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fine print

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Editorial

Welcome to the first edition of *Fine Print* for 2010. As I write the year is already in full swing, and those summer days lying back with a good book have been relegated to memory. Despite this, we have chosen to feature an image of an ageing wheel on a rocky beach on our front cover. Why? Well it's as good a way as any to remind us that beach days will be here again. But it also serves to introduce our feature articles.

Oceans have an uncanny knack of alerting us to the big picture. They encourage me to look at life through a broader lens, and make me wonder about what's going on beyond my little patch. In our first feature Tannis Atkinson provides a fascinating account of the state of adult literacy education in Canada. She describes her concerns in relation to notions of accountability and the overt importance being placed on the measurable, the observable and the vocationally oriented view of literacy education. Her concerns will no doubt resonate with many practitioners in Victoria.

Our second and third feature articles also speak to national and global perspectives. Mark Brophy and Mary Brennan share their insights and enthusiasm for Study Circles and the Dialogue to Change Program, while Pauline O'Maley offers a detailed account of the many insights shared at last year's Australia Council for Adult Literacy national conference.

Our regulars offer information as well as ideas. In *Technology Matters* Jill Koppel provides practical details in relation to using screencasts in the classroom, while in *Open Forum* Philippa McLean provides plenty of information about the Australian Core Skills Framework.

Beside the Whiteboard gives us the chance to meet Jacinta Agostinelli as she reflects on her experience at Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre. In this edition we also introduce a new section, *A Provider Profile*, where we discover something about the programs offered by different organisations. We profile Morrisons, and learn something about the literacy program on offer there.

From Over the Border is back. In this edition Jean Searle, the current editor of *Write On*, the newsletter for the Queensland Council for Adult Literacy, provides information about their state conference. In *Foreign Correspondence* Snoeks Desmond describes many of the difficulties facing South Africans with low levels of literacy, and describes programs that are in place to alleviate some of those challenges. In *What's Out There* we offer some useful reviews about two interesting resources recently produced by AMES.

We've also included information about our upcoming Student Writing edition for 2010. The theme this year, *The Spice of Life*, will centre on food, and we're hoping that students and teachers will be encouraged to submit writing. We've also included details about this year's VALBEC conference to be held in June. This year's theme *Real Learning* will focus on the ways in which we as practitioners make learning possible in diverse and challenging contexts.

So, here's hoping you enjoy all that's offered here. We also hope that 2010 proves to be a great year for us all.

Tricia Bowen.

Whose knowledge counts?
A Canadian Perspective

By Tannis Atkinson

In describing the state of adult literacy education in Canada, Tannis Atkinson suggests that the turn to rigid accountability frameworks has taken over all levels of education in many OECD member nations. She asks where such a context might leave teachers and learners when the only thing that counts seems to be what can be counted? Victorian practitioners may find her question unnervingly familiar.

I have been involved in adult literacy work in Canada for almost thirty years now. Here in Ontario, Canada's largest and most densely populated province, some things, depressingly enough have not changed. Few policies actively support the aspirations of adults seeking basic education or recognise the barriers that make it difficult for them to find, or stay in, programs. Socioeconomic factors account for many adults being unable to attend basic education, and this fact has been routinely ignored over the past three decades. Instead, as two recent studies both discovered, the current system privileges students who can move most quickly through the system rather than the students with the greatest needs (Hoddinnott, 1998: Veeman *et al*, 2006). Despite the persistence of 'lack of recognition, minimal professional development opportunities, and insufficient funding supports' (Woodrow, 2006: 21) practitioners continue to do the work.

However, some things have changed. In the 1980s, community literacy programs in Ontario taught learners according to their individual learning needs and also worked to highlight how print can be a barrier that prevents some people from accessing information, being active citizens and participating in society (Gaber-Katz & Watson 1991). Since the mid-1990s, however, adult literacy policy, and funding for programs, has explicitly tied literacy to labour market policies. Community literacy programs are expected to conform to this approach, which understands literacy as a means to help people "reach their work or other life goals" (Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities). As in many other OECD member nations, adult literacy policies have became aligned to narrow employment-related goals as defined by the OECD-sponsored International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) (National Literacy Secretariat, 2000; OECD & Statistics Canada, 2000) and governments have begun to manage program outcomes through increasingly rigid administrative frameworks that require extensive reporting (LoBianco & Wickert 2001; Hamilton 2001; Merrifield 1997; Hautecoeur 1997). The result in Canada has been that practitioners across the country currently feel that 'tracking financial details takes precedence over delivering literacy services' (Crooks *et al*, 2008). Many practitioners are intensely frustrated, feeling that what they know about adult literacy is routinely overlooked. I'm keen to discover why their knowledge, and the knowledge of adults who might enrol in adult basic education, does not matter. So, whose knowledge *does* matter?

A note about the context in Canada

A Winding Path

Canada is a vast country with a relatively small population comprised of deeply marginalized indigenous people and settlers who, recently or long ago, emigrated from another part of the world. Our two official languages, English and French, reflect our colonial past, and perpetuate a national imagined community (Anderson, 1991) that is defined in relation to that past, rather than to indigenous people or to the huge diversity of cultures that now call Canada home.

For aboriginal literacy work, First Nations have clearly articulated the need for specific programs to undo the damage wrought by colonization through residential schools and other policies designed to supplant indigenous cultures, knowledge and languages. First Nations have been clear that programming must be culturally relevant and distinct, must pay attention to the range of impacts of colonization on individuals, families and communities, and should include opportunities to learn languages that colonial policies

tried to eliminate (Antone *et al*, 2003; Barman *et al*, 1986; Gaikezheyongai, 2000; George, 2001). Not surprisingly, these recommendations are routinely ignored.

Non-aboriginal adult literacy work is tremendously complex because the adults who want to improve their literacies include people whose first language is English or French—both those who attended school in Canada and either left at a young age or completed the mandatory years of schooling without acquiring the literacies they now need, *and* those who grew up in other parts of the world and may or may not have attended school, including some who speak dialects of the official languages that are generally not reflected in print—and people whose first language is neither English nor French and who have no experience of any kind of print, are not familiar with alphabetic writing, or have completed all of the language instruction available to them but still struggle with vernaculars of print in Canada.

To further complicate matters, while instruction in the official languages has long been a federal matter—reflecting the fact that immigration is a national policy concern—adult literacy policy has, like all mandatory education, been under the jurisdiction of the ten provinces and three territories. This means that although the federal government has an interest in adult literacy—as evidenced in its enthusiastic role in developing and implementing the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) (1994) and the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALLS) (2005)—it is unlikely that it could implement an effective national policy to increase provision of literacy programs. It also means that the thirteen separate jurisdictions can, and do, support adult literacy work to varying degrees.

The lack of national policy means that there is no consistent framework for provision. Program delivery models vary widely from coast to coast to coast: in many parts of Canada, delivery of adult literacy includes a combination of community-based programs, classes within school boards and community colleges, and some programs in the workplace. Adult literacy programs reflect the low priority placed on them by all thirteen jurisdictions in the federation: they are under-funded and under-resourced and there is little initial or continuing professional development for literacy workers. Because of the range of provision and commitment between jurisdictions, working conditions range from unpaid volunteer work to low-paid contract workers with no job security or benefits to salaried staff with pensions and other benefits. In some places, practitioners hold secure full-time jobs while in others they must apply for short-term funding if they want to work on a project or offer a program for adults in their community. These realities mean that the turnover of staff is often extremely high.

The role of practitioner research in the Canadian context

Challenges and Complexities

The complexity of the Canadian context sets up a range of challenges for adult literacy work, and offers a rich field to be explored through research of all kinds. A national practitioner-research project a few years ago offers an in-depth perspective on the state of literacy work and the role that practitioner research, or research-in-practice (RiP), might play in addressing the challenges of our context. The researchers found that 'the state of the literacy field makes it both virtually impossible and essential to do RiP' (Horsman & Woodrow 2006, p. 105). Here is a summary of the researchers' conclusions:

- practitioners don't have the time or energy to read research or to think about the implications of research findings;
- practitioners understand the vital roles RiP could play in supporting their work;
- practitioners need RiP because of their isolation, yet this isolation makes it impossible to do RiP;
- the state of the field makes RiP essential yet limits how valuable it can be;
- practitioners don't trust research but 'use research skills all the time'; and
- RiP may prompt changes that practitioners might not like. (pp. 105–115).

This project was the culmination of a decade of work by a small and dedicated group of people to support field-based research in adult literacy. Its findings mirror almost exactly the list of barriers to practitioner research outlined seven years earlier. In *A framework to encourage and support practitioner involvement in adult literacy research in practice in Canada* (1999), Horsman and Norton argued that:

In order for practitioners to read research studies and reflect, carry out research and make changes as a result of research, they need suitable working conditions, paid time to engage in research in practice, and

opportunities and support to implement changes. More important, in order for practitioners to commit mental and emotional energy to the demanding tasks of research in practice, they need opportunities for long-term, stable employment in the adult literacy field (p. 1).

Despite the fact that the material conditions of the field have not significantly improved, practitioner research has been vital to the field's development in the past decade. Its presence owes much to the legacy of the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS), established by the federal government in 1987. Its work proceeded from the assumption that literacy 'enables individuals to improve the quality of their lives…[and] is the gateway to powerful citizenship, social involvement, cultural expression and economic well-being' (National Literacy Secretariat, 1996). The National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) saw its role as 'work[ing] with its partners across the country to promote the value of literacy and lifelong learning as primary forces for achieving personal wellbeing'. One of its aims was 'to use research as a tool for community development—a way to get resources and knowledge to grassroots literacy programs' (St. Clair, 2007, p. 59).

