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Editorial

In what is becoming a *Fine Print* start-of-year tradition, we open this first issue for 2021 by publishing the most recent Arch Nelson Address. This time around, the address was presented by Pamela Osmond at the Australian Council of Adult Literacy annual general meeting in 2020. Her address is a 'call to the loom' rather than a 'call to arms' as she invites us to "weave a richer narrative of adult literacy and numeracy" (p.3).

The idea of weaving a richer narrative is supported in Liam Frost-Camilleri's "Soft skills and mindset: the story of John the plumbing apprentice", and Lindee Conway's "Remembering, loving, dissenting, changing and learning how to teach".

My appreciation for the weaving metaphor was enhanced when I read Gretchen McCulloch's *Because Internet*, the subject of What's Out There this issue. I learned from McCulloch that 'text', 'textile' and 'technology' all come from the same Proto-Indo-European root *teks*, which means 'to weave'.

As you would expect, technology features in several of our articles as we all try to make sense of the year that was 2020. In "Enacted virtual tours as a language booster", Serena Cecco and Sabina Fata share their creative solution to the restrictions that the COVID-19 pandemic forced upon face-to-face learning. LWA, the Quality Assurance Provider for the Adult Migrant English Program, offers the results of a nationwide survey of students, teachers and managers in the program during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For In Conversation, Elizabeth Gunn talks with online learning specialist Michael Burville about the fundamentals of designing online learning and the concept of 'digital agility'. This is followed by interviews with three teachers, Sharon, Jim and Urmi, who have been checking in regularly with *Fine Print* over the past year to share their experiences of remote learning and teaching.

The library is a key character in our story this issue. Andrea McMahon shares "The transformation of the Libraries Tasmania Literacy Service" and Sarah Deasey reports on the public library and education sector working together in Adult Literacy Connect. The library and technology come together in Vanessa Iles and Robin Miles' report on research into form filling support provided by community service organisations around New South Wales. As more forms move online, demand increases for community organisations (often libraries) to bridge the gap for members of our community who are most exposed to digital exclusion.

Finally, please take a moment to read our call-out for learner stories on page 36. We would love to provide a platform for the opinions and ideas of the people that this journal is all about. Email fineprintvalbec@gmail.com

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.

Rethinking foundation skills: what advice would Arch Nelson have for us?

by Pamela Osmond

Each year, the Australian Council of Adult Literacy (ACAL) invites a leading figure in the field of adult education to give an address in recognition of the outstanding contribution Arch Nelson made to adult education. In 2020, Pamela Osmond presented the Arch Nelson address at the ACAL annual general meeting. This article is an edited version of that address. The video, text and slides from the original address are available at https://acal.edu.au/2020-arch-nelson-address/

I want first to acknowledge the importance of ACAL's tradition of presenting this Arch Nelson address annually, not only because it pays tribute to our founder, and his legacy of wisdom, but also gives an opportunity for us to look back to our history and ask what that history can tell us.

Arch played a major role in placing adult education on the government and public agenda in the mid-1970s, as Western nations such as Australia were just becoming conscious of the fact that significant numbers of their citizens had fallen through the educational cracks and were in need of a second-chance education.

He was an influential figure in the early years of our field and remained chairperson of ACAL until 1984, when he became its patron for some years. In 1984 he was awarded an Honourable Mention by UNESCO for his services to adult literacy internationally.

Of all the wise advice Arch gave us, on this occasion I want to address just two points: his community development approach to adult literacy, and his considerable political know-how.

I'll come back to those points shortly, but first I want to look to *why* we need to re-think foundation skills; why we need a new narrative, and what are the points of discontent with the present one.

Weaving a richer narrative

At the pre-conference forum discussion at ACAL's 2019 conference in Sydney, a room full of practitioners from around the country, as well as some international guests, was asked to consider how we might weave a richer narrative of adult literacy and numeracy, on the assumption that the present public narrative is inadequate.

There seemed to be no disagreement in the room that day, that a richer narrative was urgently needed. And at the risk of simplifying that conversation, the main point of discontent appeared to be centred on the lack of recognition of the diversity of student needs and potential student needs; that while teachers were often aware of the real and expressed needs of their students, the constraints of the provision offered did not allow them to respond to those needs. The discourse, and the resulting provision has been reduced to an almost exclusively instrumental and employment-driven one, to the exclusion of other values that literacy and an adult basic education can hold for the individual, and for society.

