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Editorial

Welcome to the Spring 2004 edition of *Fine Print*. In this issue we ponder issues of how best to provide meaningful programs for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) learners, and delve deeper into the mysteries and theories of 'learning', the role of identity and its impact on learning.

Flemington Reading and Writing Program trialed the provision of Integrated Counselling Services (ICS) to CALD learners. Liz Suda comments that the experience was rewarding on a professional level, and a steep learning curve for the counsellor and teacher involved. As a counterpoint, Robin Kenrick provides a critique in Open Forum acknowledging the benefits of the ICS model and articulating the challenges to be met in the model's ACE implementation.

Paul Hager suggests learning is a poorly understood concept. A myriad of theorists can't agree and notable learning institutions waste millions of dollars. He challenges the view of learning as a product and reflects on it as a process, a holistic view of the person interacting with learning.

The NCVER study on enabling courses indicates that six percent of the total VET student population is in enabling or pre-vocational courses in which they often choose to re-enrol after successful completion. Increased self-esteem, confidence and motivation for further study help students overcome learning barriers.

Judith Miralles showcases the 'Step into Voluntary Work' program, which has given over 150 women from many backgrounds the confidence and qualifications to become more actively and meaningfully involved in Australian life.

Ian Falk and Josephine Balatti delve into the role of identity and its impact on how and what we learn. Their paper aims to contribute to a better understanding of how identity and learning are explicitly related, and how they underpin education and training in the postmodern world.

In Policy Update, Ian Cornford comments on the impact of competency-based training (CBT), its implications for education, and its role in skilling the workforce and promoting Australia's international competitiveness. Lynne Matheson reports on the second 'Roundtable Discussion' held by DEST in Canberra as part of the ongoing consultations on adult learning in Australia.

In Practical Matters, Corinna Ridley details her work developing the book *Real Texts*, and gives practical advice on how to use authentic materials in and out of the classroom. In Open Forum, Denyse Ritchie asks why so many adults fail in the literary process. She considers this question drawing on her experiences with THRASS, a method used with Indigenous adults and children in the Torres Strait Islands to explore the difficulties and complexities of learning English. In Foreign Correspondence, Tommy Byrne provides an insight into Ireland's NALA. Low literacy levels are a major issue in Ireland, and he describes ways in which NALA tackles the issues. Beside the Whiteboard showcases the Material Galz from PRACE, a great example of pragmatic 'can do' teamwork.

Enjoy your springtime read.

Ann Haynes
VALBEC Executive

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.

Integrated counselling: working with the whole person in an ACE setting

by Liz Suda

It was a government-funded action research project into integrated counselling for learners from diverse backgrounds. Six community providers—including the Flemington Reading and Writing Program—took part. Their unanimous decision was that integrated counselling services should be offered by ACE providers. Then the politicians came into the picture, and the final outcome was a real shock.

The Flemington Reading and Writing Program (FRWP) was one of six community providers invited to participate in an action research program conducted by Australian Multicultural Education Services (AMES), and funded by Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE) during 2003. The project brief was to involve community providers in an action research project, where they would be given professional support for a pilot trial of providing integrated counselling to learners from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD). The project targeted:

- newly arrived migrants and refugees in regional and rural Victoria, especially those in isolated areas
- longer-term settlers from CALD backgrounds, especially young people
- mature-aged learners especially those seeking to enter/re-enter the workforce.

The concept of integrated counselling was new to our organisation, and we felt the training offered in the program would be very beneficial to staff at FRWP. In particular we were attracted to the learner-centred approach, which sought to improve the opportunities available to learners and consequently their outcomes. The proposed strategy recognised:

- the importance of effective learner participation in planning their own pathways
- the significant challenges presented to service providers by the barriers of limited English, cross-cultural differences and limited understandings by many CALD workers of the educational, employment and workplace systems and procedures which operate within Australia
- the special challenges which distance, isolation and small numbers of CALD learners can present to providers trying to achieve effective and efficient processes and procedures with limited funding regimes.

As a large community provider of language and literacy services, FRWP had been keenly aware of the challenges

facing our learners in relation to settlement, educational and vocational needs. We had also been frustrated by the lack of resources available to meet those needs. The proposed outcomes of the project were therefore encouraging:

- Increased capacity on behalf of ACE providers to provide an integrated counselling and referral service appropriate to needs and skills of CALD learners.
- Tracking and management of learning across a range of curriculum frameworks appropriate to CALD learners.
- Improved awareness of referral options appropriate to CALD learners.
- Individual Learning Plan templates appropriate to use with CALD learners within ACE settings.
- Experience of a range of effective flexible delivery strategies appropriate to limited resource context.
- Increased understanding of needs of CALD learners in ACE settings.
- Participation in professional development workshop.
- Access to Integrated Counselling Service model and resources via AMES website.

The task was approached with these goals in mind. Most of these outcomes have been achieved in the course of the project, but they represent only part of the solution to the barriers faced by CALD learners and the people who try to support them. It was clear at the outset that any models developed would require extra work on the part of providers, and therefore could only be implemented in the longer term if funding was provided to deliver this service to CALD learners.

The participants therefore identified other outcomes that the project should aim to achieve, the primary one being the creation of an adequately resourced integrated counselling program for the community sector, that receives recurrent funds commensurate with student enrolments. It was envisaged that the participating providers could then use a Train the Trainer model to disseminate a range of models for effectively implementing integrated counselling programs in other centres.

One of the recommendations put forward at the very first meeting was that community providers of further education programs for CALD learners could provide an alternative case management service that integrated the needs of the whole person. This seemed like a logical way of implementing an integrated counselling model, and sourcing existing funding available through the Commonwealth Job Network. We therefore embarked upon the action research process with a degree of enthusiasm and optimism, in anticipation of improved support services for our learners.

Learning on the job

Another attractive feature of this approach was that participants would be able to learn by using the action research methods of triangulation and gathering information and training from different sources. Most importantly, the creation of case studies meant that we were given adequate funding to work intensively with a small number of students to trial the model we developed in the course of the training.



The researchers in this project participated in a number of training activities that provided them with knowledge and skills necessary to carry out action research. Participants were familiarised with the services offered by AMES, and the model for integrated counselling used by AMES teachers. Information sessions from the Overseas Qualifications Unit and the Survivors of Torture support group provided participants with an insight into the range of issues a counsellor might need to address with individual students.

Most participants agreed that this information was essential to providing holistic support for students who may have a number of complex issues to resolve in terms of their settlement and vocational needs.

Integrated counselling at FRWP

The concept of 'learner responsibility' underpinned the model we had devised in the course of the training. The role of the centre should be to offer support, but it should also encourage learners to view the management of their settlement, vocational and educational needs as a process which will assist in their acculturation to the host culture, develop their language skills and the generic vocational skills of gathering information, working collaboratively, organising information and so forth. It was decided to

work with learners in a high-level ESL group at our centre to trial this method, as we felt they had the language and literacy skills necessary for such a process, and were probably further down the track in their vocational pathway than lower-level language learners.

We discussed the project with a group of 16 students, and asked them to fill out a questionnaire which sought information about their vocational, settlement and educational needs. The results were quite surprising in that many students expressed their continuing difficulties in accessing information, and understanding the services available to them. Seven students expressed a desire to participate in the individual counselling sessions and develop a learning plan.

Over the next ten weeks, each student met with the counsellor on three or four different occasions. Each time the counsellor and learner were given tasks to complete before the next meeting. This process ensured that the learner took responsibility for gathering information as well. Of the seven participating learners, one found employment in the course of the project and three went on to further study or training in another institution.

It is clear that the settlement, vocational and educational needs of learners are interrelated. For many learners the process of settlement is an ongoing issue. Even after 20 years in the country, learners still face issues of cultural assimilation and language barriers. While the majority of learners in our project might be considered to have functional language skills, their ability to function independently within mainstream society is still a challenge. Their confidence in accessing services or planning educational and vocational pathways is hampered by lack of cultural knowledge and fluency in English.

For many, learning English in a local community setting is the most obvious step they can take. It is accessible, convenient and inclusive. Participation in English classes provides not only language support but also social support. Moreover, teachers are seen to be sensitive to their needs. Many students commented that they could communicate in English with their teachers and fellow students, but not when they were in the wider community. Listening to the radio, watching television and dealing with mainstream society in general were challenges students faced daily.

Support networks

Learners rely on family, friends, classmates and teachers to help them deal with settlement, vocational and educational issues. Some students were more confident about accessing health, education and housing services than others. Most welcomed the idea of ongoing support in planning future

pathways. However, there was tentativeness—perhaps borne from previous negative experiences and uncertainty—about whether they could in fact move beyond their current situation.

Centralised and integrated support networks make sense on a number of levels. It became obvious that learners felt more comfortable with a holistic approach to their needs, and welcomed the opportunity to plan out a pathway with achievable steps. Some of the participants had received support from other agencies, but were confused about their options as they had received conflicting information. One of the pitfalls seems to be too much support and not enough consistency of information and follow-up. A community case management model might redress some of these difficulties. Learners would be cared for by their community rather than by a range of different support agencies and bureaucracies.

The time frame for this project was too short to measure the overall effectiveness of an integrated approach, as many of the learner needs are ongoing and take time to resolve. English language, for example, does not improve dramatically in 12 weeks for learners who already have a functional level of language proficiency. Consistent support networks need to be in place over an extended period.

Pathway options

While integrated counselling might provide learners with information, support and a learning plan, many of the barriers they face are external and often beyond their control; for example, prerequisites of courses they may wish to do, the attitudes of employers, and the requirements of Centrelink. Setting realistic goals is therefore extremely important. The counsellor has to balance a complex range of variables in developing a learning plan with students.

The interview process was useful in encouraging students to look at a range of options and consider alternatives to their ideal pathway. It also provided them with the experience of taking responsibility for gathering relevant information. Some students coped with this better than others requiring varying degrees of support and encouragement.

The role of the counsellor

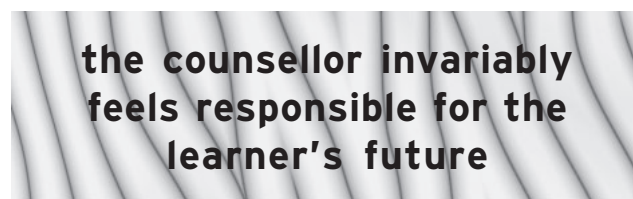
The approach we adopted was to encourage learner responsibility in researching information, developing a resume and making contact with relevant agencies. However, the skills required to do this were quite challenging and most students required support and direction. It was often necessary for the counsellor to make

phone calls, follow up issues, and research websites as the information was not readily accessible to the learner.

Some of the barriers facing learners were also quite daunting, and it was difficult not to feel completely responsible for the outcomes of the process. The counsellor invariably feels responsible for the learner's future.

The knowledge required by the counsellor is enormous, and while the training sessions were very informative, there is a lot to learn. Counselling is a skill that develops with experience, and the time frame for this project was insufficient to really develop those skills. Consequently, the integrated counselling process would be quite time consuming for the novice counsellor.

There is also a concern about the learners' expectations of the counsellor when such a service is offered. Some learners felt that the counsellor might be able to get them a job or help them to get into a particular course of study. The counsellor is generally not in a position to address all the barriers faced by the learner, and this can lead to disappointment and disillusionment. Such expectations can be potentially stressful for both the counsellor and the learner.



While integrated counselling makes sense on many levels, it does place enormous responsibility on the counsellor. Learners clearly require support, but so does the counsellor.

Action research and quality improvement

The experience has been very rewarding on a professional level, and a steep learning curve for the counsellor and teacher involved. The information gained through the training sessions has been invaluable, and will benefit the quality of services offered to students at FRWP. It has also been very instructive to work with other community providers and see different perspectives, interpretations and approaches to the task at hand.

There is no doubt the program offered to students at FRWP will be enhanced by this experience, and the knowledge gained has augmented the initial interviews/language assessments we conduct with students when they first come to FRWP. We are now able to provide students with information about other services, particularly those offered by AMES, which complements provision in

community settings. The employment and vocational services offered by AMES, as well as access to the virtual ILC, have also enhanced provision within our program.

However, the possibilities for quality improvement are limited by the level of resources available to community providers. Partnership opportunities with AMES could facilitate the provision of an ongoing integrated counselling program at FRWP, but additional resources are required to ensure that this service is available to all CALD learners who require such assistance.

Wherefore integrated counselling?

The research report produced by FRWP made a number of recommendations, as did the other participating providers. All agreed that integrated counselling should be a service offered by community providers of further education. While providers already do this kind of work to a certain extent (and often voluntarily), a structured, documented and well-resourced model would benefit all learners in community settings and provide a means of tracking learner pathways.

The idea of establishing a centralised database in the form of a web site, where centre managers and teachers could access information about relevant agencies and services in relation to educational, vocational and settlement issues, was widely recommended. The integrated counselling website could include case studies from the project, with action taken, and models used. The website would be accessible to all further education providers. Ongoing professional development for staff on integrated counselling processes and training in vocational guidance would need to be offered. Counsellors, in particular, would require training and support in dealing with traumatised learners.

Resources are essential for the effective implementation of such a service. A funding formula which recognises the time spent by teachers and counsellors outside of their existing duties is essential. Our experience suggests:

- a minimum of 1 hr per week time release for each group of 20 students for the teacher
- 2 hrs per week per 20 students for the counsellor

- 2 hr per week record keeping and writing up reports for the whole service
- time out for training and professional development.

At the end of the project, FRWP applied to ACFE to continue providing an integrated counselling service, with the view to building upon the research conducted thus far and getting some hard data about its effectiveness by following through with the learners in our case study, as well as formally offering support to other students. We argued that there were many aspects to the process that required careful consideration and evaluation. We were unsuccessful with that submission.

The Integrated Counselling for CALD Learners project had the potential to refocus the work of community providers and potentially contribute to their sustainability. But in the end the positive outcomes we had hoped for did not eventuate. The project is described as having achieved its outcomes—the participating centres were given the opportunity to trial a method that really does work, AMES fulfilled the terms of its contract, and ACFE has distributed hundreds of CDs to community providers. The problem is that the outcomes prescribed fell far short of making a real difference to the community education sector and the many other CALD learners who would have liked to get that level of support.

The recommendations made by participating organisations seem to have been largely ignored, and are not given any acknowledgement in the ministerial statement on further education. In short, the money invested in this project will have little effect in ensuring that integrated counselling services are more widely available—an unfortunate outcome for a process that had so much potential.

Liz Suda is manager of the Flemington Reading and Writing Program and has worked in the community sector for the past 14 years. She also teaches literacy methodology in the Graduate Diploma of TESOL and Literacy, at Victoria University. She has been involved in numerous research projects and has a strong commitment to social justice and culturally inclusive educational practices.

Metaphors of workplace learning: more process, less product

by Paul Hager

Learning is a poorly understood concept, according to the author, with the finest academic minds in disagreement and millions of dollars wasted by respected higher education institutions as this 'product' is offered to the student-as-customer. So what is learning, if it is not something up for sale?

In seeking a better understanding of learning, we enter controversial territory.

'Learning is a term with more meanings than there are theorists'¹.

