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Editorial

Dear readers,

A new year often incites the urge to evaluate. When we met in January to discuss a theme for this issue of Fine Print, we began with the question 'Where has the ALBE student gone?' Over several editorial committee meetings the question evolved—was the traditional literacy student disappearing, or was the adult education field in general adapting to a changing social and economic environment? By the conclusion of our planning meetings we had settled on the question 'How are teachers and providers responding to demands arising from economic, social and political change?'

With this focus, or theme, we requested writers seek to clarify the changing contexts that we face and investigate the diverse responses we are making to those changes. Among the features you will read articles that examine changes in the language, literacy and numeracy context, and what the consequences are for teachers, students and organizations at the chalk face.

When our feature article arrived from Shelley Tracey, a teacher-educator, poet and researcher from Queens University in Ireland, I realized that some things are permanent and are not affected by changes in the broader context. Among this permanence is the learner's desire for expression. Shelley Tracey builds an engaging story around enabling literacy tutors to express thought and feeling through poetry; at the beginning of the story tutors are reluctant to engage with poetry, but by the end they are using poetry confidently to explore experience, hopes and dreams and to establish a sense of self. Without poetry some thoughts and ideas, particularly about themselves as learners and people, may have remained forever unexpressed. Tracey draws the reader in to this phenomenon of learning with her own skill and passion for the written word; she is after all, a poet herself.

In the last edition of Fine Print for 2010 we asked for reader contributions on critical issues for the ACE sector. Lindee Conway responded with a brave article that raised the very pertinent question: are *we* (teachers, providers, teacher-training, government) the ones who are failing? Should it be the teacher, or the *system,* that is given the *not yet competent?* Why else, Lindee Conway asks, are students not progressing? Read Lindee Conway's article *English class—again?* in the Open Forum section and let us know, in many or few words, how you responded to her conclusions. Or maybe you have a separate issue you would like others to comment on. Send your comments to <fineprint@valbec.org.au>.

Our writers bring many variations to the theme of change and adaptation: systemic adaptation from Western Australia and Victoria University, research for insight, creative ideas to keep us current. These articles and more will make for good cold weather reading. Enjoy, learn and regenerate!

Jacinta Agostinelli
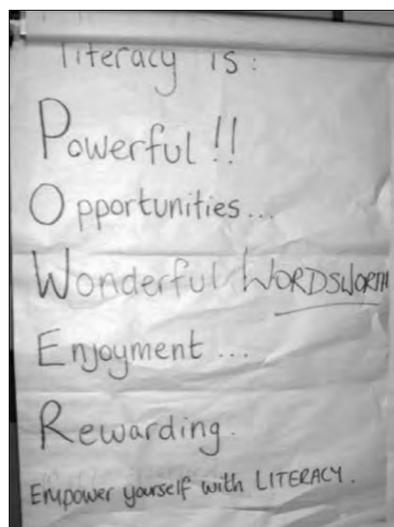
Poetry in practice: engaging teachers and learners in reading and writing poetry

By Shelley Tracey

What is poetry?

> Poetry is useful
> Poetry is imagination
> Poetry is freedom to express
> Poetry is the power of words
> Poetry is refreshing
> The freedom to have fun!
> That's poetry!

These exultant words were written by a group of adult literacy practitioners on a tutor qualifications programme at Queen's University Belfast. When they began their studies on the programme, few of these tutors held such positive views about poetry. Their responses to it stem from negative experiences at school, as one explained:

> When we did poetry at school we were always doing things to it, you know analysing it, we were never taught poetry as a form of expression, we were never told you could do that. We never created poetry ourselves.

This article makes a case for including poetry in adult literacy classes and reflects on strategies used to reduce tutors' and learners' alienation from the practices of reading and writing poetry.

The poem at the start of this article is a happy ending to the story of including adult literacy tutors in the world of poetry. The article tells the rest of the story, drawing on the poetic responses of tutors and their learners. Every story has a narrator, with variations in their participation in or distance from the action. The narrator of this story must declare her presence and her vested interests, raising questions about her objectivity from the outset: she designed and teaches on the programme described in this study, she believes in the power of poetry for supporting the expression of ideas and feelings, and she is a poet herself. She acknowledges that her close relationship with poetry differs from that of most of her students. Her poem 'The Place of Poetry' plays with resistance towards poetry, beginning with the ironic assertion that 'To avoid embarrassment, poetry should keep itself to itself. /It should be private, not shout out loud or pretend that it can sing.' This poem, and others which reflect humorously on the nature of poetry, are used as stimuli for discussion on people's feelings about poetry in class. Tutors enjoy the line from this poem that declares 'Poetry should sit in a corner, fiddling with its hair,' as it reduces the perception of poetry as exclusive and powerful. Adrian Mitchell's statement in the preface to an anthology of his poems that 'Most people ignore poetry because poetry ignores most people' (Mitchell, 1964) opens up debate on the appropriate language and subject matter of poetry. It also prompts tutors to acknowledge the rich traditions of poetry in Ireland; many of them have experienced family members and friends reciting their own and well known poetry on social occasions or participating in poetry challenges. One of the tutors currently enrolled on the programme uses the work of a local poet in her practice. The reminder that poetry exists outside the classroom reduces tutors' reluctance to engage with it.

This article challenges the idea that poetry is an elitist literary form for select individuals, proposing that it can be accessible to all and that it gives learners a voice and allows them to play with language and to experience its possibilities. The idea of including learners in writing poetry draws on Cameron's notion that all individuals have 'the right to write', especially by using expressive forms such as poetry and creative writing (1999). In an interview about poetry and adult literacy (online), the poet Roi Kwabena commented that

> Poetry is not a luxury; it is a necessity. Some people refer to poetry as a 'higher language,' but poetry is life itself. For me, poetry is a necessary medium to communicate with people, to harness their creative potential, to allow them to explore things about themselves that they have never explored before, to

give them a tool for self-realisation, a key to open doors hereto foreclosed to them. … Poetry is very important in the literacy classroom. If poetry is not included, it is not a literacy class at all, because of all the missed opportunities that could have occurred.

This article tells the story of how poetry opened the doors to learning for a range of learners in adult literacy classes, and how spaces were made for their inclusion through the use of poetry writing frames and engagement in events such as National Poetry Day in the United Kingdom.

Setting the Scene

The story begins by setting the scene and introducing the characters. The action takes place in a range of locations, with many participants.

At the heart of the story is an adult literacy and numeracy (Essential Skills) tutor education programme, which was established in 2002 in Northern Ireland as a result of the Essential Skills for Living Strategy—Department for Employment and Learning, (DEL) 2002. This strategy aimed at addressing the low levels of literacy and numeracy of over twenty per cent of the population aged sixteen years and older, as identified by the results of the International Adult Literacy Survey at the end of the twentieth century. Essential Skills for Living (ibid.) established the right to literacy and numeracy support of those who had scored at the lowest level, and outlined initiatives to address this.

Initially, the strategy targeted adults of all ages who wished to improve their literacy and numeracy skills for a range of reasons, from supporting their children with their learning to enhancing their career prospects. In 2011, the majority of learners in Essential Skills classes are no longer the adults who enrolled in classes voluntarily, but young people aged sixteen to nineteen years who are required to complete their literacy and numeracy qualifications as a compulsory component of their vocational programmes. Many of these learners are reluctant to engage in literacy and numeracy classes because they perceive them as irrelevant to their vocational studies, and as a potential repetition of their negative experiences at schools. They share a lack of confidence with the adults who are willing participants in the programmes. The tutor qualifications programme at Queen's University Belfast recognises that strategies for motivating and including learners are of primary importance in this sector. Further considerations for the programme are the diversity of adult learners and the need for flexible modes of delivery to address their needs.

Literacy classes take place in a variety of contexts, including further education colleges, community and voluntary organisations, training organisations, workplaces, alternative education projects, and statutory institutions such as the prisons. Literacy tutors themselves are as diverse as their learners; there are more female than male participants; they come from a variety of vocational and educational backgrounds; they range in age from twenty-two to sixty-five; their teaching experience on entry into the programme varies between none at all and over twenty years. The tutor education programme takes the form of a two-year part-time course to address the needs of tutors, most of whom work full-time. They therefore attend classes in the evenings and on weekends, carrying out their teaching practice outside working hours; despite their many commitments, their dedication to their learners and their studies is exemplary. The nature of this dedication and the demands on tutors are expressed in the following poem by a tutor who completed the course in 2005. As a published poet, she was unusual amongst her peers, and her poems were included in course materials to inspire them. The following stanzas are from her poem 'Dedication', which is reprinted in the course handbooks every year.

> On Monday mornings I'm a Mummy
> In the afternoon I'm a secretary
> On Monday evenings I'm a student
> It takes dedication to be me
>
> On Tuesday mornings I'm typing again,
> Taking calls, taking minutes, making tea,
> In the afternoon I start my homework
> It takes dedication to be me
> …
> It's dress down day on Friday
> And the hours pass so quickly
> Whilst I squeeze full time into part time
> It takes dedication to be me
>
> On Friday night I might be a lover
> After fish and chips for tea
> And a glass of red wine and a movie
> It takes dedication to be me
>
> On Saturday I'm a poet, I'm a cleaner, I'm a decorator,
> I'm a gardener, a webmaster and motivator,
> I'm a Mummy, I'm a friend, I'm a navigator,
> I'm a dreamer, I'm a baker, I'm a scream translator,
> I'm a lazy bones, a chef, a cheap wine waiter,
> I'm a tourist, I'm a shopper, social commentator,
> I'm an accountant and a clerk, a point debater,

I'm a work of art, an eyesore and domestic dictator,
a host, a telephonist, and home curator
an agony aunt, comedienne, and clock hater,
I'm a television remote controller, a political
commentator,
a servant, a guru, a child
and a life creator

And Sunday
Sunday is the day of rest
It takes dedication to believe

Chelley McLear

Over 600 literacy and numeracy practitioners have participated to date in the tutor qualifications programme, which DEL tasked Queen's University Belfast to establish in 2002. The courses prepare tutors to teach five levels of learners: with regard to literacy, entry level one learners at one end of the spectrum struggle with reading and writing, while level two learners at the other end are working at the level of GCSE (qualifications gained at the age of sixteen years). The literacy programmes follow the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum (Basic Skills Agency, 2001), which is a set of standards for supporting the development of the communication skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Many classes include English speakers of other languages (ESOL) learners, and tutors adapt the curriculum to address the needs of these learners. The ideas in this article about including poetry in adult literacy tutor education have therefore been applied to ESOL learners as well. While the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum incorporates both the expressive and functional aspects of writing, the focus on vocational learning in many contexts means that the functional ones take precedence. This article challenges this, arguing that the use of poetry in adult literacy not only enhances expressiveness, but complements the development of other skills, such as fluency in reading and writing (Padak, 2001).

The capacity of poetry for stimulating writing is explored from the beginning of the literacy tutor qualifications programme. Many tutors do not necessarily identify themselves as effective writers. Less than a quarter of them enter the programmes confident about their skills in academic writing, either because several years have passed since they participated in higher education, or because this is their first experience of university study. Their perceptions of writing in general and academic writing in particular are bound up in the understanding that they bring to the course of literacy as nothing more or less than the ability to read and write to a high standard. This limited conceptualisation of

literacy is challenged by engaging tutors in exploring their literacy practices and those of their learners in all aspects of their lives to support the recognition that literacy includes multiple skills in different contexts, such as using social networking sites, reading newspapers, consumer literacy and civic participation.

Allowing tutors to explore their own writing practices helps them to identify their strengths and to build on these, rather than to be overwhelmed by their lack of skills in the academic setting. This exploration of writing lays the foundations for supporting learners in recognising their abilities rather than their difficulties with literacy. At the start of the tutor education programme, participants mark off on a list of writing practices those with which they identify, such as emailing, report writing, list-making, texting and journalling. Tutors express surprise both at the range of their writing practices, and at the sense that these are regarded as legitimate. This leads to discussion about the multiple processes of writing and engaging learners in recognising and valuing their own writing practices outside the classroom as a basis on which to build their skills.

Making Spaces: poetry writing frames

This part of the story takes us on a journey through the doors of learning into the spaces of poetry writing. The poet Jane Hirshfield suggests that poetry is an effective tool for engaging learners with writing (2010, 44):

During the classroom hour of poetry, writing wants to be an open field. Spelling does not matter, punctuation rules do not matter, rules of grammar do not matter. It's far better if poems are not graded. The sigh of relief is palpable, but something more important happens as well: students can remember for themselves that the point of language, written or spoken, is, quite simply, to express, to understand, and to be understood.

While the lack of emphasis on rules is encouraging to less confident writers, the notion of an open field of writing suggests the blank page, daunting to all levels of writers. This part of the article explores a structured approach to poetry, providing contained spaces for self-expression and for playing with language through the use of poetry writing frames.

Writing frames, commonly used in literacy learning to supporting the development of writing, are structured prompts for learner writers, in the form of templates or appropriate vocabulary. This article focuses on the

following types of poetry writing frames: shape poems, acrostic poems, the use of refrains, and poetry templates.

Shape Poems

The first experience of poetry for participants on the tutor education programme at Queen's is the creation of a group shape poem. The purpose of this activity is for tutors to experience the role of discussion in supporting writing and the inclusion of a range of contributions from writers of different levels of ability. The act of making a shape poem also offers insights into choosing and positioning words in the process of composing a poem. The creation of a shape poem begins by drawing the outline of a shape on a flipchart. Students suggest words that relate to the theme, and decide where they should be placed on the shape and whether they should be written in lower case or capital letters. The subjects of shape poems have included stars, hearts and circles, and images that reflect seasonal themes, such as a tree for Christmas and a pumpkin for Halloween.

While tutors debate whether or not the shape poem is an example of *real* poetry, this activity generates active participation and a good deal of enjoyment. Many tutors report that they have taken this form into their literacy practice and that learners have responded positively to it. One tutor reflected that frames such as shape poetry are useful 'because it gives you a different structure to work with [from formal writing]; it's like using collage, you are

Image 1: Tree shape poem

Image 2: Heart shape poem

just throwing things out there and arranging them and it helps you think and play with ideas.'

