Australia. The Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education (VALBEC) holds these twilight forums regularly. Using a pub is a spirited way of delivering professional development for TAFE and ACE teachers working in adult education. You drop in on your way home and stay longer than you intended!

At this forum we talked about learners who are marginalised because of their low levels of literacy, and we talked about literacy and genre theory. Genre theory is popular with progressive adult literacy teachers. It argues that literacy is a social practice and is therefore purposeful, and shaped by the values and ideologies of the mainstream society in which it is embedded. The premise of genre theory is that adult learners can empower themselves by learning how reading and writing is practised by the dominant discourse of their culture. To use genre theory is to accept that the adult learners we teach are disempowered by their low levels of literacy. But are they?

Stereotyping fails again

Four years ago I started teaching literacy with a 'literacy student' stereotype and a 'literacy teacher' stereotype in mind. The student was an enormous untapped potential; the teacher was like a plumber who had the tools to turn the taps on. But the further I ventured into the literacy field, into what middle class Australia might call the margins of mainstream society, the more I understood the limitations of stereotyping (ironically, stereotyping is one

of our class's favourite discussion topics). The people who come to my class understand the power of literacy and are aware that literacy provides a means for knowing and interpreting the world. But the people who come to my class also come with a strong sense of identity; with interpretations of the world formed through experiences, relationships and interactions; with literacies that they value while being aware of the limitations of those literacies. They have purposeful and busy lives. The people in my class do not see themselves as people without power. Perhaps I am proposing a redefinition of how literacy theory sees people.

Back to the forum. One of the things I love about teaching is the dialectics between teachers. At this forum someone suggested we challenge genre theory and ask ourselves whether the literacy practices of marginalised sections of the community are valid. Does acceptance of the literacy practices of the mainstream necessarily empower all groups within the community? Could we not accept that our future community will have multiliteracy practices? The discussion was an interplay between our past theories and future possibilities. At the 2003 ACAL Conference I understood that the opening speaker (Mary Hamilton) was proposing a definition of literacy along these lines. I believe one of her key ideas was that institutional literacies—those practised by powerful corporations and institutions—and vernacular literacies, or those practised in private and in some communities and community settings, are both valuable and powerful in their own right.

Epiphany at Bondi

Maybe the term multi-literacies applies to what Hamilton was discussing. It was a complex presentation at the time, an incongruity in the hedonism of Bondi, which is where the ACAL Conference was that year. Any Bondi resident who eavesdropped the conversations of bunches of teachers who were nutting Mary's theory out while walking or jogging (some did) along the Bondi promenade on the

Friday evening would have been perplexed to say the least. I think an eclectic approach to teaching literacy is required if we are to embrace the positive aspects of genre theory while acknowledging that our society is multi-literated. I think I've just created a new word. I believe the students in my class want and need to know the conventions, features, types and purposes of texts used in contemporary Australian society. But I also believe their literacy practices can be powerful, and I have included some student writing in this article to exemplify my point.

The next day I ditched my prepared lesson, and I did get home early enough to prepare one, and put it to my literacy class. 'Why are we here?' I asked. 'Why do we come, good and bad humoured from the weekend, to wrestle with the TAFE VC and written words, joking and hanging out for a smoke or a coffee from the new cafe on the corner? Write about the present time', I suggested, 'write about what's happened in the past and what you want from the future'.

The two students whose words are reproduced below are aged 21 and 19 respectively, and were both referred through local networks. Ray, the volunteer, brings valuable workplace and life experience to our classes. This is what they wrote.

Student:

I have struggled (with literacy) all my life. My mum tried to help me but she just got frustrated. I had tutoring but still it didn't work. As I got older I still had this big secret only my family and some close friends knew. I was ashamed to ask for help. I remember one time I wrote a story about my heart condition and my teacher failed me. She said it was too good to be mine. No matter how hard I tried people would always say that's not your work. I would always be dumb. I wished I could be like normal people. Why did I have to be this way? I got to the point of killing myself, but I thought it was selfish to do that to the people who loved me.

So I went to my doctor and told her that I hate my life, that I can't get a job because of my heart problems and my spelling and reading. She sent me to CRS (Commonwealth Rehabilitation Services). My caseworker told me about this course and I was scared because I didn't know what to expect. The next day I went to class not knowing what would make this different, not knowing that the people were like me, that they suffered like I did.

I listened to the teacher and watched her writing on the whiteboard. Someone had asked her how to spell a word which I could spell. She asked them to pronounce the letter and they weren't scared to make a mistake. No-one laughed at them. Everyone was so helpful and I thought at last I'm not the only person suffering because I can't read and write.

I believe that I have a family inside the classroom and I will learn to read and spell. I'm not alone anymore.

Another student:

I found out about this course from my school. I started to see the school counsellor and social worker who introduced me to Steps (for young people having problems at school) where I spoke to someone who told me that I was not alone and there were other people like me.

I answered a few questions about what areas I would like help in. They found some places that could help me with the areas that I need help. That's why I am here.

Next year I want to do Year 12 English. I am doing other Year 12 subjects this year and coming here to improve my literacy.

Ray, volunteer teacher:

As a volunteer assistant in our class I have experienced an atmosphere where courage, and caring, is evident.

Courage is mixed with desire. As I learn about the stories of the students who have battled for years to overcome the stigma of not being able to read and write well, my admiration for them grows. They persevere. The sounds they hear in no way match the symbols we say spell the word they are wrestling with.

