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Editorial

Welcome to another year of provocative and engaging reading in *Fine Print*. This edition is a blend of thought-provoking adult literacy research and practice. We kick off with a dialogue between colleagues Peter Waterhouse and Crina Virgona. Their conversation explores issues emerging from their research, Contradicting the Stereotype: Case Studies of Success Despite Literacy Difficulties. Their work with ten Australians illuminates a reality of what it is to be 'positively deviant'—to live a successful life *despite* literacy difficulties. Waterhouse and Virgona discuss the value of this kind of research for adult educators.

Margaret Palmer from the Northern Territory tells of the Policy in Practice research she undertook as part of her doctoral thesis on the relationships between policy, context and professional practice. Margaret examines the ways in which NT practitioners' experiences relate both to their local context and to the wider national ALBE policy environments. The value and benefits of non-accredited courses—which provide learners with opportunities to build confidence, resilience and self-worth—has long been known to ACFE providers. Karen Dymke reports on the A-Frame project and resource. The A-Frame assists teachers and course managers in developing quality learner-centred, non-accredited courses to attract people to learning programs and ongoing learning pathways.

Anne Walstab reports on an ACFE-funded longitudinal study of ACE learners from Language other than English (LOTE) background. The research highlights the merits to LOTE members of the community of ACE learning. LOTE learners enrol in ACE hoping that they will be more prepared for work and further study, and will make connections with other people and their community. The research shows that ACE is meeting these LOTE learner needs.

In Practical Matters, Robyn Hodge tries to pin down some notions about the nature of learning and the cognitive processes that are involved. She describes it as a mysterious 'other world' landscape that teachers and learners must map and journey together. This edition's Open Forum is a triple-header. We hear two perspectives on the re-accreditation of the Certificate IV in Further Education and the Diploma of Further Education. Cate Thompson of CAE was part of the review and reaccreditation project team and gives an outline of the project and its outcomes. Meg Curlewis from Moreland Adult Education has been involved in the delivery of the two courses since the initial pilot project, and gives a management and delivery perspective on the expired and the new courses. Both Cate and Meg give a thumbs-up to the newly accredited qualifications and describe how these courses can help ACE learners achieve further education pathway goals. In the third Open Forum piece, Lynne Matheson and Robyn Hodge give an update on a VALBEC strategic planning day held in January this year. VALBEC is committed to its role as a dynamic and responsive advocate for adult literacy practice and practitioners, and the planning day was an opportunity for the VALBEC executive to discuss how best its goals can be achieved.

Many readers, particularly those delivering federally-funded programs such as WELL and/or LLNP will be interested to read Policy Update. A consortium of practitioner researchers, led by Linda Wyse, is working through a review of the National Reporting System. In this update, Linda and her colleagues describe the first stage of the review process and how this has been used to develop a working draft of a revised NRS which will now undergo further trialing and consultation. The article concludes with contact details for those who want to know more or take part in the next phase of consultations.

Foreign Correspondent takes a slightly different tack from recent 'Aussies abroad' reports of adult education programs. Michael Coghlan tells us about the Webheads—an online community of language teachers and learners. Webheads explore the use of internet-based technologies for teaching and learning, and promote international friendship. This community of practice welcomes the interested and the curious to visit and contribute to this global fellowship.

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.

Contradicting stereotypes: reflecting on case studies of success

by Peter Waterhouse and Crina Virgona

Middle class literacies taught for middle class aspirations can create a narrow definition of what constitutes successful reading and writing. If this definition is not satisfied, the learners—not the definition—are often found to be unsatisfactory. This study introduces ten people who defy any rigid definition of 'correct' reading and writing, and shows how broader interpretations of literacy can open multiple pathways to success.

In this paper the authors reflect conversationally on research conducted with ten individuals—all from native English-speaking backgrounds—who were seen to be living successful lives despite persistent difficulties with literacy. The argument is not that such individuals are typical; indeed, one characterisation is that they are 'positively deviant' (Sternin 1999). However, it is suggested that their lives provide testimony and critical insights of value to adult educators interested in the process of empowerment and building autonomy with adult learners.

Peter: This research[1] was funded through the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), under the Adult Literacy Research Program. When we drafted the original proposal to NCVER we noted the orientation of much of the contemporary academic and policy discourse about adult literacy. The discourse highlights the plight of those with limited literacy in terms of the limitations for personal growth and career satisfaction, the resource loss and the cost to the community and the economy. Compounding these concerns are the vulnerabilities poor literacy creates in reference to safety and production quality. With the increased textualisation of the workplace the argument is made that those with limited literacy have a bleak future (Watson et al. 2001). There is quite clearly a framing of the issues within what might be termed a 'deficit model'.

And yet there are examples of people with limited literacy who demonstrate considerable success in sustaining employment, in changing jobs, in managing businesses, particularly small businesses, and in contributing to the community in a variety of ways. When I reflect on my experiences teaching adult literacy classes I can recall individuals who did not fit the stereotype of the dependent adult miserably eking out an existence without literacy.

Crina: That's right, I am sure we have all met them in our literacy teaching ventures. I have worked with many literacy learners who have set up and conducted their own

businesses and been hugely successful *and* wealthy. There is plenty of folk lore about rich and famous 'dyslexics'. There is the legendary Jamie Oliver, Richard Branson and Tom Cruise and rumour has it that dyslexics are disproportionately represented among the world's richest people. We did not manage to substantiate that during our research but it would not be surprising. There was nobody famous in my classes but there were motor mechanics, plasterers, carpet layers and shop keepers well able to maintain the pace of the commercial world.

Some of them were very entrepreneurial and all of them were sufficiently resilient to withstand change and to lead robust, active lives. But virtually all of them also hauled behind them a huge, dark shadow of shame associated with their poor literacy. They attended literacy classes to dispense with this shadow. Some were successful but others left the program not having made the difference they were seeking in their literacy. For some this was their third, fourth and fifth attempt to address the problem. They reminded me of Weight Watchers clients having yet another go at a new diet. You had to wonder whether this was the best, or the only, pathway for these people. Griffin et al. (1997) report that 30 per cent of their original sample was still enrolled in literacy classes five years after the longitudinal study began. Even after years of training it seems that relatively few arrive at a point where they declare themselves untroubled by their level of literacy.

Peter: So this study set out to identify the 'positively deviant' (Sternin 1999) strategies and behaviour of successful individuals; not necessarily typical adult literacy learners, but a significant minority. We wanted to profile individuals who still have literacy difficulties but have nonetheless achieved a measure of success. We wanted to investigate the balance of skills referred to by other researchers (e.g. Falk & Millar 2001) who have concluded that literacy is important but not enough for success in VET and work. Our review of the literature suggested that this approach had not been much explored and, in

the light of the Blue Sky Project (ANTA 2002), we thought it might generate fresh thinking in adult literacy policy and practice. So the project set out to expose the factors, strategies and experiences that have assisted those with literacy difficulties to be relatively successful in the work environment. We also wanted to ascertain whether these factors, strategies and experiences transpose to the current work environment.

Crina: That's right. I thought these people had a great deal to teach us. Their voices are not heard in literacy forums, particularly when they talk about getting on in life without literacy. I was keen to affirm their value within the community and the economy and to observe the roles they played in lifelong learning. I believe we need positive role models for those with limited literacy. We have always been so quick to find solutions; you know: "We can solve your problem. Here is the class and here is the book". I wanted to know if there were other ways of hearing these learners or other identities that they might harbour. I was hoping that this project would broaden the debate around adult literacy.

he was totally untrained, at least formally, but he was an outstanding learner
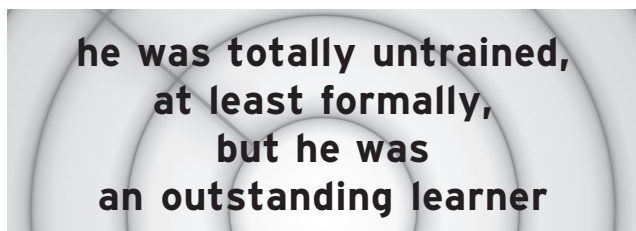
Peter: So Crina, you did all the interviews for these ten case studies. What did those interviews reveal to you about the roles these people were taking on? And in what sense are we arguing that they are successful?

Crina: They were amazing, as you know. Corrie was brilliant. He was totally untrained, at least formally, but he was an outstanding learner who worked virtually as a civil engineer. He designed and built bridges, equipment and machinery using his powers of observation, his lively intuitive intelligence and his fantastic mathematical ability. One thing that surprises most people is that of the ten participants, three graduated from universities. Helen is still a student working through her second degree. She is supported by the disability unit at her university who say she is an outstanding student, always organised and focused. John and Matthew got through with just unstinting determination and the support of some of their friends. I loved the bit where John went into battle with the dean of his outdoor education program and demanded the right to an education. Mick also had a bevy of vocational education certificates. However most of them have had a terrible battle in sustaining their belief in

themselves when all the world seemed to tell them they were frauds, but that builds resilience which was an essential ingredient for all of them. Ray is an outstanding example of resilience. He has had a rotten time in life but he picked himself up each time he fell over and started again. All of them are fighters and hard-workers and it has been that that has made them successful. Hiding and appearing invisible has also been an important survival strategy. Melissa and James were particularly good at it. As a strategy it has worked to keep them in employment and to disguise their literacy levels.

Peter: OK, so in various ways, the individuals whose stories are told in this project are living successful lives. However, on the whole their success has *not* been due to mastery over the written word. It's not as if they are really on top of literacy now is it? Perseverance, networks and technologies emerged as key strategies, and resilience is identified as a significant attribute for success. The resilience of some of these individuals seems extraordinary. What do you put that down to?

Crina: They all seem to have a really strong core which tells them they are worthwhile and intelligent and they can overcome whatever life throws up at them. They seem to have built up a level of defiance against the world that is telling them they are not quite right. For most, it is an internal dialogue of rebuilding their shattered confidence but Helen was quite direct about it. She has arrived at a point where she says:

> I am not ashamed of who I am now and if they ask me to do something I can't do, I am prepared to say: "Well I can't do that and this is why I can't do that, and if you don't like that, that is your problem not my problem any more"

Family and friendship networks have been really important—people who express faith in them when their own was flagging. Margaret was the only one who celebrated the journey and each achievement, but she always identified herself as disabled so she did not set herself huge expectations. Others seemed to be driven by enormous expectations they set themselves, often put in place by a rigorous father. Corrie and Tim were in this situation. Ray was also someone who could not tolerate failure, but his strength was in defiance of an alcoholic father.

Peter: The literature on resilience also signals the importance of those networks, family, community and so on. It is interesting that in education so often we seem to adopt a very individualistic approach. Competence and capability is so often framed in individual terms. However, we have often seen in our own adult education practice

how competence and capability can be social and collective qualities (Virgona, Sefton & Waterhouse 1998). Perkins (1993) also contrasts a 'person-solo' perspective with the potential of a more comprehensive 'person-plus' analysis:

> Most views of thinking and learning lean toward the person-solo, neglecting the ways in which people employ the surround (including other people) to support, to share, and undertake outright aspects of cognitive processing. In contrast, one can take a person-plus perspective on thinking and learning, treating the person-plus surround as one system, counting as part of the thinking what gets done or partly done in the surround, counting as learning traces left in the surround (assuming it stays accessible) as well as the person, and in general picking the lock of a person-solo view of thinking and learning. (Perkins, 1997, p.104)

Work by Lave and Wenger (1996) also highlights the significance of the 'community of practice' in ways that cause us to rethink what it means to learn and function effectively within particular settings. Kilpatrick's work (2003) also highlights the importance of social capital and the benefits of collaborative approaches to the planning, development and delivery of training, particularly within rural communities. The research stresses the importance of networks, shared values and trust 'in generating superior outcomes for individuals and communities'. This study had its primary focus upon the individuals who chose to participate and tell their stories. However in recognising that individuals do not operate in isolation, we also considered the significance of the social, relational and community context and the part it plays in fostering success.

Crina: Social networks and social structures are definitely part of the success story. However in several cases we also noted the innovative use of technologies. Both Helen and Margaret used voice recognition software. As long as they could put text on the computer, it could be vocalised. Likewise they could write by speaking to the computer. Margaret worked in a caring role at an institution for disabled adults. Her supervisor, Joni, was a very enlightened manager who valued diversity and the skills that Margaret brought to the centre. Joni bought the software for Margaret. There were other technological aids that Margaret knew of. One was a talking pen. When you passed it over a word, it vocalised it. But this device was expensive.

Margaret learned a lot about the available technologies from a dedicated chat room established especially for those with limited literacy. Computers open up a range of communication means beyond the written word and people with limited literacy often find it useful for its graphic and auditory information. It seems to me that voice-activated technologies could really assist some literacy learners, but most teachers do not know much about them, myself included before I started this project. If we could help learners work with these technologies we would do a great service for them.

they 'wrote' using audio tape and/or digital technologies
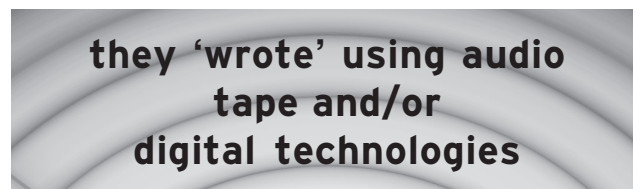
Peter: One of the interesting things about these individuals and their stories is that despite their resistance to, and avoidance of, literacy all of these individuals were actually using literacy at least to some extent. When we talk, in the Freirean (1983, p.10) sense, of 'reading the world' as a precursor to reading the word, we suggest reading (and literacy) as a broadly defined process of interpretation and meaning-making. All of the participants in this study were 'reading' in this sense—indeed in this sense, many demonstrated impressive acuity in their readings of the world. Most participants also made at least occasional use of print. Some were also capable writers—although they rarely, if ever, picked up a pen or pencil. They 'wrote' using audio tape and/or digital technologies, including software programs that converted voice into text or they created and negotiated texts with a scribe.

The concept of multiliteracies (New London Group 1996, Lonsdale & McCurry, 2004) opens up, multiplies and legitimates diverse understandings of literacy. Under a framework of multiple literacies we could make an argument that these individuals are literate after all. That is, it might be argued that they are adopting and developing their own personal literacies, family literacies, workplace or micro-literacies, despite their rejections of 'literacy' per se.

Crina: That's true enough, but if we consider literacy in conventional terms as most people understand it, as a process of creating meaning through the construction and interpretation of texts, then the participants in this study were deliberately avoiding and often consciously rejecting literacy. Most of the participants resolved that they would never learn literacy and they could get by without it. They recognised the words they needed to know for work. They learned how to fill out simple workplace forms and records, and they had found a strategy to deal with the predictable literacy tasks that presented themselves throughout the day.

