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**features**

**A model for pedagogical change: the Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills**

*by Susan Bates*

For many students training for a trade, the completion of literacy and numeracy requirements has been a barrier to what would otherwise be plain sailing. But since the introduction of the Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills—designed for students undertaking vocational courses—both students and teachers report successes beyond all expectations.

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**'A' is for applied: what is applied learning?**

*by Jenny Dalton*

The concept of applied learning has been with us for many years. In 2002, it was formalised as a senior secondary or post-compulsory qualification—the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning—and is now offered in all TAFE colleges and most secondary schools. But is it a viable alternative to the more academic qualifications for students in the post-compulsory years?

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**Touch one, touch all: taking education to the workplace**

*by Anne Duggan*

In 1993, the training unit of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union had 43 workers doing short courses through its educational programs. Ten years later, 8000 people were studying various Certificate III, Certificate IV and diploma courses.

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**Regulars**

**Practical Matters**

Have you ever gone blank in an exam, or read the same page six times without absorbing anything? Send your mind for a workout at the Brain Gym! As Mary Nicholls explains, it's all about exercise reducing stress levels and getting the mind/body system in harmony.

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**Open Forum**

Our last edition featured a stimulating article—'Adult literacy: towards a new paradigm', by Rob McCormack—that sent several readers' minds to Brain Gym. But after a number of readings, a group of VALBEC and ACAL members said that the rewards from getting a grip on McCormack's propositions were well worth the effort. Also, Jane Casey tells us about Craig, a young man who shed his old habits and attitudes and dared to dream of the future.

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**Foreign Correspondence**

Inconsistency and a lack of continuity in literacy policies have created a daunting future for the 50 million-plus Pakistanis with little or no educational opportunities. However, help is on the way from the United Nations, the US and Japan and the Pakistan government itself plans to open 270,000 literacy centres by 2005.

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**Beside the Whiteboard**

In an informative talk with Robin Kenrick, Dr Amjid Muhammad provides some valuable insights for teachers working with Islamic students.

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# Editorial

Welcome to the first edition of *Fine Print* for 2004. A lot of thought goes into providing topics, issues and ideas that will engage and challenge our readers. We hope you find this edition no exception.

The autumn features offer insights into emerging trends in adult and youth literacy education. What comes through strongly in each of the articles is the importance of listening and responding to learners, ensuring that they stay *connected* with education, education programs and educators. It could be argued that the ideas these pieces describe translate the rhetoric of lifelong learning into practice.

Applied: employed; put to use; practical. There is no doubt that the term has an increasing profile in literacy education settings. Susan Bates describes the ways in which the Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills (CAVSS) has championed pedagogical change, initially in Western Australia and now in other states. Along with describing the development of the CAVSS model and the implementation of team-teaching practices within vocational course contexts, Susan tells how CAVSS teachers, trainers and most importantly, CAVSS students, are responding to the collaborative and explicitly integrated aspects of instruction in ways that had not originally been anticipated.

The Victorian Certificates in Applied Learning (VCAL) have been delivered in Victorian secondary colleges, TAFEs and adult community education organisations for the last few years. *Fine Print* readers will be familiar with some individual programs that have been featured in 2003. In 'A is for Applied', Jenny Dalton takes readers a step further, examining some of the more complex notions of how applied learning is understood and what potential there is for engaging learners of any age in compelling educational programs that provide what learners want, as well as what teachers know learners need.

'Touch One, Touch All' tells us about the importance of getting the mix of the learning right for workers in the commercial construction industry. Providing cohesive training programs for transient workers in physically demanding employment requires creative and lateral solutions. Anne Duggan writes of how the success of the CFMEU education and training unit has grown by keeping the individual in focus at all times.

Our regular features are also included. In Open Forum, some VALBEC and ACAL members confess over curry to how many times they read Rob McCormack's article from the last edition. Lynne, Pauline and Karen share their interpretations of Rob's playfully provocative piece. The consensus was that the multiple readings were well worth the effort. Jane Casey shares with us a heart-warming story of Craig, and yes, it is all good. Practical Matters invites literacy teachers to exploit kinaesthetic learning behaviours. Mary Nicholls is a literacy teacher and Brain Gym instructor. She details four easy activities that promote wellbeing and improve learning capabilities. We encourage you to give them a try. If you're not quite ready to make them a part of your program, why not try them out quietly at home, and see what benefits they bring you.

Adult literacy in Pakistan is featured in Foreign Correspondence. The realities of catering for the 50 million-plus Pakistanis with little or no educational opportunities are daunting, but there is hope. In Beside the Whiteboard, Dr Amjid Muhammad provides valuable insight for teachers working with Islamic students.

We hope you find this engaging fare and encourage readers to share your thoughts with the *Fine Print* community in our Open Forum 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.**

# A model for pedagogical change: the Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills

by Susan Bates

**The Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills has, in just a couple of years, succeeded well beyond expectations. While its proponents knew the system would produce effective learning, they were pleasantly surprised by the extent to which learners became engaged, barriers between academic and industry cultures were dismantled and the adult literacy field given new life.**

**T**he Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills (CAVSS) is a curriculum framework designed for the provision of literacy and numeracy support to students enrolled in vocational qualifications. It was developed and accredited in 1999 by the then Western Australian Department of Training (now Western Australian Department of Education and Training) and is currently being delivered by TAFE colleges and other training providers in Western Australia, Victoria and Tasmania. It is also being trialled in several further education colleges in Scotland and the European Commission has indicated its interest.

CAVSS is designed to improve vocational training outcomes by dismantling the barriers faced by students who will struggle or fail to meet the literacy and numeracy demands made by VET course competencies, and/or by teaching, learning and assessment methodologies. Now in its fifth year of delivery, CAVSS is producing those results and a great deal more. It is providing important insights into collaborative teaching models as a means of engaging learners, and how literacy and numeracy processes are most effectively learned and taught. Some of these insights challenge some well-established notions to do with good practice in literacy and general education.

## CAVSS in practice

CAVSS is a team-teaching model, where for a few hours a week a literacy/numeracy specialist teacher comes into a vocational training environment: a classroom full of plumbing students learning how to read plans and technical drawings; a commercial kitchen full of trainee chefs being assessed on how to double, treble or halve quantities for recipes; or a workshop full of tiling apprentices measuring up to tile a floor.

The literacy/numeracy specialist (the CAVSS teacher) and the vocational lecturer share the role of instructor, teaching in unison and taking turns to teach the group. The vocational lecturer teaches the industry skills and knowledge. The CAVSS teacher teaches students how to do the reading,

writing and maths that they need to achieve the industry-related competencies: understanding concepts of scale and ratio to read building plans; using percentages to adapt a recipe; or applying formulae to calculate an area to be tiled.

Together, the lecturers take responsibility for making sure that every student is able to complete the task successfully. The CAVSS teacher is not the 'remedial teacher' and neither lecturer is relegated to being responsible for the students who 'can't keep up'. The CAVSS teacher teaches literacy and numeracy processes in the same time and place as the students needing to apply those processes to an industry task, and using the actual industry task as the context for teaching.

## Concept design and course development Defining the task

Prior to CAVSS, the usual approach to literacy support in vocational training in WA had been for vocational lecturers to identify the two or three students in each group who most needed support, and refer them to remedial classes or learning centres, or for part-time enrolment in the CGEA. That referral would mean either being withdrawn from (usually practical/workshop) industry lessons, lunchtime classes, or attending at night. All of these strategies required literacy teachers to teach students in at least some degree of isolation (including total isolation) from the vocational course, its competencies, and the teaching learning and assessment activities that students had to undertake to pass that course.

This approach was rarely successful. According to vocational lecturers, the usual response was that students would attend once or twice and then stop because the support they were receiving did not seem to be helping them. They hated missing out on vocational classes and they experienced embarrassment and humiliation because they had been singled out and identified as needing help. Central to the task of providing literacy support to vocational students was creating a mechanism whereby that support would always be delivered in a form that students regarded as relevant and useful, and which did not bring unwelcome attention.



In the mid-90s, the department's Adult Literacy Services Bureau set up a series of projects in TAFE colleges to test models for delivering integrated literacy support to vocational students. The outcomes of these models reflected what vocational lecturers had told us about why students rarely found remedial literacy support to be of any benefit. The approach that proved most acceptable to students and vocational lecturers was also the most cost effective. This model involved the two lecturers weaving their instruction together to create a seamless joint delivery, demonstrating how literacy and numeracy processes are selected and brought together with industry knowledge to find solutions to industry problems. The model became the basis of CAVSS.

### Developing CAVSS

The core elements of the delivery model most favoured by students reflect two central issues in adult literacy teaching. Firstly, recognition that language, literacy and numerical practices are socially and politically embedded, and vary significantly according to the discourses from which they emerge. Secondly, that there is a potent stigma associated with needing help with reading and writing. Students respond very positively when the literacy support is directed to all of the students and no one is singled out and left to feel humiliated, and when the support students receive is wholly relevant to the industry training or assessment activity that they are undertaking in that moment. Feedback from students has been consistent right from the first trials of CAVSS in 2000. They like having two teachers and see having access to a second, and perhaps alternative, explanation as very valuable.

There are two central principles that underpin the concept and success of CAVSS. One is the *normalising principle* whereby the CAVSS model and rules are designed to relegate literacy support to a non-remarkable, ordinary part of the VET training, and something that every student is engaged in as a matter of course. The *relevance principle* works to

eliminate the possibility of 'foreign' (academic) literacy or numeracy practices being imposed by literacy teachers delivering CAVSS.

These principles represent a significant shift away from the 'individual deficit' perspectives which underpin existing remedial approaches. They reflect the notion of literacy as social practice in that they ensure that the support students receive is directly related to achieving industry training outcomes and, on another level, counteract the ways in which academic cultures and the values and practices associated with them tend to manifest in learning environments, even when they are not relevant to, or even at odds with, the values and practices of the industry culture. The CAVSS principles are there to ensure that the industry culture prevails.

Creating a course that would achieve pedagogical change, at the same time as providing an accountable funding mechanism for literacy support in any industry area, was a complex task. We undertook that task with advice and support from departmental staff responsible for course accreditation—those involved with the development of the State Training Profile and the consequent allocation of funding, and TAFE managers who had responsibilities for literacy and industry programs.

Our approach was to give primacy to students' interests by applying the CAVSS principles to every decision made in designing the course, and to evaluate course requirements and rules in terms of compliance with those principles. In several instances, there was significant tension between system requirements—or assumptions about good practice in literacy education—and the CAVSS principles. When this occurred, our approach was to work in collaboration with systems staff to create alternative ways to accommodate those requirements without compromising the CAVSS principles. Examples included the embargo on literacy assessments, the provision for repeated enrolments in the same CAVSS modules and negotiating practicable methods for evidence of delivery.

This approach was crucial for the development of a curriculum product that was so non-standard. It engendered a strong sense of ownership and ongoing support of CAVSS by those involved in its development, and it resulted in the systems being modified to accommodate effective educational practice, instead of the other way around.

### Implementing a new technology for teaching literacy:

#### The problem with, and for, teachers

At first glance, CAVSS seems straightforward and simple. It might even seem familiar. A not uncommon first response to CAVSS is 'Oh yes, we are already doing this'. There is

certainly nothing new about the idea of team-teaching, nor about customising literacy support and teaching and learning materials for vocational students to reflect aspects of the industry they are studying for.

But CAVSS is not like other team-teaching approaches. The CAVSS model for team-teaching is narrowly defined and necessarily inflexible in order to achieve specific, essential outcomes. It defines the relationship between the two teachers, and by doing so, provides a mechanism which ensures that the literacy support being offered is wholly and immediately relevant to the students, and just as importantly, provides a means for the literacy teacher to fit, and be accepted and trusted, within the industry training environment.

