fine print

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Editorial

Welcome to the summer edition of Fine Print for 2004. In this edition there are a number of diverse and motivating articles to stimulate and enjoy over the summer break. The opening article, 'The centre of attention: ACE community building hubs', details the innovative outreach work of ACE provision. Next, Jenny Buckingham looks at the development and implementation of the learning system—Partner Assisted Learning. The core of the package is the creation of a learning system that encourages people with and without a disability to work and learn together. Partner Assisted Learning is indeed 'bottled magic', confirming the important place of relationships in learning.

Jill Sanguinetti outlines the research project 'Generic skills' and holistic educational practice in ACE. The project documented and analysed the ways in which ACE practitioners draw on a wide range of strategies, approaches and pedagogies to foster and nurture generic skills development. The researchers produced a 'descriptive framework of ACE pedagogy' as it is being practised in the 22 settings.

Karen Dymke encourages teachers to use dramatic activities in the classrooms. Applied Learning pedagogies require both teachers and students to move away from the 'empty vessel' theories of education and to share expertise and knowledge. Most teachers are well aware of teaching all four elements of language: reading, writing, speaking and listening. Often it is the reading and writing that is concentrated on—listening and speaking is more difficult to structure and assess. Drama provides the perfect vehicle. Drama pedagogy aligns well with the latest curriculum advances integrating curriculum and the development of rich texts, and is a powerful means of allowing students to actively demonstrate learning outcomes.

For the past two years, Leni Shilton has worked in the education unit at the Alice Springs Correctional Centre, teaching literacy and numeracy. Almost all her students are indigenous. Leni gives us an overview of her students, the teaching conditions and tells us about Matthew and how he is able to express his life through poetry in English.

In early June of this year, the Minister for Education and Training launched the Ministerial Statement on ACE: Future directions for Adult Community Education in Victoria. Respected ACE leaders Liz Suda, Jan Corben and Megan Langdon comment honestly on the consultation process and the policy product.

In a postcard from Vietnam Mary Collins discusses the difficulties of teaching disability staff and teachers through translators in incredible heat, 95 per cent humidity with noisy traffic outside and recalcitrant party officials to contend with.

In Policy Update, Katherine Percy considers how the New Zealand government's literacy policy, strategy, funding and implementation have affected the development of Adult Literacy practice in New Zealand. The themes of vocational skills versus generic skills arise. She also looks at how New Zealand's distinct geography, government structure and small population has on the implementation of adult literacy policy.

In this edition's Beside the Whiteboard, Robin Kenrick speaks with Jan Corben, who has worked in ACE since the early 1980s. Jan has worked at the Mountain District Women's Cooperative, which operates as an Adult Learning Centre in Ferntree Gully in outer Eastern Melbourne. Jan recalls the first adult literacy classes in 1975, a time when there were no curriculum documents or awards for student achievement. Jan reflects on the enduring challenges over the past years in funding, resources, facilities and professional development.

On behalf of the VALBEC and Fine Print Committee I send our warmest greetings for the Christmas New Year season. We look forward to your contributions and involvement in VALBEC activities in 2005.

John Radalj

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.

The centre of attention:
ACE community building hubs

by Bernadette O'Connor, Sue Olney and Theresa Mitchell

More than 300 community groups across Victoria have already made use of the ACE Community Building Hubs initiative since it began in June 2003. The project enables ACE organisations—more than 100 at time of writing—to offer region-specific training, support and advice on governance to community groups in their local communities.

There was a sigh of relief when the Adult Community and Further Education Division of the Department of Education and Training received a community support fund grant to establish community building. The aim was to resource Adult and Community Education (ACE) organisations to act as a focal point or 'hub' for local community-based organisations seeking training, information or advice on governance.

Community organisations, and the volunteers that keep them functioning, play a critical role in the social, cultural and economic development of their communities. The environment in which they operate has become increasingly complex. While plenty of training and resource materials exist to assist them in their governance and operation, very few small community organisations have the financial resources or time to access and appropriately implement them.

The ACE Community Building Hubs initiative uses the extensive network of community-owned and managed ACE organisations across Victoria to offer training and support tailored to the needs of local community-based organisations.

> ## the aim was to resource ACE organisations to act as a focal point or 'hub'

Community organisations that could benefit from the initiative include emergency services organisations, sport and recreation clubs, indigenous groups, arts and heritage organisations, community development organisations, support groups, child care organisations, playgroups, toy libraries, multicultural organisations, senior citizens' groups, youth organisations, environmental groups and residents' groups.

The expected outcomes of the initiative are:
- Simple and straightforward access for community organisations to expertise, information and resources about issues that affect their governance and operation.
- Increased networking of community organisations within local communities.
- Stronger relationships between ACE organisations and other organisations within their communities, including community groups, non-government organisations, local government, State government and Commonwealth government.
- Sharing and pooling of resources and expertise within communities.
- Increased financial and organisational capacity and viability of community organisations.
- Increased awareness of lifelong learning opportunities available through ACE within the communities involved.
- A model of using community organisations to assist the development of other community organisations.

The initiative is being implemented in ACE organisations in stages between June 2003 and May 2005. By October 2004 there will be over a hundred ACE organisations in Victoria operating as community hubs offering training, support and advice on governance to community groups in their local communities. To date, more than 300 community groups across Victoria have used the service—emergency services organisations, sport and recreation clubs, indigenous groups, arts and heritage organisations, community development organisations, support groups, child care organisations, toy libraries, multicultural organisations, senior citizens' groups and environmental groups. More broadly, the work of Community Building Hubs is intersecting with Commonwealth Government departments, State Government departments like the Department for Victorian Communities and the Department of Human Services, local government and non-government organisations and is raising awareness of the important role of ACE in community development.

'So…You're on a committee' Hubs Project

A breakdown in governance destroys much of the good work of community organisations and seriously hurts the individuals involved. The issues can be complex if not addressed in time, but the solutions are simple when applied within the framework of a good governance model. This project aimed to strengthen the governance of community organisations by developing local hubs to provide governance expertise, training, support and mentoring in each community via ACE infrastructure. The major strength of this model has been its capacity to have a person or ACE organisation in each community that can provide a face-to-face support in the development of governance skills, therefore making the learning accessible.

> **a breakdown in governance destroys much of the good work of community organisations**

In July 2003, ACFE regional offices called for expressions of interest from ACE organisations to be in the pilot stage of the ACE Community Building Hubs. Education Centre Gippsland (ECG) was the lead organisation in the consortium that successfully tendered for the implementation of the first stage of this project. The other members of the consortium are BACE (Bairnsdale), ACEs (Sale), I-Gain (Morwell), Colac ACE, The Wimmera Hub (Horsham), Djerriwarrh (Melton) and The Centre (Wangaratta). The consortium has been supported in this project by Jobs Futures. The consortium was awarded the tender in August 2003, with the project scheduled for completion by the end of May 2004.

The consortium members formed the steering committee for this project and the ACFE project officer joined the steering committee meetings. This committee oversaw the implementation of the project, provided guidance and direction to the project team, ensured that the project met the milestones as detailed in the contract were met, and provided feedback from the community regarding the approach and relevance of the Community Hub concept.

The steering committee met regularly throughout the project and stayed linked to all communications through a dedicated site on MC2. All meetings were guided by an agenda with full minutes recording the discussion and the decisions taken. The initial steps of this project involved research into existing resources, web materials and training opportunities related to the development of governance skills and knowledge in community-based organisation. The research methodology involved a literature search, web search and consultation with a range of organisations and individuals. The project identified and documents many excellent resources that are available to the hubs, and therefore to community organisations, to support the development of knowledge and skills in relation to governance.

Project outputs

The consortium had a number of goals within the hub initiative. These included the development of a customised governance training program, incorporating a 'train the trainer' component for ACE organisations; a governance guide for ACE and other community organisations; the development of a training program and resources to support ACE organisations in offering training, support and mentoring on governance and management issues to local community organisations; and the delivery of the customised governance training program to a trial group of 36 ACE organisations.

After much debate the steering committee decided that the kit of project resources be entitled: 'So…You're on a committee'. These resources include:
- A resource book for committees of management.
- A facilitator's manual for organisations that will deliver training, offer support and mentor on governance to community-based committees of management or individuals who are interested in governance and governance issues.
- A video/DVD that explores governance issues raised in three case studies, and the implications that those issues had for the individuals and organisations concerned.

The project developed a customised program to introduce the concept of a Community Hub to participating ACE organisations. This program is designed to be conducted over 18 hours and explores the obligations of organisations joining a hub project, the potential for the hubs to deliver new programs and services to groups within their local area, and the common issues faced in committees that indicate problems with governance. The program explores the 'So…You're on a committee' materials as a basis for the training and works with the hubs to identify how they might use the materials in their own delivery.

The consortium worked with the participating ACE organisations to identify eight community-based organisations in their own local areas and to deliver training, support and mentoring to those eight.

Resource development and delivery methodology

The project team was openly influenced in its approach to the design and development of the resources by its

experience of the factors that enable adults to best learn and engage with materials and, in relation to governance, the personal implications for committees and individuals when governance goes awry. The methodology used in the design, development, authoring and production of resources has reflected the belief that the trial and feedback stages are immensely important in establishing the real improvements that make a difference in accessibility of materials.

there was a level of anxiety amongst participating organisations

There were targeted topic areas for the governance resource. The steering committee debated the content of the resource materials and concluded that for the purposes of this project the major topic areas would be:

- governance
- volunteers and people management
- strategic planning
- risk management
- financial management.

The practicality of a short timeline in the project meant that the team needed a process that rigorously tested the materials in the developmental stage, but also minimised the re-drafting time. In order to achieve this it was decided that the most effective method would be one similar to action research methodology. A team of learning facilitators from across the consortium was drawn together before the end of 2003. They reviewed the materials and the proposed activities with a view to delivering them in February–March 2004 to 72 people from 36 ACE organisations.

The team debated the content, structure, layout and language of each topic and designed and redesigned the activities to ensure the ACE organisations would have a solid basis for planning their own delivery. This enabled the authors and facilitators to clarify the expectations of the project, explore the possible implications of issues that arise in community-based organisations, develop a shared ownership over the resource materials and the proposed delivery methodology, and develop relationships that can be drawn on beyond this project.

The team agreed upon the following approach to the development and delivery of the materials:

- Maintaining resource materials in draft until after the pilot, to ensure that the feedback from people taking part can be incorporated into the final presentation of the materials. Since those people are going to be using these materials in their presentations, it was considered

important that they also develop an ownership over the content and layout.
- Plain English—The team explored the language implications of governance concepts, and identified the terms that could alienate committee members, or potential committee members, from engaging in training. Activities are incorporated into the facilitator's guide to address the language issues.
- Style—The team debated the details of layout and style, consistency of approach, size of the materials and presentation.
- Use of real experiences to illustrate underlying principles of governance, or to highlight the identification of emerging issues.
- Openness in addressing governance concepts, with the highlight on common good practices, questions to be asked and approaches that enable governance issues to be addressed systemically.
- Flexibility in style of delivery, with the focus on exploring the concepts so that the hubs would be able to apply the materials to their own learning environments.
- Follow-up and support for the hubs as they recruited organisations and delivered the training to those organisations

Delivery to ACE organisations

Training commenced in February 2004 and was completed by early March. The delivery was conducted at locations around the state to ensure that travelling distance was minimised. The locations were Bairnsdale, Narre Warren, Melbourne city, Dunkeld, Bendigo, Wangaratta and Mildura. Workshops were held one day per week over three weeks, totalling 18 hours. Of the 36 organisations that were accepted to take part in this project, 34 completed the training and went on to recruit and deliver to eight community organisations in their local area.

The workshops explored the material, the Community Hub concept and the potential opportunities for participating organisations to grow their delivery of programs and services in their own communities. It was initially evident in all of the groups that there was a level of anxiety amongst participating organisations about the background to the project, and their own skills and abilities in taking on this project. It was clear, as the facilitators worked through the sessions, that this anxiety reduced and that people began to see the relevance of the project to the community organisations in their local areas.

The terminology of 'train the trainer' was used initially to characterise the training sessions. The project team now feels that the use of 'train the trainer' is not appropriate for the Community Hub Project since in this project we

are recommending that organisations use experienced adult educators. Similarly the use of the description 'training manual' is inappropriate for these resources, given the current context of accredited training packages, competency-based training and learning outcome terminology. The facilitators stressed that the project enables organisations to utilise good adult education practices in the planning and delivery of the training, and to design the services to meet the needs of each of the community groups and the individual learners.

One of the training outcomes was an expressed need for the hubs to continue to liaise and share ideas, experiences and expertise into the future.

Delivery to community organisations

The project has received, to this point in time, reports from 15 of the participating hubs relating to the delivery in their local community. The overall response to the training has been very positive, with organisations as diverse as the local ballet society, sports clubs, kindergartens, a bush nursing centre, toy library and land care organisations taking up the offer for training.

In some areas the takeup was slow due to local factors, such as clashes with local government-sponsored training of a similar nature being offered at the same time. In other areas the response was overwhelming, with hubs working with up to twice the number of community organisations as required by their funding arrangements.

The feedback via the reports, through the mentoring and at the ACEVic conference was exceedingly positive in relation to the relevance to local organisations and to the future possibilities of related training. Hubs with the greatest response had invested time in making personal approaches to local organisations, in addition to running newspaper articles and advertisements. The facilitators have maintained contact with each of the hubs as needed to mentor them through this initial round of training.

A number of recommendations have emerged from this project:
• Participating hubs should ensure that they are using experienced adult educators to lead the project in their organisations, ensuing that the initial impact of the service is maximised.
• ACE sector should continue to work on collaborative projects, since such projects offer the capacity to develop

the profile of the sector, whilst enhancing the networks and contacts of the participating organisations.
• Community Hubs get the opportunity to liaise and network together to share ideas and grow confidence in delivery.
• The stage 2 steering committee be more involved in the selection of the participating ACE organisations.
• That an introductory session be added in for the second stage, to ensure that the participating organisations explore the background to the project, and are introduced to the issues encountered by the first-stage hubs.
• Representations to be made to other government departments to use hub infrastructure to target governance strengthening in community organisations funded by those departments.
• References to 'train the trainer' and 'training packages' be removed from promotional material, and in the approach to the second stage of this project we believe the focus should be on learning and development terminology.
• The Good Governance Guide for ACE organisations be retained as a historical publication, and that the publications produced from this project be used, along with other materials as listed in the literature search, as recommended resources for ACE organisations looking to strengthen their governance.

Conclusion

The project has enabled the consortium to work closely together to form a statewide team that responded to the needs of the participating ACE organisations. It demonstrated that collectively the ACE sector has the expertise to deliver statewide projects that are focused on community learning and community development. The project implementation has also demonstrated the effectiveness of using the infrastructure of the ACE sector to provide accessible training, support and mentoring in governance and provides a model for future projects focused on community development.

Sue Olney is from ACFED and manages implementation of the ACE Community Building Hubs initiative in Victoria. Bernadette O'Connor and Theresa Mitchell are from the Education Centre Gippsland in Warragul and were involved in all aspects of the project.

More information is available on the ACFE website *http://www.acfe.vic.gov.au*

Bottling magic: the Partner-Assisted Learning System

by Judy Buckingham

The Partner-Assisted Learning System is a project that encourages people with and without a disability to team up to work and learn together. If there was ever a suitable acronym, PALS is it!

In 1996 the Open University and partners Mencap and People First developed a learning package.[1] Often referred to as Equal People, this package encouraged people with and without an intellectual disability to work and learn together. In 2001, Gawith Villa Inc. and Deakin University, in association with a number of community organisations, was funded by ANZ Trusts to develop a learning package based on Equal People.

This project was deemed appropriate for the Australian community, retaining the partnership component but also being applicable for use within paid employment, recreational and educational contexts. The project's goal was to create a package for adult partners learning together when one partner may have an intellectual disability. The project was named the Partner-Assisted Learning System. The package aimed for the recognition of the learning of both partners, the connections between them and the mutual development of both partners in gaining skills, confidence and pathways to education or work. The essential components of the package were to be learning and relationships.

Before describing the process of the research and what the reference group [2] found, I want to talk about two of the participants in the research process, as an example of what can be achieved through partner-assisted learning techniques. I will then describe the package itself and what it is intended to achieve.

Introducing Jenny and Sandra

Jenny is a young woman in her early twenties from a non-English speaking background. She has physical health problems as well as an intellectual disability which, I when I first met her, I took to be moderate. This assessment was based on her small amount of verbal communication other than single words, grunts and shouts and her lack of positive interaction with others when we first met. No one, including her parents, had any great expectations of her ability to learn, even though Jenny was to spend one day a week learning literacy in a class with Sandra, an individual volunteer tutor.