For about a decade, funding through the NLS supported research that counted grassroots knowledges about adult literacy. Because practitioner research arises from the deep complexities of practice, it can and does examine questions that help practitioners make sense of what is happening when students enter their programs and try to learn. Only research connected to practice can ask, and explore, questions that can strengthen programming and practice. Practitioner research in the past decade in Canada has been exciting precisely because it has asked fundamental questions such as how to:
- actively de-colonize ways of understanding aboriginal literacies (Antone *et al*; Balanoff & Chambers; Silver *et al*).
- address root causes of literacy issues, such as violence (Horsman; Norton)
- allow room for 'non-academic outcomes' that make it possible for adults to learn (Battell *et al*; Grieve; Literacy BC)
- understand how adults who do not read learn (Niks *et al;* Taylor)
- develop relationships that support learning (Campbell & Burnaby; Harrow *et al*; Steeves; Trent Valley Literacy Association)
- provide literacy for people with disabilities (Gardner; Carpenter & Readman)
- reach the most marginalised groups, including women in the sex trade (Alderson & Twiss) and homeless people (Trumpener)

- attend to the different experiences and learning needs of English speakers and students learning English as an additional language (Millar)
- speak back to narrowing definitions of learning (Lefebvre *et al;* Pheasey), unrealistic attendance requirements (Brown & Dryden), and accountability requirements that detract from rather than support strong programming (Crooks *et al*).

Knowledge developed and shared by practitioners over the past decade strengthened the field immeasurably. And then, in 2006, the community development approach of the NLS abruptly ended.
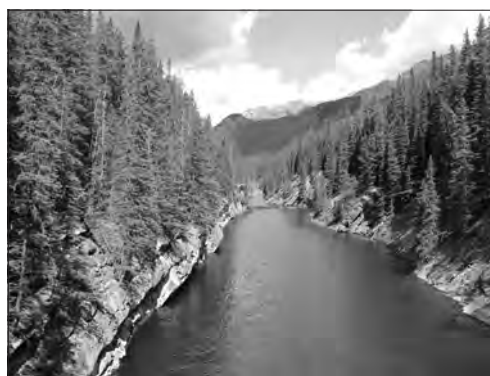
The Vista Narrows

Numbers win: what counts is what can be counted

In 2006 the NLS was amalgamated with two other programs, becoming first the National Office of Literacy and Learning, then the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills. This move drew the NLS closer to Human Resources and Skills Development's core mandate. The department was, and remains, eager to narrow the complexity of adult literacy work into the manageable frame of Essential Skills. Their approach is far removed from the community development approach of the NLS and funding for practitioner research is now severely limited. A recent literature review found that towards the end of the NLS mandate, Canadian adult literacy research had 'become dominated by a focus on numbers and statistics related to people who have literacy challenges, especially studies and reports arising from or in connection with the various International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) reports' (Quigley, Folinsbee & Kraglund-Gauthier, 2006, p. 16). The study also found a minimum of research 'on the lived experiences of adults with literacy challenges, on their learning experiences in programs or tutorial situations, on practitioners' experiences, or on the everyday literacy practices of people with literacy challenges' (p. 26).

In Canada IALS has definitely become the dominant discourse about adult literacy work: frameworks that align with it, such as Essential Skills, are becoming the measure

against which adult literacy policies and programs are judged and have supplanted infrastructure and support for community-based approaches and research. For example, Alkenbrack's 2004 examination of assessment in six practitioner research projects from British Columbia and Alberta found that every one 'identify[ied] three things as important: non-academic outcomes, learner participation and safety' (p. 4). None of these criteria is included in accountability matrices that align with IALSS. Sadly, Canada is a brilliant illustration of the ways in which IALS has 'become naturalised as commonsense within educational policy and practice, pushing aside those other truths about literacy known through everyday lived experience of adults and the practitioners who work alongside them' (Hamilton, 2001, p. 193).

What to do?

Perhaps this state of affairs sounds depressingly familiar to practitioners in Victoria. Unfortunately, it seems that the turn to rigid accountability frameworks has taken over all levels of education in many OECD member nations. So where does this context leave us, when the only thing that counts seems to be what can be counted? I think that there are two things we can do: continue to point out what special and essential contribution community programs can make, and take time to think about and understand why the acceptable range of understandings of literacy has been narrowing over the past decade.

Highlighting our special contributions

I would like to take up Bradshaw's suggestion, in *Multiple images, common threads* (1995), that advocates for community education must continue to point out what special and essential contribution our programs make (p. 1). This strategy offers hope because we *do* possess unique understandings that could make vital differences to the societies in which we live. A few examples from Canada that might be relevant for adult basic education in Victoria:

- Two practitioners from New Brunswick documented what barriers prevent adults from attending educational programs in their community (Brown & Dryden). In a 2008 article they recount how reflective practice allowed them to see and document these barriers; they also discuss what they learned about how rarely funding bodies heed community knowledge about what changes could make programs more effective. In the current funding climate in Canada, non-profits of all types are expected to develop endless 'pilot projects' so that they will not become 'dependent' on core funding. This article documents the price that such an approach to funding entails. You can read "Beyond the checklist: Using reflective practice to remove barriers in family and community literacy" at *www.literacyjournal.ca/literacies/9-2008/pdf/brown&dryden.htm*

- A 2004 practitioner research project (Battell *et al*) investigated what qualities effective instructors possessed. The researchers discovered that to be a good adult basic education instructor, one must have a great capacity for hope. In an era in which outcomes-based, accountability-driven policy mandates entrench rigid prescriptions about education, this report is a wonderful reminder that adult education is a human process rather than a mechanical one. You can access *Hardwired for Hope: Effective ABE/Literacy Instructors* at: *www.nald.ca/fulltext/hwired/cover.htm*

- Over two years, four researchers in Ontario and Nova Scotia examined learning circles—spaces in which people learn together regardless of their level of education. This project began from the assumption that community literacy workers understand a lot about how to facilitate learning in very diverse groups. The researchers set out to find other sites where inclusive learning was taking place, and to document the characteristics of inclusive learning. You can read more about the project on its website: The Learning Circles Project at *www.nald.ca/learningcircles/index.htm*.

Understanding the big picture

Deep Thoughts

In Canada many adult literacy practitioners and advocates believe that we could affect policy, if only we presented the right information. But our contributions have never been quite enough. Despite our best intentions, despite the findings of practitioner research, despite testimonials from students in our programs, the push towards outcomes-based education and narrow accountability frameworks has been relentless. It seems to me that the only corrective to that truth is to try to understand what is behind those changes. I am not alone in making this suggestion, and I have

found common cause with colleagues from Australia. Two strategies for understanding those changes include paying more attention to the history of our field and examining how the policy about literacy has been, and continues to be, used by government.

A number of years ago Green, Hodgens and Luke (1997) undertook historical research to offer a broad 'perspective on the relationship between literacy crises and larger economic, social and political contexts' (p. 2) in Australia. Their work reminds us that, 'literacy debates are fundamentally a contest of social visions and ideologies' (p. 3). Yet relatively little attention has been paid to how definitions of literacy are used to construct subjects' identities 'within particular discourse sites' and how these constructed identities '[serve] political and ideological interests' (Wickert, 1993, p. 37). As we know, ideological differences are rarely resolved with facts. Rather, the vision that wins is the one that holds more power.

I have found that Foucault's notion of governmentality is tremendously helpful in making sense of these power struggles. It has given me a new perspective on why policies routinely overlook the actual experiences of people who struggle with print. According to Foucault, capitalism 'would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes' (Foucault, 1978, p. 141). Modern power under capitalism needs to find ways to increase the number of bodies available, able and willing to work. Governmental power involves 'the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life' and the tools it uses are 'techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations' (Foucault, 1978, p. 140). That is, it operates on the level of the entire population rather than on the level of the individual units, which comprise the whole. According to this logic, what counts is *not* the individual students who enter our classes with particular histories, hopes, barriers and aspirations. What does count? The speed with which students pass through the programs, the country's IALS ranking, the Gross Domestic Product, the census figures. As Jackson (2005) argued, governments use accountability measures to translate 'the messy details of people's lives' into 'standardised and objectified categories through which they can be counted and made administrable as the object of policy' (p. 775). She showed, using institutional ethnography, that the gap between policy and practice is 'a systematic feature of a textually mediated mode of governance' (p. 775), not an accident or a problem that will be remediated by 'better' policies. So when we focus on how the knowledge about our work gets used–what it is used *for*–it is easy to see why, for government, what can be counted *is* what counts.

What next?

Where there is Hope there is Life

Does this means that there is nothing we can do? I don't think so. I believe that when we understand how our work is part of a larger structure with a long history, we are in a better position to consider what we can do here and now. For example, understanding that literacy has a long history of being used to help reorganize 'society at a time of transformation' (Graff 1995, p.49) can help us see the colonial roots of literacy policies and discourses. This perspective also allows us to view Essential Skills and other IALS-inspired frameworks as simply the latest manifestations of efforts to use education to further the economic interests of the state. Seeing policies as tools of governmentality could help us name what those policies obscure, and how to bring those hidden issues to light. This approach could help us to honestly consider how our work may have been used over and against the students in our programs; and it could help us think about what we could do to resist being used in this way. From there we could consider how to develop an 'enabling framework, rather than a restrictive delimiting one' (Derrick, 2002, p. 2).

