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# Editorial

Welcome to our winter edition. While it may be winter in Victoria, we haven't gone into hibernation. This edition of Fine Print is as vibrant as ever, with a collection of articles informing us of the changes and challenges facing adult literacy and basic education across Australia and the world.

It is interesting to note that most articles either directly or indirectly have a common pedagogical theme: literacy in itself is not empowering, it is the context in which it takes place that gives it power.

Elly Robinson looks at resilience research and explores how positive adult contact, such as interaction with teachers, is a key factor in building educational resilience. Through deeper level relationships, expectations and a willingness to share power, teachers can influence the educational outcomes of their students. Good news.

A few literacy myths are debunked in Elsa Auerbach's article. With reference to the social changes brought about by globalisation, Elsa shows us how literacy plays a role in social change—not as the framework for change, but as a vehicle for 'analysis and action'. Literacy needs to be situated locally, and taught and used in service of local action.

It's always good to have statistical evidence that shows what we already know. Through the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth, Sheldon Rothman supports the contention that achievement in literacy and numeracy influences later outcomes in further education, training and employment.

Natalie Nawrocki's national research into effective strategies for low-level literacy learners documents lots of approaches teachers have found useful when teaching this group of learners.

Our regular features reappear! In Open Forum, ACAL president Jim Thompson outlines the work ACAL has to do in getting adult literacy back on the agenda in this election year. We welcome readers' contributions to our forum pages on this and other issues in coming editions.

In Policy Update you can read the preview by Rosa McKenna and Lynne Fitzpatrick of an NCVER project that investigates international literacy policies, trends and initiatives. How does Australia fare in relation to international adult literacy policy and provision? This article, again, picks up the stated theme of literacy contextualised in adult experience.

Teachers will be tantalised by Ruth Wood's General Curriculum Options unit developed around public art in Practical Matters. From the perspective that arts and culture play a major part in lifelong learning, Ruth shares her teaching ideas for ESL and Literacy classes—and the best part is you don't need to be an art teacher. Our pedagogical theme sneaks in again.

Foreign Correspondence is one of my favourite sections of Fine Print. In this edition Andrew Miller details the colourful and unique pathway through apartheid and democratic policies that literacy education has taken in South Africa. Largely an historical account, with some surprising ironies, Miller also considers the challenges of the future. Our theme re-emerges when Miller makes links between education and capacity building of rural communities.

We hope you enjoy this edition. It's a great winter's read.

Jacinta Agostinelli  
VALBEC

**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.**

# Educational resilience: the power to make a difference

by Elly Robinson

**One challenge for educators is how to create and maintain an effective learning environment for young people. This also applies to the adult education field, where teachers and trainers must cater for a range of ages, experiences and motivations. In these circumstances, teachers may be surprised to find they are experiencing fluctuating degrees of enthusiasm for the job. However, there are strategies on hand to help overcome the problem.**

Whether teachers are keen to motivate young learners to achieve or simply see them as a nuisance to be tolerated, an understanding of positive youth development will alleviate the associated tensions and stresses. Incorporating the basic principles of positive youth development, including the basics of fostering resilience in the classroom, will not only enhance the learning experience for the young learner but also those who surround him or her. I'll start by looking at risk-taking behaviours and their role in adolescent development, before considering how these behaviours impact on the development of resilience. In conclusion I'll examine how these concepts can be influenced in a learning environment.

## Risk-taking behaviour

Over the past few decades, adolescence has increasingly been seen as a developmental stage in its own right, where childhood behaviours are adapted and adjusted to adult forms. The beginning of adolescence is generally seen as coinciding with the physical changes of puberty. Where this stage of development ends is much harder to define, as individuals move through each stage of development at a different rate. This is due to the influence of social, cultural and other factors which impact on the timing and nature of change over this period, including the way in which adolescence is viewed and defined in different societies and cultures.

The period of mid-adolescence is typically characterised by increased experimentation and risk-taking behaviours. Risk-taking is seen as encompassing a range of behaviours that characterise the adolescent's striving for independence. It is not until late adolescence that young people are more likely to understand the consequences of their behaviours. In late adolescence one's cognitive capacity is enhanced by educational and other experiences, coinciding with an increase in the development of realistic and practical vocational goals, the capacity to engage in adult relationships, and refinement of adult values and beliefs.

It is important to bear in mind that risk-taking is not a purely adolescent exploit—we all take risks, large and small, every day. Some risk-taking can also be considered in a positive light; to take a risk often means to try something different, and may be the only way we learn what 'works' for us and what doesn't. A certain amount of risk-taking behaviour by young people is also considered developmentally normal, especially around the ages of 14–16 years. Adolescents have more opportunities to engage in risk-taking behaviour than children do, and engaging in something risky is often a new and exciting way to beat boredom. Whilst this is sometimes a concern, overall this behaviour is a normal part of the push for independence.

Risk-taking behaviours can be viewed as a continuum, ranging from high-risk to low-risk situations and activities. Behaviours such as debating, presenting in front of the class and playing sport can all be seen as risks at the lower end of the spectrum for young people. Unsafe sexual behaviour, injecting drug use, train surfing and drink driving, on the other hand, are considered high-risk behaviours that ring the 'alarm bells' of those working with young people.

Research has shown that engagement in such high-risk behaviours is often associated with young people who have a lack of connectedness with important people and to places in their lives, for example school, family and peers. Research also suggests that some young people, particularly those who are depressed or alienated, may take more risks than others and engage in higher-risk activities. Young people may also be unsure of rules and expectations, and may just think of their behaviour as fun, challenging or exciting.

The challenge facing society is to equip young people with the skills and strategies to make healthy choices about their risk-taking. In this way, young people will be able to take risks which help them learn and develop boundaries and self-concepts. In addressing this challenge an important

concept to understand is resilience, with its associated factors and influences.

## Resilience

Resilience is defined as the tendency for a person to be able to 'bounce back' from adverse conditions or situations. It is the key to why, under the same set of circumstances, one person will do well while another will fail.<sup>1</sup> Rather than it being a trait, it is seen as an interaction between the person and the environment. Researchers are particularly interested in what factors contribute to make this interaction positive, rather than negative, for the resilient individual.

Coming to understand this positive interaction has required an examination into the protective factors or circumstances that help buffer a young person from harm. These factors can moderate or mediate risk factors and environments around young people, and increase the likelihood of positive health outcomes. These factors in a young person's life will often—though not always—yield resilience.

## Protective factors

Protective factors are often examined on an individual, family and environmental (such as school and community) level. Individual protective factors include verbal and communication skills, problem solving abilities, easy temperament, empathy and spirituality. However, these factors alone are not now seen as sufficient in their own right to protect an individual from harm—they coexist with family and environmental influences in a young person's life. These include social skills, good family relationships, academic success, having (at least one) positive adult role model and connectedness to the community.

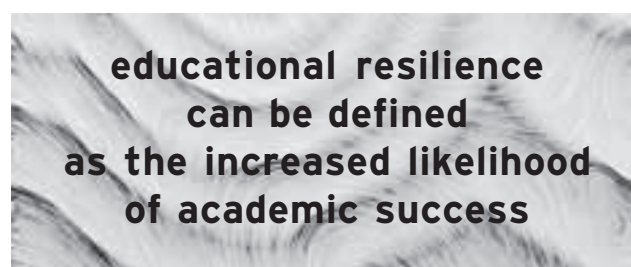
Examining risk behaviours from a resiliency perspective has shifted the focus from a deficit model of youth development, or seeing young people as problems to be solved. The positive youth development model has attempted to define what factors can be influenced to minimise young people's involvement in risky behaviours. This perspective also recognises that engagement in one risk behaviour often increases the likelihood of involvement in others. Therefore, enhancing protective factors is likely to impact on more than one of the young person's behaviours.

## Educational resilience

Resilience that is related to the school or learning domains for young people is often termed educational resilience. Educational resilience can be defined as the increased likelihood of academic success, despite adversities related

to environmental conditions and experiences. Positive adult contact is a key protective factor in educational resilience, and teachers are often listed as the sources of this positive contact.<sup>2</sup>

This indicates that there is increasing evidence that a teacher's interaction with a student will go some way towards predicting educational success. Benard (1991)<sup>3</sup> suggests that teachers who have the power to make a difference provide and model a number of protective factors—including meeting the young person's need for safety, love and belonging, respect, learning, accomplishment and meaning. This is not through any specific program, but at a deeper level of relationships, expectations and a willingness to share power.



The difficulty for educators is how to apply these concepts on a day-to-day basis. It assumes that all teachers and trainers have a desire to extend their relationship with a student beyond that of a simple didactic exchange. This can be particularly difficult with a young person who gives every impression that they'd rather be anywhere else than in a training or educational program, and who appears hell bent on ridiculing the educator and others. The key is to recognise the fact that understanding and addressing this behaviour is in the interests of everyone. It makes for a positive learning environment that increases the health—particularly the mental health—and wellbeing for all involved.

Behaviours that are disruptive or attention-seeking more than likely serve a developmental purpose for a young person who does not necessarily have the skills to use more advanced methods to gain what they need. They are often learned behaviours that have served a purpose for the young person over a long period of time. It may not be possible to change these behaviours in the time you have with them, but you can do two things. One is to model and encourage them to use alternate ways of communication to get what they need. They can't know how to use these if they don't know they exist or have not experienced how they work. The other method is to believe that there is an innate capacity of all people to learn and achieve. This belief is backed up by the work of eminent US psychologist Roger Mills.<sup>4</sup>

## Positive learning climates

Mills' research has found that any young person has the potential to access a strong, healthy 'self-righting' capacity—an 'innate resilience', no matter what their history of disadvantage. This includes an inbuilt motivation to learn, and the capacity to master and understand a given subject. Outcomes in targeted schools have also shown that irrespective of the extent to which a young person has been alienated from the learning experience, this healthy motivated state of mind can be re-engaged.

Part of this approach addresses the mind-state of the educator and the climate that they create within their educational program. There is recognition that a positive climate cannot always be created, and that there are a myriad of reasons for this—a bad night's sleep, personal problems or illness, for example. Regardless of a teacher's daily mind-state, what is recognised is the requirement for an atmosphere that will foster the best set of circumstances for learning.

Mills suggests nine guidelines to help teachers create this positive learning climate which can tap into a student's innate resilience.<sup>5</sup>

### 1. Be climate-oriented versus task-oriented

If both teacher and student are in the right frame of mind, a great deal of learning can be achieved in a small amount of time. No lesson plan will be good enough to counteract either party's reluctance to teach or learn. The best way a teacher can try to foster such a climate is to take care of themselves—recognise where a student's behaviour is coming from, respect this, and tend to one's own wellbeing.

### 2. Don't take it personally

Young people deal with situations in the way that they know best; they may have no other strategies or options to utilise. Their behaviour may seem malicious or intentional, but this may be the teacher's personal interpretation of the behaviour, and anger and frustration may arise as a result. In heated situations it is important for the educator to step back and realise that the young people may only be doing the best they can considering the way things look to them.

### 3. Be confident that you can engage on health issues

Even the most alienated and difficult young people have a natural tendency towards mental health and wellbeing. Experience has shown that consistency, clarity, firmness, affection and empathy can help to trigger this tendency once more. Having the ability to look beyond the expressed learned role of the young person to their strengths can help to elicit compassion, respect and caring. Adults have

the advantage of experience that may offer a path away from the troubled thoughts that contribute to a young person becoming 'stuck' in maladaptive patterns of behaviour. These alternatives need to be offered in a spirit of compassion.

### 4. Model and teach mental health

If teachers and trainers can manage not to take a young person's behaviour personally, and remain impervious to their attention-seeking efforts, they can appropriately model unconditional self-esteem and presence of mind. In offering genuine concern, interest and unconditional regard to young people, educators demonstrate their worth. When different actions and reactions to situations are modelled, young peoples' minds are opened to different and healthier perspectives.

### 5. Don't be a doormat

Offering students respect and belief in their ability does not equate to an invitation to being walked over. Disrupting the class is unacceptable; understanding the need for rules and order is respectful. Involving students in rule-setting and consequences is an age-old way of initiating reciprocal respectful relationships. Following through on these rules and disciplinary procedures in a matter-of-fact way elicits the most cooperative response from students.

### 6. Build relationships

Being able to function with a healthier state of mind opens the door to greater understanding of another's behaviour. Recognising what they are making of a situation on a cognitive level helps teachers be more empathic about the learner's perspectives. This helps to build more thoughtful and supportive relationships.

### 7. Practice effective discipline

Negative behaviour from students still requires intervention which helps to set limits. Ideally, discipline should be administered in a non-judgmental and no-nonsense way. Acting-out behaviour can best be dealt with in a calm and secure state of mind, incorporating a sense of understanding and assistance. This will help to shift the situation in a positive direction towards a solution.

### 8. Resist labelling

Some educators will have a preconceived idea about the characteristics and attitudes of young people, virtually before they set foot in the classroom. These young people thus come to the teaching situation with a strike already against their name. As a result, the chance to engage their 'healthy' side has already been dealt a blow. Students need to be given the chance to start again. 'There is no hope when hope is not allowed to surface'.<sup>6</sup>

## 9. Develop rapport

Educators need to develop relationships with young people based on something other than their problem behaviours. This may involve interaction around their interests or everyday events. Such interactions allow learners to contribute to conversations without being in a one-down position. The relationship can then be further built on from a disciplinary perspective, and this increases the possibility of students seeing the learning environment in ways contrary to their conditioned thoughts.

These guidelines will complement current practice with young people in the classroom. The suggestions are specific in their relevance to fostering resilience. It is important however to appreciate that it is not solely the teacher's job, (nor is it possible) to foster resilience in isolation. It needs support from family and community. Others in the workplace must have a good understanding of the guidelines, and knowledge of the community support services for young people to supplement them. One of the greatest helping hands one can give a young person is to help them access the services they need at any given time. This will ultimately enable young people to sustain a stable environment and allow their natural capacity for learning to re-evolve. In the 1950s, Abraham Maslow was the first to recognise that the higher needs of learning and self-actualisation could not be considered when basic needs of food, shelter and warmth were not yet met.

Successful learning and development occurs with the facilitation of the following 'conditions of empowerment'. These help to address some of these basic needs :<sup>7</sup>

- Caring relationships that provide love and consistent support, compassion and trust.
- High expectations that convey respect, provide guidance and build on the strengths of each person.
- Opportunities for participation and contribution that provide meaningful responsibilities, real decision-making power, a sense of ownership and belonging and ultimately a sense of spiritual connectedness and meaning.

These three broad areas offer a framework for strategies which give educators the opportunity to work differently from the deficit model of the past, where a need was identified and addressed. While there has been a plethora of best-practice strategies that have been associated with positive learning outcomes for young people—such as mentoring, full service schools and community service—none would be successful without ensuring quality, respectful relationships surround the program.

A common belief is also that young people who are marginalised or at-risk do not have a family that cares for

them. This is often untrue, and involving family in the learning experience of the young person may be possible. Let family members share their achievements. It is worth remembering that other family members may not have positive memories of learning environments, and may exhibit some initial reluctance in becoming involved or see it solely as the young person's business. This does not negate the importance and significance of the offer.