Eighteen months on, Jenny has become more open, greeting people with a pleasant 'Hello' rather than a grunted 'Oh no',

as she'd done previously, and she is now initiating conversations. She has increased other social skills sets, such as being able to order her own hot chocolate at the café where she and Sandra have lunch together. Now she speaks in whole phrases and sentences. A year after the first observation I was called into the class by Sandra to hear Jenny read, something she was unable to do when we first met. On my wall I have a picture Jenny drew for me, personally signed by her in her own name. Jenny now approaches literacy with confidence.

These outcomes are fantastic, but Jenny is not the only person to have learned. Even though she was a trained teacher, Sandra found the process of working with Jenny had taught her about the building of trust between them, and about Jenny herself and what it is like to have a disability. Sandra felt that these new lessons could be used in other aspects of her life.

Names and identifying details have been changed, but this is a true story. Jenny's was not the only success story witnessed during the two-year research phase, but it highlights the possibilities of what can be achieved in learning. Both the person with a disability and their co-learners—while not necessarily learning the same things—gain skills that they can use in other contexts, such as listening, communications and better understanding of disablement…that is, the ways in which society disables those with impairments. The project's task was to take Jenny's and other stories like hers and to try to 'bottle the magic'.

Learning is socially-based

The project started with an intensive literature review. The concept of relationships in learning is not new. Earlier educational theorists such as Piaget and Vygotsky posited that learning is socially-based, and therefore requires social interaction, and this concept has remained as a core of socio-cognitive learning [3]. There has been substantial research undertaken within the framework set by Carl Rogers on the positive effect of relationship and feelings on student learning and behaviour [4]. Similarly, emancipatory education that relies on dialogue also depends on such interactions [5]. In other words, there is considerable evidence to suggest that learning relies on relationship/s between the teacher and the taught—even more so when the teaching/taught identities are interchangeable.

Collaborative learning is not a new idea either. This is the broad term used to cover learning in which two or more learn together within a structured curriculum. Emphasis is placed on social and goal interdependence (that is, participants have an interest in the social development and the achievement of the learning goal, both by themselves as individuals and also for each of the other members of the team) and reciprocity between peers. It has been successfully used with groups and pairs of primary school-aged children, including those in which one member has an intellectual disability[6] and with adults[7]. However, there is very little written about adults with intellectual disability learning with other adults. In fact it has been pointed out that adult education has yet to develop theoretical frameworks around adults with an intellectual disability[8]. It has been easier, as Jeannie Sutcliffe says, to '…concentrate on the mechanics of literacy and numeracy than to construct meaningful contexts for people with disabilities'[9].

What does have to be acknowledged is that people with an intellectual disability can learn. Because theirs is a learning impairment, this learning may be slow—it may be very slow. It may take place in very, very small increments, but there is evidence that most people with an intellectual disability can learn, given the right teaching and learning conditions and the motivation. My understanding of this has been augmented by the work of the Schonell Institute, which has shown that the 'vast majority of students with an intellectual disability'[10] can and do learn even such an abstract skill as literacy. This is supported by further literature from the Schonell and overseas[11].

Field research

As well as a literature review, we conducted research in the field over three contexts—adult community education, recreation settings and the workplace—where it was considered adults with an intellectual disability might be learning.

Thirteen pairs of learning partners, one of whom had a disability, were observed and interviewed. Another 25 people with long-term involvement in teaching and/or managing people with a disability in learning environments, and ten organisations where learning was taking place, were also involved in the investigation part of the research. This looked at good teaching and learning practices, what people wanted and needed to learn, how people formed relationships and barriers to learning and relationships. From the data collected, a prototype set of learning modules was developed. These were then action-researched with four small focus groups of pairs (one with, and one without a disability), and finally tested with five learning organisations—both generic and disability specific—across all three contexts. Toolkits, once created, were also critically reviewed by a number of disability practitioners, academics and people with a disability.

> **there is very little written about adults with intellectual disability learning with other adults**

Key findings

Space does not allow for a full account of all research findings, but the following paragraphs give an outline of a few of the findings most important to the learning package. The research confirmed the place of relationships in learning. Lack of confidence in learning was cited as a major barrier to learning. However, it seemed that even where people with an intellectual disability had been convinced—either by family, past education experiences or even current education experiences—that they were not capable of learning, this self-identification could be reversed by someone they trusted and who affirmed their ability. Jenkins[12] posits selfhood as being initially that which is reflected by others, but then changing through a process of reflexivity. Because of the nature of the impairment, and the difficulties posed by reflexivity for people with an intellectual disability, it would be reasonable to suppose that for people with this particular impairment, they would be more reliant on the reflection of others in establishing their concepts of self-identity. The research also confirmed the need for ongoing dialogue, review and assisting in the process of reflection as a teaching strategy. Sandra spent time with Jenny looking at past work, reminding her of what she had done, reassuring her about how well she had done and also connecting on a more personal level, building trust and a sense of reciprocity which could allow both of them to participate in the change process.

There was a concern amongst most of those interviewed that learning partners, either as teacher/student or co-learners should understand what and how to learn, and that both should explore their own and each others' learning styles. There was almost universal support for a curriculum that could encompass social skills, and not only for people with a disability. It seems many non-disabled people have difficulties in being able to facilitate social introductions to help those they support to fit into the general culture of a community setting, or to help them negotiate the support they might need in a generic setting. It was people's lack of access to such social skills that was identified across all three contexts as being one of the biggest barriers to inclusion.

The Partner-Assisted Learning System

The Partner-Assisted Learning System is a set of learning modules—learning materials, or 'toolkits'—that are support materials for both management and co-learners. They cover aspects of disability and support, basic teaching strategies and

good practices, accreditation guidelines (since the competencies gained fit within GCEA General Curriculum Options) and further information on the literature and research processes. The modules cover those areas that research showed those with and without a disability felt it was important to learn.

Learning together
This is an introductory session for partners to get to know each other, their learning styles and about learning.

Making friends
This module shows partners how to look at different kinds of friendships and suggests ways of introduction into social groups.

Being safe
Lets partners discuss what it means to be safe, safety issues pertinent to partners themselves and emergency procedures.

Fitting in
This module allows partners to look at ways of fitting into the cultures of workplaces, recreational and other community groups.

Looking out for each other
This includes some basic self-advocacy and advocacy strategies and promotes discussion on rights and responsibilities between partners.

Getting out and joining in
Addresses the ways partners can participate in research, enroll and undertake a community activity ensuring they have the support they need.

Meeting together
This module assists partners to support each other to attend and contribute to meetings.

Partners are expected to work cooperatively through the modules, using a process which involves dialogue and reflection and which allocates each partner interdependent roles at a pace that suits both of them.

Not just learning materials
The important point about Partner-Assisted Learning is that it is a process, not just a set of learning materials. It requires a relationship that can be developed between the partners. However, the nature of the partners can vary. They may be one non-disabled person such as a friend, a co-worker, a volunteer, or a support person working with a person with an intellectual or other disability, or they can be two people, both of whom have a disability. There is a requirement for one person to have basic literacy skills, even though wording and concepts in the learning package have been kept as simple and easy to read as possible.

Some of the ways this package can be used beyond conventional teaching structures include the induction of people or volunteers who have not before experienced working with people with a disability; the induction of people with a disability into new environments such as the work place; the integration of people with a disability into non-disability-specific community activities, and the involvement of people with a disability into planning and governance. One innovation already implemented has been to assist small groups of people with a disability along with non-disabled people to work together to produce an organisational code of practice using the 'Looking out for Each Other' module.

Judy Buckingham has worked in community education for 20 years. For the past six years her focus has been on the inclusion of people with an intellectual disability. Judy has been project officer on the Partner-Assisted Learning System for three years, and is completing a PhD on including adults with an intellectual disability into learning and relationships.

For more information about Partner-Assisted Learning visit *www.pal.org.au* or contact Gawith Villa, PO Box 234, Armadale, 3143, (03) 9509 4266.

Notes and references

1 Fairchild, B. & Walmsley, J. (1996), *Using 'Equal People'*, Milton Keynes, England: Open University.

2 The reference group consisted of myself as project officer, a co-researcher who had a disability, and others, four of whom also had a disability.

3 Wells, G. (2000), Dialogic inquiry in education: Building on the legacy of Vygotsky, in C. Lee & P. Smagorinsky (eds.), *Votskyian perspectives on literacy research: Constructing meaning through collaborative inquiry*, pp. 51–85, England: Cambridge University Press.

4 Neville, B. (2004), 'A brief review of the proposition that the retention, wellbeing and academic achievement of at-risk students is related to the quality of relationships offered them by teachers: Submission to ministerial review of post-compulsory education and training pathways in Victoria 2000' retrieved 27 May 2004, from www.latrobe.edu.au/fe/staff/review.doc.

5 Foley, G. (1996), Bread and sex: Learning in Brazilian women's organisations, in P. Willis & B. Neville (eds.), *Qualitative research practice in adult education*, pp. 359, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia: David Lovell Publishing; Shor, I. & Freire, P, (1987), A pedagogy for liberation: Dialogues on transforming education, Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey.

6 Stainback, W.C. & Stainback, S.B. (1994), Introduction, in J. S. Thousand & R.A. Villa & A.I. Nevin (eds.), *Creativity and collaborative learning*, pp. xxiii–xxvi, Baltimore: Paul H Brookes Publishing Co.

The ACE experience: pedagogies for life and employability

by Jill Sanguinetti, Peter Waterhouse and David Maunders

Adult Community Education practitioners develop their skills in a myriad of ways, from a formal classroom lesson to a conversation with a client over a cup of tea. This project sought to document and analyse how practitioners draw on a wide range of strategies and pedagogies to develop generic skills.

Good practice in ACE is often said to be about engaging people in explicitly useful teaching and learning, while implicitly fostering their overall personal, intellectual and social development. This project invited ACE teachers and managers to articulate their implicit or 'embodied' teaching practices: those aspects of teaching that reflect the teacher's own values and subjectivity, and the ways in which they work with relationships, environments and power in the course of their teaching.

The generic skills movement

The project was prompted in part by the 'generic skills movement'—the focus of much national and international debate and research. It seemed to us that while new projects are being funded to find out how generic skills and attributes can be integrated into training curricula, such integration has always been a central part of the educational tradition and culture of ACE. We set out, therefore, to tap into the rich store of individual and collective knowledge about generic skills (broadly defined), and how such skills are being taught, fostered and developed amongst adult learners within the ACE sector. The project was co-funded by ACFEB and Victoria University.

The positive outcomes of ACE programs[1] are often attributed to the holistic and flexible approaches to teaching and learning that are the norm within the sector [2]. ACE practitioners work with learners on several levels, developing their personal and social skills while teaching practical skills across a broad range of program areas. There is significant overlap between the personal and social skills (including work readiness skills) that have traditionally been a focus of ACE teaching, and the skills, competencies and attributes that are now understood under the rubric of 'generic skills'.

We wanted to document and analyse the ways in which ACE practitioners (including those located in TAFE and industry programs) draw on a wide range of strategies, approaches and pedagogies to foster and nurture generic skills development. We found that these strategies and approaches are intrinsic to and connect with the cultures that characterise ACE centres, ACE environments, and ACE places—what we have called, 'the pedagogies of the plACE'.

Analyse and understand

The main aim of this project was to describe and analyse ACE pedagogies in order to gain a better understanding of the connection between pedagogical practices and generic skill outcomes; to tease out the ways in which the practices and the pedagogical culture of ACE interact to produce the 'complex tangle' of outcomes of which Clemans and her colleagues (2003) speak.

Twenty-two ACE practitioners, based in Melbourne and two regional/rural areas, participated as co-researchers in the project. These practitioners (managers as well as teachers) documented, shared, reflected upon, discussed and analysed their practice in relation to generic skills development. They produced reports of their practice after a protracted period of individual and collective reflection on, and documentation of, their practice. These reports, plus group discussions and follow-up interviews, provided the data that were analysed to answer the key research questions concerning the linkages between pedagogy and generic skills development. The participant co-researchers contributed to the analysis and the key findings of this report.

The participation of the practitioners fulfilled a further aim of the project—to facilitate and model a form of professional development, based on participatory action research, in which the practitioners were also co-researchers and hence engaged in actively learning about research, as well as developing a theoretical language with which to understand and describe their own practice. The small and large group discussions (about generic skills, pedagogy and their daily challenges as ACE teachers) over the six-month period of the research constituted an effective professional development project in itself.

A definition and framework of generic skills

The definition of generic skills that we adopted as most appropriate to ACE is that of Kearns who writes of generic skills as 'life and employability skills and attributes'[3]. This definition ascribes equal value to both 'life' and 'employability' and recognises that these two dimensions of human learning are ultimately inseparable. It also recognises that personal attributes and values underpin other more 'technical' skills.

Kearns' definition conceptualises generic skills and attributes within a developmental framework that provides the context for the pedagogies and teaching strategies that nurture their development.

The Kearns' framework (see figure 1) provides a holistic view of 'skills and attributes'. It enables connections to be made between the five 'key skills clusters' and the pedagogies that are directed towards their development in teaching and learning situations.

Defining pedagogy

Teachers' work is complex, eclectic and multi-dimensional [4]. Levine explains the eclecticism of teaching thus:

> Teaching is an eclectic undertaking, and complexly so, its character frequently arising from putting together often very disparate, even unlikely, concerns related to theory, knowledge, understanding and experience [5]
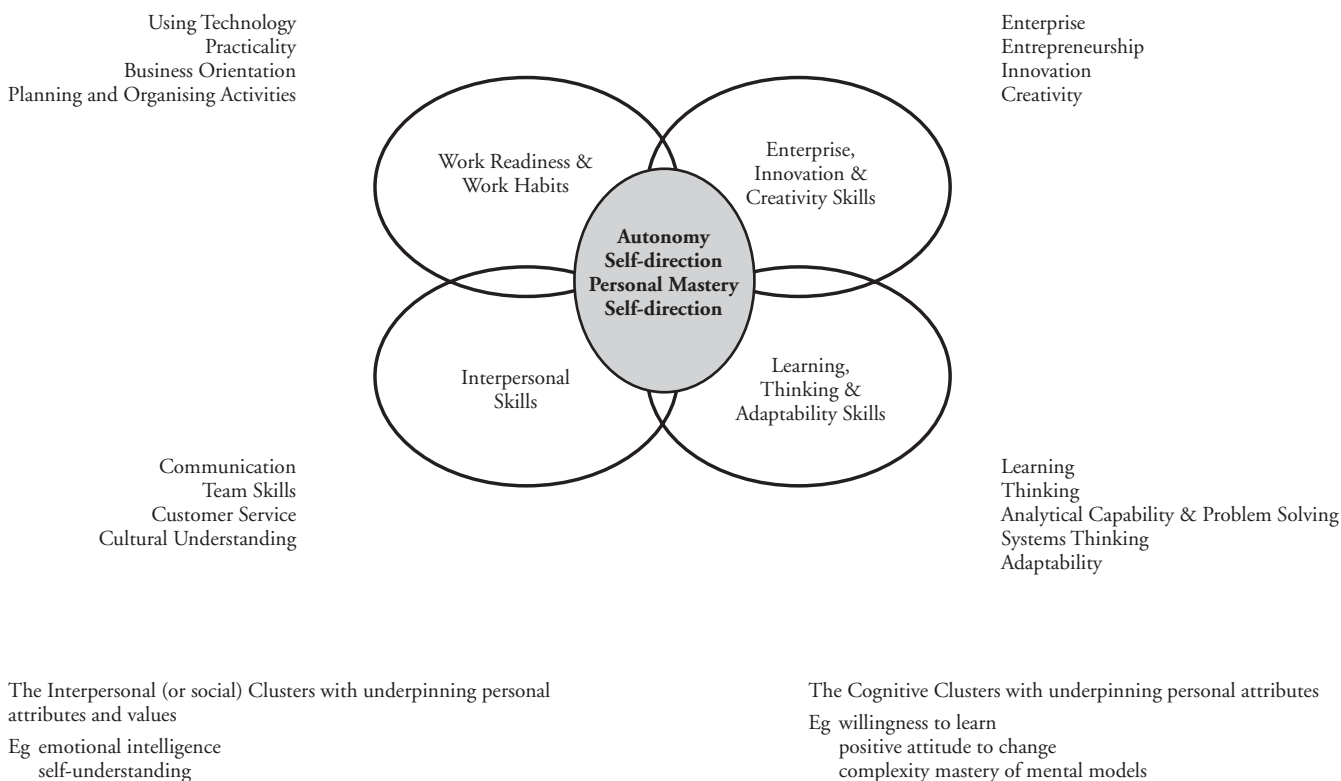
Hatton's notion of teachers as 'bricoleurs' (who craft their teaching in an ad hoc way out of the limited repertoires and means available to them) is another way of conceiving of the eclecticism [6], or 'multi-dimensionality'[7] of teachers' work.