Finally, I must return to a historical perspective. Both Australia and Canada share a colonial past that has not been resolved. In both nations, governmental power has *not* been a benign force that aims to support the liberation of its subjects, through education or any other means. In our contexts, whose knowledge counts has *never* been uncontested. It's not a new struggle. Remembering that fact gives me strength and reminds me why it is important not to lose hope.

Tannis Atkinson was founding editor of *Literacies*, **Canada's journal linking research and practice in adult literacy, which was funded between 2003 and 2009. At present she is a PhD student at the Ontario Institute for**

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Photographs by Tannis Atkinson, except for, A Winding Path and Deep Thoughts, by Tracey Mollins.

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Study Circles and the Dialogue to Change Program

By Mary Brennan and Mark Brophy

A Dialogue to Change Program is a type of community dialogue process that can help people explore issues, make decisions and begin to take action. At the heart of the Program are study circles, where people come together to have deliberative dialogue on an issue. Mary Brennan and Mark Brophy elaborate.

Background

The origins of study circles can be traced back to the Chautauqua movement in the USA in the late nineteenth century. However, interest diminished in the USA and the Swedes discovered and enthusiastically imported the study circle idea as a remedy to their problems of poverty and illiteracy and to educate the broadest possible spectrum of society in the art of democracy.

Over the next 100 years Sweden developed the process to such an extent that the Government now subsidises this form of education and uses it not only to educate people about government policies, but also to receive feedback from the public. The late Swedish Prime Minister, Olaf Palme, is often quoted as having said, "Sweden is a study circle democracy".

Today over three million people participate annually in 350,000 study circles in Sweden. Over 75 per cent of Swedes between 15 to 75 years of age have participated in study circles at some time in their lives. In recent decades, the use of study circles has spread throughout the world from the United States to Bangladesh—and now Australia.

Based upon the Swedish model, study circles re-emerged in the USA in the late 1980s through the work of *Everyday Democracy* which has developed and refined the process to address challenging community issues such as racism, multiculturalism, terrorism, educational reform, student achievement, small rural town poverty, the environment, religious and interfaith tensions and community development; often with hundreds and even thousands of participants.

The Australian Study Circles Network has recently been formed and is founded on the 100 year tradition of study circles in Sweden and the last 20 years of development by *Everyday Democracy* in the USA. The Australian Study Circles Network has fine-tuned the US community wide study circle program process to meet the Australian context.

Historically, study circles have been used in Australia, frequently with great success. For example the work of Helen Sheil, who researched study circles in Sweden and who now works with rural communities in Victoria, Denise Hagan with remote Indigenous communities in Queensland, Mary

Hannan from Adult Learning Australia and Liz Suda who researched Spanish dialogic study circles.

In Australia our sporadic experience and understanding of this unique method has not been pooled. Many different iterations and adaptations have been used over time. We now need to build a systemic capability to make use of such a powerful program. The significant study circle activity in Australia's past demonstrates, and is testimony to, the need to bring together in an organised manner the experiences of the current and past study circle activity.

The Australian Study Circles Network has developed the necessary local and international study circle links and partnerships, has developed a model for Australia and has started to deliver workshops for many organisations and communities across Australia.

In 1995, Len Oliver, who was instrumental in introducing study circles to the United States, stated in his article '*Is the United States Ready for a Study Circle Movement*' that study circles '*may possibly be the most powerful adult education format for small group democracy ever devised*'.

Organising a Dialogue to Change Program

A Dialogue to Change Program is a type of community dialogue process that can help people explore complex issues, make some decisions and begin to take action. At the heart of the Program are study circles, where people

come together to have deliberative dialogue on an issue. A Dialogue to Change Program is a community driven process that recruits from all community sectors. The process begins with 'community organising' and is followed by facilitated, small group dialogue that leads to change. The process doesn't advocate a particular solution. Instead, it welcomes many points of view around a shared concern.

A Dialogue to Change Program is organised by a diverse coalition that reflects the whole community. It includes a number of study circles with participants from all walks of life, uses easy-to-use nonpartisan discussion materials and trained facilitators who reflect that community's diversity. It results in specific opportunities to move to action when the study circle stage concludes.

A Dialogue to Change Program requires significant organising. Before the round of study circles commences it is important to organise the logistics, the recruitment of participants, the training of facilitators, a communications strategy, development of a discussion guide and establishing how the final action ideas—that will emerge from the process—will be addressed. Planning for the action ideas starts at the beginning. This stage can take two to three months.

After the organisational stage, the round of circles begins with an opening session where individual participants tell their own story and offer personal experiences about the issue that concerns them. This gives members the chance to hear, listen to, and empathise with authentic stories, real people, real scenarios and real experiences. In further sessions, members then look at how the issue evolved and how others have dealt with the concerns. Subsequently, members examine and discuss alternatives for action, after which, in the final session they work toward common solutions. A Dialogue to Change Program is based upon five separate study circle groups, each operating once a week for four weeks.

Initially, some people are a little hesitant about a Dialogue to Change Program due to the length of time for the process to unfold. However this is one of the key strengths of the approach. Sessions build on each other, allow participants to work through the issues, and work on finding solutions that they then work to implement. With fewer sessions, the 'buy in' and participation in the action outcomes lessens. Shorter formats also face the risk of reactionary ideas coming forward. The more time spent on the dialogue and careful deliberation, the higher the quality of the action ideas that emerge.

Furthermore, even with a round of study circles that runs for four sessions, invariably participants will state that the time passed quickly and they would have preferred more time.

Study circles—the Heart of the Dialogue to Change Program

A single study circle is a small, diverse group of five to eight participants who meet for about two hours weekly for a 'round of study circles' over four weeks where they address a critical public issue in a democratic and collaborative way. Led by a neutral facilitator, people consider an issue from many points of view. The discussion progresses from personal experiences, to sessions examining many points of view on the issue; and on to a session that considers strategies for action and change.

Study circles are not typical meetings in which members feel unheard and worse still, feel that nothing is resolved or acted upon. On the contrary, a round of study circles is designed to lead to collaborative action. In contrast, when people debate, they often never listen with intent to understand, because they are so busy preparing a counter argument and are eagerly waiting to interject.

Quite often, many contentious community issues are dealt with by either a focus group, which usually consists of only invited similar thinking or homogenous groups of people, or forums in which a handful of 'experts' express their opinions and only a few people are allowed to have a voice. Alternatively, often 'experts' are engaged to devise solutions and plans that are then imposed on everyone else.

Study circles are effective due to the small, safe and supportive nature in which the dialogue occurs, allowing members to feel comfortable about expressing their true feelings. Members begin to actively engage and participate and experience connection. One begins to understand that we are all interdependent, and the wellbeing of each of us affects the wellbeing of all. The process results in the critical reflection of ideas and the development of new knowledge and insights.

No instructor teaches or controls the circle. They are led by the neutral facilitator trained in group dynamics and study circle concepts; the participants make all the decisions. Due to this inclusive process, individuals benefit in many ways including confidence building and gaining real voice. The group is able to move forward because they know that their contributions are valued and heard, the decisions are owned by the members and the core fundamentals of a study circle ensure that all participants' knowledge and experience are given space and used as the basis for initial discussion.

Learning from others is another essential element of the study circle. Understanding and learning is built upon through the contribution from each member's experience and knowledge. As members study and discuss their issue, they learn from each other and horizons are expanded as

everyone's views are being considered through open and democratic dialogue. The process results in the critical reflection of ideas and the development of new knowledge and insights. Based upon this new knowledge, members are empowered to act in whatever way the group sees as appropriate.

This approach aligns with much of adult and student learning research that demonstrates the need for authentic purpose and ownership of the learning process. In day-to-day work and community settings, much of the process of generating, distributing and applying knowledge actually occurs best in team settings. The more effective the team works together the more understanding and learning occurs. The educational ideas behind the success of the study circle approach align with many fundamental adult educational principles: that is, adult education is a living, active process that relates knowledge to action, creativity, as well as to collective and personal development.

Study circle principles also align to social objectives that aim to encourage individual participation and ownership of the community. Understanding the fundamental principles of study circles is important for recognising the context and the content that study circles ultimately deal with. A study circle is an environment where:

- It is accepted that people fundamentally have an innate desire to learn.
- Individuals meet and share their experiences.
- People learn in a participatory environment.
- Knowledge is built upon by listening to the experiences of all members.

- Everyone's views are considered.
- Life and learning belong together.
- The learning is self-directed and experiential.
- Learning is democratised.
- Outcomes can be personalised for each individual member.

With deliberative dialogue, study circle members deliberate, cooperatively investigate, explore and clarify different views, use critical thinking, evaluate ideas and decide on solutions. The dialogue is constructive, all types of discourses are accepted, stereotypes are dispelled, members are honest, and they listen and try to understand each other.

Creating ownership is an important characteristic of study circles. Even though the study circle format is simple in design, it encourages democratic participant-directed, group-directed experiential learning through open discussion in several sequential sessions, developing tolerance for differing views, equality in participation, and collectively arrived at outcomes. Study circles are always voluntary, highly participatory, and totally democratic.

More details are available at: *http://www.studycircles.net.au/*

Mary Brennan is a Director of the Australian Study Circles Network and Deliberative Dialogue Practitioner, helping communities organise their own Dialogue to Change Programs. She is an experienced teacher, lecturer and workshop facilitator. Mary also contributed to the design of the unique Australian Dialogue to Change Program, is on the Committee of Management of the Centre for Rural Communities Incorporated, is a Lecturer at Victoria University and Director of her own private practice, which has included the delivery of workshops across Australia on the Commonwealth Government's Ministerial Declaration on Adult Community Education.