Teachers of adult literacy confront an important central issue—whether or not they are able or willing to acknowledge it. That is, that by definition, their students will have ambivalent, if not largely negative, memories and feelings concerning school and (to be honest) schoolteachers. That is not to say that all schoolteachers are bad. It is not uncommon for adult literacy students to talk about the ‘one teacher’ who saw the potential in them, and was the catalyst for their eventual return to education. But those other teachers, the ones who failed to see the potential, and the value and worth of some students, create a legacy of (at the very least) wariness that those students bring with them when they return to formal study.

While students who are enrolled in CAVSS cannot be categorised as ‘literacy students’ (they have chosen to enrol in a vocational qualification), they are likely to have some experiences in common with students who enrol in adult literacy and general education courses. They are arguably less likely to have studied at what are regarded as the highest levels of English and maths. The students who studied at those levels are more likely to have articulated into universities.



## Experiences of students

A significant proportion of vocational students will have had experiences similar to those of adult literacy students—of being undervalued and of having their skills, interests, talents and goals regarded as second-rate while they were at school. It is no secret that vocational training does not have the same status among teachers as a university education, and in the social status hierarchy teachers are likely to be more inclined to value academically-oriented jobs. It is important for CAVSS teachers to understand as well that vocational lecturers were once vocational students—one of the kids who left school, very possibly with the sense that they somehow didn’t quite make the grade in teachers’ eyes.

The CAVSS team-teaching relationship is not an equal relationship for good reasons. First, it cannot be equal because the vocational lecturer is solely responsible for getting the students through the course, and with skills and knowledge that will keep them employed and safe in the industry. There is no expectation, nor could there be, that the literacy teacher be able to teach industry competencies. Therefore decisions about what is taught and how it is taught can only be made by the industry expert.

Second, positioning the CAVSS teacher as auxiliary—in terms of being required to teach wholly within the confines of the teaching, learning and assessment materials developed and presented by the vocational lecturer—prevents literacy teachers from introducing ways of reading, writing and doing maths that do not reflect the industry culture (and importantly, reflect instead the exclusive literacy and numeracy practices of the academic industry).

Third, when literacy teachers demonstrate that they are willing to seek and take direction (instead of being the one who gives it), and interested and keen to learn about the industry (which is essential if they are going to be any use at all), they will find that barriers that might exist will come down. Such barriers might relate to the students’ wariness or suspicion, or the lecturer’s concern that students will be judged, or have their time wasted, or their aspirations undervalued. Vocational students and lecturers are very quick to recognise a CAVSS teacher’s genuine interest in the craft of the industry and the goals and achievements of the students, just as they are very quick to recognise when those interests are not there.

School teaches people to read teachers’ attitudes towards them with great accuracy. We all knew, and probably still remember, which teachers always recognised the best in us, which didn’t care what happened to us, and which were too quick to focus on our failures. It is why teachers are so loved and, in some cases, so feared.



## The CAVSS Professional Development Advisory Group

In 2000, CAVSS was trialled in all but one of the TAFE colleges in Western Australia. In some cases the team-teaching partnership grew and flourished, and in other cases it never got off the ground. Research showed that the difference was almost always to do with the individuals involved. However, a closer examination showed that where the CAVSS partnership failed to gel (as identified by either or both parties) it was almost always attributable to where the literacy teacher was unable, or refused, to limit instruction to the VET training tasks, resist the temptation to 'extend' students' (mainly) literacy skills to include academic reading and writing activities and conventions, and/or teach without reliance on pre-prepared sheets of 'generic', school-type exercises—including cloze exercises and lists of punctuation exercises.

In some places, CAVSS thrived. At these sites, the literacy and vocational lecturers had found strategies to manage and overcome the strangeness and uncertainty involved in bringing a schoolteacher into the VET classroom and workshop, and were able to identify and describe the actual behaviours and communication and interpersonal strategies that they had used to do so.

These lecturers, now members of the CAVSS professional development advisory group (CAVSSPDAG), continue to provide invaluable insights into how the CAVSS team-teaching relationship operates, and is established and maintained. They have contributed significantly to the development of promotional and professional development products for CAVSS, including the CAVSS teachers handbook, and the CAVSS team-teaching video. They provide educational leadership in their own workplaces, a trouble-shooting service for CAVSS teams in other locations, and are regularly called on to deliver professional development workshops for prospective CAVSS teachers and to promote the model to vocational lecturers in Western Australia and other states.

### The CAVSS teachers' workshop

We have developed a two-day CAVSS workshop for literacy teachers which gives literacy teachers opportunities to experience CAVSS from the students' perspective, to get hands-on experience delivering CAVSS to real (CAVSS-savvy) VET students, and to gather practical strategies and tips from literacy and vocational lecturers who are now in their fifth year of delivering the course. The vocational lecturers who teach aspects of the workshop, and take novice and prospective CAVSS teachers into their workshop to practice on their students, include stonemasons, plasterers, tilers and bricklayers. Their contribution to the education of the literacy teachers who attend the course is



significant, and often totally up-ends the assumptions that some literacy teachers have brought with them.

For many literacy teachers, it is the first opportunity they will have had to meet and talk to a vocational lecturer. Those teachers experience being taught by the vocational lecturers, and find out first hand that those lecturers are not only impressively skilled and knowledgeable artisans, but also that they are intelligent, intuitive and caring teachers whose interpersonal skills in managing a learning environment display a subtlety and sensitivity that is not necessarily found in school classrooms. For workshop participants, it is a chance to recognise that they have everything in common with vocational lecturers in terms of a shared commitment to students' welfare and success, and they will also be able to rely on the vocational lecturers for support and advice as they find their feet in a new teaching environment.

The vocational lecturers are not the only ones who provide encouragement and assistance to CAVSS teachers. At a recent workshop, one of the literacy teachers confided to me that she was so nervous and afraid of going into the drafting room and meeting the stonemason apprentices that morning that she hadn't slept. (It is not uncommon for teachers to feel this way if they have never taught VET students before, especially when they don't have the option of arming themselves with handouts and authority.)

When I saw her directly after the prac session, I asked her how it had gone. She was a bit teary, but had a big smile on her face, and told me how she had gone into the room and stood at the back, not sure what to do or what to say to the students. One of the apprentices had seen her discomfort and beckoned her to his table, and asked her if she would like him to show her some of the maths that she might be able to help him with. She said that from that moment, she felt very comfortable: not only safe and welcome but with something to offer to the students. She was very impressed

and touched by the student's gesture and clearly no longer nervous about being in a room full of apprentices.

### **What CAVSS has taught us and what CAVSS reminds us**

CAVSS has focused a new light on important aspects of adult literacy and general education, and illuminates some of the issues that are not often talked about in literacy circles.

#### **Students really like team-teaching**

Vocational teachers say that the students like team-teaching because CAVSS teachers provide expert literacy and numeracy instruction to students and an enthusiastic, encouraging, non-industry expert who is always impressed by the vocational skills that students demonstrate. The students say that they like having a CAVSS teacher because if they can get extra or alternative explanations for processes that didn't click the first time, without having to admit to their trade lecturer that they didn't understand. They also say that having two teachers who get on well creates a fun environment for everyone, and 'when you're having fun, learning is easier'.

CAVSS teachers say that vocational lecturers have always taught literacy and numeracy, and having a second teacher halves the teacher-student ratio, and that CAVSS sends a strong message to students that there is not just one, but two lecturers who believe in them, and will help them succeed.

#### **CAVSS changes the culture of the learning environment**

Vocational lecturers say that students who have had CAVSS support are more actively engaged in the learning process, that they start to speak up, ask questions and take part in discussions, that they demonstrate increased motivation and confidence, and that they readily work together with other students, and 'the first thing they do when they have finished is turn around and see if someone else needs a hand'. The collaborative approach to learning seems to be displacing more competitive (and defensive) behaviours.

#### **The secret to being a CAVSS teacher is being a learner**

CAVSS teachers have to learn about the industry culture and practices from the very first moment they start teaching CAVSS. The fact that the VET lecturer and the students themselves will be enthusiastic and readily available teachers is the secret to the literacy teachers' acceptance within the VET environment.

Don't ignore the literacy stigma, or the implications of imposing foreign literacy and language cultures.

These two issues are complex and confronting, but unless they are acknowledged and accommodated, vocational students will reject literacy support. These issues also have important implications for the effectiveness and success of all adult literacy and general educational delivery.

#### **Despite the challenges, CAVSS is exciting and fulfilling teaching**

CAVSS teachers say that CAVSS is exciting, with the challenge of learning useful, practical skills and teaching 'by the seat of your pants' in new and varied contexts. They talk about the pleasure of seeing students achieve so quickly because they are keen and interested in what they are learning. And some CAVSS teachers have talked about the pleasure to be had in engaging with students and teaching with total focus on tasks at hand; of being able to let go of issues to do with controlling students' behaviour; and being free of the warlike struggle that sometimes exists in schools, where the issues of power and control are always being contested and where teachers are made to feel as if they must close ranks to survive. Vocational students regard CAVSS teachers as trusted allies, who also just happen to be 'very handy to have around'.

CAVSS has produced more than we ever expected it would. We knew that it would produce effective learning. Learning is always more successful when it is directly related to something we need to achieve. What we didn't expect was that it would engage learners and enhance the dynamics of student interaction, dismantle barriers between academic and industry cultures within training organisations, and reinvigorate an adult literacy field which, at least in this state, had come to accept high levels of student dissatisfaction with literacy services as somehow inevitable.

There is every likelihood that, applied to other adult literacy and general education initiatives, the underlying principles of the CAVSS model and the process of its development could produce similar benefits.

**Susan Bates is a project officer with the Western Australian Department of Education and Training. She has more than 20 years' experience in the adult literacy field including volunteering, teaching, professional development and curriculum development.**

# A is for applied: what *is* applied learning?

by Jenny Dalton

Jenny Dalton looks at some of the more complex notions about applied learning, and examines its potential for engaging learners of any age in educational programs that provide what learners want, as well as what teachers know learners need.

The Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) is a new senior secondary or post-compulsory qualification that was introduced into 19 Victorian schools and three TAFE colleges in 2002. It is now operational in most secondary schools, all TAFE colleges and a number of ACE providers. The introduction of these qualifications (there are three VCAL award levels—foundation, intermediate and senior) to sit alongside the regular senior school qualifications (VCE and VET) has opened up the debate about appropriate pedagogy for students in the post-compulsory years, particularly those seeking alternatives to the more academic curriculum.

In spite of the inclusion of accredited Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs in secondary schools, which would appear to offer more ‘applied’ learning opportunities, too many students were choosing to leave school before completing Year 12. Government reports such as *The Ministerial Review of Post-compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria* (Kirby Review, August 2000), found that amongst the range of motives at play, the two factors most frequently cited by students for their decision to leave school were the desire for work and the lack of interest in schoolwork. Yet the prospects for these students post their school departure are dramatically hampered by a lack of experience, the absence of any confirming record of achievement from their school years, and a lack of the right kind of training for the jobs they aspire to. The school experience for many of these students had left them with a sense of failure. It was in this context and in response to some very successful but unaccredited applied learning programs which some schools were conducting to meet the needs of their more at-risk students, that VCAL was developed and accredited.

Many of the students who enrolled in VCAL in the first two years of its operation have been those who were considered at-risk—of not completing their secondary schooling. Those enrolling in the TAFE and ACE programs are in large part those who have already chosen to leave school. Many from both groups do not have strong literacy and/or numeracy skills. While VCAL was not specifically designed for students with less well developed literacy/numeracy skills, nevertheless it offers an alternative accredited pathway for those students

and in the process challenges providers to develop teaching and learning approaches which will both cater to their needs and advance and develop their skills.