While some authors use a broad definition of 'curriculum' to include some of the dimensions referred to above, we have deliberately chosen the more old fashioned term of 'pedagogy' because it relates to the traditions of Freire, Max van Manen, feminist pedagogy and other democratic traditions that address issues of power as well as the 'whole person' in teaching and learning. While it is useful to think of teaching in ACE as in terms of multi-dimensionality and bricolage, 'pedagogy' leads us to look more deeply into the values, epistemologies and theoretical constructs that are inevitably reflected within classroom activities and interactions.

The notion of pedagogy takes on different meanings within different discourses and theoretical traditions. ACE pedagogy, like ACE teaching, can be said to eclectically draw on and combine several of these traditions. For this project we have used the following definition that takes into account this theoretical eclecticism:

> Pedagogy is about the processes and dynamics of teaching and learning, including the purposes, methods, relationships, strategies, management, physical environment, power relations and social context of learning[8].

Figure 1: Clusters of key generic skills

Using Technology
Practicality
Business Orientation
Planning and Organising Activities

Enterprise
Entrepreneurship
Innovation
Creativity

Work Readiness & Work Habits

Enterprise, Innovation & Creativity Skills

Autonomy
Self-direction
Personal Mastery
Self-direction

Interpersonal Skills

Learning, Thinking & Adaptability Skills

Communication
Team Skills
Customer Service
Cultural Understanding

Learning
Thinking
Analytical Capability & Problem Solving
Systems Thinking
Adaptability

The Interpersonal (or social) Clusters with underpinning personal attributes and values
Eg emotional intelligence
    self-understanding

The Cognitive Clusters with underpinning personal attributes
Eg willingness to learn
    positive attitude to change
    complexity mastery of mental models

From Kearn's Developmental Framework for Generic Skills, Generic Skills for the New Economy—review of research, NCVER, Adelaide, 2001

Action research

The participatory action research approach values the practitioners as the expert 'knowers' of their own pedagogy and how it should be represented. Our process incorporated cycles of action, individual reflection and documentation, consideration of theory, and collective reflection and identification of issues and practices. This continuous cycle of action, reflection, consideration of theory leading to further action and reflection is also known as 'praxis'. The end product was the documentation and distillation of a 'slice' of the collective wisdom and experience within the field in Victoria at this time.

A one-day seminar was held on 4 April 2003 to introduce the project and invite the participation of teachers, tutors and managers. From this meeting and subsequent notices disseminated through the ACE regions, 28 people were recruited of whom 22 participated until the completion of the project. A reference group was established at the Office of Training and Tertiary Education to advise the researchers and oversee the project.

A one-day orientation program was provided for the participants/co-researchers. This focused on action research theory and methodology, the notion of and research about generic skills, and an overview of pedagogical theory. A strategy for the project was developed with the participants, who formed three separate research groups: one in Melbourne and two in regional Victoria. Each group was facilitated by one of the lead researchers.

At the orientation workshop, the participants agreed to document their practice. They kept journals about daily teaching experiences and challenges, critical incidents and ideas about their pedagogies, in relation to the generic skills development of learners.

Each of the three subgroups met three or four times with their facilitator to discuss their journals, and issues emerging in relation to their teaching. These meetings were recorded and transcribed. In the course of these discussions, a picture began to unfold of common practices and collective understandings of ACE pedagogy. Each of the three lead researchers also visited (some of) the participants at their places of work, observed lessons and discussed their practice. At the end of 12 weeks the participants each submitted a report and/or their journals and other documentation of their programs.

The data that were analysed for this report consists of the 22 practitioner reports, the transcribed small group meetings, and records of follow-up and one-to-one discussions. These data were analysed thematically looking for outcomes (encompassing personal development and generic skills), looking for the various elements that make up 'teaching', and looking for the ways in which 'teaching' contributes to outcomes. A common coding system for the pedagogical 'practices', 'relationships' or 'approaches' was agreed on, and the data were coded accordingly. This yielded a list of over 20 pedagogical approaches or practices that we called 'elements'. The list of pedagogical 'elements' could be divided into four broad categories, which became pedagogical 'dimensions'. These were arranged along a horizontal axis. With a little reorganisation, the elements could then be arranged in a matrix structured in its vertical dimension according to five well-known pedagogical principles in ACE. Thus a 'descriptive framework of ACE pedagogy' was produced.

A draft report was prepared by the lead researchers and presented to the participant/co-researchers at a final one-day workshop. The findings were discussed in detail and there were some amendments. The participants unanimously endorsed the draft findings and the proposed framework for ACE pedagogy.

A descriptive framework for ACE pedagogy

The framework for ACE pedagogy comprising four main dimensions was derived. These dimensions included:
- the teacher (personal, social, and attitudinal values and characteristics of ACE teachers)
- the teaching (the practices, approaches, methods, strategies and purposes)
- the curriculum (including content, purposes and approaches to assessment)
- the plACE (the geographical, social and institutional contexts of ACE).

The framework (see Table 1) is a distillation of the pedagogical practices and understandings expressed and reflected in the data provided by the participants. As such, it is a kind of snapshot of ACE pedagogy as it is being practised in these settings at this time. It is not a definitive framework and should be seen as one way of describing a complex and ever-changing field of educational practice. While the notion of a framework can have the discursive effect of 'capturing' (and perhaps 'freezing') a set of understandings, we hope that this framework will continue to grow and develop as pedagogy in different contexts continues to evolve and be described.

Generic skills development and ACE pedagogy

In making the connection between pedagogies of ACE and generic skill and attribute outcomes, we referred back to the Kearns developmental framework (Fig. 1) and to the research literature, both of which suggest that what are referred to as 'generic skills and attributes' are composite

Table 1: Principles and dimensions of ACE pedagogy

	Dimensions of ACE pedagogy			
Principles of ACE pedagogy	**Teacher**	**Teaching**	**Place**	**Curriculum**
Focus on learners and their needs	Is engaged with learners and their learning on a personal level	Is developmental (starting from where learners are at and consciously helping them to progress)	Embodies collective values: commitment to education, to community service and to the ACE sector itself	Prioritises learner needs through creative assessment for accredited curricula
Continuous learning for work and life	Is reflective and open about her/his own practice and professional learning journey	Is largely (but not exclusively) experiential	Is a strongly networked community of teaching and learning practice	Is oriented towards generic skills for employment, life and further study
Building learning on and within real-life contexts	Is able to improvise and take risks	Fosters skills of critical literacy	Is community-owned and is engaged in community building locally	Is contextualised (in terms of local, community and individual issues, interests and needs)
Sharing power– empowering people & communities	Is aware of relations of power	Includes various strategies to empower learners	Is led by management committed to enabling learning processes and staff needs	Is negotiated wherever possible (i.e. learner respected as key player and partner in the learning)
Many roads to learning	Is patient and able to put trust in the learning process	Is multi-layered and eclectic	Creates a sense of belonging	Opens pathways through accredited, non-accredited and enrichment programs

and inter-related, and underpin the overall educational development and social growth of individuals. Hence, the development of 'autonomy', 'self-mastery' and 'self-direction' underpins and is dynamically related to the development of all the other skills. Likewise, the development of 'interpersonal skills' will feed into 'work readiness and work habits', 'enterprise, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation', and 'learning, thinking and adaptability skills', and so forth.

The data demonstrate how Kearns' five skills clusters are encouraged, fostered and strengthened by practices that implement the elements, dimensions and principles of ACE pedagogy as described in this report (and formalised in Table 1).

The central cluster of 'autonomy, personal mastery and self-direction' is supported by practices that enact the pedagogical elements within each of the dimensions as shown in Figure 2 (p. 14). Our data suggest a close link between the pedagogical elements and the attributes described by Kearns in his developmental framework. Further research could help to clarify these linkages.

Action research as professional development

One of the aims of this project was to model a process of professional development involving teacher-based participatory action research. The principles of action research were followed in all stages of the project, with the teachers included as participants and co-researchers. This report is the result of a genuine collaboration between the lead researchers (two of whom had been ACE teachers in the past) and the participant co-researchers (who were also teachers). While there is great diversity in the practices

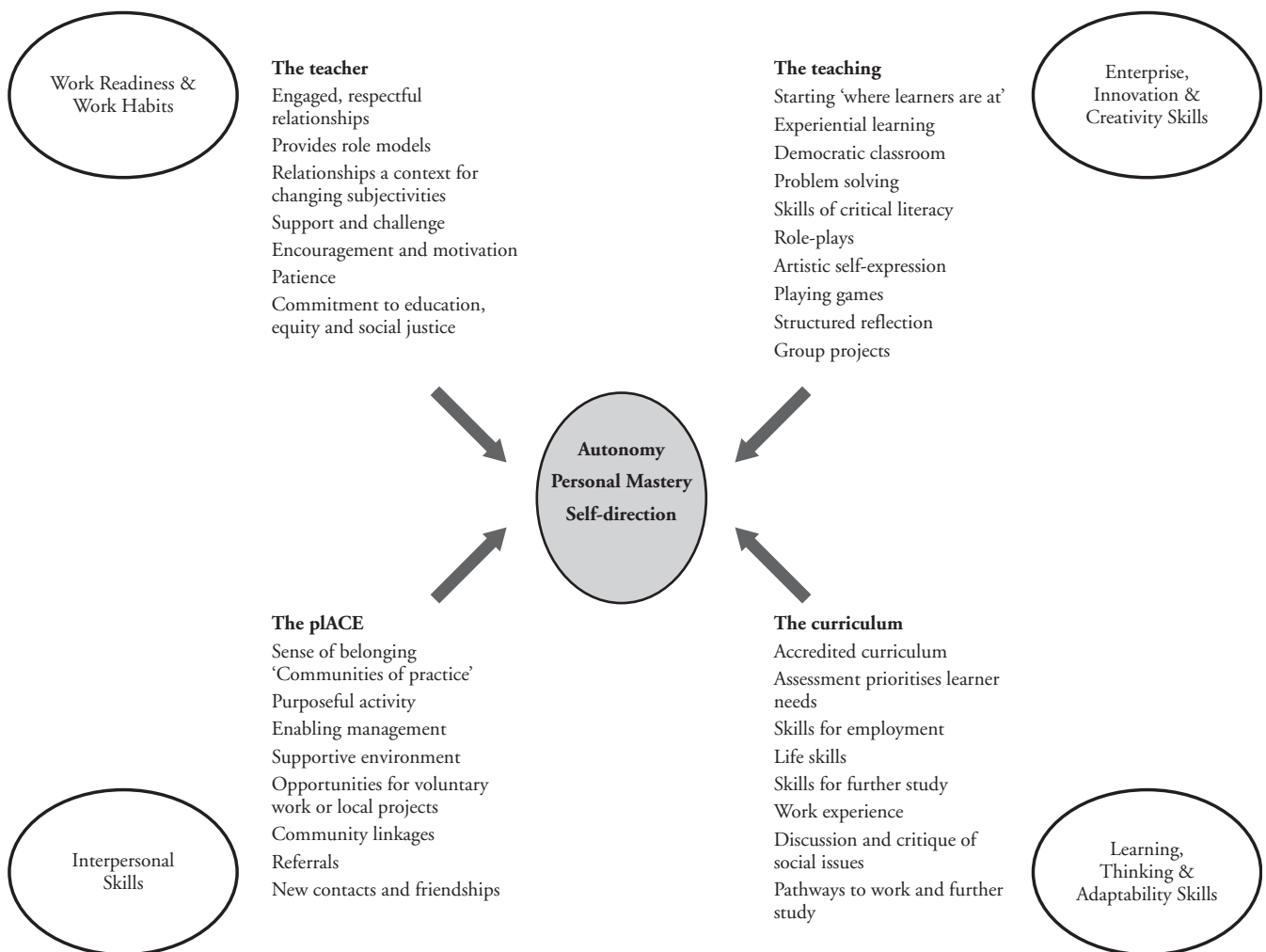and approaches documented, the findings of the report have been unanimously endorsed by the participants.

The feedback from participants about the personal and professional significance of participating in the project was extremely positive. According to them, the project has been an outstanding success as a professional development undertaking. Written feedback and follow-up emails referred to the following aspects in particular:

• benefits of reflection and keeping a teaching journal
• value of sharing ideas and concerns with one's peers in a collective process
• development of awareness and self-validation from this process
• instances of personal and professional transformation
• contribution to the quality of their teaching, especially in ways of embedding a focus on generic skills in everyday teaching
• project as a model for continuous improvement
• importance of skilled and experienced facilitation
• growth in their awareness and understanding of the sector and its importance
• significance of learning about and integrating new theory into one's own personal theories of teaching.

All participants thought the project should be continued or replicated as a profoundly educational and energising strategy for professional development in the future.

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Figure 2: The dimensions of ACE pedagogy and generic skills outcomes

Work Readiness & Work Habits

The teacher
Engaged, respectful relationships
Provides role models
Relationships a context for changing subjectivities
Support and challenge
Encouragement and motivation
Patience
Commitment to education, equity and social justice

The teaching
Starting 'where learners are at'
Experiential learning
Democratic classroom
Problem solving
Skills of critical literacy
Role-plays
Artistic self-expression
Playing games
Structured reflection
Group projects

Enterprise, Innovation & Creativity Skills

Autonomy Personal Mastery Self-direction

The plACE
Sense of belonging
'Communities of practice'
Purposeful activity
Enabling management
Supportive environment
Opportunities for voluntary work or local projects
Community linkages
Referrals
New contacts and friendships

The curriculum
Accredited curriculum
Assessment prioritises learner needs
Skills for employment
Life skills
Skills for further study
Work experience
Discussion and critique of social issues
Pathways to work and further study

Interpersonal Skills

Learning, Thinking & Adaptability Skills

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Beyond words:
learning literacy through drama

by Karen Dymke

Because reading and writing are easier to teach and assess, they often get more classroom attention than the other two elements of language—speaking and listening. But there is a way to include all four elements, and it's fun, it's creative and it works.

For a lot of students, literacy by 'talk and chalk' (or texta!) just doesn't work. Over the last few years the Victorian Government has introduced the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) for Year 11 and 12 students. VCAL teachers have been grappling with the notion of 'applied' learning—how to teach literacy in a hands-on, real, experiential way. Allowing learners to move from their desks, away from textbooks, negotiating their curriculum, considering flexible delivery options, meeting students where they are at, discussing, acknowledging and teaching to students' individual learning styles and abilities…these have been the real challenges for many teachers.

Applied learning pedagogies require teachers and students to move right away from the empty vessel theories of education, where teachers are positioned as 'fonts of all knowledge'. Applied learning advocates facilitated learning approaches where learners are creatively engaged in their own networks of work, learning, society and family. These approaches require teachers to break down the 'silos' of school subject areas and to share expertise and knowledge. Drama provides the perfect vehicle for that.

What is literacy?

The final report on the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS)[1] tells us that literacy means more than knowing how to read, write or calculate. It states that literacy refers to the ability to understand and use print and digital texts in day-to-day activities at home, at work and in the community. Film, TV, text messages, notes, memos, emails, books, letters of complaint, protests, footy guides, newspapers, ATMs, the internet, email, filling in taxation forms or understanding supermarket checkout procedures are just some of the day-to-day tasks that require people to apply their literacy and numeracy skills in diverse ways. These forms of literacies and numeracies are the 'new' basic skills of the 21st century.

Consider the words have you spoken, read, shared, laughed since you first opened your eyes this morning. These are your real texts, far removed from the reading and writing you may have done at school. Literacy is also about having an element of confidence to interpret information, to read the meaning of words and of character. Literacy transforms lives and transforms communities. Literacy is seeking to develop self-expression, skills for practical purposes, ways to develop knowledge and to provide avenues for debate and discussion.

Drama in literacy enables learners to:
- develop self-awareness
- grow in confidence
- become more fluent in their speech
- explore ideas in a positive environment
- work cooperatively with others
- practice the language of negotiation
- experience self-discipline
- express dramatic ideas through—play/screenplay building, story writing
- become self-aware, with greater self respect
- find a forum for public debate
- encourages the use of sound, voice: great for aural learners
- hear and be 'other' voices and identities
- cooperate and be culturally aware
- role play for real life
- socially contextualise language
- investigate a variety of viewpoints in non-threatening ways, e.g. conflict management/bullying—'you tell me' scenarios
- use and interpret the language of others (verbal and non-verbal)
- build a greater social awareness.