Dr Mark Brophy is the founder and a Director of the Australian Study Circles Network. Mark's 15 years of research developing his understanding of the application of study circle methodology as it is used internationally, has resulted in the unique Australian Dialogue to Change Program. He has created many resources, written extensively, presented workshops and training in Australia and overseas. Mark is internationally considered to be the key study circle authority and exponent in Australia.

From Strength to Strength: Thoughts on the 2009 ACAL Conference

By Pauline O'Maley

Pauline O'Maley provides a comprehensive summary of the many highlights from last year's ACAL conference.

The ACAL conference is always one of the highlights of the year for me. I assume it is for others as it guarantees to provide much stimulating food for thought, a well needed work energy boost, and lots of opportunities to network. The conference held in Fremantle on Friday October 2nd and Saturday October 3rd, provided all of the above in a delightful setting.

The Main Attractions

In her opening comments, Cheryl Wiltshire the conference convenor, focused our attention on the theme, *From Strength to Strength,* and the relationship of this theme to the three sub themes of:

- Language diversity, educational outcomes and literacy
- Building on our strengths
- Literacy, equity, justice and human rights.

Margaret McHugh, ACAL's president (now immediate past president) and Cheryl summed this approach up nicely in their welcome notes in the program when they said,

> They wanted to move away from a narrow skills-based conception of adult literacy, often associated with a human capital approach to education and training and bring the whole person—and his or her communities—back into the equation.

The stage was set for the keynote presentation, *The Strengths in us all*, by Peter Waterhouse, Managing Director of Workplace Initiatives, a specialist RTO and research company. He spoke passionately about strengths based practice, how to work with our own and our students' strengths in the context of the ways in which texts shape us. He demonstrated this by taking us on a virtual tour of his personal library that was both engaging and serendipitous. I came away with an interesting list of inspirational books, a passing acquaintance with the *fairy god writer* and examples of how a focus on strength, rather than deficit has opened up possibilities in Peter's diverse practice in education and training.

He spoke of the NCVER research project entitled, '*Contradicting the stereotypes*'; of ways of building resilience and seeing students' strengths by looking through a '*multiple intelligences*' lens. He reaffirmed the importance of listening to students and asking them open-ended questions such as the miracle question, 'what if you could?' and responding positively to their answers. Peter summed up by saying we are all both ordinary and at the same time special, different and extraordinary. For those who would like more detail on Peter's presentation, it along with other presentations from the conference, are available on the ACAL website *www.acal.edu.au*. For a library pass to check out Peter's library I guess you have to go directly to him!

The conference had two other plenary sessions, one on Friday afternoon with Dave Baker and one on Saturday morning with Rob Mc Cormack. Dave is a reader in Adult Numeracy and Post 16 Mathematics at the London Institute of Education. His presentation was entitled, *What counts, who counts: developing understandings of numeracy teaching in international experiences*. I found Dave to be a very engaging speaker who situated his work in the real lived experience of students. He suggested that often process takes over rather than meaning. We need to start with what students can do and make use of students' own funds of knowledge. If numeracy is not to be '*gate-keeping*' then the focus needs to be on embedded contexts. Dave was very strong on using betting as a mathematical vehicle. I took Dave's advise very much to heart. As I write this it is Melbourne Cup day and I had my dollar each way on the winner, Shocking! I am sure Dave would be very proud of the mathematical me. He also gave details of his fascinating research, which has a focus on teacher as ethnographer. This role has the teacher viewing 'real life' from an ethnographic perspective, a perspective that acknowledges the students' funds of knowledge, and their ample cultural and cognitive resources, which have great potential for utilisation in the classroom. This perspective acknowledges the teacher as learner too and the learner as teacher. It was delightful to hear at the end of the conference that ACAL has asked Dave to come to Australia to do some of this ethnographic research.

First thing Saturday morning was Rob Mc Cormack's keynote presentation, *Beyond Schooling: Towards a more adult LLN curriculum*. Rob opened his session by telling us about the ways in which his thoughts on the topic and his presentation had changed over the time leading up to the conference. He focused on questions about the way in which adult literacy is positioned. He asked; Who are we?

And, if we have something to teach, whether we see written language as a goal or a medium? He pondered a change of positioning of second chance education into the mainstream and questioned our role as adult educators. He spoke of the objectification of language and the ways it can become a reductive object. Rob then moved on to talk about three personal stories.

He spoke about his early work with the Tertiary Orientation Program (TOP), a year 11 and 12 alternative and the ways in which he, and the team he worked with, looked at literacies as multiple. Rob's second story was of his time at Batchelor Institute in NT where he taught transition courses for indigenous students structured around ancient rhetoric. He suggested learning oral text patterns added up to powerful speech. Rob demonstrated this with a video of a student making a very impassioned speech and groups of students celebrating their new art out on the streets. Rob's final story was about his current work with student learning commons at Victoria University in Melbourne. He talked about the student rovers in the library who assist other students with technology, engage in learning conversations, and model communities of practice. Again this work, and the students he works with, was brought to life in a video where they spoke in a lively and enthusiastic way about their own engagement and learning experiences. Rob summed up with a glimpse into the positive future he sees for young people, a future in which they are active in shifting modes of communication as they write more, online and for a specific audience. He finished with the Jack Davis poem *Retrospect* that was both moving and pertinent.

Choices and More Choices

One of the drawbacks of conferences is that it is not possible to attend all the sessions so here I will focus on those sessions that attracted me. I think the variety reflects the wide range of choices possible at the conference.

On Friday I attended a panel entitled *National policy implications for adult literacy, numeracy and language learning.* The panel was chaired by Keiko Yasukawa, from the University of Technology Sydney. The panel members represented a range of perspectives. Charlie Reynolds, Director of Training Resources from DET, WA discussed the impact of the current funding agreements between the states and the Federal Government. These agreements now focus on the delivery of higher level qualifications. While WA continues to fund Certificate 1 courses, the funding base is somewhat compromised. WA recognises the need to provide LLN support for students enrolled in vocational courses and funds this through the *Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills (CAVSS),* which provides for an LLN specialist to work alongside the vocational lecturer. Needless to say their results have justified this approach.

The second speaker was Pam Owen, Assistant Director of Adult Literacy from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. Pam spoke of new federal initiatives including extensions to WELL funding and the introduction of a model of brokerage from Industry Skills Councils and short 'taster' courses in LLN for severely disadvantaged students, including unemployed people. While tasters may be a useful approach at engaging individuals with low participation rates in VET, it seems to me that by refusing to include Certificate I in the funding agreements with states, the Federal Government is undermining the capacity of the state training systems to deliver LLN courses. She also spoke of scholarships that will be available for LLN teachers attempting a range of courses, not just the controversial Vocational Graduate Certificate and Diploma.

The last speaker on the panel was Margaret Mc Hugh, President of ACAL. Margaret stressed the importance of the relationship with bureaucrats at both a state and federal level and also the importance of the frequency of conversations that include all stakeholders. She went on to say she was unsure whether we need a national LLN policy: She feared such a policy may look like the LLNP—inflexible and with a heavy administrative burden. She questioned how a policy could be flexible and inclusive?

I came away with more of an insight into how many things need to be balanced and juggled in the process of delivery of services to students. And while I appreciate this difficult process and the tensions and compromises that go with it, I nevertheless hadn't changed my belief that in recent times we have lost more than we have gained. The loss of dedicated funding to literacy and numeracy research, the loss of funding for the production of *Literacy Link* and the precarious status of the Reading and Writing Hotline cannot be underestimated.

Also on Friday I attended a session with Mark Butler, a research fellow at the Australian Council for Educational Research. In his session, *A Quick Test of Literacy,* Mark talked about an English Language Skills assessment instrument that ACER has developed to measure student ability. He said it was a quick to administer diagnostic test that can be taken on computer and has the benefit of instant reporting. He told us about the skills that were tested with the instrument but alas we were unable to see samples of the test. I found it hard to engage with the session, as the material in question could only be hypothetical in these conditions.

Later that day I had the opportunity to chair the forum entitled *Literacy, Equity, Social Justice and Human Rights.* The panel brought a wealth of experience to the task.

Snoeks Desmond spoke of her experience in setting up a family literacy program in South Africa. She contextualized her work within the South African Freedom Charter responding to the express call for the doors of learning to be open to all. Geri Pancini, who has worked with indigenous students in the Northern Territory and Victoria, spoke of the many and diverse ways in which rights are unacknowledged and undermined, from lack of privacy about health information to lack of access to education. Adriano Truscott, from Western Australia, spoke of powerful literacies of Standardised English and the paradox of literacy for indigenous communities being 'deadly'. On the one hand it is great but on the other damaging to identity, respect and rights. This dominant literacy makes others invisible. The discussion that followed focused on the intrinsic relationship between literacy and culture and the significance of a dialogical approach to education. This is clearly a conversation that will, and needs to continue.

On Saturday, Sue Ollerhead with her session *Investigating agency in teaching of very low-literate adult ESL learners in Western Sydney,* gave us a fascinating glimpse of her research data. I am always delighted to attend sessions at a conference where the presenter makes links between theory and practice. Call me lazy, but it seems to me that the presenter does all the reading and theorizing and I reap the benefit. Sue's data illustrated in a very stark way the importance of material in the classroom that is culturally appropriate and has significance in students' lives. It was a terrific session.