Like shape poetry, acrostic poems offer spaces for generating and playing with ideas.

Acrostic Poems

The acrostic form is a simple writing frame in which each of the first letters of a word or phrase is written on a separate line and becomes the first letter of the particular line of poetry. On the tutor education programme, acrostic poetry is used to explore ideas about literacy and to generate ideas about course themes, as is evident in the images 3 & 4.

Many tutors use acrostic poems in their practice; this is a typical response from a learner:

> Cold day hot chips
> Hips get wider
> Inches on my waistband
> Peas with chips are nice
> Sausages are better.
>
> *Stephen McKee*

The simplicity of the acrostic format makes it accessible to learners of all levels of writing ability. At the same time, the form lends itself to more complex pieces, such as these stanzas from a poem by tutor Nicola Toner, written for an assignment which required her to reflect on her learning (Tracey, 2010, pp.298–300). This was the first poem Nicola had ever written.

> **Reflection**
> Reflecting on this road I've travelled
> Regard the distance I have come
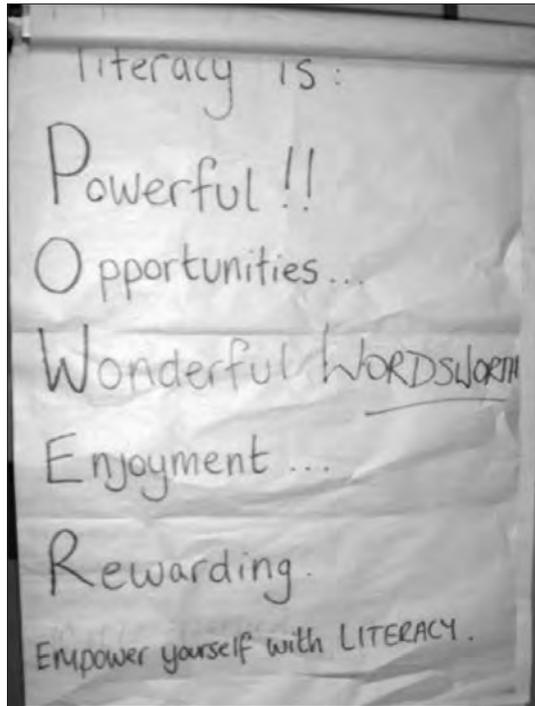
Image 3: Acrostic Poem

Recall the places where I've stumbled
Face all the fears I've now undone

Each footfall on this winding pathway
Stretching far behind my back
Has brought me to a new position
From which there is no changing tack

Fearsome foes, inclement weather

Many things to overcome
Not least of all the inner demons
Each tried to break me, one by one

…

I gaze into this tranquil mirror
Reflect on all I've seen and done
I've learned so much along this journey
I can't believe that now it's done

On this quiet shore the gentle lapping
Soothes me into slumber sweet
I'll rest a while 'til it is morning
The onward will I further seek

Not at an end, my quest continues
A new path must I seek and tread
For learning is an onward journey
That will not end till I am dead.

This poem has been used as a stimulus for discussion about the processes of learning to teach literacy, the relationship between reflection and practice, the importance of peer
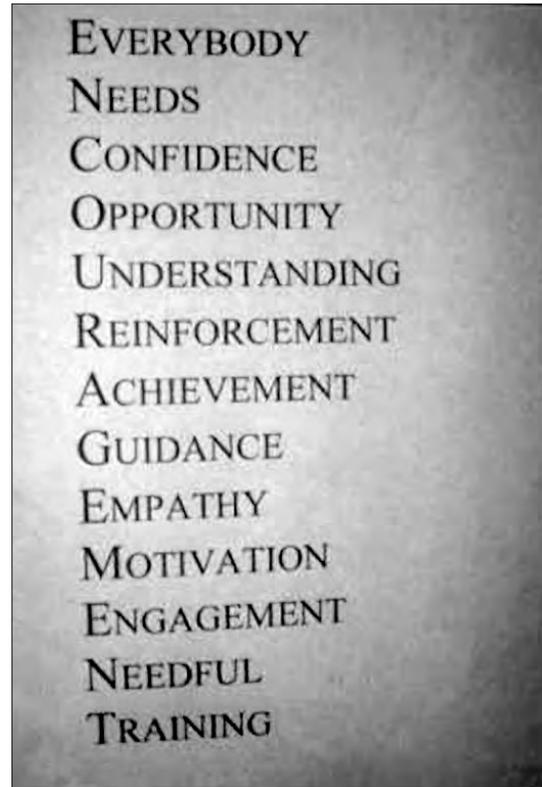
Image 4: Acrostic Poem

support and collaboration, and the expressive function of poetry. This article proposes that poems by tutors and learners are rich sources of inspiration for their peers, and that their shared experiences make the poems accessible and meaningful to them.

Refrains as Writing Frames

The stimulus for the poem below was the requirement in a course session about word classes. Tutors were asked to use an adverb as a refrain in a short poem.

Quickly
Quickly and without a pause
Quickly I recognised the clause.
Quickly and with compunction
Quickly I spotted the conjunction

Quickly and totally unperturbed
Quickly I noticed the verb.
Quickly while on a mission
Quickly I saw the preposition

Quickly and without a splash
Quickly I knew I had to dash
Quickly I got the siphon
Quickly I omitted the hyphen.

Geraldine Reid

This ingenious poem was much admired by Geraldine's peers, who quickly named her as class poet and encouraged her to write other poems about aspects of grammar and language.

The next poem, written by a learner, used the refrain 'I am an adult learner' (Tracey, 2009, p. 22).

I Am An Adult Learner
I am an adult learner.
I wonder what classes I will do next.
I hear my soul cry out when I want to learn.
I see myself no longer stupid.
I want to learn as much as I can.
I am an adult learner.

I pretend that I am a teacher and this I do with my children each day.
I feel more confident and more able.
I touch my soul with all I have learnt.
I worry less than I used to because I made a life changing choice.
I should reach out and encourage more adult learners.
I cry when I see people who think they are not good enough.
I am an adult learner.

I say get involved in essential skills.
I dream of gaining as much education as possible, in order to help my kids.
I try, no matter what I do.
I hope for peace and understanding.
I Am An Adult Learner.

Rhonda Weir

This poem, with its powerful expression of emotion, makes a strong case for using poetry in adult literacy classes to allow learners to describe the impact of their learning experiences. The story of poetry in adult literacy, which this article tells is full of emotions; the next poem offers an insight into what constitutes pleasure and happiness for a young adult learner in a further education college.

Poetry templates
The recipe template (in bold) used in the poem below generated a number of responses from learners of all ages. This example tells a vivid story about the poet's life and interests.

Recipe for Happiness
An ounce of early October's rain

A slice of leaves of all colours and shapes drifting to the ground
Mix up well
With a squeeze of waking in the morning
Half a cup of gentle breeze swirling the leaves
And a large tablespoon of birds singing and flying across the sky
Add a freshly picked stroll around the mall
Stir in a splash of getting home to relax
Add the mess of a disco dancing on a Saturday night
Bake slowly with dancing to all the different sounds of music
Add a pinch of going to work on an autumn morning
Sprinkle with a tasty portion of Chinese food
Pour in a glass of wine
Serve with a lot of flavoured nibbles
And there you are—the recipe's done.
Paula Mallon

The opportunity that this template offers for individual expression within the containment of the recipe format makes it an effective poetry writing frame.

Making Spaces for Poetry: National Poetry Day
An important day in the story of how and why adult literacy tutors and learners engage with poetry in Northern Ireland is the first Thursday in October every year. On this day, National Poetry Day is celebrated across the United Kingdom, with reading events, postings and videos on a website, and radio broadcasts. A well-known poet is usually selected to front the event, publicity for which appears online several months beforehand. The theme for the event is usually evocative, and broad enough to generate a range of poetic responses. Some of the themes from the past eight years and the poems which learners and tutors wrote about them are included in this chapter of the story. Most of these poems use examples of poetry writing frames with which the tutors became familiar on their course; this demonstrates that they have been able to apply these experiences to their practice.

National Poetry Day usually coincides with the second or third week of the adult literacy tutor education programme, which begins at the end of September. The focus of the second session of the course is on writing and poetry, with specific activities to involve tutors in reading and writing poetry on the current theme of National Poetry Day. Including poetry early on in a programme of learning appears to normalise it as a reading and writing practice.

Tutors are invited to use the ideas from the course session on poetry and writing to involve their learners in National Poetry Day. Learners' poetic responses to this event are gathered in the next few weeks, sent to the author of this paper and collated and shared with other learners and their tutors. One tutor commented about National Poetry Day in 2010 that '... my learners enjoyed using acrostic poetry. I also tried doing shape poems; they were quite surprised these different types of poems existed.'

The theme of food in 2003 generated a number of humorous poems, some in the form of limericks. This group piece used the prompt of a line from the song 'Food glorious food' from the film *Oliver!*

Food glorious food?

I still remember at lunchtime each day
I used to sit back and think 'O God no way!'

Mrs. Crabbe in the kitchen with her cauldron
Dishing out food that was anything but scaldin'.
Lumpy potatoes with lizards' eyes
Smelly socks in cardboard pies.

She had green teeth and a long pointy noise
She needed a scrub and then a good power hose
She picked her warts and threw them in
And then she added scraps from the bin.

O school dinners, they were a sin!

Essential Skills Learners

Below are two examples of powerful poems about food by learners in an adult literacy class in a local male prison. These poems convey the significance of food in a prison setting and its associations with a lack of choice and power.

Food For Thought

I wake in the morning
I wonder what's that smell?
It's the screws cooking bacon
Now I feel I'm in hell.

As I walk down the wing
I long for a slice
But all I'll get here,
Is food without spice.

I go for my dinner
And I think to myself
Will it be steak, for a change?
Such a culinary delight!

As I arrive for my meal

I jump back in fright
'What the xxxx's that?
I want steak tonight!'

FOOD

FOOD FOR EATING
OR FOOD FOR THOUGHT
NIBBLING IN SECRET
TO WISH TO BE CAUGHT.

TAKE UP YOUR PLATE

AND JOIN THE LINE
ANTICIPATE THE GRUEL
BEING SERVED AT THIS TIME

THE MIX AND MATCH
THAT LANDS ON YOUR PLATE
AN EXCUSE FOR FOOD
SAID TO SEAL YOUR FATE.

WITH OFFERS OF SECONDS
IT'S PLAIN TO SEE
NO RESEMBLANCE TO FOOD
FOR YOU OR FOR ME.

REFUSING THE SWILL
IT'S FOR YOU TO DECIDE
TO NIBBLE ON THOUGHTS
OF GOOD FOOD OUTSIDE

The theme 'The Future' generated a range of utopian ideas, but the following poem paints a bleaker picture. It was written by a young woman in a literacy programme for disengaged youth as a response to an invitation to use the acrostic format (Tracey, 2009, p.1).

M miserable
Y yelling

W wheelchair
H horrible
E embarrassment
E exhibition
L legless
C clamped
H horrid
A annoying
I irritating
R raging

This poem contains only twelve words, but it is an effective expression of the writer's feelings about her disability,

which she had never discussed before; neither had she engaged in any writing activities up to this point. This is a powerful demonstration of the capacity of poetry to give learners a voice and to express their feelings.

The theme of 'dreams' also gave learners the opportunity to explore and express their hopes and concerns. Some of the responses were collaborative pieces, such as this one by a group of women learners who had come together originally to address the challenges of the religious conflict that divides many communities in Northern Ireland. At the suggestion of their tutor, they used the refrain of 'I dream' and 'we dream' as their writing frame.

Dare to Dream
I dream of a week to myself
I dream of an exotic holiday with the sun on my face
I dream of eating croissants with blackberry jam
I dream of having a nice house
I dream of happy children who have everything that they need for life
I dream of Jeannie with the light brown hair
I dream of a red sky at night, predicting that tomorrow will bring sunshine and peace

We dream of funding for our future
We dream that our communities will unite
We dream of education for everyone
We dream of peace for future generations
We dream of happy children playing safely in the street
We dream of peace and hope in our communities; for one and all
We dream of contentment in the last years of our lives
We dream of the sounds of joy and laughter, a joining of hands and a happy ever after

Together we can move forward
With recommendation and strength
For Ulster as one
We will take the power that is within us
To unite our communities
Once and for all
We will support our communities
To create a bright new future
We stand united, side-by-side
In a world with no divide

Sharon, Mari, Beryl, Joe, Susie, Rhonda, Kathy and Joyce (Families Beyond Conflict)

The poem 'I Wish' is a more personal piece, which brings together two examples of writing frames: shape poetry and the use of the refrain. (See image titled 'I wish')

A tutor used the acrostic form for her response to the theme of *work* in 2009:

Wondering how long it is until payday.
Oh! It can't be Monday morning already.
Reminiscing about the lie-ins I had when I was a student.
Keep smiling.

Margaret Sharvin

The work theme was not particularly popular with learners, and few wrote poems about this topic. In contrast, the theme of National Poetry Day 2010, *home*, inspired tutors and their learners alike. Neill, a reluctant writer, wrote:

Happiness
Others
Music
Effort

Happy Endings and Creating New Stories
This article told the story of how adult literacy tutors and their learners engaged with poetry, in many cases changing their previous opinions about it as exclusive and alienating. The story was set in Northern Ireland, which is a small country, but the themes of the story, about the capacity of poetry to explore experience and express emotions, are universal. This article ends with some starting points for new stories about engaging with poetry in adult literacy practice:
- providing poetry writing frames for exploring and expressing ideas
- offering group as well as individual writing activities
- choosing relevant and interesting themes to stimulate writing
- sharing poems written by other learners and tutors
- visiting websites about poets and poetry, such as The Poetry Archive, which include interviews with poets and recordings of poets reading their writing
- linking up with national or local poetry events; if these do not exist, create your own!

