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By Rosalie Martin

Resilience – stories of adult learning
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Interweaving life experience and teaching practice
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Lynne Matheson reflects on the collection *Mindfulness and Educating Citizens for Everyday Life* (eds) Malgorzata Powietrzynska and Kenneth Tobin; Lindee Conway recommends *Stories of Transformative Learning* by Michael Kroth and Patricia Cranton; Manalini Kane reviews Maggie Power’s *Passages to English 3*.

VALBEC acknowledges the financial support of the ACFE Board

Editorial

Welcome to the first edition of Fine Print for 2017. There is a wealth of inspiring and useful material for all of us who are getting the teaching year underway, and for the adult literacy field in general. Each article goes to the heart of teaching and learning which makes a refreshing departure from the constant administration, which can take up so much of our time.

Rosalie Martin, 2017 Tasmanian of the Year, writes about *Just Sentences*, a prison education program. It is based on a systematic, safe and personal approach to successful literacy learning which combines phonemic awareness and writing.

You will hear the voices of learners, as Keiko Yasukawa and Michael Chalk reflect on the process of gathering stories for the RAPAL/ACAL project Resilience – Stories of Adult Learning. The authors situate the process of eliciting learner stories in the context of the adult literacy field, the inevitable challenges of working across two countries and sensitivities around publication and personal writing.

Elizabeth Gunn writes from the perspective of a close colleague, as she reflects on the rich and varied hands-on experiences Kate Pitman brings to her young adult migrant students. Meg Cotter writes about an ACFE funded project that took a different approach to sharing exemplary practices and programs, each effectively documented on a *YouTube* video.

We continue the theme of personal stories with Greg Curran's approach to digital storytelling. His article not only covers the technical and practical management of the process but also the personal issues for the students, and how they develop the confidence to project and express themselves freely on camera.

Tina Berghella brings home the challenges of health literacy. Her work with Diabetes Victoria, in which she analyses the literacy and numeracy skills of diabetes management, is a reminder of the complex and changing literacy demands on learners.

We move on to the big picture of assessment with Anne Leske and Chemene Sinson's article. The authors have been working with the National Foundations Skills Strategy, and they take us through the 'start-to-finish' model of foundation skills assessment, showing how diagnostic, formative and summative assessment can be embedded in the teaching and learning process.

Marj Sjostrom, 2016 Learn Local Outstanding Practitioner, talks to Lynne Matheson about her day to day work as a teacher and coordinator at Keysborough Learning centre. The interview takes us through the successes and challenges of classroom teaching, as well as the complexities of professional leadership. Marj inspires us with her optimism.

Foreign Correspondence puts our local issues into perspective. Anna Cranney gives an account of her work in Timor-Leste with a parent education program to assist children learning in the home. Finally, we have three reviews of resources picked by the editorial committee to match current needs and interests of teachers.

We hope you enjoy this edition and wish you all the best for 2017.

Sarah Deasey

Convenor of the Editorial committee and this edition of Fine Print.

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.

Just sentences – more than just words

By Rosalie Martin



Imagine a prisoner with low skills and a vocabulary strong in the colourful four-letter words of English. A lot of other ‘big words’ pass him by; he doesn’t tune in to them much. If someone uses those big words straight at him, he’s pretty sure they are mocking, trying to confuse, at worst ‘going after a rise’. It’s hard to stifle that rise and it is certain to land him in a higher security unit. If the beast is unleashed, reining it in is nearly impossible.

He knows about reading, but his motto and his manner declare ‘I hate reading’. It’s a motto which serves him well for the preservation of the tough image he’s cultivated. It means he never has to read; and no explanation is needed, for the reason is obvious. He has declared it to be an activity of no worth. He doesn’t write either, not even to fill in forms. ‘They can stuff it’ is his default response.

The purpose of this article is to share an overview of the methods used within the *Just Sentences* program to build and repair language and literacy skills in individuals whose situations might be akin to those of the composite character described above. Before turning to this, I wish to relate some of the considerations which must be weighed up to create a ‘just sentence’. I will give a short account of how society arrived at a place in which prisons are a major part of a justice response.

Neither of these topics can be fully addressed here as they are themselves the subjects of generations of scholarly thinking, and writing within the disciplines of law, philosophy, political science, theology, sociology and criminology. Nevertheless, it is important to pause briefly in order to retain connection between the activity of teaching literacy in prison and the broader questions of justice. It is a connection to reflect upon in the work of teaching anyone to read and write in any context. For mastery of communication and literacy skills are intrinsically linked to the health and agency of individuals, and of society (Snow, 2016).

A lens on crime and prison

A look at the production of a ‘just sentence’ in response to crime, would involve examination of society’s attitudes to

crime and the historical bases of these attitudes; the causes of crime and the ability of society to identify its own role in these causes, as well as how to then make response to socially-structured inequity. It would involve a closer look at the processes of the courts, the machinery of law and conflict resolution, and the traditions, research and reforms associated with these areas of practice and scholarship.

Political attitudes and power are part of the equation, as is the influence of the media. Consideration would need to be made of the social institutions responsible for education and what society’s response should be when these systems have permitted any child to reach adulthood without being able to read and write well enough to manage the demands of daily life.

Should such failure be viewed as victimisation in, and of, itself? And therefore should reparation of such failure be part of a just response? Should such reparation be made during a term of incarceration or instead of it? And what processes and attitudes, which have been part of the historical purposes of prison, might exist as barriers to a modern justice response?

There is much thought, research and action around all these questions in all of the disciplines named above. And there is value for members of all other disciplines and walks of life, including adult literacy instructors, to reflect and hold dialogue upon these questions. The responses to them impact and influence the lives of us all, for they are questions relevant to community safety, harmony, fairness and social rectitude. And for the same reasons, community reflection about prisons themselves is of value.

Prisons have become an entrenched part of the western psyche, but have only existed in the way in which we currently know them – as institutions of mass incarceration – since the 1600s (Mathiesen, 1990; Meiners, 2015; Ruggiero, 2015). Their original purpose was to keep vagrants rounded-up off the streets out of public view, and out of sight of the merchant class doing its business (Mathiesen, 1990; Meiners, 2015; Ruggiero, 2015).



Justifications were made using the kind of pious arguments typical of the era, and were centred on using the time of incarceration to ‘redeem the soul’ through hard labour and religious activity (Mathiesen, 1990). Prisons became disproportionately filled with the poor and those with reduced opportunity and agency.

Still today, prisons disproportionately house people with disabilities (Caire, 2013) and from disadvantaged and minority groups (Baldry et al, 2015; Meiners, 2015; Ryan & Ward, 2015) demonstrating that the root causes of the crimes of which these people have been convicted are socially constructed and result from:

failures by the state to provide high-quality public education, health care and a minimum wage that is a living wage (Meiners, 2015; 122).

Prisons have been declared a social failure by criminologists (Mathiesen, 1990; Baldry et al, 2015; Herzog, 2015). Ruggiero (2015) cites philosopher Herman Bianchi who states that:

imprisonment produce[s] an annual output of wretched and destitute people, criminalised and stigmatised, who apart from a few exceptions, [are] no longer fit for normal civil life (p. 93).

There is nothing just in these outcomes.

Unleashing our ‘better angels’

Early nurture, emotional security, stimulation of oral language, which forms the roots of literacy and pro-social

interaction within a wide relational network (Hart & Risley, 1995; Perry, 2015; Perry, In Press; Powell, 2014) are the *upstream* experiences of enormous importance if such *downstream* devastation is to be avoided. Dignified, non-coercive, non-punitive, generous, kind, relationally-based supports for at-risk families must be poured out if cycles of poverty and crime are to be halted and reversed into flourishing.

And ... dignified, non-coercive, non-punitive, generous, kind, relationally-based supports which nurture, are emotionally secure, stimulate oral language and link it directly to the printed word, all taking place within pro-social interaction in wide relational networks are also the downstream experiences to pour out if existing cycles of poverty and crime are to be diverted. These qualities, these platforms for interaction, these actions which demonstrate the ‘better angels of our nature’ have power to enrich and generate new vision and hope. This is so for any of us at any time in our lives, whether we’ve been in prison or not, as they also do for people in prison.

The majority of people currently in prison will complete their sentences and return to society. We will live tomorrow, with those we punish today. It is safer and more dignifying for community and for people who have been imprisoned, if reintegration is without stigma and with the furnishing of the necessary skills to live productively and meaningfully. This includes the generation of hope for chosen positive pathways and identity.

Unpacking ‘Just sentences’

Research into what causes people to desist from crime shows that hope and skills are major factors (Farrell & Calverly, 2006; McNeill, 2012; Ward & Maruna, 2007). The permutations of meaning of each of the homonyms of ‘just’ and ‘sentences’ within the term ‘just sentences’ touches these factors and has relevance for supporting our hypothetical inmate, as well as for reflecting upon our own better angels.

Parsing the semantics, where ‘just sentences’ means ‘mere language’, it speaks of the accessibility of language, and therefore of hope for increased skills on the pathways through reading, writing and spoken interaction. Where it means ‘mere time’, it speaks of acceptance, of use of time for the nourishment and growth which come of reflection.

Where ‘just sentences’ means ‘rightful language’, it speaks of words of honour; and the right to communicate, to be

educated, and to grow language itself, for language is a major foundation of knowledge and human agency. And in final permutation, where 'just sentences' means 'rightful time', it speaks of using time wisely and honourably to build skills, redress past disadvantage, and as much as possible, to make reparation of harm done.

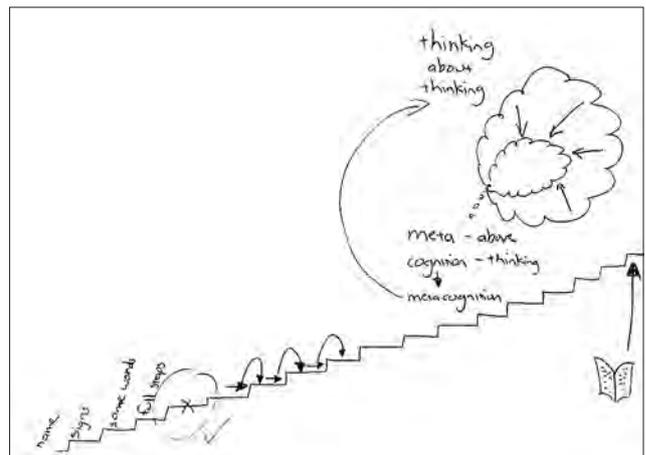
The methodology of *Just Sentences* draws upon all of these areas, while bringing the dignity and efficacy of the scientific assessment of reading skills, and evidence-based, direct-teaching methods for literacy instruction. So, having established the social reasons to offer a skill and hope building program, let's now return to our hypothetical inmate, and look more closely at the methods used in *Just Sentences* to address his challenges.

A place to start

All *Just Sentences* participants start the program with assessment of their current skill levels. In starting to work with a participant, it is essential to know which skills are easy for them, and which are not. This information points straight at the starting place for intervention. For example, if the participant is unable to segment a three-phoneme word into its component phonemes, then it is essential to start the journey by first building phonemic awareness and phonemic processing. And this immediately gives rise to the need to explain the trajectory of the journey to the participant and provide a dignifying explanation of why intervention will start by noticing and separating phonemes. I've never had anyone refuse to do these activities once an explanation has been given. The most common responses I hear are 'I never got the sounds when I was at school' or 'I hated the sounds'.

Participants are relieved when I tell them that it is my job to make the sounds (phonemes) easy for them and that if they are experiencing a struggle, that it is my fault because I haven't done a good enough job of working out how to make the task easy for them. I promise them that I will do everything I know how to do, to always make it easy for them. Their end of the deal is that if it ever feels tricky and I haven't noticed, that they have to tell me. This creates psychological safety for engaging once more with a task they usually feel shame at having previously failed at. The kind of comments that I commonly hear are 'No one's ever taught me English like this before!', 'I've been in education programs before, but no one's ever done it like this before. This is really good. I get it!'

Sometimes I find that I need to spend a long time on the explanation of the process that will roll out in the program.



Mapping the stairs

It might be over a couple of sessions, with many ongoing updates in subsequent sessions. It matters for hope, dignity and engagement with the program, that the participant really understands that the tasks he is being asked to do are foundationally connected to the big picture of becoming a reader.

I usually draw a long set of stairs and explain that mastery of reading involves learning a lot of skills that are connected and built upon each other. I usually ask the participant to indicate which stair he thinks he is currently on with reading skill. The guys usually choose low, or mid-low. I always congratulate them for an honest appraisal and then name up the literacy skills which represent the stairs below the one they chose. These are the skills they can already do, such as identifying some words by sight, blending sounds together, or whatever other skills I have observed. I ask them about their histories and make links between the information they share and why they have found it difficult to learn to read.

This is done without placing blame on them, or anyone else in their stories; rather, the neurological bases of language learning and phonemic processing are referenced. I explain that the first task we will start with is the next step on the staircase to the one they identified themselves as being on; and that we will work on the skills needed to do this task until it is mastered. Then we'll jump up to the next step. They can see that all of the steps are contributing to the structure that will lead to the top step that is fluent reading. Comments I have had include 'When you did those steps, I really got it'; 'I realised I have to keep climbing up the stairs'.

Reading takes practise

Almost invariably, the participant will have a favoured activity, usually sport. The mastery of which is also

comprised of a sequence of steps. For a lot of the guys I've worked with it is boxing or body-building. I always ask about this and then use it as a metaphor and analogy for the acquisition of reading skills. It's also very supportive for introducing the concept of tenacity. They know that to get good at boxing they've got to keep refining their technique and keep their tempers under control. And, most importantly, that it takes daily practice.

I tell them it's the same for getting good at reading and they get the connection. Sometimes I put my fists up as if I was boxing and get them to correct my hand position. I let them know this is what I will be doing with their reading by making some adjustments and then intensively practising the moves using those adjustments. I ask if they always love doing boxing practice. 'Nah, sometimes I hate it, but I make myself do it'. Then the conversation can turn to motivation. What keeps them going? What would keep them going with reading practice? This then leads to goal setting.

Meaningful assessment and engagement

I always assess the participants' receptive vocabulary (the words they understand) and phonemic awareness and basic letter-sound correspondence knowledge. Sometimes, for participants whose skills are at the very beginning of the literacy continuum, I skip the reading skills assessment because the starting points are already defined as being in language and phonemic awareness.