Drama brings words to life—it's innovative, essentially experiential, learning and can provide motivation, purpose, context and focus for improving literacy and oracy. Drama can develop important creative skills for living with change. These 'life-literacies' are not learnt by sitting down at a desk. They are experiential, and require confidence, interpretation, action and communication.

Let me tell you about Jo

I taught Jo in an English class in a factory in the eastern suburbs. Each week we would start the class with a 'speak-

easy' where each person spoke on a topic for a minute. In a speak-easy people take turns to speak on a given topic, such as 'What makes me mad'. Incrementally we highlight and develop skills such as standing up to speak, eye contact, gesture and intonation. It's a type of shortcut public speaking activity. It's amazing how people's confidence grows and develops through this simple activity.

> ## what I remember
> ## are the tears
> ## that silently flowed down
> ## his face as he spoke
> ## slowly and deliberately

Every week Jo refused to join in the speak-easy activity. Each week I would accept his position as fine, and pass over him to the next speaker. It is so important to start where people are at and allow them to move at their pace into these type of activities. After six weeks of refusal I figured that this was one fish that was not going to bite.

However, on a day nearing the end of the course Jo told me that he was ready to speak. Up he stood, a huge Maori man, and he began to speak. I can¹t even remember what he said. What I remember are the tears that silently flowed down his face as he spoke slowly and deliberately. They were tears of pride. This was the first time this man of 45 years had spoken before others to share his views and opinions. The group was stunned and speechless but applauded Jo sincerely as he quietly sat down. The following week Jo returned bursting with pride sharing the news that he had given a speech at his son¹s 21ˢᵗ birthday party in front of 150 people.

It didn't end there. At the end of the course, he and his workmates approached the manager with a written submission to investigate improved conditions in the canteen at the factory. Literacy skills had enhanced their communication, understanding and awareness. In only a few weeks, taking (in their own time) the opportunity to participate had engaged these men as more effective participants in democracy; in the community, in the workplace and in the home.

Education in the fullest sense

Drama engages learners in communicating creatively. It is about 'experiencing' a form of learning that moves beyond words, and acknowledges the learner as a whole person. Drama gives learners the opportunity to use a variety of learning styles. It is interactive, experiential learning. Drama provides the opportunity for the communication of thoughts, feelings, ideas and actions.

Most teachers are well aware that they ought to teach all four elements of language—reading, writing, speaking and listening. Often it is reading and writing that they concentrate on. Listening and speaking are more difficult to structure—and assess! Drama is the perfect vehicle.

Through drama, students can to practice listening and speaking, which can lead to reading and writing. It can happen in contexts that are real for them, rather than isolated incidents set up by the teacher. These experiences can give students the opportunity to be players and not spectators in learning.

Research

Using dramatic activities as an instructional tool in the language arts classroom is based on the principle that drama directly involves the learner, and an involved learner will be interested in learning. Studies have documented the effectiveness of incorporating dramatic activities into a language arts curriculum, and found that drama is an effective medium for literacy development in nine areas. Drama:

1 creates motivation for students to participate, and facilitates students' responses in reading instruction
2 is a source of scaffolding for emerging readers by providing rich background experiences for future reading
3 leads students to develop symbolic representation (the same concept children require in order to understand the alphabetic principles)
4 provides students with meaningful opportunities for developing oral reading fluency
5 provides students with opportunities to acquire new vocabularies and develop meanings visually, aurally, and kinaesthetically
6 helps students acquire the knowledge of word order, phrasing, and punctuation that contributes to the meaning of sentences
7 helps students read different forms of discourse, especially non fiction
8 enables students to monitor their own comprehension in drama and develop effective reading strategies
9 can be used as an assessment tool since it provides immediate feedback about students' understanding of new reading materials.

For adolescents, dramatic activities provide meaningful contexts and motivation to practice literacy use. The writing done by a teen theatre ensemble showed that the aesthetic activities provided adolescents opportunities to see writing as a means for communication other than solitary practice. Two British secondary language arts teachers engaged students with literature by producing soap operas. During the production, teachers engaged students in various

language usages, spelling, and writing instruction. Students were motivated to participate because they had ownership over the product. Students also had opportunities to study realistic materials, use technology, learn actively, and to collaborate with peers in the production process.

Dramatic activities also provide scaffolding for effective literacy instruction in lower literacy and ESL classrooms. Scaffolded play with lower-level literacy students allowed them to participate actively in their language learning. Students were motivated to organise, rewrite, discuss and perform the play. Classroom drama builds reading, writing, speaking and critical thinking skills. Melissa McQueen [2]

describes drama as a bridge of understanding between students and the text. By adding physicality, voice and emotional value, students shift from decoding texts to gaining deeper understanding.

The fear factor

A lot of teachers are afraid of using dramatic activities in an adolescent or adult educational program, equating it with 'acting' and 'theatre' and being 'on the stage'. There are issues of control and the potential for the unknown—like exposed psychological issues. Many teachers also feel that they do not have the extrovert personality required to carry it off. These same teachers often greatly value the rich vein

M Hanrahan

of ideas and responses to theatre visits and discussions on shared dramatic experiences. They admire the performance skills of the actors and the immediate impact it has, but don't feel able to build on the experience, because they don't feel they have the planning skills to teach it.

So how can this work?

We need to consider another way to promote the use of drama in the classroom. There is enormous potential for drama, not only as an innovative approach to literacy but also as an effective curriculum integrator, and a way of engaging students particularly through emotional engagement with themes, characters and issues.

Drama pedagogy aligns well with latest curriculum advances: applied learning strategies, integrating curriculum and the development of rich tasks, and is a powerful means of allowing students to actively demonstrate learning outcomes.

Prof. John O'Toole from Griffith University has designed a professional development program in drama education: Pretending to literacy—Learning literacy through drama, which prepares classroom teachers with drama education techniques, and invites them to take a major supported role with their learners in participatory performance. The PD program then provides an intensive workshop in drama education, providing ownership, confidence and the skills to continue teaching through drama for all teachers.

Introducing drama to literacy classroom requires some finesse in terms of preparation. Teachers need to have a personal understanding of how and why they want to use drama and when it can best be used. After that there is great freedom to approach the matter from wherever each teachers feels most comfortable. My experience has been that it is wisest to start from where you are at! Start with small successful tried and true ideas—if you're new to the whole idea, aim for maybe a five-minute participatory experience and work your way from there.

Teaching ideas

- Consider a modern version of old classics, for example, Macbeth.com.
- Dramatise workplace issues. This provides an excellent foundation for writing assignments. Once students participate in the strategies explored through drama, they have concrete images to put into written words.
- Teach sounds with the body.

- Teach beginning, middle and end through tableaux or frozen pictures.
- Ask students to move to words and their meanings, for example, spongy, fantastic, amiable, frilly, fudgy. Capture how you feel about the word. Talk about meanings.
- Make the shapes of vowel sounds with movement— very helpful for students learning English as a second language.
- Play team games. In random teams of four or five get them to make a capital letter, or some object or idea in the shortest amount of time for a score.
- Sound circles, improvised stories, sharing stories in pairs.

You don't have to be a trained drama teacher to use creative activities in the classroom. You don't even have to be an extrovert. Anyone can try these ideas. It's worth having a go. Rather than running a full interactive class, try just five minutes in which to get people up and get moving. Start with a small idea such as using frozen pictures to tell a story, and use a camera to record your fun. And if worse comes to worse, you might even have some fun. It's fun when you learn, and we learn when it is fun!

The Drama Victoria Conference is coming up soon, and is a really great opportunity to attend very interactive workshops and meet other teachers who are working in a range of settings.

'Pulse' Drama for Life, Melbourne University, 25–26 November. Contact Jim Lawson on (03) 9686 6829 or *www.dramavic.@netspace.net.au.* Further workshops for teachers and notes can be obtained from Karen Dymke at *karen@qps.net.au*

Karen Dymke has worked for more than 20 years in literacy education and drama. She currently runs her own training business, Innovative Team, providing facilitation, workshops and conference presentations, incorporating 'High Impact', an interactive professional development theatre group.

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Switched on: learning through audio

Learning is easier when you can hear yourself think. You just need to have the Audacity. Simon Goodrich explains.

It is a well-known fact that engagement in the classroom is one of the biggest issues in teaching. Even in 2004, we are still shaped by 19th- century-based pedagogies of teaching, focusing on written outcomes and assessment. However, we now live in a time when all of us need to become more literate in many different mediums. Technology and its associated communication devices have gone from the periphery to core principles of interaction in 21st century society. We need to value mass media communication—web, television, video games and radio—as it plays such an important role in shaping our lives and opinions, and integrate these into relevant teaching practices within the classroom.

For many years we have coexisted with these non-written media purely as consumers. The ability for people to create media and be creative in media has been beyond the grasp of the vast majority. However, with the advent of technology and a re-interoperation of the media, things are beginning to change. People are becoming creators of this media, especially those (youth, CALD communities, disadvantaged groups) who have had limited access before. These creations are also becoming recognised within a learning context, and are re-engaging people with learning by providing a platform or publication culture where people can get their work out to a greater audience. It is not about linking the curriculum to media, it's about linking the media to the curriculum, especially to the core principle of literacy.

Ten years ago you would have needed a six-figure sum to even attempt to make some television. Now, the highest rating community television show in the country (SYN TV [Channel 31 Melbourne] has over 100,000 viewers a week) was set up on no budget with a borrowed $2000 camera. Times have changed, and will continue to do so, as the means of production becomes cheaper. Increasingly, it is becoming possible to create professional standard media on conventional computer equipment.

Where things have most progressed is in radio, which people consider to be one of the oldest of the technologies. Even though it has been in existence for 80 years, recent advances have made it a great tool to engage people within a learning context.

Consider the teaching and learning outcomes

Literacy teachers could ask their learners to produce a written piece on the history of migration to Australia, or students could make an audio documentary. They could:

- use music and sound effects to set the scene, recording the sounds around Station Pier, or
- interview a recently arrived immigrant and someone who came to Australia just after World War II, contrasting their experiences.

The student would still need to do research for the piece and set out a script, writing questions for the interviews, developing narrations between the sections. This all involves the core basis of old-style pedagogy (reading and writing), but incorporates other elements like oral communication or presentation and working within groups. Furthermore, if students knew that their work could be played on radio for others to hear, it would encourage them to work harder than if they were creating a written piece that would be read by the teacher, given back and forgotten about. Everyone likes to see their work rewarded, and what better way than getting your family and friends to listen to it. What makes it even better is that this can now be done with minimal or no cost at all.

The other reason why audio is such an engaging tool is the amount of publication points where it can be used. Any computer with a CD burner can produce an audio CD that can be played on any hi-fi system from your car to Triple J. Community radio is an ideal output for the work created. Victoria alone has over 40 stations, most of which are in regional areas. The best community radio example has been Student Youth Network (90.7 SYN FM) in Melbourne. Since the station started broadcasting in January 2003, over 1800 students from 100 education providers have broadcast live-to-air, many creating audio pieces on their schools' computers. The 290 community radio stations throughout Victoria and Australia are now seeing these broadcast partnerships as a way to connect to their community and provide learning opportunities for local students.

Many of the common devices you use in your everyday life can help you to get your message across with audio. All computers built since 1995 come with their own inbuilt
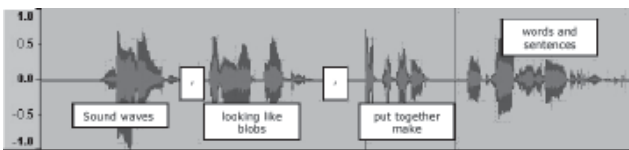
sound card, allowing you to record and edit your work. If you have access to a microphone, you can get a conversion lead to use it with your computer. You can also record audio using mini discs, MP3 players and cassette tapes. These can all be transferred onto your computer for cheap and easy editing.

Audio editing freeware

The increase in audio technologies has also been matched with the increase in freeware programs. Freeware programs differ from software as they are based upon a general public licence agreement and open source language, which means that the program is totally free, and the code that makes it is readily available so interested parties all around the world can add to it. Over the last ten years, freeware programs have been developed by computer programmers who believe that all software should be free. So now you can get a whole suite of programs, such as Linux, which serve the same purpose as Microsoft Office except that it's free. Audio editing freeware programs are now also available, the most prominent being Audacity.

Audacity allows you to record in voice, music or sound effects, edit them and output them to a file to be burned to CD. Since its release in March 2003, the program has had three upgrades and is being continually developed. Even after such a short time there is little difference between Audacity and a purchased audio editing program. Previously a school might have had to pay $600 per computer for a licence to edit audio, but now there is no cost at all. This has caused a revolution in the radio education field, and opened it up to anyone with a standard computer. Editing voice is similar to editing a written text onscreen, and anyone who has used a word processing program will be able to pick up the basic audio editing tools.

The skills learned in a program like Audacity are transferable to other editing programs, and provide an engaging and enjoyable experience for students. Even if learners have no desire to work in the media, getting their story out there is a great boost to their self-confidence and abilities. Of the 100 educational providers on SYN, only three have been through media classes. The vast majority of those involved in SYN have been VCAL students, many of whom plan to do apprenticeships. But the skills they learnt during their SYN projects have proved to be valuable life skills.
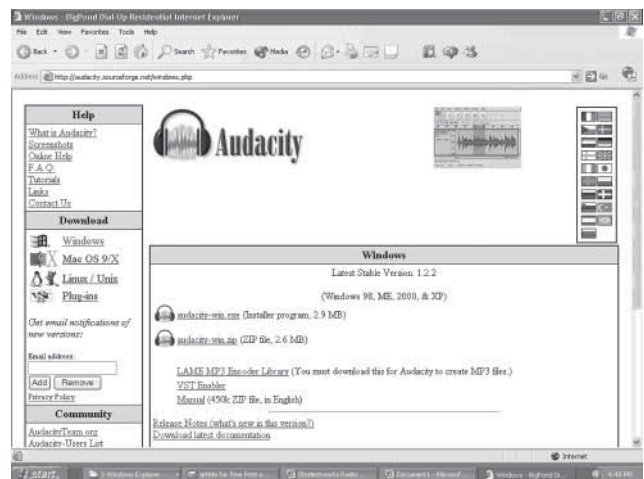
Getting started
1 Download Audacity

It can be found at *audacity.sourceforge.net* (NB: there is no *www* in the URL). The program is regularly updated and the newest version is 1.2.2. It is a tri-platform program and can be run with Windows (PC), Mac OS and Linux/Unix.

The program itself is quite small (2.9MB) and even if you have a dialup internet account, it shouldn't take more than ten minutes to download. If you are using a school network internet connection it could take less than a minute.

You will then need to unpack the program, which can be done by opening the file. The program takes about 45 seconds to install, so you could go from loading the website to using the program in no time all!

Screen shot of Audacity website

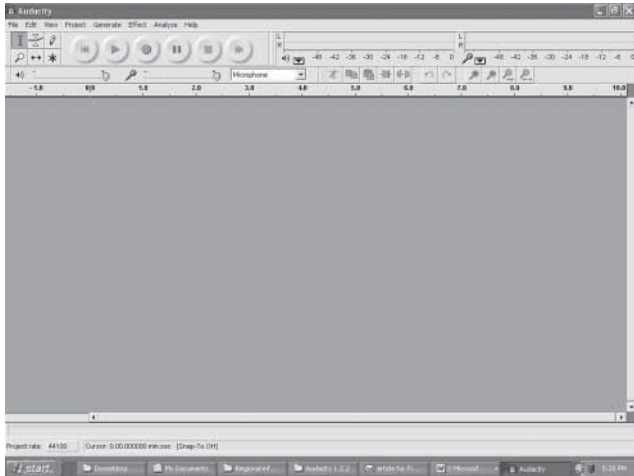### 2 Download LAME MP3 Encoder Library

On the same web page you will find LAME MP3 Encoder Library. Download this file and unpack it. The Encoder Library is needed so you can save your files in MP3 format, the most common audio file type on the internet. It is recommended that you save the files as MP3s because they are compressed in size and won't be demanding on your computer or network. Compare this—a regular audio file (WAV) size is 10 MB for one minute; an MP3 file size is 1MB for one minute.

Saving audio files as MP3s would be infringing copyright laws, but having the LAME MP3 encoder allows you to get through this legal loophole. The first time you save your files as an MP3, Audacity will prompt you to find the file 'lame_enc.dll', which is packed into the file you downloaded from the site. After this anyone who uses the program on that computer will be able to save the audio files as MP3s.

Practical Matters

3 Have fun with it

What to do now? The short answer is anything you want. The layout might take a little time to get accustomed to, but the concepts are similar to what you are used to in word processing programs like Microsoft Word. Cut, Copy and Paste all serve the same purpose as in Word. Instead of selecting text, you select audio, and instead of making a word bold or italic, you can use some effects.

