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Editorial

Welcome to the autumn edition of *Fine Print*, our first edition for 2009.

Our front cover for this edition features a striking image of scaffolding. The Concise Oxford Dictionary lists one definition of scaffolding as a temporary structure providing a platform to stand on while building a house or other structure. It goes on to suggest that scaffolding can be defined as a temporary framework, and indicates that this definition may be interpreted both literally and figuratively.

In our first feature, Wendy Cowey, introduces what was initially known as the Scaffolding Literacy Program, but since 2004 has been situated at Charles Darwin University, as the Accelerated Literacy Program. She provides an interesting example of it working in practice and demonstrates the applicability of the program to adult literacy learners. In our second feature, Scaffolding Literacy into Community Services, Julianne Krusche describes a model of dual delivery, the Certificate IV in Community Services and the Certificate III in General Education for Adults, with the CGEA delivery used to support and form the framework for the development of vocational skills.

All the *Fine Print* regulars are here. In *Technology Matters*, Josie Rose, in her report on the AccessACE project, outlines some of the lessons learned and poses questions about the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT's) now and into the future. Iris Ralph walks us through a web-based learning project she conducted with her students at Moreland Adult Education, while Jane Westworth and Sally Hutchinson have compiled a comprehensive list of useful web addresses, offering a practical resource for both students and teachers.

It's a perfect lead-in to *Practical Matters*. Here Michele Gierck, from NMIT, provides a personal and reflective description of her approach to teaching writing. Hopefully, her thoughts will offer encouragement to all because we've also included a call for submissions for our next Student Writing edition of *Fine Print*, due out in August.

Policy Update alerts us to the disturbing news that the Federal Government's funding for the Adult Literacy National Project has been cut. This has significant implications for the sector as this funding has supported research and professional development activities, the national newsletter *Literacy Link* and the Reading and Writing Hotline. We reprint an article featured in *Literacy Link* in 2008, which exemplifies the value of the Hotline. We also reprint a support letter from VALBEC urging the government to reconsider their decision.

Beside the Whiteboard celebrates the 2008 joint winner of the Victorian Adult Community Education Award for outstanding ACE practitioner, Sue Paull. Sue tells us about her current work at the Diamond Valley Learning Centre. She describes the many people, places, and circumstances that have shaped her career in adult education.

Foreign Correspondence introduces Sheila Stewart from the University of Toronto, who describes an interesting research project from Canada involving literacy practitioners sharing and reflecting upon their own stories. As Sheila suggests, language and literacy practitioners are often very good listeners but as she goes on to ask, how often do we really listen to one another?

Finally, we offer a couple of interesting reviews. Jill Rodgers tells us about *Good Better Best 3*, a grammar resource specifically written for students learning English in Australia while Julie Palmer introduces us to *Family Literacy*, a publication aimed at promoting the value of family literacy programs.

As many readers may be aware, due to limitations on resources, we are now going to three editions of *Fine Print* for the year instead of four. Fortunately, as this edition attests, the high quality of contributions will remain the same.

The editorial committee offer their thanks to all those who have contributed to this edition. We hope you find it interesting.

Tricia Bowen

The Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council (VALBEC) aims to lead the adult literacy field through identifying issues of importance to practitioners and facilitating positive change. This is achieved through networking, professional support, the sharing of information and the promotion of best practice.

The Accelerated Literacy program and its relevance to the discourse of adult literacy acquisition

By Wendy Cowey

The Accelerated Literacy program is a method of teaching English literacy that shows the potential to make quick gains in reading levels for many participating students. Wendy Cowey illustrates the possibilities of the program and sheds light on how it actually works.



As members of an egalitarian society Australians must wonder at the stark reality of literacy results for children in remote Indigenous communities. The 2007 Multilevel Assessment Program (MAP) results in the Northern Territory (NT) for example, show that in very remote communities only 33.6% of Year 7 students reached benchmark levels in reading. The 2008 National Assessment Program (NAP) results showed that only 49.2% of Year 7 students in very remote schools reached benchmark across the whole of Australia. It could be reasonably predicted then that Year 7 students without benchmark reading skills would go on to become adults without functional literacy skills. These adults then face a vastly different future from the one we expect to result from years of compulsory schooling. In fact, such illiterate or barely literate adults find full participation in Australian society difficult to attain.

The natural reaction of any fair-minded person when faced with such reading results is to look for reasons why this situation exists and then try to rectify the problem. At the moment the overwhelming reason proposed by educators and even indigenous leaders in the press (e.g. *The Australian*, March 5, 2009) is that of attendance. If children are in school, the reasoning goes, they would learn. This reasoning places responsibility for school attendance squarely on the students' families and on governments for not pursuing the issue of attendance effectively enough. Such reasoning, however, completely omits schools, teachers and the role of teaching methods in teaching reading. There are also demands in the media for quality teachers to go to remote areas, but the reading program these quality teachers will teach to the student is still invisible.

This article will make visible one program, Accelerated Literacy (AL) that is being introduced in many remote and very remote Indigenous schools and will illustrate the possibilities offered by that program through an example of how it works, not only with school students but also where it has made small incursions into the area of adult education. For, while we read and hear about interventions in schools, when the large numbers of students who leave

school without adequate literacy skills become adults, they become another kind of statistic (e.g. unemployment, health) and largely become invisible as potential readers. The pathways open to them to become literate having left school become less easily defined.

What is Accelerated Literacy?

The Accelerated Literacy (AL) program is a method of teaching English literacy that, as a result of successful pilot programs between 1998 and 2003 showed the potential to make quick gains in reading levels for participating students (McRae, Ainsworth, Cumming, Hughes, Mackay, Price, 2000; Cresswell, Underwood, Withers, & Adams, 2002; Gray, Cowey, Axford, 2003).

The program was initially known as the Scaffolding Literacy Program but since 2004, has been situated at Charles Darwin University (CDU) as the National Accelerated Literacy Program (NALP). CDU is currently working with the NT Department of Education (DET) and with other jurisdictions in WA, SA and Qld to systematise, develop and research the program (www.nalp.edu.au).

The Accelerated Literacy pedagogy has some unique almost counterintuitive qualities. Perhaps the most challenging part of the program is related to the books or reading texts that are the basis of all teaching in the program. Rather than teaching students with literacy difficulties at the level they can cope with on their own then move up to harder material in small stages, AL teachers take the view, from Vygotsky (1978), that real learning takes place in a zone of proximal development (ZPD) where students can learn much more with careful teaching than they can do working 'at their own pace'.

In practical terms, the team involved in developing the program found that students who had been struggling with learning to read over time, as in the case of many older primary and secondary students, were constantly restarted on 'the basics'. Over and over again, the team would find older students struggling with the simplest early childhood

readers with one line of repeating print per page. There is something particularly poignant about listening to a stressed and embarrassed young man try to read something like 'a fox in a box' unsuccessfully.

Repeatedly, the team found classrooms across very remote areas of Australia had Kindergarten or Year 1 emergent literacy reading schemes as the reading material available in classrooms across a whole school. A secondary classroom with 'Spot goes to School,' or other books parents would typically read to pre school young children on its sparse bookshelves, was a common sight.

It would not be exaggerating to say that it is quite impossible for students who have been working on such low level reading material over time to learn to read from it (Cowey, 2005; Gray, 2007). Rather, such students become fossilised in their approach to learning to read. They adopt survival tactics or assume a role where they become dependent on a listener to prompt or guide them through a seemingly meaningless ritual. As Marie Clay (1991) points out, learning to read is a complex task. One finding of the AL researchers has been that reading, a complex task, can only be taught to older students using more complex reading material than those early reading texts. It is as if students have to break the bonds of the ineffectual patterns of interaction with text that have failed them in order to move into a principled understanding of how reading works as an educational activity.

The ZPD provides a theory that allows this 'break out' to occur. Students can be taught to read at a much higher level than they can manage individually with the support of an appropriate teaching method. The key to teaching at this higher level is what teachers commonly call 'scaffolding'. This term, used by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) describes temporary support provided by teachers or others to help a student do something he/she cannot do alone. As the student gains control of the task the teacher 'hands over' as the previous support is no longer required. The outcome of carefully applied scaffolding is such a lessening of cognitive overload for students that they can do much more with this support than they ever imagined.

The Accelerated Literacy Teaching Sequence

The AL teaching sequence consists of four pedagogic tools or strategies: literate orientation, transformations, spelling, and writing, all of which are applied to a reading text, usually a passage from a longer text. This text obviously has to be carefully selected by the teacher to be at a level of difficulty above what students can read individually and as close as possible to age appropriate for students. The text then becomes the literacy resource for teaching the class over a series of lessons. The aim of each teaching sequence

is for students to be able to read the text accurately and fluently, comprehend it at an inferential level and to use it as a model for writing.

Competence gained in one teaching sequence becomes a resource for the next and the common knowledge shared by teacher and students expands into a very rich resource. As Mercer points out, 'For those involved in teaching and learning, continuity of shared experience is one of the most precious resources available' (1995: 33). Literate reading texts are the foundation of AL teaching. It is through these texts that students can learn about the implicit ground rules of success in English literacy.

Accelerated Literacy in practice

The following example may serve to illustrate the working of a teaching sequence in an adult setting. This example was used in a very remote school in the NT where the Indigenous teachers and assistant teachers wanted more access to AL themselves because the children in the school were making such good progress. The adult participants varied in literacy competence from non-readers to readers but none of the group were confident writers.

The text used as the resource for teaching this group was from Paul Jennings, '*Spooks Incorporated*', a short narrative from the book '*Quirky Tales*'. This story is about two villains who swindle vulnerable people into selling their homes cheaply so that the villains can then sell them at a large profit. Predictably enough, the villains themselves are eventually tricked and come to a bad end.

To read the whole text individually would be too demanding for adults with low or little literacy but as part of an AL teaching sequence the whole story would be read to the group so that they can enjoy it. Then short passages would be selected to study in detail. The passage used in this example is from the orientation to the narrative where an old lady, Miss Pebble, living alone, is scared from her home by the ghost of Ned Kelly, one of the villains in disguise. One of the writing techniques used by the writer of '*Spooks Incorporated*' is to intensify the sadness Miss Pebble must have felt at the loss of her home by describing how much it meant to her. The villains' unscrupulous behaviour is made worse by understanding the distress of their victim. The passage reads:

She loved her old house. She had lived in it all her life. She loved the old verandah and the tin roof. She loved the old cellar under the ground. She loved everything about it. It was her home. (Jennings, 1997, p. 67)

The benefits of using such a passage as a teaching resource with adults are many. It is an authentic text from a longer

story but it serves as an example of a writer's technique that can be taught to adults as a useful writing tool. The need to engage a reader's emotions is a challenge for all writers.

Furthermore, the benefits of this text extend to its straightforward structure and wording. Note below how 'she loved' repeats, for example. This language feature immediately reduces cognitive overload for readers as well as intensifying Miss Pebble's feelings for her home. The structure of the text is also straightforward.

Structure	Text
The valued object/place	She (Miss Pebble) loved her old house.
Length of ownership	She had lived in it all her life.
Examples	
1 & 2	She loved the old verandah and the tin roof.
3	She loved the old cellar under the ground.
4 (generalisation)	She loved everything about it.
Summary	It was her home.

Despite its simplicity it is still a literate text, that is, it is more like the language of books than oral language. The aim of the teaching sequence described here was to write about a favourite place; one they could not bear to lose. To achieve this aim, students first had to learn to read the text. The part played by the AL teaching sequence is described below.

Literate Orientation

This pedagogic tool provides a context for making the purpose of the study explicit. Edwards and Mercer (1987 p. 158) point out that much of what happens in school lessons operates according to implicit 'ground rules' known to the teacher but not necessarily understood by the students. For adults who have become ritualised in their school engagement, understanding the educational purpose of the lesson is crucial. They do not automatically realise that there is even an educational goal behind the activities they complete. Wertsch (1984) calls this alignment of understanding 'situation definition' to draw attention to the fact that a teacher and students may be undertaking the same task but not define it or understand it in the same way. For example, the goal of a study of the above text might be to describe a favourite place using the same writing technique as Paul Jennings. Students may perceive it as a word substitution activity to produce a piece of writing. The teacher however may have had the educational goal of teaching students how to write a description that shows a deep emotional attachment to a place. Both goals produce a piece of writing but the students have constructed the task as an activity while the teacher had a different educational goal: to teach students to use a writing technique. Edwards

and Mercer (1987) discuss the difference between ritual and principle in learning to describe the way in which some students steadfastly work to come up with a product to satisfy what they see as the task. They simply do not define the task educationally in the way that the teacher intended.