It is difficult to be in the last sessions on the last day of a conference, and more challenging again I think when the sessions are only forty minutes long. The two sessions I attended in this last stretch both gave us 'hands on' activities and I noticed participants at the end of each session reluctant to leave their 'toys' and move on, always a positive sign. The first of the two sessions was presented by Claire Anderson and was called *Neuroplasticity Puzzles and Literacy.* Claire talked about the significance of puzzles in the classroom and linked this to reading on the subject, including the fascinating work done recently by Norman Doige. Then she let us loose with the puzzles and we were immediately engrossed in them. Claire uses puzzles to enable her to do one to one work with students in her mixed levels class.

The other session I attended in this block was *Professional Play with a PDA* (personal digital assistant) by Megan Colley and Anne Willox. Again they gave us an overview of why and how they used the PDA in their literacy classroom, and then they let us play. I had never held a PDA before and the exercise they gave us was great fun. They also gave us examples of instruction sheets that they have made up for students on how to use the PDA functions that were very user friendly. I left the session feeling like I could blackberry (can it be a verb?) like Barack Obama.

Finally, in the conclusion to the conference, Margaret Mc Hugh brought the threads together and then focused on looking at ways forward for action. It was a positive note to finish a fine conference on. Thanks WAALC. See you all next year in Darwin.

Pauline O'Maley is a member of the VALBEC executive. She works for the Salvation Army in the Community Reintegration Program.

Technology Matters

Using and producing your own screencasts in the ICT classroom

By Jill Koppel

Jill Koppel suggests that screencasts are becoming more prevalent in the world of ICT training as they are succinct, immediate and engaging. Here she shares some thoughts about using screencasts with ACE students.

Ever wanted to write, direct and star in your very own movie? Perhaps you're looking to pep up your ICT teaching with some audiovisual resources rather than those tired old handouts? Maybe you'd like to help your students become more independent learners responsible for their PC skills development?

If you answered yes to any or all of the above, then screencasting might meet all those needs. Screencasts are videos of the computer screen accompanied by the voice of the trainer explaining the process as it is demonstrated.

Screencasts are becoming more and more prevalent in the world of ICT training as they are succinct, immediate and hopefully more engaging than wading through a turgid hard copy handout. If you and your students are connected to the web via a broadband connection there are literally thousands of free screencasts available.

Last year a small group of ACE teachers from the inner northern suburbs of Melbourne participated in a professional development project funded by the Australian Flexible Learning Framework to investigate, develop and trial screencasting resources for use by our students.

The first stage involved trawling the various host websites to ascertain what was already available and suitable for immediate use. We found a lot of the screencasts to be inappropriate for ESL students, the trainer's delivery often being too fast and the language too complex or waffling. Also, screencasts seem to be available and then can disappear overnight without warning.

As ESL/VET teachers we decided that we could do better than most screencasts on offer. So we chose a relatively easy to use screencast production program called *Screencastomatic* for making and hosting our finished screencasts. We also planned to store our library of screencasts, and any other relevant resources, on a wiki easily accessible by all ACE students and teachers at the free private label ACFE wiki, *Clever ICT in ACE*.

The immediate benefit of having all the screencasts in one place on the internet is that students can go back to view them again and again on demand and can view them in their own time at home, at their local library or internet café. The wiki is also relatively easy to maintain by project participants. It also represents a safe place on the internet for embedding ready-made screencasts located at many other sites and initiating our students into the big wide world of e-learning.

Integrating the Screencasts into your classroom delivery of ICT

Part of the project involved trialing the screencasts with our students. I found them to be a useful additional learning resource as they are short and focused on one topic or skill. I would introduce the topic then either project the screencast using the data projector for all to watch together or get the students to view it on their own PC and listen with the headset. We then minimised the Browser window to practise the skill (in the relevant program, eg. Microsoft Word) and then re-activated the Browser window to view the screencast again.

Many students enjoyed being in control of the pace of learning by being able to play the screencast as many times as they needed to comprehend the spoken language and master the process. Playing and listening to the screencast together as a whole group gives you the opportunity to pause and check comprehension at any point, eliciting the next step or instruction from the students.

Closing the loop—Feedback and Discussion features of the wiki

When you visit the wiki, you'll notice there is a separate page for Feedback, which is very easy for students to fill out. This gives the project participants and funding body immediate and on-going feedback regarding relevance and quality of the screencasts.

The wiki also has a Discussion Tab on each page where the viewer can post a question or comment about something on that page enabling interaction between users, both students and teachers, and the Wiki organisers.

Producing your own screencasts for the *flexivet* wiki

Producing a screencast is relatively easy. However, producing a near perfect screencast sometimes proved to be a chimera

(ie a 'thing that is hoped or wished for but in fact is illusory or impossible to achieve'—not a 'fire-breathing female monster with a lion's head and goat's body'). Our team at CNLC spent some patient hours producing screencasts of four or five minutes' duration. Obviously this improves with practice. Nevertheless, we found it to be a worthwhile experience as it compels the speaker to use the correct ICT terms and to tighten up the teacher talk.

If you are interested in making some screencasts, you will need a quiet room and a headset with microphone plugged into your PC. I recommend buddying up with a colleague or e-mentor for support. You don't have to use Screencastomatic to host the finished product—you could upload the screencast to Teachertube or similar website. Then your screencast may be embedded on the *flexivet* wiki for all ACE providers to use. For guidelines on how to make

a (good) screencast and an overview of the project, go to the project wiki at: *http://flexivetproject.acfe.vic.edu.au/* .

The Student Wiki is located at *http://flexivet.acfe.vic.edu. au*. The pages are organised according to the Learning outcomes of the ICT Certificates One and Two. Please feel free to browse the site and let us know of any important gaps in topics covered as we intend to widen the offering of screencasts there.

Thanks to our Project Leader, Michael Chalk at PRACE for his inspiration and continuing assistance with the project.

Jill Koppel teaches at Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre.

Beside the Whiteboard

Up until the end of 2009, Jacinta Agostinelli was a teacher and language and literacy coordinator at Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre. Recently she described some of her experiences, and offered some sage advice to new teachers.

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

I came late to teaching. I completed my Diploma of Education in 1999 with Literacy and ESL methods. I worked in a number of Adult and Community Education Providers in 2000 and decided to accept more sessional hours at Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre at the end of that year.

What have been your influences?

I think the biggest influence in my teaching career was working under Jude Newcombe's management. Jude has a deep understanding of adult literacy and learning and teaching, which she generously shared with all of the teachers at Glenroy. She was also very good at throwing challenges my way, which increased my knowledge and confidence as a teacher, and kept me in touch with developments in the field.

What lies ahead for you?

I resigned from Glenroy at the end of 2009 with the intention of taking about six months off to have a break and catch up with other loves in my life that I didn't have time for while working, and looking after a large family of daughters. Sometime throughout my break I intend picking up another unit towards a Diploma of Professional Writing and Editing, which I started in 2003, if it isn't too many years between units. I have a Consultation project to do and I have joined the *Fine Print* editorial committee! I will catch up with friends, and I'm interested in writing and sustainable gardening, so I have a lot to do in my time off.

What has teaching meant to you?

Teaching allows me to work with people in a creative and meaningful way. I enjoy supporting people to make desired changes in their lives, and literacy teaching is a significant way to do that. I have also enjoyed meeting and working with other teachers who I find are humorous and sensitive people.

What have been some of the challenges and highlights of working in adult literacy education?

The biggest challenge has been not having the time or money to do everything I wanted to do as a teacher—teach, prepare, develop curriculum, evaluate, report back to students, as well as undertake professional development and projects. I also found juggling family and work a big challenge,

especially in the early days. Keeping up with accountability measures and witnessing these become more and more demanding was a challenge.

Highlights included writing a research paper with Helen McRae and then presenting it at an ACAL Conference; writing a set of Adult Literacy and ESL readers *The Wheatsheaf Readers* based on real life interviews (this was a big challenge as well as these readers were drafted on the Trans Siberian Railway between Ikurtz and Moscow, as far removed from the wheatfields of old Glenroy as possible); and co-ordinating the Literacy Program at Glenroy. Being involved in the writing of *Fancy Footwork* with some wonderful Adult Educators was a big highlight.

How did you become involved in adult basic education?

I was doing a short course at my local Neighbourhood House and it got me thinking…

What advice do have you for new teachers?

Have a go at everything and try not to worry about the amount of time you spend doing it. Be open to learning from everyone around you including your students.

What advice do you have for those starting out in adult education?

As students? Great decision! As a teacher? It's rewarding and it's becoming more and more relevant at all levels –personal, communal, political and national.

What made you decide on teaching as a career?

My father was a teacher and Primary School Principal so I suppose I grew up with teaching. I wanted part time

work and a career and teaching in Adult Education offered both.

What were your first teaching experiences like?

Before my first class ever as a teacher I spent the whole day preparing for a two hour ESL class. I didn't have a clue where to start and drafted my first move about ten times. I remember feeling very anxious and thinking I can't do this. My dining room table was covered in paper and books. Of course once I started the class it took on its own life and my preparation was hardly touched. Also the walls of the room were improvised and quite inefficient and I was talking very loudly because I was nervous. The whole centre heard everything I said and it would have been very annoying for the other teachers and students.

What have been some of your best teaching experiences?

I am always amazed at how differently people can perceive the same thing. It throws the idea of a single reality into chaos and keeps teachers in awe of perception and learning. Having students come back to share their successes with further study and work is great. Running Professional Development sessions for teachers and teaching volunteer tutors in our Volunteer Language and Literacy Tutor training program were rewarding experiences for me.

The Spice of Life—food and cooking

Following the success of the Student Writing editions of the past two years, the Fine Print editorial committee continues the tradition. We will celebrate the learning and insights of ALBE students through publishing their writing.