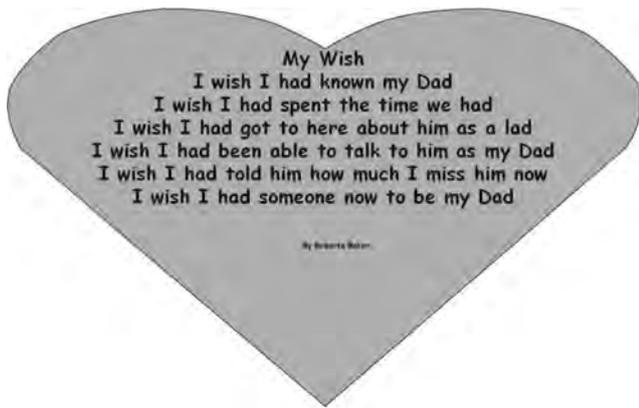A tutor on the programme at Queen's University Belfast suggested:

My Wish
I wish I had known my Dad
I wish I had spent the time we had
I wish I had got to here about him as a lad
I wish I had been able to talk to him as my Dad
I wish I had told him how much I miss him now
I wish I had someone now to be my Dad

By Roberta Baker

Image 5: I wish

> I think using music and song lyrics is a good way of getting learners to read and write poetry; it's not poetry in the conventional sense but a lot of it is poetry, younger students can write something like that.

Another tutor shared a story about involving her learners in reading poetry:

> I asked my young learners to go on the Internet and find an inspirational poem or piece of music and ask why it appealed to them; some of the poems they found I never knew myself.

This is one example of a success story about poetry in adult literacy; this article ends with an invitation to adult literacy tutors to recognise the possibilities of poetry and to create more success stories in their practice.

Shelley Tracey is a poet and teacher educator who co-ordinates a tutor qualifications programme for adult literacy and numeracy practitioners at Queen's University Belfast. This programme uses a range of creative methods to support practitioners in enhancing their understanding of literacy and for exploring and building on their learners' literacy practices. Shelley has published a number of articles on the use of poetry in adult literacy classes, practitioner research and creativity in teacher education in education journals in the United Kingdom and Canada.

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Crossing the academic-vocational divide

By Margaret McHugh

The Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills (CAVSS) was introduced in Western Australia in 2000 as a means of providing concurrent literacy and numeracy support to students enrolled in vocational qualifications. CAVSS is an arrangement whereby literacy specialists and vocational lecturers work in partnership in front of and among students. In Western Australia the delivery of CAVSS is associated with reduced withdrawal rates and improved module completions in vocational training courses.

CAVSS in a Nutshell

In one sense the CAVSS model is very simple: it provides additional funding to establish a programme in which two teachers teach the same group of students, at the same time, in the same place for a few hours a week. Team-teaching is not a new concept. It is a strategy familiar to many teachers because of its use in schools; in some states and territories it may have also been common practice in the vocational training sector. This was not the case in Western Australia. CAVSS created a set of funding and accountability conditions that made team-teaching possible in both the TAFE colleges and other training organizations in receipt of public funding. Accrediting the CAVSS course was the practical culmination of several years' work aimed at encouraging registered training organisations to integrate language, literacy and numeracy with the vocational training they delivered. The decision to attach additional funding for concurrent support to a team-teaching model was made in this instance because this was seen as a means of addressing root causes of both the systemic failure of teaching and the individual failure of learning. The provision of a specialist team teacher created the conditions whereby literacy and numeracy skills could be explicitly taught by an expert, but at the same time be fully integrated with vocational training. The team-teaching model, derived in large part from the role of the enterprise-based teacher funded at one time under the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) programme offered two benefits:

- Students did not need to identify themselves as needy and be persuaded to engage in additional learning activities.
- Literacy and numeracy specialists could be introduced to the specialisations of other industries, very different from their own, and begin to adapt their teaching accordingly.

The team-teaching method employed by CAVSS teams has been labelled *tag teaching*. Two teachers take it in turns to teach the class and both teachers offer help to individuals and small groups as they are performing both practical and more theoretical tasks. The two teachers should explicitly model their collaboration and the joint interest they share in making sure that the students can succeed in their learning. The group would witness the teachers talking about the plan for the lesson, giving and receiving instructions to one another, clarifying roles or tasks, interjecting and offering help, anticipating needs and generally working together to make things go more smoothly. Neither teacher should be identified as a remedial teacher or exhibit a focus on teaching weaker students. The industry lecturer is clearly in charge and is the subject specialist. The CAVSS lecturer is the *helper*, deferring to the superior knowledge of the industry lecturer and the additional responsibility he or she carries as the assessor. When the CAVSS lecturer is introduced to the group, this is usually best done with reference to the *helping* role: CAVSS teachers help the industry lecturer make sure that everyone will pass the course. The various CAVSS business rules support the implementation of the model so that students experience no additional barriers or disincentives. They do not pay extra fees, they do not have a literacy and numeracy qualification appearing on their academic record, they do not have to undertake additional assessments, and they are not singled out as having weak skills. What they get is all benefit and no cost. In order to provide this service to students, systems may have to adapt some of their practices. These adaptations may need to take place at both the systemic and the local level.

Problems with Traditional Models

There are two intractable problems with delivering literacy and numeracy tuition to adult learners whose focus is vocational learning. One problem is that those people with most to learn are those most likely to reject the offer of extra teaching, especially if this singles them out from their fellows, stigmatises them by labelling them as deficient, and requires extra time in literacy classes. The second problem is that the most skilled literacy and numeracy teachers usually have a background in education, which generally means that they have limited experience of any other industry. The second problem contributes to the first

and validates vocational students' perception that what the literacy teacher teaches is irrelevant to their vocational training. Both of these problems need to be addressed simultaneously if there is to be any hope of breaking out of the dilemma. The CAVSS model is an attempt to solve these two problems simultaneously.

Usually the problem is not discussed in these terms. It is much more common to find that the debate focuses on the problem of the individual student whose skills are deficient. First he or she must be identified by means of an assessment, then having been found to lack certain skills, he or she must be provided with a support programme and persuaded to attend it. Many voices call for this approach. Vocational trainers demand to know which of their students are likely to struggle with their course material. Many complain that they do not have time to teach literacy and numeracy skills when these are lacking and would prefer that all their students have a full complement before they enrol in the vocational qualification. Their preference is for preparation courses that bring all students up to the mark, believing that this would guarantee the efficient delivery of their own training.

Literacy and numeracy teachers are often supportive of an approach that begins with a literacy and numeracy assessment. It has long been a tenet of good practice in literacy and numeracy provision that the initial assessment plays a key diagnostic role, leading to the design of an individualised programme of learning. It is true that an initial literacy assessment, delivered as a private interview by a skilled literacy professional can be an entirely positive and productive experience for both parties. The assessor/teacher gets to know a new student, hear about their goals and aspirations, find out about the skills they already have, and provide information and reassurance about what to expect from a literacy course. The student has a chance to tell their story, say what they want from a course, find out more about the skills they already have, and be assured that they are one among many with similar experience. There is an opportunity for negotiation to take place, which, in well designed literacy courses, forms the basis of teaching and learning. Literacy and numeracy teachers, quite rightly, value this individualised approach, and it is particularly useful for placement into a literacy programme where the student's skills and preferences are the sole points of reference. Literacy courses are in this respect different from industry courses where the outcomes and content of the course are entirely determined by industry standards—the student does not help to determine the content of the

course and cannot influence its outcomes. A literacy assessment is therefore less relevant in this context since it cannot change the nature of the programme the student undertakes.

The CAVSS model brings a different kind of thinking to the problem of identification of need. In the traditional model, the central imperative is to identify individuals who are at risk and also to determine which skills they may lack. This approach is based on the assumption that at risk individuals are few in number (the exception rather than the rule), and that once identified the individual will be compliant in their referral to specialist services. The CAVSS approach questions both these assumptions. In the first place we know from the national surveys such as the *Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey* (ABS, 2007) and before that the *Survey of Aspects of Literacy* (ABS, 1996) that a significant proportion of the whole population (45%) lack the communication and cognitive competence to successfully undertake certificate III level training. A further 35% will struggle if they attempt qualifications at certificate IV or above. Only 20% have developed the abstract knowledge and processing skills required to undertake higher-level qualifications. Given these statistics, we should assume that the majority, rather than the minority, of vocational students will require some additional support to develop more complex abstract reasoning and communication skills (literacy and numeracy) if they are to complete qualifications at certificate III level and above.

Instead of proposing a support programme to cater for the stragglers on the edge, with the assumption that this is only needed at the lower levels, the CAVSS model centralises the need for specialist and explicit teaching of complex cognitive and communication skills as an integral component of all or any vocational training course. The decision to include CAVSS support is based on an analysis of the cognitive and communication demands of the vocational course and the fit between these demands and the likely skills of the learning cohort. It is a system level approach that has an impact on programme design and delivery rather than an ad hoc option for the most needy individuals.

The CAVSS model is successful because it delivers a service that students find useful and palatable. When we designed the model we thought first about the problem from the students' point of view. It was clear that there were weaknesses in the traditional models of offering support. Traditionally

a support programme could be delivered as a stand alone study skills programme attended by students from a range of vocational courses; it could be a learning centre or drop-in arrangement where an individual may get some one-to-one assistance; or students may be referred to scheduled general education classes. Sometimes one or more of these methods entailed withdrawing students from the main group for part of the time. None of these methodologies are particularly efficient: students may attend infrequently, or only when there is an assessment for which help is needed, and it is difficult for the support teacher to tailor tuition for the different industry content and processes students are engaged with. A few students, those attending regularly, may get some valuable individual tuition, but many in need of help would not get any. Without additional support, vocational students might need to repeat assessments, could engage in distracted and distracting behaviour, or in the worst case, withdraw from the course. All of this represents wastage, including the wastage of human potential particularly in times of skills shortage.

The CAVSS Attraction

In order to avoid replicating the weaknesses of traditional support programmes, we made an effort to see things as students may see them and came up with a wish-list of features that might make a programme attractive to students. Some of these features avoid impositions that might create disincentives to participation, and others identify what makes learning pleasurable rather than stressful. This is what we came up with:

- no singling out and no shaming
- no additional assessment (no shaming, no distraction)
- no additional time commitment from the student
- no extra fees
- teach abstract cognitive and communication skills in application to industry tasks (be relevant)
- substitute the discourses/values of specific industries for those that are academic
- provide opportunities for revision/relearning
- provide easy access to an extra teacher.

From this wish list we identified two principles that would make a support programme truly student-centred. The first principle is the normality principle and the second is the relevance principle. The normality principle means that any extra help students may get is a totally unremarkable part of the vocational learning: they are not required to identify themselves as needing remedial assistance, nor to leave the rest of the group to access assistance. If extra help is needed, that help can be given immediately, without

fuss. The relevance principle means that only the cognitive and communication skills that are used in the industry context are taught. It is sometimes difficult for literacy and numeracy teachers, who have worked exclusively in the education industry by virtue of their job roles in schools and adult education programmes, to appreciate the communication styles, social pragmatics, values, key concepts and conceptual tools that are distinctive to each industry. It is even more difficult for them to refrain from comparing these distinct discourses unfavourably with the standards that operate in academic institutions. The relevance principle encourages teachers to focus on the communication and cognitive skills that vocational students need to demonstrate competence for work roles in the industry they are going to join, and to teach these in ways that are relevant to the work roles that students are preparing for.

Challenges for CAVSS Lecturers

The biggest challenge for teachers undertaking the CAVSS role is to be able to *fit in* with the vocational group. Some people find this easy and some people never manage it. One of the CAVSS business rules insists that both teachers in the CAVSS pair elect to form the partnership: establishing a team can be hard and sometimes frustrating work and is difficult to achieve without a willing commitment from both sides. For the ultimate benefit of the students, both lecturers give up the usual autonomy they enjoy when they are solely in charge of their classrooms. The vocational lecturer takes the risk of exposing himself/herself and their students to a bossy know-it-all (every teachers' occupational hazard!) the like of which they all remember from school. The literacy and numeracy teacher must relinquish the primary focus on their subject area, the content of which they enjoy teaching. Instead they must be able to cultivate an interest in whatever the vocational students are learning. The motivation for making these sacrifices is that both lecturers expect that their students will benefit. If the team-teaching relationship can be successfully established, the students do benefit: the statistical data shows that withdrawal is reduced by about a third and that module completion rates go up by three percent. The anecdotal evidence shows that students are more motivated, more actively engaged in learning and are more likely to pass assessments.

Students Report

Some students have described the positive outcomes of being taught by a team of teachers. Students appreciate having an extra *helping hand* and someone to ask questions

of, who is not the assessor for the course. As one student said, 'I can ask the same question over and over until it clicks without having to look dumb in front of my lecturer.' Students enjoy being able to show off their work skills to someone who may not be as skilled as them at these tasks. They enjoy being treated as adults by a 'teacher' and will compare this to what they experienced at school. They appreciate the second teacher offering different explanations and teaching methodologies for difficult abstract concepts or complex processing. They have expressed their satisfaction in the cohesion of the class where no one is left behind and the whole group is working as a team. They have remarked that learning is more fun when there are two teachers, attributing this to the fact that their main lecturer enjoys teaching them more when he has a mate alongside.

For the most part these benefits appeared to be associated with the practice and value of team work rather than the specialised skills and knowledge offered by the literacy and numeracy expert. It seems that the modelling of a team approach can have a transformative effect on the dynamics of the learning group. It engenders a focus on learning and problem solving; it displaces the element of competition that can exist in formal education settings and establishes a collaborative dynamic making the learning environment a more risk–friendly space. But, what the students' comments may also show is that the literacy and numeracy skills they have been developing are fully integrated with their vocational learning and are therefore *invisible* as separate entities. When literacy and numeracy are treated as separate entities (separate classes, remedial work, additional assessments) by learning institutions, this can create barriers. When literacy and numeracy teaching is associated with the authentic reasons people have for acquiring abstract knowledge and mastering complex processing skills, the effort this requires is more justified and the rewards are more immediate. This is an efficient and effective learning loop.

Students have also been quite forthcoming in providing advice to CAVSS teachers about the kinds of behaviours that will make it difficult for them to fit in. This is often described in relation to what happened at school. Students want teachers to take an interest in them as people, to share their interests, to show respect for them as individuals—they cite this as something they did not experience at school. They warn against a CAVSS teacher coming in and trying to take over the class. The worst thing a CAVSS teacher could do, according to one student, is

to give them wrong information about the trade. What all this advice amounts to is that the CAVSS teacher needs to take a low-key role (sitting among the students perhaps, visibly taking instruction from the vocational lecturer), asking questions, waiting to be invited to take a lecturing role and generally demonstrating a willingness to participate in the vocational learning.

