

this issue:

Deconstructing the literacy crisis

By Gerry Pancini

Building strong foundations

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Bridging the employment gap in

Bendigo By Chris Moore

About the future...

By Lindee Conway

The story behind My Neighbourhood:

literacy in context By Jan Hagston

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Adult Education in  
the Community

## features

### **Deconstructing the literacy crisis** 3

*By Gerry Pancini*

A lucid deconstruction of the reports generated by Adult Literacy and Life Skills survey.

### **Building strong foundations** 8

*By Jacinta Agostinelli*

An examination of ACFE funded pre-accredited courses in the ACE sector in Victoria.

### **Bridging the employment gap in Bendigo** 14

*By Chris Moore*

A terrific report coming out of the *Responding to CALD Learners: Cultural Diversity in Action* conducted by AMES and ACFE, describing one Learn Local organisation's efforts to address diversity issues around employment.

### **About the future...** 18

*By Lindee Conway*

An eventually, positive reflection on what lies ahead.

### **The story behind *My Neighbourhood: literacy in context*** 20

*By Jan Hagston*

Behind the creation of a literacy resource.

## regulars

### **Practical Matters** 23

*Flyphonics* *By Melanie Fulton*

### **Technology Matters** 25

*Employabilit-E* *By Allan Cormack*

### **Open Forum** 26

*Symbols, signs and words* *By Lynne Matheson*

*Dear reader* *By Pauline O'Maley and Gerry Pancini*

*Grassroots and National Year of Reading* *By Digna Libera*

*Brainfood conference* *By Paul Rawlinson*

### **Beside the Whiteboard** 31

*The making of a VET teacher* *Natasha McCormick*

### **What's Out There?** 34

*My Neighbourhood: literacy in context* by Jan Hagston. *Reviewed by Tracey Grimmer*

*Understanding Everyday Australian* by Susan Boyer. *Reviewed by Sandie Forbes*

*Running with Boats and Cyclone Tracey* by Anne Dunn and illustrations by Moira Hanrahan. *Reviewed by Janette Platt*

*Responding to CALD Learners: Cultural Diversity in Action* AMES and ACFE project prepared by Lynda Achren and Jude Newcombe. *Reviewed by Jacinta Agostinelli*

*Money Problems* by Hazel Davidson and illustrated by Dorothy Court. *Reviewed by Eleni Prineas*

# Editorial

Through a glass clearly...

Many, many years ago around about the end of 2001, Helen Macrae and I researched and wrote a paper titled *Women and Literacy in Australia*. I hadn't been teaching long but I had already formed the idea that literacy classes and literacy programmes alone, were not the answer to meeting the needs of the students I was teaching. The paper was successful, in the way that papers can be, but I don't think I quite articulated what I had intuited through my teaching and contact with adult learners. I felt I was looking 'through a glass darkly'.

So ten or so years on, with the help of some very fine writers, I got another chance to articulate my thoughts; I became the editor of *Fine Print*. *Fine Print* is a conduit for two-way communication between teachers, researchers, co-ordinators and managers, consultants and those working in policy. And in this particular issue I chanced to write an article and while writing that article, the glass was less *darkly* and I managed to see more clearly that literacy classes in isolation will not move adults who are unemployed and who have low literacy and numeracy skills, into employment. The relationship between low literacy and unemployment is not that simple—fix up your literacy and you will get a job—it's the belief, but it's not the truth. Education on it's own will not fix unemployment: we need to mobilize communities and governments to do that, we need whole of government approaches; read this *Fine Print* to understand more.

I remember vividly one of the interviews for that research project. I was in the richly furnished, *good* lounge room of one of my students, a beautiful, intelligent and strong woman around thirty years of age. A silver tray of sweet

alcohol and middle eastern treats were set beside me, and I felt diminished not only by the velvet couch I was sinking into, but more so by the importance the student had placed on my presence in her house. I found it very difficult to ask her research questions and quite quickly the interview turned into a conversation. She didn't want to learn to read and write English so she could work (I'm sure she could have got any job she went for anyway), no she wanted to learn English so she could help her children with their school work. She valued education for its transformative power, for what it could give to the person as a whole. She didn't see herself as lacking, as deficit; she just knew that literacy was a way to access the treasures of the world.

I want to say that lately our Open Forum section has been blossoming. Open Forum is an important section for it is here that we track the intellectual wanderings of practitioners. Keep the entries coming!

From Gerri Pancini's opening feature to Eleni Prineas' closing review, and all the 'treasures within', enjoy your *Fine Print*.

Jacinta Agostinelli



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

# Deconstructing the *literacy crisis*

By Geri Pancini

Media and others who claim inaccurately that Australia has a *literacy crisis* and that the ALLS (Adult Literacy and Life Skills survey) shows 46% of Australians cannot read and write, exasperate literacy and numeracy teachers. In outlining how these claims are inaccurate, Geri Pancini provides us with some responses to the current hype around levels of literacy in Australia.

## Introduction

Over the past three years, as President of Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL), I have gradually learnt not to panic when a radio or newspaper journalist phones and asks me to comment on Australia's *literacy crisis*. The first few times this happened I was very nervous: Who me? What do I know? What if I forget I'm speaking on behalf of ACAL and not as an employee of an educational institution or from my personal perspective? I found this *public voice* on behalf of ACAL nerve-racking to say the least and I dreaded these requests. So, it was an unusual response on my part when a journalist recently phoned at 6.30 am asking if I would do an interview on radio at 7 am—calmly, I said OK. And even though he said the interview would be live rather than pre-recorded, I stumbled out of bed to face another round of questions on Australia's *literacy crisis*.

I suppose now I've learned that having a *literacy crisis* grabs the attention of the media and gives radio and newspapers a good yarn. For example, the phone call mentioned above came after Germaine Greer told an audience at the Brisbane Writers Festival that 'almost half of Queenslanders had low literacy levels' (Courier Mail, 7/9/12). Known for her provocative stance, Greer stirred up quite a reaction from the media and those attending the festival, and hence the early morning phone call the following day.

For me, there are two sides at least to this discourse of an adult *literacy crisis*. On the one hand, as a *crisis* it draws attention to the need for increased funding and resource allocation so that adult learners can engage with education, develop skills and complete higher-level qualifications. On the other hand, it makes it sound as if every other person you meet in Australia is *illiterate*; and worse, that it's their own fault if they're unemployed or they don't have the qualifications or skills to meet the demands of the Australian workforce.

The *literacy crisis* also carries its own story. The narrative runs along lines something like this: if people improve



their literacy and learning skills, they can move into work and/or higher qualifications. Higher level of qualifications will mean a more skilled Australian workforce, and an increase in productivity. This line of reasoning persists despite the fact that at the same time, we read daily that jobs are being cut back in all manner of occupations: retail, manufacturing, construction, business services and finance, and the public service. Are all these people losing their jobs because of their low literacy skills? Can the prediction that some 2000 TAFE teachers in Victoria, or that over 2000 health workers in Queensland, will lose their jobs, be the result of poor literacy? I think we know the answer to this question. These job losses are directly related to policy decisions on funding rather than the skills of particular individuals.

Ever since the results of the 2006 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALLS) have become more public, I have spent some time thinking about the *literacy crisis* and in fruitful discussions with colleagues on the ACAL executive, trying to come to some understanding about it. This article is a reflection on the crisis and its representation in the media.

## ALLS 2006

In 2006, Australia took part in the international test called the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey. Based on the results, it was reported that the literacy and numeracy skills of nearly half of the Australian population were

low and below the minimum level needed to function in today's complex world. In fact, the figure most often quoted is '46%'. That is, 46% of the Australian population needs additional literacy skills and even more (53%) need further numeracy skills. This then became linked to a more generalised crisis in the social and economic well-being of Australia as evidenced in reports by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) (2008), Skills Australia (2010) and the Australian Industry Group (AiG, 2010).

Qualitative researcher Laurel Richardson (1997) draws on the metaphor of a *crystal* to explain that what we *see* depends 'upon our angle of repose' (p. 92). So the first question we might ask is: from which angle or stance do we view literacy? And the second question might be: what is the connection between the benchmarks (levels) for the ALLS survey and how the media and others report them?

In order to respond to these questions, we need to explore both the discourse of the *literacy crisis* and its socio-economic effects, and look at the ALLS survey and how it is interpreted.

### Discourses on the literacy crisis

According to Green, Hodgens and Luke, (1997) there are three major literacy discourses circulating in Australia relevant to the *crisis* debate. They point out that understanding the current debates around a so-called literacy *crisis* requires:

... that we understand how literacy is related to social and cultural issues, and to political and economic forces. Only then can we begin to make informed decisions about what should count as literacy, for whom, and in and for what kind of literate culture and society. (p. 22)

The three discourses offered by Green et al are functional literacy, cultural literacy, and critical literacy. Each of these discourses views literacy differently and therefore approaches teaching and assessing literacy in different ways.

Functional literacy focuses on basic skills and views these skills as located in the individual to prepare them to meet the requirements of an increasingly complex technological society. Most of us recognize this view of literacy as the *learn the basics* view of literacy. Giroux describes functional literacy as meeting 'the pragmatic requirements of capital: consequently, the notions of critical thinking, culture and power disappear under the imperatives of the labor



process and the need for capital accumulation' (Giroux, in Freire & Macedo, p. 102). Certainly the current focus on employability skills is situated in this discourse. This is not to say that employability skills are unimportant. Of course they are. We all want to have the skills and knowledge needed to function at work. However, here I am pointing out that this is merely one way to think about literacy and it also puts the *problem* in the individual. If you fix up the person, you will solve the problem.

Cultural literacy focuses on the individual knowing what a *well-educated* person should know about their culture. Freire & Macedo (1987) describe this view of literacy as serving the interests of the elite. This means literacy for the elite might include learning languages and the classics rather than merely the functional skills needed for employment (p. 102). Traditionally, prior to mass education, this form of literacy was the norm for the social and political elite who could afford an education. Cultural literacy creates a sphere of high culture separated off from the sphere of the general population. Interestingly, many would say that recent developments in forms of other media besides written text (e.g. radio, TV, film, the internet etc.) are undermining cultural literacy. They argue that there is more information *outside* educational institutions these days than we might find inside them. In other words, culture is being democratized with access to knowledge available to more than an elite few.

Finally, critical literacy involves developing a 'critical understanding of the text, and the sociohistorical context to which it refers ... it involves critical comprehension of reality' (Freire & Macedo, 1987 p.108). This means literacy 'demands a reading within the social context to which it refers' (p. 109). Put another way, critical literacy encourages the reader to read the world *behind* the text. For example, critical literacy might read a statement from

a mining magnate that argues against a carbon tax and suspect or entertain the thought that the statement might be driven by self-interest. In a Freirian sense, this is not just about critique alone. It is about a commitment to values and a future shaped by social movements. Somehow I imagine that if Freire were around today, he would suggest that literacy classes take part in (and study) events like the Occupy movement. The discussions and debates that would follow from this form of participation would offer serious engagement in literacy learning for those involved.

It is important to note that there is a further question about literacy that is not addressed by these three literacy discourses. Namely, how is literacy learnt and where is it exercised? Is literacy something that happens in our minds or something that happens in our behaviour and social relationships? Brian Street (1984) has focused on the latter, on literacy as a social practice. For Street, literacy is not about basic skills or information processing, but the practices that take place in social settings. In other words, literacy is social by nature and the meaning of literacy depends on the context in which it is used. This ethnographic approach, often referred to as the New Literacy Studies (NLS), is associated with Street but also theorists such as Barton (1994), Barton & Hamilton (1998), and Gee (1996). NLS considers the way people actually use literacy in specific situations. For this reason, the term *literacies* is probably a better descriptor of how people use literacy in everyday life, whether in formal schooling contexts or in home or work contexts.

This focus on literacy as social practice complements another school of thought that describes literacies as not just print-based texts, but the whole range of different media involved in learning, life and work. This approach represents a shift away from a myopic focus on reading and writing written texts as the only media for meaning making. Pioneered by Kress, the New London Group focuses on the multiple modes of text, image and new information technologies in contemporary meaning making and textual practices. Literacy is no longer just reading and writing; it has become multimodal demanding multi-literacies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kress, 1996, 2000, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). These are constituted on similar semiotic principles to those of language and as a result 'they are now part of the whole landscape of the many modes available for representation' (Kress 2003 p. 35–6).

To this point, I have tried to explain that the crisis discourse stems from a particular view of literacy—the

functional view. Functional literacy, as Gee (1990) puts it, means that the problem or crisis 'can be located within the individual and not in the wider society or the institutions that sustain the structures of the elites in society' (p. 30). Functional literacy locates the problem in the individual and in their lack of knowledge or skills about how to extract information from written texts, or place information in written texts so others can extract it. I will come back to this picture of literacy later when dealing with ALLS because it also thinks of literacy as extracting and injecting information into written texts.

### CGEA: Why four literacies?

The CGEA as framed in terms of the four literacies also rejected the idea that literacy was a matter of extracting or injecting information into written texts. The idea of four literacies was an attempt to recognize that we use different literacies in and for different aspects or social domains of life. That is, literacy as a social practice needs to be thought of as different literacies for different kinds of contexts. Initially, the literacies were referred to as Literacy for Personal Expression (cultural literacy), Literacy for Public Purposes (critical literacy), Literacy for Knowledge (academic literacy) and Literacy for Procedural Purposes (functional literacy). Although these names have changed with various re-accreditation processes from the original, the current certificates still describe literacy as involving engaging with texts in contexts needed for personal purposes, for work purposes, for learning purposes and for participation in the community. A representation of the literacies might look like the matrix in Figure 1.

Here we see each of the four areas of literacy as a separate domain or sphere of life. However these four areas of literacy are in constant dialogue with one another. They speak to—and talk back to—each other. So even though

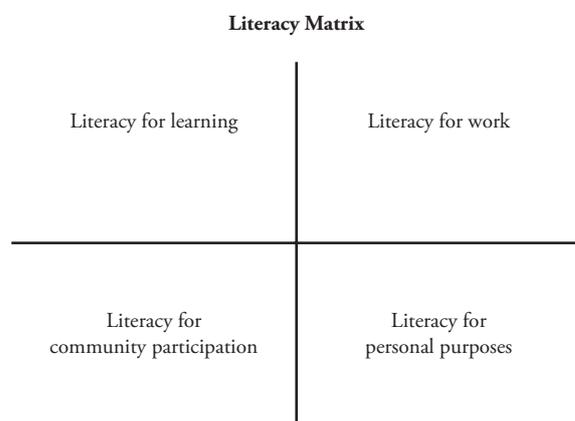


Figure 1

each area is important, no one form of literacy should take centre stage. For example, having the skills to work productively is very important but having the literacy to learn how to learn is also important for study and work. Can learning for work be learned in isolation of a workplace or even separate from the literacies of learning to learn, of personal expression or literacy for community participation? Each literacy or form of life exists in relation to each other. That's why focusing on, for example, just employability skills in isolation to other literacies is not even the best way to become *functionally* literate. This might be better explained by looking at some of the examples of contexts and texts involved in the different literacies (see Figure 2). These are just some examples and many others could be added.