The most important message to take away from resilience research is that it is relationships, beliefs and expectations, rather than any specific programmatic approaches, which will help to foster resilience. While this deeper level of connectedness may be difficult to implement in a short-term class situation, it may help to bear in mind that any change is good change.

If teachers can facilitate a positive learning experience for one young person who has never engaged in the right set of circumstances for this to happen previously, it can only be considered a victory.

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- 6 *ibid.*
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# Embedded literacy: a political process with educational character

by *Elsa Auerbach*

**It is a myth that literacy is in itself empowering. Many practitioners now talk of 'really useful literacy', where literacy is localised to help learners acquire the practical knowledge whereby they can achieve social goals.**

The most profound, far-reaching and significant impact of literacy on people's lives is its empowering potential. To be literate is to become liberated from the constraints of dependency. To be literate is to gain a voice and to participate meaningfully and assertively in decisions that affect people's lives. To be literate is to become politically conscious and critically aware and to demystify social reality. Literacy helps people to become self-reliant and resist exploitation and oppression. Literacy provides access to written knowledge and knowledge is power.<sup>1</sup>

This quote makes some pretty strong claims for literacy. My hope is that it makes readers just a little uncomfortable. Committed and passionate literacy practitioners know all about the flaws in the myth that literacy is the key to economic and cognitive development. By embracing claims for literacy's potential for empowerment, however, we 'critical educators' may be contributing to a different version of the literacy myth. In this article, I will argue that just as it is not literacy which leads to cognitive or economic development, and it is not literacy per se which leads to social change or community empowerment. Whatever transformative power literacy may have comes from how it is contextualised and what it is in service of.

Thus, when we look at family literacy, community literacy and literacy practices in schools, part of what we need to focus on are the ways in which we, as literacy practitioners and educators, connect what we do to the ongoing struggles of learners who are living, working and learning in those contexts. We need to embed our work in local movements and organisations that are fighting to change the conditions of participants' lives.

This line of argument is certainly not new. For social change activists and community organisers, it is stating the obvious. In his opening comments at the literacy conference held in Cape Town in November 2001, Kadar Asmal—a long-time activist in the struggle against apartheid, and Minister of Education in South Africa—argued that those who think literacy in itself is going to yield empowerment are deluding themselves. He argued

that texts are often used as instruments of separation, alienation, and oppression. When literacy is privileged over the knowledge of ordinary people, it can become disempowering. Asmal's argument is a warning not to position literacy as the key to liberation. Such privilege is not only misleading, but dangerous—potentially creating literacy as a fault line for segregation.

Michael James, an activist in San Francisco who works with youth on health, employment, drug prevention and other social issues, likewise argues that the notion that literacy is empowering is naive and counterproductive.

Many literacy educators and programs today would hope their programs were indeed transformative. The new interest (in literacy for transformation) has also generated an inclination to mystify literacy, to ascribe to it catalytic properties far beyond its actual utility. It has captured the imaginations of many activists and educators for whom it represents a panacea for social and political inequities...literacy alone rarely guarantees privilege, access, or political leverage. When practitioners naively accept this idea, they sabotage their credibility with their students, who, in many cases, have an ability to recognise such idealism and know when to reject it.<sup>2</sup>

When literacy is ascribed with such power it undermines the importance of the context itself. As James says, illiteracy (sic) is usually addressed as a social or educational problem, rather than as a symptom of larger and far more complex political contradictions.

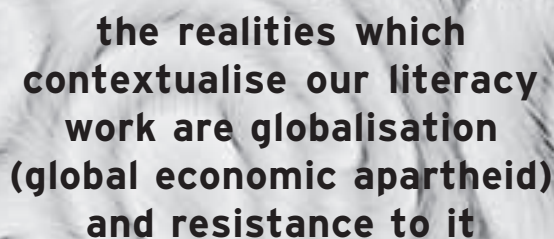
The antidote to these larger political problems is organising for change through concerted action. This was the lesson of the civil rights movement in the US, and the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Concerted action has been the lesson of union movements around the world, and is the current struggle being played out in Australia with opposition to asylum seekers and refugees in detention. Literacy has played a role in each of these movements—not as the structural framework for change, but as a vehicle for analysis and action.

What James is calling for is not educational activity with ‘relevant’ content, but political processes with an educational character. It is the context in which literacy education takes place and the struggles in which it is embedded that are the forces for change—not literacy itself.

## Living with globalisation

In broad geopolitical terms, the realities which contextualise our literacy work are globalisation (global economic apartheid) and resistance to it. These two contradictory forces have been called globalisation from above and globalisation from below. The former consists of transnational forces that are consolidating power and wealth in the hands of the few while increasing the impoverishment of the many. The latter refers to the emergence of local organisations challenging the forces of transnationalism and neo-liberalism. We need to understand the forces of globalisation because they are so powerful in shaping family, community and school life.

So far, much of the discussion about globalisation within literacy circles has focused on the impact of globalisation on literacies—how it has changed literacies and how literacy education needs to accommodate these changes. There seem to be two tendencies within this discussion. On the one hand there are those who focus on the study of multiple, local literacies and the ways in which globalisation threatens local identities, discourses, and literacies. On the other are those who focus on the ways in which new technologies have profoundly changed communication within and between regions, requiring new attention to multimodalities, multimedia, critical media literacy, the discourses of power, and so on. Often the local and the global are framed as contradictory—some argue for the need to protect the local and others argue for the need to provide access to the global. You could call these the ‘power of literacies’ vs. the ‘literacies of power’ camps.



**the realities which  
contextualise our literacy  
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and resistance to it**

I believe that this debate misses the mark on two counts. First, it focuses too much on the changing nature of literacies at the expense of understanding the changing nature of the economic and political context of learners’ lives. Second, it constructs a false contradiction between the global and the local. What happens when the question

of how globalisation shapes literacy education is inverted? How can literacy contribute to shaping and resisting globalisation from below? Contextualising our work within local organisations which challenge globalisation from above connects the local with the global.

## Globalisation from above

My argument rests on an understanding of the geopolitical and economic contexts in which we work. As you consider these statistics, facts and trends, think about how each of these factors shapes families, communities, workplaces, and/or schools.

Of the 100 largest economies in the world, 51 are corporations, not countries. US\$1.5 trillion flows daily across international borders.

Globalisation from above is characterised by (and some of these will look ominously familiar): changing work structures; global markets; transnational finance and financial institutions (IMF, WTO, World Bank) which supersede national governments; corporate restructuring and transnational mergers; privatisation, deregulation of trade; tariff agreements; economic control taken out of control of poor countries; global assembly lines (sweatshops, child labour); accelerating migration; militarisation, and the dismantling of welfare systems.

Globalisation from above has resulted in increased impoverishment and inequality; the concentration of wealth; a growth of poverty; global ecological and environmental damage; economic volatility; permeability of borders and migration cycles, and the deterioration of human rights.<sup>3</sup>

## Globalisation from below

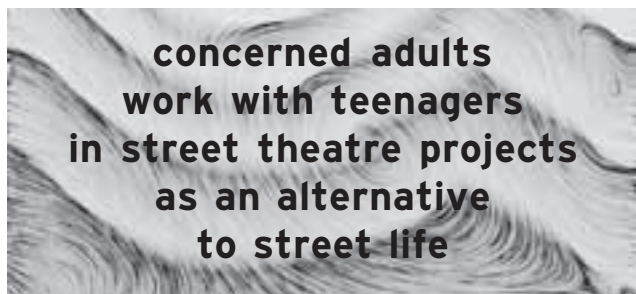
In the face of all this change, a new hybrid transnational resistance is developing. It’s not really anti-globalisation, but a movement to shape globalisation in the interests of poor. Globalisation from below is characterised by a solidarity that crosses the boundaries of nations and identities, and ignores narrow interests. Movements are emerging all over the world in social locations which are marginal to dominant power centres, and there is concerted action with diverse local starting points.<sup>4</sup>

Globalisation from below has resulted in:

- struggles against child labour
- union organising
- protection of indigenous peoples/cultures
- resistance to engineered food
- environmentalist movements
- debt cancellation campaigns
- anti global sweatshop campaigns (Nike, Gap, etc).



These campaigns have created networks that cut across national borders. Local struggles are seen to be different facets of the broader struggle which, while working locally, simultaneously form global alliances where the combined force is greater than the sum of individual forces (Seattle, Davos, Calgary).



This analysis is a reminder (certainly not one you are likely to hear in an election year) that major global forces and not individual competence shape life possibilities. It suggests that promoting new multimodal literacies as the key to participation in the globalised world risks becoming a 21<sup>st</sup> century version of the ‘literacy myth’. It also suggests that preserving local literacies is not going to provide protection, access or power in the face of the onslaught of globalisation from above, and its economic apartheid juggernaut.

### **What’s the alternative?**

One alternative is a pedagogy that applies the adage of ‘think global, act local’ to literacy education. This approach suggests that change is possible, not when individuals improve their skills or expand their repertoire of practices, but when they join with others in challenging the specific conditions and forces which undermine their communities—when the local literacies and the multimodalities and technologies are acquired and used in service of action. In this view, literacy programs might be situated in local issue-based movements, with content focused on analysis, skills, practices and discourses that enable people to participate in organising for local change within a global network.

US adult education program workers Tony Baez and Eva Mack<sup>5</sup> offer examples of such courses: parents learn public speaking skills so they can participate in parent associations, local and school council meetings; they learn small business skills so they can set up child-care cooperatives and study education and law as they work with educators to develop community-control in schools. Concerned adults work with teenagers in street theatre projects as an alternative to street life or develop the writing and computer skills necessary to produce a community newspaper. Neighbours learn research methods so they can document pollution caused by the waste products of a closed factory. Community members

learn script writing and video production so they can share their concerns and visions for their community with a wider audience. In each case, sites of community struggle become sites of learning.

Relatively recently I edited a collection of case studies of ESL community partnerships.<sup>6</sup> The projects described in the book were located in many parts of the English-speaking world—from the Nunavut province in Canada, to South Africa, UK, New Zealand and the US. Beyond geographic diversity, the projects reflect diversity across age, gender, linguistic and national origin. Some projects were home-based, others community-based or school-based. Although the projects reflected incredible diversity, there were common recurring themes in terms of the planning and administration of family and community literacy projects as well as in terms of their pedagogical components.

### **A NOT-literacy focus**

One of the most important lessons across projects was that, although many of the partnerships were set up as ‘ESL’ or ‘literacy’ projects, the participants/learners wanted opportunities to become more active and proactive in community life. The result was that many partnerships took the form of programs focusing on community enterprises, computer education, addressing community problems, creative writing, and in some cases, recreation. English or literacy acquisition were by-products of these initiatives rather than being their primary focus.

### **The context is the key**

The importance of contextual factors in designing partnerships was repeatedly stressed. As one of the Somali organisers of a project in London said, ‘You can’t work on literacy if housing is bad’.<sup>7</sup> These contextual factors range from the broadly political, to the economic, social and logistical.

Not surprisingly, the South African community partnerships addressed the role of the political context most explicitly, describing the legacy of apartheid in shaping the culture of schooling, and the impossibility of conceiving change within schools without embedding change within the community. The partnerships were structured to promote the democratic participation of parents who had, under apartheid, been denied any voice or role in either school or community development.

The understanding that educational problems originated outside the education system led to a strategy for integrating school and community reconstruction through a wide range of economic development projects linked to schools. Parents and community members decided to set

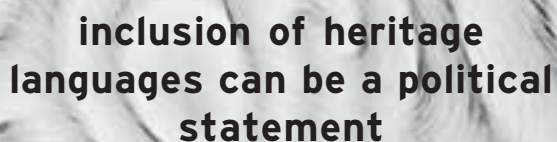
up a vegetable cooperative, a day-care business, computer training facilities, a training program for ceramics, bricklaying and metalwork, and a community park. The vegetable garden was a response to malnutrition and poverty and, as one parent said, 'It impacts on learning because a hungry child cannot think...So our garden helps learning'.<sup>8</sup> A day care centre was set up by community women which addressed school attendance problems and at the same time shifted traditional gendered economic roles within the community.

What was most interesting was that often the negative political climate (which devalued parents, their culture, their language, and their knowledge) made the work of the partnerships even more powerful—precisely because participants faced these forms of oppression on a daily basis, the projects took on meaning as a positive force for change.

### **Owned by the community**

One theme which emerged over and over again was the theme of 'ownership.' I have mixed feelings about this word—it implies commodification, but the point is that partnerships flourish when there is a shift from outsider to insider control. There were four interrelated factors which promoted 'ownership':

- involving community members in planning
- ensuring non-hierarchical relations between partners
- staffing the project with people from the learners' linguistic and cultural backgrounds
- promoting leadership of community members.



**inclusion of heritage  
languages can be a political  
statement**

Partnerships which were unilaterally initiated by dominant institutions (universities or service agencies) based on their perception of community needs, often met community resistance in the form of non-participation. Simply put, nobody came. Projects which originated in the communities themselves, or which involved communities in planning from the beginning, did not encounter these difficulties.

### **Letting go of the plan**

Another key factor in many of the projects was the 'letting go of the plan'. Many of the authors attribute the success of their partnerships precisely to the ways they deviated from the original proposal. As the professionals listened to community members, they realised that the goals they had established did not reflect community realities and aspirations.

Conventional educational interventions are often designed by experts who decide what the target groups need, how it is to be delivered, and what the outcomes will be. But most of the partnerships in the book attributed their success at least in part to the fact that what happened was unexpected, unplanned, and unpredictable, or 'wild.' The London community partnership<sup>9</sup> was initially designed as a series of courses for Somali women, but when the women didn't participate, it became evident that they could be reached through working with children. The Somali staff set up a football club for youth and other projects including a men's project motivated by high unemployment among men and their resulting sense of dislocation. Thus, through this indirect approach, adults were eventually involved. A number of the projects evolved to provide pathways to leadership development.

### **Network to other organisations**

Successful partnerships built on or linked to pre-existing community organisations, rather than competing with those already in place. The Nunavut project stressed the importance of connecting community initiatives with each other and filling gaps, rather than duplicating or adding new entities. The effect of this strategy is to strengthen organisations that already have histories and ties to the community, rather than draining resources away from them.

### **Value and exploit language diversity**

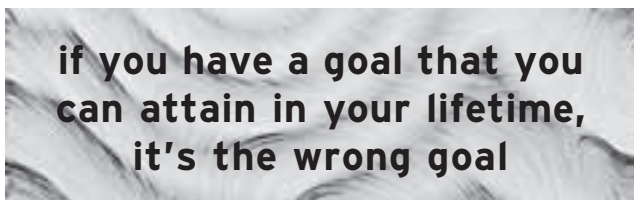
Hiring staff who are tied to the participants' communities and who speak the learners' language/s, values and invites the use of learners' first languages, even in ESL projects. Several projects which started with an ESL focus experienced dramatic shifts when they switched to first language use. In Soweto, parents who had been reticent when stories were in English, participated eagerly when the stories were translated into African languages, and they then helped with the translations. Inclusion of heritage languages can be a political statement. In Nunavut, indigenous languages have been officially excluded until recently, so promoting community choice in language/literacy use was a stance that supported local control.