Caring definitely includes acceptance. The centre has a family feel about it. I am 72 years of age and have been part of the class since the beginning of this year and I feel accepted. I am learning too, not only about adult literacy methods in practice, but also about acceptance of people with whom I have had minimal contact in the past.

What interests me in relation to the genre theory I sketched out earlier is the way learners, when asked, make connectedness a strong metaphor in their written discourse. They have identified that the affirmation of their ability to learn is important to them. They stress that the literacy class gives them the chance to belong to a learning community—they do not feel alone anymore, but, like them, are a part of a family. Literacy is not simply a set of skills they failed to acquire. Literacy is less a matter of empowerment and more a matter of connectedness; the students' and tutor's expressions are powerful and I wouldn't want to change them.

I seem to have arrived at a new starting point: valuing the multi-literacies that are practised in our community while looking for ways to connect them. The local connections and networks that referred the learners to us are part of the pattern of connection, as are my own connections to

professional associations. After all, connection with other teachers was the impetus for this article and points to a new discourse around literacy provision.

I wrote this article in response to a competition held by the Inner Northern Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN). Articles were to demonstrate links and relationships between local agencies who are engaged in employment services and education. Our community is

moving towards a more integrated approach with many agencies, including the Inner Northern LLEN, working cooperatively to connect and educate people who are writing in the margins.

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Learning good things—young people in an adult education setting

Background—the youth unit

Staff at the youth unit at Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (NMIT) have been involved in delivering the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) for the past two years. The unit is part of the Faculty of Further Education. The faculty has a history of actively identifying and meeting the needs of disadvantaged students. It offers programs over three campuses in the northern region of Melbourne, an area with high numbers of disadvantaged young people. Youth unit programs and services provide the gateway for young people to access post-compulsory education and training, and lay solid foundations for the development of meaningful and accessible pathways. It provides an advocacy mechanism within NMIT for youth unit students by mapping and reporting on policy developments and their potential impact on students, and by investigating flexible, innovative and achievable transitions to TAFE programs and settings.

The youth unit has been established for three years and has developed expertise in program and curriculum design for early school leavers. It integrates some delivery with the Adult Literacy and Basic education (ALBE) program, which has been delivered to young people for many years with staff who are experienced in customising and delivering competency-based training. Our involvement with the 2002 and 2003 VCAL trial projects has enabled us to refine and review our programs, and helped us develop expertise in mapping curriculum to the VCAL to ensure that all accreditation requirements are met.

VCAL in the youth unit

The youth unit programs involved in the VCAL Trial in 2002 were the Young Adult Migrant Education Course (YAMEC) at Collingwood and Preston, and a program that had evolved over the two previous years, the Alternative Year 10 Program at Epping and Preston. In 2003, three themed VCAL programs have been trialled. These were in engineering, building and construction, and hospitality.

YAMEC is a program for young people from non-English speaking backgrounds, predominantly young refugees and asylum-seekers with severely disrupted educational backgrounds in their country of origin. This program has evolved in response to the changing needs of different waves of young refugees, from an early engagement with predominantly Cambodian, Lao and Vietnamese young people to more recent groups from the Horn of Africa and the Middle East. Students on this program frequently have associated settlement issues related to their experience as refugees. This often involves torture and trauma, family loss/dislocation and chronic health issues including mental health issues related to their experiences in refugee camps.

The Alternative Year 10 Program developed from the increasing awareness that many students were seeking an alternative to secondary school. ALBE classes that had once been the domain of adults were attracting youth who wanted to continue their schooling. This program was set up in 2000 to provide pathways for young people into further study and or employment. It transferred easily to the requirements of the VCAL trial in 2002.

Characteristics of students in this program are:

- early school leavers
- students disengaged from learning and school
- students who had attempted to find work and realised the limited scope of jobs available to them without a school completion certificate
- age range 15–18 years
- those who did not want to do VCE-style study
- low literacy/numeracy skills
- low self-esteem/confidence
- students with disrupted family life
- students with a history of disrupted schooling
- low socioeconomic status and few job prospects
- students with a range of personal issues
- homeless students

- mental health issues
- students who found the school environment unpleasant and intimidating.

The VCAL students we refer to in the remainder of this article are those enrolled in YAMEC, the Alternative Year 10 Program and the themed VCAL programs.

Transition into the youth unit

The first two to three weeks of the program was a transition time for the VCAL students coming into the youth unit. Many were familiar with the rules and requirements of a secondary school, but did not have a clear understanding of the learning environment of a TAFE institute. Students needed time to develop an understanding of the rights and the responsibilities that come with their transition to the adult learning environment. This was an opportune time for the class teacher to establish the learning environment of the classroom and the expectations of a student within the youth unit program.

In the first week or two teachers were expected to organise class time, to negotiate class rights and responsibilities, to ensure that students were aware of institute rules and regulations—particularly student discipline—and to ensure that students were able to successfully operate within these frameworks. The youth unit implemented a code of conduct and a contract that students had to sign before commencing classes. Consequences were clearly noted and followed. A code of respect was also developed and placed in classrooms around the building, as a constant reminder that it was a shared learning environment with certain expected behaviours.

If, after being supported and guided by the process outlined above, a student did not appear to be settling into or benefiting from the program, they were referred to the coordinator or managed individual pathways (MIPS) officer for further discussion of expectations.