Peter: That's right, and that poses for us a kind of contradiction. How do we name the 'literacy' of individuals who are consciously rejecting, yet simultaneously utilising literacy skills? This conundrum is what leads us to the concept of 'para-literacy'—perhaps it is an idea worth playing with. When we think of a 'para-professional' worker we think of someone doing work which is not dissimilar to that of a professional, but usually without the same degree of authority and independence; a paramedic compared to a medical doctor, for instance. Other examples might be those of a law clerk working in the office of a solicitor, or a draughtsperson working for an architect. In such scenarios the para-professional often lacks the autonomy of the professional although they may use many of the tools, understandings and strategies of the professional.
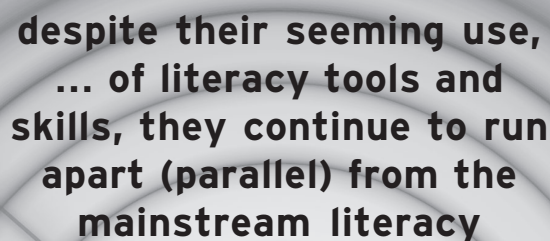
Crina: But this does not mean to imply that the para-professional is entirely dependent. They all learned to meet the everyday literacy demands in the workplace with their understanding of key words and phrases. Some less regular tasks they took home to partners, parents or friends but no one fulfilled the prognosis that Melissa was fed when her literacy problems were diagnosed. She was told that she would never be able to get a job and in fact she would not even be able to catch public transport because she would not be able to read the destination on the front of the bus.

Peter: On the contrary, para-professionals often operate quite independently in their own fields of practice and (ironically) it may be that some professionals would struggle to cope with the demands of the para-professional's work life. In some circumstances para-professionals may choose to become professionals, but their legitimate identity and continuing practice is not dependent upon such a shift.

Crina: In this sense we might think of the individuals participating in our study, those contradicting the stereotype, as para-literate rather than illiterate. For instance, Corrie could make his way through a tender document recognising key words and completing complex mathematical calculations. James and Melissa could complete the warehouse paperwork responding to key words they kept on lists in their pockets. Margaret could complete care plan notes if given time to take work home.

However, despite their seeming use, at least to some extent, of literacy tools and skills, they continue to run apart (parallel) from the mainstream literacy. Their para-literacy skills, like those of para-professionals, can become extremely sophisticated (even challenging those of 'full' professionals). However such skills do not take them to quite the same place on the literacy map as those of other literacies. It may also be that their continuing use of their para-literacy skills serves to maintain the distance; they serve as a protective mechanism, just as a parapet does atop a wall.

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Peter: OK, but we also noted that often those survival strategies, the para-literacies, were not endorsed or legitimated by the educational authorities that these individuals came into contact with. It seems that the para-literacy skills are conceived not only as deficient, but as illegitimate or inappropriate. We noted that the spectre of cheating still haunts many adult education contexts for teachers and learners alike. Perhaps the strategies these people are using are seen as illegitimate because they do not correspond precisely with those of the conventionally, or 'fully' literate (whatever that might be in these multiliteracy days). So we found ourselves thinking that, as adult educators we might more usefully think of these para-literacy skills as valuable and important; perhaps even as essential in maintaining a positive sense of self and capability. If such skills were better recognised, better understood and appreciated they might be reinforced, developed and legitimated in ways to support learner autonomy, personal growth and employment pathways. So what then are the implications of this study for adult literacy teaching?

Crina: One thing that stood out very clearly was that 'good enough literacy' is different for every individual and probably every environment. For some of our participants 'good enough literacy' was about getting by using whatever you had to jump the literacy hurdle. For others, it was a matter of ducking and weaving to avoid the requirement. However Matthew, James, John and Tim had set the bar much higher. Their goal, to become fully and independently literate, was driving them on. Teachers in schools have regulated and universalised goals that they need to achieve. All our participants suffered the painful distress of failure at school; some were quite crippled by it. Good enough at school was a significant distance away from everyday adult literacy competence for the average worker.

Employability is another measure. Our group had to establish their value as workers despite their literacy level. Their talking

skills and ability to read workplace requirements was what kept them employed. I wonder whether literacy teachers might do more with these employability skills in literacy classes because they go far beyond traditional literacy. The flip side of the deficit perspective probably does not get enough attention. According to John, dyslexics are particularly creative and ingenious. Where most people's thinking is linear, dyslexics think in a multi-dimensional way and hence produce unusual solutions to problems. John sites the winged keel on Australia II, the yacht that won the America's Cup in 1983 as an example. John believes that teachers do not explore the multiple intelligences that Gardner (1985 2003) puts forward. He is convinced there are solutions here for those who fail the traditional teaching methodologies. Would it be too gross a generalisation to say that most literacy teaching is bookish and academic? Traditional approaches in adult literacy classrooms may compound a repeated sense of failure already internalised from school.

One of the significant findings of this study is its reinforcement of the observation that schools and adult education providers tend to teach particular literacy/ies. They are often middle class literacies for middle class aspirations. Teachers' expectations of learners may be shaped within relatively narrow scholastic interpretations of what counts as successful reading and writing. When these expectations are not met, for whatever reasons, it is often the learners (rather than the expectations) that are deemed to have failed. The lives of the individuals represented in this study show that broader interpretations and multiple pathways to success are possible.

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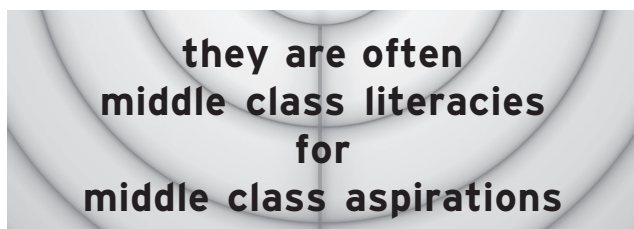
Peter: The study also suggests the value of rethinking assumptions about what is essential or necessary, and asking whether in some circumstances there might be equally legitimate but quite different ways to move forward.

Crina: Yes I think we have just scraped the surface here. I think there is a lot more work to be done in expanding the literacy discourse to embrace other ways of looking at literacy, and of expanding the support network to invite in the full range of people with literacy needs.

Dr. Peter Waterhouse is managing director of Workplace Learning Initiatives, a company facilitating change in industry through teaching, consultancy and research. In recent years his research, with colleagues, has investigated adult and workplace literacies, generic/employability skills and adult community education pedagogies.

Dr. Crina Virgona has worked in vocational education as a practitioner and researcher for some 20 years. She has worked in a range of manufacturing and service industry projects directed towards workplace change and enrichment. She is currently working with a team of educators and researchers at Workplace Learning Initiatives.

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Policy in practice: practitioner perspectives on ALBE in the Top End

by Margaret Palmer

The Ramsay report (2003) said: 'In remote areas, access to secondary education is poor or non-existent, and educational outcomes are negligible'. Such inequities make adult education—particularly in the form of ALBE—extremely important.
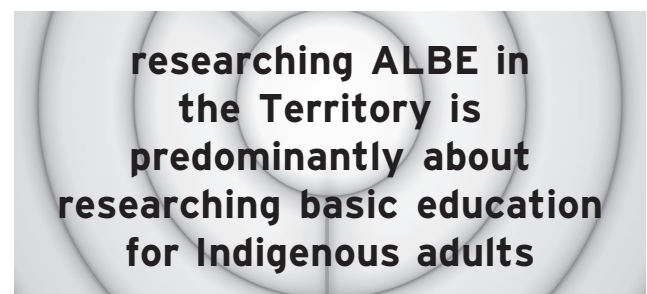
Having worked in teacher education (secondary, adult and vocational) in the Northern Territory (NT) since 1989, I became aware that although the experience and effects of policy changes in other ALBE contexts have been studied previously,[1] there was a lack of NT-specific ALBE policy studies. This awareness helped shape the qualitative research that I undertook for doctoral studies in which I interviewed eight experienced ALBE practitioners working in the Top End[2]. My research focused on relationships between policy, context and professional practice. I was aiming to understand the 'lived' professional experiences of selected ALBE practitioners and managers from their perspective. I wanted to examine the ways in which their experiences relate both to the circumstances of their local context and to the wider national ALBE policy environment.

The theoretical concept that I found best describes this nexus of situated understandings and practice is 'policy-in-practice'—a term based on concepts employed in the work of Ball and Crump [3]. Unlike the situations of specific policy action and implementation in which these terms are usually applied, my research extends the meaning of policy-in-practice to encapsulate the idea of professional stance towards a number of policy issues affecting ALBE. The patent inequities between different groups in the Territory in their access to educational opportunities impelled me towards a critical theory perspective in order to understand how these inequities have been constructed[4] as a necessary step towards creating a more just system. These inequities are recognised in the research as continuing the effects of historical injustices now embedded in apparently neutral structures.

Education in the Northern Territory

ALBE in the Territory is not by definition only about the basic education of Indigenous adults. However the historical circumstances that have led to unequal exercises of power and opportunity mean that in reality, researching ALBE in the Territory is predominantly about researching basic education for Indigenous adults.
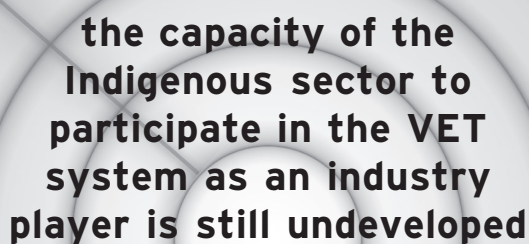
The chief feature of the NT context for this study is the far higher proportion of Indigenous people in the population than in Australia's other states and territory. The population of the NT is estimated at 200,000, representing about one per cent of Australia's total[5]. This is the percentage often used in the allocation of resources, a logical and apparently equitable distribution but one that takes no account of the costs of implementing services. Indigenous people make up 29 per cent of the NT population, while nationally the figure is 2 per cent. The NT's age profile is lower than that of the other states and territories. Within that general NT profile, the age profile of the Indigenous population is lower still, and is characterised by significantly lower life expectancy and higher birth rate. Indigenous children make up 39 per cent of the school age population in the whole NT and closer to 50 per cent in Central Australia. Historical and continuing political and socio-cultural factors underpin an environment where, in the education sphere, Indigenous students' lack of achievement and inadequate participation has come to be accepted. Whatever the policy direction, the implementation of educational programs is profoundly affected by the fact that in most instances, teachers, curriculum developers and administrators belong to the dominant social and language group.

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Understanding the situation in school education in the Territory is one of the best ways of grasping the importance of ALBE there. The greatest difference in education from the other states and territories is in secondary education: a high school system leading to

further education possibilities including higher education opportunities. Secondary education in this sense has not been available to Indigenous secondary age students outside the main urban centres in a way that is comparable to the rest of Australia's secondary age population. Instead of high schools, community education centres (CECs) have been attached to primary schools and offer 'post-primary' courses. Some parents and communities have opted to send their secondary age children to independent boarding schools or to study in distance mode via the Northern Territory Open Education Centre (NTOEC). Both options present considerable difficulties.

The Ramsay report[6] on secondary education exposes the inequities in educational outcomes for Indigenous students in urban and regional schools compared to their non-Indigenous peers, and the extreme educational inequities in relation to opportunities, facilities and resources for Indigenous students in remote settings in comparison with the urban/regional picture: 'In remote areas, access to secondary education is poor or non-existent, and educational outcomes are negligible'.[7]

> ## the capacity of the Indigenous sector to participate in the VET system as an industry player is still undeveloped

Learning Lessons: An Independent Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory[8] is another significant report on NT education. The constant theme in this report is the overriding concern for Indigenous children to develop English language oracy, literacy and numeracy skills while maintaining their own language, cultural heritage and Indigenous identity. This concern centres on the current barriers that Indigenous people experience in relation to employment within and outside their communities, to the management of personal and community life, and to participation in the wider society. One major employer peak body cited low literacy skills as the first, second, and third barrier inhibiting greater employment of local Indigenous people in their industry.

The availability and quality of school education, particularly secondary education, are always factors to be considered in relation to the size of the potential ALBE learner group and the creation of structural disadvantage. However the reforms recommended by these reports can only influence the learning outcomes and opportunities

of current and future school students, not those who have suffered from the systemic deficiencies they report and who are now outside the school context.

The importance of VET

One outcome now evident under policies of self-determination and self-management is a flourishing of organisations largely employing Indigenous people, organisations that develop work and training cultures shaped by social values different to those in mainstream work cultures, and also different across regions and groups. However, the capacity of the Indigenous sector to participate in the VET system as an industry player is still undeveloped. Some of its features, such as modularisation and national recognition of competence at many different levels, can actively assist Indigenous learners in breaking through the barriers that their earlier experience of school may have created. However, the diverse organisations that form the Indigenous sector struggle with minimal resourcing that prevents them from developing in-novatively and professionally into organisations that are recognised and respected by parallel mainstream or-ganisations. There is also a palpable tension between the goals and processes of self-determination and the goals and processes of mainstream adaptation, with time- and resource-consuming philosophical contortions involved in dependence on a system that serves different economic, social and educational visions.

Researching ALBE in the Top End

In the ALBE field, the NT has developed some distinctive institutions which illustrate different ways of providing basic education for adults, in addition to recognisably mainstream ones. Similarly, there are distinctive ALBE programs such as those run by mining companies in addition to national programs such as the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP). The small and scattered population of the NT and its diversity of needs mean that educational institutions and private providers tend to be generalist and multifaceted rather than specialist.

For this research I interviewed eight experienced non-Indigenous practitioners twice. I believed that these eight people could, through their professional histories, offer their work at the time they were interviewed and their ways of thinking about that work, a rich and complex sense of adult basic education/adult literacy activity in the Top End of the Northern Territory.

In geographic terms, five participants worked pre-dominantly in urban settings and three in rural or remote settings. Four worked with groups of Indigenous students only and four worked with mixed groups of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. The programs they were

involved in at the time of interview were the Certificate II in Introductory Vocational Education (IVEC), the LLNP, Certificates I–IV in Resource Management, a workplace ALBE program, units for beginning degree studies for Indigenous students, and holistic ALBE/learner support programs.

> **companies took the view 'that it's the government's responsibility to educate people'**
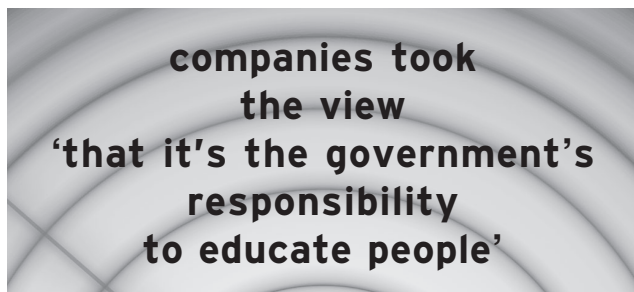
I prepared an outline for the first interview and sent this to participants in advance. The first focus questions were for background information. This was familiar ground, but when pooled, yielded complex pictures of professional identity. The next focus on professional work context prompted descriptive and reflective talk. The third focus offered an open-ended list of possible 'significant changes' affecting practice. The second interview began with a review of the previous one. This was a valuable way of confirming understandings of what participants were saying and their continued informed consent to the research process. It also meant that participants elaborated on their earlier accounts and views, thus generating depth and complexity in the data.

