

this issue:

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By Rob McCormack

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education?
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Anke Grotlueschen
By Elizabeth Gunn

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Adult Education in
the Community

Editorial

Welcome to *Fine Print* for 2020! Two years ago, I wrote my first editorial for *Fine Print* and the first thing I did in that editorial was to thank Lynne Matheson for her careful handover as editor. Now it is time to thank her again and this time, sadly for me and the editorial committee, to say farewell, as Lynne has decided to bow out of active service on the committee. I am truly grateful to Lynne for all the advice, contacts, suggestions and well considered words she has contributed to *Fine Print* since I've been here. I sincerely hope that we will be publishing more of those well considered words in future editions of *Fine Print*, even if we don't see her at committee meetings.

In this issue of *Fine Print*, Rob Mc Cormack offers the second of his three-part series on Paulo Freire. In this instalment he examines the contradictions inherent in Freire's theoretical approach and comes up with some very thought-provoking (and pertinent!) things to say about democracy. Freire also scores a mention in our other two features this issue and both articles come from presentations given at the 2019 ACAL conference, which had 'critical re-imaginings' as its theme: Bob Boughton shares an edited extract from his Arch Nelson address, in which he focuses on some of the women who have been pioneers in adult education around the world; and Elizabeth Gunn interviews Anke Grotlueschen, who gave a keynote address at the conference on the role of critical numeracy in empowering adult learners.

Whether you attended the ACAL conference or not, you will find Sally Thompson's reflection on the event provides plenty of food for thought and Konstantina Vlahos offers some great ideas that she picked up at the ProLiteracy Conference on Adult Education in San Diego, which she attended as the recipient of a VALBEC scholarship. Also in this issue, Sarah Deasey surveys teaching resources for climate change and sustainability, Amelia Trompf reflects on Marie McLeod's Positive Psychology for Adult Education workshop and Jane Woodman provides insight into the work of a volunteer at the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre. Elizabeth Gunn reviews *Sexing the Animal in a Posthumanist World*, an intriguingly named volume that speaks to the concerns that inspired Sarah Deasey to conduct her survey of teaching resources. Finally, I venture out of my editor's hidey hole to share my favourite teaching app with you.

Please contact me if you have a comment about this issue of *Fine Print*, would like to propose a future article or would like to put your hand up to join the editorial committee: fineprintvalbec@gmail.com or find me at the VALBEC Conference on 15 May (for further details of the conference, see page 21).

Deryn Mansell

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.

Freire: theorist or prophet?

by Rob McCormack

This is the second in a three-part series examining the educational journey, theoretical approach and praxis of Paulo Freire. It is published here to mark the 50th anniversary of the English translation of Freire's seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Part One, published in the last issue of *Fine Print*, described Freire's educational journey. This second part focuses on his educational philosophy and Part Three, to be published in the next issue of *Fine Print*, will examine the 'Freire Method' of adult literacy education and speculate on what Freire might say to us today.

Reading the extensive commentary on Freire, one soon discovers two quite different attitudes sitting incongruously side-by-side. On the one hand, a discourse extolling how inspirational he is in his life, his educational work and writings. On the other, impassioned disputes about his theorising, about whether he is a Marxist, a Catholic, a Critical Theorist, a Humanist, a Phenomenologist, a Hegelian, an Existentialist, a Postcolonial, an Enlightenment thinker, a dialectician, a revolutionary or a reformer. As Rosas Torres (1998) observed: There are millions of Freires.

In Part One of this article, I emphasised that there were many Freirean pedagogies both pre- and post-*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, Macedo & Shor, 2018. Henceforth cited as PO), even though PO is the only text most of us have encountered. Certainly, before writing this article, PO was the only Freire text I had tackled.

In this second part, I will describe Freire's fundamental stance in terms of humanism but show how he was continually trying to bring together competing positions. In this way his theorising was always very dialectical. He was always saying: "We need to work with incompatible theories because each on their own is not enough". This to- and fro-ing helps explain why competing theories try to claim him, but then accuse him of not fully embracing their position. His writings were continually circling around these tensions, conflicts and opposing positions, trying to find a way to reconcile them.

There is a second reason for the mutability of Freire's discourse. He trusted his experience and learnt from all the new contexts and experiences he encountered. His thinking was never static; he was not trying to produce a pedagogic system that could be simply 'applied' everywhere. He was attuned and responsive to the particularities of each of the new contexts he faced. His views grew and changed in response to his experience.

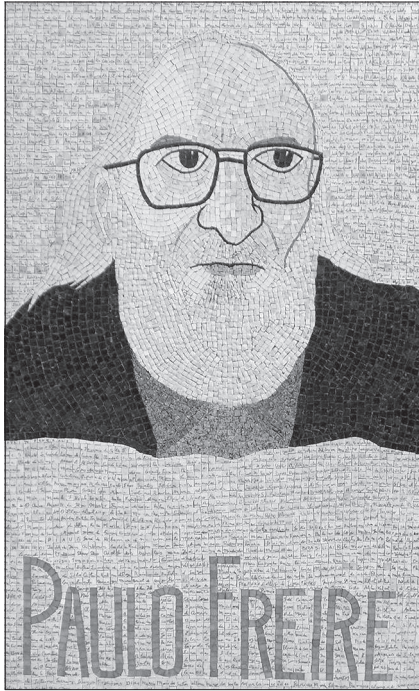
What was Freire's central message?

Educational philosophers, political theorists, Marxists, academics and progressive activists have created an industry arguing about whether Freire's theorising is consistent or makes sense, as well as over which theoretical paradigm he adhered to. My inclination is to simply say *it was the ethics he learnt from and through his educational praxis that constituted the unifying core of Freire's life, not his theorising*. His theorising was basically a reflective effort to give voice to this ethical core in ways that would be intelligible and credible for other educators and activists. But as his localised educational work became more widely known, he was forced to 'translate' his experience into generalised, more abstract vocabularies and concepts to participate in academic discourse.

He was pushed by political circumstances beyond his original focus on developing localised adult education centres, culture circles¹, and adult literacy in 'backward' northeast Brazil, a setting where he had simply wanted to make sure that poor families were not left behind or left out during the rapid modernisation of Brazil industrially, politically, educationally and culturally.

In brief, the different political contexts he encountered, and his responses were:

- He began in Brazil with the progressive modernist ideals of the modern democratic social nation state.
- In Chile, he wrote to and for radical and revolutionary political activists from all across Latin America.
- During his Geneva years, he mainly acted as the provocative coordinator of discussions all around the world for activist and educators.
- In Africa, he worked with new postcolonial states setting up adult education networks.
- In São Paulo, he was a CEO trying to re-brand the public education system, decentralise decision-making, and promote school-based curriculum development.



Paulo Freire as he appears on a monument in front of the Ministry of Education in Brasília, Brazil. Photo by Brandizzi (cc BY 2.5)

- By the end of this long life he was trying to imagine a public education system of schools that would unify popular education, vocational training and academic studies around two central themes: ecology and citizenship.

And yet, it seems to me that throughout this life there was indeed a central thread: a deep educational commitment to drawing people, cities, even nations, into a more ethical, more responsive, more imaginative relationship to life on Earth, others, ourselves, our communities, and the possibilities of the times.

Constructing theory or picturing an educational ethic?

As a founding voice in the new fields of adult literacy and adult education, especially for post-colonial 'third world' nations, Freire's theorising looked to design a background ethico-political framework for these new fields of education that would be relevant to the whole range of contexts and agendas. His theorising – what he thought, said or wrote – was thus systematically different from today's theoretical or academic discourse. He was trying to lay out some fundamental ethical principles to motivate, inform and guide the concrete work of educators.

A constitution if you like. He gathered together relevant ideas from his wide reading and tied them together to form a scaffold and direction in which these fields could grow. He was a public intellectual and a prophet, not a sober academic scholar. Arguments over how he aligns with the various theoretical traditions he drew on – Christian, Marxist, Progressive, Pragmatist, Modernist, Humanist, Populist, and so on – are certainly interesting and may help understand him but are mostly beside the point.

Freire was not trying to create a theory-based method of education to be implemented by practitioners. Instead, he was intent on picturing an ethico-political form or spirit of education that embodies and prefigures possible ways of living, ways of being with others, as well as forms of society that are more just, more equal, more community-minded, and happier. His discourse is a *call* to embrace an ethos, not a *description* of socio-political systems. But any call to a new life rests on a critique of the present one.

Critiquing the present and utopian thinking

Denunciation, critiquing the present, often invokes another different reality or possible reality: annunciation. As a modernist, Freire placed his better world, his utopia, in the future. Pre-modern societies, by contrast, usually look back to a past, to a golden era or originating time. Others look to contemporary places elsewhere: 14th century travellers looked to New World First Nations as utopian communities; Gauguin pictured Tahiti as a utopian paradise; some today look to Finland or Cuba as better places, better ways of living and learning that we should aspire to or at least learn from.

By contrast, philosophers such as Plato, Levinas, Gadamer and Derrida often found their footing for critiquing the present by creating an imaginary place. They did not pretend that this utopia was something that we could or should consciously try to bring about in the future. Instead, they used their imaginary utopias to perceive the present differently, to see new possibilities or notice injustices. One of the advantages of clothing critique of the present in utopian dress is that it helps us imagine, feel, sense, and desire that different world emotionally, not just represent it in theoretical wording and concepts.

As a call to change, Freire's writings needed to appeal, not just to abstract reason but also to emotional affect, to the whole person and their deepest dreams, fears, desires. Focused on issuing an impassioned prophetic call to reach a different understanding of what we are doing and the

shape of the world around us, Freire's writing implores readers to let themselves hear his call, to let themselves experience the power and truth of his 'take' on the world and the way of life, the ethic, the *ethos*, upon which it rests.

Humanism: becoming more human

Freire drew on many strands of critical theory and utopian thinking: a range of Christian traditions including Teilhard de Chardin, Mournier's personalism, liberation theology; secular Enlightenment views; Hegelian and Marxist views, Frankfurt School critical theorists, and South American revolutionary thinkers such as Che Guevara, along with many other important South American radical theorists, unfortunately not translated into English.

For the sake of economy, I will gather these strands of critical theory and utopian thinking under the single heading of 'humanism' as there are many strands, traditions, and versions of humanism – it is a broad church, as they say. Humanism is a way of life committed to the value and power of human reason (*logos*). Humanism believes that the world of individuals and societies can be improved in major ways if we consciously use our powers of reason.

To give a taste of one modern existentialist humanist who influenced early Freire, here is an outline of theses propounded by the French Catholic philosopher, Mournier, concerning the ways that *logos* operates in human beings, in history, in science and technology, and in the world:

- (a) both the history of the world and the history of human beings [have] meaning;
 - (b) progress is constant, despite diverse vicissitudes that may complicate its route;
 - (c) the development of science and technique that characterises the modern Western era and its spread worldwide constitutes a decisive aspect of liberation; and
 - (d) progressive people [are] charged with the task of liberating themselves.
- (Grollios, 2009, p. 31)

This view weaves together a number of quite disparate theoretical, religious and philosophical traditions: the idea that God did not just create the world and then leave it alone; that God is still creating meaning in, with and through histories of individuals and the world; that God and the development of science and technology aimed at increasing production are compatible; and that everything makes sense as part of history, as leading towards a final worldly utopia. This is a view that radical modernist,

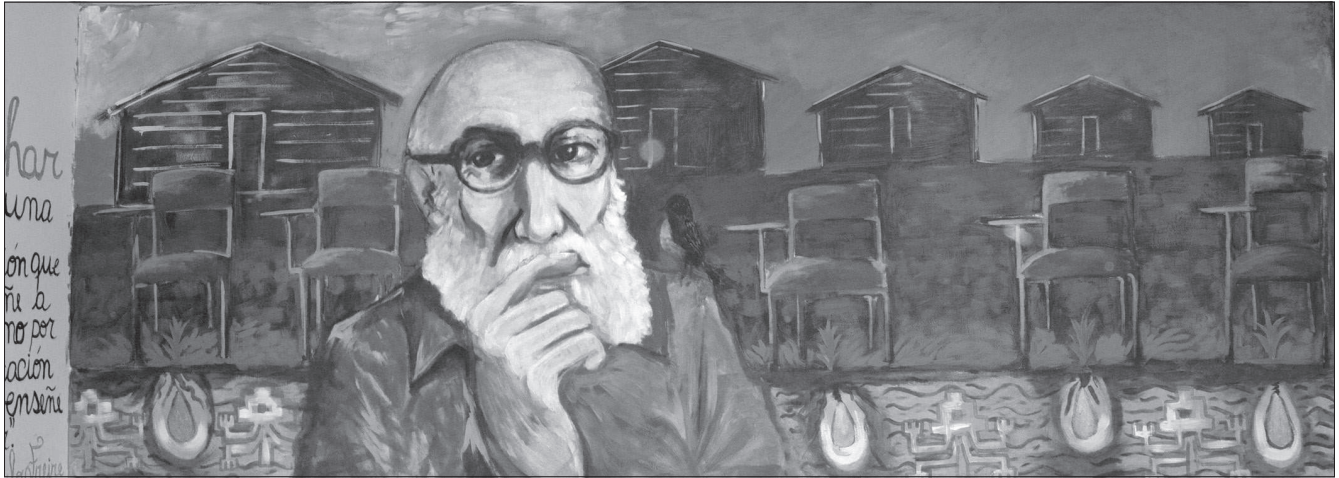
existentialist, worldly, politically progressive Catholics – who were the primary audience for Freire – could embrace. If we substitute humankind for God as the real Agent or Subject in this story, then we have the standard secular modernist notion of progressive humanism.