The two ways you manipulate audio in the program are 'Record in your voice' and 'Import Audio'.

Record in your voice

You will need a microphone. Some computers, especially laptops, come with inbuilt microphones. It is recommended that you use an external microphone for better sound quality. These can be purchased for as little as $15 from electronics stores. A microphone/headphone set is recommended for classrooms as students can work side by side.

The Verbatim Multimedia headset with microphone—a good start at $14.95

The microphone and headphones will plug into your computer. All computers, including laptops, come with input jacks for microphones and headphones. This can be found at the back of your machine and sometimes at the front.

The headphone jack is traditionally color-coded green and might have a headphone symbol next to it. The microphone jack is usually red and has an insignia of a microphone.

What the back of your computer might look like

Once you have this plugged in, you can check them by using Audacity. Simply press record ⏺. Then press stop, and listen back to see how it sounds. If it sounds distorted, it might be because you have recorded with the microphone level too high. You can monitor this by checking your recording levels. You can also reduce your microphone level by reducing the microphone level.

Recording in Audacity

Import audio

Audacity allows you to import audio through Project > Import Audio. This could be any sound file you have on your computer or find on the internet. However, the program will not recognize the WMA files used by Windows Media Player, due to copyright.

You can obtain audio from any stereo CDs you have by 'ripping' them onto your computer. You can do this by using another freeware program, CDex (*www.cdex.n3.net*), which allows you to create MP3 files from normal CDs.

However, do be aware of copyright. Although this is an emerging industry, treat it the same as you would when photocopying books—not more than ten per cent. All audio you use from artists must be noted if it is to be played on radio, similar to a bibliography for an essay. In the case of radio, the station will pay royalties when their song is played. For a better understanding of copyright go to *www.copyright.org.au*.

Practical Matters

You can also use royalty-free music and sound effects, and there is an abundance of this on the web. A good site to check out for royalty-free music is *http://freeplaymusic.com/*. For sound effects, type what you are looking for and also type 'royalty free' into a search engine. Also don't forget that you can record your own sound effects. This is a great creative task to do in the classroom. For some ideas about sounds that you can recreate from the most ordinary of household items go to *http://english.unitecnology.ac.nz/resources/units/radio/sound_effects.html*

Short task
Recording in audio
Now we can put the theory into action. We are going to make a 30-second community service announcement about *Fine Print* (taken from their website). *Fine Print* is the quarterly journal of the Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council, and has a mandate to keep members informed of activities and developments in the areas of adult literacy and language research, project work, policy work and administrative practice.

Fine Print aims to promote informed debate on theoretical, methodological and policy issues. So read out and record this into the program by pressing Record on the toolbar. If you don't have access to a microphone, this excerpt of audio can be found on the VALBEC website *www.valbec.org.au/fpsound.html*

Editing
The great thing about editing with audio is that you can make people say things they didn't say by cutting and pasting their voice together. Understandably, digital audio evidence is not allowed in a court of a law!

As covered earlier, sound blobs are just like words and you can select them by using the I tool on the taskbar. By cutting and pasting we will make what was just recorded into something totally different. You won't be recording in your voice again. You will just be manipulating it from the original to this:

> *Fine Print* is VALBEC's quarterly journal of debate within the field on theoretical, methodological and policy issues about activities and developments in the areas of administrative practice.

The five steps you need to create the above sentence from your initial recording are:

1 Save a copy of your work as a backup.
2 Cut the words 'debate within the field on theoretical, methodological and policy issues' and paste them after 'VALBEC's quarterly journal'.
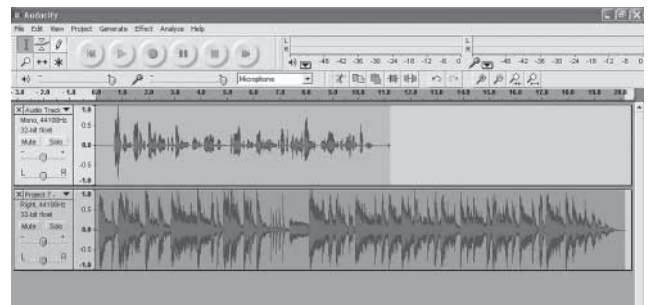3 Cut the words 'about activities and developments in the areas of' and place them after 'policy issues'.
4 Cut the words 'administrative practice' and place then after 'in the areas of'.
5 Delete all remaining audio.

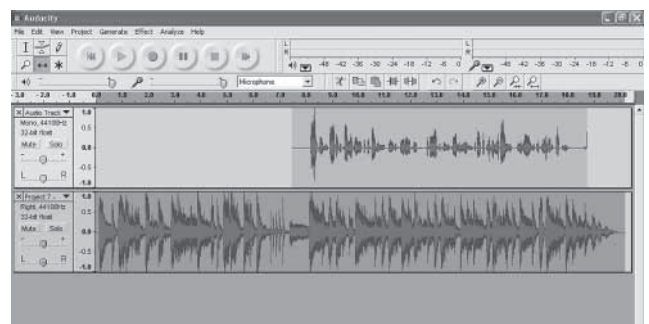Have a listen back—it sounds quite different from what you had recorded in.

Adding in music and sound effects
Using your new recording, we will add background effects to make it sound more interesting. Source some audio from your computer or the web (you can do this by saving files from websites; when you click on sounds, you will prompted to save the file. There is a base music file available on the *Fine Print* website).

Once you have found your file, go to Project > Import Audio. Now you should have two tracks on the screen as below.
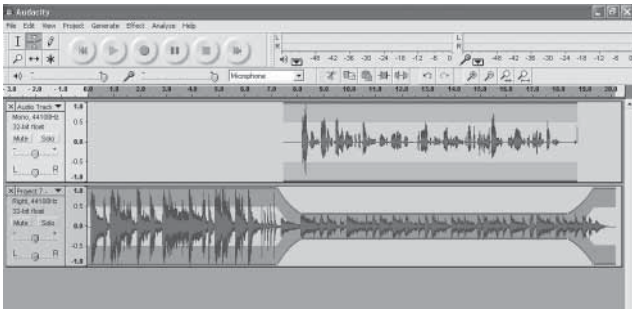

Using other tools, like the time shift tool ↔ you can move around your tracks.

How does it sound? Make sure that you can hear your voice over the music. If you can't, you can use the envelope tool to reduce the music track whilst there is the vocal track.

Using the same principles you can add as many tracks as you like. Think of what mood you are trying to create for your announcement.

Mixing it down

Once you are happy with the track, you should save it again at File > Save Project. However, saving this will only preserve your work. It won't let you export it to be put onto a CD. To do this you'll need to export your file as an MP3. This can be done by going to File > Export as MP3. The first time you do this it will prompt you to find the 'lame_enc.dll' which you should have downloaded from the Audacity site.

Exporting your work as an MP3 will mix down all your tracks into one, and allow other programs and other computers to recognise the file. It also allows you to burn the file to an audio CD, to be played in any stereo, including on a radio station.

Best of luck, and I hope to hear you on radio soon.

Simon Goodrich is an educational media consultant, and has worked in community radio for seven years. He can be contacted at *simon.goodrich@syn.org.au*

Open Forum

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

The Alice Springs Correctional Centre is total prison for its indigenous inmates, relieved only by the efforts of people like Leni Shilton in the education centre. She talks about teaching conditions, the role of English, and a man who found freedom in poetry. And back down south, ACE veterans Liz Suda, Jan Corben and Megan Langdon comment on the Ministerial Statement on ACE, which will guide policy directions for the next five to eight years.

Lost property: discovering a language in prison

Rules, conventions, boundaries and restrictions characterise the lot of the students I teach. That is their physical experience, because they are prisoners. But what of their educational experience, where they are learning literacy in English as their second or third language— should they also be bound to English rules, conventions and lack of freedom? Or should their learning and use of English give them the freedom to express themselves in their voice with their own style of writing, even if this form of expression can and does depart from formal English?

There is a dilemma for me, associated with the teaching of 'correct' English to students who use this language as a limited communication tool, and who have limited skills in writing or comprehension. I will share an example of writing which shows how written expression in English can be used to develop 'voice', even when it is not a first language, and the style of writing is not conventional. I will discuss some of the issues impacting on students who attend education in a prison, and some of the issues that influence the barriers to learning that they face.

A story

I want to tell you a story about a young man. I'll call him 'Matthew'. He comes from an Aboriginal community on Groote Island, which is off the far northeast coast of the Northern Territory in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Matthew is 20. He entered prison at 18, and with parole he'll be out in 2009 at 25. Without parole, he'll be in until he is 32.

Matthew went to school on Groote Island until Year 8. He tells me he finds it hard to remember things now because of the petrol sniffing he did as a kid. I met Matthew in my literacy class in the education unit of the Alice Springs Correctional Centre. Matthew speaks four languages but he can only read and write in English, and it is the language he uses the least. He struggles with English, but it is the only written language he has to express himself in. He said he wanted to study reading and writing so he can "learn and understand well to make my own story about myself".

Matthew is one of the many students who study at the education unit where I teach. My students are trying to use the only written language available to them in the hope that by increasing their skills in this language, they will improve their chances of getting work and hopefully staying out of prison. The path that many men like Matthew follow to prison is one of poverty, social dislocation, substance abuse and oppression. The last time most of my students were in a formal school setting was in primary school or, for a smaller number, lower high school. The experience of school for many was negative and traumatic.

Many years of casual attendance at school have meant that there are gaps in learning, and as school becomes harder, interest in learning declines. In the years that follow early school dropouts, the students' use of written English is often limited to filling forms or signing names. It is necessary therefore, to establish a new experience in the classroom that will be positive and facilitate learning. Forming a cohesive group facilitates trust between the students, so they feel they can read out their work and share their ideas in a safe environment.

In the prison

At the Alice Springs Correctional Centre (ASCC), 80 per cent of the inmates are Aboriginal in a prison population of about 380. In the education unit, 95 per cent of students are Aboriginal and many are traditional men from remote Aboriginal communities all over the Northern Territory.

Education hours have to fit into prison routines, which revolve around uniform staff shifts and that other all-important event— meal times. At ASCC we have been fostering relations with uniform staff, and attitudes are changing and education is no longer seen as "just filling in time". The education centre has on average 50 students per session studying certificate-level courses in music, art, computing and literacy. Working in a prison, we rely on our custodial colleagues to bring us our students. This can result in inconsistent attendance due to other demands on the students' time, such as prison work requirements, attending programs and visits to the clinic, and so on.

Problems with inconsistent attendance, classes of mixed ability and the poor literacy outcomes that followed, lead my colleague and I to streamline our classes. Our aim was to bring the

students into education for at least three sessions a week, to grade the students into classes according to their literacy ability and to work through a module from beginning to end with the same group of students.

We are currently working from the Certificate I (Level 1) in General Education [1]. This course was written for Aboriginal adults by Northern Territory University. We are using this course because it gives us the flexibility to work with students who have varying literacy abilities, whereby we can teach the same module with a different focus, depending on the literacy levels of our students.

My colleague Mike Fewster teaches students with little or no reading and writing in English. He uses a teaching strategy called THRASS, which is an acronym for Teaching Hand-writing Reading And Spelling Systems [2]. He has had great results using this technique, and a number of his students have learnt to read and write and have moved into my classes.

Students in my classes can read and write—some in a very limited way, being able to form simple sentences—while the students with higher literacy can read and write independently. The aim of my classes is to increase the English skills and confidence of my students with a focus on the basic conventions of English, grammar, sentence structure, punctuation and spelling with an emphasis on writing.

Students express themselves by writing stories in English. We do this by encouraging students to draw on their own life experience, and by recounting traditional stories. Through this process, students are building up a body of writing to work on. They are encouraged to share their work with the rest of the class, either by reading it out or by having it displayed around the room for others to read. Sixteen of my students have recently submitted poems and short stories in the 2004 NT Literary Awards—three of which have been shortlisted in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Section.

My students, like any group of adult learners, come to study with a wealth of knowledge and life experience and their world-view influences how they learn. They have told me they come because they want to read and write better. This means different things for different people. One man told my colleague that he needed to know how to read because he'd been in prison for so long, and his family expected him to be able to read the newspaper to them when he got out. The school system has failed so many Aboriginal people. It seems for some, they will only learn to read in jail. Another man is stated on film as saying, "… prison was good because he could learn art, music, reading and writing and then he would understand how those whitefella's think [3] ".

It is enough for me that students want to come to class, and the reasons why they want to come are their own. The process we are going through in class is more than teaching English, it

is facilitating a conceptual shift in thinking, encouraging the use of imagination in the written form and giving people a tool with which to express themselves.

Matthew's story

Matthew has given me permission to use his work. I asked him if I could use it because of the strength of his writing and his strong desire to tackle the language. He is imaginative and descriptive when he writes, but he is far from conventional. This is an example of a piece of writing he wrote for the Northern Territory Literary Awards, before he and I worked on it together.

Here is the story as Matthew put it on the page:

Funeral story
When is happen about people too die
they respect a law
and the traditional law they have to
to sing song and dance
and because that shop and offices an
school is closed because all cursed so
person is past away one week respect
Aboriginal law the people understand

Is respect about
Aboriginal law because
That's the law we have to do
our law singing song dancing
till the past to for get about
also they will paint up with clay
and come sits around all the man
sing song some mob them dancing
no one will be in house
they put a line all around house because
nobody enter the area after the past
is also the house is curse
only people they sing and dance they will
enter the house is area will be
some of people coming and woman
dancing also man sing song a dreamtime
they will be there follow the track and
the ancestor to finish.

Matthew's writing appears stilted. It is not always clear where it is going and it does not follow the accepted writing conventions, but it has a strong message and a distinct writing style.

In class, I regularly discuss the use of conjunctions and basic sentence structure, commas and full stops. It is often not until the piece of writing is written that the student goes over the work to see where the punctuation should go. This is how Matthew works. From reading a number of Matthew's stories, it has become clear that issues of structure and the standard conventions of English are not foremost in his mind when he

starts writing. If he was to stop and put these in as he writes, it would stop his ideas. I have tried this, suggesting that students should form their sentences as they go. For those who find this difficult, the writing grinds to a halt and ideas stop.

Only three of my students read and write in their own language. These students also read and write very well in English, so the majority of my students are not reading and writing in their first language. The expectations of government and society is that everyone should be able to read and write in English. How important is it that work is written in standard English? Does having written work in irregular English limit the audience? Stories in traditional communities are not written down; they are told in the local language. Oral storytelling is the way messages are passed on, and how children are taught. My students remember the stories they were told as children and are retelling these stories in English.

Back to Matthew

Looking at his work together, we discuss the structures of English. I talk about making the writing clearer for the reader, making it more understandable in a conventional sense so his message gets across. Often when I want to clarify the use of a particular word in a piece of writing, Matthew will explain the whole story to me over again, until I know what he is trying to say. We may be using the same words but it possible these words have different meanings. It is vital that the sense and the meaning of the work is Matthew's [4]. We work through this process very slowly, trying to achieve a balance in the type of English I am teaching and the type of English my students are using, keeping English accessible both to the writer and to the reader.

Looking at the funeral story, we simply read it aloud to see where the natural sentences lay. Where we felt we needed a breath, that is when the story began to look like a poem, not prose. Matthew changed some of the lines, took some out, and put new ones in. We gave it some structure, added a few conjunctions and punctuation, and we worked on some stanza breaks.

After Matthew and I worked on his story, this is how it looked:

Funeral story
When this happens
about people who die
we respect a law
the traditional law
we have to sing songs and dance

the shop, offices and school is closed
all cursed
a person is passed away
one week respect
Aboriginal law
the people understand

this respect about Aboriginal law
that is the law we have to do
our law

singing songs, dancing until the past
they paint up with ochre
rubbing it with their hands
come sit around
all the men sing songs
some mob them dancing

no one will go in the house
they put a line around the house
nobody enter the area
the house is cursed

only people, they will sing and dance
they will enter the house
people coming and women dancing
also men will sing dreamtime songs
they will be there
follow the track
and the ancestor will finish
the curse.

As you can see, this version has more structure and makes more sense in a conventional way, but it is still very much in Matthew's voice. His style of writing is distinctive, interesting and from reading his work we can see a little of his world.

Matthew and the other students in my class are writing their thoughts and ideas, using English. They have written many stories since the beginning of the year, and are developing a substantial body of work. I have watched this transformation happen as students work more and more with a language they had, up to this stage, rarely used. They now have the confidence to discuss what they are writing, as they put their ideas, stories and their hopes for the future on paper.

Leni Shilton has lived and worked in Central Australia for 20 years. She now teaches literacy and numeracy in the Alice Springs Correctional Centre's education unit, and is studying applied linguistics through Charles Darwin University.

