

this issue:

Keeping Learners Connected.  
By Leonie Francis and Anne Leske.

Making a Difference: Positive  
Parenting Pupil Participation.  
By Julie Neeson, Dr Kaye Scholfield  
and Melissa Collits.

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Cards. By Sue Ollerhead.

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Policy, Statistics and Story.  
By Kerrin Pryor and Sandra Wolfe.

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Adult Education in  
the Community

## features

- Keeping Learners Connected** 3  
*By Leonie Francis and Ann Leske*  
Inter-agency partnerships prove to be a successful way to approach family literacy provision.
- Making a Difference: Positive Parenting Pupil Participation** 8  
*By Julie Neeson, Dr Kaye Scholfield and Melissa Collits*  
This discussion presents an interesting partnership that addresses generational social and economic disadvantage and its impact on literacy.
- Blue Buffalos and Battered Soccer Cards** 14  
*By Sue Ollerhead*  
Sue Ollerhead draws on the similarities between Australia and South Africa when discussing the issues for literacy programs and policy.
- The Power of Real Learning** 17  
*By Tricia Bowen*  
Tricia Bowen reports on the 2010 VALBEC Conference.
- Policy, Statistics and Story** 19  
*By Kerrin Pryor and Sandra Wolfe*  
Snapshots from the 2010 ACAL Conference that highlight what is happening around the country and just across the sea.
- ## regulars
- Practical Matters** 21  
Tim Morris outlines ways teachers can find real audiences for student writing tasks.
- Technology Matters** 23  
David Bradley shares some practical ideas for using technologies available through libraries and Clive Hutchison discusses ways of using voice technologies.
- Provider Profile** 25  
We profile On Track Learning in Horsham, Victoria and pay tribute to its founder Margaret Simonds.
- Foreign Correspondence** 27  
Lia (Emily) Cross writes to us from the 8th Asia TEFL Conference where she comments on the difficulties and peculiarities of teaching English in Asia.
- What's Out There** 29  
Helen Rosenberg reviews *Speak Safe* an AMES publication written by Maggie Power and Carmel O'Day; Linno Rhodes shares her thoughts on *Empowering women through literacy: views from experience*, edited by Mev Miller and Kathleen P. King.
- The Winners Are** 32  
We list the winners of the 2010 ACE Awards for best organisations and people.

# Editorial

Dear readers,

I have enjoyed editing this edition, my first as the commissioning editor of *Fine Print*, and you will find it an interesting read. But before I continue I would like to acknowledge the 'big shoes' Tricia Bowen, the previous commissioning editor has left me to fill. Tricia was a professional editor who brought great enthusiasm to the role. Thankyou Tricia and best of luck in your future endeavours. I would also like to acknowledge the behind the scenes work of the *Fine Print* editorial committee. The committee is a small but diligent group of VALBEC members. Together, with a typographer, we bring the journal to you.

As you can see from the cover image we present a rural aspect in this issue. There is a lot to be learnt from a critical examination of the differences between rural and city providers. Our three feature articles come from contributors based in rural settings. In Wagga Wagga, regional New South Wales, Leonie Francis and Ann Leske have developed four models of family literacy that depend on inter-agency relationships for success.

From Wagga Wagga we move to the Southern Grampians. Julie Neeson, Dr Kaye Scholfield and Melissa Collits are working in a cross educational sector partnership where the goal is to break the cycle of generational educational and economic disadvantage.

And from Wagga Wagga we travel all the way to rural South Africa where Sue Ollerhead is doing a doctorate in adult literacy. Sue writes us a humorous and engaging account of her experiences and reflections on the issues for teachers and policy makers both in South Africa and Australia.

Conference delegates, Tricia Bowen, Sandra Wolfe and Kerrin Pryor discover a wealth of expertise at the VALBEC and ACAL conferences.

We have many ideas for you in our *Practical Matters* and *Technology Matters* from Tim Morris, David Bradley and Clive Hutchison. In keeping with the rural theme the *Provider Profile* features On Track Wimmera in regional Victoria. On Track owes its establishment to Margaret Simonds who died earlier this year, and on making the trip there to interview the current manager, I discovered that her pioneer spirit lives on.

*Foreign Correspondence* is filed by Lia (Emily) Cross who writes about issues facing teachers of English in Asia.

In *What's Out There* Helen Rosenberg and Linno Rhodes recommend the latest resources. Finally we have listed the winners and nominees of the 2010 Adult Community Education awards.

So take a look inside and enjoy the issue!

Jacinta Agostinelli

**We do not have an *Open Forum* section in this issue, which brings me to the point of asking you, our readers, to put pen to paper and write between 50 and 1500 words about an issue in the language and literacy field that concerns you. Your contribution could be in the form of *Letters to the editorial committee*, or you may want to write more formally. I hope someone will get the ball rolling in the next issue. Send your contributions to [fineprint@valbec.org.au](mailto:fineprint@valbec.org.au)**

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



# Keeping Learners Connected

By Leonie Francis and Ann Leske

Family literacy is the enhancement of literacy for more than one family member. Where family literacy provision is tackled by inter-agency partnerships, in this case between literacy teachers and community services, the results are noteworthy. Here Leonie Francis and Ann Leske outline four models of family literacy that have evolved in the New South Wales town of Wagga Wagga over the last five years.

## Introduction

Taking a mobile approach to the provision of adult literacy has resulted in four inter-agency community based family literacy programs to flourish in Wagga Wagga. This paper outlines the rationale for developing inter-agency, or cross-sectoral, partnerships with community services to enable new strategies to engage adults in learning, embed literacy learning in authentic community contexts and enhance literacy outcomes for families. Included in this information is some insight about developing partnerships with community services informed in part by experience and also by recent (2009) research as a National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) Community of Practice researcher exploring the perspectives of community service workers and literacy teachers around partnerships involving team teaching.

In some analogous ways finding and aligning with potential partners is similar to a blind date at a local dance. There may be many services represented in the dance hall. Each may have individual reasons to be there, as well as feelings of uncertainty about who is to make the first move to form a dance partnership, and who knows the dance steps.

The family literacy models presented here exist or have existed in the New South Wales inland Riverina regional city of Wagga Wagga. The population is approximately 55,000. Although based regionally, the community services involved in the inter-agency partnerships can be regarded as being broadly representative of the range of services in other parts of Australia.

## The TAFE STEPS Program

In 2004 a community consultation meeting was held. Representatives from the Department of Education Regional Office, family services, the city council, the local primary school and TAFE met to discuss how we could work together in new ways not previously explored to support local families. The common concern

was the number of children in the first year of school commencing formal education with limited learning and reading readiness. It was at this meeting that the TAFE STEPS program was initiated. For us, it was the first attempt at an off-campus mobile literacy and inter-agency partnership approach to family literacy. The intent was to offer a user friendly and easily accessed education venue for marginalised families with young children, who were disconnected from services and education opportunities. The project commenced with the support of Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) Adult Literacy National Project (Innovative Project) funding. The name, the STEPS Program, is not an acronym—the word STEPS represents the journey that participants undertake when they are part of the program. In 2007 the TAFE STEPS Program was awarded Adult Learning Australia ‘Runner-up’ Best Adult Literacy Program.

The TAFE STEPS Program has continued since 2004. As community demographics and services have changed, so has the program. Since 2004 four separate family literacy models have evolved:

- |                                |           |
|--------------------------------|-----------|
| • Parentgroup/Playgroup        | 2005–2010 |
| • Koori Family Homework Centre | 2006–2008 |
| • MEN Education Network        | 2009–2011 |
| • Community Conversations      | 2010      |

## Family literacy

Family literacy views the family as a ‘learning unit’ and aims to enhance the literacy skills of more than one family member. It comprises an inter-generational approach based upon a powerful premise: *parents are their children’s first and most important teachers*. It provides integrated support and learning opportunities for all family members through the combined strengths of practitioners and services. Literacy development becomes a shared responsibility. Some family literacy programs can offer intervention strategies related to literacy development for young children. Central to the described models is the opportunity for parents to pursue their



### Parent group

own educational goals, support them in the challenging and critical job of raising children, and to promote and support lifelong and lifewide learning.

### Engaging adults

In 2006 the Australian Bureau of Statistics conducted the Australian Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey. The results showed that 7 million people scored below the minimum level for one or more of the literacy domains identified as being required to meet the demands of everyday life and work in this emerging knowledge based economy. There exists a clear statistical link between literacy levels and a range of social and economic indicators.

The TAFE STEPS program commenced in a suburb of Wagga Wagga identified by a workforce participation rate of thirty percent, when it was sixty-eight percent for Wagga Wagga. The percentage of public housing residents unemployed was forty percent and the percentage of public housing residents under the age of twenty-five who had completed year twelve was zero. It was also evident that people in this community were not accessing TAFE. It was important to develop new learning opportunities to address this disconnect.

Learning happens in all life stages. Australian learning and education systems are based on the principle of learning early on for use later in life. However this might not be the best model. The Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL) proposed a comprehensive policy agenda which included embedding adult literacy issues in a framework of lifelong learning, addressing social inclusion and community capacity building. The importance of literacy for

the national economy, society and individual capacity is also highlighted by Golding (2008) who suggests that the need for government supported opportunities for adult lifelong learning is urgent.

Proponents of adult literacy models between community services and literacy teachers, advocate the potential for improving social capital outcomes. Their potential to contribute to community literacy, their capacity to address social policy problems and facilitate social capital outcomes is gaining momentum (Wickert & McGuirk, 2005; Sanguinetti & O'Maley, 2007; Balatti, Black & Falk, 2009; Black, Innes & Chopra, 2009). Social capital refers to the social networks and the connections between people within or amongst groups (Black, Innes & Chopra, 2008, p.5; Priest, 2009) and the self esteem and confidence gained through respect received from their teachers and peers. For some students, these advantages presumably help them find work and interact more easily with those around them.

For each of the family literacy models we have included a summary of the key elements and a model demonstrating how these elements come together. It is also important to highlight what the adult literacy teacher/s involved with these models share: a perspective that literacy learning is lifewide and lifelong; a capacity to teach in multiple and possibly unpredictable locations; a holistic approach to relationship building and individual capacity; and a commitment to social capital outcomes.

### Parentgroup/Playgroup

**Why** Promote parents' awareness of pre-school literacy skills

**How** Steering committee  
Community Housing for venue  
Council grant for minor painting expenses  
Rotary Club assisted with minor repairs and painting  
Planned, negotiated education sessions  
Individual literacy teaching  
Resources library

**Who** Families New South Wales—funding and early intervention and prevention context  
Department of Education and Training Regional Literacy Officer  
Wagga Wagga City Council  
Community Health—Early Childhood  
TAFE

(See Figure 1 Parentgroup Model.)