Materialism vs idealism

There is also a tension in Mournier's philosophy between the impersonal trends of history and development of science and technology (*materialism*) and the role of autonomous human beings using their own conscious powers of reason (*idealism*). This tension between *materialism* and *idealism* haunted Freire along with the entire 20th century tradition of Marxism. From Descartes to Hegel, history had been understood to be the work of the ideas-based powers of knowing and acting by 'great men' – thinkers, scientists and political leaders. However, Marx assigned historical agency to the impersonal, materialist economic class struggle and technological development. He construed 'ideas' as passive ideological reflections of this materialist base lacking any historical weight or causal impact.

Much of Freire's discourse centred on negotiating a path between these clashing extremes. He was like a circus performer trying to straddle two horses at once. On the one hand, he rejected the materialist view because it demeaned the place of subjectivity and agency of individuals by portraying them as mere playthings controlled by secret causal forces of history. Materialism did not view critical education as important: students should be taught to conform and follow their all-knowing leaders, not question, imagine or criticise. On the other hand, idealist voluntarism goes too far in the other direction. It thinks that everything depends on the conscious ideas, intentions and deliberate actions of individuals and collectives, as if humans could create the world and control the future however they liked out of their own hopes, desires and actions. For Freire, idealist voluntarism attributed too much power and historical efficacy to education and human thought.

Freire wanted to acknowledge that both non-human forces and the conscious actions of humans impact the world and its future. As we have noted, Freire's deepest ethical instinct was that everyone (not just rulers or citizens) should be able to participate in the (educational) work of discussing the state of the world and then participating in enacting (political) change to improve things. He felt that all human beings were capable of participating in the work of shaping the world and history. He called this



A mural depicting Paulo Freire at the Faculty of Education and Humanities, University of Bío-Bío, Chile. Photo by Nefandisimo (cc BY-SA 4.0)

‘Humanisation’. Humanisation for Freire is the capacity of human beings to know, criticise, and join together to change the world. The communal activity of knowing, judging and acting on the world is what Freire calls ‘Praxis’. Praxis is being a ‘Subject’, that is, a conscious mind, who can know, criticise and act to change the objective world.

Freire’s pedagogy was designed to enable ‘the oppressed’ to realise that they too are potentially Subjects and his curriculum is designed to help them experience and possibly embrace this role of being a Subject and participating in Praxis to re-imagine and re-make the world. In cooperation with others, they will be able to know, judge and act to change the world. As well as joining others in the educational dimension of Praxis, they can help make the world a better place by participating in the political dimension of Praxis. Praxis is the exercise of reasoning, *logos*, by individuals thinking together in interpersonal discussion and debate in class, followed by engaging in collective political public action. These are different manifestations of the same fundamental *ethos*, humanism, engaging in its task of humanising people and their worlds. Reason, *logos*, exists in two forms: as reasoned speech and as reasoned action. Reasoned speech is the provenance of education; reasoned action is the provenance of politics.

Concrete political goals vs background guiding principles

Even though Freire’s own praxis was always framed within this deep humanist ethic and practice of education and its potential role in bringing about a better world, his more specific ‘concrete’ goals varied depending on the concrete

political context at the time, as well as on who might be his collaborators, interlocutors and allies. Different situations opened up different possibilities:

Brazil 1950s-1964: to create a modern socially just & democratic Brazil through reformist action by citizens

Chile 1964-75: to create a postcolonial socialist continent through revolutionary action by resistance movements

The World 1975-88: to create a world-wide radical education movement

São Paulo 1989-91: to reconstruct a state education system that is anti-hierarchical, democratic, decentralised, and that can enlist good will and energy of parents, community, students, employees, and teachers towards autonomous ‘popular public schools’

Confronting global ecocide 1991-97: to imagine a new kind of school for inducting students into forms of knowing and praxis that is accountable to an ethic of democratic ecological sustainability towards life on Earth.

Yet underpinning all of these different immediate concrete political goals lay the same background humanist ethic or *ethos*.

Two traditions of ‘reason’: Plato and Isocrates

Until now I have privileged Christianity, the Enlightenment, and Marxism as strands of humanism, but in fact there is

another strand of humanism that Freire, in his modernist prejudice, did not investigate: the ancient Greek city of Athens in the 4th century BCE. Yet it was here that the practice of *logos*, of reasoned discussion and debate, was invented, analysed, regularised and a pedagogy developed to foster it (Marrou, 1956). In fact, there were two schools of *logos* constituting two practices and two pedagogies of humanism: Isocrates' school of rhetoric, designed to create public citizens discussing and debating the common good of the city (Poulakos & Depew, 2004); and Plato's academy, designed to produce theory-based experts who would create laws and structures for the good of the city (Gadamer, 1980).

These two views of education and humanism have competed ever since. The Platonic view won the public relations battle, and so most people think it created the liberal arts curriculum embodying humanism. But, in fact, it was Isocrates' rhetorical democratic tradition that created the actual liberal arts curriculum that formed humanities education over subsequent 2000 years (Kimball, 1995; Muir, 2005). It was this tradition which was expanded in the 15th century contributing to the Renaissance and the beginning of modern forms of humanism.

Plato felt that communities (cities, nations) would only live in peace and prosperity if they were governed by politicians who had studied the sciences of social and political theory. These politicians would be the Subjects who knew, judged and acted to change the population for the better. Isocrates, by contrast, felt that communities (cities, nations) would only live in peace and prosperity if all citizens were allowed (and in fact obliged) to contribute their powers of *logos*, reasoned knowledge and judgements and experience of action, to the collective discussion and debate by the polis in forming a shared decision or understanding of what is happening, what it means, and what to do or what should be done. In Isocrates' view, it is all citizens who are Subjects engaged in the democratic practice of coming collectively to know, forming judgements, and enacting actions through a practice of free discussion.

In Freirean terms, we could say that Plato leaned towards 'banking' education², while Isocrates opted for democratic discussion-based culture circles. In fact, what tended to happen is that in terms of the 'seven liberal arts' curriculum that developed in the Roman empire and became the foundation of higher education in the Western medieval world, the first three branches of knowledge (the Trivium) were assigned to the arts of speech, while the last four (the Quadrivium) were assigned to the sciences of knowledge,

epistemé. Thus, the Trivium tended towards Isocratic discussion and dialectic, while the Quadrivium sought Plato's rigorous knowledge that is apt for application in technologies, regulation or legal systems (Kimball, 1995). Framed this way, it seems clear that Freire aligns more with Isocrates' privileging of democratic discussion.

However, a crucial difference between the seven liberal arts curriculum and Freire's curriculum proposals is that, whereas the liberal arts curriculum was directed towards a small elite, Freire has democratised the right to *logos*. For Freire, everyone should have the right and the capacities to 'have a say' about how the world should be; and this means everyone has a right to an education which enables them to learn the practices of *logos* and to develop the skills and capacities to contribute to the collective formation of a more just and better future.

Freire: an Isocratean heart imprisoned in a Platonic cage

This contrast between two approaches to *logos*, Plato's elitist view and Isocrates' democratic view, enables us to re-frame Freire's theorising. Modernity itself, along with its Marxist critics, is built on faith in knowledge and technology as progressive forces leading to a better world. Plato and modern humanists were at one in privileging *epistemé*, knowledge, over *praxis*, public discussion. As a modernist, Freire couched *conscientização*, critical consciousness, that is, *logos*, as a movement from *doxa* (the unthought attitudes and beliefs arising from lifeworlds) to *epistemé*, scientific knowledge. This seems to treat questions of what to do ethically or politically as if they were matters of knowledge or as if what the future holds as a utopia were also a matter of knowledge.

Clearly Freire is caught in a contradiction here. On the one hand, he takes *logos* to mean pursuing scientific knowledge and technologies. On the other, he is deeply committed to open dialogic discussion in 'culture circles' where students can freely offer their opinions, intuitions and sense of things in searching for a 'bottom-up' consensus. Freire is the circus rider, his two horses are Plato and Isocrates. Can he keep them in sync enough to not fall off?

In his earlier days, Freire did not experience this contradiction too strongly because he tended to think of his pedagogy as simply providing the conditions for people to throw off their ideological blinkers and become their true selves, thereby entering into the same universal knowledge and world as every other 'enlightened' knower. This would mean that everyone would freely agree on the

basis of their own individual reasoning in the culture circle discussion. There would be no competing understandings, interpretations, hopes or fears.

However, with the collapse of Marxism's claims to scientific knowledge of the socio-political world and historical change during the 1970s and 1980s, Freire moved towards an accommodation with poststructuralism and postmodernism through a formula that he often relied on: 'unity in diversity'. Poststructuralism had insisted that there was no underlying 'unity' to society, history, languages, or nations waiting to be discovered in the concepts of systematic knowledge. Each of these totalities or 'unities' were outcomes of a contingent history of conflicts between competing elements, interests and trends. Postmodernism went further by arguing that there is no reality or necessity in things at all; everything is plastic and groundless. One response linked to this rejection of any foundations has been the strong upsurge of identity politics over the last 40 years (Peters & Wain, 2003).

Freire resisted both poststructuralism and postmodernism. 'Unity in diversity' was his way of trying to picture common ground. That is, even though we have to respect difference (Isocrates' pluralistic polis), there can still be unity (Plato's truth based on demonstrated knowledge). On the one hand, he wanted to retain the strong sense of *logos* as objective knowledge, on the other, his ethical instincts were to embrace differences of culture, gender, race and religion.

Like the tension between materialism and idealism, this tension between Platonic *epistémé* and Isocratean democratic dialogue of *doxas* threads its way throughout Freire's entire oeuvre and educational ventures. In fact, they are probably just two ways of approaching the same tension or contradiction. But the fact that Freire tried to hang on to both arms of the contradiction is a sign of his integrity and commitment to grappling with the paradoxical conundrums of a profession devoted to forming free selves and free communities.

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Rob McCormack, a second chance educator for over 35 years, is interested in systemic functional linguistics, philosophical hermeneutics, political philosophy and rhetorical theory and practice. He has been writing for *Fine Print* since 1989.

Notes

1 Culture circles were small discussion groups in which student coordinators led free discussion and debate about contemporary issues. They are discussed in more detail in Part One – see *Fine Print* (42)3, 3–9.

2 To Freire, 'banking' education assumes the superior validity or truth of the dominant power's perspective. It is discussed in more detail in Part One – see *Fine Print* 42(3), 3–9.

An alternative tradition in adult education?

by Bob Boughton

This article, focusing on women popular educators working in and with social movements in the Global South, is an edited extract of the Arch Nelson Address, Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL) Conference, 4 October 2019. The full version of the address included more detail on Arch Nelson's life and work. Slides from the full address are available at <http://www.nswalinc.org.au/ACALConference2019Program.htm>

Today, as we reach the end of the second decade of the 21st century, ecological disaster, resource scarcity, unrelenting wars, massive population displacements and rapidly growing inequality compel an urgent rethink. What does university adult education today have to offer the 800 million people around the world who have not even had the most basic education, the people who cannot read and write in an official language of their own countries? To build a practice and a theory which can take us forward, I argue we must put the liberal tradition aside, and connect instead with the tradition of adult education for revolutionary transformation, led now as it always has been, by the popular education movement of the Global South.

I first met Michael Welton, a Canadian adult education historian, at the 1995 Popular Education Conference at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS). A few years later, Welton, myself and an Australian labour historian, Lucy Taksa, teamed up to write a chapter for Griff Foley's adult education textbook. Welton began by reflecting on history as a process of storytelling:

Story telling is... a political act. Those with power, who triumph over others (usually militarily), celebrate their victories with stories of their triumph and glory...

We call these stories court histories. They add glory to the actors who triumphed. *They also wilfully distort and repress other's experiences and accounts.*

Stories, then, have agendas behind them. Essentially, we tell stories to affirm our identities and justify our beliefs and actions in the world. But the danger is that our desire to live in an orderly, predictable and meaningful world will lead us to deceive ourselves.... Our desire that things end well does not mean that they will. (Boughton, Welton & Taksa, 2003, p.124 – emphasis added)

Taking my cue from Welton, I decided the ACAL Arch Nelson lecture should not be an occasion where we deceive ourselves, hoping that by going back to the beginning of our association, we can reassure ourselves that things are working out well when, clearly, they are not. Because, as the veteran Canadian popular educator Bud Hall said when he opened that UTS Conference 24 years ago, *the world is not OK.*

What can we learn from Nelson's life now, that will help us understand and respond to these new threats?

The positive lessons, which Nelson himself learned during wartime, are clear. First, the defence of democracy against fascism requires an educated population, and low levels of literacy in the adult population are a serious barrier to this. Second, raising the literacy level in the population occurs most effectively, as he himself wrote, when there is a wider social movement for justice and equality to support it. Third, the only way to overcome the problem of low levels of literacy was through a national coordinated effort of adult education, such as Arch had experienced in Army Education.