These studies underscore the importance of involving community participants in the selection of program and curriculum content. Once participants become involved in the process of selecting program/curriculum content, they chose to focus on issues—like stable housing, soccer, or gardening—rather than skills.

### **This is not new**

What I've outlined here is really old news in many countries of the two-thirds world—just not the countries of the industrialised world. As Martin and Rahman suggest, we

in industrialised nations can learn from the literacy work in countries like Bangladesh.<sup>10</sup> They argue in favour of what they call ‘really useful literacy’, which entails the acquisition of practical knowledge to help people act on their world, harnessing learning to a social purpose. There is a vision of literacy that ensures democratic control over the curriculum, and the development of literacy materials enabling people to take power whilst promoting respect and trust.



One of the political lessons of globalisation is that the local and specific struggles of ordinary people all over the world can become part of the wider, international struggle for democracy, social justice and equality. As we all, in our different ways, live out the meaning of ‘globalisation from above’, the question is: how can we make our work part of an alternative and deeply subversive ‘globalisation from below’...?<sup>11</sup>

I wish to conclude by referring back to the quote at the start of this article to highlight a wonderful paradox. It is only by debunking the myth that literacy in itself is empowering that we can position ourselves to contribute to the struggles that challenge us all. By acknowledging the limitations of our work as literacy practitioners, we can support a broader vision of democratisation.

Founder of the influential Highlander School, Myles Horton, once said, ‘If you have a goal that you can attain in your lifetime, it’s the wrong goal’.<sup>12</sup> The point of an ideal or vision is not to reach it, but to let it guide one’s

journey. What I’ve proposed in this article is a direction, not an attainable goal. As Horton also says, when we decide just what our vision is then we can start to ‘just hack away on it’.<sup>13</sup>

**Dr Elsa Auerbach is a professor of English at the University of Massachusetts/Boston. She has worked and written extensively in the areas of adult literacy, adult ESOL, participatory curriculum development, family literacy and workplace ESOL/literacy.**

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# Effective strategies for low-level literacy learners

by *Natalie Nawrocki*

**Low-level literacy teachers develop a lot of expertise during their time in the field. The problem is that this expertise is rarely passed on to other teachers in a systematic way. The author, with the help of an Australian National Training Authority grant, looks at this problem while also investigating which strategies do or don't work for low-level literacy learners.**

Adult literacy teachers, particularly in the adult community education (ACE) sector, have few opportunities to meet and discuss effective teaching strategies for low-level literacy students. Teachers are allocated minimal hours for developing their skills, networking and/or undertaking training. There are also minimal processes in place to document and share the experiences of teachers. Too often, teachers move on and the knowledge and experience they have acquired is lost to the sector. Documenting this knowledge would assist new teachers in this field, help teachers to continue to improve their teaching skills, and provide support to teachers who work in isolation. Collecting this knowledge would also provide teachers in the adult literacy field with recognition for their expertise.

It was this hunger for knowledge that led me on a journey to seek answers from my own teaching experiences, and from the knowledge held by teachers in the field. Through my workplace at Olympic Adult Education in Melbourne's northern suburbs, I was successful in obtaining funds from the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) to carry out a research project.

The aims of the research were:

- to investigate what strategies and approaches work and don't work for low-level literacy learners, and how they differ to strategies for working with higher-level learners
- to facilitate a process whereby teachers of low-level literacy adults were participant researchers, reflecting on their teaching practices and strategies
- to produce a report that provides practical strategies and approaches that could be applied in the classroom
- to provide a foundation for developing resources, and curriculum for low-level literacy students.

'Low-level adult literacy' students were defined as those undertaking the Certificate I of General Education for Adults (Introductory), or the Certificate I in English

Language Literacies (Foundation). 'Strategies' were defined as the processes or activities that are undertaken to assist in adult literacy learning. These were grouped differently—direct strategies that include teaching and learning activities, and indirect strategies that include room arrangement, teacher traits and styles.

The term 'innovative' was included as an element of the research. Although a popular term in adult literacy, 'innovative' is very loosely defined, conjuring different images for different individuals. It may be associated with computer technology, or it may represent bringing something new to an already existing approach. Some see innovation as some product or technique that is completely new. Because of the complexity of researching such a variously defined term it was investigated, but omitted from the published research title.

## Drawing on experience

Having worked as a sessional teacher of low-level literacy students for six years, I have trialled a variety of strategies, experiencing degrees of success and student retention with strategies that appear to work. I was also curious about what other teachers do. Teachers have a wealth of ideas and information, and have developed many successful strategies acquired through their training, professional development and experience. It is through their own trials, errors, and evaluation that they have developed successful strategies. They have discovered what works for adult learners and what doesn't.

The teacher experience has often led to the formulation of new theories of practice. Knowles<sup>1</sup> identified this when examining the *Journal of Adult Education* 1929–1948. Published articles described the ways in which teachers developed strategies that deviated from the pedagogical models of the time. As Knowles noted, there was no theory to support their practices—'They were simply being pragmatic and following their intuitions'.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, this research attempted to document the experiences that teachers have had with low-level literacy adult students.

A steering committee was established and provided support, direction, expertise and editorial assistance to me in my role of researcher. The steering committee consisted of three practitioners with experience in adult literacy teaching, research and management. A reference group was also established, including those with research expertise.

### Collecting data

Research data was collected via surveys, a workshop at the 2003 Australian Council of Adult Literacy (ACAL) conference, group interviews and reflective journals. The survey was designed to obtain information on the general profile of classes—the teacher profile, an overview of the approaches teachers were taking, the teaching strategies used and their perceived level of effectiveness, and what teachers believed were the strategies that learners liked. The average number of teaching years in adult literacy of survey respondents was seven. The profile provided a general overview of the students. Classes were generally low in numbers, with an average of 13 students per class.

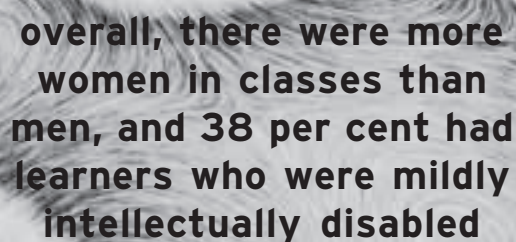
Overall, there were more women in classes than men, and 38 per cent had learners who were mildly intellectually disabled, and 36 per cent of respondents' students had physical disabilities. The 16–24 age range group was present in 82 per cent of the classes, with 70 per cent of respondents having students who were unemployed. The survey provided teachers with the opportunity to reflect on their teaching, and extended an invitation to respondents wishing to participate further in the research. Eleven teachers were selected, representing a diverse range of classes and settings of, and experience with, low-level students to participate in a group interview, and then to keep and provide a summary of a reflective journal. They received an honorarium acknowledging their expertise and the value of their contributions.

The process of keeping reflective journals over an 8–10 lesson period provided teachers with the opportunity to be practitioner researchers analysing their teaching.

A journal is not merely a flow of impressions, it records impressions set in a context of descriptions of circumstances, others, the self, motives, thoughts, and feelings. Taken further, it can be used as a tool for analysis and introspection. It is a chronicle of events as they happen, a dialogue with the facts (objective) and interpretations (subjective), and perhaps most important, it provides a basis for developing an awareness of the difference between facts and interpretations. A journal becomes a dialogue with oneself over time. Over time, patterns and relationships emerge that were previously isolated events 'just lived'. Time provides

perspective and momentum, and enables deeper levels of insight to take place.<sup>3</sup>

Teachers were given information on keeping a reflective journal and an outline of what to include to ensure consistency. The journal outline provided for a basic class profile, what strategies teachers used, how and when the strategies were used, why they used the strategy and what was the outcome of the strategy. Despite being given the same framework, the summarised responses varied. Teachers provided honest accounts of their experiences. Many found it difficult to condense their findings into a 1000-word summary, but all found the experience a positive process. All were challenged by it and many found it beneficial for their practice.



**overall, there were more women in classes than men, and 38 per cent had learners who were mildly intellectually disabled**

The summaries contain useful insights into teaching low-level literacy students, and were inspirational in terms of detailing the thought and preparation that went into each class. What emerged was a strong sense of teacher consideration of, and preparation for, individual student needs. The journals also illuminated the dedication and determination of the teachers and the high regard they have for their students. Flexibility of approach was the most successful strategy practised. This allowed for student input into the flow of the lesson, and learners showed positive outcomes, such as obvious enjoyment of the class. The teachers showed, through their journal entries, that they were willing to change the lesson plan to accommodate the interests of the students, with enhanced motivation and enthusiasm as the result.

### A variety of approaches

Overall, the strategies used were as varied as the teachers themselves. Nevertheless, there were some common elements. Most prevalent was the teachers' general approach with building students' self-esteem, and providing a warm, friendly and positive atmosphere. Many identified using familiar, personal, everyday texts and relevant topics for learners. Others used a learner-centred approach or negotiated with students on content and processes, while other respondents provided enjoyable and fun activities to engage students. Some respondents identified specific learning theories that informed their

practice; for example, critical literacy theory, genre theory, and psycholinguistic reading theory. Other respondents articulated their approaches philosophically, citing flexibility and variety or adopting holistic or integrated approaches to teaching and learning.

The sample also provided data on what specific strategies teachers were using, and how they rated them in terms of perceived effectiveness. The most effective strategies included discussion, reading aloud, pair work, comprehension, question/answer activities, referential work, direct content explanation, cloze, brainstorming, games and excursions. Formal programs were identified by respondents as a strategy that they were least likely to use. A number of respondents (36 per cent) in the study outlined a number of additional strategies and approaches that they have found to be effective. These included phonics, group composition, journal writing, narrative therapy techniques, modelling and watching TV programs.

### Strategies that work

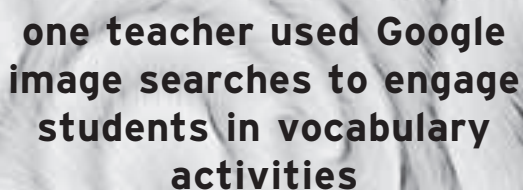
Up to 87 per cent of respondents indicated that indirect strategies assisted student learning. Room arrangement, a teacher's style and personal traits were cited as three of the most-used indirect strategies that assisted in learning. The most effective teachers' traits were having a sense of humour (56 percent) and flexibility (31 per cent). Other traits included tolerance, patience, firmness, perceptiveness, confidence in students' ability, an understanding of the barriers to learning, communicating a genuine interest in students and keeping teacher talk to a minimum. Other indirect strategies specified were the inclusion plenty of small breaks, a safe environment, praising students, encouraging students to listen to each other, consistency, and presenting a variety of topics and ideas.

The research also enabled teachers to reflect on the ways in which they have developed their teaching strategies. Participants outlined a number of processes:

- measuring student attendance
- observation of students' learning styles
- student feedback (verbal and non-verbal)
- professional development
- collaboration with other teachers and colleagues
- being aware of the students' emotional state
- life experience
- professional reading.

It became apparent that respondents were not able to clearly define whether the strategies they were implementing were innovative. What did emerge, as evidenced in the reflective journals, were elements of

innovation and creativity whereby teachers adapted strategies to address the students' needs and achieve learning. One teacher used modelling as a strategy. Another teacher used a role-play strategy creatively by drawing on the expertise of others presenting a clowning workshop. The use of computers was also popular. One teacher used Google image searches to engage students in vocabulary activities. The fun use of games was much in evidence, and others responded to known issues; for example, non-attendance on excursions with lateral and creative solutions. Attention was given to the whole person with physical activity and aromatherapy documented as effective and creative strategies used. Teachers were receptive to trialing new strategies and approaches. They were willing to give things a go.



### one teacher used Google image searches to engage students in vocabulary activities

It also became apparent that the approaches and strategies used reflected the teachers' preferences and educational beliefs. Student beliefs also impacted on the perceived effectiveness of the strategies used. These ideas were not explored by this research project.

This research project has been an enriching experience for all of those involved. Maintaining a reflective journal was, in particular, a very effective process. Teachers have taken their reflections back to the classroom, improving their teaching practice. Learners have benefited from this as a consequence. What is evident is that teachers have developed a great level of expertise over the time they have been teaching low-level literacy students. This expertise is seldom passed on to other teachers in any systematic way. Sharing this knowledge and expertise will benefit new teachers and learners alike. There is a better chance that learners will experience success if teachers can more readily utilise strategies that have been found to be successful.

### Effective strategies

- Phonics in context (THRASS is an option, but only works for learners who like systems)
- Matching cards (for example, words with pictures) students like to manipulate objects
- Visual cues, visually-based
- Drawing
- Develop relationships and rapport

- Use student's experiences
- Use variety and a range of strategies
- Promote motivation
- Understand student's culture
- Use volunteers, give free choice of student
- Promote confidence
- Promote self-learning, teaching themselves and discovery
- Journal writing
- Fill-in responses, rather than writing
- Experiential writing and reading
- Directed learning with 100 common words
- Be specific about outcomes
- Active learning, and in context
- Copying
- Written news items
- Auditory dissemination program
- Structured reading programs
- Real life material
- Topics that interest students, and are relevant to their lives
- Flexibility
- Practical hands-on activities
- Individual program centring to learning styles, needs, goals
- Non-threatening environment
- Large font that is readable
- Rapport between teacher and students
- Using the computer in the following ways:
  - word processing
  - using computer graphics for the final version of own story
  - speech balloons for text
  - PowerPoint
  - email
  - CAL (Computer Assisted Learning)
  - search engines.

## Non-effective strategies

- Having to manage lots of paper
- Dense text
- Anything that is too vague
- The same thing for everyone
- Rushing
- School text books
- Big classes
- Anything directed at children
- Lack of continuity of attendance
- Making judgments about students
- Large groups
- Anything that reminds them of school
- Inappropriate staff selection
- Fancy fonts.

Natalie Nawrocki has worked as an adult literacy teacher since completing a post-graduate degree in TESOL and Literacy at Victoria University six years ago. Prior to that she was a social worker and community worker for ten years. Her previous work experiences include two other research projects— a needs analysis for a Neighbourhood House, and a research project into the health issues of older Greek women. Natalie is a sessional teacher in adult literacy and ESL at Olympic Adult Education in West Heidelberg.

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# 15 up: early achievers and a bright future

by Sheldon Rothman

**A successful involvement with further education, training and employment can be predicted through a student's performance in literacy and numeracy at secondary school level. The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth is a program that makes it possible to assess the influence of achievements in Year 9—combined with the successful completion of Year 12—while tracking the progress of students as they move through the education system to the workforce.**

For more than 25 years, a number of longitudinal studies have tracked the lives of young Australians as they moved from school to work and post-secondary study. Since 1995, these studies have been managed jointly by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) in a program called the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY). This article provides a brief description of LSAY and reports some findings, particularly as they relate to literacy achievement in the transition from school.