According to Winch '*...the possibility of giving a scientific or even a systematic account of human learning is... mistaken*' His argument is that there are many and diverse cases of learning, each subject to '*constraints in a variety of contexts and cultures*' which precludes them from being treated in a general way. He concludes that '*...grand theories of learning...are underpinned...invariably...by faulty epistemological premises.*'²

A concept for dispute

Not only is the concept of learning disputed amongst theorists, it seems that even those with the greatest claims to practical knowledge of learning may be lacking in their understanding. Higher education institutions can trace their origins back many centuries. If any would know from experience what learning is, surely they would. Yet the recent cyber-learning debacle suggests otherwise. Notable institutions such as Columbia University, the University of California, the London School of Economics, and New York University invested many millions of dollars setting up suites of online courses, expecting to reap large profits from off-campus students. However, prospective students were not prepared to pay the fees. Many of these online courses are now available free as backup resources for on-campus students. Brabazon³ argues these university-based learning 'experts' confused technology with teaching, and tools with learning.

I suggest that learning at the start of the 21st century is a poorly understood concept, in much the same way that the concept of motion was 'mis'understood at the end of the Middle Ages—for a long time, understanding of motion was limited by adherence to the Aristotelian attempt to provide a single account of all motion. Aristotle proposed a second-order distinction between natural and violent motions. It was the 'nature' of all terrestrial bodies

to have a natural motion towards the centre of the universe (the centre of the Earth). But bodies were also subject to violent motions in any direction imparted by disruptive, external, 'non-natural' causes. So, the idea was to privilege one kind of motion as 'basic' and to account for others in terms of non-natural disruptions to this natural motion.

Breaking with common sense

The Aristotelian account persisted for so long because it was in accord with 'common sense' ideas on motion. However, real progress in understanding motion came when physicists departed from 'common sense' ideas and recognised that there were many different types of motion—falling, projectile, pendulum, wave, and so on—each requiring its own account.

In educational thought there has been a strong tendency to privilege one kind of learning, and judge the worth of other kinds by how well they approximate the favoured kind.⁴ This dominant view of learning also fits well with 'folk' conceptions of the mind.⁵ Likewise, it seems there are many types of learning and things that can be learnt—propositions, skills, behaviours, attitudes, and so on. Efforts to understand these may well require a range of theories, each with somewhat different assumptions.

Learning as product

The dominant view of learning is, in its influence, akin to the Aristotelian view of motion. It provides an account of supposedly the best kind of learning, and all cases of learning are judged by how well they fit this view. This dominant view of learning—the 'common sense' account—views the mind as a 'container' and 'knowledge as a type of substance'.⁶

Under the influence of the mind-as-container metaphor, knowledge is treated as consisting of objects contained in individual minds, something like the contents of mental filing cabinets.⁷

Thus there is a focus on 'adding more substance' to the mind. This dominant view involves two basic assumptions

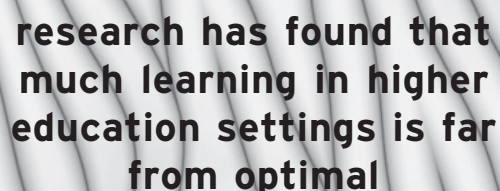
of stability and replicability. The stability assumption requires the products of learning to be relatively stable over time, enabling learning to be incorporated into curricula and textbooks, passed on from teachers to students, able to be measured by test, exams and assessments, and amenable to comparison. Formal education systems, for assessment purposes, depend on learning that is stable, familiar and widely understood. The replicability assumption posits that the learning of different learners can be literally the same or identical. The sorting and grading functions of education systems requires the possibility of this kind of foundational certainty of marks and grades.

Under pressure

The 'learning as a product' view is under increasing pressure. The 'learning as product' view underpins the front-end model of vocational preparation, a model being increasingly questioned for its failures. The term 'front-end' refers to models of vocational preparation that require a period of formal education and/or training, that need to be completed by entrants to an occupation before they can be regarded as qualified workers.

This period of formal education and/or training usually takes place in classrooms remote from the workplace⁸ but, most importantly, this model is called 'front-end' '...because it implies that *all* of the learning that is needed for a lifetime of practice has been completed'.⁹ The perceived failures of the front-end model of vocational preparation are varied. These include:

- the increasing realisation that front-end courses in themselves are insufficient to prepare novices for a lifetime of practice
- the growing rejection of the technical-rationality assumption that underpins many front-end vocational preparation courses
- growing doubts about the capacity of the front-end model to prepare practitioners for accelerating change.



**research has found that
much learning in higher
education settings is far
from optimal**

There are other critiques and questions raised about 'learning as a product'. Bourdieu makes a distinction between the logic of practice and the logic of the theorisation of practice¹⁰. He sees a strong tension between the two, between the logic of practice, which is contextual and tacit, and the logic of the theorisation of practice, which centres on generality, abstraction and logical

reasoning. Bourdieu's critique is that 'the logic of practice can only be grasped through constructs which destroy it as such'.¹¹ I recognise the tension here, but offer an alternative perspective. My argument is that 'the logic of the theorisation of practice' focuses on the wrong concepts, ones that bring with them unacceptable assumptions, hence the perceived incommensurability of theory and practice. Better concepts that involve more relevant assumptions might yet produce a conceptual understanding of practice.

A deficient product

Resting on concepts such as surface vs. deep learning, research has found that much learning in higher education settings is far from optimal. It is often found that '...despite students having successfully negotiated the assessment system, little understanding of fundamental concepts has been gained',¹² the product is deficient.

New directions in psychology also challenge the view of 'learning as product'. Everyday cognition makes more sense if we abandon the idea of a mind operating on stored mental content, and replace it with the idea of a mind continually and automatically responding to the world and making sense of whatever befalls it. I call this the

connectionist view of mind...Connectionism provides an alternative metaphor, which enables us to conceive of a mind that can act knowledgeably without containing propositions or other knowledge objects.¹³

Recent research into learning transfer reframes transfer and, by implication, learning. Despite experimental techniques, learning transfer 'seems to vanish when experimenters try to pin it down'.¹⁴ As Bransford & Schwartz (1999) point out, transfer is indeed rare if it is restricted to replication.¹⁵ These researchers propose a notion of 'transfer' that includes an emphasis on 'preparation for future learning'—the ability to learn in new environments; a notion of 'knowing with', rather than 'knowing that' (replicative) or 'knowing how' (applicative).

Denigration of learning

Unconscious commitment to the 'learning as product' view can lead people to assign negative connotations to terms such as 'learner' and 'learning'. Although educators view the terms 'learner' and 'learning' as unproblematic and relatively neutral, in the community at large being a learner can be seriously problematic. For example, in workplaces:

- 'Learner' (compare with 'knower') can have deficit connotations; for example, learners may be viewed as inexperienced or incompetent.
- Learners will often have less power, position, recognition, or legitimation.

- Novices are often keen to discard their 'L plates'. This suggests that they also discard the role of learner as soon as possible.¹⁶

The efficacy of lifelong learning discourse can be reduced by perceptions such as these, which is not to deny that it has had some success in changing people's understandings of 'learning'. The terms 'learner' and 'learning' do different work in different contexts. The act of naming someone (especially oneself) as a learner can be controversial; the act of naming something as learning is usually somewhat less so.

Lifelong learning is more than a 'quiz show' view

The 'learning as product' view has unattractive implications for lifelong learning, suggesting endless accumulation of discrete pieces of learning and over-crammed filing cabinets of the mind. If learning is centrally about minds acquiring propositions, lifelong learning is potentially about perpetual enrolment in formal accredited courses. The individual learner is in danger of being condemned to learn all subjects/disciplines. In this respect, part of the 'folk theory' of learning is an acceptance of a 'quiz show' view of what it is for someone to be learned. As well, the focus here is firmly on the individual learner. Illich (1973) was right in suggesting that we have been schooled to accept a 'consumer of formal courses' view of knowledge acquisition.¹⁷

Learning as process

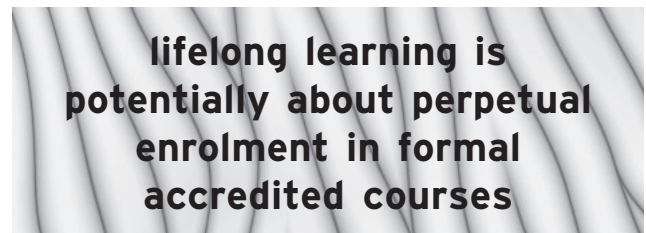
When learning is viewed primarily as a process rather than as a product, different features are emphasised. Learning becomes a process that changes both the learner and their environment.¹⁸ This view of learning underlines its context, as well as the influence of cultural and social factors. It is holistic in that it points to the organic, whole-person nature of learning, including the importance of dispositions and abilities.

Metaphors of learning

Two metaphors—learning as *acquisition* and as *participation*—have long underpinned much educational thought.¹⁹ The acquisition metaphor has been influential, subordinating the process of learning to its products—the something acquired (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, behaviour, understanding, etc). This contrasts with the increasingly influential participation metaphor which presents learning as a process blended *with* product. Neither metaphor is adequate to understanding of the full complexities of learning.

A metaphor that better represents learning as a process is *construction (re-construction)*. This could encompass the construction of learning, the community of practice, the

environment and the self. This metaphor has an extra dimension.



Rogoff (1995) proposes viewing learning and development within a community in terms of three '...inseparable, mutually constituting planes comprising activities that can become the focus of analysis at different times, but with the others necessarily remaining in the background of the analysis.'²⁰ They are:

- 1 Apprenticeship (community/institutional).
- 2 Guided participation (interpersonal).
- 3 Participatory appropriation (personal).

It is the third of these that particularly involves constructive processes, since appropriation of a personal kind clearly implies something stronger than mere replication. The three metaphors about learning link differently to lifelong learning and related concepts. The participation metaphor is undoubtedly more congenial for lifelong learning. People participate in many activities at many levels, signaling much scope for learning. This learning is at whole-person level rather than just being centred on the mind. As well, rather than focusing solely on individual learners, the participation metaphor accepts the importance of learning by groups, communities and organisations.

However, participation in itself does not ensure learning. Quite the opposite, as is demonstrated by participation in closed societies or organisations that are dedicated to resisting change (for example certain religious societies). The construction metaphor, however, with its tripartite focus on the construction of learning, of learners, and of the environments in which they operate, has a wider scope in which change, learning and human flourishing are inextricably enmeshed.

Workplace learning is poorly understood if viewed as a product. There are considerable advantages in viewing it primarily as a process that has important social, cultural, and political dimensions. Both work practices and the learning that accompanies them are processes. We might almost view practice as a process that coincides with learning.

This process feature is also best captured by a (re)-construction metaphor, given that the use of metaphor seems to be unavoidable when thinking about learning. It also

seems that we should be wary of attempts to account for workplace learning in terms of single overriding factors or via universally applicable theories.²¹ I conclude that there are four major criteria for assessing workplace-learning theories, through consideration of how well they:

- 1 View such learning as a process.
- 2 Take account of the social, cultural, and political dimensions.
- 3 Reflect (re)construction metaphors.
- 4 Avoid single factor or universally applicable explanations.

My current work involves an examination of various theories of workplace learning in terms of how well they exemplify these criteria. I propose four dimensions for understanding productive learning that:

- 1 Redefine existing patterns and rules.
- 2 Involve the creation of new learning that simultaneously reshapes the environment (the learner, the organisation and the work practices) in which the learning occurs.
- 3 Involve the social, cultural and political construction of individual identities.
- 4 Centre on holistic, whole-person, embodied judgements.

It seems to me that in the first two of these, construction is clearly a more suitable metaphor than participation. In the last two, we can see elements of both construction and participation, hence the importance of the (re)construction metaphor for understanding of workplace learning.

The paper on which this article was based was expanded into a full-length chapter—‘Current theories of workplace learning: A critical assessment’—for a forthcoming book, *International Handbook of Educational Policy*, edited by N. Bascia, A. Cumming, A. Datnow, K. Leithwood and D. Livingstone.

Professor Paul Hager has been involved in vocational education for over 30 years, with his major focus being the professional development of vocational teachers and trainers. His main research interests are informal workplace learning, professional practice and the role of generic skills in work. Paul is writing books on informal learning as it relates to lifelong learning (with Professor John Halliday, University of Strathclyde) and on graduate attributes and lifelong learning (with Professor Susan Holland, Edith Cowan University).

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An appetite for learning: going back for a second course

by Robyn Hodge

One in 12 of the graduates from enabling courses re-enrolled in the same course the following year, according to an NCVET report. A follow-up study showed that, rather than being a negative experience, taking the course again helped these students increase their self-esteem and confidence, maintain motivation for further study and overcome learning barriers.

The term 'enabling' describes the lower-level preparatory and pre-vocational courses in the vocational education and training (VET) sector.¹ One of the primary aims of enabling courses is to give students remedial education or preparatory activities to facilitate skills acquisition necessary for further studies or employment. A report by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd. (NCVER) titled 'Outcomes of enabling courses' (Phan & Ball 2001), had indicated that one in twelve of the graduates from enabling courses re-enrolled in the same course in the following year.

A follow-up research project was commissioned by NCVER. The main purpose of this further research, undertaken by Susan Dawe, was to investigate the reasons why some students who have completed an enabling course remain at the same level of qualification or re-enrol in the same enabling course in following years.

Background

Of the total VET student population, around six per cent are in enabling courses or lower-level preparatory or pre-vocational courses (106 700 students out of 1.75 million in 2001). Positive outcomes were found for most students who completed enabling courses. There was a slight increase in the proportion of women employed after course completion compared to men; the proportion from the various 'disadvantaged' groups in employment remained static. However, many graduates indicated that they chose their course for 'personal interest' rather than 'to get a job' or 'get into another course'.

Over 20 per cent of the enabling course graduates went on to enrol in a VET course the following year. Of these graduates, a third enrolled in a course at a higher level of qualification, less than ten per cent in a lower-level qualification, while almost half of these graduates had enrolled at the same level of qualification as their previous course. While some diversified into other areas of learning, over 80 per cent enrolled in the same course they had successfully completed the previous year.

Successful completion of an enabling course means the student has demonstrated the competency standards for that qualification. For example in South Australia, Certificate I in Employment Skills Training, Certificate II in Introductory Vocational Education (IVEC) or Certificate I, II and III in English Proficiency. In New South Wales, Certificate I in Works Skills, Certificate I in Foundation and Vocational Education (FAVE), or Certificate II in General and Vocational Education (GVE). In general, enabling courses are expected to lead to future activity such as higher-level general or vocational studies or paid employment.

Six groups were identified as including students most likely to re-enrol in the same level or same enabling courses, they were:

- 40–64 years of age
- from language backgrounds other than English
- disabled, more likely with an intellectual disability
- whose highest secondary schooling was Year 9 or below
- of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent
- unemployed prior to the course.²

In this study, the data from the NCVER 2001 national VET collection was analysed and compared to Phan and Ball's findings. Further investigation was sought from New South Wales and South Australia. VET access and equity managers provided referrals to specific TAFE institute program managers. Three sites in metropolitan and rural regions in South Australia and New South Wales were selected to focus specifically on vocational preparation, disability and Aboriginal education. For case studies, semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff and students at:

- Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE, South Australia (metropolitan campuses)
- Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE, South Australia (metropolitan and rural campuses)
- Djigay Centre of Excellence in Aboriginal Education, TAFE NSW, North Coast Institute, Kempsey campus (regional campus).