Another goal of literate orientation is to reduce the considerable cognitive overload experienced by students in the process of reading (Sweller 2002). Sweller points out the limits of short term memory in performing cognitive tasks. Thus, a reader struggling to decode unknown words has no mental space available for thinking about meaning. As a result, meaning cannot act as a cue for the reader and a valuable tool of competent readers is not accessible.

The two dimensions of literate orientation, low order and high order, provide the context for working towards common goals and understanding about the study text.

Low order literate orientation

In practice, low order literate orientation is a conversation that takes place before the teacher reads the text to the group. In introducing '*Spooks Incorporated*' the teacher would outline the story, introduce the characters, particularly the vulnerability of Miss Pebble and briefly outline the part played by the Miss Pebble incident in the overall story. The teacher would then read that part of the story to the group with the students now able to listen with understanding. A foundation then exists for the lesson and subsequent lessons to build on. Later in the lesson, and in subsequent lessons, this information (common knowledge) provides a resource for asking questions and discussion about the motives of characters and the emotions they evoke in readers.

High order literate orientation

High order literate orientation shifts attention to the actual wording of the text. The text has to be projected or available to the students in some way so that the discussion between students and teachers can be focused exactly on the words. Teachers often ask students to underline the wording that is the focus of discussion. For example, in 'She loved her old house' the teacher might ask, 'To show us how much the house meant to Miss Pebble, the writer tells us how she felt about it. She didn't just like it a little bit. How did she feel about it?' The students would then have to read the text to identify and underline the word 'loved'. The teacher can then expand upon the significance of the word and remind students that in the previous paragraph, the reader found Miss Pebble had lived in the house for possibly eighty years or more. That information implies that she probably loved it. Next, the teacher might continue, 'Now we find out how the writer describes the age of the house. Can you read the words that tell us about what sort of house is it?' The students

would then underline 'her old house'. The teacher can then expand on how a reader could interpret those words. They infer that the house belongs to Miss Pebble and consistent with how long she had lived there it was an old house. That might mean that it needed some repair but despite its age she still loved the house. Note that the questions cue students in to the answers (Cowey, 2007) and make clear 'what is in the teacher's head'.

In this way, students find the task of reading the words is made easier, cognitive overload associated with decoding is reduced by access to the meaning of the text and comprehension at an inferential and critical level is developed.

While the first lesson in a teaching sequence often involves more teacher talk than some people are comfortable with, in subsequent lessons students and teacher share an adult discussion about the possibilities for meaning making contained in the words of the text. Wertsch (1984) refers to this process of discussion and joint negotiation as participants develop a common understanding of the study or a shared situation definition, as a state of intersubjectivity.

Transformations

The process of developing a state of intersubjectivity about the study of a text can take time and is not achieved without the semiotic mediation of talk about interpretations of the study text. Another powerful tool for working in the ZPD is transformations. Transformations involve the study text, or parts of it, being written on cardboard strips that then allow the text to be manipulated. For example,

- She loved her old house.
- She had lived in it all her life.
- She loved the old verandah and the tin roof.
- She loved the old cellar under the ground.
- She loved everything about it.
- It was her home.

With the sentences arranged in order it is possible to turn some of them over to prompt further conversation about the work the words are doing in the text. For example,

- She loved her old house.
-
-
-
- She loved everything about it.
- It was her home.

This arrangement allows a conversation about what has been left out and why. The teacher can now ask students to draw on previous discussion to explain the significance of, 'She had lived in it all her life.' That Miss Pebble, as an old lady, would have a special attachment to somewhere she had lived all her life makes the loss of her old house even more poignant. Continuing with the transformation sentence by sentence, students are able to discuss the significance of the listing of each part of the house. They can then extend the conversation to include what other parts of the house she may have loved. Why choose these features and not others? Transformations provide an opportunity for students to take control of the discussion about the text as they build on what they know.

The discussion about the text during transformations is also slanted towards examining the text as writers analysing another writer's work. The study can extend into finer and finer analysis that includes grammar and punctuation. For example,

She | loved | her old house | .

This transformation allows the class to discuss the use of pronouns, as in, 'Writers don't keep repeating a person's name in their writing, they use a word to stand in place of the name, a pronoun. Who is the person 'she' refers to?' The teacher can then choose to follow up with more discussion about pronouns that takes in cutting up the noun group,

her | old | house

so that the relationship between 'she' and 'her' can be made.

Another strength of this teaching tool is that every time the group comes back to the same piece of text they each have to read it. Because the wording of this example is simple, students can also use their memory to predict words and can therefore participate as if they are readers. The discussion is always in context and thus always makes sense to participants. Newman et al, (1989, p. 62) describe the importance of students behaving 'as if' they are competent literate people as they are when operating on this text in an AL lesson. As they engage with their teacher and other group members, they become that literate person.

Spelling

Because the text is short and relatively simple, it can be easily memorised. At this stage, memory can be both helpful and unhelpful. The aim of AL is definitely not to have students memorise text. Where a student rattles a text off in a ritualised manner memory is unhelpful and teachers of AL have to guard against working on one

text for so long it becomes nothing but a ritual. On the other hand however, some memory of text aids prediction and is useful as students can use it to identify words. For example, if the teacher wants students to identify the word 'loved' they have only to point to each word while reading to identify it.

Spelling follows transformations in the AL teaching sequence because, as shown above, the sentence shown has been divided into individual words. From this point, teachers can choose known words to illustrate how these words are spelled and can be decoded. In the example, a common word is 'loved'. It would be practical to teach how, in English, this word can be chunked into l/ove/d. The etymology of the word can also be discussed, as this is a word that is spelled as it is because of scribes before printing presses. Scribes did not like to write u and v together because they looked like uu in the writing of the day. Using o instead of u made the word easier to read in a page of predominantly vertical strokes. Other words like this, for example above, worry, come, can also be discussed and the system of English spelling becomes accessible over time (Brown & Brown, 2005).

In addition, the spelling tool provided by the AL teaching sequence is intended to assist with teaching phonological awareness and decoding. In this text, for example, it might be expected that 'cellar' could be difficult to decode but the emphasis on meaning that began in literate orientation means that words like this are no problem at all. They also provide an opportunity to discuss that 'c' makes an 's' sound when it is followed by e, i, and y.

While spelling in AL involves chunking words, looking for recurring letter patterns in English and applying that knowledge to decoding and discussing etymology, it also involves putting the spelling words back into the context of the story in an activity called joint reconstructed writing. This activity then flows seamlessly into a writing 'workshop' where the structure of the passage is used as a plan for writing a description using the same words as the author used. The technique is a little like that of artists who learn some of their painting techniques by recreating the work of the great masters.

For many students it is the first time they have written something that makes sense and that they can read accurately and fluently.

Writing

The extent of common knowledge shared by participants about a passage of text in an AL teaching sequence is considerable. The structure of the description of Miss Pebble's love for her home has been made clear from the

start. This structure was adapted slightly into the following writing plan.

Valued place

Examples

1 & 2

3

4

Summary

The students then used this plan to create a text of their own in a writing 'workshop'. In Wertsch's terms, teacher and students, at this stage, had similar 'situation definitions'. That is, they knew what they wanted to achieve with this writing workshop. They shared considerable intersubjectivity at a detailed level about the place of this description in the whole text, about how it was structured and how writers make language choices to emotionally move a reader and enlist sympathy for a character. In addition, they would be able to discuss, spell and write the text as individuals as well as a group. In reality, students often add to a teachers understanding of a text as they each bring their own life experiences to it.

There is considerable flexibility in the writing plan above to ensure the exercise is principled learning rather than a kind of word substitution activity. The goal is to have students write about a favourite place in a way that would entice readers to like it too.

Additional support for students could take the form of one or more joint constructions before students attempted to write individually. Where students are very unconfident, extra joint constructions can be done.

Some of the texts written by the adult students who studied the text passage above are reproduced below.

Student 1

She loved Dhamala. She used to go hunting there. She loved fishing and crabbing. She loved to drink water from the water hole. It was a special place.

Student 2

Rita loved Dipirri. Rita loved to go hunting there. Rita loved to watch the kangaroo in the bush. Rita loved to go out to get long neck turtle in the swamp. It was my favourite place.

Student 3

Anna loved the island. She used to go hunting there. She loved the oysters and the mud crabs and mussels.

She loved the ocean and the sound of the waves. She loved the sand and the turtle laying eggs. It was her favourite place.

Student 4

John loved the sea. He used to go fishing. He loved the fish and the turtles. He loved the smell of the sea. That was his favourite hobby.

Each participant in the group (nine in all) was able to write of a favourite place and bring their own life experience and voice to the description and each felt enough of a sense of accomplishment to bring their writing together into a booklet. Interestingly, despite their similarity, each example reflects that person's individual level of understanding of the task. Example 2 shows that this student had not understood the role of pronouns in writing but the image that writer captures still reflects the spirit of that place and its possibilities.

It is also interesting to note that the model was simply a description of Miss Pebble's house. These writers had taken that description further to describe not just what their location looked like but some have included the sounds and smells they could sense and activities that could be carried out there. They had perceived the 'ground rules' of the activity in a principled way.

It should also be stressed that the writing examples were carefully scaffolded. That is, the students were taught to use a writing technique from a literate text. They were not just asked to go away and write about a favourite place until they had a literate resource to employ. When they had that resource, the participants had considerable experience to bring to it. To reach a level of competence where they are able to compose and write choosing appropriate writing techniques suitable for each situation takes longer than a few AL lessons. This example has simply raised possibilities.

Issues

This example was intended to demonstrate, at a practical level, how the AL program can be implemented with adults with previously very low levels of literacy and how the success of the program in primary and secondary schools can be transferred into an adult context. Joy Harley (2008), in an article entitled, 'Hey teacher! You're waking me up!' described her experience using AL as a teaching method with students at Batchelor Institute of Tertiary Education. As a lecturer there she found AL a particularly appropriate teaching tool for engaging adults in literacy learning.

It should be added, however, that the adults used in the examples above, while having quite low literacy skills to the point of not actually being functionally literate, still had

some knowledge of alphabets and phonological awareness. These students make rapid progress with AL. For adults with no letter knowledge or phonological awareness, progress is still possible but is slower.

Conclusion

Adults, who have not learned to read at school, have instead learned many coping mechanisms. Many of these methods of maintaining an illusion of being a good student actually work against them learning the very skills they want to acquire. Copying diligently and neatly from 'the board', completing work sheets, making posters, having a listener guide them through a reading text, all increase their dependence on ritualised rather than principled habits of learning.

The AL program and the teaching tools offered by the teaching sequence offer a method for teachers to make explicit the ground rules of literacy learning so that students gain access to the whole discourse of literate language.

It is as though someone was faced with the task of assembling a two thousand piece jigsaw of tiny pieces with no illustration of the finished picture as a model. All the pieces scattered on a table are a meaningless jumble unless the puzzle assembler sorts them into edge pieces, colours, or imposes some sort of order into them so that an overall picture starts to emerge. The more the picture is completed the easier it becomes to fit it together.

For people learning to read, letters and sounds don't make sense until recognisable patterns start to emerge. If stress is added, for example, everyone except you is able to do the puzzle easily, or if you are trying to sort the puzzle out inefficiently by memorising where pieces are on the table or taking them out of the box one piece at a time, then the task is even more baffling. On the other hand, if an expert at jigsaw puzzles sits down with the novice and demonstrates how to sort the pieces and make sense of the task, encourages the novice and occasionally, at strategic moments points out pieces that fit together, then there is no stress, no feeling of failure and the task seems straightforward.

Adults with literacy difficulties have often learned many pieces of the literacy puzzle; their only problem is not quite seeing how to make sense of them. AL provides a context where an expert can guide novices to understand the patterns that can help them put the puzzle together.

The example described here was later replicated with another study text in two Indigenous forum settings in Alice Springs and Darwin during 2008. The participants felt excited and empowered by what they had learned in a short time. The experiences of teachers and students who have used AL

methods have been encouraging. They are, however, just a beginning but one that is worth consideration by people working in the field of adult education.

Wendy Cowey is co-developer of the Accelerated Literacy methodology currently being introduced into schools in the NT, WA, SA and Qld. At present she is managing the development of teaching resources and professional development for the National Accelerated Literacy Program (NALP) from Charles Darwin University. For more information on the teaching sequence see www.nalp.edu.au.

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Scaffolding Literacy into Community Services

By Julianne Krusche

Not all vocational teachers are going to feel equipped with the skills to accommodate the literacy development of their students. As Julianne Krusche explains, providing dual delivery programs where the literacy development scaffolds the vocational development is one way of addressing this issue.