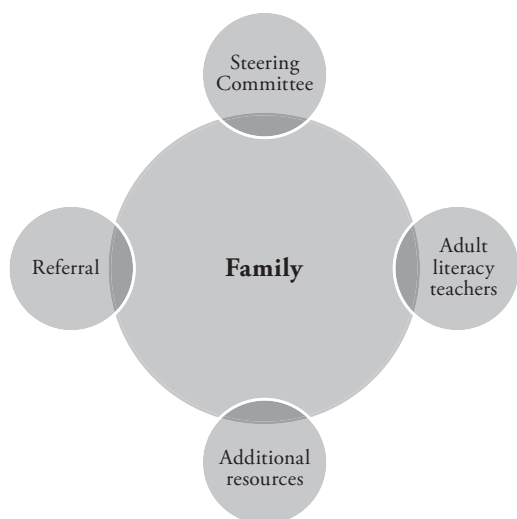


Figure 1: Parentgroup Model

### Koori Family Homework Centre 2006–2008

**Why** Improve educational outcomes for local Aboriginal students through family literacy learning

**How** Reference group  
Aboriginal culture and identity promoted  
Develop school teacher cultural and family literacy understanding  
Planned, negotiated education sessions  
Individual teaching

**Who** Reference group comprising local Aboriginal community family members  
Local public primary school  
Families New South Wales  
Department of Education and Training, Aboriginal Child Youth and Family Strategy  
TAFE

(See Figure 2 Koori Family Homework Centre Model.)

### MEN Education Network 2009–2011

**Why** A request from WAFRICA, a local incorporated body representing African men. The leader said, 'Our men need education about life in Australia.'

**How** Department of Immigration and Citizenship funding  
Steering Committee including local African men  
Activity plan for the year  
Communication via SMS technology  
Planned, negotiated education sessions  
Individual teaching

**Who** TAFE

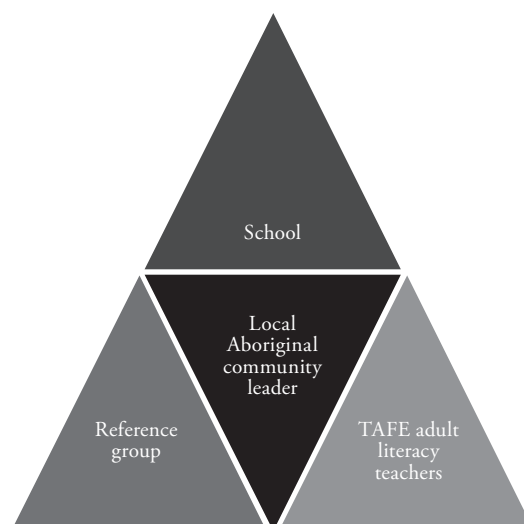


Figure 2: Koori Family Homework Centre Model

Centacare  
Communities New South Wales, Sport and Recreation  
WAFRICA, community nominated African men  
Rotary Club

(See Figure 3 MEN Education Network Model.)

### Community Conversations 2010

**Why** Request from local Burundi community to address barriers to participation in society

**How** Community learning  
Volunteer interpreter  
Planned negotiated education sessions  
Individual teaching

**Who** Local church  
Community leaders  
Centacare  
TAFE

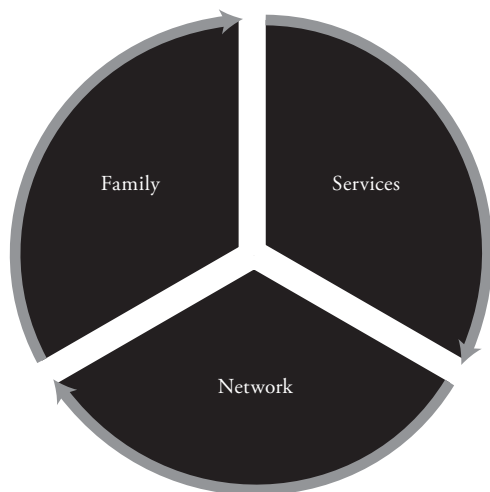
(See Figure 4 Community Conversations Model.)

### Common elements

The four family literacy models share common elements which underpin their success. These core elements fall into two loose groups which can be described as professional perspectives and partnership perspectives. Our experience with a partnership approach to developing new learning opportunities is that the professionals involved matter more than the services they represent.

### Professional perspectives

Each family literacy model began with a vision held by



**Figure 3: MEN Education Network Model**

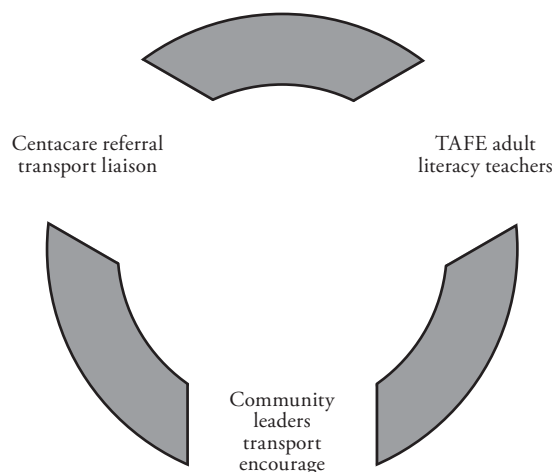
either a community service or literacy teacher professional. The vision was connected to an identified community and/or cultural need and contributed to the identification of other like-minded professionals whose work can add value to the overall program intent. This professional perspective has led to commitment by a team of cross-sectoral professionals with a shared responsibility for outcomes and long-term program continuity.

### Partnership perspectives

Sometimes, developing new work models requires a preparedness to push boundaries—new ways of working don't always fit existing work practices. Often it is necessary to clarify in what way the respective workplace can support the potentially new enterprise and how this commitment is demonstrated in practice. It is important to clarify in what way(s) the respective partners can add value to the program outcomes. Each model demonstrates adult literacy teachers plus community service professionals. The value and effect of this partnership is a community and education-based adult literacy and social capital focus which can offer outcomes not previously experienced by each partner on their own. In some circumstances this opportunity to align with other colleagues also adjusts the community service worker and the literacy teacher's usual role as the provision of the new learning environment unfolds.

### Underpinning pedagogies

Underpinning each program is adult literacy pedagogy which emphasises participant involvement with the program direction and session activities. Aligned with the adult literacy pedagogy is social capital pedagogy



**Figure 4: Community Conversations Model**

which creates a safe and supportive learning environment, and acknowledges the capital the learner brings to the group. The approach should also engage the learner with networks at many levels: learner to learner, learner and teacher, learner and the community and networks (Balatti, Black & Falk, 2009a, 2009c).

Each program is delivered by adult literacy teachers. Sometimes this has involved co-facilitating with community service representatives or community 'leaders'. It has been essential to identify literacy teachers with a shared perspective on the definition of literacy. Perspective influences planning, practice and possibilities. It has also been necessary to 'unpack' literacy for the inter-agency partners as their perspective also influences planning, and can lead to presumptions about how and where adults learn and what a literacy teacher does.

Our preferred definition of literacy is that literacy involves a continuum of learning through life. It is viewed as a flexible group of skills and strategies that enable a person to make sense of what they want to know. Literacy acquisition is complex, cumulative, interactive and closely linked to context and purpose, which enable a person to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, reflect, compute and use information to make informed choices (Hartley & Horne 2006).

### Engaging marginalised families

It is important to note that each family literacy model aims to engage families who are disconnected from mainstream community services and may have had negative experiences of learning in the past. For these families information is generally accessed through

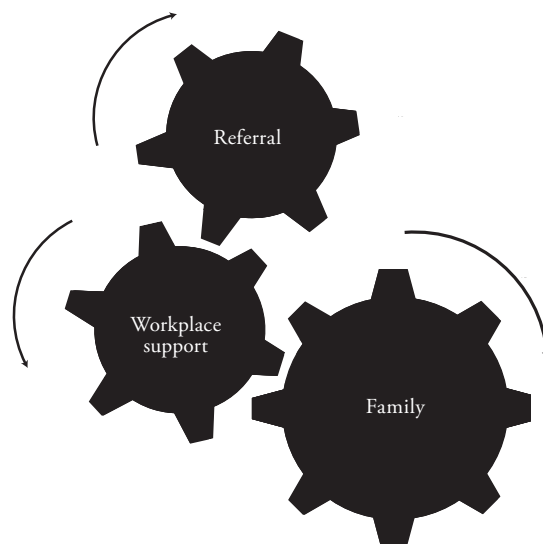


### Men kayaking

informal conversation with friends, family and services rather than local newspapers, letter-box drops, personal correspondence and flyers in prominent locations. Developing a united approach to engaging marginalised families is integral to the professional and partnership perspective and the program outcomes.

Consistent with each model is a three stage approach. The first step is to create a program that offers potential participants an ‘enticing’ purpose to step into a new, potentially threatening, setting. The venue familiarity, ease of access and timing are all relevant. The ‘content’ or reason to come together should be personally relevant and potentially satisfying. The second step is to have a member of the inter-agency partnership recommend the program to the adult in a non-formal conversation. At this point initial interest can be gauged. Having an additional person take a personal interest in the referral outcome makes a big difference to connection. Engagement may not happen straight away. It may be beneficial to raise the possibility of interest and participation again. If there is sufficient interest shown, then the third step is to ask the adult’s permission to forward their telephone number to the program contact person who can make an informal call or SMS, which can be an opportunity to enable the potential participant to reply in their time and discuss at a distance their family circumstances and have questions about the program answered. Or even better, it may be possible for the referring agency representative to attend with the adult. Where non-English speaking participants are concerned the use of telephone interpreter services is also valuable.

The ongoing interest of more than one partner is an effective and positive ‘wrap-around’ effect. Being genuine



**Figure 5: The wrap-around effect**

about your intention to engage and build rapport is essential. The inter-relationship between the inter-agency partners, the personal referral and the family are represented in Figure 5, The wrap-around effect.

A feature of each program is the capacity to connect with individual participants between sessions. This can be via face-to-face or e-communication or telephone. These opportunities are identified on a needs basis and are individually arranged and personally negotiated. These sessions offer a valuable one-to-one opportunity for teaching and learning to follow up or expand on the participant’s goals as they align with the program intent.

### Getting started

1. Become familiar with your community—services and demographics. Look for ways of locating your role in the community. Develop an internal radar for what is happening locally—are there gaps?
2. Develop an idea and see who is interested. From which community services do they come? Focus on engaging new learners.
3. Prepare how to communicate your intent. How will you present what you do?
4. How will you talk about literacy? Determine what literacy means to you.
5. Be prepared to have answers to questions. Define what you do—how is it different? What can it contribute?
6. Are there other ways to use existing ‘working’ hours or resources? Clarify the expectations of partners and self.

**Continued on page 31 ...**



# Making a Difference: Positive Parenting Pupil Participation

By Julie Neeson, Dr Kaye Scholfield and Melissa Collits

A partnership between Southern Grampians Adult Education, RMIT and a local primary school attempts to address social and economic disadvantage in a rural Victorian town. We will hopefully follow the progress of this project in 2011.

## Introduction

The progress of children through their schooling is considerably enhanced when their parents and carers are fully supportive of their education. The Positive Parenting Pupil Participation (PPPP) project is a community learning partnership (CLP) bringing together three levels of education: adult community education (ACE), university research and a small rural primary school in Victoria.

The purpose of the CLP is two-fold: to address broadly recognised community needs and to provide the ACE organisation with the opportunity to bring learning opportunities to the community in new ways. In this project, the PPPP is working in partnership to increase the engagement of parents with their children's education and with their school, at the same time as re-engaging with their own learning.