But there are negative lessons also. Nelson's own career, and the trajectory which ACAL has followed since 1977, is no longer viable. The tradition of adult education and adult literacy on which he and ACAL have largely drawn for inspiration and ideas has turned out to have been deeply misguided. We can understand the choices they made, but with the benefit of hindsight we have no choice but to be absolutely clear about their limitations.

Nelson, along with all the other men who were the official leaders of adult education in Australia from the 1950s and 1960s, made a big mistake when they turned against their communist and socialist allies with whom they had worked closely during the war, and literally drove them and their ideas out of Australian adult education. Instead of continuing to build an adult

education grounded in the unions and the progressive social movements – against fascism and for peace and disarmament, for women’s rights, for workers’ rights, for Indigenous rights – they chose a new model, the one promoted by the United States, in which adult education is positioned as a profession.

Because history is written by its victors, the US-led attack on radical adult education – what we now call popular education – was so successful in Australia that Nelson and his colleagues in the Australian Association of Adult Education (now Adult Learning Australia) simply removed the radical tradition from the histories they told about their field. This same act of historical forgetting was then carried on to ACAL when it formed in 1977. As a result, the Australian literacy movement of the last 40 years has not had a history on which it can look back for the inspiration it now needs. We remember Paulo Freire, and some of the exciting experiments that took place in the 1970s and 1980s, but the stories of our own historic leaders, including Nelson, provide little guidance for the crisis that we are now in.

Some women popular educators

So now, rather than talk any more of Nelson, I want to tell you some different stories. These stories are not about English-speaking, university-educated white men. They are about women, mainly, but not only, from the majority world: women who used adult education to mobilise social movements. These are stories of popular education.

They are stories, I hope, which can help inspire the young women and young men of today who join our field and want it to be part of the movement to avert the climate crisis, the destruction it has already begun to wreak on the poorest people in the world and the associated rise of neo-fascism in politics which is seeking to crush the new radicalism.

Madame Li Li (1926-?)

Madame Li Li was born into a privileged family in 1926 in the city of Huai’an, China. In 1939, just as she was starting high school, the Japanese fascist army entered the city. When her father refused to bow to them, they beat him to death. So, she and her elder sister joined the Communist Party, the only effective resistance force at that time. She was 14 years old. The party gave her a new name, Li Li, to protect her family, and this has remained how she is known until today. Li Li joined the New 4th Army, a ‘student army’ made up of young men and women who, but for the war, would have been at school or university. The communists



Madam Li Li. Photo courtesy Roger Boshier

had already been mounting literacy campaigns among the peasantry and their army for several years, and the New 4th Army laid particular stress on learning and teaching:

Even in army hospitals there were educational events. “Over the beds hung a series of cards, each displaying five ideograms. Illiterate men were expected to learn one card a day” (Smedley, 1943, p.176). Literate men were given books and newspapers. People like Li Li sat at the bedside and wrote down whatever injured or illiterate men wanted to contribute to the wall newspaper. ...After 75 days on regular duties in the New 4th Army, members were brought out for 25 days of education. ... For Li Li, the New 4th was an army and a school. It was what turned her into a revolutionary communist and adult educator. (Boshier & Huang, 2009, p.50)

After the Japanese surrender in 1945, the communist armies fought a civil war with the armies of the nationalist forces. In 1949 they triumphed and established the People’s Republic of China on 1 October that year. Li Li then turned her early experience in surveillance and propaganda into a career as an adult educator, working in Shanghai municipal administration. For five years, during the cultural revolution, Li Li was sent to live in a May 7th Cadre School, established for the re-education of government officials who, like her, came from privileged backgrounds. She returned to party work in 1973 and went on to head a massive adult education enterprise as

“Head of the Shanghai Bureau of Workers’ and Peasants’ Education” (Boshier & Huang, 2009, p.47). In 1984, she helped organise an international symposium on adult education convened in Shanghai by the International Council of Education. At 82, when this paper was written, she was “still a committed (though critical and questioning) communist and patriotic Chinese” (Boshier & Huang, 2009, p.58).

Marta Harnecker (1937–2019)

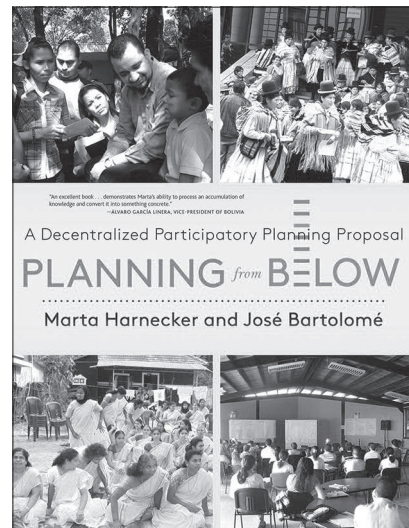
Marta was born in Chile, just before the start of the Second World War. In the 1960s, she undertook postgraduate studies in France under the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser. Returning home in 1968, she taught at university before becoming an adviser to the radical left-wing government of Salvador Allende. Allende’s government, as you may know, was overthrown in 1973 in a military coup supported by the United States Central Intelligence Agency. Marta escaped to Cuba, from where she continued her work as a popular educator. In 2002, she went to Venezuela as an adviser to Hugo Chavez and his Bolivarian government.

When most Western educators think of Latin American popular education, we remember Paulo Freire and his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. But in fact, Marta’s work has had an equal and perhaps even greater influence. Her book, called simply *The Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism*, which is now in its 66th printing in Spanish and multiple editions in numerous other languages, has sold equally to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Marta has also written an eight-volume set of popular education booklets, which sold over 250,000 copies in their original editions published in Chile during Allende’s government (Holst & Vetter, 2019).

Why do we know so little of her in the West? One reason is that not many of her books have found their way into English. Also, they are not ‘scholarly’ like university texts. Rather, she writes for movement activists, for them to use in educational work inside their movements. This will be obvious to teachers of literacy, when you see their heavy use of subheadings, paragraph numbering, discussion questions, and detailed table of contents. She also produced numerous videos and pamphlets on popular education and participatory community development projects, as you can see if you look her up on YouTube.

Marta died on 15 June 2019 at the age of 82. In the words of her publishers, Monthly Review Press:

[She] devoted her life to collaborating in building radical democracy in Latin American communities where people have, for generations, experienced crushing poverty and a near complete loss of control over their lives.... From the ground up, she has helped to build new structures and methods that bring to virtually unknown towns and provinces the full meaning of the Bolivarian revolution. (Monthly Review, 2019, para. 1)



Marta’s last book, published posthumously, is a handbook for social movement activists.

Paula Allman (1944–2011)

Just seven years younger than Marta, Paula Allman was born at the end of the Second World War. She grew up in the USA, then worked as a teacher before completing her PhD on Piaget. In 1973 she moved to England, where she taught at the Open University and then at the University of Nottingham, which had the oldest adult education department in the UK. In the 1980s, she began delving deeply into the works of Paulo Freire, Antonio Gramsci and Karl Marx; and she developed postgraduate teaching programs in which both the content and pedagogy was inspired by Freire’s philosophy. At the same time, she was a social movement activist, a convenor of the Nottingham branch of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and active in the Education Group of the Socialist Movement. She was also on the editorial advisory boards for *Convergence*, the journal of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE).

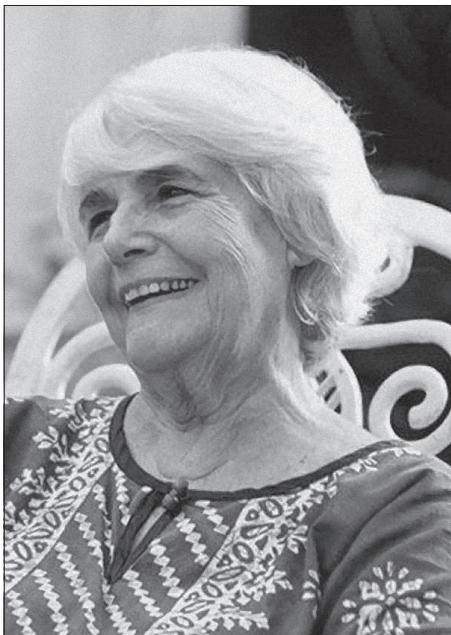
I have included Paula in this talk because she is arguably one of the 20th century’s most outstanding theorists of

popular education philosophy and pedagogy, and her work has inspired many younger writers, including Sharzad Mojab and Sarah Carpenter in Canada, and John D. Holst in the United States. I strongly recommend you look up some of her work when you have the time. I think she is one of the few academic adult educators who has truly understood what Paulo Freire really meant by humanisation:

... the process of humanisation i.e. of becoming more fully human, is always collective, a social process, perhaps best expressed by conceptualising our individuality as internally related to our collectivity, to humanity, such that the harmonious progressive development of one is impossible unless interconnected to the harmonious collective development of all. (Allman 2007, p62, quoted in Carpenter & Mojab 2017, p.20)

Leonela Inés Relys Díaz (1947-2015) & Nydia Gonzales

Now we come to two Cuban women who are barely known in the West. Born in 1947, Leonela joined the Cuban literacy campaign at the age of 15 and went on to become a teacher before joining Cuba's international literacy missions where she helped design the *Yo, Si Puedo!* (*Yes, I Can!*) literacy campaign model and assisted in spreading it to the Global South. She was general coordinator of this work in Haiti and later in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, as well as



Nydia Gonzalez in Cuba in 2010.

contributing to the implementation of the program in other countries such as Bolivia, Nicaragua, Panama, Dominican Republic, Guinea Bissau and Colombia. The campaign has now run with the support of Cuban advisers in more than 30 countries around the globe, now including Australia, and reaching more than 10 million people with low literacy.

Nydia Gonzales, also a Cuban, was already a schoolteacher when the 1961 campaign began, and she led a brigade of high school students teaching the people in the countryside to read and write. In the 1980s and 1990s, Nydia helped open up Cuban adult education to the ideas of Paulo Freire and popular education and she became the President of the Cuban Association of Teachers. She represented Cuba at many ICAE and UNESCO forums, and when we met her in 2010, she was still, in her 70s, training Cuban teachers to join the international *Yo, Si Puedo!* missions.

Rosa 'Muki' Bonaparte Soares (1957-1975) & Zelia Fernandes

My last examples come from Timor-Leste. Rosa 'Muki' Bonaparte Soares was born in February 1957 in what was then known as Portuguese Timor. In 1974, she was studying in Portugal when the Carnation Revolution occurred, and the fascist government was overthrown. She was one of a number of Timorese students who learned during that time about Marxism and Paulo Freire from comrades in the Portuguese left and the anti-colonial movement in Portugal's African colonies. When these students returned to Timor in late 1974, one of their first actions was to run political education classes with students in Dili, and then mobilise the students to mount a literacy campaign in support of independence.

She was one of three women appointed to the Central Committee of FRETILIN, the party which led the independence struggle, and the founding secretary of the first East Timorese women's organisation, the Popular Organisation of Timorese Women (Organização Popular da Mulher Timorense – OPMT). She was executed after her capture by Indonesian troops, on 8 December 1975, still only nineteen years of age. Muki, as she is remembered, has inspired generations of Timorese women who still work within OPMT to continue the struggle against colonialism and patriarchy, both during the war of independence between 1975 and 1999 and beyond the formal achievement of independence in 2002. OPMT has made building the literacy of women in the villages a central feature of its work.



Zelia Fernandes in 2002

I have included Zelia Fernandes here because she represents the new generation of young women who are leaders of OPMT today. As teenage university students in the 1990s, Zelia and her sisters took on the task of popular education in the last years of the Indonesian occupation, campaigning for independence. Then, when the Indonesians left, they restarted the literacy classes in the villages and, from 2005 onwards, worked in the Timor-Leste national literacy campaign with the Cuban advisers (some of whom would have been trained by Leonela or Nydia). In 2012, when the Cuban campaign was launched in Wilcannia, Zelia came to Australia to be part of that historic event.¹

Literacy, fascism & the climate crisis

My hope is, that by remembering the lives and work of these women, we of the Australian adult literacy movement can be inspired to develop the courage and the clear-sighted analysis we need to confront the enormous dangers now facing us. The time is long overdue for plain-speaking. The situation in the world at the end of the second decade of the 21st century is no less dangerous than it was back in the 1930s and 1940s. We ignore the threats we are facing at our peril, and at the peril of our children and our grandchildren. Part of what we face is the re-emergence of fascism as a political force. But this time, the threat it brings with it is not only war, but total planetary collapse.

We cannot pretend that the climate crisis and the re-emergence of fascism are not intimately interrelated. Both have come about through the total failure of capitalism *on a global scale* to deliver real welfare for the majority of the world's people. Today, there are millions more people in the world without basic literacy than there were in the 1970s.

As a consequence, as the conditions of the majority world deteriorate, and as movements in protest grow larger and larger, the only recourse for those who still benefit from the current system is to turn to more and more repression, while at the same time bombarding us with propaganda designed to turn our attention away from the real problem, by creating false divisions among the world's peoples based on racism, sexism and ethnocentric nationalism. This is what we must name for what it is: neo-fascism.