Access and equity in VET

While the national strategy for VET³ aspires to provide access for everyone and to enable everyone to engage in meaningful work, it recognises that there are equity groups which require specific encouragement to participate in VET, or risk further marginalisation in our society and long-term dependency on government support.

Traditional target equity groups in VET include:

- women, especially sub-groups of young mothers and women who are unemployed or from non-English-speaking backgrounds
- people of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent
- people from non-English-speaking backgrounds
- people with a disability
- people living in rural and remote areas.

More recently identified equity sub-groups include people:

- with low socioeconomic status within all equity groups
- with low-level skills (literacy, numeracy and social)
- who left school early (before completing Year 12)
- who are unemployed, especially the long-term unemployed
- who have been displaced as mature aged workers
- in custody.⁴

A wide range of outcomes

In examining why students re-enrolled in enabling courses it was important to consider what the positive outcomes were. ‘Outcomes’ can be identified as the practical results of undertaking a course; for example, outcomes of courses for Indigenous Australian students relate to employment, knowledge acquisition, community, and personal and social outcomes.⁵

...involvement in VET-related learning in itself gives participants satisfaction, a sense of greater control over their lives and can encourage them to seek out new opportunities, enable better informed choices to be made, and to pass on these and other benefits through their interactions with their families and communities.⁶

There is a wide range of other possible outcomes from undertaking an enabling course. Participants in learning activities often report improvement in their health, their ability to cope with health problems and/or their sense of general wellbeing.⁷ A small-scale survey in the UK by NIACE found that 87 per cent of respondents reported benefits to their physical health, while 89 per cent reported positive emotional or mental health benefits. These direct health benefits reflect the greatest general benefits experienced from learning, which include increased confidence and self-esteem, new friends and contact with other people, improved relationships with other people, and new employment or voluntary work. Education staff

encouraged 20 per cent of learners to attend adult education opportunities. This was a key method used to encourage people to begin to become learners. In a NIACE health education project, a ‘learning advisor’ offered ‘prescriptions for learning’ in three general practice surgeries. The learning advisor offered educational advice and guidance and linked education providers, primary health care professionals and people who may not have participated in learning since leaving school.⁸

Research findings

Enabling courses contain a high proportion of students from ‘disadvantaged’ groups. For example, students who left school before completing Year 10 are up to four times more likely to undertake enabling courses than those whose highest school attainment level was beyond Year 10. That is, in enabling courses, the proportion of students who left school before completing Year 10 is 19.5 per cent compared to 5.6 per cent for those students who had completed Year 10. There is an even higher proportion of students who belong to more than one ‘disadvantaged’ group in enabling courses than in mainstream VET courses; for example for women, non-English-speaking background students or Indigenous Australian students who were also unemployed prior to undertaking their course.



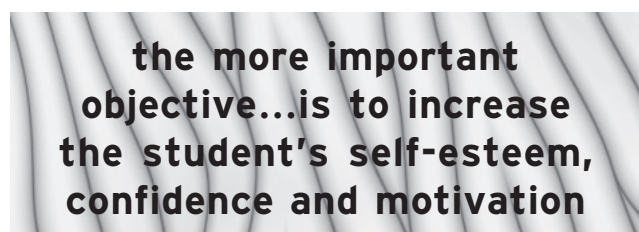
Students with an intellectual disability are most likely to be enrolled in an enabling course, compared to a mainstream program. As a result of the implementation of the ‘bridging pathways’ strategy, the focus of enabling courses for students with a disability is on achieving the competencies required for the course. Previously there were recreational programs, particularly for those students with intellectual or multiple disabilities, where the students benefited from the social interactions and the carers obtained respite while the student was at TAFE once a week. These programs have been replaced by, for example, School to Work Partnership Programs for students with a disability such as the program delivered at Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE, Gilles Plains campus.

The analysis of data from the 2001 national VET collection indicates an increasing proportion of students in the 15–19 years age group in enabling courses. Some of these are students leaving school early for personal reasons, including disenchantment with the school system or family problems. Other students may be in special

programs, such as students with a disability or programs for teenage mothers.

Building self confidence and motivation

There is not a significant problem with students remaining in enabling courses—many of these students progressed to more advanced courses within the same level of qualification. For example, students moved from Certificate I in Preparatory Education (CPE) to Introductory Vocational Education Certificate II–IVEC or a pre-vocational course. Other students diversified into other areas of learning at the same level of qualification, exploring vocational or personal interests such as office skills or information technology.



The staff at the Djigay Centre for Excellence in Aboriginal Education in Kempsey, found that allowing the Aboriginal students to undertake Certificate I in Work Skills before entering a Certificate II vocational course, gave students more time to adapt to the TAFE learning environment, and increased their chances of successfully completing a Certificate II or above course. The Certificate I in Work Skills has a focus on skills in literacy and numeracy—giving and getting information, job seeking and work placement. A feature of the course is that electives can be undertaken from higher-level courses in Arts and Media, Tourism, Horticulture, or Aboriginal Studies. This meant students could try different vocational areas and discover what suits them.

Djigay features a work-based learning program and work-based learning enterprises, including the Wigay Aboriginal Food and Culture Park and the College Café. At Djigay, particular vocational pathways are determined over time—when students are ready. The support of staff and fellow students plays a major part in a student's motivation to complete a Certificate II or III course.

TAFE staff note that often the more important objective of enabling courses is to increase the student's self-esteem, confidence and motivation for further study or employment. In particular, students need to become independent learners, motivated to succeed by their own or community goals. TAFE staff acknowledge that students who have completed an enabling course and are looking for work, are encouraged to continue in the same or a similar course in order to maintain their self-confidence and skill levels while job-

seeking. Students who complete enabling courses can move into voluntary or paid work, and then may confidently re-enrol in the same course to achieve higher skill levels, especially in English language, literacy and numeracy.

In fact, the contract with DEST—the federal government Department of Education, Science and Training, allows students to complete Certificate I in Preparatory Education (CPE) twice. This is because the biggest problem is the confidence factor and the course builds confidence and motivation. For example, 'Kenny' was shy with low self-esteem and so struggled to complete CPE. Then, he got a job in a furniture factory and developed confidence. He wanted to come back to do CPE again. He gained more advanced skills from doing the course a second time and also progressed at work. He was given a full-time job.

Education Manager, Human Services and Aboriginal Education
at Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE

TAFE staff highlight that students in enabling vocational preparation courses often have multiple learning barriers to overcome—low self-esteem, demoralising experiences at school, lack of schooling, immaturity and problems with their finances, health or the legal system—before they can move on. Students who lack self-esteem or maturity take longer to find their area of interest, and so may remain longer or try several enabling courses before achieving the self-confidence or motivation to continue with studies for a higher-level qualification. The increasing number of 15–19 year-old unemployed people enrolled in vocational preparation programs often require other support services, including accommodation, rent assistance, suicide prevention, counselling and crisis intervention.

Staying engaged

Some students may re-enrol in the same course or qualification because they want to maintain their engagement with learning. These are generally students who are unemployed, have a disability, or are from non-English-speaking or Indigenous Australian backgrounds. Other students, especially mature-aged students, may re-enrol to maintain their quality of life through further learning and continued social contacts that are available in training programs. Students have a variety of reasons for re-enrolling, including:

- revisiting prior learning
- maintaining skills and self-confidence while seeking paid work
- gaining additional skills and knowledge in new areas of learning
- maintaining social contacts that are available at TAFE
- supporting other students' learning.
- personal interest reasons
- improved lifestyle and health of individuals

- increased support networks
- a sense of belonging to a community
- increased community ownership of courses (eg Aboriginal elders attending TAFE)
- more opportunities for mentoring by mature-aged students.

Early school leavers and long-term unemployed people need specific strategies to enhance their success in moving on from enabling courses to further study or employment. The study identified six successful strategies for increasing the motivation and success of students.

Customising curricula and assessment methodologies

An important strategy for encouraging participation, increasing motivation and successfully moving students on is to customise the curriculum to suit the location and needs of students. One example is the use of project-based learning in a local community, and adapting delivery to the preferred learning styles of students. The study found a preference for oral and practical learning by many of the students.

A variety of assessment methodologies should also be developed for enabling courses, to ensure these students have as much opportunity as possible to demonstrate their achievement in the required competencies. For example, Indigenous Australian students may prefer oral to written assessment.

Allowing students longer, when necessary, to successfully complete courses

Students with low-level literacy and numeracy skills or those with a disability or having left school without completing Year 10, often need more time. They may lack the emotional maturity, trust in teachers and self-esteem to believe in their own ability to learn. These students need extra support and time to build confidence, to become independent learners and move on from enabling courses to mainstream VET courses. In these instances, it is usually beneficial to provide longer than the allocated number of hours for an enabling course, or to allow students to repeat the same course.

Supporting students with definite pathways to employment

Students with low-self esteem generally do not know what they want or are able to do, and hence are often unable to set their own long-term goals, or identify a pathway that leads to paid employment. Supported and directed pathways to employment opportunities should be provided for all unemployed students in enabling courses, especially those students between 15 and 19 years of age. Initially, some students may be referred to TAFE by

Centrelink or enrolled in enabling courses to access government allowances (for example, Abstudy or Austudy allowances). Often these students do not have access to trusted others for support and guidance in career education. They often rely on lecturers and student services officers for long-term support and guidance regarding further study and employment opportunities.

Providing work experience

Most students, but particularly those of low socioeconomic status or low self-esteem, are motivated by work to become independent learners, undertake further study or set goals. This 'work' could include workplace-based learning projects, such as building and maintaining a children's playground for the community. A positive strategy is to include work experience and work placements as part of the enabling course curriculum.

Linking training to employment

The motivation of students for further study is particularly enhanced by linking training to employment opportunities. At the Djigay Centre, training was linked to recruitment for new jobs being created by the extension to the Mid-North Correction Centre near Kempsey.

Encouraging students to use their skills and knowledge in a voluntary capacity in the community, campus-based business enterprises, or small or cooperative businesses for the community, are other strategies which help students to move to more advanced mainstream VET programs or paid employment

Providing mentoring

A primary aim of enabling courses is to increase the students' feelings of self-worth, confidence and motivation for further study. Thus, mature-aged students or staff members mentor new students to provide the long-term support and guidance with respect to possible further studies and employment opportunities. For example, there were 20 Aboriginal part-time and full-time teachers on the staff at Kempsey campus.

Conclusion

Students re-enrol in the same enabling course and others re-enrol at the same level of qualification, but these outcomes should not be considered negatively. The study shows that these students are still progressing to more advanced levels of study, or are exploring different vocational areas and are gaining further skills and maintaining self-esteem. There are direct and indirect benefits for students re-enrolling in enabling courses. Direct benefits include increased self-esteem and skills, maintenance of skills and confidence while seeking work, or improved health. Indirect benefits include maintenance of supportive networks through TAFE
continued on page 26 ...

Migrant women step up

by Judith Miralles

Since its inception three years ago, the 'Step into Voluntary Work' program has helped more than 150 women from a dozen backgrounds gain a sense of connectedness with the wider community, and become more actively and meaningfully involved in Australian life.

Over the past three years, I have been involved in a program to demystify voluntary work and to support women from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds who are eager to become involved in civic life, but who also feel disinclined to make the first move on their own. Often, this reluctance to become involved in life outside the front door is due to a lack of confidence in their English language skills, and in their inability to meet the demands of the Australian workplace.

The program is called Step into Voluntary Work. Over 150 women from many backgrounds have enrolled in the program. These are some of the countries of birth: Iran, Afghanistan, Sudan, Eritrea, Pakistan, Iraq, El Salvador, Argentina, Spain, The Philippines and Vietnam. It became clear when developing the program (my partner is the Australian Multicultural Foundation) that Step into Voluntary Work would need to address the lack of confidence in a practical way.

While the primary intent of the program has been to support women who wished to become volunteers, a related objective was to provide accredited training. The women who complete Step into Voluntary Work obtain a nationally-endorsed qualification recognised by the community sector—valuable to those who later wish to go on to further training or seek work in the sector.

The power of VET

A review of training statistics, research findings and feedback from community consultations highlights the dishearteningly low participation in the vocational education and training (VET) sector of people from culturally diverse backgrounds. There remains an over-representation of people from a language other than English background in the VET field of study (language, access and preparatory courses). Whilst initial enrolment in language classes is often essential, it is of concern that many people continue to enrol in such programs even as they seek employment outcomes for their studies.

Recent research highlights that many people from a language other than English background consider it possible to successfully complete vocational training programs with only moderate English language skills, if

systematic and integrated language support is provided as part of the training program (Miralles 2004). This same research documented, during focus group discussions, that people wish to get recognition for existing skills:

Adult(s) with previous work experience in their homelands expressed concern about the lack of recognition in the classroom—not in the sense of formal recognition of competencies, but in the informal sense of being able to make space in the classroom for their lived experience and know-how. The wish to have vocational skills and experience acknowledged seems to be an attempt to claim an identity beyond the usual signifiers of linguistic and cultural background.

Consultations held during the planning stage in 2001, with representatives from ethnic organisations with solid experience of working with volunteers, indicated strong support for a credential with national credibility. (The pilot was funded by ANTA through the Innovative National Projects program; subsequent programs have been funded by the Community Support Fund.)

The value of accreditation

This view has been validated—for the women participants, the nationally accredited outcomes are a key reason for enrolling. Many of these women hold post-secondary qualifications and understand the currency of accredited qualifications. What defines them is their memory of themselves as capable and skilled, and their passion to offer the community their insights and problem solving skills. They are eager to take part in civic life, and their initial concern about their lack of local knowledge and English language skills is counterbalanced by their strong identification as women with valuable life and professional skills.

This course helped us to overcome the lack of motivation that migrant women sometimes feel when they live in isolated areas of this country, although when we come to Australia we are already professionals with different types of degrees on our own rights and merits, so stepping forward to do this course has helped us to refresh our previous knowledge and to feel we have something to offer which is valuable.

Rosa Schirato, Morwell course graduate, 2003

The program targets women who are not in the first stages of settlement and are able to interact with civic life, government services, schools and doctors with some assurance. This also means that the women who take part are not actively seeking full-time work. Settlement is a long-term process, the impact on the first generation life-long, and all encroaching. However, once the immediate needs for housing, employment, education and health are met—in other words, once people feel they have gained a foothold in this society—people seek to address their emotional needs. It is often the case that volunteer work provides a manageable pathway, as they endeavour to establish a sense of connectedness with the broader community.

we had to make sure that...they were able to...speak the language of community work

The period of settlement of the participants does vary, and reflects the various histories of settlement of the ethnic groups in our community. The Spanish-speaking women who have completed the training have been in Australia for over 20 years, have adult children and are enjoying the first few years of their retirement. The women from Eritrea, the Sudan and Somalia have been here for less than ten years, have children in primary and secondary schools and in some cases work part-time.

Unlocking the sector

Those attending the consultations identified key competencies, fundamental for successful engagement with the sector. They also highlighted the importance of the language (written and spoken) of the sector. Community representatives also discussed the need to be very explicit about such fundamental concepts as confidentiality, client support and teamwork. If we were to open doors for the women who participated, we had to make sure that on completing the training program they were able to confidently speak the language of community work. Step into Voluntary Work had to unlock the very specific philosophical, ethical and professional world of volunteering in Australia.

