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Literacies and prisoners' everyday lives By Stephen Black

Life changing lessons in prison
By Yvonne Russell

Meanwhile, in a parallel universe
By Lesley Farrell

Focus on work readiness
By Janet Shaw and Cameron Barker

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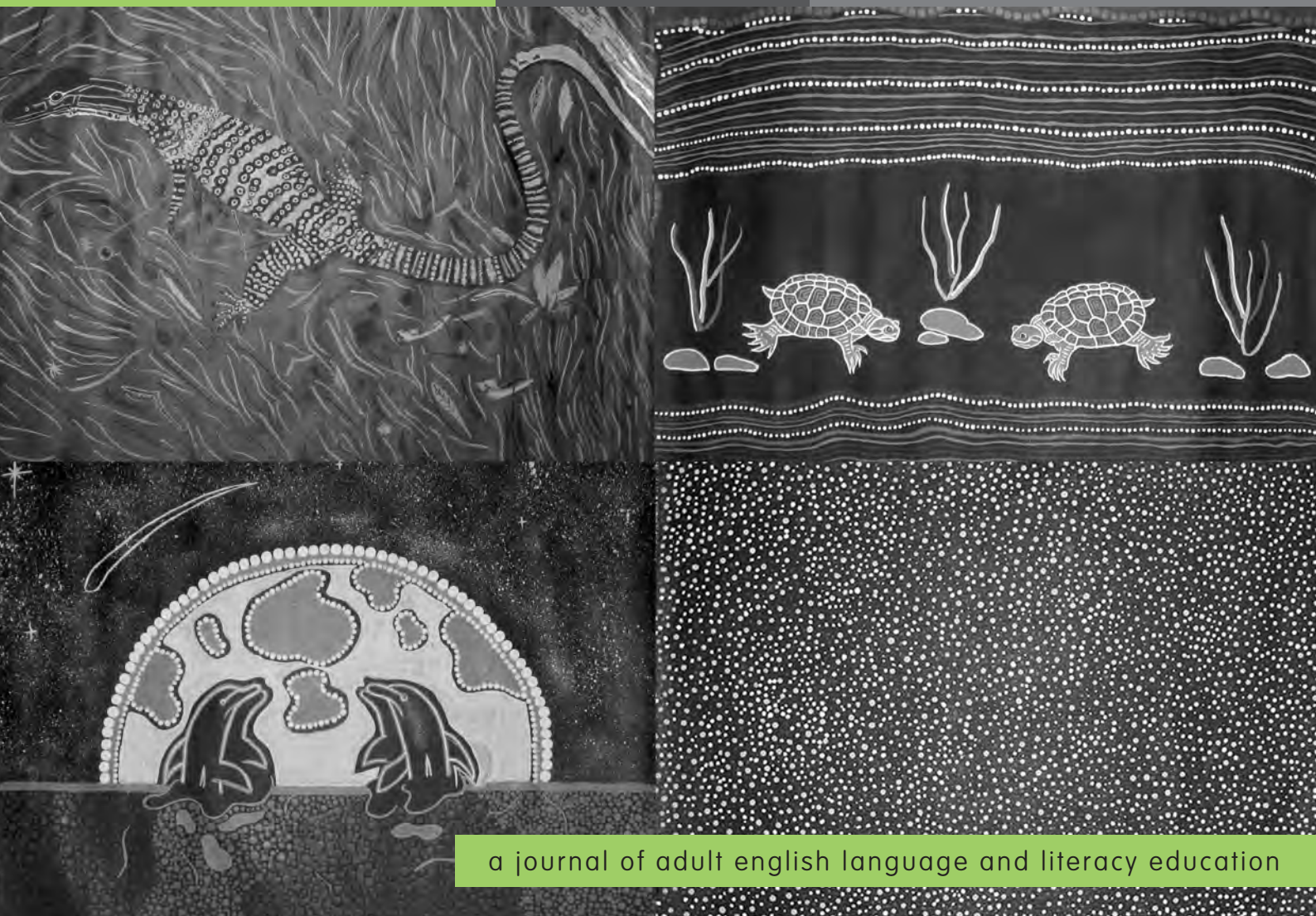

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Editorial

Petrichor: a pleasant smell that frequently accompanies the first rain after a long period of warm, dry weather.

It is exciting to come across a new word and find an opportunity to use it. Petrichor is such a word that conjures up a memory of being in nature, with the senses fully engaged. Sometimes it is enough to be able to remember and cherish such a moment.

For people who are in prison, it is not possible to have the freedom of being in nature. The senses are more likely to be dulled or jarred by the controlled and regimented environment. Incarceration means being removed from the known environment and more critically, from loved ones. Through education programs, there may be some opportunities for self-expression and transformation through writing, learning new skills or through art (see our cover design).

The first two feature articles explore prison literacies and education programs, past and present, in male and female settings. They both illustrate some of the ways in which learning can be conceptualised, adapted and guided within the constraints of the corrections system. In Practical Matters two teachers describe their work in learner focused programs that cater for both everyday prison literacies and workplace skills and employment outcomes. We have added a Vox Pop section to provide a number of teacher voices in snapshots of successful classroom activities.

Lesley Farrell reprises her keynote address at the VALBEC conference and challenges us to think about the globalisation of education. The SLPET program illustrates how students are benefiting from volunteering, work placements and partnerships with industry. Each feature article touches on the importance of building social capital through the support of teachers working with other professionals.

I would like to thank Beverley Campbell for sharing her reflections and insights as our guest columnist for 2015. She has interlaced threads of adult literacy and education theory with contemporary issues and concerns, all observed with perception and compassion.

After some internet searching, I found that Alexander Graham Bell coined the expression 'When one door closes, another door opens'. He is a great example of a person who learned from his mistakes, overcame adversity, persevered and found new opportunities. I feel confident you will have some 'door opening' moments and trust you will be inspired by this edition.

Lynne Matheson

Editor's note: In Fine Print Edition #2, I incorrectly attributed photos of Jelena Petronijevic with Masoumeh Ahmadi (p 16) and Lisa Hall (p 18). My apologies to them and below are the correctly labelled photos.

Jelena Petronijevic (left) with Masoumeh Ahmadi

Lisa Hall

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.

Literacies and prisoners' everyday lives

By Stephen Black

Introduction

In this paper, I outline how literacies are used in the everyday lives of prisoners and the implications this may have for prison literacy programs. But first of all, I should explain that it has been a long time since I have researched and worked in prisons—approximately 25 years! It was back in the early 1980s that I first worked as a part time 'remedial English' teacher at the Long Bay Prison Complex in Sydney, followed by a few years working as a full time senior education officer in two NSW prisons.

During this time I combined my work with study, completing an MA honours thesis on prison literacy (Black 1989), elements of which I draw on in this paper. But despite the 25 year hiatus, during which time I have worked and studied further in the field of adult literacy (in TAFE NSW and the University of Technology Sydney), I would contend that the issues I outline in this paper are as relevant today as they were back then in the 1980s.

Essentially I make the point that, despite the modern day focus on prison literacy programs for improving the post-release employment prospects of prisoners and improving recidivism rates, that is, literacy as human capital, we know little about the social dimensions of literacy—how prisoners value and use literacy in their everyday prison lives, and how this affects the ways they relate with others, a literacy dimension James Gee (1999) referred to as the 'social turn'.

Prison literacy as human capital

In an academic sense, Gee was probably correct in asserting a 'social turn' in literacy studies, in light of the extent to which socio-cultural studies, known for several decades as the New Literacy Studies, have impacted on literacy research (see for example, the work of Shirley Brice-Heath, Brian Street, David Barton, Mary Hamilton, Mike Baynham, Colin Lankshear, Allan Luke and many others). But in adult literacy policy and practice, literacy as human capital has long prevailed in the neoliberal era of market-based ideologies.

This is clearly apparent in the context of prison literacy and prison education generally, where the stated main rationale for providing prison education programs is expressed as increasing employment opportunities and reducing the risk of re-offending following the release of prisoners from custody, as outlined in the NSW departmental website (http://www.correctiveservices.justice.nsw.gov.au/Pages/CorrectiveServices/programs/adult-education/adult-education.aspx). This website also indicates that the means of achieving these human capital ends in current prison education/literacy programs are through formally assessing prisoners' core skills, followed by enrolment in nationally accredited courses, a process that largely mirrors what happens in literacy programs in vocational education and training (VET) providers such as TAFE institutes.

While I have long been a critic of literacy as human capital (Black 2004, Black & Yasukawa 2014), in this paper my primary focus is with how prisoners perceive literacy issues; how they use and manage literacy-related practices in prison. Through semi-structured interviews with prisoners (in male prisons), my own work observations, and use of some prisoner writings obtained during my studies, I present a conceptualisation of literacy, not as a set of generic skills, which Street (1985) calls 'autonomous', the acquisition of which is assumed to lead to favourable outcomes such as employment and crime reduction, but rather, literacy as social practices, what people do with literacy. The focus is on the range of social practices, or literacies, that prisoners engage with as part of their daily prison lives. While the research data I refer to is not recent (the 1980s), I would argue that prison life has changed little in the intervening decades.

The social context of prison literacy

Prison literacy is a distinct field of research and practice, insofar as the life of prisoners is necessarily very different to life in mainstream society—it is restricted in a tightly regulated and retributive system. When someone enters the prison system as a prisoner, they lose access to many of the things they take for granted in the outside world. Social networks in particular are disrupted, and communication with others, family, friends and associates in the outside

world is different and difficult. Face-to-face visits are very limited, as are telephone calls. Literacy takes on a new significance, as communicating in writing becomes a key way to maintain contact with people on the outside.

Brennan and Brennan (1984), researching prison literacy at about the same time as my research, wrote the following about letter writing in prison:

> To use the letter profitably in prison is a personal challenge. It is the only controllable contact with the outside. It is the only way to project yourself into relationships that lie beyond the walls. They contain everything that is precious to a prisoner's humanity and must be seen as the essence of the literate enterprise. Letters are the basic literature of prisons … (p. 228).

But it is not only letter writing that takes on new significance. Everyday living in prisons involves engaging with a distinct range of literacy-related practices that are essential for maintaining a degree of prisoner wellbeing.

At a recent national adult literacy conference, educators from NSW prisons outlined some of the main literacy (and language) practices required of prisoners (Burkitt, Humphreys & Josling 2013), confirming for me that little has changed from the time I worked in the prison system. They explained that informally 'on the wing', these practices include: requests (using a form known colloquially as a 'bluey') to be completed in writing for all manner of official requests within the prison hierarchy; buy-up forms for purchasing a range of additional food, snacks, toiletries and other miscellaneous goods; telephone access (a form is required), and the learning of new vocabulary—the slang of prison, such as ramp (a wing or cell search), durry/bunger (a cigarette), boneyard (a protection wing), tipped (transfer to another prison for disciplinary reasons), and dog (someone who talks too much to officers).

Beyond the 'wings' there are other prison contexts that require their own literacies, for example, those associated with the prisoner's own legal cases, participation in various rehabilitative programs such as drug and alcohol, and prison work that may involve applying for work, workplace health and safety, and various training courses, such as obtaining a forklift driving licence.

To date, the everyday literacy practices of prisoners remain a relatively unresearched area, certainly in Australia (though not so much in the UK, see Wilson 2004). In accord with the human capital argument explained earlier, when literacy features in research on prison education, as with an NCVER study several years ago (Dawe 2007), the focus is invariably on the inadequacy of prisoner literacy levels (frequently described as 'deficits'), how they can be assessed, how levels can be improved, and the rehabilitative effects of literacy programs (Meatheringham, Snow, Powell & Fewster 2007). When prison literacy practices are mentioned, it is in the context of the misunderstandings that may occur, such as blocked information, and 'officer time being spent explaining such information verbally' (p.141). But my research reveals that prison literacy practices are a lot more complex than this, and they are not necessarily 'problems' for the system.

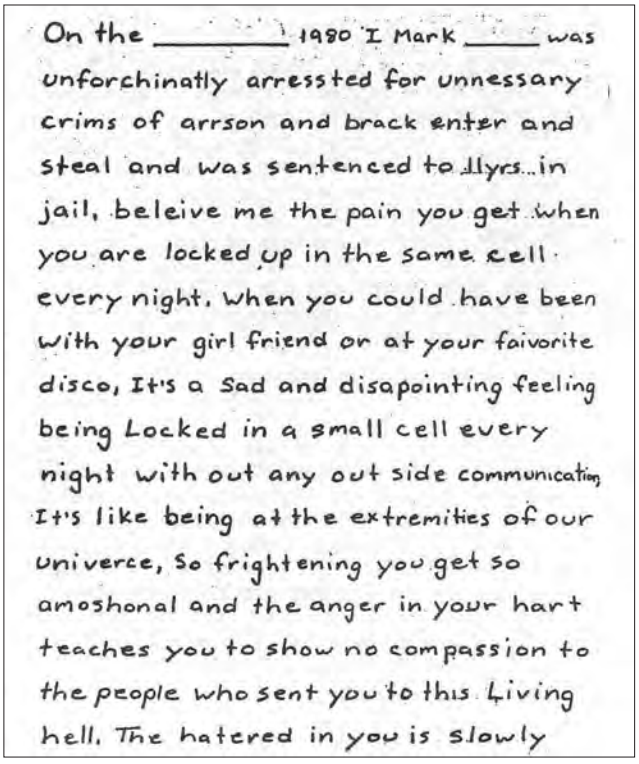
So how do prisoners manage their everyday prison literacy lives?

Given the wide range of prison literacy practices, I will focus on just several in this paper that may serve as illustrations of the distinctiveness of literacies in prisoners' everyday lives. The first form of literacy practice relates to the need, for some prisoners at least, to express their feelings in writing. As a form of self-reflection on their life circumstances, and not necessarily with any other audience in mind, prisoners may feel the need to write, possibly as a means of coping with prison life (Perry & Homan 2015).

The following writings (see Black 1985) are two examples of this. The first involved a young prisoner, 'Mark', who, one Friday afternoon, came into my classroom (a demountable in a maximum security prison), and said he wanted to improve his writing. I suggested he write what he felt like writing, and, equipped with a few words his brother had provided him with (communication, extremities, frightening, compassion) he provided me with a written piece on Monday morning. The extract in Figure 1 powerfully conveys his feelings. Soon after writing this, and with no follow-up on his writing, Mark was transferred to another prison and it was the last I saw of him.

My second example is quite different. 'Tony' was an Aboriginal prisoner and I was helping him with a correspondence course in English with mostly comprehension-type content and questions. Tony enrolled in a creative writing correspondence course and Figure 2 is one of his first short stories.