In the 1940s, Nelson and his colleagues in Army Education realised only too late that the only defence against fascism is an educated and mobilised population, determined to build a more democratic, peaceful and equal world. This time, however, we cannot take Nelson's path, because neither liberalism nor a national army of mobilised literate men can save us.

What is needed now, even more than it was then, is a popular education movement, because not only must we develop a critically literate movement able to resist and combat the propaganda and lies which try to obscure the truth of what is happening; we also need to unleash the enormous power and creativity that exists within people and enlist them in the work of building a genuine alternative society.

So, the question I am raising is this: what role can we, as popular educators committed to working with people with low literacy, do to help build this movement?

In 2011–12, the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies estimated there were approximately 2.5 million people in Australia at Level 1 or below on the literacy scale. We know at least some of these people personally, because we are working with them in our literacy classes.

We also know that people with low literacy tend to be among society's most vulnerable. They are less likely to be employed, they have less education, they have poorer health and they are less likely to speak English as their first language. They are also more likely to be living in rural and remote parts of Australia, or on the fringes of the major cities. Aboriginal people, as we know from the work we are doing in the *Yes, I Can!* literacy campaign, are heavily over-represented in this population also.

What this means, and what we need to speak out about, is that they are the people in Australia most likely to be

adversely affected by the climate crisis, because they have fewer resources with which to mitigate its effects. They will therefore become its first victims, a fate they now share with many of the 780 million other people around the world who, according to UNESCO, lack basic literacy.

This is why we must speak of a climate *justice* movement – because the effects of climate change fall disproportionately on the people in the world who are least able to resist, who are most vulnerable, who have the least capacity to get out of the way. The other aspect to this injustice is that, because these people have lower incomes and consume fewer resources, they have probably in their lifetimes contributed significantly less to the carbon emissions which have brought on the crisis than people with higher levels of education and literacy.

But how can the people who are most affected become part of this movement, and ensure that their interests are given priority and their voices are heard? How can people who lack the education to read much of the material which explains the crisis, and how it has come about, become involved? Clearly, this is a role for literacy practitioners like us, and a role for our organisations, like ACAL. Like Paulo Freire in Brazil, like the Cubans who worked on their national literacy campaign, we have to mobilise people with low literacy into activities where they can learn about these things and where they can learn how to raise their collective voices to insist that our governments and our corporations take action now.

I will finish as I started, with the words of Mike Welton:

The struggle over the meanings of the past is tied to the kind of world we want to build tomorrow.

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Dr Bob Boughton has been a community development worker, an adult educator and a political activist since the 1970s. He is currently an Associate Professor in the School of Education at the University of New England in Armidale, NSW, due to retire in 2020. His research focuses on the role of popular education in development in marginalised and impoverished communities. From 2006 to 2010, he worked with the Cuban education mission in Timor-Leste on that country's national adult literacy campaign. Since 2012, he has been researching and evaluating the Literacy for Life Foundation adult literacy campaign in Aboriginal communities. From 2016 to 2019, he was the Chief Investigator in a three-year longitudinal study of the impact of the campaign on the social determinants of health, funded by the Australian Research Council. At the 2019 ACAL Conference, where an earlier version of this address was given, he was made an Honorary Life member of ACAL.

Notes

1 To read more about this literacy campaign in Australia see *Fine Print* 41(3) 11–15 and *Fine Print* 42(1) 28–32.

Critical numeracy: an interview with Anke Grotlueschen

by Elizabeth Gunn

Anke Grotlueschen was a keynote speaker at the 2019 Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL) Conference in Sydney. Her research focuses on the numeracy practices of vulnerable German subpopulations affected by financial indebtedness, technological change, or displacement by war. In her keynote, Anke introduced delegates to the innovative work of 16th century German mathematician Adam Ries. Ries is highly regarded by Germans for his translation of the Roman numeral system to Arabic numbers, thus making numerical calculations accessible to common people throughout the world. His mathematical innovation had important consequences for improving everyday people's access to social justice and financial emancipation. In this sense, Ries is a significant figure in contemporary numeracy education although his work is not well known outside Germany. By focusing attention on this crucial moment in European history, Anke's keynote reminded literacy educators not to waste Ries' legacy but to increase numeracy's prominence in adult literacy education.

In our conversation afterwards, Anke discussed her current work on the Hamburg Numeracy Project, her outlook on numeracy in the context of critical literacy, and how it takes more than eating apples for humans to live healthier lives.

Could you give *Fine Print* readers a brief overview of the Hamburg Numeracy Project?

It is a research project that was born out of the idea that we need more adult basic education or more literacy research. And then step wise, we realised that there's quite a bunch of literacy stuff around, but no one is exploiting the numeracy data that are available. I know that PIAAC [Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies] and the adult skills survey is somehow difficult for many adult educators. But on the other hand, there are data that have been provided by both the countries and the OECD, and taxpayers have paid for this data. We decided that we needed to exploit these data both on numeracy skills as well as on numeracy practices.

And again, because I'm not advocating quantitative statistics only, we found some colleagues who work with qualitative data. So, the project that I am working on is checking on vulnerable subpopulations and their numeracy practices.

Project number two is on ageing populations and people who learned how to calculate and apply arithmetic in the post-war generation. So, that's about retirement plans and about what it means to handle numeracy issues when you get older and how that compares to earlier times when digitisation was not so self-evident.



Anke Grotlueschen

The third subproject is about digital numeracy practices and competencies of refugees. For example, people who just recently came to Germany, and their skills and their attitudes towards numeracy. The skills are low, but their attitudes are very positive, much more positive compared to European countries. That's something I found *really* interesting.

There is another subproject that cares for disabled people. People who have their small budget how they handle issues around managing time and resources, money, geographical

issues, distances, for example, that require numeracy practices. That's a qualitative, ethnographic study. The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning is part of the project team. They monitor the sustainable development goals related to worldwide literacy and numeracy among adult populations. So how do you test that? How do you monitor that? I'm pretty critical about the overall testing industry that is launched by this development.

And there's one subproject that is focusing on indebted subpopulations, how they handle numeracy issues, and how their counsellors try to improve their skills or their awareness of numeracy practices over periods of around a year.

Your focus on numeracy through the prism of vulnerability really galvanized our thinking about numeracy education in a very urgent way. But you pointed out also that numeracy education is under-theorised. Why do you think that is?

I think most of the scholars in education are much more into literacy than into numeracy. We are all female and it is a gender issue. Numbers are male, literacy is female; this is a common gender stereotype. So, it's probably us [adult literacy educators] who don't care about numeracy because we think literacy is more easily accessible. Except some women like Keiko Yasukawa, Diana Coben, Jean Lave, for example, in the 1980s, who cared about numeracy early on because they knew that behind numeracy there are power relations. It's about claiming your share. It's about money management and couples. It's about retirement plans and making sure you get enough when you *do* retire. It's about annual leave; making sure you record how many days off you took this year, and whether something's wrong in the system, just to be able to claim what you're eligible to receive. So, I think the reason why numeracy education is under-theorised and under-researched is probably because educational science is more female than male currently.

The second reason is about Martin Luther and Adam Ries. Martin Luther is always understood as *the* one who made the Bible accessible to the wider public, who started popular education, who started educating the common people on using the Bible without having to ask a priest to interpret it for them. So reading and standardised German came with the Bible and with the Gutenberg book printing systems and industry. At the same time, this arithmetic book [by Adam Reis] translating Roman numbers to the Arabic system also came about in order to educate the commoner to not be exploited. But that has been totally forgotten; everyone focuses on Luther; he is well known worldwide. There's a saying in German when we think of

calculating, we say, for example, "*zwei und zwei macht, nach Adam Riese, vier*" (two plus two is, according to Adam Ries, four). So, Adam Ries is pretty well known in the German common consciousness and history, but not elsewhere because he didn't found a church!



A woodcut of Adam Ries dated 1550 (in Arabic numerals) and showing his age (58) in Roman numerals. Public domain

Your team's research reveals a more nuanced focus on various numeracy practices of vulnerable people. Things like that they get a lot of experience with calculating and estimating because of their budgetary restrictions. Why is it important to mine PIAAC data beyond just the comparative league table approach?

Oh, actually there is so much more in the data, and it's, in many ways, the economists, econometric and psychometric psychological scientists who make use of these data and they have a special mindset. Probably for the economists it's mostly about human capital. So, they compare the *economies'* human capital with each other. That's the league table, that's the pattern that's important for them. And it makes sense if you share their standpoint. On the other hand, psychometricians come from differential psychology. Differential psychology means they differentiate whether people have these or those personal traits: whether they have grit, whether they are open to the world, whether they are motivated, or focused, or whatever. So, if you come from that perspective you don't end up with league tables, but you'd end up with outcomes of investment in personal skills.

So, if you and I invested our personal skills, because of our personal motivation, we have certain outcomes like better jobs, better lives, better wages, as Andreas Schleicher¹ calls it. But both perspectives are *so* difficult for educational scientists because you would never see a person in your classroom as human capital, first of all, and the other way around, you wouldn't blame his or her failure on him or her because that's something that has a *lot* to do with societal structures and so on. And we all know that from a rich set of research about that.

So, we need research from an educational perspective, from social science, philosophy and thinking. We need research that keeps in mind that if we find, for example, that people with low literacy volunteer less often than average populations (e.g. Grotlueschen, 2017), this is not to blame the individual (i.e. the psychometric interpretation) but you can blame it on the society. And the volunteering organisation, they *exclude* people with low literacy, they do not *include* them; they are not *open* for integrating people who have some skills to improve. So, the pedagogical conclusion from this would be to go to institutions, like churches and trade unions and political organisations, and say, "Hey, please, why don't you open up for subpopulations that are not so skilled. Please integrate people into your organisation because they want to contribute to volunteering in society and so on." And that's a completely different conclusion you make from the data.

That's why I say don't leave the data to the economists and psychologists. We need to interpret the data from *our* perspective to get *our* conclusions from it and use them for convincing policy makers that they have to invest in adult educational training. Get custody of the data *and* the interpretation.

Why is the idea that literacy and numeracy cannot be separated an important one for literacy teachers and what can we do to address gaps in teachers' approaches?

Interesting question. I'm not so sure whether I have an answer for the second question. Putting these two together to see the numeracy aspect and literacy questions is sometimes pretty easy once you start. There's a lot of discussion about financial literacy. Actually, huge parts of that are about numeracy, about handling money for example, and not only for people at the lower end of the data, but also for people who have quite good skills but still don't treat their income or savings efficiently. Same for health numeracy within health literacy. Health literacy is

often about, let's say, counting steps or counting calories. And even if that is not what I would call critical, it is more *numeracy* than literacy anyway.

And in relation to political literacy, you find a lot of interpreting and handling statistics, tables, graphs and so on. So, when you try to advocate for someone, for example, low literate adults, first thing you do mostly is start collecting data. You count how many people called your hotline in order to seek advice. And then you see that the numbers are rising. And with these rising numbers, you go to the policy makers and advocate for better funding. So, there is a numeracy aspect, and political activities are, as we call it, political literacy. And that's definitely true for the digital world.

I don't think we *really* see yet what's coming. Like big data, digitisation, automatisisation, algorithms and self-tracking. I use the example of health insurances. Health insurances are very much after our self-tracking data; like how much we eat, when do we sleep, how many steps we have per day, how old we are and whatever. And they would *definitely* individualise the fees that they apply to people for health insurances, and [middle-class, educated] people like us will benefit from it. So, this neoliberal paradigm *shoots* up the middle classes, but it leaves behind the lower classes.

This is not only one aspect of your life that is going to be controlled by large systems. Insurance is only one of these systems, but all our life is going to be controlled, and those who are marginalised will get much more of these controls than the middle classes who are better off and can buy out of being controlled². This is something that we see coming. It's insurances, it's governments; government services will control everything. Learning analytics: universities and schools will control every single step of our students as well. Individualising curricula also goes hand-in-hand with controlling where each student is, currently, and what he or she achieved and what he or she needs. So, we are running into this control society and that is so much about digitisation and numeracy, much more than about literacy.

That brings us into the whole notion of criticality, which was a major theme of the conference, and your paper built on that solidly. I would love to get your view on critical numeracy. What does it mean?

Being critical, when you relate it back to either Paulo Freire or Oskar Negt³ in the German discussion, usually means that you try to help a population understand their

position inside society, define their interests and articulate their interests. And also, when it's critical theory, there's also an aspect of developing a vision, a Utopia, a world that you would like to live in. And then, from that standpoint, being able to criticise the world you actually find yourself living in now. That's the idea of critical theory. And if you apply that to different types of numeracy, you can develop a lot of examples. For example, if it's about health numeracy, I would say the *basic* education that you find *everywhere* is teaching people how to feed their children in a *healthy* way, and healthy always means a lot of vegetables combined with a lot of exercise. And that totally *individualises* the problem, as if being healthy were a completely *individual* problem.