The training program developed concentrates on the:

- language of the sector
- fundamental principles underpinning voluntary work in Australia
- communication skills for work in the sector
- rights and responsibilities
- roles and types of work.

Students undertake 100 hours from the Certificate II in Community Services (Community Work), supported by

intensive English language training. The participants have received statements of attainment for the following units/competencies:

- Communicate with people accessing the services of the organisation (15 hrs).
- Undertake work in the community services industry (50 hours work experience as volunteers in a community or local government agency).
- Identify and address specific client needs (15 hrs).

Future programs will probably also offer units from the Certificate III, as we have found that many women would be capable of completing these with language support.

The Community Services Training Package Qualifications Framework was seen to incorporate the skills-set identified during the community consultations. The very broad and generic nature of the competencies and their accompanying elements was a major factor in the decision to use a training package. It meant that it was possible to make competencies relevant by contextualising them to meet the needs of the participants. The fact that many of the performance criteria identified underlying language and literacy skills was also a key consideration. The range of variables and evidence guides also stipulated that it was possible to use English or a community language.

A number of the women began to work as volunteers with their communities. Within these very broad parameters, it was possible to tailor a specialised program that covered the competencies expected by the industry, and afforded the flexibility to address the lack of English language proficiency and familiarity with the philosophy and practice of voluntary work in Australia.

Focus on inclusion and explicitness

The initial tasks were standard ESL practice. First, to identify underpinning language and literacy skills embedded within vocational competencies, to subsequently contextualise these, and finally to create specific resources. These resources, aligned to the units outlined above, provide explicit language work and practice with the four macro skills—reading, writing, listening and speaking. During each classroom session, glossaries were compiled and new linguistic structures discussed and applied. Extensive use was made of role-plays to give the participants the opportunity to put into practice, in a safe environment, the competencies being covered.

The resources also support an inclusive pedagogy and open the discussion in the classroom to a diversity of views and professional practices, not merely those ‘we’ as professionals working in this field in Australia assume as normal and universal. Social interaction is not value-free, and equally, some values are privileged and others silenced.

Culture is sometimes used as a way of marginalising people. We may regard what we do as normal and see our beliefs as universal truths, and see the behaviour of people from other cultures as the result of specific and circumscribed cultural beliefs and values—exotic, at best, inferior or oppressive at worst. Furthermore, the victims of this cultural determinism are matched against Australian men and women who are culture-free. Cultural detail thus becomes a means of pathologising the other.



the class discussion seeks...a level playing field where all beliefs and practices are critically assessed

By welcoming the views and practices of the course participants into the classroom, it is possible to gain new insights and increase the range of strategies available for working with clients in Australia's culturally diverse community. The principal objective is to ensure that participants understand the culture-bound nature of all beliefs and practices, their own included. The class discussion seeks to create a level playing field where all beliefs and practices are critically assessed. At the same time, the approach seeks to give them the confidence to speak out and offer other alternative approaches, confident that their life experiences may sometimes give them unique and valuable insights.

Different viewpoints, different opinions

The inclusion of different views also helps to unpack the cultural and professional assumptions implicitly assumed by workers in the sector. This ensures that participants understand clearly the paradigm framing the Australian community sector and generating key assumptions, such as appropriate communication styles, the rights and responsibilities of workers and clients.

The very dynamic classroom discussion around the topic of confidentiality is a case in point. The discussion on this topic explores other ways of understanding the nature of information and the dynamics of dealing with this issue, so as to expose responses that take into account cultural differences with respect to family relationships, as well as professional responsibilities and principles. One of the ways it does this is by spending time exploring how situating the individual at the centre of a problem or situation will sometimes deliver radically different options than if one places the family or group in the centre—in other words, if one approaches a problem from within an individualist or a collectivist frame of reference.

There is no formal pre-course assessment of English language proficiency. Information material explains that it is preferable for participants to have completed the 510 hours of English instruction available through the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP). The program brochures also explain that the program is not a job skills program. This is again emphasised during information sessions held in community settings, so that women do not attend the program with expectations we cannot fulfil. Women self-refer and in the majority of cases, this has worked well.

In a few instances when a woman has attended the first few sessions and realised that the spoken language demands are beyond her capabilities, she has been referred to English language classes and invited to join a Step into Voluntary Work course at a later date. This is the approach taken when it has sometimes become clear that a woman views the program as a pathway to employment.

The challenge of written literacy

Overall, the spoken English language proficiency amongst the participants has been moderate to high. Written literacy has been more varied. The differences again reflect the diverse histories of settlement within ethnic communities. Some of the women who have been in Australia for many years went straight into the workforce and speak English comfortably, but struggle to write in English, and may also have low literacy in the L1. More recently arrived women have had the benefit of English language classes and although hesitant verbally, show greater confidence when writing. Some refugee women with interrupted or non-existent schooling have low literacy in the L1 as well.

In the case of some of the participants from the Sudan, the complexity of the verbal written interface was striking. All of the Sudanese participants have spoken English very well. Not all of them however, have had accompanying high levels of written English language proficiency. Sometimes the spoken language skills have masked low written literacy in both English and L1. Other times, the student was literate in written Arabic but not in English. Those women over 30 were also likely to have been educated by English missionaries and to have worked in the public service. Younger women have not had access to this education.

A useful approach to turn the diverse skills and experiences into positive classroom interaction seems to be small group work, either to brainstorm, problem-solve or role-play. In this way it is possible to create an informal 'buddy' system where participants share their own discrete skills—language, previous experience of volunteering, greater familiarity with the Australian context—sometimes, but not always, in same language groupings. A participant had this to say:

Language was sometimes a barrier, however (our teacher) put us into groups where we could partner with someone who could translate for us if necessary. Once we start to learn about body language in the communication section, we could start to understand each other better, in the context of our different backgrounds.

Knowledge other than English

This also models the approach we have been promoting to the organisations where the women have been volunteering their time. The message is that English language proficiency is but one skill, and while we acknowledge its centrality by providing language support, existing vocational knowledge, life experience and personal attributes are also crucial competencies for voluntary work.

Many of the organisations that have opened their doors to the Step into Voluntary Work graduates have established a range of support structures. A 'buddy' system where a volunteer more proficient in English works to assist with the completion of written tasks is one example, and one-on-one English tutoring is another.

The over-emphasis on English language skills can cause some people from a language other than English background to become discouraged, and to begin to doubt their identity as professionals. Certainly some of the women with limited written English literacy had to overcome a strong sense of inadequacy. At the same time, some of these very women had an outstanding capacity for empathy and ability to bond with clients. It was most gratifying when organisations were able to recognise this, and simultaneously provide the language support to make it possible for the women to increase their language skills.

Outcomes

We set out to show that credentialed training outcomes are possible for people with limited English language proficiency. We also set out to show that voluntary work

serves as an important pathway to civic life. All three of the volunteers had been working with the organisation prior to beginning the course. As their placement for the Step into Voluntary Work course, they worked with the Centre for Philippine Concerns Australia, and the Salvadorian Community Council of Victoria. Although they were already skilled in their respective areas of work (administration, project work and friendly home visiting), I could see the development of their understanding of their work as the course took place. For example, being able to put into context such issues as confidentiality, duty of care, what is or is not appropriate to be dealt with by a volunteer (referrals) and legal issues.

Having this information come through a formal course stressed its importance and the three volunteers were keen to apply the concepts at work and discuss them among themselves and with me. From here they can more confidently take part in the political debate.

Norminda Varga, settlement worker, Dandenong Migrant Resource Centre

An added benefit we have documented is that women speak of significant improvement in their mental health through an increase in their self-confidence and sense of connectedness with the wider community. As one of the participants said at the end of the course, 'coming here gives me fresh air'.

Judith Miralles has over 20 years of experience in the area of culturally inclusive service delivery. Her work spans the community and government (local and state) sectors across a number of portfolios, including education and training and multicultural affairs. One of Judith's specialisations is the developing of programs to provide vocational outcomes for people from a language other than English background. Judith has worked with VicHealth, the Office of Training and Tertiary Education and the Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs, and is currently on the board of the Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service.

Know yourself: the role of identity in learning

by Ian Falk and Josephine Balatti

Identity and learning are explicitly related, with the former playing a major role in determining how and what we learn.

Adults use all sorts of resources in their learning events. For example, they might use a computer, a book or a face-to-face interaction with a colleague. An elusive component of learning events—another of these resources—has been shown to be the *identities* of the learning participants. These identities are key to influencing the effectiveness of the learning outcomes. Some researchers identify the importance of the role of identity as an aspect of social capital development in workplace learning communities of practice. Others refer to ‘identity resources’¹ as a component of social capital building and learning.

However, the articulation of the rather general term ‘identity’ remains incomplete. What is required is to identify the kinds of identity resources that are called into play in interactions, and what this might mean for learning. This paper provides a framework for practitioners that helps to make identity work explicit in the design of education and training programs.

How does identity impact on learning?

That identity and learning are somehow linked seems to be ‘common sense’.² Educators understand intuitively that the learning of their students is in some way affected by ‘who they are’ and that ‘who they are’ is somehow affected by how and what they learn. As well as it being part of the common sense that educators distil from experience, the involvement of one with the other has been the subject of much academic theorising. Especially since Erikson’s³ ground-breaking work on conceptualising identity not only as a lifework of the individual, but also as a lifework located in community and—more generally, society—the disciplines of psychology and sociology have produced many theories of identity that have informed what we understand about learning.

By way of example, developmental psychology has produced stage models of adult development. From social psychology we have social learning theory⁴ and social identity theory⁵ that explain how our group memberships go toward defining who we are. Environmental psychology⁶ has given us theories of place-identity that explain how the question of ‘Who am I?’ is tied to a second question of ‘Where am I?’

In contrast with psychology’s focus on the individual, sociology’s contribution to understanding identity has been

largely a response to the questions of how much and in which ways people are at the mercy of the structure and culture of society, and to what extent do they have *agency*. The macro-sociological or structural perspective holds identity to be a construction produced by social systems and structures, with individual agency being downplayed. In contrast, most work from the micro-sociological or interactionist perspective maintains that it is individuals who fundamentally define who they are, through the meaning-making that takes place in their social interactions.

In different ways, theorists such as Bourdieu (*habitus*), Habermas (critical theory) and Giddens (structuration theory) have produced understandings of identity that link or integrate the macro- and micro-perspectives. Attention to the role of language and discourses by poststructuralists and others has done likewise. Ethnomethodology has also contributed to the understanding of identity⁷ because of its indifference ‘to structure at any level and likewise to any kind of “linkage” problem’ and its focus on ‘concrete empirical social practices wherein both macro- and microstructures and their interrelations are produced, reproduced, used, and managed’.

The abundance of literature from different disciplinary traditions can lead to a great deal of confusion of terms: identity, subjectivity and self are often used in sociological literature almost synonymously—correctly or not. For educators, clarity is further obscured because learning theories, while implying that identity does matter in the process of learning, rarely make explicit what the relationship between identity and the process of learning might be. There are some notable exceptions to this; for example, Senge et al’s work on personal mastery⁸, Wenger’s on the negotiation of identity in communities of practice⁹, and Lesser and Storck’s research on how identity shapes the workplace learning process¹⁰.

This paper contributes to a better understanding of how identity and learning are explicitly related. We use the term ‘learning’ to describe the processes whereby people interact with each other and other texts to lead to changes that may involve knowledge, skills, values, attitudes or beliefs. The paper does not propose a new theory of learning and identity—it argues for and presents a new interdisciplinary application of existing theories in the form of a framework for enacting identity in learning.

Our first aim is to show that there are three key elements of identity involved in learning that can be usefully described as a content element that we call identity resources, and two process elements that we identify as a storying process and an interacting process. Our second aim is to describe a tool that we are currently developing that can be used to make identity work explicit in the design of VET learning opportunities.

Methodology

The task of the research was to draw some coherence from the many strands of literature about identity for the purposes of producing a useful aid for educators. The process comprised a thematic analysis, a text analysis and a literature review in that order, the latter resulting from the former two steps.

A thematic analysis involved categorising the different ways in which the word ‘identity’ occurs in cross-disciplinary databases. A text analysis, used in parallel with the thematic analysis, sorted the different ways into groups via a grammatical classification. Frequency of mention was not a consideration. The titles and abstracts of refereed articles were scanned in two literature databases¹¹ and 179 different occurrences were found. These formed four categories of the use of ‘identity’:

- as a noun preceded by an adjective—for example, Indigenous identity, lost identity
- as an adjective—for example, identity journey, identity markers
- in a phrase—for example, quest for identity
- after a verb—for example, making identity, transforming identity.

The two strongest impressions from this categorisation process was the large diversity of verbs used to describe the many ways of enacting, or ‘doing’, identity and the large diversity of types and components of identity.

Through a cross-disciplinary review of the literature that followed the thematic and text analyses, we reduced these lists to a set of fundamental or core elements that were implicated in identity and learning. We searched for processes that could serve as the core ways of ‘doing’ identity, processes that might in different contexts present themselves as any number of the verbs found in the text analyses. We also searched for a general concept that could successfully refer to the diverse clusters of elements or facets of identity evident in the text analysis. Three elements appeared:

- 1 The notion of ‘identity resources’ (with the related notion of ‘sources of identity’).
- 2 The process of storying.
- 3 The process of interacting.

The thematic and text analysis helped us develop a frame as to which specific aspects of identity we should look for in the literature review. The resulting analysis produced one version of the identity framework for supporting learning. Other revisions to the framework resulted from researcher, policy and practitioner feedback.

A framework for making identity in learning explicit

The results reported here comprise three sections, each of which addresses one element of the framework for enacting identity in learning. The first section makes the distinction between identity resource and sources of identity, the relatively more common expression. The next two have to do with processes we use to produce identity resources. One process we refer to as ‘storying’—how we go about updating or renewing our supply of resources. The second process is the immediate interacting where the banking and renewing takes place. It is also where the identities are publicly displayed, new aspects tried out, and changes are ‘saved’.

Sources and resources

The Macquarie dictionary defines a *source* as ‘anything or place from which something comes, arises or is obtained, origin’. It defines a *resource* as the ‘available means afforded by the mind or the personal capabilities; capability in dealing with a situation or in meeting difficulties’. The distinction we make between the more common term ‘identity sources’ and the way we use ‘identity resources’ is similar to the dictionary definition: we refer to identity resources as those individual attributes that have their site of production in various sources or origins.

Concepts such as social identity, personal identity, self-identity and ego-identity imply different sources of identity depending on the qualifier. The term ‘identity sources’ is more often associated with the idea of social identity, and refers to those social categories that in some way shape the way we see ourselves and the way others see us. For example, sociologists write of class, gender, age and ethnicity as being sources of identity. To this list we can add family, work, religion, organisations and nationality. Place, too, is a source of identity.

A wider interpretation of sources of identity can include ‘all of life’ experience. From the sum of that experience, we might see different aspects of our identity in other categories. We might have an identity as learner, friend, carer, stayer, lair, high achiever, winner, loser, trier. The list goes on. These categories are different from the first set, and are more aligned with interpretations of identity other than that of social identity.

‘Sources of identity’ can categorise experience into different pools, depending on our purpose and from which we derive our sense of who we are. Because of the way we use language

to abbreviate, we tend to use the sources of the identity as the descriptors of identity, a practice that runs the risk of being stereotyped or stereotyping. There is potential for confusion between the terms 'sources' and 'resources', and for this reason we will refer to 'sources' of identity by the longer, but accurate, term 'categories of experience'.