Profiles of two participants

Peter[9] is manager for community development in a mining company. He has always worked in Indigenous affairs and community development, and had been in his present position for three years. According to Peter, mining companies on Aboriginal land have agreements covering financial matters such as royalties and rent, as well as others that deal with social issues such as employment, training and business development. In the past lip service was paid to these social aspects: 'They tended to use words like "best endeavours" or "maximising Aboriginal employment" and the like'. There wasn't a high level of understanding of Aboriginal issues ('too complex') and companies took the view 'that it's the government's responsibility to educate people'. As a result of this way of seeing things, the letter of mining agreements was observed but their spirit, in relation to Indigenous employment, was avoided. Peter maintained that things are very different today. One of the guiding principles now is the belief that 'Aboriginal people want to be part of the development that's taking place on their land'. The program that Peter set up at the mine is grounded in this thinking.

Peter's workplace ALBE program includes a training wage for learners and is funded jointly by the company and the Commonwealth. Considerable thought and resources have gone into establishing an appropriate learning environment, employing teachers, writing learning materials, sourcing relevant training, providing work experience on-site and stakeholder communications. Company policy guarantees employment for learners who follow the training path. Literacy and numeracy combined with accredited training from different sources (e.g. occupational health and safety, horticulture, use of chainsaws, felling trees, money management and budgeting) are the focus of training programs.

The target learners are Indigenous people of extreme disadvantage. They are traditional land owners or those who are affected by the mining. Some have no interest in working for the company; others do, but they don't have the skills to benefit from the company's employment policy. The target learners for Peter's program include men and women of ages 17–50. The company's drug-free policy is also a barrier to increasing participation.

Fiona works in a remote community on behalf of an urban tertiary institution. Certificates I–IV in Resource Management (RM) have been trialled in several remote Top End communities. The RM program is closely aligned with enterprises that combine economic benefits and valued cultural practices, and is managed as training under the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP). The certificates have been written by Fiona and her colleagues to support the ranger movement and she described them as being like a General Ed course for Aboriginal rangers via land management. The underlying philosophy of the certificates is one of 'seeing people's cultural knowledge as a resource':

> … and so I've been really interested in looking at … the similarities between what we call Aboriginal culture and what we might call Western culture; how you can make links between those two things and how good teachers would make links between those things

The ranger movement grew up from the Caring for Country unit of the Northern Land Council as a response to spreading mimosa.[10]

> … it's important to say that over the last five years I got to work very closely with them, and this was training to support that movement so that people then began working a lot more with Western scientists and needed to be dealing with and managing stuff on their own country, so not only feral animals and pigs but particularly mimosa pigra and … grasses such as Parra
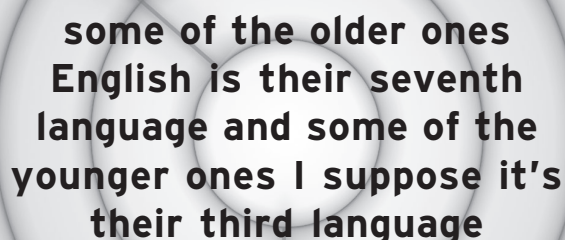
grass and Gamba grass, and now of course there's the cane toad …

The certificates were developed to be taught to a group working at different levels. This is a key factor in course viability. The process of accreditation was drawn out because in Fiona's opinion, the accrediting body was not convinced of the need for the certificates to be conceptualised as 'resource management' rather than 'general education'.

The learners:

> … are all Aboriginal men, ranging from 17 to 50. Some of the older ones English is their seventh language and some of the younger ones I suppose it's their third language. The older ones have had a good primary school education in the Sixties. The younger ones probably had intermittent schooling over ten years. Some are quite literate in a Western sense. Others are illiterate in a Western sense. All of them … it's hard to describe … there's a strong culture there … I would describe them as being very strong in their own culture.

These rangers are all 'paid under CDEP money'. They are 'involved in crocodile egg harvesting' and 'long-neck turtle stuff'. Their work with Western scientists involves 'a lot of surveying' so aspects of numeracy connected with 'counting and patterns and how information's recorded' are highly relevant to their work and 'where they see themselves going in the future'. At the moment 'real' jobs as outcomes of the resource management training are lacking. Fiona suggested that if the Federal Government 'is really fair dinkum about ecological sustainability in Australia' then ranger positions are going to be needed on a similar scale to those for Aboriginal health workers. Fiona believes that the resource management training is 'potentially sustainable' because 'people have always been out in their own country looking after it, and this is an extension of that'.

some of the older ones English is their seventh language and some of the younger ones I suppose it's their third language

Working with a competency-based curriculum, Fiona said she was always looking at how different modules link, and building these possibilities into her teaching and assessment. She felt that only by teaching courses she has

written enables her to retain pedagogical power in way that is very important to her. The course is run in blocks when Fiona goes to the community. This avoids the disruptions and disorientations for people coming into Darwin and learners have said to Fiona, 'We really like it because you come to us'. This remark gives expression to one of the key findings of the Djama and VET study.[11] Fiona has been keen to involve more locally-based educators and others in the community in teaching and contributing to the course.

Analysis and interpretation

I found the interview process completely involving at the time. It was exciting to hear the policy-in-practice stories emerge in the conversations and see them again in the transcripts. Practitioners' ways of dealing with policy issues affecting their practice were as significant as the identification of policy issues themselves. Unsurprisingly, their driving force seemed to be making the particular program work for the particular learners concerned. Some spoke readily about their changed views; for example, on such issues as Competency-Based Training (CBT) and the National Reporting System (NRS); others rehearsed arguments for modifying the system within which they worked. In this regard some invoked bureaucrats' and administrators' fundamental lack of understanding of the local situation as the cause of resistance. Others were more accommodating of the ground rules and recognised policy modification as a sign that practitioners were being heard.

The search for a way of conceptualising the relationship of practitioners' professional practice to policy issues and the policy environment led me to Salmon's development of the concept of 'personal stance'.[12] Through the metaphor of personal stance, Salmon theorises the 'highly particular' ways in which learners and teachers experience and understand the processes in which they engage together. She defines stance as 'placing oneself towards' and takes it to mean much more than 'attitude'.

> Because personal stance refers to the positions which each of us takes up in life, this metaphor emphasises aspects of experience which go deeper than the merely cognitive, and which reflect its essentially relational, social and agentic character. In this, it offers a view of learning as a vehicle for social change.[13]

Salmon's argument suggests the holistic nature of the metaphor of stance and the purposes it might serve. My reflection on the practitioners' different accounts confirms the impression of making things work in a particular time and context for a particular group of learners. Policy-in-practice is thus understood as a situated stance, only comprehensible within its multi-dimensional context.

I worked through three broad cycles of interpretation, focusing progressively on individual stances, shared themes and a typology of policy-in-practice stances. To start with, I tried to capture the qualities of each participant's policy-in-practice, their way of thinking and acting in the policy environment. I selected a phrase from their own words to point towards these qualities. For Peter, I selected 'How can we maximise or utilise … rather than duplicate'; for Fiona, 'It's always trying to adapt something that doesn't fit'.

The next stage of analysis and interpretation involved emerging themes. These eventually settled around four major focal points:

1 The professional learning of ALBE practitioners (including Indigenous language learning).
2 Measures of successful learning (including contrasts between learning and course completion).
3 Funding issues (the effects in particular contexts, of the conditions that come with program funding).
4 Perceptions of learners and their needs (with emphases ranging from cultural strength to multifaceted disadvantage).

Further interpretative analysis brought these key themes together in a new synthesis. Two of the major elements of this synthesis were the quality of practitioners' agency in the policy environment and the limitations and possibilities of a local focus. Understanding these themes enabled me to develop a more sharply defined perspective on ALBE in the Top End.
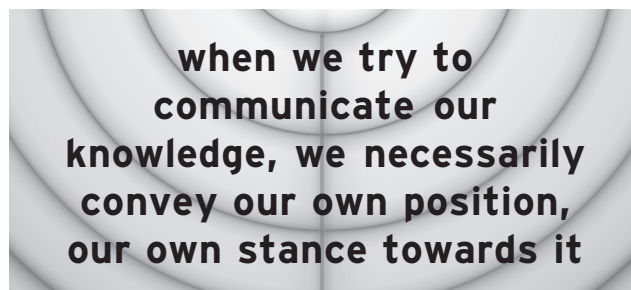
In the active shaping of programs, ones that are unique to the Top End as well as ones that are also found in other parts of Australia, we are seeing finely tuned responses to particular circumstances of place and people. Such a picture of the professional work of ALBE practitioners brings to the fore the great diversity of their contexts of practice even within one geographical area, the compounding pressures of history, politics, economics and the influences of 'globalising processes'[14] on policies for people who are largely out of reach of the benefits of globalisation. The analysis also confirms the range of relationships that learners participating in these ALBE programs bear to the dominant culture and language, the 'real' economy, and notions of work and knowledge. This is a conceptualisation of policy-in-practice in this place.

A typology of policy-in-practice stances

I was encouraged to press this interpretation further, to see if I could identify a typology of policy-in-practice stances based on the interview data. A broad interpretation of the stances taken by the practitioners in this study can be represented in a threefold typology. The positions taken up by these practitioners in response to policy constraints, imperatives and possibilities in the Top End context can be described in terms of :
• endorsing and innovating
• striving for balance among competing demands
• creating one's own domain.

> when we try to communicate our knowledge, we necessarily convey our own position, our own stance towards it

The first type, endorsing and innovating, captures the stances taken up by three of the participants. In each case there is a professional alignment with the ALBE policy direction as it applies to their work, and also considerable investment in innovation and contextualisation. Peter embodies this type. His acceptance of the policy structures for ALBE appears to create a space for him to advocate for the program with Indigenous owners and company stakeholders, and to deal with the unique challenges of developing the program he has set up. His knowledge of the dynamics of both Indigenous and industry contexts has sensitised him to the validity of different perspectives on learning outcomes even within the structure of ALBE in VET.

The second type, striving for balance among competing demands, encompasses the stances taken up by two participants. The third type, creating one's own domain, applies to the stances taken up by three participants. In Fiona's case, the vehicle for creating one's own domain is primarily the construction of curriculum for her specific context of learning. Salmon sheds light on the connection between curriculum and personal stance:

> In teaching, whether formally or informally, we set out to convey what we know, what we have experienced … And when we try to communicate our knowledge, we necessarily convey our own position, our own stance towards it. This means that, as teachers, we do not just pass on a curriculum; we actually represent, even embody it.[15]

Fiona's way of talking about the development of curriculum bears this out. She talks about the cultural strength and linguistic adeptness of her students and what she sees as the necessity for someone in her position to do nothing to diminish these qualities.

Conclusion

This threefold typology offers a nuanced understanding of the interaction of policy, practice and context in professional practice. It offers those understandings in a way that invites comparisons with accounts of professional practice in other educational contexts, as well as in contexts such as health, local government and the environment.

The stark inequities in educational opportunity and achievement in education in the Northern Territory give an especially urgent importance to adult education, particularly in the form of ALBE. Understanding the policy-in-practice perspectives of experienced practitioners who know the context and its challenges provides valuable knowledge on which to base policy.

Margaret Palmer worked in adult and vocational teacher education at Northern Territory University (now Charles Darwin University) before concentrating on her PhD. She has been associated with NTCAL (the NT equivalent of VALBEC) since its beginnings.

Notes

1 Sanguinetti, J. (1999), Within and against per-formativity: Discursive engagement in adult literacy and basic education, PhD thesis, Deakin University; Lo Bianco, J. & Wickert, R. (eds) (2001), *Australian policy activism in language and literacy*, Melbourne: Language Australia.

2 The Top End broadly refers to the area including and to the north of Katherine and centred on Darwin.

3 Ball, S. J. (1990), *Politics and policy making in education: Explorations in policy sociology*, London: Routledge; Crump, S. J. (ed.) (1993), *School-centred leadership: Putting educational policy into practice*, Melbourne: Nelson.

4 Cox, R. W. (1980), Social forces, states and world orders: Beyond international relations theory, *Millennium*, 10 (2), pp126–155; Neill, R. (2002), *White out: How politics is killing Black Australia*, Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.

5 ABS (2001), Demography, Northern Territory (Cat. No. 3311.7), Australian Bureau of Statistics, accessed 25 March 2002.

6 Ramsay, G. (2003), *Report on future directions for secondary education in the Northern Territory*, Darwin: Northern Territory Government, Department of Employment, Education and Training.

7 ibid.

8 Collins, B. & Lea, T. (1999), *Learning lessons: An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*, Darwin: Northern Territory Government.

9 All names have been changed to protect participant confidentiality.

10 Mimosa *pigra* is also known as giant sensitive plant and is native to tropical America. It is not known when it was introduced into Northern Australia, but its spread was suddenly accelerated by favourable conditions in the 1970s—extensive floods and the ecological devastation caused by Asian water buffalo (also introduced). Its continuing spread is choking northern waterways and threatening the ecology of the region, including Kakadu National Park

11 ANTARAC (1998), *Djama and VET: Exploring partnerships and practices in the delivery of vocational education and training in rural and remote Aboriginal communities*, 2 vols, Darwin: NTU Press.

12 Salmon, P. (1989), 'Personal stances in learning', in I. McGill (ed.), *Making sense of experiential learning: Diversity in theory and practice*, Milton Keynes: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press, n.p., pp 230–241.

13 ibid.

14 Edwards, R. & Usher, R. (2000), *Globalisation and pedagogy: Space, place and identity*, London: Routledge.

15 op. cit.

Building on the best: the A-Frame for non-accredited learning

by Karen Dymke

The A-Frame project is a user-friendly tool that helps Adult Community and Further Education teachers and course managers develop uniform quality, learner-centred, non-accredited courses to attract people to learning programs and ongoing learning pathways.

What has scrap-booking, coffin building and tractor driving got in common? No, this is not a joke. They all share the connection of being valuable opportunities for learning in the community. They do not have any accredited certificates attached to them, but they all provide ways for people to connect with communities and find new pathways.

Herma, from the Seymour Neighborhood House, was an army wife looking for a door-opener for engaging with the community. Having moved many times, Herma had found it hard to find her place. She did not feel ready or interested to try any formal classes. An advertisement on a scrap-booking class at her local community centre sounded interesting, so she thought she would give it a try. Herma found it fantastic! It was a very successful door-opener for her. It was not intimidating and joining the class built her confidence and contributed to her healthier self-esteem. She not only learnt the skill of scrap-booking but Herma also learnt about her self-value and worth.

A start on the path

The value and benefits of non-accredited courses has long been known to Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE) providers. Non-accredited courses are highly valued ways of engaging learners because they attract people to learning programs, are learner-centred and focus on the learner's strengths. A start in a non-accredited course that encourages positive outcomes can be a great incentive and motivation for adults to continue on a learning pathway.

Many non-accredited courses lead into accredited further education courses, building confidence, resilience and self-worth. Jill, a mother of seven, felt her life was at the bottom of the barrel. She had never left her children in childcare and had spent 25 years at home with the family, running the farm. After a tentative introduction into the King Valley Learning Exchange, she found the confidence to give Year 11 English a try. Finding success here, she moved on to Year 12 by distance education. What started as a very small step changed her life. Jill has now spent the last six years managing a wine company and is an inspiration to all. Learners in non-accredited courses get the opportunity to make new connections with family and the wider community. The flow-on benefits include increased social capital. The community members experience a strengthened sense of belonging, as well as the increased knowledge and confidence to achieve community goals.

