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Editorial

How often do you hear someone say ‘just Google it’? When you need to find out some piece of information that eludes general knowledge or the fading memory bank, it seems the first response is to go to Google. With our constantly evolving language, we may well ask when does a noun become a verb?

At the Excellently Local conference there was much talk about the diversity and range of pre-accredited courses across the sector. A teacher was heard to say ‘we A-framed it’ to much laughter in the room. It was acknowledged that the A-frame has now entered our vocabulary as a verb and will no doubt be picked up on Wikipedia soon. (The current entry refers to a-frame as a structure with two legs like a sawhorse).

The A-frame provides a great tool for developing and delivering courses that provide pathways, while meeting the needs of learners in a range of settings across Victoria. The first feature article illustrates how the A-frame is being utilized in a range of innovative ways. We profile Nina Bekker, who is an A-frame champion and she represents one of the stories from the field that Louise Wignall suggests we need to capture and celebrate locally and nationally. Colin Lankshear has written a thought provoking article that challenges us to think about where education is heading in the digital age.

We would like to congratulate our illustrator, Bianca Raffin, who was profiled in the Age as a recipient of an early offer for 2015, as part of La Trobe university’s Aspire program.

Another year is drawing to a close. Thanks to all the contributors for 2014. Enjoy your reading over the summer.

Lynne Matheson

Fine Print does not often receive feedback so I would like to share with you this letter from Libby Rowswell.

Dear Editor,

Thank you for the broad range of articles compiled in the recent Vol: 37 #2 Fine Print. We are in an era when teachers are overwhelmed by administration and compliance paperwork, so it is refreshing to read such great articles on teaching and learning. I’ve always found Beth Marr’s pearls of wisdom enlightening and have found tasks such as Multidigit very useful. However, after reading this article, I made a personal connection. I realised that despite a science degree and years of teaching high school maths and numeracy in the ALBE sector, I too experience maths anxiety. It’s just a question of what triggers that anxiety. For me, my anxiety starts with vectors and complex numbers. Beth’s article caused me to reflect on those very negative ‘I can’t do maths’ thoughts. I realised that while I happily accept my shortcomings in other subject areas, my negative self-talk is more exaggerated when it comes to maths ability. So thank you Beth for making me more aware, and as a consequence, more empathic to those with similar feelings.

Other articles from this edition that relate to teaching of numeracy include Integrating Literacy and Numeracy (Lidia Interlandi and Chris Tully) and Teaching and Assessing Conundrums (Lindee Conway). These are filled with wonderful teaching ideas and scenarios for presenting numeracy concepts in real life contexts. Lindee’s discussion of the LOVE project cites great examples of developing teaching and assessment activities that are relevant and engaging for the learners ... (I’ll view ciggie butts differently in future!) Her observations about the challenges of integrating assessment across units, ACSF and EAL so that they satisfy audit are valid.

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.

Ingenious A-frame programs

By Lynda Achren

Five snapshots

Picture this: a veterinary surgeon, a language and literacy teacher and a dog grooming trainer meet while teaching an accredited Animal Studies courses at a mainstream tertiary institution. The three women discover a shared concern for students who sometimes ‘fall through the cracks’. Students who do not have the independent study skills to cope with tertiary studies or who do not cope with the assessment aspect and become disengaged and demoralised. Their solution? Set up their own organisation to focus specifically on the disadvantaged, those with limited opportunities and those who need much more support. The Rovers Network has now been in operation for a year and with a memorandum of understanding with the Jesuit Community College (JCC), operates out of the Brosnan Centre in Brunswick, running a pre-accredited Introduction to Animal Care course.

Picture this: to the west of Melbourne, in the highly multicultural suburb of Wyndham, a primary school principal is concerned that many Aussie parents are not engaging with their children’s schooling. His solution? Join forces with Wyndham Community and Education Centre (CEC) to start a choir located at the school, with a choir master supplied by Wyndham CEC. The first performance, in which children and parents join forces, will be at the school assembly. The plan is that parent numbers will swell as enthusiastic children urge their parents to come and join the choir.

Picture this: in Melbourne’s inner west, Horn of African women have completed, or almost completed, an accredited course in Children’s Services or Aged Care. They are still unable to find ongoing employment, or an employer willing to take them on for work placement so that they can complete their training. After talking to employers, Jesuit Community College (JCC), the education branch of Jesuit Social Services, finds that while the employers consider the women well suited to working in aged care because of their respect for elderly people, their courses have not equipped them with sufficient understanding of the workplace. The employers themselves do not have the time to train them. As a result, JCC conducts a pre-accredited course, Ready, Steady Work—Aged Care, to equip the women with the language, literacy and cultural understandings they need.



Picture this: in Melbourne’s outer east, Rowville Neighbourhood Learning Centre (RNLC) has developed a pre-accredited Train the Trainer course specifically for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) women who have completed a Women’s Leadership course conducted in conjunction with the Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women’s Centre (VIRWC). The Train the Trainer course aims to equip the women with a high level of best practice skills so that they can deliver the Women’s Leadership training to others, or alternatively, develop and run their own high quality courses focussing on a specific community need, as they see it.

And picture this: in a completely different vein, but also in the outer east, The Basin Community House, nestled in the leafy foothills of the Dandenong Ranges, offers its predominantly Aussie community a taster course in various complementary therapies including reflexology, Reiki, massage, art therapy, homeopathy, naturopathy and yoga. Many of the participants have been out of the workforce for some years, raising children and may not have been in any type of education since leaving school, and so lack confidence about their skills.

These are just a few of the ingenious pre-accredited courses being offered by Learn Local organisations around the state since the introduction of ACFE’s re-vamped A-frame curriculum, as part of the Pre-accredited Quality Framework Kit (ACFE 2013).

Learn Local organisations develop pre-accredited programmes to meet the needs of adults in their community who have experienced barriers to education in the past and find it difficult to undertake accredited courses as their first step into vocational training. (Howell, C. and FitzGerald, L. 2013, p.12)

The needs of the adults in these snapshots are diverse and the pre-accredited courses described are uniquely tailored to cater for them. This article looks at the pathways these vastly different pre-accredited programs open up and how the development of employability skills has been incorporated into them.

Uniquely tailored courses

The people accessing these A-frame courses are as diverse as the courses themselves. The students attending the Rovers Network Introduction to Animal Care course are predominantly (but not all) women who have often been referred to the course by other organisations dealing with the homeless, youth on parole, and the unemployed. Many are young women with anxiety disorders for whom interacting with animals works as therapy—animals being non-threatening and non-judgemental. With their unique blend of skills, Selma Gotsbacher, Kaye Widdowson and Rachael Hawkins can address the student's employability skills, their literacy and numeracy skills, as well as their animal care skills and knowledge of the industry.

But above and beyond this, they are passionate about creating an environment where the students want to be and where it's worth making the effort to get out of bed in the morning to attend. The keys to success, in the team's view, is the invaluable assistance of volunteers and a course that they work hard to make relaxed, casual, fun, interactive and flexible so that it can be structured around individual student needs. In this supportive environment, Kaye Widdowson says, they are able to capture people who would otherwise have been lost, by engaging them through working with the animals.

The Horn of Africa women attending JCC's Ready, Steady Work—Aged Care course all live in public housing. Many have a qualification in children's services and have been working in family day care but, as the caring is done in their own homes, find it a socially isolating environment. They have little opportunity to develop their English language and cultural skills while they care for children from within their own communities. Others have been enrolled in Certificate III in Aged Care through organisations that require students to organise their own work placement. Lacking networks and language skills they have been unable to do this and so unable to complete the course. Still others have completed both the course and the placement but have been unable to find secure employment.

The Ready, Steady Work—Aged Care participants are hand-picked as being work-ready: they have their child care organised, they have driver licences, they understand about shift work. They are ready to go, they just need help getting there, such as help in understanding the cultural expectations of the workplace along with its language and literacy requirements. Course delivery is through case studies, stories and role play which are the modes that



well suit these participants from oral cultures. Carole Pondevie-lay explains:

Our point of difference is that our course has a volunteer with industry experience working alongside a qualified English as an Additional Language (EAL) teacher.

CALD women are also the target of Rowville's Train the Trainer course. In this case, they are women who have recognised that they have skills they could pass on to their communities and have already completed a Women's Leadership course. The course is also delivered at a number of other Learn Local organisations across the Southern and North Eastern Region. However, as many Learn Local administrators will know, it is often difficult to reach and engage women from various CALD backgrounds. It requires strong links and established relationships to encourage them to participate.

The women who have completed the Women's Leadership course are thus in a prime position to promote and deliver the Leadership course to other CALD women. If the women are going to deliver the leadership course, best practice suggests they need to be qualified to do so. The pre-accredited Train the Trainer course was developed specifically to serve this purpose and can only be undertaken by those who have completed the Women's Leadership course.

While Wyndham is a highly multicultural community, the focus of the Wyndham CEC choir is engaging the Aussie parents in this low socio-economic neighbourhood. An additional objective being to foster parent-child interactions around school activities such as homework or volunteering. Judy Bowman, Wyndham CEC's Training Manager, says that this target group has also been difficult to engage in other programs. Through the choir and the informal sessions they will run after it, she will ascertain

what else they might need that could be conducted either as more formal sessions after choir practice or at Wyndham CEC.

Determining needs of parents is also a primary motivation in providing the complementary therapies taster course. Heather McTaggart, coordinator of The Basin Community House, sees it as an ideal engagement tool in this low socio-economic community with a strong interest in personal and family health and wellbeing. The course is attended by women who are often looking for flexible employment that fits in with their families and offers a good work and life balance, as well as possibilities for setting up a home-based practice. The course is presented by local practitioners who talk not only about the therapy and how it works, but also about their own journeys to becoming a practitioner, including practical matters such as setting up a small business.

Pathways & employability skills

In some of these courses, the pathways to employment are direct and clear, in others they take a more indirect route. Nevertheless, employment and the development of the necessary employability skills ultimately underpin all the courses. However, the way the employability skills are incorporated varies depending on the course, the participants and their current location on the path to employment.

In Rowville, as well as delivering subsequent Women's Leadership courses, the aspirations of graduates of the Train the Trainer course have included running domestic violence support groups, assisting with the governance of community organisations, and delivering pre-accredited training at a Learn Local or other organisation. Employability skills are integral to the Train the Trainer course. As well as helping women develop their leadership, advocacy and mentoring skills, the Women's Leadership course 'assists CALD and newly arrived women to *navigate* Australian culture and workplaces more effectively increasing participants' chances of integrating into Australian conditions' (Hiam 2014, p. 17).

Consequently, it is essential that employability skills and the expectations of employers are thoroughly understood by the women in the Train the Trainer course who will ultimately deliver the Leadership training themselves. To do this, the Train the Trainer course utilises discussion, activities and commercially prepared resources such as *Keys to Work* (AMES 2008).

For the Horn of African women studying in Flemington, JCC's contacts with employers mean that there is a very real prospect of employment. To maximise successful outcomes for all parties, employability skills and the expectations of employers are made explicit throughout the course. This includes such things as time keeping, dressing appropriately for work, reading rosters and participating in hand-over conversations as well as making small talk. It also includes frank discussions aimed at problem solving and negotiating potentially problematic cross-cultural dilemmas.

Moreover, the women are supported through their work placement with visits from the volunteer industry specialist who is a former nurse and aged care worker herself. Once they are in employment, they continue to receive support through JCC's Workplace Inclusion Program which enables JCC to act as a go-between bridging the gap between employer and employee and troubleshooting if issues arise. This vital link with employers, while difficult to initially establish, is pivotal to the success of working with marginalised groups to assist them in gaining meaningful employment and full social inclusion. As Carole Pondevielay says, 'Employers are overrun with requests for work placements, but they know that our students will be prepared, capable and supported.'

Engagement in learning

A more subtle approach to embedding employability skills is taken by the Wyndham CEC, Rowville NLC and the Rovers Network teams. The choir, serves not only to engage the parents with their child's schooling but also, ultimately, to engage them in learning new skills for employment. By listening to their needs, Judy Bowman hopes to be able to ascertain what courses could be mounted by Wyndham CEC that could set them on a path to employment.

While language and literacy skills are developed incidentally through the choir (reading lyrics for example) and team work is implicit in choirs, making these explicit at this stage would be likely to alienate this particular target group and negate the engagement process that the choir has begun. Judy Bowman points out that the time to address employability skills more explicitly will come when, through the choir, the parents are engaged in pre-accredited or accredited courses.

The Introduction to Complementary Therapies course is also primarily an engagement tool, and consequently, as with the choir, employability skills are embedded and

implicit. Participants are given information on pathways, on where to go if they are interested in further study in one or more of the therapies. Some students have decided to do a small business course to see what it involves before training in a specific therapy. However, as many have not been in education since leaving school, the course, with its particular appeal for this target group, gets them into an educational setting and into thinking about what they might do. It is an engagement tool, a first step. In the same vein, one off sessions, e.g. on menopause, are invaluable in keeping people connected and engaged.

While a few of the students in the Introduction to Animal Care course have gone on to access accredited courses in animal studies at TAFE, and one has started her own dog-walking and pet-minding business, for most, the pathway to employment is much longer. The course acts as a significant tool for connecting students with the broader community and re-engaging them in society. Rather than employment or further study, most of the students go on to volunteering at such places as the Lost Dogs Home, the RSPCA and Lort Smith. Kaye Widdowson explains:

For the majority of our students—those with mental health issues, in particular—volunteering a day a week is a very positive outcome and another step along the way to employment. It contributes to developing work habits such as getting up in the morning and turning up on time; and knowing if working with animals is really what they want to do—the reality of the daily grind is that it's not so much about cuddling animals as about cleaning up after them!

As the pathway to employment is likely to be a long one for many of the Rovers Network students, it is necessary to take a *softly, softly* approach to employability skills. For the most part they are implicit because otherwise it can be too threatening to the students and too much pressure. A session on job readiness deals with what the industry expects and includes a reflection in class on the skills gained from the course and how they relate to employability skills.

Students often say, 'Yes, but we have no experience', so we show them how things they do demonstrate experience. For example, keeping a portfolio demonstrates organisational skills, administering eye drops to their own pets demonstrates pet care skills. This is a big eye opener for them (Selma Gotsbacher).