This paper describes a model of dual delivery—Certificate IV in Community Services and Certificate III in General Education for Adults, delivered at the School of Human Services, University of Ballarat. The term ‘scaffolding’ has been used to describe this model as all CGEA delivery is designed to support and form the framework for the development of the vocational skills. All LLN skills (language, literacy and numeracy) taught are in context with the practical application of the community services vocation. The program is a joint initiative between the Departments of Humanities and Further Education and Community Services.

This is the third year this model of delivery has been used. Each year the dual delivery program evolves through continuous improvement strategies put in place to deliver a quality program to prepare students for the growing demands of study and workplace.

The report commences with a theoretical rationale behind the development of programs at the University of Ballarat catering for the development of LLN skills in a vocational context. The dual delivery program came about from a combination of research into ‘best practice’, current LLN trends in Australian society and government initiatives into VET delivery. It is important to commence with a full explanation of the theoretical and research journey leading to the development and implementation of this program.

How it came about

My initial experience in scaffolding LLN into vocational learning was in 2002 when I delivered strands of the VCAL curriculum in the automotive area. This curriculum promoted embedded LLN skill development in conjunction with the practical application of vocational knowledge. This model made a great deal of sense because all skills developed had direct relevance to the vocational areas that the students were studying.

Research perspective

In 2003 I broadened my understanding of the term ‘literacy’ after completing research titled *Unpacking Literacy and Numeracy in Training Packages*. Aside from lots of research

this study also involved interviewing vocational teachers about their perceptions of LLN development in the areas they teach.

One of the most interesting aspects of the research was that it highlighted the misconception of the term ‘literacy’. The vocational teachers interviewed considered the term ‘literacy’ to be more focused on a deficit or ‘illiteracy’ rather than it being a continual acquisition of skills. They believed that literacy and numeracy skills were solely the responsibility of mainstream schooling or the further education sector. They saw little relevance to their vocational area and the application of LLN skills associated with it.

However a positive outcome of the interviews was that the teachers came away with a broader knowledge and shared understanding of the term literacy and the relevance it has to their teaching. One definition that captures the essence of literacy is:

Literacy is the ability to read and use written information as well as to write appropriately in a range of contexts. Literacy involves the integration of speaking, listening and critical thinking with reading and writing. Literacy is more than basic reading and writing (sometimes called functional literacy -following instructions, filling in forms, reading bus timetables, writing personal notes). It is also a process of using higher order reading and thinking skills to question what we see in written texts (sometimes called critical literacy). The literacy demands placed on individuals also change throughout their lifetimes. As we experience new situations we need to continually adapt and extend our literacy skills. This is particularly relevant to changing demands within the workplace. (*Service Skills Australia, 2007, Taking the Lead*)

As the definition states literacy skills change according to context and these contexts will alter throughout people’s lives. Entering into vocational study places students into a new context that means that greater demands will be placed on them to adapt and extend their literacy skills. Not all vocational teachers are going to feel equipped with

the skills to accommodate for the literacy development of their students. Providing dual delivery programs where the literacy development scaffolds the vocational development is a way of addressing this issue.

Government Perspective

Governments at both a state and federal level highlight concern about the future of Australia's workforce and its ability to be competitive in the global environment.

- Despite 17 years of continuous economic growth, Australia faces an unprecedented skills shortage (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008)
- On the basis of current skill formation, in 2020 Australia will have nearly three times the proportion of low skilled or unskilled than the best performing countries (Australian Government, *Skilling Australia for the Future*, 2008).
- Currently 1.4 million adult Victorians do not hold any post school qualifications. Unless the current skills shortage changes drastically it is estimated that there will be a shortfall of 123,000 people at diploma or advanced diploma level by 2015. (Allan, 2008, *Securing Our Economic Prosperity*)

As a support to higher qualification delivery the importance of providing LLN scaffolding programs becomes more important than ever. Students will be having increased demands placed on literacy skills.

Results of ALLS survey

Alarming the increased literacy skills requirements for Australian society were not reflected in the recent Adult Literacy and Life Skills (ALLS) survey. This survey conducted in Australia in 2006/2007 highlighted that between 46% and 70% of adults have poor skills across one or more of the five skill domains tested. The domains were prose literacy, document literacy, numeracy, problem solving and health literacy. Participants were tested against five levels of complexity with level three regarded by experts as a suitable minimum level of coping with the increasing and complex demands of modern life and work. (Tout, 2008 *Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, Summary Results*)

The results of this survey indicate that many adults are equipped with the entry level LLN skills to cope with the demands of higher level study. Scaffolding LLN development into vocational study becomes an essential ingredient in supporting students through their current courses.

How the dual delivery program works

Students who enrol in the dual delivery program are all interested in future employment in the community

services sector, in areas such as welfare, youth work or disability. In the main they have not fully completed Year 12 through traditional schooling. Some of the students have already worked in the industry and are now seeking formal qualifications.

At the beginning of the year all students enrol in the two courses—Certificate IV in Community Services and Certificate III in General Education for Adults. They are fully informed of this dual delivery program at an information session prior to its commencement. As the students will be enrolling in more than the maximum hours (640) in the community services course, there will be no extra cost incurred by enrolling in both courses.

Students attend for three days per week with one half day being devoted to the completion of the CGEA. Upon successful completion of all units in both courses, the students will be eligible to receive two complete certificates.

Certificate III in General Education for Adults delivers the following core units:

- Evaluate pathway options, design a learning plan and compile a portfolio (VBQU155)
- Engage with a range of complex texts for learning purposes (VBQU157)
- Engage with a range of complex texts for employment purposes (VBQU158)
- Create a range of complex texts for learning purposes (VBQU161)
- Compose workplace documents (PSPGOV313A)

These units have been selected to complement the study requirements of the community services course and to provide the minimum amount of core units that the students need to fully complete the requirements of the CGEA. The units chosen allow for the development and refinement of both academic and workplace literacy skills. Often students progress to higher level study upon the completion of this program into Diploma, Advanced Diploma or Bachelor Degree courses. The CGEA allows for elective modules (minimum of 140 hours) to be credited from Certificate IV in Community Services Work.

Explaining the Approach to Students

At both the information session and at the beginning of the course the following rationale, describing the benefits of dual delivery with the CGEA, is provided to students.

- Most students commencing the Certificate IV Community Services are mature age and have not completed Year 12 and in some cases they have not completed Year 11. The 'dual delivery' model provides concurrent

support for their study and enables students to develop the literacy skills to continue to higher-level further study.

- The program caters for refinement of literacy skills as a preparation for formal study. Students do not necessarily have literacy issues, as they can be proficient readers and writers. However, they have had limited, if any, experience with academic texts—eliciting the main points, inferred purposes, separating opinion from fact, recognising sound opinions, ability to question the text, effective note taking and using it as a tool to generate their own opinion. With academic writing skills, students often require revision on paragraph structure, clarity of writing opinions and supporting with facts, sequencing of paragraphs, formatting of essays and reports.
- ICT is becoming increasingly used as a method of study and communication. There is an expectation that students are all proficient in word, power point, internet and email when entering a course. Many mature age students lack both the confidence and skills required for IT. Although younger students enter with confidence and a higher degree of skills, some of these skills have been self taught and may not be the most appropriate methods. To deliver some community services units the UB Blackboard will be used which assumes the students have IT skills. Although not formally assessed in this field, course delivery will be centred on the proficient use of ICT.
- Even if literacy is not an issue for students, they often enter courses with a limited amount of academic skills in research. Skills in the proper use of referencing, researching methods and using library databases, journals and printed literature will be taught. It is also important for students to develop the ability to assess the reliability of internet sites.
- The ability to communicate orally is important in vocational course delivery and workplaces. The CGEA will assist students in the development of formal oral presentation skills.
- The educational skills taught within the CGEA will allow the students to gain in confidence and promote the concept of life long learning. Many of the students completing the Certificate IV in Community Services will opt to continue with study either personally or due to workplace requirements.

Why the dual delivery program works

The dual delivery program works for the following reasons:

- Both the community services and CGEA coordinator attend and present at the information session showing a united front and reinforcing that the two courses are part of the one model of delivery. To strengthen this

team work, both coordinators also work together and provide an induction at the beginning of the year.

- The CGEA teacher is in constant discussions with the community services teachers about the content and assessment demands of the community services delivery. These discussions then form the framework of the CGEA delivery. No CGEA tasks are set without prior consultation with the other teachers as they are the experts when it comes to understanding the applied literacy requirements in community services. Only the literacy skills considered relevant to the vocational area are taught. For example, students are not expected to learn formal essay writing skills, as it is not a skill required in the workplace or current study. However, report writing is an essential skill so the students are taught this in the format appropriate to the community services sector.
- The CGEA teacher contextualises all tasks to the community services study. The students are shown the relevance to all skill development that they are undertaking.
- The CGEA teacher finds out how the students are to be assessed in their vocational units and so bases a lot of skill development around this. As a result lots of dual assessments take place within both courses. Some examples of this are completing both a written and oral report on a local community service organisation. This satisfies some of the performance criteria in all of the core CGEA units.
- All CGEA units have been selected to complement the study requirements of the community services course. As a result the students are not given any extra CGEA assessment. Rather the students are required to keep a portfolio of their completed community services assessments as evidence for CGEA assessment. The current CGEA curriculum has a lot of overlap in the core reading and writing units which makes it relatively easy to validate the community services assessments.
- CGEA delivery takes place in a multipurpose classroom, which has a bank of computers. Students use the computers continually as part of the CGEA delivery, which allows for the ongoing development of ICT skills required for study and workplace.
- Students are given some time to work on the community services assessments during the CGEA class time. In this way the students are given extra study support from the CGEA teacher and are not overloaded with too much extra study demands as many of them work part time and have personal commitments.

Where to from here?

This is the third year that the dual delivery model has been used with Certificate IV in Community Services. Over time the model has been continuously improved through

trial and error and constant feedback from students and all teachers. Experience has shown that if students are to benefit from dual delivery study, they cannot be overloaded with too much extra class time and assessments. The flexibility of the CGEA, combined with a trusting and an open professional relationship between community services and CGEA teachers, means that dual delivery programs can be achieved.

In 2009 dual delivery programs at UB have been extended into the Diploma of Community Welfare, Certificate IV in Disability, Certificate IV in Nursing and Certificate III in Aged Care. The delivery method used to scaffold the LLN skills into these courses is dependant upon the needs of the vocational area.

In light of the ALLS results, scaffolding LLN into vocational study is an effective way of supporting the governments' strategy to 'up skill' the workforce into higher level qualifications.

Finally dual delivery programs will only work through the shared understanding of the meaning of 'applied literacy'

and the continued cooperation between TAFE departments and schools. In this context it is important to acknowledge the support of the Head, School of Human Services and all staff in the Department of Community Services. Without their cooperation, the ability to experiment with and continuously improve the dual deliver models would not exist.

Julianne Krusche works for the University of Ballarat (TAFE Division) as a Program Coordinator and teacher in the Department of Humanities and Further Education. She began as a language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) practitioner in TAFE in the mid 1990's. Throughout this period she has seen many changes to delivery styles of LLN to accommodate the ever-changing demands of the VET sector. Amongst these changes Julianne has taught mostly CGEA in a variety of programs—preparatory, dual delivery with vocational areas and youth specific. Due to a combination of research, changing workforce and community needs, experiences in a variety of curricula plus a supportive manager, Julianne has been allowed the opportunity to develop a series of models of LLN delivery in the VET sector.



Technology Matters

AccessACE—Clever Use of ICT in ACE—Lessons Learned in Blended Learning—Real Solutions to Real Problems

By Josie Rose

The challenge for the participants in this project was to work out which technology and which blend of technology and face-to-face teaching would best suit them, the curriculum and the learners. What might a clever use of ICT's look like in the future?

Background

During 2007 the ACFE Board funded the AccessACE project to trial various blended learning strategies using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) within a range of ACFE funded courses, including language and literacy. The project defined blended learning as a combination of the best features of face-to-face teaching with the best features of ICT enabled learning in order to enhance the educational experience of ACE learners.

The aim of the project was to encourage the uptake of alternative delivery models by ACE organisations and in doing so improve the capacity of ACE organisations to deliver a greater variety of programs to individuals and small groups in a highly flexible manner.

In other words, looking for practical technology based solutions to real problems, for real learners.

The learners ranged from students studying VET courses such as aged care, child care and hospitality, to students with an intellectual disability, young people studying VCAL, and CALD students. There was also a good mix of regional and metropolitan learners.

The teachers were knowledgeable, helpful and responsive, both online and / or face-to-face. They were passionate about their subject matter, interested in how technology could support and enhance their delivery, and above all, willing to take risks.

In terms of teacher experience with and confidence in technology, some could be described as early adopters, but the majority would fall into the category of mainstream users. Almost all were digital immigrants¹. What they did have in common was their passion for teaching and learning and their commitment to learners in ACE.

