

## Publication Details

Commissioning Editor: Karen Manwaring

Copy Editor: Glen Dower  
writer@alphalink.com.au

Fine Print Editorial Group:  
Sarah Deasey, Robin Kenrick,  
Julie Palmer, Debbie Soccio, Lynne Matheson

Subscription, advertising and editorial inquiries:

VALBEC  
PO Box 861  
Springvale South, 3172  
Telephone: (03) 9546 6892  
Email: info@valbec.org.au

Fine Print is published by the Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council Inc. (VALBEC).

Fine Print is the registered journal of VALBEC: ISSN No: 0159-3978

No part of it may be reproduced without prior permission.

The opinions expressed through this material are not necessarily those of the Fine Print editorial group or VALBEC.

Layout: digital environs, Melbourne  
enquiries@digitalenvirons.com

Printing: Document Printing  
Australia P/L, Port Melbourne.

Cover image: Alex Bottomley



VALBEC and Fine Print acknowledge the financial support of the ACFE Board



## features

**Adult literacy and numeracy research and the demise of NCVER funding** 3

*by Pauline O'Maley*

What happens now that the only targeted funding for adult literacy and numeracy research in Australia has come to an end?

**Words on Wheels: a teacher's thoughts on community VCAL** 9

*by Louisa Vale*

A project to help young rural students find ways to rediscover education also helped them 're-view' their own community and the wider world.

**Underworld** 14

*by Karen Manwaring*

An interactive, animated investigation into female reproduction? By detectives? With music?

## regulars

**Practical Matters** 16

Lisa Bartels and Pauline Morrow outline their workshop, 'The Reaccredited CGEA—a focus on course-planning within a large provider', from the recent VALBEC conference.

**Technology Matters** 17

Getting to the point of PowerPoint with Debbie Soccio.

**Open Forum** 21

Dianne Parslow's short report on April's PD session, 'Implementing the new CGEA'.

**Policy Update** 22

ACE workers are undervalued and underpaid, says the NTEU's Michael Evans, while the VQA's Greg Deakin explains the outcomes-based quality standards for registered training organisations.

**Foreign Correspondence** 26

Restricted phone and internet access were the least of Dr Siobahn Bourke's challenges in India's northeast provinces.

**Beside the Whiteboard** 29

'Don't be afraid to try something new', said Glenda McPherson. And like a good teacher, she always followed her own advice.

# Editorial

This winter edition of *Fine Print* truly reflects the diversity within adult literacy and language education. Settle in with a hot cuppa and take your pick from articles about research priorities, working with country youth, sex education (here at home on the web, and in remote communities in northern India), the lack of recognition of workers in the ACE field, and the new AQTF.

In 'Adult literacy and numeracy research and the demise of NCVER funding', Pauline O'Maley deplores the loss of what was the only targeted funding for Adult Literacy and Numeracy research in Australia. Pauline looks at the research that has been done by NCVER between 2005 and 2006. The research completed since 2002 will be covered in upcoming editions of *Fine Print*.

Louisa Vale from the 'Words on Wheels' VCAL project in Bright takes us with her as she reflects on a project that helped young, rural students 're-view' their world. The project helped students reconnect with education and discover new ways to connect with their community and with the wider world.

From our world to 'Underworld', which showcases writer-producer Jenny Swain's award-winning sex education resource. 'Underworld' presents information on human reproduction, particularly the female reproductive system, through a musical detective investigation! The CD-Rom, study guide, lesson plans, MP3 music files and printable glossary offer a fun and factual resource to teachers delivering sex education.

In Practical Matters, Lisa Bartels and Pauline Morrow give us a taste of what went on in their workshop 'The reaccredited CGEA—a focus on course planning within a large provider', at the recent VALBEC conference. Look out for more on this workshop in the next edition of *Fine Print*.

Debbie Soccio comes to the rescue of those of us still challenged by all matters PowerPoint. If this sounds like you, take a peek at Technology Matters—all will be made clear.

The Open Forum on the new CGEA is still a little light on contributors, but this is understandable given that many of you have not yet started implementing the new CGEA. Di

Parslow keeps the fire burning with a short report on the PD session 'Implementing the new CGEA' run by the Curriculum Maintenance Manager in April. Di gives us directions for finding the new implementation guide and also flags the need for more PD on implementing the new CGEA.

In Policy Update, Michael Evans from the NTEU argues a watertight case for more funding for the ACE sector. Inadequate funding means inadequate wages and that means that 'The sector survives, and in many ways thrives, by exploiting the commitment and goodwill of its staff'. Michael goes on to discuss the new collective agreement negotiated by the NTEU and other unions, ACE sector staff and their employers.

Also in Policy Update, Greg Deakin from the Victorian Qualifications Authority takes us through the revised standards of the AQTF. Greg notes that the AQTF is 'moving away from a "one size fits all" model of regulation to one where RTOs which are performing well will be subject to a lighter regulatory touch, while those performing poorly will be more closely monitored'.

In Beside the Whiteboard, we listen in as Lynne Matheson from VALBEC (and NMIT) interviews Glenda McPherson from Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE (GippsTAFE) about Glenda's rich career in education. Glenda's career has spanned teaching and administration; country and city; schools, TAFE and ACE. Glenda's passion is information and communication technologies (ICT) in education and her words of wisdom about ICT apply to just about every aspect of teaching and learning: 'Don't be afraid to try something new. Start off very small and get it right so it feels comfortable! When you have it right, build on it by trying something different'.

Foreign Correspondence takes us to the remote north of India where Siobhan Bourke from Family Planning Victoria has been improving the skills of nurses, doctors and health care workers in diagnosing and treating sexually transmitted infections and working with intravenous drug users. Working in this program meant developing effective communication strategies—so spoken, written and diagrammatic language took centre stage.

Continued on page 8 ...

**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.**

# Adult literacy and numeracy research and the demise of NCVER funding

by Pauline O'Maley

**Why the National Centre for Vocational and Educational Research lost its funding is yet to be fully explained. However, one of a number of possible wide-ranging ramifications will be the reduction of a valuable research base that has informed policy and the ongoing development of improved practice.**

## Introduction

The Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), provided a \$400,000 fund for adult literacy and numeracy to the National Centre for Vocational and Educational Research (NCVER) after the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (ALNARC) funding ended in 2002.

This funding to NCVER has now been lost, so the research first done by ALNARC, and since 2002 by NCVER, comes to an end. It was the only targeted funding for adult literacy and numeracy research in Australia, and was invaluable in widening understandings of literacy and numeracy issues, approaches and opportunities both inside adult literacy and numeracy classrooms specifically, and in VET generally. In an environment where adult literacy and numeracy departments in universities are gradually being lost, this signals the probable end to research in our field in Australia.

It comes also at a time when one of the COAG targets is to improve the percentage of the Australian population that has post-compulsory education or training qualifications. The timing of the loss of the funding is also crucial in relation to the Adult Literacy and Life Skills survey (ALLS). The first results of the Australian ALLS are expected to be available in October 2007. This survey will potentially provide a wealth of data, information and ideas that should be of interest to not only educational sectors, but also to government and business in terms of social and educational policy and planning, training and employment issues. I believe the ALLS data will now be underutilised, as the NCVER adult literacy and numeracy funding was the logical vehicle for research of this nature. This will mean invaluable data will be lost to the vocational and further education sector and other sectors who value the foundational importance of literacy and numeracy.

It is difficult to understand, in this context, why these cuts would be made to the only research funding for adult literacy and numeracy in the country. Literacy and numeracy are key issues in both social and economic terms. Reducing the research base that provides information to inform policy and support the development of improved practice is an alarming

backward step. The reasons for demolishing this dedicated research base remain unclear.

Adult literacy and numeracy practitioners work in a fragile environment where a shrinking, ageing, predominately female workforce is under pressure from the disjunctions that competitive tendering brings, and its practitioners are increasingly being asked to work in diverse settings and with an increased understanding of cutting-edge technologies. Access to quality relevant research, of the kind that NCVER has provided, has been crucial to this workforce. It will be greatly missed and will most certainly have an impact on teaching and learning practices as well as a diminishing of the profile of adult literacy and numeracy.

It is timely to look at the research that has been done by NCVER in recent years. To do a thorough audit of the work done since 2002 would require more time and space than is available here, so I will look only at research published between 2005 and 2006. This does not include the papers yet to be published and the research in progress. I will not be able to examine even this small snapshot of the research in as detailed a manner as I would wish, and may as a result not give the full picture of the research. If this fulfils the purpose of encouraging the reader to seek out the research and read it in more detail, then it will have been a useful exercise.

Within the aforementioned limitations, it is my intention here to look at the breadth of the research that has been published in this period, the dominant themes that have emerged from that research, and the directions indicated for further research. I have proposed several categories, and acknowledge that this is not the way everybody would categorise the projects—of course the boundaries are fluid; it is merely one way to build the picture of diverse research and draw out dominant themes.

## Good practice

Three projects fit into the good practice category. All have a different focus, but there are themes related to such things as resources, professional development and funding. McKenna and Fitzpatrick, in their paper *Integrated approaches to teaching adult literacy in Australia: A snapshot of practice in*

*community services*, focus on integrating learning, literacy and numeracy (LL&N) into training packages, while McGlusky and Thaker's *Literacy support for Indigenous people: Current systems and practices in Queensland*, looks at ways of enhancing support systems for Indigenous students, and Snyder, Jones and Lo Bianco's paper *Using information and communication technologies in adult literacy education: New practices, new challenges*, looks specifically at technology in education.

McKenna and Fitzpatrick explore good practice in the integrated delivery of LL&N skills using the community services industry as an example. Their research indicates successful delivery depends on the ability of facilitators and assessors to interpret vocational training packages and develop appropriate teaching and learning strategies. They believe there is a growing acceptance of workplaces as sites for learning, and workplace programs as vehicles for fostering innovation. As a result of these programs and changing workplaces LL&N is now more visible in the workplace.

They point to several professional development tools and projects that have promoted integrated approaches and give guidelines for how to do this. They believe a multi-disciplinary approach is the most appropriate, with facilitators who understand both the training packages and linguistic demands outlined in the standards. The research indicated practitioners are experiencing challenges with understanding training packages. Nevertheless they 'were able to demonstrate great flexibility in response to contextualising training to the community services industry and applied a remarkable consistency of instructional strategies to enhance the language, literacy and numeracy skills of students' (2005, p.6). The practitioners in the study demonstrated broad and deep skills, but this skill development needs to be supported by professional development and adequate supporting materials.

Funding is an area they identify as problematic, believing that restrictive funding models leave registered training organisations to make commercial decisions that can result in learners with high support needs being excluded from VET courses.

McGlusky and Thaker's research identifies the literacy and numeracy supports available to Indigenous students, and examines which work most successfully. To do this they apply the principles identified for Indigenous adult education. LL&N skills are highly valued in the Indigenous community and are a key to further training, education and employment. McGlusky and Thaker suggest, however, that LL&N support remains inadequate, although effective support systems are available.

The study identifies one-to-one support as the most effective method of support, and names the two systems that use this method effectively as being class tutorials and peer tutoring,

both formal and informal. They also suggest that funding arrangements must accommodate best practice models. Further, given the primary importance of the relationship between teacher/tutor and student, there is a need for more Indigenous staff, more cross-cultural training and more professional development as well as a review of TAFE teacher training.



The focus of Snyder, Jones and Lo Bianco's research is on understanding more about adult learners' digital communication practices and the implications of this for adult literacy programs. They suggest it makes little sense to think and talk about literacy and information and communication technologies as if they were separate activities, 'literacy education is equally and simultaneously digital literacy education' (2005, p.6). Attention needs to be paid to the promotion of critical awareness and informed use of technologies. Learners want and need a broader technology curriculum. There is a need to rethink the work of technology-mediated literacy and how it is labelled. For them the use of the word 'literacy' comes with its own baggage, and they suggest the word 'communication' would be an appropriate substitute.

There are both pedagogical and professional development implications here. Opportunities need to be provided for:

all adult literacy educators to develop a confident and coherent approach to the inclusion of new literacies into their teaching practice; they require opportunities to consider how to integrate the use of information and communication technologies into adult literacy education (2005, p.36)

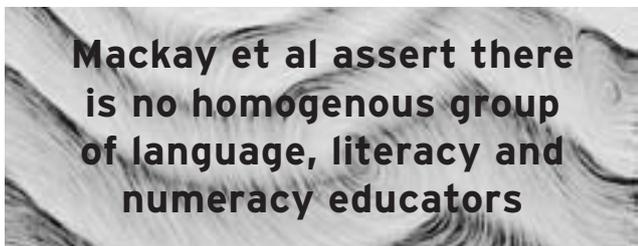
All three research projects look at implications for professional development in their research. In this, they have a connection to the projects in the next category that specifically examine professional development.