The genius of it

The five snapshots of ingenious pre-accredited courses very clearly demonstrate that the A-frame is a highly flexible curriculum capable of adaptation to widely differing needs. The Learn Local managers, curriculum developers and course deliverers of these A-frame programs are unanimous in their agreement that, while it also provides a structure and clear guidelines for course development and delivery, its flexibility is the key to its success as a planning and delivery tool for their mostly marginalised learner groups.

This flexibility is derived in part from the simplicity and clarity of the document itself. In Selma Gotsbacher's words, 'Simplicity is the genius of it'. Another member of the Animal Care team emphasised the benefits of this for less experienced teachers and trainers:

The session plan is easy to fill in and helps with the concept of lesson planning. It's very useful for new teachers and those coming from industry because it makes the language of education and training accessible. It helps you know where your knowledge slots in. It also makes the employability skills explicit. The A-frame makes it easy to see how to incorporate them into the course (Rachael Hawkins).

But its usefulness extends also to the more experienced teachers, one of whom commented that since being redesigned, the A-frame was now:

... more rigorous, as previously the process of course development was more haphazard. The framework helps teachers to put more consideration into the development of the course. At the same time it helps illuminate new ways of packaging existing courses (Judy Bowman).

While Kaye Widdowson, the experienced language and literacy teacher on the Animal Care team goes so far as to assert that it is:

... the best curriculum I have ever used—the documents really help you consolidate your thinking about the course you're teaching. The A-frame is a very supportive tool that I constantly refer back to.

Maximising flexibility

Perhaps even more than its simplicity, the A-frame's flexibility derives from its freedom from formal assessment:

Accredited courses are assessment driven—students learn content in order to pass the assessment. The A-frame curriculum is flexible and allows trainers to vary the course according to learner needs while ensuring that subject matter is still delivered (Kerry Cronjaeger, Rowville NLC).

With the A-frame, there is no set assessment so it allows us to purely focus on individual needs—we can be totally learner focused in order to develop their confidence and skills.

... providing learners with the opportunity to find out what it is they want to do. They are not locked into something because they have enrolled in an accredited course and later, even if it turns out to be unsuitable, cannot access a different course at the same course level (Selma Gotsbacher).

Course developers and deliverers are thus able to be as learner-centred as possible. The Rovers Network team describe how the Learner Plan makes an invaluable contribution to learner-centredness because it enables trainers to very clearly know from the beginning where the students want to go. It provides a tool to structure the course. In their view, the only issue is the intensity of the learner plan because students with language and literacy issues have trouble with it. However, this is outweighed by its usefulness:

The learner plan is such a valuable thing for us as teachers that it is well worth putting in the often

intense support that people need in order to complete it (Rachel Hawkins).

In the final analysis, regardless of how flexible and accessible the curriculum document, it is the vision of the course developers and deliverers that makes courses ingenious: the vision to identify and respond to needs in all their varied guises and disguises, combined with the passion to do something about it and the dedication to see it through. The challenges of engaging marginalised groups and providing courses uniquely tailored to their needs are great, but, as the five snapshots in this article have shown, the possibilities are even greater.

Special thanks to each of the teachers and managers who gave their time to be interviewed for this article.

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Dr Lynda Achren is a freelance consultant in the field of language, literacy and culture. She has worked in Laos and Vietnam on a range of AusAID projects; in Australia as a lecturer at Victoria University, La Trobe University and Melbourne University; and as a project manager at AMES. Her involvement with the Learn Local sector began when she managed the four year ACFE funded state wide capacity building initiative, Responding to CALD Learners.

A finer grained assessment approach

By Michael Christie and Jennifer Dunbabin

Background

The introduction of the state government's Tasmanian Adult Literacy Action Plan 2010–15 (Action Plan) energised the adult language, literacy and numeracy field in Tasmania. This was in the wake of the 2006 Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey (ALLS) statistics which showed Tasmania as the state with the lowest rates of adult literacy and numeracy. The Action Plan provided for 23 literacy coordinators, placed in LINC Tasmania and Corrections sites throughout the state, as well as grant opportunities for demand driven, locally tailored literacy projects. A campaign to raise awareness about the extent of adult literacy skills, provide plain English workshops, and a strategy to coordinate a concerted response involving business, community and government coalesced into the *26 TEN: Get the Tools for Life* brand.

Measuring progress—the theory

The Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) was chosen as the tool to measure improvements in a learner's language, literacy, learning or numeracy skills. The chosen measure of progress was a movement from one core skill level to the next in one core skill. For example, a learner is assessed by a literacy coordinator at Level 1 in the writing core skill on entry into LINC's one-to-one literacy volunteer tutor program. Nine months later, the learner is assessed again, and found to be performing at Level 2 in the writing core skill. From the perspective of the learner, the learning supporter, and the Action Plan funder, this counts as a successful outcome.

Measuring progress—how it turned out in practice

Reports from the Action Plan's first years showed that using the measure of a movement of a whole level in one or more core skills within a reporting period meant that much of the Action Plan's progress and success was invisible. A consequence of the bar of success being set at this height was a growing sense amongst the Action Plan's stakeholders that something was not performing to expectations.

A decision was taken in 2011 to slide the bar down to the level of core skills indicators. Reportable progress became a rise in a level of one of the eleven indicators during a reporting period or the course of a community or work-based project. One consequence was that learner progress

and success became more visible to the funder, program managers, adult literacy support officers and tutors. This decision moved the measure of progress from the *coarse grained* core skill level to the *finer grained* indicator level. This is the scale used for the federal Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) Program. The program guidelines outline the expectation that learners progress one level in one indicator per 100 hours of instruction (approximately) with up to a total of 800 hours each time a learner joins the program.

The magnitude of the Action Plan's strategies for delivering literacy support is significantly smaller than the SEE program. Both community and workplace based initiatives can begin at as little as five learner contact hours. In the workplace, business pressures have a significant impact on project design. Furthermore, in the community, key characteristics of target learners and how they engage in this support can constrain the number of hours available for delivery. For example, LINC's largely one-to-one volunteer tutor-based program brings Tasmanian adults from across the state's regions into supportive relationships for weekly tutorials that can run from one to two hours. This amount of time provides the first steps for many back into learning engagement. Progress made is difficult to capture using the measurement unit of an indicator level, even over a year.

The literacy support offered through the Action Plan's grant programs provides real opportunities for learning engagement. However, the length of many of these courses and programs, from one day in some cases, to one day a week for six weeks in others, alongside the difficulties of performing comprehensive diagnostic assessments, makes these measures of success unable to be drawn and reported.

Implementing the plan

The Action Plan targets adult Tasmanians at ACSF Level 3 and below. Based on the reported assessments of learners in LINC Tasmania's program, learners seeking Action Plan-based support overwhelmingly have core skills at Pre-Level 1 and Level 1 in at least one indicator. These starting levels provide significant barriers to the speed of progress, as learners in this cohort often present with multiple social, psychological, and economic problems, and often have had negative experiences with the formal education system. Due to these barriers, the nature of

learner engagement can be intermittent and characterised by a series of short-term engagements. Taken together, these factors of program and learner characteristics make the choice of using an increase in ACSF indicator levels too coarse a measure to make much of the learner progress and success visible and reportable.

The LINC Volunteer Tutor Service and the Grants Programs have been underway since 2010. In this time, through formal and anecdotal reporting, we have seen evidence that people's lives have been improved and business's profitability has increased despite a smaller than anticipated number of learners improving one level in one indicator of a core skill. Faced with this fundamental dissonance, Skills Tasmania commissioned research to see if the ACSF could be used to assess smaller improvements than the indicator level: that is in a *finer grained* way.

The research project

Philippa McLean and Katrina Lyle from Escalier McLean Consulting, used their deep knowledge of LLN provision, and particularly Philippa's intimate understanding of the ACSF, combined with the experiences of Tasmanian practitioners, to produce a report (2013) that makes three recommendations. Central to the recommendations is an analysis of each of the six finer grained options of the ACSF, weighing up how effectively each could be used to measure literacy progress (Table 1).

These options are:

- indicators
- focus areas
- performance features
- level of support
- domains of communication
- text types.

The report's recommendations, which have either been carried out, or are in progress, are to:

- Convene a discussion group to consider the options in Table 1.
- Trial some or all of the options in Table 1.
- Trialling will indicate which of the options might work and whether this approach will meet the requirements of Skills Tasmania.
- Situate the report and the trial in the national arena by seeking the support of DIICCSRTE [sic] who have responsibility for the ACSF.

- Broaden the research and trialling of possible options to other states and territories to strengthen the veracity of findings from further exploration of this issue.

The pilot projects

In March 2014, trialling of options, not including indicators, began after eighteen literacy practitioners met in Campbell Town, in the middle of Tasmania, for a day long workshop to explore this stage's possibilities. One notable outcome from the workshop was that some practitioners were keen to mix options, seeking to balance the specific needs of learners in their programs with the funder's requirements of valid and reliable assessment measures. Seeking this balance will remain one of the main challenges of this trial.

While the range of trial projects is large, some common themes have emerged. Most projects are mixing finer grained options, often starting with one or two focus areas. From these focus areas, key performance features that target the specific skill gaps learners are seeking to fill are chosen, and cross-checked against movement in level of support. Workplace-based programs that are targeting specific skill development, such as improving report writing, are using the ACSF to disaggregate the elements of this text type and then map the lines of progress that increasing independence in performing, and mastery of, these elements travel along.

Community-based programs, where learner-directed goals can range across the ACSF, are also honing in on focus areas, but allowing the learner's needs to guide which ones are brought into play and how these are cross-checked against other finer grained options, such as communication domains. For example, a learner with Level 2 oral communication skills in the personal and community domain of communication could be supported to successfully perform sample activities in the education and training domain, as a finer grained outcome.

Assessment challenges

As mentioned above, the challenge here, especially in the more learner-directed programs, lies in balancing different assessment and reporting purposes. Indeed, as Rosemary Hipkins citing Aikenhead (2010) argues, assessment can be seen to have three purposes, with each purpose aligned in an assemblage with particular criteria, methods and actors:

- systems accountability and reporting—reliable and summative—program funder

Table 1: Some Options for Reporting Progress using the ACSF

Option	Advantages	Disadvantages	Outcomes	Where applicable
<p>Option 1: Provide evidence of gain against a <i>core skill – current way of recording progress</i></p>	<p>Addresses a whole core skill</p> <p>Does not treat parts of the skill as discrete</p> <p>Allows all skill development within a core skill to be acknowledged</p> <p>Allows for development of a number of focus areas and performance features</p> <p>Easy to record</p>	<p>Difficult to move learners one whole level</p> <p>Does not allow finer gradations of progress to be reported</p> <p>May not allow individual learners' particular strengths or needs to be seen</p> <p>Indicators are not discrete; they are part of the whole core skill</p>	<p>Allows progress to be identified from one level to the next</p> <p>Addresses the current KPI</p>	<p>More applicable to delivery modes that include quite a large number of hours, e.g. approximately 200 hours per core skill</p> <p>Works well with learners who are making fast progress</p>
<p>Option 2: Provide evidence of gain against <i>one indicator</i> in a core skill</p>	<p>Addresses a number of focus areas</p> <p>Can acknowledge progress in all focus areas of an indicator</p> <p>Easy to record</p>	<p>Does not allow finer gradations of progress to be reported</p> <p>May not allow individual learners' particular strengths or needs to be seen</p>	<p>Allows progress of part of the core skill and a number of focus areas to be identified from one level to the next</p> <p>There are no indicators at Pre Level 1 so could not use this option when reporting progress from Pre Level 1 to Level 1</p>	<p>More applicable to delivery modes that include quite a large number of hours, e.g. approximately 100 hours per indicator</p>
<p>Option 3: Provide evidence of gain against a predominant <i>focus areas</i> for a core skill</p> <p>How reported: training needs could be linked to a focus area/s, e.g. register in report writing (progress notes in Aged Care), and performance measured against progress in that focus area. Progress would need to indicate a one level increase in this focus area.</p>	<p>Links focus of delivery and learning to specific reportable performance</p> <p>Could work well at the lower levels of the ACSF where focus areas may be able to be treated as more discrete</p> <p>Is an attainable outcome even for quite low total hours of training, e.g. 10 hours</p>	<p>Focus areas are not discrete; they are interconnected with other focus areas. It may prove difficult to isolate and report against</p> <p>Requires assessors to make a judgment which incorporates assessment of performance from a number of focus areas and the Performance Variables Grid. This will require a solid understanding of the ACSF</p> <p>Difficult to make work with a group because learners may be at different points within a focus areas</p>	<p>Allows progress to be identified within a level</p> <p>Allows a particular focus area to be identified as a need for the learner, the cohort and the employer</p> <p>There are no indicators at Pre Level 1 so could not use this option when reporting progress from Pre Level 1 to Level 1</p>	<p>Where specific aspects of a core skill are taught, e.g. interventions that help workers write appropriate progress notes by focusing on aspects of register for the identified audience</p>