## What is applied learning?

The term ‘applied’ is attached to a wide range of education and training programs at all different levels. There are courses in applied science, applied mathematics, applied psychology, applied economics, applied research and many others. One of the most academic of the senior school subjects used to be Calculus and Applied Mathematics—that’s what the really brainy students studied. Yet it is difficult to find a definition of applied learning in any of the education reference texts. The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary offers, ‘Applied—put to practical use; having or concerned with practical application (opp. Abstract, pure or theoretical)’. The various dictionaries of education make no mention of applied *learning*, but some do refer to specific applied subjects, as in:

- *Applied mathematics*

1. School mathematics, in which the topics selected for teaching are aimed at some particular use of mathematics, as, for example, consumer mathematics, business mathematics, business arithmetic and trade mathematics.
2. Topics in mathematics which are relevant to the theory of other disciplines and which are studied for this reason.

- *Applied reading*

The utilisation of attained reading skills in reading situations other than those contrived specifically for reading skill development (Dictionary of Education, Good 1973).

There are a number of other similar entries for individual subjects. An analysis of the wider educational literature finds that while the term ‘applied learning’ has little currency in its own right it may be found embedded in the other terminology such as authentic learning, constructivist learning, experiential learning, situated learning, vocational learning, enterprise learning, or learning for work.

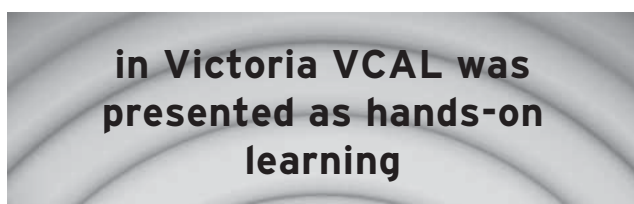
A brief account of some of the terms may be useful in establishing some idea of what applied learning may include:

- Contextual teaching and learning was commonly referred to as experiential learning in the 1970s.



Essential elements include 'meaningful learning', 'application of knowledge', 'higher order thinking' and 'cultural responsiveness'. It is said to be a merging of several educational concepts that include experiential learning, authentic learning, applied learning, work-based learning and service learning.

- Authentic learning is regarded as a current version of older concepts of educational innovation, consisting of a teaching approach where daily experiences and students' awareness of those experiences, provide a focus for learning.
- Constructivist learning states that students learn as they actively engage in a practice of creation of sense and knowledge, rather than submissively accepting information. Students construct meaning and knowledge.
- Experiential learning is a learning theory where participants are involved in an activity, reflect on the experience in a critical manner, benefit from the critical process and integrate the outcome in modifications to their perceptions and behaviours.
- Situated learning states that learning inevitably occurs within a context. The idea of 'cognitive apprenticeship' is important to this theory, where learning in a specific situation is likened to an apprenticeship where a teacher uses modelling, coaching and scaffolding as students solve authentic problems.



State education departments in the US have developed content and performance standards for all school disciplines, including applied learning, across all grade levels from kindergarten to Year 12. The Standards for the State of California describe applied learning as 'a process of integrating one or more subject content areas (disciplines) under study with authentic (personal, home, career, community, society) learning experiences'. The standards identify that what makes applied learning unique is:

the degree to which it provides experience in the problem solving process; the manipulative use of tools, equipment, materials and related techniques; personal skills, occupational awareness and safety; and employment literacy.

They emphasise the interrelatedness of all the disciplines and stress that:

applied learning must be ... dynamic, rich with information about student capabilities, potentials and progress, and

career preparation. It must be motivating to students, teachers, administrators, community individuals, and involve business and industry representatives. (California Department of Education 1995, p. AL1).

In Washington State, applied learning is described as incorporating the following essential elements:

- it must address a compelling purpose in the eyes of the student
- it must produce a valid result for someone beyond the teacher, family or classroom
- it must place learning in real world contexts through community connections
- it is focused on clearly named standards
- it engages students in comprehensive assessment.

Much of the broader international literature couples applied learning with vocational outcomes for students, and this has been a major focus of the Victorian Applied Learning initiative. In Victoria VCAL was presented as hands-on learning and some publicity included images of a collection of gloves, including a chef's glove, a gardener's glove, a manufacturing worker's glove and a sports person's glove, with the caption 'VCAL lets students get their hands on a career'. Applied learning in Victoria is linked with vocational learning, but it is not synonymous with VET. The Certificate of Applied Learning encompasses VET, but VET does not always encompass applied learning pedagogy.

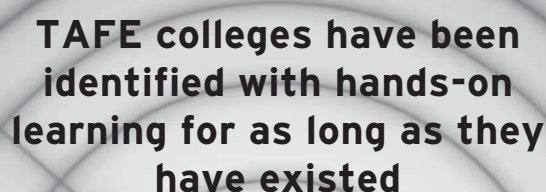
### **An alternative form of teaching**

Dr. Helen Praetz outlines the thinking behind the establishment of the applied learning qualification in Victoria, in which she refers to 'applied learning' as an alternative to classroom-based learning and describes it in part as 'practical studies ... including general orientation to work and the acquisition of key employment-related competencies' (2002 p.198). She identifies the complex and expanded roles which will be expected of applied learning teachers:

applied learning pedagogies require teachers to determine what learners need to know and be able to do, what developmental activities will assist their learning, what skills and knowledge can be applied routinely in the workplace, how students will integrate and consolidate their learning to ensure that competency is achieved, and what assessment activities will cumulatively recognise performance at the standard required ... within schools and colleges, creating a student-centred curriculum for disaffected young people and more flexible and hospitable places of learning for people of all ages will require the active engagement of young people in their own education. (Praetz, 2002, p.100)

Feedback from the schools and TAFE colleges that piloted VCAL in 2002 indicated that applied learning was conceptualised in terms of the following key points:

- it is strongly associated with vocational learning and it is actively promoted as hands-on learning
- it involves students producing something that is useful for themselves, their school and/or their community
- it should reflect students' interests whenever possible
- it tended to be associated with students who were less successful academically, and was recognised as offering opportunities for these students to excel in their areas of interest and strength.



**TAFE colleges have been identified with hands-on learning for as long as they have existed**

Teachers, parents, students and other stakeholders, when asked to define applied learning, provided a range of responses. Teachers referred to it in terms of:

- students getting out of school and learning in the real world
- using skills in a work/life context
- recognising the whole person involving social, personal development and communications
- practical learning that can be applied to work and to life.

Another respondent provided the following multi-layered definition of applied learning in practice. Those who have been involved in teaching in TAFE, ACE or other adult learning environments will recognise the similarities between this and the adult learning principles which guide their work:

Applied learning is recognised when:

- the pedagogy is student-centred with close interactions with teachers and students
- the interactions promote cooperation rather than competition
- the program offers flexibility in content and process
- the activities build on and expand students' current interests, knowledge and expertise
- the relationships between students and teachers value each other
- the assessment makes explicit what is being learnt and incorporates opportunities for self-assessment
- the classroom is not necessarily the dominant venue for learning, with learning elsewhere having parity with classroom-based learning activities.

The underpinning determinant of appliedness in the VCAL studies was vocational learning. Thus a student's program was applied to the extent that it focused on preparation for employment such as in:

- students learning how to prepare for interviews, and to develop resumes and other documentation as part of their program
- students being involved in learning specific work-related skills
- students being involved in working with adults outside the school environment, through community service activities and work placements
- students being involved in projects and team-based activities that emphasised the development of inter-personal communication skills.

As you can see from all of the above, applied learning can incorporate a number of related elements, but there seems to be general agreement in contemporary definitions that a particularly important element is vocational preparation.

### **Applied learning programs in ACE providers**

While there has been some involvement of ACE providers with VCAL students, and there is an increasing reliance on ACE to provide education programs for early school leavers and other educationally disadvantaged young people, until now the main involvement outside the schools sector has been TAFE. It is expected that ACE providers will become significant providers of applied learning programs, as the concept and need expands.

TAFE colleges have been identified with hands-on learning for as long as they have existed. To that extent, one might be forgiven for assuming that all learning in TAFE is applied learning. However as the discussion and definitions above indicate, there is more to applied learning than hands-on, and furthermore not all that happens in TAFE can be classified as hands-on. Many programs in TAFE now have a significant theoretical component, with often the more entry level, access-oriented programs being the least applied and hands-on.

Both TAFE and ACE providers have the capacity for involvement with the VCAL on two main fronts—as providers of VCAL programs in their own right, and as a support for school sector providers through auspicing or delivery of aspects of the program. For example, some schools have had auspicing arrangements for the delivery of CGEA as the literacy and numeracy components of VCAL. Others have delivered the VET components of the VCAL program.

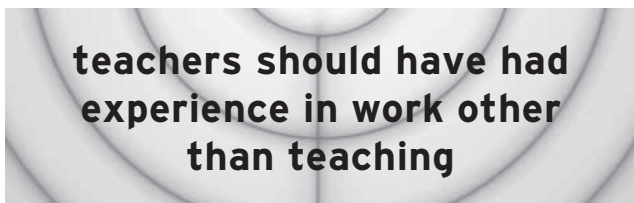
One drawback of this approach, if the lines of communication are not open and flowing freely, is that the

students' applied learning programs lack integration, with the literacy, numeracy or VET components being delivered in isolation. Arrangements like that are certainly not in keeping with the ideals of applied learning.

### **Dedicated teachers required**

Effective delivery of applied learning programs, particularly to the young people who have made up the bulk of the TAFE/ACE enrolments, requires teachers who want to be involved and who have the necessary skills and experience to build real and applied curriculum and delivery onto the VCAL framework. Effective applied learning programs require special staff.

From the experience-based knowledge gained in the TAFE VCAL pilot programs in 2002 and 2003, it was clearly relevant, for example, that teachers should have had experience in work other than teaching, or in activities that were relevant to the students. This enhanced their ability to draw on authentic knowledge and experience and helped to build rapport with the students. Having broader experience also included having practical skills that could be incorporated into their teaching program, supported by connections with local employers and community agencies. For example, a number of literacy teachers were aware that their students had an expectation and were very keen to be 'making things' as part of their classes, and while this may have opened up a lot of literacy learning opportunities, the teachers regretted their own lack of practical skills in that regard.



Team teaching and ensuring that within the team there was a good spread of skills and relevant knowledge would help to alleviate this situation. Teamwork was also essential in ensuring that different aspects of the applied learning program could be integrated, and for this purpose it was also seen to be important for all teachers involved to have an understanding of the Australian National Training System and the requirements of the AQTF.

Further findings from the broader VCAL pilot projects indicated that effective applied learning pedagogy should:

- involve student ownership of the projects and learning experiences
- include authenticity in the learning environment, in the learning activities and in the assessment as essential features

- include reflection as a key component
- incorporate approaches that emphasise the development of higher order thinking
- recognise that applied learning approaches may be particularly well suited to some students on account of their learning styles, cognitive styles and/or learning preferences.

At this point, by way of illustration, I would like to offer you a fairy tale. While it may be based on a true story, names and details have been changed to protect the innocent! (Any resemblance to any person living or deceased is purely coincidental).

#### *A fairy story*

Once upon a time there was a secondary maths teacher who had been teaching for many, many years. He enjoyed his subject and he believed he was a good teacher. His senior students got very good results, and this made him feel happy and successful.

After some time, as the years passed, he decided to give up his job to take some more time for himself. However, he didn't want to give up work altogether; he still had a lot to contribute, and besides, he could do with the extra dollars.