Both of these writings, despite their normative differences in literacy levels, are rather poignant examples of



On the _____ 1980 I Mark _____ was unforchinatly arressted for unnessary crims of arrson and brack enter and steal and was sentenced to 11yrs...in jail, beleive me the pain you get when you are locked up in the same cell every night. When you could have been with your girl friend or at your faivorite disco, It's a sad and disapointing feeling being Locked in a small cell every night with out any out side communicating It's like being at the extremities of our univerce, So frightening you get so amoshonal and the anger in your hart teaches you to show no compassion to the people who sent you to this Living hell. The hatered in you is slowly

Figure 1: Mark's story

self-expression. Mark possibly felt the need to write about his feelings of being imprisoned. In Tony's case, it would seem to be about his enjoyment of writing about his own experiences with people he knew from the outside world. Based on her ethnographic studies of prisoners in the UK, Wilson (2004) would refer to both of these examples as prisoners creating for themselves a 'third space'. A way for them to resolve the conflict between the institutional oppressiveness of prison life and their own desires to retain a sense of personal self.

These two writing examples represent personal and individual efforts by prisoners with minimal assistance. Managing the literacies of their daily lives for a number of prisoners, especially those who feel they cannot independently do this very well, may involve seeking assistance. Prisoners commonly stated that they received assistance from cellmates, but this strategy could be problematic as prisoners may not be allowed to choose who they share a cell with, and not all cellmates were obliging. Take the case of one prisoner who explained to me his experiences with a cellmate:

> I had a cellmate and he said there one night, oh, if you don't stop snoring I'll get up and smack you round the cell, you know. But I'd been with him about a week or more and, you know, he's a sort of real friendly attitude. Well, this showed me how quick people can change

WILD CAT

His real name was Archie Burnes but we all just called him 'Wild Cat.'

The thing that I remember most about the Cat was that he was the funniest man I ever knew. I remember once I was going droving with him, we had to drive a mob of sheep to a little town called Walgett, 85 miles from Brewarrina. It was just after a big rain and we were taking a taxi cab out to the plant. The cab driver, Buddles Norton, was talking about the rain and he said,

"Plenty of feed around here Cat."

The Cat answered in a quick, like manner, "Yes, even the bloody trees are gittin' fat."

Buddles looked at me, I looked at Buddles, and we just busted out laughing. We laughed nearly all the way out to the plant.

As I sit and think about the Cat, it is with fond memories because he taught me one of the greatest lessons in my life, he taught me how to laugh. As I sit here now a smile comes to my face as I remember the time the Cat became a preacher. He was holding a prayer meeting down by the river and he was going like a wild fire. He was really worked up, when all of a sudden, he let go with that famous four letter word.

"I am so f...ing happy I could jump across the f...ing river."

All of us young people busted out laughing. The Cat looked at the old people and dropped to his knees and prayed for forgiveness. Yes, that Cat, no matter how you look at him, you gotter smile or laugh at him, not with malice but with love.

Cat, I wish I could write a book about you because the world could do with a good laugh right now and a book about all of the things you said and did could get this world laughing again. Cat, as I sit in my cell, writing this, a smile comes to my face as I remember the time you was preaching and telling about when you were a sinner. Remember Cat, you was telling us how you used to drink down by the river all of the time. I can still remember your word,

"Kids," you said, "when I was a drunk I used to drink down by the river all of the time. If you ever wanted to find me, you would find me down by the river. If you wanted to send me a letter, you would simply address it 'care of the river bank.'" And then cat, without blinking an eye you said:

"Let's open our hymn books to my favourite hymn, 'Shall we gather at the river.' "

Cat, I must confess, I laughed at you that night so if you can read this wherever you are now, please forgive me for all of the times I laughed at you when you was preaching. But Cat, I know that if you are up in heaven, you would have them angels and God himself bustin a gut laughing.

Cat, thanks for the memories, but most of all, thank you for the laughs.

Figure 2: Tony's story

If not a cellmate, then a trusted fellow prisoner was often found to provide assistance. One prisoner, for example, spoke of receiving assistance 'from a couple of me mates. They all come from Queensland'. Another referred to help from just the one trusted prisoner:

> Neville, he's helped me a lot. He doesn't tell anybody else, he keeps to himself. He's not a bloke to mouth off. If I want a letter written, he'll make it, just like that ... There was another bloke wanted to read the letter to me. I said 'nope'.

As this last comment indicates, fear of being seen to have a weakness, of the vulnerability of being seen as 'illiterate' in the prison system, is something to be avoided, as indeed it is in the general community, but in prison it has particular implications. As one prisoner stated: 'it's a big drama in jail, you know, once they find out what you want'.

For other prisoners it was a mix of trying to get help from fellow prisoners, but trying also to retain some sense of agency, especially in private letters to loved ones. For example, one prisoner received help with the initial parts of a letter, and 'then I write how much I love her and all this'. Another prisoner, whilst struggling with his spelling, nevertheless wanted to ensure that any help was provided on his terms: 'I'll tell him what I want to write and he'll just help with the spelling'.

Much depended on the individual dispositions of prisoners. Some were determined to struggle along the best they could using independent strategies. One prisoner for example, spoke of how he completed his 'buy up' form: 'I had to pull out me tobacco pouch and write *White Ox* you know, that's how you spell it, and I write it down. And then I get me matchbox out ... I copy it out'. Other literacy practices involved making a decision over whether it was worth the effort, with some tasks prisoners deciding to 'let go altogether if, you know they're not really necessary'. But these cases seemed rare.

On the whole, prisoners managed the literacy practices they encountered, even if sometimes there was a bit of bluff involved. One prisoner recounted that on reception to a previous prison he was assigned a 'good' job in the store:

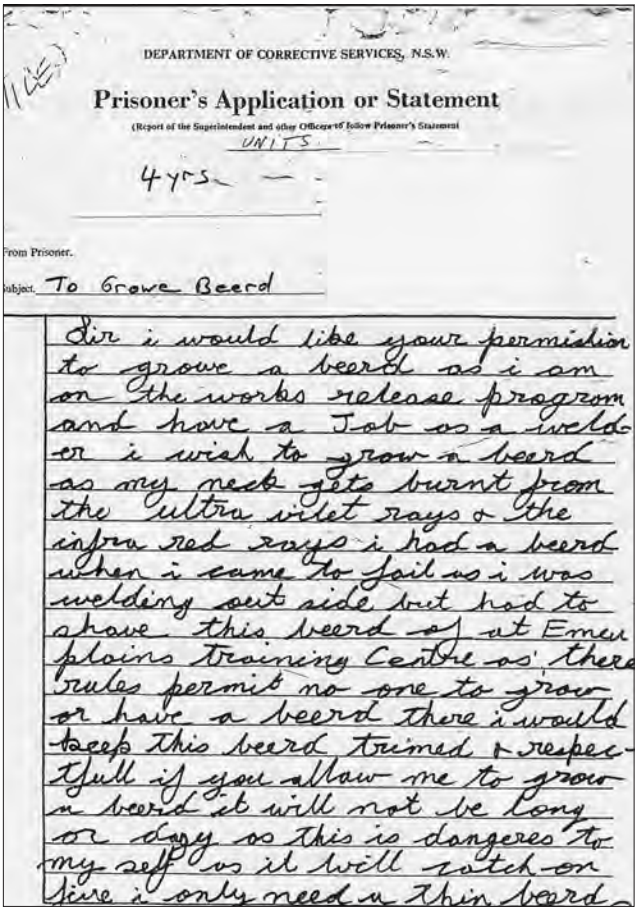
> …at a desk, keeping files, doing bookwork, even though I couldn't really do it. I copied a lot of stuff that was already on the list. They never knew, they never picked it up ...'

One highly problematic source of assistance with writing tasks was from prison officers. Some prisoners were prepared to seek assistance as the following example indicates:

> The reception committee, the first forms they gave me. I said to the bloke I'm not real good at them, and he said, 'oh, no worries', and he just asked me the questions, you know ...

The situation depended a lot on the individuals involved, with some prison officers being seen as helpful, and others not so helpful. For many prisoners, crossing the cultural divide between officers and prisoners to seek assistance was an impossibility: 'All on tape! No way in the world, no way in the world ... I wouldn't ask them the time of day'.

A factor that needs to be remembered at all times is that prisons are about authoritative power. Prison officers and the officer hierarchy have that power over prisoners, and it is frequently exercised in writing. The example in Figure 3 shows an extract from one prisoner's respectful (though ungrammatical) official application via a 'bluey' to grow a beard, an application which was subsequently refused.



DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIVE SERVICES, N.S.W.

Prisoner's Application or Statement

(Report of the Superintendent and other Officers to follow Prisoner's Statement)

UNITS

4yrs

From Prisoner.

Subject. To Growe Beerd

Sir i would like your permision to growe a beerd as i am on the works release progrom and have a Job as a welder i wish to grow a beerd as my neck gets burnt from the ultra vilet rays & the infra red rays i had a beerd when i came to Jail as i was welding out side but had to shave this beerd of at Emu plains training Centre as there rules permit no one to grow or have a beerd there i would keep this beerd trimed & respectfull if you allow me to grow a beerd it will not be long or dagy as this is dangeres to my self as it will catch on fire i only need a thin beard

Figure 3: a 'bluey'

Implications and conclusions

Only a few prison literacy practices could be commented on in this paper, but enough hopefully for a brief discussion of the role of literacy and literacies in prison. As I explained in the early part of this paper, everyday prisoner literacy practices are not the primary concern of prison authorities given the official education focus on employment-related and rehabilitative program outcomes to be achieved through nationally accredited courses.

Focusing on how prisoners manage with everyday prison literacy practices provides a different dimension. It highlights what is important to prisoners and the often complex manner in which literacies are used in their daily lives. Thus, to explain how individual prisoners manage these practices, we need to take account of their individual

literacy proficiencies, their individual dispositions, and their access to, and use of social networks and relations within the prison system. And we need to be mindful that prison literacy practices relate to the exercise of power, and in particular, the authoritative power of prison officials.

The implications for prison literacy programs are that the everyday literacy practices of prisoners should be recognised and accommodated. No doubt in many respects they already are, as experienced literacy teachers would necessarily draw on the immediate needs and motivations of prisoners within whatever accredited course they are teaching. But it may also involve a shift in roles from teacher to mediator. For example, when prisoners have literacy tasks they need to manage, such as completing request forms, they do not necessarily want a lesson in learning how to write them, they just want one completed, and they may be happy for someone to do it for them, or to act as a scribe.

In some ways, prison literacy programs need to accommodate the type of community 'drop-in' centre that Ken Levine (1986) proposed. This being where people can simply get help without a fuss in a quiet, reflective space where they will not be judged 'deficient' or in need of testing and slotted into a nationally accredited program. This informal 'drop-in' element was part of the function of the prison literacy program that I worked in during the early 1980s, and from my perspective, it remains valid today.

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Life changing lessons inside

By Yvonne Russell

> One of the many lessons that one learns in prison is, that things are what they are and will be what they will be. (Oscar Wilde)

Introduction

This article will focus on education for women in prison, primarily focusing on the role of Vocational Education and Training (VET) and the way education changes lives for both the students in prison and beyond, as well as for their teachers at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre (DPFC) and Tarrengower.

Bendigo Kangan Institute (BKI) was established as a legal entity in July 2014, resulting from the merger of Bendigo TAFE and Kangan Institute. With more than 25 years' experience, BKI has been delivering educational services in Victorian prisons to target and specialised groups, that include prisoners with low level literacy and numeracy skills; Koori; youth (between 18 and 21 years); Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD); or have a range of intellectual or physical disabilities.

BKI operates in both public and privately operated prison sites and delivers to short and long term prisoners, in both maximum and minimum security settings for adult male and female, youth, remand prisoners and forensic patients. Currently, BKI provides 63% of VET delivery in the Victorian prison system that encompasses Melbourne Assessment Prison, Metropolitan Remand Centre, Dame Phyllis Frost Centre (DPFC), Loddon, Middleton & Tarrengower, Port Phillip Prison, Fulham Correctional Centre and Forensicare Thomas Embling Hospital.

BKI Corrections Education Department employs more than 120 staff across nine prison sites. Our department is a team of dedicated teachers and administrative support that deliver vocational education and training in challenging environments with many operational restrictions, including no internet access. Every day, 120 teachers perform extraordinary work in extraordinary circumstances. Our teachers engage the disengaged and shine a light on the value of education. Education changes lives.

DPFC was opened in 1996 and BKI (then trading as Kangan Batman TAFE) began delivery of VET programs

to 125 women. Between 1996 and 2015, the population of DPFC has expanded to 352 women, with an expected prisoner population of 494 for 2016–2017. Tarrengower Prison was opened in 1989 with a population of 24 women. Today the population at Tarrengower fluctuates between 50 and 72 women. Tarrengower is the only minimum security, female prison in Victoria. Tarrengower is a working farm which also has a strong emphasis on the Horticulture and Hospitality industries, supported by VET programs offered by BKI.

Delivering education programs for women

Our delivery of educational services has increased exponentially, yet we continue to focus our delivery methodology on the ways women learn, both research based and intuitive. Our teachers at DPFC and Tarrengower possess a solid understanding of the needs of the women they teach. They have an innate ability to incorporate into delivery an awareness of the circumstances that may affect learning, in this case, issues of separation from family and children. They manage to create a safe environment for women prisoners to learn, become motivated and experience success.

The delivery approach at DPFC and Tarrengower is consistent with Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) standards and compliant on all Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) requirements. However, it is our method of delivery, the way we teach women, that is the central component to the success of women participating in education and training. The program profile is common to both prisons, thus accommodating continuity of educational services when women transfer

from a maximum security metropolitan prison (DPFC) to a minimum security regional prison (Tarrengower).

Our teachers deliver to the program profile issued by Corrections Victoria, using a combination of project based learning supported by regular classroom learning activities relevant to women and their lives. BKI has a contractual obligation with Corrections Victoria based on a framework that supports an integrated approach to education and training which aims to increase ex-prisoners' employment prospects and access to other socio-economic opportunities. There are a diverse range of Certificates on offer including Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA), Certificates in Spoken and Written English (CSWE), Foundation Skills Training Package (FSK), Information Technology (IT), Printing & Graphics, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) Art, Textiles, Horticulture, Hospitality, Cleaning Operations, Construction Pathways, Business, First Aid and Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S).

We tailor our programs to provide relevance and meaning. An example from DPFC is a highly successful program called *Childs Play* which was designed and conducted to assist women to develop and enhance their parenting and child-rearing skills and support literacy development. In partnership with the Mothers and Children unit at DPFC, our BKI education centre developed this project to benefit the children, assist the women to re-integrate on release, prevent re-offending and recidivism, and contribute towards breaking the potential for generational disadvantage.

This popular short course assisted women who are parents, and women who are carers of children in prison, in supporting the growth and development of young children. Through this short course, women have the opportunity to explore and discuss different ways of communicating with young children. They also plan and cost a child-orientated activity reflecting their new knowledge of positive communication and approaches to parenting techniques. Flexible learning materials and audio-visual resources are a key feature of this course.