<p>Option 4: Provide evidence of gain in an indicator against <i>performance features</i></p> <p>How reported: Use performance grids to identify appropriate features and track changes by highlighting them in the grids. Evidence would also need to be attached to the highlighted grids</p>	<p>Creates visual map of progress so that changes can be easily tracked and seen</p> <p>Allows very specific and detailed changes in individual performance to be identified and reported</p> <p>Easy to use but must still be informed by the Performance Variables Grid.</p>	<p>Too detailed for some purposes Need familiarity with the detail of the ACSF</p> <p>Needs to be supported with evidence</p> <p>Will a minimum number of performance feature increases be required</p>	<p>Allows progress to be identified within a level</p> <p>Gives a more individual picture of a learner's performance by identifying a spiky profile within levels</p>	<p>Allows gains to be reported across a wide range of delivery scenarios because not linked to any particular task or text.</p>
<p>Option 5: Provide evidence of gain in a core skill using <i>text types</i></p> <p>How reported: a text type is identified, e.g. procedural (for writing a set of instructions) and the training focuses on that text type only</p>	<p>Progress linked directly to engagement in identified texts</p> <p>Useful for delivery involving groups</p> <p>Can meet employer expectations</p> <p>Provides specific evidence at ACSF level</p> <p>Provides the opportunity to specify need against a text type and a core skill</p> <p>Easy to locate in an ACSF level and describe progress</p>	<p>Doesn't allow individual learners' particular strengths or needs to be seen</p> <p>May work in a first round of training but may be difficult to justify subsequent round of training focusing on the same text type</p> <p>Would require progress to be demonstrated in that text type for all indicators and all focus areas</p> <p>Requires solid knowledge of the ACSF</p>	<p>Allows progress to be identified within a level</p> <p>Allows for specific needs of the workplace to be met</p> <p>Allows for cohort goals to be articulated</p>	<p>Wide range of applications, in supporting engagement in specific workplace texts, e.g. technical (instruction manual); regulatory (industry standards list); procedural (standard operating procedures)</p>
<p>Option 6: Provide evidence of gain against <i>level of support</i></p> <p>Describe task and map to ACSF performance variables grid</p> <p>Assess the level of support the learner needs to complete the task before and after the LLN intervention</p>	<p>Appropriate where the LLN context, text and task remains the same but where training has enabled the learner to complete the task independently</p> <p>Easy to use and report</p> <p>Provides easily identified gains for employer (increased productivity)</p>	<p>Could under report or miss other progress if used when delivery allows for gains using other measurement options</p> <p>Is very task specific so reports against a very limited outcome</p>	<p>Allows progress to be identified when all other factors of a learner's core skill level remain static.</p>	<p>Workplace interventions which have limited time frames and specific task focus</p> <p>Maintenance literacy</p>
<p>Option 7: Provide evidence of gain against <i>Domains</i></p> <p>How reported: learner would need to demonstrate that skills acquired in one domain were able to be demonstrated in another domain</p>	<p>Allows reporting directly against sample activities</p> <p>Easy to use and report</p> <p>Useful for group delivery</p> <p>Acknowledges improvement in breadth of progress within a level rather than progress to the next level</p>	<p>Doesn't allow individual learners' particular strengths or needs to be seen</p> <p>Requires depth of knowledge of ACSF</p>	<p>Allows progress to be identified within a level</p>	<p>Training that allows for demonstration in broader contexts, i.e. workplace gains that can be transferred to personal/community life, e.g. creates a flyer for workplace and creates a flyer for local sport club barbeque</p>

- improving teaching and learning—valid, diagnostic and formative—teacher
- lifelong learning—student owned and formative—learner.

The challenge of balancing these three assemblages may well be supported by using the ACSF in finer grained ways. On the other hand, a risk in the project is that finer grained could mean more detailed and thereby less manageable assessments (Hipkins, 2010). In contexts where practitioners work to established assessment targets and methods, such as occurs in the SEE Program, exploring finer grained uses of the ACSF might seem a marginal use of squeezed time better spent preparing, teaching and assessing. While use of finer grained methods might be easier to fit to community based and targeted, workplace based literacy support, exploration and trials in other contexts would support the goal of seeking to balance these three assessment assemblages that can often oscillate arrhythmically in programs where one assessment assemblage outweighs the other two.

What's next?

The trialling of projects in Tasmania has continued throughout 2014, with a final report drawing conclusions and making recommendations due in early 2015. The authors invite practitioners and others working in the LLN field to join this exploration either by considering trialling projects in your region or state, or by contributing to and continuing the dialogue that has recently raised its volume in Tasmania.

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Michael Christie is Literacy Coordinator at Bridgewater LINC for LINC Tasmania. He has worked in the university and adult community learning sector since 2004. Michael completed a doctorate (2009) in the narratology of Australian Grunge fiction and Australian Labourism's neoliberalising. He has research interests in further developing narrative methods to support and provide accounts of adult learning.

Jennifer Dunbabin is Senior Project and Policy Officer—Adult Literacy at Skills Tasmania. She has worked in the VET sector since 1999, specialising in workforce development, e-learning and most recently adult literacy. She manages the 26TEN Grants program which funds LLN projects in the community and workplace.

Social learning: resource platforms and the dynamics of 'push' and 'pull'

By Colin Lankshear



Introduction

In *Minds on fire: open education, the long tail and learning 2.0*, John Seely Brown and Richard Adler argue that for populations to thrive in the foreseeable future they will increasingly depend on the availability of 'robust local eco-systems of resources [that support] innovation and productiveness' (2008, p.17). Being able to produce in sustainable ways, and to innovate in ways that generate new resources and products from what already exists rather than digging further into scarce resources, will be especially important. Hence, the capacity to supply innovative and efficient creators and producers and to support their ongoing learning and creative activity becomes a key component of robust resource eco-systems.

Modern societies have depended on formal higher education systems to support such learning, but this option is running out of time. Brown and Adler claim the demand worldwide for ongoing learning of the kinds required for future viability and sustainability, likely cannot be resourced on the conventional bricks and mortar, courses, teachers and administrators model. Demand and resource availability are in tension. Moreover, even if resources were available to meet numerical demand, current approaches to teaching and learning are out of sync with what is needed to prepare populations for their future lives. Conventional courses and credentials based on decontextualized and abstracted content transmission have proved ineffective performers for innovation and productiveness.

By contrast, innovation and productiveness is often conspicuously *present* among participants in popular affinities, who learn, create and innovate in the company of others within grounded contexts of practice (of all kinds). Every instance of *modding* a video game, *mashing up* web services and applications, or designing and creating artefacts for virtual worlds is an innovation; and mashups are paradigms of adding value to existing resources. Moreover, the kinds of learning that mediate and accompany such forms of productiveness (e.g., Wikipedia, mobile device apps, serviceware mashups) do not presuppose bricks and

mortar and formal courses, although some (e.g., Facebook) famously emerge from non-formal activities among campus-based learners. This is not to say that innovation and productiveness does not emerge from conventional higher education institutions. Some does. But it is often highly resource intensive, confined to small numbers of people, and is proprietary and exclusive. Future living requires much wider diffusion and at many more diverse levels, since innovations required for living well are often everyday and simple: what is important is nurturing the innovator and creative producer in the everyperson, as well as in the lab scientist.

Some years ago, it was thought the development of massively open online courses (MOOCs) might provide a model for what is needed: free courses offering open scope for participants. It is now reported that even deluxe MOOCs, like those associated with Stanford University, have very poor completion rates. Most remain, at heart, *courses* close to the traditional model, differing in crucial ways from the kinds of massive affinity-based spaces and communities that have emerged around popular cultural interests, tinkering communities, open source software communities, and massive participation spaces like Wikipedia. These latter can all be seen as providing *platforms for social learning* where participants can share and acquire expertise within contexts of common interest grounded in hands-on activity and purpose. Participants can *pull on* resources that are freely available within processes of becoming deep learners of a practice, in ways that lead, ultimately, to becoming full participants in a particular practice.

In what follows I draw mainly on the work of John Seely Brown and colleagues to spell out the ideas of *social learning*, the contending paradigms of *push* and *pull*, and the idea of *learning platforms*. Together these comprise a view of what robust eco-systems of resources for a kind of learning that supports innovation and productiveness might look like.

Learning as social learning: participation and deep learning

By social learning, Brown and Adler mean, in the first place, learning based on the assumption that our understanding of concepts and processes is constructed socially in conversations about the matters in question and ‘through grounded [and situated] interactions, especially with others, around problems or actions’ (2008, p.18). From a social learning perspective, the focus is more on *how* we learn than simply on *what* we learn. The emphasis shifts from ‘the content of a subject to the learning activities and human interactions around which that content is situated’ (ibid.). That is, the emphasis shifts from a view of learning as a matter of getting content into heads—on the model of providing private minds with raw materials from which to produce thought and knowledge—to seeing learning as a matter of involving individuals in processes and practices within which knowledge, understanding, and ideas are produced by participants as *social* accomplishments.

Social learning also emphasises ‘learning to be’ (Gee, 2007, p.172). According to Brown and Adler (2008, p.19):

mastering a field of knowledge involves not only *learning about* the subject matter but also *learning to be* a full participant in the field. This involves acquiring the practices and the norms of established practitioners in that field or acculturating into a community of practice.

This underpins the efficacy of social learning for promoting an ideal of ‘deep learning’ (Gee 2007), in contrast to the kinds of surface learning that so often results from formal education approaches based on driving decontextualized content into heads in pre-determined sequences: deep learning in a sense that people like Howard Gardner (1991) identify as typically missing in cases of successful students. Drawing on extensive research from the 1960s–1990s, Gardner provides case after case of students:

... who exhibit all the overt signs of success—faithful attendance at good schools, high grades and high test scores, accolades from their teachers—[yet] typically do not display an adequate understanding of the materials and concepts with which they have been working: including students who receive honor grades in college level physics courses are frequently unable to solve basic problems and questions encountered in a form slightly different from that on which they have been formally instructed and tested (ibid, p.3).

Unlike surface learning, deep learning can generate ‘real understanding, the ability to apply one’s knowledge and even to transform that knowledge for innovation’ (Gee, 2007, p.172). Gee argues that to encourage deep learning we need to move beyond ‘learning about’ and, instead, focus on ‘learning *to be*’ (ibid.; our italics). Deep learning requires that learners be ‘willing and able to take on a new identity in the world, to see the world and act on it in new ways’ (ibid.). This points partly to the *materiality* and *situatedness* of deep learning, where ideas and content are grounded in specific tasks, interactions, purposes, actions, outcomes, and the like. In addition, however, if one is learning to be, say, an historian, or a music video creator, one needs to see and value things about the world and one’s work or activity in the ways that historians and music video creators do. This is because:

in any domain, if knowledge is to be used, the learner must probe the world (act on it with a goal) and then evaluate the result. Is it good or bad, adequate or inadequate, useful or not, improvable or not? (Gee, 2007, p.172)

Gee argues that this involves learners developing the kind of value system that Donald Schön (1983) calls an *appreciative system* as a basis for making such judgments.

Appreciative systems:

are embedded in the identities, tools, technologies, and worldviews of distinctive groups of people who share, sustain, and transform them—groups like doctors, carpenters, physicists, graphic artists, teachers, and so forth through a nearly endless list. (Gee, 2007, p.172)

Social learning is effective because it immerses learners from the outset in processes of induction into the ways of becoming full practitioners and acquiring their appreciative systems, and provides hands-on practice with their mental and material tools within authentic contexts where these are employed by successful practitioners. In traditional education systems, according to Brown and Adler (2008, p.20):

... students may spend years learning about a subject; only after amassing sufficient (explicit) knowledge are they expected to start acquiring the (tacit) knowledge or practice of how to be an active practitioner/professional in a field (Polanyi 1966). But viewing learning as the process of joining a community of practice reverses this pattern and allows new students

to engage in *learning to be* even as they are mastering the content of a field. This encourages the practice of what John Dewey called *productive inquiry*, that is, the process of seeking the knowledge when it is needed in order to carry out a particular situated task [aka *just-in-time-and-just-in-place*, which is a hallmark of non-formal learning in affinity spaces].

By contrast, Brown and Adler consider the kind of induction into non-formal social learning available via participation in Wikipedia. They focus on how the process of becoming a trusted contributor to Wikipedia with administrative access rights to higher level editing tools than those available to rank and file contributors, ‘involves a process of legitimate peripheral participation that is similar to the process in open source software communities’ (Brown and Adler 2008, p.19).

Likewise, within open software communities beginning or novice programmers start working on relatively simple, non-critical development projects. As and when they have displayed capacity ‘to make useful contributions and to work in the distinctive style and sensibilities/taste of the community’ they may be invited to participate in more central projects, and the best of the best are invited to work on the system’s kernel code (ibid: p.19). In the case of Wikipedia, the process of enculturation that can lead to administrative rights is mediated by access via the History and Discussion functions to non-formal mentoring. Since the openness of the process exposes to anyone who chooses to study and learn from it, the process by which content is discussed, contested, negotiated, etc. This enculturation process enables ‘a new kind of critical reading—almost a new form of literacy—that invites the reader to join in the consideration of what information is reliable and/or important’ (ibid: p.19): from the very outset of contributing.

Paradigm shift: from push to pull

Brown and Adler conclude their discussion of social learning by arguing that this potential coincides with the need for a new approach to learning that replaces the familiar *push* or *supply* model with a *demand* or *pull* approach. They claim that a demand or pull approach to learning ‘shifts the focus from pushing pre-determined curriculum content contained in (learning) programs’ to ‘enabling participation in flows of action where the focus is both on learning to be through enculturation into a practice and on collateral (or consequential, spin off, by-product) learning’ (2008, p.30).



This builds on the ongoing work in a complementary area by Brown and colleagues (Hagel and Brown 2005; Hagel, Brown and Davison 2010), which began with John Hagel and Brown’s (2005) original account of an emerging paradigm shift in everyday thinking about how to mobilise resources for getting things done; and has latterly evolved into a substantive theory of how to use *pull* as a strategic approach to achieving innovation, sustainability, and success at both institutional, organisational and personal levels (Hagel, Brown and Davison, 2010).

Throughout the twentieth century, the dominant commonsense model for mobilising resources was based on a logic of *push*. Resource needs were anticipated or forecast, budgets drawn up, and resources pushed in advance to sites of anticipated use so they would be in place when wanted. This push approach involved intensive and often large-scale planning and program development. Indeed, Hagel and Brown see programs as being integral to the push model. They note, for example, that in education the process of mobilising resources involves designing standard curricula that ‘expose students to codified information in a predetermined sequence of experiences’ (2005, p.3). Conventional education, in fact, is a paradigm case of the push model at work.

Hagel, Brown and Davison (2010, p.1) speak of a current ‘big shift’ being driven by ‘new technology infrastructure’ and public policy initiatives responding to rapid social, cultural and economic transformations occurring globally. Demands for innovation, sustainability, and effective responses to rapid change are seeing ‘a fundamental re-ordering of the way we live, learn, socialize, play and work’ (ibid.). This involves a move from the familiar push paradigm toward an emergent pull paradigm as the conditions for successful change.