In reality, whether you live in a healthy way or not has so much to do with workplace conditions, with precariousness, with having stress because you don't know where your income is coming from next year and getting burnt-out because of time pressure. So, critical health literacy and numeracy would mean, according to me, that you start discussing with people what *makes* them ill or what makes them *vulnerable* to becoming ill. First of all, understand their position in society. The second step is to try to figure out their interests. Like, for example, having more time for doing this or that, rather than being chased around by someone watching from behind or a supervisor or whoever. The third aspect would be to find out *whom* to *tell* what you want. For example, a workers' council in a company, or trade unions or policymakers.

And we heard several times at the conference, from Joe Lo Bianco and from Ralph St. Clair, and I would agree, that once you get the ear of your local policymaker, they *do* listen. They listen to these stories. And so, it makes sense to use adult basic education classes to get people into the position that they are able to say what they want, to speak up and *know* what they want.

And also, you may even feel more connected to your group – I'm talking about collectively saying something. The classroom is mostly a room where between five and 25 people come together. So, you're not alone anymore, and you collectively negotiate what you want to advocate. For example, less time pressure, or more time at home, or being allowed to work remotely, which is relevant for many mothers or parents. Others may say, "I do not want to work at home. I want to have the opportunity to stay here and work here. And when I get home, I have my time off". Negotiate and articulate and make a case for



what you really want. And that's probably *healthier* than just eating apples.

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Anke Grotlueschen is Professor for Lifelong Learning at Hamburg University. Her research mostly focuses on assessment, literacy and lifelong learning. She was a keynote speaker at the 2019 ACAL Conference, which had the theme: Critical Re-Imagining: Adult Literacy and Numeracy Practices for Sustainable Development.

Anke was interviewed by Elizabeth Gunn, who is a member of the Fine Print editorial committee and is the Victorian representative on the ACAL Committee.

Notes

- 1 Andreas Schleicher is Director for Education and Skills (PISA), and Special Advisor on Education Policy to the Secretary-General at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in Paris.
- 2 The Robo-debt algorithm set up by the Federal government in Australia is a recent example of vulnerable people's lives being severely impacted by callously programmed data systems (Medhora, 2019)
- 3 Oskar Negt is a prominent German philosopher and critical social theorist.

Practical Matters

Teaching resources for climate change and sustainability

by Sarah Deasey

Climate change is escalating year by year and we are seeing the disastrous, apocalyptic, frightening, monumental destruction of the environment across the world. More than ever, as educators we have a duty and opportunity to work with our learners to understand and take control of the multitude of environmental issues that are impacting our work, community and personal lives.

On an organisational level, learning institutions are in the position to consult, model, teach and raise awareness of sustainable practices and at the same time help lead communities for action on climate change.

At the classroom level, Language Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) and English as an Additional Language (EAL) teachers can address the subject content, alongside language learning, either within an accredited, generic language and literacy curriculum framework or through preaccredited courses. The subject matter is broad and complex, but also rich with opportunity for learning language, learning through language and learning about language. Our learners are all experiencing the consequences of climate change in varying ways and all are experiencing the day-to-day decisions about waste disposal, energy use and transport.

This topic is not new! Classroom EAL and LLN teachers and curriculum developers have been preparing content and resources on the subject for decades.

Teachers use a range of resources for thematic content. There are ready-made resources, teacher-created resources, and teacher-sourced community texts and information which may need to be scaffolded and adapted depending on the level of the learner. Online resources produced by state and federal departments for use in school are abundant and can sometimes be used or adapted for adult learners.

The Sustainability Victoria website points to a number of further sites for teachers:

<https://www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/School/Get-started/Professional-learning>

as does the federally funded Education for Sustainability project's resources portal:

<https://sustainabilityinschools.edu.au/>.

There are community resources on any local government website to guide residents on topics including recycling, energy saving and safety tips for heatwaves. Teachers are adept at making such resources accessible to students.

2040

Documentary films are another teaching resource that may need scaffolding and supportive pre-learning and introductory activities to make them accessible. The first step, of course, is to watch the film before showing it to the class!

The documentary *2040* is a unique movie which takes the form of a personal narrative about climate change by the director Damon Gameau, in which he addresses his now four-year-old daughter Velvet. He bases his story in the present and in the year 2040 when Velvet is 24. He documents and celebrates examples of current technological and scientific solutions to climate change which, he avers, should be mainstream by 2040.

His key message is: "We have everything we need right now to make it happen."

The film is upbeat and positive, with a complex structure going back and forth between the documentary footage



© GoodThing Productions/Regen Pictures



2040: Discussing solar power in Bangladesh. © GoodThing Productions/Regen Pictures

of the present and dramatised sequences for the future. A tousled, friendly and passionate Damon Gameau speaks to the camera, addressing the audience and his daughter and this direct interaction with the audience engages and reassures.

Gameau starts the narrative at home, introducing his family and explaining in simple terms the cumulative effects of the build-up of greenhouse gases which have caused the alarming warming of the planet and the consequent effects on our environment. He then travels the world to show us a number of successful projects in energy, transport, regenerative agriculture, and ocean cooling permaculture. The film addresses both emissions reduction and carbon drawdown as a means to reduce greenhouse gases.

The film runs for 92 minutes. Showing a full-length documentary feature film to LLN or EAL learners in one session is a lot absorb. The visuals and vocals in the film are engaging but the content is complex.

Luckily the structure of the film allows a breakdown into sections as Gameau travels the world and shows each positive venture that is addressing climate change. Sections of the film can be shown over a number of sessions. This approach enables students to better understand and engage with all the facts and issues. Each section follows a formula: what is happening in the present and how the project could be applied on a global basis in the future, not just for emissions reduction but with the ‘cascading benefits’ of a more equitable distribution of wealth and power.

Each section starts with an interview with an expert such as an economist, a scientist or futurist. Next there are the faces of the future generations: schoolchildren

who give us their thoughts and hopes for the future with both fantastic and feasible solutions for sustainability, for example: “Cleaner water. That would make me happy.” and “I want rocket boots instead of cars.”

Some suggested sections for classroom sessions are:

- Introduction and energy solutions. Gameau travels to Bangladesh and shows us a community project using interconnected solar home systems. The future application is applied worldwide with solar grid and battery storage for sharing power in every community and 100% renewable domestic power.
- Transport. Gameau looks at on-demand electric cars in Los Angeles, with driverless cars and ride sharing vehicles rather than personal vehicles.
- Agriculture. Agricultural regeneration is achieved by introducing mixed planting, eliminating fertiliser for pasture grazing as a means to withstand lower rainfall and keep food for cattle.
- The ocean. Marine permaculture is presented as a way to cool warming oceans while also provide food for millions.
- Conclusion. Some final suggestions come from Project Drawdown. These include the education of girls, which according to population experts will allow women the freedom to choose if and when to have children, and in turn give women better resilience to face the impacts of climate change.

The film can be purchased as a single DVD for personal use for around \$20, or there is a schools’ version for \$110. The pricing for the schools’ version includes an educational licence and the book *2040: A Handbook for the Regeneration*. The book has a foreword by Paul Hawken from Project Drawdown and there are five chapters: Energy; Transport; Drawdown and Sequester Consumption; Recipes; and Getting to 2040. The book is a useful reference to dip into when reinforcing the key messages of the film. It will be more useful for teachers than students. Visit <https://whatsyour2040.com/> for more information.

The schools’ version includes lesson plans which can also be accessed at the Cool Australia website by creating a free user account: <https://www.coolaustralia.org/unit/2040-watching-the-film-years-5-10/>. These lesson plans are mapped to the Australian Curriculum for Years 5 to 10 but could easily be adapted to the adult learning setting.

Resources designed for EAL learners

In my searches for content and resources specifically developed for EAL learners, the most recent I have found is the excellent *Our Environment – Teaching Materials for Adult ESL Students* produced in 2012 in a joint project between Lalor Living and Learning Centre, Sustainability Victoria, and the City of Whittlesea. It was reviewed in *Fine Print* at the time:

https://www.valbec.org.au/fineprint/archive/2012/fp_2012-02.pdf

There are six teaching units, with teacher's notes, image support files, flash cards and 'the waste game', covering the topics: Understanding Climate Change, Energy Efficiency at Home, Managing Household Waste, Being Wise with Water, Smarter Shopping and Sustainable Transport. Eight years on, in 2020, this resource is still very relevant.

The resource comes on a CD and can be downloaded. See the VALBEC website for purchasing details: <https://valbec.org.au/resources-produced-by-members/>

Another quality resource from the recent past is *Living for Tomorrow: a practical approach to the environment for new arrivals* by Carmel Everitt. This education kit, comprising a book, a CD and a DVD, was produced through a partnership between AMES and the EPA (Environmental Protection Authority) in 2007. It is an EAL resource and tied to the CSWE (Certificate in Spoken and Written English) learning outcomes, which can easily be adapted to EAL units. Units of work are Energy Use, Water Use, Transport, Rubbish and Waste disposal, and 'Smart Shopping'. The kit is available for loan from Frankston, Geelong and Hume libraries: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/work/31968794>

Sarah Deasey is the Further Education Coordinator at the Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre.



All Comers Welcome:

educating for community and growth

VALBEC Conference 15 May 2020 

"Inspiration for new approaches in the classroom and an opportunity to connect with others in the field. I had a fantastic day!!"

"Opportunities to learn new information, be inspired and get some practical ideas"

"... new ideas, meet new people and catch up with old contacts. All achieved."

That's just three people's feedback from the 2019 VALBEC Conference.

The 2020 VALBEC Conference is at William Angliss Conference Centre on Friday 15 May

Registrations open 11 April: <https://valbec.org.au/2020-conference-home/>

Read eVALBEC to keep up to date with conference news.

Foreign Correspondent

ProLiteracy Conference – San Diego, California

by *Konstantina Vlahos*

Konstantina Vlahos was the recipient of the 2019 VALBEC Scholarship to attend the ProLiteracy Conference on Adult Education in San Diego, California. Here, she reflects on some of the workshops she attended and shares what she learned with *Fine Print* readers.

I left Melbourne on a cold blustery day in late September and arrived in Los Angeles on the very same day. Being granted that extra time felt like some type of magic, with the only blight on that magical feeling being my long-sleeved top, jeans, boots and compression socks: totally out of place in balmy September California.

The first thing I noticed when I arrived at the ProLiteracy conference was how warm, welcoming and immensely passionate everyone was regarding adult literacy. The second thing that stuck out was just how many librarians and library staff were present. It soon became clear that public libraries play a huge role in delivering literacy programs and training to their communities as do trained volunteer tutors: it seemed to me that the adult literacy programs rely heavily on volunteer tutors.

I was impressed that so many people in the US are keen to commit their time to adult literacy. However, in the opening session of the conference I learned that in the US, education accounts for less than 2% of all federal spending and that education investment is US\$7 billion below what it was in 2011 in inflation-adjusted terms. It therefore seems that the heavy investment by municipal libraries and the people in the volunteer tutoring program is born of necessity. Another thing that struck me was the number of private companies that sponsored the conference.

In the opening session I also learned that ProLiteracy have a two-pronged approach to advocating for adult literacy. The first is to work towards receiving federal funding and related legislation that impacts adult learners and programs and the second is widespread awareness building. Even though our political and funding systems are different, I feel that Australia and the US have that in common.



In this piece I will focus on the workshops that had the most profound effect on my own professional development. Many of the workshop contributors have generously provided slides and handouts that can be accessed from the ProLiteracy website: proliteracy.org/Professional-Development/ProLiteracy-Conference/Workshops

Dyslexia simulation & dyslexia overview

In my final class before I was due to leave for the conference, one of the learners who has dyslexia said to me, “Maybe when you go to America you can find out more about dyslexia and tell me why my brain works this way.”

According to the Australian Dyslexia Association, as many as one in five Australians is on the continuum of mild to severe dyslexia.¹ So, it is safe to say that every teacher would have encountered or will encounter a student with dyslexia in the classroom. I have taught an evening literacy class for a number of years and at all times, at least a third of the learners have been diagnosed with dyslexia. I also teach a literacy class for people with mild intellectual disabilities, therefore finding ways to effectively and

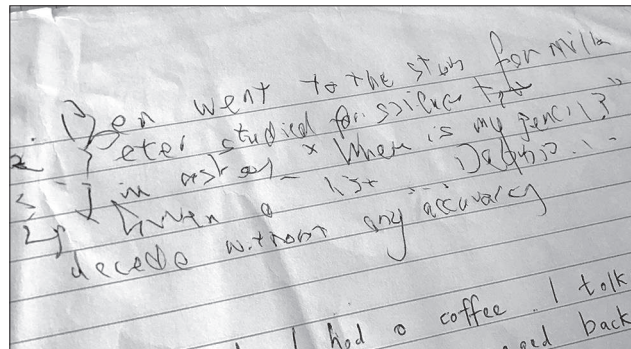
dynamically teach reading, writing and spelling has been my predominant focus.