VCAL teaching staff

The employment of suitable teaching staff to work in the youth unit was essential to the successful operation of the programs. The teachers in the Young Adult Migrant Education (YAMEC) VCAL programs at Preston and Collingwood had been in these programs for a number of years, whereas staffing the general VCAL programs at Preston and Epping required recruitment of new staff members. Teachers had to want to work with youth, and have the qualities and strategies to deal with difficult behaviours including a relaxed and understanding attitude to working with youth. As well as employing teachers with literacy and numeracy teaching backgrounds, we were also looking for a variety of teaching experiences and skills, as

we wanted to integrate a range of subjects into the general course, for example, art and drama.

The aim was for the teachers to firstly make a real connection and build a relationship with these students. This was developed through:

- spending time with students—the core teacher would work with the students for up to 10 hours a week
- building trust and confidence—many students had not had positive experiences when interacting with teachers
- small classes
- having one main teacher who they could refer to when issues arose
- following up
- showing we had faith in students and letting them know they could achieve.

For many students it was particularly important to address welfare, health and social issues before they could fully participate in a learning program. These issues often interfered with a student's ability to take part successfully.

Avenues used to address these problems included:

- trying to gain the confidence of students—reinforcing that the youth unit understood their needs and could help get support, if required
- MIPS officers worked closely with students and staff
- NMIT student counselling service available if needed
- employment of empathetic staff
- developing curriculum materials that reflect needs and issues of students.

Succeeding in an adult education environment

Perhaps the most important task we helped students address was learning how to succeed in an adult education environment. We needed to be aware that TAFE or ACE settings presented a new education culture for students. Students required time to learn about it and work out how to operate in it. Assisting students to learn to function in an adult education environment is part of our overall 'learning to learn' teaching responsibilities.

New understandings required

The mantra that teachers often repeat to students is that at TAFE you are expected to *take responsibility for your own learning*. Our experience revealed that many students do not fully understand the implications of this statement, or interpret it as *no requirements at all*, resulting in poor attendance and non-completion of tasks. Some students took considerable time to realise they had to be responsible for their own learning—no-one was going to make them do it.

We found we needed to take time to thoroughly explain what ‘taking responsibility for your own learning’ really meant within the context of new freedoms that the adult education sector provided.

Students also need to learn about the way competency-based assessment worked, as it was generally new to them. From the outset, we needed to demonstrate that all course activities were meaningfully hooked into the overall attainment of course learning outcomes. We provided ways that students could clearly see how course work was related to outcomes, and that set time frames (for example, 40-hour VET competency) were important because, to quote Eminem, this was ‘your one shot at it’. For 2004, NMIT is exploring actively teaching these concepts through an orientation program incorporating working towards outcomes from VCAL personal development skills.

Facilitate motivation

Whilst motivation comes from within, teachers needed to help students maintain and regenerate their motivation. The fact that students were coming to a positive learning environment, where they felt accepted and were treated as adults, helped to encourage attendance and participation.

Success

Success can be a great motivator. A learner’s success, and the satisfaction experienced, motivates further learning and success. Many students have had little or limited success at school. Lack of success is often a humiliating and painful experience. As a result, students can have well-established protective and avoidance strategies in place that we needed to help them address. Fundamentally, students must feel safe to take the risk to actively participate in learning.

Success—risk-taking

Firstly, students required a learning environment where success was possible and acknowledged. NMIT VCAL programs aim to provide for the learning needs of students, and candidates take part in an interview and assessment of their literacy, numeracy and oracy to identify needs and possible pathways. Applicants whose needs cannot be met in our program are referred to providers who can respond effectively. This process enables participants to enter study at a VCAL level appropriate for success. Our structure of small classes (limited to 15) with one main teacher, means the student’s learning needs can be better assisted and catered for.

Success—completion

For some students, their lack of success has often resulted from lack of completion of set work. We employed strategies to facilitate students’ completion of tasks. For example, we ran longer sessions, with breaks, using tasks that can be

completed in session times. We also divided topics/themes into achievable parts and acknowledged completion of parts in context of overall activity. Correcting and returning finished work quickly to provide acknowledgment of completion was also important, as was informing students where the completed work fitted as part of achieving overall. Finally, we identified slow workers as soon as we could so we could plan together to build strategies for finishing.

Motivation—assessment

It may sound surprising, but we found the ongoing assessment that is a feature of VCAL was an aid to maintaining motivation. For students, successful completion of learning outcomes provided an awareness that effort put into the course was paying off. We provided students with regular oral and written feedback and gave them access to their assessment records so they could monitor their progress. We corrected assessment tasks quickly, recorded the results and gave feedback. We tried to find positives where students needed to improve, and kept the possibility of completion available by offering students options to achieve at the required level. It was important to keep assessment student-friendly and to make it visible, especially in terms of how it relates to progress towards completion of the subject/course.

Motivation—attendance

In the ACE sector, one of the primary complaints teachers working with youth have is poor or intermittent attendance. Our experience has been that in general, those students with poor attendance patterns have poor course completion success. Attendance levels impact not only on an individual’s progress and success, but also on the teaching style and content employed. Thus, strategies that improved attendance also facilitated attendance in the long run.

For students, understanding the importance of very consistent attendance and participation for progress may not in itself be sufficient to maintain good attendance. The institution needed to also take responsibility for encouraging students to attend by allowing an environment that was relaxed, friendly, sociable, with good content, where, as one student said, ‘you learn good things’. Regular attendance is acknowledged through feedback and is often linked to group or individual rewards.

We found it was important to intervene early if a pattern of absence was emerging. We followed up students by phone, reassured them they were welcome back and that we would support them to achieve as much as possible. Continued absences may have meant the course was not suited to them. NMIT then utilised MIPS and Jobs Pathway program staff to support students in planning a new pathway.