### **Professional development**

Two major pieces of research have been done in this category: *The professional development requirements of workplace English language and literacy program practitioners*, by Berghella, Molenaar and Wyse; and *Current and future professional*

*development needs of the language, literacy and numeracy workforce*, by Mackay Burgoyne, Warwick and Cipollone. While the work of Berghella et al is specifically focused on the needs of workplace trainers, and the work of Mackay et al is more broadly based, it is no surprise that they both have similar findings and identify similar challenges related to workforce issues, absence of career paths for LL&N teachers, an ageing workforce and limited professional development opportunities for educators in a changing and complex environment.

Mackay et al assert there is no homogenous group of language, literacy and numeracy educators. They identify three groups for their research: vocational trainers, specialist teachers and volunteer tutors, and believe all have different professional development needs. Berghella et al suggest Workplace Language and Literacy Programme (WELL) practitioners have needs specific to understanding workplace environments, in addition to practice and compliance needs. Nevertheless, all sectors have faced new and significant changes as a result of the changing landscapes of education training and industry in Australia. The provision of professional development services is made more complex by the different pathway by which educators enter the LL&N field, and therefore the different needs they have and skills they bring. Berghella et al highlight the need for a minimum entry-level standard and qualification for prospective LL&N teachers, and they also stress the need for consistent induction support.



**Mackay et al assert there is no homogenous group of language, literacy and numeracy educators**

Both projects examined informal as well as formal professional development. Mackay et al point to some innovation in the delivery of professional development services, but indicate issues with the wide dissemination of information. Many teachers and trainers they contacted indicated compliance demands have increased their administrative workload. Respondents felt this had adversely affected not only their teaching but also the time and energy they had available to engage in professional development activities. Further, while there seems to be adequate professional development pertinent to compliance, this is not necessarily the professional development that fulfils the educators' needs. Who is responsible for the provision of professional development is also another area of mismatch, with managers and practitioners having different ideas of responsibility. Berghella et al found two-thirds of respondents had no professional development in the last two years.

The main barriers identified to adequate professional development were funding, time, employment status and distance. It is no surprise then that the two-thirds of language literacy and numeracy workers who do not receive equitable access to professional development are those who are part-time, casual, sessional and geographically remote. Berghella et al indicate one of the limitations of their study was the small number of causal practitioners who responded to their survey.

Further research opportunities to build on this research include identifying strategies to develop more accurate profiling of the language, literacy and numeracy workforce, and exploring the use of flexible delivery and communication technologies, as well as how these technologies affect practice. Embedded opportunities for informal learning into the everyday practice of language, literacy and numeracy workers requires planning and commitment of resources, but may prove to be strategic and cost-effective in meeting locally identified needs.

### **Workplace research**

Both Gleeson, with *Economic returns to education and training for adults with low numeracy skills*, and FitzSimons with *Learning numeracy on the job: A case study of chemical handling and spraying*, focus on numeracy skills in the workplace and the importance of building numeracy skills by providing training that is both situated and specific.

Gleeson suggests there is an economic cost to low-skilled workers who have poor numeracy skills. These workers have a double disadvantage: there are fewer jobs available in the new economy for the low-skilled worker, and they are less likely to be offered or receive further training. She suggests the changing demands of workplace skills in combination with new welfare reforms leaves poorly skilled workers in a very vulnerable position. Nevertheless, her research has shown that if they are given the opportunity for further training there are positive and significant benefits. She highlights the link between an increase in skills and an increase in wages. Her research leads her to believe that education and training can be effectively targeted to this group.

The focus of FitzSimons et al's work is on chemical preparation, handling and spraying and the challenges this presents to industry. This research indicates workplace numeracy cannot be approached from a traditional school mathematics framework, while mathematical skills underpin numeracy, which is both complex and contextualised. Workplaces present different learning environments, and workplace numeracy requires training that reflects workplace practices and incorporates both real and simulated authentic problem solving. They suggest training also needs to 'incorporate the development of metacognitive skills such as critical thinking, learning to learn, planning and problem solving' (2005, p.4).

Along with training their research also indicates the need for on the job mentoring and support.

There are two areas FitzSimons et al point to for further research, the first is *how*, given the complex issues, numeracy is learned in the workplace, and the second relates to the development of vocational teacher training education and how it handles workplace numeracy.



The work of Waterhouse and Virgona, *Contradicting the stereotype: Case studies of success despite literacy difficulties*, does not fit as neatly into this category because its focus is on lives generally, and it therefore has a social element that would be best placed in the next section. However, a close look at the case studies provided indicates a major focus on how individuals with literacy difficulties negotiate the world of work. The research reminds us that individuals achieve success despite literacy challenges, and they develop a range of strategies in this process. This is not an easy path. It requires resilience, and there is often a degree of deception, avoidance and dependence. They stress the value of network and supportive technology, and suggest there is value in further exploring their concept of 'para-literacy', which they define as skills not unlike literacy but 'such skills do not take them to quite the same place on the literacy map as those other literacies' (2005, p.22).

Finally they suggest schools and LL&N teachers have a relatively narrow interpretation of success. It is this focus on success in broad-based social as well as economic terms that links it to the work that I have grouped under the final heading of literacy for the lifecourse, and to which I now turn.

### **Beyond VET—literacy for the lifecourse**

There are several pieces of research that fit into the broad heading of innovative and exploratory work. I group them here because they have a focus on literacy outcomes and impacts for individuals and communities that are broadly framed in social terms rather than economic or educational ones. These include the work done by Hartley and Horne, *Social and economic benefits of improved adult literacy: Towards a better understanding*; that of Wickert and McGuirk, *Integrating literacies: Using partnerships to build literacy capabilities in communities*; and Cumming and Wilson's work on alternative dispute resolution, *Literacy, numeracy and alternative dispute resolution*. I also include in this category the work of Balatti, Black and Falk, *Reframing adult literacy and numeracy course*

*outcomes: A social capital perspective*. While this work focuses on outcomes from LL&N courses, it does so from a social capital perspective and therefore it relates primarily to the building of social capabilities and opportunities.

There are several themes that run through these projects that I will examine first, and I will then look at the specific findings and recommendations of the individual research projects. All indicate that the benefits of building literacy capabilities are pertinent for communities as well as individuals, and stress that literacy and numeracy can be a barrier for fair participation in society. Another consistent theme is the need for further education of practitioners in other social domains, not just in terms of awareness but also in relation to practical strategies. This also, as Wickert and McGuirk point out, has implications for the roles that literacy workers currently fulfil, as well as the need to expand these roles to include literacy workers as mentors, brokers and facilitators supporting workers in other social domains. Funding is another consistent theme, and Wickert and McGuirk suggest 'short term ad-hoc funding provides no real incentive and limits change possibilities' (2005, p.6). The final consistent theme over the projects is the lack of research in the broader social context. Some are very specific about the sort of research that needs to be built on the work they have done here.

The work of Hartley and Horne is very wide ranging in its scope, with its focus being the identification of economic and social costs and benefits of literacy across contexts including health, finance and small business. It was conceived as an exploratory study and a starting point for further thinking, exploration and research. Little work has been done in this area. Literacy and numeracy impacts are complex, cumulative and interactive. Benefits to individuals and communities of learning can be both direct and indirect, and there can be sustaining benefits that allow people to continue or improve what they do in communities and/or transforming benefits such as increased employability.

While there is little research in Australia to build on this work, there are some international examples of work that could be used to model further research. One promising example is Nutbeam's (1999) framework, which describes functional, interactive and critical health literacy. The success of this work is dependent on active collaboration across sectors.

As is appropriate for an exploratory study, Hartley and Horne give clear details of the research needed to follow. They believe further work needs to be done in addressing conceptual issues, in addressing issues related to measurement, on the interaction between multiple literacies and the different impacts of factors such as age, gender, life circumstances and level of literacy and numeracy disadvantage. There needs to be further targeted consultations, and there is scope for small and large-scale

research projects as well as the possibility of buying into existing longitudinal studies. The data from ALLS will also be a rich source of data.

## Social capital

Wickert and McGuirk focused their study on social and community settings. They assert that literacy needs to take place in authentic contexts, that these contexts are social, and that literacy is fundamental for building social capital. Therefore we need to have a better understanding of diverse and localised contexts and approaches that suit these situations. They believe there is potential for examining and trialling ways to apply the successful ‘built-in not bolted-on’ formula used successfully in workplace delivery to non-workplace situations.

It is very early days in this thinking but the prospects are very exciting. Like Hartley and Horne, Wickert and McGuirk suggest cross-sectoral partnerships are essential for success in this type of venture, and there is a need for a lot more work to be done in the area of sustainable partnerships. They are also clear that as yet we do not have the infrastructure for this work, nor have we developed the language to discuss how potential literacy outcomes in these settings can be counted or recorded. Paradoxically, once the literacy is embedded into a broad range of social settings it is then difficult to draw it out again to measure.



The work of Cumming and Wilson in the area of alternative dispute resolution is one specific example of the impacts of literacy in a social setting of the type Wickert and McGuirk refer to. Cumming and Wilson looked closely at this very specific aspect of legal work and concluded that while alternative dispute resolution is steadily growing, with 70 per cent of disputes going to resolution of this type, limited literacy and numeracy are barriers to fair participation in this service. Parties represent themselves in this process and they are usually isolated from the supportive communities where their literacy and numeracy difficulties can be hidden. Consequently, many are reluctant to engage with the law under these circumstances.

Cumming and Wilson suggest there is an urgent need to develop resources and that these resources should be developed by literacy and numeracy practitioners in conjunction with the National Alternative Dispute Resolution Advisory Council. They also indicate the need for further research into the way

messages are communicated. This research could address ‘the fundamental principle established in Canadian case law that “a message has not been communicated unless the person receiving the message understands it” (2005, p.41). Finally, they believe there is much work to do in terms of practitioner awareness and education in how to manage working with clients who need literacy and/or numeracy support in the dispute resolution process.

The work of Balatti, Black and Falk is focused on social capital outcomes of LL&N courses rather than the outcomes that are predominately tracked and measured in these courses—the human capital ones. They used the twelve ABS indicators of social capital to examine outcomes for students in these stand-alone courses, and found that these courses do produce social capital outcomes, but these outcomes tend not to be acknowledged and measured. They believe the National Reporting System ‘does not adequately capture the complexity of outcomes when taking into account student perspectives which see course outcomes largely in terms of changes in sense of self’ (2006, p.11).

Social capital, they believe, is a resource that makes for a healthier society. Their interest is in identifying resources that draw on and build social capital. They conclude ‘language and literacy practices are considered the vehicle for various transformations in the lives of people and their communities’ (2006, p.9). The implications of this are the need to make these social capital outcomes more overt. There is a need to identify relevant pedagogical elements that help build these social capital outcomes, and experiment with ways to build on these elements. Further research would include developing a social capital indicator framework suitable for the identification of the social capital capacity of education and training courses. There is also scope for research of social capital outcomes that employ larger samples. Finally, the researchers believe a social capital perspective ‘potentially involves a “reframing” of the whole field of adult literacy and numeracy, including pedagogy, and more fundamentally, even how adult literacy and numeracy could be defined’ (2006, p.43).

The 2006–2007 funding round is the last for NCVET research, and researchers will use the received funds to continue their work into social capital. This work focuses on collaborating with other domains into the development of social capital and the implications for policy, partnerships and pedagogy.

## Conclusion

It is clear that this NCVET research has provided solid and innovative research in areas of interest to literacy practitioners, program managers, academics and workers in a broad range of social domains in the work they do and their quest to improve outcomes for students and clients. But this is not the extent of

the benefit—there is evidence here of exploratory work focuses on the life-wide as well as the life-long learning of individuals and communities.

It is exciting but difficult work that explores new territory. The potential of this work has also been lost in the demise of this significant funding. If we believe in its value, we need to make our feelings known to our political leaders. It is not an adequate response to look at the ALLS survey data and lament the way in which Australia fares compared to countries such as Norway. We need to have a research base to drive and support adult literacy and numeracy development in this country.

On a more personal note, it has been a privilege to represent ACAL on the NCVER Adult Literacy and Research Program Advisory Group over the past three years. It has afforded me with the opportunity to engage with, hear and read about LL&N issues, to help decide priorities for research and to see the way research gains build over time and on the good foundations that have come before. The loss to adult literacy and numeracy now and into the future is inestimable.

As well as being ACAL's representative on NCVER's Adult Literacy Research Program Advisory Group, Pauline is a member of the VALBEC executive, and works for the Salvation Army's community reintegration program.

## References

- Balatti, J., Black, S. & Falk, I. (2006), *Reframing adult literacy and numeracy course outcomes: A social capital perspective*, Adelaide: NCVER.
- Berghella, T., Molenaar, J. & Wyse, L. (2006), *The professional development requirements of workplace English language and literacy program practitioners*, Adelaide: NCVER.