References

1 Certificate 1 (Level 1) in General Education (2001), Northern Territory University, Darwin, NT.
2 Davies & Richie (2003), *Teaching Thrass*, Osbourne Park, WA.
3 Trevor Graham (director) (2003), Lonely Boy Richard: an intimate account of one man's journey to jail, Film Australia, Lindfield, NSW.
4 Eades (1982), 'English as an Aboriginal language,' in J. Bell (ed.), Aboriginal Languages Association, ALA, pp. 14–17.

Reflecting on the Ministerial Statement on ACE

In early June of this year, the Minister for Education and Training, Ms Lynne Kosky MP launched the Ministerial Statement on ACE, *Future Directions for Adult Community Education in Victoria. (http://www.acfe.vic.gov.au/ news/20031112devminstat_news.asp)*. This statement will guide the future policy directions for the ACE sector over the next five to eight years. *Fine Print* invited some respected ACE elders—Liz Suda, Jan Corben and Megan Langdon—to comment on the consultation process and the policy product.

Did you take part in the consultation process last year? Is the statement indicative of the issues raised and comments made in your session?

LS: The consultation process was very rigorous and demanding. One of the frustrations expressed during the consultation was that many of us had been involved in such 'needs analysis' and 'strategic planning' and 'consultation ' many times before. In good faith, we give freely of our time, energy and reflections, fitting what we do within the jargon of the 'latest framework' (jargon) and so on, but in return we get more motherhood statements and good intentions not supported by appropriate types of funding.

Those who have a sense of history of the ACFE sector recognise that the mantle of Cinderella is still clearly our lot despite the plethora of reports, research, policy documents and ministerial statements claiming to recognise the value of the community sector. You could say there was an undercurrent of cynicism and fatigue underpinning the process.

The Ministerial Statement rehashes the same old stuff about lifelong learning and the value of community, without coming up with anything new in the way of ensuring that the community sector is recognised and funded as a credible sector of the education system in this state. One of the big issues raised by participants at the consultation was about the professionalism of the sector and the problems of attracting and retaining qualified professional educators. Many expressed the view that despite the increased demands on the sector for accreditation of courses, increased accountability requirements and increased demand for innovation in curriculum, especially in the technology area, there is little recognition that educators in the community sector are still subject to the poorest working conditions and career structure when compared with TAFE, AMES or CAE. The statement says nothing about the development or sustainability of a community education profession, nothing about offering real jobs with professional working conditions.

There is nothing in the statement that would encourage qualified teachers to choose a career in the community education sector. The role of volunteers however, is presented as a strategy.

The statement assumes that the sustainability of the sector is assured by the goodwill and self-exploitation of the sector. The facilitators on the day assured participants that these issues were raised. The result simply reinforces the initial cynicism of those participating on the day.

JC: Yes, I did participate in several consultation sessions last year. A consistent view was that there should be *money* to support the statement, that is, new money, and I don't believe the meagre amount announced in the budget, coupled with redirecting money already in the system, equates to the needs and expectations. The move to three-year funding is welcome but what are the implications? Across government accountability or at least some simplification of accountability also seems to be happening—at last!

ML: To be honest, I actually can't remember if I attended the consultation process in 2003. I most likely did, but I don't remember anything about it.

What impressed you most about the Statement? What, for you, are its strengths?

ML: I am impressed with the Minister's foreword extolling the strengths of community-based education. It appears that the government is going to listen to what we have to say, particularly 'communities have told us that they want to plan and implement adult education, based on community and individual needs'. And on page 7 'ACE helps build stronger communities by identifying and addressing local learning needs'. I take these comments to mean that the government is acknowledging that the community is best placed to know its adult education needs.

The statement provides a good overview of what community-based adult education is all about. I feel proud that I am part of this sector. It is good that the sector is being recognised as the first point of contact for people who have been out of formal education for some time and that it is seen as a gateway to learning. It is good that the small classes, informal learning strategies and flexibility of delivery that differentiate ACE from other adult education are highlighted. It is good that it is recognised that, in some areas, ACE is the only point of access for adults who want further education and training.

JC: It provides a government policy document supporting the role of adult education and therefore should raise the status and hopefully the recognition of the sector in the community as well as within government.

LS: The move to three-year funding was welcome, however this will not have a significant impact on delivery that increased levels of funding would. The increase in fee concessions is an

effective approach for targeting the most needy centres (i.e. those that service the most disadvantaged groups), but the total amount of funds committed to the community sector over the next three years is miniscule, as compared with the resources that had gone into the consultation process, the launch of the statement and the dissemination of reports and CDs. It seems like nothing more than a marketing exercise by the government with a few crumbs for the sector to win their approval. It's difficult to see the strengths of a policy that ignores the fundamental challenges facing the community sector.

Are there any 'gaps' for you? Are there any omissions or issues not addressed?

JC: I believe more attention should be paid to human resources within the ACE sector. We don't get enough money at pay properly for the expertise we have. The resources aren't available to collect the intellectual capital in the sector. Professional development is adequate but not often inspiring or providing realistic ideas for future planning. The Ministerial Statement is a NOW statement, not FUTURE directions—other than saying we'll keep on doing the same.

LS: I don't believe that issues such as the sustainability of small centres have been sufficiently addressed. Nor have the ongoing demands for professional development. Other issues that don't get much attention include funding to accommodate increased accountability in terms of AQTF, and accreditation and infrastructural support required to maintain the community centres' capacity to provide ICT learning.

ML: Once again the issue of funding for positions for the ACFE worker is not being addressed. This is critical in small organisations where paid hours are totally dependent on courses running successfully. There is no job security, and very little job satisfaction under the current funding model. Strategy 3 (page 16) aims to attract and retain skilled and experienced workers. It needs to look at a better way to do this.

What tensions (if any) are there within the statement?

LS: Once again the government wants the community sector to address new needs with no real increase in funding. More rearranging of deckchairs. More for less or the same.

JC: The statement provides an overview of where we are already and the direction, if any, beyond our current position, seems to want us to rearrange our activities—possibly fixing what isn't broken. Out go clusters and networks, in come partnerships. Does this equal heaps more work for no more money?

ML: The major issue I have with the statement is that on the one hand, it is extolling the strengths of ACE as it is currently operating, yet it seeks to implement a strategy that will radically alter the way in which the sector will operate. By broadening the role of ACE, particularly by delivering the education and training components of other government departments where

a measure of coercion is involved, the basic strength of ACE, its informal, non-threatening, reaffirming environment of learning for personal fulfilment, will be lost. It appears to me that this is really a tendering-out exercise where, unfortunately, ACE is seen as the cheapest way to provide education and training for government departments. Throughout the statement there are references to increasing volunteer involvement in the sector, either by encouraging more people to volunteer and make volunteering more rewarding, or by actively promoting community partnerships that are expected to deliver in-kind support, such as facilities and equipment.

A second problem I see is that it is going to be very difficult for small, isolated communities to be able to continue providing community-based adult education. The Community Learning Partnerships Strategy will be very difficult to implement in communities that are too small to form any viable partnerships.

Small communities will be unable to meet the criteria for funding the Recognise Specific Groups of Learners Strategy, because most of these target groups are not living in their community—such as Winchelsea, where I work, which has no Koorie population. We have very few people with a disability (other than people with hearing aids or glasses. In my six years here, I have seen only two people in wheelchairs in the town); we have no people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; we are not in a position to retrain men aged over 45 because our scope of registration only includes FE courses; and we do not have the resources to offer what is needed for young people returning to education. Housing, health, personal counselling, and financial issues are all part of what is needed when educating disadvantaged young people. The only target group that we do have is the people over 55. This group is not concerned with vocational training—they want life-enriching classes.

'Strategy 3: Enhancing the Sustainability of ACE Provision', is all about improving, adopting, attracting, extending, promoting, and better understanding. But there is no money to enable these things to happen.

The simplifying reporting and accountability requirements aspect of this strategy sounds good. However, I can't see this happening when other government departments and even community partnerships are involved, but I could be wrong here.

Can you give examples of the potential for new community learning partnerships (Strategy 1)?

ML: I am at a loss to know how we will actually be able to form any community partnerships. This is my biggest worry, because if I can't form partnerships, I won't be able to access government funding: "These partnerships will contribute directly to community-strengthening activities…in fulfilment of the Government's goals for the innovation economy".

These goals all seem employment-oriented, regardless of whether there are in fact any jobs. The policy of lifelong learning has shifted the education and training responsibilities from the state to the individual. It's all about being work-ready in our changing world. It has nothing to do with being a well-rounded person. I know you know all this, but it makes me really angry. If an individual does not participate in further education and training it becomes their fault that they can't get work, not the state's fault that there actually isn't work for everyone. Sorry, I know this isn't completely relevant here, but it's as if the statement is saying that the community has to provide the education and training, not the government, especially if these 'partnerships' are to provide in-kind support.

JC: Community Learning Partnerships are the in thing, but do they really differ from a local network of ACE providers, networks of groups cooperating on provision of youth programs (LLENs), current ACE clusters, specific learning area networks (Adult VCE Educators Network), and generally being aware and supportive of the other community organisations in your local area. We all do it formally and informally now, so what is required for *new* community learning partnerships? Formal meetings? Documented contracts? MOUs?—often driven by accountability rather than community needs.

LS: We are currently trying to form learning partnerships with the local schools, the library and health and community services. The formalisation of these partnerships can be quite time consuming, however.

What kind of support would/could you envisage for organisations to improve their workforce (Strategy 3)?
JC: The funds quoted in Strategy 3 were announced in the last budget—prior to the launch of the statement and when spread over three years, and all providers across the state, amounts to very little! (Possibly five cents SCH extra per year and possibly more paperwork to get concessions). To enhance sustainability, we need to be able to pay for quality staff at somewhere near equivalent rates to TAFE or the schools sector. Right now that's a joke and would seem to be leading to tragedy. As in the primary system, the average age of staff (particularly teaching) is getting older and payment cannot hope to keep younger quality staff, much less attract them.

ML: The funding of the worker's position would be a good start to improving the workforce! I'm wondering what the 'innovative ways to contract staff' will be. Expect them to volunteer for the good of the community? Basically, we need more money to be able to do any of the things suggested in this Strategy.

How can ACE improve services for men over 45? How would/could your organisation tackle this (Strategy 2)?
ML: I would suggest that the best thing we could do for men over 45 who have been retrenched, or whatever, is to offer a series of classes on basic life skills, health and wellbeing (dealing with depression, addiction, mid-life crisis etc); alternative ways to make a living using the skills they possess; human behaviour and relationship skills; anything of interest that is not work-related. Then when these men have gained a bit of confidence and self-worth, they could be counselled about their realistic work pathways and opportunities. To expect these men to happily embrace education and training for a job that might be non-existent (and in the country, this would be a real possibility) is cruel.

We are running Introduction to Psychology and courses in Creative Writing this year. There are a few men in each class, which is a first. The basic gardening, alternative building and energy, cooking and alternative health classes (all funded under the Fixed Development funding) always get some men. ACE was set up to encourage learning, not force it on people. Perhaps this is where the smaller community providers could play a key role with this group. They would be unable to offer accredited training (unless in partnership with a large provider, and this is good—we do this) but they could be that first point of contact for this group to gain much-needed confidence.

JC: MDWC is already participating in a local government project to identify needs of older men. Employment of more men in the system may be a good strategy, but payment and often sessional work is a problem. Many, if not most community groups draw their majority of participants from women, and naturally provide an appropriate environment for that group, but maybe the men want something different—more masculine.

LS: There is a cultural change that needs to take place to entice older men into the community sector. Generally computer training and active learning approaches seem to appeal to this group more. Also, there should be more men employed within the community sector. However due to the poor working conditions there are few who can afford to work in the community on an ongoing basis. We are currently developing IT courses that would meet the needs of this target group

What would you want of a new 'performance measures framework' (Strategy 4)?
JC: It would be really good to be able to demonstrate how one of our low-level literacy students (single mother) is now able to competently bring up her young son, how some with low self-esteem and depression are now participating happily in the community, that isolated people have developed friendships/support networks from class associations, and so on. An enormous pathways-type exercise, with qualitative outcomes. What a job! We know we do it but how to measure it is another question—and it is yet again time and money.

ML: The whole performance measures thing worries me. It started with the AQTF requirements, which have proved *continued on page 40…*

Foreign Correspondence

Working overseas is an enrichening experience, but try teaching via translators in 95 per cent humidity against a background of noisy traffic while contending with a recalcitrant party official. So enjoy this account of Mary Collin's work in Vietnam. Or else.

Postcard from Vietnam: weather's fine, glad you are here

In February 2001 Australian Volunteers International (AVI) advertised for a special needs teacher for a project in Vietnam, as a volunteer training teachers in a special school in Ho Chi Minh City. As a part-time TAFE special education teacher at RMIT University delivering the Certificate IV in Community Services (disability work), this caught my eye. The Certificate IV in Community Services (disability work), is the base qualification for staff working in non-school sector disability programs in Victoria, including adult day services, residential settings, employment and recreation programs. An added link for us was the newly-opened RMIT University campus in Ho Chi Minh City.

The advertisement did not ask for a tertiary-level lecturer in special education, but wanted a classroom teacher with experience and skills. At the time I was also working as a classroom teacher in a special developmental school in Melbourne. I was lucky to have a manager who values staff initiative and has a background in community development. She gave me the go-ahead to find out if RMIT's Community Studies Programs area could make a contribution to the project with training materials.

The project was based at Binh Minh Special School for students with moderate to mild intellectual disability. The school is in Tan Binh district, one of the poorest districts of the city. Binh Minh school is supported by the Loreto Vietnam Australia Program (LVAP), which is coordinated by Trish Franklin, an Australian member of the Loreto order. Trish has lived in Vietnam since the mid-1990s working on a number of community development and support programs. AusAid had provided funding to build the school and now AVI and LVAP wanted to support the teachers by providing practical training and education.

One of the hazards lying in wait for any group of foreign professionals going into a country is that of being the 'foreign expert' who has all the answers. Our teaching team was comprised of Ken Hubbard, principal of Kalianna Special School in Bendigo, Georgina Mountford, coordinator of TAFE Disability and Aged Care Programs at RMIT, and myself, lead teacher in TAFE Disability Programs at RMIT. Each of us has worked with people with disabilities for many years, but we have a store of experience, accumulated knowledge and ideas to share, but none of us has all the answers. However, we lacked knowledge and understanding about the needs of teachers in special schools in Vietnam, and the cultural setting and beliefs about disability, education and schools. If we were to provide any useful support, we had to find out what teachers already knew and what else they wanted to know. We had to understand the context of disability services in Vietnam.

In Victoria we have a sophisticated multilevel service system. There is, and should be, discussion of its effectiveness but there are many supports available for people from infancy through to adulthood and, increasingly, in retirement. The disability system in Vietnam, a country still recovering from centuries of colonial rule and war, is in the beginning phase of development. Access to new ideas and medical knowledge and educational therapy is increasing as access to the outside world increases. But it seemed from my reading about teacher training, education and special education in Vietnam that teachers do not have easy access to information and learning as we do in Australia.

In October 2001 my manager and I undertook a series of visits to disability and community development projects in Ho Chi Minh City and Ha Noi. We visited the Centre for Research and Education for Disabled Children of Ho Chi Minh City, World Vision Community Rehabilitation Program, the newly formed Special Education Faculty of Hanoi University of Education and LVAP. The purpose of the trip was to research the education and training needs of local staff working with children with disabilities in Vietnam, and to explore the potential for development of a professional development program. We wanted to have an understanding of:
- current services for people with a disability in Vietnam
- cultural beliefs and understandings about disability
- support services for families of people with a disability
- the impact of the traditional carer's role on women
- current training for workers in the disability field
- how and if Australian training materials and methods could be customised to meet education and training needs in Vietnam.

Through our discussions, we found that:

- Disability staff wanted and needed education and training—many staff working in schools as teachers may have had little or teacher training, let alone special education training.
- Initiatives such as the Center for Research and Education in Ho Chi Minh City, and the Faculty of Special Education in Ha Noi, were developing educational programs for workers, often in partnership with western NGOs.
- Competency-based training materials used in TAFE-level training in Australia included foundation knowledge and skills training that could be useful in Vietnam.
- Families often had limited knowledge of what to do to help their children, as the medical and educational fields had no access to research and study.
- There was sometimes some shame felt by families—they were embarrassed by the disability in their family.
- Mothers and grandmothers were the primary carers and this often impacted on their opportunity to work, and contribute to the family's economic stability.
- The Centre for Research and Education and LVAP were already working together, and were keen to work with us as disability specialists from Australia to develop a professional development workshop for their staff.