Motivation—content

Although no guarantee, youth-focused content often facilitated interest and motivation. Teachers needed to be aware of, and give validity to, youth issues and popular culture. We found young people, like all of us, were more engaged by meaningful, authentic and relevant content. Generally content was just the vehicle for teaching the learning outcomes required. The Certificates in General Education for Adults curriculum is a very flexible framework and we found it to be excellent for integrated work with these students. As we progressed, we found that almost any interest-based content could be creatively used to teach the learning outcomes, and where possible this engaged students in the selection of topics/themes which captivated the need to socialise in the learning environment. Students also required content that enabled use of a range of learning styles to maintain interest and cater for individual learning needs.

Classroom management

One of the main differences between the high school and the post-compulsory sector is the different discipline rules. In the post-compulsory sector, generally the main coercive power to ‘make students pass’ is to suspend—and of course repeated suspensions decrease the student’s chance of passing. In the youth unit at NMIT we employ the view that rather than ‘making students pass’ we must work with them to create a cooperative, non-conflicting, relaxed but purposeful classroom environment.

Furthermore, our observations, albeit unproven, also suggest that students enrolling in the ACE sector do not want an authoritarian teaching style. Consequently we needed to be daring and trust that students could and would take responsibility for their own learning. Students usually found this attitude refreshing, and we found we were able to capture the window of good intentions that students enrolled with, and we managed to keep that attitude maintained.

Whilst it was good to be positive, it was important also to recognise that some students weren’t always able to carry through. Some students found themselves in transition in their relationship with their learning and their teachers. In this situation we saw our role was to support, encourage, motivate and facilitate students in achieving their goals. However we could not, and do not, accept responsibility for making students succeed. That lies with the student. This philosophy allows us to work with difficult and frustrating students in a non-conflicting, unemotional manner.

This is an authoritative approach, not a laissez faire one. NMIT has clear rules on misconduct, including classroom

behaviour. We make students aware of discipline procedures within the youth unit and NMIT, from minor to more serious incidents. Using these guidelines, students participated in setting up and reviewing the group’s classroom rules and sanctions. Teachers dealt with most inappropriate behaviour directly, but support is available to teachers for difficult behaviours or situations. This provides a structure and allows teachers to step out of potentially high conflict situations.

Some of the non-conflict strategies we have developed to work with are:

- Reinforce taking responsibility for own learning.
- Emphasise rights of others to learn unimpeded by others’ behaviour.
- Rules, expectations and sanctions are clear.
- Be brief.
- Stay cool, try humour.
- Try not to reprimand unnecessarily.
- Speak quietly to individuals, rather than in front of the group.
- Listen to students.
- Be open with students about the impact of their decisions.
- Have another person who can deal with students.
- Be prepared to say ‘no’.
- Use the systems you have in place.

If you are working with youth, or contemplating it, the message from our experience is, ‘Hang in there! There is no magic bullet’. Our successes have been through perseverance and hard work. We have supported the students and helped them to learn and participate in an adult education culture, giving clear rules and guidelines regarding behaviour, and focusing on the concept that in our environment everyone has the right to learn in a place where we respect each other. Enjoy the students, because they are fun and funny and basically good kids, and always remember to give yourself credit for trying new ways and building on what has been effective. For many of our students, small achievements have led the way to a changed attitude to learning and the emergence of a pathway to their future.

Ann Haynes is a team leader in the youth unit at NMIT working with specific programs in literacy and ESL as well as JPP and MIPS. Elaine Cannard teaches students in the themed VCAL programs—engineering, and building and construction in the youth unit.

Policy Update

Literacy has become more than a set of strategies aimed at people with low-level skills. As Louise Wignall explains, the new vocational education and training (VET) national strategy is a far-reaching plan where language, literacy and numeracy will reach beyond education and training to embrace employment, regional development, environmental sustainability, innovation and social inclusion.

Here, there and everywhere—literacy in the next national strategy for VET

The way in which literacy is thought of and expressed in current times is complex, controversial and sometimes contradictory. At times literacy is associated with groups of people lacking in basic skills, and tied into debates about the failure of individuals and the schooling system. At other times it is seen as a valuable commodity that buys access to higher-level training, jobs and pay. Past definitions of literacy which limit it to the basics of decoding and recoding of text (reading and writing) are passé today as individuals have to understand what they read and write in a range of formats (including ICT), and apply this knowledge for an increasing range of purposes like teamwork, problem solving, action learning, dispute resolution, learning to learn, and so on, at a time in human history where there is an unprecedented amount of information, both visual and printed.

Literacy and the National Training Framework

Language, literacy and numeracy within the vocational education and training sector cannot be defined as occurring in only specific work competencies delivered in training packages. Language, literacy and numeracy are crucial underpinnings to all generic employability skills, and accredited content on the National Training and Information Service (NTIS). Language, literacy and numeracy in VET is a part of all delivery, whether this is through training packages in large public or private providers and enterprise RTOs, or through adult basic and general education curriculum delivered in the community sector. Language, literacy and numeracy are deeply embedded as part of quality training delivery and assessment within the National Training Framework.

The paradox between applications of literacy practice that make it clearly defined and measurable on the one hand, and deeply embedded in a range of more abstract generic skills on the other, creates significant challenge for the development of effective policy.