As part of the *Dyslexia Simulation & Dyslexia Overview* workshop presented by Kelli Sandman-Hurley and Tracy Block-Zaretsky, the participants were given an opportunity to experience 'Dyslexia for a Day'. We were given a limited time to read a text in which certain letters could be one of two letters. For example, the letter 'i' could be an 'i' or an 'e', and a 'p' could be a 'p' or a 't'. The experience of reading the text was initially intensely confusing. I kept having to refer back to the 'code' – is it an *i* or an *e*, a *p* or a *t*? When it came time to the oral comprehension questions that quickly followed the reading, I had a general idea of what the text was about, but completely floundered when it came to identifying specific information within it. The experience of reading became unpleasant. I wasn't reading to garner information, as all my efforts went into understanding what each word was. Moreover, whereas normally I can quickly scan a text to locate the main information, during the dyslexia simulation, I totally lost that ability. Instead I was guessing and skipping words.

We then participated in a dictation, where we had to use our non-dominant hand to write sentences. The presenter made it clear that the sentences would not be repeated, we just had to keep up.

Finally, as part of the writing simulation we had to write a paragraph about what we had done earlier that morning. We were not to use certain words (such as and/be/the) and when spelling words, certain letters had to be replaced. An 'a' for instance, had to be an 'o'. I ended up writing the most simplistic of sentences as anything more complex would have taken far too much time and effort. The result was that I couldn't write what I wanted to say, what I would normally be capable of saying. I was unable to express myself fully and authentically and the process of writing was anything but a joy.

The simulation component of the workshop was highly effective in that it enabled the participants to experience the difficulty, restriction and frustration a learner with dyslexia – or associated conditions such as dysgraphia, dyscalculia, ADD/ADHD and executive functioning deficit – will most likely experience within a learning environment that has not been designed with the necessary accommodations, teaching style and approach required to support the learner with dyslexia.



Dyslexia simulation activity

The workshop presenters stressed that in order to provide for people with dyslexia, teaching needs to take a structured, explicit and multisensory approach. In the workshop they took us through the Orton Gillingham Approach and Structured Word Inquiry (SWI).

I have used aspects of both of these methods in the classroom and I am always amazed at how enthusiastically the learners embrace what I often assume are far too complex ideas and concepts. I have come to the conclusion that my own trepidation creates a stumbling block for both the learners and me. Like therapists, teachers and trainers can only take their learners as far as they are willing to go themselves. By that I mean, that we first have to explore, discover and understand the intricacies and underlying structure of the English language before we can support our learners to do the same. The process can be overwhelming but within it we can find a renewed sense of excitement and energised inquiry into how our language works.

Links and further reading

Workshop slides:

proliteracy.org/Professional-Development/ProLiteracy-Conference/Workshops

Detailed information, exercises and resources on Orton Gillingham and SWI can be found online.

The *English Alphabetic Code* for understanding the 44 sounds of the English alphabet:

alphabeticcodecharts.com

Spelling – a strategic approach (Teacher resource and student workbook) by Lee Kindler & Jan Hagston for learning more about the different spelling knowledges and how to teach them:

multifangled.com.au

Community curator: student-designed museums

In this workshop, presenters Megan Wells and Martin Rabotti shared their experience of working on a project with the theme: *Our City Our Museum – A Museum Space For Us, By Us*. The facilitators worked with different adult learner groups in their home city of Chicago to encourage them to see themselves as agents of history. Essentially, the learners, who were studying for their high school equivalency, became the creators of both the museum artefacts and the museum.

The learners had to select a special object that held deep significance for them and was a part of their history. The original objects could not be displayed in the pop-up museums as there was a risk that they might be lost or misplaced. The students therefore set about creating replicas of the original objects – this involved working with scale and materials.

As part of the process the learners had to discuss the era in which the original object was created. They were asked questions such as, “What year was it? What was happening in your country at that time?” The project incorporated many skills including research, presentation and speaking, critical thinking, creative thinking, synthesising information, time-lining objects together, writing and revision, trouble shooting, problem solving and revising and condensing.

The project followed the principles of project based learning and was designed to be completed over six weeks. Specific goals and activities were incorporated into each weekly lesson and the learners used a weekly tracker to record and plan their progress.

The facilitators were very generous with their resources and provided the workshop participants with the worksheets with the weekly goals, documentation trackers and the weekly progress tracker. I particularly wanted to share this workshop as I can see the enormous potential it would have for VCAL, literacy and EAL adult learners. It not only provides opportunities for learners to develop their employability skills, but it is also a lovely project that would contribute to building trust, understanding, empathy and community.

During the workshop the participants were able to begin thinking about how we might make our own museum activity. The steps were: Identify an object (that holds significant meaning) and then ‘mine it for

its meaning’ by thinking about and answering the following questions:

1. What is it?
2. How did it get to you?
3. What story would your object tell if it could speak?
4. How many miles has your object travelled to get to you?
5. Why is this object important to you?
6. What memories does it bring?

It was inspiring and moving to hear the workshop participants’ responses – all thought of in such a short span of time. I can only imagine the depth and quality of any extension work done on those responses and on the personal value and history of the cherished objects.

Links and further reading

Workshop slides: proliteracy.org/Professional-Development/ProLiteracy-Conference/Workshops (scroll to ‘UIC CFL - Comm Curator Student-Designed Museums ProLiteracy Presentation 2019’)

[facebook.com/ourcityourmuseum](https://www.facebook.com/ourcityourmuseum)

See also ‘Sharing museum practice with adult learners’ by Liz Suda in *Fine Print* 41 (1) pp.30–32)

A conversation group in 5 acts

Apparently having a number in the title of your workshop or presentation grabs people’s attention and makes it more enticing. I was attracted to this workshop, possibly unconsciously because of the engaging title, but more so because I teach a conversation class at Mernda Community House filled with immensely amazing learners who have lived incredibly rich lives, from whom I learn something new every session. Although the classes are structured, in the main they feel very informal. Often it feels like a gathering of friends sitting around a large kitchen table, talking, laughing and sharing stories. I hope that this is what a conversation class should feel like.

Like every teacher, I am constantly looking for ideas to engage the learners in my classes and this workshop, presented by Amy Thorna, Literacy Coordinator at Onondaga County Public Libraries in Syracuse, New York, did not disappoint. The first recommendation was to have many activities ready to keep the group engaged, especially (and facilitators of conversation classes will understand this) when you are not certain as to who will be attending on any given day. Plan something especially

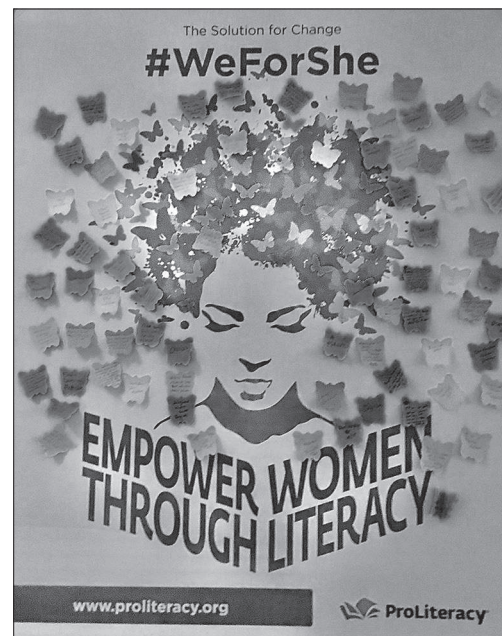
for a particular learner and you can be almost certain that they will not attend on the day; I think it's some mysterious law of the universe. Personally, I feel far less anxious walking into a classroom with an extra-full 'bag of tricks'. It means that activities can be modified and tailored to the immediate needs of the class. It also means that as the facilitator, I am not holding tight to a set expectation in my head as to how the class will go. One of my personal mottos is that 'expectation is the mother of disappointment'.

Some further suggestions from the workshop:

- Keep activities consistent so that the learners will know what to expect and can prepare for the class.
- Ask learners something as they arrive in order to highlight a grammar skill. For example, "What did you do last weekend / yesterday / before coming to class?", "What will you do after class?" etc. The grammar point should be made explicit and corrected as required.
- Focus on commonly confused words such as homophones and have an idiom for each week, e.g. 'Kick the bucket'.
- Keep vocabulary 'in the common space', adding to it each week and only removing it once everyone has learned it. Learners who have already learned the vocabulary can provide the definitions and related words and idioms can be added when they are relevant to a conversation.
- Use partner activities to encourage learners to form relationships with fellow learners and to allow them more speaking time.

Additional resources suggested in the workshop were:

- Just-a-Minute game by Elizabeth Claire: <https://www.elizabethclaire.com/products/just-a-minute-game>
- Look Who's Talking! Activities for Group Interaction by Mary Ann Christison & Sharron Bassano. (Prentice Hall)
- Back & Forth: Pair Activities for Language Development by Theodore S Rodgers, Adrian S Palmer & Judy Winn-Bell Olsen (Alta English)
- Talk-A-Tivities: Problem Solving and Puzzles for Pairs by Richard Yorkey (Addison-Wesley)
- Listen and Draw: Easy Drawing Activities for the EFL/ESL Classroom by Stephen Mark Silvers (University Book Store Press)
- Drawing Out: Creative, Personalized, Whole Language Activities by Sharron Bassano & Mary Ann Christison (Alta English)



Conference participants wrote notes of encouragement, solidarity and support for the ProLiteracy Empower Women Through Literacy campaign. To learn more about this and about the *Write Her Future Institute*, please visit the ProLiteracy website.

Adult math: four concepts the books need to teach

This is a major assumption on my part, but it seems to me that at some stage early in our formal education we decide whether we prefer words to numbers or vice versa. I remember making the decision to choose words long ago, as numbers seemed far too abstract to me. To this day, I hold a sense of inadequacy surrounding mathematics and the concepts it encapsulates.

There are excellent videos and resources available online to further explore the four concepts addressed in this workshop presented by Dorothea Steinke. For links to some of these resources, see the *Fine Print* section in the March 2020 issue of eVALBEC. (for archived eVALBEC visit: <https://valbec.org.au/evalbec-archive/>). I highly recommend them as Dorothea Steinke is a very a dynamic presenter with extensive knowledge and experience as a maths and music teacher and as an adult educator.

#SubwayReads

One final presentation that I would like to mention is *Subway Reads: An Innovative Campaign to Promote Reading*, presented by Anthony Tassi. It would be wonderful to see

a campaign such as this in Australia. The organisation, Literacy Partners, provides free excerpts from over 250 books to the public. During the #SubwayReads campaign they partnered with publishing houses, New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority and an internet provider to reach out to the public and subsequently had 167 thousand visitors to their site. This sounds like such an amazing initiative. Not so easy perhaps to run in an Australian city as it was for a New York based organisation, given the number of publishing houses in that city, but I am hoping that the right person out there learns about the #SubwayReads campaign and creates something similar for an Australian audience. To learn more, visit: <https://literacypartners.org/subway-reads>

Acknowledgment

I would like to express my deepest gratitude and appreciation to VALBEC for their very generous

scholarship which granted me the amazing opportunity to attend the ProLiteracy conference in San Diego, California; ProLiteracy for their generous conference scholarship; all the presenters and facilitators I was fortunate enough to learn from and my fellow conference attendees who showed me such warm hospitality and inspired me with their passion and enthusiasm for adult literacy.

Konstantina Vlahos began working in the adult literacy sector in 2006 and has worked at PRACE (Preston Reservoir Adult Community Education) as a literacy and EAL teacher since 2007. She loves words, especially the written word, and believes that everyone has the right to the gifts and empowerment it can bring.

Notes

- 1 <https://dyslexiaassociation.org.au/dyslexia-in-australia/>

Open Forum

Reflections on the 2019 Australian Council for Adult Literacy Conference

by Sally Thompson

Many years ago, I attended a conference organised by Adult Learning Australia (ALA) and the Australian Education Union (AEU) about disengaged youth. One of the keynote speakers, Dr John Falzon, gave out this challenge to the audience: you need to ask yourselves - are you a movement or a club? I have thought of this exhortation at every conference I have been to since - particularly those run by peak bodies, unions or professional associations - and I thought of it again at the 2019 Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL) Conference.

Implicit in Dr Falzon's question was the suggestion that being a movement was a more worthy goal than being a club. After all, social movements achieve important social change: ending wars, establishing social welfare systems, tearing down supremacist governments. Clubs, on the other hand, have much more modest goals: bringing people together around a common interest, providing support and a sense of shared purpose. I would argue that professional associations should do both these things and that a good conference can hold both these goals in mind.

The adult literacy profession has a long and proud history of keeping one eye on the broader environment in which literacy and numeracy classes operate. The ability to read and write text has always been a political act and the more textually dense our world becomes, the greater the political imperative becomes to ensure this basic right is available for all citizens. Keynote speaker Ralf St Clair began by reminding the conference that the growing evidence base showing the relationship between literacy, poverty and other negative life outcomes is compelling. While Bob Boughton, who gave the Arch Nelson oration, made the sobering point that the rural NSW communities in which the Literacy for Life Foundation runs the *Yes, I Can!* literacy program are fast running out of water.