'Identity resources' describe how social capital is built and drawn on at the point of interaction, comprising cognitive and affective attributes such as self-confidence, vision, trust and commitment to community. Identity resources are described as the 'common understandings related to personal, individual and collective identities' that people produce in an interaction¹². This implies that identity resources are socially produced even though they may end up being personally owned in the form of specific knowledges, behaviours, feelings and beliefs that come with identifying oneself as a certain sort of person.

Identity resources are the specific attributes of our broader experiential base (identity sources). They include the behaviours, beliefs, feelings and knowledges, that we hold as a result of belonging to 'categories of experience'—in different ways and degrees of intensity—in any given context at any given moment. The value of the notion of identity resources to understanding how identity is implicated in learning, is that it allows a more fine-grained view of what takes place in interactions than that afforded by the stereotype-prone notion of 'categories of experience'.

The storying of identity

In the last 20 years or so, there has been a 'narrative turn' to the understanding of identity and self in psychology. It proposes that the way we construct identity (or identity resources) is through storying our experience.

We construct personal narratives complete with plots and subplots, dramatis personae, settings, goals, beginnings and endings, climaxes and anti-climaxes etc. In construing a self from the referents for 'I' and 'me' in spoken or silent monologues, the person does not simply chronicle experience, he/she renders experience. The doings of persons and the happenings of nature are rendered to form a comprehensible self-narrative.¹³

The process of storying is of necessity temporal and involves an ongoing reinterpretation of the past from the position of the present, that also looks toward an anticipated future. The narrative perspective assumes that identity formation is about working toward a sense of coherence and continuity and sameness (going back to the Latin origins of the meaning of identity).

From the field of neurological research, Damasio¹⁴ adds to the understanding the identity formation through the metaphor

of narrative. He refers to identity as the autobiographical self, and describes how autobiographical memory builds identity. The idea of the storying of identity supports a growing understanding of how identity resources are collected and shaped over time, but it is not enough to explain how identity resources are produced in the here and now.

Interacting in the here and now

One convergence in the literature is that it is through interactions—face-to-face with other people or representations such as computer software, the internet, and so on, or those internal processes that involve us reflecting—that our identities are reviewed, reinstated and adjusted.

... a sense of identity is important because it determines how an individual directs his or her attention. What one pays attention to is, in turn, a primary factor in learning. Therefore identity shapes the learning process.¹⁵

Educators know well that learning only occurs through interactions. Identity resources are central to effective learning and come from interactions. Interactions in the here and now are the central processes that draw on our categories of experience to produce identity resources.

The identity framework

The dynamic of the three dimensions of the identity framework act to simultaneously and interactively produce and (re)construct identities. Put simply, these interactions are the engine room of identity. Figure 1 shows the relationship between the three dimensions of identity just discussed in detail—the process, categories of experience and identity resources involved in identity (re)formation.

Figure 2 elaborates on the three elements—content, storying and interacting described in the last section.

The Processes column captures the interactive or 'doing' dimension of identity formation, reformation and co-construction that occurs in learning by naming some of the more significant ways in which the processes of storying and interacting take place. Both of these processes produce resources, and interactants call on them simultaneously to reproduce and reconfigure what counts as identity in those interactions. The next three columns condense the 'categories of experience' into the three clusters of Individual, Group and Place. The last column articulates the different categories of identity resources that are called on and/or generated in learning, through the processes of interacting and storying; they are the result of what we do with experience.

In terms of applications for learning, Figure 2 articulates processes and sources of identity in a way that allows learning practitioners to identify, and address explicitly, the various components of identity as they may impact on

Figure 1: Dynamics of identity in learning



Figure 2: Dimensions of identity in learning

<i>Processes—</i> Interacting and storying through:	Categories of experience for identity in learning (Sources)			
	Individual	Group	Place	Identity resources
Anticipating	Age	Class	Buildings	Behaviours
Choosing	Appearance	Communities	Built environment	Beliefs
Creating	Education	Consumer	Climate	Feelings
Evaluating	Health	Ethnicity	Dwellings	Knowledges
Experiencing	Name	Family	Geography	
Feeling	Physicality	Gender	Institutions	
Performing	Sexual orientation	Language	Landscape	
Redefining	Spirituality	Occupation	Natural environment	
Remembering	Time	Profession	Neighbourhood	
Talking about	Voice	Religion	Work places	
Thinking	Work			

learners’ capacity and willingness to adopt new practices, and apply new or existing knowledge in different ways.

The challenge

The need to better understand how learning and identity are co-involved is acute. Identity-related issues are directly implicated in the postmodern world of adult education and training. The assumptions underpinning lifelong learning for example, take as ‘given’ that adults would want and are able to see themselves as formal and non-formal learners for life. Adult learners—and their teachers—can now find themselves in multi-age groupings ranging from 15–40-plus. How are identities being negotiated in such learning spaces? What is being required of the educators? Increasing numbers of students are leaving the enclaves of Indigenous-specific courses and entering mainstream educational programs. How are they experiencing learning and identity? And let’s not forget the influence of identity on education and training consumerism or choice. Gender, for example, continues to be a variable on the road to access, particularly in VET¹⁶.

The identity in learning framework provides three interrelated dimensions of the identity/learning nexus for educators to consider. Accounting for identity in learning across these three dimensions allows educators to more effectively design and deliver programs. The challenge to

educators is to design effective programs that capitalise on the unique pools of identity resources that learners bring with them, and to provide the opportunities to transform or add to those pools to meet their learners’ goals.

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Notes

- 1 Falk, I & Kilpatrick, S. (2000), What is social capital? A study of interaction in a rural community, *Sociologia ruralis*, vol.40, no.1, pp.87–110.
- 2 Gerber, R. (2001), The concept of common sense in workplace learning and experience, *Education and training*, vol.43, no.2, pp.72–81.
- 3 Erikson, E. H. (1975, *Life history and the historical moment*, New York: Norton.
- 4 Bandura, A. (1977), *Social learning theory*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall; Bruner, J. (1991), The narrative construction of reality, *Critical inquiry*, vol.18, autumn, pp.1–21.
- 5 Tajfel, H. & Turner, J. C. (1986), ‘The social identity theory of intergroup behaviour’, in *The psychology of intergroup relations*, S. *continued on page 40 ...*

Using 'real texts'

At last—a use for junk mail! Letterbox litter is just one of many sources of authentic texts that can be used in the classroom, as Corinna Ridley explains. While talking about her work in developing the book *Real Texts*, Corinna offers some good advice on how to make use of those brochures, leaflets and all the other stuff you find jammed into your letterbox.

Adult literacy teachers often use real texts in the classroom. Junk mail, local papers, brochures, bills and forms are all familiar materials that adult learners encounter on a daily basis. They are an obvious choice for teachers looking for relevant, motivating texts which have a purpose beyond the teaching of reading skills, and an audience beyond the classroom. However, 'real texts' also have a downside. They are often more complex than adapted and modified text book imitations, don't come with a set of instructions for classroom use, and often defy neat classification as a report, exposition or narrative. Add to that the need to map them to a set of curriculum outcomes, and you could be forgiven for thinking that using such material is fine in theory, but not so great in practice, especially for teachers and tutors new to the field.

Real Texts (2003) was developed with the assistance of ANTA innovative project funding, to help reduce the load on teachers striving to offer students access to authentic material. It uses a simple approach to text analysis which encourages a focus on the original context of the text, its audience and purpose, without using metalanguage which might be unfamiliar to teachers—and their students—and which can be applied simply to any text. It then offers a number of teaching ideas which could be used with the text, or with a similar text, aimed at developing reading skills, building the learner's ability to critically evaluate a text, and using the text as a springboard to other activities, such as further reading, writing or tasks related to the original purpose of the text.

Text selection

Text selection was driven by an ambition to 'keep it real'—to resist the temptation to pick and choose items that would be easy to analyse, or which fitted some curriculum-driven way of dividing up the world. Rather, an awareness of what was 'out there' formed the basis of the selection process, resulting in an eclectic and broad-ranging set of material which was hopefully reflective of the real world—or at least a metropolitan Australian version of it. Consequently takeaway pizza menus, Feng Shui, the AFL and head lice information all found their way into the resource alongside a letter from the local MP, a Neighbourhood Watch newsletter and some mobile phone brochures. The inclusion

of electronic texts was considered essential, as increasingly the public is urged to log on to websites to order their groceries, find out about local planning laws or check their bank accounts. These texts pose new challenges to those of us educated in the pre-internet era, with their own unique set of features, emerging patterns of language use and multiple layers and links.

Organising the texts

Continuing the theme of resisting familiar ways of categorising texts, some loose groupings were established which became the organising framework for the resource. These categories were:

- In your letterbox—letters, advertising, takeaway menus and council information.
- Did you know?—Rights and responsibilities, OH & S, anti-discrimination laws, and claiming family assistance. A lot of material was found to be about the dos and don'ts of everyday life.
- Did you know?—Health and wealth, the other most popular topics including articles on common ailments, advice on dealing with head lice, gambling and basic budgeting.
- Read all about it—which is based on texts from the print media, including women's magazines, newspapers and the local press.
- On your screen—which showcases online texts from small business, big business, and government.

Many texts could have appeared in more than one section—life's like that—with no neat divisions and many grey areas. The decision on where to place a particular text was often pragmatic—to make sure roughly similar numbers of texts appeared in each section.

Working with the texts

The next stage of the project involved developing a model for analysing the texts and providing some ideas for using them in the classroom. One important criterion in this stage was to make sure that the model of analysis and many of the teaching ideas would be transferable to other texts. Real texts have a short shelf life and are only 'real texts' for a relatively short period of time and for a limited number of people. Simply put—what I might find in my letterbox is different

every week, and is also probably different from the contents of your letterbox. One of the aims of using authentic material is to offer learners the opportunity to use the texts in a way that mirrors their original purpose (for an in-depth discussion of this see Jacobson et al 2003). So, ultimately the takeaway menu will be used to decide if you want to order food from that particular place, the railway timetable to find out what time your train is and the budgeting advice to work out if you really can afford to take a holiday. A menu from a restaurant in another suburb or a train timetable for another city are of limited use, as is an advertising offer that expired six months ago! It was therefore considered important to make sure that the analysis and ideas offered would work for other texts, so that while teachers might start out by using one or more of the texts in the original resource, they would also then be able to use the model with other authentic material, reflecting their students' current needs, interests and circumstances.

The analysis was therefore designed to be easily applied and focused on four text variables:

- 1 The original context for the text.
- 2 The intended audience and purpose.
- 3 The key features of the layout and/or structure.
- 4 The most obvious language features.

Even though the analysis was supposed to be simple, many of the selected texts were not that easy to unpack. They often had multiple purposes and audiences, unconventional use of language, and in some cases looked like someone had just discovered the format button on a word processing program. *Italics*, fonts, **bold**, underline, and shading are now accessible to all and liberally applied. Add to that the ease with which dot points, columns and tables can now be inserted into text, and even the simplest of information can be presented in many varied layouts which serve to foreground some points, gloss over others and impact on how and what we read.

Working with electronic texts presented a whole range of new issues in terms of text analysis, not least of which was determining where one text stops and another starts. Is it what you can read on one screen, or what is accessible by scrolling—as opposed to jumping through a hyperlink? Are the advertisements and navigational tools part of the text or separate texts in their own right? Add to these issues the fact that the texts change frequently, with no warning, making a paper-based analysis of an internet text at any one point in time of questionable validity. On the other hand, pinning down an electronic text by printing it on paper was seen as one way of scaffolding teachers and learners into incorporating online activities into their program—as it is no longer a moving target.

Pulling together the teaching ideas

Imagine you had the chance to sit down with a group of your colleagues for an hour every morning, and brainstorm all the great things you could do with a piece of authentic material you or your student had found. More or less, the teaching ideas in *Real Texts* are a kind of 'brainstorm' of activities, many of which will be familiar to experienced teachers, and all of which could be used with a wide range of authentic material.

The ideas were grouped into sections, to make them easier to work through, although once again determining which ideas would go into one section and which into another was not an exact science. 'Developing critical comprehension skills' offers ideas for helping learners understand and engage with the text. This section also includes ideas for strengthening a range of skills associated with confident reading such as skimming, scanning, predicting, reflecting and making connections to existing knowledge and experiences. Activities in 'Developing awareness of audience and purpose' focus the learner's attention on how language and structure vary depending on the social context of the text. This section includes ideas which are designed to build a growing understanding of how language choices reflect the socio-cultural context, how the text relates to other texts, as well as encouraging critical evaluation of the text.

Finally, in the section 'Developing skills beyond the text', ideas are offered for using the material as a springboard to further reading, writing, numeracy, research, reflection or discussion. This section also includes ideas for using the text which relate closely to its original or 'authentic' purpose—building the learners confidence in the world outside the classroom.

While many of the texts are quite complex, activities are suggested which could make them more accessible to lower-level learners, and ideas for working with lower-level students and authentic texts are also offered in the introduction to the resource.

Planning a unit of work

Real texts is designed as a resource for teachers to dip into, and pick and choose ideas and activities from, to develop a series of lessons or unit of work which suits them and their students. The same text could be used with different activities, or in different ways depending on the needs of the student, the curriculum requirements or the teacher's goals.

For example, using the council information leaflet on 'Snakes', and the teaching ideas in the resource, the following unit of work could be developed.

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Snakes (Developing critical comprehension skills)

- Ask learners what they know about brown snakes and tiger snakes. Put up their ideas about what the snakes look like, whether they are aggressive or not, what they eat and so on. Compare their ideas to the information given in the text.
- Brainstorm with learners what to do if you see a snake, and what to do if a snake bites you. Compare the group's information to that given in the brochure.
- Ask learners to make a list of ideas for keeping snakes off their property, based on the information given in the text.

Developing awareness of audience and purpose

- Ask learners how they feel about snakes. Possibly curious, terrified, or indifferent. Ask them to discuss what message the council is trying to put across about snakes to people. Discuss how changing the visual to a photo of a snake might change the brochure.
- Discuss with learners the purpose of the different parts of the text, the factual information, the advice about keeping your backyard tidy, and the instructions on what to do if you see a snake and the first aid section. Discuss how the layout helps to make this text effective (for example, the capitals make the most important bits of information easy to find).
- Ask learners to think about how they might read a text like this. For example, from top to bottom, starting with

the introduction, just skimming through the information in the table. What kind of reading does the layout encourage. For example, in-depth study, scanning for interesting details?

- Find another text about snakes or first aid for snakebites. For example, in a first aid manual or an encyclopaedia or on the internet. Ask learners to compare the texts. Look for similarities in content and language.

Developing skills beyond the text

- Learners research what snakes are common in their area. Then ask them to write some factual information about these types of snakes, similar to that in the brochure. Or suggest learners give a short presentation on a snake of their choice. For information on different types of snake, try looking on the Australian Venom Research Unit (AVRU) at www.avru.unimelb.edu.au/avruweb/creatable.html or type 'Australian snakes' into your search engine.
- Arrange to visit a zoo with learners. If possible, arrange to meet the keeper in the reptile display. Before the visit, learners could prepare questions to ask the keeper. Learners can write a report or recount about the visit.
- Watch a documentary/video about snakes. Prepare questions for learners to answer while watching the video. Use the information in the videos to write a short factual piece about a different species of snake.
- Suggest learners write a brochure warning people about poisonous spiders. They will need to research which

Context
This text is taken from a public information brochure distributed to house holders by the local council.