Which blend?

The challenge for the participants in the project was to work out which technology and which blend of technology and face-to-face teaching would best suit them, the curriculum

and the learners. This differed significantly across the ten participating organisations.

As mentioned previously participants were encouraged to select a technology enabled learning solution that would meet the needs of a specific cohort of learners or solve a particular problem. The result was that the ten exemplar projects varied greatly in how they selected and applied their technology. It varied from completely online, i.e. no face-to-face, to completely face-to-face with online activities conducted in the classroom with the support of technology: i.e. computers, data shows, etc. The choice was dictated by the characteristics of the learner group, including their language and literacy levels, as well as general organisational familiarity with and access to technology.

Why AccessACE?

The AccessACE project aimed to answer the following two key research questions:

- What *does* a clever use of ICTs in ACE mean and look like?
- What *could* a clever use of ICTs in ACE mean and look like?

These two questions formed the basis of the research conducted by the 10 participating organisations and the project team. In order to answer the first question regarding what clever use of ICT in ACE means and looks like, the project team investigated a range of issues facing ACE practitioners when integrating technology into mainstream delivery. It looked at change management, sustainability, cost effectiveness, accountability, professional development, IT infrastructure issues, program design as well as the question of measuring success and learner outcomes.

Each of these key factors is discussed in detail in the project report, downloadable from the AccessACE website at www.acfe.vic.edu.au. The key messages are summarised here:

- A clear understanding and shared strategic vision of the role of ICT in educational delivery is crucial in defining and measuring organisational success.

- ACE needs to have the underpinning infrastructure in place, and needs to develop blended learning programs that work within the IT constraints of the organisation.
- There needs to be a recognition that the introduction of ICTs into established, more traditional practices is a change management issue; and communication is the key to making it work.
- The integration of ICTs into ACE educational delivery and business practices is vital to future sustainability.
- Online delivery for regional and remote organisations is a very practical solution to their particular challenges around geographical spread and smaller class sizes.
- Cost effectiveness will come with subsequent delivery instances. As with any new program, there are up front costs. These can be significant when introducing ICTs.
- Professional development (in-house, regional and state) needs to cater for mainstream adopters and will require diverse strategies and styles.
- There is a strong need for a mentoring program; just-in-time and just-for-me peer support.
- Effective IT support is crucial.
- Introducing ICTs extends the boundaries for learners and teachers outside the classroom and significantly extends the organisation's potential educational reach.
- A good induction / orientation process ensures successful learner outcomes.
- The embedding of ICTs in ACE program delivery can make a significant impact on program design through more learner centred teaching approaches
- Participating organisations agreed that the key to succeed is to start small
- There are many free, low cost, easily accessible tools available that can make a real difference in supporting, engaging and retaining your learners.

So, what does a clever use of ICT in ACE look like?

If we focus on a clever use of ICT in terms of the tool or technology, and factor in all the other key success factors as outlined above, clever use indicates a trend towards free or low cost, easily accessible tools. 80% of the organisations that participated in the trials used a Web 2.0² tool to support their trial, either as a vehicle for content delivery, or to support face-to-face and online activities, with wikis as the most popular tool.

Web 2.0 tools allow for easy and effective collaboration—they do not require additional equipment, and they did not require elaborate and expensive technical support. Most of the tools are small, free and can be set up online resulting in immediate access.

The recently published *2008 Horizon Report*³, which aims to “identify and describe emerging technologies likely to have

a large impact on teaching, learning, or creative expression within learning-focused organizations”, comments that web 2.0 and social networking tools are increasingly being adopted for educational use, and “that the way we work, collaborate, and communicate is evolving as boundaries become more fluid and globalization increases”.

The findings of the AccessACE project confirm this trend, as the participating ACE organisations are extremely positive about the future and the tremendous potential for ICT enabled learning—particularly in extending their educational reach.

In a recent interview for the *Campus Review* magazine, Greg Black, the CEO of Education.au discusses the ICT imperative in the context of predictions about the future training needs of industry and individual learners. Black mentions predictions that student knowledge gained in the first year of their training is likely to be out of date by their third year.

He reminds us that the “only sustainable approach will be to find the learning and teaching strategies that will ensure that people embrace attitudes and behaviours anchored in lifelong learning”. He goes on to say that in order to “stimulate these new attitudes and behaviours in students, learning has to get more stimulating, flexible and personally relevant than ever before.”⁴

The future

For us a clever use of ICTs could mean a wiki for each accredited class.

Clever use could mean a lot more course materials available online for our pre-accredited students to access.

Finally, the teachers and managers involved in the project were asked to consider what clever use of ICTs could look like at their centre into the future. The quotes above demonstrate quite clearly that the clever use of ICT is highly contextualised and that a range of key factors impact on its success. They are:

- teacher skills, knowledge and confidence
- organisational capacity and
- teacher support
- in-depth knowledge and understanding of the characteristics of the learner group
- an understanding of the technology or tool that will best support the delivery.

AccessACE demonstrated that good teachers, even when relatively inexperienced in any particular online technology

can deliver successfully if these key success factors are present and managed well. It demonstrates that although the size of the organisation impacts on access to resources, it does not necessarily guarantee success. Small organizations with limited resources also performed well.

Perhaps the final word should be given to a teacher who contacted the project team six months after completing her first online course, with this comment. Prior to this project she had had limited access to technology and with variable access to broadband, was certainly not the most experienced online teacher in the group:

Glad that you enjoyed the blogs, I am getting good reports. I am booked for an online class in July and another organisation wants to run one in August. I have also adapted my second course to online. To be honest I enjoy it so much I could just keep going creating online classes. I love my new technology and I now take my own photos. My classes have improved heaps, last year I was using over heads now I create Powerpoints for all my classes and its well received.

Want to Find Out More?

If you are interested in finding out how you can get involved in AccessACE, the ACFE Board will be funding an extension of the project in 2009, built around two Circles of Professional Practice. The Circles will have as their main themes *Classroom Practice* and *Organisational Strategy*. They will be managed by 2 ACE organizations that participated in the original project. For more information contact Josie Rose at josie.rose@dpcd.vic.gov.au

For more detailed information regarding each of the ten exemplars featured in the project, you will find links to their action plans at <http://www.acfe.vic.edu.au/actionplans>

A full report is part of a suite of tools available to ACE practitioners to support them in their planning. For more information, in-depth advice and information, visit the support site at: <http://www.acfe.vic.edu.au>. A complete version of the report is also available online at: <http://accessacereport.acfe.vic.edu.au>

Josie Rose is an ESL teacher and has been working with computers and e-learning since 1990. She has been involved in e-learning projects on a state and national basis for some years. Josie is the project leader for the AccessACE project. She is based at the SMR ACFE regional office. You can contact her for further information on josie.rose@dpcd.vic.gov.au

Endnotes and References

1. A digital native is a person who has grown up with digital technology such as computers, the Internet, mobile phones and MP3. A digital immigrant is an individual who grew up without digital technology and adopted it later. A digital native might refer to their new “camera”; a digital immigrant might refer to their new “digital camera
2. The term “Web 2.0” refers to a *perceived* second generation of web development and design, that aim to facilitate communication, secure information sharing, interoperability, and collaboration on the World Wide Web. Web 2.0 concepts have led to the development and evolution of web-based communities, hosted services, and applications; such as social-networking sites, video-sharing sites, wikis, blogs, and folksonomies. Accessed 23 Feb. 2009 at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2.0 Source: Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_native. Accessed January 2008
3. 2008 *The Horizon Report*, New Media Consortium p6. <http://www.nmc.org/pdf/2008-Horizon-Report.pdf> accessed January 2008.
4. Mitchell, J. ‘*Inside VET*’, Campus Review 15/10/07 p.12

Connecting with communities through web-based learning and research skills

By Iris Ralph

Creating stories that include reference to larger social and political events.

The purpose of this paper is to share with language and literacy professionals a small part of a project I worked on last year at a Neighbourhood House in Coburg, Moreland Adult Education (MAE). The aim was to work with students towards creating personal stories that include, as an effective narrative and rhetorical device, reference to larger social and political events. Towards this

aim, my students and I researched indigenous history and stories about and by indigenous Australians. These would become our models and an inspiration for us. Assessment activities and tasks focused on computer-based learning and research skills, thereby familiarising students with the use of computers in the classroom for formal learning outcomes.

The Students

The ESL students I work with at MAE are enrolled in a Certificate in Spoken and Written English (CSWE) III class and a Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) Literature class. They are mostly women aged between mid-forties and late sixties. They have worked in unpaid or low-income jobs, mostly in the home as caretakers for their families, for most of their life in Australia. Several hold a tertiary qualification in their first language and held professional positions before migrating to Australia. Since then, they have not accessed a formal learning environment, with set venues and meeting times, set learning materials, specific learning outcomes and assessment activities. They are strong speakers and listeners in English and want to continue to improve their speaking and writing skills. They also want to improve their reading and writing skills towards enrolling in a Certificate IV or other further education course in art and literature at a TAFE or university.

The Approach

Initially the students were reluctant to use the computers and technology in the classroom for formal learning outcomes and assessment tasks and so my aim was a modest one: to familiarise the students with using computers for research, to conduct simple web-based searches using popular website search tools such as Google, YouTube and Wikipedia, and to learn to distinguish among and evaluate web sites and website sources. Our focus of study continued a topic we had embarked on earlier in the year: Aboriginal-Australian history and identity and the role this history and identity has played in shaping Australia in the period of colonial and post-colonial settlement.

We began the web-based search activities with the Australian government's official Apology to Indigenous Australians. Students searched for information about this historic event using the search tool Google. Supplemental texts were a DVD recording of the televised event and a transcript of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's 'sorry' speech published in *The Age* newspaper (13 February 2008). A web-search followed of three key political and historical terms: 'reconciliation', 'integration' and 'assimilation'. This last activity was unplanned, inspired by a recently published tribute to Oodgeroo Noonuccal (1920–1993), environmentalist, prominent spokesperson for Indigenous rights and 'the grandmother of Aboriginal poetry'. We read a recent tribute to Noonuccal, 'Rebel Voice', by Alexis Wright, which led us to Noonuccal's poetry and her famous, historic, 'Speech Launching the Petition of the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement' (1961). Noonuccal's speech lucidly and succinctly distinguished for us the terms assimilation and integration in the specific

context of the relations between Aboriginal-Australians and Anglo European-Australians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Innumerable artists and writers could have made up our small selection of writers and artists. We simply followed the fence-posts of readily available and accessible, recently published, print-based and digital texts. The website search activities and tasks using Google, Wikipedia and YouTube were a collaborative effort. I gave the students leeway in their search for material and then worked with them helping to organise sources and cull others. The students quickly understood the more broad the query (the information entered into a search field), the more general the response (the subject matter and number of website responses). We worked on how to conduct more efficient website searches including evaluating web sites so as to narrow the research source material to a relatively small, manageable number of web sites. A useful online document for this task was a Victoria University website link, which offers tips and guidelines for evaluating and using web sites: <http://w2.vu.edu.edu/library/searchsmarter/evaluteswebres.html>

In a subsequent task, we searched for and discussed 'Waltzing Matilda'. The seemingly unsophisticated verse proved to be a much richer text as we researched the song's origins, its identity as a popular folk and protest song, its associations with the union movement in the 1890s, and its political significance as Australia's unofficial national anthem. A key digital source document for our work was the National Library of Australia's web site, where we viewed on-line the manuscript of the 1894 'Paterson–Macpherson' version (score by Cristina Macpherson, lyrics by Banjo Paterson). We also researched the words 'coolibah' and 'billabong', which appear in the text and are of Aboriginal-Australian origin. We discussed Indigenous identity and culture as something that is deeply bound up in younger histories and foundation narratives of Australia, not separate from them.

YouTube links provided us with many audiovisual recordings of 'Waltzing Matilda'. The students responded particularly well to this audiovisual source material as well as to other audiovisual source material that we engaged with during the course of the project. As part of this web-based activity, students were asked to address how audio and visual content can add to, shape and re-define the reception of printed information and printed texts in ways that can make these more accessible to an audience.

The final piece of the project focused on artist and prominent spokesperson for and elder of the Wurund-

jeri people, William Barak (c. 1823–1903). Almost immediately, we ran straight into and got derailed by myriad website links to another famous ‘Barak’, U.S. President Elect, Barack Obama. When we returned to William Barak, we visited the National Gallery of Victoria and The Catholic Education Office web sites, the latter of which has a useful link, ‘A Wurundjeri story’, to Barak.