Hagel and Brown argue that we are now seeing early signs of an emerging pull approach within education, business, technology, media, and elsewhere, that creates *platforms* rather than programs: platforms ‘that help people to mobilise resources when the need arises’ (2005, p.3). The kinds of platforms emerging are designed to enable individuals and groups to do more with fewer resources, to innovate in ways that actually create new resources where previously there were none, and to otherwise add value to the resources to which we currently have access. Pull approaches respond to uncertainty and the need for sustainability by seeking to expand opportunities for creativity on the part of ‘local participants dealing with immediate needs’ (2005, p. 4). Pull models help people:

... come together and innovate in response to unanticipated events, drawing upon a growing array of highly specialized and distributed resources. Rather than seeking to constrain the resources available to people, pull models strive to continually expand the choices available while at the same time helping people to find the resources that are most relevant to them. Rather than seeking to dictate the actions that people must take, pull models seek to provide people on the periphery with the tools and resources (including connections to other people) required to take initiative and creatively address opportunities as they arise.

... pull models treat people as networked creators (even when they are customers purchasing goods and services) who are uniquely positioned to transform uncertainty from a problem into an opportunity [and] are ultimately designed to accelerate capability building by participants, helping them to learn as well as innovate, by pursuing trajectories of learning tailored to their specific needs (ibid.).

Most recently, Hagel, Brown and Davison (2010) identify three levels of pull and how these function as a strategy for successful learning: namely, *access*, *attract* and *achieve*. At base, ‘pull helps us find and access people and resources when we need them’ in a manner analogous to ‘searching’ (ibid: xiv). At the next level, pull involves the ability to attract people and resources that are relevant to and important for achieving our goals and purposes—especially people and resources we didn’t previously know existed. This ability is enhanced by the kind of serendipity enabled via weak ties in social networks. The third level of pull involves ‘the ability to pull from within ourselves’ the

necessary ‘insight and performance’ needed to ‘more effectively achieve our potential’ (ibid.). When viewed from the standpoint of a journey (of pull) toward achievement or success e.g., involving innovation, productiveness, viability, competitive edge pull can be understood in terms of *trajectory*, *leverage* and *pace* (ibid: x). Pull involves creating and putting in place in a systematic way a viable trajectory, the direction in which we are heading; passion is crucial here. Hagel, Brown and Davison advocate making our passions our profession, sufficient leverage (mobilising other people’s passions and efforts), and the right kind of pace (making progress at the appropriate rate for doing best in prevailing conditions and contexts).

Building platforms for social learning

The idea of a pull approach to learning has been explored from different perspectives. Jay Cross (2006) applies it to informal emergent learning within workplaces in pursuit of value-adding innovation and productivity. In place of training programs, Cross advocates paying greater attention to building and nurturing *learnsapes* or *learning ecologies* ‘where workers can easily find the people and information they need’; ‘where learning is fluid and new ideas flow easily’ (ibid: 41). This involves creating learning platforms enabling workers to make fast and effective learning responses to needs and challenges as they arise. Within work contexts such platforms may include expertise locators that map likely go-to people and rich information portals within and beyond the organisation; they build on workplace design decisions to create spaces that encourage ‘productive conversation’ and establish guidelines for ‘conversing productively’ (ibid: 29). More generally, platforms for collaborative learning mobilise ‘community, storytelling, simulation, dynamic learning portals, social network analysis, expertise location, presence awareness, workflow integration, search technology, help desks ... mobile learning, and co-creation’ (ibid: p.41).

For Cross, learning to be, practice, and communities of practice are largely assumed, because participants share a work culture and are already in a practice. By contrast, Brown and Adler (2008) approach the issue of building learning platforms from the standpoint of social learning possibilities within formal higher education that has long been dominated by content that is hived off from the kinds of practices in which such content originates and/or finds its natural home. Accordingly, they are interested in how to build platforms for learning that positively enable students to participate in ‘flows of action’ where they get ‘[enculturated] into a practice’ (2008, p.30).

Such platforms will involve varying mixes of access to physical and virtual environments, depending on local contingencies, but always on the basis that these environments and resources provide opportunities for learners/newcomers to participate in authentic practices with access to support and guidance from experienced and expert practitioners, scholars, researchers, and other disciplinary and technical professionals. The resource intensive nature of this approach entails a special place and significance for access to *virtual* environments and resources available on- and offline.

Building the virtual dimension of learning platforms may include mobilising open courseware made available through initiatives like the Open Educational Resources (OER) movement; identifying relevant scholarly websites and networks; enabling online and/or ROM-based access to powerful instruments, simulations, and other kinds of virtual environments; accessing selections from the myriad 'niche communities based around specific areas of interest in virtually every field of endeavour' (ibid: p.31); accessing online technical forums associated with products and services; and creating or joining purpose-built collaborative spaces using Web 2.0 resources and services (e.g., wikis, academic social networking sites, etc.); providing starter directories or indices of potentially relevant resources on sites like youtube.com; among many other options.

Final thoughts

This view of learning and how to enable it represents a serious point of departure from so much conventional learning that is driven by curriculum and course-based approaches. It begins from what individuals are seriously interested in learning to master as practitioners; what they will be inspired to persevere with when the going gets tough; what they want to become expert at, to experiment with and to develop and extend as a field of activity within some part of their lives. From an educator's perspective it emphasises thinking about how to help resource the open-ended pursuit of such passions rather than about how to develop content to transmit.

An interesting non-formal contemporary perspective on social learning and how everyday people pull on resources for learning can be found in James Gee and Elisabeth Hayes' (2010) account of women becoming involved in design, production, and general participation in learning communities within the context of *Sims* gaming communities. Their work provides rich examples of the key



concepts discussed in this article, particularly from a learner perspective. Their account offers much to educators wanting to explore the kinds of resources that have more or less organically developed as platforms for learning around everyday affinities like gaming. I say organically despite the fact that at key points individuals and groups of people have consciously asked themselves the question 'What can I/we do that might help enable people like us to grow our interest and support each other as much as possible?'

In the final analysis, it is *that* question and countless empirical responses to it that, together have revolutionised learning and provided researchers and theorists with the material basis for conceptualising and advocating ideals like social learning in the first place. Here, as in other dimensions and facets of social practice, *we make the road by walking* (Horton and Freire, 1990).

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Higher order thinking skills and the adult learner

By Rhonda Raisbeck

Take a moment to walk in the shoes of an adult language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) learner. You have come to class for a variety of reasons and won't be inclined to stay if not fully engaged in learning, or feel like you are making progress. You want to be treated as an adult, learn as an adult and be engaged in the skills and knowledge related to what adults do and how they think.

Essentially teachers need to remember and apply the adult learning principles espoused by Knowles, Brookfield and Mezirow (in summary form, IBSA, 2011) in their teaching practice. A way to do this is to use Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956) as a framework to develop teaching and learning activities that encourage LLN learners to use higher order thinking skills.

Bloom's Taxonomy as a framework

Bloom (1956) identified three overlapping domains for learning: cognitive, psychomotor and affective. Within the cognitive domain six levels of thinking were identified: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

A revision of Bloom's taxonomy was undertaken by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001). The nouns were rewritten as verbs and the order of the top two was reversed. This revised taxonomy in Table 1 is outlined in the Innovative Teachers' Companion (2011, p.20) and is now more widely used in education:

Levels are cumulative, in that any level incorporates learning at all levels below it. The aim is to move students from lower levels to higher levels and so encourage higher order thinking in the learning activities. When using Bloom's Taxonomy it is important that students recognise the six levels of thinking and therefore, understand how they are to act at each level. They can then develop the metalanguage around their own higher order thinking and learning processes.

Practical application

How can you put this theory and framework into practice? Firstly, think of a hook to engage your learners in the content and skills for thematic LLN work. A hook is one

big topic or question which will have impact, motivate the learners and give them ownership of the investigation activities. Some examples could be:

- Energy—Oil: can we live without it?
- Environment—What happens when we don't recycle our stuff?
- Law/Numeracy/Health—How many drinks can I have and still drive?
- Entertaining/Numeracy—Can I afford to have 20 people to dinner?
- History—Ned Kelly: hero or villain?
- Sometimes a hook can be a picture, a story, a video, an object or article of clothing—be creative!

The following is an example of the use of a text as a starting point to devise a range of teaching and learning activities which will address higher order thinking skills. This example uses a short folk tale, from *A Treasury of Asian Folktales* (1992) retold by Linda Gan. This is a brief recount of the story:

The chess player

Tohan and Benppo were friends who lived on the pasturelands in Mongolia. Benppo's father was a wealthy sheep farmer who wanted his son to work on the farm. Tohan's father was a poor weaver who wanted his son to better himself, so he sent Tohan into town to learn how to read and write, play the flute and learn the game of chess.

Tohan wanted his friend to come with him, but Benppo said he didn't need to study as he would inherit his father's farm. Tohan went into town alone and, as he was clever and hard-working, he mastered all three skills quickly.

When he returned home he found that his father had died and bandits arrived. They captured the camp and took everyone prisoner. Tohan pleaded for their release. The bandit leader asked if he had a special skill. So Tohan offered to play the flute. The bandits liked his music so much that they said he could go free. Tohan asked for his friend to be released too, but

Practical matters

Table 1

<i>Bloom's Taxonomy</i>	Thinking skills verbs and sentence starters (to assist in working out where the activity falls on the taxonomy)
<i>Remember</i>	Labelling, listing, matching, retelling <i>List all the ...</i> Describe what happened at ...
<i>Understand</i>	Classifying, discussing, explaining, paraphrasing <i>Give reasons for ...</i> Describe in logical steps how to ...
<i>Apply</i>	Calculating, solving, writing, practising <i>Write a news report ...</i> Write a letter to ...
<i>Analyse</i>	Comparing, arguing, contrasting, debating <i>Summarise the reasons for ...</i> List the pros and cons of ...
<i>Evaluate</i>	Arguing, assessing, deciding, judging, recommending <i>Which of the two (examples) would be better for ...</i> Evaluate the effectiveness of ...
<i>Design</i>	Creating, generalising, improving, predicting <i>Compose a song, or rap to ...</i> Generate key questions for ...

when the bandit asked for his special skill, Benppo had to admit that he didn't have any.

So Benppo stayed with the bandits and Tohan travelled on alone to another small town. It was owned by a wealthy landlord who employed everyone who lived there. He was the only person in town who could read and write, so he signed for only small amounts of food at the store to feed everyone. Tohan decided to help the people and signed for larger amounts of food. The people were grateful but urged Tohan to leave in case the landlord found out and killed him.

Tohan rode on till he came to the tiny kingdom of Sakim. There he found many people playing the game of chess. He was told that the king was crazy about chess. Every day he played a game against one of his subjects, but if they lost, then they were put to death!

An angry Tohan rode onwards to find the king. When he arrived, to his surprise, he found that the king's next opponent was his friend Benppo. He had escaped from the bandits, but had been captured by the king's men.

Tohan watched the uneven match unfold. In just two minutes Benppo had lost and the king jumped to his

feet, ready to have Benppo put to death. However, Tohan called on the king to have another game of chess with him, saying if he lost then the king could kill them both. The king agreed. Tohan continued to bargain that if he won, then the king must grant him a wish. To which the king agreed.

The king was good at chess, but Tohan was even better and eventually won the game. The king was angry but had to keep his promise as his people had heard him. To the cheers of the crowd, Tohan asked the king to do away with the death penalty. The king agreed and set Benppo free.

At last Tohan had put all his learning to good use—just as his father had hoped he would.

Unit of work planning

Think of a hook to lead off with a discussion about the story and its themes and content:

- Which skills are important to learn? Why?
- Why do we study / learn?
- Learning: is it important?
- Chess is a wonderful game.

List some activities which address the cumulative levels on Bloom's Taxonomy. Take into account your curriculum and the needs of your students. Note opportunities to teach the required sub-skills: spelling, vocabulary development, grammar, sentence structure, paragraph structure and the features of different text types.

A grid structure is often useful for planning a unit of work [see Table 2]. Think of as many examples of activities as you can for each of the levels on Bloom's Taxonomy. Select the most interesting, but make sure you have activities from all the levels, especially the top three levels.

Focus on the positive

Reinforce the learning with positive attitudes and behaviours. There is some good material in the research report, *Helping great teachers make great students: How empowering students with a positive mindset for learning improves their reading achievement* by Professor Michael Bernard (2010). It is critical to engage students in a conversation around positivism and the relationship between emotion and behaviour.

Practical matters

Table 2

<i>Bloom's Taxonomy</i> Sample activities based on The Chess Player story	
<i>Remember</i>	Name the skills that Tohan learned. How did he use these skills? (Recount)
<i>Understand</i>	What is the key message of the story? Describe how the game of Chess is played. Research the history of the game of chess. (Explanation text / report)
<i>Apply</i>	Write a news report on Tohan's chess game against the king. Teach someone to play chess / a musical instrument. (Give instructions)
<i>Analyse</i>	What skills do you develop when learning to play an instrument or a game like chess? How can you transfer these skills to other activities? Should children be forced to learn music at school? (Discussion)
<i>Evaluate</i>	Which skills are most important to learn? Why? Everyone should learn the game of chess. (Debate)
<i>Design</i>	Write a parallel story about a person with some special skills. (Narrative) Write a short text to persuade or show the value of learning to play a musical instrument. (Argument)

For too long education has largely ignored the evidence that teacher effectiveness is determined by the mindset of students towards their learning. Specifically, research shows the key factor that determines the extent to which students achieve to their maximum ability or underachieve are the strength of their positive attitudes and behaviours for learning (Bernard 2010).

Be explicit in how you extend higher order thinking skills and learning to learn skills from class activities into the Individual Learning Plan:

- State and share the lesson goals.
- Keep monitoring students' progress and share their successes.
- Discuss positive attitudes like self-sufficiency and positive internal motivation.
- Identify and review positive behaviours for learning such as listen, focus, stay calm when you don't understand, ask for help.
- Discuss the differences between positive and negative self-talk.
- Assist them to be confident, persistent, organised, work together, be emotionally calm and resilient.

- Name and praise positive behaviours for learning.

Using Bloom's Taxonomy for planning and the development of engaging activities for the LLN classroom should mean your lessons are more varied, challenging and motivating for your students. Activities which address the higher order thinking skills are usually more interesting as they give learners a deeper sense of purpose and ownership of the tasks. By building in some of the positive attitudes and behaviours for learning, you can enhance students' learning and give them some of the skills to continue learning outside the classroom.