Students

This time the inspiration for writing is 'The spice of life—food and cooking'. Ideas for writing could be: food traditions and culture; food abundance or privation; food issues such as food security and sustainability; flavour and smell; growing food including community gardens; food jobs; evocative food; learning to cook; what food or meal is the 'spice of life' for you and why. Or you might like to use the picture here as inspiration. Both poetry and prose are welcome. No recipes please!

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. The editorial committee reserves the right to edit the entries that are selected.

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

Deadline: Friday June 11th

Teachers

We want you to use your students' writing as inspiration for writing about your teaching practice and the ways in which you develop learning activities that enable integration of curriculum to achieve learning outcomes. Describe and comment on the success of programs you have developed for specific projects or courses to meet funding requirements. Illustrate effective ways of making links between accredited curriculum and competency based training packages while engaging and motivating learners. Include ways of assessing and celebrating learning and we welcome photos of students engaged in activities that are food related.

Submission Guidelines

Electronic texts only

Word limit: 1000 words

Please include a title for the piece, your name, workplace and a mailing address.

The editorial committee will select pieces that best fit the guidelines. The editorial committee reserves the right to edit the entries that are selected.

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

Deadline: Friday June 11th

A Provider Profile

In this new section of *Fine Print* we present a profile of a learning organisation and their approach to, and history with, language and literacy delivery. Here we meet Jan Simmons and Kerrin Pryor from Morrisons, who took some time to talk to us and write about their literacy program.

Some background

Jan Simmons is the CEO at Morrisons, the community education and services facility in Mt Evelyn where she has worked for 30 years in various roles, one of these being the setting up and co-ordination of the literacy program. Prior to this there had been no literacy program in the Shire of Yarra Ranges. Becoming aware of this, the creation of a program at Morrisons was seen as an imperative. Contact was made with the ACFE regional office and a new ALBE centre was quickly hatched.

Her postgraduate studies at Monash University focussed on community education with a special study of the work of Paolo Freire. Jan spearheaded the drive for Mt Evelyn becoming a Learning Town. Her work has an emphasis on there being a sphere of action in the community, and it being a link to the development of the human potential of all citizens. She also works actively to facilitate partnerships that contribute both to community learning and community strengthening.

She has set up models of practice that are wedded to this thinking and has also adapted models of practice following visits on overseas study tours. These include an intergenerational literacy program, a careers guidance and life planning program set in the community library, a youth enterprise program, an interactive exhibition space that encourages disengaged learners to participate in learning programs, and the creation of a curriculum in partnership with the regional museum for application in schools and other centres. She also has an interest in implementing programs and projects from different sector streams, as seen in the arts and environment, as well as partnering with businesses on projects.

Kerrin Pryor has been involved with Adult Literacy for over twenty years. She began as a volunteer tutor in the 1980s and now has a degree and graduate diploma in education (literacy studies). Kerrin has taught the CGEA and has been involved in various literacy based research projects. At present she coordinates the adult literacy program and Community Services courses at Morrisons.

The Centre

Morrison House, now rebranded as Morrisons, is located in Mt Evelyn in the foothills of the Dandenong Ranges in the outer eastern suburbs of Melbourne, within the shire of Yarra Ranges. Mt Evelyn is the fourth largest township in the shire and has a fringe rural character.

Morrison House began operation in 1976 and became incorporated in 1992. During its long history of operation, it has demonstrated a commitment to creating high quality programs and services. Alongside this has been a dedication to the development of the community through finding solutions to meet identified needs.

The primary functions of Morrisons are:
- Adult education
- Community Development
- Enterprises

Can you tell us about your present literacy program?

Jan: Literacy programs are managed in a dynamic way that often takes the learning out of the classroom. This has had successful outcomes for both young and mature aged learners who have responded well to learning in non-traditional learning environments. Because of the diversity of projects and programs at Morrisons, the opportunity for interconnection between programs and students and making links to community projects, expand and enhance the learning environment.

With the government emphasis on skills shortages there has been a drift away from traditional literacy classes. However Morrisons has a history of reinventing itself and continues to look at ways to respond to changing environments and emerging opportunities. As an example, we have developed a program in which the history of the Mt Evelyn Football Club will be recounted through digital story telling. This project is an adaptation of a project seen in Edinburgh and will bring the literacy program into a sporting facility. The project also utilises Morrisons' connection to high profile champions like David Parkin, which endorses the street credibility of being part of the project.

In our project we focus on the use of digital literacies to create a history of our local Mt Evelyn Football & Netball Club. The project is inspired by the Tynecastle Initiative set up by Edinburgh's Adult Learning Project where, following Paulo Freire's principles of focusing on dialogue and the experiences of the participants, soccer was used as a hook to engage footy fans in literacy

practices. We will gather members of the local football and netball community to learn about digital literacies while they create a history of their club. We kick off on March 31st.

Kerrin: Currently we run literacy courses two days a week utilising the CGEA and incorporating computer skills.

I suppose you could classify our students into three groups: the first group are those with mild intellectual disabilities who appear to reap social as well as learning benefits from being a part of a broad learning environment; the next group are those who missed out on the basics at school because of a variety of reasons, either slipping through the cracks due to misunderstood learning challenges or though life circumstances; the last group is our minority—ESL students. We see perhaps two or three a year, and most of the time they join literacy classes to get support while they journey through a VET course.

We are very excited about the new FSTC (Foundation Skills Taster Courses) a project which endeavours to engage a 'hard to reach' audience and introduces digital literacies to a traditional literacies cohort.

How has delivery changed since inception and why?
Jan: Initially the program began in the one to one style of programs of its era.

Within a year the program had grown in size to become unmanageable and quality provision was being compromised.

The opportunity to provide small classes with some volunteer support within the classroom was taken up. The initial resistance to this format passed and the program continued to grow to become the largest program in the Eastern region.

The next stage was to take the once a week 2 hour session forward to larger time allotments and then onto the introduction of the CGEA.

Each move forward carried the challenges, as could be expected, of change management. Resistance from both staff and students required a response that would support the acceptance of this change.

One of the ways in which this was addressed was to commit additional allocations to enable professional development and weekly staff meeting time. This gave staff the time and space to voice their concerns and fears and be reassured by the leadership and their colleagues.

Have you observed changes in the profile of your literacy learners?
Jan: No just that there are less referrals, as students focus more on vocational learning.

What sort of approaches, pedagogical, social, do you think make a difference?
Jan: One of the things we have as an absolute is the recognition that the traditional formats have not worked for our students and the following approaches are often successful:
- Recognition of what the student does know rather than an emphasis on what he or she doesn't know.
- Knowledge is power so using literacy to empower students to address inequities in their lives.
- Utilisation of social and community enterprises to gain literacy skills
- Use of technology.

Kerrin: Starting with the knowledge learners bring into the class-room makes a difference. This socio-cultural approach means that we are not dictated to by a curriculum that leads the learners, rather than the learners leading the learning. Our tutors are very clever working with the CGEA to make it meaningful to the students and in balancing individual needs while managing a group.

Students often decide where they want to go for their excursions. Therefore they are motivated to use the experience to write and extend their reading . In all our classes we have a volunteer supporting the tutor. Our computer class of about 10 students enjoys the support of two volunteers. The commitment of our volunteers is appreciated and certainly facilitates the individual learning that takes place.

We are very proud of several students who have moved successfully out of our CGEA classes onto Certificate III and IV courses and into employment. These students moved in and out of the literacy classes as they needed, while they are were studying. I think being able to do this, to touch base once again with a familiar, safe and supportive learning environment creates a space where transition is not so scary. Literacy classes can be more about nurturing confidence and risk taking skills, more than reading and writing capabilities per se. I know this is not news to most literacy educators!

You have a very broad program with a range of vocational courses. How does literacy sit as part of the program? How do you support learners in vocational courses who have literacy needs?
Kerrin: It can be difficult to keep literacy programs visible in today's climate of skills, skills, and skills for jobs.

Morrisons deliver VET Certificate and Diploma courses in a variety of community services qualifications such as IT, Business, Hair & Beauty and more. These courses are very visible in the current paradigm. Maintaining the visibility and highlighting the importance of literacy classes is an ongoing challenge. However, the literacy program plays a special role in encouraging and supporting those who wish to get to a VET course and also those who are already enrolled.

We ask all students entering into a VET course to complete a literacy support indicator tool, which consists of a writing task, comprehension questions and life skills and numeracy tasks. Coordinators can approach me to talk about the learning needs of a student identified as requiring extra support. Often these students join a morning session where they are given support pertaining to the content of their chosen qualification. At other times the trainers, coordinator, the student and myself work together to come up with strategies that address specific needs of the students within the delivery of the course.

How are you managing the ACFE pre-accredited hours with literacy?

Kerrin: We have had to rethink our traditional approach to and delivery of literacy, which has revolved around the CGEA. We have A-Framed a computer course 'computer for the terrified' and plan to utilise the A frame increasingly.

We have liaised with employment agencies in creating new courses and are currently planning courses that will incorporate reading and writing, job seeking skills and taster subjects for industry areas.

How do you think skills reform will impact on literacy courses?

Kerrin: Employability skills seem to have replaced literacy on the agenda and in the discourse. Employability skills are what employers have deemed important for work but it does not take into account the social and individual learning that takes place in a person's life.

I think we have to get smarter with how we integrate literacy into our VET courses. This will be a challenge especially when looking at budgets in this increasingly competitive environment. However I also think we need to get more creative in our design of literacy classes.

Open Forum

Is that working or exit level?