Any website on Adult Literacy and Basic Education (ALBE) or community education and services provision is full of such stories of progression and connection. Sometimes these stories take many years to unfold. Each small step makes a difference to a network of people's lives. Just a cup of coffee, a welcome smile, an invitation to a newcomers group, can be the perfect start.

Despite oft-heard anecdotal evidence, non-accredited programs have often felt like the poor cousins in education. Many providers and programs have not felt they are valued to the same extent as accredited curriculum, yet those at the coal face know how valuable these courses are. At the same time there has also been a danger that some courses stagnate, continuing on ad infinitum, with no pathway beyond. Funding bodies have the right to question the validity of some programs if they appear to keep learners in a holding pattern, moving students nowhere and showing limited outcomes. Social groups are very valuable, but as a funding body of community and further education programs, ACFE is looking for more specific directions. So how can non-accredited programs be recognised for their worth? What has to happen to justify the importance of non-accredited training and connections? How can the quality and value of programs be assured?

Support for providers

A project to support quality non-accredited teaching and learning in Adult Community Education (ACE) has commenced as an initiative of the ACFE Board. It is an investment in supporting practitioners and managers to implement strategies and structures to ensure quality provision in non-accredited learning in ACE, whilst also

being an opportunity to document and recognise the worth of non-accredited programs.

Not since Bradshaw's (1999) *Transforming lives transforming communities* has there been an opportunity to recognise and acknowledge the quality of programs that have over the years benefited so many. The ACFE project will build the capacity of the ACE sector as the key developer and deliverer of training and management of non-accredited learning, supporting the Ministerial Statement outlined in Future Directions for ACE in Victoria. The project will work towards consistency in quality and standards of non-accredited provision. By identifying best practice curriculum, teaching and delivery, it will raise the awareness of opportunities and pathways for ACE students.

A resource has been developed and is currently being trialed in a range of programs that reflect the ACFE Future Directions for ACE in Victorian priority groups. The resource, called the A-Frame, is a user-friendly tool that assists providers to demonstrate quality control via a uniform quality system and process. A-Frame also allows providers to demonstrate the valuable and varied outcomes achieved by learners and the important pathways they move on to, whether in the ACE sector or beyond. A-Frame will also include the documentation of delivery strategies and of the qualifications and/or expertise of the trainers/assessors running such courses.

The project team undertook a wide range of consultations in developing the resource: one-to-one interviews; small group forums and larger workshops. Feedback informed the A-Frame draft. Ongoing evaluations and feedback resulted in nine drafts with extremely positive and encouraging responses. 'At last!' were the words of many.

A-Frame is built on the solid grounding of the *Transforming Lives Transforming Communities* Conceptual Framework (1999), developed by Delia Bradshaw. A great deal of effort was made to develop user-friendly language that retains the thorough methodology developed by the conceptual framework, and can be readily understood by program providers who may not have an educational background. See Figure 1.

The basis of the framework is the four principles:
  • variety
  • linking
  • critical thinking
  • change.

These principles are woven through each of the four aspects of curriculum:

Figure 1: A-Frame concept
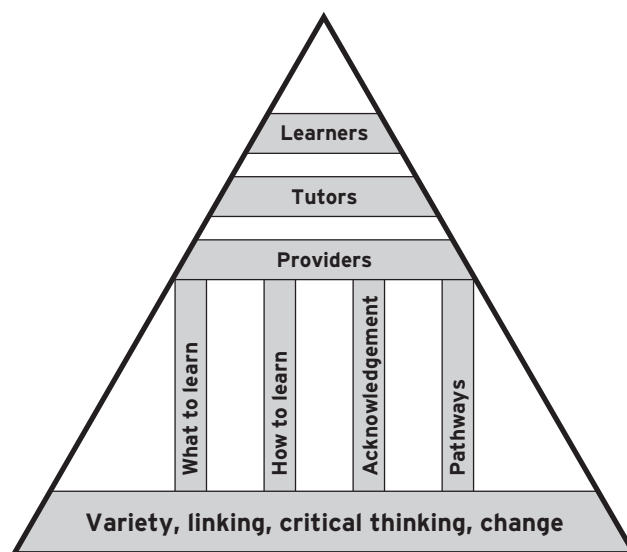
1 learning outcomes—what to learn
2 educational outcomes—how to learn
3 recognition outcomes—which form of recognition
4 pathway outcomes—where this learning will lead.

These aspects and principles are woven through the three layers of learning responsibility:
  • provider/community
  • tutor
  • student.

The A-Frame resource enhances the provision of effective educational experiences whilst ensuring quality and consistency in delivery. With so many very worthwhile programs in current practice, it develops a strong, sustainable means of dissemination and sharing of knowledge across the field. Taking into account the constraints of many providers and programs, both in time and resources, the A-Frame is a time- and cost-effective teaching and management resource, providing a tool for individual course development and record keeping.

Using A-Frame may enhance management practices of ACE providers. Using the resource throughout the organisation will give users an increased awareness of non-accredited learning opportunities and pathways, and strengthen communities by encouraging increased partnerships between community organisations and/or other providers. It can be used as a tool for planning and documenting centre activities, as well as considering and documenting future centre activities and pathways. A-Frame gives a standardised format for considering and documenting student outcomes and recording and monitoring student satisfaction.

For trainers and tutors, A-Frame can be used as a method of planning and documenting their activities as well as documenting ongoing evaluation of the course and the students' responses. Opportunities are provided for reflecting on and documenting what their students gained from the course, for considering and documenting what could be their students' future pathways and for planning future courses.

Students and learners also are catered for in the A-Frame. It provides a method on enrolment for documenting:
- why they have enrolled
- how they learn best
- what they could receive/gain from the course
- where they could go/do after the course.

After course completion, learners are encouraged to document what they have learned and the effective ways in which they were taught. By reflecting on what they have gained from the course, students are also encouraged to consider what they will be doing next.

The reality for anyone involved in funded program provision is the ever-present responsibility of collecting data that assists our organisations and funding bodies acknowledge quality outcomes. Rather than being a burden, the A-Frame and the project supporting quality non-accredited teaching and learning is making the wonderful outcomes of ACE count by acknowledging their value, recognising their worth and profiling the sector.

As part of this project, professional development will give practitioners the opportunity to use the A-Frame to develop curriculum. If you would like to know more about this, the project or the A-Frame resource, contact Karen Dymke at CAE on 9652 0778, or *karend@cae.edu.au* or visit the project page on the SAALT website: *www.aris.com.au*

Karen Dymke has, in her own words, been around the literacy and community education traps for always. Having worked with a range of inspirational people on numerous creative projects, Karen is now a project officer with CAE's Innovations Department.

In Beside the Whiteboard, Debbie Soccio talks to Marie Mennees and Anna de Luca

In 2005 Marie and Anna participated in a professional development program, Teaching Literacy: Blending the Theory with the Practice, at Victoria University. Both Marie and Anna are relatively new to the adult literacy and numeracy field. Debbie asked them about their work and the benefits of participating in professional development activities.

It is another jam-packed edition and one the *Fine Print* Editorial Committee sincerely hopes you will enjoy.

Robyn Hodge

Virgona, C., Waterhouse, P., & Sefton, R. (1998), Teamwork, collective competence and team-based assessment in action: critical reflections of industry-based vocational educators, paper presented to the Second International Workshop on Team Working, University of South Australia, 23–25 September.

Watson, M., Nicholson, L. & Sharplin, E. (2001), *Reviewing literacy and numeracy research in vocational education and training*, Adelaide: NCVER.

Note
1 This paper contains material adapted from P. Waterhouse & C. Virgona (in press) *Contradicting the stereotype: case studies of success despite literacy difficulties*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Adelaide.

ACE connects with learners: findings from a longitudinal study

by Anne Walstab

Many Language other than English learners enrol in Adult Community Education hoping to become better prepared for work and further study, but also to connect with other people and their community through the companionship of a 'community of learning'.

The 2004 Ministerial Statement on the future direction of the Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector identified certain groups within the Victorian community as being 'high-priority learners', including 'people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds'.[1] Given that one in every seven course enrolments in ACE in Victoria is a learner who speaks a Language Other Than English (LOTE) at home[2], it is important to explore the key characteristics of this group of learners, to consider what draws them to study in the ACE sector and to establish any learning or other needs specific to this group.

Recent findings from a longitudinal study of LOTE learners in ACE[3] show these groups of learners have a distinct profile when compared to other groups; in terms of background characteristics, their motivations for enrolling in ACE, their initial expectations of their courses, and on reflection, what they feel they have gained from their experiences. This longitudinal study, commissioned by the Victorian Department of Education and Training on behalf of the ACFE Board, is being undertaken by the Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning (CPELL) at the University of Melbourne. The project aims to address the following broad questions:
- does ACE make a difference (and, if so, how do we know?)
- for whom does ACE make a difference?
- what is it about ACE that makes a difference?

This three-year longitudinal study commenced in 2004 with a classroom-based survey of ACE students. The first stage of the project involved intensive work with five selected ACFE regions[4] and over 40 ACE providers. The providers were selected from within each region using random sampling techniques and ranged in size and programs on offer. A cross-section of 3047 ACE participants in these providers undertook a classroom-based survey which to established demographic data, employment status, educational background, their expectations and rationale for being in ACE, the quality of their learning and instructional experience, and

aspirations for the future. Surveying took place from May to September in 2004. The second stage of the project involved follow-up telephone interviews with 846 participants surveyed in Stage 1, approximately 12 months after the initial contact. There will be a further contact with these learners commencing in April 2006.

Profile of ACE participants speaking a Language Other Than English at home

Of the 3047 ACE participants surveyed in the first stage of the project, more than a quarter indicated that they spoke a LOTE at home (29 per cent of the total cohort). Furthermore, over half of this group reported that they did not speak any English at all at home. If the cohort of ACE participants is divided into two groups—those speaking only English at home on the one hand, and those speaking English and another language or only another language on the other—we discover that each group has a distinct profile in terms of demographic attributes.

The complexities within the group of LOTE speakers are revealed by the background characteristics given in Figure 1. The number and range of languages demonstrates the diversity of communities represented in the cohort presenting themselves to the ACE sector. However it can also be seen that across a number of economic and educational measures, as a group those speaking a LOTE at home are much more marginalised compared to the English-only group. While across the cohort overall there is an over-representation from the poorest socioeconomic status (SES) group[5], the over-representation is most marked when we look at the cohort split by language. In fact, 22 per cent of the English-only speakers are from the lowest SES quintile, compared to 37 per cent of the group speaking a LOTE at home.

Those speaking a LOTE at home are also more likely to have a more tenuous relationship with the labour market, with only 22 per cent of this group in some form of employment. This is less than half the proportion of English-only speakers who are working (48 per cent). And where they are in paid employment, the LOTE speakers

Figure 1: Characteristics of the cohort by language background (2004 survey cohort)

English only speakers	Language other than English (at home)
71% of the 2004 cohort	29% of the 2004 cohort

Albanian	Amhric	Arabic	Armenian	Ausian
Cantonese	Croatian	Dutch	Estonian	French
German	Greek	Hakka	Hungarian	Indian
Indonesian	Italian	Japanese	Khmer	Korean
Kurdish	Loatian	Latvian	Macedonian	Malay
Maltese	Mandarin	Mauritian Kreol	Persian	Polish
Portuguese	Romanian	Russian	Serbian	Sinhalese
Spanish	Tagalog	Turkish	Ukranian	Vietnamese
Pacific Islander language				

English only speakers

25% male

17% aged 15–19 years

22% from lowest SES quartile

2% completed primary school only
21% completed some secondary school
24% completed secondary school
14% completed university degree

48% working
18% working less than 20 hr/wk
14% working 20–36 hr/wk
16% working more than 36 hr/wk

24% unemployed

28% not in the labour force

Language other than English

24% male

7% aged 15–19 years

37% from lowest SES quartile

17% completed primary school only
38% completed some secondary school
22% completed secondary school
18% completed university degree

22% working
11% working less than 20 hr/wk
4% working 20–36 hr/wk
7% working more than 36 hr/wk

34% unemployed

44% not in the labour force

are more likely than the English-only speakers to be working on a part-time basis. Moreover, the English-only group are less likely to be looking for work, with an unemployment rate of 24 per cent compared to 34 per cent of the LOTE speakers. In addition, a large pro-portion—44 per cent—of those LOTE participants are inactive in the workforce (that is, they are not working and not looking for work). The labour market vulnerability of this group of learners means that their dependence on the ACE sector is enhanced, not in the least because compared to the English-only learners economic factors are more acute.

The ACE sector is also playing a compensatory role for the incomplete schooling of some in the LOTE group, many of whom have had very little formal education. Of this group, 17 per cent reported having completed primary school only, compared to just 2 per cent the English-only group. Here we find examples how the ACE sector is providing a platform into education and training for members of the community who have little or no previous educational qualifications. However, a comparison of the

distribution of previous education experience and qualifications of both groups is not straight forward. English-only speakers are only slightly more likely to have completed secondary school (24 per cent compared to 22 per cent of LOTE speakers). Furthermore, a greater proportion of the LOTE group are highly qualified (18 per cent with a university degree) compared to the English-only group (14 per cent with a degree). One explanation could be that the university qualifications of this group are not recognised by the Australian education system or employers—a situation which learners are attempting to rectify.

The majority of LOTE participants were enrolled in Certificates of General Education for Adults (CGEA) in programs that incorporate a range of English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction within numeracy and literacy programs. This is reflected in the relatively high rate of enrolment in Certificate I and II courses for this group at 65 per cent, compared to 23 per cent for the English-only group. The English-only group were more likely to be undertaking a 'subject-only' or non-award course (54 per

cent compared to 21 per cent of LOTE at home speakers) and have higher rates of enrolment in Certificate III courses (13.5 per cent compared to 7 per cent of the LOTE at home speaking group). The significance for the ACE sector of the differing profiles of these two groups will become more apparent in an examination of the motivations for enrolling in ACE and learners' experience in ACE.

Motivations for enrolling in ACE

Before assessing the impact and effectiveness of ACE for our cohort, it is important to consider why learners enrol in ACE, and what they hope to gain from their course. The original survey of participants undertaken in 2004 revealed two key motivational factors that were critical to all learners: firstly vocational factors, with a near unanimous agreement that one reason for enrolling was 'to gain particular skills or knowledge' (97 per cent); and secondly personal development, with 93 per cent of the cohort wanting to 'explore a new interest'. However analysis of survey responses revealed that reasons for being in ACE were not uniform across different groups of learners, including the two groups divided by language spoken at home that interest us here.