One day he heard on the grapevine that there was a TAFE college that was crying out for maths teachers to help teach adults who were returning to study, so he thought he might give it a go. Along he went and offered his services, and found himself teaching people who were much older than the school students he'd been used to, but they were really keen students and he knew just what to teach them. He was pleased too because he still had spare time for playing golf, and doing all those other things he couldn't do when he was teaching school. But best of all he no longer had to go to meetings, or professional development, or any of those annoying time-wasting things, because he was paid for his teaching sessions and that was all he had to do.

Then one day something happened to turn his world upside down. 'We need you to go and teach numeracy to some applied learning students at another campus. We've got no-one else we can send', said the head of the department. 'The students are all studying a pre-apprenticeship program and they have to do at least 100 hours of numeracy. Will you do it?'

'Ooh, OK', he said, trying to sound enthusiastic, but feeling a little cross. He didn't really want to have to go to another campus. And what did he know about pre-apprentices or anything to do with trades, for that matter? 'What's this about applied learning?' he asked a couple of people nearby, but nobody seemed to know anything much

about it, so he grabbed his diary and some sheets of work, and hurried away.

Before very long the job he had thought was a dream job started to look like his worst nightmare. He met his class, and they were horrible. They slouched and sneered and made no secret of the fact that they hated maths (and they hated him, too). But that was not the worst of it. They knew nothing! They couldn't even do fractions or percentages. What was the world coming to? How did these young people (and they were all young, very young, reminded him of his worst Year Nines) ever expect any employer to hire them looking and behaving as they did?

It didn't matter how many times he told them they'd never get a job, they just ignored him. He resolved that no matter what, he would get fractions and decimals through their thick skulls. But guess what? They stopped coming to his classes! He couldn't believe it. They knew nothing, and here he was prepared to teach them what he knew they needed to know and they didn't even have the common courtesy to show up. He despised the job, and resolved that as soon as his hundred hours was up he would never again have anything to do with applied learning. And you know what, boys and girls? To this day he never has.

For those readers who like to complete some written exercises as part of every reading assignment, here is your assessment task:

- Reflecting on this story, think about any teachers you know who might similarly become sad and disillusioned if asked to teach literacy or numeracy in a context similar to this (please don't write their names).
- What would you have done if you were the numeracy teacher (or a literacy teacher) in a similar situation to the story above?
- What would you have done if you were the head of department?
- What would you have done if you were one of the students?
- To get full marks, rewrite the story above as a 'best practice' applied learning story.

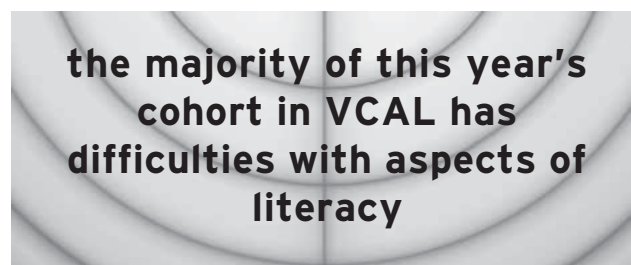
The fairy tale analogy above could probably be extended by considering what would be needed to make this into a story with a happy ending, and clearly a pot of gold would be required. This program needed resourcing so that the department in which the program was located could select appropriate staff for their skills and interest, and capacity to work with the student cohort. Those staff would need the time to meet as a team, to discuss the ways in which the applied learning program could be integrated with the literacy and numeracy components being built up from the trade areas in which the students had an interest and some commitment.

The staff would be employed on an ongoing basis (subject to the normal probation arrangements), and would therefore have an ongoing commitment to the development of the curriculum, delivery and all aspects of the pedagogy. Because they were employed as ongoing staff they would be available for meetings, in-services and professional development that would all contribute to the effectiveness of the overall program, and its continuation as meaningful education and training with real outcomes for the already disadvantaged young people it was catering to. There, I told you it was a fairy story.

### **VCAL and literacy and numeracy issues**

Many of the issues inherent in the applied learning versus academic learning debate come to the fore in the literacy / numeracy strand of VCAL. It has become clear in the course of the evaluation, through the comments of VCAL coordinators, that the majority of this year's cohort in VCAL has difficulties with aspects of literacy and/or numeracy.

As identified by the OECD, (Kirby Report, p.28) there is a close relationship between literacy inequality and economic inequality, and given that Australia currently has nearly half of its population with literacy levels below the minimum needed to operate in the modern world (Kirby, p.36), the emphasis on literacy and numeracy development in VCAL is clearly warranted.



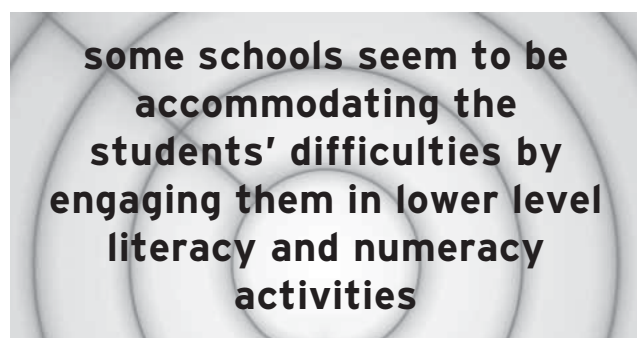
At this early stage in the development of VCAL, there are a number of matters associated with the delivery of literacy and numeracy teaching/training/skill development that will need to be addressed if this strand is to produce improved outcomes for students. It is recognised that the choices of subject offerings during this pilot phase may not be what will be offered in subsequent VCAL programs.

### **Maximising the options**

At present many schools have chosen VCE-accredited units for delivery of the literacy/numeracy requirements in the pilot. In some cases schools have chosen these units so students will have an option of going back into VCE should VCAL not continue if students select this particular pathway at a later date. In these cases, either foundation VCE or units 1 and 2 have been selected because this has



enabled VCAL students to continue as part of the general VCE cohort, rather than being separated out. This option was often preferred to other possible options when timetabling and staffing issues needed to be resolved.



Other schools addressed the literacy/numeracy requirements of the VCAL by hiring trained and experienced adult literacy teachers to deliver CGEA components in the school. Still other schools sent their students out of the school to either local ACE or VET providers. In one case, a group training company was used to deliver the literacy/numeracy components of the school's VCAL learning program.

Having VCAL students integrated into regular VCE English classes may be appropriate if the VCAL students' literacy skill levels enable them to participate effectively in that class. However, given that so many of the students in this year's VCAL are there because they and/or their teachers believe that they would be unable to cope or succeed in VCE, this may not be the best option. Reports from schools where this integration is occurring indicate that unless there is ample time for collaboration between the VCAL coordinator and the English teacher, the VCAL students will most likely fall through the cracks.

What is of concern here is that in their attempts to deal with the low levels of literacy and numeracy, some schools seem to be accommodating the students' difficulties by engaging them in lower level literacy and numeracy activities, rather than addressing these difficulties in such a way that would 'enable development of the student's literacy, numeracy and other skills, knowledge and attitudes that enable progression to further learning and to the world of work' (VQA guidelines, purpose statement, literacy and numeracy strand). This is a particularly difficult issue for schools, but one that is clearly recognised by teachers.

For significant progress in the literacy and numeracy development of students in their post-compulsory years, explicit numeracy-level entry and building towards achievable goals within a pathway-oriented instructional plan will help to lift students' confidence and self esteem, while significantly progressing their literacy and numeracy skills.

The notion of linking literacy and numeracy to workplace communication through an integrated program was also observed in practice. This was perhaps most advanced at one VCAL pilot school, where the approach to learning is completely different to the traditional classroom experience of talk and chalk. From the work environment and relationship dynamic between students and staff, to the experiential nature of the learning process, everything about this school's program was radically different to that offered by mainstream secondary colleges.

The emphasis was on applied learning with academic skills and knowledge considered useful only to the extent that these were relevant to the process of getting the job done. Literacy and numeracy skills are treated in the same way. Students are given real reading and mathematical problems to solve, but always linked to workplace communications and/or self-directed discovery learning.

### **Some considerations when developing programs**

Students need to be involved in determining the relationship between their career pathways plan and the development of a relevant literacy/numeracy plan of action. The two go hand-in-hand, and it would appear that for many VCAL students, unless they can see the point of the literacy or numeracy skill development course, they will not necessarily participate effectively. It is recognised that this may take some time to develop, depending on the progress of individual students in work and career planning.

Where students do not need to complete VCE units to meet career objectives, literacy/numeracy skills can be developed and assessed through a range of integrated activities as part of the broader VCAL learning program. It is recognised that this approach will have professional development implications for many secondary school teachers.

Some students with a career pathway plan and a literacy/numeracy development plan in place may need specialised teaching assistance in a small group, or individually if real progress is to be made. This will have resource implications, but the ultimate resource implications of not doing it may be far higher.

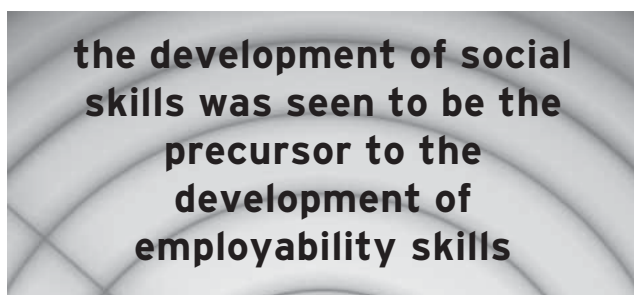
### **Inclusion of employability skill development in applied learning programs**

The incorporation of employability skill development into VCAL learning programs has largely been constructed by schools in terms of classroom-based activities such as resume writing, interview skills and telephone etiquette. More positive examples of employability skill development tended to be conducted by a person well versed in employers' general requirements of employees, variously



termed soft skills, generic skills, key competencies and work readiness skills in the contemporary VET jargon.

These people were also able to work with VCAL students in small groups or on a one-to-one basis with a less expository style of communication. The interaction style observed on these occasions tended to be more advisory and mentoring in nature. These examples focused on appropriate personal presentation, person-to-person interactions and behaviour in the workplace.



Employability skills development tended to be addressed through a concern about a range of underpinning behaviours that could be grouped under the general concept of 'sociability'. The development of social skills was seen to be the precursor to the development of employability skills. This was expressed through a focus on ameliorating behaviours thought most likely to be off-putting for prospective employers. At times, this approach was implemented by VCAL teachers explicitly modelling respectful and reciprocating ways of behaviour with their students. In at least one VCAL provider the focus on employability skills was direct, explicit and unambiguous—VCAL students were told they were there to learn four 'things':

1. to be punctual
2. to be reliable
3. to be able to take instructions without complaint
4. to be able to give instructions to others.

At this school it was made clear to students that these are the attitudes and behaviours that determine their potential to develop into a 'good' employee. Whether they are employed as an apprentice or not, the type of people employers are looking for is determined in the first instance by these four 'things'. The clear message given to students was that trade skills can be taught on the job, but attitudes and personal presentation and organisational skills need to be established before an employer will consider engaging an applicant for employment.

### **Integration of work placement within learning programs**

There are two aspects to this matter of work placement integration. The first is making it happen in the sense of

incorporating a work placement opportunity or opportunities into students' experiences of VCAL. The second is the connections between each student's learning and development activities while on a work placement, and those occurring elsewhere in their overall VCAL learning program.

All providers are working to establish extended work placements as an integral part of their VCAL programs. This is in marked contrast to the limited work placements typically available to students under the VET in VCE regime. This is now being extended to the active promotion and implementation of school-based new apprenticeships within VCAL.

Addressing the second aspect—integration across the curriculum strands—is an important issue for local VCAL providers. Over time it is expected that integration will become a stronger feature than is currently the case, as VCAL coordinators and teachers become more aware of the possibilities within the VCAL program structure. There are some promising examples of integrated activities in TAFE, where the literacy, numeracy and personal development strands of VCAL are integrated and incorporated into a real and applied approach.