In the new environment created by *Securing Jobs for Your Future—Skills for Victoria* and *A Stronger ACFE—Delivering Skills for Victoria*, CLPs facilitate ACE organisations to expand their reach into the community by supporting people and communities in acquiring the skills that are needed to prosper economically and socially. The PPPP partnership seeks to break the cycle of family marginalisation and educational disadvantage, by:

- creating a welcoming environment for parents at the school, and
- providing parents with adult education courses such as life skills, literacy and numeracy in the school setting to better equip them for employment opportunities.

The ultimate aim of this project is to re-engage the parents in formal education and training within a school setting, specifically to enhance their literacy and numeracy skills. Further, by developing a positive school culture where closer connections between the parents and the school will be created, it is hoped the learning

outcomes of the children will be improved. A learning community can develop where several educational and other organisations, staff and parents can come together for the benefit of children and their families.

The PPPP project is employing two main activities in support of its objectives:

- the delivery of targeted education programs to the school's parent community, and
- action research.

The CLP initiative provides opportunities for ACE organisations to extend their use of alternative learning approaches to address community needs in partnership with other stakeholders. CLPs are effectively the research arm of Adult Community and Further Education. The PPPP project employs both alternative learning approaches and research, enabling a wider perspective on an issue, hitherto seen as an in-school problem, as well as an opportunity to reflect on and refine the approach taken by project proponents as they navigate a complex local issue. The role of the research component of the project is to test assumptions about parental involvement in education and informing strategies for creating a more positive environment.

This paper describes the partnership's response to a particular critical local issue. There is a perception that a number of parents have disengaged early from their own education and that this affects their attitude and ability to engage in their children's school education, which is likely in turn to lead to the extension of generational poverty cycles. The project aims to trial new approaches to



addressing a complex problem that is difficult to measure, understand, report on and overcome.

## The Partners

Southern Grampians Adult Education (SGAE) provides a range of accredited and pre accredited training programs in the area of adult literacy and numeracy, pre-study, returning to work, youth programs and more. SGAE's role in PPPP is to provide initial informal learning and social opportunities to encourage parents to come into the school, and to gain confidence with re-engaging with learning. SGAE will then provide targeted modules for this parent cohort.

RMIT University operates a regional research and learning centre in Hamilton. Much of the research focuses on real world issues in partnership with the local community. RMIT's role in the project is to undertake action research to assist with the implementation of PPPP and to reflect and help develop the partners' approaches.

The primary school partner is one of several state and independent primary schools serving the surrounding district. The school caters for a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. The school is providing the venue for adult learners who are parents at their school so that they can re-engage in learning opportunities.

Statistics regarding the year three and year five literacy and numeracy levels of this school, taken from the 2009 Government *School Annual Report to School Community*, show that the students are performing at levels below the median of Victorian government schools.

## Background

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics Socio Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA, 2006), the surrounding region is generally ranked at average and above. However, the neighbourhood in which this school is located is ranked as most disadvantaged. The school community has observed an overall decrease in the involvement of fathers in parenting, and this is perceived to impact on children's behaviour. There is also proportionally a high number of 'out of family' care children in this school. All of these factors have resulted in a disproportionate number of troubled and disruptive children in the school.

SGAE had similarly observed a parallel trend of young people disengaging from formal education and also some young people becoming parents at a younger age. Over

years of working in the region, the three PPPP partners had observed cycles of disadvantage.

The school is fortunate to have a group of supportive parents who involve themselves in the life of the school. The school council is extremely dedicated, working tirelessly for the school despite a general lack of involvement of the larger parent body. They are prepared to be strong ambassadors for the school and give generously of their time as volunteers in a range of capacities. Strategies emerging from this project will assist the council to develop innovative approaches to involving currently disengaged parents in the school and re-energising the parent body.

The school on its own lacks the capacity to deal with the accumulating problems associated with the range of detrimental socio-economic factors. The PPPP partners observe that morale has been low amongst staff, school council and the general parent body. This is exacerbated when families (particularly engaged families) leave the school, which further decreases student numbers and increases concerns and stresses.

Any response to the increasingly complex array of difficulties, including concerns for families, and educational responsibilities, challenge the resources of those involved. The first basic question though, was: how can we make things better for this school? The problem is not unique to this school, nor is it new (Plowden Report, 1967, UK in Fielier 2010), which suggests that there are no simple solutions.

A one year project cannot hope to achieve much in this environment. The research process will help to establish a basis for an ongoing strategy which will include a whole of community approach as originally envisaged by the school principal.

## The project so far

A project officer has been appointed to work closely and practically with the principal and teachers of the school and facilitate operations between the project partners. The role is to engage parents in activities including informal and formal learning opportunities, as well as to work with the school body to become familiar with the character of the school. This two-way familiarisation is important for the development of the project. Without the CLP funding there is little capacity in the existing staff profile to instigate engagement opportunities for 'hard to reach' parents.

Members of the project team meet regularly providing a forum for airing ideas and learning which has informed the development of the PPPP—part of the action research cycle. The project officer also consults regularly with the school council and members of the teaching staff to develop strategies. Activities so far have included book covering classes, cooking demonstrations, literacy and numeracy classes. A calendar of events has been developed to inform parents of upcoming activities.

The first meeting of the project members with staff was organised for early February to take place at morning tea break at the school. The project members gave a very brief presentation to staff to outline the project's aims and concerns. The reaction of staff was somewhat disappointing. They neither indicated any awareness of the project (even though the principal informed staff of the winning of the grant to fund the project) or little interest in the presentation as it was being given.

Meetings with the principal and staff have helped to develop an understanding of perceptions of the parent body. It was understood that these views would have to be treated with a degree of caution but it provided an important starting point regarding perceptions of the parent body. The principal had indicated that aside from those parents who were members of the school council, and a few others, the parents are largely disengaged; the principal had not even met a number of parents.

The project officer joined school council as a community member and has been attending meetings since February. Council members, presumably the most engaged of the parent body, were both helpful and positive from the beginning and recognised the need for the project, seeing it in the main as a way of improving school morale.

Having decided on the need to gauge parents' interest it was agreed by the project partners that a personal approach was likely to be more successful than sending home forms for completion. The project officer therefore took the opportunity to talk with parents at a number of school events and then sought to ring as many parents as possible. Generally the parents spoken to were quite positive but it was clear that none had heard of the project (despite considerable publicity through the school newsletter). The activities proposed included cookery demonstrations, a basic computer course, craft activities and activities involving the children.

From talking to the parents it became clearer that a number would be more interested in participating in activities that were directly of benefit to their children and the school, for example book covering. This, coupled with research of similar projects overseas, led to the decision to hold two book covering sessions as our first activity. Research also led to further refinement of what type of engagement we were aspiring to make. The literature tended to emphasise that it is engagement of a particular kind that impacts positively on student outcomes—namely that the parents need to be actively involved in their children's learning, not simply being at the school. However, given the positive response to suggestions of activities such as cookery demonstrations and introductory computer lessons it was decided to still offer a range of opportunities and test which was most successful. Parents of prep to year two students were invited to attend book covering sessions. Invitations were sent home and then followed up by phone calls. Approximately forty percent of the invited families attended, which was an encouraging start.

### Key issues

These first sessions drew attention to a number of issues which will affect the ongoing development of the project:

- a non-homogenous parent body
- the attitude of teachers to the project
- interactions between parents and staff
- relevance of program activities to pupils

The first major issue, not taken into account explicitly by the project team and which has not been discussed in the research literature reviewed to date, is that the school does not have a homogenous parent body. The personal dynamics of each session highlighted this. Whilst this is clearly not unique to this school, the situation is compounded at this school because the school population itself is so small. Questions are raised regarding whether some parents might be discouraged from attending school activities because, for example, of the awkwardness arising from significant differences in socio-economic backgrounds.

A perception is that some parents feel intimidated by the other apparently more confident group who tend to dominate the school council, fund raising committees and so on. But it also seemed evident, for example at the book covering sessions that parents from different socio-economic groups can be uncomfortable with each other. Breaking down the barriers between different

parent groups, not just between parents and the school may become an important, if previously unconsidered, part of the project.

The second issue that has been highlighted was foreshadowed to a degree at the introductory staff morning tea, namely the attitude of some of the teachers to the project itself. Whether it is a case of the teachers feeling so overwhelmed by the challenges they face on a daily basis, whether they (probably quite justifiably) feel somewhat cynical and jaded about the prospect of another project proposing to provide solutions to the school's problems, or whether they felt the project had been foisted upon them without proper consultation, there has been an initial lack of commitment to, or engagement with, the project. However, for the project to succeed it is felt that the teachers must be seen to support it and encourage parents to become involved.

A further issue concerns the interaction of parents and staff—particularly staff attitude and ability to interact with parents. Managing a range of parental attitudes from non-engaged, sometimes hostile, or shy and awkward, to highly confident and assertive—not to mention a range of challenging social issues associated—is evidently a challenge for teachers.

It had been assumed that the key challenge was to engage the parents, which by necessity includes the staff welcoming and engaging with the parents. It was now clear that an impediment to parental engagement is the quality of staff and parent interactions. It reinforces the importance of the 'softly softly' approach being taken. It is critical that staff are not antagonised by 'outsiders' coming to the school and telling them what to do. A further challenge therefore is to encourage and support staff to create an inclusive welcoming environment at the school, part of which is to positively endorse the project if 'hard to reach' parents are to become involved in the school and in learning.

A further observation by the project officer was the amount of care parents took with the preparation of the covers. The interest shown was markedly high, suggesting that for at least some of the marginally engaged parents, activities that show a clear benefit to their children may provide a way forward.

### **Key Learnings**

The learnings from the project so far underline the difficulties this school, and probably others, face, including

the lack of response to requests for information, and apparently contradictory results to opinion surveys. For example, results from a survey to establish how well the school communicated with parents were generally positive which were at odds with the survey results from the previous year compiled by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development which were very negative. Further research will be gathered through surveys and focus groups to test these results and map any changes.

The troubled state of the school in terms of generally low morale and child misbehaviour has been recently confirmed by the allocation of an education worker to the school. The education worker is currently working with the school to develop strategies for dealing with the inappropriate behaviour of the students. Her reaction on hearing of this project was very positive.

A noticeable increase in the level of enthusiasm and commitment to the project by council members has been discernible. For example, they were very interested to hear of development of a logo for the project and one parent member arranged a donation of a sign from the local sign-making company. Council also continues to make a valuable contribution as a forum for discussion of ideas and solutions. It has become even more critical that council is on side, in a school where morale is generally so low.

The most recent organised activity was a cookery demonstration, a most enjoyable and positive experience. Numbers were limited and the parents that attended were those who would probably be described as already engaged but they were so positive about the experience and so appreciative of it that it seems to be an unexpected side benefit—something constructive and encouraging for these parents in a school more usually characterised by low morale and poor student behaviour. It is becoming apparent that another possible unexpected benefit of the project is that it is providing a more positive experience of the school for those who are already engaged with the school and their children's education. Their attendance at the cookery demonstration appears to have improved their feelings about the school and what the school community can offer.

Yet there are some parents who are not engaged with the school in any way, some being rarely, if ever, sighted. For the next activity—a numeracy session for prep to year four parents; parents will be rung individually and invited, in addition to an invitation being sent home. It is acknowledged that it is success in reaching this sector





that will still take quite some time as efforts to ring them on previous occasions have been unsuccessful. It is these parents in particular that PPPP wishes to reach: to first get them into the school, and then to engage them in useful learning and skill development. However, the project partners are beginning to discern three strands to the parent cohort:

- those that are engaged and are happy to attend events if circumstances allow
- those that have little or no connection with the school
- those that are tentative about attending (shy, feel intimidated, lacking confidence) but with some encouragement we are hopeful we can succeed in attracting them to activities, particularly if it is of benefit to their child.