Literacy is no longer only defined as a set of particular programs for groups with low-level skills—it is about the

quality assurance and expansiveness of a range of education and training provision nationally. Language, literacy and numeracy are key underpinning skills for generic, employability and learning to learn skills that are required by all trainees at all levels of the AQF. Language is both the process through which these skills are achieved as well as, in many cases, the performance by which these skills are demonstrated or assessed. These skills need to be strategically placed as an essential feature of the National Training Framework if the goal to deliver the required skills sets to Australians for the 21st century is to be realised.

Therefore the national strategy for VET recognises that language, literacy and numeracy has to be here, there, and everywhere: in the vision statement; in the objectives and sub-strategies so subsequent action plans convert into literacy provision to allow all adults to participate in the labour force; use literacy skills at work; participate in adult education and training and use literacy at home and in the community.

'Shaping our Future': national strategy agreed in principle

(ANTA press release, 17 June 2003)

Australian vocational education and training ministers have endorsed in principle the next national strategy for vocational education and training for 2004–2010.

Commonwealth, state and territory ministers endorsed 'Shaping our Future' at their meeting in Darwin on 13 June, 2003.

The vision—four objectives and 12 strategies—the Ministers have agreed upon are:

The vision is:

- VET works for Australian businesses, making businesses internationally competitive.
- VET works for people giving Australians world class skills and knowledge.
- VET works for communities building inclusive and sustainable communities.

The objectives are:

1. Industry will have a highly skilled workforce to support strong performance in the global economy.
2. Employers and individuals will be at the centre of vocational education and training.
3. Communities and regions will be strengthened economically and socially through learning and employment.
4. Indigenous Australians will have skills for viable jobs and their learning culture will be shared.

The strategies are listed in the summary document at <http://www.anta.gov.au/dapStrategy.asp>

Work will now commence on finalising the strategy, as agreed in principle. This includes development of key performance measures for MINCO to consider at their meeting in November 2003 and an action plan to implement the strategy that they will consider in 2004.

Features of 'Shaping our Future'

The strategy is more far reaching in its length and scope than previous national strategies, and reaches beyond education and training to employment, regional development, environmental sustainability, innovation, social inclusion and other portfolios. It recognises that for real change to occur, VET cannot achieve the objectives on its own and that partnerships and agreements between spheres of government, non-government and private organisations are crucial to achieving outcomes.

It is more clearly focused on clients, and the ability of vocational education and training to better respond to the multiple and diverse needs of businesses, individuals, and communities and Indigenous learners. It clearly recognises the role of Adult and Community Education in providing discrete outcomes for adult learners and pathways into VET, and the need for more customised services and products for a diverse range of learners in the context of a rapidly changing world.

Finally, the strategy is more inclusive in that it recognises explicitly in the introduction and in sub-strategy 4 that people facing barriers to learning due to disability, age, gender, cultural difference, language, literacy, numeracy, cost, unemployment, imprisonment or isolation have particular needs which vary from person to person. It challenges the system to take an integrated diversity approach to equity—that is, to position equity as a responsibility for all within the system and to breakdown the 'silo' approaches that have in the past added to marginalisation.

Built in, not bolted on

Therefore, language, literacy and numeracy have deliberately not only been positioned as a clear issue of equity, but also

as an issue of quality in all training products and services. Given that language, literacy and numeracy are key skills needed by all people across all AQF levels and all areas of VET, it is important that 'skill standards and other products reflect emerging skill sets as well as employability, language, literacy, numeracy and cross-cultural skills'. (Strategy 9)

Because language, literacy and numeracy are defined in the strategy as a particular focus for people with particular needs, and at the same time as an integral part of all provision, the scope for attention to literacy is opened up considerably. Effective action plans for all twelve sub-strategies will need to consider the place for language, literacy and numeracy in the 'unpacking' of terms such as learning/learner needs, transition, access, cross-cultural, skill sets and community responses.

The policy of 'building in' language, literacy and numeracy has been expanded from attention specifically to training package content, to a whole-of-system approach with this strategy.

Development of action plans

A session at the latest ACAL conference, 'Metropolis to desert sands—literacy in multiple environments' in September, posed a series of questions to participants about each of the four objectives of the draft national strategy, and the types of policy decisions that might need to be made to implement them.

The summary of responses to this consultation session have formed a paper that has been forwarded to the ANTA team working on the national strategy action plan round tables.

The four categories and questions are listed with a selection of participant responses listed as dot points below.

1. Industry will have a highly skilled workforce to support strong performance in the global economy

How do we build the right skill sets for the future given the multiple/expanding definitions of literacy?

What do the VET products look like that would deliver these skills?

- Increase attention to effective soft-skills development.
- Harmonise the dual training and regulatory systems for occupational licensing purposes to avoid training fatigue or unnecessary anomalies.
- Increase general literacy awareness training for all assessors.
- Increase consultation with learners and educators when reviewing VET training products.

2. Employers and individuals will be at the centre of vocational education and training

How can the VET sector partner more effectively with industry to open up opportunities for workers to upgrade their literacy skills and have existing skills recognised?

What would a range of system-wide VET products look like that would serve all learner needs?

- Effective incentives for addressing LL&N of all trainees need to be identified and applied in a nationally consistent way to ensure equity across the system.
- Encourage partnerships of VET and LLN trainer across all departments within large RTOs. Must include all learners but focus on at-risk learners.
- Map all AQF curriculums to National Reporting System levels.
- Develop a process to prevent low-level LL&N skilled people being screened out and provide incentives to retain and train them.
- Provide access to traineeship for all ages.

3. Communities and regions will be strengthened economically and socially through learning and employment

What factors do we need to build into the system to increase community resilience, help communities to adapt to change, and encourage lifelong learning?