Assessment requires deep focus on the presented tasks, and the guys are supported to do this by my feedback, praise and comments to maintain their engagement and to feel good about what they are doing. Many have made comments which show that their experience of the assessment has a meditative effect: 'Doing that kinda cleared my head. Before I come up here, my head was going in a spin with all the stuff in my head'; 'I notice that I don't feel so bad as I did in my cell. I was feeling shitty, but I don't feel shitty now. It emptied my head'.

They notice that using their minds with focus makes them feel better and this is also true of the intervention tasks. I always grab onto these comments because their observations can be used for building the participant's metacognitive awareness of their own processing. For any of us, reflectively observing our processing and responding is the first step to making choices and change. It is important to lift-up such comments to the guys and highlight the valuable insights within their comments.

As assessment proceeds, most participants make comments about how they are experiencing the tasks being presented to them. These comments are invaluable to help me better understand their processing systems. For example, while assessing vocabulary, one of the guys said 'I've heard that word before, but I don't know what it is'. After some cogitation he said 'this is a guess' as he chose the correct answer. This shows me that he is comprehending language and he is unaware of comprehending at the same time.

Another participant said 'don't say it again because it will mess up what I nearly got'. This shows me that extra processing time allows this participant to stabilise information in memory. Intervention then proceeds from each participant's first step, in sensitive response to the individual differences which each one brings: processing abilities, cognitive ability, emotional triggers, histories, social communication skills, personalities, interests and so on.

Swearing provides prime opportunity for me to genuinely exercise non-judgment. I never let swear words bother me, or receive them as a sign of disrespect. Rather, by responding non-judgmentally, the participant is provided with an experience of himself being respected as a person, and this usually diminishes use of such language anyway. That said, rarely do the participants use swearing in my presence.

Unlocking language skills

Many of those who populate prisons, (around 50%) have severely impaired language skills (Caire, 2013; Snow, 2016; Snow & Powell, 2011). This means that much of the language going on around these individuals is not understood as it is intended. They might glean and infer meaning through observations of what is happening, but the clarity of meaning which would ideally come through language may not be accessible to them. And using language to formulate and express their own thoughts is difficult and can quickly tip into frustration. For those with competent language skills, the quickest way to gain a sense of what it might be like to live with language impairment is to think of yourself communicating in France with only your high school French. Those with impaired language have a lifetime of this type of experience. They need patient and dignifying understanding, as well as support to acquire and use more language.

In *Just Sentences*, the imperatives of these understandings are at the back of everything that is undertaken with

participants, and they undergird all interactions. Methods to support the participant include careful choice of vocabulary and sentence structure in order to keep language in the active voice. To speak their name before asking a question, and to ask questions directly rather than by implication or with tag questions. A tag question is, for example, 'you did it, didn't you?' – the question part is 'tagged' on to the end of a statement. Slightly slower speed of delivery of language allows participants more processing time and is therefore supportive. Pauses are supportive for the same reason.

Using a little of the participant's own phrasing supports positive connection that is a major platform for sharing meaning accurately. New words are actively taught and revisited; and the participant's sense of safety to point out to me when he doesn't know a word is actively built. When explanations are made, or sequenced information is given, they are sketched on a page at the same time the verbal language is delivered. This allows the participant to see what he is also attempting to process through language. Such visual information captured on the page can help in providing meaning to the participants which might be missed if words are used alone.

Respectful conversations

Also in the back of all of the literacy activity is an open conversation about emotional regulation, how communication and emotion are connected to each other; and about reflection and metacognition or thinking about thinking. At every point in interaction at which a participant shows that he has noticed a feature of his thinking, emotion or processing, this is lifted-up as an example of excellence. For example, if a participant self-corrects an error, he is congratulated for noticing the error and this is held up as progress against the times when he might have made the same error but not noticed. Supporting the participant to become metacognitively aware of his processing and emotional responding is essential, not only to make the best and speediest gains in literacy, but in all of life's goals.

The opening of such awareness and conversations often leads to the guys making comment on my communication with them. They thank me for helping them with their literacy, but what I am thanked for more than anything else is for being kind and for 'not holding a grudge'. Non-judgment and kindness are important human and clinical tools for supporting regulation, reflection and enjoyment, and thereby learning.



Rosie with a program participant

With non-judgment, non-punitive responding, respect, enjoyment and carefully graded tasks which are scientifically informed in their sequence and always at the 'just-right level of challenge', the motto 'I hate reading' can be broken down. The guys take pride and delight in succeeding at tasks which had hitherto stymied them and caused confusion, shame, fear and anger. They experience the deep and motivating pleasure of worthwhile achievement. Their negative responses are ameliorated when it is pride which is attached to the experience of literacy, rather than shame. Typical comments are 'I've noticed reading relaxes you. It gets your mind off things', 'I'll probably finish reading this book – it's kinda got me interested now'.

Pitching at the just-right level

The 'just-right level of challenge' is a critically important concept in traversing this territory. The task being presented must demonstrably be part of the sequence of steps toward the goal, as this gives it purpose; it has to be easy enough to successfully achieve with just enough effort that the struggle doesn't tip over into frustration; and it has to be challenging enough that it is not insulting or boring to do. This means carefully observing the participant's pattern of response and continually adjusting the task so that it meets all of these criteria.

A general rule of thumb is that tasks need to always be pitched at a level that allows a 50% to 90% success rate. When working at the just-right level of challenge, enjoyment and motivation will flow. It is essential to reinforce with praise and humour. This must be nuanced to the individual – his cognitive level, his experiences, the things he values.

I consider that it is my job to keep the work at the just-right level. If I have given a task that is too hard, it is essential that I take the responsibility and do not blame the participant for not being able to do it. I always

apologise when I realise that this has happened and accept the fault for the error. I never say ‘C’mon you can do it, it’s easy’. I learned from the first participant in *Just Sentences* that if someone said to him that it is easy, yet he still couldn’t do it, that the message that gave him about himself was that he must be stupid. He experienced such a scenario as a personal put-down, regardless of the intentions of the tutor. The *Just Sentences* work has been all about lifting-up, and not at all about putting-down.

Starting with writing

I always get the guys writing as soon as possible. Writing is the fast track to literacy success and I tell them this. I explain that all of the learning associated with literacy will be faster and stronger if they get writing. I set open questions about their lives for them to respond to by writing in their journals. I have an expectation that they will write and they do. But this expectation is never coercive or punitive. I talk with them about my own writing so that they know I am not asking them to do something I don’t do myself.

In the beginning, it doesn’t matter at all about spelling. What matters is reflection and pleasure in the process. As they write in their journals, the participants are taking opportunity to be reflective about their lives. Pleasure and also some nostalgia comes from this. Pleasure also arises from knowing that I will read their work and honour what they have done, both its form and content.

I share John Dewey’s wise words with them: ‘We don’t learn from our experience, we learn from reflecting on our experience’. Mostly, the participants become very honest in their writing. Our conversations in the next session will then be reflective upon the memories or thoughts they have written about, linking these thoughts to emotional regulation.

It is common at the beginning of the *Just Sentences* program that the guys don’t want to write, but it quickly becomes a powerful motivator of its own. Systematic spelling and grammatical support is introduced gradually as their curiosity is piqued about these areas and as they begin to ask questions. This usually happens quite quickly too. One comment to me recently was:

I believe I’m learning heaps. Especially with my writing – I’m really flowing. They read out the thing I wrote, at my cousin’s funeral. You got me editing. You got me constantly writing. It’s flowing. I’m not worried

about the spelling mistakes. I know now that I can go back and fix them.

I have seen that with the support of a positive, valuing relationship, hope, and skills established through systematic, evidence-based techniques, that men and women in prison can go back and fix much more than just spelling mistakes. This is the hope and purpose of *Just Sentences*.

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Resilience – stories of adult learning

By Michael Chalk and Keiko Yasukawa

Compiling stories written by adult literacy learners into a small in-house booklet or a publication for wider dissemination is a tradition that is familiar in many Australian adult education colleges and centres. In 2015, the Australian Council of Adult Literacy (ACAL) and its United Kingdom (UK) sister organisation Research and Practice in Adult Literacy (RaPAL) initiated a joint project to invite and publish the stories of adult literacy learners in Australia and the UK. The stories were published online and in print form in late 2016.



In this article, we introduce the Resilience – Stories of Adult Learning publication through our own reflections of the journey taken in this project, as both ACAL members and project workers. We briefly discuss debates in the scholarly literature around learner stories in adult education programs. We share some lessons learnt by the project team members through undertaking this project and some of the challenges of working across two countries. Finally, we suggest ways of approaching learner story projects in future, as well as ways of working with the current publication in literacy classes.

ACAL and RaPAL working together

As the peak professional associations for adult literacy practitioners and researchers in their respective countries, ACAL and RaPAL have had informal exchanges between members, at both organisational and personal levels, over many years. These exchanges have enabled adult literacy professionals in both countries to follow and compare policy developments and their impacts. Members have been welcomed at conferences and written for publications in both countries.

Policy directions taken by governments increasingly rely on large scale survey data and measures that reduce literacy to numbers (Hamilton, Maddox & Addey 2015), a concern shared by many practitioners and socio-cultural researchers of adult literacy and numeracy (Yasukawa & Black 2016). Media reports that rarely look beyond these numbers fuel a ‘crisis’ discourse about poor literacy levels of workers threatening economic productivity and international competitiveness (Rubenson & Walker 2015; Yasukawa, Hamilton & Evans 2016).

The absence of any reference to the people and lives that sit behind the statistics of literacy is a constant source of frustration for practitioners. They witness the multiplicity

of meanings that literacy learning brings to the lives of their learners. As Joe Lo Bianco advised to the 2010 ACAL conference audience, what practitioners and literacy researchers are uniquely positioned to do is to challenge the dominant discourse of literacy. They can do this by creating a richer narrative about the significance of adult literacy and basic education programs by interweaving their learners’ stories into the official statistics. Thus, when representatives of both organisations first discussed a possible collaborative project, it did not take long to reach a consensus that it should focus on giving voice to the learners and the meaning they attribute to literacy learning.

In the early discussions of how to launch a joint student stories project across the two countries, the project team decided that it would be helpful for the literacy teachers who would be integrating this project into their teaching program to have a broad theme for the learner stories. A common theme would also be critical to provide coherence for the anthology of stories. In several earlier learner stories projects in Australia, themes such as ‘journey’, ‘luck’ and ‘home’ were chosen (Blakely et. al. 2004; Hazell & Finch 2005; Stein et. al. 2007): themes to which teachers felt their learners would be able to make strong, albeit in some cases, difficult connections, whoever they were and however their lives were unfolding. For this project, the theme of ‘resilience’ was chosen in recognition of the many ways in which adult learners have had to, and continue to, demonstrate resilience in their lives.

Pedagogical dimensions of learner stories

The key curricula currently used by many adult literacy programs in Australia are text-based. The story genre features in all of these curricula at different levels. For example, within the Certificates in Spoken and Written English (CSWE) used in the migrant English language programs, there is a progression from certificate levels 1 to

3, starting with recounts, then moving to story texts and then to broader narrative texts. Thus, while programming, particularly in government funded literacy programs, entails significant constraints related to assessment and reporting regimes, integrating the learner stories project was not expected to pose major pedagogical challenges to teachers.

Some suggested guidelines on how to introduce the theme and the writing task were produced and made available on the project website. Workshops were conducted in some states to share possible approaches that teachers might use to engage their learners. A number of strategies, such as using visuals, popular songs and famous quotes from different cultures around the theme of resilience were suggested.

Teachers also spoke about the importance of not presenting the task to their learners as writing a story of 'heroic feats'. Thus the necessity of unpacking the theme in everyday, accessible terms was emphasised. An important strategy that was proposed in these workshops was to use learner stories books produced by previous learner groups. These could be used as a source for models of the kinds of stories that students might choose to write.

The idea of writing from their personal experience – what is familiar and tangible for the learners – sits well with adult teaching and learning practices and wisdom in adult literacy programs. The use of reflection on experience and educational autobiographies in adult education is supported in the scholarly literature (e.g. Clark & Rossiter 2008; Dominice 1990; Gaber-Katz 1996). Proponents of learner autobiographies in adult education identify several benefits of this approach. In addition to 'learning the story genre', it provides a space for learners to express aspects of their identity and culture in their own terms.

In the context of community-based adult education in Canada, Gaber-Katz (1996) writes:

Learners, volunteers, and staff collaborate together on projects which promote the utilisation of learners' interpretations of the world ... The kind of relations set up in community-based literacy programmes are not representative of the way things work in other community or social settings where those with the greatest social privileges such as wealth and education are the ones whose voices are heard and who give direction. In these small community-based programmes, the learners are the experts (pp. 54–55).

The sentiment expressed in this quote is likely to resonate with many adult literacy practitioners in Australia. However, the production and reading of learner stories is not without its critics, nor are proponents themselves unaware of the limitations of this approach.

Risks and limitations of learner stories

Gaber-Katz herself outlines several limitations of learner stories, only a few of which will be mentioned here. One is the risk to which practitioners can expose learners by asking them to write about some aspect, however small, of their life. Without skilful care and sensitivity, some learners may perceive the task as requiring them to expose carefully protected life experiences that are a source of shame, trauma or distress. To what extent are adult literacy practitioners equipped to support learners if the task takes learners to some part of their life that they may not want to, or feel able to deal with?

Another limitation identified by Gaber-Katz and expanded upon by Michelson (2011) is related to the celebration of the learner stories as authentic voices of the learners. Michelson (2011) makes the provocative claim that:

... the life histories produced by adult learners in our classrooms are, in important senses, fictions. The provocativeness of this claim depends in part on the everyday meaning of the word fiction – something that is untrue, invented; fiction as opposed to fact – and I argue that we may not so much be allowing students to discover and express a 'true' self as we are teaching them to invent one (p. 5).

Michelson presents a powerful Foucauldian analysis of the adult education practice of using learner autobiographies and suggests that such practice is based on the privileging of an 'ordered' self and life. In particular, she argues that stories demand a plot, and more often than not, the plot that learners learn to adopt is one where their life, riddled with chaos and failure, is positively transformed through participation in an adult learning program.