Responding to the needs of CALD learners

The CALD population at both DPFC and Tarrengower draw on a highly developed CSWE program that accommodates the identified learning styles of this group. We offer three levels of language learning through this curriculum structure: Course in Preliminary Spoken and Written English and CSWE Certificates I and II. (A selection of students' writing from the CSWE course delivered at our Tarrengower campus was published in the last edition of Fine Print.)

The CSWE provides a curriculum framework to develop the four macro language skills of speaking, reading, writing and listening, from absolute beginner to advanced English levels. This curriculum is particularly effective at our corrections sites because it responds to the needs of the learner within the broad social, political and cultural environment in which they are learning English as a second or third language.

Our specialist teachers adapt their approach to individual students and meet their needs using alternative teaching methods. For example, teachers provide oral assessments as opposed to written assessments; use visual stimuli and practical demonstrations to overcome language barriers. Our corrections based teachers are able to draw on our mainstream Learning Support unit and Foundation Studies department who can assist with providing appropriate translated and modified materials and tools to develop student language capabilities.

Women enrolled in the CSWE program display increased confidence and willingness to engage with other women to practise speaking. They can successfully transfer into other English support courses such as *My Story,* a family history piece. Ultimately, they can extend their education into areas such as IT and business studies. BKI also uses the CGEA for those CALD students with some literacy, albeit low levels of literacy.

Integrating vocational programs

At DPFC, an integrated project was designed to extend the education offered under the Cert I in ATSI Cultural Arts, the Cert I in Textiles, Clothing and Footwear, and Cert I in Business and deliver the program to the Protection area textile class, *Made by a Dame*. The idea was to marry two areas of education—creating the design on material and then creating an item with the material. The long term plan is to incorporate the Business students and have them establish a small business that could sell the created items.

A particular highlight of delivering VET in prison settings is working in collaboration with prison industries to provide women with on-the-job training that will lead to a set of employability skills to assist with employment upon release into the community. Hospitality delivery

at both DPFC and Tarrengower has always been strong, providing women with increased capability in areas such as catering and food handling. Hospitality at Tarrengower was enhanced by a community partnership between Zonta Women's Support Group in Kyneton and Tarrengower prison winning the Victorian State 'Prime Ministers Awards for Excellence in Community Business Partnerships' in 2005—Small Business Enterprise Award for the establishment of a café.

The main goal of running BKI's Hospitality course as a working café is to provide a simulated work environment. This innovative hospitality program includes the opportunity to deal with everyday workplace pressures such as time management and decision making, menu planning and food orders, catering deadlines, dealing with difficult customers and conflict within the kitchen. The course is conducted as a full-time program for ten weeks. The Certificate II in Hospitality (Kitchen Operations) is delivered in the purpose built, industry-standard commercial kitchen within the education building. The selection process for each course ensures that women from over-represented groups in the prison community, such as CALD and Koori women, have an opportunity to participate.

Tarrengower has an expanding Horticulture program providing meaningful on-the-job training to women. There is potential for horticulture and construction to work together and address emerging employment opportunities. Providing training in construction units such as White Card, Operating Heavy Machinery, Tractor Operations and Front end loader will address growing demands from women to develop skills for more diverse occupations. Tarrengower has the facilities to deliver a combined course such as horticulture and construction and facilitate the transition from DPFC to continue their horticulture studies and expand their skill set with the addition of construction units.

Conclusion

At each of our nine Corrections Education prison sites we have Lead Educators who support the teachers and administrators. Our success is determined by our collegial support of each other and our relationships with our host organisations. Our Corrections Education department is also supported by an Education Manager and an Operations Support Manager. We operate as a team of more than 120 people supported by an institute with more than 1,000 people. I am enormously proud of the work that BKI Corrections Education teachers perform in prison settings. Education changes lives.

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Meanwhile, in a parallel universe

By Lesley Farrell

> The world is nibbling at the edges of intractable learning problems. Now is the time for scale. (John Fallon, CEO Pearson Education, http://blog.pearson.com/african-outcomes/)

Reconceiving national policy discourses for global times

The call for 'scalable' education innovation is loud, persistent and comes from many directions. It rests on the assumption that, around the world, people and governments are facing similar challenges and these challenges can be addressed through the globalisation of 'best practice' policy. As Tota (2015) points out, education policy has 'escaped' its national boundaries and become a matter for International Governmental Organisations like the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and global businesses like education publisher Pearson, on the one hand, and technological skill hungry corporations like IBM.

In this article, I want to consider these kinds of developments in relation to Adult Literacy and Basic Education. Specifically, I want to consider these questions:

- Why does literacy figure differently in the policy landscape now, than it has figured in the past?
- How is the professional authority of teachers contested and reconfigured in this policy landscape?
- How might we understand the potential for Adult Literacy and Basic Education professionals to recalibrate their professional authority in ways that situate the profession as wellsprings of educational innovation?

Powerful players in global contexts

When we think about globalisation in relation to Literacy Education we often think about assessment, particularly the 'life cycle' international assessment programs run by the OECD. We now have the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) in schools, while for adults we have the Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). These programs run in parallel with national education programs and inscribe the parameters within which systems, educators and students are seen to succeed, or fail, in their literacy attainment.

The OECD through PISA and PIAAC, Cambridge University through International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and Pearson Education through the Pearson Test of English (PTE) Academic, all effectively globalise aspects of Literacy Education through their assessment programs. Through their assessment, they assert a distinctive understanding of what literacy is, how it is demonstrated and what constitutes 'enough' literacy, and the right kind of literacy, for an adult to function in the working world. With other global organisations like the World Bank, they are unambiguously powerful players in the global education field.

Without intending to diminish the obvious importance of these players, I want to focus here on one other ubiquitous category of players—the Professional Service Firm. I am interested in professional service firms in relation to Adult Literacy education in Australia because their aim, and their business model, is to 'scale up' curriculum, pedagogy and assessment beyond local, national and regional boundaries to make all aspects of education a global endeavour. They are powerful stakeholders who believe their time has come and are no longer prepared to leave governments and educators to define and police the terms of engagement within the global Education Industry.

Professional authority in Literacy Education

Meanwhile, the traditional players in the Education field, teachers, are recalibrating their claims to professional authority within what is a very volatile policy landscape. While it is clear, as Susan Robertson (2012) and others argue, that teachers are identified as the major drivers of educational success (or failure) and are monitored and audited exhaustively, the scope and scale of their professional authority seems to be increasingly constrained and defined. What teachers do seems to matter more than ever. However, the scope of their expertise, the discretion they have to act and the trust that is invested in them individually and as a profession seems to diminish, even as the demands on their professional expertise seem to increase.

The claims that teachers have made to professional knowledge, discretion and autonomy have always been contested in ways that similar claims by doctors, lawyers and accountants have not. Now they share with other professional groups the challenges to professional knowledge and expertise, and to professional discretion and authority. This will recalibrate their authority in traditional educational contexts like local schools and adult educational systems, as well as in the educational contexts that are emerging across increasingly attenuated, multi-scalar, global networks.

I will approach my questions from two directions. First, I want to think about literacy and how we understand both what it is and how it works from a policy perspective. I am particularly interested in how it is being understood, outside of education in the parallel universe of international government organisations and global corporations. Second, I want to think about authority in relation to professional authority, the authority that is associated with professional knowledge and expertise, with professional discretion and autonomy.

For this discussion, I will be mostly using the work of Julia Evetts (2011) and colleagues, working in the sociology of the professions, in relation to the formation and contestation of professional knowledge and authority in general. I will also be relying on Mari Sako (2014a, 2014b) and colleagues' work in the sociology of organisations, particularly in relation to the disaggregation of professional knowledge and skill, the routine-ization and modularisation of professional knowledge, processes and procedures, and the standardisation of professional problem-solving to enable outsourcing for, and to, professional service firms.

A world view of Education

This seems at first blush to be a long way from the grassroots of education where learning actually happens but my argument is that we cannot understand what is happening to education in our own specific locations—unless we take a clear eyed look outside of education at the whole 'policyscape', not just the part of it with which we are familiar.

But, when we do accept that the traditional terrain of education may not be the main game anymore, then there may be possibilities for transformation that we will not see if we look only at the policy drivers that we have been schooled to see. In saying this, I am relying on the fact that education always happens in the vernacular. It cannot be otherwise despite whatever pressures there are towards standardisation, or however directly policy stakeholders want to intervene in the practices of education.

Private sector involvement in education is ubiquitous. This includes philanthropy and social enterprise, but also global corporations. Traditional private sector actors like education publishers are vastly expanding their mission and reach. By redefining their core business from peripheral actors in the education sector to major players providing core educational services to governments and NGOs globally. Non-traditional actors, notably professional service firms like Price Waterhouse Coopers and McKinsey, have moved into public sector service provision as a lucrative aspect of their business.

Governments now outsource services that used to be considered unambiguously public, like health and prison systems. As Stephen Ball argues:

> the sum of these changes indicates the beginning of the end of state education in its welfare form. (2012:2)

Education policy, but also the foundational activities of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment is being practised in new locations on different scales, by new actors and organisations. As a consequence, education policy analysis cannot be limited to the nation state.

McKinsey, education policy and a global business plan

Professional service firms are now major players in the public sector field. McKinsey and Company is a century-old professional service firm. It was founded by a professor of accounting and developed its original profile in management consulting. Since the mid-1950s it has included a significant research function and encouraged the publication of many books and articles. In 2001, it began to develop its Public Sector practice. This practice includes an Education Practice with a comprehensive list of services and a comprehensive mission statement: 'We help transform education systems and institutions to improve individual, social and economic outcomes.'

McKinsey's Education Practice provides comprehensive research and advice on all aspects of education policy to government and to industry. Global corporations are familiar with the company and with using them as consultants in their specialist fields. They have confidence in their research, analysis and advice. McKinsey and company has provided a number of very influential

reports on Education. They adopt a global perspective on problems and propose global solutions at both policy and implementation levels. They aim to fill the gaps that governments create when they outsource public policy and public services.

Their report: *Education to Employment: Designing a System that works* frames and defines an education issue in global terms:

> Employers, education providers, and youth live in parallel universes. To put it another way, they have fundamentally different understandings of the same situation. Fewer than half of youth and employers, for example, believe that new graduates are adequately prepared for entry-level positions. Education providers, however, are much more optimistic: 72 percent of them believe new graduates are ready to work (Exhibit 3). The same disconnect occurs with regard to education; 39 percent of education providers believe the main reason students drop out is that the course of study is too difficult, but only 9 percent of youth say this is the case (they are more apt to blame affordability). (2012:18)

Having identified a global problem they present a comprehensive solution which relies on their in-house research:

> Innovative and effective programs around the world have important elements in common. Two features stand out among all the successful programs we reviewed. First, education providers and employers actively step into one another's worlds. Employers might help to design curricula and offer their employees as faculty, for example, while education providers may have students spend half their time on a job site and secure them hiring guarantees.
>
> Second, in the best programs, employers and education providers work with their students early and intensely. Instead of three distinct intersections occurring in a linear sequence (enrolment leads to skills, which lead to a job), the education-to-employment journey is treated as a continuum in which employers commit to hire youth before they are enrolled in a program to build their skills. (2012:20)

Having identified the problem, and the solutions, they argue for scalability—just the kind of scalability that they can provide:

> The problem, then, is not that success is impossible or unknowable—it is that it is scattered and small scale compared with the need. (2012:20)

Adult literacy education reconfigured

How does this work in relation to adult literacy education? You will notice that the McKinsey document defines the issue of transition to employment globally. That is, they define a problem—lack of hard data, then they address the problem through their own empirical research:

> To do so, we developed two unique fact bases. The first is an analysis of more than 100 education-to-employment initiatives from 25 countries, selected on the basis of their innovation and effectiveness. The second is a survey of youth, education providers, and employers in nine countries that are diverse in geography and socio-economic context: Brazil, Germany, India, Mexico, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States. (2012:11)

This call for, and reliance on, hard data is not unique to McKinsey. It is, as Tota (2014) demonstrates, a feature of 'international non government'. The PIAAC responds to the call for hard data that allows for international comparison. In order to make those international comparisons, it identifies five literacy levels and sorts respondents to the PIAAC survey into those levels from Level 1 (minimal level) to Level 5 (sophisticated literacy).

The OECD report of PIAAC is called 'literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology rich environments'. This links literacy and numeracy (understood as skills, not as social practices) to the new work environment—an environment that focuses on problem solving and that takes technology in the workplace for granted.

The McKinsey Report and the PIAAC literacy levels have been taken up and used in the Australian policy landscape. A working paper from the Productivity Commission, *Literacy and Numeracy Skills and Labour Market Outcomes* poses the question 'Why the policy interest ?' and then identifies these policy initiatives:

> It goes on to explain why policy is good for you. In particular, it takes up the problem identified by the McKinsey report—the challenge of education to work transition—and demonstrates that increased literacy levels increase employability. It also demonstrates that increased literacy levels increase wages. (2010:viii)

The general point I want to make here is that, in this significant contribution to the Australian literacy policy landscape, the framing of the problem, the data used, and the concept of, and measurement of literacy levels, have been imported from sources that are not just international, or even global. They are globalizing. I could have used a number of other policy documents, for instance, the AiG report *When Words Fail,* to make the same point.

McKinsey has such a large public policy department because they can frame the problem, propose a generic solution and have it 'scaled up'. Their clients are governments around the world who are increasingly outsourcing public policy. Perhaps McKinsey is right, that education professionals inhabit one universe and employers and ordinary people inhabit a parallel universe. Certainly it seems that the knowledge and autonomy of education professionals is under threat.

Professional knowledge under pressure

I want to now consider knowledge and work, the authority of professional knowledge and the pressures this is placing on education professionals and traditional education institutions. In doing so, I will say something in passing about knowledge, work and literacy.

We are seeing a fundamental shift in what constitutes professionalism that has been going on for at least twenty years. Brint (1996) argues that, in relation to the professions, we are in the midst of: 'epochal shift from the rhetoric of trusteeship to the rhetoric of expertise'. The concept of a profession, and the basis on which a profession asserts its authority, is contested.

The field of the sociology of the professions has not been able to clarify what is distinctive about the professions, nor what might make professionals different from other occupational groups. There are two perspectives on these characteristics that I would like to sketch. The first is the ideal perspective, the second is the ideological perspective.

If we look at professions from the ideal perspective we see a commitment to a specific body of knowledge and an extended period of formal education. In addition, many professionals must also be licensed. Often that license needs to be periodically renewed. However, once these criteria are met, and specialised competence is assured, in this ideal configuration of professionalism, professionals exercise discretion based on that authorised competence. Professionals are trusted to exercise discretion and judgement based on their competence and to do so in complex and novel situations. Because this understanding is based on trust, professionals are subject to few rules and to a large degree, are self-regulating.