What strategies will best engage the disengaged?

- Full examination of the E in VET.
- Consultation about community learning needs at a grassroots level.
- Linking the national ACE strategy to the national VET strategy.
- Recognition by funding bodies that quality options may exist outside of accredited curriculum or training packages.

4. Indigenous Australians will have skills for viable jobs and their learning culture will be shared

What are the short-term actions required to move towards this objective?

How do we build mechanisms for strategic partnerships to deliver this outcome?

- Develop incentives for cross-agency delivery of training.
- Expand government definitions of 'remote' and provide incentives to deliver within real remote communities.

- Removal of funding being connected to student contact hours—make it project-based.
- Cultural awareness programs funded nationally.
- Cross-mentoring going on between community and outside workers.
- Interagency outcomes as measures of success.

What next?

The next six months will see activity across Australia on the development of action plans that will allow for the final strategy to be implemented. Round table debates (with representation from key professional bodies such as ACAL) are being held around key issues to address through the action plan. An outcome of these discussions is an 'Ideas for Action' paper which will be posted on the ANTA website. All interested people are asked to comment on these papers.

Visit the ANTA website to read and comment on the emerging papers www.anta.gov.au

- Innovation through partnership—paper available now
- Mature age workers—coming soon
- Diversity—to be posted in December 2003
- Communities and regions—to be posted in early 2004
- Branding—to be posted in early 2004
- Internationalisation and VET—to be posted in early 2004
- Resourcing VET—to be posted in early 2004.

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Foreign Correspondence

In Ontario, literacy workers prepared for trouble when moves were made to standardise procedures and measures of accountability. The new policy also meant a narrowing of the focus on literacy work. Would Ontario's literacy industry lose its reputation, its learner-centred philosophy, and its soul?

No, writes Guy Ewing, and explains why this story has lessons for all of us.

Beyond dangerous times—literacy studies in Canada

In the fall of 1999, I wrote in *Foreign Correspondence* about the dangerous times that literacy workers in Ontario, Canada, were experiencing. The provincial ministry that funds literacy programs was bringing in standardised procedures and measures of accountability. Simultaneously, the Tory provincial government was developing a policy of getting tough with welfare recipients. This policy would lead, in 2001, to a policy of mandatory literacy testing for all welfare recipients, and the mandatory referral of welfare recipients with low literacy skills to literacy programs. Literacy programming in Ontario, with its long history of meeting adult literacy learners on their own ground, and working together with literacy learners to determine what gets learned, and how, and why, were now faced with an externally-mandated focus for literacy work—one that narrowed the scope of adult literacy learning to meet policy objectives. These policy objectives had more to do with Tory perceptions about who literacy learners are, than with any attempt to try to understand literacy learners or literacy learning.

The development of standardised procedures and measures of accountability by provincial administrators, in conjunction with a Tory policy which narrowed the focus of literacy work, seemed to spell trouble for literacy work in Ontario. There was the potential for literacy work in Ontario to lose its breadth, its learner-centred philosophy and its soul.

This hasn't happened. It is, unfortunately, the case that there has been a reduction in programming for some of the more 'expensive' kinds of literacy learners (in particular, people who cannot attend programs regularly). But literacy programming in Ontario continues to be learner-centred, and to serve a wide range of needs. This is an important story, and it is instructive to understand why things have turned out this way.

Much credit is due to literacy workers and to the strength of the culture of literacy work in Ontario. In my 1999 column, I said that 'the most effective strategy against bad

policy may be good practice'. I think that this has proven to be the case. Literacy workers have continued to make their programs accessible to learners who do not fit the government image of lazy welfare recipients who need a push. Literacy programs continue to open their doors to people in low wage jobs who study at night in order to improve their lives, to elderly people seeking the education they never had, to parents who want to help their children get ahead in school. Native literacy programs continue to address the spiritual and cultural needs of their students. Literacy workers continue to ask learners what they want to achieve, and to accept their answers.

Credit is also due to the social workers who were supposed to implement mandatory testing and mandatory referral. Recognising that welfare recipients have a variety of needs, most have prioritised needs that the welfare recipients themselves have identified as most important. In other words, the people they have referred to literacy programs are, for the most part, people who have themselves identified literacy as a need. The offensive mandatory testing and referral approach is still policy, and this has negative effects. But, for the most part, social workers have minimised these effects by taking the needs of their clients seriously.

And, of course, there are the literacy learners themselves. These remarkable individuals continue to come forward, seeking help with their reading and writing wherever they can find it, working in less than ideal conditions to learn what they can, making us all aware of their need, which is also our need. That literacy workers have chosen not to deny learners what they need is in large part because literacy learners are not easily denied.

So, in spite of setbacks and problems, learner-centred literacy work is surviving the dangerous times. And there are some new beacons of hope.

An exciting development has been the engagement of researchers in helping literacy workers articulate the need

for a broadly inclusive literacy work. This engagement was first noticeable to us in Ontario at the national level. For several years now a pan-Canadian group called Research in Practice in Adult Literacy (RiPAL) has been meeting to explore ways in which research and practice can work together. At the initiation of literacy workers, a national consultation was held, resulting in a new journal with startup funding from the National Literacy Secretariat. The journal, called *Literacies: researching practice, practising research* (www.literacyjournal.ca) has created a national platform for discussion between literacy workers and researchers. Here in Ontario, there is a new initiative called Festival of Literacies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). This initiative has brought together literacy workers, graduate students, academic researchers and non-academic researchers to discuss, debate, do research and learn from each other. Researchers from across Canada and from other countries have been invited to speak and to give courses. This approach has re-energised literacy workers, and the spectre of government perceptions of literacy learners has begun to fade as the voices of researchers and literacy workers become louder.