Figure 2 shows just a few examples of literacy as social practices inclusive of various texts and contexts. If we look at a few of the examples, and ask: at what point do *cultural sensibilities* (Personal Purposes) intersect with deciding when to speak in a meeting (Workplace) and do these ever intersect with having a voice (Community Participation)? We might also see here that literacy is not just about the decontextualised acts of reading and writing texts as extracting or injecting information. Contextualised functional literacy also involves embedded social practices such as self-presentation (Personal Literacy) or emotional labour (Workplace Literacy) as an example.

### Back to the question

So, is it true that 46% of Australians are not literate? And what is my response to the journalists and others who worry so much about the literacy *crisis*? First, let's accept that different interests will draw on different discourses about what it means to be literate. Secondly, literacy is difficult to define and attempts to define it need to recognise that there are different literacies appropriate to different purposes or social practices. Finally, how we measure and interpret literacy needs to be made clear.

### Looking at the ALLS test

The ALLS test is a good example of a standardised test that does the job of placing Australians on a spectrum from low to high literacy levels. It does this well. In fact, it does exactly what all good standardised tests are designed to do. That is, it places the population tested along a standard bell curve. This means that when you look at the results, some of the sample will be at the low end of the scale, then a larger group will fall somewhere in the middle of the curve and some will be at the high end of the scale. If the

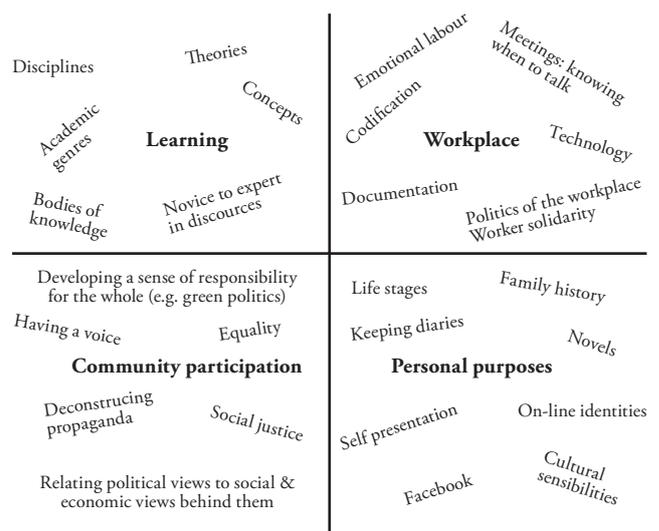


Figure 2

test did not show this, then the test would be considered flawed. This is not an argument for or against standardised tests. I am just making the point that the test itself does the job it was designed to do.

If the results did not place the population along a continuum of low to high, test designers have two options: they either rework the test or they change how the test is scaled so that it does end up looking like a bell curve. This reworking of the benchmarks is what happens in tests like NAPLAN or when the Year 12 scores are ranked each year. Rather than rewrite the test, the test is scaled to reflect a distribution as described above. For example, if too many people get too low or too high of a score, the benchmarks are moved around to accommodate this and the result is a test that once again resembles a bell curve. The graph in Figure 3 shows the ALLS results for prose literacy from 2006. We can see that it is a bell curve.

If we look at the actual results as quoted from the survey, Levels 1 and 2 make up the figure of 46%. This is described as the level required to cope with the demands of a modern complex society including the ability to undertake further training at the Certificate III level in VET courses—it is not the number of *illiterate* Australians. And it is not the number of Australians at Level 1. See Table 1.

Now, here is another interesting thing: there are as many people at Level 1 as there are in Levels 4 and 5 combined. This means that the highest and lowest are fairly similar e.g. approximately 16% are in the lowest level and 16% in the highest level—this is what all standardized tests set out to do. No problem here. The rest of the population falls into

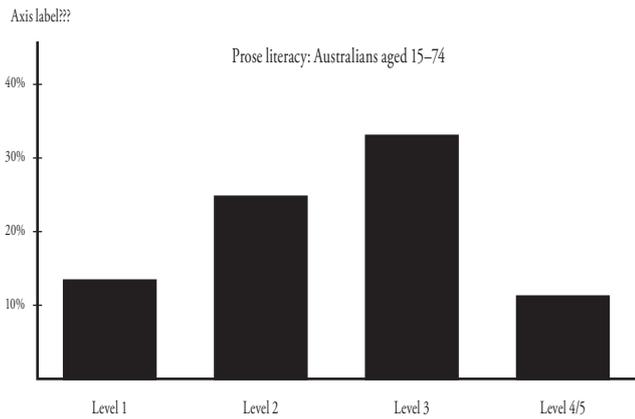


Figure 3

Table 1: Prose literacy (Australians aged 15–74 years)

Level 1/2	7 million	(46%)
Level 3	5.6 million	(37%)
Level 4/5	2.5 million	(16%)

(Australian Bureau of Statistics, Summary Results, para 7)

the middle of the graph—again typical of standardised tests. However, in reporting and quoting the results, Levels 1 and 2 are always combined which means that it is not the lowest but the lowest two levels that make up the 46%. Levels 1 and 2 (46%) are combined and labeled as below what is needed to undertake further education and training. This figure is quoted, or screamed out, by many (including Greer) that 46% of Australians are not able to read and write. However, if results were reported as 46% of the population needs further education and training that might be more reasonable. In fact, these days everyone needs to continue to take part in education and training (formal and informal) to maintain currency in all manner of personal, study and employment situations.

There are many other limitations of the test that this paper will not address. However, the main problem is that assessment tools such as ALLS favor an information processing or functional view of literacy. They require the individual to extract information and repurpose it in a decontextualised way. They do not assess people's literacy in terms of how they deal with texts in actual social situations, situations that include additional other resources (not just their own mind). For example, forms of standardised testing would find it difficult to include fellow workers or friends, Google, spell-checks, or a history of practical experience in workplaces or political debate. This form of assessment is not able to account for the physical

aspects and spatial layout of tools, objects and artifacts in play in a workplace. In short, they do not assess literacy as engaging with text in context. In this way, literacy is framed as *functional* or as extracting meaning out of texts rather than participating in practices.

## Conclusion

Of course, as literacy educators, I'm sure we all agree that we want a population that can take on the challenges of a complex modern world. Even if the percentage of Australians with so-called low literacy were not as high as 46%, there would still be work to do. But to combine Levels 1 and 2, and then claim that '46% of our population is not literate' sets up a situation where it becomes all too easy to blame the individual for needing to increase their skills for the changing workplace or to cope with the loss of work altogether. In other words, it becomes easy to say: 'No need to blame anyone but yourself if you find you lose your job, or if you don't have the skills to get a job, or if you can't afford to return to formal learning'.

Yes, we all need to keep learning and upgrading our skills. But along with literacy levels we should also keep in mind that jobs are disappearing at a rapid rate, while education is increasingly more expensive. Blaming the individual takes the gaze away from the lack of policy initiatives including programme delivery, professional development, and resource development. If the focus on the *literacy crisis* has any redeeming qualities, it will be to turn around this lack of interest in adult literacy but hopefully not at the expense of blaming the individual.

**Geri Pancini has been in and around literacy education for many years. She has taught adult literacy and trained teachers to work in adult literacy. Currently she works as a researcher in the Work-based Education Centre (WERC) at Victoria University and spent the past three years as President of ACAL**

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- Continued on page 40 ...

# Building broad foundations

By Jacinta Agostinelli

In this article Jacinta Agostinelli looks at pre-accredited foundation skills education. She starts with an historical perspective, and then looks more closely at the present experience of four Victorian metropolitan providers.

... while education is an ongoing process of improving knowledge and skills, it is also—perhaps primarily—an exceptional means of bringing about personal development and building relationships among individuals, groups and nations. (UNESCO, 1999, p. 12)

In 2008 the Victorian government began a four year strategy to reform vocational education and training, as outlined in documents such as *Securing Jobs For Your Future: Skills for Victoria* and *2009 A Stronger ACE—Delivering Skills for Victoria*. The strategy included an injection of funds and reforms to accredited and pre-accredited foundation skills education and training within the ACE and VET sectors. Pre-accredited foundation skills training in Victoria is provided by the ACE sector. Four years on, *Fine Print* decided to see how community learning centres were faring in the new environment. We surveyed four metropolitan providers, and although this is a small sample and doesn't include any rural or regional providers, we believe we have achieved some sense of on the ground experience.

In this article we take a brief look at some of the political and economic factors—and the theories of adult literacy running along side them—that together have shaped the evolution of the pre-accredited environment. We then take a look at the current situation with reference to ALBE research, consultation papers and reports, and the experience of the four providers.

## Pre-accredited programmes

ACFE funded pre-accredited programmes in Victoria are local programmes designed to prepare adult learners without formal post-schooling education, for further vocational study and training, and work. The type of pre-accredited learning funded by ACFE must address the needs of adult learners who have experienced barriers to learning and who lack the skills and confidence to enter formal, accredited courses, in general those who missed out acquiring basic, foundation skills, particularly literacy and numeracy, during their school years. In order to create pathways to nationally accredited curricula or work, funded pre-accredited programmes tend to be designed around adult literacy and numeracy, and employment



and specific vocational skills. (<http://www.skills.vic.gov.au/Pages/learnlocal-ACFE/provider-services/grants-and-funding/pre-accredited-programs.aspx>).

The Victorian government decision to fund pre-accredited foundation courses through ACFE was the result of research and provider experience that showed disengaged learners and those with incomplete formal education were generally less likely to participate in formal accredited training and further education. It was the Victorian ACE sector's specialised understanding of adult learning, disengaged learners and local community needs that prompted government to continue its provision of pre-accredited foundation skills training to the many Victorians who lack basic skills required for further training and employment.

## Political and economic factors

Over the past two decades the Australian government has increasingly viewed adult literacy and basic education (ALBE) as a means for increasing economic growth and productivity. The belief that a literate and well-trained workforce is a more productive workforce, dominated policy discourse, as is evident in framework documents mentioned in the introduction. Literacy and numeracy, and their delivery context, namely TAFE and ACE, have featured in the training agenda because without a certain level of basic skills people are less employable, are less able to undertake further training, and will be less able to cope with work in the rapidly changing, technologically advanced world of the twenty-first century.

This political and economic environment raised awareness of the ALBE movement already developing in TAFE colleges and community centres in Victoria. It certainly boosted the profile of ACE and enabled the sector to expand its services and move into the mainstream. As part of the National Training Reform Agenda in the nineties, we saw the birth of the CGEA: a literacy certificate that conformed to the language of competency based training and that attracted the recognition of employers, while still reflecting the values that the ALBE field had established since its beginnings in the seventies. In *Reading the Fine Print: A History of the Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council (VALBEC) 1978–2008*, Bev Campbell writes:

The CGEA was an important development in the institutionalisation and professionalisation of the adult literacy field. Such a certificate offered a credential and learning pathways to learners in a previously unregulated field. (p. 120)

Editor's note: For an engaging and comprehensive study of the initiatives and discourses that framed the evolution of adult literacy and basic education and its context, the adult and community education (ACE) sector, read the full text of this reference, available from VALBEC.

The popularity and demand for accredited, vocational courses grew and so did the number of providers to deliver them, ACE providers among them. More recently however, funding bodies have accepted that accredited training is not suitable for everyone, in particular for learners with limited formal learning experience. Findings from the Adult Literacy and Life Skills survey (ALLS), released in 2008, reinforced the reality that many Australians still lacked basic skills and were not accessing further education and training:

Just over half (54%) of Australians aged 15 to 74 years were assessed as having the prose literacy skills needed to meet the complex demands of everyday life and work. Results were similar for document literacy with 53% and numeracy with 47% achieving this level. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Summary of findings, para 7).

The fact that many adult learners lack the foundation skills required for further education was not new to adult literacy and numeracy practitioners. Back in 1990 teaching resources such as the seminal *Learning to Learn* (1990) by Rob McCormack and Geri Pancini, focussed on teaching adults *how* to learn. *Learning to Learn* is still referred to



today and we eagerly await its revision. In *Transforming Lives, Transforming Communities* (1999), Delia Bradshaw developed a conceptual framework for further education that prioritized foundation education, and which many adult basic skills educators based their practice around.

Nevertheless, the ACFE funded pre-accredited environment we have today is a part of the Victorian government's intervention to improve the foundation skills and the confidence to learn, of the many Victorians who do not participate in further education and training for work.

We can see that national training agendas and political and economic factors have largely been responsible for the expansion of the ALBE field and the Victorian ACE sector, and for shaping the evolution of the pre-accredited training environment. But alongside the political and economic factors are influencing theoretical discourses.

### **Theoretical factors**

Many educators in foundation education adhere to theory and approaches that place ALBE at the centre of community development and social change. The following section is a snapshot of some of these frameworks.

### **A global perspective (UNESCO)**

At the beginning of this article is a quote from a wonderful UNESCO document titled *Learning: the Treasure Within*. The holistic approach to education contained in the document offers lessons for both the government and practitioners in community education. Central to the

document is the thesis that education cannot be blamed totally for unemployment and there are ‘... other political, economic and social prerequisites for achieving full employment...’ (p. 18).

The writers of the UNESCO document state that more than anything, the world of the twenty-first century will require ‘*learning to live together*, by developing an understanding of others and their history, traditions and spiritual values ...’ (p. 20). To achieve *learning to live together* we need to create a learning society where we learn at every opportunity—in economic, social and cultural life as well as in formal learning situations—in order to fulfill our potential. Learning needs to go beyond the traditional concepts of vocational training and should open up opportunities that satisfy desire for knowledge, and this in turn will advance our society and strengthen mutual understanding among people.

Not only must it [lifelong education] adapt to changes in the nature of work, but it must also constitute a continuous process of forming whole human beings—their knowledge and aptitudes, as well as the critical faculty and the ability to act. It should enable people to develop awareness of themselves and their environment and encourage them to play their social role at work and in the community. (UNESCO, p. 19)

The UNESCO belief is that education policy in isolation cannot fix unemployment, but it can be used to strengthen our social systems and to build social cohesion, which will address the inequalities that lead to unemployment. This is the argument for an adult education policy that values social capital (networks, civic and social settings) and identity capital (personal plans and goals) outcomes as much as it values human capital (qualifications, skills and knowledge) outcomes.

### **A national perspective (ALA)**

A recent paper from Adult Learning Australia, *Let’s Get Serious About Adult Literacy and Numeracy* (2011, December), argues for a shift towards a more holistic view of adult further education, reflecting the OECD concept of lifelong learning: ‘The right to literacy and numeracy is an inherent part of the right to an education’ and ‘... literacy is an ongoing endeavour developed through many contexts over the lifetime.’ (Kearns, 2005, in Adult Learning Australia, p. 6).