## Correction

In Julie Green's article 'Health literacy: socially situating community-based research' in the Autumn edition of *Fine Print*, we omitted the final sentence of her conclusion. It should have read: *Her PhD research is being supervised by Professor Johanna Wyn and Professor Joseph Lo Bianco at the University of Melbourne. Julie would like to thank both of her supervisors for their insightful comments during the preparation of this paper.*

- Cumming, J. & Wilson, J. (2005), *Literacy, numeracy and alternative dispute resolution*, Adelaide: NCVER.
- FitzSimons, G., Mleck, S., Hull, O. & Wright C. (2005), *Learning numeracy on the job: A case study of chemical handling and spraying*, Adelaide: NCVER.
- Gleeson, L. (2005), *Economic returns to education and training for adults with low numeracy skills*, Adelaide: NCVER.
- Hartley, R. & Horne, J. (2006), *Social and economic benefits of improved adult literacy: Towards a better understanding*, Adelaide: NCVER.
- Mackay, S., Burgoyne, U., Warwick, D. & Cipollone, J. (2006), *Current and future professional development needs of the language, literacy and numeracy workforce*, Adelaide: NCVER.
- McKenna, R. & Fitzpatrick, L. (2005), *Integrated approaches to teaching adult literacy in Australia: A snapshot of practice in community settings*, Adelaide: NCVER.
- McGlusky, N. & Thaker, L. (2006), *Literacy support for Indigenous people: Current systems and practices in Queensland*, Adelaide: NCVER.
- Nutbeam, D. (1999), 'Literacies across the lifespan: Health literacy', in *Literacy and Numeracy Studies*, vol 9, no 2, pp.47–55.
- Snyder, I., Jones, A. & Lo Bianco, J. (2005), *Using information and communication technologies in adult literacy education: New practices, new challenges*, Adelaide: NCVER.
- Waterhouse, P. & Virgona, C. (2005), *Contradicting the stereotype: Case studies of success despite literacy difficulties*, Adelaide: NCVER.
- Wickert, R. & Mc Guick, J. (2005), *Integrating literacies: Using partnerships to build literacy capabilities in communities*, Adelaide: NCVER.

... continued from page 2

We're sure you'll find much to interest you in this edition. Many thanks go to all who have contributed and don't forget, dear reader, that your contributions to *Fine Print* are welcomed—see the back cover for contact details.

Until Spring, best wishes to all

Karen Manwaring

# Words on Wheels: a teacher's thoughts on community VCAL

by Louisa Vale

**'Rural youth live where they are for a range of reasons ... (and) face the context of their environment as their home and also as their place'. With this in mind, the writer developed the Words on Wheels project to help young rural students find ways to rediscover education as well as a fresh outlook on their own community and the wider world.**

Student's decisions and aspirations are shaped by their relationship with individual, familial, school, community and governmental social and material networks, their experience of schooling, their access to programs, employment opportunities, support and infrastructure.

## Literacy, numeracy and other education

The changing concept of what constitutes literacy in our new times, and the ability for policy makers and funding bodies to accommodate this, is central to Australia's ability to address the literacy needs of its community in the future.

There are many programs and curricula in Australia which have sought to provide alternatives to more traditional schooling methods for young people. My first experience with working with the VCAL model began with a limited understanding of the rationale by which VCAL was being designed, or of the politics behind it.

VCAL was developed in 2001 largely in response to the Kirby Report of 2000. A number of pilot programs were trialled around Victoria in 2002 with a 'mixed bag' of schools, and 546 students undertook the new curriculum. In 2003, the VCAL was considerably expanded in its delivery around the state; with the emergence of themed VCAL and the use of many adult learning models and techniques. Many LLEN areas saw the development of VCAL projects which were firmly based in the VET sector, with particular emphasis on trades and traineeships.

Most commonly, however, VCAL was still being delivered predominantly by state schools across Victoria, with 75.7 per cent of the student cohort. Only 14 per cent of students were enrolled in TAFE or ACE, and interestingly at the time, the VQA drew no distinction between these two sectors in their analysis of the trial.

I read with great interest the report by Knipe, Ling, Botterell and Keamy as well as the VQA commissioned RIPVET report by Dalton, Walsh and Wilde, both of which contained seeds of concern surrounding delivery, community understanding and potential recognition by employers and state schools. I was

slow to recognise some of the issues which would affect the delivery of the literacy and numeracy strands by my own ACE organisation, particularly the support of the local school:

The VCAL coordinators were highly doubtful that these pedagogical developments would be possible within what they called a normal school environment, as the 'degree of flexibility' necessary for success would not be available ...

Many schools have been traditionally focused on the 'excellence in education' approach to VCE, driven both by funding issues and the kudos of academic success as opposed to vocational training. The VQA-commissioned report in 2004 by Ryan et al saw this in many school-driven deliveries of VCAL, where 'we found little evidence to suggest that VCAL is stimulating significant changes to teaching practices and to the cultures of schools'.

Our community VCAL project has altered from a troubled and wilful offshoot of the school community in 2004 to an educational alternative which (although not supported by all members of the P-12 community) is now recognised in formal agreements, day-to-day running procedures and dialogues between providers. In a rural community which is unlikely to have practical access to TAFE provision in the future, the strength and value of our ACE provider in offering this alternative has been made clear.

At the start of 2007, I find it of great significance that the ACE sector is now one of the major players in the design and implementation of the VCAL and other basic literacy education programs across Victoria.

Young people have long been a part of the ACE sector, but a number of studies have produced a range of evidence which illustrates the capacity for the ACE sector to deliver legitimate and sustainable community based education for them.

Most recently, Walstab, Volkoff and Teese completed a three-year longitudinal study which found a number of significant positives for young people in ACE including '(ACE) provides a platform for further study, offering encouragement, laying



a foundation and assisting with entry to new and higher-level courses, both within and beyond the ACE sector'. In our program, small but significant numbers of our students have either gone on to other accredited training or re-entered into state school education. Much of the research into ACE provision has been undertaken in this qualitative way, reflecting that researchers interested in the sector have realised for some time the importance of attempting to evaluate the more intangible aspects of reconnecting with education.

In 1999, Golding and Volkoff published a preliminary report for NCVET, where they explored the features of the ACE sector, examining the responsiveness of ACE providers to local needs as well as the need to recognise the value of re-engaging with education. In 2001, they went on to publish a further report for NCVET which examined the field of research into ACE, emphasising findings that:

the ACE sector, with its historic commitment to learner-centeredness and its proven ability to be responsive, is in a prime position to provide the leadership to play an important role in partnership with other sectors in transforming Australia into a learning society.

Our project has demonstrated that a successful rural program linked with a school and with a large RTO has developed new and different learning pathways ... 'especially important to young school leavers'.

### **Repackaging and rurality**

Rural youth live where they are for a range of reasons: not all by choice. They face the context of their environment as their home and also as their place. This importance of place is seen where within the rural, and one's identity within it, 'the soundness of individual place-identity rests on having a place and on knowing that one's place is held in esteem by others'.

The siting of our project within a rural community has its own unique hurdles. Although it is possible to find a range of similarities within many rural communities, each town and area has its own characteristics. Any rural community is both

dynamic and diverse, with fluctuations in dominant cultural discourses, leadership and social structures. It has been central to our curriculum to explore the culture of individuals within a unique rural community: the 'living experiences of rural people rather than representations of them.'

Many young people in the country are not the youth of McLeod's Daughters or even of Summer Bay. Many of our students found themselves challenged by hiking and camping without showers and mobile phones, found themselves enchanted with the new Subway franchise in the town and found themselves experimenting with a range of hard drugs. They did not find themselves working in rural industries, living on a farm or even out of town. They had no ambitions to stay within the community and none of them aspired to work in the rural sector.

Just as some of them had discovered in field trips to Melbourne that the city was not all that it seemed, the students were also infuriated by those from outside their community who saw them as country hayseeds who wore Blundstones and drove in utes. The challenge of 'repackaging' for our students within their community came from the wider community recognising difference and then moving on to accept it—a significant challenge for any rural town.

Much recent research has focused on social capital and community capital, often in terms of employment and industry viability. Sometimes this research also acknowledges the underlying issues of viability of the community itself, where social cohesion can support a range of ages and demographics within a community. The capacity of projects such as this community VCAL cannot be understated in its significance to potentially add to the cohesion and sustainability of a community by allowing young people access to social groups, behaviours and conventions.

The concepts of social capital and partnerships must surely now be used to help young people remain part of small communities despite their differences and despite their problems. Rural communities with rapidly aging and childless populations would seem to be some of the most vulnerable in Victoria.

Where researchers acknowledge that 'the awareness and willingness of all parties to recognise, appreciate and make allowances for the processes and cultural differences of other partners was (is) important', it seems fundamentally important that communities attempt to do this with their young people as well.

### **The global community**

How young people in rural communities perceive their place in the global community is a very different issue to their position in a local context. A number of incidents and experiences through

the project have shown me some interesting ways in which young people view their world. Many of the young people identify with cultures and concepts which are far removed from their physical geography. Conversations surrounding new electronic tools and toys were frequent, as were conversations surrounding new television programs or films. Brand recognition sessions yielded surprisingly high levels of cognisance with famous labels and products which the students had only ever seen on television.

As our critical literacy approach towards media and marketing continued each year, it was common to find young people identifying with subcultures which were viewed through music and current affairs. A number of the students identified strongly with the 'metal' music movement in clothing, dress, jewellery and accessories. Others were more interested in 'dance', wearing t-shirts, shoes and caps which indicated this to others.

Interestingly, from a local context all the students eschewed the local 'boarder' culture, not wearing the polar fleece, snowboarder shoes and sportswear associated with the dominant social subculture in an alpine community.

The most important aspect of our project, however, was not the raised awareness of advertising but rather 'world view'. I have participated in discussions of global issues which have had powerful outcomes for the students in using their voice. An example was when in 2006 students instigated discussion about WorkChoices legislation, a striking example of a broad issue about which their level of understanding was surprisingly coherent.

Simultaneously, students constantly surprised me with gaps in their knowledge as well. When discussion was raised by me about the pros and cons of nuclear power in Australia, most students were firstly unaware of the debate, secondly had no understanding of past nuclear incidents, and went on to describe their understanding of nuclear power as illustrated by 'The Simpsons' and 'Futurama' cartoons. They proved to me time and time again that the validity of voice was important to these young people, but that literacy and basic education hurdles combined with personal circumstances had left many of them without the tools to make their opinions heard.

Ironically, the young people within our project show, as do many others of their generation, the great capacity for self expression and opinion given means of communication which are accessible to them. In my opinion, this self expression rests on the importance of acknowledging multiliteracies that no longer focus on the need for language expression to be essentially text-based.

There can be no dispute that an inability in our society to read (and to a lesser extent write) is a fundamental hurdle, and that a responsibility exists where possible for literacy teaching to



continue to provide that key knowledge for daily living. Equally, our project has shown that the most powerful expressions of voice from our students have come from their capacity to 'talk' with the technology they are most comfortable with.

The final project for students in 2006 showed me both the capacity and ability for young people to operate on a broader level within their society. Students were originally asked to compile a text-based list of phone numbers and basic summaries of youth services within the region. The students pointed out very articulately that text-based information was not appealing to their demographic as it was frequently lost and inflexible. They then went on to comment that net-based information was more discreet and private to view, and that a range of information could be updated as necessary if produced in an electronic form.

Both issues were startlingly clear and significant. The teachers involved in the project had not thought about text versus electronic presentation, and had not thought of issues of comfort and privacy when accessing sensitive information.

The result was the students' own site 'alpine youth', which was the result of quite complex critiquing of websites before selection, delineation of topics and issues for each sub-page and selection of online and 'on the ground' resources. The site also included some (occasionally very witty) writing from each group of students to introduce each sub-page, including this gem from the Renting page: 'Make sure you keep the place half clean in case the real estate agent comes around'.

The ultimate format was far removed from an A4 sheet of paper, and demonstrated that in this form students were able

to use literacy in all its powerful forms. The active literacy of the 2000 ACAL definition was here and was successful.

### **Delivery: the re-view**

To ascertain the impact of our program on the capacity for participants to 're-view' their world, I can ultimately only examine some of the issues and outcomes within the program itself. The capacity for our program to offer students *tools* for a different construction of the world around them comes from examination of methodology and curriculum. The extent to which these tools are used by the young people themselves is much harder to assess.

Our curriculum within the project has been driven where possible by my personal commitment to critical literacy. Some of the projects mentioned, such as the 'alpine youth' website, illustrate this focus on presentation of information in a reasoned and argumentative way.

Flexibility of delivery has been of more importance to me than having a clearly mapped out curriculum each year. For some of the students, however, this approach has been challenging. The reach from the more traditional learning experiences to more critical and abstract learning has sometimes been perceived as irrelevant, and indeed some students have left the project because of discomfort with this approach to learning as well as to collaborative experiences.

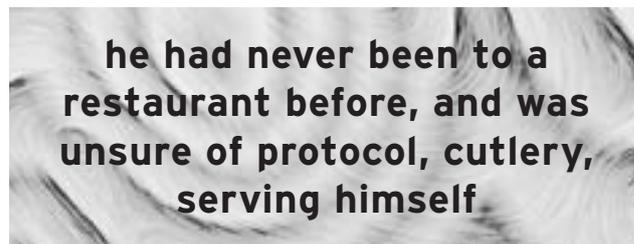
One young man in 2006 was a good example of this. He left the program very early because 'I just wanted to learn English and maths to get a job'. Paradoxically, a young woman left the project at around the same time because the 'washing up roster is too authoritarian and I don't drink coffee so I don't want to do it'.