By Philippa McLean

Philippa McLean provides welcome information regarding the ACSF, the Australian Core Skills Framework.

The Australian Core Skills Framework, ACSF, describes levels of performance in the five core skills of Learning, Reading, Writing, Oral Communication, and Numeracy. It's development and rollout has been funded by DEEWR, via a project group comprising Kath Brewer, Katrina Lyle, Philippa McLean, Kate Perkins, Dave Tout and Linda Wyse.

The ACSF provides:
- a consistent national approach to the identification of the core skills requirements in diverse personal, community, work and training contexts
- a common reference point for describing and discussing performance in the five core skills (ACSF, Commonwealth of Australia 2008 p 2)

Two documents have been developed: a full ACSF designed for use by Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) practitioners and a summary ACSF document designed for use by non LLN specialists.

The ACSF has been out and about now for around 16 months. Initially rollout workshops concentrated on outlining the content of the ACSF and how to navigate the document. The emphasis has now moved to focussing on the application of the ACSF including, development and validation of tasks; moderation of learner performance; and identification of LLN needs in various contexts including the workplace and in training packages.

The DEEWR funded Language Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP) and the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program, now use the ACSF to assess learners and report outcomes. Also, there are national projects underway to develop support resources for use of the ACSF in workplaces, institutional and community training and assessment settings. One example of this is the WELL funded project, currently being conducted by Precision Consultancy, which is developing industry specific pre-training assessment tools aligned to the ACSF. Mapping documents of the major LLN curricula are also available through DEEWR.

The ACSF is built on the National Reporting System (Commonwealth of Australia 1994). However, in its development, considerable attention was given to improving the accessibility of the document to allow broader use by a range of stakeholders in workplace, training and community settings. The five core skills are organised into five levels of performance. For each skill at each level, performance is described by indicator statements fleshed out with a number of performance features that provide detail about what a person can do. A set of sample activities, appropriate for different contexts, is also included. These contexts, known in the ACSF as Aspects of Communication, include:

- personal communication for expressing identity
- cooperative communication for interacting in groups
- procedural communication for performing tasks
- technical communication for using tools and technology
- systems communication for interacting in organisations
- public communication for interacting with the wider community
  (ACSF, Commonwealth of Australia 2008 p 9)

The level of detail included in the ACSF enables judgements about performance to be made with accuracy. This in turn supports the development of specific training pinpointed to a learner's needs. The reality for many people is that LLN performance varies both across and within core skills. This is known as a spiky profile. A person may have stronger numeracy skills than writing skills. Within the skill of writing, a person may, for example, be stronger at writing sets of instructions (procedural writing) than writing a letter of complaint to the local council (public writing). Further, within the skill of writing, a person may demonstrate a good understanding of spelling, grammar and punctuation. However, the person may not be so strong at producing a cohesive passage of writing that clearly addresses the audience. In this example, the person may demonstrate a higher level of performance on the second writing indicator than on the first writing indicator. By structuring the document with this level of detail it is possible to provide accurate information about a person's skill level. It also enables a trainer and learner to pinpoint areas of need that can inform relevant training plans.

The ACSF is designed to provide information about what a person can do. So for example, a person demonstrating speaking skills at exit 2.07 would be able to:
- provide key information relevant to an exchange
- begin to demonstrate a recognition of the differences between formal and informal registers
- use simple questions and instructions
- use adjectives, pronouns and prepositions to describe people and places

The term NYA (not yet achieved), initially coined for use in the LLNP, is now widely used to describe those learners who are not yet able to demonstrate the level 1 indicators and performance features. This is the only term that refers to a working level and applies to working level 1 only. All other ACSF levels refer to exit levels.

The current document is still in its trialling stage. A revised edition, incorporating user feedback, will be developed later in 2010 or 2011. A DVD has also been produced and is designed to support professional development around the ACSF. It is suitable for both new and experienced ACSF users. It is due for release in April 2010.

Copies of both the full and summary ACSF documents are free. To obtain your copy please contact DEEWR at either:
- adultlit@deewr.gov.au for the ACSF summary document
- Call 133873 for hard copies of the full document.

The ACSF is also available online at *www.deewr.gov.au/well* under "what's new".

Philippa McLean has extensive experience in quality assurance in vocational education and training, with particular expertise in adult language, literacy and numeracy. Philippa is a member of the project team that developed the Australian Core Skills Framework. She is currently working on a number of national projects in VET.

From Over the Border

A Report on the Queensland Council for Adult Literacy 2009 State Conference

By Jean Searle

Jean Searle, the editor of *Write On*, the newsletter for the Queensland Council for Adult Literacy (QCAL), reflects upon the many successes and memorable moments of an energising State conference.

The Queensland Council for Adult Literacy (QCAL) has had a long history of collaborations with the State Library of Queensland (SLQ). In 1982, the then State Librarian, Lawrie Ryan, was one of a handful of people who were instrumental in establishing QCAL and he held the office of Vice President of QCAL for many years. Under Lawrie Ryan, the SLQ developed an extensive adult literacy collection and a designated adult literacy librarian was appointed to oversee the collection and send bulk loans to regional Queensland to support community literacy programs.

This history of collaboration continues today and so we were delighted that the State Library of Queensland agreed to co-host the 2009 QCAL state conference. The conference was held at the beautiful new State Library of Queensland complex on the 5th and 6th November.

The conference themes of *New literacies, new contexts, new learners* were chosen to reflect, firstly, that there is a need for practitioners to engage with new technologies and, secondly, that new learners may be from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, may have a disability, and may be engaging in programs within the community, in the workplace, in a training organisation or in correctional centres. In order to reflect these themes, the conference was organised into two main strands:
- literacies and numeracies in correctional environments and
- literacies and technologies.

The conference was opened by Mary Teague from the State Library of Queensland and the keynote speakers were, Dr John Benseman from the Department of Labour, New Zealand, Ron Cox, Director, Adult Education Vocational Education and Training with the Queensland Corrective Services, and Dr Sarah Prestridge lecturer in ICT education at Griffith University. Along with a number of presentations reflecting the conference strands, conference attendees were able to take part in longer workshops which focused on numeracy, the Australian Core Skills Framework, and creating digital stories. The program also included a panel discussion with representatives from Queensland Government departments, in which a number of issues were raised and debated. More than 100 practitioners attended the conference, which was designed to critically engage them in debating issues, informing policy and shaping the future of adult literacy in Queensland.

Mary Teague's presentation focused on the State Library's role in developing literacy and how technology can engage with all Queenslanders to enhance their quality of life. She provided some background to the State Library's digital role and described how public libraries are working in the community to support literacy. Of particular interest is the SLQ program to improve library services and collections for Indigenous peoples in remote communities. The Cairns office, supported by the whole of SLQ is working in partnership with Indigenous communities to develop and establish Indigenous Knowledge Centres (IKCs). There are now 18 IKCs in the Torres Strait, Northern Peninsula region, Cape York and South East Queensland. The process of establishing IKCs has involved challenging traditional library models and developing and exploring the potential for libraries to meet the knowledge needs of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders. Partnering with local people, agencies and philanthropic partners is a key strategy to delivering programs that improve literacy in these communities.

Welcoming Places is a document produced by the State Library to promote ideas for working with Aboriginal people

and Torres Strait Islanders to encourage connections with the library, taking the library to the community and creating relevant services. See *http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/info/ind*

Ron Cox, from Queensland Corrective Services (QCS), provided information relating to the history of the provision of literacy and numeracy education in Queensland correctional centres. His keynote address included an overview of the process for the provision of relevant education and the outcomes and effectiveness of the program, QCS policies and procedures relevant to screening, assessment, and the provision of training available to prisoners.

Prior to 1996, literacy and numeracy support was provided through individual centres engaging educators, either on a paid or voluntary basis, to assist prisoners to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. With the publication of findings of an adult literacy and numeracy survey in Queensland Correctional centres, it was recognised that a high percentage of prisoners entering Correctional Centres have lower literacy and numeracy skills than that of the general population. As a result, since 1996, prisoners in all Queensland correctional centres have been provided the opportunity to access support through a structured, centrally organised and managed literacy/numeracy program. This program provides literacy/numeracy education from an accredited curriculum, delivered by contracted, registered literacy/numeracy training providers. The training is provided through the partnership that Queensland Corrective Services (QCS) has established with the Department of Education and Training (DET).

Dr John Benseman presented a keynote address entitled "*Impacts achieved and effective practice in workplace literacy programs: lessons learned from across the ditch*", which outlined an evaluation of the *Upskilling Partnership Program.* The program is a New Zealand government initiative set up to find out more about supporting businesses and their employees to build literacy, language and numeracy skills in the workplace.

Conference participants were also impressed with the achievements of a Family Learning program outlined by Alison Sutton. Family learning is a relatively new but successful context for adult literacy learning in New Zealand. Adults with low literacy and no educational qualifications (mainly women who are sole parents) are recruited into a program based in a school because they want to help their children. The program has four components: adult education, a family learning and child development component, children's literacy and a special parent and child time. Parents stay in the program when they start to be successful learners.

Full copies of the Teague, Cox and Edmunds presentations are available in the December and March issues of *Write On* together with a selection of photos from the conference.

Dr Jean Searle is an adjunct Senior Lecturer in the school of Education and Professional Studies at Griffith University in Brisbane. She is currently the editor of Write On, the newsletter for the Queensland Council for Adult Literacy.

Foreign Correspondence

Insights From South Africa

By Snoeks Desmond

Snoeks Desmond pinpoints some of the means by which the many challenges facing South Africans with low levels of literacy may be overcome.