As a result of this trip, RMIT Community Studies programs, the centre and LVAP agreed to work in partnership to develop and deliver a two-week intensive summer workshop in July 2002. We could do this with RMIT Melbourne supporting us to include this project in our programs, and through RMIT Vietnam providing us with local contacts, knowledge and practical support like photocopying training materials. We then had to find the money for this venture. That struggle continues, and will do so as long as our project does, I suspect! It has affected the timing of delivery of initial and follow-up training.

As in other areas of education, in working with children and adults with intellectual disabilities we must start from where the individual is at. I try to stand in the shoes of my students and clients, their families and communities, and see the world from their perspective. Our language and literacy-based society is very confusing if you can't read or count or understand verbal language. Access to knowledge and information is limited because you can't understand and meet the requirements. We try to rewrite the codes for people whose intellectual impairments mean that the codes might always be largely or utterly inaccessible. To do that, we have to find out what the person needs to know and do in their world, and how they learn that knowledge and those skills. We have to work out how to alter the learning environment to meet the individual's needs.

In developing and delivering workshops to working staff, the teacher also must know where the person is, how they learn, what they need to know in their world and their experience of education and expectations of training. In April 2002, we returned to Vietnam to conduct a learning needs analysis at the Binh Minh school. Over five days we spent time at the school, observing classes and talking formally and informally to the teachers and the principal. We wanted to gain their view on what was needed. We also worked with the AVI volunteer who had been at the school for some nine months, delivering some training and conducting assessments of the children. The purpose of the needs analysis was to:

- identify the current knowledge and skills of staff at the Tan Binh Special School.
- determine the immediate learning needs of the staff group as identified by the staff and the LVAP team.
- document the training needs as identified by the staff and the LVAP team.

Trish Franklin also organised visits to other special education and disability settings including local primary-level schools with base classrooms for children with a disability, orphanages for children with disabilities and non-government special schools. These were very valuable in adding to our sense of how services are provided.

The first challenge for us was our complete lack of language skills. In some ways this mirrors the daily experience of people with an intellectual disability. Functionally, we are disabled in our daily interactions in that society. We have to rely on an interpreter to give and receive information. This is a telling reminder of how reliant we are on our verbal language and literacy skills. We were fortunate in having the interpreting services of Ho Thy Me Le. Le is not only a fluent English speaker but she works with Trish Franklin and so has a great understanding of disability. She understood what we were trying to find out and could work through the questions with the teachers. Le also managed my changes of tack in mid-sentence. Whenever I had not thought through an answer or statement and needed to re work it she would stop me and say, "…start again, say the whole sentence" or, "what are you talking about, Mary?" or "No, we can't say that…". Accuracy, brevity and clarity take on new importance. I can be accurate, but I am rarely said to be brief.

Staff were interviewed in small groups. Ho Thy Me Le (LVAP) was the interpreter for all interviews. A member of the Tan Binh People's Committee Education Office attended part of the interview with the teachers from one group. She appeared to be against the idea of us asking questions, perhaps believing we were going to be critical and that this would reflect badly on Vietnam. The official spent some time in serious discussion with Le, who advocated for our cause. I retreated into discreet silence as there was clearly no contribution I could make to a delicate negotiation about what foreign teachers could ask about a Vietnamese school. That an education official can

determine whether outsiders can work in a school is appropriate, but it was the relationship between the school and the official that was interesting. There was a strong tension evident in the exchange.

The relationship between officialdom and schools and teachers in Melbourne has an entirely different quality. It is more inherently equal with schools and teachers being able to argue on an equal basis. The education department may make the decision, but the debate can be vigorous. It was a new experience for me and one which left me overwhelmed and tired. These cultural and political differences were a challenge.

Despite this, the teachers were willing to think about and discuss their students and their experiences in special education. They were willing to talk about their own strengths and deficits as teachers. Teachers often did not see the link between the disability and its impact on the learning of their students. They worried about the tendency of students to 'forget' what they had been taught. Teachers noted the difficulty that students have in learning material that relies on symbols, such as reading, writing and counting. They wanted to know why the children couldn't learn and remember.

In Vietnam, teaching methods involving blackboard and chalk, rote learning and written bookwork are used. Teachers teach in a formal, direct manner. The children appear to be used to this style of education, participate readily and generally appeared to be relaxed and happy in the classrooms. The teachers at the school are required to follow the national curriculum—children of the same age around the nation will be learning the same material at the same time. There was a focus on learning basic letter recognition and sounds, formal writing, number, colour and shape facts. The teachers valued accurate copying of pictures in terms of shape, colour and dimensions. The children were keen to achieve a 'good' result and were happy to receive praise from the teachers. Fun activities such as guessing games and songs were also used to develop and practice skills. In the senior classes independent living skills programs were observed. Students were helping in the school kitchen, doing laundry and using their numeracy skills along the way. The teacher used a 'task modelling' approach along with a game which motivated the students and ensured an enjoyable fun atmosphere.

Having gained an understanding of the current skills and needs of the teaching group from the school, we began to plan the workshops that would be delivered over ten days during the northern summer break. The teachers from Binh Minh school would be joined by 20 teachers from local regular schools. The workshops would be delivered to 45 participants overall. We also conducted two half-day workshops for families of children from Binh Minh School.

We had observed teachers working in formal, structured ways in their classrooms. It was likely that this mirrored their experiences of education. From our discussions with Trish Franklin and Huynh Thi Than Binh, the centre's coordinator, we learned that our workshop delivery would need to be formal and structured. This presented us with a big challenge. Australian schools and teachers are less formal, and this is more so in special education settings where children may not sit at desks and concentrate on group activities.

In TAFE settings our approach was a mix of theory and practical activities, with an emphasis on practical activities. The local education authorities were concerned as to how and what foreign groups were teaching. They wanted to sight and approve of any materials we used in advance, and sent a representative to the workshops. Our representative was the same official who had attended the interviews! Having decided we were okay she was an interested and supportive participant, although still inclined to use the power of her steely gaze to sort us all out. Morning tea and lunch breaks did run to time. which is rare in workplace training.

If the teachers are used to a structured formal learning environment, then we were obliged to teach in a complementary way. What was important was to transmit helpful and meaningful information to them. The workshops would focus on:

- foundation knowledge about disability; definitions and types of intellectual disability including autism, intellectual disability and cerebral palsy
- individual learning plans and developmental programming
- communication programs and behaviour management
- families with a child with a disability; integrated education programs.

These were the priorities identified by the teachers, the principal and LVAP and the centre. These priorities would be similar to those expressed by many disability teachers and staff in Victoria. Despite our greater opportunities for education and training, our greater access to information and research, we still struggle with the same challenges—what disability is and what it means for the individual, what to teach, how to teach it and how to teach children and adults with serious cognitive disabilities.

The preparation of our materials was a tribute to email—how did we manage before that lightning quick mode of communication? The training team in Melbourne prepared materials and emailed them to LVAP and the centre for comment and alteration. When all parties were happy, staff at the centre translated the materials into Vietnamese and these were collated into booklets for the participants. Overheads were prepared in Vietnamese.

It sounds quick and easy, but again relies on the capacity of our partners in Vietnam to work across two languages and cultures. It was vital that we have partners who would tell us if we were not clear, or taking a bigger step than the participants were ready for. Support from RMIT Vietnam in photocopying meant that this task was done quickly and at no cost to the project partners.

Reflecting on the delivery of the training in July 2003, I am reminded of some of the particular challenges that I haven't had to deal with in Australia:

- Environmental factors—heat and humidity, high levels of external noise from traffic and an iron foundry across the road—were significant, but everyone became used to these factors. We all seemed to adjust to the sounds of motorbike horns, overhead and pedestal fans, and iron workers going about their business. The room was set up with rows of tables, making group work awkward (they were very heavy tables) and participative activities impossible.
- The use of small group activities was new for many participants. It was a challenge to which they responded positively. Structured learning activities in small groups, including the introduction of activities like water or sand play, cooking and physical activities, would be fun and decrease the time spent sitting passively.
- Teachers were initially reluctant to ask questions, perhaps feeling a need to be 'right'. Taking written questions allowed them time to work on the question, sometimes with another participant. We responded later that day or the following day. The teachers were more likely to take a chance and ask verbal questions over each day.
- Working with interpreters presented particular challenges. Our interpreters were disability specialists and supported us through their intelligent and informed (and sensitive) translation of learning materials and questions/answers. It might be useful to make time to consult and practise with interpreters before the workshops. It is also necessary to have the interpreters available to move the overheads and write up examples on the whiteboard. The whiteboard developed into a good practice tool.
- It was intended that the participants would be given the booklets on Day 1 so that they could follow the overhead presentation and add their own notes. Our People's Committee Education official did not want that to occur. The participants consequently felt the need to copy down the overheads. This is hard work, as we would all know. She also insisted that there be formal written 'tests' at the end of each day. We decided to give her the tests to correct—so she received 45 test papers each day! We heard nothing of results, however.
- When using delivery techniques (such as group work) unfamiliar to participants, every step must be explained clearly. Role-plays were a useful and fun way of illustrating points and providing a lighter atmosphere. We trainers enjoyed swapping between the roles of the child and teacher. Children across the world find wonderfully similar ways to waylay the best-planned session and this is what we demonstrated! Trish brought cakes as an 'incentive' for participation on one morning. This fun touch was appreciated by all.
- Culture and custom are important when planning and implementing training. Revision of the workshop material, including examples from Vietnamese life, is necessary to better customise for the Vietnamese experience. Generally, the communication examples were culturally appropriate. We need to refine other examples, such as participation in community life.
- Parent sessions used one team member's experience as a mother of a child with a disability. The experience is one that is powerful and impossible to know from the outside. The parents appeared tired in the afternoon session—we presumed they had all been working in the morning. It was a difficult session for them and probably very painful for some.
- First and last days should always be planned with time for the ceremonies to be included. We, with local and central city officials, were introduced to the participants. On the last day we presented Certificates of Participation to each teacher. We, in turn, received gifts. This is important in the Vietnamese culture and 'framed' the workshops.

It is challenging and interesting to look back on this project, just as we are planning the next stage. There have been achievements and mistakes. One of our risk factors is the struggle for secure and ongoing funding to deliver training, but we will be returning to deliver follow-up training in January and July 2005. Our partners have asked us to tackle the topic of sex education for their students with intellectual disabilities. We must clarify what is required and acceptable within a different educational and social context, as this is always a sensitive subject.

The project began with a long-term passion for the work of teaching and working with people with a disability. Teachers in any setting or country intervene in people's lives profoundly, through the ways in which they work as much as through the material they teach. If we can help one teacher to understand why the little boy with autism repeats words, or why the adolescent with Down syndrome gets so angry, and provide the teacher with strategies as to how to respond, several lives may be made a little easier each day. The teacher will feel more in control of the classroom and the teaching. The student will be more understood and less likely to be frustrated and cross. Families may have a happier and more relaxed home life. I remember the 'breakthrough moments' in my learning and teaching—the 'maybe that is why that happens' moments. It can then lead to a different approach,

Policy Update

In this interesting and enlightening article, Katherine Percy considers the ways in which policy has affected the development of adult literacy practice in New Zealand. This paper was presented at the Quebec Literacy Centre's Summer Institute, Montreal, June 2004, as 'Adult basic education—the impact of policy on practice'.

The impact of policy on practice in New Zealand

My particular perspective on these issues comes from Workbase's focus on workplace literacy, and the development of the adult literacy sector in New Zealand. Adult literacy policy and practice expertise are particularly important to us in relation to its impact on the provision of literacy development support for employed people.

My perspective is also that of a chief executive (from neither a policy analyst nor practitioner background), although these are critical activities in our organisation. I have a change management and business perspective, as Workbase survives selling literacy programs to private companies, and selling sector development projects to a new government agency that isn't in control of the policy agenda.

With this in mind, I'll give you a bit of background to help identify what is distinctive about trying to address adult literacy in New Zealand, as compared to other nations and I'll discuss how these features of New Zealand have affected the development of adult literacy policy and the development of the adult literacy sector. What we have in common are the types of issues we are trying to address:

- How adult education and literacy policy relates to other social and economic policy development and implementation.
- How adult literacy is linked to other adult education initiatives.
- The tensions produced between accountability and funding mechanisms that drive behaviour in a different direction from intended policy outcomes.
- Responsiveness of policy to stakeholder needs and priorities—including that of learners.
- A lack of research and evidence about approaches and effectiveness—and identifying what should count as evidence for what purposes, what areas of research and evaluation are most important, and how we would collect, analyse and disseminate information.
- How to preserve the language and culture of first nation or indigenous people, and support English literacy development for *tangata whenua* (people of the land).

- How to address needs of multi-lingual, multi-ethnic learner groups.

There will be a lot of recognition of these issues, but there are things that distinguish New Zealand in dealing with these issues. We are a small country with a geographically dispersed population of four million. We have a three-yearly political cycle, a fickle electorate and two major political parties that struggle to differentiate their policies. New Zealand has an export-dependent economy, with increasingly non-English-speaking background immigration patterns. Like other OECD countries, we have an ageing workforce, 60 per cent of whom will still be working in 2020. New Zealand has the fourth lowest unemployment rate in the OECD (4.3 per cent), and skill shortages are increasingly being identified as holding back company growth. We participated in the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) in 1996 and 40 per cent of employed people scored below level 3, meaning that the vast majority of people with low literacy levels (as assessed by IALS) are in the workplace.

The IALS results were a surprise. New Zealand has an international reputation as a leader in school level literacy teaching—in relation to the work of Marie Clay and whole language approaches. However, our history in adult literacy is much more recent. Adult literacy has traditionally been undertaken by part-time volunteers in small community schemes. We have no universities or teacher training institutions that specialise in training or research in adult education, adult literacy or workplace literacy. There has been very little formal professional development for adult literacy practitioners.

The previous lack of funding for the adult literacy sector meant that there were minimal infrastructure, systems or processes in place in relation to quality assurance, measuring literacy skill gains and the professionalism of practitioners in the field. Often literacy outcomes were reported in relation to numbers participating, contact time and social justice outcomes, rather than by literacy gains achieved by learners.

The fact that New Zealand is small creates opportunities, which, on the one hand, are not available in other nations, but it also poses challenges as only a small group of people are available to undertake the development work required. The impacts of 'getting it right' are potentially profound, as are the impacts of not making real gains in adult literacy.

Socioeconomically, New Zealand's future will depend on our ability to address workforce literacy to develop a knowledge economy, to add value to our primary produce, and to market higher value exports globally. Alongside these no doubt familiar drivers sit the results of a recent New Zealand survey that confirmed a national identity that values egalitarianism, fairness and quality of life.

One of the effects of our small size is that it is impossible to support the number of experts on specialist topics that is possible in a larger nation. We tend to be a nation of generalists. This is true in academia as well as in government, and it is also true among adult education practitioners. Similarly, government officials' and analysts' portfolios tend to be quite broad and people tend to move around between government departments, making it difficult to institutionalise subject area knowledge. We also have relatively easy access to senior officials and politicians and usually know many of the participants involved in influencing, developing and implementing policy.

What's been done in adult literacy policy and practice?

In 2001, the government adopted an adult literacy strategy and a definition of literacy, and for the first time allocated funding to develop the adult literacy sector. These initiatives were well received among academics, practitioners and providers of adult education.

The broad goal of the Adult Literacy Strategy was:

> over the long term New Zealanders should enjoy a level of literacy which enables them to participate fully in all aspects of life, including work, family and the community and to have the opportunity to achieve literacy in English and Te Reo Maori.

Literacy was defined as, "…a complex web of reading, writing, speaking, listening, problem solving, creative thinking and numeracy skills."

The Adult Literacy Strategy emphasised the intention to develop qualifications for adult literacy practitioners, a quality standard for provider organisations, a process for tracking and documenting learning outcomes, and to increase learning opportunities. There was little government departmental resource dedicated to coordinating or leading

the work, but development projects involving working groups from the adult literacy sector began to work on a range of infrastructure projects.

The funding accountability framework remained largely unchanged, although the amount of money available to support participation in learning increased. The increases in funding went to pre-employment initiatives for young unemployed people, people who were seeking work but faced barriers, and establishing modern apprenticeships that were not associated with literacy support. The key elements remained:

- Tertiary funding to providers based on annual enrolments.
- Requirements for industry training funding to achieve unit standards on the National Qualification Framework—which have few, if any, explicit literacy or numeracy elements. These tend to be taught by content experts who rarely have any training for addressing adult literacy. Indeed, this area of training has become adept at getting around the literacy demands of coursework and workplace contexts through approaches like verbal assessment.
- Pre-employment training where the measured outcomes are employment or further training placement (although supporting literacy was also an expectation).
- Investment in 'modern apprenticeships' that assumed the people involved would not need literacy skill development.