Although internal reflection and review has been a constant underpinning practice in the project, the determination of staff to continue with the overall approach has obviously lost (and will continue to lose) some students because they don't feel serviced by the project. Others will continue to leave the project for personal reasons. Some students have relocated, others have priorities or troubles bigger than their education—inevitable as well with projects of this sort.

Where students do go on to further learning, employment or even return to state school education, they are viewed within the project as success stories. Their re-viewing of themselves and the world had enabled them to take the next step.

For those who take on only even a small part of the curriculum and who may participate in part but not all of the year, success must also be recognised. One young man who has been at risk of homelessness in 2005 and 2006 has attended classes intermittently, not submitted any work and has gained no recognised qualifications. He has, however, overcome

significant difficulties to attend the project, and is addressing a need for engagement and recognition by his participation and attendance.



A personal experience for me in 2004 encapsulated the capacity for our project to help students 're-view' their world and ultimately to 'repackage' themselves within their society.

As part of the field trip to Melbourne, the volunteer staff members and I decided to find one of the more challenging places we could think of, and take the students out for a meal. We took them to a very famous Turkish restaurant in Sydney Road, Brunswick. One young man who had had a very challenging childhood and adolescence had joined us on the trip. He had only just entered in to formal education at 16, and had also experienced extraordinary difficulty with homelessness and lack of family care.

I noticed that as we took our places around the table, the young man sat very quietly next to me and seemed quite anxious. As the other students were guided through the wide array of foods by the volunteer staff, I noticed the young man seemed increasingly distressed. I suggested we both went outside for a moment and was then able to ask what the problem was. The young man told me that he had never been to a restaurant before, and was unsure of protocol, cutlery, serving himself ... the whole process was new and alien (let alone the Turkish food!).

I suggested that he take his cues from observing me and the other adults at the table, and for the rest of the night I made sure he was included in the communal form of eating. This may seem a simple example of the power of participatory learning and its capacity to help people with new experiences, but this small and private exchange has remained with me as a powerful motivator throughout the project.

The experience for me as teacher and learner in this project has been a challenge and a privilege. At a recent VCAL in ACE conference, overwhelming concerns about the trials of the young people, their advocacy and their recognition in the broader community (and in the education community) were expressed by almost all participants, whether from rural or urban environments.

The capacity for empathy, commitment, inclusiveness and innovation demonstrated by all presenters at this conference,

and by many who persevere in this challenging field, has been a constant inspiration to me throughout this process, despite the daily problems and difficulties. Ultimately, a single conversation with a student in 2005 encompassed for me the importance of our Community VCAL.

I began a conversation with a young woman about enrolling to vote. She had asked me whether it was compulsory to enrol when she turned 18, and we had discussed the ideas of compulsory voting and some ideas about how elections work. The young woman then said that she had always thought that she would not enrol, because her lack of education and understanding of the world meant she was 'too dumb' to vote. I asked her to think of the 'dumbest' person she knew, and did they vote? She smiled, said she had never thought of it that way before, and said that 'she wanted to have a voice'. She enrolled to vote.

I began to consider wanting to have a voice long ago, both as an individual and as a teacher, but until that moment had never seen the right to have one so clearly.

Whether VCAL is sustained in Victoria, or another model is used in the future, the underpinning view of this project is that basic and emancipatory education is the right of all people, including the young and often-hidden communities of rural towns. Marginalism and hardship are exacerbated through lack of education, not only the capacity to read and write but through the long-term lack of access to the discourses of the society around us; both on a social and interactive level, and also within the discourse of a global community.

The words of Gee have been an echo throughout the development of both the VCAL project and this paper, where the young people in this small rural community are at risk for their whole lives of becoming trapped in a system where they '... sell not knowledge but the brute delivery of services connected to ... the 'winners' in the new capitalism'.

A project such as the Bright Community VCAL has a number of positive impacts on the young people it supports, perhaps ultimately helping find some of their own tools for life.

**Louisa Vale is the VCAL coordinator for the Community VCAL Project in Bright, Alpine Victoria.**

After some possibly disastrous sorties into adult literacy tutoring while as an undergraduate, and a sideways career move from DET to veterinary nursing, Louisa returned to teaching in 2000. She established the Words on Wheels Adult Literacy project with Bright Adult Education in 2003. Louisa completed her Masters in Adult Education in 2006 with a focus on youth, rurality and critical literacy.

## Notes

- 1 Blackmore, J, Angwin, J, Shacklock, G and Hodder, P 'Why stay on at school? Two stories of student attitudes to school in a rural and a suburban community', in *Educational research, risks and dilemmas: NZARE/AARE Conference 2003 New Zealand Association for Research in Education* <http://www.aare.edu.au/03pap/ang03607.pdf> accessed 20.5.05
- 2 Victorian Department of Education and Training *Ministerial review of post compulsory education and training pathways in Victoria; final report 2000.*
- 3 Ryan M, Brooks J, Hooley N, *Evaluation of the initial statewide implementation of the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL)* Victoria University December 2004 [http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/voced/Accreditation/Courses/VU\\_\\_VCAL\\_evaluationfull-rpt-20050826.doc](http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/voced/Accreditation/Courses/VU__VCAL_evaluationfull-rpt-20050826.doc) accessed 5.4.05
- 4 Victorian Qualifications Authority [http://www.vqa.vic.gov.au/vqa/vcal/vcal\\_trial.htm](http://www.vqa.vic.gov.au/vqa/vcal/vcal_trial.htm) accessed 12.6.03
- 5 Knipe, S., Ling, L., Bottrell, C. & Keamy, R., *Disturbing the Cycle: Implementing the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) in the Alpine, Indigo, Towong Shires and the City of Wodonga*, North East Local Learning and Employment Network, Wodonga 2003
- 6 Henry, J Dalton, J Walsh, J and Wilde, C "Evaluation of VCAL Further Development Pilots 2003" [http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/voced/Accreditation/Courses/RIPVET-VCALreport\\_July03.doc](http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/voced/Accreditation/Courses/RIPVET-VCALreport_July03.doc) accessed 21.4.04
- 7 Ibid p 21
- 8 Ryan, Brooks, Hooley op cit p 7
- 9 Walstab A, Volkoff V, Teese R "Ace Connects: Building Pathways to Education, Employment and Community Engagement" *Summary of findings from ACE Longitudinal Study - 2005 Survey* Melbourne University 2005 see also Sangunietti, J, Waterhouse, P and Maunder, D *The ACE Experience: Pedagogies for Life and Employability* ACFE 2004 and Stokes, H *Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL): Changing Lanes* [http://www.dsf.org.au/learningchoices/case\\_studies/vcal/changing\\_lanes.php](http://www.dsf.org.au/learningchoices/case_studies/vcal/changing_lanes.php) accessed 10.10.06
- 10 Walstab A, Volkoff V, Teese R *ACE Longitudinal Study: ACE makes a difference: building pathways, providing opportunities& creating outcomes FINAL REPORT—STAGE 3—2006* Melbourne University 2006 p 13
- 11 Golding B, Volkoff V *The Vocational Essence of ACE: the delivery of VET programs by adult and community education providers* NCVER 1999
- 12 Campbell and Curtin in Golding B, Davies M, Volkoff V, *A consolidation of ACE research 1990–2000: Review of research* NCVER 2001 p 119
- 13 Allison, J Gorringer, S Lacey, J *Building learning communities Partnerships, social capital and VET performance* NCVER 2006 p 20

Continued on page 16 ...

# Underworld: an investigation into the female reproductive system

by Karen Manwaring

**This award-winning sex education resource by writer-producer Jenny Swain is an animated, musical, interactive look at human reproduction, and particularly the female reproductive system, through the eyes of Sam Sperm P.I.**

Sex education can be a tricky issue in any classroom. In a classroom of young adults, the approach can be as crucial as the content, and then of course there's the all-important question of whether sex education of any kind is appropriate for a particular class. All of these things considered, the next step of finding good resources can often leave teachers with a very limited choice.

Enter stage right, to the sound of drum roll and cymbals, the visually, linguistically and musically rich *Underworld*—a multimedia interactive resource that has been developed for teenagers. In the form of a CD-ROM, *Underworld* gives teenagers the opportunity to explore a wide range of sexual health issues. It uses animation, storytelling, video and humour to help students learn about the female reproductive system, while engaging their interest and curiosity.

The story of *Underworld* begins at Sam Sperm's Detective Agency, which is on a mission to uncover what goes on during the menstrual cycle. As the guide to *Underworld* explains:

Male (Y chromosome) and female (X chromosome) sperm wriggle through four phases of a menstrual cycle, gleaning information, falling in love, trying to remain inconspicuous and to stay out of danger.

In 1996, when Jenny Swain was studying for her graduate diploma in animation and interactive media, there wasn't much around in the way of innovative sex education resources. Jennie, already an accomplished performer and writer, had long wanted to create a musical based on the interior of the female body and decided to use some of her ideas for her animation and interactive media project. The result, a project called *Down Under*, was shown at graduation night where representatives of the Australian Film Commission were proactively sniffing out promising multimedia projects. Jennie received funding to develop her idea further.

'I wanted this to be a useful resource—not just an art piece', says Jennie. 'I wanted it to be seen by educators as something that they wished they'd had as a teenager. So I started doing market research with a group of sex educators from a range of organizations'.

The next step was talking to teenagers. Jennie's target audience was mostly girls around 15 years old—Years 10 and 11. Some educators commented that *Underworld* could be used at lower levels, depending on the theme of the lesson and the level of guidance. 'It's also a good resource for boys', Jennie says. 'It's a fun way for boys to find out stuff they don't know about'.

Jennie noticed that teenagers gave feedback in a different way to the educators she'd spoken to:

Kids of that age know what they like or don't like, but don't necessarily have high level critical skills. They won't so much say what's missing as comment on what's there.

Some comments from teenage students included:

It's just like in the text books but singing and dancing.

When you know what's going on it's not so scary.

It's good to be able to go through it in your own time.

The young people Jennie interviewed also suggested that she use easier words—like 'balls' instead of testicles—words that young people recognise more easily.

Jennie was aware that 'teenage girls have a "dip" in self-esteem and academic achievement when they hit puberty'. She noted: 'Sometimes, teenagers are too much in the thick of it all to have a clear perspective' for example, with the issue of body image. 'It's good for them to get another perspective, not just peer wisdom', says Jennie. This issue was raised by a teacher. It is addressed in one of the songs from *Underworld*, as are many of the emotional and social issues around developing sexuality.

Jennie argues that language is one of the biggest barriers to discussing sex and sexuality, so there's a section of interviews called 'words' where people say what words they like and don't like. 'If it had been funded by the Education Department, I would have had to modify a lot of things I thought were important—including language', Jennie says. 'Depending on schools, cultures and other factors, some parts of the video may

need guidance. Sex ed. is a hot bed, so you can't win. I didn't want to take everything worth knowing out of it'.

## A plasticine roll model

In addition to language, there are some parts of the video that people may find too graphic. 'In the section that discusses recognising fertility through mucus, we used egg whites to simulate mucus, and when discussing the use of condoms, it was important to show how to put one on properly. So I made a plasticine penis for that part and added a bit of decoration to make it all a bit, well, nicer', says Jennie. 'The things that could make it controversial are the things that also make it most useful, and humour is so important as a way to inform as well as entertain'.

There certainly is nothing else like Underworld's humour and creativity in the sex education area. 'Resources that do exist tend to be quite clinical and completely lacking in narrative', Jennie explains. 'If you use a story to get information across, then people want to know what will happen next. They're in! It's the same if you add humour and music. If you're talking about something that's profound or controversial, putting it in a story or a narrative makes it less confronting and less personal'.

Teachers using the resource will find that Underworld is most appropriate for key learning areas that focus on issues such as health and physical education; personal and social development; health of individuals and communities, and self and relationships. The CD-ROM includes a comprehensive study guide for teachers, written by Mandy Hudson (a qualified teacher and sexuality educator who has worked in schools and community settings for over 25 years) and Sarah Hardy (a women's health educator and midwife with postgraduate qualifications in adult education and training, and 14 years' experience working with young people in school and community-based environments).

The Underworld CD-ROM is both Mac and PC-compatible and doesn't require high levels of technical knowledge. Underworld is a particularly useful resource for learners with lower literacy levels as it is very 'audio rich'—most of the information is in audio and pictorial form. But there is also plenty of written language to learn. Useful additions include the ability to click on a word and be given its meaning, a glossary, forward arrows, 'hotspots' (areas that link to other areas), and a site map. Students can exit the CD-ROM at any time by clicking on the 'Exit' option that appears on each screen.

Some of the 'audio richness' of Underworld comes in the form of catchy songs. They include 'The Follicle Girls', 'Eva Ova', 'Girls Don't', 'Eva's Lament' ('I'm still waiting for the sperm of my dreams ...'), 'Sperm', 'Let's Fuse' and the much awarded 'Rubber' ('If it wasn't for the Rubber ... I could've been a burning sensation').