Enjoy working on higher order thinking skills with your students.

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Rhonda Raisbeck has taught and managed CGEA and ESL courses at Holmesglen since 1992. She has taught in graduate LLN programs and refresher programs for overseas trained teachers, as well as presented professional learning.

Numeracy matters

Mathematising

By Beth Marr

This is the third of Beth's articles that have drawn on her wide ranging experiences teaching numeracy and developing teaching and learning resources that are authentic, accessible and relevant.

Many years ago when I was employed in the RMIT education faculty, one of my tasks was to ensure that trainee primary teachers had a reasonable level of numeracy before being let loose on children in schools. One day, I was explaining to a sessional lecturer, (a secondary maths teacher in his day job) that their personal numeracy should include an understanding of the meaning of fractions. However, not to the extent of having to perform convoluted operations like adding and dividing fractions. He argued vehemently that such operations were indeed an essential part of numeracy.

'Why?' I said. 'In this day and age who needs to do that? And what for?'

'Well' he argued 'You need it for year 10 algebra!'

It became horribly clear to me, that in his world view, numeracy students would continue to undertake bewildering searches for lowest common denominators, whether there was any practical application or not, and thus mathematics teaching would continue on its self-perpetuating journey into the world of the abstract and the obscure.

I don't know how many readers will remember from their school maths classes the rule for dividing by fractions, *turn it upside down and multiply*, nor if any of those who do recall it could possibly make sense of why it works. It is typical of the many mathematical rules we rote-learned at school.

An old Tandberg cartoon depicting a young boy literally standing on his head holding the upside-down fraction while the teacher looks on encouragingly, attempts to convey how much of school maths consisted of blindly following such rules. I use it in professional development (PD) workshops to illustrate that teachers tend to go unnecessarily into fractions operations. It still provokes arguments amongst trainers, many of whom continue to teach fraction rules to their learners, 'because they will need them to transpose formulae' or 'to work out ratios' somewhere down the track.

I am not arguing that learners will not need any of these skills, however, I think the trap is thinking that it has to be done now, just in case it's needed later, and making it abstract and impractical, rather than meaningful and context-related. It is challenging enough for many adults just to grasp what fraction notation means and how the idea of fractions underpins the important percentage and decimal concepts in their immediate worlds, without having to conquer dividing by three eighths or adding two unlike fractions together.

Incidentally, the first adult maths teaching resource I co-wrote, *Mathematics: A new beginning*, devotes several pages to using hands-on materials to make sense of these kinds of rules. In writing that, at least one group of teachers finally gained a clear grasp of why the rules work. But that was several decades ago, before ideas of *numeracy* had entered our consciousness. We were still teaching the discipline known as *mathematics* to adult students and asking ourselves how best to teach its procedures so they make some sense.

Questions of numeracy

Nowadays, I try to ask different questions like: Why do these rules matter? Who needs to know them? What will they need them for? If they do need it, when is the best time to teach it? And the even more fundamental numeracy question: What do these students really need to function more effectively in their work, home or community? For PD purposes I have recently invented a new term, *mathematising*, relating to this instinct to teach the mathematics rather than the numeracy. I have found it quite useful to name this tendency with a single word. Not only to convey the idea to other teachers, but also to remind myself as I design new resource materials and workshops.

Decimals for numeracy

In particular, these questions have figured large whilst I have been writing the new material for the *Decimals* section in *Building Strength with Numeracy*, the VALBEC online resource. Decimal calculations learned at school,

were, after all, riddled with rules; mostly about counting decimal places or moving the decimal point backwards and forwards. Trying to remember which rule to use, and when, often gets in the way of a sensible approach. To that end, the activities to be included in this resource should instead encourage learners to think of decimal quantities in terms of sensible or friendly whole numbers in order to estimate things, like decimal multiplications and thus put the decimal point in a sensible position.

But even that decision invites the mathematising questions: Who needs to multiply decimals together, and why? If they do, wouldn't they just do it on a calculator? So what do most adults need decimals for anyway?

For money calculations

The first and most obvious reason is that decimal notation is used for money. All adults need to understand decimals sufficiently to perform money calculations on a calculator and to give and interpret oral instructions related to money. The meaning of decimals for this purpose figures largely in the new Decimals section. In order to assist students who are learning English as well as numeracy, focus is also given to activities that encourage students to speak and hear money amounts themselves as they practise using calculators.

In addition, given the many ways of making mistakes when we perform calculations with a calculator or computer, adults need a way of checking that the answers they get are reasonable and that they make sense. The resource will present exercises designed to introduce students to this way of thinking, asking the important question: About how much will it be? This is followed by plenty of practice at estimating simple calculations and using relevant language.

For measurement

The other major reason that it is important for adults to comprehend decimal notation, and the meaning behind it, is its constant use in measurement. Whether in a supermarket, their car or a modern workplace, it is expected that adults read the decimal scales on common measuring devices and understand the readings when written in decimal form. To this end, several sessions

are included to make sense of decimals. These make visual links between decimals and fractions (tenths and hundredths) using diagrams and fraction circles.

Emphasis is also given to the links between common fractions such as a half and a quarter and their decimal equivalents. These relationships and their relevant language are strengthened through a collection of *Cooperative Logic* problem solving activities and several matching activities to encourage student collaboration and discussion. Other activities relate decimals to scale markings and provide practice at reading scales of various levels of complexity which can be tailored to the needs and level of the students.

And perhaps some mathematising

As mentioned above, differentiating between numeracy and mathematising has figured large in my mind while developing the Decimals section of *Building Strength with Numeracy*. Some of our earlier resources, aimed at teaching mathematics, contained engaging games and learning activities which focused the learner's attention on the behaviour of decimals in calculations. Games such as *Target 100* and *Decimal Dilemma* encourage deeper understanding of decimal quantities and develop more sophisticated estimation skills.

For many students still coming to understand decimal notation for the first time, this deeper level of thinking would indeed fall into the category of mathematising. However, for those in higher level numeracy programs, or bridging courses, these can be a powerful means to consolidate their understanding of decimal quantities. For this reason, these old favourites have been included in the resource. In these cases, the question of what is mathematising and what is numeracy will be up to individual teachers to consider in relation to their own students.

Beth Marr has worked in adult numeracy over several decades and most recently developed the resource *Building Strength with Numeracy*, with additional sections to be included in 2014. She has conducted numeracy training and recently, webinars, in a range of sectors across Australia and overseas.

Open forum

Ethical dimensions

By Tricia Bowen

This is my last instalment of *Open Forum*, and once again my focus is on teaching and learning. But on this occasion I'd like to write about what I've been learning since I returned to study in late July, and from there speak to what I see as the broader implications of that learning for teaching. Before I do, a little background as to what prompted a return to study in the first place. After all, the decision to write thousands of words and speak up during seminars, particularly when you're not all that sure of what it is you want to say, is not to be taken lightly.

Background

Over the the past three years, I've been teaching language and literacy in the VET sector, and life has been full of evidence gathering and audit preparedness. Accountability measures are everywhere. Like many of my colleagues, I've started to find this idea of *accountability* more and more troubling. My unease has nothing to do with any resistance to being accountable for my efforts. Like all the teachers I've worked with, I have a commitment to doing the very best I can for the students in my classes.

My concern with accountability stems from the fact that, in its current guise, it has a top-heavy connotation to it, implying teachers' efforts should be directed up, towards satisfying those in authority. But surely the teacher should also be looking in the other direction. Teachers are motivated by an intrinsic sense of *responsibility* to their students. They aim to assist them in maximising their potential. Teachers want to contribute to making their students lives better in some way.

With this idea of responsibility in mind, and motivated by a belief in the fundamental worth of knowledge and education, I started thinking about the ethical dimension to our work. At its very heart, teaching is an ethical endeavour with the purpose and imperative to act for the common good. How then might ethics theory inform and shape teaching practice?

Theories of ethics

For the past two months I've been learning about some of the most influential strands of ethics theory. These theories offer profound insights as to how we may live and

what constitutes a meaningful life. But they might also offer ideas for the work of teaching. They contain the potential to start another dialogue, to sit alongside the dominant discourse of accountability, a dialogue which examines the ethical dimension of our work. But first, let me elaborate on some of the ideas contained in these theories.



The first strand, Virtue Ethics theory with its focus on *how to be*, harks back to Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, written well over 2,000 years ago. Aristotle's picture of ethics centred on the idea of using reason, which he described as a distinctly human capability, as a means of building virtue or character, and in so doing maturing, developing and ultimately flourishing. Aristotle's theory lists four cardinal virtues, namely justice, temperance, courage and practical wisdom, suggesting that they form part of one's character, once they are acquired and learned through habit.

You may still feel fear with every conference presentation, but with this ongoing practise of courage, despite the sweating palms and racing heart, the virtue can develop and grow. A lack or deficit in these virtues or conversely an excess, Aristotle saw as a vice, implying that the mean, or the central point on the virtue continuum, represents the ideal. Taking the virtue of courage once again, displaying timidity or cowardice would represent a deficit, and recklessness an excess. His picture involves a process of development, of maturation, and the reaching of what he referred to as *Eudaimonia*, the idea of happiness, wellbeing, flourishing, arising from the full realisation of your human potential.

The second strand, with its focus on our *duties*, has as its key propopent the theories of Kant (1785, 1964). For Kant, traits of character are not as important as they were for Aristotle. Kant maintained that as rational beings, we have unconditional value, and it is imperative that this rationality, this *essence*, for want of a better word, affords

each human being unconditional respect. Consequently meaning all must be treated as an end in themselves, rather than be used as a means or instrument to achieve something else. In Kant's view, the moral value of your action depends entirely on the intentions behind it, suggesting an action only has moral value if it is motivated by a sense of unconditional respect for, and duty to, another rational being. His formulation, the *Categorical Imperative*, tells us that you should never adopt a principle of action unless that action could be universalised, unless everyone else was free to do it too.

A third strand, with its emphasis on consequences, or what might happen as the result of an action, suggests that actions are morally right when they create the greatest happiness, for the greatest number of people, and wrong if they produce pain and unhappiness. The focus is on the goal, the core idea being what makes an action right is whether it brings about better consequences than any of the alternative courses of action. Followers of this theory still see the worth behind moral principles such as *do not steal, tell the truth* and so on, but suggest that the power of these principles comes directly from the fact that by following them it is likely to create the greatest happiness for the greatest number. The theory also suggests that when strictly following these moral principles does not maximise happiness for the greatest number, then the authority of the original moral principle loses its force. Lying to students about the beauty of the gift you've just received, will probably lead to a larger number of people enjoying the farewell party, than if the truth were actually told.

Ethics theory and teaching practice

So what has all this got to do with teaching and learning? In my first instalment of *Open Forum*, I spoke of the importance of reflecting in the moment of teaching, directing and redirecting our actions to maximise learning, and then reflecting on our teaching, after the event, to determine what worked and what could have been done better. But in order to reflect deeply on our actions we need to be able to ask ourselves the right questions. Located at the heart of ethics theory there lies the means to assist us in formulating some of those questions.

How do I model and maintain this idea of respect for others in the teaching space? How do I promote and maximise a sense of wellbeing in the classroom? What are my responsibilities to my students and to this content? At the heart of ethics theory, there are profound truths that can potentially be reinterpreted as questions, questions that



may offer some assistance with the challenges contained in assisting students to maximise their potential.

An ethics of care

And then there is the Ethics of Care theory that aligns itself very closely with the work of teaching and learning. A key founder of this theory is American ethicist and psychologist Carol Gilligan, with her thoughts initially outlined in the 1982 book, *In a Different Voice*. More recently much work has been contributed by Nel Noddings (1984, 2003, 2010).

As the title of the theory suggests, an Ethics of Care requires the individual to act and respond to another with care. It posits that actions are morally good if they exhibit caring on the part of the agent, and actions that display indifference or malice count as being ethically wrong. At the centre of an Ethics of Care the importance of caring relationships is acknowledged. Care Ethics requires someone to be open and receptive to the reality, thoughts, desires and fears of someone else. As Slote (2007) suggests, Care Ethics has been characterised by a concern not only for individual welfare, but also for the establishment and maintenance of good relationships, suggesting that empathy is basic to the theory.

Teachers create, maintain, and build relations with their students all the time. They understand the relational aspect of their work. When students trust teachers, it enhances the teaching and learning experience and maximises students' potential to gain knowledge and skills. It is a teacher's willingness to be truly present to their students that promotes learning, and without it, it would simply not be possible to conduct all the evidence gathering that accountability entails. In my mind, it is the relational aspect of our work that is undervalued and needs to be recognised and better understood if we are intent on

enabling and maximising student learning, or contributing to the project which Aristotle referred to as the potential for our human flourishing.

I'd like to offer my sincere thanks to VALBEC, Lynne Matheson and all the Fine Print editorial committee for the opportunity to share some of my thoughts with you during the year.

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Tricia Bowen is a teacher, writer and researcher, and now a student. In a career spanning several decades, she has designed accredited curriculum, created resources to be used in conjunction with training packages and contributed research and publications. She has also taught in a wide range of settings including workplaces, the corporate sector, TAFE and recently, in China.

Editor's note: Thanks Tricia for your insightful reflections on teaching and learning in 2014. Good luck with your studies.

Pride of place shines through

By Sarah Deasey

The *Annual Learn Local Awards* took place at the St Kilda Town Hall on Thursday 28th August 2014. VALBEC co-president, Linno Rhodes and I attended, as guests of the ACFE board.

The Victorian Learn Local Awards are held annually by the Adult, Community and Further Education Board to recognise the inspirational efforts of learners, practitioners and training providers in the Learn Local education and training sector. The awards are an opportunity to shine a spotlight on this valuable work. Through the awards we acknowledge the sector's many contributions and celebrate the success of learners, practitioners and organisations across the state.

The Annual Learn Local Awards night represented all that makes working in Learn Local organisations (LLOs) worthwhile. We heard about and shared in the celebration of such a rich variety of people and learning programs. The entertainment and catering was authentically Learn Local with the *Massive Hip Hop Choir* from Footscray Community Arts Centre followed by musicians from the Jesuit community College Artful Dodgers studios. The

delicious food was from social enterprise catering company, *Ignite* and Diamond Valley Learning Centre introductory floristry course students provided the flower arrangements.