Figure 2 reports separately the motivations for enrolling in ACE for LOTE participants and English-only speakers. It is clear from this chart that ACE participants who speak another language at home hope that their enrolment in ACE will have a dual purpose—firstly, to prepare them for further study and work, and secondly, that of social development. These learners are not enrolling in ACE for the sole purpose of learning English, nor with a narrow

employment outlook, but in the hope that their ACE course will provide them with the opportunity to make social connections with other people. This LOTE group wants to meet new people (44 per cent 'strongly agreeing' compared to 27 per cent of English-only speakers) and improve their self confidence (53 per cent 'strongly agreeing' compared to 40 per cent of English-only speakers), and they view their enrolment in ACE as one way of achieving this.

The preparatory role of ACE is also important, with 47 per cent in strong agreement that their ACE course would help them go onto further study (compared to 31 per cent of the English-only speakers); 38 per cent wanting to prepare for further study and 34 per cent strongly agreeing that they want to 'gain a qualification' (compared to 24 and 32 per cent of the English-only speakers respectively). Thus using their ACE course as a platform for further study is given a greater emphasis by this group than the English-only group. This is not surprising taking into account the aforementioned relative profiles of previous participation in education and training. Moreover, the sub-group of learners with little previous educational experience are even more likely to emphasise the social aspects of their ACE study (meeting new people, improving self-confidence) than the members of the LOTE group with a higher level of educational experience.

Quality of ACE experience

Survey participants were asked to rate the quality of their experience in the ACE sector and their course. Overall, all respondents were extremely positive in their response and

Figure 2: Motivations for enrolling by language background % strongly agreeing (2004 survey cohort)
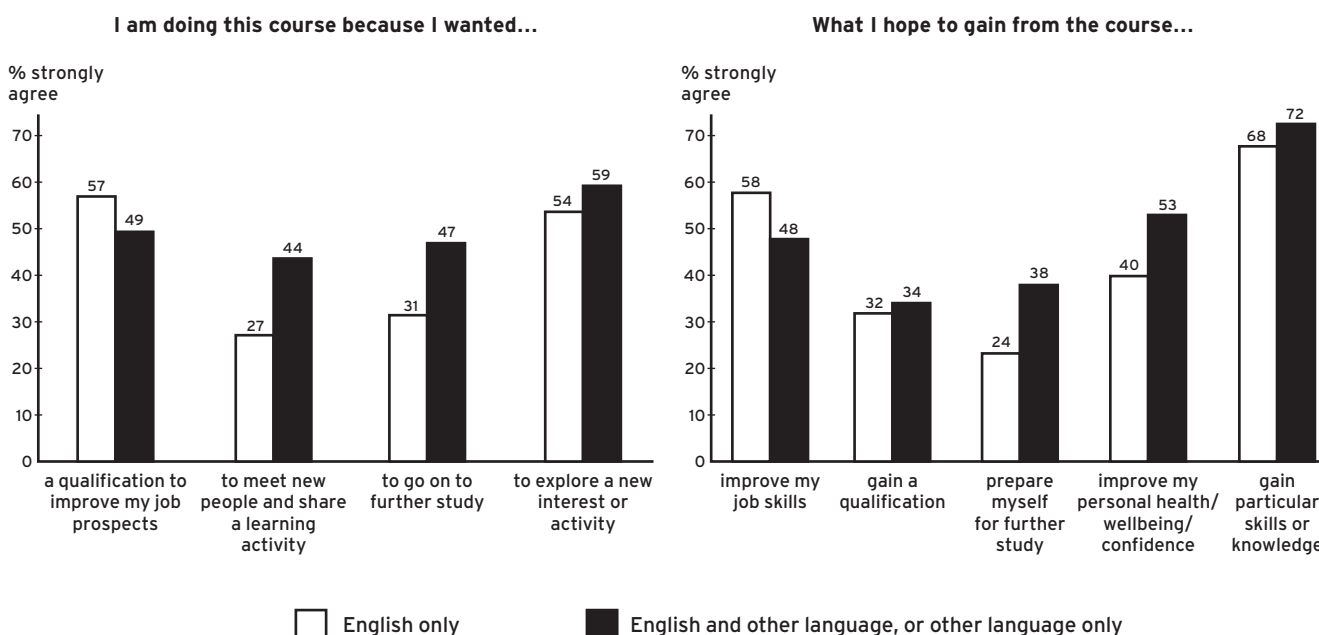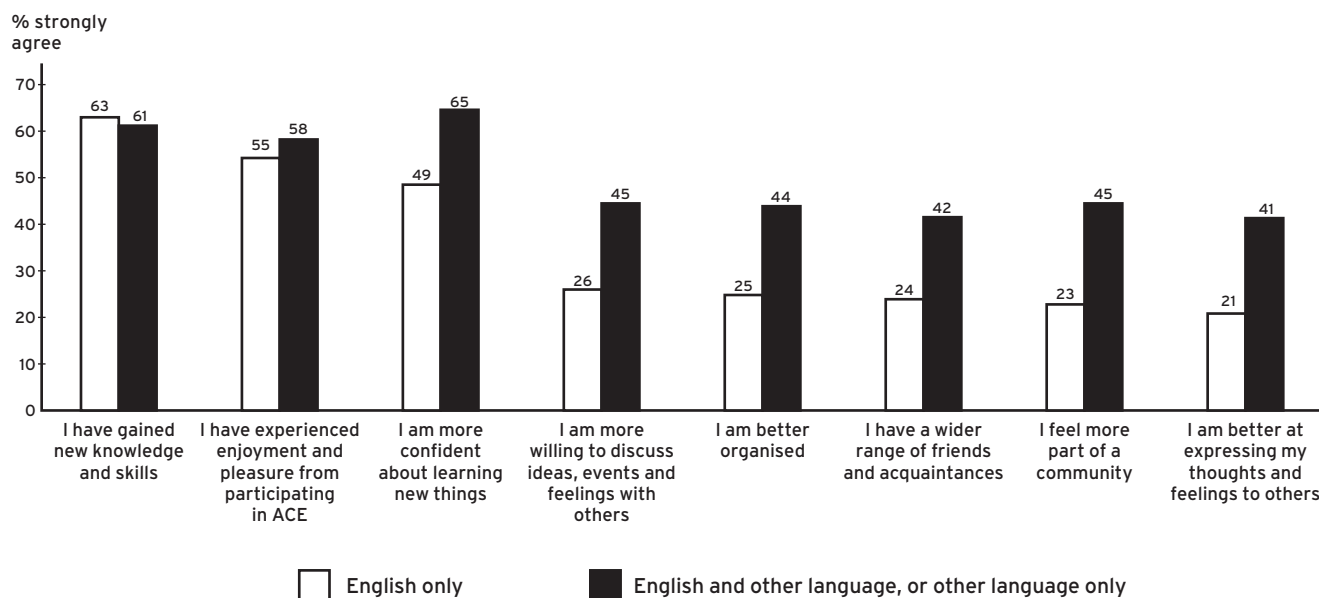

I am doing this course because I wanted...

What I hope to gain from the course...

English only | English and other language, or other language only

Figure 3: ACE experience by language background (2004 survey cohort)

% strongly agree

English only ▢   English and other language, or other language only ■

reported that studying in ACE was worthwhile across a range of levels. Again, the commonalities across the cohort in terms of what they were gaining from their experience in the ACE sector was emphasised by all students (that is, 'gaining new knowledge and skills' with 99 per cent total agreement, and 'experiencing enjoyment and pleasure from participating in ACE' with 98 per cent total agreement). When we look at the responses for the two groups we see a further reinforcement of the role ACE is playing for this group. See Figure 3.

As a group, the LOTE learners were more likely than the English-only learners to note that they had gained in confidence during their course (with 65 per cent strongly agreeing 'I am more confident about learning new things' compared to 49 per cent of the English-only group). LOTE learners were much more likely to point to benefits from the socialisation aspects of the ACE experience. They have met new friends (42 per cent 'strongly agreeing' compared to 24 per cent of the English-only group) and feel more part of a community (45 per cent 'strongly agreeing' compared to 23 per cent of the English-only group). These less tangible aspects of the ACE experience are of great value to the LOTE learners. This is particularly gratifying when we remember the emphasis given to social motivators by this group when enrolling in their courses. Moreover, this is even more likely to be the case for the sub-group of the LOTE-at-home-speaking group with little prior educational experience.

In 2005, approximately one year after the initial classroom-based survey, a number of the 2004 survey cohort were re-contacted by telephone. A total of 846 respondents

participated in this second contact and became part of the 2005 survey cohort. The 2005 contacts yielded further data on areas as diverse as 'churning' behaviour, pathways identification, and the range of non-vocational uses of ACE. One-fifth (19.5 per cent) of the 2005 survey cohort were part of the group who had identified themselves as LOTE speakers at home, which is a smaller proportion than the 2004 cohort (29 per cent). This may have been due to many of this group being recent migrants and unable to provide long-term contact details at the time of the 2004 survey.

Course completion and study pathways

Overall, course completion rates were high. Of the 846 ACE learners in the 2005 survey cohort, 81 per cent (685 people) had completed their 2004 course, 9.8 per cent (83 people) were continuing in the same course and 9.2 per cent (78 people) had not completed their 2004 course. LOTE respondents were twice as likely (15.8 per cent) as English-only speakers (7.5 per cent) to have not completed their 2004 course. They were also less likely to be continuing in their 2004 course (8.5 per cent) than English-only speakers (10.2 per cent). Of the 846 respondents in the 2005 survey cohort, 36 per cent (302 respondents) were engaged in study in 2005. Of these, 25.9 per cent (219 respondents) were studying in a new course, and 9.8 per cent were continuing in the same 2004 ACE course. Those who had completed their 2004 course were slightly more likely to undertake a new course (29.2 per cent) than those who had not completed (24.4 per cent). LOTE learners were more likely than those speaking English-only to be studying in 2005, with 34 per cent having enrolled in a new course and another 8 per cent

continuing their ACE study (compared to 24 per cent of English-only speakers in a new course and 10 per cent continuing their 2004 study).

Longer-term ACE impact

When asked to look back and evaluate their time in ACE, the 2005 survey cohort was unanimous in its strong endorsement of the experience. Almost all learners surveyed (98 per cent) thought that their 2004 ACE study was a 'worthwhile experience' and 96 per cent of them would 'recommend it to others'. If we examine survey responses by language background, the analysis suggests a confirmation and endorsement of the priorities that LOTE learners had expressed in Stage 1 of the study.

Figure 4 shows the impact of ACE study by language spoken at home. For those who reported speaking a LOTE at home compared with those who only spoke English, LOTE respondents were more likely (than English-only speakers) to value the development of a broader outlook on life, new interests and stronger connections within their community. These outcomes reflect their original motivations for enrolling in ACE study which, compared to the English-only group, included a strong emphasis on stating that a reason for study was to meet new people and share a learning activity.

Preparation for further study—an important motivator for this group—was reflected in the reported outcomes, with 83 per cent saying their 2004 ACE study had prepared them for more study compared with 76 per cent of English-only speakers. This was also confirmed by the 2005 study destinations of this group, with over one-third (34 per cent) enrolled in a new course (compared to 24 per cent of English-only speakers, as we saw above).

Employment outcomes were also reported in higher proportions by this group, with almost half (48 per cent) saying their ACE study had helped them to gain a job and 27 per cent saying it had helped them to set up their own business. These responses reflect the improving labour market status of this group between the 2004 and 2005 survey contacts. As noted above, LOTE learners were more likely to be unemployed in 2004. If we look at only the 2005 respondents, 42 per cent were unemployed at the time of the 2004 contact (compared to 22 per cent of the 2005 cohort of English-only speakers). By 2005 however, only 17 per cent of LOTE speakers were unemployed (compared to 11 per cent of English-only speakers). This was mirrored by a growth in employment between survey contacts. There was an increase in the proportion of those not in the labour force for the LOTE group (41 per cent

Figure 4: Impact of ACE study by language background % agreeing and strongly agreeing (2004 survey cohort)

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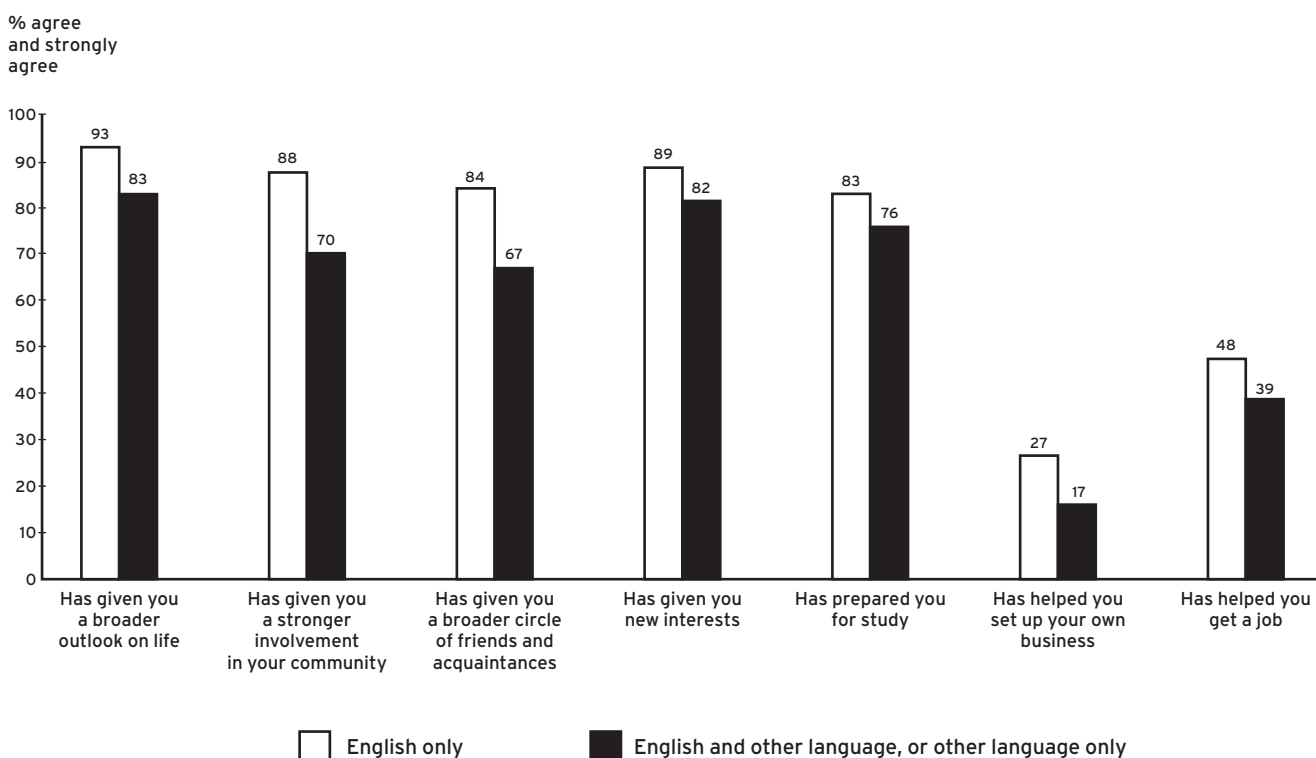
The mysterious underworld of learning

How do you organise a discussion about the nature of learning, and the cognitive processes that are involved? First, rent an ocean-front house on the Great Ocean Road. Then you buy a dozen ... Sorry, it's not that easy, as Robyn Hodge found. But as the discussions evolved, what had at first had seemed ethereal took on a more concrete form.