In the absence of the completed infrastructure project work, there was little sustained professional development for adult literacy tutors, and few incentives for, or measurement of, literacy needs or gains for learners.

In 2003, the government released a new Tertiary Education Strategy and later a Statement of Tertiary Education Priorities. These identified 'foundation skills' as a priority area. No formal definition of foundation skills was released, and it is understood in a variety of ways: as an alternative to what was formerly known as literacy and the Adult Literacy Strategy; as covering the lowest two levels of the National Qualifications Framework; as industry-related education at these levels; and as the pre-employment programmes for youth and other unemployed people. The concern with defining foundation skills as everything delivered at low levels on the framework (without changing the content of the framework to make literacy explicit), is that it implies that there is widespread literacy provision occurring when this is not the case.

Alongside the new Tertiary Education Strategy, the tertiary education system was restructured and responsibility for operational activities shifted from the Ministry of

Education—which continues to develop strategic policy—to the newer Tertiary Education Commission, charged with operational policy. With the shift came the loss of institutional knowledge of the adult literacy and workplace literacy sector, and knowledge of the Adult Literacy Strategy and the work that lead up to it and followed it. Funding for professional development, resources for practitioners and research projects hit a pause.

At the same time, development work associated with the Adult Literacy Strategy has been protracted. Despite significant effort and some trialling of initiatives—in practitioner qualifications, monitoring learner achievement, and a quality standard for literacy providers—none of these have been finalised.

It is also apparent that while the Adult Literacy Strategy and its definition looked great when it came out (it represented a huge and welcome advance over the former absence of government acknowledgment of the issues), it was not accompanied by a policy or implementation plan, nor linked to the necessary dedicated and sustained governmental engagement, resourcing or evaluation that are necessary for effective implementation and change.

More recently, the Ministry of Education (in their strategic policy role) started looking at the DeSeCo work as the basis for the development of a framework for key competencies across tertiary education.

This work can be seen as a belated approach to addressing implementation of the Adult Literacy Strategy and/or the Foundation Skills Strategy. It is also possible to view it as conceptually consistent with the IALS framing of literacy as a continuum. In New Zealand IALS is seen as important for its contribution to moving away from the literate/illiterate dichotomy. The DeSeCo work provides a meaningful way to think about literacy in relation to a fast-changing knowledge society and lifelong learning.

However, as Ministry of Education officials consider the implications of the DeSeCo key competencies for teaching and assessment, they are starting to question some of the progress that has finally begun to emerge from the infrastructure development projects.

In the context of limited established expertise, and the magnitude and complexity of the issues, the resources invested in implementing the Adult Literacy Strategy have been inadequate. This resourcing was not associated with a strategic or operational policy, nor with an implementation plan, nor with targeted departmental responsibility to align funding and accountability with the strategy. These gaps, so obvious with the benefit of hindsight, were not initially obvious to the sector. The result has been that the policy, research and development work needed to support infrastructure development has been slow, erratic and insufficient. There is still little evidence to support particular approaches to design, delivery, or evaluation of adult literacy programmes.

Three years since the publication of the Adult Literacy Strategy, it is apparent that the funding and accountability mechanisms that have remained in place have had a greater impact on practice than the strategy itself. It has been the funding regime, rather than the literacy strategy, that has driven practice.

The impacts on practice

All parts of the adult literacy sector—funders, providers, practitioners and learners—are hampered by the slow development of an adult literacy infrastructure. The development of the infrastructure has been hampered by the lack of attention to implementation.

Although development work is underway, the qualification for practitioners, the quality standard for providers, and the achievement framework for learners have not been completed and released. Recently, the lack of an implementation plan and the policy hiatus have been manifest in declining funding for professional development. There has been little increase in provider capability or capacity in adult literacy.

A significant inhibitor of development has been the absence of a link between the Adult Literacy Strategy, which supported an integrated literacy approach, and the criteria used to fund and monitor programs. The funding and accountability mechanisms have emphasised increased participation and attainment of low-level qualifications. They have not emphasised literacy learning outcomes.

Funding and accountability requirements are the most direct mechanisms for driving adult literacy provider behaviour from the government's perspective, but they can also inhibit capability development. They are not sufficient in themselves to build desired capability or program quality but, to the extent that they work at cross-purposes with these goals, the goals will not be achieved.

In New Zealand, as the rhetoric associated with adult literacy has been used more widely, the numbers of providers claiming to address adult literacy has increased. This has occurred particularly in pre-employment training, where few practitioners have teaching qualifications or access to professional development. The government's tertiary education agency talked up the expectation of growth in literacy capability but has not funded or measured this.

Currently, the Ministry of Education is working to develop standards and progressions for literacy and numeracy. It is now recognising that definitions and measures of outcomes have to be a basis for accountability and funding. This work raises questions about many providers' capabilities to understand and implement meaningful measures of literacy achievement. Attention is slowly turning to looking at providers' and practitioners' perceptions of their own needs and priorities, and to the effectiveness of different approaches to professional development. No capability building will succeed until there is a degree of match between the pressures faced by those working in the adult literacy sector, and the objectives stated in government strategy.

Funding for providers of adult and workplace literacy support is still dependent on annual subsidy pools. This funding uncertainty is a significant disincentive to providers to invest in new types of program and expertise. In spite of the government's acknowledgement of the need for literacy development, the market demand for workplace literacy provision is still low. The costs of developing expertise and delivering literacy support are high. At this juncture, providers of adult and workplace education have little to gain financially from developing expertise in this area. Almost no providers are willing to invest in developing workplace literacy service provision because the returns to such investment are so uncertain.

The nearly completed quality standard for providers has raised concerns about whether the implementation will be associated with the provider development support and funding needed to support achievement of the standard. The implementation of a qualification for practitioners will require career paths and employment opportunities to motivate practitioners to become more qualified. Even with increased capability of providers, evidence of outcomes will be needed to encourage employers and learners to invest their time, energy and resources to become more involved in literacy programs.

Lessons

So despite a far-sighted strategy, a lot of optimism and hard work and, from the government's perspective, significant increases in funding for participation in tertiary education, we have not achieved great gains for adult literacy provision or learning. We do not expect that the results from New Zealand's participation in the next International Adult Literacy and Life Skills survey will be any better than in 1996.

To reiterate, what we have had are strategies rather than policies. With the benefit of hindsight we needed both strategic and operational policies. We needed an implementation plan that was responsive to the capacity and capability of the whole sector, and that engaged the sector in developing a robust infrastructure to achieve the outcomes of the strategy.

Building capacity and developing the sector cannot just be left to the market. Government has an important role in steering development and in funding evaluation and research that will inform effective practice and ensure outcomes. This is because there needs to be alignment between funding and accountability mechanisms and the approach to implementation. At present the sector cannot change without significant support. Despite New Zealand's small size, in the absence of a policy and implementation plan, it has proved remarkably difficult to get coordination among government agencies and between the government and the parts of the system that need to be involved.

We are now struggling to make the links between newly emerging policy and the infrastructure development initiated three years ago—to the frustration of the people who have been committing their time for those three years. Much of this effort will be wasted as it is overtaken by the thinking and frameworks that should have informed the strategy.

This may be the lesson New Zealand can offer—that it is crucial to take planning and research seriously in designing the implementation of a strategy. This needs to be informed by empirical knowledge of the needs and priorities of the sector. We will only achieve desired change if the goals are feasible to the providers and the tutors on the ground.

Katherine Percy has worked in the public and private sectors in New Zealand. She is chief executive of Workbase, the New Zealand Centre for Workforce Literacy Development, a not-for-profit organisation that works in partnership with business, the tertiary education sector and government to raise the literacy and numeracy skills of the New Zealand workforce.

Beside the Whiteboard

Jan Corben is an elder statesperson of the ACE sector, with an involvement that goes back 30 years. She spoke to Robin Kenrick about those early years of trial and triumph, and wondered whether she was retiring or just changing pace and direction.

Can you tell us a bit of your professional background?

I have worked as Funded Education Programs Manager at Mountain District Women's Cooperative (MDWC) since 1989, when an additional 0.5 salary was allocated to MDWC with a focus on literacy coordination. Prior to that I was a part-time community liaison officer at Box Hill TAFE from 1982 to 1988 and taught literacy one day a week at MDWC. During that time I was the community provider representative on the TAFE Board, the forerunner to the ACFE Board.

What other things have you been involved in over that time?

Prior to teaching literacy, I was involved with the establishment of MDWC in 1974 and the introduction of the first classes in 1975. The higher school certificate was a particular interest from 1976, but so many of those who came to us didn't have the skills to tackle a Year 12 level study, so we needed to offer more basic education.

Why retire?

I want to retire, or perhaps change direction, while I'm still pretty much with it, and in good health. I plan to mind grandchildren and take over some parental support from my sister. I want to be involved with some of the economically needy people in the community through my local church, and I would like to restore more order to my home—something neglected for the past 20 years.

How did you get involved with basic education?

I started teaching numeracy in 1979, when MDWC was funded to provide a course aimed at helping parents understand their children's maths. The secondary teacher involved planned to place her emphasis on low- to middle-level secondary maths. To our amazement a large number enrolled, and about one-third of them couldn't manage basic mathematical processes. The teacher asked to split the class and approached me, a primary teacher and former infant school maths coordinator, to take on the lower group. One classic memory I have is of a NESB learner in that group who insisted that she always arrived at a different answer for the subtraction exercises I was trying to teach because she had learnt a different method. I'm not sure I ever convinced her that the answer must be the same no matter what the method. Even the answer given by a very primitive calculator was definitely Australian/English, not the same as from her ethnic background.

In the early 1980s MDWC started literacy classes in the evening, and when there were many requests for daytime classes I was asked to take them. MDWC was already conducting English for Pleasure (around CGEA Certificate II) for those needing some assistance before attempting HSC. My group was to be at a lower level than that (around CGEA Certificate I and Introductory). I continued regularly teaching literacy until about four years ago, and now only do replacements when the regular teachers aren't available.

Tell us a little about Mountain District Women's Cooperative

MDWC operates an adult learning centre in Ferntree Gully, an outer eastern suburb of Melbourne. The area has one of the lowest percentages of post-school qualified adults in the Melbourne area and particularly in the eastern suburbs. School retention rates were poor and very few had completed their secondary education. This is definitely an educationally disadvantaged area. In the 1970s and early 1980s, MDWC wanted to assist people, women in particular, to improve their educational standards and enable them to complete secondary education for entry to further or higher education courses. This now extends across the total adult population, and both men and younger people attend our classes. We also offer entry-level VET courses, working with people who have few formally recognised skills but wish to enter the workforce.

What are the changes you've witnessed over the years?

Literacy teaching in the early 1980s for me was an intuitive process, building and drawing on my training and experience in the primary system. I'd also had practical experience in the folk high school system in Sweden in 1969–70.

Appropriate material was almost always 'real world' stuff because very little else appropriate was available. Of course there was no curriculum document for guidance and no awards for achievement—except the writing folio of our students' efforts so many of us produced. Literacy conferences were important for ideas and mutual support.

The process leading up to the introduction of the CGEA was a very valuable time, where philosophy and practice came to the fore and the International Year of Literacy put

us on the map. From most of us being voluntary tutors, we achieved something like fair pay in the early 1990s. I'm disappointed the rate of pay, in Victoria a least, has remained almost static in the ACE sector since then.

I'm sure teaching the CGEA has improved the quality of literacy teaching, although I sometimes feel record keeping and moderation processes detract from the students' needs.

Why did you stay in ACE?

It certainly hasn't been for the money! So it must be job satisfaction. I didn't want to return to the primary school system. I'd done heaps of emergency teaching between 1973 and 1982 so I had kept in touch. After working in a voluntary capacity organising adult education classes at MDWC and ANLC (no H in the name at that time) developing a structure, policy and philosophical statements, I couldn't believe Box Hill TAFE was prepared to pay me for similar work. The sector gained huge recognition within the framework of a review of the TAFE system following the election of a state Labor government. This resulted in the restructure of the TAFE Board to include ACE, and worthwhile funding to all groups participating in adult education at the time. I felt I was valued for my efforts and had something to contribute.

The people involved in the ACE sector have generally been good to work with, and I have gained wonderful satisfaction from seeing so many people developing educationally and socially, often being able to change their lives. The buzz I've got from seeing our VCE students listed in the newspaper as high achievers and last year one getting 50 is beyond comprehension.

What have been the challenges over this time?

Funding has always been a challenge and that isn't changing. Resources, facilities, finding and keeping good teachers, recognition of what we do and those we try to help, struggling with competing goals and perspectives on committees (MDWC included). These are enduring challenges that test all ACE workers.

What are your hopes for the ACE sector?

I hope the ACE sector is able to cope with the increasing accountability and maintain its philosophical under-

pinnings. I hope more appropriate funding is received to be able to pay teachers in line with the TAFE system—I see that as crucial in encouraging younger people to join or remain in the system. Getting some of the 30- to 40-year-olds to commit themselves to ACE is vital—so many of us are getting older, especially in the literacy area, and I'm not convinced there are enough really good people to fill the gaps that will be left.

What advice can you share with new ACE teachers and trainers?

People need to be in the sector for the satisfaction of providing the opportunities for others to achieve great and small things. You won't get far if you're out to advance yourself or climb the career ladder, you'll have to move out.

Be sure you collect satisfactory qualifications and build on them. Experience is useful, but you need to know you can cut it with the tall poppies if and when they parade their academic achievements. I've often felt that we literacy teachers and coordinators are not seen as able to make it in the big, wide world, and I'm proud to declare my choice to stay in the sector for its purpose and philosophy, and not because I didn't have the academic skills to work elsewhere.

Listen at every opportunity, consider carefully all you hear and see, and choose your own path wisely. Know why you believe in what and how you do something, and be prepared to stick to your principles.

Know what you want to achieve, and think through ways to use the 'givens' to meet these goals. Don't sell out yourself or your organisation's principles and goals for funding for something outside these principles and goals.

It's been a really wonderful experience, and I feel privileged to have been part of the development of the sector, but I'm ready for a change of focus.

Congratulations Jan, on your wonderful contribution to ACE. Thank you for your time, and good luck with your future endeavours!

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difficult for small providers. Trying to upgrade the sector, (which is what I think it is all about) putting it on a par with TAFE, which is trying to compete with the university sector, is all vocationally oriented, certification driven. Learning is no longer for pleasure or an individual quest for knowledge. The outcomes for Strategy 4 are 'in line with government priorities' or 'match the requirements of a range of government funding bodies'. The ACFE Board will implement a performance measures framework basically to see if the government's money is being used as it wants it to be. If the community's needs are different from the government's stated targets, who has the last say on community building? I don't think it will be the community.

Any final comments?

LS: $1.2 million over the next three years, divided between 480 community providers means about $1000 in additional funding per year. Strategy 3 (sustainability) does not adequately address the needs of the sector.

ML: Thank you for asking me to participate. You know I did like the concluding statements—the talk of building strong communities; the role of community-based adult education in being accessible to all individuals; community-based adult education continuing to provide learning opportunities that allow people to connect and reconnect with learning at all stages of their lives. It all sounds great — but something has gone wrong between the foreword and the conclusion of the statement that in effect makes the statements nothing but hollow rhetoric. I am passionate about ACE and how important it is in small communities in particular. My belief is that the government actually wants less and bigger providers, totally subverting the original purpose of ACE.

JC: I feel the sector came a long way, both in status and funding in the 1980s, but I've not seen real progress in the last ten to 15 years (except in quality standards). My gut reaction to the Ministerial Statement was that it hasn't moved ACE forward and as a future direction, why bother? I'm glad I was part of the exciting 1970s and 1980s, and I'm not sorry to take a step away. It's no longer exciting, just survival and making the best of what we are given. Knowing and playing the game is so important but the constant changes to the rules gets wearing! Working out how to manipulate it to suit your purposes is essential—but why does it need to be this way?

Megan Langdon is the adult education programmer at Winchelsea Community House. Liz Suda is manager of the Flemington reading and writing program. Jan Corben is retiring from her position as education programs manager at Mountain District Women's Cooperative (read more on Jan in Beside the Whiteboard).

a new idea or simply a better relationship between the student and the teacher.

We are building a collaborative partnership between colleagues who understand each others' experiences, despite cultural and physical distance. With the difficulties of long distance communication and planning, we have sometimes had misunderstandings and disagreements, but the quality of the relationships that have developed is the greatest achievement, because those relationships allow us to continue our work.

Mary Collins teaches pre and in-service TAFE courses in disability work at RMIT University. She has worked in the disability field since starting as a volunteer in 1978.