The conference theme, *Critical Re-Awakening: Adult literacy and numeracy practices for sustainable development*, framed adult literacy and numeracy practice within the broader political context in which the poverty and marginalisation that accompany adult literacy, are becoming more pronounced through climate change and its attendant threats. Keynote speaker Ros Appleby addressed the theme most directly by speaking about the importance of animals and engagement with the natural



Workshop discussion at the conference. Photo supplied by ACAL

world as a theme and topic of adult literacy practice. Pamela Osmond and Keiko Yasukawa's presentation outlined additional factors impacting the broader environment in which teachers practise. In addition to climate change, they suggest, erosion of the social safety net, fragmentation of social services, increased transfer of lifecycle risks to the individual, the rise of the gig economy and insecure work and new digital technologies and 'big data' all impact both the need for adult literacy and numeracy provision, and the capacity of the sector to deliver the literacy that people need to avoid further marginalisation.

One of the things that has prevented the adult literacy sector from being a movement rather than a club, has been an inability to rally around a shared set of ideals. When I first began as a practitioner, the differences were largely between those who taught adult literacy as an extension of the social welfare and charity systems versus those who taught adult literacy as part of the mainstream VET and higher education

systems. Many of the early debates were about the perceived infantilization of adults attending courses and classes and the lack of strengths-based approaches. In more recent times, the field has been divided by people's various positions in relation to widespread national and international testing and the pedagogies and practices that flow from it. Specifically, some in the field, and its peak bodies, have rallied around the significant body of ethnographic research that identifies literacy as a social practice, with limited meaning outside its context and purpose. They point to the perverse views of literacy and numeracy (and illiteracy and innumeracy) that emerge from creating arbitrary measures and encourage resistance to it. Others have more pragmatic approaches, welcoming the policy attention and funding that comes with a 'big data' evidence base.

An example of the divisive nature of this debate occurred in 2011, when a flurry of media interest in adult literacy was stirred up by the release of the Industry Skills Councils (Australia) statement on adult literacy, entitled *No More Excuses: an industry response to the language, literacy and numeracy challenge*. At the time, concerned about business interests owning the public narrative around adult literacy and numeracy, and thereby constructing publicly funded adult education as entirely about work, the Australian Education Union (AEU) and Adult Literacy Australia (ALA) attempted to create a counter statement, representing union and community views. Representatives of both reached out to ACAL to partner on the statement, but were rebuffed by the Executive at the time, largely on the issue of referencing the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey data. After failing to come up with a consensus view and amid accusations of perpetuating 'deficit views of adult learners' ALA and the AEU went it alone and produced the public statement, *Let's Get Serious About Adult Literacy and Numeracy*. Fast forward to 2019, and ACAL is now the main voice lobbying for Australia's inclusion in the next Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies survey. *Let's Get Serious* now reads like an utterly benign statement of policy sense and it's hard to know what the fuss was about.

At the recent conference, Ralf St Clair from Canada outlined the complexity of adult literacy and numeracy policy and practice, and the diverse agendas and interests at play, but suggested that, despite this, there is enough consensus in the sector to act in a unified way: the basis of a movement, one might say. He proposed four consensus statements, supported by the evidence base, around which the sector could agree. These are:

1. People are not empty vessels. Most live full and happy lives.
2. Literacies are multiple and complex.
3. People are systematically denied access to literacy. The same communities that lack access to material resources also lack access to education.
4. Literacy is a human right – no one should have to justify why they are entitled to functional literacy.

ACAL and its affiliate bodies should take up Dr St Clair's challenge and, unless they can engage with the many other peak bodies and groups who share these aspirations (like ALA, the AEU and the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic Adult Education), then it won't be much of a movement.

I began by suggesting that a peak body should be both a movement and a club. Clubs are places where people feel welcome and resources are shared. There's nothing wrong with a club, as long as the rules of entry are based on something positive (like a commitment to changing lives through literacy) rather than something negative (like the ownership of a sports jacket). Keynote speeches, by their very nature, appeal to the broader environment in which literacy and numeracy work occurs, are usually given by people who are paid to comment on the broader environment in which literacy and numeracy work occurs. Workshop sessions are inevitably given by people who have no such luxury, people who work within reporting and funding frameworks over which they have little control. These people may or may not lead a broader movement, but they play an important role in supporting the club, by sharing survival tips and resources and making other teachers lives a little easier.

The ACAL conference featured a number of these little gems. I note, in particular, Leigh Dwyer, who sent everyone away from his workshop on Trigger Word Analysis in Assessment with a full set of resources that they could use immediately. If you can walk away from a conference with a manifesto for the future of the movement, and a good set of resources for work on Monday, then, that is a conference well done.

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Industry Skills Councils (Australia). (2011). *No More Excuses: an industry response to the language, literacy and numeracy challenge*. <https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A45623>

Sally Thompson is a former President of VALBEC, EO of ACEVic and CEO of Adult Learning Australia.

At ALA, Sally worked on the *Lets Get Serious About Adult Literacy and Numeracy Policy* mentioned in this article. She has worked in the ACE, TAFE and Higher Education systems and is currently working for the Victorian Department of Education.

Focus on the positive

by Amelia Trompf

The VALBEC Positive Psychology for Adult Education workshop led by Marie McLeod (12/11/2019) was a thought provoking and inspiring evening. We all came away with some practical ideas and a great deal to think about in terms of our own mindsets and some of the challenges our students face.

Marie began the session by asking, “*What are you hoping for your students?*” Answers from around the room included: to break down barriers and make connections, to give students hope and resilience, to increase engagement, to help students recognise their own strengths and talents and to teach learning-to-learn skills in an authentic way. Contemplating this big picture question was a great reminder for all of us about why we teach and what we want for our students.

Marie asked us to think about those of our students who are vulnerable and how vulnerability affects learning. “*The need to survive overwhelms any willingness to learn or change*” is a persuasive quote (adapted from Peter Schwartz) from Marie’s presentation. As she explained, living in the tyranny of the moment, can affect our ability to learn and also our ability to look to the future. She commented that many of our students would not be able to envisage their future. Therefore, we need to help our students articulate their beliefs about the future and help to change their self-talk.

Marie then encouraged us all to think about the lens we look through in life. Do we focus on the deficit and dysfunction or do we look for the positive? While discussing the importance of cultivating positivity, she explained that like a flower that opens in the daylight, the brain ‘opens’ when we get positive emotions such as love, pride, gratitude and heart-felt experiences. When we are in an open state, we get more neural connections

and therefore we can think more, connect more, increase problem solving skills and are more likely to be resilient and ‘let stuff go’. She posed the questions: “*How do we use the power of positivity with students to open them up and get them in the best brain states for learning, connecting and creating?*” and; “*What strategies could we share with our students to build their emotional resources?*”

The simple but well researched exercise to cultivate positivity Marie shared is to keep a three-blessings diary. Every day for a week, you write down three things that went well and why they went well. It has been found that when we do this, our brains can start to rewire after four days and after six months it has been found to decrease depression. Another suggestion was to start the class with the question “*When was the last time you felt or gave kindness?*” We discussed the fact that it is important to vary these kinds of activities so that answers don’t become too rehearsed.

Marie concluded the evening by discussing *the concept of hope*. She said, “*Hope is believing that the future will be better than it is now and believing that you have some power to make it so*”. This made me realise that having hope is something I take completely for granted and think little of but many of my students don’t have this luxury. Marie explained that having hope has shown to increase school achievement by 12%, increase happiness by 10% and increase productivity for adults (an hour per day). I particularly like the quote she included: “*Hope is like a*

journey – you need a destination, a map and transportation to get there” (Lopez). I will definitely use Marie’s ‘Hope Map’ graphic organiser (see Box below) as a way to introduce the concept of hope and as a way of explicitly showing the pathways and obstacles to achieving goals.

Among the everyday business of teaching lessons along with assessment and data entry, it is easy to lose sight of the big picture questions. It was very refreshing to listen

to Marie and I know I am not alone in feeling inspired to find out more about positive psychology.

Amelia Trompf began teaching English as an Additional Language in Scotland and Canada and now teaches at Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre (currently on maternity leave). She was a primary school teacher for six years before completing a Master of Education (TESOL) at Deakin University.

Hope map

Using the table below, first write down one goal you’d like to achieve in the year ahead to reach your Hope. Then note down at least three different pathways you could take to make this goal a reality. For each pathway, note down at least one obstacle you may encounter along the way. Finally, at the top and bottom of the table note down any ideas for maintaining your energy and agency as you move along the pathways and through the obstacles to make your goal a reality – think about how you can use your strengths.

Pathway	Obstacles	Goal (just one)
1.	1.	
2.	2.	
3.	3.	

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In Conversation

Volunteering at the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre

An interview with Jane Woodman

Less than a year after retiring from her role as an assistant principal in a large primary school in Melbourne's eastern suburbs, Jane Woodman was back in the classroom as a volunteer teacher and teacher's assistant at the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC) in Dandenong. *Fine Print* asked her to reflect on the similarities and differences between her former and current roles.

Why do you volunteer at the ASRC?

My work as an assistant principal was diverse and very rewarding and I always knew that I would do volunteer work in some capacity when I retired. I wanted to do something different but something that would complement my skill set. I was looking for reward and challenge out of my comfort zone.

Dandenong wasn't an area of Melbourne that I knew much about, so even going to a new spot was exciting. While I hadn't taught a class of students for nine years, I was confident that I hadn't lost my teaching skills. I was happy to volunteer at the ASRC and do something else to support people in my community, but teaching was my preferred contribution.

I am very interested in the cause of supporting people seeking asylum to have a good life in Australia. I travel a lot to various countries and enjoy learning about people from different countries and cultures. A long-term goal is to teach overseas in a voluntary capacity, and this would be a good introduction.

How did you end up in Dandenong?

It took a while to get started as the main centre is in Footscray and that was too far for me to travel. I didn't think that it was going to happen as it is a highly sought-after volunteer role for retired people like me. My ex-principal knew about the Dandenong centre and encouraged me to pursue this instead of Footscray. I was offered a visit to the ASRC in Dandenong and to observe the classes. The Program for Teaching English (PTE) staff member was very welcoming and showed me around the facility and gave me some background.

The facility is in a central location in Dandenong and is very modest to say the least. The teaching rooms are small with whiteboards and some resources such as dictionaries



and maps. A central kitchen facility is a warm spot for all to gather, chat and have some food that is provided. The other volunteer teachers were very accommodating and let me observe their teaching. I thought immediately that I would like to be part of this organisation, especially the teaching part. Since my initial visit, I have taught solo for eight lessons. The rest of the time, when available, I have assisted in Level 1 classes.

Can you tell us a little about the English program at the ASRC?

The ASRC have an English for Work program which operates four days a week. The classes last for two hours each day from 10:15 to 12:15. This allows members (ASRC's name for students) to get to classes after school drop offs. There are two levels of English language acquisition with members able to access at their level of understanding. All teachers and assistants are volunteers and are coordinated by a (PTE) staff member.

A comprehensive 10-week curriculum program has been devised. This includes plans for each day, which is easy for the teachers to follow, and resources are included. This is a shared document enabling each teacher to put in what was covered.



A classroom at the ASRC in Dandenong. Supplied by ASRC

The curriculum planning document outlines the same components as typical lesson plans in schools. A lesson starts with a learning intention or goal and reviews previous learnings, supporting the notion of working from what we know to new learning. Keeping in mind that language acquisition is designed to help members to get into the work force, focus topics include understanding questions, following directions, small talk, communicating effectively, idioms, dealing with an emergency, being punctual and working hard. A typical lesson comprises a speaking-and-listening and a reading-and-writing component. There is recommended vocabulary to be covered in the session which links to the goal. The planner has a section for future learning and evaluation which guides the next stage.

Approximately 18 members start the program at the beginning of the year. The classes follow the Victorian school terms and during the school holidays professional learning courses are offered to volunteers and staff. My experience is that a regular group of eight to ten members attend classes each day. Attendance is recorded daily and, in this way, members are monitored and supported when required. Members work hard, want to learn English and want to get a job. Most travel by public transport for up to two hours to attend the classes. Some bring their young children and babies to class.

In what ways did/didn't your previous work prepare you for your role at the ASRC?

My previous work skills were transferable to this educational setting. The way that the ASRC operates with guiding principles and set processes is like a school. Like a graduate coming into a school to teach, I was required to complete an induction process. There were three online

modules encompassing ASRC values and principles, occupational health and safety processes to mention a few. I was well equipped to manage the administration and communication required. There are even volunteer staff meetings at the start of the day – believe it or not, I really enjoy them!

The teaching component was always going to be the main difference and the main challenge, but I was sure it would give me the greatest satisfaction. While I was 'au fait' with current teaching and learning practice, I hadn't taught adults before. I hadn't taught non-English speaking students and I hadn't taught across such a range of cultural backgrounds. A typical group of ten members might be originally from eight different countries! This surprised me. I'm sure they all have very different journeys and bring different understandings about learning. In some cases, education might have been inaccessible in their country of origin.

I am still wondering about several ways to improve the delivery of the curriculum. I ponder the thought of cognitive overload. I try to 'put myself in their shoes' and think about my travels to foreign lands and how difficult it is to be understood – and that's only when I'm trying to buy a train ticket! Now it's my challenge to make myself understood and get the message across: tailoring my questions or directions more precisely; speaking slowly but naturally; getting the scaffolding 'just right'; modelling without enabling direct copying; encouraging thinking and independent learning rather than relying on memory; teaching and practising learning behaviours such as reviewing, checking and taking risks; understanding cultural differences to be respectful and gain personal knowledge; developing a greater awareness of adult learning demands rather than first time learners in a primary school.