What the voices say is that adult literacy cannot be reduced. Literacy (or, as the New Literacy Studies would have it, 'literacies') is/are plural. Literacy learning is diverse, and embedded in social context. The uses of literacy cannot be specified in advance.

And inclusive literacy work is also being strengthened locally by the grassroots involvement of communities, including new immigrant communities, in literacy issues. For example, in Toronto, recognising that there is no provincial funding for starting new literacy programs, communities are drawing on other resources to create literacy programming. This new programming is supported by volunteers and by new ways of using public and private funding. A family from Pakistan starts up a tutoring program for their neighbours. The members of a church decide to provide tutoring to local youth involved in street gangs. A Somali community program uses municipal access and equity funding to support a literacy group. A community program that supports low-income families convinces an insurance company to fund family literacy programming. As these initiatives grow, provincially funded literacy programs are becoming a smaller and smaller part of literacy work, and cannot pretend to define literacy work. Eventually, the government, or perhaps a new government, may want to catch up.

Guy Ewing has worked in the literacy field in Toronto, mainly as a front line literacy worker, for 20 years. He is executive director of the Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy, an umbrella organisation, and is conducting research on how narratives about literacy learning are negotiated by learners and literacy workers.

Beside the Whiteboard

The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) Research Centre is a government-funded body that conducts research relevant to English language teaching and learning. The centre has produced a series of fact sheets that give teachers background information on the homelands of students from the Horn of Africa, Iraq, Rwanda and Sierra Leone.

Sarah Deasey talks with Alan Williams, Lynda Yates and Howard Nicholas about the development of the fact sheets focussing particularly on the Horn of Africa.

What prompted the need for fact sheets for teachers?

Howard: There was a shortage of readily digestible overviews for groups of learners where the teachers had not yet had the opportunity to build up their own reliable understandings of the learners' cultures and circumstances.

Alan: I think that Australian teachers have often had considerable knowledge of the regions from which immigrant students have originated, if not the specific country. In the case of the Horn of Africa, this is a region which Australian teachers have generally had no experience or knowledge, and so some background knowledge helps in starting to develop a more complex appreciation of different cultures.

Were you finding that there were particular issues for teachers working with Horn of Africa students that had not been apparent with other student groups?

Howard: Yes, but the apparent issues were not always the real issues—perceptions of Horn of Africa learners as lacking education and not progressing. Yet the reality was that the Horn of Africa group is incredibly diverse. One of our issues was, therefore, to try to prevent perceptions of problems turning into stereotypes

Lynda: There were also perceptions that some were outspoken and difficult to deal with in the classroom. There appear to be issues here related to cross-cultural communication and also teachers' expectations in relation to working with people from backgrounds with which they are not familiar.

Alan: I think a lot of teachers were feeling that the strategies that were successful with other groups of learners weren't so successful with students from the Horn of Africa (and some other groups of students).

What kinds of assumptions do you think we as teachers make about our students' perceptions of education?

Howard: I don't know how to respond and it risks stereotyping.

Lynda: I agree. Perhaps what we can say at this point is that teachers and students may not necessarily share

assumptions about what the purposes of education are and how these may be achieved.

Alan: I might stick my neck out a little here! My hunch is that as teachers we have been highly socialised into formal education systems, or ways of acknowledging learning in some formal way, such as using RPL to formally recognise a person's skills. We are so used to thinking in these terms, that it takes considerable effort and even a degree of imagination to envisage how other people have learned in quite different ways compared to how we have. This even extends to understanding what is considered and valued as learning. As we are so used to working within our formal systems, when we encounter new learners we start thinking about where the learner stands in relation to the formal and informal frameworks we work within, and that can easily lead us to see learners in terms of how far they need to move or progress.

We notice less about what they themselves see as their strengths and achievements. Without us realising, we can fall into thinking in terms of the learners' deficits, rather than strengths. This is despite our best intentions and our general intention to be positive about diversity and difference. Our learners, on the other hand, often have a strong sense of what they have achieved in their often limited experiences of schooling, and are often proud of what they have achieved in difficult circumstances. I suspect they often see Australian teachers as well meaning, kind and friendly, but either unaware, or dismissive of, what the student feels they have achieved and what they can really do. It's not just what we do consciously, it's what we convey by everything we do, and it comes as much from our institutional practices as from us as individual teachers.

What impact can these assumptions have in the classroom?

Howard: Ditto: but is this really about 'did we encounter any stereotypes'? If so, the answer is that the particular stereotype of Horn of Africa learners, uniformly unable to progress, could easily have led to a reduction in expectations.

Lynda: I think the figures we used in our first presentation on the project which showed that Horn of Africa students

often came with higher levels of education, or with very low levels of education, is relevant here. We cannot stereotype, and opportunities for education were variable in quality and length and variably available to learners before they arrived.

Alan: I think we as teachers tend to approach our students with strong sense of where they need to go in order to meet the requirements of outcome statements or other assessment or accreditation tasks. We understand why this is important in our society. But for many learners from other parts of the world, the significance of these things is not readily apparent. This is especially true in the early stages of the process of settling in a new country. So the learners may be participating in classes with a different sense of what is significant, compared to the sense of what the teacher believes or knows is important. This can lead to a mismatch of perceptions in both the big picture—of what is being taught and learned and why—and the small picture, in terms of what students are expected to do in particular classroom tasks, and why they are doing a task in the first place. This can result in both parties being frustrated, or feeling that somehow the full potential of participation in classes has not been fully realised.