The language in columns 2 and 3 of the text is more instructional. It uses simple present verbs and some imperatives. The pronoun 'you' is used to mean a general human agent. This kind of language is also used in the next section on what to do if you see a snake. Explanations are added which help explain why you need to follow these instructions.

This text organises information under four main headings, three of which correspond to the folds of the brochure. The brochure has a broad audience, its purpose is to inform people about the types of snakes found in the area, and give instructions to residents about how to deal with a snake on their property.

The language of this section is typical of informative texts. It uses generic participants eg snakes, the Brown snake, the Tiger snake, and present tense verbs.

Despite containing a lot of information, the layout and use of capitalisation, boxing, shading and visuals help make critical information in the text stand out.

This text lends itself to an exploration of the features of factual texts and instructional texts, as it offers good examples of both.

THE NATURE OF THE SNAKE
Snakes play an important part in keeping nature's balance. They help control pests by eating insects, rodents and feral animals. They thrive in warm weather and are most active on warm nights. They move to residential areas in hot, dry conditions usually in search of water, food or somewhere to hide. Snakes eat mostly mice. They also eat frogs, rats, birds and lizards. Some larger species have been known to eat kittens. Smaller snakes prefer insects and crickets. Snakes can have about 40 young a year. The most common snakes in Hobsons Bay are the BROWN and TIGER snakes. The Tiger snake can be identified by green or black coloured blotches. The Brown snake can be identified by its silver to chocolate brown colouring and has a very small head. Tiger snakes are generally frightened of you and will try to get away when approached or disturbed. However, the Brown snake is very aggressive when disturbed or approached. If you see a snake on your property it is important to have it taken away by a professional wildlife controller. This is a free service in the City of Hobsons Bay. It is the safest and most effective way to remove it. Do not attempt to remove the snake yourself.

DISCOURAGING SNAKES FROM YOUR PROPERTY
Prevention is always better than a cure. A well maintained garden is less likely to attract snakes to your property. Cut your grass regularly. You should cut away from your house. Vibrations alert snakes that you are there and they head away from your property. Keep any masts in your backyard to a minimum. Things leaning against your fence make good hiding places for snakes. Keeping animals like chickens, rabbits and birds attract mice. Mice are a snake's favourite food. When gardening, wear gloves and solid footwear. An extra layer helps to protect you from a snake bite. If you must do any garden work after dark, turn the light on. Don't put your hands into mounds and crevices – it could be a snake's hiding place.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU SEE A SNAKE
If you see a snake on your property, the two most important things to do are:
1. STAY CALM
2. CALL HOBSONS BAY CITY COUNCIL (the back of this brochure). They will contact a local snake controller who is available 24 hours a day. DO NOT TOUCH THE SNAKE – LEAVE IT ALONE. It only aggravates it, making the snake controller's job harder. Keep an eye on the snake's whereabouts while you wait. SNAKES ALONG CREEKS AND WALKING TRACKS Please take care when walking along creeks and bike tracks in Hobsons Bay as some areas are a natural habitat for snakes – and you may need to share the path!

FIRST AID
If you are bitten DO NOT WASH THE WOUND.
Put pressure on the wound with a bandage, by applying it FIRMLY (or a piece of material or clothing if you don't have a bandage). Immobilise the injured area to avoid spreading the venom.
Have someone drive you to the nearest hospital. (local hospitals with Anti-Venom are listed on this brochure).

IT IS ILLEGAL TO KILL, KEEP OR CATCH SNAKES IN VICTORIA UNLESS YOU ARE LICENSED TO DO SO.

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spiders are commonly found in their area, their habitats, distinguishing features and so on. Ask them to offer advice on avoiding spider bites (such as wearing shoes in the backyard) and first aid for spider bites.

This series of activities, selected from the suggested activities for this text, represents only one of the many possible ways of working with this brochure. Different teachers working with different groups will select those activities that best suit the needs of their students and their teaching style. Many are likely to add their own ideas to those suggested, others will pick up on what happens in the class, where students might show particular interest in developing a topic further.

In conclusion

Research in the US, particularly by Victoria Purcell Gates (2002), suggests that adult literacy learners who are encouraged to use authentic texts in the classroom for authentic purposes, show an increase in their 'out of class' literacy practices. Purcell Gates argues that the increased use of literacy outside of the classroom is a more meaningful way of measuring the outcomes of adult literacy programs

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contacts, developing personal interest—which may lead to part-time or voluntary work—or providing community benefits such as mature-aged students providing role models and encouraging younger people in marginalised groups.

The challenge for VET staff is to continue to engage these learners in appropriate education and training to improve their employment prospects and quality of life. The full report, 'Moving on from enabling courses. Why do some students remain in enabling courses?' by Susan Dawe is available from www.ncver.edu.au

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than tests or scores. Hopefully, this resource will encourage and support teachers who are trying to provide their learners with authentic literacy activities, while also meeting accredited curriculum outcomes.

Corinna Ridley is the education officer at ARIS, and the author of *Real Texts*.

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Open Forum

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

The Integrated Counselling Services deal with the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners and their settlement, educational and vocational goals. While acknowledging the benefits of the service, Robin Kenrick indicates some of the challenges in implementing ICS in adult community education. Meanwhile, Denyse Ritchie asks why so many adults fail in the literary process, and talks about the THRASS method used in the Torres Strait Islands to master the difficulties of learning English.

Implementation of an integrated counselling service in ACE: what's missing?

Integrated Counselling Services (ICS) is a holistic approach to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) learners considering their settlement, educational and vocational goals. The impetus for my response came about as I was sitting in a presentation that was part of the integrated counselling services 'rollout' by AMES (Adult Multicultural Education Services) to each ACFE region in Victoria.

As the presentation progressed I started to feel frustrated. I was being given a model to implement but unlike the ACE providers who participated in the project, I had neither access to extra funds to implement the model, nor access to the professional development that underpinned the project. To add insult to injury, AMES was promoting the benefits of ACE for CALD learners to a group of ACE providers—in the case of our region, providers with extensive histories and expertise in working holistically with this group of learners!

After the presentation, hoping to soothe my irritation, I delved into the action research report and the CD resource. For providers funded to be part of the project, the action research model, the two days of professional development workshops and the resources to implement this model were invaluable. Their project reports and outcomes for learners are testimony to this. However, there are a number of omissions in the report and the CD provided to support implementation at the provider level.

The introduction to the report implies the ICS concept is a new concept for ACE. There is a failure to acknowledge the extensive pathway planning already undertaken by many ACE providers around educational and vocational outcomes (the outcomes at the core of the AMES ICS model). Through ACE cluster funding in the Eastern Metropolitan ACFE region there has been extensive work already done; for example, the work of Morrison House and Barb Lorey on career guidance with

the establishment of Career and Life Planning and Resource Centres.

For some providers in country areas, CALD learners—particularly refugees—are new groups in the local community. Yet the report introduction infers that CALD learners are new to all ACE providers. It fails to mention that for many providers, CALD learners are core business. What most ACE providers don't have is a level of resourcing comparable to organisations such as AMES, to provide expert counselling staff and time for teachers to provide individual support.

The CD video footage of counselling interviews gives the impression that it is a simple process to interview and provide information to support learner goals. We see three different AMES counsellors in action bombarding three highly articulate CALD learners with information. Perhaps it is the word 'counselling' that is a misnomer in the ICS model. My background as a trained social worker/counsellor implies time to tease out what the issues are, discuss sensitively and provide ongoing support. The video footage belies the complexity of successful interviewing techniques. Difficulties faced by counsellors are hinted at throughout the reports—expectations that the counsellor will solve all their problems, tension between the need for learner responsibility, and the need for support in accessing complex information or services. These issues should have been addressed more explicitly in the resource.

The ICS model is a more goal-focused action plan, with discrete responsibilities allocated to the learner and the counsellor through the creation of a learning plan. Perhaps an integrated individual support and referral service as referenced by Cobram Community House is a more appropriate name for this model.

The migration experience is a highly sensitive area, particularly for refugees. One provider reflected on this when evaluating

the initial settlement interview questions on the AMES proforma. In recounting their reasons for leaving their homeland and coming to Australia, learners were reminded of the trauma and problems they had left behind. This recreates emotional distress for the learner. The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (1998) recommends limiting discussion of background history and personal family background, so that learners can choose whether to disclose information or not.

Learner responsibility seems to be a core process for the successful implementation of the ICS model. Yet the resource makes no reference to the principles behind this concept in action. This is despite the fact that ACE providers mentioned it constantly as a core process that supported their implementation. This limits the effectiveness of the resource currently as a training tool for providers. It is important that the goals our learners set are realistic, and that we work with learners as a group to understand and address systemic barriers, otherwise we could be setting our students up for self-blame if they fail to achieve their stated goals.

Critical success factors that participant providers identified were not included in the summary of recommendations for

the project. The capacity to employ bilingual and community-endorsed or 'trusted' workers underpinned the success of projects in newly emerging communities. The need for localised support and networks seems to be at odds with the project recommendation that staff be allocated at the regional level to set up and manage an integrated counselling services. The cited projects were successful because staff were available at the local provider level.

The most powerful use of ICS is to integrate it with classroom content, particularly as settlement issues can go on for years. Understanding the 'systems' (welfare, housing, education, health, government departments, employment, legal systems) breaks down barriers to participation and provides a 'rights' perspective for CALD learners. All providers acknowledged the power of using these understandings as content for empowering ESL courses. Yet this was not recognised in the final recommendations summary.

Throughout the project report, the recurring theme in each participant organisation's reflections was the need for adequate funding to enable the ICS model to be implemented to its full potential. Time allocation and expertise were recurring themes. It takes time to gain learner trust, develop resources, build up

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information banks, network with other services or provide one-to-one support for learners to achieve their goals—irrespective of learner responsibility.

I look forward to the injection of funds that will enable all ACE providers to implement a well-resourced ICS model comparable to AMES. It will be a tragedy if learners are denied the opportunity to access an ICS model that responds to their settlement, educational and vocational goals because they are studying at their locally community-connected ACE provider.

Robin Kenrick is the manager of Kew Neighbourhood House. She has worked in the language and literacy field in a broad range of contexts for more than 20 years.

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THRASS: making sense of English sounds and symbols

***Fine Print* readers might recall THRASS being mentioned as a strategy in Natalie Nawrocki's low-level literacy research report featured in our winter edition. The *Fine Print* committee invited the WA-based business to tell us more.**

Why is it that many learners find 'was' a more difficult word to read and write than 'cat' even though 'was' is written and read so many more times? Why have so many intelligent and competent adults failed in the literacy process?

Perhaps it is the process of English language teaching that is flawed. The grapho-phonetic method used to teach early literacy skills makes English a difficult, complex and contradictory language to learn.

One of the biggest problems in literacy teaching today is the misunderstanding that surrounds teaching methodologies of reading and writing in English. Many learners of English as a second or other language struggle with literacy skills, as do adults and children for whom English is their first or only language. Many adults who struggle with literacy were in remedial classes in their earliest of years at school without success.

Much early teaching in literacy is based around the teaching of 'initial' or 'letter' sounds; for example, the letter 'a' is commonly referred to as the sound heard at the beginning of 'apple', the letter 'c' as the sound heard at the beginning of 'cat', the letter 'g' as at the sound heard at the beginning of 'goat', and so on.

This methodology is an initial cause of confusion. If the learner is taught that the letter 'a' is the sound at the beginning of 'ant', they cannot possibly read the words 'was', 'what', 'want' and other similar words where the letter 'a' does not represent the sound at the beginning 'ant'. To do so, the learner must 'discount' the 'sound' they have been taught

for the letter 'a' and take a visual approach to decoding. The problem is clearly identifiable in a learner who reads the word 'was' as 'w' as in water, 'a' as in ant and 's' as in sun, but writes 'was' as 'woz'. The learner is clearly following the given instruction and is using an auditory-visual approach to decode and encode the word. The learner who reads and spells the word 'was' correctly is clearly not following the instruction given, and is taking a visual aspect to encoding and decoding.

This problem occurs because there is a lack of understanding by many people of the function of letters in English. Contrary to what is taught in much early literacy teaching, English is not a language that has only 26 letters and 26 sounds. When we speak in English we use a set of 44 different sounds, and when we write in English there are different spelling choices used to represent those 44 sounds. For many years teachers have been instructed to start teaching literacy by introducing the 26 letter sounds. This becomes problematic when the learner is faced with even some of the most basic common/high frequency words such as 'my', 'to', 'of', 'was', 'the' and 'said'. For the learner to read and write these most basic frequently used words they must employ a visual strategy and not 'hold on' to the notion of 'letter-sounds'.

During a recent professional development course in the Torres Strait Islands, I was privileged to in-service many Indigenous teachers, teacher aides and parents in THRASS (Teaching Handwriting, Reading And Spelling Skills) with very positive results. I worked with Indigenous adults and children where English is their third or even their fourth language. It is the language they learn in school and for communicating with non-Indigenous teachers and mainstream Australian services.

The difficulties adults and children faced were immediately apparent. A clear example of this misunderstanding was demonstrated as we were working through the words on the THRASS chart. When we arrived at the word 'fly', it was being mispronounced by many as the 'f' as in fish, 'l' as in leg and 'y' as in yawn. Having the THRASS chart gave me the opportunity to clearly demonstrate to participants that the letter 'y' functions more often in words as a vowel sound than as a consonant sound heard at the beginning of 'yawn'.

THRASS provides both the teacher and the learner with the opportunity to understand the basic building blocks of English. It enables teachers to teach the *functions* of the English letters/sound system. The 26 letters of the alphabet are identified and referred to by name, which then provides a clear understanding of their use in representing sounds in English words. The learner can graphically see that one letter does not just represent one sound, that letters can be used in groups of two, three, and four to represent sounds, and that these sounds can be represented by different spelling choices. This then builds the correct understanding of the structure of English words. There is no re-learning that must take place.

Through instruction around understanding the function of letters in English, THRASS reduces the complex and contradictory elements of learning to read and write in messages English. THRASS uses a phonographic principle enabling learners to adopt a more visual approach to learning without an auditory contradiction and vice versa. For example, on the THRASS chart there is a sound box for the vowel sound 'o' as in 'frog'. The box contains the spelling choices 'o' and 'a'. The 'o' represents the spelling used for the sound in 'frog' and 'a' represents the spelling choice used for the sound in 'swan', 'was', 'what', 'want' and so on. The learner can identify the sound heard in the word (the auditory) and at the same time be given a clear visual pattern of the correct spelling choice, thus making it easy to understand the spelling of words such as 'was', 'what'. The process is not contradictory. The letter 'a' is clearly a common spelling pattern used to represent the sound 'o' in English words.

With multimedia resources, learners can be exposed to the clear articulation of each of the 44 sounds of English, and each of the 120 words used on the THRASS chart. At the same time, there is a clear visual understanding of the letter patterns that each sound is given, and how these letter patterns are then grouped together to form the word used on the THRASS chart.