Teaching Rewards

To balance what could be a rather negative impression of the strictures of the CAVSS role, it is as well to recall what CAVSS teachers have described as the rewards of teaching in this way. CAVSS teachers in successful team-teaching relationships have described the pleasures of working with someone else, just as the students could observe. They have spoken about the pleasure they feel when students are hungry for what they have to teach: one teacher talked about the years she had been teaching numeracy to students whose eyes would glaze over, and how rewarding it was to teach someone who was demanding to be taught because now he had a real and urgent purpose for learning. The other reward CAVSS teachers describe is the opportunity to learn all kinds of new (often practical) skills from the different industry lecturers and students with whom they work.

The professional challenge for the CAVSS teacher is how to bring their expert skills and knowledge to the vocational learning space without taking over, without being like the teacher that no-one wants to remember with love, and without introducing concepts that belong to the academic industry rather than whatever industry they have at least momentarily become part of. The CAVSS role requires teachers to be specialised teachers of literacy, numeracy, or, where the situation demands, teachers of ESL. CAVSS teachers must be experienced teachers in their field because the role demands that they can draw on a wide and deep repertoire of teaching strategies and adapt these as needed when opportunities arise. It is the knowledge and skill that the CAVSS teacher carries around inside them that is useful to the industry lecturer and the students. It is the CAVSS teacher's understanding about the way people process information, develop concepts, perform abstract reasoning, approach problem-solving, communicate effectively and develop skills to use both linguistic and mathematical semiotic systems that must be deployed in this role. Each industry context and each team-teaching relationship will provide a CAVSS teacher with new and different opportunities to explore ways of teaching what is their traditional curriculum content.

The most common doubt about accepting the CAVSS model raised by vocational lecturers is the fear that time will be wasted: the industry content is difficult to get through in the time they have and there will not be time for the 'distractions' of literacy curriculum. CAVSS teachers should not expect to introduce worksheets, exercises, topics, themes or activities that they have found useful in teaching general education courses. The concepts, content, processes and tasks demanded by the industry course must provide the focus for their explicit literacy and numeracy teaching. Over time, the experienced CAVSS teacher may start to develop a collection of print–based or other resources designed for use with different industry qualifications. The development of such resources will be part of the collaborative effort between the industry lecturer and the CAVSS teacher. The CAVSS model is best understood as a means to industrialise academic skills and it works by inviting specialists from the academic industry to learn the discourses of other industries.

CAVSS for the Future

The CAVSS course was developed at the end of the 1990s when it was already clear that the effort to integrate language, literacy and numeracy skills development with vocational training was failing. Training package specifications failed to explicitly identify the educational and other underpinning skills that comprise a readiness for work and the foundation for training at entry and higher levels. The arrangement to apply nominal hours to each qualification—fewer hours at lower levels—effectively prevented educational skills from being taught as components of job roles at certificate 1and II. When the regulatory framework for quality standards was developed, this failed to make proper provision for that component of the VET workforce that already exceeded the benchmark level for professional competence in teaching. While there may have been an expectation that industry lecturers would teach underpinning educational and other skills, no provision was made to ensure that they developed the specialised skills and knowledge to do this. The commitment to integrating language, literacy and numeracy with vocational training existed in name only: the system tools to achieve the objective were never developed. CAVSS was designed to fill this gap: it provided money (time), a skilled teacher and a methodology likely to be accepted by students so that any training organisation with a mind to do so could engage in the project.

CAVSS was developed and implemented under the last national strategy for literacy: the *National Collaborative Adult English Language and Literacy Strategy* (NCAELLS). At the time of writing, a new national strategy is proposed: the *National Foundation Skills Strategy* (NFSS). The issues remain relatively unchanged:

- A significant proportion of the whole adult population have poor or very poor reading and comprehension and maths skills.
- Training package specifications do not articulate the cognitive and communication skills needed to perform to industry standards.
- There is no effective provision to build the skills of industry trainers to effectively teach complex cognitive and communication skills.
- The specialist literacy and numeracy workforce has atrophied, in part because market forces have undermined pay and conditions and new entrants are discouraged.
- The development of the training market and the spread of contestable models of funding have not adequately incorporated processes to ensure that registered training organisations explicitly address language, literacy and numeracy skills.
- Funding levels have remained fairly static; while almost half the adult population might require some additional education, the national agreements have provided no targeted growth in funds for adult education programmes.

A Success Story

CAVSS provides a useful, system–level funding and accountability mechanism. It also specifies a delivery approach that encourages participation from people who may have opted out of educational activity. It improves system performance and it improves life chances for individuals. It encourages a two-way exchange of skills and knowledge between industry and education staff. As states and territories strive to meet Council of Australian Governments (COAG) targets to reduce the number of people without post school qualifications and improve the proportion of the population who achieve higher–level qualifications, CAVSS may prove to be one of the more successful systemic approaches to improving outcomes in the vocational training sector.

Margaret McHugh is from Western Australia and has been working in adult literacy programme management and policy for fifteen years.

A Victorian experience

By Deborah Starbuck

Deborah Starbuck reflects on her more local experience of the Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills (CAVSS).

The Study Skills Support Unit at Chisholm Institute of TAFE has become increasingly active over the ten years since its establishment. Its teachers, with experience in ESL, literacy, numeracy, English and engineering in the TAFE and secondary school systems, offer support to all of Chisholm's six campuses, at certificate III to diploma and degree levels. The Course in Applied and Vocational Study Skills (CAVSS) trial in 2010 was supported by the goodwill and experience of many teaching areas, many individual vocational teachers and the study support team.

The Need for Study Support

CAVSS first appeared as a small blip on the radar in 2009. The Course in Concurrent Study was already being used as the framework at Chisholm to deliver support. However, a course with more flexibility and relevancy to the breadth of study support that Chisholm was requiring was needed.

In this same year, however, Chisholm identified there was need to more actively support its apprentices and pre-apprentices and undertook an investigation into how best to do this—from the pointy end, the vocational teacher's point of view. Discussions with small groups of vocational teachers at different campuses and in different teaching areas revealed a common theme: the reasons for unsuccessful completion of apprenticeships were varied and diverse and not necessarily within the control of the off-the-job training provider. This conclusion was backed up National Centre for Vocational and Education Research (NCVER) research. Support that was *built in* to the off–the–job training was a welcome concept and definitely worth a try.

The 2009 investigation recommended that the CAVSS style of delivery be trialled in 2010 with a focus on the educational and administrative implications and outcomes.

Rolling out CAVSS

CAVSS was rolled out to five different pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship areas at four campuses. The teaching areas included hospitality, electrical, automotive, horticulture and plumbing.

As CAVSS involves a change in mind set for teachers, all of Chisholm's study support staff (literacy and numeracy) undertook the two-day training offered by Margaret McHugh from Western Australia, before embarking on CAVSS delivery. Thus a bank of CAVSS trained teachers was established.

In order to further introduce CAVSS to Chisholm, all subject areas that expressed interest in CAVSS were invited to a CAVSS information session. For the trial groups there were also start up meetings with the senior educators, the vocational teachers and the CAVSS teachers. Discussions were held throughout the trial to reiterate the CAVSS purpose and address any issues that arose. The process was time consuming and challenging but deemed essential to the CAVSS uptake.

Evaluation

Comments and observations of CAVSS were gathered from vocational teachers, CAVSS teachers and the students. Although not all experiences were favourable, overwhelmingly the comments were positive. Comments indicated that benefits beyond successful completion were evident:

> More understanding of the subject we're learning.

> More help when needed.

> Students gain a better understanding of concepts and terminology and therefore greater self-confidence and a sense of achievement.

Teachers Comment

Comments from staff involved in the trial are valuable to the learning experience and have been included here:

> Matching of partnerships is crucial.

> The partnering of the tag-team is crucial to CAVSS' success. This matching has to be a voluntary acceptance by both teachers and this acceptance is predicated on both teachers having a clear understanding of

Language and skills support

By Lynne Carolan

Supporting the language and study skills of students from non-English speaking backgrounds and English speaking backgrounds is a challenge for universities and TAFE colleges today. As we have read in previous articles, institutions and their teachers are developing models of language support that work for them. Lynne Carolan describes a model trialled by the English for Further Study Department and the School of Business and Management at Victoria University in 2008.

TAFES and universities now have a laudable student centred focus but at the same time the student population has possibly never been so diverse. Students in TAFE and university courses can belong to distinct groups based on their language and skill needs: culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD), Australian from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, Australian with NESB background, and international.

Language and skills support teachers are therefore more and more asked to think about the following:
- common language and skills needs
- approaches that address common needs while not alienating any of the groups
- lesson plans that help all students in language and skill development
- the specific needs of the department they are supporting.

Discussion

Grammar teaching has been defined by Ellis (2006, p.84) as 'any instructional technique that draws learners' attention to some specific grammatical form in such a way that it helps them to understand it metalinguistically and/or process it in comprehension and/or production so that they can internalize it.' This is, broadly speaking, what ESL teachers do every day to help ESL students and, therefore, is applicable to CALD students including international students in mainstream courses. Grammar teaching is effective, whereas students struggle to achieve high levels of grammatical competence when they are studying in a naturalistic environment (e.g. immersion) without language help (Norris and Ortega, 2000).

In a study of international students in business and enterprise courses at the University of South Australia, students nominated language difficulties as one of the main areas of concern (Bretag, Horrocks, Smith, 2002). International students at Victoria University confirmed this.

There are many ways to focus students' attention on language while extracting meaning from text. Broad principles followed over the last decade or so would be that explicit grammar explanation and practice should occur in contextualised, communicative activities with rules of use highlighted in the context of the discourse. In this way, students can work on understanding and communication through, or as well as, noticing grammatical forms and other features–vocabulary, register etc. Genesee et al. (2006:224) maintain 'interactive learning environments that provide carefully planned direct instruction of target language skills, as needed, are likely to be effective. Language skills that are linked to literacy and academic domains should be the target.'

There is ongoing discussion about how these principles can be turned into lesson activities. Ellis (2006) explores what grammar can be taught, when it can be taught, and how: intensively (over a sustained period), extensively (many grammar points in one lesson), and/or through teacher correction. He concludes that grammar instruction should combine separate grammar lessons and communicative activities. He also maintains that students can be very effective grammar learners through teacher feedback.

In the discussion of what grammatical features to teach, students' expectations are also important. Scheffer (2008) maintains that if students want a difficult grammar rule explained teachers should do it, thereby helping learners to understand the language and feel secure that expectations have been met.

Grammar teaching and attention to genre are combined in ESL teaching documents and these principles apply to NESB students and international students in mainstream courses who have the same needs. Feez (2002, p.66) describing the Certificate of Spoken and Written English framework, which includes modelling and deconstructing different genres, maintains that during the process of deconstruction of a text 'second language learners learn the grammar of the target language, but in the context of

purposeful language use'. This type of approach gives learners the chance to 'investigate and manipulate text structures and to study grammar, vocabulary and the systematic links between form and meaning, text and context.'

The above principles informed the syllabus and methodology of the English language support course. The challenge was to do this while still engaging the Australian youth and second-generation NESB students.

The Victoria University Experience

The following is a description of one language and skills support experience at Victoria University (VU) between the School of Business and Management (Enterprise) and the English for Further Study Department in 2008. The Department of English for Further Study at VU contacted a number of TAFE departments, based on the pathways that many of the exit Certificate IV ESL (Further Study) students had chosen over a number of years. A general invitation was sent out to common destination departments for the students. The meeting explored how the ESL department could work with destination departments to support ESL students once they had enrolled in mainstream courses and to get very much needed feedback on how ESL students were faring according to their mainstream teachers. Discussion was positive in a number of ways including: feedback about performance of students who had completed Certificate IV ESL (Further Study); confirmation of the skills needed in mainstream; and comprehensive detailing of the problems and needs of ESL students in mainstream TAFE courses. While some departments appreciated the chance to give feedback the problem of funding ESL teachers to support their courses was daunting. Only one school, the School of Business and Management (Enterprise) was able to take up the offer of language and skills support by financing the ESL teachers.

At meetings prior to setting up the model many issues were discussed including past experiences of English language and skills support and what had and had not worked. The Head of Department gave important input about previous attempts where it had been found that students would often miss classes that were called English Skill Support deeming them to be less important than core modules. To succeed, the classes needed to be called something else and tied to assessment. Accordingly, the class was timetabled as a Communications Skills module and allocated three hours a week. The student cohort included first and second-generation Turkish, Croatian,

Vietnamese, Lebanese, Italian, African and Australian students, as well as international students from Papua New Guinea. The cohort was mainly young with a few mature age students.

Also discussed were the expectations of the mainstream teachers and their estimations of what the students could and could not do. The ESL language and skills support teacher was given a summary of the skills that students needed:

- reading comprehension
- speaking in order summarise, synthesise and analyse
- note-taking, particularly to be able to decide which parts of the text were important
- recall of important information.

Finally the English language and skills support teacher was given information about the types of assessment students were given in the mainstream classes. This included short gap fill tests, contributing in class (group work, responding to questions etc.), topic tests and assignment work on developing a project. The Head of Department wanted all students to be given a language test in the first class.

Given this vital information, English language and skills support teachers were also given paid time to work on a syllabus for the year based on a recommended textbook, *International Marketing 2007* by Kleindl. Looking at the teacher expectations, assessments and the student cohort a number of common threads were drawn out in an attempt to make one class relevant to all stakeholders. It was clear that all students could benefit from the lessons on the following:

- referencing, both in-text and bibliography
- powerpoint presentations and informal speaking
- summarising and paraphrasing
- vocabulary specific to the subject
- report writing genre
- note-taking and paraphrasing
- grammar structures of the kind found in high level texts (noun groups, passives, multi clause sentences, higher level academic vocabulary).