## What is LSAY?

The current program of LSAY consolidated two earlier programs of longitudinal surveys of young people—Youth in Transition (YIT) begun by ACER in 1978, and the Australian Youth Survey (AYS) and its predecessor the Australian Longitudinal Survey (ALS), conducted by the Commonwealth Government between 1984 and 1997. In 1995, YIT and AYS were combined and LSAY commenced with the introduction of a new cohort. A second LSAY cohort was added in 1998, and a third in 2003. It is proposed that a new cohort will replace the 1995 cohort in 2006. [see Table 1]

All three of the LSAY cohorts continue to be interviewed in 2004. The 1995 cohort is a nationally representative sample of young people who were enrolled in Year 9 in Australian secondary schools in 1995. The 1998 cohort comprises young people enrolled in Year 9 in 1998. The 2003 cohort is based on a sample of 15-year-olds who participated in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Each cohort is contacted annually for an update on activities in work and study over the previous 12 months. Between September 2003 and February 2004, more than 22,000 telephone interviews were completed.

The LSAY surveys provide descriptions of what young Australians are doing as they negotiate the transition from school, documenting changes as the group gets older and making comparisons to other groups when they were the same age. To date, LSAY research has examined issues

relating to school achievement and completion, participation in employment and post-secondary education and training, and a number of aspects of wellbeing. Now, with the 2003 cohort based on the international study of 40 countries conducted by OECD PISA, it will be possible to compare Australian transitions with transitions made by young people overseas.

## Why LSAY?

The LSAY program arose out of recognition by successive Commonwealth governments of the importance of the transition from youth to adulthood. This transition was especially difficult between the late 1970s and the mid-1990s, when social, economic and technological changes were profoundly affecting the Australian and world economies. Unemployment had grown to levels higher than those seen among the previous generation, and young people were particularly disadvantaged.

**Table 1: The LSAY Cohorts, 1978 to 2004**

Cohort name	First survey (year & age)	Last survey (year & age)
<b>Youth in Transition (ACER)</b>		
C61	1978, age 17 (school data in 1975 at age 14)	1994, age 33
C65	1981, age 16 (school data in 1975 at age 10)	1995, age 30
C70	1985, age 15 (school data in 1980 at age 10)	1995, age 25
C75	1989, age 14	2002, age 27
<b>Australian Longitudinal Survey (Commonwealth)</b>		
Waves 1 to 4	1984, ages 15–24	1987, ages 18–27
<b>Australian Youth Survey (Commonwealth)</b>		
Waves 1 to 9	1989, ages 16–19 (New sample of 16-year-olds added each year 1990–1994 (school data two years earlier at age 14 for the 16-year-olds added 1991–1994)	1997, ages 19–27
<b>Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (ACER &amp; Commonwealth)</b>		
Y95	1995, average age 14 (Year 9 in school)	Ongoing annual surveys
Y98	1998, average age 14 (Year 9 in school)	Ongoing annual surveys
Y03	2003, age 15 (based on PISA sample)	Ongoing annual surveys

Notes: All cohorts were surveyed annually from the first to the last year shown, with the exception of the C61 cohort, which was not surveyed in 1985 or 1988. The ALS surveys were managed by the Bureau of Labour Market Research. The AYS surveys were managed by predecessors of DEST.



Between the middle of the 1980s and the late 1990s, the proportion of 15-to-19-year-olds in full-time employment dropped from 32 per cent to 17 per cent, where it remained in 2002. The number of young people in part-time employment increased over the same period, with fewer positions available in unskilled and semi-skilled occupations (Lamb et al., 2000). Secondary education was changing on a number of fronts as well, with the disappearance of technical schools, the removal of an intermediate certificate in most states and the increase in participation in senior secondary schooling.

### Retention rates

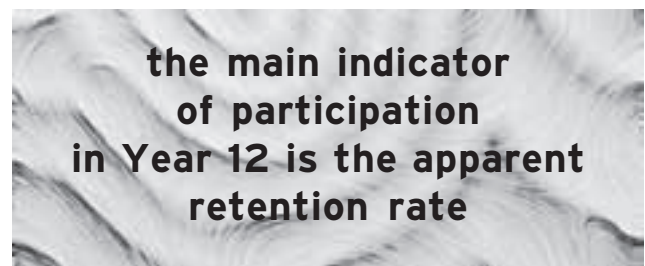
The main indicator of participation in Year 12 is the apparent retention rate. In 1982, the apparent retention rate in all Australian schools was 36.3 per cent. Over the following ten years, the rate more than doubled, growing to 77.1 per cent in 1992. The rate peaked in 1992, and has remained above 72 per cent into the 2000s. In 2003, the apparent retention rate was 75.4 per cent, suggesting that three out of every four young people who entered a secondary school in 1998 or 1999 enrolled in Year 12 in 2003. While the apparent retention rate is often mistakenly considered a Year 12 completion rate, it does rise and fall as the true completion rate rises and falls, and is a reasonable proxy for monitoring trends in the proportion of students who participate in senior secondary school education.

To account for the increased participation in senior secondary schooling and the demise of separate technical secondary schools, states developed programs for students who may not have previously considered study in Years 11 and 12. Between 1990 and 2001, for example, there were substantial increases in enrolments in vocational-oriented studies, particularly in computer studies and technical studies, and decreases in more traditional school subjects such as the humanities, social sciences and biological and physical sciences (Fullarton et al, 2003). School-based vocational education and training became more formalised, with better articulation for students undertaking VET in schools programs and recognition of standard levels for vocational qualifications.

### Examining pathways

LSAY has been designed to increase understanding of key transitions and pathways in the lives of young people, particularly the transitions from compulsory schooling to the labour market and further education and training. The program examines the educational and occupational pathways of various sub-groups of young people and identifies the education and labour market activities and pathways that provide a smoother transition to employment. One particular area of interest has been the relationship between individual characteristics, social

background and school achievement, and how school achievement influences subsequent educational and occupational outcomes. This research also identifies areas where policy interventions by both Commonwealth and state governments can be effective.



The longitudinal data make a distinctive and significant contribution to knowledge about post-school transition processes and outcomes. Longitudinal data enable an examination of the pathways followed by participants in the program. The data also assist in our understanding of changes over time—between different cohorts—and how these changes affect young people as they age. This is especially important for understanding the impact of policy initiatives on longer-term outcomes in the labour market and in further education and training.

### Research design

The focus on post-school transitions has led to certain design features in LSAY that distinguish it from other longitudinal studies. LSAY uses a two stage sampling procedure. For the first stage, approximately 300 schools across Australia have been selected proportional to size, with consideration for state/territory and sector (government schools, Catholic schools and other non-government schools). As LSAY makes first contact with possible sample members while they are still at school, there are relatively low costs of generating adequate sample numbers.

For the second stage, schools randomly select two Year 9 classes—usually English—to provide a minimum of 35 students per school. The aim is to yield a sample of 10,000 young people to be interviewed in the second year (Year 11 for those still at school). The school selection procedures were similar for the 2003 cohort, with students selected if they were born between May 1, 1984 and April 30, 1985, regardless of the year level in which they were enrolled. Because LSAY samples are drawn from around 300 schools, researchers can also investigate the impact of school factors on outcomes.

Selected students in the 1995 and 1998 cohorts took reading comprehension and mathematics tests, and completed a questionnaire that asked about their family background, their attitudes toward school and their

aspirations for work and further education. The reading and maths tests were based on tests used in the Australian Studies of School Performance project in 1975, the source for the first YIT cohorts, allowing comparisons of achievement in reading and mathematics over time. In the second year these LSAY cohorts were asked to complete and return a mail questionnaire. Since the third year cohort members have been contacted by telephone for a 20-minute interview. The 2003 cohort had participated in OECD PISA, and undertook more extensive assessments of their reading literacy, mathematical literacy, scientific literacy and problem solving skills. They also completed questionnaires, providing information about family background, attitudes and aspirations. Follow-up telephone interviews were conducted later in the school year to ensure consistency with previous LSAY cohorts.

### **The importance of surveys**

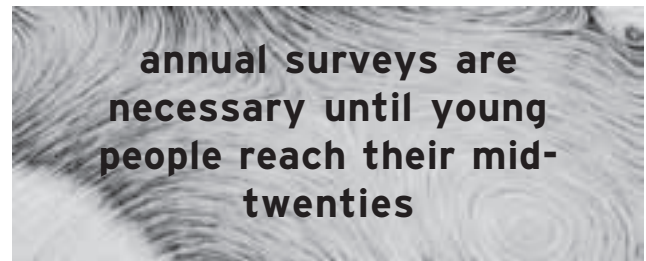
Annual surveys are necessary until young people reach their mid-twenties because of the rapidly changing education and labour market circumstances, and the high mobility of young adults. Annual contact with the sample improves data quality by reducing errors associated with extended recall, and regular contact with interviewers reduces the risk of attrition. The LSAY samples are relatively large, allowing the inclusion of various social background factors, such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity and geographic location, in the analyses. The large initial sample sizes allow for the effects of some attrition, retaining sufficient numbers to generate reliable estimates for various sub-groups.

LSAY has a strong concentration on education-to-work linkages, so the program collects extensive information on educational and occupational aspirations, participation in vocational education and training in school and afterward, and a wide variety of labour market outcomes—including extent and duration of unemployment, occupational status, hours of work, earnings, job satisfaction and job mobility.

LSAY adds a new cohort of students at reasonable time intervals to monitor relationships among key variables over time, especially as governments implement new policies aimed at young people. Earlier surveys enable the current experiences of young people, as they move through education into the labour market, to be compared with those experienced by earlier cohorts of young Australians.

What has LSAY found? In this article the terms ‘literacy’ and ‘numeracy’ are used when the discussion concerns the greater skills; ‘reading comprehension’ and ‘mathematics’ are used when the discussion concerns the achievement tests administered when cohort members were in Year 9.

Achievement in literacy (reading comprehension) and numeracy (mathematics) has been found to have a significant influence on a number of outcomes. Even when some of the analyses are conducted using reading comprehension or mathematics scores alone, the analyses produce similar findings regarding the importance of achievement in Year 9.



This section reports briefly on some of these findings, looking first at the results of studies that concentrated on literacy and numeracy achievement alone, then at the results of studies that concentrated on other outcomes and how these outcomes were influenced by Year 9 achievement in literacy and numeracy.

### **Achievement in Year 9**

In 1975 sample testing of 10-year-olds and 14-year-olds was administered as part of the Australian Studies in School Performance. Five years later, samples of 10-year-olds and 14-year-olds were again tested. In 1989, a new cohort in the YIT program took tests of reading comprehension and mathematics achievement. These cohorts, when combined with the 1995 and 1998 LSAY cohorts, provide a series of data on reading comprehension and mathematics for young people generally at the same age or same point in their school careers.

The major purpose of the Australian Studies in School Performance was the quantification of non-mastery among Australian school students. A mastery level ‘cut-off’ was agreed to by each state and territory and also applied in an LSAY report, which looked at three major groups: all students, 14-year-old students and 14-year-olds in Year 9. Four smaller AYS cohorts were also included in this analysis. Between 1975 and 1995 there was little difference in the mean score on reading comprehension among the groups, and there was no statistical difference in the percentage achieving mastery. The authors concluded ‘that there is no substantial change in performance in reading comprehension over the last two decades’.<sup>1</sup>

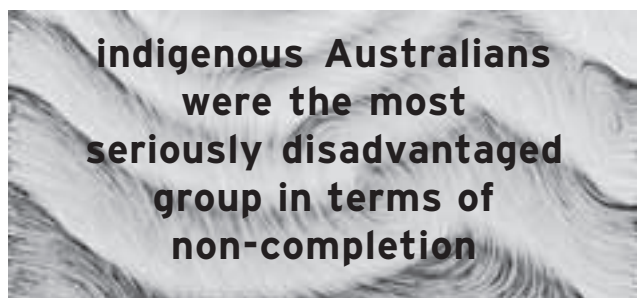
When the 1998 cohort is added to the analysis, again there is little change in achievement in reading comprehension over time, although there was a significant decrease in 1998

among 14-year-olds in Year 9. Some of the significant difference between 1975 and 1998 for this group could be attributed to changes in the age-grade structure of Australian schools, because in 1975 there was a higher percentage of 14-year-olds in lower grades.<sup>2</sup>

The comparisons over time were limited by the explanatory factors that could be used across all cohorts, so a more recent analysis used more of the data available in the 1995 and 1998 cohorts to examine factors relating to the scores on the reading comprehension and mathematics achievement tests. Socioeconomic status (SES), gender, ethnic/racial background, parents' education and attitudes toward school were significantly related to students' literacy achievement in both cohorts, and schools influenced students' literacy achievement through average SES levels and the positive climate fostered in the school.<sup>3</sup>

### Later school achievement and post-school study

In 1999, the states and territories agreed to the National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century. Goal 3.6 states that all young people, regardless of sex, language, culture/ethnicity, religion, disability, socioeconomic background or geographic location, 'have access to the high quality education necessary to enable the completion of school education to Year 12 or its vocational equivalent and that it provides clear and recognised pathways to employment and further education and training'. As noted above, however, only three-fourths of young people who enter secondary school at Year 7 or 8 remain until Year 12. Some leave before Year 12 and take up apprenticeships or traineeships.



Earlier achievement in literacy and numeracy influenced YIT cohort members' participation in Year 12. Two-thirds of the highest scoring young people born in 1961 had completed Year 12 by 1980, compared to only 10 per cent of those who scored in the lowest 25 per cent. Both the high scorers and the low scorers increased their Year 12 completion rates in the 1975 cohort; by 1994, 92 per cent of the high scorers and 58 per cent of the low scorers completed Year 12.<sup>4</sup> A later study, including the 1995 cohort, came to a similar conclusion about the influence

of earlier achievement on Year 12 completion. The authors found that SES, gender, language background, geographic location and school sector had significant effects on school non-completion, and that indigenous Australians were the most seriously disadvantaged group in terms of non-completion. They also found that 'literacy and numeracy achievement has the strongest net effect on school non-completion'.<sup>5</sup>

### Achievements and influences

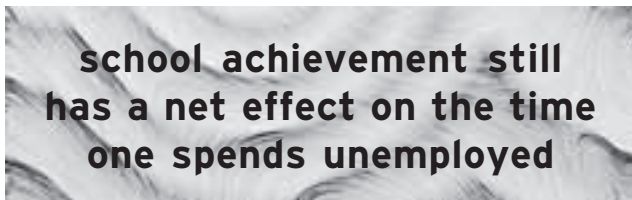
Achievement in Year 9 also influences the choice of subjects studied in Year 12. Higher-achieving students were more likely to enrol in mathematics, physical sciences and humanities subjects, reflecting what many see as the more traditional senior secondary school curriculum. Lower-achieving students were more likely to enrol in technology subjects, including technical studies, computer studies and home science subjects.<sup>6</sup> There is a strong relationship between achievement on the tests of reading comprehension and mathematics in Year 9 and on the assessments for tertiary entrance. Scores on the achievement tests in Year 9 had the strongest statistical influence on the university entrance scores achieved three years later, and numeracy achievement had a stronger influence than literacy achievement.