The second perspective is the ideological perspective. Claims to professionalism can be made on an ideological basis. Researchers in the critical analytical traditions read professionalism as a claim to special privileges not justified by the nature of the expertise or the task. They understand professionalism as an ideology which involves monopoly control of work and the closure of open markets. They argue that the primary purpose and effect of the professionalisation of occupational groups is to promote the self-interest of the professions, in terms of salary, status and power, as well as monopoly protection of an occupational jurisdiction.

A question of trust

For good or ill, the professionalism of an occupation is no longer based on the belief that the training and experiences of a professional make them a certain kind of a person, a person who can be trusted, within the parameters of their profession, to act in the best interests of their clients, patients or students, even when novel or dangerous circumstances arise. Professional authority is now based on expertise, or knowledge, and that makes a difference. Expertise alone, especially as it has been democratised through the internet, is a fragile foundation on which to base claims to professional authority.

Professional knowledge, when it is uncoupled from trusteeship, can also be uncoupled from professional authority. Information technology (IT) has had well documented impact on the democratisation of knowledge. The ubiquity of all kinds of knowledge and expertise has presented its own challenges to the professions. What I want to focus on here, however, is the effect that IT can have on the unbundling of knowledge and the disaggregation of skill.

Mathas and Whitaker (2007) have demonstrated how IT allows the codification, standardisation and modularisation of many kinds of knowledge beyond routine processes and procedures.

- *Codifiablity* is the extent to which knowledge can be converted into a form that is suitable for transfer across economic agents. A high level of tacit knowledge used to work against codifiability, but that is much less the case than it was before. Even tacit knowledge can be codified to a significant extent if there is enough data about a procedure to produce a reliable algorithm. These days there is nearly always enough data.

- *Standardizability* is about developing a common framework and vocabulary to provide a set of consistent and repeatable processes.
- *Modularizability* of an occupation (not a process or procedure, but an occupation) is about the extent to which the activities of an occupation can be performed independently by separate people, potentially in separate locations.

Education can be seen as an information intensive industry like any other. The mechanisms of codification, standardisation and modularisation, facilitated by information technologies, are working to unbundle knowledge, disaggregate education activities and stratify the profession.

If professional education work can be stratified according to the extent to which it is routine, the extent to which it is generic and the extent to which it requires a high degree of skill, discretion and innovative capacity, then professional education workers can be stratified in the same way. There can be people who oversee routine work like marking, or people who specialise in work that is standardised globally—like PIAAC, and people who manage and co-ordinate these people and processes. And a very few people who innovate.

In terms of professional authority, this is a significant shift. Highly specialised levels of accountability are associated with each element. Professional authority is unbundled with the disaggregation and unbundling of education tasks.

Conclusion

These changes are not in the future, they are happening now. But, this need not be a comprehensively depressing story. It is clear that professional authority, including teacher authority, has changed and fragmented. And, curiously enough, this is where I see the possibilities.

Studies of the professions are beginning to indicate that disaggregated professions are joining up in interdisciplinary teams in formations that, while not anarchic, are certainly generating new power relations through new allegiances and alliances. They do this because policies are never just implemented, they are animated—at particular times, in particular places by particular people. Education always happens in the vernacular.

So, when education is the province of teachers, but also IT professionals, software designers, nurses, welders and other people with expertise, these teams may forge new kinds of professional authority. So our challenge as literacy education professionals may be to learn to work even more effectively across professional and geographical boundaries.

> We are in the midst of an epochal shift from the rhetoric of trusteeship to the rhetoric of expertise. (Brint, 1996)

Twenty years later, we are still negotiating that shift.

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Focus on work readiness

By Janet Shaw and Cameron Barker

The Settlement Language Pathways to Employment & Training (SLPET) program is offered at Melbourne Polytechnic to eligible AMEP students from diverse educational and work backgrounds. The course focuses on work readiness with a strong focus on communication in the workplace. Previously called Employment Pathways Preparation (EPP), it changed to SLPET in 2011. Like all programs in the current VET climate, it is subject to improvement and change.

In this article we will focus on three aspects of the course: its structure, the challenges of managing the expectations of stakeholders and how we developed practical solutions, in and out of the classroom, to prepare our students for their working life in Australia.

Course structure

We have tried a number of models but this model has proved very successful for a number of reasons, primarily it is the most flexible. We have run the program as both ten and fifteen week courses, with both models having benefits. The fifteen week course gives the students more time to process the vast amounts of information presented. The ten week course provides students who want to transition into other education pathways or longer term volunteering placements quicker access to these options.

The work placement gives the students real life experience of work environments and the skills they need. We have seen an increase in numbers of students who have higher level English language skills and are job ready at completion.

The course accommodates students who have many different demands on their time. It also allows for students to actually absorb a lot of course information and time for homework. We have good retention and evidence of developing skills. Volunteer work is particularly encouraged as a valid work experience.

Challenges for stakeholders

One of the challenges of the course is managing expectations. Our clients, as new arrivals, often expect to get a job straight away. After arrival, they may find themselves looking for work for some time or have held professional careers in their own country. They are often faced with the dilemma that without local work experience and local referees they cannot access the job market. They have to rethink their pathway, reassess their goals and perhaps reconsider what is possible. SLPET is a step along this path.

It helps if they have access to sound advice which we have achieved through a number of means. Course promotion is delivered by current students who give a series of presentations about the course to prospective classes. We are always amazed by their understanding of what other students need to know and they are able to balance the advantages of the course with clear messages of what can realistically be achieved.

This is reinforced by the teachers with the support of two very important people. The SLPET counsellor is always available and plays an important role in career guidance. A dedicated Work Placement Officer (WPO) assists students to set realistic work experience goals based on their individual preferences. The WPO has an initial vocational counselling interview with the student where issues can be addressed. This may be helping students manage their expectations by mapping out a pathway step by step. While no dream is impossible it is beneficial to show that the pathways for careers, such as doctors and lawyers can take up to, and beyond, ten years.

The two week work placement is also an excellent opportunity for students to get a feel for where they are in regard to both their work readiness and their suitability for the career of their choice. A positive outcome is sometimes for students to find that they are actually not suited to the career that they have chosen. It is far better to do a two week placement and realise that you don't enjoy the job rather than completing a course and then realising. The opposite is also true of course, where students have

a taste of an industry, have a great experience and then passionately pursue this career.

Keeping informed and connected

As educators we have to balance giving accurate up to date information with the expectations of our clients and the demands of preparing them for Australian workplaces. Keeping informed about local up to date industry information is critical. Good links with industry experts need to be nurtured and built, however, we have found employers very willing and happy to accommodate us. Particularly, larger organisations who have community liaison officers or can send an HR manager to describe what they expect to see on a resume or a risk manager to identify hazards and describe workplace accidents.

We visit some of the biggest employers in our area: Darebin Council, Northern hospital; in retail, Woolworths and Bunnings; and electricity supplier, Jemena. We talk to them about what they want in employees; what is involved in their interview process; how to apply for a position and how much work is available. The students learn about the potential for different work available in these organisations. We host a number of speakers from Jobwatch who talk about Workplace Health & Safety (WH&S) issues and the importance of volunteering. All our students are encouraged and supported to get involved in volunteering.

At the Preston campus, we work closely with the Overseas Qualified Professionals (OQP) who have a number of industry contacts who they have surveyed in the past regarding fears and expectations when employing newly arrived staff. They also have up to date information regarding industry specific requirements for job seeking and employment.

By far the greatest resource is the opportunity to speak to someone in the student's industry of choice. We keep in contact with former students through LinkedIn and a SLPET Facebook page. A growing number are more than happy to speak to our current students about their industry, ranging from doctors, engineers, accountants, architects, microbiologists, bankers, purchasers, supply chain managers, estate agents, teachers and also many non-professional careers.

As teachers we have to network constantly, but the more times we meet with these employers and they have our students on work experience, the more success and positive experiences we have, the more likely they are to help us in the future. It is a reciprocal and mutually beneficial process.

The workplace classroom

Workplace models that focus on employability skills underpin our teaching practice. We stress the importance of punctuality, reliability and teamwork both for success in the course and for the student's future working life. The teacher takes on the role of 'the boss' in the classroom and the students treat them as such. If they are going to be late for 'work' they need to text the boss with a legitimate excuse. If a student arrives late without having called or sent a text they must explain in front of the class why they are late. The class will then give feedback on both the reason for being late and the delivery of the excuse.

One thing that has really helped the students as a cohesive whole is having a time each week for a 'tea break'. This encourages social conversation and contact but also gets them to take responsibility for organising and planning it. All the workplace visits and other outings are planned with input from the students. Where we go, what we do, schedules, how we get there are all negotiated and roles and tasks delegated.

Class work is as practical as possible. We challenge them with both formal panel interviews for which they 'apply' for a job, send a resume, are given a time and have to dress appropriately. Although stressful for them, they usually say they would like more of this kind of practise. We also do group interviews (in response to employers telling us this is what they do) and telephone calls. Telephoning always unnerves our students so we endeavour to practise job interviews, enquiries and to respond to a number of enquiries.

WH&S is another important aspect of classroom activities. Students must be given basic information, not only to keep them safe at work but to make them aware of hazards and risks, to read signage and to understand instructions. Also many students now have to undergo online inductions, even for work experience, and they need the language skills for this task.

In groups, they have to go and find hazards around the campus. They need to describe them and assess the risks. They generally email the report but then we have a 'staff meeting' to present their report to decide on the action that should be taken. There is a lot of discussion, not only about the nature of these formal meetings but also the

reporting structures in companies. Later they complete a WH&S form to report an injury that has occurred at work.

Teamwork activities ensure students must collaborate to complete them. They have to take the initiative, plan and make decisions by working together. The students work in small groups from similar industries so that they can share their experiences and approach job search activities from a similar perspective. The language and the skills that these groups need to develop obviously vary a great deal depending upon the industry. We encourage these groups to conduct all group activities in a language register appropriate to their field.

Authentic experiences

One of the SLPET teachers was in the *Ride to Conquer Cancer* challenge and the students participated in a project to help raise funds. This involved them in all the activities of small event management. Again the class broke up into small groups and each managed a different aspect of the event. We were lucky enough to have two very competent project managers in the group who had excellent English. We had great buy-in from the students and to a greater degree they completed their tasks independently.

There was an IT group who looked after developing flyers, banners and advertisements for the event. Another group approached local businesses to ask for donations and another group spoke to student and teacher groups to get donations for the bric-a-brac sale. The remaining students worked on the preparation for the barbecue and muffin sale.

On the day, all the students came together to run the stalls and the barbecue and to drum up customers. It was an exciting day with a great deal of fun had by all and over $900 raised. The students developed real life skills and gained some local volunteering experience that could be added to their CVs, all while having a great time and raising money for a great cause.

Networking and volunteering opportunities

Each semester we aim for a cross-campus networking event and again the students are put in charge of hosting the event. With teacher support they conduct campus tours, arrange refreshments and convene conversation groups.

We are very proud of our links with the Whittlesea council. Every year they run an event for new residents and our students volunteer for the day at the *Whittlesea Expo*. This year there will be 65 service providers and community groups represented there.

Student on work placement

The council gives the students formal training and an induction. They are put into groups and have jobs allocated. The practical value of this kind of activity can't be underestimated. The council always stresses that they cannot run this event without us and the students gain so much from this work experience. It gives them huge confidence for their actual work placement and they feel valued and an important part of something. For these students, who often struggle with isolation, disconnection and settlement issues, this kind of activity makes them feel valued, connected with others and gives them a feeling of self-worth.

Work placements

The 'real juice' in the SLPET course occurs when they go on a two week work placement. The work placement officers work feverishly in the background to find placements for students in, or close to, their chosen field. It is here where the students get to practise the workplace communication skills that they have been developing for the previous seven weeks.

The feedback from the students nearly always includes comments regarding how difficult the Aussie accent is to understand and about how quickly people speak. Far from being overwhelming, the majority of students are excited by this opportunity to engage in an authentic Australian workplace and they relish their experience. Where possible, students stay on in the company as a volunteer to further their learning and experience, sometimes gaining further employment as a result.

Three months after completion of the course, SLPET students are surveyed to get an overview of where they are at. Depending on the cohort, employment is often above 50% and further study is close to the same percentage. Exceptions may occur due to health issues or overseas travel; however, we are pleased with these outcomes.

Finding employment in Australia without a local referee is an incredibly difficult task. By preparing students to have a successful experience in the Australian employment market, we believe we are giving our students the best chance to successfully enter the workplace. SLPET gives students the opportunity to understand Australian workplace culture, further their language skills, gain confidence and improve their chances of work. However, the value of the class goes far beyond this: their work experience makes them feel more connected to their new country, they establish networks and build long term friendships. The course becomes an important building block in their settlement journey and career pathway.

Janet Shaw has over thirty years' experience in education. She has worked for Melbourne Polytechnic in EAL for nine years, most recently teaching SLPET for the AMEP.

Cameron Barker is an EAL teacher with ten years' experience across TAFE, high schools, community centres and overseas. He has worked in areas such as building and construction, real estate, hospitality and psychotherapy. He is passionate about supporting new arrivals to not only learn English and find work in Australia, but to also feel valued for the knowledge and perspective that they bring to the classroom.

Vox Pop: what has worked for you in your classroom?

Compiled by Liz Gunn

This is a new section of informal snapshots that provide examples of teaching practice and hopefully some springboard ideas.

It seems difficult for teachers to find opportunities to sit down and reflect and share with colleagues what has worked in their classrooms. How to capture those times when class activities have flowed, with students excitedly engaged and learning outcomes accomplished? How to find time to review and redesign activities, adjusting for different student groups to ensure more effective learning? How to affirm and extend good teaching and learning among colleagues who are spread across different centres or campuses?

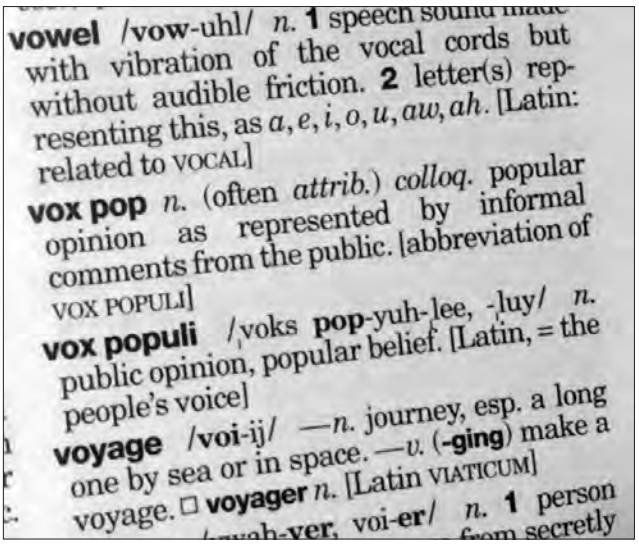
With this in mind, we sent emails and grabbed teachers for quick, on the spot interviews, as well as put out a call in eVALBEC. Charged with a few open-ended questions, the focus was on activities that have worked and how they might be used and adapted for future classes. Here is a selection:

Leisure as a theme for integrated activities

Laine described her success around a set of integrated activities that covered a range of skills. She created an elective whereby students, and teachers, were immersed in learning about leisure. The theme for the unit of work was Free Leisure Activities in Melbourne and it was developed over the duration of the term.