How do you think teachers can help learners adjust to a more learner-centred, contextual approach to language and literacy?

Howard: Deconstruct literacy to see it as a multifaceted and language-specific concept; recognise literacy development as a sub-component of language development and recognise the development of bi-literacy; acknowledge existing cultural practices as shaping views of the role of classrooms and be prepared to negotiate a bicultural transition.

Lynda: As with any adult education, be sensitive to where the learner is at and start there—what are their expectations and assumptions, how do they differ from ours, and work out how to work with both sets of expectations. Also, however, the importance of models of language—learning literacy is also about learning the language used in literacy events, and if you have not experienced these in English (or at all), you will need plenty of input on how these can be done.

Alan: I agree with what Howard and Lynda have said, but I also think we need to be clear about what we mean by these terms. In a way, the term learner-centred is a misnomer for educative processes that involve some sort of orientation to a common set of practices, such as a new language or the ways of using language and literacy that prevail in a particular society. It is more learner-oriented in the way Lynda describes—understanding the different starting points of different learners, and the different learning paths they may have in learning to make the new language or literacy practices work for them in the circumstances they find themselves in, living in a new country. The other thing this

project has reminded me of is the importance of thinking not only of literacy in its broadest sense as ways of doing things. We also need to think of oracy in the same way—and not just as ‘speaking’, as some sort of precursor to literacy or aid to literacy. There are specific cultural practices associated with speaking and the ways we speak to each other, and we need to be aware that this is different in different cultures, and to acknowledge how this impinges on classroom practices as well as learning a language and developing literacy in that language.

How did you avoid generalisation and stereotyping with different learner groups when writing the fact sheets?

Howard: This is part of Alan’s genetic makeup; don’t pretend that we can say everything; make up-front the acknowledgement of diversity; encourage readers to go beyond the fact sheet; share the sense of excitement in discovering something personally unknown.

Alan: This always worries me when exploring learner backgrounds. We make generalisations in order to make sense of the world, but we constantly need to be conscious of the extent to which any generalisation may be only partially true. This means that in writing the fact sheets we need to do the things Howard has stated. But what is perhaps more crucial is how the fact sheets are read. The reader needs to approach them with a sense that these may help by giving a tentative starting framework for their dialogues with their individual learners. Each reader will expand, revise, reconstruct their understanding as they have more experience with people from a particular country or culture. As you read such documents, you can hopefully develop a crude sense of the context in which the people you meet have lived. But you also need to be aware of the diversity that exists in any culture—both in terms of the experiences of different social groups within a culture, the experiences of people as women, as men, or as people of a certain generation or stage of life, as well as their individual qualities and experiences. In this sense, I think documents such as the fact sheets need to be seen as tentative starting points—or perhaps a sort of impressionist painting in the background—that can inform a richer dialogue between people from different cultures, rather than some sort of definitive statement.

What are the implications for accredited curriculum design and language and literacy teaching methodology for learner groups with low literacy levels and low levels of formal education?

Howard: Chapter 2 in the book written about the changing AMEP client groups addresses this issue in some depth. I think the comments already made also cover this question in many ways. We need to treat literacy as part of language as well as part of personal development. (The book is Wigglesworth, G. (ed), *The kaleidoscope of adult second*

language learning: learner, teacher and researcher perspectives, Sydney: NCELTR, to be published shortly).

Alan: We need a few weeks to cover this! The short answer, I think, is that we need to be constantly exploring and understanding our own assumptions, and making these explicit to our students. In turn, we will help our students to make explicit their assumptions and starting points. From these starting points we can consciously talk about, and show our students, what we think we can help them to learn, and what others might expect of them in this society. We can then help them to explore how they might react to such expectations, and how they may develop skills and understandings that help *learner, teacher and researcher perspectives*, Sydney: NCELTR, to be published shortly).

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As teachers, we are highly literate people in a highly literate culture. The challenge in working with low-literacy students is in peeling away the many layers of assumptions and bases of our skills, understandings and perceptions, and helping our students to come to understand as much as they can of this, in 'chunks' that are manageable. But here is the excitement and reward of this sort of teaching, for it forces us to explore the things we take for granted. Like all good teaching, we learn as much from our students as they learn from us. The encounter with people with a very different view and experience of the world helps us to see ourselves and other aspects of the world in a new light. Doing that in a classroom is one thing, but there is a huge challenge here for the development of accredited curriculum statements and frameworks, where the emphasis is on common learning outcomes. The first problem lies in how to acknowledge very different starting points and pathways for learners of diverse experiences and backgrounds. The second problem lies in how learning outcomes can be seen and used as a catalyst for a process of deeper and more profound learning of a whole, rather than as an end in themselves, in the sense of learning fragments of something.

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The AMEP fact sheets are available on line at the AMEP web site at <http://www.nceltr.mq.edu.au/pdamep/factsheets.html>

Practical Matters ...continued from page 26

- Difficulty socialising.
- Find it difficult to sustain work, study.
- Neglect of health and appearance.
- Can't get interested in anything.
- Find it difficult to sustain relationships.
- Overwhelming loss of self-esteem.
- Intense feelings of worthlessness.
- Mistrust of professionals.

Other helpful websites for further information are SANE Australia, www.sane.org.au and the Mental Health Foundation, www.mentalhealth.vic.org.au