The ‘William Barak’ web search activity was in preparation for an end-of-term visit to and guided tour of the Indigenous art collection at the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) at Federation Square. Geelong-based artist and NGV tour guide Brian McKinnon gave us a fascinating tour of the ground floor permanent collection of Indigenous art. We walked so slowly through the collection and sat and stood in front of the art so long, all the while barraging McKinnon with questions.

The Year Ahead

This year, students will work on creating their own personal stories that draw on for inspiration, the stories of struggle, survival and achievement by Indigenous Australians. We will revisit the private-made-public stories of William Barak, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Doris Pilkington (author of the biographical novel *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*), and Sally Morgan (author of the autobiographical *My Place*).

My use of computers in the classroom to learn more about Aboriginal-Australian identity and culture and to use the histories we encountered there as models and inspiration for our personal stories, is motivated by a recent, ‘CanYouHearUs?’ project that I participated in and ‘Finding the Threads’, a *Fine Print* journal article by Maree Keating (2007) that I recently read.

In the ‘CanYouHearUs?’ project, led by Michael Chalk at Preston Reservoir Adult Community Education (PRACE), participants experimented with and trialled new audio-technologies in the classroom. Spurred by it, I decided to engage more with using computers and technology in the classroom and so worked on creating assessment activities and tasks that focused on web-based learning and research skills.

The ‘Finding the Threads’ article spurred me to work with students on creating personal histories that draw on and contribute to Australia’s collective identity and history. It and the ‘CanYouHearUs?’ project offer much to language and literacy teachers working in the adult and community education sector. They inspire us to make connections with other communities, to learn more about these communities, and to actively

contribute to a collective Australian, multi-cultural history and identity.

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Have you clicked-on?

Jane Westworth and Sally Hutchison, from the *Fine Print* Editorial Committee, have assembled a comprehensive list of web addresses for teaching theory and practice—together with plenty of information as to what each site has on offer.

Digestible Theory for Teachers

- eSchool News *eschool.news@eschoolnews.com*
This Journal is American, the newsletter is delivered free each week and covers a variety of topics. It has teaching ideas, theoretical underpinnings and examples that can apply to any level of education: primary through to adult tertiary. There are reports on such things as IT Literacy, *No Child Left Behind* and Project-based learning. Reports are short—bite-sized—and give practical teaching suggestions, not just theory. This is also available under the ‘current’ tab on the website: <http://www.eschoolnews.com/> which also has a lot of other quickly-accessed hotlinks.
- eCampus News *eCN@eschoolnews.com*
This online Journal is, as its name implies, an upstage version of eSchool News. It has only recently been released. It’s a great example of an online site because you can read it through your email, online, as a PDF—and even as a flip-book. It’s good fun! Although much of it won’t be directly applicable to VALBEC members, there is a nice summary of the implications of the 2009 Horizon Report, and a couple of articles on working safely online.
- The New Zealand Literacy Portal *info@nzliteracyportal.org.au*
Again, this drops in your email letterbox each week and is neatly thematically arranged, so if one week is irrelevant to your needs, the next one may be perfect. You can choose to use or delete by reading just a very brief outline of each article and linking to it only if it is relevant. This is a much more theoretical collection, you will be offered entire Reports, as well as interpretations or comments on these reports. I think it’s worth subscribing to just for the content outlines alone. You may not have to read the entire report but at least you know something about it.
- Sage Journals Online Alert *sage_contents_alert@alerts.stanford.edu*
Purely for research, theoretical underpinnings or interest. Not everyone seems to know that you can get email alerts to various online publications. Sage has many Journals available under its banner: you merely tick a list of any you may be interested in reading when you first join up. You can always change your mind, and add or delete later. The email alerts come through to you with just a list of titles of articles: the first click brings up the abstract;

if you’re interested in reading more, you can bring up the whole text. The whole text service is totally free for a year to individual subscribers, and if you belong to a big institution, you can persuade the library to subscribe and you have free downloadable, current research at your fingertips.

Teaching and Learning Sites

- One Stop English *onestopenglish.newsletter@macmillan.com*
This is a great resource for teachers of all levels, excellent for ESL sites and first language literacy too. Updates drop into your email, in abbreviated form only. You select what you need. If you haven’t tried it, look out for:
 - news lessons in three levels—adapted from *The Guardian*—and infinitely adaptable to your own needs
 - grammar ideas
 - podcasts
 - stories on audio (worksheets provided)
 - English for nurses
 - Business English
 - Grammar
 - PunctuationIt is possible to subscribe to a separate section of this, which for very little extra cost gives you lots of additional materials.
- Macmillan Education *http://www.insideout.net/le-lessons.htm*
Primarily intended for ESL learners, but equally useful and adaptable, for literacy students. This site comes with a weekly email offer. Just click if you need a suggestion; ignore it if you don’t. The site offers weekly ‘e-lessons’, different levels on different weeks. The lessons basically comprise a reading comprehension, activities on this, teacher’s notes and a short glossary. The lessons can be photocopied. A lot of the material lends itself well to oral work and follow-up writing too. This site is a very good example of integrating the ‘four skills’ and beyond. If students have access to computers, each lesson has a list of websites, hot linked in the original, which encourages students to find out more about the topic and gently introduces the concept of research, as well as the skills of reading online. Each week there is also a resource pack. These are excellent for quick pair work. The emphasis is usually oral and they serve as good, fun, revision materials, as well as introductory lessons and extension work. It’s free to register: <http://www.insideout.net/registration/insideoutreg.aspx>

- In the News—BTN activities—to register <http://www.inthenews.com.au/subscribe.asp>

Everyone knows about BTN but not everyone makes the most of the BTN activities. Registration gives you the log-in and password. It's definitely worth having, especially for the many and varied uses of the transcript, and for the grammar, and the integrated learning of specific skills.

Other Useful ESL and Adult Literacy Sites

- <http://www.world-english.org/>
This is a very comprehensive website which includes English assessment tests, exercises in vocabulary, phrasal verbs, grammar, English tenses timeline chart, listening and spelling tests, as well as puzzles and quizzes. There are lots of activities for different levels.
- <http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/help-with-english/amep/other-languages/>
This site provides information about settlement issues for newly arrived migrants from the Department of Immigration. The information is available in other languages.
- <http://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/languages.htm>
This site provides information on legal issues in other languages.

- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/webwise/index.shtml>
This site is great for low level literacy classes who may be learning computer skills or doing internet searching.

- www.english-to-go.com
Here you will find excellent English language photocopiable lesson plans based on current news events from Reuters and news stories for English teachers.

- www.english-to-go.com
Plenty of teacher resources here including free ESL handouts and printables, TESL jobs, educational news and a directory of teaching resources.

- esl.about.com/od/teachingenglish/
Here there are TESOL teaching English resources available including teaching writing, reading, pronunciation via multimedia, suggestopedia and teaching theory.

- www.spice.org.au
This site has literacy and numeracy materials for young students.

Jane Westworth is a lead teacher in the Diploma of Education at RMIT while Sally Hutchison is Acting Head of Department, Foundation Studies at NMIT.

Practical matters

How my own writing has influenced the way I teach writing in the classroom

By Michele Gierck

Sharing journeys and life experiences, while recognising we are all learners.

I've discovered that having the time and space to write, finding your own voice on the page, and having someone you respect who encourages you and appreciates your story, is as essential to authors and professional writers as it is to adult literacy and English as a Second Language students.

Apart from working in education, for close to a decade I've been a non-fiction freelance writer, focusing on personal human stories. Artists, aid workers, refugees, people with HIV/AIDS, tank commanders, business people and the occasional rock star, have all sat down to tell me their tales.

As I reflect on those interviews, what strikes me as most important is just being myself and giving the interviewee the space and time to respond freely, and to know that what they ask to be off the record, will be.

Of course I am not averse to a little prompting. Not unlike educators, writers too have all kinds of limits: words, time and memory. One must be realistic. But the key is to create trust, to listen, engage, and where appropriate, dialogue.

It is this same approach that I bring to teaching students to write. For the last two years I have worked part-time at NMIT, teaching Certificate 3 English to adult English as a Second Language refugees and migrants from around the globe. (Some are technically ESL students, but their oral language is so proficient that it may be more accurate to describe them as literacy students.) While they need a little encouragement to begin with, what amazes me is the number of students who, in the course of writing, find what many writers struggle with—their voice on the page. Grammatical errors, misspellings and limited vocabulary are not an obstacle.

At the beginning of each year I wrote to the students, telling them a little about my own story: born and raised in Melbourne, worked in business for a while, lived in a war zone and its aftermath, worked with refugees in Australia and overseas, and working part-time as an ESL teacher. And, I added near the end, when I was injured and unable to work a few years ago, I wrote my first book, *700 Days in El Salvador*.

The students all wrote back. Well, to be honest, they had to. It was a task. But they were intrigued about the book. They wanted to know more. How did I write it? How long did it take? Can we read it in class? It prompted some enlightening discussion. They were surprised to find out that the first draft of my book was hand-written and that it took almost six years of rewrites to get published. And that surprise escalated when I explained that articles I regularly write may be redrafted up to four times.

It dawned on some students that having to redraft their written work several times was often not an indication of being a poor writer, but rather a committed one.

We didn't just talk about tenses, past, present and future. We would look at tense in context, for example, in a feature article, how it indicated moving back and forward in a story.

When they asked to read some of my articles about people's life stories, I brought them in. We read, questioned, looked at article structure and main ideas. We discussed what questions might have helped in the interview, and whether they could pick if I really liked the person. That was insightful.

Some of them began looking at texts as if they were editors—questioning, wondering and asking why. My love of writing and stories seemed to be rubbing off on them.

I believe passionately that one of the most valuable things each of us have is our story. And how I love stories. What's more, the students all had their own stories and what they needed was someone to listen. I noticed, over time, that during journal writing each week, where students could write on a topic of their choice or an idea I had suggested, that many started writing their own stories.

One of the students, an Iraqi fellow, well educated and artistic, whose oral communication was very high, struggled with literacy. The burden of having vibrant ideas but not being able to express them in English frustrated him. He began to avoid writing in class. But his story was so captivating, regardless of how it looked at first draft stage, that I encouraged him to write more.

Practical matters

He had been a conscript of the Iraqi military when one day, the prisoner my student was accompanying to jail escaped while in his care. Reporting the incident, my student was informed by his commanding officer that unless he found the prisoner within the next 24 hours, he would serve the prisoner's term!

Each week I waited with anticipation for the next installment in the saga, and became editor when, over a semester, he worked on it. In my mind I could see his story captured on celluloid, projected on a big screen.

Another student, an introvert but highly philosophical fellow, wrote about discovering his father who he thought had been dead for 10 years, and his personal chronicles of being attacked—by wild water hippos crossing the Nile and by bandits on the bus to Kenya. His stories were written

with such poise, emotion and insight that I found them inspirational, and asked for copies.

Other students wrote about life in Australia: filled with longing, lost land and learning to live again.

The writing wasn't simply a writing task, although there was marked improvement in the quantity and quality of written work for most students over a year. It was more about creating a space for their stories, and finding their voice. It was about having their stories respected and treasured. It was about building trust between teacher and student. It was also about sharing our journeys and our experiences of life, and realising that in this respect we are all learners.

Michele Gierck teaches at NMIT and is the author of *700 Days in El Salvador*.



The Fine Print Editorial Committee announces the Teachers and Students Writing Edition 2009

Following the success of the 2008 edition,
the Fine Print editorial committee continues the tradition.

As in 2008, we want to celebrate the learnings and insights of ALBE students through publishing their writing. We also want to celebrate the work of teachers.

This time we ask students to use the broad theme of 'memory', as an inspiration. This could include memories of people, places, turning points, precious objects, holidays, emotions, or anything else that has been significant. Both poetry and prose are welcome.

Teachers, we ask you to write about how you help your students with not only the processes and mechanics of writing but also how you inspire, build confidence, and help your students find a voice.

Submission Guidelines

Electronic texts only

Word limit: 500 words

Please include a title for the piece, your name, learning institution, and place where you live and a mailing address.

The editorial committee will select pieces that best fit the guidelines and represent a diversity of learners and teachers.

Please email all contributions to VALBEC at www.valbec.org.au

Deadline: June 19th

Policy Update

Adult Literacy National Project Funding Slashed and in Doubt

As Sarah Deasey explains, the Federal Government's decision to cut funding for the Adult Literacy National Project has significant implications.

Modest funding from DEEWR has supported an array of valuable research and professional development projects, ACAL resources such as the national newsletter *Literacy Link*, and the unique and precious Reading and Writing Hotline, which has made a difference to so many people struggling to find help and referral for literacy.