The students gathered and then presented information that reflected their leisure interests, such as free yoga at Federation Square, free fashion exhibitions, free sport for boys, amongst many others. They worked on individual projects and created posters to represent the information. The activity culminated in an exhibition of students' work that was shared with students and teachers from other classes at the institute.

> This unit enhanced students' learning about audience and purpose. Setting up an exhibition for other students became really meaningful. When students started copying chunks of text that had complex vocabulary that perhaps they didn't understand, I could ask them, what does this mean? Are the students from other classes going to be able to read this? Having an audience of their peers gave the students a real purpose for simplifying their language. The students responded well and together we figured out a better way of expressing the information. (Laine)


vowel /vow-uhl/ *n.* **1** speech sound made with vibration of the vocal cords but without audible friction. **2** letter(s) representing this, as *a, e, i, o, u, aw, ah*. [Latin: related to VOCAL]

vox pop *n.* (often *attrib.*) *colloq.* popular opinion as represented by informal comments from the public. [abbreviation of VOX POPULI]

vox populi /ˌvoks **pop**-yuh-ˌlee, -ˌluy/ *n.* public opinion, popular belief. [Latin, = the people's voice]

voyage /**voi**-ij/ —*n.* journey, esp. a long one by sea or in space. —*v.* (**-ging**) make a voyage. □ **voyager** *n.* [Latin VIATICUM]

voyeur /-yah-**ver**, voi-**er**/ *n.* **1** person ... from secretly

Job seeking skills using social media

Sonya works with students who have overseas work and study experience. She helps them to refine their job seeking skills for the Australian employment market. She finds that the social media site, *LinkedIn* is perhaps the most useful tool for assisting students in promoting themselves in the job market. She also provides activities for students to practise job interview techniques and discuss individual skill sets in class.

Sonya includes herself in the learning process so that they learn together how to update *LinkedIn* profiles, how to connect with people, how to send them emails and attachments. This illustrates different methods and ways of connecting with people through *LinkedIn*. Sonya puts emphasis on all the different ways of using the widely used social networking site to help students in their quest to find professional positions in Australia.

> I stress to the students the importance of having correct, relevant, precise and honest information on job seeker profiles. I encourage them to discuss their

skill sets with each other in small groups. They also present information about their skill sets to the whole group with the help of PowerPoint presentations. In this way, they can rehearse and refine the information they eventually present online. Job seeking is all about networking and being seen on the internet. (Sonya)

Nine letter word challenge

Linno begins her class with a nine letter word (9LW) activity related to the topic the class is working on. She uses the 9LW or a word within the 9LW for a spelling and grammar activity. For example, for the numeracy unit on measurement – measuring / ascending / expensive / dimension. Choosing one word per lesson to focus on, the letters are written on a worksheet in a 3x3 table and students find as many words as they can. The only limitations are on proper nouns, contractions and abbreviations. The activity is suited to small or large groups, pair work or individuals. An example of making the activity stretch further into a spelling and grammar activity using the word expensive to look at prefixes or the role of vowels and syllables.

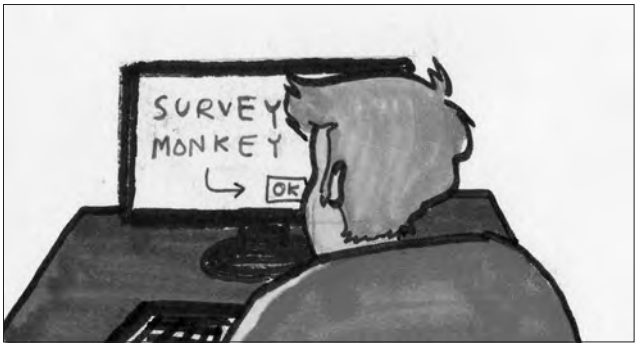
The students really sharpen their word recognition skills and love the 9LW challenge each lesson. (Linno)

Generating language through surveys

Felix has had great success using an online survey tool, Survey Monkey, to assist students to write and conduct surveys. The students use the data from their survey to generate information for comparative writing and presentation tasks in the classroom. The students find Survey Monkey very easy to use and it is great for generating language, especially the language of questions.

Felix added a speaking dimension to the survey activity. Instead of conducting the surveys online, some students printed the surveys and used them for face-to-face interviews. These were conducted with members of the public who they encountered during an excursion to Federation Square. This activity gave students valuable practise speaking with a wide range of English speakers from different backgrounds. They then used the information they had collected to create charts and slides for speaking presentations.

This activity integrated language and literacy elements, which, in turn, facilitated practice of different skills. It also involved a team teaching approach, as teachers



worked with students along the way; on the excursion, in computer classes and preparing students to deliver the final presentations. Survey Monkey is a very good platform for developing authentic language. (Felix)

Journal writing

The first thing students do when they arrive in Johanne's class is write in their daily journal. They are free to write what they like but Johanne gives them a topic as well. This topic (with ACSF writing/learning evidence in mind) may require using a grammar point studied, a reflection of their learning, expressing an opinion or commenting on current events.

The best benefit is that it gives me one on one time with students to correct their writing and instruct them on specific points. (Johanne)

Movie classic for language practice

Finding something interesting for the last week of term can be a challenge. Jyothi decided to read the story of Helen Keller to her class. The vocabulary was difficult for the level of the group, but as some of them were moving to the next level she felt that this could be a taster for them.

They enjoyed the story and one student told of how she had watched the movie a long time ago in her country, in her own language. Jyothi looked on the internet to see if she could find the movie and to her surprise it was there on YouTube. The students watched it together and had a lot of conversation around the teacher's style of teaching, discipline and language learning.

Liz chipped in here to recall how she read the Helen Keller story with her students and then invited a blind student from a neighbouring creative writing course to meet the class. The students composed questions to ask her about

her life, which she generously answered. She then showed them how she used her Braille writing machine and wrote their names in Braille. There were many other literacy topics that sprang from this inquiry into blind literacy practices, such as the art of Braille writing and reading and how computer technology is helping blind people to read online texts.

Triumphs and the tried and true

Through asking teachers about their teaching, we found that overall they were very keen to share their recent classroom triumphs. Some mentioned tried and true methods, while others had woven new technologies and online resources into their teaching techniques. Including input from colleagues was often a part of successful learning activities. Collaboration with students in the construction of knowledge was also an important teaching strategy. Regardless of the situation, asking teachers about what worked confirmed our notion that educators continually bring creativity and innovation to their practice and are keen to discuss this aspect of their work, given time and space.

Editor's note: We hope to run Practical Matters Vox Pops again in 2016 so send your contributions (up to 250 words) to fineprint@valbec.org.au.

Communication is the key

By Margaret Sala

Teaching in a women's prison can be both challenging and enriching as this account by one of the BKI Correction Education team illustrates.

Despite the challenges that teaching ESL at Dame Phyllis Frost Centre (DPFC) presents, the work is all the more exciting and interesting. The boundaries of my knowledge and expertise are pushed and constantly require reflection and compassion, not to mention a large dose of cultural awareness and sensitivity. Also there are a number of constraints which limit the way you would normally deliver English language programs.

Firstly, there is no access to the internet and when I started teaching there, the women had few listening materials. Their dictionaries were very complicated and included a thesaurus nobody could understand or use. There was one picture dictionary in Thai and nearly all my students were Vietnamese! However, I found a large number of other resources (some bi-lingual) all skilfully amassed by the dedicated teachers who had gone before me. So I did have a fairly solid basis to commence with, and I got some new resources fairly quickly.

Obviously, we are unable to go on excursions nor have access to YouTube, iview or SBS on demand, which my colleagues at other campuses use so effectively in their programs. We do have a shared drive which students can access and on which I can place a large amount of material. The shared drive plus the smart boards in each classroom are wonderful resources, allowing for the extension of numerous e-learning activities.

Working with CSWE modules

The curriculum I work with is the Certificates in Spoken and Written English (CSWE). It is well suited to the particular circumstances of my students with its small, explicit modules and access to a plethora of assessment and learning materials, all developed by Adult Migrant English Services (AMES). It is the cornerstone, or yardstick around which I plan activities, but it is just one element in the delivery.

It is important that I make sure that the class is an interesting and stimulating place for students, maybe even a tranquil refuge from everyday prison life. I observed that the students did not articulate into many of the mainstream programs offered, such as information technology, business, printing and graphics. They had formed a small, quite tight-knit community, cooking and gardening together, but rather isolated in the prison.

Therefore, my first objective was to make communication with other inmates and the officers easier by emphasising speaking and role plays. Here the CSWE is the perfect curriculum with a number of spoken modules covering a variety of modes: personal transactional exchanges, telephone messages, short conversations etc. I developed a bi-lingual booklet with all the information needed for a student to easily settle into prison life and we practised role plays for situations such as tele-court.

Crucial to a successful CSWE program at DPFC is to understand what the students' language needs are in prison. For example, how to make a polite request, how to write a letter to request a special family visit, in order to meet these needs and to address them consistently. My second objective was to encourage them by becoming more confident with their language skills to integrate both into the life of the prison, for example by applying for more responsible jobs such as kitchen and canteen billets, and to encourage them to undertake courses other than simply English.

Over time we obtained more software and developed short podcasts to be placed on the shared drive. Here I emphasised listening and pronunciation. The shared drive allowed students to store all of their completed activities in folders for assessment and one to one teacher review. Each CSWE session is meaningful, carefully documented and reviewed by the student and teacher. Students make individual recordings of their punctuation and spoken recounts on our audio recorder and then save them onto a personal sound file.

We downloaded video clips and made a listening songbook with the help of materials from the teacher website http://busyteacher.org. We started a collection of DVDs that included popular titles and some of the indigenous materials we have at DPFC, such as Cathy Freeman's Going Bush, Bush Mechanics, The Rabbit Proof Fence and Storm Boy.

Tailoring resources

The shared drive has allowed me to develop booklets for the students on specific topics that they enjoy and understand. Many students are from rural Vietnam and I found they really liked working on their reading with booklets that could be easily uploaded. My aim here was twofold. I believe that too often CSWE materials allow the students to undertake a session in a resource centre that may be in some ways intrinsically useful: reviewing spelling or comprehension exercises, but does not seem to fully integrate in a positive way into a learning program. In my program, all the CSWE activities are meaningful and attached to some aspect of the modules being studied. As an example, Going Bush is incorporated into spoken and written recounts, or linked to a wider cultural development and understanding of Australia and its people.

Throughout the year, we also have a number of sessions exploring poetry and personal writing. Often this can loosely provide some practice material for the module CSWE I *Comprehending and composing short informal texts*. One of the text conventions can include a blog or diary entry. Both Chinese and Vietnamese learners often have a great pride in their national literature and I exploited this by using the *I am* poetry form. The students often exhibit an innate sense of structure and many of their poems are hauntingly sad.

I am friendly and patient
I am wonder if my children will be happy
I hear a bird sing a song
I see the beautiful flowers
I want learn more English

I am friendly and patient
I pretend to be happy
I feel sad and lonely
I touch my children
I worry about my future
I cry every night because I miss my children

I am friendly and patient
I understand life could be better
I say I believe in God
I dream I play with my children
I try to not thinking too much about being here
I hope that I can see my children every week

My final project this year is to have a combined class called *Speak out,* based around the kinds of activities often undertaken for International Women's Day. This is simply a forum in which everybody contributes something they want to say to a general group discussion. Most of the students are practising for this activity and are looking forward to it.

They have come a long way, as now speaking up is not an issue. Also they are occupying billet positions and are more involved in mainstream programs. They have accomplished a great deal and I continue to learn much from them.

Margaret Sala is a CSWE teacher at DPFC with extensive experience across all fields of language communication and numeracy provision in TAFE and secondary colleges. She has been a Federal verifier for the LLNP program, and has published, lectured and conducted workshops in ESL, Literacy and Numeracy throughout her career. In the last ten years, she has taught in China, worked in support programs for families, women, outworkers and youth at risk and was extensively involved in the roll out of the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF). She is keenly interested in the use of technology to develop and extend the learning needs of her current students.

The power of plants

By Sue Kellow

Life can take some unexpected turns, for both the teacher and the student, with a passion for gardening the common thread.

I was a thirty-eight-year-old, recently qualified English teacher, with a husband and six young children, when I suddenly decided that I wanted to learn more about plants. It was something that crept up on me and then utterly consumed me. I found a year-long certificate course being offered at my local TAFE. It would have been an unusual option for someone who had just graduated from university, but as it turned out, the course was already full.

Not to be put off and with a proverbial bee in my bonnet, I enrolled in an Adult Trade Certificate in Gardening. This was a three-year course, mostly populated by eighteen to twenty-year-old boys, with three or four other confused souls, somewhat like myself. One week in every month, we attended classes to learn how to identify hundreds of plants, lay bricks and drive a bobcat, among other things. I loved every minute of it.

My teachers were all extremely capable and caring individuals. Eventually, they talked me into teaching some modules in the course that I had loved so much myself. From there I started teaching horticulture at the Tarrengower Women's Prison, along with some communication modules at the horticulture campus. After a year or two, I started teaching the Certificate in General Education for Adults (CGEA) at the main campus. Eighteen years later, I am still teaching the CGEA and continue to marvel at the amazing ways in which adult education can transform students' lives for the better.

One of numerous examples for me in my early years at Tarrengower was a woman who was enrolled in horticulture. She had been caught up in a situation that had involved escalating violence. Like many people in prison she had been shocked by the turn of events and struggled to come to terms with what had happened. She threw herself into her horticulture studies and became quite passionate about the art of Bonsai. Inspired and motivated by the children she had waiting for her on the outside, she became absorbed in studying and practising the craft.

Eventually she was released, and to her credit followed through with advice to continue her studies. A month or two after her departure, we received a beautiful card thanking the teaching staff for their encouragement and assistance. As it turned out, her new teacher had rapidly discovered that our student's knowledge exceeded that of her own. Several weeks into the course, the teacher had been unable to continue and, after making a recommendation to those in charge, our student had been given the job. The gratitude that she expressed in the card was truly heartfelt.

I am sure that many teachers have similar stories to mine and would share my gratitude for the experiences they have had. Teaching can be very challenging at times, but it can also be very rewarding. The opportunity to help others to have a more enriched life is a gift of itself.

Sue Kellow is a CGEA Literacy teacher at Tarrengower as well as an avid gardener.