Sally Thompson, CEO of Adult Learning Australia, further developed the concept of lifelong and contextualised learn-



ing in her conference presentation, ‘Lifelong and Lifewide or Piecemeal and Punitive’ (2012, September). People learn literacy and numeracy in all life contexts, not just in training or educational contexts. The current national training approach therefore, does not provide for people who do not have basic literacy and numeracy skills who are not actively looking for work, whether through illness, choice, caring duties or loss of hope of ever finding a job. Literacy acquisition is a social process developed through participation, so government strategies to improve foundation skills levels need to go beyond vocational contexts only.

### **Literacy as social practice**

Adult literacy and numeracy educators have embraced the theory that literacy is a social practice, that is, we use literacy in social situations or contexts and not as an isolated set of skills. Reading and writing would be meaningless if they had no purpose connected to everyday living. As educators we know that different social situations require different types of literacy. In relation to the current training agenda, the question we need to ask is, can we really learn the literacy required for work without actually being in a work situation or context?

An important aspect of the view of literacy as social practice is that the literacies we use in specific contexts interrelate with each other, just as the contexts of our lives interrelate with each other—we don’t *turn off* our personal lives when we go to work, we don’t stop belonging to a community when we close the front door, for example. The same goes for the literacies we use—we read a newspaper over breakfast and disagree with the front page story, and we go to work and use the same critical thinking to suggest an improvement to the health and safety procedures, for example. Our literacies intersect and interrelate, so isolating them from each other is not the best way to learn. Isolating literacy for work and further study is therefore contrary

to the practice of many teachers in adult and community education.

### **A discursive tension**

Educational theorists would define the national government's current approach to ALBE as a *human capital* approach: the government commits to investment in the training and further education needs of the adult population where and when there is a perceived economic return. As discussed in the previous section many adult educators would view this approach as a narrow understanding of adult learning and its place in our community. A human capital perspective in isolation of the other approaches to adult education, does not always sit easily with adult educators and the tertiary researchers who support them. Anyone visiting a foundation skills class, accredited or not, will see that broader frameworks for understanding learning, and disengagement from it, underpin much of the teaching practice.

However, while campaigning for the inclusion of social and identity capital into government discourse, foundation skills practitioners can still work within frameworks of work force participation and productivity. We all recognise that employment is a major contributor to personal happiness and well-being, to healthy communities, and a factor in breaking intergenerational poverty; it is a good *meeting* place for the ACE sector and the government bodies that fund it.

In any place, discursive tension is not a bad thing. Firstly, it necessitates the development of a strong professional base and a valid body of knowledge. One cannot go to the bargaining table without support and knowledge based on sound research. Secondly it encourages those responsible for developing strategies around pre-accredited and foundation skills to consider the needs of learners. Future consultation between adult learning educators and the Victorian government will no doubt raise awareness of the need to broaden the rationale, design and delivery of funded pre-accredited foundation courses.

### **ACE provider experience**

The government's recognition, through the foundation skills strategies, that many people needed a stepping stone into formal training, has translated to an increase in dedicated funding for foundation skills in TAFE and community centres. In Victoria, ACFE has directed a portion of funding towards ACE providers to develop a range of pre-accredited courses. Courses at the four providers surveyed include: Life Skills Literacy, Life Skills Maths, Improve your

Writing and Spelling, Improve your English Grammar, Introduction to Hospitality, Introduction to Horticulture, English for Children's Services, Computer courses and ESL courses. The most popular courses, possibly because of their applied learning content and obvious pathways, are computer courses and anything to do with hospitality and horticulture. ESL classes, such as Living and Working in Australia are also popular in the providers surveyed.

A few of the surveyed providers have been approached, and sometimes funded, by other community organisations—typically community banks and local services—to provide training for them or to run a course addressing community needs. This can work well as there is immediate value to the pre-accredited concept, and it reduces the work required in marketing the course. Students in the four surveyed providers are undertaking a mix of accredited and non-accredited coursework: the pre-accredited course is used to support language and employment needs that the accredited curriculum doesn't cover or that students might be struggling with. Often the decision to offer both types of curriculum (accredited and pre-accredited) is based on student demand. For example, ESL students in a pre-accredited course might want extra language hours because elements such as pronunciation and spelling are not covered in the accredited course. ESL learners in particular benefit from and enjoy the extra support in this concurrent delivery, however providers report that the paperwork and planning can be onerous.

When setting up an ACFE funded pre-accredited course, providers need to meet set criteria: a minimum twenty hours, focus on creating pathways to nationally accredited training or employment, be locally designed and subject based, use the A-Frame framework. Further criteria is listed on the Skills Victoria website (<http://www.skills.vic.gov.au/Pages/learnlocal-ACFE/provider-services/grants-and-funding/pre-accredited-programs.aspx>).

Local realities and considerations present a second layer of criteria for providers when planning foundation skills pre-accredited courses. Providers typically assess the employability skills of a course and the employment pathways. A common consideration is marketing the course: where to find students, how much time and money will marketing take, how to attract hard-to-reach learners. Marketing is a big issue and will be expanded on in the next section. Teacher or trainer availability is a consideration; depending on the course, trainers may require industry experience, as well as a Certificate IV in TAE and most importantly, the

specific skills required for teaching disengaged and low level learners. Venue space is another criteria: the popular kitchen skills and horticultural type courses require specific settings and spaces—kitchen settings are particularly costly to set up and run.

## Marketing

All four surveyed providers reported that marketing their foundation skills pre-accredited courses was problematic. Marketing can be a challenge for community organisations regardless of the type of course, due to resource issues and competition with larger more profitable providers. Survey responses indicate that marketing foundation level pre-accredited courses is even more difficult. One challenge is that community awareness is a problem either because learners and referring organisations aren't aware of the benefits of this type of course, or because the courses don't lead directly to employment (this latter reason is put forward especially by younger people). Another challenge is that hard-to-reach and disengaged learners do not respond to the conventional methods of marketing through brochures and printed material. Word of mouth is the preferred method in the foundation skills market, and to work well word of mouth marketing requires developing partnerships and creating a profile in the local community, which are time and resource intensive. Providers can't normally rely on Centrelink or Jobsearch services (known as JSAs) for referring students as these services require their clients to undertake at least fifteen study/contact hours, which most small learning centres don't have the resources to provide.

One respondent mentioned that need in the community does not always match the funding criteria of employment or further study outcomes, and gave Citizenship courses as an example. Other organisations seem to be offering Citizenship courses and this disparity would indicate a communication problem. However, the comment highlights the fact that not all learners are in the labour market, and so the criteria requiring courses to be a pathway to accredited training creates a challenge. The document *Let's Get Serious about Adult Literacy and Numeracy* (2011, December) puts it succinctly:

While well intentioned these initiatives and approaches [towards labour force participation and productivity benefits] tie the right of all Australians to read and write and use numeracy at a basic level to their employment or job seeker status. They assume that those adults currently in the job market or

actively looking for work are the only Australians worth investing in. (p. 4)

Some organisations market pre-accredited courses through their accredited courses, and as mentioned earlier, offer a type of concurrent delivery. Concurrent delivery works very well for particular groups of students because pre-accredited hours can fill in the language and numeracy gaps in accredited curriculum. And it solves a large marketing and resourcing problem. In some ways concurrent delivery pre-empts the model of integrated delivery developed by Stephen Black and Keiko Yasukawa in *Working Together* (2011), where language, literacy and numeracy skills are not taught separately to vocational skills, but are contextualised or embedded within vocational courses.

One provider reported that although concurrent delivery can work well the difficulty is that it can result in too many classes for students, leading to feelings of being overwhelmed; students then drop the pre-accredited hours quickly. Another provider is trialing some innovative curriculum involving concurrent delivery, admitting that the challenges are around planning and communicating the model to new staff.

## Effective marketing strategies

The *Strategic Review of Effective Re-engagement Models for Disengaged Learners*, (Davies, Lamb & Doecke, 2011) commissioned by Skills Victoria, identified why conventional marketing approaches are ineffective for encouraging disengaged learners back to learning:

... disengaged learners will not approach education or training providers, nor will broad untargeted advertising campaigns result in increased desire to participate ... disengaged learners develop a social distance from education and training ... (p. 23)

The above report discusses a number of national and international models for reaching disengaged learners and keeping them involved with learning. Among the strategies are outreach models that bring learning to the learner. Models include the employment of a dedicated community liaison officer, locating learning 'in-place' or 'embedded with a host community organization...' (p. 25), and targeted outreach and engagement to particular groups and organisations (p. 26). The report states that hard to reach learners are more likely to consider and engage with education and training if they have built up a lasting and meaningful relationship with staff or peers connected to the training provider. This



type of outreach or marketing is expensive because it takes time and dedicated staff. Marketing or outreach is an area that seems to require more attention.

### The literacy campaign model

Literacy campaigns have been a successful method for getting literacy to the people who need and want it. At the ACAL conference (2012, September), Bob Boughton spoke about the You Can Too literacy campaign model in his keynote address, ‘South–South Cooperation: Can it work in Australia?’ As opposed to a programme approach for improving the literacy rate in a community, the campaign model mobilizes the whole community by getting commitment from community leaders and agencies and government departments already working within it. The campaign model has three stages: socialisation, basic literacy classes, post-literacy consolidation activities. Boughton described a trial literacy campaign run in the Aboriginal community of Wilcannia. Socialisation involved forming partnerships with Aboriginal elders and other established local agencies. The campaign ran basic literacy classes using resources from international literacy campaigns, such as in Cuba and East Timor, contextualised to the local Aboriginal community. The aim of post literacy consolidation activities was ‘to consolidate learning from initial classes and build pathways to a community of literate practice’ (Boughton, 2012). Activities included both formal and informal activities such as computer classes at the Land Council, cooking classes at a Women’s Safe House, a market garden with a Community Development Employment Projects programme (an Indigenous employment programme), work experience at the shire council and WELL tutorial support, with future activities planned (Boughton, 2012).

When discussing the benefits of the literacy campaign model Bob Boughton quoted international literacy expert, Maria Torres:

The success or failure of a literacy activity does not ultimately derive from economic or technical issues, but rather from the existence or not of a firm political will with the capacity to organise and mobilise the people around a literacy project. (Boughton 2012).

When thinking about marketing strategies it might be useful for the Victorian government and providers in the ACE sector to further explore the literacy campaign model and other re-engagement models.

### Conclusion

The ALBE field recognises the importance of the national initiative to provide foundation skills to Australian adults with limited formal learning experience, through accredited and pre-accredited courses. The Victorian government has strengthened the capacity of ACE to enable it to fulfill the purpose of providing foundation skills through pre-accredited courses,, however provider experience highlights a number of areas in need of attention.

Jacinta Agostinelli is the editor of *Fine Print* journal.

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Continued on page 39 ...

# Bridging the employment gap in Bendigo

By Chris Moore

'Bridging the employment gap in Bendigo' is one of a number of research reports produced by Learn Local practitioners as a result of a project conducted by AMES and ACFE, titled *Responding to CALD Learners: Cultural Diversity in Action*. This research by Chris Moore was first published on the Skills Victoria website and is reprinted here with permission from AMES and ACFE. The publication *Responding to CALD Learners: Cultural Diversity in Action* is reviewed in the Reviews section of this issue of *Fine Print*. In his research Chris Moore takes great care in responding to the complexities surrounding cultural diversity.

## Research context

Employment is a cornerstone issue for Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, as employment is intertwined with not only financial stability but also social cohesion, self-esteem, independence, the ability to gain stable housing, opportunities to build and maintain English language skills, greater systems knowledge and, overall, a greater sense of community belonging and well-being. (Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia, 2011:1)

Bendigo, the city in the heartland of Central Victoria, boasts a booming population, a semi-rural lifestyle with all the benefits of city living, plus a regional area that caters to every industry, interest and living aspiration. It is a viable and liveable alternative to city dwelling, and as such is presenting itself more and more as a desirable place to settle and start a new life. This is particularly true for many of our CALD refugees, who have come from rural areas in their own countries, and prefer the country to city life.

Fleeing conflict in Burma, Karen people began settling in Bendigo in 2007. Since then many more have arrived either directly from refugee camps in Thailand or through relocating from elsewhere in Australia (Karen Buddhist Dhamma Dhutta Foundation 2011). The official figures on Karen refugee settlement in the Bendigo region now exceed 300; but there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that this figure is much understated. It is difficult to track the exact number of people who move here from their places of initial settlement in the larger Victorian Karen communities of Geelong and Werribee, and therefore we are left with only an estimation of actual figures. It is without doubt, however, that the Karen are poorly represented in both training and employment in this region.

Whilst we see training in such fields as aged care and children's services as equitable, empowering and inclusive,

we understand that the Karen feel a greater need for rapid movement into sustainable employment, so that they can stop accepting Centrelink payments, and can support their families. As many in the Karen community have had little or no formal schooling, and are unable to read and write in their own language there is a long path of training and general education that must be completed before certificate training can even commence.

The most obvious need for the Karen community is the mastery of the English language, a need we address here at On Track with ESL training, but this is only the tip of the iceberg. Employment, transport, accommodation and social inclusion into mainstream society are of paramount importance to ensure successful integration into Australian society without an ongoing dependence on welfare and social security.

We are aware that at this point in time, the Karen community's wish to gain sustainable incomes and support their community has a higher priority than ongoing certificate level study, and with the number of settlers increasing all the time, there needs to be a focus on training and employment, and on making those first inroads into the local business communities.

It is our contention then, that training in ESL is not enough to enable the Karen to become self-sufficient, nor to meet the needs of the employers in the area. With this in mind, we wished to research the needs of the employers and the Karen community in relation to the employability skills: firstly to discover what learning is needed for the Karen to become attractive as potential employees, and secondly, to discover the best means of tailoring a course to enable the Karen to develop the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in gaining and keeping a job.

We currently run an Employment Skills programme, called ES21, which we wrote and designed for the general public. We also run a tailored version for youth at risk. This pro-

gramme has elements from Certificates in Retail, Business and Community Services, and is funded by government. The information garnered from the research would be used to develop a similar programme specifically to run alongside the ESL programme and tailored for each industry.

### Where do we start?

The first decision was where do we start. This was not as obvious or easy as expected. After much deliberation, we settled on the following question to focus our first cycle of research: *If we investigate the perceptions of employers of our Karen community, and the perceptions of the Karen community towards finding employment with local employers, how will it assist us to provide meaningful pre-employment assistance and training?*

As we already have an established employment team, with regular contacts and networks, we considered that one good way to gather data would be to talk individually with our contacts in the course of normal communications. In order to reach as many employers as possible, we also held an employer forum and distributed a series of questionnaires. Most of the information collated came from the forum discussions, as we had a poor response to the questionnaires.

The Karen people are very aware of their circumstances, and many feel obliged to do whatever is asked of them without complaint or criticism, as they often consider themselves indebted to Australia for giving them opportunities. With much trial and deliberation, we discovered that the best way to gather information and real opinions from the Karen was informally. Through many a discussion with both employed and unemployed groups and individuals, and in the presence of community leaders, including a Buddhist monk, we managed to elicit the attitudes and opinions that really mattered.