The THRASS methodology is being used to address the particular learning needs of intelligent competent males who have struggled with literacy. As a general rule, I believe that males tend to do better in subjects that are logical and rule-

based. Such learners struggle with instruction that appears to offer immediate 'rules' without logical explanation. Thus, as 'logical' learners try to apply the rules and patterns of what they have been taught, they can end up wrong without understanding why. Their confidence in their own ability shattered, frustration sets in and they give up trying.

THRASS is a consistent, systematic approach for teaching literacy skills to adult ESOL and English-speaking adult literacy learners. The system is effective for teaching literacy to learners starting from the most basic level. THRASS is being used internationally in adult literacy teaching programs. The THRASS organisation has trained hundreds of teachers for whom English is not their first language, but whose job it is to teach English or to teach in English. The THRASS charts help them understand the complexities faced by many learners in the initial stages of language teaching.

On seeing the chart, many adult users—teachers, educational psychologists and language specialists—say they wished they had been taught using THRASS, as they would not have had the difficulties and struggles with language or literacy. THRASS has been adopted by AMES and adult literacy teachers who have attended THRASS courses. These teachers have left excited because they have been given a simple program to help their learners understand what is to them a very confusing contradictory language.

Denyse Ritchie is co-author of THRASS. She is an Australian author, publisher, former teacher and teacher trainer. Along with her co-author Alan Davies from the UK, Denyse has developed the various THRASS professional development courses and the wide variety of THRASS teaching resources.

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Foreign Correspondence

Low literacy levels are a major issue in Ireland, and the National Adult Literacy Agency is tackling the problem in a variety of ways. But as NALA's media officer Tommy Byrnes reports, there is still a long way to go and momentum must be maintained.

NALA: providing adult literacy research and support throughout Ireland

What is the National Adult Literacy Agency?

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) coordinates, organises training and develops policy on adult literacy and adult basic education (ABE) work in Ireland. It is a national non-profit organisation that people can join as members. We were created in 1980 and have campaigned since then for the public and for policy makers to recognise and respond to literacy difficulties in Ireland.

A large part of our work involves supporting ABE practitioners, such as tutors. We also work to raise awareness of literacy difficulties and ABE work, and to obtain political commitment to the improving adult literacy. In particular we:

- provide training for ABE practitioners
- develop new ways to deliver ABE support through our projects
- carry out research into ABE
- advise Government
- provide information on our work and on ABE in general
- raise awareness about the extent of adult literacy difficulties in Ireland
- organise a wide range of events, such as conferences and workshops.

Who are the main providers of adult literacy support in Ireland?

The main providers of ABE support in Ireland are Vocational Education Committees (VEC) Adult Literacy Schemes (known from here on as 'Schemes'). There are about 126 Schemes throughout the country and each VEC employs an Adult Literacy Organiser (ALO) to organise ABE support in their local area.

In addition, the other places or people which provide ABE support include:

- senior traveller training workshops
- prison education service
- Youthreach centres
- community training centres
- post Leaving Certificate courses
- the National Training and Development Institute
- rehab centres.

Low literacy levels being tackled on many fronts

In the International Adult Literacy Survey (OECD, 1997) 500,000 (25 per cent) of Irish adults were found to have difficulties with simple numeracy and literacy tasks. In order to adapt and participate fully in economic, social and family life, people require ever-higher skills levels. With so many Irish adults with less than the desirable level of skills required to function effectively in today's society, ensuring access to and understanding of information presents a huge challenge. The adult literacy issue is being tackled mainly by the 126 Schemes through the work of local organisers, tutors and development staff. There are over 5000 trained tutors, 80 per cent of whom are volunteers, providing support for nearly 30,000 learners who are the driving force behind the work of NALA.

Meeting needs through practical initiatives

The actual need on the ground, not the above statistics, was the driving force behind the establishment of NALA in the 80s. We are a non-profit membership organisation funded for the most part by the Irish government Department of Education and Science. We are established to campaign for recognition and a practical response to adult literacy in Ireland. Today our goals all emanate from our mission statement, 'To ensure all adults with literacy difficulties have access to a range of high-quality learning opportunities', and we are at the heart of a very busy and productive year, with many highpoints. This translates into practical projects to expand the range and quality of adult literacy provision in Ireland. In this article we will outline the highlights of this work in recent years including:

- Read Write Now TV literacy series
- Workplace Basic Education
- health and literacy
- family literacy
- specific learning difficulties
- ICT and literacy
- Plain English service
- literacy awareness
- Mapping the Learning Journey
- quality framework for Adult Basic Education
- in-service training.

Read Write Now TV literacy series

One of our most successful initiatives is literacy through the media in the form of the Read Write Now TV literacy series, which entered its fourth series in 2003. As with previous years, the program changed in light of feedback from learners involved in the previous series, as well as other stakeholders. The program retained key features for its success to date—a learner's story, everyday literacy skill areas and learning to learn. The average rating for the series was 165,000 viewers, with over 7000 packs distributed to independent learners who called the free phone learner support line.

Workplace Basic Education

Recently NALA secured EU funds through the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment to develop a model of Workplace Basic Education (WBE) for small medium enterprises. This work began late in the year in conjunction with Co. Monaghan VEC. Also in 2003 we organised a national seminar on WBE, which involved the launch of our strategy on the area.

Health and literacy

NALA is also involved in the exciting and diverse area of adult literacy in the context of health and literacy. This initially involved the launch and completion of research. More recently, we began work to develop a set of literacy materials themed around health, involving piloting of the materials by adult literacy providers and health promotion workers. This will help literacy practitioners work with learners, boosting both literacy skill and knowledge of health issues.

Family literacy

While family literacy has been on our agenda for some time, we have not had the resources to pursue it comprehensively. The agency appointed its first dedicated family literacy policy worker in 2003 to draw up policy guidelines and a strategy for the development of family literacy in Ireland. To date, this has involved the setting up of a working group with members from the VEC sector, Barnardos and the Department of Education and Science, as well as ongoing consultation with family literacy providers.

Specific learning difficulties

Another working group was established in the area of specific learning difficulties, also drawing from a wide range of organisations including the Dyslexia Association of Ireland. A dedicated worker in this area has also been appointed, who has concentrated on the development of a scoping paper as well as collating the results of a questionnaire to literacy providers on this subject.

ICT and literacy

Innovation is something NALA constantly strives towards, seeking out new ways to meet the needs of adults wishing to

improve their literacy skills. To that end, NALA recently piloted and evaluated a web-based literacy program www.literacytools.ie.

Plain English service

NALA and the Department of Social and Family Affairs embarked on a project focused on Plain English in 2003, resulting in the appointment of a dedicated worker for this area. NALA established a Plain English service and has worked on documentation from the following organisations:

- Department of Enterprise Trade & Employment
- the National Disability Authority
- the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions
- Irish Cancer Society
- the Courts service

Literacy awareness

We are constantly challenged by the lack of awareness of the size and complexity of the adult literacy issue in Ireland. To address this we organised a range of awareness-building activities. These include National Literacy Awareness Week and the International Literacy Day conference, both of which are themed. The theme last year was the literacy and the legal and justice system. We also produce a wide range of printed news, promotional and other support materials which are made available through our website.

Mapping the Learning Journey

Another NALA project to mention is Mapping the Learning Journey, which is a new system for recording progress on literacy and numeracy. This represents the culmination of a three-year research project, which we believe will significantly contribute to the enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning in adult literacy. The most recent work on this project involved the development of a resource pack for using the framework.

Quality framework for Adult Basic Education

In the last 18 months we have been mainstreaming the first-ever quality framework for ABE in Ireland. ABE providers are using this as a tool to evaluate their own practice involving learners, practitioners and senior management. Since its introduction, feedback on use of the framework was collated by NALA and highlighted the range of benefits that accrued. These included a range of program improvement plans covering recruitment of learners, promotion of the service, increased understanding, supported team working, promoted ownership, facilitated strategic planning, promoted networking and improved quality.

In-service training

In-service training has long been a central feature of NALA, and it continues to be a major part of our work. In 2003, 67 courses were delivered as part of our in-service and NALA-
continued on page 40 ...

Policy Update

Competency-based training policies were developed on the basis of ideology with little, if any, thought given to effective implementation, writes Ian Cornford. And now there are serious implications for education and its role in the workforce and Australia's international competitiveness. Also, Lynne Matheson reports on the second 'roundtable discussion' held by DEST in Canberra as part of the ongoing consultations on adult learning.

Competency-based training policy: doesn't Australia deserve better?

Competency-based training (CBT) was introduced into Australia with the intention of revolutionising training and learning in the vocational education sector in the early 1990s. The underlying rationale for this major policy change, implemented by Australian federal and state governments, was Australia's lack of international competitiveness in the late 1980s, with high unemployment and balance of payment problems. There was considered to be a need for increased productivity and skill levels of the workforce generally, and CBT was perceived as the solution to these and a large numbers of related problems in updating and preparing the workforce.

More than a decade later, it is probably true to say that CBT has had a major impact upon learning and training in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector, as well as related areas in education. But this has probably not been in the ways intended by the politicians, bureaucrats and representatives of business and industry who oversaw the policy development and implementation. Although the fierce debates that raged over the educational value or otherwise of CBT have died down—with educators inured to the fact that their serious concerns have been ignored—the debates could soon be reignited. Two recent reports have clearly indicated that current VET policies in Australia are not meeting Australia's skill needs. The major plank underpinning all VET policies is CBT, with this pervading many areas but especially training packages, the vehicle for delivering much accredited vocational training in Australia.

Two recent reports

The first report from the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee (2003) inquiry into present and future skill needs, 'Bridging the skills divide', concluded that existing VET policies were not meeting Australia's needs. This conclusion was arrived at after considering the evidence of serious skill shortage presented by representatives of large employer groups. Other evidence presented to that inquiry included empirical research evidence—as distinct from much anecdotal evidence—of a decline in standards in some trade areas subsequent to the introduction of CBT (see Mills and Cornford, 2002). Evidence was also presented that training packages, the dominant form of 'curriculum' used in the VET sector and based on the

concept of workplace training, were not appropriate with some 70 per cent of trainees being educated in classrooms.

Unfortunately such senate report findings are likely to be dismissed by the present Howard government as partisan and driven by political motives, although the coalition parties were strongly represented on that committee. To date, the Labor Party has not made political use of these findings for a variety of reasons, and appears to lack coherent policy regarding the issue (see below).

More recently, however, a report for the Business Council of Australia (2004), examining the skill needs of large business enterprises, came to exactly the same conclusions regarding policy failure. In this case the conclusions drawn were the same, but came from a group that could be perceived as a natural ally of the federal government, and a group that had strongly advocated the implementation of CBT. What is fairly remarkable about this report is that the terms that were used are remarkably similar to the language used more than 15 years ago to bring about major policy change, introduce CBT, and revolutionise the VET sector.

It is noteworthy that in neither of these two reports was there any attempt to analyse the reasons for the failure in policy. This in itself should be cause for serious analysis of the political factors operating to reduce the potential effectiveness of these reports. It would make logical sense to determine causes of failure, to know where changes to policy must be made in order to move away from ineffective policy elements. In the case of the senate inquiry, considerable public money was expended over a considerable period of time to examine a serious issue, and the expectation of detailed suggestions for remedial action is not unreasonable.

The failure to examine causes in both reports is explicable in terms of politics, and the continued attempts to wield influence and power over government decision-making. With regard to the senate inquiry, reasons for failure to identify sources of policy deficiencies can be equally found for both Labor and Coalition parties—the Labor Party introduced the policies and the Coalition parties continued refining and implementing them after succeeding to government. In what was shaping up

as an election year, neither major political party would wish to be seen as the originator or responsible for major policy failure connected to potentially serious future economic outcomes through skill shortages. With regard to the Business Council of Australia's report, lack of interest in analysing underlying causes may be attributable to their very successful lobbying that ensured CBT policy formation and implementation.

Pragmatically, if you wish to continue to remain credible to influence government decision-making, it is wise not to be easily identified as the source of embarrassing policy (and political) failures. If you were so wrong last time on a major issue, what chance is there that you'll be right next time around?

Australia's persistence with CBT

Australia, despite rhetoric at the time from politicians declaring independence from the UK, adopted CBT because the UK saw it as the way out of its troubling concerns of low skill levels and productivity vis-à-vis its old European rivals in the EEC, France and Germany. The UK has moved on beyond CBT, with CBT largely seen as not even the answer to yesterday's problems, after noticeable policy failures. Alison Wolf's (2002) savage critique of the government education policy failures in the UK has helped change the CBT policy perspective there. Her criticisms are equally applicable to the Australian context. However Australia, to its now more obvious detriment, has persevered with CBT, with this perseverance troubling but explicable.

Australian policy makers seem to have embedded CBT much more firmly into the fabric of vocational education than their UK counterparts. This came about partially because of the support CBT enjoyed with powerful and vociferous employer groups. More important however, was the control that the federal ideologues exercised through funding of TAFE, the largest vocational education body, as well as the licensing of registered training organisations (RTOs) to conduct and accredit training. The problem now facing policy makers is that they have been too clever by half in implementing a seriously flawed paradigm, and it is now very difficult to extract themselves from the problems that have been created, without losing a great deal of credibility.

Training packages and CBT

Training packages have come to be the chief vehicle for implementing CBT in vocational education areas. The federal government has moved to ensure that training packages have become the dominant curriculum form (see below) through financial incentives for state TAFE bodies to disband their curriculum units, and accept the training packages developed under the guidance of business and industry and the (formerly) Industry Training Advisory Boards.

Even NSW TAFE, which had stubbornly adhered to conventional curriculum, has given into federal government

pressure and will use training packages from next year. This means that training packages have become the major curriculum form for the large-scale, public providers in vocational education that provide the bulk of formal vocational training and certification. And here, in part, is where the dilemma lies.

While training packages may have come to be the vehicle for implementing CBT, there are major problems with them. Training packages may reflect business and industry's desired learning outcomes, but the vast majority of training packages do not represent conventional curriculum. That is to say training packages, with few exceptions, do not contain a logically sequenced listing of content and suggestions for teaching. The endorsed elements of training packages do contain learning outcomes, but that amounts only to indicating summative assessment, that is final assessment, and this does not assist the teacher in the longer formative process whereby learning is developed through practice and feedback, so that learners are ready to undertake that final assessment to determine their level of competence.

The competency standards provided are not particularly useful either in actual assessment events, unless an assessment guide has been specifically written for the package. Thus training packages are not conventional curriculum to guide teachers and trainers. Unless members of training organisations have worked in concert to develop a common program from a training package, each teacher needs to take the learning outcomes and assessment indicators and develop his/her own teaching program to attain those objectives.

Many RTOs refuse to teach using training packages unless there is a substantial package of non-endorsed elements to support the training; for example, learning guides for trainers and trainees. These elements are, of course, quite distinct from what are conceived as the essentials of a training package in bureaucratic terms. There is also anecdotal and/or reported evidence that some employers are dissatisfied with training packages, with the bureaucracy associated with their administration, and the role of registered training organisations (see Schofield & McDonald, 2004).

There is an important (as yet unreported) trend for organisations to cease to maintain registration as RTOs, even very large state government organisations, because of the complexity and cost of registration maintenance. These major problems are largely unacknowledged by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), which has continued to support training packages and CBT as articles of faith (see Wheelahan, 2004).