Numeracy matters

Measurement: catering for beginners and mixed groups

By Beth Marr

At VALBEC hosted workshops for numeracy teachers, recently conducted at Werribee and Dandenong, Beth Marr introduced the new Decimals and Measurement sections of the online resource, Building Strength with Numeracy.

In this article, I suggest some of the measurement activities suitable for a range of classes, and some strategies for using them with mixed groups to the benefit of all students, albeit in different ways. Teacher feedback from the workshops indicated strong similarities in student groups, along with similar teaching challenges. Teachers indicated that they mostly have students at the lower levels of numeracy or students with mixed numeracy levels, grouped according to criteria such as their common language requirements.

Fundamental measuring skills

Many adults in lower level numeracy classes have limited past education in practical measurement skills. Others come from cultural backgrounds which have provided very little experience with formal measurement of any kind. This was definitely my experience of adult learners in Timor Leste. With these students in mind, several introductory practical measurement activities have been included in *Building Strength with Numeracy.*

Making a 5 metre Measurer, involves small groups of students creating a five metre measurer from string and a one metre long tape. They then use the measurer to estimate and measure pre-selected distances around the training centre or classroom. This activity has several potential benefits. Firstly, at the end of the activity students should all have a reinforced visual impression of one metre and five metres.

Secondly, they will have learned and practised using the string to measure distances. This includes such skills as always starting from the zero point, as well as measuring distances longer than five metres by laying the string down, marking the endpoint, and laying it down again. Counting in 5s is also part of it. Obvious as these skills may seem to most of us, they are techniques which may not come naturally to all adult students. You may have to demonstrate them clearly several times at the beginning.

Using a hand span to measure

Any students in the group who do not have difficulty with such basic measuring techniques will still benefit from the estimation aspect of this activity. The final benefit is that you will have a number of measuring tools for longer distances, so you don't have to buy and carry around lots of expensive builder's tapes. These 5 metre measurers, wound on a stick to keep them tidy, can be used for several subsequent activities, such as *Paces for Estimating Metres* and *How Far Will My Plane Fly?*

Paces for Estimating Metres, provides strategies to help students measure, adjust and practise using their own pace for estimating lengths and distances. This activity complements *Estimating Lengths in Metric Units*, in which students use parts of their own bodies, such as hand spans,

as an estimating tool. This activity is a great one for getting students to interact with one another in a novel way. It has potential for all learners, whatever their mathematical levels, to develop new estimation skills.

How Far Will My Plane Fly? invites students to create paper planes (instructions provided), fly them, then estimate and measure the distance they fly. This activity is popular with young adult students and active learners. As one workshop participant said:

> My students loved this—they like lessons where they get out of their seats and move around. Also the competition to make even better planes gets them going.

Incorporating language in measurement activities

In addition to the action and practise at estimation and measuring, the plane activity includes opportunity for calculating differences and using the language of comparison such as, shorter/longer than, and shortest/longest. There are suggestions for modelling in the teacher notes and explicit questions in *Student Activity Sheets.*

The language of comparison, estimation, measuring using a tape and calculation of differences is developed further in the activity *Taller or Shorter?* In this activity, students estimate and measure heights and create sentences of comparison about each other such as:

- Ahmindo is taller than Elisa.
- Maya is the second tallest person in the class.
- I am 3 centimetres shorter than Ari.

Combinations of estimation, measurement and language in the one activity provide greater potential for all students to benefit from a single activity. It also encourages them to mix as a whole class for at least some of the time, rather than all doing individual numeracy worksheets set at different levels.

Catering for different abilities

Another approach to developing numeracy related language is used in *Back to Back Times* which encourages students to work in pairs to interpret, speak and listen to times on analogue clock faces. In this activity, sets of increasing levels of difficulty are supplied. This strategy, which can be applied in many circumstances, enables teachers to subtly pair students of roughly similar levels of ability. This ensures that all students are engaged in, and challenged by, the same activity, even if they are working at different levels.

The strategy may also be used with the *Matching Times* activity since five sets of differing difficulty are included. Some sets of cards consist of times expressed in different modes, digital, analogue and 24 hour time (advanced set). They mix words, numbers and diagrams. Others explore longer times and comparisons between days, weeks, months etc. involving basic fractions such as half a year.

Why estimation?

Many of the examples discussed so far have mentioned estimation, which may surprise some teachers new to adult numeracy teaching. In the world of adults, estimation is just as important as accurate measurement and related calculations. However, traditional teaching of measurement tends to have focussed on rote learned rules for converting between units and using formula for calculating area and volume.

What it has not done well is enhance students' sense of measurement, being the knowledge which would give meaning to descriptions we read or the results of any calculations we may need to do. Estimation is needed to decide: Is this answer reasonable? Neglect of this skill in formal education means that even if your students have achieved high levels of maths, they may not have developed the numeracy skill of estimation. They will benefit from estimation and measurement activities, just as much as learners at a lower level of mathematical skill.

A 'sense of' measurement

Having a 'sense of' measurement means that if we hear measurements, such as someone is 195 cm tall, or we need 8 litres of water to mix with a cleaning product, then we have an idea of what that looks like. We can visualise it or make some meaning from the information.

This ability to visualise usually depends on our own personal references or benchmarks, things that we refer to in order to compare the quantity and gain a sense of its size. For the examples above, our own height or the volume of a household bucket would serve as useful references. Similarly, the times taken for common activities serve as a reference for judging less familiar time intervals. Explicitly encouraging students to develop and work with these personal references is important. Two approaches are modelled in the Measurement module of the resource.

Students doing a group activity

Developing personal references

Practical guess, estimate and measure activities, as described earlier, develop students' strategies to estimate measurements and use of personal references, like hand spans, arm lengths or paces for judging lengths or distances. Additional activities, *Estimating Metric Volumes?* and *How Heavy is that?* use common household objects, like buckets, cups and spoons, for estimating volume/capacity; and familiar supermarket items, such as rice, pasta, sugar or potatoes for comparing weights. Similarly, *Just a Minute* invites students to judge when a minute has elapsed and to estimate and measure what can be done in that time.

The second approach to developing personal references is that of pair and small group discussion activities. For example, *Matching Metrics, Metric True or False* and *The One Most Likely* and *What do we use this for?* These provide stimuli for learners to share and extend their existing personal references and metric general knowledge. Using a variety of questions allows for diverse learner contributions drawn from their differing cultural, domestic backgrounds or from their work, hobbies or sporting interests.

Finding out about your students

Pair and small group discussion activities can also be useful for ascertaining your students' existing knowledge before commencing to teach about measurement. For example, when I asked a group of Timorese adults to sort the cards from *Sorting and Ordering Metric Units* into categories: length, weight and volume, their lack of prior exposure to metric units was quickly apparent. I then picked out the length cards and used them to discuss the unit names and the relationships between kilometres, metres, centimetres, thus introducing the idea of prefixes. We then moved on to develop the personal references of fingers, hands and arms to conduct a lively guess, estimate and measure activity in centimetres.

Feedback

I was pleased to hear from two teachers how much their students had enjoyed participating in the *Metric Quizzes,* a revision activity set up as a trivia quiz with teams. One teacher was from a TAFE Women's Centre and the other from a male prison setting.

Here is some email feedback from an educator at an interstate not-for-profit RTO:

> Such wonderful resources! Thank you so much for these they are perfect for my adult learners. I have been so frustrated as I find most resources at this level of learning are directed towards younger learners and often not related to the core skills that adults need in real life. After spending months developing my own assessments I found myself having to develop workbooks for my clients and this was turning into an almost impossible task. Being so busy teaching and having no time left to research and write. Now, thank goodness, I don't have to do this, I can just concentrate on teaching with your amazing resources.

Feedback on how you have used any of the activities with your students is always welcome and helpful. Email: bethmarr@westnet.com.au.

Beth Marr has worked in adult numeracy over several decades, in which she has developed resources and conducted workshops and training across Australia and in Timor-Leste. She is committed to her work in adult education and continues to inspire a new generation of numeracy teachers.

Technology matters

Learner productivity with Google

By Michael Gwyther

Keeping up with developments in digital technologies need not be burdensome, with some suggestions here to implement in the classroom and workplace.

Digital literacy is a term that has gained currency with the rise of digital technologies. For the literacy and numeracy teacher, it adds another level for learners to negotiate in making sense out of the myriad of visual, auditory and intellectual typologies that exhibit our capacity to operate independently and individually. Many teachers across the VET and ACE sectors, shy away from the use of digital technologies with their learners through a mixture of their own anxiety and a misunderstanding of the ubiquitous nature of digital communication.

In my own practice, I was happy to stay a step ahead of students when introducing various digital tools so long as their use reflected some core plank of the curriculum being delivered with learners. It made for some anxious moments but it helped with students seeing me as a learner too. My advice is to grab the basics on your own, plan a purpose for each tool and give it a go. Start with the task and teach the technology as students engage and negotiate the stages to achieve the outcome.

Digital literacy, for me, is essentially about publishing the self through everyday tasks and identity expression. It involves the capacity to store and reuse digital content sourced from the internet to critically appraise and unpack the language and symbolism used in a variety of online multimedia.

I think that the following components are key aspects for developing digital literacy:

- Curate—collect information from the web
- Organise—categorise information collected by topics or collections
- Evaluate—clarify a resource for its accuracy and usefulness for purpose
- Share—recognise informal learning occurs through shared digital content
- Participate—have an opinion or idea that you communicate with others online via sharing, publishing or direct text or voice content
- Connect—communicate with and share information with individuals or groups online.

Of course, for many of the more social aspects of digital literacy listed here, your initial practice would be to consider the classroom participants as 'the world'. Introduce tasks so they can safely begin to use various personal productivity tools before embarking on strategically connecting with information or outside users based on their own interests, or the broader classroom themes.

Exploring the Google suite

Google provides learners with a range of tools on the one log in to support many of the objectives for consolidating literacy skills with learners:

- Email—send and receive messages, address book
- Calendar—create endless calendars, share with others or be added by others
- Google Documents—online word processing, spreadsheets and presentations
- Google Drive—cloud file storage for all digital documents
- Maps—search for locations as well as create and label customised maps with added text labels and images
- YouTube—search for videos, subscribe to channels, save and create playlists
- Blogger—create your own online journal.

Google gives great flexibility, depending on your infrastructure situation. Available through the web, there are also apps for all smartphones and tablets. Using Google helps to entrench personal productivity skills that students can continue to use long after their learning with you has concluded.

Let's take a look at the more common features that come with a Google account once a student has set up a personal account. The list is overwhelming but tools can be chosen for specific purposes or needs within your curriculum so that their use is built into their day-to-day work.

The easiest way to get started is to create a Gmail account at https://www.google.com.au/. Once a Gmail account is created learners have access to all the other Google tools attached to their account by clicking on the nine squares icon in the top right hand corner.

Gmail (connect)

Start here to help learners understand how to connect with others using email, which is the cornerstone of sharing in all the other Google tools. Learners can create simple folders to store various message types (family, learning) as well as assemble address books.

Find out more at https://support.google.com/mail/?hl=en#topic=3394144

Calendar (organise and share)

Calenders can assist learners to organise time and commitments. They can share their calendars or specific events with each other at the level of viewer and or editor.

Calenders can also be used to:

- document activities and tasks on particular days, or during work placements
- share important dates with learners, for example holidays, due dates for tasks, birthdays and project milestones
- set reminders for important dates, ten minutes, one day or a week in advance with notifications coming by email or text message.

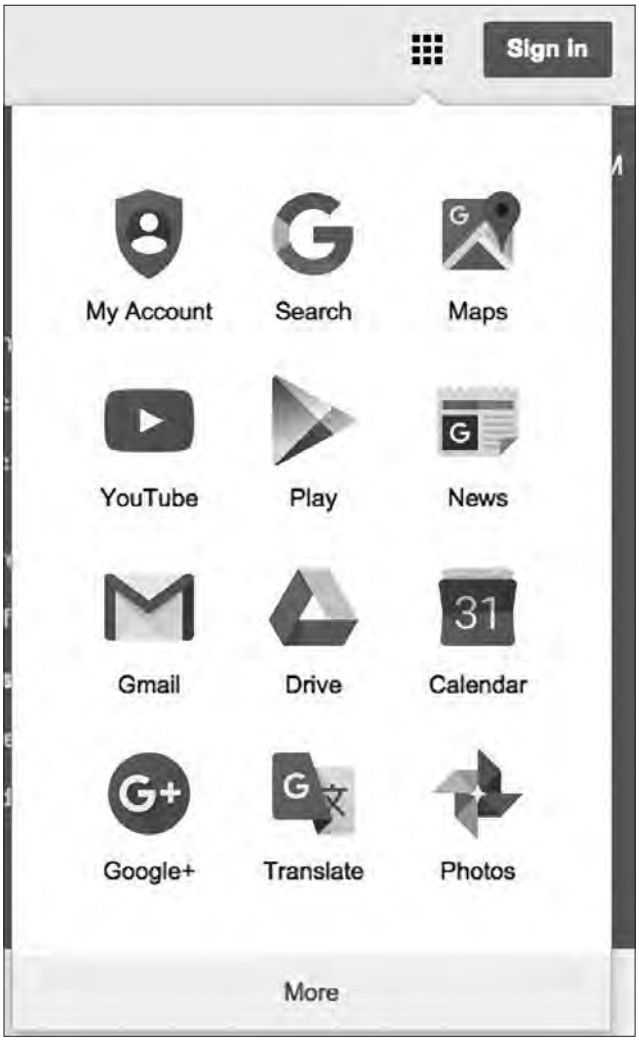
Find out more at https://support.google.com/calendar/answer/2465776?hl=en

Using Google Documents (participate, connect, share, evaluate)

With Google documents, your learners can easily create, share, and edit documents online. Tied to Google documents is Google Drive, an online file cloud storage area where learners can store and organise their documents into folders.

Here are a few specific things you can do using Google documents with your learners:

- Upload Microsoft Word, OpenOffice, RTF, HTML or plain text documents, create documents from scratch, and download online documents.
- Edit documents online simultaneously with other learners, and invite learners to view them. Learners can share documents with other Google users in your class, choosing whether to extend sharing rights to editing or viewing documents.
- Keep track of who made changes to a document and when, and roll back to any version. This is terrific for keeping track of individual responses in group writing projects.
- Learners can comment on sections of text they select. If sharing a document, others can see and respond to comments made.
- Publish documents online to the world, as webpages or post documents to your blog.
- Email your documents out as attachments.
- Submit written assessments as shared files with their trainer.



Google apps

Organisations also use Documents to share and work together on a range of administrative and managerial tasks.

Find out more at https://www.google.com.au/docs/about/

Google Drive (organise)

All documents created with Google Documents are automatically stored in Google Drive, the cloud file storage component of Google. Other files not created with Documents, such as images, audio and video can be stored and shared if required by others. Each file has its unique URL that if shared and made public can be viewed by others online. Learners can create folders to store and organise their learning files, assessments and other documents they have had shared with them or downloaded.