I should note now that the picture across Australia is not uniform; that some states (notably, Victoria) have acknowledged in their policy and state funded provision, the individual and societal value of an adult basic education, and that some of you may have found ways to respond to the expressed needs of your students in spite of the strictures of the program that you are working within.

Nevertheless, the major funded program in Australia is the Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) program: literacy and numeracy for work. That's fine for many of our potential students; improving their literacy and numeracy skills in order to improve their job prospects is the goal of many. However, not all of our students or potential students have work-related goals, or the likelihood of ever achieving secure or 'worthwhile' employment.

A statistic from the Reading Writing Hotline bears repeating in this context: over the years that the Hotline has been

collecting statistics, of all the callers to the Hotline asking for a referral to a literacy/ numeracy class, an average of only 17% were jobseekers. The remainder of the callers were either employed, self-employed, or were not looking to join the workforce, such as parents of small children, and other carers. This statistic has remained remarkably constant over many years.

And yet, the majority of provision is for jobseekers via the SEE program. There are few classes on the Hotline's database of providers for non-jobseekers. And in many places in Australia, there are none.

Nevertheless, the Commonwealth Government continues to commit ever increasing levels of funding, through the SEE program, and the recently introduced *Foundation Skills For Your Future Program*, towards employment. Literacy and numeracy are seen only as work-related issues. The public discourse around the urgent need for Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) provision is always around the nation's productivity, very rarely around the personal and social needs of its citizens, or of civic cohesion. Adult literacy learners are seen, in the public and policy narrative, almost exclusively as adults who are unemployed and need to improve their reading, writing and numeracy skills in order to get a job, thereby improving our national prosperity. We do indeed need a richer narrative.

Moreover, the policy discourse implies a dichotomy between the employment-related, or human capital argument and the social capital argument; the argument that relates to the wellbeing of communities. The literature has argued that social capital also contributes to the economic wellbeing of individuals and communities and that it can have an important part to play in the prosperity and wellbeing of nations.

I could say much more about the inappropriateness of the literacy/numeracy provision that has been made for jobseekers, and in fact much has been written on the subject of literacy and human capital both here and overseas, but I want to turn our attention to the other values that literacy holds for the individual, the community and society: the values that were at the core of our foundation years.

At the crossroads

Now I want to dip back into our history to see what that can tell us. For many of you, this is familiar territory, but for those of you who are relatively new to the field, I think it is interesting (and important) information.

Being 'at the crossroads' has been a recurrent refrain in our field, since the late 1980s, little more than a decade after we first gained recognition as a legitimate field of education. That period, at that crossroad, in the late 1980s bears a moment of reflection, because we are yet again at a very similar crossroad.

The discourse of the foundation years (from the mid-1970s and into the 1980s) was based on ideals of social justice, on humanist education and a pedagogy of student centredness. Adults' personal, social and work-related goals were valued equally, and these values were not seen to be in conflict, with a diversity of provision to meet this diversity of student goals.

But by the late 1980s we were at that first crossroads. That road that had been laid down in the foundation years was progressively blocked off. Due to a global economic crisis, unemployment levels in Australia had risen sharply, the industrial base had shifted, manufacturing was moving overseas and deep concerns were expressed for Australia's economic competitiveness. This was a global and national economic context similar to the dilemmas of today, and adults with literacy and numeracy skills that were deemed inadequate were seen to contribute to the problem.

We saw an abrupt change in the discourses that had characterised the field. The foundation discourse of social justice and of liberal, humanist education became progressively ignored and at that crossroad in early 1990s, we were marched decisively down the main highway of neoliberalism where any programs that were not deemed to contribute to our economic prosperity were deemed to be of no value. Literacy and numeracy training in the narrow interest of the economy therefore replaced earlier broader conceptions of literacy and numeracy education for personal and social purposes. The discourse of liberal humanist, student-centred education that had characterised the foundation years was rendered irrelevant.