Learning styles are most commonly described as different approaches or ways of learning. Those closely associated with the delivery of teaching, training and tutoring of adults are, (hopefully) facilitating the learning of those within their care by attending to and catering for those different ways of learning. Most adult education practitioners are familiar with 'tests' that classify people as predominantly visual, auditory or kinaesthetic. These tests identify learner strength in receiving and responding to information in terms of their unique sensory strength, and are a fantastic way to open learners up to the mysterious 'underworld' of the learning process. While it's great to know this stuff, I'm not sure that a V, A or K label is enough for teachers to rely on to ensure their teaching methodologies complement their learners' learning styles. In this Practical Matters I want to explore some of the deeper mysteries of learning and their impact on learning styles.

We bandy the term 'learning' around as if there is universal consensus in its usage and meaning—I used it at least eight times in my opening paragraph, for heaven's sake! What we can learn is a little easier to define: we can learn knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes and behaviour. But I want to dig a bit deeper about the chaotic process I'm trying to capture for analysis here. For me, learning is a mix of memory, instinct, persistence, discomfort, reflection and change. When we look at learning as an active, internal process of these elements, emotions and skills it is much easier to see the distinction between 'it' and the passive/receptive 'external' process that teaching often is. Teachers and students (and I include myself in this generalisation) often focus too heavily on teaching content. When we do this we ignore the intrinsic value of learning itself.

There are many reasons why 'being taught' does not always directly correspond to 'learning'—particularly where adults are concerned. Adult learners (as opposed to adult students) are goal-driven, have purpose, and are as diverse as any other group of adults. Learning requires fresh information and experiences, sufficient prior meaning to make sense of the new and freedom from outside pressures to process it. Success in learning will wax and wane (you'll know this to be true if you ever see me ski), but at the very least, the learner needs to concentrate, to get involved, and to practice.

Whilst learning is an internal process, it is sparked by a social process of discussion, theorising, estimations, action, risk-taking, reflection and revision. Successful learners use some, if not all, of these strategies. They may not necessarily be able to articulate how they use them, but they will have some implicit understanding of what they have to do in new situations and how they can go about it. Second chance/adult literacy students, whose educational experiences range from the disjointed to the traumatic, may not be aware of how to use the learning strategies at their disposal. They may desperately want to know and understand the skills being taught, but can be uncertain of how this can best be done. Teachers need to make the use of learning strategies explicit and transparent and help students develop a language about learning and learning styles.

Learners' strategies

So let's have a look at some hypothetical learners and the strategies that they use. I wonder if you recognise characteristics of yourself or your family and friends in these mock case studies.

Simon is an *active* learner. He is always up for a challenge; he is hands on with all tasks and shows no signs of worry about making mistakes. He is comfortable about having a go at new experiences on his own, and doesn't spend a whole lot of time talking to others or observing how others might approach a new task. Because he is so 'gung-ho', he often ends up getting far more practice at tasks than other learners because he rarely gets it right the first time. In discussions, he offers comments and solutions that range from the creative to the impractical. His suggestions and insights are often critiqued by others but that doesn't particularly bother him.

Charlie is *reflective*. He's also prepared to have a go at new tasks and knowledge but is cautious in his approach and

Moira Hanrahan

lot more methodical in how he works through new stuff. You'll find Charlie on the periphery of activities for a while, he watches other people and likes to have a bit of chat and hear what they have to say about how they might go about the task at hand. Charlie likes to have a bit more of an end point in mind before he acts.

It's step by step for the *theoretical* Elena. She is most comfortable with a systematic and teacher-directed methodology when she is faced with new material or activities. She likes to feel in control of a path of logical steps which take her from the known to the unknown. Elena is not keen to experiment nor is she keen on open-ended tasks or making mistakes. She likes to travel from A to B without distractions.

Fiona is *experiential*, she rarely waits for instruction or anything remotely like teaching tips or hints. She likes to do things for herself—she's not the type to stop and ask others for directions. For Fiona it's all about getting the end result, preferably the quickest way possible.

I don't wish to imply any judgments about the strengths and weaknesses in learning for these four learners or their methods. The descriptions are artificial in that they suggest each person only has one way of doing things. In reality, learners are fairly eclectic in adopting strategies that help

them. I've used these descriptions as a way of isolating the strategies of how people get things done. Simon, Charlie, Elena and Fiona will have success and struggle with different activities but have a lot to offer each other.

Transforming students to learners

Simon, Charlie, Elena and Fiona are in the computer room. They are low-level literacy students who attend six hours per week of class time. Two of these hours are spent in a computer room. The teaching objectives for this class are to:
   • facilitate working in pairs
   • explore problem solving in groups
   • develop (vocabulary) and use a dialogue about learning strategies

by:
   • using computers (turn on/off, select program, use floppy disk)
   • typing personal stories (to open, save, spellcheck, edit and print etc).

The teaching objectives could be part of a non-accredited return to study program or translate to Reading and Writing; Oral Communication and General Curriculum Options learning outcomes of a Certificate I in General Education for Adults (CGEA, 2004) program. But by framing the teaching objectives as learning skills as well as computer content, it is

easier to imagine greater opportunities for insight and discussion in preferred learning styles.

When I have facilitated workshops on learning styles, I've presented the computer room scenario and asked participants to imagine that they have a group of learners with characteristics similar to my 'Gang of Four'. Participants are then asked to consider the following questions:

• Who would you pair together? Why? Why not?
• Would the learning task be demonstrated? By whom? When? At the beginning of the class? After some trial time? At the end of the class?
• What instructions (whiteboard or overhead transparency display) and/or resources such as handouts might you give all or some of the students?
• At what stage of the class would you give them (instructions and/or resources) to students? Would resources be distributed simultaneously? Staggered? On request? Why? Why not?
• What kinds of questions could be used to elicit information about learning strategies at the end of session?

Workshop responses to each question were mostly contradictory, often surprising, and usually challenging. Participants gave compelling reasons to pair or keep separate each of the possible learner combinations, and that's good! When one justifies one's reasoning for pairing, for example Simon and Elena, they are making explicit their learned understandings about the potential of pair work and what Simon and Elena have to offer each other. If these justifications can be articulated to a group of teachers in a workshop, they can just as easily be made explicit to Simon and Elena. Why not explain to seemingly disparate learners the benefits of working together by highlighting the strengths each of them exhibit in the classroom? Learners benefit from teachers being transparent about their choices and why.

There was a variety of responses to the focus questions about the staging of the lesson and when to refer to resources. Some participants were comfortable with the idea of giving instructions/resources to some learners and not others, but just as many participants were disquieted by the perceived lack of equity in learner support.

Discussion about equity issues came back once again to the notion of transparency in the classroom. Any teacher decisions about who got a set of instructions and when (for example, Elena and Charlie—after a couple of tries; Fiona and Simon at the end of the lesson after they've explained what they did and how they did it) revolved once more around the notion of transparency. If a teacher were to treat learners so differently, the reasoning would need to be made explicitly clear to the learners as to why. Again, such conversations would contribute further to building the vocabulary and conversation about such strategies as trial and error, or the step process, and so on. What was also interesting in workshop reflections on these questions was the critique of lesson staging. Do we present information in ways that reinforce or challenge different learning strategies, or are teacher presentation techniques and staging about logistics and convenience? There were no easy answers to these questions, but I loved the discussions.

The last focus question, about how to generate classroom discussion about learning, generated a lot of ideas and reflection. What became clear through the course of workshop discussions was that the pressure to get through the course content meant that discussion and reflection time at the end of the class was rarely factored into lesson planning.

Creating a dialogue about cognitive processes ain't easy, but what had at first had seemed ethereal took on a more concrete form. Participants came up with a range of questions that prompted learners to talk about what they did and how they felt. The questions listed here are in no particular order and are not always applicable, but give the gist of an open-ended conversation about learning that teachers can respond to:

• What did you do that was new?
• How much could you remember (from last class) before you started?
• How much did you remember once you got going?
• Did you talk much to your partner?
• What did you say?
• What did you think when you watched your partner doing it? What did they do that was the same/different to you? Why do you think they did it that way?
• Did you say anything to them?
• How did you work it out?
• Did it work OK the first time?
• How did you feel when it didn't work?
• What did you decide to do then?
• Did you try the same thing again or something different? Why? How did you decide?
• When did you look at the notes?
• When did you feel like kicking the computer?
• Did you want to give up?
• Did you ask for help? What did you say? Who did you ask? Why?
• What would you differently next time?
• What was your best bit?

Continued on page 36…

Open Forum

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

This edition's Open Forum has two perspectives on the reaccreditation of the Certificate IV in Further Education and the Diploma of Further Education. The CAE's Cate Thompson, a member of the review and reaccreditation team, outlines the project and its outcomes, and Meg Curlewis from Moreland Adult Education, who has delivered both courses since the initial pilot project, offers a management and delivery perspective on both the expired and the new courses. Closer to home, Lynne Matheson and Robyn Hodge give an update on the VALBEC strategic planning day held earlier this year.

Reaccreditation of the Diploma of Further Education and the Certificate IV in Further Education

The Diploma of Further Education and the Certificate IV in Further Education were first accredited in Victoria in 1999, with the expiry date set for December 2005. The courses were designed to cater for those persons who either left mainstream education at an early stage, suffered life experiences which inhibited access to formal education or encountered Australian education after acquiring their earlier training overseas.

With the expiry date due in December it was important to establish if there was still a need for such a course. In July 2005, in consultation with the Curriculum Maintenance Managers (CMM) from Victorian University of Technology (VU) and under guidance of the project steering committee, CAE undertook research to establish the need for the courses.

Initially, it seemed that due to the small number of students who had undertaken the courses, the demand was low. However, further research revealed that the reason for the low take-up was because providers had difficulty in implementing the courses because of the complexities and opaque expression of the original documents. In fact it was discovered that there was a growing need for such a course, but for it to be fully utilised it needed to be written in a user-friendly way with greater clarity on delivery and student outcomes and pathways.

The case for reaccreditation was further supported by the lapse of a number of key ACE programs in 2006. A new Diploma of Further Education and Certificate IV in Further Education were seen to provide the framework on which to map a number of these popular ACE programs.

Funds for the redevelopment of the Diploma and Certificate IV were allocated by ACFE. Consultation took place with a wide range of present and potential providers, students, higher education and TAFE representatives. General consensus was that, rather than the certificate being all things to all people, it should be streamlined to a selection of study areas, while also allowing opportunities to develop specific programs for individuals.

Research showed the most popular pathways have been creative arts, business studies, health and community services and information technology. While there was a recommendation that the Certificate IV in Further Education and the Diploma of Further Education also incorporate a science stream, research indicated that this was not necessary as there is a range of science pathways.

Members of the project steering committee provided advice to the project manager and curriculum writer on specific areas of expertise during development. The research and the findings of the project steering committee and the working party agreed that the content of core units should be governed by the entry needs of the students and the skills, knowledge and understanding the exit students require for tertiary studies.

The focus is tertiary preparation. Accordingly, the courses have been redeveloped as unit-based courses utilising wherever possible endorsed units of competency from training packages to increase the number of potential pathways.

There was much debate about the need for two levels (Certificate IV and Diploma) of qualification. The two levels were retained but outcomes and entry criteria are now more tightly defined than the original document. The two courses are presented separately in a move away from its previous interpretation as a nested curriculum. It

was felt that separate but related courses allowed providers and students greater flexibility. Consequently, greater clarity and flexibility has been achieved by focusing the course outcome for Certificate IV as entry to an AQF 5 level vocational course or entry to the Diploma of Further Education.

How does it work?

In both the Certificate IV and the Diploma, students choose endorsed units from appropriate training packages to meet their course requirements. The choice of units depends on the course of further study the student intends to take. Where course enrolment procedures permit, the final choice of units should be left until the student has established their further study goals. In Certificate IV, students are asked to select units up to a maximum of 120 nominal hours. One unit may be drawn from a Certificate III qualification while the remainder must be drawn from Certificate IV qualifications.

Readers will be aware that details of training package qualifications and their units of competency are found on the National Training Information Service website *www.ntis.gov.au*. Nominal hours for units of competency are contained within purchasing guides that are listed under their training package industry and are available on *www.trainingsupport.otte.vic.gov.au*. The purchasing guides are useful to providers wanting to add the Certificate IV and Diploma to the scope of registration, as they contain sample qualification structures at all levels to Advanced Diploma. As with other accredited training, providers should ensure that all rules concerning pre-requisites and co-requisites are followed.

Cate Thompson is manager of Projects and Professional Development at CAE in Melbourne.

Further education pathways in ACE: a practical approach

For practitioners looking for an accredited course for adult students interested in a pathway into tertiary education, the new version of the accredited Certificate IV in Further Education and the Diploma of Further Education offers a viable alternative to other bridging and preparatory courses. As the former course is being shelved and its newly accredited replacement course is implemented, a number of questions are arising at all levels. ACE managers are wondering about their ability to deliver units which are not on their scope of registration and the cost of new resources, teachers are worried they may not have the VET qualifications necessary to deliver the course and students are evaluating whether it would be better to undertake senior secondary certificates or enrol in vocational courses.

A quick review of the new qualifications should reassure providers that they have the skills and abilities to deliver a course which will prepare their students for a smooth transition into tertiary education. ACE managers can be confident that the core and general elective units can be delivered using existing staff and resources, and if the organisation has few or no training packages on its registration, they can deliver the stream-specific elective units in tandem with another ACE organisation or TAFE institute. Creative sessional teachers can draw on a multiplicity of existing print-based and online resources, and continue to mentor learners by negotiating their goals and learning programs. Because of the flexibility of the courses, students can undertake whichever units they need to prepare for the tertiary courses they select, as the core

units give them the preparatory skills, the dialogue and academic knowledge they need to succeed.

A feature of the expiring Certificate IV in Further Education and the Diploma of Further Education (1999) was the student-centred, flexible delivery mode. This feature is carried over into the new qualifications, although there is less emphasis on mentoring and more emphasis on integrating elective units from vocational education. The expiring versions of the qualifications were based on the Conceptual Framework of Further Education[1] which synthesised the works of Paolo Freire and Jacques Delors' four pillars of lifelong education: Learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be.[2] The new qualifications retain the basic tenets underpinning these concepts and they also expand the emphasis on the vocational element of the course by including a selection of negotiated units from training packages, and integrate Recognition of Prior Learning/Recognition of Current Competency (RPL/RCC) and pathways from existing accredited courses such as the Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA), the Certificates in Spoken and Written English (CSWE) and VCE.

For managers, the choice to introduce the new courses can depend on the costs involved. If the organisation is already a nationally Registered Training Organisation (RTO) , there would be the additional costs of purchasing the curriculum document; lodging an application to add the course to the organisation's scope of delivery (approximately $200 per

level); purchasing resources and finding appropriate staff members with knowledge in the secondary, adult, TAFE and Higher Education sectors, along with skills in VTAC and alternate tertiary applications.