The threat of diminished or no funding, or uncertain funding for the Reading and Writing Hotline is of grave concern to adult language and literacy teachers. For many Victorian providers the Hotline plays an essential role in linking people with literacy classes. It is very difficult for individuals experiencing difficulty with literacy to find their way to a provider. If the Hotline disappears a door will be closed in the face of many vulnerable people.

Here we reprint an article from *Literacy Link* (Volume 28 No. 3 June 2008) by Steve Goldberg on the work of the Reading and Writing Hotline, highlighting the value of the service. We also reprint a support letter from VALBEC to the editor of *Literacy Link*, urging the Federal Government to reconsider.

All Around Australia in 24 hours at the Reading and Writing Hotline

Steve Goldberg has been the Coordinator of the Reading Writing Hotline since 2000. The Hotline is a national adult literacy referral service funded by DEEWR and has been managed by TAFE NSW Access and General Education Curriculum Centre since 1994. For more details telephone 1300 6555 06 or visit www.literacyline.edu.au

Between 12.00pm and 12.00pm on the 16th and 17th of April 2008, the following calls to the Reading Writing Hotline were taken in the sequence shown below. Several of these were callbacks via our messaging service for after-hours enquiries. Not only do they reflect the broad diversity of enquiries, they also indicate how much information the Hotline can provide to the general public. The majority of these callers sourced the Hotline's telephone number via the Hotline's television advertisement. At the time of writing, the advertisement was being screened in a paid television campaign across regional Queensland, hence the significant percentage from this sample of callers from that state.

In many instances, callers tell us that they have seen the Hotline advertisements on television for many years but feel embarrassed or nervous about calling the Hotline. As a means of addressing this, a new Hotline television advertisement inviting callers to "take the plunge" is being currently developed and will begin screening nationally as a community service announcement in late May 2008.

Townsville, Queensland

Caller: Mother seeking help for her children because she is unable to assist them with their schoolwork.

Comment: She is unaware that the Hotline is set up to help adults and that we can provide her with a suitable referral to an adult literacy class. She expresses much surprise that adult literacy classes exist and gratefully accepts a referral to a provider.

Orange, NSW

Caller: Woman seeking a suitable course for her soon-to-be ex-partner.

Comment: She says his reliance on her to do the paperwork for his business and generally manage all literacy and numeracy tasks on his behalf has put too much strain on their relationship.

Melbourne, Victoria

Caller: WorkCover provider seeking help on behalf of a 57-year-old Italian-born man on workers' compensation.

Comment: His client has been out of work for two years and needs to improve his literacy and numeracy skills in order to retrain.

Tamworth, NSW

Caller: Male in his early 50s is writing a letter and asks if we could spell two words for him.

Comment: He only wants small amount of over-the-phone assistance. He knows about ALBE classes but does not wish to attend them at the present time.

Moura, Queensland

Caller: Mining company representative.

IS THIS THE FUTURE?



Comment: He is seeking advice and referral information on how to get help in the workplace for “a significant number of employees.” Referral information given includes the DEEWR WELL coordinator for Queensland.

Gosford, NSW

Caller: 18-year-old male shop assistant.

Comment: He works as a casual. He has been told by his employer that he needs to improve his literacy and numeracy skills if he wants to apply for an upcoming full-time job.

Wollongong, NSW

Caller: Employment agency seeking advice on behalf of a client.

Comment: The client has attended various ALBE courses at TAFE and community colleges for several years and says that he has “plateaued” in his learning. We discuss a number of options and suggest that a Certificate 2 level vocational course with learner support may be a pathway worth exploring with both the client and a local VET provider.

Shepparton, Victoria

Caller: Representative from an Aboriginal cooperative.

Comment: She is seeking literacy and numeracy classes for 2 clients.

Bendigo, Victoria

Caller: A primary school teacher.

Comment: He wishes to retrain as an ALBE teacher and is seeking information on how he can make this transition.

Darwin, NT

Caller: Woman aged 23.

Comment: She works in a government department and has just been asked to take on new roles that require writing e-mails and reports.

Bowen, Queensland

Caller: Male security guard in his late 20s.

Comment: He has had minimal schooling and seeks help in relation to his job. He says his employer has just introduced shift reports.

Geraldton, WA

Caller: Woman seeking help for partner who had only a grade 3 education.

Comment: Her partner has just been offered a job and is concerned that his poor literacy will undermine his job security.

Sydney, NSW

Caller: Male in his 40s.

Comment: He is seeking hands-on help in writing a letter in relation to a consumer matter. He does not want at this stage to go to a class. He is given contact details for his local community legal centre where he may be able to get assistance.

Sydney, NSW

Caller: Social worker.

Comment: She is seeking a referral for an Aboriginal client who had minimal schooling and is a full-time carer for her grandchildren.

Rockhampton, Queensland

Caller: Mother seeking referral information for her 18-year-old son.

Comment: Her son is seeking a job as an apprentice electrician but has not been successful because of his poor literacy and numeracy skills.

Newcastle, NSW

Caller: Human Resources Manager for NSW Roads and Traffic Authority.

Comment: She is seeking information on enhancing the literacy and numeracy skills of their workforce in the Hunter region. She is given several contacts including the DEEWR WELL coordinator for NSW.

Hobart, Tasmania

Caller: Personal Support Program field worker seeking a literacy referral for a 28-year-old male client.

Comment: She is given the contact details for the local TAFE and the RTO offering provision funded under the LLNP. We explain the enrolment process via Centrelink for accessing LLNP provision.

Gawler, SA

Caller: 56-year-old woman originally from Scotland.

Comment: She left school early and wants to be able to read to her grandchildren. She is given a couple of community education referrals.

Sunshine Coast, Queensland

Caller: Male aged 39.

Comment: He works as a salesman. He left school at 15 and needs to improve his literacy skills for employment-related reasons.

E-mail enquiry received

I want improve my reading ritting but dont want to go to a class can I study at home

Comment: No name or location is given so we compose a reply in a simply worded e-mail listing the distance education contacts for each state and territory.

Toowoomba, Queensland

Caller: Woman calling on behalf of her husband.

Comment: His poor literacy skills are causing strain on their marriage. She has tried tutoring him but now wants him to enroll in a course.

Hobart, Tasmania

Caller: 30-year-old woman.

Comment: She says she's in a "dead-end job." She wants to do a catering course but wishes to improve her literacy skills first.

Mackay, Queensland

Caller: Woman aged 25.

Comment: She recently moved from Brisbane where she was doing a literacy and numeracy course and is seeking a similar course provider with whom she can continue her studies.

Toowoomba, Queensland

Caller: 17-year-old male.

Comment: He had a very itinerant upbringing. He left school at 14 and is seeking an apprenticeship to become a house painter. He feels he needs to improve his literacy skills in the meantime.

Sydney, NSW

Caller: Church volunteer.

Comment: She is seeking one-to-one help, preferably at home, for a recently arrived Sudanese woman with young children. We provide her with information on the AMEP home tutor scheme.

Perth, WA

Caller: Woman who is tutoring her partner.

Comment: She is looking for some suitable self-help spelling resources. She is also given information on free volunteer

tutor training offered by Read Write Now, as well as a list of resources she can purchase.

Letter to the editor of Literacy Link—February 2009

VALBEC is dismayed by the federal government's decision to discontinue funding for the Adult Literacy National Project. The cost of this national program, that has contributed so much to a vital and largely overlooked education sector, is relatively small (\$1.5m) and supported by many hours of unpaid work.

VALBEC is an affiliate of ACAL and thus is critically aware of the direct impact this decision will have on the co-ordination, provision of advice and representation on national adult literacy and numeracy issues. ACAL provides leadership in Australian debate on adult literacy and numeracy practices and policy and advocates on behalf of equitable adult literacy and numeracy provision for all Australians.

The loss of the national newsletter *Literacy Link*, produced by ACAL, and the national program of innovative web-based and face-to-face professional development activities co-ordinated through ACAL, will substantially impact on adult literacy practitioners across Australia. They will be deprived of major communication and networking tools that contribute to the currency of their professional expertise and a sense of professional identity, so sorely needed in these times of increasing casualisation of the teaching workforce.

The adult literacy field is further disadvantaged by the loss of the Adult Literacy Innovative Project that provided small, special purpose grants for individuals and organisations to undertake resource development and small scale research. Innovative approaches to research and resource development have enriched both teaching and learning in adult literacy and numeracy education. Targeted adult literacy and numeracy research funds have already been cut from the NCVET budget so that opportunities to undertake research have become non-existent in Australia. The federal government is vociferous in promoting skills development and social inclusion as policy priorities. Australia is now in the position of having to look to

other countries for research in Adult Literacy and Numeracy, as well as those areas highlighted in the ALLS survey results, such as health literacy, financial literacy and numeracy. No specific research will be undertaken in this country due to research funding cuts which seems ironic in the face of the huge investment in data collection and the subsequent reporting made available by the ABS from the ALLS survey.

Further to our concerns are the far reaching implications of the closure of the *Reading and Writing Hotline*, a national telephone advisory, referral and counselling service for members of the public. Here in Victoria we know from anecdotal evidence from ACE and TAFE providers alike of the importance of this service in linking the public to adult literacy and numeracy programs and services. It is particularly important for people living in remote and rural communities to have a service that is a phone call away.

As a result of the Federal government decisions, as of March 2009, Australia will have no specific adult literacy and numeracy research funding, the only national adult literacy and numeracy newsletter will have been decommissioned and the Reading and Writing Hotline, the vital and proven conduit between providers and prospective students will be no more. We urge the government to reconsider these far reaching and retrograde decisions.

We would like to take this opportunity to commend the ACAL committee and in particular, the President Margaret McHugh, for their commitment and diligence in their ongoing work to ensure nationally co-ordinated activity and advocacy for adult literacy and numeracy learners and practitioners is maintained.

Lynne Matheson and Ann Haynes—VALBEC co-presidents

On behalf of the VALBEC committee

Editor's note: Since this letter was written the Reading and Writing Hotline has been given funding for another 5 months. The states, territories and Commonwealth are considering how to reinstate the Adult Literacy National Project funding.

Beside the Whiteboard

Sue Paull is a teacher and literacy coordinator at Diamond Valley Learning Centre in the North Eastern suburbs of Melbourne. In 2008 she was the joint Winner (with Wayne Baker of Youthworks Ballarat) of the Victorian Adult Community Education Award for Outstanding ACE Practitioner. Sue talked to Sarah Deasey from the Fine Print Editorial Committee about her work as an adult literacy teacher over the last 20 years.

Beside the whiteboard—preliminary thoughts

I feel very comfortable talking ‘beside the whiteboard’ with a marker in my hand. It’s such a basic tool of teaching and one I’ve always liked to use. My affection for it began with its precursor, the blackboard. I started teaching in 1965. It was a primary school prep class of 53 children in country NSW. The classroom was large with two resources, a piano I couldn’t play and walls covered with blackboards. The piano I left for another lifetime, but the blackboards saved my life. By the end of the year, I could’ve written a book entitled 101 ways with blackboards. Over my years of teaching, I’ve never really embraced the overhead or power-point. I enjoy the simplicity, flexibility and the blank canvas of the whiteboard, waiting as it does for something to be created in the moment by the teacher and students.

Tell us about Diamond Valley Learning Centre

Diamond Valley Learning Centre began in those heady years of the early 70’s as a learning exchange, also offering HSC and childcare. It was run by women and focused essentially on the needs of women though it never excluded men. Over the years, it’s grown significantly to become a registered training organisation providing nationally accredited VET training, VCE & VCAL, language literacy and basic education, computer classes, general interest and self-managed groups. Each week in 2009, over 480 students walk through its doors.

There is a welcoming, non-threatening air about the Centre. Part of its secret is in the building itself; as you walk through the doors you enter a home. The kitchen lies at the heart of the place and all doors lead to it. Food, and the sharing of it, is also part of the welcoming and connecting of people. Making people feel at home lays the foundation for the learning that happens in all ACE centres, and I think DVLC does this well. Of course there’s the learning that happens in the classrooms, but what happens around the kitchen table, at our regular social gatherings and within the links to the broader community is arguably as important.

The students in our ESL program come from the four corners, with an increasing number from Asian countries. Long-term migrant numbers have declined and our students tend to be more recent and/or skilled migrants.

Greensborough’s a fairly Anglo-Celtic zone, but it’s changing and with about a third of our student population NESB now, DVLC offers a good meeting place, and also opportunities for our more advanced ESL students to move easily into mainstream classes with ESB students.

It has been a place where I have learnt so much about teaching and about myself. I think the key to this learning has been the trust that has been placed in me, and the warmth extended to me by students, teachers and staff. My work at DVLC has been a joy, like the pleasure of doing a kind deed for a friend.

Can you tell us a bit about your professional background and your pathway to teaching adults?