Resisting narrow vocationalism

At that time there was an urgent need to reform the national vocational training agenda, and adult literacy was rightly co-opted into this cause. Since our field had become part of the VET sector, we gained, for example, Competency Based Training and Assessment; the approach to education that has been a thorn in our side ever since.

However, academics and activists in our field at the time warned that this was a dangerous moment for

our fledgling field. In her prophetically titled article, "Resisting hijack and seduction", Helen Gribble, the Victorian adult literacy pioneer, warned that:

> We should expect to struggle against aggressive efforts to hijack our work, and more subtle efforts to persuade us that a vocationally specific approach is appropriate for adult literacy and basic education in the workplace. If we resist, there's hope for success. Surrendering to narrow vocationalism without a fight is unthinkable. (Gribble, 1990, p.55)

In the years that have followed, our field has argued consistently against that narrow vocationalism and the exclusively human capital agenda that was rapidly gaining prominence. What Gribble and others were warning against was an abandonment of adult basic education's principles of social justice that had become central to the discourse of the field. This, she argued, would not lead to the development of the flexible, critically thinking workers that the new industrial environment would require and, among other challenges, the road to student-centred education for those with non-employment needs risked being progressively blocked off. Our history shows that this is what happened, and her argument is as relevant today as it was in 1990. We are again at the crossroads, and it is time again to question the road that we have been taken down.

What better time to do that than right now. We keep hearing social and economic commentators suggesting that, as a result of the upheavals of this year, it may be time to recalibrate our social and economic settings. They suggest that it's time to re-examine the policy settings that we have taken for granted for so long, and that this re-examination just may include the effects of neoliberalism, the ideology that has seen concerns for productivity and work-related literacy eclipse any other values that it holds. Perhaps it is time to argue for a more just and inclusive society; that an opportunity may now arise to insert into the public discourse the role that literacy and education plays in that just society.

Recently we learned that the Department of Education, Skills and Employment is proposing a new national framework for foundation skills, and ACAL has been invited to consult on the initiative. At the risk of mixing my metaphors, it seems that a door of opportunity to weave that richer narrative has opened.

Arch Nelson and community education

And that brings us back to Arch Nelson. What would he advise? Nelson's field was community education, and while not involved in the provision of adult literacy services, his interest in community development helped to mould the early vision for the field. In his paper, "The community development approach to literacy", Nelson defined community development as "a movement designed to promote better living for the whole community with the active participation and on the initiative of the community" (Nelson, 1985a, p.25).

He had a vision of adult literacy provision in which various sectors of the community would play a part. These included: commercial and industrial firms, employer organisations, trade unions, professional associations, local, state and federal government departments, welfare organisations, and so on.

His vision, however, was never realised. Adult literacy (as the field was then called) was absorbed into the public education systems, particularly TAFE, in most states. The 1975 recommendation of the Commonwealth committee that charged state TAFE authorities with responsibility for the development of the new field of adult literacy, recommended that, although it was to be managed by the institutions of TAFE, "an effective literacy program will almost certainly have to be conducted outside the formal institutional framework" (Richardson, 1975, p.96).

For a short time that is what happened. I can speak most closely for NSW, but the evidence is that in all states, small group programs were set up not only in TAFE colleges, but in community centres, in libraries and other locations, under the auspices of TAFE. In her reflections on those early years, one of my colleagues, who was then working in the western suburbs of Sydney, described what a community development approach to adult literacy looked like:

> It was, I guess a social capital kind of view – that you weren't just developing the individual, you were helping to develop the community … [In Liverpool] the literacy teachers and head teachers and Outreach coordinators would be setting up classes here, there and everywhere and going to council meetings and there would be kind of, community development meetings, I guess facilitated by the council with health people and education people and settlement workers and Aboriginal people and all of that going on, and

there was again that sort of web of information. Literacy was seen as being part of a developing community and the developing community in turn fed into the literacy programs. (Osmond, 2018, p.115)

But that soon ceased as TAFE became corporatised and was required to compete with the new entrants into the vocational training field. I don't think that TAFE any longer encourages its teachers to spend their time attending community meetings in the interests of community development. But surely it could be within the scope of a new strategy, and indeed a new funded policy, to encompass a similar vision.