Find out more at https://support.google.com/drive/answer/2424384?hl=en

YouTube

The largest video sharing site in the world, YouTube gives learners the capacity to upload their own videos and share with the world. A good place to start here is to encourage learners to subscribe to channels of interest and to save for later viewing the videos they find. Learners can also create playlists of videos and share them with others by URL. This is a good way for teachers to also curate video and share with learners by either their blog, group or email.

Find out more at https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/4489286?hl=en and also https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/4489417?

Blogger (participate, share, evaluate)

Each Google account has a blog attached to it that only commences once the learner has created a name and activated. Blogs can be used as a portfolio of a learner's work, a journal, a record of group work or a place to publish their writing. Images can be added along with video or audio embedding from sites such as YouTube, SoundCloud or Slideshare.

People can follow the blog and be notified once the learner has created a new post. Blogs can also be used by teachers to provide guidance on each session's tasks. They can provide links for learners to curate and pose guide questions to provide context for any readings or video provided.

Google Groups (connect, participate, share)

Google also provide Google Groups if you wanted to provide a private group space for your learners. Similar to blogger, it also allows discussions between group members.

Find out more at https://support.google.com/blogger/answer/1623800?hl=en

Google Photos (curate, organise, share)

Finally, Google Photos provide learners with a way of storing images and if required, sharing their own images online.

You can learn more at https://support.google.com/photos/answer/6220402?hl=en

Google storage is very generous with 15 Gigabytes of online storage space across each of the tools. Your learners will be well set up once they have spent time with you working through the right tools for their purpose from the Google apps suite. However at a minimum you could concentrate first on Email, Calendar and Google Docs.

Perhaps the only thing missing is a web content curation tool to easily capture and share items collected from the web. Take a look at Pinterest for a good visual alternative for learners to collect and share online resources.

Google is not just for learners. Organisations can also benefit from the collaborative tools for sharing information, keeping everyone in the loop and drafting policy and other key administrative documents.

Michael Gwyther commenced e-learning work with ALBE & ESL learners in Adult & Community Education in the mid 1990s. He began mentoring ACE teachers in 1998, and from 2001, co-owned and managed yum productions. Michael now oversees a variety of coaching, mentoring and training programs to assist practitioners and RTOs to introduce learner-centred and social approaches to digital learning. Michael is also an e-learning developer working with corporate, TAFE, RTO and ACE clients. This year he has been working on Blended Learning at Federation University TAFE and is a mentor with the VET Development Centre.

Open forum

When one door closes, another door opens

By Beverley Campbell

In her final piece for 2015, Beverley Campbell reflects on the theories and theorists who have influenced her career in adult education and underpin her current work with Rural Australians for Refugees.

'I feel like doors will forever open and close…'. Australian actress Sarah Snook chose a commonly used metaphor to describe the opportunities life has offered her in a flourishing acting career (The Age, Sunday Life, 20 September, 2015).

I am drawn to this metaphor of doors opening, and alerted to the ways that people use it in conversation. Learners will often reflect on the positive aspects of their learning experiences and the sense of moving forward from one state of being to another. In the context of adult literacy and basic education, how often have we heard the expression that education has resulted in 'opening doors' for the learner?

An open door offers an invitation into the unknown, a sense of anticipation and an element of risk taking. It gives glimpses of new spaces of knowledge beyond, of unexplored rooms of possibilities, and of discovering new ways of thinking, even a new identity; that is, if a person is prepared to take the risk of going through the open door. Opening doors seems an appropriate metaphor for a good education at any level, but is particularly relevant for adult education. In my role as adult educator, I came to realise that, as much as anything, adult education was about extending participants' conceptual repertoire, and thereby opening doors.

When I embarked on further education studies as a mature aged student, I also had my own 'door-opening' moments. My early adult education conceptual landscape was expanded by the writings of Paulo Freire (1970). Such key phrases as 'reading the word, reading the world', and 'sometimes teacher, sometimes learner' had a huge impact on me. Later, this pedagogical framework was extended when I encountered other new ideas and concepts. These led me into new conceptual spaces and allowed me to view the world in a different way along with many of my colleagues.

Other influential writers took my thinking as an educator in new directions and compelled me to rearrange my mental landscape. Reading Lakoff and Johnson's, 'Metaphors we live by', was an epiphany moment for me. According to them, metaphors are not just a poetic device, but turns of phrase, which define people's identities and shape the way they live—life as battle, as journey, as tapestry, as adventure, to name a few.

Then I encountered James Gee, with his socio-linguistic theory, in which he differentiates 'discourse' from 'Discourse' (Gee 1992). According to him, the language of a discourse, is only part of a more expansive Discourse, to which we belong, within a social network, socially acceptable ways of thinking, feeling, valuing, believing and acting. At the same time, I was reading Vygotsky, with his zone of proximal development (ZPD) and the importance of scaffolding in cognitive development (Vygotsky 1978).

But for these ideas to find a place in my conceptual framework, I needed to have some content to go with the concepts. I well remember my first use of the term, 'post-modernism' in a public setting. I knew the term and hoped that my use of it was in the right context, rather than betray that I was not quite sure that I knew what I was talking about. Some years after reading Gee and Vygotsky, yet another metaphorical door was opened for me when I discovered the work of Russian philologist, Mikhail Bakhtin, and I was able to add his theory of the 'dialogic imagination' and the 'dialogic self' to my conceptual repertoire. According to Bakhtin (1981), the dialogic self is a social self, engaged in a social world, with the other in its many forms.

Expanding conceptual frameworks

This year, during the southern hemisphere winter, we spent five hot weeks in the German summer. Previously, I lived in Germany for nearly four years and so I have a reasonable working knowledge of German. But learning a second language as an adult means that there will always be gaps in vocabulary for certain areas of conceptual knowledge. I can participate in everyday conversation, but a move into more abstract areas of ideas and specific discourses means I am often lost for words. Failure to grasp the meaning of one or two key words results in missing the whole meaning of aspects of a conversation, or of a passage in a newspaper article.

We were in Germany at the time of the Greek financial crisis. The nightly news was dominated by daily developments in Europe and Greece. There were limits to my comprehension of the issues, limited both by my conceptual understanding of the situation in English, and by my knowledge of the specific German vocabulary required to understand the issues. As frustrating as our television viewing experience was, my understanding of the issues and my German language were helped by further conversations about the situation with German friends, especially with their differing points of view.

Back home again, we watch television, once again in English. Nothing fits more comfortably than the glove of one's mother tongue. News of the Greek financial crisis has been overtaken by the events of another crisis, that of the mass migration of Syrian refugees into Western Europe. Now I am able to understand the issues, as we watch the images of crowds of people, standing at the border, between Austria and Germany. They cry out, 'Germany', begging to be taken in, as they seek a safe place away from their war-torn homeland. And yet subsequent news reports indicate that even that once open door has been closed to the newcomers.

I have not been involved in the frontline of action in adult education for some time, but my years of involvement remain an integral part of my identity. Rarely do I have to call on Vygotsky's or Bakhtin's theories; they remain, nevertheless, part of my thinking. Several years ago I moved to live in rural Victoria. These days, rather than educational concepts, a new vocabulary has been inserted into my conceptual framework, through my involvement with Rural Australians for Refugees. Now I grapple with the discourse of refugees and asylum seekers, with its

key concepts of 'refoulement' and regional response, resettlement, temporary protection visas and off-shore detention centres.

To engage in any conversation, both for or against, I need to have some content and understanding of the key concepts. But coming to understanding does not happen in isolation. Rather it happens within a community, where people's levels of knowledge vary and where the learning is both communal and social. And so my conceptual repertoire has been expanded well beyond adult literacy education, and with it I have gained a glimpse through the doorway into the unsettling, and unsettled, world of the refugee and the asylum seeker.

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Beverley Campbell has a long career as teacher, academic, past president of VALBEC and author of More than Life Itself: a handbook for tutors of adult literacy and more recently, Reading the Fine Print: a history of the Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council (VALBEC) 1978–2008, among other research work and publications.

Loud and proud—2015 Learn Local awards

By Linno Rhodes

VALBEC committee members have been involved in the Learn Local awards for several years, both on judging panels and attendees at the Learn Local awards night. Linno Rhodes represented VALBEC again in 2015.

Even though it was the fifth time I have attended the Learn Local Awards, I felt a familiar sense of excitement and anticipation. The first Learn Local awards presentation that I attended was a daytime event at Birrarung Marr. I clearly remember the displays featuring Learn Local providers and examples of learners' work. The setting was amazing, but mostly I enjoyed the company of a multiplicity of learners and Learn Local staff. Everyone was dressed in their finery, with their pride in achievement out on display.

This year was no different. The 2015 Learn Local Awards were held in the ballroom of the Collingwood Town Hall. The event was well attended by the Minister for Training and Skills, Hon. Steve Herbert, ACFE Board members, Department of Education, Participation branch staff, peak body representatives, members of partnering organisations, business enterprises and most importantly, learners and Learn Local staff, teachers, managers, and community workers.

People had traveled from all over the state to attend this annual gala event. The excellent catering, table and stage floral arrangements, dancers and music were all provided by various social enterprises and Learn Local organisations. The atmosphere was convivial and as the awards were announced, the cheers were loud and proud. Each category was short-listed to feature three finalists and on the night, one winner announced. It was affirming to hear of the wonderful achievements of each finalist as they were presented to the appreciative audience.

This year saw the inaugural AMES Diversity Innovation award, which was won by Nhill Learning Centre, with finalists from Dandenong Neighbourhood House and Wyndham Community and Education Centre. Each organisation had excelled in the ways that their programs catered for the diverse needs of their respective community.

Karen Fleischer was awarded the Outstanding Practitioner award in recognition of the work she has done at Paynesville Neighbourhood Centre. Over twenty-three years she has worked tirelessly for the centre to see it grow and develop to meet the changing needs of the East Gippsland community.

Karen Hokai from East End Community House was awarded the Outstanding Pre-accredited Learner award. Karen has gone from strength to strength, beginning as a keen gardener, then after completing, and excelling in several courses, she has become the community garden coordinator. She assists teaching in the Spadework program and is helping to drive a new social enterprise to supply seedlings to local outlets.

From 2016, the Outstanding Pre-Accredited Learner will be known as the Rowena Allen Award, in recognition of the huge contribution that Rowena Allen made to the ACE sector in her role as Chair of the ACFE Board.

The regions were well represented in each award category, with finalists from across the metropolitan and regional areas. Over the past few years, I have noticed how strong the Learn Local sector is in regional areas that have been hard hit by natural disasters and where people are often living in economic hardship. The common thread in the stories of these finalists is always the (re)building and strengthening of community, which I think is what best characterises the Learn Local sector.

I am looking forward to the next Learn Local Awards night and seeing again the amazing work of people in the ACE sector. Consider nominating your organisation, a program, learner or practitioner for the 2016 Learn Local awards. Information is available on the Learn Local website: www.learnlocal.org.au.

2015 National ACAL Conference

By Meg Cotter

Being greeted by conference organisers donning animal beanies was a novel start to the 'Resilience, Risk Preservation: the evolving world of adult literacies' conference at the Adelaide zoo. Meg Cotter attended as a VALBEC delegate and reports on some of the highlights.

The conference theme of 'Resilience, Risk, Preservation: the evolving world of adult literacies' was taken up by the keynote speakers, Vincent (Jack) Kanya Kudnuitya Buckskin, and the Governor of South Australia, His Excellency the Honorable Hieu Van Le. Both were inspiring speakers who shared their very personal life stories to illustrate the importance of education and language.

Jack Buckskin grew up not knowing his traditional language and culture. What he knew was a mixture of many different indigenous languages mixed with English. He described the impact of colonisation and the mission system had on destroying aboriginal languages. In the missions it was forbidden to speak first language but at night the kids from different places would share different words. In the end they would string together sentences that came from everywhere and an Aboriginal English language developed.

This example he likes to give to demonstrate the mix of words and languages:

> Look at those ugly shoes on the lady's foot.
>
> Nukkan the jooberty boogerties on the wiina's tjina.
>
> Nukkan = Ngarrindjeri; jooberty = Narrunga; boogerties = Narrunga; wiina = Wirangu and Tjina = Pitjanjatjara.

For a time as a young man Jack felt adrift, especially when he lost his sister. Eventually, through starting to do some traditional dancing, he became interested in his roots, language and culture of his Kaurna heritage. Kaurna is the language of the traditional people in South Australia's Plains. Jack is on a mission to renew the Kaurna language and culture. After first learning Kaurna in 2006, he now teaches it to indigenous and non-indigenous, young and old people in Adelaide.

Jack was named the 2011 Young South Australian of the Year, and was a finalist for Young Australian of the Year 2011. A documentary made about Jack called 'Buckskin' took out the 2013 FOXTEL Australian Documentary Prize at the 60th annual Sydney Film Festival, for which the selection jury praised his talent. We were fortunate to hear some of this talent when Jack performed for the ACAL audience with traditional song, clap sticks and didgeridoo.

Hieu Van Le, with his wife Lam, came to Australia by boat as refugees from Vietnam in 1977. They were one of the early groups of Vietnamese refugees to arrive in Darwin Harbour. Once they were settled in Adelaide, they had to learn a new language and culture. Mr Le's qualifications were not recognised and he had to start his economics degree from the beginning, even using some of the same textbooks that he had studied in Vietnam. To add insult to injury, he also had to pay back the government study assistance that he received as it wasn't valid for a qualification that had already been completed.

Despite these setbacks, he did learn a lot about Australia at university and it laid a good a foundation for a successful career. Mr Le worked in the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ATSIC) and served on many community boards and committees before becoming Governor of South Australia in September 2014. He is the first Vietnamese-born person to be appointed a Vice-Regal position in the world.

What is in a name?

Interestingly, both speakers focused on sport and names as significant factors in their lives. Something as simple as a name carries so much meaning. For Jack, his name carries the meaning of where he comes from. In English his name is Vincent Buckskin but his family called him Jack after his grandfather's father. Kanya 'rock' is his Kaurna name. His newly derived Kudnuitya 'father of the black swan' comes from his daughter. He is Kaurna through his grandmother and his grandfather's father was Wirangu and his mother was Narungga, so therefore he is a proud Kaurna/Narungga and Wirangu man.

The Honorable Hieu Van Le talked about fitting into Australia by trying to understand the game of cricket,

which he originally thought was two insects fighting. He jokingly said he even went as far as calling his sons Kim and Don, in the hope they would be good cricket players. He lamented he still doesn't understand cricket and his sons are hopeless cricketers, but good pharmacists.

Both of their stories showed their struggles to find their place in their lives and how important education was as a means of achieving their goals. For me listening to these two stories there were two 'tear-up moments' where the story conjures up an image or idea that is so significant and powerful that it brings tears to your eyes. It was the ordeal of the escape from Vietnam and the conditions of the journey for Mr Le, and finally the image he described of seeing seagulls. Everyone on the boat knew that seagulls meant land. They were close to Australian land and the seagulls were 'like angels'. For Jack, it was when he ended his presentation with saying that his daughter was the first language speaker (L1) of his Kaurna language since 1830. This was both shocking and wonderful at the same time.