For many learners, this order is not necessarily a reality, but Michelson argues they feel compelled to end their story with a resolution because that is what happens in a 'story'. Moreover, in many cases, adult education programs promise a positive life transformation. The key message from Michelson is that adult educators themselves need to be critically reflective of their own

social position and cultural frames when promoting pedagogies that they claim to promote critical reflection in their learners.

Gaber-Katz (1996) does not go as far as to discount the authenticity of learner stories, but is cautious about 'overclaiming' the power of autobiographic learner stories. The problematisation of learner stories as a pedagogic practice may well be a future project for ACAL and RaPAL members to contemplate in light of the stories that emerged in this project.

Challenging issues around anonymity

One issue that was challenging for the editorial group was that of anonymity. When is it acceptable for a student writer to publish under a pseudonym?

The editorial group decided early on in the project that every piece needed an accompanying disclaimer. This would make sure that the writer knew about the Creative Commons license we intended to publish under, and also verify that the story was their own. However, one group of learners had surprised their teacher with some stories that touched on disturbing experiences, including family violence. A couple of these students wanted to publish their stories under a pseudonym. The editorial group had different perspectives on this issue, and due to the nature of long-distance committee conversations via internet telephony, decisions took a while to be made. There were some difficult communications between the teacher and the project worker, but a resolution was reached in the end.

In the publishing world, generally, anyone should be able to publish under a pseudonym. However, our publication was slightly different because of the need to make sure people were publishing their own stories, and because we were aware of a duty of care between institutions and their students. We made the decision that an institution or teacher could sign a disclaimer on behalf of the student, or that a student could use their real name on the disclaimer with our assurance that their real name would not be used in publication.

Questions and differences around tutor perspectives

There were differences between the editorial groups in the UK and in Australia, over whether to publish additional pieces known as 'tutor perspectives'. For RaPAL, this had always been a part of the project. Tutors could offer their own understanding of how individual learners had

progressed in their skill and understanding. However, for the people at ACAL there was a strong feeling that this detracted from the focus on learner voices. So after much discussion, we decided to have two versions of the book, one published in the UK and one in Australia. In fact there are multiple versions, in various e-book formats, PDF format and actual paperback as well, each with its own ISBN number.

Using social media to promote and engage

Michael, the project worker for ACAL, used various social media: Facebook, Twitter and Google Plus to spread the word and connect with teachers around Australia. Most of the focus was on the Facebook page. It is an ongoing challenge to make and sustain connections with teachers in adult education. Often their teaching and preparation workloads are demanding and they do not have a lot of support for extra-curricular projects. Social media can provide that extra impetus of connection, especially when the focus is on visual information, video, or interesting links that may be related but aren't necessarily part of the project. It was useful to get feedback through the number of 'likes', and also the number of times a post was shared by followers.

Reaching a wider audience

Mark Hopkins' story of success and learning became very poignant for Michael. He met Mark at Preston Reservoir Adult Community Education (PRACE) and was immediately struck by his mix of vulnerability and a fierce determination to improve his understanding and capacity. To support Mark's story-telling, Michael was able to explore a more connected method, that of recording the conversation then writing it up. After the piece was sent for approval, Mark edited it further himself for more accessible reading.

Mark was selected to appear on a special episode 'Reading Between the Lines' (Ep.29, 2016) of the SBS television program *Insight*. He was joined on a panel by other adult learners from around Australia to discuss adult literacy issues and their life experiences. In the audience were their families and supporters, as well as experts from the field. This was a big step in going public with his story, however he was very positive about the whole experience.

Mark's story was also the first selected for publication on the European Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE) website, translated into several other languages.



Mark Hopkins (third left) with panel members on *Insight*

Effort was made by Tara Furlong (RaPAL) to connect with other organisations who might be interested in the publication, and this was one of the outcomes. In Mark's case, the original audio conversation is available via the RaPAL site, and the SBS *Insight* episode can be found via their YouTube or the Resilience – Stories of Adult Learning project Facebook page.

Transcribing stories from beginner EAL learners

Another case of Michael going to visit learners in person was with Manjit Bhamral's EAL class at the Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre (GNLC). This was a challenging task because the learners were mostly beginner level in their spoken English. Again the method of recording and transcribing these conversational stories was used, followed by some editing for the final publication. These audio recordings are also available via the RaPAL page. Some of these students wrote their own versions of the story to accompany their verbal interview.

Here, we could reflect on the position expressed by Michelson earlier in this article, in that the model we presented to learners was one of chaos and failure followed by positive transformation. However, in this case we did not demand of these students stories about the shining light of transformation, merely some small aspect of their life which had been improved.

For Michael who witnessed the learners participating in the task, this was a moving experience because the learners shared their vulnerability so openly. Moreover, Michael observed how their teacher was highly skilled at making her students feel safe in the learning environment. She was adept at drawing out their stories when they were struggling, and making sure that this open conversation was useful for them as learners.

It is always impressive to witness the empathy of teachers in adult education, and this quote from Manjit to her students shows the depth of such empathy:

From my experience of learning a language, when I came to Australia, I had the language, but I felt like I was 'somebody' in my country, and I was 'nobody' here. It took a lot of time and patience to become somebody. Now I know people know my name. Now I know that when I go somewhere, people come and talk to me. Before, I would be in a crowd, and nobody knew me, and I knew nobody, and it was a very strange feeling. And I found Australia to be very big and vast, and I was lost. And it's the same Australia, but I have an identity now, so I understand what you say.

The connected approach taken in these two examples, was inspired by Tricia Bowen's (2010) work interviewing adult learners for the VALBEC publication *A Fuller Sense of Self*. Tricia conducted interviews with adult learners and then wrote up a more structured story around the conversations, changing spoken language to written. In this case, we kept the final language very close to what people actually said. At least one teacher was using *A Fuller Sense of Self* directly as inspirational material for her group before embarking on writing their own stories. Unfortunately, this group did not get to the point of feeling confident enough in their writing to share with the wider world.

Themes and issues

The stories we received encompassed a wide range of issues and topics across the UK and Australia. Some of the most frequently recurring themes were: using computers, building confidence, counselling and intervention, depression, domestic violence, drug addiction and substance abuse, dyslexia, employment, immigration, parenting, self-esteem and state intervention. It was clear from the beginning, and not unexpected, that people in adult learning have faced enormous challenges in their lives.

Here is a brief overview of some of the stories:

Brett Whiting (TAFE East Coast, Australia) writes about his experience of returning to learning after being a single parent for years. 'It was hard at first, getting my mind around the books. I put my head down and went for it'.

Denise Hodgson (Somerset, UK) speaks of early experiences where she was ‘branded thick and often made to sit in the corner’. Now she works as a college lecturer.

Anna-Lisa Egan (Waylilpa, Northern Territory, Australia) writes of the resilience of her grandmother, a Warlpiri woman. She was a community leader working to improve education in their community, who fought to keep their culture and language strong.

Toni Hodge (Swinburne, UK) writes about her series of battles with depression and violence, explaining how learning to write short stories helped her through crisis: ‘we all may chase rainbows, but the reality of learning: even a basic thing like reading and writing will make your rainbow easier to find’.

Where to now?

The Resilience – Stories of Adult Learning publication project was an affirming one and we spoke to several teachers who decided to take this project into their classrooms. Their feedback showed how successful they found the project to be for their learners. For some it was developing their literacy in the narrowest sense of producing a story-based text, and for others, it was being able to show their grandchild how they are now a published author. The benefits of this writing project for the learners are undoubtedly varied, but this is the nature of adult basic education; learners participate for different reasons, and the learning leads them to different, often unanticipated places.

There is much potential for using the publication in classrooms. Teachers can make selections of stories that are accessible to their learners for reading focused lessons. As with other collections of learner stories, this book of stories can provide model texts when teachers are designing a unit of work on writing narrative texts. Some of the stories can also be resources for critical literacy lessons that engage learners in learning about the wider socio-political reasons for the different opportunities that are afforded to people in their lives.

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Find your copy of the e-book on the ACAL site: <http://acal.edu.au/resilience/> and on the RaPAL site: <https://rapal.org.uk/resilience/>

Follow through various links and resources on the project Facebook page <http://fb.com/learnResilience>

Watch Mark Hopkins on SBS Insight from August 2016: <http://youtu.be/XNpGmB-mIZU>

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Interweaving life experience and teaching practice

By Elizabeth Gunn

What do we bring of our own life stories to our teaching? An innovative youth program has been developed by teachers who collaborate and share aspects of their own life journey through their teaching.



A few years ago, I worked with Kate Pitman as a co-teacher on the Young Adult Migrant Education Course (YAMEC) Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) program at Melbourne Polytechnic. YAMEC is a nest of integrated pathway courses designed specifically for young migrants and refugees (16 to 26 years of age) who have had interrupted education or who need to develop their English literacy skills. At the core of YAMEC is a small team of teachers who have built up an array of dynamic programs that help connect these young students to their local communities. The program demands a lot of energy and motivation, which, fortunately, all the YAMEC teachers have in abundance.

The more I worked with Kate, the more impressed I became with the energy she injected into her teaching. I resolved to find out more about her inspirations and motivations. It took a while to coax her out for a coffee to discuss some of the community-based programs she oversees. Her reluctance to talk about herself isn't just because she's busy, she is; but is mainly because she didn't want to draw attention to herself as being the only person who makes good things happen in the YAMEC program. Kate is at pains to emphasise to me that the innovative programs undertaken in all the YAMEC classes are very much the result of staff, students and external community members' combined efforts, and have evolved over twenty years.

A 'can do' approach to learning

Although Kate attributes the success of the programs, events and connections she facilitates to other people's doings, she does point to her own upbringing as a driving force behind her innovative teaching practices. Kate describes her early life 'We grew up in an atmosphere of we can make anything, we can fix anything, we don't need to get it out of a book, you know'.

Kate models that approach to her students by creating many of her teaching materials from scratch. She prefers to generate class content based on students' interests, like

most of her colleagues. 'I think teaching's more about drawing out from them, rather than filling up the empty vessels,' laughs Kate, and she constantly reminds students to be active about learning, not passively depending on the teacher to 'fill them up'.

Language learning was an important part of Kate's upbringing. She remembers, 'There were always foreign words and connections drawn between them and English, games with words, poetry and literature'. As a child, her parents took the family to Europe for a year. That experience engendered in them a fascination for languages and people of different cultures. 'When you speak to people with little English, you have to find a way to communicate ... and I feel, maybe because I had learnt French for such a long time, and lived there, yet still lacked confidence at times while travelling later as an adult. I have more understanding of students when they can't say something, because I feel I've been there. I still struggle with French prepositions and gender, even after 50 years!'

Last year, Kate went to Iran and armed with her phrase book, she admitted, 'I'd try my really bad accent out on people and they'd go "Yeah!" or "No, it's over here", and I'd think Oh, it worked!' Her own courage to have a go at speaking different languages helps her empathise with students and she encourages them by saying things like 'Yes that worked!' Her early language learning and subsequent travel experiences have had a critical influence on Kate's work as an English language and literacy teacher.

Radio SYNFM

Developing the courage to communicate in many challenging situations is vital for young adult migrants. When she first started as one of the VCAL teachers at YAMEC, Kate followed in the footsteps of Terry O'Reilly. He had forged links with RMIT's radio station SYNFM and started a program for high school students presenting radio shows at the studio. The YAMEC VCAL class was amongst the first cohort of students to participate in that program.

Kate outlines the program saying, 'You go in there and do a training session about how to speak into the microphone and write a little script, and after a few rehearsals and preparation time, the students become really independent'. She allocates groups of students to go into the studio each week and the groups brainstorm content, based on different discussion topics, to present in their weekly timeslot. Each group writes a script for their program and chooses songs; Arabic, African or American (just not too much swearing). They also learn basic broadcast laws.

All the YAMEC classes can listen back at school to the live to air broadcast and in the past, could interact with the presenters via telephone. 'We'd set up a telephone in another little office and ring up the radio station and they would give their opinion on the topic on air. It was really great, it was so empowering!' At first there was a lot of apprehension and nerves amongst students about getting involved and speaking in public, 'but in the end, everybody did it, and when they came out they were so proud, so triumphant, you know. There were huge sighs of relief. It was like overcoming an enormous challenge'.

As well as being a huge confidence builder for students, participation in the radio program authentically matches all the outcomes of the Personal Development Skills module of VCAL, such as 'speaking, planning, working together, team building, OH&S, problem solving, navigating yourself into the city, being on time, everything' identifies Kate.

Integrated and transferable skills

YAMEC is a holistic program that integrates key elements of communication. She observes that 'this is how a lot of YAMEC teachers like to work really. We integrate everything ... They [the students] don't even feel like they're doing any tests or anything. They're just doing this stuff that's quite complex and building them up ... and then they write up what they've done and realise how big it was, how much they've achieved. Everything is integrated in our minds. Whereas in a lot of other classes they might operate differently, say, doing Modules separately. I don't know if I could work that way. I find it hard to separate stuff. Life's not like that. I'm always looking for connections'.

We talked about how many of the Australian literacy and numeracy education curricula separate elements of literacy practices, which can complicate the assessment of students' learning in project-based activities. Modularisation of skills does not exist in the real world and Kate points to her more than fifteen years of work as a dressmaker and costume



Students at SYNFM radio studio

designer, prior to teaching, where she integrated many varied skills. 'I had to generate my own work, I had to network with people and I had to interpret people's ideas into a design and then source materials, consult continually, make it, and fit it to accommodate the needs of actors, opera singers, acrobats, debutantes, brides, mothers of brides, Moomba kings, directors, always making quick changes'.

Dressmaking and costume design seemed to be miles away from teaching. I had imagined sewing as a sedentary, lonely occupation, couped up behind a machine, hidden by bolts of fabric. It didn't seem like Kate at all. But Kate made me realise that her previous career was anything but restricted. 'People would ask me to make them look like an ice cream for instance, to sell their produce at the royal show'. It required a lot of initiative, problem solving, networking and experimentation.

Indeed, I had direct experience of Kate's passion for dressmaking while teaching with her. One day I told her that I had some fabric at home and I thought it would make a nice pair of trousers. High school fabrics classes had permanently destroyed my self-confidence as a dressmaker, so I was going to offer the fabric to Kate. However, before I could offload the material, Kate immediately swung into action. She brought her trouser pattern from home and gave me a crash course in trouser construction. Her enthusiasm and belief in my practical skills completely distracted me from my fear of sewing and I became convinced that I could achieve the unimaginable feat of making a pair of trousers. I now wear them proudly.