Despite major problems with training packages as the means for teaching competencies, ANTA and the government at present cannot afford to abolish them, as they are the only form of vocational education curriculum that exists in many states. Without them, as inadequate and messy as they may be,

there will be nothing resembling curriculum. This is the real reason why there was no option available to Schofield and McDonald (2004) in their recent ANTA-commissioned report, 'Moving on', to conclude that training packages were a grave mistake (Wheelah, 2004).

The predictable outcome is that ANTA, as it is currently doing, will gradually inch training packages around through numerous revisions to make them realign with conventional curriculum. ANTA will pretend that this is not happening and that no major failure in policy implementation has occurred, but such revision to a conventional curriculum position—and serious recognition of VET educators as important stakeholders—is inevitable unless ANTA wishes to totally lose what little credibility it still possesses with educational practitioners.

Why is CBT so problematic?

Many of the arguments advanced by early critics of CBT have proven only too accurate. Teachers—an exceptionally knowledgeable group about teaching and learning and what will work in practice—were excluded from policy making and debate when CBT policy was formulated by politicians, representatives from business and industry and the unions, with ideological and social change being the agenda.

CBT is hard to define, and the research conducted indicates that many teachers have been uncertain whether what they are doing really is CBT. Emphasis upon performance outcomes to the detriment of underpinning theory and knowledge is one of the persistent problems. Effective problem solving, often claimed as desired by employers, is not achievable unless there is a sound theoretical underpinning knowledge. What is also now more widely recognised is that the kinds of skills being demanded in our society are of a more cognitive kind, even though there is reason to believe that the rhetoric of Western societies becoming 'knowledge societies' is not supported by available evidence. Patently most CBT and training package approaches do not encourage development of critical thinking skills, as any wide scale analysis of actual documents will reveal.

There is also the issue of lifelong learning. The Australian federal government has belatedly endorsed this concept, long after European countries had done so. Training packages that fully represent the federal government's disdain for learning and teaching do not serve as effective models likely to motivate students into continuing learning. There is a major credibility gap with NCVET and ANTA continuing to claim large increases in new apprenticeships (read short-term traineeships), and existing major skill shortages in many important trade areas. Clearly, the lower level entry training to satisfy employers' basic employment needs has not resulted in trainees continuing on to more advanced learning.

Many problems are inherent in the flawed concept of CBT, quite apart from problems of definition. The concept is based

on a myth that there is one set of standards, agreed upon by industry or any other groups. In practice, there are multiple standards in industry that relate to high, middle and low-quality work within different price ranges (Cornford, 2000). This problem explains why so few nationally agreed standards came into being with the initial push by governments for national standards. Another major inherent problem, now finally being acknowledged by some of the academics that championed the introduction of CBT, is that competency standards only represent desired outcomes. That is to say, they do not offer any great guidance to teachers, who each have to develop all the prior formative learning materials in order to reach, ultimately, the desired summative assessment outcomes (Cornford, 2000).

This fact explains why program designers have to work backwards from the statement of competency standards in training packages, to establish the effective, up-front learning programs. It also explains why there can be such variability in standards and outcomes with CBT and training packages, on account of the wide variation in interpretation of what is needed as a learning program.

Failures of policy formation, implementation and good governance

CBT and training packages are but one part of a raft of VET policies that has proven to be ineffective. Also part of the group of policies was the movement to a demand-driven system of vocational education to meet the needs of business and industry. Business and industry were to play a much larger role in the provision of training. Yet the evidence indicates that the ideology and the policies themselves have proven to be failures. The present skill shortage has, in part, resulted because business has continued to see that its chief business is business, and not education. Business has not stepped into the influential training role its spokespersons claimed it wanted, and which policy makers provided for it. It is doubtful, however, whether small-medium businesses, that represent approximately 70 per cent of employment, and that have very limited opportunities for providing workplace training, were really represented in this process. In any case, with CBT the complexities of VET policy development and bureaucratisation have alienated many in business and industry.

These failures in VET point to major failures in policy formation and implementation. The CBT policies were developed on the basis of ideology without, or with very limited, forethought to effective implementation (Cornford, 2003). Planning for implementation is widely recognised as important in policy-making circles if effective policy change is seriously desired (Calista, 1994). The importance of this was certainly known at the time that CBT policies were being framed with the intent of revolutionising the VET sector and Australian society. Conspicuously absent from policy planning were serious efforts at small-scale trials of CBT before its large-scale adoption.

Subsequently, there has been the failure by Australian governments to conduct proper policy evaluation on a large scale, and the refusal by ANTA and other official and quasi-government bodies for a long time to commission or acknowledge seriously any research that challenges the dominant ideology that CBT and training packages are the answer to all of Australia's VET problems. The 'real' terms of reference established for the very recent report into training packages, is yet another manifestation of the failure to seek out evidence as a serious basis for policy management (see Wheelahan, 2004). Without serious research as an evidential basis—and blunt and honest interpretation of the research—policy formation, implementation and fine-tuning are doomed to failure. Research is of course also connected to serious evaluation processes for establishing accountability.

Without being too melodramatic, the failures in VET management and policy making also provide indication more generally of a threat to Australian democracy, political accountability and good governance. In part the VET policy failures are also attributable to the politicisation of the senior levels of the public service, so that only answers acceptable to the politicians in power at any time are acceptable. Researchers in one study found that research was poorly understood by VET managers and policy makers, and only often only used to reinforce decisions reached on other grounds. (See Cornford (2003) for additional details and analysis.) This is one reason why Australian VET policies have become so ineffective—to a point where major shortages of skilled workers will threaten continued national prosperity. These problems of politicisation of the public service have also been revealed most clearly with the Iraq war, and the intelligence advice offered to the federal government. Current VET policies are just another specific example of this more generic problem for Australian society of ensuring good governance.

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You can too: a roundtable discussion, Parliament House, Canberra

After attending the first round of 'You can too' consultations on adult learning in Australia held in Melbourne in February, I was invited to attend a roundtable discussion in Canberra in June. The Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) offered to pay for my flight, so I joined the suits commuting on the day.

The issues paper circulated before the meeting identified matters which had been raised repeatedly as a high priority

of those engaged in adult learning, from both the written and face-to-face consultation process.

The five key issues are:

- 1 A national policy or statement on adult learning.
- 2 Recognising the value of adult learning.
- 3 The need to communicate and promote adult learning to both to prospective adult learners and employers.

4 Coordination arrangements.

5 The learning needs of rural and regional Australia.

These issues formed the basis of discussion, with selected speakers each to present a three-minute presentation to the Minister.

The roundtable discussion was scheduled for 3pm–5pm, so time was fairly restricted. The Minister, Brendan Nelson, was delayed by Parliamentary proceedings and did not participate as planned. The scant 15 minutes he had to spend with us gave him an overview of the issues, but his advisers were there for the whole time. They were in a better position to get a sense of the driving issues from each of the participants. The roundtable session provided an interesting insight into the workings of government policy-making, as well as some of the platforms and priorities of various stakeholders from around Australia. I took notes throughout, and the following is a summary of the discussion and the points raised.

Most of the discussion centred on the need to develop a real policy, in language that was accessible, and with strategic objectives and outcomes clearly stated. The feeling was that what had been produced in the discussion paper was a statement, and that a policy must go further in articulating future directions and establishing a learning culture in Australian society.

References were made to the diverse forms of adult learning—vocational, non-vocational, formal and informal, post-secondary and post-retirement. Recognition of the broad range of adult learning should be coupled with the range of outcomes in terms of health, sustainability of communities, economic imperatives and lifelong learning. It was expressed that placing value on education for education's sake must be a part of the policy, and that opportunities be opened up for adult learning to be community-driven and determined. The role of mentoring and volunteering as community strengthening was raised in considering the needs of youth and mature-aged participants.

Reference was made to the UK model—Ministers responsible for all aspects of adult learning and the mapping of opportunities in 'Learn Direct'. The need for a structural framework that would underpin a whole government policy and link it to other government strategies was also mentioned. The fact that learning promotes sustainability of communities, and that it should be regarded as a legitimate rather than 'soft'

strategy—as it may have been perceived in the past—was made. That a national policy should 'promote adults to learn' rather than be about adult learning.

It was suggested that part of reshaping thinking about adult learning, especially for the post-secondary cohort, was to overcome the 'welfare mentality' and engender the need to have purpose and responsibility in learning with community-driven and adequately resourced centres of learning as a model, particularly for rural and regional areas. Placing value on informal opportunities—engagement in meaningful learning to give back and become involved in the community—was a key factor for participants from remote areas. Promoting a culture of learning, and acknowledging valued portals to learning in ACE and TAFE, was seen as a way of increasing access and participation.

Recognition of prior learning was raised several times as a barrier, and a system that does not necessarily encourage learners, nor achieve desired outcomes. Issues around cost, documentation, articulation and process means that for many RPL is not an option. In considering the place of learning in the workplace, the issue of cost was raised and who bears that cost—the employer, government or employee. For professionals working in the field of adult education, the existing disparity and under-resourcing in terms of pay and conditions across sectors poses a conundrum for the valuing of adult learners. One of the last comments was in relation to the needs of our ageing population and the concept of productive rather than dependent seniors.

It was obvious to all that appropriate resourcing and promotion of the value of a learning culture, in terms of building relationships and healthy communities as the cornerstones of a national policy, were the key messages coming from participants in this roundtable discussion. There was also a sense that we were 'talking to the converted'. Minister Nelson gave an assurance that greater emphasis and funding resources would be given to the adult sector. He reinforced the undertaking that there would be a real policy for real change for everyday people. With an election looming, perhaps adult learning will get more recognition. We live in hope.

Lynne Matheson is the further education coordinator at Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre and attended the roundtable in her role as VALBEC co-president. Lynne would like to thank DEST for the opportunity to participate and for funding her trip.

Beside the Whiteboard

Meet the 'Material Galz' from PRACE

Anne Dunn, Chris Malakar and Moira Hanrahan, aka the 'Material Galz', are the authors of the successful 'PageTurners' series published by Preston and Reservoir Adult Community Education (PRACE). The series began in 1999, after the authors decided they were tired of the over-serious, uninteresting stories for 'completely beginning adult readers'. Sarah Deasey, from *Fine Print*, interviewed these three enterprising, dedicated teachers who have developed a successful series of stories for beginning adult readers.

Anne and Chris, along with Michael Chalk (subject of *Beside the Whiteboard*, winter 2004), are also largely responsible for the website 'English at the Beach', a range of online stories, information texts and activities written for learners of English as a second language at intermediate levels.

Tell us a bit about your respective backgrounds.

Anne: I've taught ESL, literacy and English and humanities in secondary schools, community schools, TAFE and the ACE sector. I write fiction and worked on English at the Beach.

Chris: I've taught ESL, literacy, and English in secondary schools, language centres, TAFE and the ACE sector.

Moira: I taught in secondary schools for 15 years, teaching English, humanities and media. I've been teaching in the ACE sector for 10 years and have drawn cartoons for years.

Can you start by telling us about the inception of the 'PageTurners' series?

Having taught literacy and ESL in a variety of educational institutions, we knew there was a need for adult texts at lower levels. Anne has made books for and with students throughout her teaching career. Our budgets are miniscule in ACE, and we needed more wide-reading books, so we started making simple short books for our own students to read, using photos or magazine pictures as illustrations. We approached Libby Barker, the manager of PRACE, for some funding to do more of this, and she suggested that we ought to develop more texts for sale to a wider audience. So we did.

Tell us why you saw the need for texts for adult literacy readers.

There weren't many appealing texts at a very low (beginners) level that had stories that were written for or about adults.

Where do you see the place of authentic texts?

Authentic texts are very important, and we use them in our classes all the time. However the majority of authentic texts are very hard for beginning readers to tackle unsupported. We wanted to make texts that they could



read with little outside support. We also wanted stories that were mainly for entertainment and pleasure.

Where do your ideas for titles come from?

From a variety of sources. Some have come from our students' written or oral stories or from other people. There are tales from our own experience and some have just come, like any creative writing piece, from developing an idea.

Tell us about the process from draft to publication.

First we discuss possible story areas—in each series we try to have a variety of stories to appeal to various adult tastes—from elderly people to youth, for people born overseas or native-born readers. We write the stories and work together to edit them. We show them to other teachers and trial them with a variety of students. We discuss possible illustrations and Moira draws them. Then we lay out the books and print off drafts, trial them and



make adjustments. Finally, we get them printed. Then there's the selling and distribution part of the job—we design and print up pamphlets and flyers, we do publicity, we sit on tables at conferences and visit bookshops.

What role has PRACE played in the development of the series?

A very important one. PRACE is a bit of a centre for innovation, and the atmosphere there encourages teacher innovation and further development. We took the idea to the PRACE committee of management and made an initial funding application, presenting them with a costing and business plan. We got the go-ahead and a few months later the first series was launched. PRACE continues to support the venture in many ways—funding, distribution, accounting, discussion and ongoing support, reviewing texts before publication, publicity and so on. PRACE found the funding to employ Michael Chalk for the PageTurners online project. (<http://pageturners.prace.vic.edu.au/snakes-alive/index.html>). The list goes on ...

Tell us about your approach to developing texts for the ESL literacy learner. Do you use different subject matter and language?

Not really. We do try to make them as accessible as possible, and that results in adjustment of language to

facilitate repetition where possible, and we use a more limited vocabulary that might 'naturally' occur so that the books will help build student confidence. But mainly we write the kinds of books that we would enjoy if we were learning to read. The subject matter we hope is intrinsically interesting, and we try to make the books as entertaining as possible for the audience we have. After all, we all get enormous pleasure from reading, and we want our students to see that reading can be fun, not just a chore.

What role do your students play in the development of the texts?

Apart from what we've said already, mainly they get to read drafts as they are an excellent guide to how accessible a text is. And they will pick up things we don't. They really enjoy seeing the new stories and trialling them.

How do you use the texts with your classes?

In lots of ways, from whole class exercises to an individual's wide reading. From the word or spelling level, use of capital letters, to the whole sentence levels, finding and making questions, matching pictures to sentences, sentence order sequencing, discussion, giving opinions, comprehension—the usual range of activities. We have some of these exercises up on the PageTurners site—free downloadable worksheets people can use with some of the texts. (<http://pageturners.prace.vic.edu.au/>)

We also do some rewriting of the stories so they are about class members, or reflect a different experience. It's very stimulating for student writing and leads them to want to make their own books.

Thanks very much.

The PageTurners website: <http://pageturners.prace.vic.edu.au/>

Snakes Alive—a free audio PageTurner: <http://pageturners.prace.vic.edu.au/snakes-alive/index.html>

English at the Beach—a free PRACE online learning site: <http://beach.prace.vic.edu.au/>

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Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) programs, covering 50 thematic areas, delivered in 13 locations and catering for 1140 participants. In addition, a number of gatherings were facilitated, namely the Adult Literacy Organisers' Forum, Adult Literacy Tutors' Forum and regional learner meetings.

In conclusion

Low literacy levels are a major issue for Irish society. NALA, in conjunction with the VEC and other ABE providers, are tackling this issue in many different ways. But there is still a

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long way to go and we must be ever vigilant about maintaining the momentum of our work.

For more information about NALA call 01 855 4332, email us at oliteracy@nala.ie or log on to our website www.nala.ie.

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