However, there were some basic issues and questions that needed to be recognised and taken into consideration before we even began to collect information. We needed to be aware of preconceptions—those of the people being interviewed, and our own. It is important to remember that at the time of these discussions, the issue of the so-called *boat people* was very prominent, and suggestions of links to crime, terrorism and questionable character were very much the order of the day. Consequently, in formulating our questions and our approaches we were careful to take into consideration such things as:

- How can we make sure the findings aren't affected by preconceived ideas and generalities?

- How do we word each question to minimise the impact of preconceptions?
- How do we ensure discussions truly reflect honest opinions and viewpoints, that is, how do we make sure we don't just get statements that reflect what they believe we want to hear?
- What influence would popular opinion and media reporting have on the outcome, and will this distort the truth? How can we counter this?
- How can we make sure the findings don't just reflect our own assumptions?

These are all important questions, and we spent untold hours discussing and formulating strategies to address them to the best of our abilities. There can be no guarantee that what we achieved is not tainted by prejudice, preconception or misconception, but in being aware of the possibilities, we believe we have minimised their impact on our findings.

### From the employers

There were a number of common issues that emerged from data collected from the employer focus groups and surveys.

#### Communication

Many employers saw communication as an insurmountable problem. They would not consider the Karen people for any job entailing customer service/contact, telephone operations or inter-staff communications. Whilst many were sympathetic to the Karen needs, and the need to find sustainable employment for them, they were largely unwilling to take on what they saw as a *burden*—people who would need extra assistance and close scrutiny.

As with communication skills, it was assumed that refugees would not be able to use email, word processing programmes and so on, which are often a prerequisite for employment.

#### Workplace expectations

Discussions with employers identified cultural issues relating to workplace expectations and employability skills that needed to be addressed. One of these, for example, is the propensity of the Karen people to leave work without notification when they need to carry out a personal errand, such as taking a sick child to the doctor. This is a cultural issue, because as subsistence farmers in their own country and after having spent years in a refugee camp, and so not having had an employer before, they are unaware of what employers expect in Australia.

## OHS policies and procedures

Many employers were concerned about OHS procedures and Worksafe compliance. Employers were worried that, given the background of the Karen, along with their limited English-language skills, they would not have much understanding of OHS processes or of their responsibilities in following policy and procedures.

## Prejudice of customers and staff

Some employers stated that they had no objections to employing refugees, but were worried about their customers or their existing staff having objections. It is conceivable that this was used as a mask for employers' own misgivings.

## Religion

Many employers showed unease at the prospect of employing Muslims. This was not necessarily due to prejudice or fear, but due to prayer times, and having to pay wages for these times. Employers also believed that workers would need to stop for prayer four or five times a day, which they saw as disruptive. A further worry was that the non-Muslim workers would demand equal amounts of time off in response to this. Apart from being a generalisation and apart from whether or not prayer times are more disruptive than other work practices such as *smoko* or toilet breaks, this concern was completely unfounded because the Karen settlers are either Buddhist or Christian. Clearly, this emerged as an area in which employers needed educating.

At our forum, the notion was raised that the Karen people should put their religion on their resume in order to reassure the prospective employer that there would not be a prayer-time issue. There is no requirement in Australian law that a person should have to state his/her religion, either directly or through inference to an employer as part of a recruitment application. Yet the problem remains that employers may assume the person's religion, and not employ that person because of their incorrect information and assumptions.

## Height

As strange as this may seem, the issue of physical height was brought up. The Karen people tend to be smaller in stature than the average Anglo-Australian, and some employers raised concerns about their physical ability, and their ability to reach and carry. We could advise the Karen to write 'I'm taller than I look' on their resumes!

## From the Karen

In our discussions with the Karen people, we found a

couple of prevalent misgivings, namely, isolation and communication.

## Isolation

The larger employers in this area who are actively employing the Karen have unofficially adopted a model of group training and interaction. They employ CALD people in groups, and delegate the most accomplished speakers of English to leadership roles, so that instructions and directives can be dispersed efficiently. Unfortunately, this has the effect of segregating the group from other workers. From their comments, we understood that feelings of *belonging*, of being socially included and accepted, were undermined by this practice of keeping them separate from the mainstream workforce. We realised that we needed to devise training that would enable them to take their places in the workforce as full and equal members of the existing team.

## Communication

Just as the employers expressed concerns about language and communication, so did the Karen. They told us that potential employers often speak too fast, or use words that they do not know, and this leaves them unable to satisfactorily answer the questions, and as such do not obtain the job. The Karen people also have difficulty understanding the fast and imprecise nature of workplace banter, and instructions that are heavily loaded with colloquialisms, abbreviations and word misuse. This is something that could be addressed in training by concentrating on everyday conversational English language, and understanding language and its verbal and non-verbal aspects. Also our training would need to focus on teaching clarification techniques to the Karen—how to ask questions to clarify points that are unclear, or seem to be nonsensical.

From this first cycle of research we realised that while we have taken on the challenge of adapting our training to address the needs of the Karen people, there is equal need for education amongst employers about the Karen people. Moreover, training must not only equip the Karen to succeed in the workplace, but also to deal with misconceptions, misrepresentation and potential hostility.

## Our challenges

Our next challenge was to use the gathered information to formulate changes to our training that would accommodate the needs of the Karen, as highlighted by our findings. Our next cycle, therefore, was based around the

following question: how do we develop our employment skills programme in response to the issues?

Now the work really began!

## The training

As the teaching continues, so does our learning. We are discovering how much more there is to accomplish, and how much more there is to do. Teaching employability skills, and workplace and conversational language, are small parts of the picture. The issue of employability skills in the context of language is closely intertwined with cultural issues and attitudes. Whilst the *soft* skills that are needed to gain employment are of paramount importance, so are the skills required to maintain employment.

We decided that our OHS sessions needed to be extended to cover what could perhaps be better described as induction, i.e. to include such things as management hierarchy, use of facilities and meal breaks. In any workplace there is a hierarchy of management and supervision, which should be followed—for example, to whom do you speak when you have a complaint, and is it the same person if you have a query or a request for time off? This even entails some procedures that we take for granted, such as do we need to ask permission to go to the toilet? Can we go and get a glass of water if we are thirsty? And of course, what should we do if we need to take time off work? In the course we integrate all these functional processes into general OHS to ensure that the employee has a full understanding of their responsibilities and processes when they start work.

We are also finding that such training cannot be linear—it has to take a more holistic approach. A linear approach does not take into account the matters that arise everyday. Nor does it allow for fluidity—new people starting at different levels and with varying degrees of knowledge. The training has to be developed and maintained by a variety of interested parties so that health, community awareness, social inclusion and workplace inclusion are catered for throughout.

## A cyclical process

Alongside the training, we instigated a *road show* to take to employers to help them understand the Karen people's lives, culture, experiences and understandings. The response from other community and employer groups has been incredibly positive, and has resulted in the formation of the Bendigo Employment Working Group. This group comprises members of the local Settlement Committee, Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE, Hazeldene's Chicken



Farm and the DEEWR Local Employment Coordinator. We also have expressions of interest from other employers from a range of occupations including recycling, mining, horticulture, and property services. We are approaching the Jobs Services Australia providers in order to sign up representatives of their organisations.

It is important that our training be in line with the culture of specific workplaces, and it is with this in mind that we developed the Bendigo Employment Working Group—so that we can ascertain the needs of each employer. The CALD learners need to understand the way the workplace functions, and the processes and procedures involved, and this functionality is determined by consultation with the employers. In this way, problems can be solved before they become issues, and understanding can take the place of recrimination.

The training and the Bendigo Employment Working Group feed into each other in a cyclical process. The employment group has, in fact, become part of the holistic approach to the training. Not only does it enable us to more easily consult employers in order to focus our training, but the formation of the group has opened up opportunities for orientation visits so that what we teach our Karen learners can be experienced directly, not just in abstract. These orientation visits are invaluable in providing greater relevance for the training, and in increasing the Karen's understanding of the Australian workplace and workplace expectations. We are hoping that, in time, the group will also provide opportunities for work experience as part of our training. It has already enabled us to provide post-employment support to Karen people who are already working and we are confident that with more employers on board, it will open up new employment opportunities for the Karen.

What has become apparent through our discussions with the Bendigo Employment Working Group and others, is **Continued on page 39 ...**

# About the future...

By Lindee Conway

In a depressing time for adult educators across the nation, and most particularly in states whose governments have taken to cutting deeply into the VET sector, it's difficult to stay positive about what we do and why we do it. In addition, LLN practitioners are under more pressure than ever to cut down trees to demonstrate compliance, and re-registration worthiness. Despite this, optimism continues. Why is that? Well, probably because there is so much good teaching and learning occurring across the wide-brown land. Lindee Conway tries, and fails, to stay miserable about the future.

The idea for this article came to me while attending, and speaking at, a forum in June run by Adult Learning Australia (ALA). The forum, titled *The Future of Adult and Further Education in Australia*, was organised by Sally Thompson (the CEO of Adult Learning Australia, and a wonderful force for good in our field), in response to TAFE/VET cuts made by the Victorian government in the 2012 budget. In my presentation I railed against quietism in the community sector.

Very early this year I was rung by a well-meaning public servant from Melbourne's Spring Street (the seat of state government in Victoria), who asked if I had any 'good news stories' from the Community West Neighbourhood House Education programme. 'I sure do', I said, and went on to tell him about a really beautiful end of year ceremony for a group of differently-abled learners we teach. As the programme coordinator, I was brought in to hand out appreciation and attendance certificates by the wonderfully gifted, dedicated, and smart teacher who'd worked all year with her classes. Was this not a story worth celebrating? Especially since we'd doubled our business levels with the local day programme centre that works with these young people? That's worth celebrating, isn't it? 'Well, No, we're really looking for stories around vocational stuff. Sorry'. That's when I started thinking that perhaps the senior and policy people in education are worrying about the wrong things.

A few months later, I attended a workshop to celebrate the launch of *Responding to CALD Learners: Cultural Diversity in Action*. Sian Lewis, the General Manager of Adult Community & Further Education (ACFE) thanked all the contributors for 'doing so well, with such limited funding'. Around the same time, I heard Sally Thompson, who is a former community educator herself, remark that 'Community education funding is like dog-years, one dollar in a community house is used like seven dollars anywhere else.' Hmm, I thought—yes, but should we keep doing it like that?

Change is another issue in adult education. Practitioners in adult education have continually worked to support adult learners through sustained change. To remain in the field, and many practitioners remain in the same workplace across decades, means to be inured to change. A simple measure of the rolling change we've borne is the name of our industry: From ALBE to LLN, from foundation skills to general education, from second-chance learning to basic education. Reporting requirements, with a focus on paper-based evidence that can be measured, filed and copied, is another thing that changes regularly in community education and the VET sector. In the September 2012 issue of *The Monthly*, there is an extended article on Australian justice, called, 'The Work of Judges', by Kate Rossmanith. In it she quotes NSW, Magistrate Hugh Dillon, 'I don't pretend to speak for all magistrates or judges or our courts, but I think that the process is unnecessarily complex and intellectually turgid, overladen with all sorts of rules and guidelines'. I hope that neither Ms Rossmanith or His Worship Dillon takes it as a slight on the importance of the article or the sector, if I ask you to put your thumb over the first half of the quote and read it again. What does it remind you of? That's exactly what compliance and assessment have become in the world of LLN. Nobody wants to work in an industry with low or no quality, however, the extreme focus on compliance isn't what VET, or LLN practitioners want to focus on and it isn't what learners want either.

And so my annoyance about appearing happy to be the poor cousin of adult education developed and festered and culminated in my presentation at the June ALA forum mentioned at the start of this article. The press release about the forum quotes me as saying, '... people working in community education have not taken a vow of poverty', (what I actually said was, 'Community education is not a vocation and I haven't taken a bloody vow of poverty', but thank you to the writer of the press release who cleaned up my act!).

But then the Victorian and other state governments decided

to reduce TAFE funding and courses to the make the TAFE sector poor too! Ironic—and not much fun. And although Fine Print is not a platform for political views, I have to say, from an educator's point of view, the depths of these cuts don't seem very sensible to me. How do we—to use the Victorian government's own clunky but descriptive phrase, 're-engage the disengaged'—provide pathways and encourage foundation level learners to embark on them, if the paths are cut because TAFE no longer offers courses?

If you read Fine Print, you know all this. The real question, which came to me while sitting and listening to the other speakers at this forum and while at other events since, is this: Why do we stay in community education if the thanks we get is for doing more with less; if the thanks we get is for filling in matrix upon matrix of information for reporting requirements, to the detriment of creative classes and meaningful assessment tasks? The answer is because so much good occurs in the classroom, and the staffroom—if you are an LLN practitioner lucky enough to have a staffroom—and because we know it's important.

Before expanding on the good work, I will acknowledge discussion around statistics that report low levels of literacy and numeracy skills among adults in Australia. I think the figures are less reliable than they appear, and rather than go into that obscurity here I refer you to the excellent work of Geri Pancini, 'Reflections on literacy: It depends on the question', in this issue of Fine Print and to Stephen Black and Keiko Yasukawa's report on their research findings, *Beyond Deficit Approaches* (see references below). Yet in spite of the problems with the way adult literacy and numeracy is presented as being in crisis, we know that literacy is real and important. The ALA and the Australian Education Union phrase the issue perfectly when they say:

The right to literacy is an inherent part of the right to an education. All Australians, regardless of their employment status, should be supported to develop their language, literacy and numeracy skills.

Anywhere an interested LLN practitioner cares to look, she finds good teaching celebrated, and that brings me to the point of this article!

As is often the case, the ALA forum evolved into something quite different in the course of the afternoon. It began as a serious, frantic response to the cuts in education: president Barry Golding told the gathering that belly-dancing is important and does lead to enrolments in further, more

formal, learning; Mike Hallpike told the story of a PhD graduate at Victoria University, having recommenced formal learning in a community basic computer course.

At the launch of the report, *Responding to CALD Learners: Cultural Diversity in Action*, there were some great stories. A formidably resilient groups of practitioners from Robinvale have used minimal financial wherewithal to provide community dinners, twenty-eight times, so that seasonal workers can get to know the centre and learn about cooking and English classes. For more information on this report I refer you to the feature by Chris Moore, 'Bridging the employment gap in Bendigo', and Jacinta Agostinelli's review on the report, in this issue of Fine Print. On the subject of good teaching, the recent Australian Council for Adult Literacy conference in Hobart was a pearler. I listened to speakers from the Glenorchy council talking about great programmes and activities they run for young women who are early mothers. It was practical as well as inspiring. At another session, I heard about good teaching in relation to prisoners and people on community detention orders. Again, it was very rousing, to hear about ways to teach and show respect at the same time: not judging, just teaching.

And about cutting down trees, excellence in teaching and learning, and attention to compliance can be recorded in ways other than photo-copying: Dale Pobega from the community education provider in Sunshine, Duke Street Neighbourhood House, captures beautiful work using phone cameras and phone microphones and uploads it to a class website. He also encourages his learners to upload their homework on the class ESL site. This is common practice in many places around Australia.