It is unclear how long this process may take, but even after six months it seems reasonable to say that there have been changes for the good—sufficient to encourage us to continue in aiming towards our ultimate goal of engaging these parents in both their children’s education and their own.

## Conclusion

Responses to the PPPP project in the community suggest there are many schools, parents and agencies interested in the outcomes of this project. Early findings from the project indicate there is much to consider, including how to deal with parents from widely differing socio-economic backgrounds in one school. This situation may arguably be more evident in rural communities where schools serve the entire community, rather than metropolitan suburbs where pockets of advantage and disadvantage are perhaps more likely to be defined by location or suburbs. Also to be investigated further is the possibility that parents are

more likely to undertake an involvement in the school if it directly benefits the children; thus learning programs for parents need to consider this in the planning and to develop their own learning development accordingly in the PPPP project.

Other considerations will arise as the project progresses. However, at this stage, project partners remain of the view that working with the parents is a valid place to begin, despite the challenges involved. ‘Hard to reach’ parents according to a new British report by Anthony Fielier, are “undoubtedly one of the most demanding issues facing schools.”

The design of the research recognises what each of the partners brings to the table: local solutions to local problems. The project team, in conjunction with school council and the staff of the school, will continue to guide the inquiry and help refine the project.

Success is likely to be small increments—such as arresting further disengagement of what might be termed the ‘middle band’ of parents by providing activities that they can be involved in and stay in touch with the school. This leads to asking questions such as ‘What *is* the problem?’, ‘What would success look like?’ and questions about how will we know whether the project’s strategies are working.

Here the advantage of having a dedicated project officer has meant the ability to reflect changes back quite quickly to the project team. Similarly the supportive response of the school council can be utilised in the project’s implementation—the cycles of action learning. At the end of this project there will be direct benefits for children and their long term attitude to education, for their families, and for the school community:

- Parents will have learnt new skills and feel more comfortable about being involved in the school community and they will become part of the school community and proactive supporters of their children’s schooling. They will gain life skills, improved literacy and numeracy, and connections, enhancing their employment prospects and life choices.
- The school will have a more cohesive and enthusiastic school community.
- The action research arising out of the project will help the school and its council to develop improved education leadership including practical long term engagement processes.

- A long term outcome is to break the cycle of family dysfunction and marginalisation by creating a welcoming environment for parents, and providing adult education in the school setting.

The problem of rural schools struggling with a relatively small number of families who are caught in a cycle of poverty, anti-social behaviour and low literacy levels is not confined to this school, as evidenced by other schools already expressing strong interest in the project. Such families can have a highly detrimental impact on the whole school and in the long term, on the community. The cycle can continue over generations, straining tolerance and educational and community resources, and most of all, impair the life opportunities of those involved.

The PPPP project has chosen one approach to address a part of a very complex problem and any successful outcomes are likely to be part of a complex set of solutions. However, the initiative has commenced with considerable goodwill and a strong partnership.

It is envisaged that the project team will present the next stage of this 'story' to the 2011 VALBEC Conference when it is hoped that some of the outcomes will have been realised and a difference made for some struggling families who have so far been unable to successfully benefit from the educational opportunities that exist in the community.

Julie Neeson is Executive Officer at Southern Grampians Adult Education. Julie has worked in adult education in South West Victoria for over twenty years. With a passion for literacy Julie has developed many programs with a life-skills literacy focus. The anecdotal generational impact of literacy has led to the development of this project.

Dr Kaye Scholfield manages RMIT's Hamilton campus. She has a long involvement in community and education, strongly supporting partnerships including local research and initiatives that develop community capacity. Kaye has a particular interest in rural education, including the need for access to appropriate education, training and employment for rural people.

Melissa Collits had worked for over twenty years in the publishing industry before moving to country Victoria approximately three years ago. Since moving to the region she has been pleased to use her project management and communications experience in the local education sector.

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# Blue Buffalos and Battered Soccer Cards

*By Sue Ollerhead*

**Sue Ollerhead uses some delightful examples to draw parallels between literacy programs in Australia and South Africa. She questions reporting and administrative requirements that take time from more important aspects of teaching such as training and professional development, often leaving teachers to rely on a deficit model. The author concludes that the way forward is to recognise the centrality of the social uses of literacy.**

‘Ek kan skryf maar ek kannie lees nie. Ek’s seker dom,’ (‘I can write but I cannot read. I must be stupid’) \*Mma Lizzie says. She sighs, removing her glasses and rubbing rheumy, tired eyes. This is the elderly learner’s frank assessment of her literacy ability when we first meet over sweet, milky mugs of tea during a break in her numeracy class.

Later, it becomes clear Mma Lizzie is making little headway with a worksheet designed to practise the concept of hundreds, tens and units. Teacher Andiswa delivers the worksheet instructions in Xhosa. ‘You must decide what goes in the hundreds, tens and units column, then you must do the sum.’ Very slowly and carefully, Mma Lizzie copies the digits that make up the number 17. She places a number 1 under the first column marked H, and a 7 under the column marked T. Teacher Andiswa marks her work incorrect with a red pen. Mma Lizzie asks for a new worksheet, so she ‘can get it perfect, with no red marks.’ We move on to the long addition sums. To complete these, Mma Lizzie needs to use a calculator, but the numbers on the screen are faint and difficult to read. Two of her classmates offer to help, earning themselves a sharp rebuke from teacher Andiswa. ‘Mma Lizzie must not be lazy, she must learn to work by herself,’ she explains.

Competing for space on the cramped classroom table that Mma Lizzie shares with five other learners are piles of worksheets and assessment portfolios. While the learners complete their sums, teacher Andiswa pastes worksheets from a previous lesson into the learners’ portfolios, to provide a record of their completed work. On nearby shelves, scores of new readers, some not even out of their plastic packaging, lie neatly piled, untouched and unread.

Mma Lizzie is a seventy-one year old learner attending the Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) program at the Community Learning Centre in a picturesque coastal

town in South Africa’s Western Cape Province. She has never attended school, and has worked as a domestic worker for most of her life. Xhosa is Mma Lizzie’s first language, though she can also speak Afrikaans fluently. This is because, at the age of eight, she went to work as a domestic worker for an Afrikaans family in a farming town in the remote Karoo district. I have been visiting and working with Mma Lizzie and the rest of her class for the past three months. As a PhD student in Australia, researching adult literacy tuition to very low-literate adults, I am currently spending an extended period in South Africa. This has given me an ideal opportunity to observe and reflect on adult literacy teaching and learning practices in my home country, and to investigate whether any parallels exist with data I’ve collected from literacy programs in western Sydney over the past two years.

## **South Africa and Australia parallels**

While Australia and South Africa have two very distinct historical and socio-economic contexts, they are similar in one important respect: both offer nationally funded and administered mass adult literacy programs, which emphasise the acquisition of skills for the workplace. In Australia, this training is offered in the form of the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP), and in South Africa, the Adult Basic Education and Training Program (ABET).

Australia’s growing intake of immigrants with refugee backgrounds from countries such as Sudan, Afghanistan and Iraq, has resulted in the emergence of adult literacy classes attended by learners who have received very little or no formal education. Many Australian teachers whom I have interviewed admit to being ill-prepared to teach such learners, most of whom display little or no literacy ability in their first languages. In the same way, many South African learners attending ABET classes have had minimal or no formal schooling and little formal literacy instruction. Overall, therefore, beginner literacy classes in Australia and South Africa are not all that dissimilar in the challenges and opportunities they pose for both teachers and learners.



A discussion of South Africa's ABET program would be incomplete without acknowledging the unique historical context in which it was conceptualised. Despite the fact that the government spends almost twenty percent of its total budget on education, it is generally agreed that far greater resources need to be mobilised to undo the detrimental effects of Bantu education, an inferior form of schooling provided to black South Africans during the apartheid era ([www.education.gov.za](http://www.education.gov.za)). This had its origins in President H. F. Verwoerd's Bantu Education Act of 1953, which stipulated that black South Africans needed only sufficient education to equip them to carry out labour for their white counterparts. The legacy of this policy has long remained in the form of under-resourced township schools, staffed by poorly trained teachers. Motivation amongst such teachers is generally low, and August's crippling nationwide public sector wage strikes saw township schools closed en masse for over three weeks, leaving learners to fend for themselves at crucial exam times. Perhaps apartheid's most abiding legacy, however, is South Africa's high illiteracy rate. According to ABET, over 3.3 million adults are illiterate in South Africa, although many consider these numbers to be higher (<http://www.abet.co.za>).

Over the past decade, educational reform in South Africa has resulted in the formulation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), which categorises three tiers of education, namely General Education and Training; Further Education and Training; and Higher Education and Training. ABET falls under the General Education and Training band, corresponding roughly with grades zero to nine in terms of general school education. Implied in this correlation is that adults with little or no schooling need to complete four levels of

intensive training to get them up to speed with school leavers, before they can make a meaningful contribution to the workplace and hence the country's economy.

Significant parallels can be drawn here with Australia's LLNP, which stipulates a number of 'improvements' that learners need to make in certain discrete literacy skills within delineated time-frames. This decontextualised, 'building block' approach to literacy teaching fits neatly into what Street termed an autonomous or deficit model of literacy (1984). According to Prinsloo and Kell (1997), such a view posits illiteracy as a gatekeeper which prevents people from assuming any significant participation in social, political and economic processes.

### Pedagogical challenges

In contrast, ethnographically-based research into the social uses of literacy in South Africa (Prinsloo & Breier, 1996) provides much evidence to show how people with no formal education are adept at using lived experience and unique knowledge of their immediate environments to carry out daily, literacy-dependent tasks. The research also highlights the gap that exists between the formal, text-based literacy tuition offered in ABET classrooms, and the 'real' literacy practices learners carry out in their everyday lives (Kell, 1996).

Indeed, it is hard to comprehend how completing copious worksheets, full of numbers and activities she does not understand, benefits Mma Lizzie's life in any material way. It is also puzzling to see how the work she attempts in class helps her to realise her two chief literacy goals, namely, being able to read her bible, and being able to withdraw her pension money by herself, without having to rely on the help of her 'stoute' (naughty) children. Subsequent informal chats with Mma Lizzie reveal numerous instances in which she uses local, situated knowledge to carry out literacy-related tasks and activities. For example, she relates how, each month when she goes to the bank to withdraw her money, she asks the teller to give her 'vier blou buffels en 'n pienk leeu' ('four blue buffalos and a pink lion'). 'Blue buffalos' refer to the blue-tinted one hundred rand notes, which bear a picture of the Cape buffalo, and 'pink lion' refers to the rose-tinted fifty rand note, which depicts a lion. With a self-conscious giggle, Mma Lizzie explains how, once she has counted out four buffalos and one lion, she knows that she has received the correct amount from the teller. She also knows that she then has sufficient money to buy the staple groceries she needs for that month.