But that was just the beginning for local flavour. Think of places like Footscray, Kyabram, Traralgon Prahra, Kaniva and Werribee. These are the localities where the award winners originated, with their unique communities, industries and landscapes. Each award showcased LLOs responding positively to local needs with flexibility, creativity, partnerships and professionalism.

So who were the winners?

Footscray Community Arts Centre won the award for *Outstanding Pathways Program* for its Emerging Cultural Leaders Program. Young people from diverse backgrounds participate in a five-month course, developing skills in leadership, arts management and administration, community engagement and community services through mentoring and group seminars led by industry professionals.

The youth and arts theme continued with the *Outstanding Practitioner* award going to Tony Senese from Prahra

Community Learning Centre. Tony is an artist designer, teaching visual arts in the VCAL program, who brings flair and empathy to his work.

The award for *Excellence in Creating Local Solutions* went to Wyndham Community and Education Centre for its long-standing auspicing of the Wyndham Humanitarian network. A remarkable partnership of local organisations which have all been working together since 2005, enhancing and facilitating education, employment and settlement of local diverse groups, which include Burmese, Sudanese and the Horn of Africa.

A new award, *Innovation in Digital Literacy* was won by Traralgon Neighbourhood House. This was for a practical and cross-generational project where local secondary students help community members on an individual basis with their digital learning needs. They work together on sending email, using mobile phones, tablets and solving internet problems. The students are mentored by Federation University students and local designers who help them to improve their technology skills.

The *Outstanding Pre-Accredited Learner of the Year* winner was Lisa Stimson who participated in the Kaniva LINK neighbourhood Women in Agriculture program. Women in Agriculture is the first formal education Lisa has engaged in since completing Year 12 in 2003. She enrolled in the program so she could learn about farming and the associated administration to support the running of the family farm. Lisa then went on to complete a Diploma in Agribusiness Management and thus to enhance the operations of the family farm.

Stories from the field

By Louise Wignall

Every practitioner's professional journey provides a lens through which to view the language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) field. Their experiences are coloured by a range of demands, opportunities, challenges and imperatives. When ACAL president, Jenni Anderson shared some pertinent observations about changes she has seen over recent years, she became one of the first to take part in *Stories from the Field* - a narrative research process designed to capture the rich experiences of teachers who deliver adult LLN and foundation skills:

I began working in the adult literacy and numeracy

The *Learn Local for Business* award went to Kyabram Community and Learning Centre (KCLC) and its partnership with the KyValley Dairy that incorporates two large working dairy farms and a fluid milk manufacturing plant. The company employs more than 75 people and with the help of the ACFE Capacity and Innovation Grant, KCLC has been customizing and delivering training to workers, thus building social capital in the community.

Legendary status

The final segment of the night was the announcement of *Learn Local legends*, providers nominated by the the eight ACFE regional councils and considered to have provided an exceptional contribution this past year to their staff, clients and the broader community.

These awards highlighted the diversity, breadth and richness of programs delivered across Victoria. Details of these awards can be viewed at: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/awards/pages/learnlocal.aspx>

It was a privilege to hear all the wonderful stories associated with the award nominees and winners. We certainly left the town hall feeling proud, uplifted and inspired.

If you work in a Local setting, please consider nominating in 2015. It is worth taking the time to reflect on what you are doing well, and putting some positive words together about an aspect of your program, an outstanding teacher or learner. There will be a new category, *Diversity and Innovation for CALD learners* and it has been announced that the awards will become part of the Victorian Training Awards in 2015.

field over twenty years ago as a volunteer in Adult Literacy and Basic Education (ALBE) in Tasmania. I went on to work in community, workforce and labour market adult literacy and numeracy services. Lessons were planned around the individual student's needs or as the tutor felt driven. Learning outcomes were measured only by the individual and the tutor's observations. When I progressed through the Adult Literacy (ALT) and Adult Numeracy (ANT)



training into university, I was probably one of the first in Tasmania to get specific adult LLN tertiary qualifications.

Over the last two years, I have seen many practitioners complete the Graduate Diploma in adult LLN. VET teachers and adult LLN workers in VET are increasing their knowledge and skills levels, and in Tasmania at least, I have seen those delivering community adult LLN services up-skilled as well. Practitioners now have more reporting tools, curricula, training packages, frameworks and resources to work with or within.

While there is still a need to develop clearer pathways into, and between, the different sectors of the adult LLN field, it is wonderful to see the increase in the number of skilled adult LLN practitioners across the sectors, working at different levels and in a range of contexts. This is creating more access points for adult LLN training and increasing adult learners' ability to access the assistance they need. For those of us passionate about developing people's adult literacy and numeracy skills this is very exciting (ACAL e-news August 2014).

The *Stories from the Field* exercise is part of a *National Foundation Skills Strategy Project* to explore options for developing professional standards for foundation skills practitioners. Strengthening and diversifying the identity of the foundation skills practitioner field, and supporting professional expertise in foundation skills delivery are identified in the national strategy as elements that will contribute to raising the profile of specialist LLN and foundation skills practitioners.

Whilst the activity can be done individually, sharing stories through conversations with colleagues provides greater opportunity for reflection and professional dialogue. A series of trigger questions are provided as part of the activity, although they are not designed to be answered lock-step, rather, as a guide to shape a dialogue between participants.

The room was abuzz at the South Australian Council for Adult Literacy (SACAL) conference in August as participants interviewed each other about their own career journey. SACAL session coordinator and Foundation Skills Community of Practice member, Teresa Howie observed:

No two stories were the same but the participants found a lot of common ground. The great thing is there are no right or wrong answers. It is about

personal reflection and sharing of experiences and learning from one another. People really enjoyed the opportunity to tell their story and hear from others.

Stories from the field also featured at the recent ACAL conference, when a mix of practitioners mingled over lunch to share their stories. The resulting stories submitted from the SACAL and ACAL conferences throw light on how people became LLN and foundation skills teachers, what professional development journeys they have undertaken to build their skills over time, and what motivates them to continue to work in the field.

I am motivated by the diversity of the literacy learners. I love the multicultural nature of the learner group and the opportunities to share culture. ...I believe in social justice and a strength-based approach, treating everyone with respect.

I love seeing my low-level students build up their confidence to have general social interactions and to improve their numeracy skills so they feel better about making important decisions.

I started my journey as a volunteer at my children's school. It led to professional development in adult literacy. It is a small labour market but I have a passion to improve people's lives in both the community and through ESL work. That volunteer training really set me up for this field—I had really strong mentors.

These stories add to a growing bank as the activity is promoted and taken up by practitioners. By gathering a multiplicity of stories the project will contribute to national discussion about the professional identity of practitioners delivering foundation skills across Australia. Please make sure your story is in the mix.

NCVER Survey

Don't miss out on your chance to contribute to the NCVER survey currently underway with the completion date of 19 December. It is designed to capture information from the current workforces delivering adult LLN and foundation skills to the vast array of learner groups across the country. We want to hear from anyone who delivers these skills – full or part time, paid or voluntary – in the workplace, in classrooms, in the community. This work will complement the *Stories from the Field* and give us a fresh look at what is happening within Australia in this important area.

The survey is available online at www.ncver.edu.au and through links on a range of professional association websites and newsletters.

For people who are interested in conducting a *Stories from the Field* activity there are a number of supporting resources available. They can be downloaded from the National Foundation Skills Strategy Project website: www.statedevelopment.sa.gov.au/national-foundation-skills-strategy-project.

While you are on the site why not sign up to the project e-newsletter to be kept in the loop about survey results,

ACFE Flagship project

By Veronica Volkoff and Rosemary Sharman

Introduction

Some of the most experienced, talented, innovative and skilled language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) practitioners in Australia practise their art in Victoria's Learn Local sector. They do fantastic work with disadvantaged learners and support those people to truly life changing achievements. They are busy all the time—often too busy. That's because there is a steady demand for their services from the many people who find their own way, or are helped by friends or referrals from other agencies, to the door of the Learn Local organisation (LLO). Even if there is not really a space in a class, or it is a bit late in the course for a new learner to start, someone generally finds a way for the person who has summoned the courage to knock on the door, to join a program and begin their journey.

These practitioners go home exhausted at the end of a day, week, term, year. But most of the time they also go home fulfilled and exhilarated by the first 'on topic' comment from a learner whose aural comprehension had been so low when they started or else buoyed by the person who enrolled in another program voluntarily after finishing the program the JSA and Centrelink had mandated for them.

So why on earth would some of these same practitioners and their managers and employing organisations put their hands up to be part of a project that would mean even more work? Why would they volunteer for a project that would take almost everyone involved out of their comfort zone, out of their centres, away from familiar structures and into the world of workplace training delivery?

the Foundation Skills Community of Practice projects and broader activity to support the Strategy?

Louise Wignall has worked in the adult education sector for the past 25 years as a teacher, researcher, policy advisor and quality assurance manager. Her specialization is in adult literacy and learning in the community, vocational education and training (VET) and the workplace. She completed the Scoping a Foundation Skills Professional Standards Framework project in 2013 and is currently undertaking research to identify quality professional practice in foundation skills as part of the 2014-15 National Foundation Skills Strategy project.

For many, the attraction was the opportunity to gain the experience of working in an unfamiliar context, but to do so with the support of a mentor, other practitioners and other Learn Locals, as well as the framework of an action research project. For others, it was the realisation that to be part of the VET system's efforts to meet the skill development needs of vulnerable low skilled workers, the Learn Local sector had to be prepared to go to them and meet them in the places and at the times when they were ready to learn.

This article outlines how the ACFE Flagship project team have worked with the eight participating organisations and their progress to date in answering the following questions:

- To what extent has small to medium enterprise (SME) managers' understanding of how LLOs can assist them with worker foundation skills development grown?
- To what extent has LLO capacity to provide flexible workplace foundation skills programs strengthened?
- To what extent has LLO understanding of local SMEs' foundation skills development needs deepened?
- To what extent did workplace training improve worker foundation skills?
- What new skills, networks and resources has the LLO developed?
- What were the key challenges, barriers, enablers and outcomes?
- To what extent was the project design congruent with LLO and SME contexts and needs?

Project action research approach and model

The project brief indicated an action research approach

involving reflective engagement with participants' own professional practice (ACFEB Project RFT 2012) in order to provide for shared learning that could then be disseminated to other LLOs. To be effective such an approach requires collaboration between participants and stakeholders. Kemis and McTaggart (1998) in writing about participatory action research, note that while the action research of a collegial group is 'achieved through the critically examined action of individual group members' (p.5), the actual approach is only considered to be effective action research when it is collaborative, involving both collegial practitioner researchers as well as stakeholders.

Yoland Wadsworth (1998) in discussing what characterises all research endeavours and the commonly understood cycle of action research, emphasises the importance of conscious problematising, planned and deliberate inquiry, collaborative engagement with colleagues and informants/stakeholders and ongoing careful documentation and recording in participatory action research. The Project Action Research Model that was developed is characterised by collaborative research, reflection and analysis by the implementation team with, most importantly, the LLO participants and stakeholders in SMEs, including management, work teams and individual learners, as well as careful documentation and staged knowledge sharing.

The initial role of the Action Research Specialist (ARS) included developing an action research model, a project conceptual framework characterised by a staged approach with targeted workshops, and a detailed timeline. The ARS also developed a plan for guidance and support for LLO participants in developing, implementing and reviewing the effectiveness of the techniques they use at various stages of the project.

The first of four workshops collaboratively facilitated by the ARS and the Workplace Training Mentor (WTM) provided an induction to the project and action research, including consideration of research ethics. This was followed by collaborative development of questions to support the research and analysis of LLO workplace LLN training capacity (Stage 1), and identification and documentation of local SME potential training needs and opportunities (Stage 2). The second workshop facilitated capture of the experiences and learning from the first two stages and provided valuable input from three experienced workplace based LLN training practitioners as well as support for preparation for SME contact (Stage 3).

During the third workshop participants shared their experiences of contacting SMEs and began mapping the development of their LLO's relationships and networks. Participants also began to explore how they might manage the changes within their LLO that may be required to successfully move into workplace based training and plan for dissemination and sustainability of their project learning, within and beyond their own organisation. The fourth and final workshop will be a collegial showcase.

Additional support for participants by the ARS has included site visits, online and telephone conversations and contributions through a wiki providing document resources and a discussion board. The Kirkpatrick Model of Evaluation (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006) was introduced to support conceptualisation of SME needs and priorities as well as 'backwards planning' to facilitate identification of worker training needs through an adapted model integrating Four Performance Analysis Needs (Phillips & Phillips, 2002).

Clearly, in a demonstration project such as this one, it is critically important to capture and distil for dissemination, the participant experiences and learning related to building engagement with SMEs. During the workshops targeted to support each stage of the project, the implementation team has facilitated knowledge sharing and collaborative development of analysis and documentation templates to underpin the tasks that needed to be completed at each stage.

To support capture of participant learning for future analysis and dissemination, participants reported against themes drawing on targeted question sets. They also were provided with a reporting template designed to capture reflections and learning for each stage, as well as a conclusive review of effectiveness and outcomes. Within the context of managers and practitioners working on this project in addition to their other responsibilities, ongoing documentation and reporting of learning and resultant effective models have been encouraged to promote timely and time efficient report completion.

The workplace training mentor role and approach

The Workplace Training Mentor (WTM) has extensive experience in business and adult education/community organisations and works collaboratively with the ARS to support and mentor the participating LLOs. The WTM's work involves:

- Group mentoring of two or three people per participating organisation towards achieving the organisational goals set in Workshop 1 and within a five-month time-frame.
- Adopting a facilitative, challenging/supportive model (Daloz 2012) that encourages participants to identify their own needs, to think critically about the goals they set, to question their current assumptions and be confident about their capacities and to come to new understandings, e.g. about what existing connections and relationships they can build on to create new business with SMEs.
- Fostering collaboration and sharing of learnings across participating LLOs so they can support and further motivate each other when the project finishes.

Each LLO has different mentoring needs and therefore flexibility is a very important element in the approach. As described in the project design, the WTM contacts each LLO by phone, email, uses the project wiki and makes in-person visits and is available for support and guidance when needed by the LLOs.