The Course

All students completed a test and also a reflective sheet that asked them to list their problems in writing, reading, speaking and listening, how long they had had these problems, and strategies they had used to try to fix them.

Initial language and writing testing showed that, as expected, the Australian students did well on structures and fluency of writing, though they did not necessarily write in an academic register. The international students and the NESB students did less well on language and were less accurate and fluent in writing. From the results, the language support teachers were able to draw out a number of areas of weakness shared by all the groups including lack of variety of sentence types, informal register and organizing ideas into paragraphs, so these topics were added to the list.

The lessons were designed around the textbook. A typical lesson would ask students to look up the index for information about a topic, e.g. target group advertising; quickly read the text to answer target questions given prior; write or remember answers; discuss with others and then record information in a paragraph, using referencing. This allowed students to practise skimming, scanning, finding headings relevant to questions, finding relevant information, discussing to encourage paraphrasing and writing to practice in-text referencing and bibliographies. More in-depth reading of a text would include underlining topic sentences and examining the structure of paragraphs i.e. topic sentence followed by support information and practising writing paragraphs using the same structure.

Students were often given vocabulary tests at the start of a class based on previous vocabulary learned or had to recall details of the last lesson. Students were also given grammar classes on passives and nominalisations to which all the groups responded well; the Australian students in particular wishing that they knew more about the grammar of their own language. Also included were lessons on register where students had to compare texts and pick out the features of formal and informal writing. Much work was done in finding general higher–level academic vocabulary in the texts and trying to incorporate it into individual writing.

From the start students worked in groups and were asked to give a small presentation while seated, to one or two people, then another presentation standing up in front of one table of people, and finally in front of the class using PowerPoint. Topics were fun and related to marketing including students' opinions about a really effective or very bad advertising campaign; a product that they wanted, and how the advertising prompted this; the best thing that a student had ever bought, and why; products related to consumption in childhood; which advertisements appealed to which people; how night clubs advertise themselves; the best mobile phone. International students were able to acquaint the class with products unfamiliar to Australians and how they were marketed, bringing in examples.

Students were also given general topics to write about in timed tests with a writing criteria check list referring back to writing lessons. The criteria included using topic sentences, concluding sentences and support information, using a range of sentence types (simple, compound and complex), using nominalisation and formal register.

Because this was seen as a module in its own right, students were given semester tests which included gap fills, true false questions and a writing task based on reading some of the text and summarising it. There were clear criteria for passing including the need to in-text reference and paraphrase.

Students whose basic language skills were weaker were given detailed individual feedback in writing tasks about errors and remedial exercises in these areas e.g. tense errors, use of definite and indefinite articles, syntax. They could hand these in to the teacher, or not, as they preferred.

Most students were enthusiastic participants and improved their academic skills. At the end of the course they were asked to write another reflective piece about if and how they thought they had improved. Most reported that they had made improvements. The weakness of the course was that it did not, and could not, address the problems of students with very low–level language skills. Future developments might include streaming of students into higher and lower levels to address this.

Conclusion

The course was generally successful and this success was dependent on preplanning and most importantly on input from all the stakeholders: head of department, module teachers and the students themselves.

Victoria University now has VU College, a new entity charged with supporting students' language and skills development across the university. As part of this process, there have been periodic meetings of teachers involved in language and skills support in many different mainstream courses in a language community of practice. In this forum, many different successful approaches have been presented.

Lynne Carolan originally taught French and English in high schools. She has taught EFL in France, England, Spain, Italy and Egypt. Since returning to Australia in 1990, she has taught beginner level students to further study students at AMES, Holmesglen and RMIT. She now teaches and co-ordinates Certificate IV ESL (Further Study) at Victoria University, Melbourne.

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CAVSS—its purpose, its goals all operating within clearly defined CAVSS boundaries.

CAVSS won't meet all support needs.

CAVSS tag-teaching is not a comfortable fit for all vocational teachers.

CAVSS may not be the preferred style for all study support teachers.

CAVSS is not a *fly-in, fly-out* approach—it requires a commitment to time for planning between the vocational teacher and CAVSS teacher, before and during delivery.

Initially I was not completely sure that it would make a difference. In reflection, I can confidently say we can improve on moderating the delivery with CAVSS to improve the success of students in the future.

CAVSS requires clear, well–established reporting protocols and an administrative system to support this. The CAVSS Business Rules identify clearly specified record keeping requirements and these need to be clearly set out from the beginning so as not to add extra work for the teachers once the delivery begins.

Overall CAVSS offers students the expertise of two teachers, within a context that is of most relevance to them, while providing the organisation with a mechanism for funding. At Chisholm, CAVSS adds another string to the support bow. It gives another option to meeting the support requests from teaching areas. It offers a multi-disciplinary approach for vocational teachers to provide that support and most importantly it supports the students within their chosen industry context.

Deborah Starbuck has been a study skills support teacher at Chisholm for ten years.

New contributors to adult education

By Bridget Wibrow

The Community of Practice research scholarships awarded by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) enable practitioners to conduct research about issues that affect them. The value of such research, writes NCVER's Bridget Wibrow, is that it benefits the wider literacy and numeracy community and raises further research questions.

The NCVER has a focus on building the researcher capacity of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector. Those working within the VET sector, whether as trainers, consultants or managers, already have the context in which to place research. They know what the burning issues are.

Scholarship Awards

So, in order to increase the pool of VET researchers, NCVER awards Community of Practice scholarships to assist novice researchers employed in the VET sector to investigate a workplace issue. Facilitated by Victoria University, participants learn research skills while forming a supportive community where they can ask questions and seek advice as they begin their research journey together. For many, this is the first time they have undertaken a substantial piece of research as the scholarships are aimed at those without a postgraduate research degree. Access to mentoring by an experienced VET researcher, organised through the Australia Vocational Education and Training Research Association (AVETRA), provides critical support to participants.

These new researchers are passionate about VET and it is this passion that drives them to want to investigate issues within their organisations. Even though the research is institution based, quite often the results have wider applicability to others in the sector. NCVER publishes the resulting papers, which cover a broad range of topics, with literacy being particularly popular. Papers on literacy by novice researchers include those by Ann Leske, Sandra Cotton and Neil Hauxwell.

Blind Date

Blind date: an exploration of potential partnerships between literacy teachers and community service workers by Ann Leske (2010) investigates the possibility of a 'team-teaching' approach between literacy teachers and community service workers. Leske surveyed and interviewed the people at the heart of the matter—literacy teachers and community service workers—to discover whether they were willing and also able to create effective partnerships.

Questions centred on finding out their views of literacy, how this impacts on their work, and their ideas about potential partnerships with each other.

Leske found that while literacy teachers and community service workers held a common view about the value of literacy, they had different ideas surrounding its meaning. Literacy teachers believe the development of literacy is a lifelong process whereas community service workers see literacy as a set of transferable skills usually achieved at school. Previous research has identified that sharing a common purpose and philosophical position is essential for creating and sustaining an effective partnership (Guenther et al. 2008; Balatti, Black & Falk 2009). Leske's finding that literacy teachers and community service workers have different views on the fundamental concept of literacy could present challenges to forming successful partnerships.

One area where literacy teachers and community service workers are in agreement is that communication is vital when dealing with potential partners. Partnerships were also seen to have the ability to influence work processes, and change roles and responsibilities. Being able to communicate any changes and developing new ways of working together are critical to the success of any partnership. This means that potential partners need to be aware and willing to adjust their professional practice in order to create a good working relationship with each other.

In her work, Leske also discovered that a lack of knowledge existed about the operations of the other group. Most community service workers were uncertain about what literacy teachers actually do. As a consequence they were more likely to view literacy teachers as consultants rather than as partners. On the other hand, literacy teachers had more positive perceptions about potential partnerships—they believed a partnership could help embed literacy in community service practice, and give people more opportunities to develop functional literacy skills when looking for work, seeking benefits, or undertaking training.

Leske's message is that literacy teachers and community service workers need to develop a greater awareness and appreciation of each other's roles. Once both sides are committed to the idea and can see its benefits, opportunities for networking and making contacts will arise and can result in partnerships that benefit teacher and student, worker and client.

Breaking down Barriers

Breaking down the barriers: strategies to assist apprentices with a learning disability by Sandra Cotton (2010) explores the difficulties confronting apprentices with a learning disability as well as strategies that assist them to overcome these difficulties and achieve competency completion. In order to investigate this issue, Cotton surveyed apprentices with a learning disability, conducted a focus group made up of lecturers and disability services staff, and interviewed family members.

Of the apprentices surveyed, eighty percent had dyslexia. Reading and understanding texts was identified as the most common difficulty, followed by assessments. Furthermore, the focus groups raised that poor organisation, distractibility and confusion lead to frustration for apprentices with a learning disability. There were also additional concerns by teachers that in some instances these difficulties lead to anxiety, depression and withdrawal. Non-disclosure is another concern of teachers as it can remove the opportunity for the student to access additional support and can further compound the problem. These problems all contribute to creating barriers, especially to accessing the theoretical components of a unit of competency.

Despite the barriers, these apprentices are motivated to commence an apprenticeship. Completing VET in schools, work experience or a pre-apprenticeship often encourages students to decide to undertake an apprenticeship. Other factors motivating individuals with a learning disability to take on an apprenticeship include work satisfaction, pay and the availability of a job. Once they become apprentices, they view practical skills, helpful teachers and making friends as important to continuing an apprenticeship.

Apprentices with a learning disability identify mentoring and tutoring as the most important strategy contributing to the completion of an apprenticeship. Mentoring and tutoring can help with clarifying information for students, improving organisational skills and enabling
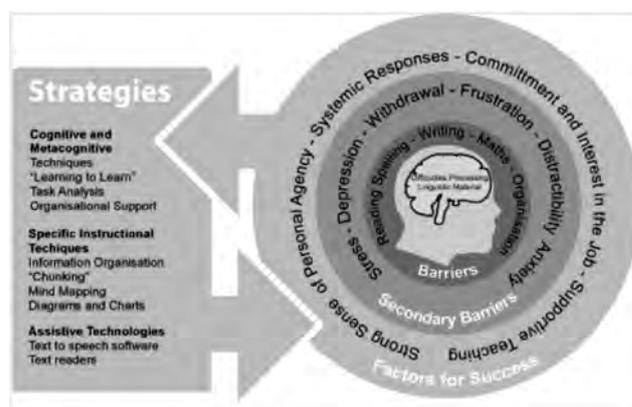

Figure 1 Factors and strategies that address the barriers experienced by students with a learning disability. Source: Cotton (2010).

the student to display knowledge. Other helpful factors include understanding staff, practical experiences and handouts. Supportive relationships, whether with trainers, peers or family, were viewed to be instrumental to the successful completion of an apprenticeship. These relationships, especially with trainers, help to reduce anxiety and improve opportunities to learn.

Additionally, teachers involved in the focus groups had developed their own measures to assist apprentices in overcoming the barriers that their learning disabilities create. These include:

- simplifying terms, clarifying concepts and breaking down the information
- mind mapping or exploring concepts
- metacognitive strategies for time management and organisation
- use of equipment, diagrams and other visual representation to present abstract concepts
- assistance with technologies such as laptops and tape recordings.

These strategies are centred towards finding a learning style that works for the apprentice, whether through assisting in the retention of information or bringing abstract ideas to life. Figure 1 provides an overview of the barriers experienced by students with a learning disability, as well as the factors and strategies that help them to complete their apprenticeship.

Cotton's over-arching theme is that early identification of students with a learning disability is critical to the overall success of their apprenticeship experience.

Trade, Language and Culture

The final paper to be discussed here, *Integrating trade, language and cultural learning,* by Neil Hauxwell (forthcoming), investigates the basic skill training needs for a specific migrant group, Sudanese, at a regional TAFE. The completion rate of Sudanese students at most qualification levels is below average and through interviewing Sudanese students and TAFE staff, Hauxwell looks at how the outcomes of these students can be improved.

Interestingly, the interviews uncovered discrepancies between Sudanese students and their teachers around the skill level of the students. Teachers rated speaking and listening as important areas for skill development followed by reading and writing in English. While Sudanese students agreed that English vocabulary was an area for improvement, they did not, on the other hand, believe there were any difficulties with their reading and writing skills.

Teachers also reported that in order to accommodate Sudanese students in their classes, they had to change their teaching style. Quite often this meant repeating instructions, limiting the use of Australian slang and speaking more clearly. The Sudanese students thought they received enough help from teachers but teachers felt frustrated that time limits restricted how much they could help and that the students could have benefited more from additional help. However, there was some argument as to whether the teachers needed more training in practical ways to help students improve their English literacy skills. As noted in the paper, the 'speak clearly and repeat' method of teaching Sudanese students is not the most adequate or accommodating version of teaching.

Another theme that emerged through the interviews with TAFE staff was the underutilisation of programmes designed to help migrants. Current programmes, such as the Gippsland Employment Transition Training programme, which can help students find job placement, are not readily used by Sudanese learners. As part of his research, Hauxwell also developed a bridging module that sought to combine basic trade skills and knowledge development with contextualised English development. Expressions of interest were sought for the programme but only two students arrived for the first class and neither returned for the second. However, is this lack of interest due to discrepancies over the basic skill level of Sudanese students or to something else?

Further investigations into the viewpoints of Sudanese students and TAFE staff also uncovered unrealistic expectations of the relationship between the Australian training system and the labour market. There is a belief among students that as long as they have a certificate they will get employment. However, a lack of basic skills, such as familiarity with tools and safe work practices, may lead to injury. This potential for injury and the possibility of high workers compensation insurance premiums may dissuade employers from hiring Sudanese workers. A greater awareness of these links is needed.

Hauxwell finds that the acquisition of trade skills alone is inadequate for the Sudanese to make the transition to work and social stability. In order to establish their family in their new country, they need to acquire basic skills and cultural understanding to convert their training into employment. An integrated approach, combining skill development with language development as related learning practices, can not only provide greater learning motivation for Sudanese migrants but also lead to a greater understanding of how Australian workplaces function and produce realistic expectations for future employment.

Hauxwell's research validates the findings of earlier work by Burgoyne and Hull (2007) who recommended professional development for teachers in the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of new populations of learners and extending the classroom techniques of teachers to build on learner strengths. A greater understanding of the cultural issues facing Sudanese learners could help ease their transition through the Australian training system and into workplaces.