Challenges

There are many challenges facing South Africans who have low levels of literacy and to explore these I interviewed two key players in the sector. Firstly I asked John Aitchison, Professor Emeritus of Adult Education at the University of KwaZulu Natal to outline what he sees as the three main obstacles to improving the lives of those who cannot read and write well or at all:

- Unemployment is so high that there are few economic reasons or pressure, apart from those who consider literacy to be a human right, to improve literacy levels in the country.
- Given that there are several million people with very low levels of literacy, there is need for large scale provision. The recently instituted government adult literacy campaign, known as *Kha Ri Gude*, needs to be expanded but unfortunately, due to the poorly functioning state sector adult basic education system, there is no adequate follow up for its successful learners.
- With the poor provision of post literacy support or activities, an environment conducive to the continuing support of newly literate adults does not exist.

John Aitchison suggests that to overcome these challenges there needs to be more support for the *Kha Ri Gude* Literacy campaign to compensate for the current incompetence at national and provincial government level. A post literacy campaign needs to be managed in such a way that a print rich environment be provided for newly literate adults. This would include the provision of small libraries, subsidization of easy readers in all eleven South African languages, support for literacy and adult basic education add-ons to various government interventions in small business development, early childhood development, social grants, and public works programs

Developing a relevant literacy program

Operation Upgrade, a KwaZulu Natal based NGO, believes there is a need to combine literacy learning with income generation and provision of food security in both rural and urban literacy classes. The director, Pat Dean, describes how this model has been developed within their organisation. She believes that adults enrol in a literacy class thinking that literacy will help them to improve their lives. They are often hungry and they may have no way of earning a living. They may be oppressed in a patriarchal tribal management system, perhaps second or third wives in polygamous marriages. Literacy learners often support many young children, whose parents have died in the AIDS pandemic in South Africa.

The Operation Upgrade literacy program is designed to achieve social change through literacy and adult basic education. The model involves teaching literacy in classes in which information is included on relevant issues such as HIV and AIDS, how to establish food security through literacy gardens and food tunnels, and livelihood development—perhaps concrete block-making, or making leather products for sale. Adult educators are trained to teach mother tongue literacy, English as an additional language, and practical numeracy. For literacy and language learning they use a problem-posing approach based on learner needs. They use their own materials and materials from Operation Upgrade to do this.

Themes in literacy lessons can range from practical issues like cholera and water purification, clearing garbage from the streets, opening a bank account, and using an automatic teller machine, to human rights issues around woman and child abuse, land ownership, how local government works, family health and nutrition, food security and running a class project to generate income.

The KwaNibela Project

The KwaNibela Project is set in rural KwaZulu-Natal—the province also referred to as the Kingdom of the Zulu. The project is based in an isolated area of the province and there has been little development for its 26000 people. In KwaNibela there are four clinics and a courthouse, but the nearest hospital is 80 kilometres away.

There is little water, and the people are poor. A few have cattle and goats, but most are dependent on social grants. There are no shops. Where there are roads, they are gravel, which makes travel difficult. There is no electricity.

Operation Upgrade has been working in KwaNibela since 2004, initially with literacy classes, which were later

expanded to include HIV and AIDS information and support, food security and livelihood development.

In 2010 Operation Upgrade has 31 classes in KwaNibela, with 682 adult learners, most of whom are women aged between 25 and 55 years. Operation Upgrade, working with the classes, set up 28 food tunnels. Water is a constant challenge for the tunnel groups and the community in general, and livelihoods are hard to establish. Where water is accessible, the learners grow food to eat and sell. There are six large literacy-group vegetable gardens, three leather craft groups and a block-making class.

The group of 17 women literacy learners at Emseni, a small area within KwaNibela, has a thriving vegetable seedling project which links well with their literacy and numeracy learning. These learners operate 5 food tunnels and some garden beds to raise seedlings. They package the seedlings in bundles of 20 and travel miles to sell to others in the area. They sell seedlings on the street in town, and at taxi and bus ranks, at pension queues, church meetings and cattle sales. In three months they made R17600 and used this money

to buy groceries in bulk for their families for Christmas. Many of the literacy learners wept at the function where the groceries were distributed. It was the first time in their lives they had ever earned anything.

Conclusion

The integrated approach to development through literacy is one worth replicating throughout South Africa. In addition, a post literacy program needs to be put in place so that those who have learnt to read and write may continue to improve these skills as they find ways in which to earn at least some money to help their struggling families.

For more information on the KwaNibela Project and Operation Upgrade contact Pat Dean on pat@operation upgrade.org.za or check their website *www.operationupgrade. org.za*

From 2000 to 2007 Snoeks Desmond worked as the founding director of the Family Literacy Project in South Africa and is now a consultant specializing in materials development.

What's Out There

Caring for Children: Effective communication for CALD workers in Childcare

Rosie Lechte reviews Caring for Children: Effective communication for CALD workers in Childcare, written by Maggie Power and published by AMES.
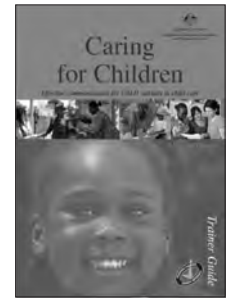
Caring for Children is a comprehensive resource kit of customised materials designed for CALD workers in the child care industry. It comprises a trainer guide, a DVD and a CD. The materials focus on developing workplace communication, employability skills and cross-cultural understanding in a community context.

The Trainer guide outlines ten units of work, divided into four sections. Each unit includes integrated activities for developing communication skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing together with trainer's guidelines for use. These activities are linked to scenarios in the DVD. Dialogues and audio scripts from the DVD and CD are also included for teacher and student reference.

The materials are aligned with a module from the Community Services Training Package, Certificate III Children's Services, 'Participate effectively in the work environment'. Each unit reflects specific learning outcomes, for example 'Contribute to the effective operation of the work group'. Employability skills are also linked to each unit. The language level of the target group these materials focus upon is lower intermediate. However they could be adapted for use with a range of learners, working, or preparing for work in the childcare industry.

The DVD presents scenarios for each unit, following the orientation and initial work experience of a childcare worker from a CALD background. It provides examples of challenges and issues occurring in a workplace and demonstrates effective ways of problem solving and dealing with people and situations in a culturally appropriate manner. The scenarios in each unit provide a stimulus for discussion based on the relevant learning outcome from the training package. The trainer guide includes a wide range of integrated activities aimed at developing the macro skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

The CD incorporates listening, speaking and pronunciation activities relevant to the scenarios presented in the DVD.

The materials are clearly formatted and presented with easily accessible instructions for both trainers and students. The photocopiable activity sheets are a highlight of the kit, and alleviate the need to purchase student textbooks. There are, of course, the options of binding them into a book for students or distributing them Unit by Unit.

A useful feature of the DVD is that it could be used with a range of language levels and target groups within the Community Studies sector. It can also be aligned to modules from other curriculum frameworks, in addition to the HACS training package, for example, the ESL Framework, Certificate III in ESL (Employment). There could be opportunities to develop similar materials aligned with other modules from the training package.

One limitation of the resource is that the literacy activities are designed for lower level learners and would not challenge many students at level III. It would be useful to have alternative activities targeting a broader range of levels.

Overall it is a valuable resource for trainers in preparing students for work placement and /or employment and can be used as a tool in conjunction with other materials. It provides a range of learning modes and multimedia to stimulate contextual learning.

Rosie Lechte teaches in the Vocational Pathways Department at Preston Campus NMIT. She is a Study Skills Advisor and ESL Childcare Teacher.

That's Work!

Sarah Deasey reviews, *That's Work!* an interactive CD Rom, produced by the AMES Resourcing Learning and Innovation Unit, by writers Elsie Hill, Maggie Power and Lilliana Hajncl, with funding from the Telematics Trust.

That's Work! is part of a series, the first one being That's Life! *That's Work!* is based on 16 workplace conversations in two different workplaces. One is in an office administrative environment at the 'High School Books Company', and the other is in a warehouse factory floor style environment, packing fruit and vegetables at The 'Fresh Food Company'.
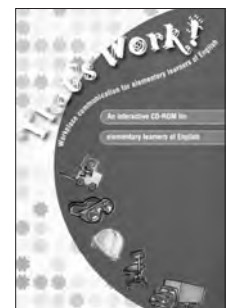
The resource:

> aims to improve the language and employability skills of low level learners and highlights the importance of:
> - showing initiative at work
> - reliability and punctuality
> - socialising and the use of humour in the workplace
> - understanding and responding to instructions
> - problem solving, negotiating and teamwork
> - employer expectations
>
> Each conversation is followed by six interactive language activities, including vocabulary, listening, comprehension and pronunciation.

There are 4 sections:

'Work Talk': social interactions at work and cross cultural issues; 'Instructions': following safe work practices; 'Resolving Problems': problem solving on a range of issues and dealing with difficult situations such as grumpy customers; and lastly 'The Way we Work': providing examples of workplace communication, such as being late and how to notify supervisors, the use of humour, and showing initiative.

The beauty of this resource is that it focuses on human interaction and human relationships in the workplace, and how these relationships are enhanced and reinforced through communication. There is warmth and humour in each scenario, in fact I laughed out loud in many. At the same time there is emphasis on workplace safety and the importance of professional and ethical work practices.

Students will need plenty of help at the start learning how to navigate the sections and to access the different activities. However this is learning in itself, providing opportunity for good skill development in working with hypertexts.

Sarah Deasey is the Further Education Coordinator at Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre and is also a member of the Fine Print Editorial Committee.