Post-secondary study, for both Year 12 completers and those who leave before Year 12, is an important avenue for gaining work-related skills. Among the 1975 YIT cohort, 84 per cent of those who had scored in the highest 25 per cent on the combined achievement tests had participated in some form of post-school education by age 19, compared to 49 per cent of the lowest achievers. For the lowest achievers, the location of their study had changed between 1980 and 1994. In 1980, 12 per cent of the 1961 cohort was enrolled in a TAFE non-apprenticeships program and 18 per cent were in an apprenticeship or traineeship. By 1994, 27 per cent of the lowest achievers were in TAFE non-apprenticeship programs and 17 per cent in an apprenticeship or traineeship.

### Participation in the labour force

Upon entering the labour force, achievement in literacy and numeracy continue to have an effect on employment. Young people with poor literacy and numeracy skills in the AYS cohorts of the early 1990s were employed for less time and they experienced longer stretches of unemployment. This was particularly true for the males in these cohorts, with numeracy having a greater effect on their unemployment than literacy did. Those young people who had above-average achievement literacy and numeracy scores experienced easier transitions into the labour market.<sup>7</sup>

Literacy and numeracy achievement continues to have an influence on employment outcomes through to age 33. While previous time unemployed is a strong predictor of later time unemployed, school achievement still has a net effect on the time one spends unemployed and the duration of individual employment spells. Achievement has been shown to be a persistent influence at all ages above the influence of Year 12 completion and academic qualifications.<sup>8</sup>



The relationship between literacy and numeracy achievement in Year 9 and employment outcomes after school continued with the 1975 YIT cohort, based on their employment activities between 1996 and 2000, and the 1995 LSAY cohort in 2000. For members of both cohorts, achievement levels were significantly related to the time spent unemployed, with lower achievers unemployed for greater periods.<sup>9</sup> Among the 1975 cohort, the amount of time spent in marginal employment activities was also related to levels of achievement. Among the 1995 cohort, the occupational status and level of earnings in 2000 were also significantly influenced by their scores on the reading comprehension and mathematics tests taken in Year 9.

## Summary

The consolidation of longitudinal research programs from 1995 onwards provided expanded opportunities for the study of the transition from school made by young Australians. One of the themes common throughout all the cohorts is the importance of achievement in literacy and numeracy. There is a consistent pattern of association between achievement in Year 9 and the completion of Year 12, participation in further study and favourable labour market experiences.

The value of LSAY lies in its use of longitudinal data. It is possible to assess the influence of literacy and numeracy

achievement on later outcomes. As a continuing program that regularly renews its samples, LSAY offers continued opportunities to study the transition from school to work, further study and adulthood.

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# Art, culture and lifelong learning

**Pictures...every one tells a story, and they're worth a thousand words to boot. It is no surprise, then, that art and sculpture are seen as valuable tools for developing language and communication skills, and exploring themes such as identity. As Ruth Woods writes, because art is visual, it 'can evoke critical thinking and debate'. So read on, and see for yourself.**

After teaching art and art-related subjects for ten years it became clear to me that art had far more to offer than simply being a matter of someone learning to paint or draw. For some time I have been throwing around ideas about how art could be used as a medium to teach many things in adult education.

The 'Artways' course<sup>1</sup>, that I have taught for several years, is taught over 12 months and allows students to explore and develop the field of contemporary art. I have been fascinated by the way people expand within themselves, and often become active members of the community through the confidence gained in doing this course. People who have been very timid and lacking in confidence, or students with mental illnesses and depression, have grown into stronger adults.

One of my students who had quite a severe mental illness and was on strong medication came to my class and knew it would be a challenge. Once the other students understood the problem they really looked after and encouraged her. She had a very naive style of drawing and painting, but it had a beautiful quality. You could see her art was very important to her. She really thrived through out the year, and towards the end I encouraged her to apply to do a visual arts diploma at TAFE. This was a huge step for her as she had been doing art courses for ten years. She was accepted into the course and now has moved to the next step of developing her art.

Jane Thompson, an English adult education researcher and writer, discusses the English policy that arts and culture play a major part in lifelong learning:

We live in a political climate in which the government of the day has made education and social exclusion two of its principle concerns. As part of this agenda, it has recognised that the arts and culture have an important contribution to make, in ways that more formal education and social policy approaches struggle to achieve.<sup>2</sup>

Having read the book she inspired me to put some of the

ideas into practice. After a conversation with several people about the idea of including some arts and culture topics into a program for general education for adults, a few colleagues and I met to discuss some ideas.

We discussed crossing the fields of boundaries within the arts and literacy. All the arts could play a part and encourage areas of participation in adult education, to link all abilities, all cultures and develop an understanding of each other's differences.

The ACE Linkweb cluster funded by ACFE decided to use this idea as a project for the second half of 2003. The brief was to design learning materials for ESL and literacy students, using art as a way to develop language and communication skills and explore themes, such as identity. The material was to link to the General Curriculum Option of the Certificate General of Education for Adults.

### Objectives

The course was developed for use as an educational tool. It would help the learner to record ideas and thoughts, collect interesting visual images, discuss them in conversation, and articulate them into text. It can be a way for the student to explore links with artistic ideas and how they connect to society and culture. It can also aid developing personal ideas and concepts which can be explored in many mediums.

These lessons were designed to engage learners in arts and culture as a way to learn and enhance their knowledge of the English language and literacy skills, and also to develop and extend their thought processes and encourage critical thinking. It is a simple format for participants who might not have engaged in any art theory or knowledge.

Some of the objectives we wanted to meet were acknowledging that people have different learning styles, and that using visuals and engaging students in experiential learning could be a new experience, allowing them to learn in a different and non-traditional way.

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## Individual objectives

- stimulate and expand their mental development
- increased critical thinking—learn to question
- enhanced knowledge of the arts
- increase community participation.

## Broader objectives

- develop a teaching tool that can stand alone, with access to many resources
- acknowledge other learning styles
- develop a greater understanding of other people and cultures
- engage learners in social activity through arts and culture
- build social capital and aids to stronger communities.

## Lessons developed

The ideas for the lessons started to come together. My problem was I had far too much information and too many ideas. I had to cull them in order to complete the project in six months. I decided to divide the lessons into two parts—visual art, and culture.

After dividing the ideas into rough lessons I then met with several ESL teachers to obtain feedback. The lessons were adjusted and a couple of the teachers tried them out with their respective classes.

### Part one—Visual Art

- analysing images
- postcard images from the National Gallery of Victoria
- art images from other countries
- visit to the National Gallery of Victoria
- photographing images
- photography as a narrative
- self portrait—celebrate me
- things important to me
- exploring public art in Melbourne
- public art in Melbourne—PowerPoint presentation
- a visit to Melbourne to view the public art.

### Part Two—Culture

- coming to Australia
- your story—a visit to the immigration museum
- the difference between Me and You—compare and contrast of cultures
- food culture
- Universal Declaration on Human Rights
- discussing the 30 points—available in most languages
- drawing images around the Declaration of Human Rights
- ‘Guernica’—discussing a painting about war.

The lesson on the Universal Declaration on Human Rights was developed because of the increased discussion on war in the classroom. I must admit I had never read all 30 points until I came across the Body Shop issue of *Full Voice*, which was available at their outlets. In the centre pages there were listed the 30 points in a very creative format. This gave me the idea that this could be used with the students.

This was one of the lessons tried out shortly after the course was created. We very quickly realised the text was too difficult. Because it was written in 1948, the language was quite difficult to interpret. However we found that on the United Nations web page the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was available in 160 languages ([www.un.org](http://www.un.org)).

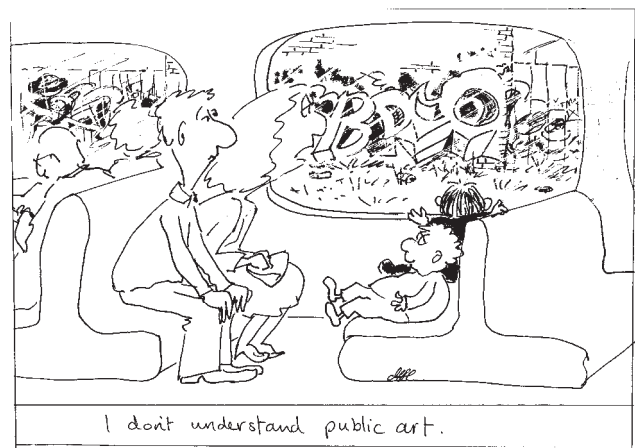
The lesson has now been changed to give students the text in their language. They can read it in their own language, and come back to class the next week and discuss some of their chosen issues or simple points.

In 2004 the ACFE Linkweb cluster decided to continue with the project and trial in detail some of the lessons with ESL teachers and students. The teachers chose the lessons they thought would be interesting for their learners.

## Public art in Melbourne

This lesson was developed by photographing the public art sculpture around Melbourne. I was not able to access a digital camera, so I asked for the photos to be developed onto a CD as well as prints. I then copied the CD into the computer and created a PowerPoint presentation with the images, inserting relevant questions onto the images. A set of teacher’s notes was also developed. This topic could last for three to four weeks if needed, otherwise the CD presentation could be a stand-alone lesson.

During the first week I felt it was important that the students did not need to be computer literate to use this



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program. A copy of the CD was installed onto each computer in the classroom and the PowerPoint presentation was ready to be used. All the students had to do was press the 'enter' key each time they needed to move to next image.

The students went through the program in pairs, answering the questions which were aimed at provoking questions and discussion. It was not the intention to have right and wrong answers, only opinions. The students then discussed the images and questions with the whole group and the ESL teacher.

Several words that came up in the conversation were used on the slides. This enabled the meanings to be discussed and prompted me to include a glossary of words. Students also spoke about sculpture on display in their countries and what they might mean. The students brought up many topics to discuss, including 'could a large piece of sculpture on the freeway be distracting and cause accidents?' (Especially when the sculpture was meant as an icon to protect the traveller!)

The second week was an evolving process from week one. We wanted time to organise a trip into Melbourne to view the artwork the students had seen on the presentation the week before. Because so many questions were asked, the ESL teacher (who had a background in art) and myself bought numerous books on sculpture into class.

The artists were discussed as a group. Some of the artists included Christo, who wrapped objects in fabric—including a bridge in Paris. This stirred great debate about how he would actually do this. Picasso—who made very naive sculptures in cardboard; and Chris Booth and Andy Goldsworthy, who are environmental sculptors and make artworks from natural materials in the environment. The students then choose a book on an artist to investigate. They were asked questions about the type of sculpture in the book:

- What materials did the artist use?
- How was the sculpture made?
- Where do the artists show their work?
- How were they shown?
- How long did it take to make the sculpture?
- What might the sculpture show?

They then bought their findings to discuss with the class. During this class the students decided that they wanted to visit Melbourne's public art, so it was organised to meet in Melbourne the following week.

The following week we met under the clocks at Flinders Street Station in Melbourne. Students had bought their

lunch and we dropped their bags off at the cloakroom in the gallery, so we didn't have to carry them around the city. We had already worked out our route. Seeing the sculptures in reality really engaged the students.

The sculpture that caused the most discussion was the aboriginal totem-type piece beside the Flinders Street rail overpass. It had a white cross and a gun at the top. One student quickly understood what the artist was trying to say. This was a highly successful day, and we concluded that going on these excursions not only enabled the students to learn about sculpture in Melbourne but also enabled us to learn about each other.

## Sculptures visited

Artist	Title of sculpture	Location
1 Inge King	Forward surge	St Kilda Road, Next to the Arts Centre.
2 Debra Halpern	Ophelia	Southbank
3 Inge King	Shearwater	Southbank
4 Unknown (well worth a visit)	Description: Totem-type poles with Aboriginal content	Opposite the Casino Next to the railway line and the Yarra River.
5 Bruce Armstrong & Geoffrey Bartlet	Constellation	Opposite the Casino Between the Yarra River and the railway line.
6 Ron Robertson Swann	Vault ('Yellow Peril')	Australian Centre Contemporary Art.
7 Alison Weaver & Paul Quinn	Three businessmen who brought their own lunch: Batman, Swanston & Hoddle.	Corner of Swanston Street & Bourke Street Mall.
8 Simon Perry	The Public Purse	Burke Street Mall. Elizabeth Street end.

'Ophelia', by Debra Halpern, is a large mosaic sculpture of a face. It was adopted by Melbourne Tourism as the 'Face of Melbourne'. However the students thought it was a troubled and sad face to be adopted.

There is a sculpture by Henry Moore of a woman and child in the garden of the National Gallery of Victoria. The woman is large and oversized—Moore usually created his sculpture in this style. One student asked if this sculpture represented the Australian woman! An interesting observation! Another student said she had not really taken much notice of the sculptures around the city but would now point them out to her children and ask them what they thought.

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## Students make their own sculpture

During the following week we discussed the excursion and spoke about the artwork we had seen. The plan was for the students to create their own piece of artwork—‘Sculpture made from found objects’. We discussed what materials could be used, but basically there were no rules. This was a totally new concept for most students, and it was the idea of the ESL teacher as she had an art background. I was actually a little sceptical because I would usually ask only art students to produce this type of work. I was amazed at how receptive the students were. They had books to look for inspiration and came up with very interesting ideas. One student wrapped a milk carton in crepe paper and inserted matches in the joins. Another made a life-size card sculpture of a person. She said she couldn’t work on anything smaller because she was used to working with patterns for dressmaking. Another student made a donkey from small sticks. It was very interesting to see the results.

After this exercise we asked the students how they felt about making art:

- They thought they had to go to college to make art.
- They now discussed some of these ideas with their children.
- One student thought it was strange what we were doing.

The observations I made quite surprised me compared to teaching the Artways course. The students in the ESL classes were mainly Asian, with a few Europeans. The Artways class that I taught consisted mainly of Australian students, and they were far more critical of contemporary art. There would be comments such as ‘my child could paint that’ and ‘I don’t understand it, it’s rubbish’ and ‘I only like realist painting’. However the ESL students were quite different. They really explored these lessons and discussed them with great interest, and enjoyed making the art in the last lesson. The conclusion was that they wanted to make more objects in a craft area. The teacher I had collaborated with on this project said she would look further into developing some lessons around craft and ESL.

## How the public art lessons link with the CGEA GCO

### Public art in Melbourne

GCO for CGEA	Lesson or activity
Collecting, analysing and organising information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research sculptural art from books and the internet.</li> <li>• Collect information, discuss with class and document in a journal.</li> <li>• Photograph the sculpture, put into a journal and write about the meaning to you.</li> </ul>
Planning and organising activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organise an excursion to visit Melbourne’s public art sculpture.</li> </ul>
Communicating ideas and information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss the sculpture documented from the excursion.</li> </ul>
Working with others and in teams.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organise a trip to Melbourne with a group.</li> <li>• Where are the sculptures?</li> <li>• How do we get there?</li> <li>• How much will it cost?</li> <li>• How long will it take to see them?</li> </ul>
Using mathematical ideas and techniques.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a map and work out the route for the excursion.</li> </ul>
Solving problems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which trams will take us to the art pieces?</li> </ul>
Using technology.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using the internet to obtain information about the international public art pieces.</li> </ul>
Identifying, analysing and applying the practices of culture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss the sculptures as a group after the visit to Melbourne.</li> <li>• Discuss the various styles and culture the artist might have been influenced by.</li> <li>• Design a piece of sculpture for a particular place, e.g. child’s playground, town hall square, a school, a university or sports centre.</li> </ul>





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## Self portrait

This lesson was influenced by one of the Jamie Oliver cookbooks. There are images on one page that illustrate people, places and objects that are significant to him. It is a wonderful collection of images—his old VW camper van, his mum and dad, an old pair of runners, a CD, his scooter, and much more.