### **Literacy, numeracy and youth education**

The evaluation of the initial VCAL pilot programs concluded that:

As a general observation, secondary schools are generally neither equipped nor resourced to address effectively the learning needs of young people at the post-compulsory level with lower levels of achievement in literacy and numeracy.

The difficulty for schools is that of addressing these students' learning difficulties in literacy and numeracy in such a way that enables progression to further learning and to the world of work. Established adult literacy approaches, including integration of literacy development with relevant vocational and social goals for the students, have shown promising results with VCAL students at the TAFE pilot sites. The opportunity exists, through VCAL, for schools to directly explore youth-oriented literacy and numeracy programs within an applied learning curriculum context, informed by the extensive experience of adult educators in this field.

The evaluation recommended that the issue of teaching literacy and numeracy skills in secondary schools be addressed through explicit developmental programs based on an unequivocal assessment of students' literacy and numeracy entering levels, and building towards achievable

and relevant goals within a pathway-oriented instructional plan. Various options to be explored include the provision of appropriate youth-oriented literacy and numeracy support personnel and professional development programs for VCAL teachers.

One response to the issue of delivering appropriate literacy and numeracy programs within VCAL has been the adaptation and accreditation of the Certificates of General Education for Adults (CGEA) for delivery as VCAL literacy and numeracy units. These will be implemented by many providers beginning in 2004, so at this stage it is too early to assess their effectiveness in lifting the literacy and numeracy levels of the students. It will also be interesting to observe the extent to which a rejigged CGEA can help to foster and develop an applied learning pedagogy within the providers, secondary schools, TAFE colleges and ACE .

In the existing VCAL programs in TAFE, there tends to be a division between the practical/vocational aspects of VCAL and the literacy/numeracy delivery caused by them being housed, funded, staffed, etc, in different departments. All sectors need help to see how literacy and numeracy can be made more applied. While there has been a great deal of development in the ACE sector in the creation of applied literacy and numeracy courses and assessment programs, this is generally not widely known in schools.

Numeracy is particularly problematic at this stage because senior secondary maths teachers are used to teaching in a

very academic expository way. There is a need for a sharing of ACE numeracy resources, knowledge and expertise with the secondary sector, and the identification of secondary maths teachers who are interested in developing their teaching skills in this direction.

However, it must be remembered that teachers teaching VCAL in schools are on the whole dealing with a different cohort of students to those teaching VCAL in TAFE or ACE providers. Teachers in schools may be teaching VCAL as only a small part of their load, and so may have limited time and incentive to undertake PD in this area, whereas TAFE and ACE providers may experience barriers in taking an integrated approach to the delivery of VCAL because of the different departments involved.

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# Touch one, touch all: taking education to the workplace

by Anne Duggan

**In just ten years the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union's training unit has brought big changes to its members, especially those from NESB backgrounds. One reason for the unit's success is the application of the principles of adult education, with a strong focus on literacy, to every aspect of its work.**

## An ongoing story

This story is about our working and learning environment, our history, philosophy and systems and some of the methodologies that have assisted the CFMEU in Victoria to extend the reach of its educational programs. In 1993, just 43 workers were involved in programs; by 2003 there were 8000. Also, in those ten years the scope of learning offered expanded from induction and short courses to Certificate III, IV and diploma courses.

We believe that when we get the mix right for just one of our members, the confidence of other workers in the power and accessibility of knowledge increases.

It is important to declare up front that our work takes place within a politically charged environment, that workers in the Victorian commercial construction industry value the educational opportunities that their union provides, and consider these opportunities to be an industrial right. Also, that workers feel some ownership of the program and have some control over how, when and where their learning takes place is indeed one of the greatest strengths of the work our unit undertakes. But it wasn't always that way.

The Education and Training Unit was established in 1993. It grew from research carried out in 1990 for the Victorian Building Industry Agreement Consultative Committee into



the educational and training needs of workers in the Victorian building and construction industry, and in particular the communication needs of non-English speaking background workers. The research found that access to formal education and training programs for workers was limited, particularly for workers with significant general education and communication needs. Limited opportunities for education and training impacted negatively on workers' formal understanding of their occupational, health and safety (OH&S) matters, industrial agreements and the impact of significant structural changes within the industry and broader society.

## Reaching those in need

The research therefore identified a specific need in relation to migrant workers, and workers with little formal education, and led to funding from the federal government's Workplace English Language and Literacy program to the CFMEU for the establishment of education and training to address the language and literacy needs identified in the research.

The dominant models of literacy and ESL teaching at the time were stand-alone English courses, which usually dealt with basic survival skills. It was clear to us that to deliver language and literacy training outside the context of workers' industrial lives would be a mistake. And so a model of integrated education and training was developed that was specific to the building and construction industry.

Our targets were workers in the non-trades classifications. This was because research showed (and continues to show) that outside of traditional apprenticeship and licensing, training for workers in the building industry was minimal. Since 1990 estimates for government expenditure on training for non-trades workers has consistently rated between three per cent and five per cent of total resource allocation for the industry.

There were other issues that needed to be considered in determining how our project would be implemented:

- the cyclical nature of building activity

- the fact that workplaces are site-based and are transient
- workers are itinerant
- work is largely undertaken through small sub-contracting companies
- there is a significant under-representation of women workers
- large numbers of migrant workers are concentrated in less secure and more dangerous occupations such as asbestos removal
- two-thirds of CW 1–4 workers are aged 20 to 40 years, there is a significant fall-off of workers remaining in the industry beyond the age of 50, and less than four per cent of workers 19 years or younger
- one-third of the workforce has less than five years' industry experience, 57 per cent has less than ten years' experience and six per cent of workers have 30 years' experience or more.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, most workers in the target group had left school early and had negative memories of their education. The challenge therefore, was to design a system that could effectively meet the vocational and educational needs of workers in an industry with these characteristics.

Host sites were established in each of the major metropolitan and country Victorian regions. These had to be large commercial construction sites that could offer reasonable training facilities. By establishing host sites, workers from smaller neighbouring sites could access training on the host site.

A database was established to keep records of individual workers training, and which could track workers as they moved from site to site. In this way workers commencing training on one site could complete that training on another site.

A program of awareness raising which would give workers a positive experience of training was initiated. OH&S representatives and shop stewards were targeted for specific courses relevant to their needs.

Clauses on training were written into collective bargaining agreements enabling organisers and stewards to treat education and training as any other industrial entitlement. Courses were selected that had immediate relevance. All were competency-based, nationally accredited and recognised.

Language, literacy and numeracy teachers were employed, and building and construction workers were trained as trainers. Partnerships for learning were developed and both industry trainers and specialist teachers shared their skills for the benefit of the program.

Slowly a culture of learning developed in the industry, and with each worker who had a positive experience with the unit, word spread.

## A worker's story

The story of just one of our members illustrates how these elements come together. This worker is 38 years old, and has been in the Victorian Building and Construction Industry since he migrated to Australia from Portugal in 1989. He first came to our attention on a building site in 1996.

At the time, he was working as a labourer, fetching scaffolding for the qualified scaffolders he worked with. In Victoria, only workers who hold a certificate of competency issued by the state authority can carry out the erection, inspection and dismantling of scaffold. This certificate is achieved once a worker has completed formal written knowledge and practical assessments conducted in English. Without this certificate, under the law, a worker has to be supervised when working in the erection and dismantling of scaffolding.

Our member had attempted to complete a course at night school to prepare him for the certificate but had dropped out because of family commitments, because he was tired after a day of hard labour, because sometimes he had to work overtime and because he found the classes daunting. Like many workers in the industry, he was trapped. Without the certificate of competency, his employment in an insecure industry was even less secure. Without adequate experience and training, his understanding of OH&S—his rights and responsibilities—placed himself and other workers at risk. Without room to develop, his capacity to participate in the democratic structures in his workplace was restricted. His shop steward was concerned and as a result referred him to the education and training unit.

## The first steps

After talking with this worker about what he wanted, he was referred to one of the English second language teachers working with our unit. He undertook a learning needs assessment and a training plan was negotiated with him and his employer.

He commenced an emergency first aid course. The unit uses this course to introduce English language and literacy training to workers with significant needs in this area. The course at a minimum is completed in six hours. When delivered as a vehicle for English language development, the course is 40 hours. It is chosen as an introduction for the following reasons:

- the high rate of fatalities and injuries in the construction industry makes first aid a priority skill for most

workers—the course therefore has relevance and meets an immediate need

- there is a high practical component—the course encourages participation and cooperation amongst participants and is therefore a good vehicle for the introduction of collective learning principles
- the course involves a lot of demonstration and repetition—providing a basis for the development and consolidation of simple language structures
- most workers succeed.

After successfully completing the emergency first aid course, this worker commenced an occupational, health and safety course delivered by an ESL teacher from the unit. Although the course incorporates practical applications of learning, it has a greater emphasis on the development of underpinning communication skills and on identifying and analysing problems and on recommending solutions.

### Higher achievements

After successfully completing the OH&S course, he was ready to tackle the scaffolding requirements. He was issued with a union trainee permit and log book and was asked to complete 800 hours supervised training on the job. He was still out on site assisting the scaffolders, but now his work was more structured and had a purpose that was significant to him.

He then enrolled in the union's scaffolding course designed to prepare him for the certificate of competency assessment. This time his learning was facilitated by an industry trainer and backed up by an ESL teacher. In 1998, he topped the class in the basic scaffolding assessment and went on to successfully complete an intermediate scaffolding course with the unit.

His story illustrates how migrant workers can be meaningfully represented by trade unions. At the site level, his shop steward was alert to the disadvantages that this worker faced, and used the policies and services of the union to do something for him. Time for training had been an issue for this worker. The shop steward used the collective bargaining agreement to ensure that all his training was carried out during paid work time.

### On-site support

On site, fellow unionists applied union policy on training and OH&S to provide him with proper practical experience and support. At the union's base, the education and training unit integrated strategies into its delivery system to assist him to develop essential general educational skills with the relevant vocational skills. In this way the unit attempted to ensure that the learning it offered served a full range of his employment needs.

His story is similar to the increasing number of workers accessing union education and training services. Underpinning the capacity of union shop stewards, health and safety representatives and activists to assist members is a national policy that fundamentally supports the development of integrated education and training.

The policy provides a description of the model as follows:

The integration of communication competency in vocational education and training means that communication skills are developed concurrently with technical skills. This involves the analysis of the actual communication skill requirements of particular jobs, the identification of individual worker's education and training needs and addressing the communication competencies required according to that need. The issues inherent in award restructuring, the demands of the workplace and workers' participation in education and training demonstrate the need for the integration of trade union training.

An important element in this definition is that in addition to protecting workers' industrial conditions, there is a need to proscribe the screening and marginalisation of workers based on unrealistic and discriminatory language and literacy requirements.

The policy goes on to outline the educational philosophy which informs the development of an integrated system.

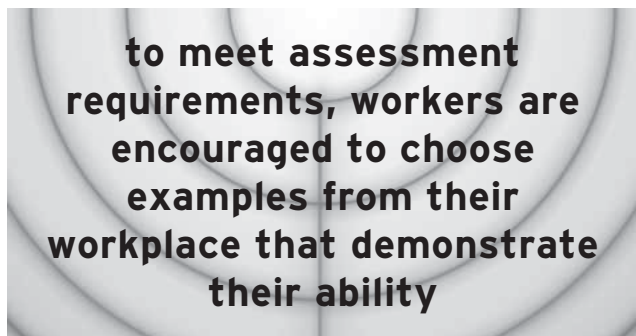
The involvement of the CFMEU in the delivery of training has led to the beginnings of a national system of integrated education and training. The philosophy which underpins this system values the existing skills and knowledge of workers, recognises that theory is based on practice and that theory advances further practice, acknowledges the strength of collective learning, emphasises that language, literacy and numeracy underpin all facets of employment, education and training and strives to provide continuity and consistency in education and training regardless of a worker's employment status.