I am still very much in the early days and a novice in this volunteer role and I will continue to learn from others and research strategies to gain a better understanding. However, while some things are the same and some are different between the two jobs, one thing remains constant, and that is the need for the learners to be the focus for all learning.

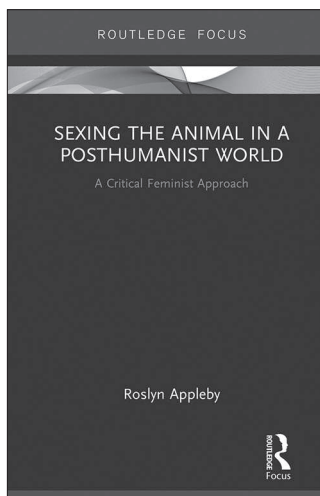
For more information about the ASRC visit asrc.org.au

Jane was interviewed by Deryn Mansell, *Fine Print* editor

What's Out There

Sexing the Animal in a Posthumanist World: A Critical Feminist Approach by Roslyn Appleby

Reviewed by Elizabeth Gunn



Roslyn Appleby was a keynote speaker at last year's ACAL conference, where *Sexing the Animal in a Posthumanist World* was launched. In her keynote she talked about ways to include stories, articles, films, songs, plays, etc. about interrelationships between humans and animals, into students' reading and production of print and multimodal literacy practice. It was at the conference where she introduced the notion of 'entangled pedagogies' as a method for practitioners to draw on the myriad texts that can expose students to new ways of viewing critical issues such as gender, history, migration, belonging, invasion and environmental sustainability. *Sexing the Animal* is a volume of essays that trace Appleby's own learning journey about a creature she became fascinated with – the shark – through her immersion in a range of textual practices such as regular ocean swimming, reading news and science of sharks, and viewing films and artworks dealing with relationships between humans and sharks. "Together these stories can be seen as another form of entangled pedagogy" (p.86), which, though a feminist lens, Appleby presents as an alternative discourse about the role of animals in human lives and "a playful engagement with shape-shifting assemblages of bodies, images, phenomena, and language that celebrate opportunities for a joyous, embodied learning" (p.86–87).

A key motivation behind Appleby's interest in writing about sharks she attributes to her concern about "the biological annihilation of wildlife – the sixth great extinction – brought about by human activities" (p.2). At the same time, she seeks to explore gender and sexuality, asking "[w]hat can we know about masculinity and feminism by studying our relationship with sharks?" (p.10). Bringing these two seemingly unrelated topics together, sharks and gender, and "thinking in a domain where language and matter come together, where representation and flesh intersect yet never fully consume, exhaust or explain each other" (p.3) is the ambitious aim of this volume of essays.

Appleby employs the philosophical framework of new materialism and its "[d]econstruction of the material-discourse binary, and the dethroning of the privileged status accorded to language" (p.3). New materialism is a constellation of posthumanist theories that see humans and non-humans as 'actors'; i.e. humans, molecules, texts, animals, technology, words, etc. all capable of possessing 'agency' and exerting influence, through interactivity and connection, upon the world around them. *Sexing the Animal* animates new materialism through the folding of personal stories, of diving and learning, of sharks and the way they're treated by humans, of the texts and discourses of arts, media, science and cinema. In the second essay, 'Entangled in the More-Than-Human World', Appleby explains how her teaching practice, daily encounters with domestic and marine animals, and feminist environmental scholarship took her "beyond my secure opinions and into a place of unsettlement, at the limit of my human–animal empathy, at the boundary of love and fear" (p.13 emphasis added). For Appleby, that boundary was her relationship with sharks, creatures that sparked ambivalence, unease and uncertainty within her.

In subsequent essays Appleby looks in depth at selective instances of the ways shark–human encounters have influenced and been depicted; in classical and contemporary Western and Australian Indigenous arts, in news reports, in scientific writing and in cinema. Each essay is equally

interesting and engaging, but I was fascinated by the antics described in the third essay, 'Shark Arts'. Perhaps because sharks seem so *other-worldly*, humans are less critical when artists 'have a go' at portraying them in their work. Appleby traces the stories of contemporary artist-to-millionaire Damien Hirst's preposterous taxidermied shark installation *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*, and Olly Williams and Suzi Winstanley's collaborative performance work *Shark Bite* depicting sharks biting artworks in the open seas.

Both works are absurdist. However, in line with the subjectivity of her ocean-swimming self, Appleby shows that the second story's discourse leads us closer to appreciating the more-than-human world in ways that may minimise our destruction of it and its inhabitants. Indeed, Appleby's immersive, academically unorthodox subjectivity seems to facilitate her bobbing up among sentences and gliding between paragraphs throughout the volume with phrases like "As I write this..." or "In my reading about...". It's a style that I found very inspiring and I decided to take up snorkelling myself over the summer. I gained insights into how this 'Other' space, of watery currents, plants and creatures, makes you feel simultaneously embraced and kept distant as you glide and float around its eery terrains. Thus, my bodily engagement allowed even greater access to Appleby's subject.

Sexing the Animal is the story of how an educator finds new ways to view herself alongside her subject, as somehow implicated in and by the subject, in such a way that her mind is opened to seeing the world, and its components, in new ways. Appleby encourages us to ask what we can know about a subject if we start from a self-serving position of infantilising, pathologising or patronising it. Importantly, for *Fine Print* readers, we want to engage with the question of how this approach might be relevant to adult literacy education. I was reminded of one of the articles we looked at in the ACAL pre-conference: *From Heroic Victims to Competent Comrades: Views of Adult Literacy Learners in the Research Literature*. In this article, it is argued that, in relation to adult literacy, the ways that learners are stereotyped "may have very real consequences for how adult literacy learning opportunities are provided and the outcomes that can be expected" (Belzer & Pickard, 2015, p.250). *Sexing the Animal* points to the need for all educators to be aware of how language moulds our perceptions and attitudes towards certain subjects. If we accept given narratives at face value, we may miss opportunities to reveal new stories of adult learners; about

their connections, their interactions and their agentic entanglement in the more-than-human world.

I enjoyed every sentence of *Sexing the Animal*. Appleby is a gifted storyteller and I revelled in her colourful tales of shark-preserving artists, pornography-informed science films, heroically deflected surfer–shark encounters and more, into her weft of new materialist critical eco-feminism. But perhaps the metaphor of weaving is not as accurate as the metaphor of felt making; think of enmeshment, assemblage, network, hybridity and, of course, entanglement. These are the metaphors that assisted me in understanding the framework of Appleby's main idea: that the narratives we tune into, that we may accept or question, are framed in such ways as to reinforce certain mindsets, and we are personally embedded in those narrative frames. Fundamental to being literate, is the ability to locate the agentive self within the stories that surround us, through all our senses – visual, tactile, oral, emotional and intellectual. And critically, as teachers, we are expanding learners' *agency* – the key purpose of literacy I would argue – when we go beyond constrained ideologies of text and literacy practice and allow unexpected connections to come into the learning process. Writing this review with the perspective of adult education in mind has been challenging, but in the end very rewarding, because, in essence, Appleby's is a bold 'call to arms' imploring educators and educational researchers to think differently, to bring new texts and new perspectives into the learning context, and to see language as more than letters and words.

Sexing the Animal in a Posthumanist World: A Critical Feminist Approach (2019) is published by Routledge Focus Hardback. ISBN: 9781138575752 eBook ISBN: 9781351271486

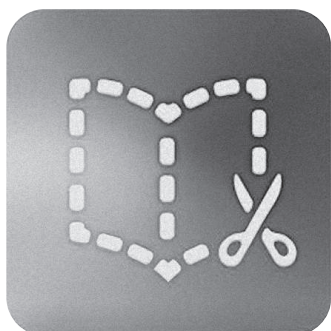
Elizabeth Gunn has taught language, literacy and numeracy in a variety of settings around Australia and China. She is currently teaching academic literacy at RMIT Training, and Learning Skills at Melbourne Polytechnic. She is also co-convening the ACAL 2020 Conference September 4–5 in Canberra.

Reference

Belzer, A., & Pickard, A. (2015). From Heroic Victims to Competent Comrades: Views of Adult Literacy Learners in the Research Literature. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 65(3), 250–266. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713615580015>

Book Creator: an app for turning language learners into authors

Reviewed by Deryn Mansell



I have been using Book Creator with my students for three years and have found it to be a very useful app. I don't teach adults, I teach Indonesian to primary school students, but I can see plenty of crossover appeal and there is nothing about the app's interface that would make adult learners feel they were being given 'kids' stuff'.

What is it?

Book Creator is an app for making books and comics. You can include text, drawings, images, audio and video and the app has a 'read to me' function, the English language version of which offers a variety of accents, including Australian, Irish, Indian and Southern African.

The app was originally created for a reluctant reader, the young son of a software designer and an author. The parents wished their child would show as much interest in reading books as he did in playing with their iPad and they came up with the idea of creating an app that would allow them to write books on the iPad about the things their son was interested in.

While not originally designed as an education app, teachers soon saw its potential and over the years (it was launched in 2011) the designers have made updates in response to teacher requests, including the 'read to me' function described above and 'combine' and 'collaborate' tools, which I'll discuss later.

For me, the appeal of Book Creator is its simplicity and the fact that with a teacher account, I can easily create QR codes for my students so they can have full control of authoring their own books in my library without needing an email address to sign in. It also means that I don't have to keep track of usernames and passwords.

Is it free?

Yes and no. There is a free iPad app called Book Creator One but it doesn't sync with the web-based version of the app and the best teacher features aren't available on it, so we'll just talk about the web-based version here. The web app can be accessed via the Chrome, Safari or Microsoft Edge browsers on any tablet, laptop or desktop computer.

And yes, there is a free version of the web app. Go to <https://app.bookcreator.com> and choose the 'teacher sign in' option then follow the prompts. You will end up at your 'library', which is where your students will create their books. With the free app, you and your students can create 40 books. The advantages of upgrading to a paid account are that you can create more books and more libraries (very handy if you teach more than one class), you can share the account with co-teachers and your students can collaborate on their books in real time.

Regardless of whether you, as a teacher, have a paid or a free account, the app is free for your students.

Is it easy to use?

Yes. When you open an account, you will find a book already on your teacher dashboard called 'Getting Started with Book Creator', which is a tutorial that takes you through the app, so I won't go into details here, but it is pretty simple. One tip: when you first open an account, the screen will probably show you your empty library. Tap on the menu icon at top left (three horizontal lines) to go to 'My Books', which is your teacher dashboard – that is where you will find the tutorial.

How can I use Book Creator in the classroom?

There is a wealth of sample books and how-to guides on the resources tab of the Book Creator website (<https://bookcreator.com/>) – so much so that it is almost overwhelming. Below are a couple of examples to give you some ideas for how you might use Book Creator in the EAL or adult literacy classroom.

As a teacher, you can make reading material for your students that is relevant to the topic you are teaching and to your students' own experience. By clicking 'Publish Online', you can also provide your students with a link to

read it online at home. The book isn't searchable on any search engines and you can unpublish at any time, so you have some control over who sees the book. The links are long strings of characters, but you can use a URL shortening tool like Bitly or TinyURL to make the link shorter (and more meaningful). This can also enable you to track how many times the link has been clicked.

Practising sentence structures can be made more engaging and interactive by getting students to each create a page or two using the structure and adding illustrations or photos. The teacher then uses the combine tool to turn all the pages into a class book (a five-minute job) that can be used for comprehension activities. This can work well for classes with very limited language and the teacher can choose whether students can see each other's books in the library (to share ideas and proof-read, for example) or whether they can only see their own and the teacher's books until the teacher combines the books.

Within a paid teacher account, members of a library can use the collaborate tool to work with each other to create a book. This can be a useful tool for project-based learning and gives more control to the students than using the combine tool. It can also help students who are unable to attend classes to stay connected with their classmates.

Most importantly, in the Book Creator library, students become authors.

Limitations and considerations

As with any tool, Book Creator can't do everything. These are some things to think about:

Book Creator works on tablets, laptops and desktops – you can't use it to create books on a phone (but you can read books on a smart phone). Also, you need internet access to use the web-based app, so internet access needs to be a consideration for out-of-class tasks. Having an offline task up your sleeve as a 'plan b' is always a good idea, particularly the first time you use Book Creator in class or if you don't have ready access to IT support.

The iPad app version of Book Creator *does* work offline: Book Creator One (free app) or Book Creator for iPad (paid app). It doesn't sync with the web-based app and you can't access a teacher's library with this version, so you can't use the collaboration features. However, as a standalone writing and illustrating tool, it is very handy: take a photo with the iPad camera then add it to your book and write about it (it's a great way to keep a travel journal).

Because of its simplicity, the editing tools in Book Creator aren't very sophisticated, so make adjustments to images (e.g. cropping) before adding to your book. If you want to get fancy with your content, consider creating your images, video etc. in a different app then adding it to your page. This is called 'app smashing' and you'll find more information here: <https://bookcreator.com/2016/05/top-11-apps-use-with-book-creator/>

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