Bespoke approaches to learning and teaching

It suddenly dawned on me that costume making could be seen as a metaphor for Kate's particular approach to teaching. Her way of working with students is like a costume maker; she's working backstage, interpreting

student's individual characters and helping them to embody new roles. With her bespoke crafting of lesson materials and adaptation of learning tasks, the students go out onto the stage of life convinced that they can achieve great feats and give stellar performances in the process.

Thinking about it further, I realise that teachers, in many diverse ways, often creatively weave their life experiences into their teaching practice. I'm sure you do it yourself and see your colleagues do it every day. Kate explained to me that her work and experience outside teaching have equipped her with many contacts and she has used these networks to link students to contexts and careers beyond the YAMEC setting. For example, following communications with her son's English teacher, Kate seized on an opportunity to link YAMEC students with year 12 students at the local high school, looking at the theme of 'belonging'. In this case, YAMEC students became teachers and leaders, revealing the reserves of knowledge they had developed through their challenging journeys to Australia.

Another time, a Circus Oz costume designer gave Kate some old lycra acrobat pants and lycra remnants. Kate decided to make lycra bathing caps so that she could persuade the Muslim girls to go into the water at the Life Saving club during water safety class. She wanted them to experience the water and feel free to exercise. On another occasion, Kate introduced a student to a colleague in the Melbourne Polytechnic building design department for a study placement. The student was successful and her skills led her to win a scholarship to attend an architecture study tour to Denmark last year.

Reinvigorating teacher voices

Integration and connection are central to the heart of this story. Integration seems to happen on a number of planes in Kate's teaching practice; her integration of other teachers' programs into her own practice; her integration of student experiences into her practice; her instinct to integrate the differentiated subject modules to form a coherent program for students; and perhaps most importantly, the integral nature of her life experience in the process and the way she weaves everything together, including the hiccups when things don't come off.

I'm sure there are many instances when you too have expanded students' social capital by connecting them to networks outside education; or transposed your experience of group membership to enhancing your



Kate (centre) with her students

team's collegiality; or introduced a dynamic activity from your personal life that enabled you to tick all the separated outcomes of the particular curriculum you were delivering. Maybe it goes without saying, but I think the skills and connections we bring from outside teaching are invaluable resources. They probably need to be recalled, fostered and recognised more assiduously than is currently the case amidst the peculiar busywork of such things as TAE upgrades. We teach students about 'transferable skills' but we should be aware of our own as well.

If ever there was a time to inquire into, and highlight our colleagues' diverse influences and transferable skills, I think 2017 might be it. I recently read Joanne Medlin's literary review on the Australian literacy and numeracy workforce (2016) in which she concludes that, 'in recent decades practitioners have moved from being highly influential in shaping the literacy and numeracy space to being almost absent as a voice in the literature'(p. 33).

Medlin puts this lack of voice down to 'the sporadic and disjointed way in which literacy and numeracy emerged as an area of education; ... [and] the diverse nature of the workforce and workplaces in which literacy and numeracy is practised' (p. 33). Breadth of practical life experience is probably something that literacy practitioners would regard as highly relevant to their work focusing on students' diverse life pathways. Recognition of literacy teachers' diverse experience might be a way to reinvigorate practitioner input in shaping literacy and numeracy spaces. I highly recommend sitting down with a colleague and finding out more about how their life experiences have informed their teaching practices, and hopefully, in the process, you'll be inspired to reflect on the unique skill set that has led you to literacy and numeracy education and teaching practice.

Continued on page 35 ...

Practical Matters

Applying a foundation skills 'lens' to assessment

By Ann Leske and Chemene Sinson

Introduction

We all rely on foundation skills to successfully complete many life tasks in different contexts: personal and community; workplace and employment; and education and training. For example, in the vocational context, Keiko Yasukawa says, 'it is the LLN demands of the vocational discipline and the work practices that the students are learning' (Yasukawa, 2014, p. 98).

Language Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) or foundation skills are critical if our learners are to attain the community, work, or educational outcomes that we aim to achieve with our teaching. Assessment plays a key role in helping us identify foundation skills needs, measure progress, and acknowledge achievements. But hitting the target with all that is involved in assessment can be a complex process. Each learner has unique needs and it isn't always easy to identify and meet the diverse needs of a learner within a learner group.

In this article we will focus on adult learner outcomes and suggest ways to apply a foundation skills 'lens' to assessment, through all stages of a training program. We call this a start-to-finish approach.

Terminology

The terms core skills, foundation skills or LLN skills are often used interchangeably. In general, these terms refer to the underpinning skills needed to complete an activity related to an aspect of adult life, either personal, community, employment or education.

In this article we will use the term foundation skills as defined in the Australia's National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults (NFSS):

- English language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) – listening, speaking, reading, writing, digital literacy and use of mathematical ideas and
- Employability skills, such as collaboration, problem solving, self-management, learning and information and



communication technology (ICT) skills required for participation in modern workplaces and contemporary life.

(<https://www.education.gov.au/national-foundation-skills-strategy-adults>)

As teachers, we rely on two government-commissioned documents for details of these skills:

- For LLN skills: the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) (<https://www.education.gov.au/australian-core-skills-framework>)
- For employability skills: Core Skills for Work (CSfW) Developmental Framework (<https://www.education.gov.au/core-skills-work-developmental-framework>).

A 'start-to-finish' approach to assessment

The start-to-finish approach offers benefits to teachers and learners. Simons and Yaringa refer to Cafarella and Daffron who support a start-to-finish approach for the focus on learning the underpinning skills:

Assessment is integral to learning and can be used for a number of purposes including to:

- assess learners' prior knowledge and skills and their readiness for learning (diagnostic or pre-assessment)
- improve teaching and learning processes or provide feedback to learners about their progress and their capacities as learners (formative assessment)
- determine what has been actually learnt and how this compares to the stated learning outcomes or standards set out in a Training Packages (summative assessment) (Simmons & Yaringa 2014, p. 60).

This approach means focusing on foundation skills in assessment from 'start-to-finish'. In other words, before,



Figure 1: Start-to-finish model

throughout, and at the end of a training program. Quality training programs include three stages of assessment: diagnostic, formative and summative. Diagnostic and formative assessments are assessments for learning. Summative assessment is assessment of learning.

Figure 1 shows how to focus on foundation skill assessment, from the ‘start-to-finish’ of a training program.

Getting started with a ‘start-to-finish’ approach

Before you can select which diagnostic, formative and summative foundation skill assessment activities to build into your training, you must first clarify which foundation skills learners will need to successfully complete the program and perform the task/s you will teach, in the real world and what level of skills learners will need.

Diagnostic assessment occurs before, or at the start of training. Diagnostic assessment results help us identify adult learners’ strengths and needs early, so that we can plan training delivery strategies that support and upskill learners.



Tradesperson (examples)

Formative assessments occur throughout training. They help us measure learner progress and provide targeted feedback. Most importantly, results of frequent formative assessments throughout training inform next steps as we continuously adjust learning activities to reflect learner progress. With diagnostic or formative assessments, we might assess foundation skills in isolation, for example, stand-alone foundation skills assessment before training begins, or we might assess foundation skills in conjunction with the vocational skill.

Summative assessment is where we look back to measure the outcomes of training. Summative assessment in a vocational context must incorporate assessment of foundation skills embedded in the vocational skills. This is because competence means having all skills needed to perform a job activity in typical workplace conditions.

Here is a simple work example to identify the foundation skills needed.

Imagine that the tradesperson in the accompanying image has come to your home to measure and install new kitchen cupboards. Now consider which foundation skills he will need to perform this task to your satisfaction.

To do the job, some of the foundation skills this tradesperson will need include:

- measure and check linear dimensions on walls, cabinets, windows and appliances
- record measurements and prepare hand-sketches
- reflect on and review the result
- communicate orally with the customer
- prepare a written quote.

In addition, he must know:

- when to be precise with measurements, and when to estimate
- how to coordinate hands and tools
- how to present himself and how to act when in your home – for example, leave his dirty boots at the door before entering.

(Adapted from <http://oggiconsulting.com/wp-content/uploads/Numeracy-by-Measure-Snapshot-Cabinet-Fitting.pdf>)

In the simple example above, we have identified some of the foundation skills this tradesperson will need to

do the job. Your next step is to identify the level of skill needed. To do this we refer to the ACSF and the CSfW developmental frameworks.

Foundation skills in diagnostic assessment

In diagnostic assessment, the quality of assessment evidence is critical. There is a lot at stake for the learners, and for the teacher. If the information revealed is insufficient or inconsistent with reality, then the teacher's instructions, support and feedback may not meet learner needs. For example, they may not make any foundation skills progress; they may be expected to perform at a level they are not prepared for, or not able to manage.

The quality of diagnostic assessment evidence depends on the assessment tool and process used. Effective diagnostic foundation skill assessment tools meet two important criteria. They must assess the particular foundation skills your learners will need, as described in the ACSF or CSfW, and produce sufficient, reliable data about learners' skills.

To select the right diagnostic assessment tool for your program, you need to ask these four questions:

Has the assessment tool been validated?

Validation means that people with sufficient foundation skills experience of the ACSF and CSfW have systematically checked the assessment tool to confirm that the questions, resources (stimuli) and tasks align with the foundation skills level they intend to assess.

Freely-available diagnostic tools that have been validated by industry specialists are:

Precision Consultancy Assessment Tasks (http://www.precisionconsultancy.com.au/acs_framework/). These generic and contextualised paper-based tools are based on the ACSF and provide examples of the alignment of question, resource (stimuli) and task to the stated ACSF level.

The Foundation Skills Assessment Tool (FSAT), which is available from the Australian Centre for Educational Research (ACER) (<http://www.education.gov.au/foundation-skills-assessment-tool>). This is an online and paper-based assessment tool that covers all five ACSF core skills as well as the ten CSfW focus areas.

If you write your own foundation skills assessment tool, we suggest finding someone else with industry

and foundation skills expertise to review and validate your tool.

Is the assessment tool generic or contextualised?

When possible, choose a diagnostic assessment tool that features 'everyday occurrences' that all learners can relate to. ACER advises that:

For a pre-training assessment, generic LLN assessments are usually more appropriate for use than context-specific ones. As the learner has not yet been introduced to, nor taught, the discourse and specific contexts and content of the course (2015, p. 20).

For vocational programs, Keiko Yasukawa reminds us of the social practices view of LLN:

The LLN assessments not embedded in context cannot tell us very much that is useful for predicting learners' and workers' success ... the assessments tend to be far too generic and simplistic to reflect the range of context specific LLN practices that all of the learners and workers will encounter (Yasukawa, K. 2014, p. 104).

Sometimes we don't have the time, resources or appropriate subject matter experts available to construct an assessment tool, particularly a diagnostic tool. In this case, the teacher may source and select a tool from those currently available. Many of these tools are written for a generic context, meaning that all learners, regardless of their personal or professional backgrounds, should be able to relate to the context behind the test questions and activities.

A diagnostic tool written for a generic context may create engagement challenges because not all learners will necessarily relate to the generic scenarios selected as the basis for test activities. For example, if an assessment includes a series of questions based on taking an overseas trip, there is a chance that not every learner who undertakes the assessment will be familiar with the specific context, language and vocabulary they are being asked to use. The question or assessment task may not give the learner an opportunity to reveal their foundation skills and knowledge.

Does the assessment tool sufficiently cover the particular foundation skills learners will need to achieve the learning outcomes?

Many diagnostic tools cover a limited range of core skills. Additionally, for each core skill, the tool may assess a

limited range of focus areas. Make sure the tool you use covers the aspects of each core skill that are most important to the type of training. For example, in the ACSF, the core skill of learning features six different focus areas, including the ability to:

- identify learning needs and goals
- plan and organise learning and study activities
- locate, evaluate and organise information
- learn with and from others.

Using this example, you must make sure the learning assessment tool you choose covers the particular focus areas that your learners will need, and that you want to assess.

Select a diagnostic tool that assesses writing skills. Most adult education and training programs involve writing. Writing is integral to most workplace roles and we are advised by Lesley Farrell (2016) that it is an increasingly important 21st Century workforce foundation skill. Oral Communication may also be relevant to the training program. Has the tool or process enabled the adult to reveal their strengths and needs in this area? You may need to provide supplementary tasks during the initial stages of training to enable the learner to reveal their foundation skills capacity with the skills not included sufficiently in the diagnostic tool.

Will the assessment tool produce valid and reliable evidence?

Make sure the diagnostic tool you choose will produce valid evidence and results. For example, some diagnostic tools provide a result which indicates a writing score, or a score for literacy (reading and writing), but the tool does not require the learner to construct or produce a piece of writing. The literacy score provided in this case is neither a valid nor reliable indicator of the learner's writing skills.

It is hard to produce a statistically valid diagnostic assessment tool. Some tools offer different mastery outcomes, i.e. the score may represent 50% mastery of the stated focus areas. Therefore, although you may receive a report that says a learner is at ACSF level three for reading, the learner may need some revision and skill development to ensure that they reach level three in all aspects of the core skill.

Diagnostic foundation skill assessment – a simple example

Let's return to our tradesperson. Imagine that he wants to attend training to help him learn how to measure and

install your kitchen cupboard. You consider the diagnostic LLN skill assessments available. Considering availability, cost and quality, you select the following diagnostic assessments:

- Before training: selected assessments from the Foundation Skills Assessment Tool (FSAT):
- Numeracy; communicate for work; work in a digital world.
- At the start of training: writing activity to fill in questionnaire about learning goals and needs that includes some paragraph writing.
- Numeracy activity: estimate and measure, a practical exercise that incorporates the ability to coordinate hands and tools.

Foundation skills in formative assessment

According to Masters (2015) 'the fundamental purpose of assessment is to establish where learners are in their learning at the time of assessment'. This statement is based on findings of the Gordon Commission (2013), a US based initiative established to research assessment in education best practices, consider the implications for education in the 21st Century and develop recommendations. They found that learning is far more effective if we use what they called the 'To Assess → To Teach → To Learn' model (Figure 2) that is a departure from traditional approaches.

The 'Teach → Learn → Assess' model has been used over time. First, we teach people something, learners learn, and then at the end of the program we assess, to make sure they have learned. We now know that learning is far more effective if we assess first, and use assessment throughout training to focus and guide what we teach.