### Education access for all

There is no doubt that the system, when implemented, maximises chances for workers of non-English speaking background and workers who have low levels of general education. In recent years, one of our greatest pleasures has been witnessing the increasing number of workers participating in certificate courses, understanding that undertaking these courses involves a long term commitment. The Certificates III and IV, and Diploma in OH&S are examples of this. We currently have 222 OH&S representatives and activists enrolled or on a waiting list to do the Certificate III.



The workers who have enrolled in the Certificates in OH&S generally left school at an early age, and have had a considerable break from formal education. It is important that a range of methodologies are employed to provide the initial support and assist them to develop the fundamental skills that will enable them to become independent learners in further education.



A formal one-to-one interview process is conducted by a literacy/ESL teacher on enrolment in the certificate courses, so that individual learner needs may be assessed. Workers are briefed on the demands of the courses and given some information to take away and think about. If workers decide to proceed with their enrolment (as most do), a smorgasbord of strategies is adopted by the teachers to establish fundamental learning skills. These strategies require workers to draw on their own life and work experience.

Participants' own anecdotes and stories from the workplace, as well as oral histories and scenarios delivered by guest speakers, form the basis for the presentation of OH&S theory, including OH&S history, principles, philosophy and policy. Text-based resources taken from the workplace are used to demonstrate how dissemination of information and record keeping can be used to enhance OH&S practice.

Slowly, models of research, analysis and synthesis are introduced and developed, and workers requiring extra assistance, particularly with written and electronic forms of communication, are able to do so on a one-to-one basis. Frequently, however, workers use the collective to assist each other where difficulties occur.

To meet assessment requirements, workers are encouraged to choose examples from their workplace that demonstrate their ability to apply the requisite knowledge and skills. In doing so, their course becomes not only a personally fulfilling endeavour but also one which assists them in their goal to make construction sites safer places to work.

While we are pleased with the progress made in developing a greater interest in learning, we know that we have many areas that need further work. We know, for example, that we need to reach a greater proportion of our NESB members—a fundamental principle on which our unit was based was that the most vulnerable and disadvantaged workers in our industry must be protected and empowered. History tells us that unions are best positioned to look after the needs of workers, including their education and training needs. Certainly our unit has effected change for some—but we must continue to fight to represent our members and remain ever vigilant of the threats posed by those who fear an informed, educated workforce.

**Anne Duggan has been teaching since the late 70s. In the 1980s she was a teacher, project officer and union liaison person for the AMES Workplace Program. An education and training officer with the CFMEU since 1993, she established and now manages the Education and Training Unit.**

### **Note**

1. From CFMEU data base.

## Brain Gym—a useful exercise

The human brain is the most powerful supercomputer ever known, but many experts also tell us that it is an important muscle in need of regular exercise. As Mary Nicholls writes, Brain Gym can remove stress, improve concentration and memory, increase energy levels and lift academic performance. Here's how.

Can you remember a time when you were studying or reading something and after one or two pages realised you hadn't taken in a word? Have you ever prepared really well for a test but couldn't remember what you'd learnt once you were in the exam room? Or maybe, you did study hard for an exam and were able to answer the questions, but couldn't remember what you'd learned after the exam was over? Have you ever prepared a speech or presentation, stood up and forgotten what you had planned to say, or stumbled over the words?

If we have these difficulties sometimes, how much harder must it be for literacy students in adult community classes—often working in a second language—to learn, remember and reproduce what has been taught?

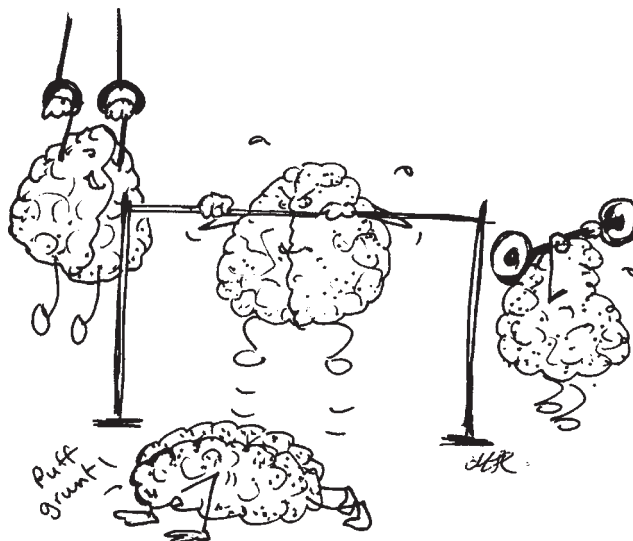
What can we, as teachers, do to help our students learn more easily and feel more comfortable in a learning environment? One thing we can do is introduce Brain Gym movements into our class routine. Brain Gym can make a difference.

### What is Brain Gym?

Brain Gym<sup>1</sup> is a system of 26 easy, safe and energising physical activities which directly enhance brain function within a short period of time, in some cases immediately. Dr Paul E. Dennison Ph.D, an expert in child motor development, developed Brain Gym over a period of 20 years from the 1970s. Brain Gym is based on over 80 years of research by specialists in the fields of movement, education and child development. The movements are not just for children or people with learning difficulties; they can help anyone perform with ease and confidence.

Brain Gym movements improve concentration and memory, release stress which blocks learning, increase energy and motivation, increase self confidence and improve specific academic performance such as reading, writing, spelling and maths. They are safe, quick and easy to do and are ideal to use in an adult literacy classroom.

A very important advantage of using Brain Gym is that it helps develop mind/body awareness so you can recognise the physical, mental and emotional signs that you are tuning out and getting stressed.



(M. Hanrahan)

### How does it work?

Doing Brain Gym movements consciously activates the whole mind/body system, stimulating nervous system activity equally in all parts of the brain and lessening the fight/flight reaction (the tendency to either struggle on or give up entirely) in stressful situations. Trying too hard switches off the brain-integration mechanisms necessary for complete learning. In this situation the dominant brain hemisphere takes over most mental processes. This can result in an inability to express or recall what has been learnt—hence the total blackout in an exam.

Brain Gym movements activate the left and right hemispheres of the neocortex equally, and provide access to those parts of the brain which become inaccessible, so learners can receive information and express themselves simultaneously. The movements stimulate different cognitive functions, including communication, comprehension and ability to think in an organised way. There are specific movements for improving reading, writing, spelling, maths and communication and alleviating stress.

### Stress makes learning difficult

Although adult community centres offer a supportive and safe environment for people who come for part-time classes

# Practical Matters

to learn at their own pace, some people seem to find learning quite difficult. There can be so many reasons, as we know—cultural, educational background, etc. Some of your students may have fear of failure or feelings of inadequacy, believing they are too old to learn, have low self esteem, feel embarrassed about attending school at an older age, or have had bad childhood school experiences. They may worry about making mistakes and being judged by the teacher or classmates. (Nicholls and Raleigh, 1998) Any of these factors can add to the level of stress your students may be feeling.

To get the most benefit from doing Brain Gym, it is really important to notice when feelings of stress are creating barriers in learning or working on the task at hand. This is the time to stop and do some Brain Gym to relax the body and improve performance.

## Some movements to try

There are four easy movements you can incorporate into the beginning of a class that can bring people into the present, reduce their levels of stress, enhance their alertness and readiness to learn. These are known as PACE.

PACE stands for Positive, Active, Clear and Energetic. Just to confuse things, it is suggested they are done in the reverse order to gain the maximum cumulative benefit from the four activities (ECAP).<sup>2</sup>

First, to be *Energetic* we simply drink water. Water facilitates every chemical and electrical reaction in our brain. Water carries oxygen to the brain and reduces that 'foggy' feeling. It improves concentration and energy levels and alleviates



Drink water

(M. Hanrahan)



Brain buttons

(M. Hanrahan)

mental fatigue. Water enhances the brain's ability to process information more effectively and efficiently. Encourage learners to drink water during the day as well.

Next is Brain Buttons for *Clear* thinking. The Brain Buttons lie directly above the carotid arteries and, when massaged, increase the flow of freshly oxygenated blood to the brain to promote focus and alertness.

Stand facing a wall or horizontal line—the top of the wall where it meets the ceiling, or the top of a bookshelf. Place your thumb and the next two fingers under your collar bone either side of the breastbone, about an inch away from the midline, and gently massage the spots where your thumb and fingers are touching. Place your other hand flat across your navel. Move your eyes from left to right and right to left—to help your students, say, 'Look at the left corner and then the right corner and back again'. After you have done this for about 30 seconds, change hands and repeat it for another 30 seconds.

To do Cross Crawl is to be *Active*. Cross Crawl activates both hemispheres of the brain simultaneously, so learners can receive and retrieve information more easily and efficiently.

This is best done standing up, but older people can sit down. Touch one hand to the opposite knee and lift the knee you are touching to meet the hand. If someone is sitting, it is more effective if they lift the knee as well as touching it. Do this for about 60 seconds.



## Cross Crawl

(M. Hanrahan)

The last movement is Hook Ups. Hook Ups release emotional stress and help us think *Positively*. They restore balance after any emotional or environmental stress, and allow us to reason rather than react.

They are best done sitting down, especially the first few times. Simply place one ankle over the other and then put both arms out in front, at shoulder height, palms facing away, thumbs down. Place one wrist over the other (whichever is more comfortable) and link your fingers. Then turn your linked hands under and rest them on your chest. When you breathe in bring your tongue to the roof of your mouth, and when you breathe out relax the tongue. Hold the position for about eight breaths, then unlink your hands and place your fingertips together (just the tips) in your lap and place your feet apart on the floor. Breathe in and out as above for another eight breaths.

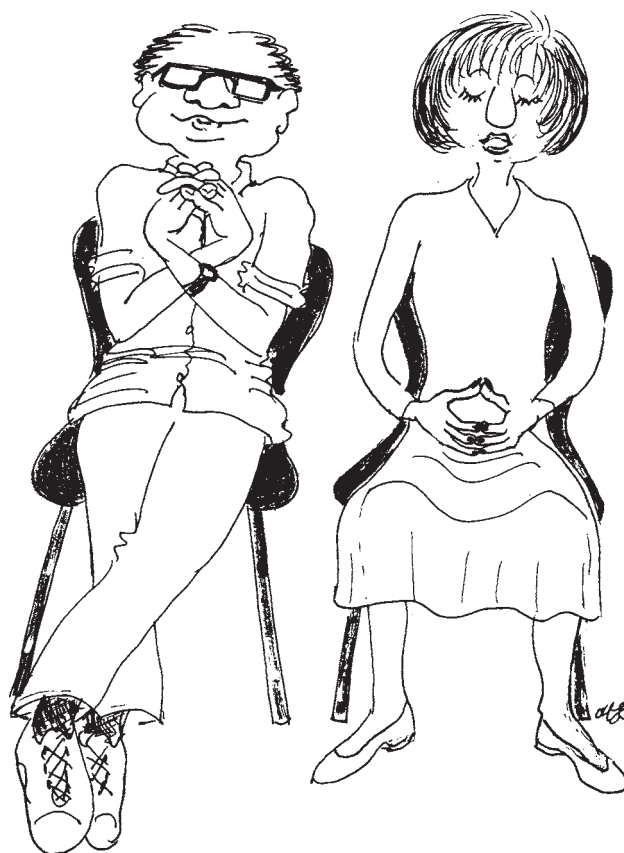
It is important is to notice how you are feeling before you do PACE and then notice if anything has changed when you have finished. If you notice a more peaceful or more focussed feeling, that's great! Do these before you start your day, or a new activity, for a few days. Once you have seen

and felt the benefits of PACE you will be ready to introduce it to your students.