My teaching career began in primary schools and I taught for about 12 years in the primary sector in both Australia and England. Teaching and traveling made me realize how little I really knew, so in the 70’s I returned to more formal learning at ANU to do a BA. While studying, I taught adult literacy to apprentices for 3 years at Canberra TAFE. That was my introduction to working with adults with literacy needs, and I drew heavily on my primary teaching experience as I explored it.

After a variety of other jobs and my sons starting school, I returned to adult literacy with a once a week class at the Pantom Hill Living and Learning Centre in 1990. They were simpler times, pre CGEA or any form of certificate, totally relaxed and free. I still have my contract of sorts apologising for the ‘bother’ that may be involved with the need to keep a formal roll.

In those years there were many opportunities for professional development and particularly memorable were the excellent summer schools at Latrobe University. They ran luxuriously over a week in January and invigorated and prepared us both in theory and practice for the year ahead. How I miss them!

Who are some of the people who have inspired you in your teaching?

Over the years, I’ve been privileged to have worked with and learnt from so many wonderful people at DVLC, far too many to name. But I’m very grateful for the initial trust Sue Beshara placed in me, and the nurturing she

gave me in my early struggles with the coordination role. Sue had and still has such a clear positive 'can do' attitude to everything, but always with a compassionate eye and a good sense of humour. She and Fran Newell were an inspiring pair and taught me much about inclusiveness and the importance of drawing people into the decision making processes.

My first summer school was not at Latrobe, but at Broadmeadows TAFE and was run by Bev Campbell. Bev has deservedly become a much loved mentor in adult literacy circles, and in 1990, she was a coordinator and teacher in the Glenroy Library literacy program. It's often hard to trace the origin of your learning, but I remember how Bev emphasised the importance of building trust in a group to open people to learning, and how the process of talking was a gateway to such trust. And I also always think of Bev when I use materials that stimulate the senses as a lead in to writing and reading.

At this time Julie McQueen offered me a position teaching at Northcote Library. Julie was an inspiration as were so many of the teachers she gathered around her there—yourself included Sarah. She believed in supporting and nourishing her teachers and provided us with regular opportunities to develop our skills as teachers. I remember Bev Campbell was employed to lead a year of reflection and discussion. What a year of learning that was!

Teaching ESL students at Northcote gave me a new teaching direction and also made me appreciate the shortcomings in my skills in that field. So I enrolled in some TESOL post-graduate study at Latrobe and was fortunate to have Lynda Yates as a lecturer and also supervisor on my teaching rounds. She was and is a wonderful teacher and I have learnt so much from her in a very practical way. Whenever I'm tempted beside the photocopier, I consider her advice to get 'mileage out of texts', to build around a single text, and use it as a basis for discussion, and for vocabulary and grammar development. Maybe one photocopied page is enough? Another piece of advice was to 'teach not test', to check if the texts and worksheets are simply testing, to query their purpose and your own use of them.

I've also taught at NMIT and in workplaces with CAE Workplace Education. Both were wonderful learning environments with talented and supportive staff. Teaching in China in 2006 with the NMIT overseas program was a great cultural teaching experience for me. How do you develop oral skills in a class of 50 young tertiary students all speaking the same language? This was a new challenge and one I'd like to explore again in 2010. I really appreciated the support DVLC and especially Julie Johnston gave me in

giving me leave to teach in China. Julie's positive support was so in keeping with her principles of drawing out the best in all staff at the Centre, and indeed the principles of the Centre itself which actively encourages learning at all levels of the organisation.

I continue to be inspired by the generosity of the people I currently work with and was deeply touched last year when I was nominated for the ACE award. It was such an honour for me to be nominated by DVLC, and then such a thrill to win. The ACE sector is full of teachers who are deserving of such recognition and when I think of the award, I think of those teachers too, from whom I've learnt so much.

Tell us about your current work at Diamond Valley

I came to the DVLC in 1996 to teach an ESL class. The following year I assisted with the coordination of the Language and Literacy program and eventually took over the role of Language Literacy and Numeracy coordinator in 1999. But I continued teaching, essentially because I love doing it. This dual role is a juggle at times, but I think the teaching keeps me grounded in my coordinating role, keeping me closer to the needs and challenges of students and teachers. At the moment I'm teaching one day and coordinating three days a week.

I enjoy many parts of the coordination role—the opportunity to support and mentor teachers, the chance to make decisions about the direction of the program, being able to work with other coordinators both inside and outside the Centre. I've grown into the job amongst patient and tolerant colleagues. The LLNP however, almost pushed me to the brink with its over-monitoring but to see the success of the students who are referred via the program encourages me to cling on.

However, my real passion is teaching. I love the preparation for it and the challenge and difficulty of it. You never feel you've really quite got it right. I love the fun and drama of the class, especially if something clicks, even the flatness when things go awry. For after a disappointing class there's also the challenge of remedying the 'disaster' the following week—if they come back!! Ah, the wonderful edginess of it all! And the pleasure and hope in knowing you may have assisted someone's growth and learning.

Any special plans for 2009?

The first plan is to revise the current DVLC spelling guide, and have it published through Flat Chat Press, the NMIT publishing group based in Greensborough. Frida Dean and I are working on this together, trialing materials in class as we develop it. As we get each section of the guide ready, we pass it onto the publishing course

at NMIT where they workshop it in class, format it, add graphics and get it ready for printing. It's a slow but interesting process.

The other plan is to organise some professional development. Over the years I've learnt so much in PD workshops and one of my concerns at the moment is that much PD is focused on certificate upgrades or changes. So I'd like to use some of my award funds to organise PD for ESL and ALBE teachers at DVLC, perhaps three workshops for

each discipline spread through the year—ESL, literacy and numeracy. It'd be good to make spaces available to teachers from other centres. For the workshops to be manageable, they probably need to be limited to 16 participants and led by someone willing to both share knowledge and guide discussion. After trialing new approaches in the classroom, we could return to another workshop to reflect and share. Hopefully these workshops will be nourishing and stimulating and continue the cycle of learning in ACE of which over the years, I've been a fortunate recipient.

Foreign Correspondence

Laughter breaking out of brackets: a reflective practitioner research project about story and diversity

By Sheila Stewart

As Sheila Stewart from the University of Toronto suggests, we have long known that literacy learner's stories are at the heart of literacy. This research project is about the possibilities and limitations of stories in adult literacy teaching and learning. But it is also about literacy practitioners' stories and the ways we listen to each other.

Since September 2007, a Toronto-based research team has been meeting monthly to reflect on practice and on ourselves as practitioners through the lens of story and diversity. The group includes practitioner-researchers from two community-based programs, Mary Brehaut, Andy Noel, Nadine Sookermany from Parkdale Project Read and Sally Gaikzhenyongai and Michele Kuhlmann from Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre, along with Tannis Atkinson (Editor of Literacies), Guy Ewing (Festival of Literacies/Ontario Institute for Studies in Education University of Toronto), Maria Moriarty (AlphaPlus Resource Centre) and myself.

The team includes seven women and two men, ranging in age from late thirties to early sixties. One researcher is Anishawbe, two are of Caribbean background, and six are white. Only three are Canadian-born. Collectively we have more than 200 years of experience in adult literacy work: one of us entered the field four years ago, several have been involved for close to twenty-five years and the rest have spent close to a decade in the field.

Officially called "The Uses of Narrative in Adult Literacy Teaching and Learning," this project is funded by the Research and Knowledge Mobilization Office of the Canadian Council on Learning. In this article I begin to share some of our process and findings. A full report of the project will be available in 2009.

After teaching high school in Libya and adult ESL at a refugee settlement in Swaziland, she returned to Canada. She realized that she didn't want to be a teacher at a Canadian school, and had many questions about international development work. She applied to a literacy program in the big city of Toronto. She told them she was good at making do with whatever she had and juggling lots of tasks. They hired her. The program was in a small room in the basement of the library...it had been a cloakroom. Her first evening, she could only go home after she woke a homeless man who was sleeping in the corner to tell him it was time to leave.

She was now part of a staff collective of four white people in 1989 working primarily with students of colour. Most of the tutors and other volunteers were also white women: librarians, journalists, lawyers, other professionals, retired

teachers and people trying to get into a Bachelor of Education program. On her second day, one of the board members came in to see who had been hired. After she left, another staff person said, "We had wanted to hire a person of colour, but we hired you instead." The board member was black and had said something about white middle-class do-gooders who go off to other parts of the world to "help people." She knew this was one way to describe herself.

After her daughters were born, she found herself running from work to home, hoping she was doing some good somewhere. She would try to get the program closed on time at night so she could get home in time to read to her children. She ran from meeting to meeting. She liked some of her work and tried not to think about some of it and she worried about the students. People talked to her all day. Their stories rattled about in her psyche, gathering in knots across the top of her shoulders.

A story needs a beginning and an end, but literacy work and why we want to do this work and why we stick with it even when the pay and hours are lousy and the space to be creative is shrinking doesn't have a beginning and end. How can we make our teaching nourishing for students and ourselves?

That was one way to begin the story of this research project on story and diversity. As a research team, we did reflective writing about our family histories, culture, and class are entwined with our relationship with school and learning and what brought us to literacy work. We are curious about the paths, which have brought us and you to literacy work.

There is power in stories, spoken and written.

When do we feel our own power as literacy workers?

How do we make best use of our energy and knowledge?

This research project is about the possibilities and limitations of stories in adult literacy teaching and learning. It is about literacy

practitioners' stories and the ways we listen and hear. We have long known literacy learners' stories are at the heart of literacy. Our stories of creativity, resilience and exhaustion, our ability to hear learners' stories and each others', are likewise entwined with literacy practice.

Stories and stances can bog us down. We hear through our own stories; the prism through which we apprehend includes our schooling, learning, trauma, creativity, culture, gender and much more. How does how do we hear in the moment, given the vast array of social differences and life experience in a literacy program?

What happens when a story has a single protagonist?

Do we need a hero and journey, obstacles and redemption?

What is the relationship between our own literacy story and our collective stories?

This project grew out of a commitment to anti-discrimination work and concern about its near absence in the literacy field. In the early 1990s there were workshops in Toronto on anti-racism in literacy work and the provincial department responsible for literacy included a staff person who talked to literacy staff about disability and literacy. Later that decade, as program reform impacted on the field increased accountability measures meant practitioners spent more and more time keeping statistics. With these changes, discussions of differences and discrimination—and how to understand these issues in literacy work—found very few avenues of exploration. This research project aims to bring this discussion to the fore and shed some light on the complex intersection of diversity issues, story and listening.

What do we love and hate about literacy work?

How do different kinds of literacy stories collide and intersect and sometimes make us feel crazy?

As a research group, we started telling each other stories about times when things weren't right in our work, reflecting on moments of discomfort, often related to all the differences at play between students and ourselves. What had happened that concerned us? What are the layers of the experience? Some of us told of not knowing where our job began or ended, some of having to hold up our program alone when things were rough. Sometimes we learned a lot from students who told us that our experience was different from theirs and we shouldn't assume things were the same for them. We talked about what we hid from students, such as sexual orientation or spiritual practice and about the effects of this hiding on ourselves, students, and the program. We reflected long and hard about whether we had done the right thing in our encounters with students and how we might do things differently. We noticed how our stories impact on how we hear and respond to students.

All her good intentions had flattened her against a wall. Literacy work made her very tired. Students' stories rained down upon her shoulders, pinned her into a corner. There was never enough time. How could she help them? She had stuffed her own story far into her back pocket, all the better to ignore it. She was professional, teacher, Miss.

There were moments of practice which stuck with us like knots in the backs of our necks, stitches in our sides which we didn't touch. We took our time telling each other these stories, providing the details of the context, and not interrupting each other. We cycled back to our stories when we met the next month, realizing we had left out key parts. We had more to tell, the underside, back story of meeting students and tutors and going to meetings and conferences. Now that we had a group to tell, we seemed to notice things differently.

I have been trying to call our meetings research, but I don't call the group's stories data. A couple of months ago I said, now we are at a new phase of the project—analysis—and the group laughed. We have taped all our meetings and the transcriber typed *laughter* in brackets. (Laughter!) Sometimes the transcript says: *(a lot of joking around which I'll skip over.)* Some of our earlier meetings didn't have as much laughter. We would talk and sigh and take a break.

As well as talking with each other, we talk to ourselves between meetings. Some of us write in journals, some write emails, some record spoken thoughts. When we meet, we pause to gather ourselves before we talk, going to a quiet corner with our journals or coloured pencils and paper for drawing, and a cup of tea. When we have this time with our own thoughts, our conversation drops to a deeper place.