What about the fact that the script is in the context of a detective investigation? Jennie explains that as well as lending itself to a great narrative, it's a good genre for monologues, and the monologue itself is a good way to deliver audio information. For example, the voice of one of the sperm detectives ... 'It was dark in there and I could just make out the face of Eva Ova'.

## Sam Sperm investigates the semen's union

The main detective in Underworld is Sam Sperm. He briefs all the other sperm and is the head of the investigation. 'I wanted something that could travel through the female reproductive system naturally', says Jennie. She emphasises that the use of condoms is promoted throughout Underworld.

This all sounds great, but what about the obvious cultural issues? Sex ed. can be problematic at the best of times, but what about across cultures?

Jennie's response is that, as with any resource, the decision about the ways to use Underworld (or whether to use it at all) rests ultimately with the teacher. The teacher notes that accompany Underworld don't offer a guide to cultural issues as such, but do offer timed lesson plans as well as themed routes through the resource. Underworld also provides resource suggestions throughout its activities, giving educators plenty of extra material to call on.

Teenagers from different cultural backgrounds were interviewed during the development of Underworld and some of the interview footage is used in the CD Rom in an effort to present different perspectives. For example, there are girls who believe that it is right to have sex only after marriage and there are girls who believe differently—that this is a 'waste of all that sexual energy'. Underworld has even been trialled in India!

Jennie has won a swag of awards for Underworld including the United Nations World Summit Information Award for the best e-health educational resource. One of the songs in Underworld, 'If it wasn't for the Rubber', won an ATOM Film and TV Award. One reason the judges gave for awarding it to the song was that it wasn't 'preachy'.

'Preachy' certainly isn't a word that comes to mind after exploring Underworld. Perhaps funny, entertaining, involving and informative are much closer to the mark.

To find out more about Underworld go to [www.underworld.net.au](http://www.underworld.net.au)

**Karen Manwaring coordinates some of the ESL and literacy short course programs at CAE in Melbourne. She is also commissioning editor of *Fine Print*.**

## The continuing CGEA saga

The reaccreditation of the CGEA is still a hot topic for adult education providers and learners. The recent VALBEC pre-conference forum hosted a workshop, 'The Reaccredited CGEA—a focus on course planning within a large provider', with Lisa Bartels and Pauline Morrow.

The session, 'The reaccredited CGEA: A focus on course-planning within a large provider', looked at issues including:

- The main changes to the CGEA and comparing the old with the new: structure, hours, units, levels, language, assessment requirements, teacher qualifications required, etc.
- Unpacking a unit: Comparing the old module Writing for Self Expression with Create Texts for Personal Purposes.
- The language of the new document.
- The possibilities and challenges for course design: Issues such as class profiles, funding requirements, staff expertise and timetable constraints.

Using copies of units from the old and new documents, Lisa and Pauline went through the process of comparing and contrasting the units from each document—particularly Writing for Self Expression, Level 1 and Create Texts for Personal Purposes, Level 1. Participants looked for parallels in the language and information contained in the documents.

Participants also discussed the constraints and factors influencing course-planning in a large institution—student profile, funding, timetabling, staff expertise, etc.

Two different course maps were used:

1. Certificate 1 Horticulture Focus
2. Certificate 1 Mixed General Group.

Lisa and Pauline also discussed creating a course-planning document to choose the units which would be most appropriate for your course.

Stay tuned for more information on this session in the next edition of *Fine Print*.

**Lisa Bartels has taught adult literacy and ESL for over 14 years at Victoria University, coordinating adult literacy programs at the Footscray campus and teaching reading, writing and oral communication CGEA 2 and CGEA 3.**

**Pauline Morrow coordinates the adult literacy and basic education programs at Kangan Batman TAFE in Broadmeadows. She has been at Kangan for 16 years, and also teaches CGEA 1 and CGEA 3.**

... continued from page 13

- 14 Fullilove in Falk,I and Balatti,J, "Identities of place: Their power and consequences for VET" In *Learner and practitioner : the heart of the matter : 7th annual conference of the Australian VET Research Association AVETRA* 2004
- 15 Bourke, L "Rural Communities" in *Rurality Bites: the Social and Environmental Transformation of Rural Australia* Lockie,S and Bourke,L (eds) Pluto Press 2001
- 16 Grey,I and Phillips,E "Beyond Life in the Bush: Australian Rural Cultures" in Lockie,S and Bourke,L (eds) p 53
- 17 Lockie,S and Bourke,L "Rural Australia: an Introduction" in *Rurality Bites: the Social and Environmental Transformation of Rural Australia* Lockie,S and Bourke,L (eds) Pluto Press 2001 p 9
- 18 Carlon,C "Investing in Our Youth': the first fully operational 'Communities that Care' project in Australia" *Rural Society* v 12, no 1 2002 see also Alston,M "Social Capital in Rural Australia" *Rural Society* v 12, no 1 2002 and Falk,I,Wyn, J, Semmens,B,Gunther, J 2001 op cit Falk, I and Balatti,J 2004 op cit and Falk, I 2003 op cit.
- 19 Waterhouse,P, Virgona,C and Brown, R *Creating synergies: Local government facilitating learning and development through partnerships* NCVER 2006 p 8
- 20 Exit interview questionnaires Words on Wheels Staff Documents 2006
- 21 Gee,J Hull ,G and Lankshear ,C *New Work Order: Behind the Language of New Capitalism* Allen and Unwin 1996 p 45

# Technology Matters

You won't break the computer if you make a mistake; remember **CONTROL + Z** to undo whatever you did last, retrace your steps and find your way out if you get lost—invaluable advice from Debbie Soccio as she introduces us to PowerPoint.

## Using MS PowerPoint—Part 1

As there is so much that you can do with PowerPoint, in this new Technology Matters edition we will focus on the following:

- Getting started with a new PowerPoint presentation
- Create a new slide and choose a template
- Add text to a slide
- Insert images, video and sounds into a slide.

I need to state upfront that this is not the easiest way to learn to use PowerPoint (in a written journal, with limited photographs or visual cues). It is far better to have a series of good examples of step-by-step instructions (with a person, as well as paper-based instructions with loads of pictures). However, what I hope that you achieve from this article is the confidence to have a go!

MS PowerPoint is a very powerful program that anyone can master with a little bit of practice. It is important for new users to work step-by-step through pictures, slides or online tutorials.

There are many tutorials and notes available for MS PowerPoint on the internet. Just do a Google search to find one or two that suit your needs. And don't forget, always save your work every 5–10 minutes.

### Getting started

Open Microsoft PowerPoint. When you first enter PowerPoint, you will be asked whether you will be starting a new presentation. Click 'Blank presentation'. Then click 'OK'. Choose the slide auto layout you want. Do you want two sections? Do you want a header and body? Do you want a section for a header, some text and a picture? (See figure 1.)



Figure 1

Choose whichever layout you think will sort the presentation you are working on. To insert more than one slide, you can click along the toolbar to insert duplicate slide. This will insert an exact replica of the previous slide. If you want to insert a new slide layout, click along the toolbar to insert new slide. Then you can change the slide layout, if you wish.

If you decide you don't want a slide, click along the toolbar to edit. The drop down menu will appear. By pressing 'Delete' the slide you are highlighted on will be removed from your slideshow.

### Saving your work

At this point you should save your work. Click on 'File' on the top toolbar and then 'Save'. You will then need to name your file and save it to your folder on the computer (wherever you would normally save your work).

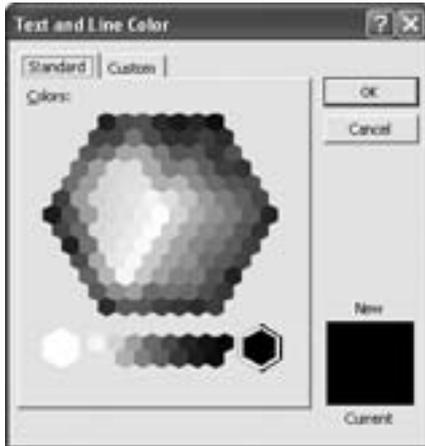
### Changing the look of your slides

There are many things you can do to change the look of your slides. You can change the colours of your slides. Go to the toolbar and click on 'Format', then slide colour scheme. You can then decide whether you want one of the preset standard colour schemes or customise your own particular colour choices.

The colours you will have on your slide are shown in figure 2.



Figure 2



**Figure 3**

Or you can choose from the many colours on the colour wheel. (See figure 3.)

The small box (bottom right) shows the colours that will be on the slide. You can keep some of the colours or change them. To change the background colour, click on 'Background', then change the colour to the one of your choice.

You can change other colours on the slide in the same way. Click any of the tiny boxes (on the left) and change the colour. When you have made all the changes you want, click 'Apply to all'.

Don't spend too much time on this when you are preparing your presentation, as you can always change it later. But when you are learning, make sure you check all the different things you can do.

### Add a background template

Sometimes you may want to insert a standard MS PowerPoint template. These are backgrounds that can be used to give your presentation a particular style or feel. Basically, it gives your presentation both a theme and a colour background. To do this, click along the toolbar to 'Format' and then to 'Apply design template'. (See figure 4.)

By clicking on any of the Presentation designs you will be able to see a preview of each design template.

When you are happy with your choice, make sure it is the one that is highlighted, click Apply.

A handy hint—when you like a template but not the colour, you can change this to suit your particular likes and needs. Once you have chosen a design template, you can then go back along the toolbar, click 'File' and then click slide colour scheme. Select either 'Standard colour scheme' (of which there will be four colour choices) or click 'Customise' and choose the colours that you want for that particular design template.



**Figure 4**

When you are happy, click 'Apply to all' (this will change all slides in this presentation) or click 'Apply' (which will only make changes to the particular slide you have selected).

### Adding text to your presentation

Make sure the slide you will work on is ready on the screen. If you have selected a slide layout with at least one box, then you just need to click in the box. A flashing text cursor will appear in the text box. You are now free to add as much text as you choose to the page.

Just as you do in a Word document, you can change the way the text looks. You can change the font (the kind of writing), the size of the letters, the colour of the letters. (See figure 5.)

In the font box, choose the font you want. When you click on that font, you will see your text change. You can try different fonts while the text is still highlighted.

Highlight the text you want to change. (Click at the beginning of the text you want to change. Hold your finger on the button while you go to the end. The text will change colour). You can only change the text when it is highlighted.

When you are happy, click anywhere in a blank space to remove the highlight.

To change the size of the text, highlight the text you want to change. With your mouse click on the size of font you want for your text. When you are happy, click anywhere in a blank space to remove the highlight. (See figure 6.)

To change the colour of the text, highlight the text you want to change. With your mouse click on the A (the font colour box,



**Figure 5**

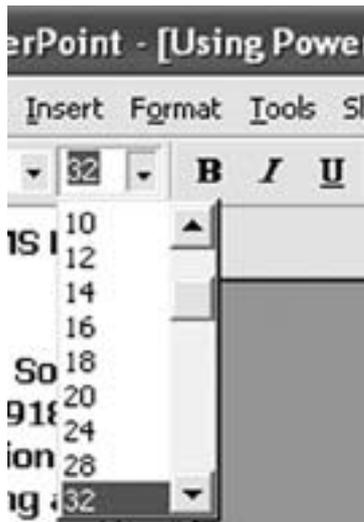


Figure 6



Figure 7

usually at the bottom of your screen in MS PowerPoint) click the drop-down box and choose the colour you want. The text colour will change. To see the colour properly, click anywhere in a blank space to remove the highlight. (See figure 7.)

### Adding pictures and sounds

Pictures, images and video and sounds (music and sounds) can all be added to your presentation.

The best tricks when adding pictures, movies or sounds to MS PowerPoint is to know what it is you are adding, why it is being added, (that is, how it will enhance your presentation) and to have already edited and saved the file into one of your folders on your computer. For example, you might have a photograph you have taken with a digital camera, downloaded it to your computer, saved the file in 'My Pictures' with a name that helps you to locate the file. You might also have downloaded the photo or image from the internet and saved it in a similar manner to a file on your hard drive.

Similarly, when locating or downloading sound files or video files, it is the same process. When you are ready to insert the image, video or sound into PowerPoint, you should remember where you have saved the file you want to use.

In most cases you can insert a movie, a sound or a picture from either the general Clip Art collection, your own files (usually saved in My Documents, My Music, My Pictures or from your portable USB stick). Make sure the slide you will work on is ready on the screen:

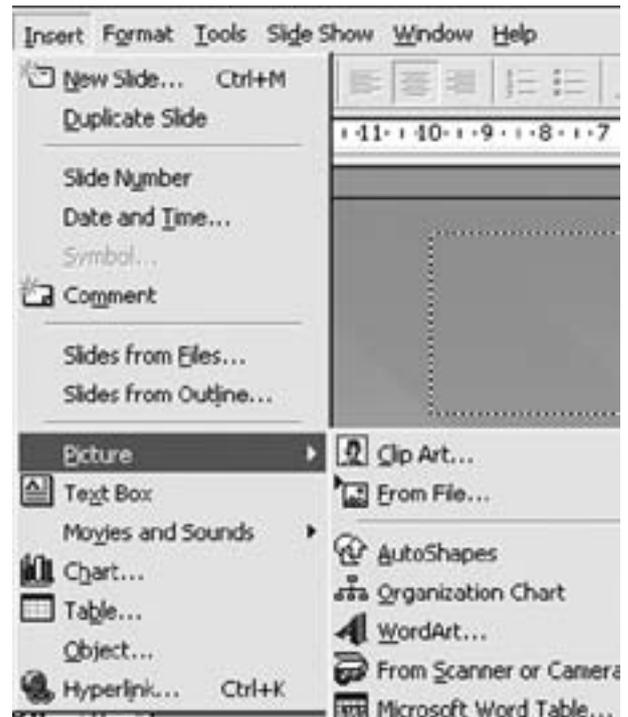


Figure 8

- Add a picture from Clip Art or from your file.
- Add a movie of sound from Clip Art or from your file.