## Administrative challenges

The challenges experienced within the ABET program are by no means confined to the classroom. The Community Learning Centre director Mr Maartens says that he frequently feels overwhelmed by the administrative and reporting responsibilities placed on both him and his teachers. In its structure, ABET is a sophisticated and complex model, comprising certification, learning outcomes and grids of corresponding qualifications that move across school, vocational and adult education. The portability of these qualifications depends on the carrying out of rigorous and continuous assessment, placing huge reporting and administrative burdens on teachers. Maartens' comments resonate with those of Australian LLNP teachers, who speak equally despairingly of the program's considerable demands on accountability that result in increased and onerous administration loads.

The knock-on effects of the assessment burden at the Community Learning Centre are all too clear. Presently, the centre is preparing for an audit by the National Education Department. As a result, Mr Maartens informs me teacher training has been suspended until all learner assessment portfolios have been brought up to date and prepared for official scrutiny. Discussions with teachers, however, reveal that no teacher training has been carried out at all this year. I find this significant, considering that these teachers have very little or no training in their field. According to Maartens, the centre's teachers were recruited on the basis of having a matriculation qualification and their indicated willingness to pursue a tertiary education. Apart from Maartens, none of the teachers at the centre has a teaching qualification.

Another telling challenge for Maartens is the task of recruiting new students to the centre. Maartens says, 'It is difficult to convince people to come and attend class, especially those who are low-literate. With unemployment standing at forty percent, there is little incentive for those who are not literate to think that learning how to read and write will get them a job.' Personally, I find it disheartening that, while much effort and expense has gone into devising a world-class, sophisticated model of lifelong learning to redress educational disadvantage in South Africa, the very learners it targets seem to remain unconvinced as to the potential benefits of this education.

## Towards the future

As I left the Centre last week, one of Mma Lizzie's classmates, Tata Dick, asked me to explain 'where I live

now, exactly.' Answering his question proved a complex and slightly intimidating task: Tata Dick speaks Xhosa, but no English or Afrikaans, and my Xhosa is faltering at best. Struggling to find a frame of reference to explain a country geographically and culturally remote from Africa, I stumbled across a brainwave. An avid soccer fan, Tata Dick never fails to arrive at class wearing a Manchester United cap. The fact that South Africa hosted the recent Soccer World Cup is an immense source of pride for him. 'Tata Dick, do you remember the Soccerroos?' I asked. He broke into a beatific smile. 'Yebo, Soccerroos, yebo, Harry Kool!' He slapped his thigh, laughing loudly. From his folder, he produced one of several battered soccer collectors card, bearing the image of Australia's talisman striker Harry Kewell. The connection was immediate. Thus, united in our soccer fandom, we proceeded to find Australia on a map of the world, paying careful attention to its position in relation to Mzansi (South Africa).

Researchers investigating the social uses of literacy in South Africa (Prinsloo & Breier, Kell, 1996) advocate a move towards pedagogical practices which recognise, consolidate and extend learners' existing literacy-related activities. The more I get to know Mma Lizzie and her classmates, the more I find myself wishing we could banish worksheets in favour of many more instances of blue buffalos and battered soccer cards. Surely it *must* be possible to incorporate this unique, situated knowledge and ability into lessons that are relevant and engaging, and which draw on learners' unique social identities?

My feeling is that, until sufficient collective will and resources are mobilised to train teachers to adopt such methods and practices, teachers will continue to act chiefly as administrators, pasting worksheets into portfolios. Far worse though, is the likelihood that learners like Mma Lizzie will continue to characterise themselves as 'dom' in such classrooms, and the discourse of deficit that has long pervaded the domain of adult literacy teaching, will be set to continue.

**Sue Ollerhead is a doctoral student in applied linguistics at Macquarie University, Sydney. She has taught English as an additional language in Africa, Europe and Australia, and worked as an English language materials developer for schools in sub-Saharan Africa. Her main interests are second language acquisition and language in education, with a specific focus on the instruction of very low-literate adults.**

Continued on page 22 ...

# The Power of Real Learning

By Tricia Bowen

If you missed the 2010 VALBEC Conference, or if you want to know about a session you did not attend, Tricia Bowen reports here.

It was early June, so cold enough for gloves and scarf, as one hundred and twenty delegates headed to the William Angliss College in Melbourne's CBD for the annual VALBEC Conference. On arrival, both the atmosphere and the coffee were warm and inviting, while the music provided by *The Parkville String Quartet* added to the positive ambience. The conference theme this year was *I Learn You Learn We Learn*. The focus was to be on real learning, with participants asked to examine how we learn as individuals, and how learning ultimately underpins our sense of connectedness to the broader community.

The Hon Joan Kirner AM was the first of the keynote speakers. She reminded us all that we were part of an enthusiastic, creative and very passionate field. While she encouraged us to celebrate our significant achievements, she also suggested that perhaps we needed to make a little more noise, especially when it comes to ensuring that adult literacy and basic education be recognised for what it is, a significant and essential contributor to social cohesion.

The next of the keynote speakers was Kate Perkins, a specialist in the leadership and management of innovation and change, with extensive experience in the literacy and numeracy field. She introduced us to the concept of our Personal Practical Knowledge, our PPK; in short, the knowledge, skills, experience, values, beliefs and assumptions that we bring to situations and

much of our decision-making. She observed that while our PPK was extremely valuable, it could also trap us in familiar and potentially outmoded patterns of thinking. Up to this point I'd been sitting very comfortably next to a colleague that I'd known for years. But suddenly Kate got us all up and moving, asking us to take up a new chair, a new position in the room, and to share our insights and experiences with new people we had never met. The point was well made. If real learning is to occur, then perhaps we all need to consider things in alternative ways, and to take our thinking in new directions.

From there it was time for morning tea, and then delegates moved off in different directions, depending on their choice of session. Being a bit of a footy tragic, I went along to *Sport meets Friere—the Mt Evelyn Football/Netball Club History project*. This session described an innovative project, which focused on the use of digital literacies to create a history of the Mt Evelyn Football/Netball Club. Kerrin Pryor, education co-ordinator at Morrisons, explained how the project actively engaged club members in the creation of their own club's history. The session provided participants with the opportunity to examine the use of digital cameras to record and reflect upon lived experience, and encouraged us to reflect on their use in a range of learning contexts.

There was plenty of opportunity for real learning across other sessions. Tim Morris from RMIT, together with a group of his Certificate in General Education for Adults students, elaborated on the value of finding a real audience through publishing in *The Age* online. Julie Neeson, Melissa Collits and Dr Kaye Scholfield, described an exciting project taking place in Hamilton in western Victoria, which sees parents connecting in meaningful ways within the school community. Serena Seah in her session, *Catering for learner needs—Chinese Heritage Culture*, offered ideas as to how we may best meet the needs of Chinese learners in the classroom.

There were more choices to be had in the second session before lunch. I was able to hear Sally Thompson, chief executive officer of Adult Learning Australia, give



Joan Kirner and VALBEC committee

a comprehensive and thought-provoking overview regarding the international perspective on adult learning. Chris Tully and Vicki Doukas provided practical ideas for dealing with diversity in the numeracy/science classroom and Lilliana Hajncs and Jacky Springall offered valuable suggestions for developing communication skills for employment pathways. Also on offer at this time was a new resources showcase.

It was one o'clock and time for lunch with great catering provided by William Angliss. Delegates had the opportunity to chat, reflect on what they'd heard, and browse the marketplace, with a host of resources on offer from the Bookery, AMES, Southern Grampians Adult Education, Pageturners, Kangan and the Victorian Electoral Commission/Parliament Victoria.

After lunch there was another selection of stimulating sessions on offer. I was inspired to hear about an exciting project based in the Riverina, with adult literacy practitioners developing collaborative community partnerships to facilitate learning. Ann Leske and Leonie Francis from the Riverina TAFE described innovative family literacy models, involving people from diverse cultures, which addressed barriers to social inclusion and learning in the community.

In another session Liz Suda asked participants to consider what is an essential question, and how we may encourage learners to pose questions that invite even more questions. Bronwyn Stretton, from the Gordon Institute of TAFE, ran a very helpful workshop in developing and documenting learning plans, while Bronwen Hickman in her workshop, *Sudoku without tears*, offered suggestions for assisting learners to develop skills in problem solving, clear thinking and observation.



The afternoon Keynote address, *Feel Good, Think Smart—the role of emotion in learning*, was presented by Merv Edmunds, a teacher, trainer and therapist. In his stimulating address, he encouraged us all to recognise the importance of bringing positive emotions to learning, and succinctly reminded us that when we feel better, we learn better.

The temperature hadn't changed a great deal by the time I headed away from William Angliss and down King Street to catch the tram. But I was conscious of a renewed sense of energy and enthusiasm regarding what real learning was, and what we as committed educators and advocates for such learning had achieved, and could achieve into the future. It provided more than enough warmth on the journey home.

For more information about the 2010 VALBEC Conference sessions and presenters go to [www.valbec.org.au](http://www.valbec.org.au).

**Tricia Bowen is a freelance writer, researcher and teacher based in Melbourne.**

# Policy, Statistics and Story

By Kerrin Pryor and Sandra Wolfe

The following session snapshots and evaluations were constructed from reports on the 2010 Australian Council for Adult Literacy Conference submitted by the above two authors. The conference, held in Darwin in September, was titled *Hands up... Hands on*.

## Policy and programs

As the fragrant frangipani flowers bloomed and dropped upon the footpaths of Darwin and a thirty-four degree heat greeted us unaccustomed Melbournites, people from all over Australia, New Zealand and Timor congregated on the traditional Larrakia land at the Charles Darwin University to listen, speak, learn and network about adult literacy. The opening speaker, Professor Joe Lo Bianco, chair of language and literacy education and Associate Dean (Global Engagement) at the University of Melbourne, inspired us with the idea that there is a window of opportunity right now to highlight and re-position adult literacy in Australia. Lo Bianco addressed Australia's current absence of a national policy on adult literacy and urged us to consider that policy should really inform and direct the activities we develop and undertake in the field. While programs are lead by bureaucrats, policy allows practitioners more of a say in how literacy learning is implemented at the grass roots. Yet programs have taken the place of policies; the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) Foundation Skills Taster Course programs comes to mind where practitioners are forced into twelve short weeks to collaborate with literacy learners with strict criteria accompanied by outcomes based reporting. Lo Bianco enforced the idea that now is the time for invigorated policy. As literacy leaders and practitioners we need to collect and marry stories to statistics to guide new policy. And the conference certainly delivered on both statistics and stories. In keeping with Lo Bianco's predictions that there is a resurgence of the oral culture emerging, stories abounded at the national conference.

## Policy

Kirsty Sword Gusmao, chairwoman of the Alola Foundation and Goodwill Ambassador for Education, Timor- Leste, followed with an explanation of the formation of the Alola Foundation. She indicated that she had been working with Lo Bianco on the development of a national policy on adult literacy for Timor-Leste. Whilst in its infancy, this work is already

showing clearly defined goals, one of which is to have all women in Timor-Leste educated to at least primary school level. Further, the Alola Foundation also actively promotes the need for pre-school teaching qualifications as an important part of the ownership of the national education directive.