There is so much evidence to show that adult learning should not just focus on vocational courses and should be encouraged and supported for its intrinsic value. The tiny snapshot, listed above is something we could add to endlessly—and maybe that's what we should do to keep our spirits up: talk, write and celebrate excellence in community/foundation/basic learning and teaching.

Government can make and promote the policy it likes but excellent, inspiring and appropriate teaching and learning will go on, celebrated or not. Policy change may well end up coming from the grassroots.

**Lindee Conway has taught and worked in adult education for more than two decades—and loves it. She is a**  
**Continued on page 33 ...**

# The story behind *My Neighbourhood: literacy in context*

By Jan Hagston

Have you ever wondered what processes the writer of a literacy resource goes through? Jan Hagston describes why she decided to write her new resource, *My Neighbourhood: literacy in context*, and how she developed methods and activities around theories on literacy and applied learning. For a review of *My Neighbourhood: literacy in context*, see the Reviews section of this issue.

From October 2008 to January 2012 I worked as the executive officer of the Victorian Applied Learning Association (VALA). VALA is the peak organisation for applied learning educators. These could be educators of students of any age, from all sectors and subject areas. However, most members of VALA are teachers of the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) or similar programs for youth.

During this time I had contact with a range of teachers in VCAL and other youth programmes, some expert at using an applied learning approach, others struggling to develop students' subject knowledge using applied learning. As a literacy educator, I was particularly interested in how students' literacy skills were developed. I observed literacy being developed in the following ways:

1. Embedded within a broader project. This included activities such as organising an end of year event or a fund raising activity or running a small business. In some instances, literacy specific to the tasks was directly taught. In other instances students were expected to acquire the knowledge and skills through doing the tasks.
2. As a separate subject. Tasks relevant to the world outside the classroom provided the context for the activities undertaken. In these instances literacy skills were often directly addressed.
3. In traditional English classes with few links made to the world outside the classroom.

Some questions arose from these observations including: Were students developing literacy skills just by using these skills in a practical context? What about the students who didn't have the literacy skills to do the tasks requiring literacy—what is the best way to assist these students to develop literacy skills? How could students who could already complete the tasks further develop their literacy

skills? What is the place of direct teaching of literacy skills in applied learning?

While working at VALA my time was consumed by the practical aspects of managing multiple projects and tasks and I didn't have time or energy to think further about these questions. I promised myself I would give them further thought when I had time and after finishing with VALA I had the time but found it hard to discipline myself to contemplate anything other than light novels. I felt I would be more motivated to consider these questions if I did so in an applied context and I decided to develop some literacy activities using applied learning as a framework.

So, as I wrote activities, I considered a range of the questions posed above, and consulted some literature along the way. This was a messy process and hard to document so what follows is more linear than what occurred.

## What does applied learning mean?

One of the first big questions to tackle was, what does applied learning mean?

To answer this question I turned to some of the literature. I was aware of starting with Dalton (2004) who, in a discussion of the meaning of applied learning, noted that the term 'has little currency in its own right' but 'may be embedded' in other terminology such as 'authentic learning, constructivist learning, experiential learning, situated learning, vocation learning, enterprise learning or learning for work' (p. 8). A number of educational theorists or theories support the concept of applied learning. For example, Dewey wrote of the link between experience and thinking (1916). The constructivists (e.g. D. Jonassen, 1999) talk about the importance of students building knowledge and learning through constructing products and solving problems. Gee (1990) also talks about students being active learners and learning through using their skills in context.

The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), the state government body with responsibility for the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning curriculum, notes that applied learning is ‘often equated to *hands on* or practical learning experiences’ (2011). They propose four key concepts underpinning applied learning:

1. Applied learning emphasises the relevance of what is being learnt to the *real world*, the world outside the classroom.
2. Partnerships between students and their teachers and organisations and individuals outside the classroom need to be made to provide the *real world* contexts in which activities can be undertaken.
3. Applied learning is concerned with the student as a *whole person*—their strengths, weaknesses, interests, experiences, issues, goals, preferred learning styles.
4. Applied learning acknowledges that as part of the transition from school to the post-school world, students should be supported to become more independent and responsible for their own learning.

Also acknowledged in the VCAA’s Applied Learning information sheet (2011) is that theory and application are equally important with context, supplying the links between them. ‘The theoretical understandings and knowledge required to complete a task will be drawn out from the context, which also provides the opportunity to use and apply what has been learnt’ (2011). Tout and Motteram (2006) also comment on the equal importance of theory and practice in applied learning, noting that in applied learning ‘the starting point will often be the context and application (projects, investigations, and the like)—not the theory and abstract skills’ (p. 13).

According to the VCAA these key concepts underpin eight principles of applied learning. The next thing for me was to consider how the key concepts and principles impacted on teaching. Given the work I had been doing over the previous three years, some thought had gone into this. Table 1 is a summary of some of that thinking.

### **Achieving literacy skill development**

*But*, not only did I need to think about applied learning, I also needed to consider how best to achieve literacy skill development in the activities I was writing. I tend to dip into a range of theories and ideas without being an advocate for any one of them. At the recent (2012) ACAL conference, O’Maley and Matheson used a range of quotes from different theorists in their workshop. I can identify a number of

these people as impacting on my understanding and view of literacy. These include Gee, Luke and Freebody, the New London Group, Barton and Hamilton. Others, like Kamler, could be added to the list of people who have influenced how I see literacy.

In the last few years I have also read a number of meta-analyses of research about what is effective in developing literacy skills (e.g. Graham and Perin, 2007; Graham & Hebert, 2010; Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Kamil et al, 2008; Kruidenier et al, 2010). Although some of these are focused on adolescent literacy there seems to be some relevance to adult literacy teaching.

It isn’t possible to summarise these reports here but some of the things I took from them include:

- the need to motivate and engage learners
- the importance of vocabulary in both reading and writing and the need to provide explicit vocabulary instruction
- the need to provide direct and explicit comprehension strategy instruction
- the importance of providing opportunities to discuss the meaning of texts
- writing is likely to increase reading and comprehension skills.

With all these things in mind—but not necessarily all at the same time, I wrote a number of literacy activities around the theme of the neighbourhood. These activities have been combined into a resource, *My neighbourhood: literacy in context*.

### **Did I achieve my goal?**

In part. I read and considered some of the literature available to me, which helped me to more clearly articulate the questions I wanted to answer and to formulate ideas about how to use applied learning as a framework for literacy development.

I think I have addressed most of the applied learning principles—but across all the activities not in each of them. I didn’t attempt to address the principle about assessment although the completed activities could be included in students’ portfolios.

As stated in the introduction to the resource, it is ‘based on the premise that the best way to develop skills is to learn and use them in context’ (Hagston, 2012, p. 1). The neighbourhood provides the context for the activities. As a context it is literacy rich, requires making some connections

**Table 1: Principles of applied learning and implications for teaching**

- 
1. *Start where learners are at.*

There is a need to take time to get to know the students—their interests, issues and skills. Activities should start from students’ knowledge and experience and build on this.
  2. *Negotiate the curriculum.*

Negotiating the curriculum assists students to take responsibility for their learning. Negotiation is also a two way process and while teachers need to take account of students’ interests and needs, students need to realise teachers have to take into account curriculum considerations, available expertise, financial and time constraints, etc.
  3. *Share knowledge and recognise the knowledge of students.*

All students bring to the learning situation knowledge and experiences. Teachers aren’t the font of all knowledge and opportunities should be provided for students to collaborate and to share their knowledge and experience as well as their reflections.
  4. *Connect with communities and real life experiences.*

This requires forming partnerships with people and organisations in the community so that students can undertake *real world* activities in out-of-school contexts. These *real world* activities tend to engage students as they have meaning and purpose in the broader community. The theory and skills behind what is being done are drawn out of the practical context and are, therefore, likely to be more meaningful for the student. *Real world* activities are also likely to require the integration of skills and knowledge from different subject areas. Students are expected to meet the expectations of those in the community, including work places, which is likely to have a positive impact on students’ behaviours and learning.
  5. *Build resilience, confidence and self-worth—consider the whole person.*

This can be facilitated in a range of ways such as:

    - starting where the students are at and providing opportunities to share knowledge, expertise and experiences.
    - providing opportunities for students to work in different ways to take account of their preferred learning styles.
    - providing opportunities for success for all students and publicly celebrating their achievements.
    - taking into account students’ personal strengths, interests, goals, previous experiences and preferred ways of learning.
  6. *Integrate learning. Learning should reflect the integration of skills and knowledge that occurs in real life tasks.*

Don’t artificially separate learning into discrete sets of unconnected skills. Using projects and *real world* activities facilitates integrated learning as the focus is on the skills and knowledge required for the project or activity. This is likely to require teachers from different subject areas to work together.
  7. *Everyone learns differently. Value and promote different learning styles.*

Provide different learning options that cater for learners with different learning styles. This can also be used this as an opportunity to develop understanding of how others learn.
  8. *Assess appropriately. Use the assessment method that best fits the learning content and context.*

Use different assessment tools for different activities. Students should become aware of the importance of collecting evidence to demonstrate skills and encouraged to collect this evidence (e.g. photos, diaries, reflections). This is a great way for students to begin to be responsible for their own learning.
- 

with the community, and, to function within it, requires the integration of skills from different subject areas (including numeracy). The activities attempt to build on the students’ existing knowledge and experiences and take into account different learning styles.

There is also an attempt to engage students, to provide activities to develop their vocabulary and writing skills and to have them critically analyse and discuss texts.

Is there enough direct teaching to further develop literacy

skills? I’m not sure. The activities try to provide a structure to support the development of a range of literacy skills and skill sheets and links are supplied to support students in some skill areas and teachers are encouraged to delve into other resources and use their own knowledge and expertise. Perhaps working on this is the challenge for my next set of activities!

**Jan Hagston is a consultant with extensive experience in adult and adolescent literacy. Prior to becoming a**  
**Continued on page 40 ...**

## Flyphonics

By Melanie Fulton

‘What’s everyone talking about? Present perfect passive what? Oh no, the teacher’s looking around. Please don’t pick me. When does this class finish anyway? Huh? More worksheets!’

As most teachers realise, not all people enjoy a typical classroom environment.

There are many reasons why some learners don’t fit into conventional classroom environments: problems with literacy, work and lifestyle, lack of confidence, the class lacks relevance. And by failing to fit into an educational environment, individuals miss out on important life skills that lead to employment and personal and social well-being. In turn the whole community misses out on their participation.

Flyphonics is a community programme run through Artful Dodger’s studios, which is a part of the Jesuit Social Services. It’s a programme that aims to improve the English language skills of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who don’t want to go to a typical ESL or TESOL class. The programme uses hip hop and rap to reach students and keep them interested.

A typical Flyphonics classroom is an assortment of personalities. There are serious rappers who want to boost their pronunciation skills, people who enjoy listening to hip hop and want to understand concepts and meanings behind songs, and people who just want to hang out. Most students work or have life issues that prevent them from regular attendance, so the programme is run in such a way that this isn’t a problem. All students know enough English to get around (pre-intermediate and above in a regular classroom), but lack fluency and natural expression.

I have been a TESOL teacher for many years and I developed and teach the programme together with Pataphysics, who is a fierce rapper and workshop leader. Our challenge was to make the task of learning English as individualised and relevant as possible. I’ll use the Victorian A-frame for non-accredited learning as a basis to explain the course we developed.



### What to learn

The students need help with English language skills—pronunciation, fluency, expression and a enough grammar to help with storytelling. They also need to learn self-management skills, planning skills relating to delivering individualised goals, and ways to access community initiatives and technology. The programme needs to heighten their self-esteem.

### How to learn

We deliver the course in, wait for it, *chunks*. A highly technical term for resource banks divided into skill sets like *secrets of flow* (connected speech) or *enhancing your rhymes* (pronunciation). We could have thought of a fancier name for the resource bank, but we were trying to avoid academic jargon. So *chunks* it is! *Chunks* are multi-level and can be used individually or in a group, with or without a facilitator. This allows us to set up multiple learning areas in the space.

While Flyphonics students have no interest in grammar and phonemics, certain structures need to seep into their minds for them to progress. We use a variety of nifty tricks to disguise the fact that, yes, this is a classroom and there is indeed learning going on.

Trick number one—space. No typical classroom props, no rows of tables and chairs; a crafty optical illusion.

Trick number two—no writing. Well, with the exception of when a student wants to write a rap; more precisely, no worksheets to fill out. The *chunks* are filled with tactile resources like cards and pictures, and we encourage the use of media like videos and songs.

# Practical matters

Trick number three—no strict plan. At every session we have our resources at hand in our big *chunk folder*. We introduce the workshop with a video or track to prompt discussion and highlight a particular language skill. We then introduce a few options for how to continue. We can do a facilitator-guided activity with a *chunk*. Alternatively students can look through the folder and find something to do individually or in a smaller group. Or they can do their own creative work. The important thing is to list the options and ask the students instead of explicitly directing them.

After *chunk time*, we have a break and talk about what just happened and what students want to do next. Then we head into creative work: writing a rap, practising raps (original or otherwise) and recording raps. At this point we play with other aspects of hip hop, such as, conceptualising a film clip or writing beats on the computer for home use. The facilitators support students in their creative work, help them expand ideas and encourage them.

Finally, we finish the session with a performance or feedback. Students perform a rap individually or in a group, or discuss what they did. This is a great chance to share tips for ongoing development as well as for offering positive feedback.

## Forms of recognition

The idea is to build up to a recording or public performance (in place of a formal assessment), where students apply the language skills they have learnt, and are publically acknowledged. As this performance or product will involve the student's own peer community, applause and positive comments resonate deeply and build confidence. This informal acknowledgement links back to the workshop sessions, helping to create a positive learning experience.

## Pathway outcomes

There are multiple outcomes possible from the workshops. Involvement leads to unpaid and paid gigs, employment based on improved communication, and greater community



involvement via social networking and increased access to current events. It promotes a change of attitude towards the education system, and improved confidence and self esteem. New interests are found and occasionally the next super flash rapper is discovered!

The Flyphonics *chunk* workshop idea can be adapted to suit traditional classrooms. The idea is similar to Guided Independent Learning but with constant regrouping, culturally relevant resources and a performative end goal. The hip hop theme can be modified to suit class interest, for example, traditional poetry, alternative music subcultures. The facilitator doesn't need to be an authority on the topic: the students do a great job of that! Assessments can be formalised with the addition of a criteria sheet. The key factor is to offer a range of resources in a theme that interests the students and helps each individual direct his or her own learning while working towards a creative goal. It's pretty fun!

Visit [flyphonics.net](http://flyphonics.net) where you will find all the *chunks* resources we use. You may download *chunks* and adapt them to suit your classes.