It is important to use formative assessment to check for the learning that is occurring or has happened. Additionally, it is critical to find out how effective the strategies you have used to build foundation skills are. Then to continuously adapt and change instruction and support strategies, to promote ongoing progress.

The Assess → Teach → Learn approach helps both the teacher and the learner.

The benefits for teachers are that it:

- Informs the delivery plan
- Promotes in-time and on-target feedback
- Integrates learners' feedback into instruction and support.

The benefits for learners are that it:

- Develops their self-reflection, concept of self within the learning process
- Builds confidence with ‘how to’ perform the tasks
- Affirms what is expected through benchmarks or rubrics.

Giving feedback and showing progress

We recommend frequent opportunities for effective communication between you and the learners throughout the formative assessment stage by using feedback as a learning tool. Brown, Roediger and McDaniel (2014) state:

To be most effective, retrieval must be repeated again and again, in spaced out sessions ... Studies show that giving feedback strengthens retention more than testing alone.

Learners need to know if they are ‘getting it’ well before the summative assessment. To be effective, you need to frequently engage learners with foundation skills practice. To do this, stretch your delivery plan to incorporate opportunities for observation, discussion, practice, and reflection.

Teachers can use feedback to clarify steps, reveal the LLN skill nuances for the workplace context or to expose common mistakes, or misunderstandings. Further to that, feedback will confirm progress, identify strengths and what’s needed. Teachers should construct clear benchmarks, checklists or rubrics with what is expected or required.

What are the criteria for learning progress? We are accountable for the learners’ outcomes. As teachers it may not be possible to sufficiently observe learners’ progress with the foundation skills during the delivery stage. For example, the size of the learner group, delivery mode and format may impact here.

Thalheimer (2016) suggests moving away from evaluation that doesn’t inform you about the learner’s’ progress with the skill in focus. He recommends asking learners to self-assess by answering a five-level multiple-choice question. Here’s how it works: Start with a question for the learner to answer, ‘How confident are you at writing a complex report’, or, ‘How confident are you with LLN strategy/skill’?

Present the following choice of responses (learners choose the one that best answers the question):



Figure 2

- I am confused and stuck
- I’ve tried and have questions
- I’m getting this
- I can do this independently
- It’s a breeze.

How to interpret results:

- Learners who respond with choice 1 or 2 will need support.
- Learners who respond with choices 4 or 5 can likely manage independently.
- The adult learners who respond with choice 3 may continue to need to refer to examples/models or check with others on their progress, but they are on their way to independence.
- The five levels align closely to the support requirements for each level described in the ACSF and the CSfW.

Formative foundation skill assessments – a simple example

We return again to our tradesperson. As training progresses, you introduce a diverse array of practical, theoretical and reflecting formative assessments, and continuously tailor and adapt training to reflect progress.

Some examples of formative assessments include:

- Practical tasks: measuring, drawing plans, building models.
- Discussions: practise vocabulary and sentence structure related to customer interactions; explain how they completed an activity and why they did it.
- Reflections: opportunity to think about a practical task or discussion, and to identify what they learned, what they still need to learn, what they struggled with.
- Learner self-assessment.

Foundation skills in summative assessment

Simmons and Yaringa (2015) remind us that the principles of assessment are especially important in summative assessment because:

You need to remember we cannot measure learning directly ... Any assessment strategies and processes ... are ‘proxy’ measures of students’ learning. As such, we need to ensure that the ways we use to assess learning are as accurate and fair as they can be (Simmons & Yaringa, 2015, p. 61).

A reminder that the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) levels are not the same as the ACSF levels. The AQF describes the ten levels of qualification available in Australia, including school qualifications, VET and higher education. In VET, the highest level of qualification, such as level eight is for graduate certificates or diplomas. The ACSF focuses on core LLN skills and describes five levels of performance in each core skill. It is important to be aware that it is possible that an AQF Certificate III level course has units of competence requiring ACSF foundation skills that can be in the range of levels 2 to 4.

When we're talking about reasonable adjustment in assessment, a good example of a reasonable adjustment is not to make the foundation skill demand of the assessment easier. Summative assessment must assess competence, which includes the foundation skills needed to demonstrate competence. To assess competence, we must assess learners' ability to perform as required in realistic working conditions. Always aim for learners to demonstrate the foundation skill at the level required by the work task, and as described by the ACSF and CSfW.

Reasonable adjustment is the term given to any adjustments made to the assessment process or materials that offers someone with a disability a fair opportunity to access and complete the assessment. All adjustments must be 'reasonable', meaning that they must not compromise the integrity of the assessment. So therefore, when applying a reasonable adjustment, you may not simplify the foundation skill demand of the assessment, but you may adjust the assessment process or tools to make it possible for someone with a disability to show what they know and what they can do.

Now for our suggestions ...

When developing and validating a summative assessment the following points may be helpful to include in a checklist.

Focus on validity and ensure the tool measures the foundation skills as described in the ACSF or CSfW performance descriptions.

Cross-check to the foundation skills performance descriptions at the task level. What should the assessment task enable the adult learner to demonstrate? Do the tasks, stimuli, support and resources align with what is expected at that level?

Ensure that the assessment validation process includes a cross-check with the ACSF or CSfW performance descriptions.

Make sure that at least one person involved with developing or validating the tool has foundation skills expertise. RTOs often engage industry experts to assist with assessment tool development and validation, but these industry experts may not have the foundation skills expertise needed to ensure the assessment tool challenges learners to the correct level of foundation skill.

Focus on reliability and ensure the design and implementation of the assessment work together to deliver an assessment that is likely to produce consistent results.

Make sure the assessment process includes sufficient support and opportunity for reasonable adjustment.

Ensure the assessment tool includes clear, complete and succinct instructions for learners, assessors and any administration staff who may also use the tool.

Be aware that there is foundation skill demand in the assessment procedures and formats.

Prepare assessor marking guides that include the foundation skill performance descriptions as part of the evidence criteria.

Test or trial the assessment tool to check if the tasks and stimuli enable the learner to demonstrate the necessary foundation and vocational skills. Give them a test run.

Focus on sufficiency and ensure the tasks enable the learner to provide sufficient evidence that they hold the foundation skills at the required level.

For the ACSF, make sure the assessment activities and tools cover all performance variables as required for the task and context and the complete range of focus areas included in the relevant core skill/s, at the level/s required.

For the CSfW make sure the assessment activities and documentation cover the skill area at the level to be assessed and the complete range of focus areas that represent the skill at the level.

If you work for an RTO, make sure your RTO's assessment tool validation criteria includes a focus

on foundation skills. To do this, consider adding some of the criteria listed above to your validation checklist.

Conclusion

In this article, we have encouraged you, both teachers and managers in a range of adult education contexts, to apply a foundation skills 'lens' to your training and assessment practice. To do this, we have promoted a 'start-to-finish' approach, meaning that the focus should be on foundation skills throughout all stages of training: before, throughout, at the end, and after training. We hope that some of the suggestions and examples provided in this article will help you uncover and build your learners' foundation skills so that we can all celebrate our learners' progress and successful outcomes.

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Numeracy Matters

Staying healthy for the long term

By Tina Berghella

Many adults struggle with the specialised skills of health literacy. Having difficulties with the literacy and numeracy skills associated with chronic disease can have adverse effects on lifestyle and life expectancy. Tina Berghella has been working with Diabetes Victoria to improve their education program for people living with diabetes.



The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) defines health literacy as:

the knowledge and skills needed to understand and use information relating to health issues such as drugs and alcohol, disease prevention and treatment, safety and accident prevention, first aid, emergencies and staying healthy (2006).

ABS data derived from the 2006 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALLS) survey shows that 59% of Australian adults lack the minimum health literacy skills needed to cope with everyday life (ABS 4223.0 Health Literacy). This means that many Australian adults have difficulty using everyday health information to make good healthcare decisions.

Diabetes management skills

For people with diabetes, their health literacy skills needs are even more specialised. They need diabetes literacy skills, and more particularly, diabetes numeracy skills. Diabetes management involves significant numeracy skill demands and studies show that low levels of numeracy skills are associated with poorer levels of treatment adherence, blood sugar control, and diabetes knowledge.

The types of diabetes numeracy challenges that some people have been found to struggle with include:

- interpreting blood glucose readings
- reading and interpreting product food labels
- calculating the carbohydrate content of foods
- interpreting serving sizes
- calculating insulin doses
- understanding and making judgments about short term and long term risks.

Diabetes numeracy is complicated by its real world application. Diabetes numeracy tasks must be performed

independently and amid the hustle and bustle of daily life. Added to which, there may be limited access to support and the added pressure of knowing that errors may have serious health consequences.

Diabetes numeracy and the ACSF

Diabetes numeracy skills include all three ACSF numeracy indicators, often in combination. For example, the task of measuring blood glucose levels demands:

- Numeracy skills to read and understand blood glucose measurements, the terminology used, safe and unsafe blood glucose levels and the units of measurement, mmol/L. (ACSF numeracy indicator .09)
- Numeracy skills to use a blood glucose metre, take accurate blood glucose measurements, check the results against safe ranges and reflect on whether the readings are reasonable. (ACSF numeracy indicator .10)
- Numeracy skills to record the measurements and talk about the results, how they were produced and what they mean using specialised blood glucose measurement terminology. (ACSF numeracy indicator .11)

Diabetes numeracy skills demands are complex, not only because of the mathematical knowledge and skill demands. The numeracy demands are highly contextualised and need to be integrated with diabetes knowledge and broader health literacy concepts. Further to this are required skills that include interpreting, analysing, evaluating and using mathematical information to solve problems and make decisions.

The consequences of miscalculations and misunderstandings pose significant short and long term health management risks that need to be considered. Ultimately, the day to day management of diabetes is an individual responsibility. Diabetes numeracy demands align with

ACSF level 4 and ABS data shows that only 5.8% of Australian adults perform at this level.

Practising health literacy and numeracy skills

As part of the Diabetes Victoria education program, participants are given exercises to practise the health literacy skills they need in daily life. An example of one of the exercises is: participants are asked to determine the amount of carbohydrate in a date pudding recipe. They are provided with the date pudding recipe and a list of common food items showing the amount of carbohydrate they contain by serving size.

ACSF Numeracy indicator .09

Participants need to read and interpret the mathematical information in the recipe text to understand the following:

- How to follow a recipe text.
- The language of measurement, such as weight measured in grams, 'g' is an abbreviation for grams.
- Amount of food expressed by count, such as 2 eggs.
- Volume using different units of measurement: teaspoon, cup and mL and weight using grams.
- Number of serves and serving size.
- What information is relevant to the exercise (for example, ingredients, amounts and serves) and what is irrelevant (method, source).
- How to navigate the food list and interpret quantities by count, volume and weight and carbohydrate amounts in grams (for example, 1 cup of plain flour contains 95 grams of carbohydrate).

Numeracy indicator .10

Participants need to select and apply problem solving processes to calculate the carbohydrate in a serve of the recipe. This includes:

- Using the food list to identify the ingredients that contain carbohydrate and to look up the amount of carbohydrate in a quantity of the ingredient.
- Calculating the amount of carbohydrate per ingredient and then the total carbohydrate in the recipe.
- Using the number of serves to calculate amount of carbohydrate per serve.
- Rounding the figures to whole numbers.
- Using a calculator to tally results.
- Using estimation and reflecting on the reasonableness of calculation results.

Numeracy indicator .11

Participants need to be able to discuss the information in the classroom setting using the specialised language.

Participants then need to use written mathematical language to represent the problem-solving process and the final result.

The list of numeracy skills required for the task looks daunting and a significant amount of pre-teaching, using a scaffolded approach is required to build skills and confidence. Pre-teaching also needs to be at a suitable pace and respectful of those participants who may struggle with maths anxiety and are particularly at risk of disengaging.

Suggestions for pre-teaching include:

- Starting with a simpler recipe with perhaps only two ingredients.
- Expressing amounts by count only.
- Using amounts that are easy to lookup in the food list.
- Using only whole numbers and a single serving size.

A good example of this would be an egg on toast with no butter. Subsequently, another recipe could be introduced with more ingredients and different ways of expressing amounts.

Still working with whole numbers only and a single serving size, an example could be a homemade pizza. Then, introduce a recipe with more than one serving, using amounts and serving sizes, and then start introducing decimals and rounding. For each level of skill, include worked examples and practice activities. Finally introduce the very real example of the date pudding recipe exercise and consolidate the learning.

Framing health risks

Framing is the way in which information is presented. A framing effect is a problem that happens when equivalent information is interpreted differently because it is presented differently. A familiar example is the glass half empty and the glass half full. This mathematically equivalent information is presented differently with different interpretations.

Understanding framing effects is critical in health literacy. Health information is often about risk and the mathematical knowledge and skills area of probability (and therefore risk) is often poorly understood. For example, many adults do not know that 1 in 10 and 10 in 100 represent equivalent risks, instead believing the second option represents a higher risk. When presented with risks of 1 in 10 and 1 in 20, many people think the second option represents the higher risk because 20 is



bigger than 10. Also, to further complicate matters, we are biased towards the positive. For example, given the choice of a 10% risk of dying versus 90% probability of surviving many people see the second option as more favourable.

Even without using numbers, understanding and talking about risk is challenging because probability has its own mathematical language. This language includes everyday terms such as likely, unlikely, very likely, very unlikely, possibly, greater chance, lesser chance, probability, probably not, certain and uncertain. These terms are familiar to most people who are native speakers of English. They can hide in everyday texts or may be in plain sight. However, they should not be underestimated as the numeracy skills needed to understand the mathematical information embedded in texts containing this language is aligned to the numeracy core skill at ACSF level 3.

Also, the health risks associated with decisions people make are short term (for example, drink alcohol and you risk a hangover) or long term (for example, drink alcohol and you risk developing liver disease). The same is true for diabetes. In the short term, a person with diabetes whose blood glucose levels are not managed risks hypoglycaemia and in the long term, they risk blood vessel damage. We also tend to make health behaviour decisions based on short term risks, for example, deciding to drink alcohol and risk a hangover without considering the long term risk of liver disease.

To make decisions that promote good health and prevent disease, people need to be able to judge short term and long term health risks. Effectively framing health risk information involves:

- Communicating risk information carefully by using common denominators, for example, 2 in 20 and 1 in 20 instead of 1 in 10 and 1 in 20.
- Communicating visually with clear diagrams and infographics.
- Adding qualitative information, for example, 'as few as 1 in 20'.
- Managing bias by advising people what they should do, rather than what they shouldn't, for example, 'manage your blood sugars to prevent blood vessel damage'.