To add any of these to your presentation, go to the toolbar, click 'Insert'. In this Insert toolbar drop-down menu, you can see that it is merely a matter of clicking on one of the options in the left-hand column and then identifying the source in the right-hand column. (See figure 8.)

Here is an example:

- Make sure the slide you will work on is ready on the screen. Click 'Insert picture'. (slide mouse to the right.) Then click from file. (See figure 9.)
- Find your picture file. It is probably located in My Pictures unless you have saved it somewhere else. (See figure 10.)
- You should now see the list of your folders and pictures. Click the name of the photo you want. A preview should be seen on the right-hand side of the screen. When you have highlighted to picture you want click 'Insert'. (See figure 11.)
- Sometimes when you insert a picture, it will be too large for the screen. You may need to resize your photo to fit the page. (See figure 12.) To do this, you must find the corners of the picture and, using the handles, click and drag the corner handles to make the picture bigger or smaller. If you use the side or middle arrows you will distort your picture out of shape. If you make a mistake, just undo it (either Control +Z, or Toolbar-Edit-Undo, or the backward curved arrow on the toolbar). [Another handy hint!]

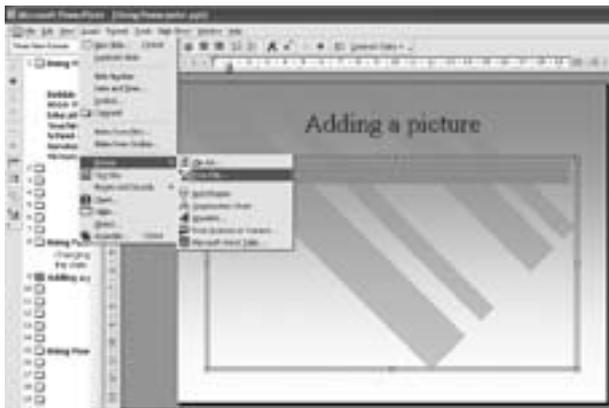


Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11

Sometimes, when you insert a picture there might be bits of the photo that you don't want. You can get rid of these parts by cropping the photo. To edit the picture, you must be able to see the 'Edit picture' toolbar. Sometimes it is visible on either your top or bottom toolbar, depending on how your computer is set up. If it is not there, click anywhere on the picture with the right mouse key and you should see a drop-down menu. Click on 'Edit picture'. A smaller toolbar will now appear. Click on the jagged square box. Then find your photo handles and just



Figure 12



Figure 13

move your picture in on all four sides (separately) until you have removed the parts of the photo you don't want.

By clicking the crop tool, you are able to remove unwanted parts of a photo. (See figure 13.)

### What do you do now?

Hopefully, this tutorial will demystify using MS PowerPoint. This program has lots of potential and can do many things to liven your teaching materials. Like with anything we do, the best way to learn something new is to practise.

I suggest you start up a new file, give it a name like Playing with PowerPoint and then just check out all the buttons on the toolbar. Work your way up and down ... insert, delete, add, change ... until you are familiar with the whole range of different appearances, and feel that you can create in your very own unique PowerPoint presentation.

Most importantly, you won't break the computer if you make a mistake. The best thing to remember is CONTROL + Z to undo whatever you did last. It's a great way to retrace your steps and find your way if you get lost inside MS PowerPoint. Good luck!

**Debbie Soccio has worked in the adult literacy field for 16 years and has a particular interest in developing blended learning programs for students who choose to study flexibly.**

# Open Forum

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

With the recent re-accreditation of the Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA) we see Fine Print as providing an important forum for issues, reflections and suggestions by those involved in or affected by the implementation of the new CGEA.

Whether you are a teacher, administrator, student or researcher, we welcome your comments.

Dianne Parslow briefly reports on a PD session 'Implementing the new CGEA' run by the curriculum maintenance manager in April. Di offers directions for finding the new implementation guide while calling for more PD on the subject.

On 20 April the curriculum maintenance manager (CMM) ran a professional development session on implementing the new CGEA at Newport. Participants were very briefly taken through various aspects of the document, and an implementation guide was also distributed. The booklet includes information on how to locate the curriculum document, finding out about imported units, designing courses and more.

Similar sessions are being run in country Victoria in May, after which the implementation guide will be revised and then be available on Sitntalk at <http://tls.vu.edu.au/cf/sitntalk/main.cfm>. Many participants are keen for more PD but it seems unlikely that this will come from the CMM.

Dianne Parslow is literacy coordinator for access, education and training at the Council for Adult Education.



# Policy Update

**Because of inadequate funding, the ACE sector survives through the goodwill of its staff, says Michael Evans of the National Tertiary Education Union, and the Victorian Qualifications Authority's Greg Deakin explains how revised standards will bring stronger outcomes-based quality standards with well-performing registered training organisations being less supervised while poor performers will be more closely monitored.**

## ACE workers: undervalued and underpaid

In a research paper presented to the 2006 Adult Learning Australia Conference, research fellow Kaye Bowman said that Adult and Community Education (ACE) providers make a critical contribution to the cultural and economic wellbeing of their communities in many and varied ways.

But, said Bowman, the different roles played by ACE providers often means that their contribution goes unrecognised, their diverse nature making it hard to successfully promote and explain the range of activities and contributions. In the same way that the sector's contributions are often unrecognised, for too long the staff working in the sector have been undervalued and under-rewarded.

ACE sector workers play a vital role in providing practical educational opportunities to a diverse range of people—people with disabilities, recently arrived migrants, people with language or literacy problems, older people, teenagers—and giving them useful and life-enhancing skills in a more intimate and supportive environment than they are likely to find elsewhere in the education system.

There are over 500 ACE providers across Victoria, mostly small independent community-based organisations. State government funding comes via the Adult Community and Further Education Division (ACFE), which moved from the Department of Education and Training to the Department for Victorian Communities following the 2006 state election. Simply, the level of funding is woefully inadequate.

Given that the bulk of an ACE provider's costs are for staff, it is the staff that has paid the price for funding shortfalls. Salaries for ACE sector teachers are significantly below their TAFE counterparts, in many cases for teaching the same or similar courses. Most centres struggle to meet even minimum wage adjustments.

Employment security (or lack of) is the other major concern, with casual employment being the norm for most of the teaching workforce. This means no holiday or sick leave and no guarantee of ongoing employment from year to year, or even beyond the current contract. The sector survives, and

in many ways thrives, by exploiting the commitment and goodwill of its staff.

### WorkChoices a threat for staff

The WorkChoices legislation introduced by the Howard government in 2006 has stripped away previous minimum safety net and award standards, leaving only five basic standards covering minimum wage rates, four weeks' annual leave, sick leave, working hours and unpaid parental leave.

It abolished the 'no disadvantage' test, which previously meant that any new agreement could not offer less overall by way of salary and conditions for employees. It also removed unfair dismissal protections for anyone working for an enterprise with less than 100 employees.

WorkChoices enables employers to use Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) to lower wages and conditions on a take it or leave it basis for both new and existing employees.

### New agreement will offer improvements and protections

In response to the threats posed by WorkChoices, ACE sector staff, their representatives and employers have worked co-operatively to counter the worst aspects of WorkChoices and achieve a fairer and better regulated employment system for ACE staff, as well as some real improvements and protections for salaries and employment conditions. This has been done in the first instance by successfully negotiating a new multi-employer collective agreement (MECA).

The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), along with the other unions representing staff in the ACE sector—the Australian Services Union (ASU) and the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union (LHMU)—worked with the employer bodies ACE Victoria and Jobs Australia during 2006 to develop a single sector-wide collective enterprise agreement, that will apply at all ACE providers that agree to be bound by it.

Major aspects of the new agreement include:

- Agreed 9 per cent salary increase (3 x 3 per cent p.a.) over the life of the agreement

- Casual loading increased from 20 per cent to 25 per cent
- Introduction of classification descriptors for positions, with an attached classification process that includes appeal rights
- Inclusion of minimum rates of pay for tutors and teachers, who had previously been award-free, with no legal instrument underpinning their employment conditions
- Maintenance of existing PACCT (professional, administrative, clerical, computing and technical) employment conditions otherwise lost through WorkChoices, and extending the PACCT employment conditions to cover tutors and teachers
- Accident make-up pay increased to 39 weeks
- Increased severance pay beyond the current ten weeks cap.

The new WorkChoices regime requires multi-employer agreements to be approved by the Office of the Employment Advocate (OEA) before they can proceed. After several months of consideration following the lodgement of the draft agreement in late 2006, the OEA approved the agreement in April this year.

Staff and employer representatives have held a series of briefing sessions with ACE providers and staff over recent months on the content and scope of the new agreement. With the formal approval process now completed, individual committees of management will be asked to endorse the new agreement and become signatories to it.

### **State Government provides protection for ACE staff**

In August 2006, the Victorian Government established a mandatory safety net (MSN) for nominated sectors, to protect the existing minimum employment standards for employees of organisations which receive funding from the government to provide community services.

The key requirement is that, as a minimum, community service organisations provide their employees with employment standards that existed within relevant industrial awards prior to the introduction of WorkChoices in March 2006.

The MSN policy will operate in a similar way to the previous 'no disadvantage' test. The MSN policy requirement is a global test which enables organisations to have wide-ranging employment provisions and arrangements, provided that when considered as a whole or on balance they are no less favourable than standards which existed under the previous relevant award.

This potentially creates an enormous amount of work for individual ACE providers in ensuring that the employment package covering existing staff or offered to new staff meets the government's MSN policy. But there is an easy solution to

this—any ACE provider signing up to the new multi-employer agreement will definitely meet the minimum required standards.

### **Broad campaign for better funding**

The new agreement will provide a long overdue foundation for reasonable salaries and employment conditions for ACE staff, and provide some basic protection from the worst aspects of the new industrial laws, as long as it can be implemented by as many ACE providers as possible. Of course, the major impediment to its successful implementation, even with the best will in the world on the part of providers, remains the funding shortfall in the sector.

The sector's various stakeholders—ACE providers, staff and their respective unions, employer and peak bodies ACE Victoria, Jobs Australia and the Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres (ANHLC)—are discussing a broad community-based campaign to raise awareness about the important role that the ACE sector plays in the community, and apply pressure to governments at all levels to adequately fund the sector.

There have been some limited moves in the right direction in recent times. The Victorian Government has introduced a three-year funding cycle for ACFE-funded organisations, enabling more long-term planning of education programs and providing limited job security. ACFE allows organisations to retain the student contribution required through the TAFE fees and charges regulations, and fully funds income foregone by organisations through concession fees. Also, the Department for Victorian Communities last year increased funding for Neighbourhood House activities by 39 per cent.

But the problem still remains with the method of calculation of the student contact hours (SCH) rate, which is the basis on which funding for ACE providers is determined. The campaign's general aim will be to increase the overall level of funding, so that a more realistic SCH rate can be determined that more accurately reflects the real costs of providing the various services.

While there is currently no specific federal support for the ACE sector, there are strong arguments for this to change, given the ACE sector's important role in providing pathways to enable clients to move up through the education and training scale.

### **Raising the community's awareness**

In her research paper, *The value of ACE providers: A guide to the evidence base*, Bowman identifies six key roles of the ACE sector. These are:

1. Facilitators of adult health and wellbeing through personal development courses such as yoga and meditation.

2. Promoters of active citizenship, with evidence showing that people who attend ACE centres often go on to volunteer themselves in the ACE sector, and elsewhere in the community.
3. Community capacity builders, by proactively building partnerships between local groups, and in Bowman's view, increasingly becoming players in the economic development game.
4. Platform builders, by offering basic education such as literacy, numeracy and language courses, as well as improving employability and social interaction skills.
5. Bridge builders, by offering people the chance to advance to work or further education from their basic education beginnings.
6. Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers.

These are all crucial roles in the fundamental work of building better communities, and in particular, the work that is being done by ACE providers is largely with those parts of

the community that are the least advantaged and the most vulnerable.

This is an enormously valuable contribution that ultimately benefits all of us in the community, but remains to a large extent unrecognised and undervalued. Our campaign will also be about raising the sector's profile more broadly so that the ACE sector receives the recognition and real support—that is, money—that it warrants and deserves.

A copy of the new Multi-Employer Collective Agreement (MECA) can be viewed at the NTEU ACE sector web page: <http://www.nteu.org.au/bd/lace>.