Continuing Research

Like all good research, these papers raise a number of issues, which warrant further investigation such as:

- How do we encourage collaboration between literacy teachers and community service workers?
- What kind of professional development programmes can be put in place to support staff in the early recognition of students with a learning disability?
- How can we make learning English language skills more appealing to migrant groups?

It is hoped that these new researchers will continue their journey into the world of research by answering some of the questions that have arisen from their papers while contributing to the pool of VET researchers.

Making the system work for you

By Jan Marrett

Sometimes the nominated hours for a course are not enough to equip students with skills and confidence. NMIT has found a way to make the system work...

The Certificates III and IV in Science are nationally accredited mainstream courses developed to provide adults with the scientific and mathematical skills necessary to move onto tertiary studies in health and the sciences, either at diploma or university levels. The allocated hours for the certificates are such that a Certificate IV is a year-long programme whereas the Certificate III in Science is delivered over one semester. At Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (NMIT) we have been providing two discrete year-long courses within the curricula of the certificates: a Certificate IV for adults intending university studies in the following year, and a Certificate III in Science, supported by a Certificate II in General Education for Adults (CGEA II). This article discusses our rationale for providing a combined CGEA II/Cert III in Science.

At NMIT we have been running a Certificate III in Science for ten years. To better meet the goals and aspirations of our learners it is delivered together with the CGEA II. The course runs for twenty-one hours per week over thirty-six weeks. A Certificate IV is separately delivered and provides a highly successful transition vehicle for adults into university degree courses in the sciences and health.

The Certificate III in Science provides:
- a pathway into diploma courses in science related fields such as Laboratory Technology, and in health areas such as the Certificate IV in Health (Nursing)
- an alternative to the minimum secondary schooling in science and maths for adults wanting to enter the Armed Forces or trade certificates
- a preparation for adults aiming for science degrees but not yet ready to enter the Certificate IV in Science.

Lengthening Delivery Time

Two earlier experiences, one positive and one negative, cemented our conviction that a longer delivery time was needed in order to prepare our adults preparing for Certificate IV in Health (Nursing) or diploma courses requiring a background in science and maths.

In 1986 through the initiatives of Beth Marr and Annette Cook, NMIT responded to client need by developing an internally accredited course, Women into Technology (WIT) tailored specifically for women interested in (the then) non-traditional areas of science and engineering. That year-long programme continued successfully for the next decade. It provided an excellent medium for women who had left school early or had chosen directions other than maths and science in their senior secondary schooling. WIT graduates went on to a variety of study areas including Certificate IV/Diplomas in Mechanical and Electrical/Electronics vocational courses; Science Diplomas in Laboratory, Food, and Environmental Technology; and Adult VCE 3,4 prior to university. The programme expanded to include both men and women in response to the needs of our learners. It was a full year course and highly successful.

A semester long Certificate III in Laboratory Skills for adults preparing for Diplomas in Laboratory and Food Technology had also been introduced. Although the curriculum was appropriate for the purpose, the half-year duration proved too ambitious for most students to successfully complete the certificate.

Our students

In terms of cultural backgrounds, our Certificate III in Science cohort comprises an equal number of adults who have undertaken all their schooling in Australia and those who are more recent migrants. Their ages range from eighteen to fifty, with an average age in the mid-twenties. Of our culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) students, some have a reasonably intact education while others have had their schooling highly compromised by civil war and upheaval.

Each class is typically a mixture of post-Year 12 students who have not received tertiary offers in sciences or health; young working adults who want to change their directions; and parents, mainly mothers, who are returning to the workforce. Many of our newer Australians have certificates in aged care but need significantly more literacy and

numeracy, maths and science understandings to move on to studies in nursing.

Positive Learning Experiences

It is important for learners to have a positive and successful experience when returning to study, particularly for those who have a negative memory of their secondary education or who are uncertain about their capabilities. As part of ensuring that the course is suitable for prospective students, both as a pathway to their goal and of an appropriate level, an hour-long initial interview and assessment is conducted.

By incorporating the CGEA II into the programme the hours normally assigned to a Certificate III in Science almost doubles. Our aim is to maximise the opportunity for our learners to grasp and assimilate the scientific concepts together with the underpinning numeracy and maths skills required.

The extended duration of the course means:
- the individual educational *gaps* that affect academic understandings can more readily be addressed
- evaluation, reflection and discussion can be included in class
- open-ended tasks can be employed allowing for different end–points for learners
- for the increasing number of CALD students, enrolled concepts can first be encountered in simple, yet contextual English and only later introduce the required academic language.

An affective outcome, one of confidence, which students display increasingly over the year, is often reflected in their final course evaluations. An important component of readiness for further study, their sense of *can do* accompanies the cognitive competencies gained, and in part can be attributed to the extra time afforded the learning process.

For some of our learners, the attainment of the Certificate III in Science is not possible in a single year. Generally, however, these students do gain the Certificate II in General Education; some return to complete their Certificate III in Science the following year.

Comments from students who completed the Certificate III in Science, 2010 indicate the success of the programme:

> In the past I was accepted into a science degree without having completed secondary school. It was a disaster. I found Cert III in Science at NMIT and enrolled to catch up on my science skills. I found it to be a supportive environment and gained the genuine skills, study habits and confidence to continue. I am doing the Certificate IV in Science in 2011 to prepare myself for university level studies in science.
>
> Miranda Powell

My name is Theresa Hosri and I graduated from Year 12 in 2009. I didn't get the result that I had expected and took the alternative of studying Cert III in Science at NMIT. This course has helped me consolidate in mathematics and chemistry in particular. The year was really enjoyable as well so it wasn't all hard work.

Miranda Powell

I actually received an early round offer at the end of 2010 for the Diploma of Laboratory Technology (Biotechnology) from RMIT University.

Theresa Hosri

Jan Marett has taught for the last twenty years as a TAFE teacher at Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE, initially in the Science and Maths Department and then within the Vocational Pathways Department of the Faculty of Further Education, where the bridging science programmes are run. She has been involved predominantly in the delivery of subjects within the Certificate III and the Certificate IV in Science programmes. Previously Jan worked in the secondary education sector as a teacher and in student welfare.

Theresa Hosri

Starting with the end in mind
By Carmen Harris

The next time you are wandering along Degraves Subway, stop at Shop 10 and buy a 'zine made by one of Carmen's students. Read on to discover all about 'zines and how to use them to make student work meaningful.

It's strange how we expect our students to get excited about learning literacy when most of their hard work ends up sitting on a shelf or in their folder, with no purpose and no productive outcome. Yooralla's adult education programme for adults with disabilities, AbleLinks, banishes the trend of useless projects with its policy of having a quality endpoint for students' work.

About AbleLinks
The AbleLinks programme delivers accredited and pre-accredited training courses. Students gain essential skills and knowledge to equip them for future study and employment opportunities. Benefits include modified programme delivery and small class numbers. Students have access to real work-experience opportunities within a small supportive environment. There is also the opportunity to link them into open or supported employment.

Our 2011 literacy and technology classes are structured around the module 'Technology for life' from Certificate I in Transition Education. The unit addresses students' identified technology needs and their learning is project based. Students are given the scope to decide whether they will send their projects out via the student email list, post their work to the student blog, upload to a simple website or publish their work in a *'zine*, the name given to a homemade magazine.

'Zines
The word 'zine is short for magazine. 'Zines can be about anything and they can be any size; the smallest one at Sticky Institute is about 2cm x 2cm while the largest is A3. At AbleLinks we usually use three sheets of A4 plain paper folded in half and students glue pictures and typed text into this mock-up, then we photocopy

the pages, double sided and staple them together with a long-arm stapler. Students also draw their own pictures, use their own handwriting, take their own photographs and use magazine clippings. 'Zines are all about creating something unique that will be a gift to the person who reads it. For this reason our students often use pencils or textas to colour the cover and interior. 'Zines are sold for between $1 and $5 depending on how much work or expense was involved.

'Zines have proved particularly popular and adding to their appeal, they can be sold in a few specialty stores around Melbourne. AbleLinks' literacy and technology students sell their 'zines at Sticky Institute (Shop 10 Degraves Subway Melbourne), a store that exclusively sells homemade 'zines. In 2010 all students made their own 'zines, completing them to their own literacy levels and at their own pace. Additionally, students built their web searching skills by using the Internet to find pictures and complete research. Their 'zine projects were extremely successful, both in providing a tailored project for each student and increasing confidence, with many 'zines selling out, some requiring more copies to meet demand.

One student, Thomas, tentatively produced his first 'zine last year, writing under a pseudonym and putting his magazine up for sale in Sticky Institute. Slowly and with the help of his trainer, Thomas wrote a story using his own experiences. He then created an original A5 version of his 'zine from three sheets of A4 paper folded down the middle, pasting in pictures and typed text.

Finally, he ran off ten photocopied versions of his 'zine and stapled them ready for sale. After filling in a few simple forms with assistance, he was ready to submit his magazines for sale. His 'zine was a huge success, with Sticky Institute requesting extra copies to sell. Staff at Sticky then asked for the next instalment and a fantastic new journey in literacy learning began. Prior to working on 'zines Thomas had struggled to find his niche, but with his new project he has found a zeal for his writing that was previously untapped. The benefits of this approach to his work are multi-layered: he can direct his learning by choosing a topic to write about, other students are interested in his work, Sticky Institute allows him to hang out there and use their resources, and on top of that he makes a few dollars from the sale of his 'zines. Thomas

is currently working on his second 'zine, a sequel to the first and has found a new drive to create quality work that others will want to read.

A Quality Endpoint

Providing a quality endpoint for our students' work has dramatically improved motivation in literacy learning among the student body and some students literally, cannot stop writing. Everyday students approach me, to show me what they've been working on at home or in their spare time. Students who create work for an audience of their peers are also making a valuable contribution to the quality of their shared literacy learning and forming enriched student communities in the process. Work that goes out into these student communities encourages peers to learn, read, and write in a non-threatening, inclusive way.

It's crucial that literacy educators recognise the potential value of student work; it is often the out-pouring of their lives, an expression of their thoughts or record of their personal experiences. Projects that are written up in their own words, naturally pitch themselves at the right level for their peers who read them. Sharing their work provides feedback, affirmation to reward their efforts and increased motivation for future projects.

Carmen has worked as a trainer, assessor and project manager for Yooralla's adult education programme, AbleLinks for over three years. She has built a cutting edge literacy programme from the ground up, focussing on using new media to connect students and share their work in a holistic and meaningful way.

Technology Matters

Web-netting refugee youth

By Jane Curry

It is highly recommended that you check out Jane Curry's blog Youth Class Blog and read about how she uses blogging in the classroom. Jane has some wonderfully creative ideas.

There is so much that could be said in this article about our online networks with refugee youth but I believe this honest post on our Facebook discussion board, from a student last year provides the best summary:
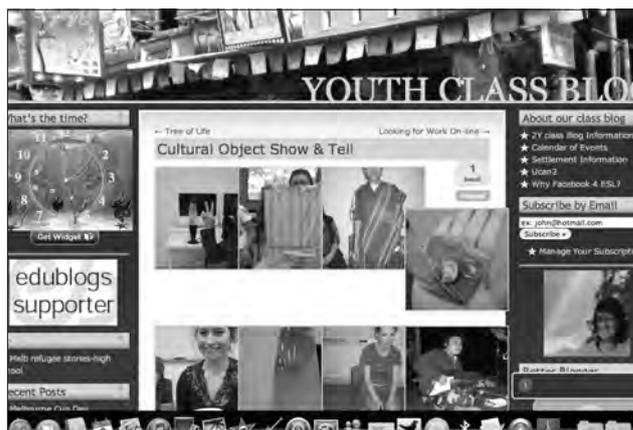
> *Life before Australia*
> My life before Australia is like who is losing her way. No education, no human rights, no job, there was so many *no*. Now I am like one who is found her way. I am happy in Australia 'cos many Australian people help us. They gave us food. They let us to learn English and teach us many things.

I like to think that we, as teachers, can give young refugees opportunities, give them the skills to find knowledge and start them on their 'new found way' here in Australia. Some of the skills I was teaching last year inspired me in my own 'new found way'. In effect, we are all learners here.

Using a Class Blog and Facebook

At the Converge 10 Conference I presented a workshop on 'Web-netting refugee youth' where I highlighted the use of blogging and Facebook in education. In summary, Facebook and blogging can be used for the following:

- *CSWE curriculum*:
  class instruction, performance and progress evaluation, study, revision, reference, learning
- *the Web2tools*:
  these facilitate learning, appeal to different learning styles, are colourful, visual, have Animoto (music and pictures), encourage active participation (Wallwisher, audio voice tools-VoiceThread, Voki), can create cartoons
- *developing learning strategies*:
  reading and writing, web researching, using discussion boards, participation
- *e-learning*:
  Internet knowledge and skills, Internet access anywhere/time, continued contact after student has left (volunteers, teachers, counsellors, peers)
- *group belonging/ownership*:
  through the Facebook group and Youth Class Blog; continued contact with volunteers, teachers, counsellors, peers after course finishes
- *storage space*:
  for pictures, videos, English language text, themes, discussions
- *Collaboration*:
  through msg, chat, emails, comments, and share
- *reaching youth*:
  TAFE teachers, volunteers, Foundation House counsellors, Centre for Multicultural Youth can send messages to the group and write posts and comments on the wall
- *social inclusion*:
  networking and keeping up with current and emerging technologies and identify with Australian English-speaking peers.

In March 2010 our youth participated in a global student blogging challenge organized by *Edublogs*. With an inspiring and enthusiastic support team from *Edublogs* and e-learning educational associations on Twitter I taught students to change themes, avatars, and widgets;

and to upload images, videos, audio files and links. The lessons also included practice in using Web2 tools such as Animoto, icons, Dvolver, VoiceThread, PhotoStory 3, Voki, Xtranormal, quizmakers, surveys, and cartoon makers; all of these excite literacy and achieve a greater understanding of the blogging journey.