Concluding comments

As a practitioner with many years' experience working in health education and vocational training, I believe that there is much work to be done developing and reinforcing the necessary skills for maintaining day to day health and risk prevention for everyone, but more particularly, for people living with chronic disease. We can all be more aware and adept at providing support through greater awareness of the numeracy and literacy skills needed to live a long and healthy life.

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Technology Matters

Unlocking life stories through digital storytelling

By Greg Curran

Students' life stories have always been an important part of teaching for Greg and in recent years his students have taken them to another level. Greg shares one of the most powerful storytelling moments, teaching strategies he used to get there, and some key insights and tips.



All eyes turn toward her as she stands up, nervously casting a glance my way. She stops a moment to compose herself, her hands and voice shaking. As she struggles to say a word, overcome by nerves, her classmate whispers it to her and reassures her to continue with her story. As the other students follow on to tell their stories and push through their nerves, sharing their digital creations, there are grins all round and loud applause.

It is Student Showcase day. We are sharing our favourite videos and stories that we've created this semester. In the audience are my department managers (the 'big bosses' to my students) and another class. To say this is a big moment for my students is an understatement.

Amidst the buzz and euphoria, I can't help but think about the power of my students' life-stories. We've been practising for a week for this showcase. Students have committed to it like nothing else. They're recruiting their children to help them, to check that their speaking is clear and interesting, and to help them with pronunciation. There's a pride here that's incredibly moving. There's a sense of community that's like nothing else I've felt, as we encourage each of our classmates to succeed. There's such joy at seeing the growth in confidence in classmates who have studied together for years.

One of the managers later wrote to my students saying she couldn't shake their stories from her memory, they stayed with her all week. Another manager, who has known my students for years, was very much impressed at the growth in the students' confidence and speaking skills. In the time since the showcase, I've been wracking my brain thinking: What made this special moment what it was? Why did it work so well? Here is my take on those questions.

Building speaking skills and confidence

There were tremendous shifts in my students' skills and confidence levels when they created videos. We used an

interview process for each video, brainstormed and wrote answers beforehand, rehearsed, then filmed. Students weren't allowed cue cards despite their efforts to get classmates to hold up cards out of my eyesight! They knew they didn't have to be 100 percent perfect. What they did need to do though, was to speak clearly so that their audience would understand them. This emphasis was crucial to student success.

Over time, with continued encouragement they became more willing to take the risk and put themselves out there, without anything going seriously awry. In so doing, they came to see the benefits of the process in terms of improving their English-speaking skills. After each video recording, they'd ask me to replay it, and if it wasn't right they were always keen to have another go. Knowing their video would be critically reviewed in class was important to them.

We'd established a supportive review process that focused on speaking:

- clearly (pronunciation)
- in an interesting way (use of intonation)
- sufficiently loud (audibility)
- and in such a way as to show individual personality.

The last aspect of showing personality was especially critical to focus on. I encouraged them whenever they showed their quirks, dared to giggle or smile, or perhaps used their hands demonstratively. Whatever it was that made them different, I wanted them to own it and feel confident showing it in the video. And wow! What a difference these splashes of personality made, drawing people into their videos, as they connected to the humanity they saw on screen.

Inspired by some Hawthorn football club 'Getting To Know Us' videos, we created our own versions to open our showcase. One of the questions used was: What's

one thing people don't know about you? It took us deep into students' village lives, and their often horrific tales of escape to Australia. As I worked my way around the classroom, assisting them with their responses, I was struck at how the stories just poured from them.

Even students who had often struggled to freely communicate were determinedly seeking the words to express what had happened to them. As the stories of their peers began to circulate the room, it was like lighting a fire of inspiration with more and more tales emerging. I couldn't wait, I had to get them speaking on video right away. There was a confidence, a sureness and fluency I'd not often seen.

Seeing each other in a different light

Many of my students had studied with each other for years but they really knew little about each other's lives. What was crucial in this digital storytelling classroom was the sense of community we actively created, so that students felt safe, respected, and always able to withdraw from participation if they wished to. Alongside this was a fierce desire to celebrate progress, a willingness to give it a go, and being 'you' with all your quirks.

This included me as a writing, video-making teacher sharing my stories with them. I also made it a priority of the highest order, to highlight improvements I'd seen and heard, and encouraged my students to do likewise. This honouring of student achievements made a tangible difference. I saw them carry themselves differently. I saw them commit to improving even more, and show a greater willingness to take a chance on things that previously made them nervous.

I've always firmly believed in the power of scaffolds to support students' writing. This year's most powerful writing and speaking moments however, occurred when we ditched the scaffolds. Now don't get me wrong, scaffolds certainly served their purpose in many writing tasks this year. But when we were talking about their lives and what really mattered to them, scaffolds too often resulted in soul-less, impersonal writing or speaking. Wide, open questions and follow-up queries to elicit more detail proved far more effective.

I often found myself astounded at what was pouring out of the students. It was like a new student sitting or standing in front of me. Not surprisingly, hearing the rich emotive tales of their peers also inspired the class like nothing

else. They had so many questions for each other, and the depth of revelation led to them seeing each other in quite a different light.

Audience, audience, audience

Knowing that their creations – whether videos, voice-recordings or story books – were to be viewed, listened to, and read by more than just their teacher was essential. Whether that was our class, my adult pre-service teacher education class, other classes, or our department managers, they knew that an audience who engaged with their work and provided them with feedback really changed the game. It gave students incentive and motivation. Seeing their reactions when they received specific feedback from their audiences was utterly priceless. Their life stories mattered, and were of interest to others. They provoked connections and moved people. And that made for a mighty fine celebration in our little ole class community.

Students may feel upset and frustrated when they first see and hear themselves on camera. Using digital tools like cameras and voice-recorders can be quite exposing. Maybe they haven't seen or heard themselves on camera before. Maybe they're not where they want to be in terms of their literacy and self-presentation skills. And there it is, on camera, able to be played over and over again.

My students in the early days often say things like: 'I'm terrible'; 'I'm no good'; 'I'll never get better'. Here's where there's tremendous opportunities for shifts in thinking and attitude. I ask my students to keep a portfolio for themselves of their work over time. It's a portfolio that we refer to on a regular basis to identify the shifts in development.

I find Google Drive especially useful for this purpose. I teach students to create folders, to upload their work to that folder, and to share that folder with me. Also, we regularly review (as a class community) what we create in our digital storytelling to identify our strengths and to improve our skills. For example, with lower level students, I may focus on:

- Clarity – Can we understand what you're saying?
- Interest – Is your voice interesting?
- Self-Presentation – Are you showing your personality?
Do you look and sound confident?

In their next videos, students are then expected to demonstrate what they've learnt from the feedback.

Through this process, students come to see the greatest potential for learning comes from:

- making mistakes and working to fix them
- identifying specific literacy challenges (like our pronunciation of specific words), or self-presentation challenges (like any nervous habits) and working on such, and
- knowing what we're doing right and continuing to build on this.

Ensuring storytelling tasks are achievable

What do they say about the best laid plans? I've come to realise that you can't have all the tech worked out beforehand. Here's some key teaching strategies I've learnt in this area:

- Check what digital tools your students have access to. This includes the make and model of mobile devices. That way, you can identify useful apps for each type of phone or iPad.
- If you work in a computer lab, check what tools are already loaded onto the computers. If there are headsets, check that they work.
- Tap into student knowledge. Even with students in my lower level classes, they will often find video-making apps that they find easier to use.
- We use the following tools, all of which are free and link to Google: *WeVideo* or *VivaVideo*, *Adobe Spark* and *Audio Recorder* (from Green Apple Studio).

To make storytelling tasks achievable, an especially crucial point in building student engagement and commitment, is to set limits or constraints. For example, with videos or photo-stories it is important to:

- limit the duration of the video to between 30 seconds and a minute
- indicate the number of photos or scenes they can include
- describe the types of shots, like wide, medium or close-up
- stress that there is a limit to the number of takes (otherwise some students will never be satisfied).

I provide a set time for rehearsal and then allow two to three takes, then students must use what they've recorded. They get better as they practise and become more confident.

Never lose the joy

I recommend that you get involved as a learner too in digital storytelling. Have a go and create the stories you are asking your students to create. Show them that you are a learner too and a digital storyteller and that you're interested in learning how to use new tech tools. They will see that you experience some of the same frustrations that they have. Above all, show them that you enjoy the buzz of creating, sharing and reviewing the videos you create.

I'm not suggesting that you must be an expert, knowing all the bells and whistles of each tech tool. Your students can be a tremendous resource for knowledge and skills, so make use of their expertise and have fun. Learning new digital storytelling skills and techniques can be challenging, and sometimes you may want to give up. Making mistakes and slipping up can be funny plus it affords great learning opportunities in a supportive, respectful class. It also keeps students committed, interested and engaged.

This article was compiled from blog posts originally published as:

Curran, G. (2016). How to Unlock Student Life Stories [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://pushingtheedge.org/unlock-life-stories/>

Curran, G. (2016). The Power of Digital Storytelling for English Language Learners [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://pushingtheedge.org/digital-storytelling/>

For technology teaching tips and insights, check out my website at: <http://pushingtheedge.org/technology/>

Also, listen to my podcast, *Pushing The Edge with Greg Curran* at: <http://pushingtheedge.org/itunes/>, where I chat to educators that are pushing the edge for innovation and social justice in education.

Dr Greg Curran is an English language teacher, a lecturer in teacher education, a blogger and podcaster. Greg's key teaching interests are digital storytelling, e-learning, and social justice. He tweets as @GregBCurran.

Open Forum

Showcasing innovation in teaching practice

By Meg Cotter

Nowadays, there is a lot said about innovation. But what is it and how do we do it in our teaching practice? This Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE) funded project set out to find new ways to showcase innovation in teaching practices.



The definition of innovation seems to sit on a sliding scale from 'new things or ways of doing things' for a particular person and place, all the way through to that of 'disruptive' innovation, usually within the context of huge technological change. It could be argued that in everyday teaching, incremental innovations naturally occur as we adapt to learner needs and technological and cultural changes over time.

This report describes eight programs exemplifying 'innovative' practice in Learn Local organisations in Victoria. Funded by an ACFE Capacity and Innovation Fund 7 grant, this project focused on identifying innovative teaching practices of teachers and developing a new way to share those innovative practices across Learn Local Organisations.

There are many good teachers, programs and practices occurring in Learn Local organisations throughout Victoria, but it can be difficult to find and disseminate this knowledge. This project sought to use the platform of *YouTube* as an effective way to communicate innovative teaching practices, both visually and through storytelling as a mechanism to provide accessible professional



Filming at PRACE

development. As well as showcasing good practice, the project aimed to value the work of teachers and inspire others. On a broader level, it may help facilitate ideas and discussion around what 'innovation' is in the context of adult community education.

Some of the participants in these videos gave descriptions of innovation in statements such as:

- Ensure the program inspires, encourages and engages students.
- Acknowledge everyone learns differently and how they learn best.
- Adapt and mould to the students you teach, rather than traditional teaching.
- Looking at a situation, acknowledging how it can be done better, and asking how can I do it?
- Looking at learner need and asking how can we attack that in a new way?

After sending out a call for applications for the project via email and other networks, eight programs were selected from three ACFE regions. We worked closely with each centre to tell their story in an accurate, compelling and educative way. Yum Studio was engaged for the video production and the film crew of Erin McKuskey and Michael Gwyther, drew on their extensive experience working in the ACE/Learn Local sector to produce high quality and authentic videos.

The introductory video provides examples of what the definition of 'innovation' is for each of the participants. Here is a brief overview of each of the eight innovative programs or teaching practices.

Let's speak - Carringbush Adult Education

This program describes a systematic and effective approach to teaching pronunciation to English language students looking for work. After identifying this challenge for learners, the teachers put extensive resources into

researching the area of pronunciation. Their practice is research informed and involved the application for grants to fund further study and develop new teaching methodology and materials.

Kim loves life reader - Djerriwarrh Community and Education Services

This project involved using storytelling and real life stories to create a reader to improve health literacy and English language skills for adult learners. This reader took on a life of its own when learners wrote their own song and music to go along with the book and also shared stories around health. Teachers obtained a grant from Cancer Victoria to print the reader and now have received another grant to write support materials.

The step challenge - Olympic Adult Education (OAE)

This program offered a whole of centre approach to improving health through walking while also learning language, literacy and numeracy. This program was open to all staff and students at OAE. Everyone was provided with a pedometer to count their steps. Every week participants submitted their weekly tally. The figures were then uploaded into a central database and steps were recorded on a map of Australia. Teachers incorporated this data into their lessons that included numeracy, geography, health and fitness, history, culture and digital literacy.

iPads in the classroom - Preston Reservoir Adult Community Education (PRACE)

Introducing and piloting iPads in the English language classroom involved seven teachers who worked together on a VET Development Centre (VDC) funded project. They developed and shared knowledge and practice in digital pedagogy. This highlighted the need for a whole of organisation approach to integrating technology in the classroom. iPads are now used by learners to access learning apps and use Google documents to share work with the teacher and others.

Forensic science approach - Community Colleges Gippsland (incorporating ESG College)

A new approach for engaging young people in their business administration units through learning about what they are really interested in, forensic science. This teacher had twelve boys enrolled in Business Admin in VET in Schools (VETis). She found out what they were interested in and then designed her classes around their interest. Over one term, students had to try and discover who committed the crime. The teacher set up crime scenes,



Filming at Djerriwarrh

databases, and even tyre prints. Through this engagement in activities, the boys could learn to use software programs for business that they had not used before.