**Michael Evans is communications and campaigns officer for the Victorian Division of the National Tertiary Education Union. He can be contacted on (03) 9254 1930, mob: 0418 241 664, fax: (03) 9254 1935.**

## Australian Quality Training Framework 2007

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting on 10 February 2006 made a number of statements in relation to improving the quality of education and training. In particular, COAG agreed to accelerate the introduction of stronger outcomes-based quality standards for registered training organisations (RTOs) in consultation with key parties including employers, regulators and unions, supported by a national outcomes-based auditing model.

The COAG decision called for the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) standards to be reviewed and amended to place a stronger focus on quality skills outcomes, and for an outcomes-based auditing model for RTOs to be developed to support the new standards (to be introduced by July 2007).

Revised AQTF standards have been developed by a working group of senior officers from state and territory Registering and Course Accrediting Bodies (RCABs). The development process has involved extensive consultation with all categories of stakeholders from across the country. The revised standards place a stronger emphasis on quality skills outcomes from RTOs and continuous improvement of RTO operations, and a reduced emphasis on inputs, processes and administrative compliance. Whereas the current AQTF (AQTF 2005) is comprised of 12 standards and over a hundred elements, AQTF 2007 is comprised of three standards and 14 elements, together with nine conditions of registration.

Nonetheless, the standards continue to identify requirements essential for the effective operation of a national Vocational Education and Training system and the protection of consumers. They are supported by a set of enforceable conditions between the registering body and the RTO to cover off obligations that apply to all RTOs. In general, the response to the revised standards has been very positive, with the majority of RTOs commenting favourably on the stronger focus on education and training outcomes and the reduced emphasis on compliance.

The revised standards have been endorsed by the National Quality Council (NQC) for implementation on 1 July 2007. The NQC has also endorsed a suite of three outcomes measures, or quality indicators, to support the revised standards:

- an employer satisfaction indicator
- a learner engagement and competency development indicator
- a competency completion rate indicator.

The NQC has decided to pilot two alternative methods of collecting data on the first two indicators—employer satisfaction, and learner engagement and competency development. The first involves localised data collection by RTOs with identified employers and current students; the second involves centralised national data collection based on targeted samples of employers and learners. The pilots will take place during the second half of 2007 and the results will be reviewed by the NQC, together with a cost benefit analysis,

prior to a decision on implementation of the selected approach from 1 January 2008.

The third indicator—competency completion rate—will require all RTOs to report the following data on an annual (calendar year) basis to a central data collection agency from 1 July 2007:

- the number of enrolments for each qualification code
- the number of qualifications awarded for each qualification code
- the number of enrolments for each unit of competency/module code
- the number of units of competency/modules completed for each unit of competency/module code
- an indicator of whether the RTO operated offshore in the previous year.

RTOs in receipt of public funding already report the above data. However, the vast majority have the information available in electronic form, and should be able to provide it with minimal effort and cost. In view of the work required to set up a national data collection system, the initial collection of competency completion data is proposed for the end of March 2008.

Establishing stable, regular data collection procedures to capture aspects of provider performance, and student and industry satisfaction with program delivery, is an essential prerequisite to driving improvements in the training system. This should be done on a national basis, utilising procedures that are reliable, practical and fair to stakeholders.

The availability of reliable information on outcomes can be expected to contribute to improvements in system quality provision at a number of levels:

- by assisting in specifying system benchmarks for all providers
- by informing regulatory/audit activity and allowing a flexible approach where appropriate
- by driving continuous improvement in both the system as a whole and in individual RTOs.

In particular, it is envisaged that availability of reliable outcomes data will assist RCABs in applying a risk-based approach to registration and audit of RTOs, enabling a more efficient application of resources in monitoring the quality system.

AQTF 2007 is moving away from a 'one size fits all' model of regulation, to one where RTOs which are performing well will be subject to a lighter regulatory touch, while those performing poorly will be more closely monitored. When the new system is bedded down, it should lead to a more transparent, efficient and consistent system for regulation of training in Australia.

Along with the essential standards for registration as a training organisation, the working group of senior RCAB officers has been busy revising and streamlining other aspects of the AQTF. Key documents include:

- Users Guide to the Essential Standards for Registration
- Standards for Registering Bodies
- Audit Handbook
- National Risk Management Guidelines
- National Industry Engagement Guidelines
- Standards for Course Accrediting Bodies
- Standards for Accredited Courses.

Further information is available through the website of the Victorian Qualifications Authority at [www.vqa.vic.gov.au](http://www.vqa.vic.gov.au) or through [www.training.com.au](http://www.training.com.au). The VQA website contains additional information in relation to two important projects with a bearing on the AQTF conducted over the past two years—review of the registration and audit functions of the VQA, and investigation of outcomes-based auditing.

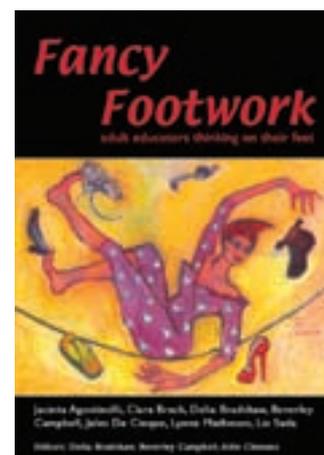
**Greg Deakin is a senior project officer with the Victorian Qualifications Authority.**

#### **Fancy Footwork: Adult educators thinking on their feet**

(Eds. D Bradshaw, B Campbell, A Clemons)

*(Well, if you're like me)...you'll be surprised and delighted by this book because it goes into places I'd never even think to go to by myself and likely you wouldn't either.* Helen Macrae

This book invites you to travel in the footsteps of a group of adult educators from Melbourne. In their desire to explore the spirit of adult education, they met and wrote regularly over two years. Their reflections, collected here, take you inside their world. With you, they share what teaching means to them. Writing of joys, dilemmas and dangers, they reveal the complexities of teachers' lives and teaching work.



Read these stories and you might very well find yourself heading in new directions.

You can purchase a copy of Fancy Footwork via the VALBEC web site <http://www.valbec.org.au/05/fancyfoot.htm>

# Foreign Correspondence

## Teaching health literacy in India

**In the remote north-east of India, Siobhan Bourke worked with nurses, doctors and health care workers treating sexually transmitted infections and intravenous drug users. There were personal as well as medical challenges, including cold bucket showers and reading by candlelight.**

In mid-2006 I found myself in India, having completed a month in Delhi learning on the job in a small HIV hospital. I wanted to give something back to the organisation I was working with and learning from, as I felt the experience I had gained in Delhi warranted something given in return.

I am a sexual health physician in training (now in my last year). I deal with issues related to human sexual health and sexuality. This includes sexually transmissible infections (STIs) including HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus), contraception, pregnancy—including preparation for pregnancy and birth, counselling around unwanted pregnancy and other issues of reproductive health—and the much-discussed Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) causing cervical cancer. We also deal with relationship issues and sexual health counselling.

In my employment in Australia, I am involved in education as well as clinical practice. As one of the senior medical officers at Family Planning Victoria (FPV), I coordinate and teach a course on sexual and reproductive health for medical practitioners, most commonly general practitioners. In my other role at Victorian Cytology Service, I educate medical practitioners about HPV, pap smears and the up-and-coming vaccine.

After discussion with program managers in India, it was decided that I would go to the north-east (this was my fourth



**Photo 1: Siobhan Bourke and five nurses working in Ukhru, Manipur, at the conclusion of three days training—theory and a clinic with 83 patients: 80 women and 3 men!**

trip to India but never the NE) to help educate the nurses, doctors and health care workers working in a program called Project Orchid. (This project has Gates Foundation funding, and input from the University of Melbourne's Australian International Health Institute and Emmanuel Hospital Association—a Baptist Indian NGO). The head office is in Guwahati, the capital of Assam.

The north-east of India is the bit of India that is in between Bhutan to the north, Burma to the east and Bangladesh to the south, and is attached to the rest of India by a small neck of land. The north-east also has an interesting history. It was heavily involved in the Second World War and in battles involving the Japanese and the British armies. Since WWII, it has also been involved in a struggle for autonomy from India. All this history and geography makes for a very interesting place to visit—albeit still in conflict and therefore not on the main tourist trail.



In order to visit the north-east, restricted area permits had to be obtained separately for each state I wished to visit, namely Nagaland and Manipur. The requirement for a foreigner to visit Manipur is that you fly in, not enter by road.

This was a good opportunity to employ my skills in sexual health care and the education of health professionals. It was great to work within an established program, imparting knowledge I have gained in the area and also exploring for myself the notion of syndromic management (see diagram).

My agenda in both states was to visit the clinics that Project Orchid was associated with to deliver the HIV prevention project. There are two arms to the project: To deliver STI syndromic management, and to deliver substitution therapy to

intravenous drug users (IVDUs). The two parts of the project are public health strategies involving harm minimisation.

Having a sexually transmissible infection increases your chance of acquiring HIV. The paradox is that the cells infected by HIV are the cells in our bodies that normally fight an infection. The biology around this statement is complex but, simply put, when someone has an STI the infection fighting cells in the body go to the body part infected; for example, the penis or the vagina. So the cells will be present in greater numbers than usual when an infection (say, gonorrhoea or syphilis or herpes) is there. These same cells, which are now in greater numbers, are the very cells that pick up HIV and are infected by it. So, if there are more cells around that can pick up HIV then the greater the chance of acquiring HIV if someone is exposed to it.

The second arm of the project aims to decrease the risk of acquiring HIV through drug use. If IV drugs are substituted with oral medication, then the incidence of sharing needles and the risk of exposure to HIV through this means, decreases. IVDU is extremely common in the north-east, with cheap and accessible drugs coming across the borders into the area. Many people get addicted young. The pressure to maintain the habit may turn some addicts to sex work. If condoms are not used, the likelihood of acquiring an STI and HIV is further increased. The target groups for the project are IVDUs, sex workers and the clients of sex workers. Often people would be in more than one category.

I was involved in the STI syndromic management arm. Syndromic management is medical management of a problem without the use of pathology testing. Practitioners must rely on clinical knowledge and experience to decipher from a patient's history the most likely cause of a condition.

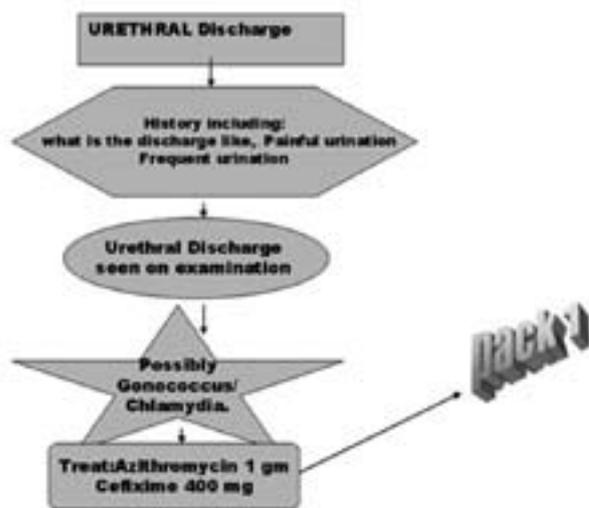
There is a parallel with other educators here (including adult literacy and ESL practitioners) in that we need good history-taking skills, combined with knowledge of possible causes and correct treatment. In NE India the people managing the clients are nurses (often first-year-out nurses working in remote areas) or health care workers, who have far less education and medical training than experienced practitioners or doctors. So our aim for these health care professionals is to teach them to recognise patterns in the history they obtain through asking appropriate questions of the client, and basic examination. From this assessment they treat with medication corresponding to the signs and symptoms elicited.

As seen below with Pack One, if a male client comes in complaining about discharge from their urethra (tube to urinate out) then the nurse or health care worker can ask appropriate questions about this. They will then do an examination to make sure that it is discharge, and that there is not anything else.

The most common causes for discharge from the urethra in a male are chlamydia or gonorrhoea, so the corresponding medication Pack One has the treatments for these conditions. Without pathology tests, it is impossible to accurately know which infection it is, and as they are both common (and you can also have both at the same time) empirical treatment for both is given. Pack One is a simple pack and doesn't require a lot of questioning or examination (see figure 1). Other packs are more complex.

The syndromic management for genital ulcers is a bit more complex. The most common genital ulcer worldwide is herpes, but in the tropics more exotic ulcers can occur and syphilis is still a big problem. (See figure 2.)

My role is to teach the nurses and health care workers the necessary skills to take a good sexual history and do



**Figure 1: Pack One, the syndromic treatment of chlamydia and gonorrhoea—commonly presenting in men as urethral discharge.**



**Figure 2**

examinations. I was also helping out the doctors working on the project. They had a vast knowledge of their local environment and processes for clinical care of clients, but only minimal training in sexual health medicine.

We would run the training sessions depending on the staff, facilities and the time available. There was theory to be learned; for example, how to take a good sexual history with appropriate privacy; what were good general questions to ask about sexual partners, and what were specifics about the complaint the person was coming in for. Theory also included the basics of STIs—how they present, their basic biology and natural history of the infection, and what complications they can lead to.