All the LLOs have contacted the WTM for specific individual support. This has been in the form of help to:

- conduct research to get a clearer picture of the SME and workplace environments in their local areas, particularly non-English speaking backgrounds
- determine the LLO's point of difference and how to start and progress a conversation with an SME
- develop a business case for the individual LLO to determine the feasibility of approaching an SME and developing this training as a new aspect of their business
- formulate a risk management strategy around the impact of working with SMEs
- design a business proposal to present to an SME.

All the LLOs have been interested in, and wanted advice and guidance on, managing the impact of the change that successful engagement with SMEs will bring to their organisations. The WTM has worked with the LLOs to help them determine:

- what changes they may need to manage within their organisations when they secure new business relationships
- how they will manage communication within the LLO
- how they will measure success
- target outcomes for the end of the project and for longer term sustainability.

The LLOs will determine who successful the mentoring has been for them. They will present their findings in a showcase workshop at the end of November 2014 and their presentations will include their experiences of the project as a whole and their assessments of the value to them of the elements within the project.

A concluding observation

All the evidence to date is that this has been a worthwhile project for those who have participated. They are of course at different stages in their relationships with business and industry. Some have learnt that for them as individuals and/or their organisations, workplace training delivery provides exciting opportunities they will actively pursue. Others are pleased for the insights into a very different training delivery context but think it unlikely they will focus too much on working in-house with industry and business.

Once the project is concluded we will be better placed to evaluate its success in both promoting understanding and skill development in the Learn Local sector that will support engagement with business and industry and in how best to engage with workers needing to develop their LLN skills.

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Dr Veronica Volkoff has been a researcher and teacher at RMIT University and the University of Melbourne. Her research has focused on equity in education across the secondary, vocational and adult education sectors. Her work has included a three year longitudinal study
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Foreign correspondent

Seven stories, the last not ended

By John Aitchison

An update on South Africa's ongoing struggles for a better deal for adult literacy and basic education.

The stories unfold

There are supposedly only seven story plots in the world and South African adult literacy and basic education has already been through six of them. It keeps trying to get into the seventh narrative. The first story has adult education playing a quite heroic role in *Overcoming the Monster*. The monster was apartheid and adult education was one of the weapons, a *conscientising* and organisation building force that gave strength to the anti-apartheid forces in the 1970s and 1980s. As in most epic stories, the account became more embellished with each retelling, and the role of adult education somewhat over magnified, but the monster was real enough. Although, as in the epic Beowulf, its mother is still alive today as we labouriously try to overcome inequality between rich and poor in South Africa.

After that first victory, with the formal ending of apartheid in 1994 and the ushering in of government elected by all the people of the country, adult education was then seen as the *Rags to Riches* path by which the previously educationally disadvantaged would become equal with the rest of the population. South Africa's huge labour union movement, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, put adult basic education squarely on the agenda. Unfortunately, that story did not have a happy ending as state provision of adult basic education was poorly run.

The official Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) system remained thoroughly dysfunctional and highly unattractive to uneducated and ill-educated adults. Its senior bureaucrats displayed no signs of energy or imagination and certainly showed no interest in engaging with concerned people in the field. In the private sector, growing unemployment and mechanisation made the captains of industry lose interest in supporting literacy and basic education. Even conventional schooling has had very poor outcomes and South Africa today comes at the bottom of most international benchmark tests of school learning.

There was simultaneously an attempt, a *Quest*, to find a holy grail by which all the dichotomies of manual and

intellectual labour, technical and academic, could be united in some higher harmony. The National Qualifications Framework and its bureaucrats in the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) strove to achieve their goals, but things did not quite work out as planned. Despite the efforts of various emissaries sent out to places like Australia and the United States of America for various solutions to heal adult education and training's various ills, South Africa erected a magnificent and complex qualifications framework which could only be fully utilised by the already advantaged. Internal political fights in the ruling party alliance continue to keep the ministries of labour and education apart.

The stories unravel

These *Voyages and Returns* brought us such things as outcomes based education, of whose actual outcomes the less said the better, particularly when finally the contagion reached the minds of university bureaucrats. Higher education is still in the coils of a dreadful infection of mergers and authoritarian managerialism that dismantled most of the centres of innovative adult education in the universities. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, they were considered some of the best in the world. They have been



A family literacy group run by a NGO in Underberg, 2005.

largely smashed and asset-stripped by the new educational Philistines in charge of higher education.

Even by the mid-1990s, it was clear that what happened to South African adult education was becoming *Tragedy*. Now ten years later and twenty years after our supposed liberation, it is clear that what we have ended up with is more nearly *Comedy*, or rather, *Farce*. In the sense that Karl Marx used farce in reference to things repeating themselves in history—the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce. What happened in the mid-1990s in South Africa is a dreadful warning of how the progressives could be trounced by the resistance from the congealed mass of old and new power.

The notion of farce becomes clear in relation to the last of the story plots—*Rebirth*. There have been moments where it seemed that there could be a new beginning, a rebirth. The first of these was in 2000 when the Minister of Education decided to launch a mass literacy campaign, the *South African National Literacy Initiative*. Within a few years it collapsed from bureaucratic blockages and incompetent leadership.

In 2008, a second attempt was made at a national literacy campaign. For once there was good news, although many literacy activists found it hard to believe that a mass literacy campaign could be good because they did not believe in campaigns. This literacy campaign was a great success and in six years a total of about four million learners were put through a very basic literacy course and their new competence assessed. But where rebirth degenerates back to farce and then into tragedy, relates to the failure to take up the opportunity created by the success of this adult literacy campaign to provide easy access to further learning. Yet, as all literacy and fundamental educators vouch, *if you do not use it, you lose it*, and the formal and dysfunctional adult basic education classes failed to attract literacy campaign graduates into continuing their basic education.

New beginnings

The latest rebirth, or at least the signs of gestation of something new, is the new state policy that seeks to create a new institutional format for youth and adult education, *community colleges*. It is too early yet to see if this is indeed a resurrection of adult literacy and basic education. In looking at the bigger context and the story narratives that can be used to make human sense of it, one may miss the changes that have occurred in the lives and work of



A group of volunteer educators of the national adult literacy campaign at a workshop on the use of simple readers in indigenous languages, Pietermaritzburg, 2013.

humble adult literacy and basic education practitioners on the ground. What has happened to them?

Well a lot of them simply went away. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, there were a host of highly committed young, and some not so young, people working in non-governmental organisations, trade union service organisations, and in political organisations such as the United Democratic Front, who were at the forefront of what they saw as progressive literacy and adult basic education practice. Many of them were informed by a Freireian ideology and in terms of pedagogical models, tended to adopt the constructivist approaches becoming dominant in university faculties of education. *Language experience* became the preferred way of looking at the teaching of literacy. A range of sometimes brilliant materials were produced. This materials development capacity has now been squandered. The extent of this decline can be seen in the fact that in 1994 over 300 people involved in materials development in adult education Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) gathered for a national conference. Today there are few remaining NGOs still at work in developing materials for adult education and most are threatened with closure. As the funding of NGOs dried up, the space for literacy activists was reduced to small pockets. Some of the activists went into conventional schooling which was decidedly non-Freireian and with outcomes selected by the education authorities dominating school instruction.

When it comes to pedagogical methods, the last ten years has seen changes in what had become dominant in adult literacy and basic education teaching and materials. First, the dominance of outcomes-based education, has now been thoroughly dethroned. The current Minister of Higher Education has argued that the whole apparatus

of outcome statements and standards should be thrown away. At a practical level in schooling, outcomes-based education clearly did not work except, ironically enough, in elite upper middle class schools.

Second, the assumption that phonetic alphabetisation was inferior to analytic approaches such as Language experience and Whole language, came under fire. Traditionally, African languages had been taught using a very crude and mechanical phonic approach. That African language orthographies are genuinely phonetically regular encouraged this approach. But attempts to use the newer analytic approaches didn't seem to be working all that well. Under the influence of new scientific evidence that the way the brain reads is irrefutably based on phonics, the designers of the materials for the new 2008 literacy campaign, and two years later for a series of school workbooks in all the South African languages, both use a synthetic phonics approach. Having said that, they have amalgamated some of the useful insights from Language experience, particularly that what is read should be interesting and vital. To *do phonics better* was the new position!

The third issue, which remains highly problematic, is that of the dominance of English. The new South African constitution made all eleven languages official. The irony is that *all languages are equal but one is more equal than the others—English*. In actuality, English is the mother-tongue of less than 10% of the population. It is utterly dominant in government and business, that is, for the elite. In spite of the assurance from the experts that it is far better to become literate in one's mother-tongue than a foreign one such as English, and that you will be a better reader and writer of English as a consequence, there is a growing demand for *straight to English*. In practice, most schools where the pupils are not mother-tongue English speakers, move to all English instruction from Grade 4. Alongside this is the farce in higher education where for reasons of political correctness, managers want courses now to be taught in local languages. At the same time as shutting down their



An elderly student in a Kha Ri Gude (Let us Learn) class of the national adult literacy campaign, Shoshanguve 2008.

African language departments because they cannot get any students interested in majoring in African languages.

Lastly, the major success of the production on an enormous scale of materials for literacy and basic education—the national literacy campaign produces about 700,000 primers in all South African languages each year and the school workbook project produces about 800,000 language and numeracy workbooks per grade (also in all languages up to Grade 3), raises the issue of choosing the right approach and the standardisation of materials. This is somewhat antithetical to the very context specific materials developed by small literacy organisations in the 1980s and 1990s. So for practitioners in what remains of independent adult literacy and basic education organisations, as well as for new school teachers, trying to get a sense of what is best practice in teaching reading and writing in English, the challenges remain ongoing.

John Aitchison is Professor Emeritus of adult education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He was a political restrictee from 1965 to 1971. He has been involved in adult education policy development in South Africa and in the setting up of the current national literacy campaign.

Beside the whiteboard

Working in the middle ground: an interview with Nina Bekker

By Lynne Matheson

Enrik's in Blackburn was the pleasant café setting for this interview with Nina Bekker, an enthusiastic teacher and champion of adult education programs. In over nine years working at the recently merged Morrisons, now Upper Yarra Community House (UYCH), she has gone from teaching one day a week to being the pre-accredited courses team leader. She spreads her working week over four days, with flexibility that allows her to work from home when pressing deadlines for funding proposals, or family commitments demand. Nina says that in a way she 'fell into' teaching; however her passion and energy are contagious.

Nina spoke about the pleasure of working in the middle ground of the Learn Local sector. She has observed growth in both the learning and confidence of individuals in the diverse range of programs, CGEA and pre-accredited, that she has been involved in designing and delivering. Balancing the demands of work and family life will always be a challenge. However, her approach, made up of equal parts of good humour and high levels of organization, seems to work well for everyone.

How did you first become involved in teaching in adult education?

In 1999, while pregnant with my first child, I was looking for employment in the education field that was going to be more flexible than taking a position as a classroom teacher at a local primary school. I started with a teaching role with SEAL, an RTO in Warrnambool. This was one day a week taking an English and Numeracy class with adult students who had mild intellectual disabilities. I returned to the position when my daughter was just five weeks old. Taking her with me to class was a natural thing to do and embraced by the students. We all worked around sleeping and feed times. I had found the flexibility that I needed, as well as students who gave my teaching a purpose and passion.

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

I completed a Bachelor of Arts in Education and a Graduate Diploma of Education (Science Education) at Deakin University, then spent my first few years working in primary schools in the Western District. Once I moved



into the adult education sector, I felt more at home. Now that I have five children, I have stayed within the field for a number of reasons. Predominately for the flexibility that the sector offers and for the joy of teaching adults.

Flexibility is the key for my family and being able to work from home if a child is sick or being able to attend special school events is important to me. Working at UYCH, I know that it is the students who motivate me to come to work each day. The students really do become a part of my family. It is how we (tutors, coordinators and learners) describe ourselves to new students, 'come in, take a seat and welcome to our family'.

How do you ensure your students stay engaged in learning?

We had a student who had an issue with a Telco and asked for help. The problem quickly escalated but I was able to advocate for the student and resolve the problem, thus keeping the student connected and engaged in the program. I doubt that she would have managed it on her own.

An older student with a large family was alarmed when her washing machine broke down. Through the staff putting her in contact with the local Men's shed, the machine was fixed. This meant that she could continue to attend her course. Access to community networks cannot be assumed and the teachers play a key role in building social capital through this kind of support.

Most classes start with a discussion of what is going on in current affairs and topics of interest to the students.

I think that the teachers are able to bring some balance to students' worldviews that may otherwise be overly coloured by watching *Today Tonight* and social media sensationalism. All our teachers have tertiary education qualifications as I recognise the importance of the skills that I gained in my studies and teaching that the TAE does not necessarily provide.

What have been some of the challenges and highlights of your work?

A significant challenge has been keeping the classroom material relevant and authentic for the students, while also satisfying the funding and auditing requirements of the CGEA. The student cohorts that I have worked with tend to be students who take a long time for new learning to take hold. Much of the classroom time is spent repeating activities, while at the same time trying to be creative in the different delivery of a similar topic.

Highlights have been when student 'light bulb moments' have occurred, sometimes after years of trying to gain skills, knowledge and understanding of the English language. Perhaps a student has had a tutor who has explained an idea again, perhaps this time with a visual or a hands-on experiment to demonstrate the idea to the student. This delivery or explanation has finally given that learner the clarity needed to progress in their learning.

What are some of the changes you have seen in learner cohorts you work with?

Since I started in the adult education field, the learner cohort I have worked with has generally remained the same. I have taught predominately Australian born students from Anglo backgrounds. Over time, there has been a mix of early school leavers or non-attenders, low socio-economic backgrounds, students with a mild intellectual disability, those with an acquired brain injury (mostly male), and single mothers who face isolation or an absence of support networks. Very few students come from a migrant background which is indicative of the UYCH catchment area. The occasional student will come along highly motivated and geared toward a pathway. However, for the majority, it is the support and social networks our programs provide that attract and keep students coming back.

When the merger was happening, I gave students an assurance I would be there when they came back to start the new term. There was an enormous effort by staff to get everything changed over to the new arrangements. The

students came back partly because they knew we would be there. All the UYCH staff provide extra support to keep students engaged in their education, which in turn strengthens the organisation.