**Melanie has been an English as a second language teacher for twelve years and is also a rapper and electronic musician, performing in Toxic Lipstick, Beastcream and Babayaga Witches. She has toured through Europe and Japan twice, taught and played in Osaka, Japan for six years and now works as a TESOL teacher in Melbourne.**

# Technology Matters

## Employabilit-E

*By Allan Cormack*

Last semester, the Centre for Adult Education (CAE) developed and delivered the Employabilit-E programme for individuals who have been disengaged from learning for significant periods. The reasons for disengagement include homelessness, unemployment and lack of prior education (which often occur alongside other conditions such as drug dependency and mental and physical illness). I mention these reasons because I want to draw your attention to the social and psychological effects of these factors. To be homeless or unemployed for long periods of time has a deep effect on confidence, self-esteem and motivation, without which it is very difficult to excel in your goals. To have missed out on education opportunities also disadvantages the learner, in that they have no fundamental understanding and skills to build on. CAE offered Employability-E in partnership with organisations such as Hanover, Common Ground and Learn for Life, who referred the learners.

The Employabilit-E programme is an accredited course where, upon successful completion, the students gain a Certificate I in General Education for Adults. The course is comprised of the following units: Develop and document a learning plan and portfolio, Operate a personal computer, Develop keyboard skills, Operate a computer to produce documents, and Participate in job seeking activities. The learners begin the programme by developing an individual learning plan and complete the programme with an e-portfolio of their work, including updated resumes.

As part of the programme the learners are also enrolled in the International Computing Drivers Licence (ICDL) course. The competencies of the Employabilit-E course were mapped against the competencies in the ICDL course and learners were able to acquire the ICDL in addition to the Certificate 1 in General Education for Adults.

The Employabilit-E programme enrolled fifteen learners. Six of these left the programme within the first few weeks to enrol in an accredited course. The remaining nine learners successfully completed the course.

One of the most important lessons gained from this pilot project was that confidence, self esteem and motivation issues are critical in re engaging learners who have been disconnected from education for many years, even decades.

The Employabilit-E programme focussed on making the participants feel safe in the learning space. The social aspect of the group was also emphasised where set breaks with refreshments incorporated a group discussion of the class topics. The teachers ensured that the gentle and positive relationships they developed with the learners were an important part of the programme. In these ways the confidence and motivation of learners improved significantly and was an important factor in getting engagement with learning happening.

Technology is interesting for its effect on confidence, motivation and self-esteem: it helps learners build confidence as they gradually understand computers and use them more to connect with society; it improves their self esteem by giving them a sense of accomplishment; it improves their motivation by providing the means to undertake and achieve useful tasks (like looking and applying for a job). Our approach in the Employabilit-E programme is to treat each learner as an individual human being with his/her own aspirations and not to let the disadvantage the learner has to cope with influence teaching and learning.

Technology is the ultimate democratic tool that gives each and every learner (regardless of their circumstances in life) an equal opportunity to learn and develop skills that are useful for participation in society.

The learners in the Employabilit-E programme gained many skills and knowledge but most of all they gained confidence and motivation. The certificates they receive will not say as much, but for these learners it is a big accomplishment and will hopefully be the factors that help them achieve a bit more each time they approach learning.

Here is what the students say about the course:

In the six months I've been here I've learnt a lot ... like word processing, tables, folders, file management... e-mail, blogs, social media ... the ICDL course which has been enlightening ... and video editing all of which has combined to give me a much greater knowledge and confidence. (Keith)

**Continued on page 39 ...**

# Open Forum

## Symbols, signs and words

By *Lynne Matheson*

Once you learn to read, you will be forever free.  
(Frederick Douglass)

Picture this: a busy airport with throngs of people surging in all directions. You have a boarding pass in your hand but there seems to be no corresponding flight number on the board. The list of numbers and letters keeps flipping over like a flight of agitated insects crunching away at each line. The combinations of letters and numbers hold the key to your onward journey but how to decipher them? You desperately look for the corresponding details on the piece of paper in your hand. You feel a moment of pure incandescent panic and then the code is broken and you can see your flight listed and the way home is clear.

The emotional and performative aspects of reading sit dormant in our being and can rise to the surface in times of stress. We are reminded of this when the pressure is on to read out a speech at a special event or give a eulogy at a loved one's funeral. The pressure of reading time in the HSC/VCE exam is a shared memory, while a new generation endures the NAPLAN testing and the incumbent pressure to perform well for the school as well as themselves.

The multiple and diverse symbols and signs in our world—children recognise the golden arches, coke and the colonel before the symbols of religion and nation. How do we read and interpret our world beyond text?

It is perhaps timely to revisit Luke and Freebody's four roles model with the premise that 'effective literacy in complex print and multi-mediated societies requires a broad and flexible repertoire of practices' (2003, p. 53). We are all engaging in a wider range of literacy practices than we were ten years ago, suffice to say that applying the model is relevant still.

Effective literacy tuition draws on a repertoire of resources that allow learners to:

- break the code
- participate in the meaning of texts
- use texts functionally
- analyse texts critically



**National  
Year of  
Reading  
2012**



In order to engage learners, reading needs to be meaningful and purposeful. This is the challenge in our classrooms when often it is hard to find age and context appropriate materials. Resources are regularly reviewed in *Fine Print* such as *Books for Blokes*, *Red Dog*, *A Fuller Sense of Self* and the selection in this issue. Magazines such as *The Big Issue* provide materials for classroom reading and critical analysis that can lead on to further reflection and inspiration. Print based and online newspapers provide context for engaging in debates of the day, the list and the challenge continues.

We read to know we are not alone. (C.S. Lewis)

Picture this: a crowded train carriage of commuters on a Friday afternoon. Alongside me a young woman is reading her Kindle, the man standing by the door is reading *The Age*, two women are sharing a glossy magazine and the woman opposite is eating an apple as she devours a blockbuster novel. A child looks on.

This is the last of my National Year of Reading columns and I trust that you have been stimulated to reflect and perhaps read more widely or mindfully.

There is a temperate zone in the mind, between luxurious indolence and exacting work; and it is to this region, just between laziness and labor, that summer reading belongs. (Henry Ward Beecher)

Picture this: it is summer, enjoy some blissful space to read for pleasure, I know I will.

Lynne Matheson is the secretary of VALBEC.

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## Dear reader, Dear writer

By Pauline O'Maley and Geri Pancini

As part of the National Year of Reading (NYR), each month Pauline O'Maley has written a reflection on reading for eVALBEC. Many of you will have followed her year of reading. In August she received a reply from past ACAL president, Geri Pancini, which is reprinted below. We would like to thank Pauline for her contribution to the NYR and if you missed *her* year of reading you can find it at <http://www.valbec.org.au/paulines-readings.htm>

Dear Pauline,

Each month, as I read your entries, I find myself responding to your musing. Actually, I respond to myself, but it's almost as if we were talking to each other. I imagine this has something to do with the way you address your readers—as if in conversation—the sort of conversation that takes up where it left off before. So when you write: 'Hello again dear faithful, stoic but silent reader', I feel like you're talking to me. So I thought I might respond and join you in conversation.

But where to jump in? I thought I might share something I came across while reading articles in *The Cambridge Handbook of Literacy* (2009). The book covers a wide range of topics on literacy, but one article that really held my interest was 'Reading as a Woman, Being Read as a Woman' by Lisbeth Larsson. In the article, Larsson looks at women's reading habits over time and the place of novels and *manuals of manners* in their lives and in developing their subjectivity. As it turns out, reading was an important aspect of many women's lives during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Reading novels and manuals of *appropriate* behaviour were very popular. However, there was always fear of possible corruption and danger if women read too many texts. Too much reading, it was thought, would lead married women to forget their responsibilities in the kitchen, and duties to their husbands and children. However, the consequences could be much worse for young women because they would clearly develop unrealistic ideas of married life. Larsson sums up saying it was thought reading kept women 'away from the realities of life and fostered a romantic, useless, often even dangerous kind of woman' (p. 243).

Reading was also considered *dangerous* and, in fact, was illegal if you were a slave in America. In Frederick Douglass' 1845 autobiography the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, Douglass describes two important childhood events: learning to read and learning the meaning of the power of literacy. Douglass explains that at some point during childhood, he was sent to a new master and the woman of his new household began to teach him the alphabet and to spell three and four letter words. However, at some point, the woman's



husband realises this is going on and tells her it must stop. It was, after all, against the law. He went on to warn her that slaves become *unmanageable* when educated and that an education would make a slave discontented and unhappy (pp. 65–67). Reflecting on this experience, Douglass writes:

These words sank deep into my heart, stirred up sentiments that lay slumbering, and called into existence an entirely new train of thought. I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty—to wit, the white man's power to enslave the black man. It was a grand achievement, and I prized it highly. From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom. In learning to read, I owe as much to the bitter opposition of my master, as to the kindly aid of my mistress. I acknowledge the benefit of both (p. 66).

So, let's keep being dangerous and read, read, and read more. And encourage our students to read as a dangerous activity and to understand the power of literacy.

Geri

Dear Geri,

Thank you for your response, it is so much more appealing to me to have a dialogue. What's a monologue if you don't have the skull of Yorick in your hand?!

I really like your notion of dangerous reading: it is very fruitful territory. And again it takes me back to the heart of why the critical literacy work of Chris Searle is so important. He identified that the reading students do, and are asked to do in classrooms, needs to speak to them, to be situated within their own lived experience. He pointed out that when he started his critical literacy project it 'contrasted starkly with the developmentally graded books used in schools at the time to teach students to read. In these *Peter and Jane* (Ladybird series) books, the two middle-class young white protagonists move in a world of neat suburban housing, private cars, red



© Judy Horacek 1987. First published in UNREQUITED LOVE.

setter dogs, holidays by the seaside and rich relatives like Mr White, who lives in a large country house' (1998, p. 84). The writing that came out of his project is also in stark contrast to the sanitised world of Peter and Jane and indeed Mr White; a very different reading of the world. The students wrote profound poetry such as this (p. 86):

One day  
a tree will grow high and strong  
in the garden of justice  
and live forever

This for me is a fine example of reading and writing as a dangerous act. It was indeed dangerous for Chris Searle. He initially lost his job over his determination to publish his students' authentic poetry and not gloss over the grim themes borne out of their lived experiences.

It is a notion that aligns well with Patti Lathers' (1991) situating of her work in education within/against the dominant discourses. Like Lather, bell hooks reminds us 'classrooms remain the most radical space for possibility' (1994, p. 12). So I agree, let's make sure there is a lot of dangerous reading going on inside and outside classrooms everywhere.

PS I have given up dusting; I bought a Judy Horacek card that is lost now under a sea of books and it said something along the lines:

I was going to be the perfect wife and cook and sew  
and clean and clean and clean.  
So what happened?  
They taught me to read.

I'm not the perfect wife, but I do a lot of reading!

Pauline

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## Grassroots National Year of Reading

*By Digna Libera*

As 2012 was the National Year of Reading our family wanted to do something for the community and I noticed an opportunity with a student at Holmesglen where I teach.

One of the literacy students at Holmesglen has two children



in a nearby primary school. The children, a five-year-old boy in prep and a girl who is seven and in grade two, have

English as a second language and struggle with reading and writing. The mother approached the school for some extra assistance, but the school was unable to offer the help they needed. The mother felt frustrated that she couldn't help her children herself because of her own low level of English reading and writing skills.

When I heard about this family's story I spoke to my children, Ashwin (14) and Swetta (12), about helping the little kids. They volunteered to spend an hour a week to read with the children and help with their spelling and writing. What has transpired is that they spend an hour reading followed by some time playing together.

Initially I demonstrated what I wanted them to do. Ashwin and Swetta observed me and then I in turn supervised them. Now they are more confident and enjoy teaching

the little ones. The children look forward to the weekend and they are making good progress. Their mother is more than grateful for the support her children receive.

It has been a win-win situation. My children have benefited enormously from this venture. They have learnt to spell new words and it has strengthened their ability to identify errors in their own work. They have received an immense amount of satisfaction and the tutoring and playing has made them more responsible. Perhaps most noticeably, the relationship has built up my children's confidence while helping the little ones adjust to a new country.

**Digna Libera is the adult literacy coordinator at Holmes-glen TAFE (Chadstone campus). Digna is on the VALBEC committee.**

## Brainfood conference

*By Paul Rawlinson*

Brainfood, held in Ballarat on September 12, appealed to me for quite a few reasons, the most obvious being that it catered exclusively to the ACE sector and that individual presentations were followed up with focus groups—an informal echo of the lecture/tutorial model.

After a few words from the sponsors (bankmecu [a community bank], Toyota Sewing Machines, the Copyright Agency and McCullough Institute), we all had a get-to-know-you chat with somebody who we didn't know, which for me was practically everybody. In our introduction, we were to tell each other about any new and exciting initiatives in our organisations.

Speaking of positivity, the opening address from Wayne Hewitt, CEO of Narre Community Learning Centre, was about dealing with change in a positive way, particularly in light of recent events in the ACE sector—currently, there are competing ideologies at different government levels, ACFE regions might soon cease to exist, and the sector is changing from being learner-centred to being industry-centred. Wayne reminded us that ACE organisations are survivors, no matter what the circumstances.

But despite these changes, the one constant is that learners always want to learn. We're always asking learners to push outside their comfort zones, because that's how people learn;



now organisations and their personnel have to do this also, but the more we deal with change, the better we get at it. The most important thing to do is to map your community and know what it does, and what it needs.

After morning tea, we had a choice between a panel of ACFE presenters and a panel of neighbourhood house presenters. I chose ACFE. The first presenter was Heather Kelly, manager of Yarrowonga Neighbourhood House Services (YNH). I'm a massive fan of YNH, because I did the Reflect and Connect course, as well as my TAE (Training and Assessment) upgrade through them, and so I was looking forward to what Heather had to say about blended learning.

YNH is in the Moira Shire, which has four large towns (Yarrowonga, Cobram, Nathalia and Numurkah) and eighteen smaller communities, some of which are quite isolated. There's a limited pool of local learners, with not enough residents to make face-to-face training viable. YNH therefore, invested in blended learning and formed Moira ACE with three other RTOs, thus building their knowledge base.

According to Heather:

- ACE organisations and learners can be challenged by fully online learning, making face-to-face support vital.
- Learners need basic computer literacy before they can start e-learning in a meaningful way; they need a face-to-face introduction to e-learning and they need to be taught how to be self-directed learners.
- Facilitators must have a flexible approach, with awareness of different learning styles; they must encourage online interaction, and guide learners along; and they must keep it simple and not try to impress learners by showing them how much they know!
- All stakeholders need to see the relevance or benefits of blended delivery.

Heather then spoke about YNH's training manager, Pauline, who is the *hare* at YNH while the rest of the staff are *tortoises* who try to keep up with Pauline's enthusiasm for new tools and technologies. Every organisation needs a *hare* and needs to value their *hare*, but they also need to support their *tortoises* by giving them opportunities for professional development, for *play* and to make mistakes.

Next presenter was Elaine Robb, CEO of Encompass in Geelong. The theme of Elaine's presentation was being like an onion isn't bad because there are lots of layers. Elaine was referring to the many social enterprises in her organisation, such as a disability employment service, a labour hire service, a youth service, and a seven acre farm in Leopold, where Encompass engages learners in living skills training.