Webnetting with Refugee Youth

Pages on the Youth Class Blog have links to information for newly arrived migrants. These are a good reference point for topics, ideas and themes for class instruction. Here you will find background information on our *2y* class and the youth programme. This includes the *Ucan2* programme running one day a week. The *Ucan2* is a programme underpinned by a partnership between three organizations: Foundation House, Adult Migrant Education Service and the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY).

It structures contact and relationships with members from the Australian community into the education of young refugees. People from the community and business world volunteer time to help the young students become acquainted and confident with living in Australia. Volunteers help the young refugees understand how to live, work, study and play in Australian society, by widening their experience to beyond the classroom. At Swinburne TAFE the *Ucan2* programme follows an employment theme. Students use the blog to upload pictures and chat about what they do in class and in the *Ucan2* programme.

I have used the Youth Class Blog for the past year since we began with the *Edublogs* student challenge in March 2010. I was learning the blog in WordPress with support from Sue Wyatt, <http://studentchallenge.edublogs.org/> and Sue Waters <http://theedublogger.com/> and the team

at *Edublogs* as well as training my students. The students' computer skills as well as their basic English literacy was post beginner, but they are young and this was their advantage—quick to catch on with a strong desire to learn the technology. The disadvantage for the students was their inability to skim read. Joining the blogging challenge for ESL students can be overwhelming, as one needs to click between blogs in the challenge and leave comments. This took time. They were able to get a few things onto their blog like pictures, text and comments, but it was more limited than I had hoped.

Facebook 4 Refugee Youth

Things changed in the second semester when our *Ucan2* programme presented an opportunity for using Facebook with the ten young volunteers and our migrant youth. This network solved my students' difficulty in having too many blogs to read and click through. We could all join the Facebook group 'Croydon Youth Class' and stay on one page. Facebook allowed us all to make posts, add comments, discussions, upload our photos and movies and all members could be sent messages.

Students have made the following comments about using Facebook:

> *Sen:* I like it is facebook because I can talk to Kathy from Foundation House. I can look at pictures

> *Paw:* I like facebook because there are many pictures, and I can chat to my friends.

> Henry: Yes, i like using facebook because i want to know more friends and learn how to put something in facebook. sometimes i chat with my friends on facebook.

> *Lian:* I really like using face book. Because i can contact all of my friends and i can sent a meaasge. When i use face book it made me so fun and when i use smiley chat. I can looked up nice photo, wall and video from the others country. Face book was very helpful for people because i really love it. :)

> *Li:* I like using Facebook because it is a great idea to get friends. It is nice to speak an our wall. When we write to each ather we need to write sentences. We talk to friends. When we write we can inprove an English. When we talk to each ather we look like leaves on a tree.

Hsa H: I want to using for facebook. And put the phitos And video. and telk to my friends.

If you are interested in blogging I would highly recommend the teacher blogging challenge, Kick Start Your Blogging (on twitter #ksyb) <http://teacherchallenge. edublogs.org/> This resource offers guidance and a network of other like-minded teachers who use blogging as a tool for developing student literacy. At the time

of publication this opportunity will have closed for 2011, however it is still worth looking at as it may be offered again in the future. Kick Start your Blogging trains teachers to create a class and students' blogs and to enter students into the *7th Running Student Blogging Challenge*—a biannual event and the first for this year was just held in March. Kick Start your Blogging is a global network of highly motivated technical minded teachers within schools and adult learning, teaching in all areas of the curriculum.

You can find me on Twitter #parrpakala or at the challenge with the Youth Class Blog—Google it

Jane Curry is an ESL teacher working with culturally and linguistically diverse youth at the Croydon campus of Swinburne TAFE.

The wiki—not too wacky for teachers

By Michael Chalk and Jill Koppel

Michael Chalk and Jill Koppel are our 2011 e-mentors for the north-west ACFE region. They discuss the benefits and ease of using wikis for collaborative work.

Current day literacies require that people work together in small teams to co-create the media release, the project or incident report, the curriculum planning document, even the letter to the council. Our job as adult educators is not only to inform learners how the new participatory digital culture works, but also to join it, and make the thing work for us.

Firstly, for the uninitiated the wiki is a website that people can use to connect with each other, publish documents and/or discuss ideas. Most different kinds of wiki will allow you to add multimedia resources and all kinds of documents. All of them allow you to decide who has access to read and write the site.

Ever since Josie Rose and the ACFE board decided to set up an ACFE-branded wikispace, ACE teachers and providers have been jumping on board (!) to get connected. Examples include the *Coonara Neighbourhood House*, the *Can You Hear Us?* investigation into audio technologies, the *AccessACE* research project on e-learning and the *flexivet* video screencast site for beginning technologies.

For a literacy educator working in the classroom, my dream was to find a way that many people could collaborate on the same document, at the same time. The wiki doesn't quite reach that dream, but it's a thing of the same spirit, and evolving in the right direction.

But can it work for teachers? Will it be genuinely participatory, rather than just another broadcast medium? Jill Koppel at Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre (CNLC) shows us that it can.

Wiki Working for Teachers

In 2009 the *CNLCtalks* wiki was developed as a platform for students and teachers to access and share Internet resources (such as videos) and to showcase and share students' work (especially audio recordings) with other CNLC students. It was not embraced as a resource because internet was only available in the computer training room and staff didn't have the skills or opportunities to build content for it.

In 2010 as part of the e-learning project, the *CNLC Staffroom* wiki was created as a 'communication hub to

try out new ed-technologies, to share ideas and to stretch the ways we use the students' *CNLCtalks* wiki.'

We decided that the best way to gain commitment from teachers to work with wiki was to get early rewards via social topic pages such as: *Reading at CNLC*—text editing skill focus; *Travel tales*—compressing and uploading photos; and *Recipes*—embedding a video.

Scaffolded Learning

Developing a ten-step wiki plan, which scaffolded the editing skills into manageable steps, ensured stepped acquisition of wiki editing skills. Staff could use this list to self-assess progress and reinforce skills through revision.

In the first session all members set their *notification* to receive an email when a *discussion* was posted or replied to. Staff was encouraged to post a discussion when they had added something important to a page, thereby alerting others to this new material.

Staff collaboratively draft and access administrative documents such as calendar, meeting minutes, letterhead templates, even handover notes from one teacher to another (for absences) or plan and allocate workload for the next newsletter. They find and add links to other resources and other wikis working for teachers, such as repositories of shared assessment tasks and other curriculum materials across the ACE sector, e.g. the *ACEPlus* project (based on the A-frame), the *ESL Frameworks Teachers' Network* wiki and the *Flexivet* project, a repository of screencasts and other resources for ICT students.

The wiki constantly evolves according to emerging needs, for example, this year a new page has been created to assist our transition to Windows 7 and Microsoft Office 2010. People can share insights into, and experiences of, new technologies, e.g. the electronic whiteboard.

Checking Usage

Anyone can view *Recent changes* to see who's been an active contributor and can check the number of times a discussion has been viewed. We also conducted a simple (and anonymous) Google survey to track progress. Feedback from staff overwhelmingly supported social learning in a user group to complement independent e-learning efforts: perhaps one hour on a three weekly basis.

Some of the outcomes for staff include: greater confidence in navigating and accessing other existing wikis, a sense of empowerment in becoming a DIY publisher to the internet, a role model for older students engaging with and publishing to the internet and a popular consensus that it's easier to locate administration documents on the wiki than on the server!

Jill Koppel teaches ESL at Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre.

Michael Chalk is an adult language, literacy and numeracy educator and supports teachers with using technology for classroom learning. He's been involved in Victorian and national e-learning projects such as *AccessACE e-Learning Research Circles* and *Community Engagement*. Further details at <http://michalk.id.au/>.

Relevant Links

The Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre (CNLC) staffroom uses an ACFE domain wiki <http://cnlcstaffroom.acfe.vic.edu.au>

valbec

Celebrate Numeracy

We want to celebrate the learning, knowledge and successes of our numeracy theorists, researchers, teachers and students. We want to look back and look forward.

We will feature leading practitioners, researchers and theorists reflecting on the debates, tensions and triumphs in the space of adult numeracy.

We would like contributions from students about their experiences of numeracy learning, in or outside the classroom; ESL students might like to share a cultural perspective. Student teachers could reflect on their unique journeys through learning about numeracy and how to teach it or on their experience of numeracy throughout their lives.

Contributions from teachers could be in the Practical Matters vein or more reflective. What are the issues around numeracy teaching? How have you helped your students with the processes and mechanics of numeracy? How have you helped your students build their confidence and learning approaches?

Submission Guidelines
- Electronic texts only
- Word limit for teachers: between 250 and 500 words
- Word limit for students: 250 words
- Please include a title for the piece, your name, learning institution, and place where you live (for delivery of your author copy if your piece is selected).

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

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

Deadline: June 24th

MEASURING UP - BY COCKADOODLEDO   WWW.TOONDOO.COM

ooh my back

how much longer?

THIS MUCH!

Coonara Neighbourhood House runs *wikispaces* on their own domain <http://coonarahouse.org.au/>

The Eastern Region conference back in 2006 used a plain label free *wikispaces* account <http://conversationsinace. wikispaces.com/>

Can You Hear Us? <http://canuhearus.acfe.vic.edu.au/>
Note: ACE organisations can request their own ACFE domain *wikispace* via Josie Rose at <http://www.acfe. vic.edu.au/>

Open Forum

English class—again?

By Lindee Conway

This is the first reader contribution to Open Forum. In her letter Lindee Conway details her disillusionment and frustration with a system that appears to be failing in its duty to learners. What do you think?

I was a teacher of adult ESL learners for fifteen years; what luck, what joy. It was great work for it gave me the chance to combine teaching, talking and thinking about language, and time off when my kids had school holidays. I was fortunate to fall into such a profession. After a few years away, I've returned to work in the same suburb, in Melbourne's north-west, although I no longer teach. Being back makes me feel very nostalgic for my former classroom work, but it's also made me wonder if my efforts were focused on the right things. On reflection, I don't think I taught the learners what they needed—help with what was happening outside the classroom.

I did the job with energy and enthusiasm, and I'm glad to be back. But I'm stunned at how many learners, taught by me, and my former colleagues, are still in *English class*. The classes are taught at the same level. Learner intelligibility is about the same as it was. The focus of employability and job–readiness is pretty much the same although 'Employability Skills' in the accredited course documents make the teaching of these more overt. However, even those students who do want to improve their language or work skills must be slightly demoralised by doing the same courses again and again. Imagine if you were asked to repeat a subject you'd done in first year university, one you liked and learned a lot in. A new teacher would give a new perspective, times change, new information emerges. But would you want to do it a third time, or a fourth?

If I were young, enthusiastic and energetic again, what would I do differently to help these learners avoid the treadmill of *English class*, a seemingly undifferentiated, generic, endless activity. The wonderful skill of hindsight tells me that if I were teaching again, I would:

1. *Treat the classroom as a workshop for 'outside'.*
   Focus on what needs to be said, or understood when the class is finished; don't focus only on what needs to be taught in order for a unit of a certificate to be achieved. I sincerely admire the huge body of work that accredited courses like Frameworks and CGEA are; and the practitioners who produced them were intelligent and sensitive to learner needs. I also admire the Australian Core Skills Framework (I enjoyed the rubric-like complexity of the National Reporting System, but this coloured version is much easier to use). But neither should be allowed to crowd a teacher's planning for her learners' needs.

2. *Teach pronunciation and focus on learner intelligibility.*
   Now each lesson would have a section on: how English–speakers say these sounds and how you, the learner, should move your mouth, to say them. There are still learners in classes today, taught by me a decade or more ago, whose pronunciation of English is strongly influenced by their first language. They are simply not easily understood, except by a sympathetic interlocutor. When I taught I used all sorts of ideas to address this issue such as giving Last Letter Dictation, whereby learners were supposed to listen, think, spell in their minds and write the final letter only (this didn't always occur, but we had fun!); and playing Word Tag, in which they had to call out a word beginning with the final letter of the previous word e.g. post-tree, egg-girl. But I didn't make the point—you've got to say it so everyone can hear it—clearly enough! It would be great to be able to work with learners now, using technology to help them hear themselves and improve their own intelligibility.

3. *Insist on spoken sentences for myself and my learners.*
   Relying on single words, or simple phrases, and allowing learners to answer questions in the same manner doesn't help them in the long run. Not if they're still answering in exactly the same way a decade later. Outside the ESL classroom or the education centre's reception area, people speak in long chunks; they use slang; they add the mystifying *mate* to the end of questions, to show friendly intent. In retrospect, I would *now* do intense study of how many ways a simple query can be delivered: Have you got a Health Care Card? Can I see your Health Care

Card please? Have you got a concession? Have you got some ID? '*Gotta* card? I used to say, (and still say) Have you *got* a Health Care… (pause)… *Card*… (pause)… *please*? And point to their wallet, or hold my hands out to indicate I'm waiting for something small. I now think this isn't very helpful and my new plan is stop using such *ESL English* speak. For learners, I wish I'd encouraged them to answer not with silence, but with speech, by producing the ID material, or just by saying— concession. Yes. It would have been a good extra step to point out to the learners that outside the inclusive ESL classroom, lack of vocabulary may be taken for lack of overall understanding of the language.

4. *Role-play all day.*
   In line with my first point, make the classroom a workshop for outside. I would *now* get the learners to watch videos of interactions and then re-do them, verbatim or ad lib, and the focus would be on real language, and real situations. And I'd play the less than sympathetic interlocutor, to make it more real, and prepare learners for *outside.* The communicative games we taught were fun, and made speaking practice in the classroom safe and loving, and mostly we all enjoyed it. But now I would add another step: how what is learnt in class works outside the classroom. I'd ask students to give examples of how they might use new language in their daily lives. I would then finish the class with asking what they have learnt about saying English words clearly. These evaluating questions would have made things more immediately useful to the learners.

5. *Think much more about the learners' needs.*
   I can forgive myself for talking too much (and I hope my former students can, too) and conducting teacher–centric classes because as my confidence grew, my grip loosened. Nowadays, when I talk to teachers about teaching and learning, I discuss the principles of adult learning and I stress that just because ESL clients may have limited vocabulary, they still deserve to be given full participation. My advice is to focus on what has happened in your students' world this week: What language was involved? What was the problem with their understanding or their interlocutor's speech? How can we prepare for this event again? What needs to be said, read or written about to improve their readiness to understand and practise that language again?