It was important to begin with basic anatomy and definitions. We encouraged questions as well as getting them to report back what they'd learned. I would also play the role of patient as they practiced history-taking. These strategies made sure I was pitching my language at the right levels.

Graphic PowerPoint pictures of what different infections look like accompanied the theory sessions. I must say that these pictures of human anatomy with infections fascinate people all around the world, and it was no different in NE India.

We would often role-play to help with history-taking and assessment. This would help the participant come to their conclusions about the treatment required. Discussion culminated in the use of the packs appropriate to the condition. The packs were supplied by the project, and it was fundamental to the project that the supply of the medication could be maintained in the clinics. There was much paper work and stock counting involved.

In many of the clinics I visited in the afternoons (after a full morning of teaching and the obligatory morning tea and lunch) we would see clients. I would try to encourage the workers to take the histories and do the examinations with me assisting on their first tries.

These clinics were often hectic, and I saw many clients who did not have STIs but had heard that there was a doctor in town and so would come to visit! But on the whole the clients were very appreciative of the work we were doing, and they were happy that we had come to train their local workers.

Over my time in the north-east, I visited eight clinics and trained 40 staff. The sessions were commonly held at one clinic, with workers from other clinics attending. I also trained the doctors monitoring the program so they could continue the training. The nursing staff would have more intensive training than the health care workers. I found the enthusiasm varied between clinics and staff, but on the whole this was a very rewarding experience for me from a training perspective.



**Possibly not the best health promotion sign I have seen!**

It is often said that the taboos around sex, sex workers and IVDU's in India are too great to be able to run such clinics. I was amazed at the quick learning and acceptance of the staff when it came to history-taking and examinations. The community was also readily accepting once they were able to have a private conversation (setting up the area for taking the history was often the first hurdle, with just a flimsy curtain between the consultation and the line of clients waiting), and an explanation of what we were doing and why. It was a good example of local worker involvement being a fundamental aspect of setting up effective health care programs.

From a personal perspective, being a female travelling alone in NE India was a bit more daunting than I had expected, but I had a lot of help and support from the local staff. I now know what it is like to take cold bucket showers, and read by candlelight, and have no phone or internet access for days on end. I also know what it is like to be restricted in my movement and to go through police checks.

Continued on page 32 ...



# Beside the Whiteboard

**During her long career, Glenda McPherson has taught in schools, TAFE and ACE in both country and city locations. With a passion for information and communication technologies in education, her advice about ICT is equally applicable to teaching and learning. Glenda talks with Lynne Matheson from Fine Print.**

## **How did you become involved in adult basic education?**

In 1995 I became the education and planning officer for Gippsland Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE). This was a new position following on from a Regional Education Adult Literacy and Basic Education Officer (REALBEO), whose sole aim was to work with Gippsland providers who were teaching the very new CGEA. As education and planning officer, I took over the role of the regional planning and co-ordination of the CGEA moderation process, and very quickly became aware of the CGEA and adult basic education, not only throughout Gippsland, but across Victoria. In those days we still had state moderation and as a 'non-provider and teacher' were regularly asked to chair at least one of the moderation sessions.

## **Can you tell us a bit about your professional background and career pathway?**

I began my career as a secondary teacher in 1976, having trained at Larnook Teacher's College. I was in the first group of trainees who had to undertake four years of training, and we were the first graduates able to teach the brand-new Human Development and Society. I majored in textiles and science. I taught in high, technical, independent and catholic schools from 1976 to 1995. Along the way I gained a Graduate Diploma in Student Welfare and a Masters in Education. I left teaching in 1995 and joined the Gippsland ACFE Regional Office as education and planning officer. This was the very first time I truly understood the long-term damage that many ACFE learners had experienced in our schooling system.

I sadly left ACFE in 1999 and returned to my previous teaching school as a full service schools officer, whose role it was to develop an educational program for Years 10, 11 and 12 who were at risk of leaving school and/or not succeeding at VCE. I developed a program based around the CGEA for these students. I didn't know at the time that elsewhere the powers that be were planning the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), which has its roots in the CGEA literacy and numeracy stream as well as vocational education streams.

In 2000 my husband and I took the monumental decision (reluctantly) to leave our home of 26 years in Gippsland and move to Melbourne for my husband's continuing work. It proved to be my greatest career move! I was employed by a very new state-wide vocational education and training support service for flexible learning called TAFE frontiers. I was with

them until the government de-funded it in June 2005. It was a privilege to work at such an innovative state-wide organisation that was very much in line with the national flexible learning agenda. More about TAFE frontiers later!

In December 2004 we moved back to Gippsland and I continued to work with TAFE frontiers part-time until the end of June. I was lucky enough to be asked to join GippsTAFE (Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE) part-time in the flexible learning support unit until I finished work at TAFE frontiers. I then became full-time at GippsTAFE, where I am still employed.

## **You have had a varied career—what have been your personal career highlights?**

Working as a teacher is a huge privilege, and when growing up there was nothing else I ever considered doing but teach. I really loved it, and each time I moved to a new school and sector, the move came about because the new school wanted to introduce Human Development and Society and/or Food Technology at the senior levels. Each time it was my role to introduce these new subjects first into Year 11, and the following year into Year 12. It was both challenging and rewarding.

Working with ACFE was wonderful. I felt like I had come home. It was comfortable and interesting, and it was fantastic driving the length and breadth of beautiful Gippsland to work closely with our then 65 ACFE providers. Working at the regional level also meant that I became part of a state-wide sector and I loved that—seeing what other regions were doing, and talking about it with Gippsland providers, and seeing them evolve and expand their delivery was very rewarding. I was very sad to leave the ACFE sector. Since then I have been an ACFE regional councilor in both ACFE regions that I have lived in, and am firmly committed to the sector.

Working with TAFE frontiers surpassed all my previous career highlights in five short years. It was challenging, exciting, thought-provoking, boundary stretching and much, much more. An absolute privilege, and the best working conditions I have ever experienced. We had a brief to try something new, to demonstrate different ways of delivering education, to role-model innovation and rapidly changing technology. It was wonderful! Sheila Fitzgerald, our CEO, was an amazing leader with forward thinking strategies and ideas. I miss her and my colleagues at TAFE frontiers very much indeed.

**What are some of the changes you have witnessed over the years?**

Huge changes in the role of teachers, both in secondary schools and in the ACFE and VET sectors. Teachers having to think much more laterally than ever before, and there is a sense of having to keep up with technology and the changing demands of our students.

When computers first appeared in schools, there were only two shared machines in the staff room for 60–70 staff members. Within 12 months the only time you could get to work on one of them was during the school holidays! When I began with ACFE I had a computer all to myself! I quickly learnt I knew very little about it other than how to word process. Although I was given an email address when the ACFE division decided it needed to link all ACFE regional offices to the division via technology, very few of our providers had computers. Slowly funds became available for one ACFE computer to be provided to most of the providers. This transition happened over two to three years. Now computers are fundamental, not only to most educational delivery, but also educational business in general.

**What have you found most challenging in your work with emerging technologies/ICT?**

Initially it was convincing people that ICT wasn't going to go away, that it was here to stay and that they needed to find ways of using it—firstly in a business sense (emails) and then in an educational delivery sense.

There was a time when I was frustrated that ICT teaching was primarily about MS Word, Excel, Access—just software. I looked forward to the day when the computers were simply a tool used for education. Although there are still teachers not using ICT well enough, generally I feel that we have achieved this transition and now use it for all education, not just IT education. Now we are much more focused on the different types of technology that ICT has to offer—voice boards, voice email, synchronous classroom environments, video streaming and the like.

**What has been the most satisfying aspect of your work?**

Working with teachers as they begin their journey into using ICT in their delivery is very satisfying. Seeing them go from being very wary and worried about how they can fully support their learners in an online environment or using online tools, to being advocates and champions of online teaching. It is a slow and gradual journey, but an exciting one, and one I am pleased to be involved with.

**What were the major achievements in your time at TAFE frontiers?**

Helping to spread the word that ICT has a lot to offer teachers and that they can be involved with it, even if they don't

have any previous experience. We always talked about small steps—do one little thing initially, and do it well. When you and your learners are comfortable with that, try another small step.

My primary role was to coordinate and deliver professional development across regional Victoria. That was a wonderful opportunity to visit providers across the state and assist them to embrace ICT more fully. I also managed the development of many online and print-based flexible learning materials which are still available and being used today.

I was part of a team who led the VET sector to think about and embrace ICT from a systemic perspective. While this process is not fully embraced by all providers, many have, and are generally reaping the benefits.

**What are the main benefits of online or flexible learning for adult literacy learners in particular?**

I think the development of the voice tools in particular has really opened up online learning for adult literacy learners. Being able to hear the words and their pronunciation as well as voice inflections has greatly enriched the online learning experience. Being able to listen and then respond verbally online has greatly improved their capacity to be more independent learners, and has allowed a maintaining and building of the supportive social learning community which many of these learners need.

**What have been some of your best teaching experiences?**

I have now been working primarily with teachers over the past 12 years, so I see that as my current teaching experience. As mentioned earlier, watching teachers develop confidence and competence and use ICT well in their classes is certainly my best teaching experience.

**What sort of work have you been doing in recent years?**

I am now with GippsTAFE working in the innovation and organisational development team, where our role is to progress flexible and online delivery for commercial clients, as well as across the five campuses of our TAFE for our managers and teachers.

Over the past two years I have managed several Australian Flexible Learning Framework (Framework) projects in the areas of learners with disabilities, youth, community partnerships and networks. That is terrific as it helps showcase what can be done to the VET sector as a whole.

In 2006 I co-managed a Framework New Practices project where we used Second Life, a popular virtual world, to deliver VCAL competencies and Certificate IV Interior Decorating

competencies to students at our Warragul and Yallourn campuses respectively. This was extremely exciting and innovative—there were many challenges, and still are, but the potential of virtual worlds such as Second Life cannot be underestimated. This year we are planning to use Second Life to teach competencies where there is a lot of risk and teacher judgement involved; for example, dealing with difficult drug and alcohol clients, setting up needle exchange programs, working with dementia and aged clients. It should be a great year!

**What do you like most about your current work?**

I enjoy the stimulation of trying new things and then getting management and teachers involved. Every day brings new challenges and ideas and it remains thought provoking and interesting.

**What do you consider are the most important issues for learners and practitioners in your region?**

Access for all to quality education and ICT is the most important issue. In regional areas, education provision continues to be problematic as government policies and priorities, funding opportunities and technical advancement continue to change and develop into narrowing opportunities. As government funding becomes more focused, the imperative to be less government reliant and more entrepreneurial often withdraws educational opportunities for learners as critical mass and the bottom line become the decider of what, when, how and to whom education is offered. In regional areas, this often leads to less learner choice and opportunities, and so widens the gap between those with recognised qualifications and those without.

Whilst the political rhetoric is for lifelong learning, upskilling and access for all, the reality in regional areas is that in many cases less people have the opportunity for quality education than in the past. This is one of the reasons why I am so passionate about online and flexible delivery as a means of helping to address this issue. Internet connectivity remains difficult for many of our learners and we need to continue to use CDs, DVDs, SMS and other technologies to address their needs.

**What advice can you share with new teachers or trainers?**

Don't be afraid to try something new. Start off very small and get it right so it feels comfortable! When you have it right, build on it by trying something different. Extend the experience; expand what, when and how you use ICT. As each year goes by students will be expecting to use ICT more and more—move with them, listen to what they use and how they use it, and try to tap into that. If they are using instant messaging or SMS, then incorporate it into your teaching—initially just to keep in touch, remind them of upcoming work requirements or special occasions; then get them to use it to reflect on what they have learned and what they didn't understand; then start getting some content in there. Be bold; be brave—but slowly, and in a controlled and supported way. Take your learners on the journey with you.

**Thank you, Glenda, for your time reflecting on your career beside the whiteboard, and in front of the computer! We congratulate you on the many contributions you have made to the field and the inspiration you have provided to practitioners launching into ICT and beyond.**

... continued from page 28

On the whole, my time in NE India gave me a lovely insight into a culture I knew nothing about, and driving about the state of Nagaland is one of the most beautiful and fulfilling experiences of my travelling career. In hindsight, I am extremely lucky to have encountered such energetic and enthusiastic learners, even though at the time I found it immensely challenging, but that is another story, about comfort zones and going outside of them—and about my own education.

**Siobhan Bourke is a sexual health physician at Family Planning Victoria, Victorian Cytology Service and the Melbourne Sexual Health Centre. She has a masters degree in public health and an interest in health in resource-poor settings. Siobahn has**

**worked overseas for several organisations, teaching health education for primary school children and sexual health for health care professionals.**

### **Note**

For more details on FPV—a service providing sexual and reproductive health services and training for community and health professionals—go to [www.fpv.org.au](http://www.fpv.org.au).

For VCS—a service providing about 50 per cent of the reading of pap smears in Victoria, and the essential training of the scientists who read them—go to [www.vcs.org.au](http://www.vcs.org.au).