Elaine reminded us that ACE organisations are good at making the most out of very little, and that we should recognise and use what we have: staff knowledge/skills/experience, networks, physical space, equipment, developing partnerships, and our reputation based on quality delivery. Put simply, if we don't ask, we don't get.

Elaine left us with a challenging question, which has been a nifty benchmark for Encompass since its inception (as Geelong Employ Ability) in 1985: would you use your organisation's services? If you wouldn't, why not, and what are you doing about it?

Next cab off the rank was Jan Simmons from Morrisons, which is the second largest employer in Mt Evelyn (between 80–120 people). Jan spoke of how Morrisons took a mud brick building and transformed it into a salon for their hair and beauty training.

Morrisons also worked in partnership with the York Road salon for on-the-job training, and set up a salon at Lilydale Health and Wellbeing. In the process, they helped to develop the community by providing training, employment and by their involvement in local festivals, where students performed make-up demonstrations.

The final presenter before lunch was Trish Dixon, Community Services Coordinator at the McCullough Institute in Mt Beauty, which is rising to the challenge of flexible workforce delivery through recognition for prior learning and workshop delivery, thereby raising their bottom line while meeting the needs of their learners.

After lunch, there was a programme showcase including:

- Wayne Hewitt and Jan Simmons putting their ACE Vic hats on to talk about the Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres (ANHLC) Transitions Programme, which collects data through surveys and focus groups to identify what is going on in ACE regarding career development, and what is best practice; and gives 'second chance' learners appropriate support and advice. Career development works well in an ACE context, because learners can receive support not just for a careers pathway, but also for life planning.
- Leanne Harris from Barwon Youth spoke about the Street Surfer bus, a mobile learning programme for disadvantaged youth in isolated areas such as Deans Marsh and Winchelsea that has been funded by ACFE and rolled out in April last year. CGEA is delivered through the bus, with learning materials provided, as well as back to school transition programmes and the Groups in Schools programme. Young people in danger of being disengaged enjoy the bus so much that they will attend school if they know that the bus is visiting their school.
- One of the characters in the ACE sector is Wayne Lentsment of Warracknabeal Neighbourhood House and Learning Centre, who is a self-styled 'entertainer in a fun-starved industry'. His RTO has recently moved into two-thirds of what was a thirty bed nursing home. Wayne has introduced many arts-oriented initiatives, such as a 'Freaky Friday Dance Party' where local DJs offer their services free of charge, as well as the ARTelier FESTival, which will be held next month and is publicised through the ARTelier FESTival Facebook page.
- Joanne Goodman from North Melbourne Language and Learning (NMLL) spoke about the Shared Services Partnership (SSP) project, funded by ACFE. NMLL

Continued on page 38 ...

# Beside the Whiteboard

## The making of a VET teacher

*Interview by Lynne Matheson*

**Natasha McCormick is a member of the VALBEC committee and has been the commercial manager of the Learning Skills Unit at GOTAFE since July 2009. She progressed from a sessional teacher to her current position over fifteen years. We approached Natasha to respond to a series of questions via email.**



### **Where are you working?**

I'm the commercial manager for the Learning Skills Unit at Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE, across the main campuses of Wangaratta, Benalla, Shepparton and Seymour in Northeast/Goulburn Valley, regional Victoria. The programmes I manage are VCAL, Pathways (CGEA), LLNO; WELL, Certificate III in Education Support, Vocational Graduate Certificate in Adult Language, Literacy & Numeracy Practice (VGCALLNP). I also manage the learning support across the institute providing additional support and team teaching within vocational education and training programmes.

### **Tell us about your professional background**

I can remember when I finished secondary schooling, I thought I would enjoy teaching but I didn't ever want to be the person in the front of the classroom. I also couldn't sing (still can't, it must have been the image of my primary school teacher Mrs Morgan). Anyway, I was accepted into a Bachelor of Behavioural Sciences at La Trobe University in Bundoora, majoring in psychology. It was part way through my final year when I overheard other students discussing how much they were going to charge per hour for their consultations, planned around their skiing weekends, that I decided this wasn't for me. I needed some real life experience! So I applied for the Diploma of Education (Primary and Secondary) the following year. I realised it was just a matter of getting over myself and getting used to being in front of the class! Once I graduated in 1993 there were very few teaching positions in Victoria. I worked teaching communication skills within a day programme and did casual teaching in small rural schools.

In 1994, I got a phone call to see if I was interested in sessional teaching at GOTAFE, teaching pre-apprentice plumbers in communication skills, how to use a telephone and teamwork. I certainly learnt a lot from this group

about the need for hands-on learning. Following this I taught the CGEA sessionally, along with job-seeking skills within the LANT program. I loved the versatility of this curriculum, and being able to work with where the students are at and tapping into their interests and passions.

I have been employed with GOTAFE on contract for the past fifteen years, nine years of this has been teaching within Corrections at the Beechworth campus, mostly with small groups with low levels of literacy and numeracy: integrating into their vocational courses, assisting with those undertaking university courses via distance learning. During this time I certainly learnt a lot about human nature and was able to see some real gains for individuals. The ingenuity with which people used to hide their lack of skills always amazed me.

I then entered a management role at one of the main campuses where I continue to gain further insight and understanding of the VET sector.

### **What has influenced your teaching practice?**

I think my biggest influences have been from the hands on learning and teaching strategies from *gurus* like Dave Tout. I was always concerned about my own lack of numeracy and mathematics skills but then I had the opportunity to get involved in the Adult Numeracy Teaching (ANT) course. Later, through further study, I got a better sense of the theories behind the learning but it was the getting in there and having a go as a teacher with my students that I learned from most.

### **What have been your challenges and highlights?**

Challenges of working in ALBE are the changing nature of our relationships with the Vocational Education and Training and the Adult Community and Further Education government departments.

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

My best teaching experiences—there are too many to just have one best! I prefer to consider what made them the best, and that has to do with the individuals in the classroom and where they have come from.

I distinctly remember working with a young man in corrections education who had had an interview with the manager of the education centre at the time. It was explained to me that this individual would not achieve as he had only attended primary school, Year One, and had many other issues as well. He had not been able to complete the questionnaire at the time. I guess it wasn't in my nature to give up on someone so early, without meeting them and giving them a chance. I can still recall the day he typed a story for me as there was no way he was going to hand-write it at this stage (over time it became more apparent that he didn't write because he didn't think it was neat enough). I think I shared this piece of writing with at least three other teachers, and then took it to one of our regional moderations, only to find that he had actually written the words of a song (Eminem), which I didn't know!

Other experiences include the sheer determination of older gentlemen to better their reading and writing, wishing to make a difference for their own children. I would often use mathematics secondary texts books in class with them, so that they could get an understanding of what their children were experiencing in the classroom, and most importantly so they could help them with their homework. Although for me, this didn't fit well with my teaching style as I wanted them to do hands-on activities, gain a greater understanding of the concepts and apply them to project based work.

Another stand out experience was teaching calculations to Diploma of Nursing students and those who had been in the industry for a long time undertaking gap training. I had made the mistake with my first group of students of not spending enough time to get to know them, so not much learning happened. I spent time in the front of the class going through formulas and concepts without listening and engaging with the students. At the end of the session one of the students approached me and said, 'Do you know something love? I haven't been at school for twenty-five years!' We then got talking about her schooling experience and the anxiety that mathematics caused for her. So needless to say my teaching and learning approach changed. We did more hands on

activities, shared experiences more, and everyone in that class (including those who had extra sessions) passed their medication unit, most importantly the medication calculations part!

More recently I have worked alongside VET teachers who have a passion for building the LLN skills of their students. About five years ago, while sitting and chairing an LLN community of practice one lunchtime, we were discussing some of the skills the students undertaking pre-apprentice engineering courses were lacking. The teachers were frustrated with the lack of literacy and numeracy skills of the students and lack of their own knowledge in relation to LLN strategies to assist. They were great tradespersons who knew how to do the calculations but lacked the ability to break the skill down for the individuals in the classroom. Now some of these teachers have undertaken the VGCALLNP and are building their own toolboxes to tackle LLN skills with their students.

### **What is it like working in a regional centre?**

I absolutely love it, although the travel is time consuming. I'm developing my technology skills to have online meetings (webinars). I enjoy the diversity of our students, teachers and programmes as well as the wide-open spaces.

### **You recently travelled on an overseas scholarship—what were the highlights *takeaways*?**

During May 2011, I was able to travel on a TAFE development centre funded overseas scholarship for ten days to the United Kingdom with a colleague from Educational Development Services. We visited Lewisham College in London and then travelled to a regional based college, North Lindsey. The highlight of this trip was the hospitality of each of the colleges and the generosity they showed us with their time, sharing of resources and processes that they were working on. My *takeaways* were that we are not all that different in our approaches to teaching and learning and our compliance regimes. We are all seeking the answers to how to engage young people in learning.

### **What do you see as the future issues in regional areas?**

The main issue for me as a manager, is the limited available workforce of qualified and experienced teachers willing to take on a challenge. I guess at times it feels as if the only constant is change. But every day you meet people who want to make a difference to the lives of others. Recently I was fortunate enough to be a part of the Benalla Rural City Bridges Out Of Poverty training, which challenged

my beliefs and understanding of the perspective of others in our lives and the importance of relationships. I came away with the question, what are we going to do differently now that we have a better understanding of the difference between those in poverty and the middle class? I liked this quote: 'No significant change or learning will take place without significant relationship' (Covey).

I think the main issue for practitioners is the attraction and retention of students to the learning environment and how we can make a difference.

#### **What role do new technologies play in your teaching?**

Personally, I have not had the opportunity to truly embrace new technologies in the development of my own teaching and learning. While working within corrections education we were limited with access, although we encouraged our students to build ICT skills.

I have used webinars for tutorials with students undertaking the VGCALLNP, which has cost and time benefits. Webinars are also good learning environments, as staff from different campus locations across north-east and metropolitan Victoria all learn together. We need to embrace new technologies with our students and get them to show us the way.

#### **What advice do you have for new teachers?**

My advice for new teachers is to hang in there! We have been through changes to funding, like the rest of the state, but I believe the focus nationally on foundation skills is only going to benefit our students. Although at times the

paperwork and compliance requirements seem tedious, it is for the benefit of our students.

Enjoy the small gains your students make and take the time to develop a rapport and start to understand them and where they are coming from.

Learn from those around you, listen to those noisy classrooms where students are having fun, interacting and learning from one another. Reflect on how that teacher has engaged their students. My greatest learning has come from exceptional colleagues.

#### **What lies ahead for you?**

I think an exciting journey is ahead for me personally. I have been fortunate to be a small part of building capability within the VET workforce at GOTAFE. Ahead is more working with teachers who have a keen interest in the welfare of their students and observing their teaching strategies, and increasing the success of our students to achieve so they can meet their potential and are able to make more life choices for themselves and their families.

Across GOTAFE over the next three months we will be delivering the TAELLN401A 'Address adult language, literacy & numeracy needs' for all staff upgrading their Certificate IV in Training & Assessment. I look forward to continuing working with exceptional teachers.

**Natasha McCormick is a member of the VALBEC committee.**

... continued from page 19

member of VALBEC and ACAL and also a member of Adult Learning Australia. These organisations keep her connected to the bigger policy landscape as well as giving her insights into what works in the classroom. For the last three years, she was Secretary of ACAL, a hugely enjoyable and informative voluntary role.

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# What's out there

## ***My neighbourhood: literacy in context* by Jan Hagston**

*Reviewed by Tracey Grimmer*

When leafing through the pages of *My neighbourhood: literacy in context*, there is something reassuringly familiar about the layout and some of the activities. For those of you who have been working in the field of literacy and numeracy for some time, I'm sure you will find this resource easy to relate to and straight away you will think of different ways to incorporate it into your classes.

In the introduction there is an honest recognition that the best way to develop literacy skills is through using them in context. There is also the recognition that this isn't a simple process and providing our students with opportunities that allow them to develop their skills within a *context* that suits them is a very real challenge. The resource recognises the incredible balancing act that the teacher has to achieve in order to meet the needs of all within their classroom—hallelujah!

The teacher information is easy to follow and includes ideas for facilitating each activity as well as materials required, skills sheets, suggestions, additional resources, assessment suggestions and even possibilities for extension work. The activities encourage the use of technology but also acknowledge the varying levels of IT skills that can exist within a classroom and allow for this. There are also many suggestions of websites that can be used to support activities and provide models of tasks to inspire students.

In addition, there is a section within the introduction that maps the activities to various curricula. As this is a Melbourne publication the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA), and the English component of the Australian Curriculum are all mapped. The mapping is a useful starting point and allows you to quickly see where the activities may sit in relation to your curriculum, but the author stresses that mapping should only be used as a guide as classrooms are very individual places.

Even though this is primarily a literacy resource, its strength is that it recognises literacy is never taught in isolation and while developing literacy skills a range of other skills are also being developed. There are activities that include numeracy, problem solving, oral communica-



tion, and computing skills. This supports the notion of concurrent skill development and allows teachers to take activities in a direction that suits the needs of students. It also allows for the situation where there are several streams and levels within the one classroom.

One activity that was particularly interesting and appealing to me was 'Activity 6: Literacy and numeracy in the community—a photo account'. I think this activity has great appeal for students who are less reluctant writers or who are visual learners or artistic. It encourages the students to engage with their own communities and find examples of text, numbers and graphics in use. It also encourages them to analyse what surrounds them in their everyday lives and possibly look at something that they may pass everyday but never really *see*. This activity allows students to be artistic with the presentation of their findings and encourages the use of technology for those who embrace IT and all it has to offer.

I found that Activity 6 ties in very nicely with Activity 7, where there is a focus on contractions. For example, when photographing signs in the neighbourhood in Activity 6, students could find instances of contractions; teachers could also expand the activity to include finding misspelt signs, which could be fun for the students to photograph.

The mapping, co-operative logic and numeracy skills involved in Activities 9 to 11 are well planned and easy to follow and have considered literacy teachers who may feel less comfortable when incorporating numeracy concepts into their classrooms. For those of you who have used Dave Tout's resources before, these activities will be easy to relate to. There are also references to additional resources.

Finally, as we approach the end of the resource we find the set of sheets referred to as *skill sheets*. These sheets aim to support the development of skills needed by students in

order to undertake the tasks in the resource. The sheets cover a range of tasks: grammar, report writing, finding averages in numeracy, tips on using the Internet. It is easy to see how they would support the activities very nicely.

The only difficulty or challenge that I could foresee with developing a unit of work with a *neighbourhood* focus is that sometimes it is difficult to promote a sense of community or even find common ground with a group of students, especially if they are a geographically diverse group. Some students have moved often and have disconnected from their communities so may find it difficult to engage with the activities, although I recognise that this resource is trying to address that very issue.