## Statistics

Loucas Harous from the Australian Bureau of Statistics spoke about the new Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), which is a new international adult literacy study commissioned by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), to be administered on a three-year cycle. The first administration will be in 2011, in about twenty-four countries. In Australia we will call it the Survey of Adult Competencies (SAC). The assessment is a household survey of adults between the ages of sixteen and sixty-four, and will be linked with previous international adult literacy surveys, the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) and the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALLS). PIAAC will assess proficiency in literacy (reading), numeracy and problem-solving in a technology-rich environment. The assessments will be computer delivered in all three domains, though there will also be paper-based components in literacy and numeracy. The international consortium that is managing the assessment on behalf of the OECD has commissioned the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to develop all of the new literacy tasks for PIAAC, drawing on both original development and on contributions from participating countries. See [www.acer.edu.au](http://www.acer.edu.au) for more information. From networking over lunch I learnt a new project will map the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) levels to the results of the SAC which will surely give more meaning to the 2011 statistics.

## Programs

Michelle Circelli, from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), discussed *From policy*



*to practice and back again: Mapping different measures of literacy—can it be done and what will it mean?* The possibility of mapping the ALLS results to the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) levels provided a tantalizing lure for those of us who just love to connect the dots. Michelle explained that the ALLS surveys had been commissioned and the question levels determined by the OECD. The ALLS survey provided us with a snap shot into adult language, literacy and numeracy levels at a given point in time. The ACSF is currently used by language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) practitioners to evaluate a student's initial and subsequent (post-training) literacy and/or numeracy levels. While the ACSF is used mostly as measure of progress in LLN programs, the complexities of using it with ALLS survey, which was only conducted every six to ten years and has international benchmarking of questions, were highlighted. How to interpret the results? The discussion deepened to consider that any adult with real literacy difficulties would fall into level one. How far down will or should the ACSF measure? How many people at ALLS level one are in fact illiterate? This session certainly provoked a lot of discussion. At this time many more questions were raised than could be answered.

### **Core skills framework**

Phillipa McLean presented *Moving along with ACSF* where we moderated a number of assessment tasks using the ACSF. This was an illuminating way of identifying the level of the assessment question using the ACSF. As a novice ACSF user, this session was successful and rewarding given that it took relatively little time to understand how to apply the framework in this context. A highly recommended session for anyone interested in creating assessment tasks at the appropriate level for a qualification.

### **Story**

Tricia Bowen in her down to earth and engaging style led us through her project *Voices from work- Story as the starting point in workplace literacy materials*. Tricia ventured into the world of the textile, clothing and footwear industry, listening, recording and retelling the workers' stories to create materials for delivery of a certificate qualification in the industry. She began by dividing the competencies into four categories: people, skills, processes

and the law. The outcome was a set of materials that truly reflect the people's experiences as well as the industry's discourse. The importance of *narrative* came to life in this workshop. I barely took notes; I was so interested in hearing the stories of the people Tricia worked with.

### **Crocodiles and polar bears**

*Crocodiles and polar bears: A cross cultural comparison of adult learning in remote indigenous communities* presented by Alison Reedy and Michelle Eady, demonstrated differences and similarities between Australia's and Canada's isolated indigenous people and each country's approach to literacy funding. Digital literacy projects were set up for both indigenous groups; however Canada's project proved more successful mostly due to participants having easier access to computers compared to their Australian counterparts. While there were many statistics, the stories the presenters told helped make this a very interesting workshop, especially learning how Canada funds literacy with separate literacy bodies and networks compared to Australia's paradigm of embedding in employability outcomes. Canada has thirteen organisations alone that cater for deaf people. It seems we can learn a lot from Canada's approach to adult literacy.

### **Evaluation**

Not surprisingly, the emerging theme of the conference was policy and statistics. How do we use statistics to inform our policy and programs and conversely how do we use our policies and programs to improve our statistics. Darwin was a great venue and smooth organisation of the conference and associated events together with the opportunity to mix with so many practitioners from different backgrounds both interstate and overseas made the experience invaluable.

**Kerrin Pryor has worked in adult literacy for over twenty years and on numerous projects including 'Integrating new literacies into classroom practice'. She now works as Education Coordinator at Morrisons in Mt Evelyn, Victoria.**

**Sandra Wolfe is the Program and Curriculum Manager at Bendigo Technical Education College (a division of Bendigo TAFE) in Victoria.**

## Finding a real audience

By Tim Morris

**Tim Morris describes how teachers can develop an authentic writing task. The benefit of a real task extends beyond the task itself and assists in developing learner confidence.**

If public speaking is the number one fear, and death number two, then getting students from the Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA) course to volunteer to speak to an audience of teachers at a Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council (VALBEC) conference was a coup! They helped present and explain a media literacy task done in class at RMIT University. How did these students have enough confidence to manage their fear?

This article reflects on the issue of confidence for learners returning to study in the Certificates II and III CGEA program. It describes a task involving getting students published online with the *The Age* newspaper and offers observations and reflections on how students have developed as confident learners with a critical eye to evaluate news media. Furthermore I have seen students come to see themselves as successful learners and critical risk takers.

CGEA students at RMIT University are enrolled in a Certificate II and III combined class. Students range in age, language and educational background. Common to all students are the jitters associated with dramatic change and return to study after months or years away from formal schooling. Coming back to a classroom environment is initially daunting and a typical term has days of highs and lows. Attendance in itself can be a mark of success. Learners, and teenage learners particularly, may not recognize that the skills, knowledge and qualities they already possess are highly transferable. It is for this reason that key employability skills underpin the delivery of the CGEA certificates. Students bring with them past employment and study experience and employment skills and knowledge along with some anxiety. As a starting point I use getting published online with *The Age* newspaper as an ice breaker and diagnostic tool.

The task of students getting published online begins with the most current weekly issue from *The Age Education Resource Centre* website, <http://education.theage.com.au>. There are several steps including student discussions



to written submissions, which can be achieved within a week over three lessons as a stand-alone exercise. The task itself however provides a bigger springboard for further media literacy work throughout the term.

Upon reflection the publishing task can mark a point of departure for student self-esteem allowing students to reach a 'real' audience beyond the classroom and also receive affirmation from family and friends. It is this public recognition and validation that can underpin a willingness to take risks in their learning and try further tasks. This is particularly important when student jitters set in and confidence wanes. Students can be reminded that their opinion was heard beyond the classroom. The decision to publish their opinion was based on merit and rested with the staff at *The Age* newspaper. This was also made clear to students at the beginning of the task to emphasise drafting steps. Students that do not get published can follow the weekly news topics and resubmit.

Initially the value of the task is diagnostic, allowing teachers to observe how each student approaches the task and interacts with the class as a whole. Presenting the class with the current news issue the task can be rather open and relaxed, allowing students to get to know each other and develop the social and oral confidence to raise questions and express their opinions. The second stage of opinion writing can also be free. Students don't need to feel inhibited by formal written structure. Students are then

# Practical matters

given time to peer review and edit each other's work before following the written instructions for online submission.

During the term students keep a media folio with various news reports they collect and discuss, with a focus on persuasive techniques. I observed students beginning to apply the language of alliteration, picking out emotive words and raising questions about why particular images were chosen in print and electronic news sources. (For helpful questions for media literacy see Office for Curriculum, Leadership and Learning Tasmania website listed below).

One lesson in week eight of term stays in my mind. I had given the CGEA class a stack of world atlases and a copy of *World Press Freedoms Index* published by Reporters Without Borders. What I had planned as a lesson opener became the whole lesson of table group conversations. Which countries were in the top ten and which were in the bottom ten? Rated number 174 from a 2009 list of 175 one student was struck by North Korea. He knew the name of the leader; he had seen the caricature in a *South Park* episode. What was it? It bugged him but before lunch the name came to him. It was a great moment and a little example of a learner drawing connections between sources of information. He was able to use different sources of information to understand news and create a more complete news picture.

Getting published has proved to be a simple starting point for students to develop an interest in news media. Through this task students take on a new self-perception

as confident learners. They are able to see themselves as critical readers and possibly even budding writers with a real audience.

My light bulb moment came a month before the June 2010 VALBEC conference. I was preparing this unit of work to present a workshop. A VALBEC organiser suggested a student come along as a guest. A great idea, but would a student be brave enough? Presenting the task at VALBEC I had the support of three CGEA students! They decided how they wanted to introduce their work to the session participants. They also decided which newspaper articles they would like to bring in for a modelling task. They had the chance to show off. They had a real audience and they had the confidence!

**Tim Morris teaches in the School of Education at RMIT University in Melbourne. He presented Finding a Real Audience at the 2010 VALBEC Conference.**

## Resources

- The Age Education Resource Centre, Issues in the news  
<http://www.education.theage.com.au/index.php>  
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... continued from page 16

Note: The names of individuals in this article have been changed to assure anonymity.

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# Technology Matters

## Making the most of your library

By David Bradley

Libraries are full of wonderful resources but many of us don't get time to browse. From library alerts to *Delicious*, David Bradley outlines some easy ways to utilise the library.

There are now many simple ways that libraries can help you find and organise the resources you need for your teaching, inform you of new resources, and find the latest information on what is happening in the profession. Librarians can also help you discover new technologies that will assist you in finding and organising resources online.

### Library alerts

It is sometimes difficult for teaching staff to find the time to visit the library in the school or institute where they work. How do you find out about new materials that are available without having to perform complicated searches or reading a new items document or newsletter that does not link straight to the library catalogue? Most library catalogues now allow you to see up alerts so you could be informed about new materials on a certain subject area, for example, grammar or pronunciation, or new readers. You can also set up alerts for a certain collection, such as English as a second language (ESL), or for a location. These alerts arrive as an email with all the new items hyperlinked to take you straight to the catalogue. This then allows you to place a quick reservation.

### Using *Delicious* to organise the web

It is often difficult to keep track of the useful websites we find on the internet. We might make a note of them in a diary or on a piece of paper or save them to our computer at home or at work by using the bookmark function in an internet browser, but this is not ideal. I frequently get emails from friends and colleagues with a useful website or a link to an article that they think I will be interested in. It is much better to have things in one place that can be easily accessed when you need them. They are also less likely to get lost that way too. This is where social bookmarking can help.

For the last few years, I have been using a free website called *Delicious* ([www.delicious.com](http://www.delicious.com)), which allows me to save all the useful websites I want to keep in one

place. I have also set one up for the library where I work to help other colleagues, teachers and students do the same thing. *Delicious* is known as a social bookmarking website because you can easily share the websites you have saved by providing others with the web address to your *Delicious* page—[www.delicious.com/nameofyourpage](http://www.delicious.com/nameofyourpage). There is a wealth of great ESL material on the internet such as lesson plans, discussion, and grammar exercises, to name a few. Using *Delicious* would make them available to more people as they would be easy to access quickly in one place.

*Delicious* works by individuals adding tags to the websites they have saved on their page. These tags are words or phrases that describe the content of the website; therefore websites with similar content can be grouped together and found quickly. I have worked with a number ESL teachers to add websites to the library's *Delicious* page, so our tags include 'ESL', 'ESL lesson plans', 'grammar exercises', 'vocabulary practice'. This works in a similar way to subjects added to books in a library catalogue, but you choose the subjects yourself.

There are other free sites available that work in a similar way to *Delicious*, but contain more functionality: [www.citeulike.com](http://www.citeulike.com), [www.diigo.com](http://www.diigo.com), [www.connotea.org](http://www.connotea.org). I continue to use *Delicious* because the site is advertisement free and allows others to search all or part of the page without the need to be given much, or if any, explanation on how it is organised or how to use it.