I think it's much harder for teachers now (this makes me sound very old!). I believe in formal, registered, planned education for adults. But I don't think that the tail should wag the dog the whole time. Some contracts really force teachers into onerous reporting activities, which is unfair; there's no other word for it.

Lindee Conway began teaching adult ESL in 1988. In her first term of teaching she taught the past perfect to a group of new arrivals who had zero English. When helped out by a colleague she re-directed her efforts to the present simple and 3rd person singular. She got better at teaching. Now she manages education programmes at Community West, a multi-programme agency in Melbourne's north-west.

Provider Profile

The people in Adult and Community Education

By Jacinta Agostinelli

To be anywhere near an award is an achievement. Mt Beauty, a small alpine hamlet alongside the Kiewa River about three hours drive from Melbourne, has a thriving Neighbourhood Centre led by Yvonne Evans. Mt Beauty Neighbourhood Centre was a finalist in the 2010 ACE Awards for the category 'Outstanding ACE organisation'. They did not win but there are some great stories behind the nomination.

As a young school teacher in the 1950s, my father taught at a small school at Mongon's Bridge, down river from Mt Beauty. The one-roomed schoolhouse still stands but is no longer a school. It wasn't just the mountains and the alpine stream that drew my father to the Kiewa Valley, although they were a big attraction to him; it was my mother who lived in Albury, a little further down the road. When I rang Yvonne and she said 'yes, come, I have a lot to say', I was excited: I would pay a visit to my father's spirit, see the Kiewa in its glory and discover another gem in the ACE field.

The Country Way

In Mt Beauty the Victorian Alps loom over your shoulder no matter where you stand, but they seem particularly majestic from the door of the Mt Beauty Neighbourhood Centre. Although not in the middle of town the neighbourhood centre is ideally located next to a secondary college and other community concerns.

Yvonne Evans is dynamic. Within about five years she took the organisation from a one-roomed building with its main purpose being storage of pre-loved and potentially useful objects such as old chairs and desks, to a thriving community centre with just on 2,000 members. She has developed learning and community partnerships, runs dozens of well-attended courses, and boasts a sparkling, new stainless steel kitchen. I have never seen such a functional, well-designed kitchen in a neighbourhood centre. The benches are wide and teachers and students can interact and move around safely and easily. Yvonne and the committee of management think creatively and much of the building and renovations have come from recycled material, donations and volunteer labour. The donations, however, did not just land on the door step. As soon as Yvonne became aware of the imminent closure of the electricity company operating on the mountain she was on the phone seeking out their portable buildings, while at

the same time organising a grant through the Department of Victorian Communities. Yvonne literally got more than she bargained for and procured not only the portables but also the equipment inside them and the grant to move them. Yvonne also secured a deal with the transport team and removal and delivery of the portables were thrown in too. The portables became a space for the art group and a fitness group, with room left over for storage.

Secret Men's Business

Programs at Mt Beauty Neighbourhood Centre are varied but perhaps the most famous is the men's cooking course, called Secret Men's Business. It was given this title during a class one night. Yvonne was working back, when she heard loud laughter erupt from the kitchen. When she went to investigate, the men all raised their glass of wine but went tight-lipped on the laughter. They would only volunteer that it was a secret and it was men's business. The success of this group would make many city providers green with envy. You may remember when engaging men over forty-five was a hook for funding. Yvonne and her committee applied for and received funding to set up a cooking group for men over forty-five. The focus of the class was to be literacy and numeracy, but these labels, she explained, are not desirable; not many men want to be known as *illiterate*. She suspected also that many of the potential participants

probably never felt at ease in a classroom and the term *class* would only serve as a deterrent. Yvonne looked for ways to attract men to the group and to avoid these terms. By engaging a local chef well known to the town Yvonne believes more participants were attracted by the idea of coming to the neighbourhood centre to learn about cooking. She had also heard along the bush telegraph that some men had already approached this chef for lessons on how to cook his popular-amongst-the-townsfolk risotto. To avoid the terms literacy and numeracy Yvonne called the class a cooking group. This was an important factor, she insists, in attracting men to the centre, and although it wasn't made explicit, literacy and numeracy were a main feature of each class.

Each weekly session was mapped to the Certificate II in Hospitality. Recognition for prior learning was awarded for life experience. Working in partnership with Wodonga TAFE, Yvonne was able to fund the course. To cover the reading and writing requirements the group was to produce a recipe book; one of the men would scribe and record the recipe for that week so this covered some of the reading and writing criteria. Most of us have produced a recipe book at some stage, however what was different with this one was that it was written by men for men. In the professional opinion of men, men do not read cook books in the same way as women. I have to believe them on that score.

Lean Times Ahead

About twenty-four men participated in the first cooking program. Most of them will tell you that overcoming fear and developing self-esteem, and developing relationships with the other men grew more than their knowledge of oven temperatures and the texture of risotto. During the course and the ensuing years the men have been a support to each other through death, illness, fire and drought. A small number have continued with subsequent Certificates in Hospitality at TAFE in Wodonga and work in the food industry.

This program led to Mt Beauty Neighbourhood Centre winning the 2008 ACE Award for most innovative program. It also earned community recognition for its positive impact on men's health and mental health, and a feature in *The Age* 'Epicure'. But rather than stopping there, the story takes an ironic twist. Under current funding structures Yvonne says she cannot offer the same men another class. It is not viable for the centre to offer Certificate III in Hospitality. Currently Skills Victoria guidelines do not allow the men to study another certificate that is the same level they currently hold; and yet the centre cannot run classes that are not accredited because funding is not attached to such classes. Students would have to pay for tuition and the centre would have to charge high fees to cover expenses. Most people would not be able to pay, or justify paying, the fees the centre would need to charge. I think we are all familiar with the scenario. And here is the irony: the very program that won the award for the centre may, just two years later, have to be cut because of a change in funding structure.

While Yvonne understands the reason Skills Victoria has adopted the current funding structure, she thinks there must be a fairer way to decide eligibility. While it is fair to charge a successful tradesman wanting to make a career sidestep the full fee it is not fair to charge a struggling single mother with a fifteen year old teaching degree the same amount; and yet currently the two students are viewed as having the same eligibility. Change is required and although impetus for change will come from the grass roots, the change itself must be made at government level.

Where there is a will there has to be a way and Yvonne is not prepared to give up. She is a creative and inspiring leader and she has support from the community. Yvonne and the busy paid and volunteer staff around her can work twelve hours a day, and more. Yvonne is a fine and inspiring example of the people who make up ACE.

Jacinta Agostinelli is the editor of Fine Print and has previously worked as an ESL and literacy teacher and literacy co-ordinator in Glenroy, Victoria.

What's Out There

Engage and Create Sample Assessments: A resource for teachers of the Certificates in General Education for Adults

By Paul Pollard and Paul Rawlinson

Paul Rawlinson and Paul Pollard extol the virtues of a resource, which was created very close to home, containing assessment tasks for the Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA). Authors, Pauline Morrow and Lidia Interlandi, are from Kangan Institute in Melbourne's north-west.

There are perhaps two things that we learn when we first set out on our journey as literacy teachers. The first is, in the words of Anne Haynes, 'Flexibility is the name of the game'. The second is 'Necessity is the mother of creativity'.

But let's face it—despite our best efforts to keep our literacy practice fresh and creative, there are only so many times we can go to the well before we may need a little outside help. And this is where CGEA practitioners Pauline Morrow and Lidia Interlandi might come in handy.

Pauline and Lidia have just released a series of CGEA sample assessments, each based around a particular topic. Certificate I (Introductory) contains sixteen assessments connected with the topic of water; Certificate I has twenty-four assessments about the Australian environment; and Certificate II has twenty-four assessments about health. Each book has a CD version containing PDF files for easy photocopying. The assessments cover all core units:
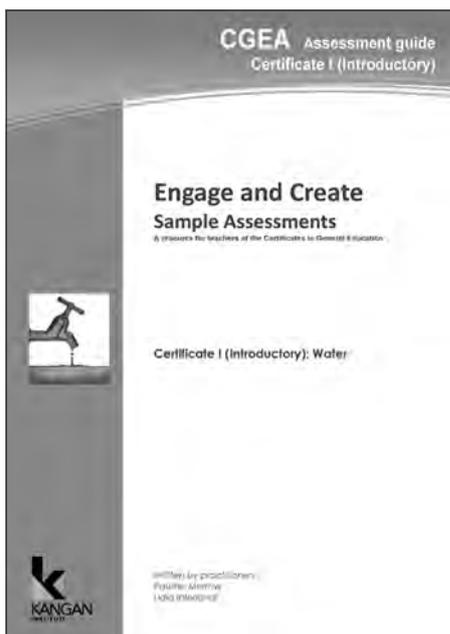
learning purposes, personal purposes, and community and employment purposes.

We were given the book for Certificate I (Introductory) and were impressed with the scope of the book, which includes several issues within the umbrella topic of water: saving water, lye water, the water cycle, a water glossary, water tanks, buying water efficient whitegoods, and so on. The sample assessments for 'Create simple texts for learning purposes' that we trialled were based around the topic of water safety—a pertinent topic for a class that mainly consists of married women with families.

The assessments are designed to be a part of a contextualised framework of tasks. We used a range of tasks such as safety at pools and beaches, CPR, resuscitation brochures and summarising skills to prepare the students for the assessments in the book.

One of the most useful facets of these books is that each assessment contains a model, thus giving students and practitioners a benchmark for performance in the assessment. Each assessment also contains all features necessary for the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) compliance, such as names, codes, and date of assessment.

All assessments have been designed to be as authentic as possible, a crucial part of CGEA assessment. These tasks, in turn, suggest other activities that are real and relevant for our students.

Overall, we found the assessment tasks to be most useful and would recommend these resources to all CGEA practitioners to use in their assessments, and as a respite from the constant demands to reinvent the wheel.

Paul Pollard currently teaches in the literacy program at Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre in Melbourne, and is a specialist in teaching students who have intellectual and learning disabilities.

Paul Rawlinson teaches literacy and VCAL at Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre and is the Literacy Coordinator.

Blogs spot: Alice in Blogland

By Lynne Matheson

Jane Curry who teaches refugee youth has set up a class blog, which provides a fantastic model for how an interactive site can be used with students from a range of learning backgrounds. We assume younger students are all so much more technologically savvy than older learners. This is not always the case and the benefits from collaborative learning in the classroom around the technology are limitless. Jane has a great sense of design in this blog that makes it extremely attractive and alluring. I love the underwater clock, the spinning globe showing visitor locations and then there are all the interactive links that you can disappear into like so many rabbit holes! The student blogs use several formats and reflect their interests. They show their responses over time to different activities and stimulus materials.

Take a look around: <http://2ycroydon.edublogs.org>

The 'Activities for ESL learners' link may be familiar to ESL teachers and is a project of *The Internet TESL Journal* (<iteslj.org>) where you can find articles and other materials. <http://a4esl.org/>

This is a fun diversion with click on instructions that take you back in time. <http://www.kraft.com.au/Products/KRAFTHistory/HowPeopleLived/>

The 'Live Traffic' feed reminds you how long you have been on the site and maybe it is time to go and do some other work! It also shows the global reach and connectivity of the technology. Jane is to be commended for the innovative approaches she is applying to her work and the learning environment.

Learning about Larry

When I was asked to review this blog the first thing I thought was *not another narcissistic nerd who spends all*

their time on the internet finding incredibly interesting things to write about themselves and what all their friends are doing. Self aggrandizement and blogs to me were synonymous or should that be synchronous? The Internet has always seemed to me like a bit of a black hole when you start searching and mining for materials—suddenly it is midnight and you still haven't finished that lesson plan, but hey it has been an interesting journey!

We are all time poor these days and so it is immediately enticing to find one of these resources that will provide us with all those amazingly useful links that we can pepper our teaching with, and impress our students with how 21st century IT savvy we are and before you know it you will be setting up class blogs and a Facebook page.

So who is Larry Ferlazzo? He has worked as a community organizer and currently teaches English language learners (ELL) in Sacramento, USA, and he has written several books mainly geared at teaching school age learners. However, he has sourced an enormous collection of resources here that range over different levels, including adult learners.

He is obviously committed to the online education community and has numerous awards and citations listed on his blog and website that attest to his outstanding contribution to education and community language, literacy and technology.

While it is impossible to endorse any of these links beyond suggesting they may be useful, here are some of the sections of the suite of Larry's blogs and website that I found interesting. A word of warning though—allow plenty of time to *go mining* and prepare to be absorbed in endless tangential explorations. <http://larryferlazzo.edublogs.org/larry-ferlazzos-english-website/>

View this as a starting point and when you click on for example 'English for Intermediate and Advanced' don't be put off by the basic appearance compared to the elegant profile of the blog. The lists require some scrolling down the page but once you go digging you will find there are some useful links on a very wide range of topics.

Here are a few that I found interesting:

http://larryferlazzo.edublogs.org/2009/10/07/the-best-websites-to-learn-about-the-hmong/
Lots of informative references for this ethnic group that takes you off in many directions. May be useful if you are planning to study the terrific Clint Eastwood film *Gran Torino*.

http://larryferlazzo.edublogs.org/2010/05/22/creating-a-jazz-chant/
The video is quite fun to watch and the steps easy to follow. We all love some inspiration to sing with our students!

http://larryferlazzo.com/math.html
Lots of maths resources here although you need to be aware that some are commercial while others have been listed by teachers. It is under construction so I suspect not all in the extensive list have been road tested.

Lynne Matheson is the co-president of VALBEC.

Or, maybe you would like to try your hand at taking up these questions? The next round of Community of Practice scholarships will open towards the end of 2011. To be alerted when they open, subscribe to *NCVER News* at <http://www.ncver.edu.au/subscribe.html>.

Bridget Wibrow is a Research Officer within the Research Management branch at the National Centre for Vocational Education Research. One of Bridget's roles is to co-ordinate the Building Researcher Capacity programme.

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