We open and close our meetings with movement and gratitude to mark the space and time together as valuable. These simple rituals helped to mark the research project as a valuable container for gathering thoughts and feelings. We try to be present and honest. Tannis and I plan the meetings so that we bring as much of ourselves—emotions, body, spirit and mind—as possible to our meetings and so we can have some fun. Meeting on a Friday afternoon after a full week of work, our meetings need to help our work and lives, by being part of our own search for meaning, rather than serving a research project's agenda. The research project grew with who was in the group. We built trust as we went. Some of us had known each other for years. Others met only recently, and we have worked to create a group climate that allows everyone to contribute as a researcher.

One of the researchers had asked if we are extracting stories from students. Another talked about how he used to like to *get* the stories with language experience approach to make them into text. Now I feel I didn't want the students' stories laid out for me, I don't want to feel I *know* their stories. Nothing is that simple. The

students are much more than what they tell about their lives, just as the practitioners are. Learning is part of a slower unfolding of story, the students and our own.

During this project, I started teaching a group of students two mornings a week. One week, between classes, I met one of the other researchers to talk about the project. I talked about what was happening with my students, what had happened the day before and whether I might be facilitating the class differently because of the research. The next day it seemed easier and a bit lighter in class, as if my shoulders had settled back into themselves. The students were still anxious about going on to college, and I still felt the tension between the college preparation curriculum and creating time for discussion, but I found myself telling them a bit more about myself. Might I be holding their stories that bit lighter?

How do stories unfold in the telling,

in the relationships we build with students and each other?

What new ways of telling and listening might better support learning for students and practitioners?

As literacy practitioners, we are often good listeners, but we can also tire of listening and we are always strapped for time. We teach tutors about active listening, but how often do we get the chance to do it with each other and to question what it is? Our group began to talk about deep listening. We asked, what is difference? We are more than the categories we put each other in to, just as students are more than the labels society often imposes upon them. We don't want to minimize the ways difference works, as it can create privilege and an unfettered sense of entitlement. But each person is different from another. If we assume difference, can we imagine new ways to respect it? Why do we use the word "across" and talk about "across difference"?

In the group, our stories ricochet off each other, creating new openings. In the web of stories we tell about our practice, we strengthen our ability to be present to each other and ourselves. Literacy may be less about social change and *getting* the learner to change and more about being present, thickening our own stories, examining them so that we are less prone to trip over them. Literacy

learning is entwined with *both* social change and personal growth. As practitioners, our ability to be present to others and ourselves in the ever-changing play of power and difference strengthens our ability to stand up strongly holding on to values of respect and supporting ourselves and others to be agents of change.

She was longing for the first day of school, a place to go that would make her feel important. She learned shame, obedience, to escape into books as if they could save her.

He was beaten his first week at school.

They had a one-room schoolhouse at the far end of town.

Research is finding new words for the work we do, and as we find the words, the work changes. We are finding our research in practice path, in fits and starts, trying to make it useful. Literacy worker knowledge is built on the agility of creating a learning space, when we don't know which students will show up, the tenor of their stories or the impact of our stories on each other.

This is one story mid-project. We are currently reading transcripts and discussing what we have learned. At our last meeting, our laughter wasn't polite or in brackets. It was belly laughter which we needed. In this article, I've played with point of view. Our tellings, like ourselves, are multiple: I, she, we, they. There will be more stories: ours and yours. Told with care, these stories open space, invite learning.

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Sheila Stewart works on adult literacy issues at the Festival of Literacies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. She also teaches an English and Maths upgrading women's group at WoodGreen Community Services with Pathway to Possibilities. Her first poetry collection, *A Hat To Stop a Train*, was published by Wolsak and Wynn in 2003. If readers require more information and the full research report when it's available, go to www.literaciesOISE.ca or email Sheila Stewart on ssewart@oise.utoronto.ca

What's Out There

Good Better Best! 3: an intermediate grammar resource

Jill Rodgers reviews *Good Better Best 3*, written by Elsie Hill and published by AMES in 2008.

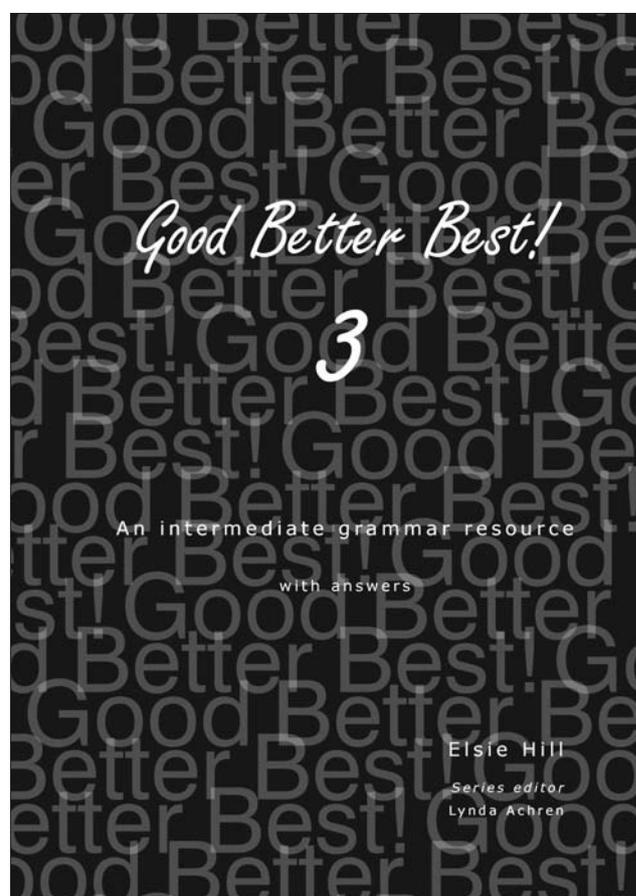
The introduction claims this book “has been specially written for learning English in Australia”. Indeed it has. It is so refreshing to open an Australian grammar book! It is well-laid out; has a clear font and plenty of white space—so essential for ESL, if not all, learners; straightforward explanations; authentic text, vocabulary and exercises. It is so suitable for ESL Frameworks Certificate 3 level that a colleague and I have decided to ask each of our Certificate 3 level students to purchase their own copy. I am also using the book with Certificate 4 level and I would not hesitate to use it in a literacy class.

According to the description on the back cover this book is “the third level in a series of grammar resource books that utilise Australian contexts to explain and practice (sic) grammar at three stages of learning: beginner, post-beginner and intermediate.” As traditional grammar terms are used anyone can refer to them in dictionaries or other grammar resources.

I used *Unit 1: Nouns and pronouns* with students who range across ESL Frameworks Levels 3 and 4, that is ISLPR 2 and above. Initially, I used the *Indefinite and definite articles: alan* and the section to reinforce some work that we had been doing on articles. I liked the presentation: clear heading; explanation in a grey-shaded box; use of brackets, quotation marks, italics, bold font; and relevant exercise. The page showed up well on an overhead transparency and the spaces provided were long enough for me to write answers clearly. The explanations are realistic and easy for students to follow.

The Contents pages are clearly laid out and the page number for the start of each unit is enlarged and grey, in keeping with each unit title. The Contents are followed by an Introduction and a Glossary. The Introduction has three parts: a short opening paragraph, and explanations of the book's contents and uses in bullet points. *Good Better Best! 3* is not intended as a course book. Nevertheless, I agree with the description provided: “Teachers will find it a useful classroom or homework tool for introducing, revising or practising the grammar associated with a theme, topic or genre.”

There are also photos to aid comprehension, the Glossary, an Irregular Verb list, and an Answer Key at the end of the book. An example of the use of a photo can be



found in *Unit 8: The Passive*. A clear photo of a diamond necklace is text-wrapped in the exercise that begins: “An expensive diamond necklace was stolen at a shopping centre yesterday morning.” *Unit 12: Conjunctions* is one of the best units I have seen for the level of students I teach.

The only negative comments I could make about this resource are trifling. I am not sure that an ESL student, looking at the title, would immediately recognise it as a grammar book. Also, from a personal point of view, I would have liked a section on imperatives.

I thoroughly recommend *Good Better Best! 3*. I am sure it will be a boon to both teachers and students alike.

Jill Rodgers is an ESL Teacher at the CAE. Level 1 of this series is currently available while Level Two should be available in June.

Family Literacy: Experiences from Africa and Around the World

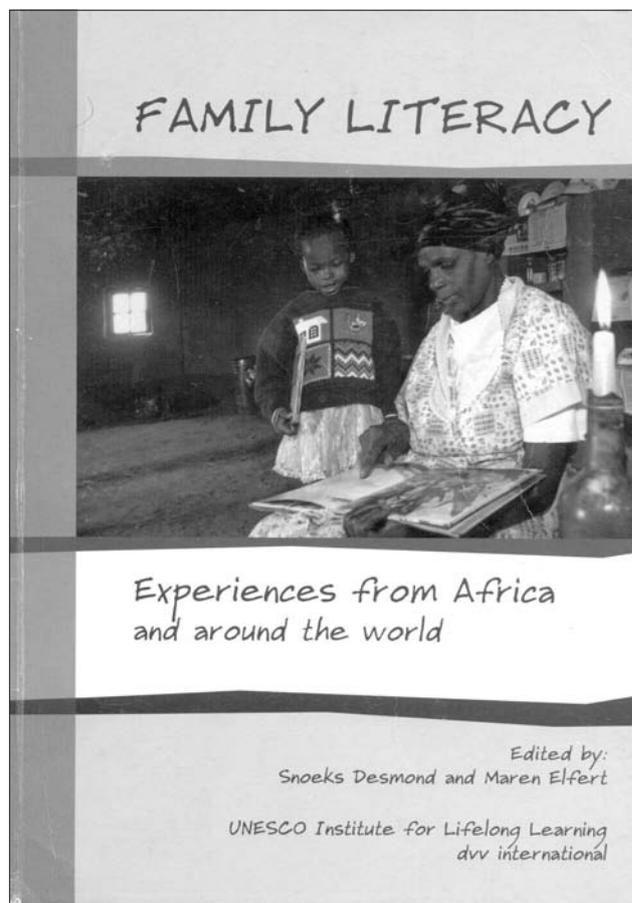
Julie Palmer reviews *Family Literacy*, edited by Snoeks Desmond and Maren Elfert and published by UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning in 2008.

The concept of family literacy, where intergenerational learning is based on connections and interactions between the education of children, young people and adults, took root in the USA and has spread throughout many countries. The UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning (UIL) has published this book to promote and raise a greater understanding of the positive outcomes of family literacy programs, primarily in Africa where the literacy rate is below 50%, but also in many other countries including Australia.

As the introduction to this book states, “many chapters show that the need for adult basic education is so strong that it becomes a focus of the program even when this was not the original rationale” This is clearly illustrated in the chapter from Uganda where the program, which originally aimed at building classrooms and training teachers for primary education by involving adults in the community, soon led to requests for adult basic education. As well as building literacy skills, adult involvement in education strengthens many other aspects, such as health, that affect lives in a community.

Nine of the fourteen chapters focus on family literacy programs in Africa. These chapters highlight the need for governments to include family literacy on policy agendas if change is to be effective and sustainable. For example, the chapter on the unique pilot project in Namibia, where the government invested in family literacy on the basis of research outcomes, showed a strong correlation between the educational backgrounds of parents and the school success of children.

The five other chapters cover a range of family literacy programs outside of Africa where communities may be highly disadvantaged due to conflict, poverty and deprivation. The chapter by Vivien Bleakley describes an Australian family literacy experience called Early Literacy—Focus on Success (ELFS). She writes: “The aim of ELFS was to raise parents’ awareness of their role in the literacy process and the importance of reading, listening and talking, telling stories with their children to build



their motivation and interest, so that, despite schooling and regardless of background, children’s learning could flourish. Through understanding their role, parents would be empowered and gain confidence to take control of their children’s learning” (Bleakley pp. 84–5).

This book is a valuable contribution to family literacy, not only for practitioners but also for policy makers and funding bodies. It provides concrete evidence of the positive ongoing advantages of investing in lifelong learning for all.

Julie Palmer is a teacher at NMIT and a member of the Fine Print Editorial Committee.

2009 ACAL Conference

The Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL) is holding their 32nd annual conference from 1–3 October 2009 at the Esplanade Hotel, Fremantle, Western Australia.

The theme is *From Strength to Strength*. The Call for Presentations is open now and closing on May 19 2009.

For further information visit the website <http://www.waalc.org.au/09conf/> or call the conference convenor Cheryl Wiltshire on 08 92644639.



Australian Council for Adult Literacy 32nd Annual Conference

From

Strength to STRENGTH

hosted by the Western Australian Adult Literacy Council 1-3 October, 2009 Fremantle, WA