I thought this would be a good idea for students to collect items and photographs to use in a collage which represented aspects of their lives that they were happy to share.

In this class, the students were asked to bring in four objects that were precious to them. The ESL teacher and I did the same. There were amazing unplanned outcomes to this lesson. I had thought it would be interesting, but it was much more than that—I found it fascinating as each of the students told the story of their precious objects. One Japanese student had brought in a diary that her mother-in-law had kept from when her son was born until he left home. She told us some of the stories in the journal. Another spoke about a photo of her grandchildren who she hadn't seen for many years as they lived in Europe, and as she spoke her face lit up with pride and happiness to talk about them. She said she missed her family, and the other students in her class had become her family and friends. Many personal stories came into the conversations, and they were all happy to listen and ask questions about each other's culture.

The ESL teacher commented that talking about each object and explaining why it was important was enthralling for the listeners—and I would say a great vehicle for the storyteller to speak passionately about things close to the heart—and all of this was done in a second language. I'm actually not sure who was learning the most, the students or teachers. I couldn't believe how much I had learnt and what a total delight it was being part of the class. I felt very privileged.

After the discussion, the objects were placed on a sheet of paper and photographed. The images are being collated, and at the end of the year we are hoping to hold an art exhibition of art pieces created in the various classes.

Through working with these groups I have realised the great diversity and scope of learning we can all experience in the classroom. When students can really explore their own identity and share their culture with other students, it is a valuable experience for all involved.



Art can be used as an effective and powerful tool to learn many things. It is visual, and can evoke critical thinking and debate. The other thing we must not forget is that using art as a medium to teach can be seen as a most enjoyable way to learn, and we want to encourage as much learning as possible. I hope you can use some of the ideas that I've shared in this Practical Matters to create, engage and enjoy.

**Ruth Woods has taught art and art-related subjects for over ten years. A former ACE organisation manager, she is currently in her final year of an Adult Learning and Development degree at Monash University. She works as a learning communities project officer in a Victorian council. Ruth can be contacted at [woods@iprimus.com.au](mailto:woods@iprimus.com.au)**

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Cartoon on page 22 by Moira Hanrahan.

# Open Forum

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

In these times of disconcertingly rapid change, it is important that adult language, literacy and numeracy providers and educators develop collaborative partnerships with businesses, community groups and local governments. ACAL president Jim Thompson outlines what the organisation must do to get adult literacy back on the agenda in this election year.

## A strategic point in time

The executive committee of the Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL) is developing an adult literacy and numeracy strategy relevant to the rapidly changing social and educational climate. Issues raised during the national ACAL forum, *Beyond Training: Literacy and Social Policy*, in Launceston prompted the ACAL executive to form a strategy group to examine and redevelop our strategic objectives.

The initial members of the group were Pauline O'Maley, Jan Hagston, Geraldine Castleton, Karen Dymke, Jana Scomazzon, Rosie Wickert and Jim Thompson. Each member brought a depth of experience and diverse expertise to the group. Rod McDonald, a highly regarded and well-connected consultant in the VET and adult education fields, was contracted to work with the strategy group. National initiatives such as the ANTA round-table discussions for the national strategy for VET, *Shaping Our Future* and the consultation document, *Diversity Management: Ideas for Action*, provoked discussion of the integration of literacy and numeracy into broader aspects of the community.

In developing ACAL policy and strategy, the work of the ACAL strategy group has been influenced by the following broad social issues that have increasing currency in Australian society:

- a greater emphasis on community capacity building—active citizenship and collaborative approaches to building the nation's social capital
- a growing awareness of the importance of health issues—including a focus on prevention and the needs of an aging population
- the significance of personal financial management—managing debt, planning for the future
- a continuing focus on the importance of education and community, and involvement in promoting a pre-emptory approach to law and order
- the increasing reference to generic skills by business and industry.

The group has met three times with the aim of clarifying how best ACAL might pursue its overall objectives in a

manner that is responsive to the broader social policy directions outlined above. The group has been consistent in its view that there is potential in exploring the notion of extending the integrated approach characteristic of VET programs to a broader community base. The case for an extended 'built-in not bolted-on' approach builds on the success of the VET strategy initially started in the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program. The strategy group believes that it can go far beyond that context, and enable an overall approach leading to improved literacy and numeracy outcomes for individuals, communities, societies and the nation.

A researcher was commissioned to establish what evidence exists in the Australian and overseas literature to support this view. The researcher found that although there is a growing interest in cross-sectoral and integrated approaches, and that a number of programs have been developed, not a great deal of attention has been paid to documenting the impact of such programs. Of interest is recent work from the Centre for Popular Education at University of Technology Sydney (UTS) concerning the development of learning outcome frameworks for various kinds of community development activities. Despite the apparent lack of supportive documentation, the strategy group has kept to the view that the strategy outlined here is the direction that ACAL should be proposing.

Outcomes of the 'built-in not bolted-on' approach could include:

- more effective collaboration across sectors
- greater connectedness with communities
- greater responsiveness to needs of individuals (solution-oriented)
- extended sense of possibilities by developing social capital
- greater collective and self-management
- increased opportunities for learning engagement
- multidisciplinary approaches.

These outcomes are likely to be achieved though:

- expanding and reworking the notion of what counts as successful adult literacy and numeracy provision
- shifting discourses away from teaching to literacy

working as a community resource that works alongside others in many and varied ways

- a broader funding base.

Partnerships with national and state stakeholders in the adult literacy and numeracy field are integral to ACAL's work. The following activities are planned for 2004 to research, develop and inform key components of the strategy.

## **1. Research think tank—Sydney, Thursday August 5**

At the same time as the development of ACAL's future directions strategy and other national policy developments in adult literacy and numeracy, associate professor Rosie Wickert from the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) is undertaking a NCVET adult literacy research project. The project will explore the possibilities and constraints to successful integrated partnership approaches to adult literacy and numeracy in community contexts. ACAL is convening a small tightly focussed cross-sectoral workshop to explore possible policy directions on the basis of the research findings. A small number of key strategic thinkers from other sectors will be approached to participate alongside key thinkers in the education and training sectors. The considerations from the workshop will be built into the ensuing national forum.

## **2. National forum—Sydney, Friday August 6**

Shaping the future of adult literacy and numeracy in changing policy environments: building on emerging possibilities.

This working forum will incorporate, but not be limited to, possibilities emerging from the ANTA strategy. It will also consider the potential emerging from DEST's adult learning discussion paper, for example, as well as considering the possibilities and probabilities in party political policy platforms that may emerge around the coming federal election.

A highly-focused options paper, based on the outcomes of the forum and produced by an external consultant, will be presented as a contribution to the further development of any proposed national adult literacy and numeracy strategy, ACAL's strategy and the ANTA strategy.

Building on the three strands of the ANTA strategy—workplace, community and individual—the forum will focus on the common concerns regarding adult literacy and numeracy for policy and practice, and the unique features of each that must be considered in both policy and practice. These will include how:

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

By utilising strategic partnerships, ACAL will:

- assist in the coordination of a national forum—A Barometer of Policy and Practice—to discuss the latest research informing national strategy development with NCVET, DEST, and ANTA (Melbourne, September 9)
- assist VALBEC to convene the National Adult Literacy and Numeracy Conference—Four Seasons in One Day: Literacies in Changing Climates, (Melbourne, September 10 and 11).
- continue its work on strategy development to provide leadership in the field.
- contribute to high-level reviews and consultations as appropriate. These include, but are not restricted to:
  - the training package review
  - TAA LLN advanced diploma
  - NCVET student outcomes survey
  - NCVET adult literacy research program
  - ANTA national adult literacy innovative projects
  - Reading Writing Hotline national reference group
  - the federal minister's literacy and numeracy awards
  - the Adult Learning in Australia Consultation paper.

The ACAL executive believes that we are at another strategic point in time for significant change in the adult language, literacy and numeracy field. Shaping Our Future promotes integrated learning within communities, improved learning cultures, partnerships, valuing of diversity, and local planning and innovation as key underpinning elements of its four objectives for VET in Australia from 2004–2010.

Opportunities must be provided for adult language, literacy and numeracy providers and educators to develop further collaborative partnerships with industries, businesses, local government and community groups to help individuals and communities deal with a rapidly changing social environment.

**Jim Thompson is currently manager of the education development unit at the multi-partner Peel Education and TAFE Campus in WA. Originally a secondary and primary school teacher, he has worked in a variety of adult literacy and numeracy programs, contributed to and managed national projects, and established a state-wide moderation and professional development network of adult literacy and numeracy lecturers and providers. Jim has been a member of the ACAL executive since 2000 and president since 2002.**

# Foreign Correspondence

**Like a tireless explorer, literacy has trod a long pathway through South Africa. And while apartheid has gone, there remains the challenge of reaching the 40 per cent functionally illiterate adults. Andrew Miller's backgrounding of literacy in South Africa highlights the question, What of the Future?**

## Ten years of democracy: 30 years of hard work

Project Literacy, South Africa's largest and oldest Non-Government Organisation (NGO) working in the field of Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET), has just celebrated 30 years of hard work. South Africa celebrates 10 years of democracy this year, and Project Literacy has witnessed enormous changes in the field and the ways in which society views literacy and adult education. Current statistics suggest that just under a half (nearly 40 per cent) of adult South Africans are functionally illiterate. Of this 40 per cent, some 3 million people have never received formal schooling at all.

This poses great challenges to South Africa in terms of entrenching democratic practice, building a more productive workforce and building a resilient civil society. The South African economy desperately needs to create new jobs as current unemployment levels stand at about 40 per cent. In order to achieve this goal the country requires a more educated and more productive labour force that will attract internal and foreign investment.

Thirty years ago saw South Africa in a very different space to where we are today. The Afrikaner Nationalist regime was entrenching apartheid in a way not seen previously. A stated policy was to offer black South Africans an inferior and reduced education. Nationalist Prime Minister Verwoerd's infamous quote (which still reverberates today) was, 'why teach the native things such as mathematics which he will never be able to use in real life?' 'Bantu education' therefore concentrated on subjects such as agriculture, African languages and biblical studies. The state did provide adult education which was identical to that offered to school-going children. Classes were conducted by schoolteachers who taught children in the morning and adults in the evening. Adults used learner support material and sat exams designed for children. Black adults were taught largely by poorly educated black teachers.

Against this background of dodgy state provision, two oppositional groups saw an opportunity to offer adults something different. These two groups were identified as

white liberals or the political left incorporating white communists and emerging black trade unionists. What united them was their rejection of apartheid and a shared belief that something better could be offered to illiterate adults. Where they differed was in the liberals' pursuit of educational excellence, and the left's push for using education as a means of political conscientisation (sic). The more literate the poor and oppressed, the more they would be able to join the liberation movements and actively oppose apartheid.

Liberal groups were by far the larger and included Project Literacy. Many had their roots in either the Catholic or Anglican Church. These groups used church property or church school property as a safe space to teach adults often living as domestic workers or gardeners in white areas. The Group Areas Act of the time made it difficult for different race groups to meet after working hours. These centres were characterised by incredible volunteerism, where largely white educators gave freely of their time to educate poor and illiterate black South Africans. It was a remarkable meeting of the white middle class with the black working class. 'Madams' met their maids in a very different place! Many of these agencies used the books provided by the Department of Education dealing with black education. Management of these centres and the teaching staff were almost entirely white. What they did differently was to provide a supportive environment with real concern, and they achieved better results than the centres run by the state. What they soon began to realise was that the teaching could be more effective, more innovative and more productive if different materials and curricula were used.

Meanwhile the left concentrated on the writing of short courses and language programs that used politics as a vehicle for learning. Whilst many good materials were produced, it is interesting to note that most learners preferred a learning program that was educationally grounded rather than taking its 'syllabus' from Marx. Programs offered by the left tended to be poorly organised and attracted fewer numbers of learners. It was a case of literacy for self-improvement versus literacy for liberation. Self-interest won the day!

When apartheid was at its peak South African non-profit organisations received more donor funding than any other

in the world. Literacy and ABET was attractive to foreign donors as the lack of schooling for black South Africans was a very visible side effect of apartheid. Investment in this area was an investment in a new South Africa, which everyone agreed had to come. Some 50 agencies, including quite famous organisations such as SACHED, English Learning Project (ELP), Use Speak and Write English (USWE), and Project Literacy received massive injections of donor funding. This funding—primarily from the European Union through the Victims of Apartheid Fund—was administered by the South African Council of Churches, Nordic countries and even USAID. At this time South Africa produced some of the best adult learning material in the world. Massive funding enabled research, testing, professional production and publishing. Funding even enabled the production of adult newspapers for learners. Most agencies, including Project Literacy, produced alternative materials to those provided by the state, and work began on an alternative examination system which would be suited to the unique needs of adults. It was generally accepted that making adults write exams based on a curricula for children was not only insulting, but also did not create the active citizen/worker the country needed.

In the final years of the apartheid regime, provision by the non-profit sector in its entirety almost equaled that of the state. Industry, especially the important mining industry, had begun to offer ABET training to its workforce in order to lift skills and remain globally competitive. The push by business for a more productive workforce which would be globally competitive is an important influence on what the new South Africa has designed and implemented.

### Change comes with a big bang

If one looks at the past ten years, the amount of the change in the field has been enormous, but not all of it has been positive.

- After extensive collaboration between industry, organised labour and the education department, South African embraced the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Drawing heavily on models from Australia and New Zealand it produced what some have called a 'Jungle Jim' of possibilities. Importantly, the South African model has a sub-field of pre-qualifications that recognise ABET as a distinct learning experience on its own. So we have an NQF 1 Level, which is preceded by four levels of adult learning. This was a real attempt to recognise the uniqueness of the South African situation, and the need to formalise the provision of ABET according to a set of nationally recognised unit standards.
- What the NQF and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) did for ABET was to lift it out of



the church hall and into the mainstream. Almost overnight national standards, accreditation, unit standards and formal examinations became the norm. What this has achieved is the lifting of ABET from obscurity to a course of learning which is taken seriously by all role players. Importantly, it began to link an ABET qualification into industry-based training. For the first time an ABET qualification could, for example, provide access to a blasting certificate on the mines. This was literacy for jobs, not socialisation.