The conference was a full and stimulating two days and I took lots of notes. Below are my observations from some of the workshop sessions I attended.

Are we there yet?

As language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) teachers we need to address the numeracy skills of our students, especially when they move into mainstream vocational education and training (VET) courses. We also need to support students in foundation programs with the numeracy skills they need for further study and work.

Chris Tully has been working in this area for many years and currently delivers numeracy support in VET programs at Melbourne Polytechnic. She has been able to see firsthand how numeracy is used in VET and identify where gaps are. This workshop concentrated on issues from the group regarding the teaching of numeracy and then focused on the common gaps in maths and numeracy and how best to cover them in foundation courses.

Chris posed the question: So what do you think are the most important mathematical concepts to teach our students? We then brainstormed our answers and for the most part were on track in identifying the top five, although algebra caught us out. Chris has identified the following five mathematical concepts as important: Basic operations; Measurement; Calculator Use; Fractions; Decimals; Percentages and Algebra.

Chris recommended starting with estimation activities, as well as some practical activities, and listed some YouTube videos about algebra, calculus and equations to engage our students, and us in key concepts and operations. She also used some shocking case studies to illustrate the importance of numeracy in the workplace. Students could do this as a reading activity to reinforce the importance of numeracy, particularly in life threatening situations, such as measuring out the dosage of medicine. This was a highly informative and interactive workshop with lots of discussion from participants.

What learners do as they read words and what this means for teachers.

Janet McHardy from Kimberley Training Institute, describes herself as a 'reading bear' with over 20 years' experience in teaching adults in New Zealand (NZ) and Australia. She is currently doing her doctoral study on single word reading practices of adult literacy learners at the University of Western Australia, as well as doing workplace literacy work.

Janet's study focused on 36 NZ and West Australian adult learners of reading and first language English background. She sat with each participant for one and a half hours and listened to them reading and talked about how they read. She found that many learners have a very limited set of strategies to decode or attack words. Many of them relied on a small bank of sight words. She described two types of reader:

- Memoriser: relies on a small bank of sight words; only knows some words; does not show word attack skills and relies on memory.
- Partial Processor: will have a go at sounds; relies on first letter; unable to blend and does not recognise irregular words.

Janet has very strong views on using context when reading, as research has shown this slows the reader down. She says it can be used but not as the first port of call. The implications of the study she believes highlights the need for diagnostic assessment tools for reading, individualised instruction and a rich exposure to vocabulary for learners.

This session was very interesting but I came away with more questions than answers. What are the right diagnostic tools to use? Who should be using them under what conditions? Where should they be used? How will testing be funded? How do we cater to individual instruction in our courses? And how best to develop the word attack skills required?

Fortunately, a later session in the day with speech pathologist, Rosalie Martin, covered and reinforced these notions as well as offered some ideas for instruction.

Sound Systems—a phonemically-based approach to adult literacy

Rosalie Martin is a clinical speech pathologist at the Glenorchy LINC, Tasmania and has 30 years' experience. She has a special interest and skills in assessment and intervention for people with literacy acquisition disorders, autism and social communication impairments. She began her presentation by explaining that when people think of speech pathologists they tend to think of people who help kids with stutters and speech impediments. In fact, that is only a very small part of the job. It turns out that mostly they are teaching people to read.

Speech pathologists see people (usually children) with severe literacy acquisition difficulties and teach them how to acquire literacy through phonemic processing. Rosalie became interested in working with adults when she volunteered at a prison. She noticed at the prison that there was a sub-group of people who were keen to learn and did their homework but made very little gain. As part of an action research project she teamed up with some LLN coordinators and watched their tutors at work.

What she discovered was that although the tutors were very proficient and knowledgeable in certain areas they were challenged in key areas, such as: knowledge about learning disorders; knowledge in phonemic awareness and how to teach it and they did not have a uniform way to describe language acquisition.

Rosalie believes that people who experience impairment in literacy either through neurodevelopmental predisposition or though reduced stimulation and experience, must have learning that includes phonemic processing. She advocates that speech pathologists have skills in the assessment and treatment of neurological based learning impairments and they bring evidence-based approaches, which can work well with adult literacy teaching.

In her action research project she trained tutors of four learners with skills drills to activate phonemic awareness. Tutors met with the learners one-on-one for two sessions a week for four months. Rosalie humorously said she knew that it was widely believed that drills had a bad name in teaching and learning. For some it is 'Drill to kill learning', however, she likes to think of it as 'Drill to thrill'.

To re-wire the brain with the skills requires a lot of practice and repetition, with just the right amount of challenge and lots of positive language to support the learner. Over four months, three of the four learners significantly increased their reading in word identification, word attack skills, knowing sounds and passage comprehension. This was a fascinating session and the sort of multi-disciplinary approach to consider more widely in adult literacy teaching and learning.

Beside the whiteboard

Agent Chalk—on a digital technologies mission

An interview with Michael Chalk by Lynne Matheson

Always up for a challenge, Michael Chalk has been an 'early adopter' in the ACE sector, inspiring changes in teaching practice through utilising a range of new technologies. For over two decades, teachers and students at Preston Reservoir Adult Community Education (PRACE) in particular, have benefited from his work as a teacher, resource developer, mentor and indomitable enthusiast.

For many people in the ACE sector, the name Michael Chalk is synonymous with innovative approaches to using digital technologies and mobile devices in the classroom, as well as the development of a range of original online resources. He has been an influencer and mentor to many teachers and brings a gentle, humanist approach to his work. He has shared his excitement for the possibilities that each new wave of technologies has brought. In this next stage of his career—after PRACE—he is looking forward to freelance work, with some teaching in pre-accredited programs. Over a delicious brunch at the Red Door Corner café in Northcote, Michael spoke about some of the highlights of his career.

What have been some of the pivotal moments for you working with new technologies and developing online resources?

The first few times I experimented with teaching adult literacy in the computer classroom were quite challenging. I quickly realised that my energy had to be divided between the machines and the people. Armed with a box of floppy discs and no internet, it was a test to make things work and keep everyone engaged.

Exploring audio technologies with a group of ACE teachers in a project, *Can You Hear Us?* enabled me to see the different ways teachers could try out activities in the classroom, given the right tools. Another major breakthrough was when PRACE made the move from digital projectors to having large televisions installed in the classroom, using Apple TV connected to laptops or tablets. It was liberating for both staff and students and certainly changed the classroom dynamics.

As part of the Flexible Learning Leaders project, I met educators from around the country. This network extended for me while working on the Community Engagement project with Josie Rose and Mary Hannan, and then around Victoria as part of the ACFE funded e-mentor projects, which emerged from the AccessACE research projects.

One of my favourite activities in recent years has been supporting Barb Matthews with her Making Connections group. These people have a range of disabilities and are building their literacy skills and finding new ways to connect with their local community. One student was quite vocal about not liking computers, but she loved the camera on her iPhone. So I suggested we try using the iPads to make stop-motion animation videos. Barb came up with the idea of combining this with their cooking activities, and so we made animations about pizza ingredients. It is always good to work with teachers and learners directly. Sometimes I feel like I spend too much time staring at a computer screen, and not enough time connecting with people.

What have been some highlights of your career pathway?

Before becoming a teacher, I was a bartender and a baker, having studied languages and travelled the world. I completed the Certificate in Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Adults (CTEFLA), now known as the Cambridge CELTA. Teaching was my entrance to professional work and I soon began to successfully blend my passion for new technologies and teaching.

PRACE needed a literacy teacher for their innovative Horticulture and Literacy course. They didn't hire me for that one, but there was an ESL class that I started working with instead, which lead to further teaching and project work. For the past 15 years, I have been the Flexible Learning Co-ordinator. My work at PRACE has given me opportunities to work with many great teachers, including the PRACE PageTurners crew, with whom I have recently developed a new shopping-cart style website.

I have recently taken up a role with the Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL), in collaboration with Research and Practice in Adult Literacy (RaPAL), a UK literacy organisation, working on their Resilience project. This

will involve gathering learner stories, both written and digital, that will be curated online. Another role I have is supporting Meg Cotter in an ACFE project building up communities of practice across the ACE sector that will help connect teachers and develop digital literacy.

What has influenced you in developing your teaching philosophy and practices?

Working in small community organisations has probably strengthened my desire to create nurturing and supportive learning environments. I developed my appreciation for group-based learning in my first studies, as the CTEFLA course had you on your feet teaching from day one. The methodological approach was very much about enabling people to learn from each other as much as possible. Working with technology, you learn fast that people need to be hands-on and try things out for themselves, as much as possible.

When I started work at PRACE, there were no computers. Now the organisation has multiple computer rooms; a fleet of laptops and iPads and other devices for teachers to use in class; large TV screens or projectors in all the classrooms. They are using cloud-based software such as google apps for education (GAFE) for a whole range of purposes, including sharing resources and booking schedules across many venues (gdrive), intranet (gsites), email (gmail) as well as project communication (g+ communities). Things have changed and teachers have embraced using social media and sharing resources and being able to communicate via their tablets, both in and out of the classroom.

It is interesting to see teaching practices come and go. I found the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach fascinating, but never managed to find a book that really broke it down and made it accessible for the adult literacy teacher. Antonia Stone's *Keystrokes to Literacy* (1991) has always informed my practice when dealing with literacy and technologies. I remember talking with Josie Rose about this at a conference in the late 1990s. Stone's approach introduces word processing skills by stealth, as you present literacy learning activities on screen rather than on paper. This lends itself to Language Experience type activities and recycling learner texts, which is particularly valuable for low level students. It also takes away the confrontational aspect of the blank page.

I like to work with a data projector, or some kind of big screen. Across all other educational sectors it has now become the norm to have classrooms fully set up so that

teachers can walk in with a USB stick or their files in a cloud somewhere, and start presenting on the screen. In the ACE sector we are gradually catching up.

What have been some of your best teaching experiences?

I really enjoyed teaching numeracy in a VCAL context. I was taking part in one of the AccessACE research projects and we were experimenting with different ways to use technology to engage the learners. I remember the effect on the group the first time we brought up google maps on the big screen. Suddenly, everyone wanted to take charge of the main computer and demonstrate places that they knew or had visited.

My favourite group of students has always been a group I worked with in the late 1990s. It was made up of women who grew up in Europe around the time of WWII and who were denied education for a range of reasons. When they were finally given the opportunity to develop their own skills, after a lifetime of migration and work and family duties, they were so delighted to have that experience. It was wonderful to see their self-belief blossom and grow.

One of our students at PRACE had grown up in a convent and had also been denied education. The nuns decided that she was stupid because of her hearing difficulty. She got to work in the kitchens while her sister was given an education. This woman was such a great student, a very intelligent and quick learner, and very resilient in spite of having experienced such deprivation. She wound up reading one of her poems to the Victorian parliament.

Across the Community Engagement, AccessACE and e-mentor projects I have worked on, it has been great to see small organisations given the chance to be innovative, and to try out new things on a small scale. It has been

really good to see adult educators given the chance to work together and network, share ideas and offer support to each other. One of the greatest challenges for our sector has always been isolation. I have enjoyed being part of any project that finds ways to combat this and bring people together, both in person and online.

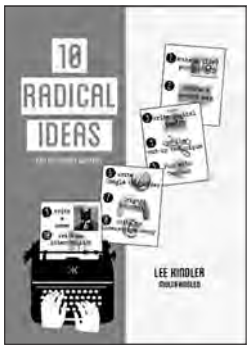
What are some of the challenges of working in the ACE sector?
Working as a sessional teacher in the ACE sector has always been challenging. People try to make a decent wage but end up putting in too many hours and getting burnt out. I think teachers in the ACE sector continue putting in hours over and above what they're being paid for. Some teachers would not be getting much more than the minimum wage, when you count the actual hours they are teaching, and all the hours of preparation and record keeping.

It is difficult for Learn Local and community organisations to compete with monolithic TAFE providers, and all kinds of private providers as well. It is not a level playing field and I think the ACE sector is suffering because of recent doses of compliance based ideology controlled funding. Government funding bodies changing the rules constantly is a huge test for small organisations trying to stay afloat. The real challenge is to balance the competing demands of the auditing bodies, while keeping the needs of the learners foremost. An ongoing challenge is finding ways to deliver certificate-based education in a way that actually provides relevant and effective learning. Systems need to ensure the compliance elements are meaningful and purposeful. Our sector is full of strong-minded, passionate and creative souls who just keep on making things happen because they believe it is the right thing to do.

What's out there

10 Radical ideas for reluctant writers by Lee Kindler

Reviewed by Jennett Colyer and Linno Rhodes



How could you go wrong with a title like this? Added to which is the promise of 'ten immediate, accessible and inspiring writing activities for students who may not feel comfortable getting their ideas out there'. This new book contains hands-on activities that encourage students to take the plunge into writing. There are notes for teachers that explain the features of different text types, where to find examples, and ideas for classroom activities. Activities are supported by free online materials that include infographics, videos, links, maps and game source files that students can use to gain a deeper understanding of each text.

Jennett has been using this resource with her VCAL class at Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre (GNLC). She has found the resource really easy to use and full of some great ideas:

> My VCAL students have such a range of learning preferences that it can be hard to get them to do the same thing. This book appeals to all of them because the activities are so creative and hands-on. So they might be writing something of their own, but do it by cutting up words or making a meme. It is written in language they are used to.

For someone who may not be all that tech savvy, the book explains different media and writing styles in an engaging way. Linno has used it with a mixed group of learners of different ages and backgrounds:

> This is the perfect resource for me as it explains 'techy things' in an easy to understand way—memes? QR readers? Twitter? I understand them all now. The hands-on method suits the learners, but also serves to illustrate to teachers how to do the suggested activities. They are all fun and importantly, easy to carry out in the classroom. Even older learners who are not digital natives, will enjoy these activities, especially making photo stories and using the William Burroughs' cut up method of writing.

Jennett was enthusiastic about the format of the book and how the students could quickly access the online support materials:

> I am across it! It is a great book for the VCAL classroom and for teachers who have run out of ideas. I like the use of digital techniques, such as allowing students to use a QR reader. This is an app that allows you to read a barcode which then takes you to a webpage. It's really another way of clicking a link to access learning activities but really quick and easy. The ideas are fresh and innovative. I have used the photo story suggestions to have my students create a photo story on shapes in the community that worked really well.

10 Radical Ideas for Reluctant Writers by Lee Kindler is published by Multifangled. It is available at http://multifangled.com.au/wp/?page_id=70.

Jennett Colyer is the VCAL Coordinator and teacher at GNLC. Linno Rhodes is the LLN Coordinator and teacher at GNLC.