Pathways to employment - Jewish Care

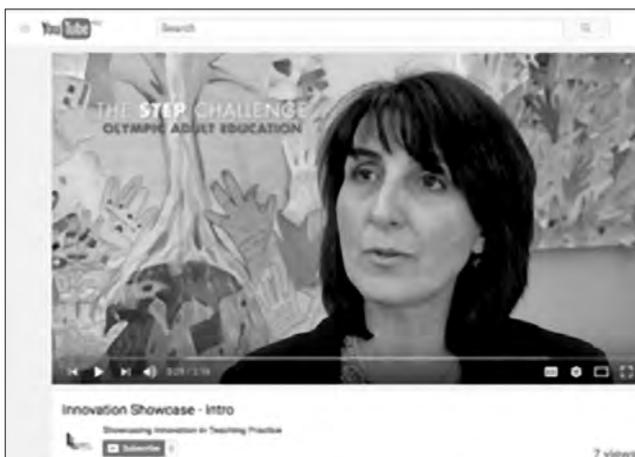
The Pathways to employment course was a central part of a holistic learning offering for people with intellectual disabilities, ranging from low to high functioning and ages 18–30 years. The course prepared learners for job-seeking activities and focused on both social and vocational skills. Central to this program was making sure that learners felt at ease and could ask any questions. Hence the informal learning environment where participants sat in a sun-filled lounge living area with classes taking part on couches. A TV and kitchen facilities were available to give a level of informality so participants could relax and ask questions that they might otherwise find uncomfortable.

The multicultural kitchen - Pines Learning

Learning about the community and English language through cooking. This course targeted people who may have barriers to attending regular classes or who may be passive in their behaviour in English language classes. This hands-on model also encouraged sharing of learner knowledge and hence facilitated a strength-based approach to learning. This centre was able to kick start this program through successfully obtaining grant money to buy kitchen equipment and obtaining access to the onsite council industrial kitchen.

Digital literacy and ESL - Yarraville Community Centre

Getting older adult English learners into apps that interest them and help them learn. Students contribute to learning beyond the classroom activities through Pinterest and Google documents. Drawing on the interests of the students the teacher has been able to reduce the level of



Screenshots of Youtube videos

anxiety around using digital technology and form linkages between classroom and outside life.

Moving forward

The potential of sharing teaching best practice through short digestible stories via video and *YouTube* is significant. TED Talks and other channels have shown how effective the online video medium can be in sharing information and learning new skills. The videos for this project were high in quality as they were produced by professionals. However, effective stories can be told with simple handheld mobile devices and a range of software and apps that can be uploaded to *YouTube* easily. This provides a simple affordable way to share information, improve

practice and keep teachers up to date with professional development.

Specific areas of focus on such things as introducing Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) or Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths STEAM to adult classes, numeracy lessons, health and financial literacy can be developed and shared. For some teachers already navigating a way through existing video files from around the world, it may be daunting as there are so many. Curating online information is important both for students and teachers. *YouTube* does allow you to follow channels that you like and develop a collection.

Not only is the use of the term innovation debatable, but also the significance of its value is in question in the broader context of progress. There is an interesting article by Jesse Adams Stein, first published in *The Conversation* and then *TheAge* comment section online (<http://www.theage.com.au/comment/stop-using-innovation-as-a-meaningless-buzzword-20170119-gtv4y6.html>) in which she questions the overuse of the word when linked to economic market driven discourse. She argues that along with 'innovate' we should also embrace a few other less fashionable verbs such as: maintain, rebuild, reform, tolerate, make, salvage, repurpose, help and repair. It is heartening that the clear focus of teachers from this project defined 'innovation' in terms of how effective and engaging the learning was for the student.

The Showcasing Innovation in Teaching Practice project was supported by the Victorian Government and funded by the Adult Community & Further Education Board. This project was managed by the Wyndham Community & Education Centre. Video production by Yum Studio. The videos can be viewed at YouTube: <https://goo.gl/B2H9LF>

Meg Cotter is a teacher, resource developer and project officer in the Learn Local sector and also co-president of VALBEC. Her current role of Education Projects Coordinator is based at Wyndham Community & Education Centre.

Foreign Correspondence

Training parents in Timor-Leste

By Anna Cranney

Deep in the hills of Timor-Leste's south coast, Quimar Soares is preparing for today's class. But Quimar is not your typical Timorese student. At 35 years of age, this will be her first experience of a classroom. Quimar is soon joined by a group of 74 neighbours, all of whom are foregoing a day's work in nearby fields, to attend this training. Most of them share a similar story to Quimar in that they have had no experience of primary school education or training before today.

Quimar and her neighbours are attending a 10-week Parent Education program delivered by Timorese trainers from Mary MacKillop International (MMI). This training aims to better engage parents in the early years of their child's education. There are multiple imperatives for implementing a parental engagement program in rural Timor-Leste. During decades of conflict, many Timorese experienced disrupted schooling. Today, Timorese parents valiantly live with the impacts of their own disrupted schooling in their everyday lives.

In 2010, the United Nations Development Program estimated that 58% of the adult population had basic literacy skills (UN Human Development report, 2010). It is estimated that literacy rates in rural and remote sub-districts, such as Quimar's village, are significantly lower. For Timorese parents who grew up during the Indonesian occupation, education for their own children is now their highest priority. However, their literacy skills impact on their ability to be active in many parts of their child's education.

Further complicating this situation is Timor-Leste's rugged terrain where schools can be long distances from homes and can be inaccessible during 'tempu udan', or the wet season. Additionally, a lack of adequately trained early childhood professionals in many remote areas means that preschool education cannot be consistently delivered in some sub-districts. MMI's program aims to address some of these barriers by training parents to understand basic elements of early childhood education and to practise them with their children at home.



The Parent Education program has operated, in various forms, since 2014 with the support of UNICEF and USAID via The Asian Foundation. In 2016, I was employed to work to review and update the program with the MMI team based in Dili. We used the feedback from participants like Quimar to revise the training. We then tried to view the content through the eyes of parents.

It was important to update training with the knowledge that participants were not educators well-versed in theories of child development and pedagogy. For example, on the first day, the existing training stated:

At 4 years old, this is what a typical Timorese child will be demonstrating in terms of cognitive and emotional development.

We saw the need to simplify the content and prompt parents to share their own observations, with questions such as: What do you see your child doing now? How do they play with their siblings and their cousins? What do they seem to be happy and sad about at home? We found that more personalised questions allowed the parents to view important concepts through their own experiences as a parent.



Quimar Soares at the Parent Education program



Children watching their parents perform educational songs in the final showcase

The key changes we made to the existing program included:

- updated the training and resources so that adult learners with limited Tetun literacy and numeracy skills were supported
- aligned training content and resources to the recently released national curriculum for early childhood and primary school education
- simplified pedagogical concepts for parents with little experience of education themselves
- updated content to reflect the changing policies in Timor-Leste around child protection
- supported parents to visit a pre-school classroom (many for the first time), to get an insight into what happens in a school each day.

At the conclusion of the program, Quimar was able to understand what pre-school and primary school education is, why it is important, and to visit a classroom and meet teachers at the local school. Quimar learnt about simple counting and alphabet games; how to use visual literacy to read simple books with her children; and understand child protection laws and different strategies for behaviour

... continued from page 17

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management at home. Throughout the training, she also practised creating learning resources and games from free materials found around her home, such as rocks and plastic bottles. On the final day of the 10-week training, all parents showcased to their children the skills they had learnt.

Quimar's own feedback at the end of her training highlighted the confidence and practical knowledge she had gained:

Most of the parents in our rural area have no basic education so through this program we can understand and learn some basic knowledge about how to treat our children and teach them after and before school. I am happy because I can learn how to read, write, sing school songs, count numbers, do art and craft. Then, after the training, I go and teach those lessons to my children at home.

By updating the training, we wanted to ensure that parents like Quimar would finish the program feeling confident and empowered. So far, we've observed that the updated activities, games and resources encourage parents to play a more active and influential role in their child's educational journey, regardless of their own school experience.

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Anna has worked on a number of education and training projects in Timor-Leste over the past seven years. She is passionate about the provision of quality training in regional and remote communities in Timor-Leste and Australia.

Elizabeth Gunn has taught in the field of EAL, LOTE and literacy/numeracy education since 1992 in a range of educational contexts including: remote aboriginal communities, Victorian primary and secondary schools, and international and vocational adult education in China and Australia.

Beside the Whiteboard

You have to be amazing ... and work hard

An interview with Marj Sjostrom by Lynne Matheson

Recognised for her passion for teaching adults, Marj Sjostrom has been a driving force at Keysborough Learning Centre (KLC) for over 30 years. Being flexible is the key to her teaching success as well as curiosity and being prepared to try new things.

Marj was genuinely surprised when her name was announced as Learn Local Outstanding Practitioner at the 2016 ACFE awards night. Not having prepared a speech, she said that all she could think of was to express her appreciation for the tremendous team that she works with, and so dedicated the award to them. I met with Marj after she had been teaching a full day of classes at KLC. She radiated energy as she told me about her students.

Marj explained that her motivation has always been to show the students how to learn, as much as to see them progress through a course, whether a pre-accredited computer class or a Certificate in General Education for Adults (CGEA) class. Over a couple of hours, Marj spoke about her work that she so obviously continues to enjoy. As she says, it is never boring and has plenty of variety. She is one who doesn't like to do the same thing twice. Marj likes to excite her students with an admonishment to 'be amazing' as she encourages them to work hard in their learning.

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

I began my career as a primary school teacher then went on to further study and achieved my Graduate Diploma in Education: Literacy and TESOL. I am dedicated to the delivery of education in a community setting and to the building of strong quality frameworks that empower students in their learning journeys.

The students I have taught over the years, have come primarily from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds or from limited educational backgrounds. These include people facing barriers to accessing education because of various disability and personal circumstances. I have taught accredited and pre-accredited classes, all levels of the CGEA, Computers for beginners, English for the very beginners, and Transition

to Work programs. This wide variety of work has helped me develop my teaching skills and individual style.

In early 2000, I took up the position of Senior Tutor/ Curriculum Coordinator with a teaching load. In this role, I was responsible for the coordination and compliance of delivery and assessment of the CGEA. I also coordinated Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) Foundation and Intermediate, for a period of five years up to December 2013.

In March 2014, I was appointed to the position of Delivery and Assessment Manager. In this role, I am responsible for ensuring that the delivery and assessment of all KLC educational programs are compliant across accredited and pre-accredited areas. This includes moderation and verification, mentoring our teachers, offering positive feedback and implementing professional development sessions in both areas.

My specialties are literacy and numeracy and English language training and assessment, which allows me to work closely with other specialist trainer/assessors in the delivery of pre-accredited and accredited vocational programs at the KLC. With the Educational program manager, Mary Fox, we have developed a suite of courses through listening to what the students want to learn and then modelling the courses around this need into a course overview using the A-Frame.

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

I would have to say my learners. I develop my programs around their needs and wants. This way they are instantly engaged because they are learning what is important for them.

I use a variety of delivery methods and educational theories appropriate to my students. For instance, I use

a linguistic and communicative approach when teaching EAL students. I deliver the classes through discussions, excursions, visual presentations, written work, speaking and listening activities, reading activities, all of which I hope are interesting and innovative. I praise the students constantly and give them feedback on their work and their progress.

I like to use technology, especially *Youtube*, online games and various websites about real life activities such as training in CPR, recognition of stroke symptoms, ways to use water wisely. I also use a variety of language activities to reinforce grammar and pictures to help stimulate conversation; and software packages such as Microsoft Office 2010 and Windows Photo Story 3.

I always try to keep my students involved in their learning process. As I am teaching level 1 this year, I have used the theme 'Using English in the Neighborhood' and it has proved to be very popular with the students. It helps them with their everyday literacy problems, as well as giving the students practice dialogue for many situations they will encounter in their neighborhood: at the doctors, making an appointment, making a complaint, giving reasons why they are late. I encourage my students to constantly reflect on their learning in terms of what they learnt, and what they want/need to learn next term.

We engage the students at KLC by listening to their needs and introducing the classes or extra support they need. This is often done through the initial conversations with them and then throughout the year when we survey all students and ask them what they have enjoyed and would like to do next. I also like to visit the classes when possible and speak to the students. This allows me to have real conversations about their learning, their progress and talk about their pathways. We survey the teachers and admin staff as well and utilise all the data to plan and underpin our programs so that they are very much evidence-based.

What have been some of the challenges and highlights of working in adult language, literacy and numeracy education?

Highlights in my working life would have to be the great team of my fellow teachers who have enriched my teaching, shared their ideas and had fun. Having a management team that totally supports you and your teaching, plus supporting the students and teachers in their good and



Marj Sjostrom

sad times. Knowing their doors are always open to lend a helping hand or a listening ear.

Meeting and teaching many students and observing their progress throughout the years. It is so rewarding to observe them gaining confidence and skills which helps them in their everyday lives and many years later seeing them graduate with a certificate. It is very humbling to know you had a small part in this journey.

Observing students building relationships with one another which extend outside the classroom, while also learning about the various cultures and traditions. Watching my students take on their own learning so that I become a guide who helps them reach their goal. Mentoring our teachers and helping them build up rich resources for their classroom and at the same time being a listening ear for them when things haven't quite gone to plan.

A special highlight last year was when I was announced Learn Local Outstanding Practitioner which was such an honour not only for myself, but also for our centre, those I work with, and all the students I teach.

Challenges in my work vary and are often beyond our control. Working with mixed levels and delivering work that suits both levels and then being ready to drop the lesson I prepared because something came up in class that was important for my students to understand then. I find it hard at times, teaching students who are in pain due to a workplace accident and as part of their rehabilitation they are sent to classes to update their skills. Often, I have to modify class activities to give them options to move

around or do things that don't give them further stress or pain.

Keeping up with all the latest changes with computers, social media and e-learning. I enjoy using the computer as a learning tool, but at times I have found it difficult to access professional development and then have the time to follow up with practise. Finding time to do research is a balancing act as I often find I have to cut back my teaching and this is often difficult for both myself and my students.

Teaching numeracy to adults and keeping it real and fun has been a challenge for me over the years, but thank goodness for Dave Tout for his support and Beth Marr for the Building Strength in Numeracy resources (my salvation). It has been challenging to encourage colleagues to share their work. I think a way for our sector to grow is by sharing and this way we are not all reinventing the same wheel.

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

Our students all come to classes willingly and they want to learn. We have students from a diverse range of countries. Turkish, Vietnamese, Thai and Sudanese are the main migrant groups and many of whom have been living in Australia for a long time. We continue to see the fallout from the Nissan factory closures and students coming to learn while enduring chronic pain from workplace injuries. We try to accommodate people with back injuries that mean they need to get up and walk around every ten minutes or so, or they simply find it hard to hold a pen and write for any length of time.