### Access to professional articles

Most libraries subscribe to a number of databases that teaching staff have access to. There is often a wealth of information available in these databases that come from TESOL publications that your school or institute is unable to subscribe to. You can set up alerts that enable you to find out when the latest issue is available. Many libraries, including public libraries, subscribe to databases that contain newspaper articles from all major Australian



newspapers. They are also updated frequently; most are even updated weekly or daily. This means you can access and use library resources without needing to leave your office, home or classroom. You don't need to wait for a reservation to arrive either.

David Bradley is the Faculty Librarian, Further Education at Northern Metropolitan Institute of TAFE in Victoria.

# Teachers stretching their voices

By Clive Hutchison

**The human voice, when combined with new technologies, is an even more powerful teaching tool.**

Using our voices as educators has always been at the heart of effective communication with our students. Most of us have models of influential teachers from our childhood who knew how to enthrall the class whether telling a story in whispered tones, or using a range of modulations and volumes to elicit the desired student responses. During my childhood in primary and secondary school the resident Tanberg reel-to-reel tape recorder was considered the epitome of audio technology. The wonder of hearing our own voices recorded and then played back had a certain spellbinding fascination. Our voices seemed distant and small as they emanated from the leatherette speakers; they seemed altered and yet definitely still recognisable as our own. As we listened to the recorded frequency and timbre of our voices the experience confirmed our uniqueness as surely as our fingerprints. However our voices also unmistakably carried the hum and spirit of our individual personalities. Although we now live in a digital world that thrives on images to push its messages, the role and power of human voice remains undiminished from the time of those early memories.

## Voice recording

New technologies are also allowing the human voice to be recorded, edited and distributed more readily and widely than ever before. Available to the contemporary teacher is an expanse of inexpensive hardware and software tools that make it possible to expand and enrich the classroom experience with, not just their own voice, but with the voices of their students and others from the wider world. No longer are recorded voices laid out end-on-end in a linear fashion as with the old real-to-reel tape deck where, if you wanted a particular piece of audio information, you would need to fast forward or reverse to find it and note with pen and paper its numeric location. Once

recorded the digital file allows non-linear entry at any point. It also allows itself to be copied an endless number of times without any loss of quality. The pocket digital voice recorder enables whole classes to be recorded as a digital file. These files can be subsequently uploaded to the internet and subscribed to by students to use as revision or to keep absent students abreast of the classes they have missed. Transferred from a computer to an MP3 audio player or iPhone the reach of these files is extended. Users can listen where and when they please. This phenomena, known as podcasting is now a regular feature of many a teacher's approach.

## Using voice recordings

Of course the ways in which such technologies can be applied will vary from teacher to teacher. As well as creating a backup of class activities, they can be used to deliver content, provide sound grabs/interviews for discussion, give regular updates of class activities, or to bring expert voices from industry or community to the classroom and beyond. The latest iterations of voice technologies often reside within online learning management systems (LMS) such as *Moodle* and *Blackboard*. These online LMS are increasingly being provided by educational institutions to provide enriched content and more flexible delivery. Here students and teachers can use voice boards and podcasts to communicate teacher to student and student to student. Online classrooms such as *Elluminate* allow teachers to facilitate sessions where participants come together to listen to each other in the same room or break out into smaller rooms. They can discuss issues or share powerpoint presentations and there is an online whiteboard to which all can contribute. These live sessions can also be recorded and further edited and distributed. So it seems increasingly that even as

**Continued on page 28 ...**

# Provider Profile

## Back on Track

*By Jacinta Agostinelli*

**On Track Learning is in Horsham. In this provider profile Jacinta Agostinelli pays tribute to On Track Learning founder, Margaret Simonds, who died in February this year, and discusses the organisation's successes and challenges with manager Martin Bride.**

A winter stillness has paralysed the distant wind turbines and dabs of yellow wattle colour the roadside scrub. Once I pass through the hills and bends of Langi Ghiran National Park the farming landscape is flat but not dull; it is like a deep breath after the congestion of Melbourne. I am driving through western Victoria beyond Ballarat, on my way to Horsham to interview Martin Bride from On Track Learning. My purpose is twofold: to profile the rural provider and to trace the legacy of founder, Margaret Simonds.

Have you been to one of the twilight forums held by the Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council (VALBEC) at the North Fitzroy Star Hotel? (If not, you should get to the next one because they are fun!) The idea of delivering literacy in a pub was happening in the Horsham district well before the VALBEC twilight forums. Early in her career Margaret Simonds realised that the best way to reach 'hard to reach' learners was to take the learning to them; she took her literacy class to 'the local'. The classes in little towns such as Moyston and Marnoo (cut off by the recent Victorian September floods) were fondly known as 'pub literacy'. Whether VALBEC modelled their delivery on Margaret Simonds' idea is uncertain, but what is certain is that Margaret started something that continues today.

Originally from Melbourne, Margaret had a long and successful career in teaching and adult literacy and basic education in the Western District and Horsham. In 2003 she won the Inaugural Minister's Award for Outstanding Contribution to Literacy and Numeracy. She held a number of positions over the years: language consultant; Adult Literacy Field Officer for Wimmera Community College of TAFE; Central Highlands Wimmera Regional Councillor for the Australian Council for Further Education; teacher and co-ordinator at the University of Ballarat, Horsham TAFE Campus; volunteer in the literacy field. In about 1980, and as a volunteer, Margaret established Wimmera Adult Learning and



Basic Education Group (WALBEG), now On Track Learning, with the intention of providing literacy and numeracy tuition to adults. She recognised that a number of students doing vocational learning through the TAFE college could not complete their course because they could not read and write well enough. Margaret was a literacy teacher at On Track Learning for thirty years, and headed the organisation from its inception until 2003.

On Track Learning is attached to the Ballarat University Campus in Horsham. It is in a quiet part of town and appears to be a peaceful place to learn. It is a community based, non-profit registered training organisation and is an incorporated body with a committee of management. Martin Bride is the executive officer.

The organisation offers a narrow but sought after range of classes: the Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA); pre-accredited literacy for young school leavers, particularly young males, wanting to enter the police force and the army; and a teacher aide course that has been offered for the past four years. Horsham is a relatively small regional town of around thirteen and a half thousand inhabitants. The smaller surrounding towns have populations around one thousand. The area covered by On Track is about one hundred kilometres to the north and about sixty kilometres to the south. The broad geographical area coupled with small populations presents challenges that many regional providers would face.

The first challenge is delivery. Margaret Simonds used to send teachers out to the outlying towns where they would deliver in the pubs, the footy club rooms or the neighbourhood house if there was one. She was also known to teach by teleconference. Margaret was versatile and innovative. On Track is still an innovative organisation and Martin makes the most of new technologies by mixing face-to-face delivery with distance learning, digital recordings and online delivery. In this respect On Track is more technologically advanced than many similar sized city providers. Necessity is the great mother of invention! Martin has participated in a number of eLearning projects to learn about online delivery and found the projects great for benefiting from everyone's input, so short-cutting the job of sifting through the myriad of online tools available to teachers.

There are however many problems associated with digital and online delivery. While it works quite well for the higher level teacher aide course students, many literacy and basic education students face barriers such as no private access to internet, broadband, or iPhones. Older literacy students often need more teacher support to use these tools, even when they do have access. The main barrier faced by literacy students however, says Martin, is the fact that they need confidence building in order to succeed, and the best way to build a student's confidence is through direct contact with a teacher. Distance, online and digital technologies do not consider this fundamental need of literacy students.

But back to the tyranny of distance and its challenges. Small populations mean small student numbers. Courses cannot continue for years as they do in the city because the provider simply runs out of students. Sometimes a course cannot even be offered because there are not enough students to make it viable, to attract funding or to justify the amount of backroom work required to set up an online course. One way that On Track addresses the problem of low numbers is by working in learning partnerships with other local organisations. The CGEA is delivered to young people in conjunction with a youth worker from the local shire council. Working with Uniting Care, On Track has been able to offer transport



**Martin Bride, On Track Manager**

to students from outlying areas. The Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) has enabled connections with job network providers and together they are working to engage young people to return to study through a work experience type project, which also addresses a need within the community, such as establishing a community garden. Creating learning partnerships with other local organisations is not just a means to address the problem of student numbers; it is also good practice. On Track has strong community links, which I am beginning to believe, is a common feature of rural adult and community education providers.

Margaret served on the On Track Committee of Management up until a month or two before she died. She had enormous energy and foresight, and the gift of education that she gave to Horsham and the surrounding towns will live for many years to come. Judy Krahe the current chairperson of On Track Learning said that Margaret Simonds, 'had an impact on the lives of students and colleagues that we don't often see.' Martin Bride is a reflective manager who has a robust understanding of adult education and adult learners. He continues Margaret's vision with passion and commitment.

**Jacinta Agostinelli is the editor of *Fine Print* and an ESL and literacy teacher in Melbourne.**

# Foreign Correspondence

## The 8<sup>TH</sup> Asia TEFL Conference

By Lia (Emily) Cross

Lia (Emily) Cross provides us with an overview of this interesting sounding Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) conference.

The above conference, hosted by the Vietnam National University and the University of Languages and International Studies, took place at the La Thanh Hotel in Hanoi in August 2010 and addressed the theme *Teaching English as a global language: creating and sharing the Asian framework of practice*. It was attended by delegates from the Middle East, South, North and Central Asia, East Asia, South-East Asia, Australia and New Zealand—a huge area.

With five plenary speakers (from United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, Indonesia, China) and six keynote speakers, plus over three hundred presenters, the conference was jam-packed with several thousand delegates in attendance. As a consequence it is impossible to do the conference justice in a few words; rather, this provides an overview of major issues.

First, some facts. The inner circle of native English speaking countries (United Kingdom, United States of America, Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) combined, now have fewer speakers of English than those where English is spoken as a foreign, second or third language. In mainland China alone, almost 400 million adults and children are now studying English (latest figures reported on national television recently) and the number is growing. Globally, more than one billion people speak English in some form or other (Graddol, 2006:62) with Mandarin a close second. Most of these people live in developing countries and most of these are in Asia. The issues that the above facts pose are enormous and a few of these are:

- Which variety of English to teach (British, American, global English (whatever that means!))
- Should instruction take place in one of the above varieties or in local hybrids? (Indian English, Chinese English, Singapore English, Malaysian English, etc)
- What role does the internet play in English teaching?
- Which methodologies should be used?



Lia (Emily) Cross

The above were all discussed at this conference creating much interaction! Professor Le Van Canh presented a hilarious speech highlighting some local (Asian) varieties of English and concluded that ‘native like norms should be the starting point’ for classroom teaching but all learners should be made aware of the ‘varieties of Englishes they will face outside the classroom walls.’ Whilst Professor Wang Haixiao from Nanjing University, in his paper *Teaching English the Asian way*, proposed that we should do away with fancy methodology and teach English in the tried and true ways of lots of memorization etc. His paper received a lot of attention and makes fascinating reading!

Some local issues were highlighted:

- Disparity of teaching English between urban and rural areas (China and India especially)
- Lack of culturally appropriate teaching materials
- Lack of resources
- Insufficient numbers of properly trained local English teachers
- Teaching to pass exams versus wider exploration of language teaching purposes

Some of us have heard the above before in our own countries but here we are talking about developing



countries, some with huge populations and enormous problems trying to teach English and other subjects in sometimes incredible classroom settings. I've taught in some of these and the mind boggles!