- The Independent Examinations Board (IEB) worked with stakeholders and invested heavily in trialing exams designed for adults. One of the hangovers from apartheid mentioned earlier was that adults sat exams designed for children. The IEB based its exams on the unit standards registered with SAQA, and on the principles of lifelong learning. Today, providers can choose between the widely accepted exams of the IEB, adult exams now set by the state and portfolio assessments favoured by the University of South Africa. All three forms of assessment are underwritten by UMALUSI (the South African Certification Body). This is a far cry from the dark days of apartheid and the Bantu education exams designed for children.
- The advent of a democratic order saw tremendous changes in the funding patterns of foreign donors. It was important and normal practice for foreign donors to support governments, and not civil society. The peculiar South African story had made this not possible. NGOs were faced with two stark realities: adapt to the changing scenario, professionalise and tender for work, or shut down. Many could not cross the Rubicon and either chose to close or were eventually forced to close on the point of bankruptcy. All left-leaning agencies have now closed as, to some extent, their work had been done. Liberal agencies which focused more on delivery have fared a little better.
- The state was faced with the tremendous challenge of transforming its adult education centres into outcomes-based learning sites which met national criteria, whilst agencies such as Project Literacy moved into the



position of service delivery (materials, teacher training) as opposed to direct delivery. Without massive donor funding, actual provision by non-profit organisations became an impossibility. The state has moved to upgrade educators, purchase materials from agencies such as Project Literacy, forbid daytime teachers from teaching adults 'later on in the day' and to bring state provision in line with the demands of the NQF. One of the new South African ironies is that the apartheid state and the homelands serviced more adult learners than the new democratic state. Downsizing, rightsizing, cuts on public expenditure and the government's economic policy known as GEAR, have taken their toll on public service.

- The Department of Labour manages Sector and Education Authorities (SETAs) which have demarcated the economy and replaced old-style apprenticeships with new-style learnerships. Many of the learners waiting to go on a learnership need ABET skills first. Project Literacy has been especially successful at winning contracts with SETAs to provide this service. Monies allocated for ABET through the Department of Labour far outweigh money voted for ABET through the Education Ministry.

## Challenges

The challenge that remains is that the totally illiterate have not been reached successfully. The government has attempted to do so through the National Literacy Initiative (SANLI), but numbers reached remain small and the follow-through is sporadic. This program has also been conducted outside of the NQF and moves literacy back to 'church hall' provision.

## How does literacy aid poverty alleviation?

Literate people may learn to read, but they can't eat the Bible. The challenge for non-profit providers and the state

remains how to effectively link skills literacy and poverty alleviation. In a country with such high levels of unemployment, the challenge remains to show illiterate people that improved literacy levels will result in an improved standard of living.

## Who will fund literacy for the sake of literacy?

We all know the arguments that improved literacy levels enable citizens to engage better with the apparatus of the state (access child support grants and other social welfare benefits), that literate parents are better parents, and that literate mothers keep girl children in school longer than illiterate mothers. Literate rural people are able to access better health care, and in the case of HIV/AIDS, monitor and take anti-retroviral drugs with confidence. This kind of ABET does not necessarily fit in with the demands of the economy or the promise of jobs. It provides a fine argument for the continuation of donor funding in a country still sharply divided into two worlds—one with skyscrapers and the biggest stock exchange in the southern hemisphere, the other where safe and running water remains a dream.

## How do NGOs such as Project Literacy survive on government contracts and still provide a critical voice which challenges and questions?

'You can't bite the hand that feeds you', said one senior bureaucrat.

We have moved a long way—as a country and as an organisation, but serious challenges still remain. Project Literacy has the staff, the vision and the governance structures to meet the challenge of change and to expand delivery. As an organisation we are bigger, stronger and better equipped to serve South Africa than ever before. Whilst significant numbers of South Africans remain shut out of the mainstream, we have a job to do which we face with determination, a tried strategy and vigour.

Andrew Miller is the chief executive officer of Project Literacy, the largest non-profit provider of adult basic education and training in South Africa. His special interests lie in building strong civil society organisations, the link between education and poverty alleviation, and capacity building of rural poor communities to access rights and take charge of their lives.

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# Policy Update

How does Australia look when international adult literacy policies and provisions are compared? Could we do better, or can we sit back and say, 'She'll be right, mate'? With this question in mind, Rosa McKenna and Lynne Fitzpatrick look at a National Centre for Vocational Education and Training (NCVER) project that examines international policies and trends, paying particular attention to the implications for Australia.

## Sustaining adult literacy: a look at international trends

What does literacy mean in today's world, with its rapidly changing technology and new landscapes in education and the workplace? To answer these questions, the National Centre for Vocational Education and Training (NCVER) funded a suite of research projects in 2003. One of these projects investigated international literacy policies, trends and initiatives with a focus on the implications for Australia. The report, *Building Sustainable Adult Literacy Provision: A Review of International Trends in Adult Literacy Policy and Programs*, will shortly be published by NCVER.

This article provides a brief overview of the methodology, some of the key messages drawn from the research, and a summary of the features of adult literacy policy provision in countries that are featured in the study. The full report includes a chapter describing adult literacy policy and provision in each country and Australia, and provides a critical insight into how Australia might continue to rebuild its adult literacy policy and provision. It features a comprehensive reference section.

### The scope of the study

The countries selected by NCVER for the study were Canada, the Republic of Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The research was confined to a desk study. It includes an analysis of the significant research and policy statements by international institutions such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Organisation for Economic and Cultural Development (OECD). It also covered descriptions and analysis of the adult literacy policy initiatives, frameworks and program provision including investment levels and outcomes, an analysis of the extent to which 'new literacies' are being addressed in other countries and Australia and a discussion of the implications of international trends for Australia.

The study is limited to programs funded by governments or their agencies, either in part or fully, or subject to

statistical and other reporting requirements. In most countries this provision occurs in post-compulsory education sectors—variously described as adult education, higher education, community education, vocational education and training and/or further education.

The framing of the project brief around conceptions of adult literacy raised the dilemma about how to treat adult numeracy, adult second language or the overarching concept of adult learning and education. While recognising adult numeracy and adult English as a second language as discrete fields of education practice, the treatment of these educational areas within government policies tends to include, or not distinguish, between them. Throughout the report the term adult literacy is generally inclusive of adult numeracy and English as a second language. The study used Lankshear's four categories of literacy—the lingering basics, the new basics, the elite literacies and foreign language literacy to describe the range of approaches in each country.<sup>1</sup>

### International perspectives

International organisations, from their varying perspectives, are sending a strong message supporting the systematic and explicit inclusion of adult literacy provision through reformed education systems supporting lifelong learning. The United Nations has called for a renewed vision of literacy that goes beyond the limited view of literacy that dominated in the past, and has adopted a view of new literacies that develops the 'ability to locate, evaluate and effectively use information in multiple manners'.

The UN Decade of Literacy calls on all national governments to respond to its action plan. The international comparative research undertaken by the Organisation for Economic and Cultural Development, particularly the International Adult Literacy Surveys, has provided the quantitative data and an assessment of the impact of literacy to promote policy development. These surveys showed that most OECD countries have 45 per cent to 55 per cent of their adult populations performing at levels that compromise their ability to process everyday information and participate in the labour market and education. The studies by the International Labour Organisation have contributed to a review of human resource development in the light of massive changes in

the labour market and technological change emphasising a system of lifelong learning, the importance of human capital and the multiple contexts for learning using constructivist rather than transmission pedagogies.

All countries have been grappling with changing definitions of literacy to cover the emerging literacy practices of new technologies, multicultural societies, the changing nature of work and expanding modes of delivery. Most countries have innovative curriculum and assessment frameworks for their adult literacy provision, capturing new literacies and adapted to the social purposes for which adults use literacy. However, these frameworks are not always mandated. Countries like the UK, Ireland and New Zealand are including the new basics in basic skills levels of national qualifications standards, while Australia has built literacy into the industry standards in its qualifications framework. In the US the emphasis in policy remains on the lingering basics with additional skills using ICT being added to that repertoire. In most countries the teaching of the lingering basics coexists with moves towards the new basics as the capacity to know about and use new technologies and pedagogies becomes available.

Despite the recognition of its importance, adult literacy remains a marginalised and relatively under-funded area of education. Most countries have recognised the need to build the capacity of their systems to meet adult literacy needs. They all have aging workforces characterised by casualised employment and poor access to appropriate qualifications and professional development to meet the expanding contexts of delivery.

Despite the lack of financial data, most countries claim to have increased expenditure.

All the countries in the study, with the exception of Australia, have or are planning a discrete adult literacy policy or strategy to address identified education needs and to guide increased investment. Most are developing adult education frameworks within the context of post-compulsory education systems with the exception of the US, where the recent policy realigns adult literacy with school literacy standards.

### **Key messages from the research**

The countries in this desk study—Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the UK and the US—have a similar distribution of literacy performance among their adult population according to the International Adult Literacy Survey conducted between 1994 and 1998.

Significant proportions of adults in these countries, between 45 per cent and 55 per cent, perform at the two

lowest levels of the prose scale of the IALS, indicating that many adults will have difficulty performing everyday literacy tasks, or in taking advantage of opportunities to participate in further education and the labour market.

Most of these adults are already in the labour market, and many will remain there for the next 20 years, so that interventions to improve literacy need to be targeted at the post-compulsory education system. Needs analysis and participation studies in the countries studied have yielded important information about the extent of unmet needs and ways to tailor provision to meet adult needs and lifestyle.

Understandings of literacy and literacy pedagogy have changed over the last decade. Literacy requirements will continue to expand to include progressive use of technological means of communication and a larger volume of information. The pedagogical trends are towards a provision contextualised to adult experience. The sites and contexts for learning need to fit adult purposes and be available through all life stages, which implies that an ongoing and lifelong strategy for literacy development in post-compulsory education is necessary.

International organisations such as the United Nations, the Organisation for Economic and Cultural Development and the International Labour Organisation all recommend the development of a strong system of adult basic education as part of a country's education and training system.

In all comparable countries, adult literacy remains marginalised and under-resourced, lacking the capacity to deliver programs to meet estimated needs. However, all other countries have developed, or are in the process of developing, national policies and strategies. The UK has developed the most comprehensive policy and provision while federations like Australia, Canada and the US need to engage the cooperation of the states, territories and provinces and key stakeholders to successfully implement strategies.

Features of a national adult literacy policy—recommended by international organisations and gleaned from the experience of countries in the study—appear to be a national leadership structure, national research and referral programs, flexible funding and diverse delivery models, nationally consistent reporting and quality assurance systems, and teacher supply and maintenance.

The Australian post-compulsory education system already has many of these features in place, and policies affecting the delivery of adult literacy have been 'built in'. To ensure that the benefits of adult literacy are available to those



that need it to fulfil personal opportunities, and also contribute to Australia's economic and social development, adult literacy goals and targets need to be established and monitored.

### **An action plan**

Australia has a mechanism for national adult literacy policy development through the Australian National Training Authority strategic planning process, *Shaping the Future*. This strategy was endorsed in late 2003. The twelve aspects of this strategy should be used to facilitate an action plan to identify needs, to set participation rates and achievements for target groups, to build a capacity to deliver diversified programs, systematically collect data and monitor quality of delivery, in an approach to be negotiated by those with a stake in the system in 2004.

A successful strategy for raising awareness about the impact of poor literacy and policy development has been the conduct of national summits or forums. The Australian National Training Authority and the Department of Education, Training and Science should demonstrate national leadership by engaging key stakeholders in these issues.

The UK, New Zealand and Ireland all feature similar qualification frameworks to Australia. These countries have identified levels of the national qualifications systems in which 'basic' or 'foundation' skills are developed. Australia needs to develop a similar mechanism so that adult literacy needs can be identified, and provision tracked within the national system.

Australia and Canada both have excellent records in funding national innovative projects. Both countries could learn from strategies in UK, Ireland and New Zealand about supporting the take-up and sustaining new forms of provision. Australia has a most successful workplace literacy program, and has had success in 'building in' literacy with vocational education and training. Innovations in intergenerational health and financial literacies have been successfully developed in other countries and are worthy of consideration in Australia.

As funding has increased for adult literacy, so have accountability measures. Most countries have engaged in developing adult-oriented frameworks for guiding curriculum and assessment and evaluation or quality assurance systems regulating provision. Most countries have, or are developing, a single gateway on the Internet for information about adult literacy provision, resources and research.

Most countries in the study have identified a lack of capacity or a skilled workforce as a major difficulty in

meeting the need for an effective adult literacy provision. Development of qualifications within national qualifications frameworks, and the provision of professional development to up-skill existing workforce and new recruits, are essential features of policies in the UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand.

### **Features of policy and provision**

#### **Canada**

Of the countries in the study, Canada, because of its size and the nature of its governance, is the most fragmented in terms of national adult literacy policy and provision. Canadians are currently in the process of developing a national strategy and dealing with the challenge of gaining support from provincial governments in a pan-Canadian accord on adult literacy.

Some of the best features of the current Canadian provision are:

- The National Literacy Secretariat, (<http://www.nald.ca/nls/aboutnls/about.htm>), located within the Department for Human Resource Development, provides national leadership with a substantial budget for infrastructure and national projects. This funding is frequently used in partnership with provincial governments and local providers.
- The Movement for Canadian Literacy, ([www.literacy.ca/](http://www.literacy.ca/)), is a strong national provider advocacy organisation.
- NALD, the National Adult Literacy Database (<http://www.nald.ca/>), which provides a database of provision, research and resources using a thesaurus developed for adult literacy, and including ICT literacy resources.
- CONNECT (<http://www.nald.ca/connect/about.htm>), features innovative provision, particularly participatory community-based approaches, online provision and resources, health literacy and new culturally sensitive literacy initiatives for aboriginal communities.
- The Essential Skills Framework (<http://www15.brdc-drhc.gc.ca/>), similar to EFF (US) and the NRS (Australia), describes the enabling skills adults need to perform. These skills have been directly linked to occupational standards, and assessments are being developed.

#### **Ireland**

Ireland is relatively small in size and population compared to other countries in the study. Nevertheless, it has rapidly expanded funding and learning options to meet the many needs of adult learners.

The best features of developments in Ireland are represented by the National Adult Literacy Agency, NALA, (<http://www.nala.ie/>), which plays a critical role in

advocacy and liaison with government agencies and professional and resource development. NALA also has processes for expanding provision through a cycle of research and awareness raising, evaluates pilot projects and develops guidelines for provision and professional development.

The agency is behind the development of specialist modules for staff training and certification with Waterford Institute of Technology as a national qualification. It also provides an assessment framework that describes literacy development within the national qualifications structure ([http://www.nala.ie/training/index.tpl? sec=3](http://www.nala.ie/training/index.tpl?sec=3)).

### **New Zealand**

Adult literacy in New Zealand has until recently been marginalised and factionalised. The process of policy development has brought stakeholders together to cooperate in capacity building.

The New Zealand government has established a unit within the Tertiary Education Commission, [http://www1.tec.govt.nz/education\\_and\\_training/literacy/literacy.htm](http://www1.tec.govt.nz/education_and_training/literacy/literacy.htm).

Also, there is the More than Words adult literacy strategy at [http://www.tki.org.nz/r/literacy\\_numeracy/clarifying/adult/morethanwords.pdf](http://www.tki.org.nz/r/literacy_numeracy/clarifying/adult/morethanwords.pdf).