Progress for these students is much slower, not to mention the effects of heavy medication on concentration and memory. The students always turn up, even on some days when they really need to be at home in bed. The social aspects of learning are important when they have experienced trauma. We take a very supportive approach and guide our students through pre-accredited courses such as computing, sewing or art, as a way of easing into learning at KLC. We are fortunate to have a community development worker who works closely with students and our staff, who also need support dealing with the myriad of situations that may arise.

Students come with more diverse reasons for attending and many are illiterate in their first language and are very disadvantaged for a variety of reasons. We are fortunate

in our relationship with ACFE that allows for flexibility when demand changes due to an influx of new residents who may have particular needs, such as high levels of debt or unemployment.

What have been some of your best teaching experiences?

Some of my best teaching experiences have revolved around excursions, hands on activities and celebrations. At KLC, our students love working together on celebrations such as Harmony Day and Australia's Biggest Morning Tea. The Harmony Day project is a multicultural event and the students share food and some dress up in traditional costumes and share their cultural stories and songs. The students worked very hard for the Australia's Biggest Morning Tea project. Money was raised from the money box challenge, selling raffle tickets on the day, auctioning and donating items.

Our students love excursions and valuable learning is ensured through visits to places such as the Chinese museum, Royal Botanical gardens, exhibitions and the Rhododendron gardens. As well as widening their knowledge, the students have gained more awareness of our local area and the city, as well as possible places for follow up visits with others. Excursions provide the students with the opportunity to talk and write about their experiences, make a short photo-story, learn how to use our public transport system and share time with other students.

Observing my students grow in confidence to come to class and be excited by their new achievements, no matter how small. Simple achievements such as turning on a computer by themselves, playing a game on the computer at home that was learnt in class. It is just so rewarding to hear a student boast about something they can do now that they couldn't do before. One of my students came to class so excited and proud because he read a book to his son for the first time. Another student made a doctor's appointment independently, while another wrote their name and address for the first time.

The students are just so excited and it is a privilege to celebrate these achievements with them. I enjoy learning about the various cultures and traditions and every year I seem to learn more from my students. Finally, working with a great team of managers, administration staff, teachers and students and volunteers has provided many great highlights: sharing ideas, refining programs and introducing new ideas to our work.

Would you describe some of your achievements in projects you have worked on?

I began my research journey working on a project with Lyn Treloar from Peninsula Adult Education and Literacy (PAEL) and Clea Nicol from Narre Community Learning Centre (NCLC). It was to investigate employability skills which is still highly relevant today.

I am currently a member of the Steering Committee for the *Word for Word* Research project working with researcher, Lynda Achren. This project began in 2015, and encompasses Learn Local providers delivering Literacy and Numeracy and EAL programs in the ACFE Southern Metropolitan Region. Lynda and I interviewed students and teachers and made recommendations to ACFE on ways to improve A-Frame Language and Literacy delivery.

Last year we delivered a series of professional development workshops that enabled teachers to be paid for their time and establish strong networking links to share skills and resources. Feedback from the participants was very positive and highlighted the need for more paid professional development for the sector to build professionalism and limit stress, as much as possible. Over the years, being involved in various research project has enabled me to share the knowledge gained, introduce new ideas and mentor our teachers at KLC.

What do you see as the challenges of working in the LLN field in the future?

There are the immediate challenges for me as a teacher trying to stay well-informed of the latest research in the LLN field and then applying it to my teaching. As an organisation there is the ongoing challenge or ensuring funding for students who require more time to learn at the basic level.

A challenge for the sector is how to make great initiatives such as the Community of Practice for Pre-accredited teachers (CoP) more sustainable. We need to continue to support the CoP as it has built up a great database of pre-accredited teachers and presents most useful professional development workshops. We all need to work at nurturing and mentoring teachers new to the LLN field so that they don't feel isolated and will stay.

What advice do you have for someone starting out in LLN teaching?

I believe you always need to be well prepared and try to make the lessons as interesting as possible. It's a great idea to use 'warmers' to engage the students and to vary the pace of your lesson. You need to be flexible as you often need to change your planned lesson and respond when something has come up for one of the students in class.

It is critical that you work with others in the field because this will enrich your ideas and lessons and take away that feeling of isolation. Join a CoP or find a mentor who will help guide you over the first months. Keeping up with your professional development and networking is vital. You will constantly gain new ideas, techniques and methods from experienced LLN teachers.

I have always found if you are willing to say 'I don't know everything but we can try to find the answer together' helps the student to understand that you don't have to have all the answers but you need the tools and skills to find them. Finally, always remember we make such a difference to the lives of our students and we are privileged to share these moments with them. I am passionate about teaching adults and continue to thoroughly enjoy my work.

What's Out There

Mindfulness and educating citizens for everyday life (Eds.) Malgorzata Powietrzynska and Kenneth Tobin

Reviewed by Lynne Matheson

An awareness of the benefits of mindfulness and meditation in the fields of health, education and leadership has become more widespread and accepted in recent times. Buddhist traditions are being adapted to western contexts to assist people to function better and to live with more balance and harmony. The Dalai Lama encourages people to live with compassion for all things and to be more present as a way of coping better with the demands of everyday living.

Mindfulness as an everyday practice has long been promoted for health and wellbeing. The benefits are now being extended into the enhancement of brain function and the capacity to learn and to develop skills and new knowledge. The field of neuroscience now acknowledges that meditation changes the brain in positive ways.

This new collection of papers from Sense publishers in the *Bold Vision in Education* research series, provides research-based perspectives on how meditation and mindfulness practices can enhance learning and health. It is organised into two parts: Mindfulness in Education and Mindfulness and Wellness.

Of particular interest, are the research studies that demonstrate a shift in teacher awareness, training programs and pedagogy. Through case studies in educational settings, subsequent improvements in student performance and attitudes to learning are documented. An authentic inquiry approach underlying most of the studies ensured that participants learned from their participation. They became aware of the changes and benefits that subsequently become evident to all. Developing teacher education to include meditation practices may have a ripple effect for pedagogy and the self-care of teachers, and in particular, new teachers.

Kenneth Tobin, in *Mindfulness as a way of life, maintaining wellness through healthy living* introduces some of the concepts, methods and practices that underpin his work and have influenced other contributors to the book. He describes

his own mindfulness and meditation practices based on a framework from *Jin Shin Jyutsu*, which originated in Japan.

He utilises heuristics to explore Mindfully Speaking and Mindfully Listening concepts that might be applied in the learning environment to build common understandings about participation and learning. He points out that:

When interacting with others it is important to understand their perspectives, build respect for what others believe and value highly, and regard others as resources for personal learning (p. 6).

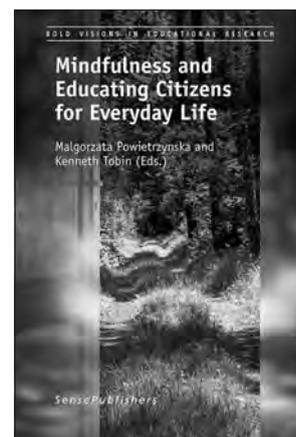
This is a pertinent reminder for teachers to monitor their own speaking and listening, as much as it is about building understanding and respect in the classroom. He makes a call to build compassion and empathy with students as being integral to creating optimal learning conditions. Being in the present and aware of all that is happening, are seen as skills that can be further developed in educational settings at all levels.

Tobin lists these three points on the Mindfully Speaking heuristic that are instructive to us all:

When I participate in conversation:

- I act to balance the amount of time I talk
- When I have been speaking too long I wind up my talking turn
- Before speaking I pause to make sure the previous speaker has finished (p. 9).

Tobin proposes an intervention at the beginning of each class that involves using abdominal breathing to still the mind, with meditation for between three and five minutes. This is then followed by ten minutes of free writing. I know of teachers who have used a similar approach with success with their adult literacy or EAL students.



There are some obvious parallels to draw with issues in youth education programs in Australia, in the experiences of working with Mexican youth described in *Concentration is the seed: Conscious attention in educational scenarios*. Ruiz refers to the pressures of social media, increasing violence and mental health issues that impact on young people's readiness to learn. Ruiz critiques the accuracy and interpretation of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data and the cognitive processes students need to develop in reading literacy. He draws a correlation with the pressures that exist with increasing dependence and attachment to technology and social media.

Through mindfulness and meditation practices, perhaps it will be possible to turn the tide to bring students to pay closer attention to reading and expand their concentration and the critical thinking skills associated with what will be needed for future employment. The introduction of sustained silent reading in some secondary schools has been shown to improve reading skills. Perhaps the additional benefits of mindfulness practices could be used as part of an authentic inquiry approach in adult learning?

Two other interesting contributions explore concepts of 'eco-mindfulness' and attitudes towards the term 'nature-deficit disorder' coined by Richard Louv in 2005. The question is posed as to whether educators have a role in encouraging children and adults to spend more time

'being in nature' and to appreciate more the benefits of connection to the natural environment. In *Last child in the woods*, science educators are involved in an analysis of Louv's premises about nature-deficit disorder. The companion study involving photo-essays and reflections with trainee teachers, *I walk in nature more confidently*, has as its rationale:

... to raise ecologically responsive citizens, teachers need to be ecologically responsive adults and figure out how to foster eco-mindful practices in youth (p. 163).

Most people would agree that time spent in nature and engaged in activities that connect us with the natural world have the potential to increase curiosity, empathy and understanding of human and animal rights, among other more intangible benefits.

While this collection is drawn from global educational and health contexts, you may approach it with the goal of broadening your professional reading. You may be inspired to develop the use of heuristics to guide practice and to apply mindful listening and mindful speaking in both professional and personal settings. As someone interested in the role of mindfulness in everyday life, I found each of the contributions a thoughtful and insightful exploration of each chosen topic.

Lynne Matheson is editor of Fine Print.

Stories of Transformative Learning by Michael Kroth and Patricia Cranton

Reviewed by Lindee Conway

The dedication in this book is:

To adult educators, storytellers all, who engage in transformative learning daily.

This book is a treat for any educator who gets caught up in the daily grind of reporting, assessing, auditing and meeting deadlines that seems to be the norm in our adult education world. It both reminds us why adult education matters and why it can be so transformative. There is an engaging discussion of the practice of storytelling as learning. Here the writers emphasise the inclusivity of that learning so that both educators and learners can grow from the sharing of their stories.

The format of the book is two-fold. There are ten stories and they range from experiences of trauma and subsequent transformation alongside journeys of transformation through education. They are all truly remarkable stories and compelling in their language and composition.

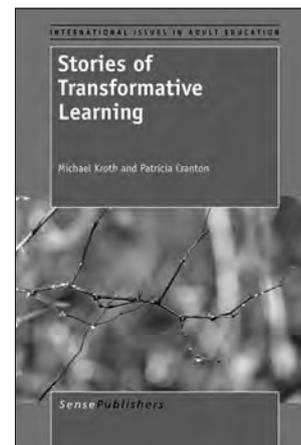
I love the opening of Jose's story, *The Good Road*:

As I write this, I am overwhelmed with feelings of euphoria as I am about six weeks away from receiving my master's degree.

In addition to the stories, there is an overview of the theories of transformative learning and adult learning. The last chapter, is entitled *What We've Learned* and it is very inspiring. It both acknowledges with gratitude the learners who gave their stories to be read and further to this, it discusses the role of adult educators who seek to encourage the bravery required to write and share. The writers quote William Zinsser, who writes on writing: 'Using educational biographies for learning makes students partners in the process'.

I have only recently latched onto Sense Publishers; their website banner declares: for *wisdom and awareness*. The series of International Issues in Adult Education is delightfully broad. If anyone reading this review works for a provider with a budget for resources, please go to the website and check out some of their books for purchase. They are inspiring, as is this publication.

Lindee Conway is Head of the Foundation Studies Department in the School of Foundation and Preparation at Melbourne Polytechnic. She completed a Masters in VET Education at Victoria University and is currently studying at University of Melbourne.



Passages to English 3 by Maggie Power

Reviewed by Manalini Kane

Many adult literacy teachers face a transition period when they move from one teaching position to another, from one curriculum to another or an updated version. Changes from what is familiar curriculum to the less familiar may occur with Foundation Skills in VET, the Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA), the revisions to English as an Additional Language (EAL) Framework or the Certificates in Spoken and Written English (CSWE). No matter which curriculum we teach, we always welcome useful and appropriate resources for each level.

Over time, most adult learning organisations have built up a bank of resources for teachers to work with when designing courses. On the other hand, developing assessment tasks aligned with the ACSF is an ongoing challenge. Teamwork and sharing resources is the key to success as classroom teachers.

Maggie Power brings to *Passages to English 3* more than twenty years' experience teaching EAL. She has written and co-written over forty EAL and mainstream education resources. This new resource provides a 'springboard' for the lower intermediate level of EAL or CSWE I and II. It is a worthwhile workbook and a useful addition to the library of the individual or the organisation. Some adult learners who like to hone their skills at home at their own pace would certainly benefit from buying a copy.

The fifteen units in this workbook culminate with fifteen passages written by the students. The selected themes mostly cater for the needs of new migrants. Every unit covers the language points at word level, like prepositions,

adjectives and modifiers. The illustrations of black and white line drawings at the beginning of every passage provide stimulus for prediction on the themes and content.



The visually appealing layout makes it a user friendly workbook. Each passage is assigned four pages that include vocabulary extension activities, comprehension exercises and problem-solving activities. They each have a study section on parts of language, small writing tasks and word find activities.

There are extension activities that provide suggestions for oral/aural activities and answers to all of the activities. The Index on the last page clarifies the language points (as covered in the book) in alphabetical order, which is very helpful. Maggie Power has done a great job building on from the earlier books in this series.

The *Passages to English* series is available for purchase online at <http://www.urbanlyrebirds.com/cds-and-books/passages-to-english>. It is also available at the Bookery and other selected book suppliers.

Manalini Kane has been teaching and tutoring English online to native speakers, and EAL to local and international students, up to graduate level. Manalini is a member of the Fine Print editorial committee and VicTESOL's professional learning committee.

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Rosalie Martin is a criminologist, an accredited facilitator with the Center for Courage and Renewal, and a clinical speech pathologist. In 2013, Rosalie founded a charity, Chatter Matters Tasmania and began the Just Sentences literacy pilot project and Just Time parent-child attachment program in Tasmania's Risdon Prison. Rosalie was awarded 2017 Tasmanian Australian of the Year for the work she began at the prison. She has recently completed honours with plans to start a PhD in Criminology next year.