## Convincing teachers

For her doctoral thesis in 1995, Jan Irving, a nursing educator, studied the effects of PACE on first-year nursing students. There were three control groups. The results were significant. She found a 69.5 per cent reduction in self-reported anxiety and 18.7 per cent increase in performance on skills tests clearly related to the PACE activities. The study showed four general effects: the subject experienced a more positive attitude, more active participation, clearer thinking and a more positive approach. (Irving, 1997).

In 2003 in my own classroom, with a CELL (Certificate in English Language Literacies) class of adult ESL/literacy students, PACE was remarkably effective in getting the students to focus. The students enjoyed the exercises and had fun making sure the others were doing them properly. There was a lot of laughter but also amazing results. Several students who had not progressed after two years of attending full time classes have now moved into the next level. The confidence, self esteem and camaraderie in the



## Hook Ups

(M. Hanrahan)

# Practical Matters

class were remarked on by other teachers and coordinators. The group blossomed with Brain Gym.

## Convincing students

Learners have their own life history and usually a firm set of beliefs. It can be difficult to ask them to do something different. However, if you are convinced that it works yourself, you will have a much better chance of having them use Brain Gym.

Ask the class to notice how they feel before and after PACE. Maybe they'll feel less tired or more alert. Get them to rub their Brain Buttons if they can't remember a spelling word. You might also tell them that Brain Buttons are great to use when you can't remember something, such as why you went into a room or where you put something earlier. Try it yourself. And, if you are convinced, sell it to your students.

Drinking water clears the head and helps people to remember and think more clearly. Encourage your students to bring a small plastic water bottle and take regular sips during the class.

PACE is a fun way to start the class. You can use music for the cross crawl section and the hookups. If you use PACE at the start of every lesson, you'll notice a remarkable change in the focus and attention of your students—even if they don't.

Good luck. Please feel free to contact me for further information.

Mary Nicholls is an ESL teacher and has taught in CGEA in community classes for six years. She is a Brain Gym instructor/consultant in Brunswick, and holds professional development days, workshops, in-services and individual consultations. Mary can be contacted on 9435 0349 or email [manicholls@swin.edu.au](mailto:manicholls@swin.edu.au). Visit [www.braingym.org](http://www.braingym.org) for information about Brain Gym.

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## Notes

1. Brain Gym® is a registered trademark of the Educational Kinesiology Foundation.
2. Diagrams adapted from *Brain Gym for Business* by Jerry Teplitz and Paul and Gail Dennison, Edu-Kinesthetics and *Brain Gym Teacher's Edition* by Paul and Gail Dennison, Edu-Kinesthetics.



# Open Forum

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

In this issue, a group of ACAL and VALBEC members discuss their reading of Rob McCormack's article 'Adult literacy: towards a new paradigm', which featured in the last edition of *Fine Print*, and Jane Casey gives a moving account of a young man's journey of discovery in the youth program at Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre.

## Wrestling with the rhetorical—getting a headlock on a 'new' paradigm

Rob McCormack's presentation at ACAL in Alice Springs, and its subsequent publication in the summer 2003 edition of *Fine Print* has generated a great deal of discussion amongst literacy practitioners around Australia. On a balmy Melbourne evening, Lynne Matheson, Karen Manwaring and Pauline O'Maley grappled with some of the issues raised by Rob, and graciously agreed to a request from *Fine Print* to publish their reflections.

### What was your response to Rob's article?

PO'M: Rob McCormack's article offered all I desire in a journal article. It delighted, it informed, it challenged, it stirred and it irritated. He said its aim was to be provocative and preposterous. It was. He took me on an interesting and enjoyable ride. He makes very big calls—his title speaks boldly of a new paradigm, he expresses his anger and disappointment at ACAL and the field for their 'blindness'. A lot of what he talks about did invoke the 'sparks of recognition' he speaks of, not because we have, as he suggests, strayed a long way from our roots, but rather because it aligns with beliefs, approaches and passions close to my adult literacy teacher's heart. Nor am I convinced what he presents is new in the paradigmatic way he suggests.

LM: I don't mind saying that I found the article dense reading but after the third re-reading I feel that I have got my head around most of it. However, there are sections of the article that seem like 'academica-polemica'. Is he speaking in 'tongues' or 'tongue in cheek'? In its original form, in the context of the ACAL conference in Alice Springs, I can understand why he was quite deliberate in his approach in aiming to generate discussion and debate. Ultimately it is an impressive piece that made me think his PhD touring through Ancient Greece, Byzantium through to the Enlightenment and more recent philosophers would make an interesting read (in my retirement years!). The academic tone he adopts nevertheless contains threads of irony and reflection that engaged and challenged me, which

after all, is what we need in a professional journal of the calibre of *Fine Print*.

### Was the exposition of styles of the ancient rhetoric and genre games (tropes) useful in orienting yourself to his argument?

KM: Rob's argument constructing a new paradigm for adult literacy is really interesting—suggesting that the tools of rhetoric provide a means of talking about and learning about society, social life and social relations. Also as a way of making students' discussions and observations 'special', and thereby giving students a means of steeping their opinions and observations in a context of 'specialness'—what we'd also call, I think, self esteem, self confidence or pride. In this sense I saw rhetoric as a kind of supportive structure that helps learners make sense of and give worth to all aspects of discussion and communication—to locate discussion in history and culture. It's great stuff and something for teachers and student to think about.

LM: My response to Rob's exposition of styles of the ancient rhetoric was one of bemusement. Where was he heading with this? Would an anger management course help? But it was informative in setting the context for his main points regarding definitions and the way forward. I like the concept of epideictic discourse in that it 'calls on the audience to reconnect with the values, the history and the hopes that bind that community together into a fellowship of humanity' connecting each other—*sensus communis*. A community of practice is one of the aims one hopes for at a national conference.

P'OM: I understand that writing an article such as this makes it difficult to develop all aspects of the thesis—space and balance are always issues. While I enjoyed the intellectual challenges of the rhetorical dance we were taken on in the first couple of pages, I felt frustrated by the way in which the argument was in many ways underdeveloped.

For example, I am unclear about the way in which Rob conceptualises culture, a concept central to his argument. My feeling is that culture, as it is presented here, is rather static and bounded. The tension inherent in the application of a method that served the skills development of 'small ancient city states' to a globalised world with shrinking borders is not teased out enough for me. Nor is the relationship between oratory and writing.

**What were, for you, the 'sparks of recognition' in what he had to say?**

LM: When he divided his speech under three headings/questions I sensed a familiar pattern. Questioning understandings of the terminology, and then proposing new definitions is an effective and engaging approach.

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.

This definition has resonance for the increasingly younger cohort of students and the weight of responsibilities they must take on, as much as for those recently arrived in Australia having to fend for themselves in an alien environment. Taking responsibility may be delayed for many due to life experiences that impact on development of literacy and selfhood. Taking responsibility for one's learning is a key factor in a student's progress, and by extension to the broader community implies civic and environmental awareness.

**His definition of adult literacy is at once perfect and problematic. What issues does it raise for you?**

... 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.

LM: Defining literacy is difficult and contested as Crina Virgona comments on in her article. She quotes Knoblauch who throws into question the motivation of those who define literacy and the intention or use to which it is put. In Virgona's case the definitions of Hull and the three dimensions of literacy that Lankshear defined give a framework to the research. The workplace community may fit in Mc Cormack's reference to communities, and an active role in engaging /mastering/questioning the rules is evident in both.

PO'M: I agree with much that Rob has to say: that literacy is a political project, that language is a powerful tool and our students benefit from understanding its subtleties. That 'every adult has a right to participate in the discursive exchanges that articulate, formulate, transform and critique

the world we live in'. I share his concern about the reductionist and static nature of tools such as the NRS and the performative principles some programs are constrained by. I agree that 'efforts to define adult education as basically reducible to vocational training in or for the workplace are absurd'. This viewpoint aligns with ACAL's view that literacy skills are embedded in all aspects of life and are essential for full participation in modern Australian society. ACAL supports and promotes literacy as a whole of life/whole of government strategy.

However, I do not agree that there is only one sound approach to this work. For example, I work in Melbourne in a program that is part of the Victorian Homeless and Drug Dependency Trial. As a part of our timetable we do, among other things, philosophy (similar but different in some ways to what Rob outlines), woodwork, cooking, computers, all of which I would (and do) argue are part of adult literacy (and other things as well). I believe philosophy is an essential tool for our participants in envisaging different futures.

LM: McCormack goes some way to giving a different slant on literacy, but I wonder about what 'the texts that underwrite a way of life' (p.7) might be, and who selects them. A dialogic approach to text may be what he intends by this, and one assumes adults get to play a role in that selection. Such flexibility may not be found in the workplace though.

KM: Then there's the aspect of the article where Rob extends this discussion of rhetoric to include the adult literacy field and its practitioners/stakeholders. I think he's saying that the field has lost its specialness—that participating in some epideictic rhetoric (the rhetoric of special occasions) is what the field needs in order to reconnect with its soul, to 'celebrate and intensify its sense of self' (p.3). It's true, we (adult literacy practitioners) don't get a lot of opportunities to get together and reflect on where adult literacy has come from—what has influenced and shaped the field over the years. Sometimes it happens at conferences (in amongst dealing with the AQTf). Sometimes it happens in university postgraduate study (though these courses seem to be either dwindling or directing themselves more towards vocational education). I very much doubt whether the new Certificate in Training and Assessment includes a module on Reflecting on the History of the ALBE field.

PO'M: Yes, actually I have an advantage over some readers. I attended the ACAL forum that preceded the conference in Alice Springs where Rob delivered his paper. At the forum Rob and some of his students from Bachelor College led a workshop where they had us, in groups, develop some statements for performance using rhetorical methods. I was

impressed by the process in which our group engaged. It was indeed a 'motivating context for engaging with language'. I felt that our text, like the others when they were performed, was purposeful, political and powerful. I believe it is interesting, challenging work, and yet I am not convinced that this is the only way to go.

### **What could or would be the canonical texts for your adult learners?**

LM: It could be argued that the cultural imperialists would have a field day making the list, but I would argue that the *sensus communis* would be open and far reaching in negotiating the selection of texts with students. There are some sensational song lyrics out there!

### **What of the future in this new paradigm?**

KM: I'm with Rob in that I believe that at the core of adult education for both students and practitioners is a celebration of taking on the responsibilities of an adult—'... responsibility for themselves, for others and for the state of the wider world they find themselves in'.

PO'M: Rob speaks of many emotions—frustration, anger and hope amongst them. It is the hope that interests me. Like him, I have hopes for our future and the futures of our students, hopes that we are open to new (and old) ideas,

and hopes that we will continue to rise to the challenge of critique and open our minds (and hearts) to new approaches and methods. So Rob, thanks for the challenge. Let us, as you suggest continue:

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.

I am inclined, as I have suggested, to put my emphasis on the coulds and not the shoulds.

LM: His conclusion is positive and hopeful. It suggests a mellowing in Rob toward his *sensus communis* and an appreciation that the adult literacy field's wellsprings will ensure an abundant supply of ideas and inspiration to send us forward.