One of the most difficult issues facing Victorian ACE providers considering delivering the course is that students are usually on concession cards and organisations receive limited numbers of profile hours under employment skills—the ACFE funding category for these further education courses. With 380 nominal hours for the whole Certificate IV level—115 for three core units, 145 for general electives, and 120 for specific stream electives—many organisations may be restricted to delivering only the core unit; not from choice but due to the limitations of funding. This is even more evident for the diploma's total 650 hours.

Although local TAFE institutes may be willing to deliver the stream-specific units, this may prove logistically difficult due to a student's mobility, inability to pay fees and unwillingness to travel. Although most ACE providers find their local TAFE colleges helpful and supportive, students enrolling only in selected units from courses may not be permissible. Students may best be advised to enrol in the core and general units one year and undertake entry applications for the following year, then return with proof of the accreditation to receive the full Certificate IV in Further Education or the Diploma of Further Education recognised by mutual recognition processes.

An additional difficulty may occur when some students want, or need, to concentrate on technology electives while others want language. In smaller providers, the expectation that a single sessional teacher will possess the skills needed to deliver all core and general elective units may cause staffing difficulties, and the cost of purchasing multiple resources to deliver to a very diverse group of aims, may prove prohibitive.

The main differences between the old and new accreditations are the changes from two core units at each level to one study and two training package core units at level IV and three at the diploma level—a shift away from the former emphasis on mentoring into more structured delivery, and the splitting of vocational units into general and stream-specific types. Given those changes, by delivering creatively and yet economically, the course can accomplish all of the intentions originally proposed by Richard Teese as part of the pathway reports of 1997.[3] Large institutes—such as RMIT, which itself delivers further education courses—often have commitments to supporting and networking with community providers. This helps create a smooth and seamless transition as they interview further education applicants as part of their access or mature age schemes, and are happy to meet groups of adult students casually in the café for a coffee to overcome nerves.

Image 1: Mentors Meg and Michael with part of Moreland Adult Education's 2005 group visiting RMIT: Moira, Kathleen, Vanessa, Maria, Sina and Zoe.

The new course commenced at the start of 2006. Moreland Adult Education in the northern metropolitan region of Melbourne has been involved in the delivery of the Certificate IV in Further Education and the Diploma of Further Education since the very beginning, delivering the former core units since the pilot project in 1999. In the years since, the course has been phenomenally successful with 100 per cent successful entry in six of the seven years it has run, with only one post-VCE student having missed out on tertiary entry. Students have achieved entry into degree or diploma courses such as education, social sciences, IT, social work, children's services, professional writing and editing, natural therapies and industrial design. Students were awarded entry to these courses without the traditional entry criteria of a successful Year 12 completion. Most had left school in years between Year 9 and Year 11.

The most effective means of delivering the course in previous years has been through its mentored approach, which can be maintained even if not actively promoted in the new curriculum document. Although the mentoring aspect has diminished in emphasis, planning to integrate delivery and assessment of most of the core and some elective units together—and using a case management approach to students—will work effectively for the new units. The newly accredited courses have streamlined the former versions in a number of ways, especially by renaming the core units and ensuring that people can enter or leave at various points

and still gain accredited Statements of Attainment. There is a reduction in the emphasis on mentoring, but the courses have maintained the original flexibility of choice and negotiation of goals and outcomes. Another positive is the introduction of the selection of general and stream-specific units within the document itself, which means a provider can deliver them without having to add a large number of certificates to its scope of registration.

As we launch ourselves into another year facing funding reductions and increased concerns about sustainability, it is encouraging to be able to acknowledge that the newly accredited courses in further education are well within the financial and educational scopes of both small and large providers, and ensure that positive pathway options are open to all adults—regardless of social, financial or personal disadvantages.

Meg Curlewis has managed Moreland Adult Education in the northern suburbs of Melbourne for 18 years. She manages the delivery of the Diploma of Further Education and personally mentors learners who are enrolled in it.

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Looking to the future: VALBEC strategic planning day

The VALBEC executive team has never been one to rest on its laurels. On an exceedingly hot Friday in January, the VALBEC executive gathered in a meeting room at Carlton library to explore, discuss and reflect on the issues driving its service provision. Allan Meers from the Q Alliance Business Consultants facilitated the day of reflection, discussion and strategic planning. This enabled the VALBEC executive to review its operations and services to members and set strategic goals for 2006 and beyond.

A difficulty for any volunteer organisation is making choices about what is worthy and possible, as opposed to the multitude of issues and demands that are worthy (but perhaps not as possible—what Allan referred to as 'Blue Skying'). These choices had to be considered in light of our Mission Statement; our goals in relation to the national organisation (ACAL) and the demands and requirements of our stakeholders and members. With these in mind the VALBEC executive used the day to articulate and then focus on three main goals. These goals are to:

1 Build and maintain VALBEC's role as a leader in adult education.
2 Know and understand the policy environments in which VALBEC operates.
3 Enhance practice in the ALBE community.

The discussions, conversations and sometimes passionate rants that echoed through the quiet library corridors were focused on the strategies and actions that will ensure each of VALBEC's articulated goals become a reality.

1 To build and maintain VALBEC's role as a leader in adult education

The VALBEC executive realised that building VALBEC's role as a leader in adult education requires a proactive response. A number of ideas were put forward, most related to strengthening personal and professional relationships with stakeholders and committing to regular conversations with these stakeholders in formal and informal settings. It was decided that VALBEC needs to network more widely. It was thought that VALBEC's current focus is too narrowly defined by funding and accountability and that it is appropriate to aim to build new and lateral partnerships with other state organisations, industry skills councils and research organisations.

2 To know and understand the policy environments in which VALBEC operates

The 'vexed' question of policy created a great deal of discussion amongst the VALBEC executive. One of the key issues centred on how VALBEC can make the shift from a 'responder' to policy directives presented to them, to an organisation of influence in policy setting: to be more of an adult literacy policy driver. A number of strategies to make this possible were put forward. It was recognised as important that VALBEC define and prioritise the potential policy environments it can be directly involved in, and then for individuals within the executive to nominate their area of expertise. The next step would involve the development of position papers for each of the policy environments and to more closely monitor and respond to these policy areas.

Policy Update

Review of the National Reporting System

As a consortium of practitioner researchers led by Linda Wyse works through a review of the National Reporting System, she and colleagues Kate Perkins and Philippa McLean describe the development of a working draft of a revised NRS, which will now undergo further trialing and consultation.

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In 2004, a scoping exercise was conducted to examine how the National Reporting System (NRS) is currently used, how effectively the NRS serves these uses and its potential for adaptation to a broader range of applications. The results of this initial research are reported in Perkins, K. (2005) *Reframe, rename, revitalise: Future directions for the language, literacy and numeracy National Reporting System.* Perkins (2005: 6) found that the NRS appeared to have developed, 'a strong following amongst those with the background knowledge and opportunity to become expert users'.

Most practitioners interviewed by Perkins reported finding the NRS extremely useful as a framework for thinking about, discussing and reporting on Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) performance. They felt that the NRS captured LLN complexity, and was flexible enough to be utilised with diverse clients in varied contexts. All identified minor inconsistencies and ambiguities that should be addressed but the consistent criticisms were the physical layout of the manual, which many found daunting and off-putting, or the ways in which the NRS was utilised within government-funded programs.

Most academics and others consulted believed that the theoretical underpinnings of the NRS were generally sound. However, some saw a need to rethink the place of aspects related to information computer technologies (ICT), and a few raised questions about the potential of the NRS to incorporate a broader range of literacies. Despite general support for the NRS, it was widely suggested that it was time for a formal review and revision, with the focus on streamlining the existing framework, rather than on rethinking it from first principles.

In response to the recommendations in Perkin's report, the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) instigated the first stage of a three stage process[1] to be conducted in 2005.

Stage 1 has involved a number of consultations to:
- validate the scoping exercise
- develop a draft revised NRS
- explore the potential to develop an essential skills framework based on key NRS concepts.

There is a DEST proviso that the five levels in the NRS be retained as this allows NRS outcomes to be mapped to the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS). The Stage 1 review has sought feedback on all other elements within the NRS and begun an exploration of the potential to incorporate recent theoretical developments in LLN. Any significant conceptual changes will be carefully considered to ensure that such changes do not undermine the identified strengths of the NRS or lose the support of the current base of expert users.

Stage 1, conducted by a consortium of Linda Wyse and Associates, CAE and Kulu is nearing completion. While working on revisions to the full NRS, consortium members explored the potential for the NRS to provide the conceptual scaffolding of a general LLN framework or of a broader essential skills framework that could provide the scaffolding, and a shared language to describe an identified set of life skills. It is envisaged that the key elements of this framework would be presented in varying levels of complexity to suit different purposes, audiences and contexts.

Stage 1: Practitioner consultations—key findings

The initial consultation process focused primarily, but not exclusively, on practitioners, with the intention of drawing on the knowledge and experience of the people who actually use the NRS regularly. At the time of writing, over 400 people from diverse contexts and with diverse client groups have been directly involved in the survey and/or workshops that have been conducted nationally.

A survey of 114 people from all states and territories provided detailed input. Survey respondents came from all parts of the LLN field, with two thirds having LLNP and /or WELL experience. The majority worked mainly with NRS Levels 1–3, with 25 per cent regularly using Level 4 and 10 per cent using Level 5 (mainly in an ESL context). Their input was taken into account in the development of draft materials related to the core elements of the NRS: revising the macroskills of Reading, Writing, Numeracy, Oral Communication and Learning Strategies, and these were then used to gather further feedback from practitioners via a series of workshops held around the country.

There was a high level of consistency between survey responses and the findings of the initial scoping exercise. Almost all of those who responded to the survey reported that the NRS was a useful tool in identifying client LLN strengths and weaknesses, and in tracking their progress. They felt it also served an important purpose by providing a nationally consistent, standardised framework and common language for talking about, and reporting on, client LLN competencies, and was flexible enough for broad application. Half the respondents felt that the major issue with the NRS was the manual, which they found complex, unwieldy and daunting. However, the other half reported that this had ceased to be a problem once they got used to it. Even so, many commented that it remained a barrier for new users, and most supported change to the layout and presentation to make it more accessible and manageable for all. There were also criticisms of the wordiness and ambiguity of the language within the NRS, and issues concerning unnecessary gaps between, and inconsistencies across, indicators.

The vast majority of respondents did not want to expand the current five macroskills. There were however a few suggestions to incorporate multiple literacies such as visual literacy, or to split Speaking and Listening into two separate macroskills. The area of most discussion was the place of ICT. About a third of respondents wanted to see computer literacy acknowledged more extensively, but were split between making it a macroskill in its own right, addressing it within Learning Strategies section or incorporating it more extensively across all macroskills.

Although there was strong support for the continued inclusion of Learning Strategies as a separate macroskill, many felt the original version focused too narrowly on goal-setting and planning. Proposals for expansion covered a wide range, including incorporating ways of reporting on readiness to learn, growth in self-esteem and self-confidence, and critical thinking. Some suggested a stronger focus on a broad range of general life skills, such as taking responsibility for learning, working in groups, and problem-solving skills.

Most respondents felt that key elements of the NRS aligned with their experience of adult learning development. Although most of those working in ESL seemed satisfied that the NRS was suitable for their clients, a small number reported finding the NRS less suited to reporting on the performance of people from non-English-speaking backgrounds, particularly those who were highly literate and/or numerate in their first language.

As a result of the data gathered from the surveys and workshop feedback, the following key changes have been made:
- Revised and updated introduction.
- Consistent approach/number of indicators across macroskills—five macroskills and two indicators of competence per macroskill.
- Expanded and revised features and performance strategies and sample activities, incorporating information from the current NRS and expanded to include a broader range of detail and a greater emphasis on ICT.
- Extensive revision of Learning Strategies to articulate awareness of learning strategies as well as applications within a range of social, personal, educational, community and employment contexts.
- Incorporation of ICT across all macroskills but with a particular focus within Learning Strategies.
- Revised layout organised around macroskills, in-cluding indicators, features and performance strategies and sample activities arranged by level and presented on one double page spread.

Towards Stage 2: Field testing, further consultations and final revisions

It is important to note that the aim of Stage 1 was to provide a working draft to generate further discussion—not to produce a finished version. While there has been support from the field and the project advisory group for the proposed changes, extensive field testing will be required to validate the revisions.

Ongoing consultations and substantial trials will occur during Stage 2. It is anticipated that this extensive input will influence the final version's shape, concepts and content. It is anticipated that feedback will be sought from academics and other stakeholders such as government and industry bodies, and that the practitioner cohort will again be broadly representative, including teachers and assessors from all states and territories working with a range of learners from many programs.

During the Stage 1 consultation workshops, a number of practitioners indicated their interest in being involved in the field testing of the revised version of the document. We are compiling a list of names and will be happy to talk to interested people.

Contact information for field testing can be obtained from:
- Linda Wyse: 03 94297551, *linda@lwa.au.com*
- Philippa McLean: 03 9652 0709, *philippa@cae.edu.au*
- Kath Brewer: 03 94297551, *kb@lwa.au.com*

The first revision of the NRS will be available from *Literacynet* at: *www.dest.gov.au/literacynet*.

The consultants are happy to receive further input on the draft via email to: *kate.p@bigpond.net.au*

in 2005 compared to 30 per cent in 2004). Those not in the labour force were more likely to have enrolled in a new course (44 per cent, compared to 34 per cent of all LOTE learners).

ACE is meeting the challenge

While ACE faces many issues from the different client groups using the sector, according to the participants surveyed as part of this study, it is meeting the challenge. One group of students who seem to be finding what they were looking for in the ACE sector consists of those LOTE learners. This group of students is more marginalised (than the English-only speakers) in terms of education and employment, and more likely to be from the poorest socioeconomic group. They enrol in ACE hoping that they will not only become more prepared for work and further study, but that ACE will help them make connections with other people and their community. These learners are more likely to note that they have gained in confidence during their course, and gained from the socialisation aspects of the ACE experience.

This view is even more strongly expressed by those who speak a LOTE at home and have very low levels of prior educational experience (eg primary schooling only). These findings were strongly endorsed by the second stage, follow-up survey which saw a match between initial motivations and reported ACE impact. Labour market outcomes for this group also improved with a reduction of the unemployment rate between survey contacts. The longer-term impact of their experiences in the ACE sector will be further explored when the cohort is surveyed in 2006, in the third stage of this longitudinal study.

Anne Walstab is a senior research assistant in the Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning at the University of Melbourne.

Notes

1. Department of Education & Training (2004), Future Directions for Adult Community Education in Victoria, statement prepared for Lynne Kosky, MP, Minister for Education and Training, Melbourne.
2. NCVER, unpublished data, AVETMISS 2001.
3. Walstab, A. & Teese, R. (2005), A community-studies approach to researching strategic issues in ACE, Victorian Department of Education and Training.
4. Eastern Metropolitan, Central Western Metropolitan, Northern Metropolitan, Central Highlands Wimmera and Loddon Campaspe Mallee Regions of ACFE.
5. 26 per cent of the cohort is from the lowest SES quintile ranked across Victoria, where SES is based on the postcode of a student's home address.