Nevertheless, many Asian countries have included English teaching in their education policies and increasingly higher education institutions in the region use English as the medium of instruction. In addition, cross-regional study is popular with students as Chris Ziguras from RMIT University in Melbourne pointed out in his paper.

For teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL), ESL and teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) who have not attended an Asia TEFL Conference, I encourage you to do so. The sheer pleasure of interacting and sharing ideas with colleagues from such a variety of countries is hard to describe. Not only that, teachers from these countries are teaching in other countries in the region and sharing other sets of perspectives—Uzbekistanis in Japan, Malaysians in Sydney, Australians in China (and everywhere else!!!), Singaporeans in Vietnam, Indians in Malaysia, Iranians in Hong Kong. All communicating in English—fabulous!

Next year the 9<sup>th</sup> Asia TEFL Conference will be held in Seoul, Korea addressing the theme *Teaching English in a*

*changing Asia: challenges and directions* and promises to be even bigger. It would be good to see more Australians and New Zealanders there. My dream is that it will be hosted by either of those countries one day.

For details of how to become a member of Asia TEFL or conference information, contact Asia TEFL president, the very amusing Professor Hyo Woong Le by email [hyowoongle@gmail.com](mailto:hyowoongle@gmail.com) or see the Asia TEFL website <http://www.asiatefl.org>

Please note that the *Journal of Asia TEFL* is now indexed in Scopus.

**Lia (Emily) Cross has been teaching for forty-one years and taught in schools in Victoria, Northern Territory and Western Australia. She taught in the Interpreting and Translating program at RMIT and English at Deakin University English Language Institute. Since 2003, Emily has lived and worked China. Currently, she teaches English at Beijing Jiatong University in a joint program with Victoria University, Melbourne. She travels extensively in China as an International English Language Testing System examiner.**

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... continued from page 24

technology drags us willingly or not to never ending new frontiers, there will be room for the human voice and its persuasive nature well into the future.

**Clive Hutchison is Project Officer at the Innovation Department at Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE in Victoria.**

# What's out there

## Speak Safe

Helen Rosenberg reviews *Speak Safe*, an occupational, health and safety resource for cultural and linguistically diverse workers. The resource is written by Maggie Power and Carmel O'Day and is an AMES publication.

What should a young kitchen hand do when his workmates are mucking around in the kitchen and want him to join in? How should a lone shop assistant juggle a queue of customers, phone calls and dealing with a hazardous spill on the floor? What action should a process worker take under pressure of production targets when the malfunction warning light has come on but the machine is still functioning? How can you raise a safety breach with your supervisor if she is the offender?

These are some of the scenarios dealt with in *Speak Safe*, a timely resource on workplace safety issues. *Speak Safe* is intended to assist trainers working with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) migrants and refugees, either employed or preparing to work in the Australian occupational, health and safety (OHS) context, who may be unfamiliar with both Australian workplace conventions and expectations, and OHS standards and procedures. It aims to assist in the development of the language, literacy and communications skills needed in a variety of workplace settings.

The package includes a trainer guide, DVD and CD, which are designed to support trainees completing OHS competencies from a number of industry training packages: Business Services; Retail Services; Transport and Logistics; Food Processing Industry; Health Training; and Tourism, Hospitality and Events Training. To this end the resource tackles OHS issues through activities built around a range of scenarios in different workplace settings eg a warehouse, aged care centre, commercial kitchen.

The DVD comprises six convincing everyday workplace scenarios each touching on a number of different safety issues presented both visually and more explicitly through dialogue. There are pauses in the narratives where a question comes up on the screen to open up discussion on what danger is being illustrated and what actions could be taken in response. The scenarios include such

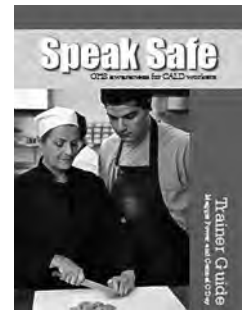
issues as recognising hazards, following safety procedures, avoiding stress, asking for assistance, raising problems with superiors, reporting machinery malfunction, asserting oneself and dealing with peer group pressure.

The *Trainer Guide* is extremely well-presented with a brief introductory preface to the trainer, followed by the training material. This material consists of a general introduction to the concepts of occupation health and safety and employability skills, and then seven themed units of work. Each unit starts with extensive trainer notes on blue pages, covering the objectives for the unit, key knowledge areas, and outlines how the materials can be used. The trainer notes also relate the content of each unit back to the employability skills, and to alignment with the various industry training packages.

The first six units are developed around the DVD scenarios, while unit seven deals with how to get OHS help. It explains the role of an OHS representative, and how to access their state work safety authority. All units comprise activities on workplace vocabulary, idioms, comprehension of OHS information, completing related formatted texts, workplace stories and dialogues. Included are pair and group work, role plays, discussion and problem solving. There is a self-evaluation in each unit, allowing learners to monitor their own progress in developing the knowledge and skills.

Models of the essential language conventions such as softening the message, using an assertive tone, and raising an issue are supported by tracks on the CD. Transcripts of the DVD and CD are included in the guide.

The *Speak Safe* package is an extremely accessible resource, providing vital knowledge and skills. It is very well designed and laid out. The range of issues, skills and text types dealt with through the scenarios and learner activities are comprehensive. It is an equally



useful resource to support industry training packages and prevocational courses or themed units of work in a general English as a second language classroom.

Helen Rosenberg teaches in and co-ordinates the English as a second language program at Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre in Glenroy, Victoria.

## Empowering women through literacy: views from experience

Linno Rhodes reviews this resource, which would be of particular interest to teachers who work with women learners, edited by Mev Miller and Kathleen P. King.

This book illustrates the vast range of creative and inspired practices in the adult literacy classroom, mostly across America, but also including Australia and other parts of the world.

The impetus for the collection of reflective and informed essays came from a *WE LEARN* (Women Expanding / Literacy Education Action Resource Network) conference. The main aim of the network is to focus on ‘... education, specifically the basic literacies women need to gain access to systems of power and to achieve personal and community empowerment.’ (pxv) It is within these parameters that the thirty-nine chapters from forty-seven contributors sit. The chapters are catalogued under three sections—Reflections, Learning Communities and Explorations of Practice.

Reading through the experiences of adult literacy practitioners (and sometimes students), I felt, at times, both humbled and inspired. There are stories of hope, courage, inspiration, but also stories of lost hope and regret. These essays invite and challenge the reader to reflect on their own teaching practices and attitudes.

Chapters reflect on the needs of women students in an adult literacy classroom, be that an English language classroom, a jail, a program for young women, women affected by poverty, homelessness, abuse, violence, drugs and alcohol...no stone is left unturned. Practitioners theorise about issues including attendance, childcare, the learning setting, incarceration and ‘learning to learn’.

Beatrice Arrindell, in her chapter titled, ‘An Ongoing Journey’ writes about the effects of systemic racism in schools in the 1970s and early 1980s, a time when segregation in schools is thought to have no longer existed. She writes the chapter from her prison cell, where she wonders about the connection between her crime and

her earlier pent-up frustrations at school.

Practitioners such as Tanya Spilovoy reflect on their journeys. Spilovoy recounts how she came to be open to, and supportive of, women with children in the classroom through recognizing her own rigidity as an inexperienced teacher, and the changes she went through as a mother herself.

Other teachers describe how they use poetry, creative writing and other techniques to assist their students to feel comfortable. Teachers who have come to the adult literacy classroom via secondary schools reflect on changes to their practice that offer ‘New ways of reading and writing allow...radical acts of re-visioning.’ (p32—Chlup)

The second section of the book deals with Learning Communities, and covers diverse topics such as overcoming the restrictions within the women’s prison system; gestalt therapies; dyslexia; the importance of reflective strategies; and the power of peer-to-peer learning. Solutions to obstacles arrive in many guises—as creative practitioners arrive at their answers to the questions—how do we support ourselves to better teach, and how do we offer students a place of learning that supports and empowers?

The final section titled Explorations of Practice, gives voice to research based practice and deals with issues that students bring to the classroom—issues of poverty, grief, trauma, violence, past negative schooling experiences and issues for women from a non-English speaking background.

There were many times while reading *Empowering women through literacy* that I reflected on my own



teaching practice; my shortcomings and the times when an 'a-ha' moment occurred. The generosity offered by these authors in their willingness to be honest in their reflections is refreshing and challenging. The authors of these thirty-nine chapters offer wonderfully creative insights into teaching: practice, theory and research.

... continued from page 7

Leonie Francis has a passion for adult literacy and has been involved formally with adult literacy provision since 1988. She is currently Head of Department at Wagga campus, Riverina Institute in New South Wales and enjoys developing and managing innovative adult literacy programs that connect with the lives of a diverse range of people, including employees. Leonie is interested in local, national and international literacy programs and provision that support and develop individuals and communities.

Ann Leske is an adult literacy teacher with eleven years experience in a range of programs and settings centred in Wagga Wagga. Through The TAFE STEPS Program Ann's literacy teaching has centred on inter-agency and inter-generational partnership models, offering a range of literacy and learning opportunities to marginalised community participants, and underpinned by a mobile literacy approach. Ann was a 2009 recipient of an NCVET Community of Practice research scholarship which enabled her to explore in more detail the potential for cross-sectoral partnerships between literacy teachers and community service workers. The outcome of this research will be published by NCVET in late 2010.

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This is a valuable contribution to the adult literacy practitioner's library.

**Linno Rhodes teaches literacy and is the Volunteer Tutor Co-ordinator at Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre in Carlton, Victoria.**

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# The Winners Are

On September 8 the 2010 Adult Community Education (ACE) awards were presented to the best organisations and people in the sector.

## The winners

### *Outstanding ACE learner*

Joanna Weeku from Werribee Community and Education Centre, Werribee

### *Outstanding ACE practitioner*

Pam Hullin from Preston Reservoir Adult Community Education, Reservoir

### *Innovation in ACE learning*

Gippsland Employment Skills Training, Moe

### *Outstanding ACE organisation*

YNH Services, Yarrawonga

### *Outstanding Koorie achievement*

Dwana Farrall from Bendigo

### *Outstanding pre-accredited program design and delivery*

Rosewall Neighbourhood Centre, Corio

## The finalists

### *Outstanding ACE learner*

Catriona Newlands from Shepparton ACE College, Shepparton

Rachelle Collett from Rosewall Neighbourhood Centre, Corio

### *Outstanding ACE practitioner*

Karen Williams from Rosewall Neighbourhood Centre, Corio

Lynne Gibbs from Coonara Community House

### *Innovation in ACE learning*

Continuing Education Bendigo, Bendigo

Upper Yarra Community House, Yarra Junction

### *Outstanding ACE organisation*

Continuing Education Bendigo in Bendigo

Mount Beauty Neighbourhood Centre, Mount Beauty

Preston Reservoir Adult Community Education, Reservoir

### *Outstanding Koorie achievement*

Mirrimbeena Aboriginal Education Group Inc, Echuca

### *Outstanding pre-accredited program design and delivery*

Banksia Gardens Community Centre, Dallas

Morrison's, Mt Evelyn

Information obtained from <http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/communitydevelopment/news-and-events/news/community-news2>