**Lynne Matheson is co-president of VALBEC and further education coordinator at the Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre, Pauline O'Maley is VALBEC secretary and coordinator of the Community Reintegration Program for the Salvation Army at Crosslink in Ascot Vale, and Karen Manwaring is literacy programs manager at the Council for Adult Education.**

## **Craig has arrived—and it's ALL good!**

Craig arrived at Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre shy, but willing to give it a go. He wasn't too sure what to expect. His gut instincts were kicking in, telling him to keep an eye on the door should he need to escape.

He didn't make eye contact with anyone—that was far too confronting. This was made easy by his hooded windcheater that cast a dark shadow over his face. What the others didn't know was that the big brown bloodshot eyes were wide open in a total state of bewilderment. Like a deer locked in the gaze of oncoming headlights. His hood helped camouflage the cold sores and pale dirty skin while also serving to muffle the cough that continually came from deep within his sunken chest.

This went on for the next six weeks, so it was with disbelief that I received not one, but three calls from friends of Craig saying that he'd changed. They always knew that they could rock up to his house any time, day or night, knowing that he would be there in his room with music on, lying on his bed, as the mind-numbing influence of his drug of choice, started to take effect.

He turns the music up louder to fade out the voices he hears outside, or are they in his head? They call over and over, for him to come outside. They are doing his head in. He knows how to make them go away. He purses his lips on his homemade bong, as he draws a breathe in and stares aimlessly at the bright orange light. The voices become a little fainter, and now they are being replaced by the sound of his mates. Mates he can rely on, he can hang with, escape with—his drug buddies.

But lately Craig's not there. His Mum said he went flying out the door without eating, complaining that the chain on his stupid bike was broken. She didn't know what he was on about, it had been leaning against the shed so long the weeds had interwoven themselves into the wheel spikes, embracing the wheels as their own. The wheels had long since forgotten their once endless adventures around the back streets of Broadie and beyond.

'Craig's changed', complained one friend to me. 'He talks all the time. And not about his usual bullshit about knocking off this place or person, or the money they are

going to make or the gear they will haul. Not even about him perfecting the ultimate glass bong, as passed on by his Dad. All this between giggles and slurred speech, as he sucks on yet another one of Australia's wake-up coffee—a bong.

'Now all he talks and laughs about is getting an education and a job in conservation, and what he is going to do with his new pad as he doodles his latest design. He reckons he's leaving this dump. It's for losers', his friends say.

'Enough is enough! We're scared we're losing him. What's got into him? He's bitching about his Mum not getting his clothes dry by tomorrow. He's washed his hair, and the matted bird's nest is now sleeked back.

'This is a trip we don't want to miss out on. How do we get into the program? He says it's way cool. People respect you, whoever you are. He has made new friends. It's all good', he says.

'We are losing him', they say with some sense of urgency. 'He is going somewhere, he's moving away'. No one's sure where, but he's moving from the motionless place of his room and reality as he once knew it.

Ten weeks later, it's hard to believe it is the same person as Craig comes bounding up the stairs, carting his bike in one hand as he clumsily enters the building, casting a cheeky grin and throwing out an equally cheeky greeting to anyone he meets.

'Sorry I'm late', he pants. 'I need a drink, can I grab a cordial? I've been riding like a madman, like there was coppers after me'. The smiles spread even further as he catches me spontaneously look out window to the street, to see if he is being followed by anyone in a uniform.

He high fives and interlocks his hand with one of his mates as they twist and turn. 'What's up?' he asks as he raises his chin and throws back his head as they pat each other on the back.

To the onlooker, it looks like some gang greeting. It's almost like some quick, new smooth dance routine. Anyhow as they see the facial expression and read the body language—it's ALL good. Energy has moved into the old dilapidated building that is no longer quiet and lonely. Craig has arrived and it's ALL good.

Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs) is about empowering these young people to think beyond today—to think about, dare to dream about and set about achieving their planned pathway to their future as they see it. This means asking the right questions, being an ear to listen to their dreams without judgement, maybe a little wise advice and heaps of accurate and relevant information.

All young people between 15 and 19 years of age have been given the opportunity to work with the MIPs worker. Those who choose to follow up their plans further have expressed that it is a positive experience to look at where they have been, where they are now and where they wish to go in the future, focussing on the steps (small steps) they need to take to get to their chosen destination.

At the end of 2003, Craig completed his Certificate II of the CGEA and is enrolled in TAFE to do his VCAL Intermediate in 2004. He is aiming to do forestry. He is a bit nervous that he is not suited to formal studies and has researched that if he finds it too hard, he can look at programs such as Green Corp and a six months work program.

**Jane Casey was the youth program and pathways coordinator at Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre in 2003.**

# Foreign Correspondence

**More than half of Pakistan's population is illiterate, with the now familiar pattern of male domination ensuring women are most affected. What progress there is tends to be slow and erratic, but help is on the way.**

## Slow and steady?—a snapshot of adult literacy in Pakistan

Over the years, literacy programs in Pakistan have suffered due to lack of consistency and continuity in policies. In spite of this, Pakistan has made slow but steady progress in improving literacy. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), estimates 43 per cent of the population to be literate, but there continues to be an overwhelming need for systematic and sustainable support for the 52 million Pakistanis (30 million of whom are women) who are not literate in their own language, or the national language of Urdu.

An initiative to reinvigorate the efforts for literacy in Pakistan in accordance with the vision of the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD), has seen the development of a joint venture between the Pakistan education ministry, UNESCO and the Japan Investment Cooperation Agency.

The wide disparity in educational opportunities between men and women is a major barrier to Pakistan's development. In rural Sind, the female literacy rate is only 13 per cent, and in sparsely inhabited rural Baluchistan it is less than ten per cent. There are many factors that contribute to the persistent low enrolment of girls and women in educational programs. Poverty and illiteracy of parents over generations have contributed to entrenched negative attitudes towards education for females of any age. The demand for separate facilities and the lack of qualified female teachers have exacerbated these difficulties. In those areas where educational programs do exist, the lack of essential facilities such as drinking water, mats or benches, and bathroom facilities inhibit attendance.

If these barriers are overcome, and universal primary school enrolment becomes a reality in the next ten years, its impact

will not be felt quickly. Improving adult literacy statistics requires a different strategy. Until recently, adult education programs have been non-existent. During the 1990s, the federal education ministry held the view that adult literacy programs should be funded and developed by the provinces. Less than 100 million rupees per year of federal money were budgeted for adult education. The provinces however, claimed they lacked the resources to create these programs, so they too allocated little or nothing.

On a more optimistic note, there are some signs of change in the government's view towards adult literacy funding and provision. At a UNLD forum held in January 2004, the federal education minister Zobiaida Jalal said the present government had planned to open 270,000 literacy centres by 2005, and that 6000 literacy centres had already been opened. This is in addition to a literacy network being established in approximately 40 districts by the National Commission for Human Development.

There are also non-governmental organisations working in Pakistan to help raise the literacy rate. Development in Literacy is run by women in the Pakistani-American community and operates schools for several thousand girls in rural Punjab and Sind. Some of these girls attend in defiance of their father's wishes. Approximately \$60 (AUD) pays the cost of an entire school year for a Pakistani child. There are many organisations working on literacy in Pakistan, and support for them is a good way to make a positive change.

Information in this article was sourced from Pakistan Link ([www.pakistanlink.com](http://www.pakistanlink.com)) and The Asia/Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO.



# Beside the Whiteboard

**Islam promotes education for both men and women, old and young, with Muslims coming from a wide range of cultures and languages. But contrary to what many people might think, most Islamic students are locals. Robin Kenrick, from *Fine Print*, talks to Dr Amjid Muhammad.**

## **Could you tell us a little about yourself?**

I am a practising dentist and have been so for the last four years. My parents are from Pakistan, but I was born in Singapore and migrated to Australia with my family in 1989, at the age of 14.

I am not a cleric or a scholar of Islam. However, I have some knowledge and continue to pursue educating myself about my religion at each available opportunity. I have delivered a number of presentations relating to various aspects of Islam. Recently I spoke to Australian Army personnel at Queenscliff in Victoria.

## **What backgrounds do the Muslim students in our adult literacy classes have?**

Muslim students in Australia come from a variety of cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. There are Muslim students in this country from possibly every continent. Some are highly educated and speak fluent English. They may be pursuing higher education and may come from families that are considered affluent in their countries. Others may be recent migrants who may have entered Australia as refugees. In contrast this category of Muslims is unlikely to be familiar with the English language and is almost always relatively poor.

Not all Muslim students are overseas students; in fact the majority are locals. Generally, the Muslim community is ethnically dominated by Turkish, Lebanese, and South-East Asian students (Malaysian/Indonesian). They are then followed by a small proportion of students from the Indian sub-continent and the Middle East. I have observed however, that the number of African students is rising appreciably.

## **What expectations does Islam have of a practising Muslim and how might this impact on the adult ESL classroom?**

Language classes typically feature high levels of interactivity amongst students. Role-plays, small group activities and so forth are conducted in order to encourage use of the language itself. As practising Muslims are generally conservative, Muslim men and Muslim women tend to feel uncomfortable in close-quarter activity. There will be a lot of discomfort in cases where a single woman and single man are expected to interact with each other, or a Muslim female is the subject of attention in a male-inclusive environment, or a Muslim male is the subject of attention in a female-inclusive

environment. Practising Muslims are typically more conservative than their non-Muslim colleagues.

Such sensitivities exist in a range of other issues to those we've discussed so far. The presence of alcohol on a table can be offensive regardless of the fact that the Muslim is not consuming it. And other social activities that fall under the category of entertainment in the West may be considered unacceptable by a devout Muslim. Activities such as 'clubbing', indulging in alcohol, sports events that require a particular dress code like shorts or a short skirt and/or other tight-fitting attire, are all likely to attract a negative response from practising Muslims.

## **What do Islamic students expect of their teachers?**

Islamic students would expect their teachers to be honest, courteous, and understanding towards their beliefs and practices. During times of prayer a Muslim may expect the teacher to be understanding when he/she indicates she must have a short break to pray after which regular activities can be resumed. Fridays are especially important since it is obligatory on a Muslim male (in particular) to attend the congregational prayer. On Friday afternoons between 12 and 2, Muslim males especially will travel to a mosque, take part in the initial sermon and then pray the prayer in congregation.

## **Are there differences between the educational backgrounds of Islamic men and women?**

This depends where they come from and their particular situations. In some cases the women may have had more educational training than the man; in other cases the women may not have had as much educational training.

It is important to note that Islam promotes education for both men and women, old and young. Everyone is encouraged to be educated and not to remain ignorant.

## **How has September 11 affected Islamic students in Australia?**

As mentioned before, Muslims come from a vast range of different cultures, languages, and of course mindsets. Reaction to September 11 was varied, although it can be said that in general Muslims became significantly more conscious of the difference between themselves and the people around them. In some cases Muslims have reacted apprehensively, even going to the extent of changing their names to hide their Muslim identity. The fact that some of

these Muslims will not have command of the English language tends to exacerbate the problem somewhat. In other cases Muslims have taken steps to engage those around them in discussion about the situation and present the Muslim perspective.

**How do students from other cultures react to Islamic students?**

Similar to Muslims. In today's multicultural Australian society, some non-Muslim students will react with kindness, others will react in anger.

**Any advice for literacy/ESL teachers working with Islamic students?**

An early rapport with the student will go along way to reassuring the student that the teacher is sincere, honest,

and genuinely concerned about the wellbeing of the student. Hostile scenarios or content can be easily avoided by utilising a proactive approach to identifying possible uncomfortable situations.

**Any suggestions where teachers might go for further information to help them understand and support their Muslim students?**

The Islamic Information and Support Centre of Australia (IISCA) on (03) 9387 7100 or go to [www.iisca.org](http://www.iisca.org). Or there's the Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) at [www.icv.org.au](http://www.icv.org.au).

**Many thanks!**