### Page Turners Series

## ***Running with Boats* and *Cyclone Tracey* by Anne Dunn and illustrations by Moira Hanrahan**

*Reviewed by Janette Platt*

These two titles are well-designed readers for beginning adult readers, particularly men. The two readers present interesting, adult-appropriate stories in a humorous manner. The text is a good size font for the beginning reader with the right amount of text for each level. My students found the books easy and enjoyable to read.

The story of *Running with Boats* is a level one reader and is excellent for men with beginning reading skills. About boats and travel, the story is quite *blokey* yet interesting and humorous. The story develops the idea of travel and visiting new places and provided the opportunity for discussion about Australia, the states and territories, map reading and holidays. The illustrations support the text well.

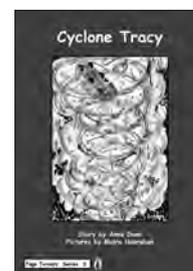
*Cyclone Tracey* is a level three reader that includes a good range of vocabulary to challenge readers. The story is interesting and factual and allows the adult reader to empathise with the participants in the story. The fact that it is about an event that most Australians are familiar with aids reading. *Cyclone Tracey* is an excellent story for promoting class discussion and could include an Internet search to gain more information about the event.

The Page Turners readers have extension and discussion activities. These activities could be built upon to provide many lessons in vocabulary, grammar, discussion, reading

Overall, I found *My neighbourhood: literacy in context* got me thinking about activities I could introduce to students to inspire them, and that is what I look for in a resource.

To obtain a copy of *My neighbourhood: literacy in context* go to [www.multifangled.com.au](http://www.multifangled.com.au) or email [multif@multifangled.com.au](mailto:multif@multifangled.com.au).

Tracy Grimmer is a staff member at Chisholm Institute and has taught all levels of the CGEA. For the past five years she has been part of the Chisholm team developing Individual Learning Centres with a bank of resources focussed on Certificates II and III in General Education for Adults.



and writing. Another excellent addition to these readers is a complete list of words used in the text of the reader. This list could be used in preparation for reading or group writing if using a collaborative writing method.

These two books are an excellent addition to the popular Page Turners series and will be favourites in any adult reading and writing programme.

*Running with Boats* and *Cyclone Tracey*, and other Page Turner readers are available from Preston Reservoir Adult Community Education, <<http://pageturners.prace.vic.edu.au>> or email [office@prace.vic.edu.au](mailto:office@prace.vic.edu.au)

Janette Platt has been a literacy and numeracy practitioner for many years and manages an adult reading and writing programme in Mackay, Central Queensland. She advocates for empowering adults to be independent and self-directed learners in all aspects of their lives. Janette has worked as a workplace based enterprise teacher, prison education officer, a TAFE literacy and numeracy teacher and most recently a community literacy programme manager.

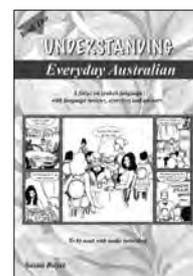
## **Understanding Everyday Australian by Susan Boyer**

*Reviewed by Sandie Forbes*

Having taught adult language and literacy classes for a number of years, I am constantly on the lookout for Australian texts that are relevant, interesting and authentic. My present students are very enthusiastic about learning colloquial language, yet they are often frustrated that despite a high level of language acquisition, they remain confounded by idiomatic language.

I tend to rely on my own texts and newspaper articles, so it was with much relief and excitement that I first discovered *Understanding Everyday Australian* by Susan Boyer. Although twelve years old now, this book still contains relevant topics and examples of commonly used colloquial and idiomatic language. It is a book I have enjoyed using with more than one class and all have found it useful, easy to use, relevant, interesting—and most of all, fun!

The chapter, 'Asking for Directions', is especially good. Giving instructions and using imperatives is often a tricky issue for ESL learners, and native speakers alike. This book is the first I have found to tackle useful road and driving language, such as, *bumper-to-bumper*, *dogleg*, *prang* (lengthy discussion ensued with this word and its synonyms), *u-y*, *bottleneck* and the ubiquitous *up-the-creek*.



Students love the authentic (though I stressed it was exaggerated for effect) dialogue. They could sense the humour, also a tricky learning point for ESL learners, and enjoyed listening and role-playing. When combined with a Melways copy of our local neighbourhood, they were able to test their new-found vocabulary giving instructions to a partner on how to get from school to their home. We didn't test whether this was entirely successful communication but in terms of enjoyment of language, comprehension and acquisition of colloquial terms, this resource, with thanks to Susan Boyer, is a winner.

*Understanding Everyday Australian* series by Susan Boyer is available from Boyer Educational Resources in Glenbrook in NSW. To enquire about the *Understanding Everyday Australian* series and other resources by the same publisher go to <http://www.englishbooks.com.au>, email [boyer@eftel.net.au](mailto:boyer@eftel.net.au), or phone 2 47391538.

**Sandie Forbes is on the VALBEC committee and is the ESL coordinator at Pines Learning.**

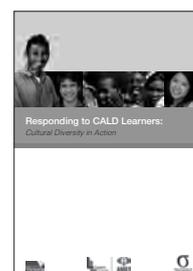
## **Responding to CALD Learners: Cultural Diversity in Action by Dr Lynda Achren, Jude Newcombe and Drew Roberts**

### **Responding to CALD Learners: Cultural Diversity in Action— Action research reports**

*Reviewed by Jacinta Agostinelli*

*Responding to CALD Learners: Cultural Diversity in Action* was a four-year project supporting Learn Local organisations delivering education to CALD learners, and was conducted by Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES) and funded by ACFE. Before even reading this report, you know it is going to be of value because the project designers and writers have a wealth of experience working with cultural diversity.

I went to the launch of the resource earlier this year and was inspired by the work of the participating Learn Local



practitioners. Here were coordinators and teachers out in the field identifying questions, consulting with communities to collect data, trialing different ideas, analysing and reflecting on results. This is the best sort of teaching practice there is.

The project itself gave providers an opportunity to research aspects of their provision to CALD communities, and to develop frameworks of good practice from that research. Research began with a guiding question:

- How can we attract CALD learners from growth areas and offer them what they need? If we consult our CALD

students, community leaders and other Learn Local providers, how will the information gained influence our marketing approach? (Diamond Valley Learning Centre)

- If we investigate the cultural perceptions of pathways in the CALD community, how will it affect NMLL's ability to provide meaningful pathways support? (North Melbourne Language and Learning)
- If we document the participation and support needs of CALD learners in a Cleaning Operations class, how will this increase our understanding of the language and cultural needs of such learners? (PRACE)

You might notice that each of these questions involves an intention to engage with the CALD community: 'If we consult our CALD students...', 'If we investigate the cultural perceptions...', 'If we document the participation and support needs of CALD learners...'. This is because Engagement is one of the three principles in the framework of good practice guiding this project. The other two principles are Supported Learning Environments and Supported Pathways. The three principles do not operate in isolation from each other but within a whole of organisation approach to CALD learners. To assist the action researches when working within this framework, the project designers included twelve strategies for addressing the three principles.

The amount of work and learning that the participants put into their individual projects is amazing and they all deserve reading. But I always think the lessons or messages from the process of researching are just as important as the concrete results. Here is what some of researchers have to say:

Through this project we have learnt a great deal both on a personal and an organisational level. We have seen how important it is to begin to engage our hard-to-

reach Islander communities by reaching out to them, by going to where they are, and by talking to them about what is important to them. (Robinvale Network House)

Importantly for our organisation, this project provided a structure that promoted not only interaction between our ESL and VET teams, but also opened our eyes to how we can work effectively side by side. (Diversitat)

These insights will feed into the development of WorkSkills' 2012 Strategic Plan, thus enabling us to proactively manage increased CALD participation in our programmes. (Portland WorkSkills)

Partnerships are a great strategy for both support and engagement but they require shared expectations and regular review for success. (Coonara Community House and Mulgrave Neighbourhood House)

The report is an excellent resource for organisations because it provides a detailed framework, with examples, for achieving good practice when delivering educational services to CALD communities and supporting CALD learners. It suggests ideas for professional development and assists understanding of cultural diversity and difference.

*Fine Print* has published the full report by Chris Moore from On Track Training and Employment in Bendigo, in the Features section of this issue.

Contact the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development at [www.education.vic.gov.au](http://www.education.vic.gov.au) to obtain a copy of the report.

**Jacinta Agostinelli is the editor of Fine Print.**

## **Money Problems by Hazel Davidson and illustrated by Dorothy Court**

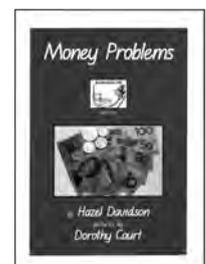
*Reviewed by Eleni Prineas*

The *Money Problems* workbook is a teaching resource developed by ESL teachers who recognise the difficulty many new immigrants encounter in dealing with money and budgeting.

The essential topics are dealt with: paying bills, banking,

credit, debt and budgeting. There are warnings about scams and advice about where to seek help with financial matters.

There is a clearly delineated delivery of key content with increasing difficulty over three levels: easy, medium and



hard. As well as reading texts and exercises at the three levels, the package includes a sound recording of the texts.

Financial literacy delivery for ESL students is important. This resource provides essential information in an accessible way. As an ESL teacher lacking in any artistic ability I am strongly drawn to illustrated texts, and Dorothy Court's black and white sketches are simple and effective. Importantly, they are included at every level, so even as the linguistic complexity of the text increases, the instant communication of concepts provided by the illustrations is maintained. Teachers working with multilevel classes will particularly appreciate this feature.

An important inclusion in the package is the *Numbers* book, which provides numeracy exercises from elementary counting to decimals, percentages and shopping. The excellent introduction to this section contains the rationale for its inclusion, which stresses the danger of assuming that all ESL students have basic numeracy skills. There are hand cards and games, and calculations that include the language used.

The literacy-based exercises are equally useful, with activities appropriate to the different levels. *Easy* includes picture/text matching, word finds and spelling activities; *medium* has comprehension and budgeting as well as spelling linked to pronunciation (with, I was glad to see, symbols from the phonetic alphabet); *hard* includes vocabulary consolidation, and paragraph and summary writing.

### ... continued from page 30

have undergone nine location changes over seventeen years, and seven of them have happened on Joanne's watch. Through this upheaval, the organisation learned a lot about how to manage change, and manage people, and they put this wisdom to good use in the SSP, which has a wiki as a fitting legacy. The project saw NMLL in partnership with five other providers—a massive leap of faith and a lot of hard work—but the project was well documented and everyone knew what was expected of them, so averting potential complications and conflict.

There were many more opportunities for participants to network well into the second day of the conference, but I finished the day by attending Heather Kelly's focus group,

My mixed-level class of ESL students—preliminary and level one Certificate in Spoken and Written English—particularly enjoyed the picture-matching and spelling/pronunciation-related worksheets.

One of the major strengths of the resource is the comprehensive guide provided to teachers and tutors. There are well-supported arguments for the inclusion of particular content and approaches, with a useful bibliography, and tips and advice for classroom delivery.

The resource is practical and relevant: more advanced students will appreciate the glossaries and grammar exercises. For English language beginners, this resource used in combination with something like the Australian government's multilingual online *Money Management Kit*, will ensure acquisition of essential financial management knowledge.

In Victoria, *Money Problems* is available through TESL Books, [info@teslbooks.com](mailto:info@teslbooks.com), <http://www.teslbooks.com> and Bookery Education [info@bookery.com.au](mailto:info@bookery.com.au), [bookeryeducation.com.au](http://bookeryeducation.com.au). For availability in other states please go to [www.sugarbagondamper.com](http://www.sugarbagondamper.com)

**Eleni Prineas is an ESL and adult literacy teacher at Preston Reservoir Adult Education (PRACE). She has a Graduate Certificate in TESOL and a Master of Arts in Language and Literacy.**

which met as a follow up to her presentation earlier in the day. Participants shared ideas and suggestions about blended delivery, as well as ways to get support, such as through the ACE Network Ning, an online space for Learn Local organisations to share information around implementing e-learning.

I headed home with my brain somewhat strained, but well and truly fed with ideas about market share survival in the ACE sector.

**Paul Rawlinson is the literacy co-ordinator at Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre in Melbourne's north-western suburbs. Paul is a VALBEC committee member.**

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the crucial need of business in Bendigo to maintain and strengthen productivity. The training of both employees and people managers will open up employment pathways leading to up-skilling and increased productivity. This in turn responds to the community need for long-term sustainable employment opportunities for CALD workers and job seekers. The investment of time and training will strengthen the local labour market and underpin prosperity in this region.

### Enrichment

There can be no doubt that Bendigo is undergoing a cultural and social change, unlike anything it has ever known before. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics census data (ABS 2006), Central Victoria has been the most Anglo-Saxon region in Australia since the gold rush. But this is no longer the case. The arrival of so many CALD people in the area has caused a change in identity, a change in attitude and a change in perceptions. Those who have embraced this change—have taken this vibrant new inflow of people and allowed their ideas, cultures and experiences to flavour the everyday life of Bendigo—have been rewarded with new optimism, new directions and new hope. This isn't just about the CALD people. This is about all of us. We often talk about what we can do for the refugees and new migrants—but we don't

On Track တာဝန်ထမ်းဆောင်သူများအား နားထောင်မှုနှင့် အကူအညီပေးရန် ကျွန်ုပ်တို့ မျှော်လင့်ပါသည်။ နားထောင်မှုနှင့် အကူအညီပေးရန် ကျွန်ုပ်တို့ မျှော်လင့်ပါသည်။

On Track thanks you for your time today we look forward to assisting you in your journey towards employment.

talk about what these people can do for us. They bring new blood, new life and a whole new world into our sometimes stagnant, communities. They have as much to teach us as we do them and it is those of us who have realised this that have benefited the most.

This whole process has been one of ongoing learning and adjustment. If the lessons we have learned can be summed up in one short phrase, it could be: diversity equals enrichment.

The Bendigo region has certainly become enriched with its new communities, and day by day it is becoming a better place to live.

**Chris Moore is the Manager of On Track Training and Employment in Bendigo.**

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[skills.vic.gov.au/Documents/Publications/Research%20and%20Reports/Strategic-Review-of-Effective-Re-Engagement-Models.pdf](http://skills.vic.gov.au/Documents/Publications/Research%20and%20Reports/Strategic-Review-of-Effective-Re-Engagement-Models.pdf). Editor's note—At the time of going to print the Skills Victoria website was no longer available. Direct enquiries for this resource to [www.education.vic.gov.au](http://www.education.vic.gov.au).

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It's been terrific, the facilities, the equipment, the patience of the staff, it's enabled me to wear the new grooves in my brain necessary ... and actually stop hating the horrible new modern version [of windows].  
(Geoffrey)

**Allan Cormack is the manager at CAE College and is responsible for VCE, VCAL, ESL, CGEA and pre-accredited programmes. He has experience across the vocational and higher education sectors, as well as international education. He has a Masters in Education, Masters in International Relations and a Master of Arts in Communication.**

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consultant she was the executive officer for the Victorian Applied Learning Association.

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