The Government has commenced building the capacity of the system certifying practitioners' qualifications, and is building an assessment framework linked to the New Zealand Qualifications Framework. Increased funding allows the delivery of an expanded range of provision, including programs such as vocational and family literacy programs tailored to the needs of Maori and Pasifika communities.

A recent innovation is the establishment of a new adult literacy portal for research and information, <http://www.nzliteracyportal.org.nz>.

### **The UK**

Since the Moser report in 1999, the UK has developed a comprehensive system of adult literacy. The Skills for Life strategy is a whole-of-government approach, setting targets for specific populations to improve basic skills. A basic skills strategy unit is responsible for its implementation.

The UK features the most comprehensive and well-resourced system. It features a learning infrastructure that includes standards within the national qualifications framework, a national curriculum, screening and initial assessments, a range of delivery sites and contexts, resources

and assessment linked to the standards and standards and professional development for staff (<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/>).

The public sector initiative is unique amongst the countries studied. All government portfolios, as part of human resource planning, have to identify and provide adult literacy support where needed, utilising funded staff training or study entitlements, ([http://www.basic-skills.co.uk/site/page.php? cms=1&p=1181&product=563](http://www.basic-skills.co.uk/site/page.php?cms=1&p=1181&product=563)).

Initiatives in the UK are being supported by research and evaluation. The Pathfinder projects have evaluated aspects of the 'learning infrastructure' and other variables in delivery such as time, mode and funding incentives, and a consortium of universities have formed the national Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (<http://www.nrdc.org.uk>). Adult literacy is considered part of social inclusion policies (<http://www.cesi.org.uk/>).

### **The US**

The US has had a national system of adult education provision since federal funds were legislated in 1964. Federal funding, with agreement with state governors, shapes the range of provision. The most recent legislation, The Adult Basic and Literacy Education Act, continues the trends of 'No Child Left Behind', outlining reforms to the American education system (<http://www.ed.gov/policy/adulted/leg/aeblueprint2.doc>). Unlike other countries in the study, the US is turning away from frameworks like 'Equipped for the Future', which describes skills needed by adults, and is returning to alignment with school basic skills outcomes.

Features of adult literacy in the US include:

- a long tradition of intergenerational or family literacy programs supported by both government and philanthropic organisations
- the utilisation of the IALS data to identify and describe the disparate needs of the three challenge groups or populations with specific literacy needs (<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ncsall/research/occas.htm>)
- the roles of the National Institute for Literacy in providing a national focus and infrastructure through LINCS, and national research centres providing collaborative and basic research (<http://www.nifl.gov/>)
- the Equipped for the Future framework (<http://www.nifl.gov/lincs/collections/eff/eff.html>), which provides a robust curriculum and linguistic model for planning and assessing adult literacy.

Events in the US have recently undermined the role of NIFL in providing national leadership in 'adult' literacy, funding cuts are being anticipated, and there is a spirited

debate about the use of scientific research-based methods of instruction and standardised assessment systems as conditions of funding.

### **Australia**

Australia had a collaborative national adult literacy strategy operating between 1991 and 1996 through the implementation of the Australian Language and Literacy Policy. Since then funding has decreased, provision has declined and collaborative national structures have fragmented. The post-compulsory education system has been reformed, for example, registering a broad spectrum of service providers, introducing a national qualifications framework, a quality framework and flexible forms of assessment and delivery. Adult literacy is being rebuilt into these structures.

### **Some features of adult literacy in Australia**

The Workplace English Language and Literacy program has operated for over a decade and provides workplace programs for workers vulnerable in the labour market. It pioneered a successful funding model as well as delivery models.

Adult literacy is 'built-in' to the vocational education and training system, the infrastructure of the National Training Framework, and a range of accredited curricula that use frameworks for developing and assessing linguistic and numeracy skills which can be applied in contexts of the learner's or provider's choosing.

In the process of rebuilding its adult literacy provision, Australia needs to respond to the UN Decade of Literacy plan of action by articulating its policy initiatives and committing to ongoing participation in the international surveys, the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills (ALL) survey, as a means to monitor performance.

Shaping the Future: The National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 2004–2010, provides the opportunity to articulate an action plan to service the needs of business, individuals and communities—flexibly and inclusively. The strategy will also build the capability of practitioners and the capacity of training organisations to improve the quality, access, and responsiveness of adult literacy provision.

Some of the tasks facing policy makers in this rebuilding process are:

- researching the dropout rates and the decline in participation in accredited adult literacy courses
- investigating the impact and effectiveness of the built-in model with vocational education
- utilising needs analysis research to target adult learners
- re-establishing consultative structures between governments and stakeholders
- linking the recognition processes available through the VET system to value informal learning
- investigating flexible models of funding similar to WELL, to expand contexts of provision
- taking innovations into established programs
- building the capacity of practitioners and providers to deliver adult literacy in an expanding range of contexts.

**Rosa McKenna and Lynne Fitzpatrick are directors of Communication in Education and Training Pty Ltd. Both have worked in the adult literacy field for many years. Currently they are working on developing a resource on contextualised teaching and learning in vocational education and training, and an NCVER project to identify and describe the literacy practices developed using an integrated training approach.**

### **Reference**

- 1 Lonsdale, M & McCurry, D, (forthcoming), *Literacy in the new millennium: A discussion paper*, NCVER.

# Beside the Whiteboard

Michael Chalk has taught adult literacy for over eight years. He last appeared in *Beside the Whiteboard* in autumn, 1996. Since then Michael has continued to teach ESL and literacy, and now works primarily in the area of technology-based learning.

Michael is the flexible learning coordinator at Preston Reservoir Adult Community Education (PRACE), and has worked on such projects as the Flexible Learning Leaders' program in 2003 and LearnScope professional development projects. He was a member of the VALBEC general committee and the Fine Print editorial group for several years, but recently retired from this position in order to finish his Masters in Education.

Perhaps the best known of Michael's projects is 'At the Beach'—one of the first online learning opportunities for adult literacy students. He talks to Sarah Deasey from Fine Print about Chalk on the whiteboard

## Michael, tell us about your professional journey since 1996

I've had a wonderful journey since '96. Starting out as an ESL teacher with his eyes on overseas travel, I was astounded to find myself working in the local adult education sector. I feel that I've learned so much that's impacted on the rest of my life—not only about teaching and learning, but also about technology, research, publishing, music and working with groups of learners and colleagues. The adult literacy field is an exciting field to work in because it is still very new, and embraces all manner of perspectives from Hallidayan linguistics to cultural theory, and visual literacies too.

## How is it that you have chosen to stay working in the ACE sector?

I really enjoy working in the ACE sector! I find there is a level of freedom and enthusiasm, as well as a sense of struggling with the odds. It amazes me that our sector is so hidden, though—many people don't realise the powerful impact that a local community learning centre can have on the marginalised lives of people who wouldn't dream of going somewhere as mainstream as a TAFE.

Why would anyone stay in a sector where more than 60 per cent of the employees have 12 weeks compulsory unpaid annual leave? Where employers want to give their employees better conditions, but just can't afford it? Where wages have barely shifted in ten years, but accountability has risen ten-fold? I don't know how our Ministers can sleep at night. They seem to be happy to leave the ACE sector in its history of volunteerism. The virulent anti-worker policies coming out of Canberra appear to have strengthened our state government's ability to appear reasonable while they move further from their roots toward corporate appeasement, don't they?

I am extremely fortunate compared to many of my colleagues, in that I have a contract position. This isn't

really fair, but I'm very grateful for my good fortune, blessed that technology has been flavour of the month for the last few years.

## What do you like about working in an organisation such as PRACE?

PRACE is a wonderful environment, largely because of the astonishing leadership qualities of the manager—and also because of the brilliant educators at PRACE who've worked in many other places, and who constantly remind us how lucky we are to have a good leader. I find it soothes my soul to work in a place that is close to the local community, has a positive impact, and allows people to be innovative. In my experience, a small organisation pays more attention to its staff, and has to work hard to retain them.

The interesting thing for a technical person like me is that I get to build such a wide-ranging set of skills—from publishing on paper and on the web, to the basics of graphic design, research, online facilitation, running a web server—all within the contexts of language and literacy learning.

## Tell us about the development of At the Beach

Part of me is surprised that people are still interested in this project—it's become a bit of an obsession with me, because I'm also researching the whole experience as my Masters study.

Originally our manager gave us—Anne Dunn, Chris Malakar and myself—time to spend developing resources in order to learn about how to put things online. What a luxury—time to spend working with colleagues and building materials!

We originally intended to build a site that could stand alone, that students could use without too much support from teachers, that would be fun, stimulating and contain useful information. Our basic model was 'pictures + text

+ activities that give the learner some feedback'. The funny thing about a theme-based lesson is that an individual teacher probably won't use it very often—so making the site a publicly shared resource was a good idea. Even if we're not using it, someone else can!

Since we started the project, people's ideas about good online learning have changed. Now the field is moving in the directions of collaborative problem solving, game-playing, role-play and teamwork. The ideas around socially interactive learning started to make a much bigger impact on online learning in the last couple of years. However our beach site really hasn't encouraged group learning—that has been left up to individual teachers. So now we've tried to build in a basic level of social interaction, but there's a long way to go.

Since we refurbished and slowly migrated the site during 2003, it's been very interesting to learn that visitors arrive from all around the world. In April, people from over 30 countries visited the site! Now, how can we encourage all those people to meet and develop their language skills together?

It would be great in the future to find better ways to involve the teachers and learners who visit the site. I'd love to find a way to bring more people into the project, so that learners could share their stories and opinions, and teachers could share any relevant activities. I'd also love to find a way to fund our time to develop more resources, and even start on a new theme too! (<http://beach.prace.vic.edu.au>)

### **What are your definitions of flexible learning and online learning?**

I take a flexible approach to both of these terms. They both fit into the 'jargon' category, along with e-learning, e-communication, blended learning, central digital object repositories, and so forth.

#### *Flexible learning*

There appears to be a strong feeling in Australian adult education sectors that flexible learning is really about increasing options for teaching and learning, making sure that the needs of learners are central to planning and delivery (The word 'delivery' does imply that you can have your learning delivered just like the milk and the mail, doesn't it?). Flexible learning can draw on a whole range of technological tools to ensure that learners' needs are catered for.

#### *Online learning*

Online learning is frequently used to describe what goes on in corporate web-based environments where teachers can publish resources, and stimulate group discussion. I

often expand the term in my own mind to read any kind of exploration of screen-based literacies, but I'd probably be alone on that one.

#### *Blended learning*

Blended learning is actually a useful term, because it describes what goes on in most adult literacy classrooms—screen-based resources being used alongside paper-based resources, in face-to-face settings. The term allows us to imagine more suitable situations for adult literacy learning—using whatever tools are at hand to improve opportunities for the learners.

I still think one of the best models for an adult literacy classroom was one from Sussex Street Neighbourhood House, when they put two classes and two teachers together in a very big room. At one end of the room there were tables for project and group work, at the other end were the computers for when people needed them.

I like other terms such as technology-enhanced learning, networked learning, or screen-based resources—or 'adult learning via whatever resources you can find at the time'.

I read a comment recently about an adult learner who had discovered the most amazing technological tool for her flexible learning—an object she could take with her wherever she went. Made out of recycled vegetable matter, she could instantly access any part of the text using a navigation device called an index. This incredible tool can be accessed using advanced search technologies at a central organising location.

Yes, our learners still need to get the basics of borrowing books from the library!

The more resources a person can access, the more flexible they are. If somebody can use the library catalogue, and borrow a book in their own time outside of class where they couldn't before, then they've improved their ability to learn flexibly.

### **What are the conditions for successful online learning?**

Much the same as the conditions for successful face-to-face learning—a balance between suitable resources, stimulating yet achievable activities and social interaction. And a teacher who is aware of the learners' goals and needs, who can engage the learners' attention and fire their curiosity, and who has the skills to successfully manage fruitful discussion.

The differences between face-to-face and networked learning lie in the way resources are presented, and the kind of facilitation skills demanded of the teacher.

### **What are the benefits of online learning for the adult literacy student? Are there limitations?**

I would not rush an adult literacy student, or teacher, into online learning as it is usually understood. There are so many barriers to overcome—the basic fear of technology, the need to develop basic skills with desktop softwares such as word processors, layout software, and image editors.

If we expand online learning to include any use of screen-, web- or CD-based resources then there are plenty of benefits. Consider the potential of an adult literacy classroom with access to an array of resources. I think a great model could be a room with data projector and just a few computers—enough to ensure access to all the resources for research and publishing, but not so much that the machines distract people from other possibilities such as collaborative face-to-face learning, printing resources from the web and working on a table.

To move away from the individual-in-a-lab syndrome, to use the machines to build communication and collaboration between your group and another. Learning thrives in a social environment, doesn't it?

The amazing thing is that literacy itself has been shifting for the educators in the last few years. Advertisers and the media have learned so much about tapping into the audiovisual cues that drive our desires. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we had the kind of budget that advertising departments have, and the time to make similar explorations.

There are limitations. If you are ever enrolling an adult literacy learner in an online course, make sure there are a variety of resources to suit many learning styles, that social settings will be there to support the learner, that the people running the course are clear about how quickly they'll respond to emails, and that there's a good help desk for technical troubles.

### **Tell us about your work as a flexible learning leader (FLL)**

In 2003 I was so lucky to receive one of these FLL professional development scholarships. What an opportunity! You get to meet people from all around the nation, and also plenty of time to develop the skills you need.

I used this time to redevelop the beach site. Some of our reviews had mentioned that the original site was difficult

to navigate, so I spent time learning a new programming language in order to build a better navigation system. We also wanted more visual information to stimulate discussion, so we put in a photo gallery that is now the most popular part of the site.

Open Source, the free software revolution that has been sweeping the world, was a major focus of my research. I learned a lot about how a web server works, and the huge range of free web applications that could be useful for literacy learning; for example, blogging tools, concept mapping, diagram-builders, and learning management systems.

### **Is online learning delivering the new forms of learning that were promised?**

Oh dear, did you believe the hype? I think in the early days some people were eager to throw out the baby, the bathwater and the whole bathroom. Now, most realise that while technology can help, what really matters is the ideal of the educational organisation that can use technology to respond rapidly and effectively to the needs of learners and teachers.

I think there remains tremendous hope for useful applications of technology within adult learning environments. For example, there is current research into the use of online voice tools that could make it easier for literacy groups to meet and interact from different locations<sup>1</sup>. Interestingly, one of the most interesting projects in recent years looks at how to use email for learning through games<sup>2</sup>. A simple use of technology, which can help people gain command over the number one networked communication tool.

However, 2004 is the end of the five-year funding cycle for the Australian Flexible Learning Framework, so now is the time to speak with any CEOs you know from ANTA if you'd like professional development to continue in 2005.

**Thanks Michael, good luck with the Masters and all the fabulous work at PRACE!**

### **Notes**

For more information about Michael's FLL journey, visit <http://prace.vic.edu.au/flex>

1 Michael Coghlan's work at <http://users.chariot.net.au/~michaelcl/fll/blog.htm>

2 Thiagi's work at <http://www.thiagi.com/email.html>