Foreign Correspondence

The Webhead story: an international, online community of language teachers and learners

Michael Coghlan introduces the Webheads, an online 'community of practice' whose members welcome the interested and invite the curious to visit and contribute to a global fellowship.

The Webheads is an online community of language teachers and learners that exists to explore the use of internet-based technologies for teaching and learning, and to promote international friendship. The term and concept is the brainchild of Vance Stevens, a veteran Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) teacher based in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The Webheads community evolved out of an online teaching volunteer organisation, English for the Internet (EFI) (*http://study.com/*) which was started by David Winet in San Francisco.

In 1997, Vance Stevens and myself (based in Adelaide, Australia) taught EFI classes around noon Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) on Sundays. The classes were timetabled to follow each other. Though we were teaching separate classes many of the students in these classes would stay on for the following class. EFI classes were typically around six weeks long but many of these students would enrol for the next run of the same course, and it was clear that the group of students that were meeting on Sundays wanted to remain meeting indefinitely. By now this group also included another EFI teacher, Maggi Doty from Germany. Vance suggested that the two classes be joined as one and call themselves 'Webheads' to reflect the intrinsic interest in the web and its role in language learning. And so the Webhead community was born.

Webheads continued to meet at GMT 12.00 on Sundays in a variety of online spaces, but principally in the now defunct Palace. We also used Hearme (*http://celt.cu-portland.edu/Tools/*), the first stable web-based voice application (also now defunct), and Yahoo Messenger (*http://messenger.yahoo.com/*). Yahoo Messenger was the first of the instant messengers to include a reliable voice conferencing facility. When the Palace finally closed its doors around 2000, the weekly meeting moved to Tapped In, a community established for educators to meet online (*http://tappedin.org/tappedin/*).

In the early years most Webhead members were English language students, and the membership gradually grew. In 2002, as part of the seminars that occur each year in the lead up to the annual international TESOL convention[1], membership of the Webhead community was actively promoted in an eight-week seminar called Webheads in Action[2]. These Webheads in Action and the Becoming a Webhead seminars have run since 2004, and have been instrumental in increasing the Webheads membership and changing the community's character to include more language teachers and others interested in the notion of online community or teaching with technology but who did not necessarily have any connection with the teaching and learning of language.

In 2006, the Sunday meeting time is still a regular event. This, together with the Yahoo Groups email list, forms the core of Webheads communications. Both the synchronous meetings in Tapped In and the asynchronous email postings cover all manner of personal and professional topics. These core communication channels are always unfacilitated and unplanned. There are no formal leaders, and no one takes responsibility for any set agenda. Topics evolve according to interest and need. This can be disconcerting for newcomers who arrive in these spaces and ask, 'What's the topic under discussion?' The answer is always, 'Whatever you want to talk about'. This has ensured that all topics are community driven and come from the bottom up.

What do we talk about? World events, culture, family concerns, travel, the planning and implementation of specific community events, and of course new learning and technologies and language teaching are always up for discussion. Vance Stevens suggested the acronym FUN (Frivolous Unanticipated Nonsense) to describe what we talk about, but this FUN inevitably merges into more serious and focused dialogue. It's not all talk however, as important as this regular free-flowing discourse is in forging links between community members. Another key aspect of life as an active Webhead is participation in events. Apart from the regular meetings, there are other frequent regular events that are open to the whole community. Types of events can be:
- Conference presentations where one Webhead will be

presenting to a face-to-face audience and will invite other Webheads to co-present as remote guests.

- A Webhead teacher may invite other Webheads to talk live to their classes using the voice facility in Instant Messenger or virtual classroom tools.
- A Webhead may give a seminar or workshop to colleagues and invite other Webheads to join in as remote guests.
- Two Webhead teachers will collaborate on a joint class activity.

As Webhead membership has grown, Webhead face-to-face meetings have also become commonplace. Chapters of Webheads within a particular area will sometimes meet, and a number of Webheads meet each year at the international TESOL convention. Such is the spread of Webheads throughout the world that travel to most regions of the world can involve meeting a fellow Webhead. On a trip to Vietnam in 2005 I had the pleasure of meeting Thuan in Ho Chi Minh City, and my son has met Teresa in Portugal for dinner. He has had the pleasure of meeting a Webhead that I have worked with a good deal online but have not yet met. Travelling the world as a Webhead, either virtually or face to face, one is never alone!

The most recent major event for the Webhead community was a three day online 'Convergence' (*http://schedule. wiaoc.org/*) that showcased the work of language teachers around the world. It is anticipated that this may become an annual or biennial event.

The benefits of being a Webhead are collegiality, friendship, excitement, wonder and the chance to grow professionally. The Webheads is what is now commonly known as a Community of Practice—though the existence of the Webheads predated the currency of this notion by some years. Webheads provides a forum for exploring new technologies, discussing their application, and trialing them with peers in a safe and supported environment. It offers a dynamic, living database of human resources that can answer most questions about how to incorporate technology in teaching. The willingness of Webheads to share what they know is remarkable. Not only are the archives of the daily discussions on the email listing a precious resource, but many Webheads also document what they do on a myriad of websites. Conference presentations, workshops, seminars and class activities are all routinely written up on websites or in published articles. Teresa Almeida d'Eca keeps an ongoing record of these resources at, http://*64.71.48.37/ teresadeca/webheads/wia-index.htm*

Personally speaking, the benefits of being a Webhead are twofold. I gain an enormous amount of knowledge and friendship in a supportive environment, and feel like my

input back into the community is respected and valued. It is an arrangement that is clearly of mutual benefit for me and my Webhead colleagues. As a colleague wrote this week:

> … I am a member of several lists and sometimes I get very useful information, but what I have never gotten is friendship. I feel Webheads are my friends, and they have demonstrated this friendship in many ways. I don't have that feeling with any of the members of the other lists. This friendship is built through this chaotic mixture of knowledge sharing, hugs, frustration, successes, synchronous and asynchronous chit-chat, etc. This is what makes Webheads unique.

Finding the Webheads

Webheads has grown to several hundred members in approximately 80 countries. No one knows the exact number of members or countries represented. Given the nature of such a diverse and productive group, it is well nigh impossible to have all the online materials of the group neatly categorised and indexed.

- The original home is at *http://wfw.webheads.info/*
- Another entry point is at *http://www.webheads.info*— a site created for the first of the Webheads in Action seminars in 2002
- Recently a Moodle site has been established for new Webheads to announce their presence—*http:// www.opensource.idv.tw/moodle/course/view.php?id=26*
- Or one can join the Yahoo Group at *http://groups. yahoo.com/group/efiwebheads*
- There is a calendar of events at *http://www.prof2000.pt/ users/vstevens/online events.htm*
- Another way of contacting us is to join us in the reception area of Tapped In any Sunday at noon GMT (*http://tappedin.org/tappedin/*). As with all Webheads endeavours, membership of Tapped In is free.

New members are always very welcome.

Michael Coghlan teaches South Australian TAFE staff how to use the internet in learning. He began teaching online in 1997, and has designed and delivered online courses in ESL, eModeration, and Using Online Technologies, and is an online instructor for the Graduate Certificate in e-Learning from TAFE South Australia.

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Notes

1 h t t p : / / w w w . t e s o l . o r g / s _ t e s o l / s e c _ document.asp?CID=23&DID=3711

2 http://www.webheads.info/

Support for quality non-accredited teaching and learning

by Karen Dymke

Many know the important role non-accredited courses play in engaging reluctant learners into training and employment and connecting them to their community. On December 2, 2005 Sandy Forbes, general manager of Adult Community and Further Education Division, presented awards to the inaugural winners of the Best Practice for Non-Accredited Learning Programs in ACE. These awards acknowledge the excellent work practitioners and providers do in non-accredited learning.

The awards are part of the Support for Quality Non-Accredited Teaching and Learning project that CAE is managing for ACFE. The project team at CAE is developing a comprehensive, sustainable support program for adult education practitioners involved in non-accredited teaching and learning to ensure that ACFE non-accredited programs are able to demonstrate quality control via a uniform process. This and the supplementary A-Frame project (see article in this edition) will ensure quality control, and provide a uniform system and process across the state. It will also encourage and support the identification and dissemination of good practice.

First prize went to Foster Community House for their program 'Headstart'.

Headstart is a 30 hour course that provides participants with skills that employers need in the hospitality and retail industries. The focus is on experiential learning, group work and visits to local employees. The program addresses the local needs of the area in that students learn transferable skills and local employers are able to employ skilled young people. The learners are aged 15–24, and at the end of the program most have gained employment in the local area, increased confidence and opportunities to take certificate courses in retail and/or hospitality.

Second prize went to the Footscray Community Arts Program for their ArtLife program, which provides high quality creative art experiences together with the development of life skills for people with a disability. Third prize was shared by Long Gully Neighbourhood House Centre for their leadership program and Traralgon Neighbourhood Learning House for their program, Making our Community Computer Literate.

Beside the Whiteboard

Marie Mennees and Anna de Luca are part of a new generation of adult literacy teachers. In 2005 Marie and Anna participated in a professional development program, Teaching Literacy: Blending the Theory with the Practice, at Victoria University. The PD program offered teachers from VU's Access Department, Further Education Department and Vocational Education Department further experience in a diverse range of teaching skills relevant to adult literacy programs. They talked with Debbie Soccio from *Fine Print.*

What were you doing before this? What is your professional background? What other jobs have you had?

Marie: Before working at VU, I was teaching at a primary school. I had been doing casual relief teaching (CRT) work in schools with short periods of full-time work. I worked in retail, part time (at Myer—where else?). As a single mother of three daughters, this suited me. During this period of time (whilst teaching), I also completed a Graduate Diploma of Education. I did this as a way of ensuring my future employability.

Anna: I graduated from uni as a primary school teacher. The positions I held included class teacher Years 4–6, Year 6 coordinator, computer teacher (when students were not so competent!), accounts manager for a building company, and currently I'm a maths and literacy teacher at VU.

What made you think about a change in direction? Why adult literacy?

Marie: A friend suggested I apply for a sessional teaching position at VU and I was successful. I was increasingly frustrated with the lack of opportunities to teach on a part-time basis—primary schools don't want to know you. I was ready for a change and so accepted the challenge.

Anna: I got into adult education via a fellow primary school teacher who had been working in adult education for two years. I must say I was extremely hesitant about taking on the position as I had had a big break from teaching while bringing up children. The flexible hours were probably the biggest draw card as I still wanted to be around for my kids at the end of the day.

Tell us about the professional development program you did at VU

Marie: The PD I recently completed was interesting and has challenged my thinking about classroom practice. I have implemented new strategies that were discussed during the course. It wasn't so much that I wasn't aware of them; I was comfortable to use the ones I had used in the past.

Anna: I took on the PD in responses to the restructure of departments at VU. When the TESOL and adult education departments merged it was clear to me that I would be teaching ESL students in my classes and I was not qualified.

What are the ideas and concepts from that program that stick most in your mind? Were you challenged in ways that you didn't expect? How?

Marie: Since the professional development program I have altered my teaching style, particularly in the way I present material to students and the types of activities I ask them to undertake. I now expect the students to be more active. This was a bit daunting for me to do at first. My students didn't like to move around very much or try anything new. They did get the hang of it and maybe now they might even enjoy it! What made the PD program really valuable for me was the opportunity to hear the challenges and experiences of other teachers. I don't think there is enough time allowed for sharing ideas and issues in the day to day rush in the Access Department (at VU). As a sessional, there is probably even less time for sharing than for contract/ongoing teachers. As a sessional teacher one tends to focus on one's own work and be fairly oblivious to what else is going on in other classes.

Anna: Going back to study was a really useful thing to do, because it prompted me to think once more about the 'little' things that sometimes get overlooked in the day-to-day rush of teaching. The things I found valuable included discussions on how students learn, for example, kinesthetic; the strategies that assist learning, like Brain Gym; ways to teach spelling to adults, such as THRASS and other techniques. What was also helpful was the opportunity to share practical tips with others working in the same area. Just to hear someone talk about the importance of reinforcing key learning outcomes at the beginning and end of the session was a useful reminder for me.

What are you doing now? What are the challenges ahead?

Anna: This year I am working on Skill UP program—placing redundant workers in training, and also teaching CGEA Certificate 1 (Introductory) Numeracy. I'm going on with my studies in the Graduate Diploma in TESOL and Literacy Methodologies at VU Footscray. It's an evening course so I'm pretty busy.

Marie: This year I am continuing my studies of a Graduate Dip in TESOL and Advanced Literacy. Even though it puts a lot of pressure on me, I want to complete it.

I am teaching literacy classes at VU and am involved in the Distance Education program. This involves me developing materials to be sent to flexible delivery students. I also teach Italian at a primary school for a day and a half per week. This is my second year doing this, with my time there increasing by half a day each week. I love teaching it, even though I am new to it. It is my long-term goal to travel back to Italy.

Thanks to you both. All the best for your studies and the future.

They're all there: questions about memory, instinct, persistence, discomfort, reflection, change, discussion, theorising, estimations, action, risk-taking, reflection and revision. Of course, the list is infinite. I don't ever expect voluble and insightful responses the first few times I prompt learners in this way, but as they get used to this kind of class conclusion, they become more aware of their learning processes and how to respond.

What does it all mean?

Like all that is complex, beautiful and chaotic in life, there are no easy and formulaic solutions to catering for learning styles and developing a repertoire of learning strategies. But with care and greater attention to making our teaching practices explicit and transparent, we can help students discover and recover their secret worlds of learning.

Robyn Hodge teaches psychology to CGEA students, edits literacy journals and writes non-fiction books. She is intrigued by the ways adults try to learn, deny they can learn and then go about working on new tasks and skills, but is not allowed to do any further study until she pays off her HECS debts.

3 To enhance practice in the ALBE community

Supporting the delivery of ALBE practice in Victoria is an enduring vision for the VALBEC executive, and there was much discussion about how to achieve this for current and future members. The discussions included what kind of professional development activities VALBEC could deliver this year, how VALBEC could be involved in a CGEA network, and the consultation processes for the CGEA reaccreditation and other state and regional conferences. Since the planning day, the VALBEC executive has started to build relationships that will lead to greater PD involvement throughout the state.

By the end of the day everyone was exhausted but buoyantly positive, acknowledging that the process was valuable and worthwhile. The challenge now is for VALBEC to take the ideas and actions put forward on the day and transform them into action. At the February meeting, executive members reported on actions already undertaken and will continue to do this at subsequent meetings. Members with ideas and strategies to assist VALBEC meet its three strategic goals can forward them, addressed as 'Attention: VALBEC executive Strategic Plan' via *info@valbec.org,au* or posted to VALBEC Administration, Box 861 Springvale South VIC 3172.

Lynne Matheson began her career as a secondary English/ Drama/Media Studies teacher in the state system, but has worked in adult literacy education for the past decade. She has always been passionate about writing and exploring the links between voice and identity.