What have been some of your best teaching experiences?

I have been fortunate to witness the growth of some remarkably strong and determined women. These women have been mature age students, or single mothers, returning to learning after their youngest child has reached school age. All of these women at different times stopped and started the CGEA for personal and family reasons and responsibilities. All returned and were able to complete their CGEA Certificate II and then move on to further certificate courses in Aged Care or Children's Services, and to then find work and financially support their family.

Some of the success stories have been about just getting someone back in the door. When staying at home seems the only option, for women especially, engaging in learning and becoming involved in activities at UYCH are huge achievements. One student was delivered to class each day by her partner and mostly slept through class due to a combination of health and substance abuse problems. Over time, she gained confidence to participate and a 'Eureka' moment occurred when I introduced laptops to the class and this student suddenly became engaged and motivated to learn. Over four years she attended regularly and lost weight, as well as becoming healthier. She was coached to speak at the Annual General Meeting and will hopefully feel confident enough to branch out to do a course at another Learn Local or TAFE.

What have been some of the changes you have seen in pre-accredited courses?

I am a big fan of the A-frame as a means of developing courses that can be delivered as vocational tasters or that meet particular student needs. I have worked with the CGEA over many years, but now I feel liberated from the constraints and requirements that dominated those courses. The pre-accredited courses are booming and I am in the process of writing several courses to respond to the needs of the community in areas such as music production and use of the ipad and apps for small business. My experiences doing the books for my tradie brother has given me insights into the short course I am developing for the small business tradesperson and their partner, who often does the books. There is so much potential for using iphones and apps that can be explored in a short course like this one.

We provide vocational tasters to ensure students are well prepared and understand the employment context and conditions before they sign up for an accredited course, such as the Certificate in Aged Care or Children's Services offered by the RTO part of UYCH. Offering career advice and clarity around the two course rule are critical to my support role.

Over the last few years, I have seen many changes in the pre-accredited area. Changes have included the type of courses being funded and offered at Learn Locals; paper work requirements becoming more stringent; Learn Locals being more accountable for hours and courses; a higher level of professionalism from providers in regards to pre-accredited courses and coordination. Initially pre-accredited courses comprised of many hobby and computer-based courses. Over the past few years, more taster courses such as Return to Study-Aged Care or Music Industry have started to surface. This type of pre-accredited course gives the learner the ability to 'try before they buy' or decide to enrol in an accredited course.

As chair of a pre-accredited courses network, I recently ran moderation sessions that have been valuable for the smaller providers. I believe we have a duty of care to the smaller providers to share resources and skills, provide support where it is needed, so we can all benefit.

What do you see for the future working in the Learn Local sector?

Things seem to be coming full circle with government funding and the push for ever more hoops to jump through. The cuts to funding have been significant and I regret that the shrinking TAFE sector, with the closure of local campuses, will further reduce pathway options for students in our region.

There has been a change to the role of Learn Local organisations and RTOs in providing taster courses and career counselling to ensure that students make the right choice. Our A-frame courses provide pathways, encourage industry consultation, unpack and explain the terminology, have user friendly formats and focus on outcomes. Documentation has become more involved and providing evidence for employability skills more of a challenge. My goal is to use every hour to the maximum and achieve best practice by setting benchmarks and clear learning objectives so that our students get the best educational experiences.

Over the years, I have had the privilege of attending students' weddings, birthdays and family events. I work with a great team and the work is focused, busy, flexible, fun and fulfilling. I can't imagine myself moving out of the Adult Education sector any time soon.

What's out there

Talk, text and technology: literacy and social practice in a remote indigenous community by Inge Kral

Reviewed by Pauline O'Maley

Inge Kral's engaging and assured book *Text and technology: Literacy and Social Practice in a Remote Indigenous Community* (published in 2012) is an ethnographic study of literacy practices within a particular indigenous community, over several generations. She situates her study within an understanding of literacy as social practice, and as such, ever in flux. She acknowledges the influence of scholars such as Shirley Brice Heath, Brian Street, David Barton and Mary Hamilton. This focus on literacy as situated social practice inevitably encapsulates history, culture and place. The reader gains a rich and highly nuanced understanding of the complex and fluid ways in which literacy has been, and is currently being, enacted in the community, and the ways in which it is intertwined with identity.

Her interest is in how people *do* literacy in their everyday lives and the complex, sometimes contradictory influences on the evolution of literacy practices in the community. In this way, she illuminates practice, its shades, its contingent and evolving nature, and its complexities. In respectfully acknowledging and describing these diverse and multiple literacy practices, she makes visible literacy competencies without ever speaking reductively or in terms of deficit. Her details of the socialisation process as children participate in social, cultural and literacy practices, leave the reader in no doubt about the richness of these practices. Nevertheless, she does not try to gloss over the disjunction between these practices and western-centric institutional and academic literacy requirements and practices, or the far-reaching impacts of colonisation and modernity.

Kral gives a very careful and thorough examination of the impact of contact on the Ngaanyatjarra people and the changing times that followed, arguing that time shows that while the promise of schooling cannot be said to have delivered on the social and employment goals that were expected, what was fostered was a 'resilient collective identity' (p.159). Kral, in her examination, chooses to separate literacy from schooling to work against pessimistic discourses of failure and look instead at the diverse literate practices of the members of the community. In this way, she successfully moves away from what people

should do and focuses on what they *do*.

Highlighting the impact of the state and the mission who used literacy as a tool for shaping 'different types of people' (p.204) Kral goes on to demonstrate the multiple ways in which the community has used, and continues to use, literacy for their own purposes, both social and political. For example, she details how the establishment of the Ngaanyatjarra Council in the 1980s impacted on literacy practices. Other textually mediated events like funerals, parties and music making, to name but a few, are outlined in the text. Kral stresses the ways in which youth are change agents, building on norms and practices of their parents and at the same time embracing new systems of meaning, and in this way 'imagining and constructing identities that are both tied to the past and stretch out to the future' (p. 232).

In her chapter focusing on the literacy practices of the current youth in the community, Kral focuses on two specific projects: Warburton Youth Arts Project and Ngaanyatjarra Media. In doing so she illustrates not only the creative emergent literacy practice and how it is impacted on by both digital media and fresh thinking about it, but she also highlights the meaningful nature of these community projects and the intergenerational connections that they foster.

Kral claims in her book to try to 'counter sweeping generalisations about youth, social practices, the development of literacy and the cultural and historical production of literate identities in one remote Aboriginal setting' (p.261). She does this very well. Her work has implications for how we think about literacy, literate subjects, literacy as social and cultural practice and change. It is a timely book and, in an environment saturated with deficit conceptualisations and simplistic reading of literacy, it is an uplifting and important read. Australia does not have a history of ethnographers recording studies focused on literacy and rooted deeply in community, like say Shirley Brice Heath's landmark US book *Ways with Words: Language, Life and*



Work in Communities and Classrooms. It is great to see Inge Kral take up this mantle.

Pauline O'Maley works as an Educational Developer, Language, Literacy and Numeracy Strategy within the Arts, Education and Human Development faculty of Victoria University. Previously, Pauline worked with the

Salvation Army in a range of teaching and management roles and was a long term member of both the ACAL and VALBEC executive committees.

Text and technology: Literacy and Social Practice in a Remote Indigenous Community is available for purchase at www.multilingual-matters.com

English as a second language (ESL): Fisheries Teaching Resource

by Meg Cotter

Reviewed by Jan Hagston and Jenny Penfold

Jan Hagston caught up with Meg Cotter over coffee in their local café to discuss the EAL teaching resource she had developed for Yarraville Community Centre with funding from Fisheries Victoria.

Good coffee and a chat is a great way to while away a few hours, which is just what Meg Cotter and I did one morning recently. Our intention was to discuss the *English as a second language (ESL): Fisheries Teaching Resource*, but inevitably we touched on a range of other topics: family, children and education generally, adult education more specifically, before getting onto the resource and its development and content.

Fish and fisheries may seem an odd topic for an English language teaching resource but if you walk along the Maribyrnong river on any weekend and talk to people who are fishing, it makes a lot of sense. As Meg points out in the resource, a key component of teaching adults language is to offer authentic and relevant materials and experiences.

Many people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds enjoy catching, cooking and eating fish. Often the methods of catching fish and types of fish and seafood sought after, are based on what they have done since their own, or their parents' childhoods. These practices are situated in another country and another time. On occasions, these practices may not be environmentally sustainable and could even breach state laws.

Fisheries Victoria, as part of the Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI), oversee and enforce the fishing regulations in Victoria. They are keen, not just to enforce regulations, but to educate the community. This includes education about the regulations but, more importantly, about the reasons behind them.

What's in the resource?

A glance at the contents shows that both the what

(the regulations) and the why (sustainability and the environment) are covered in the sections:

- Introducing the topic of fish
- Regulations
- Fish forever—Sustainability
- Fishing safety
- Fisheries Victoria.

In her approach to developing the resource, Meg undertook the initial task of unpacking the literacy, language and numeracy in the recreation fishing booklet and the Fisheries Victoria website. Then she devised activities based in authentic contexts that would be interesting. Built into the activities was the development of students' skills and knowledge and support for teachers with activities aligned to the curriculum. Initially this was the ESL Frameworks, but the resource has since been updated to map to the EAL Frameworks. Meg was keen for the context to define the level of the activity so the resource isn't at a specific EAL Framework or ACSF level and activities are from Certificate I to III levels or ACSF 1-3 and ISLPR 1-2+/3.

Meg looked for content that was likely to be familiar and known by the learner and built on this. An example of this is linking shopping for types of fish keeping sustainability in mind. She was also aware of the need to include numeracy activities that are related to fishing: measuring fish, bag limits, cost of a licence, as well as the cost of buying fish and seasonal changes to price and availability.

The resource is clearly set out with each section having notes for the teacher, information about the vocabulary or language focus, curriculum mapping and, most



importantly, well-structured and interesting activities. The resource also contains an answers section and flashcards.

How might teachers use the resource?

Jenny Penfold was not part of the café conversation, but here she writes about how she has used the resource with her class:

After eighteen years of teaching adults, I'm always on the lookout for new ideas and topics to bring into the classroom. I teach a mixed level, foundation class at the Angliss Neighbourhood House in Footscray. My students come from a mix of countries and are predominantly female. When I asked them about fishing, only one student said she had a current fishing licence and not many had ever been fishing.

So why would I teach them about fish? We were studying an elective on Australian leisure activities and I had come across the statistic that 1:4 Australians have been, or are involved in, recreational fishing. I thought I would take full advantage of the resource and use fishing as one of the main leisure activities we would explore together.

When initially planning our semester outline, I looked at the modules I was teaching in the EAL Frameworks and how the resource could be utilised. Our focus was leisure and simple conversations and transactions. The subject matter of the resource covered the leisure elements well, so we worked predominantly on Section 2, Regulations.

We investigated the various recreational fishing rules, size and bag limits, learnt how to identify, classify and measure different species and became aware of important safety issues. Role plays, surveys and discussion activities were great for the speaking modules.

Students enjoyed talking about fishing in their own countries; holidays with their families and collecting pipis or catching crabs; and exchanging recipes and advice on the best ways to cook fish, abalone and crab. We also role played conversations on inquiring about how and where to apply for a fishing licence, getting a fishing licence, ordering fish and chips and buying fish at the market. Several of these I adapted quite easily to assessment tasks.

One of the semester highlights was an incursion by DEPI Fisheries. Here students used recreational fishing guides and fishing rulers to measure fish replicas and classify accordingly, or decide whether to return them to the water for another day. The students enjoyed the expertise of the speakers and bombarded them with plenty of questions. We plan to have an excursion to the Marine Centre in Queenscliffe next year.

From a teacher's point of view, I found the resource was well laid out and easy to follow. Having been amended to the new EAL Frameworks is an added bonus. The five sections have been designed to mix and match according to your students' needs and interests.

Initially, I was a bit apprehensive about my own knowledge on the topic and whether the topic would sustain interest. However, students found the activities interesting and informative and many rich conversations and discussions evolved as a result. A few students have since got their fishing licences and taken their children fishing. Others have commented on recognising different species of fish at the markets and how they have tried and cooked fish that other students have recommended. I am planning to revisit the resource focusing on sustainability and the environment, when we look at instructions, reading information texts, writing notes. Overall it is well worth taking a look at and exploring. It is certainly a valuable resource to add to your collection.

To obtain a copy of this resource, find out more about Fisheries Education or to provide feedback on the resource, please contact Leanne Gunthorpe, Manager Fisheries Education, Fisheries Victoria: leanne.gunthorpe@depi.vic.gov.au.

Also available is a separate DVD, *Fishing For Culture*, written, directed and produced by Amie Batalibasi, that may be viewed at: <https://www.facebook.com/>

FishingForCulture and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WyezrL3hEqQ>.

Jan Hagston is an education consultant with Multifangled and has designed curriculum and resources over many years. Jan is a past committee member of ACAL and VALBEC.

Meg Cotter is a literacy program manager, resource developer and teacher (currently on leave from Yarraville Community Centre) and VALBEC committee member.

Jenny Penfold is a teacher at Angliss Neighbourhood House Footscray and over many years has developed a range of resources and teaching materials.

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Colin Lankshear is an educational researcher and writer who lives in Mexico and currently has adjunct affiliations with James Cook University in Australia and Mount St Vincent University in Canada. His main research interests are in the area of new literacies. His more recent books, in collaboration with Michele Knobel, include *A New Literacies Reader* (2013), *Literacies: Social, Cultural, and Historical Perspectives* (2011), and *New Literacies: Everyday Practices and Social Learning* (2011).

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of learners in the ACE sector in Victoria; analysis of the effectiveness of TAFE, ACE and Private Provider delivery to young people; and facilitation of ACE practitioner research demonstration projects. Since 2013, she has worked as an independent consultant, while maintaining her connection with the University of Melbourne as an Honorary Senior Fellow.

Rosemary Sharman was CEO of Sandybeach Centre until 2011, when she began her consulting business. Since then, Rosemary has mentored over 25 Learn Local organisations on developing business partnerships and expanding their pre-accredited training.