And a disclaimer here: I am not suggesting that there is no role for VET institutions such as TAFE in providing adult basic education services. TAFE colleges are a part of their communities and as such have a part to play in providing some of the diversity of provision for that diversity of student needs that I spoke of.

I must also add that a community development approach to adult literacy doesn't mean a de-professionalised, entirely volunteer approach. There is more need than ever for a policy that encompasses a central role for specialist trained professionals to draw on the wealth of advice, evidence and information that has been built up around our field in the past 40 years, and that can contribute to crafting solutions to the problems ahead.

Arch Nelson's conclusion to the paper on community development that I quoted above is a salutary one: "My general thesis has been that unless a move for literacy is community based, it is unlikely to succeed" (Nelson, 1985a, p.31).

I, along with many others, feel that it has not succeeded. It has not met the needs of all who could have benefited from an enhanced adult basic education, and it has not benefited the community.

Cultivating policymakers

In addition to helping steer the discourse of the field towards community development, Nelson was also influential in another important way: developing the political know-how of the early practitioners and activists and "instilling in them the importance of lobbying and making use of politicians" (Wickert & Zimmerman, 1991, p.181). The evidence suggests that the access that those early literacy workers had to government ministers was due in no small

part to Nelson's networking and the high esteem in which he was held in public life.

This remains a crucial message for us today. Members of parliament and public servants responsible for framing policy do not understand the role that literacy and education plays in the creation of a just and cohesive society. In fact, it is the foundation of our modern democracy. But we do understand that, and it is our role to insert that vision into the public discourse; to weave a richer narrative of adult literacy and basic education, to cultivate some new patrons and mentors of our field in the policy-making sphere.

I know this is central to the work that the ACAL executive is involved in at the moment, but it is work that we can all be involved in. I draw your attention to the ACAL website and the model letter to politicians that we are all urged to use to send to politicians and aspiring politicians in our own areas: https://acal.edu.au/how-to-write-to-your-mp/

I want to end with some more words from Arch Nelson, this time from his ACAL conference address in 1985:

> I must add that among the members of the Australian movement for adult literacy with whom it has been my good fortune to work for the past nine years, I have observed a very strong attachment to those ideas and ideals on which a caring and co-operative society must be built. This gives me hope for the future, for such ideas and ideals are basic to the ethos of any truly literate and democratic society. Without them a national movement for adult literacy would fail miserably for lack of the vitality and inspiration that comes from a sense of purpose and a clear perception of the way ahead. (Nelson, 1985b)

Thirty-five years later these words are as relevant as ever. We are issued a challenge from the past to include Arch's conception of a community development approach to literacy in our vision for the way ahead.

Thank you, Arch.

Postscript

The beginning of the new year brings an opportunity to look back with a clearer view of the plethora of crises that our society faces in the wake of 2020, and to ask what role our field might play in approaching those crises. We might ask again what advice Arch Nelson would have for us.

It was clear that the health impact of the virus and the economic fallout that it brought has been borne disproportionately by the sector of the population that is heavily represented by our target populations. The need to ensure access to and engagement with public health information is an obvious starting point. The top-down model of public information was shown to fail in many communities, reliant as it was on mainstream media. Consequently, some communities and community organisations began to fill the information vacuum. They provided evidence of the efficacy of a community approach to public information and to adult education.

Our students are also disproportionately over-represented in the sector of the population that will experience the projected impact of growing unemployment and insecure employment. At the time of writing, the government is basking in the knowledge that the economy is on track to make a faster than expected recovery. However, those on the margins of society will not be encouraged by that knowledge, as evidence grows of the widening gulf between the two poles of our economy.

It is perhaps a cruel hoax to ask adults who may have multiple points of disadvantage to attend a class whose outcome is to develop narrow, instrumental skills 'for work', in the almost certain knowledge that there will be no worthwhile job at the end; that many are unlikely to participate in the 'bounce back' of the economy. We should be able to offer them more than that, and a community approach to adult education offers an opportunity for deeper engagement in the civic life of the community.

Arch Nelson did not elaborate on the details of a community approach to adult education in the articles that I quoted above. However, the concept has been developed in the literature on social capital (see, for example Harley & Horne, 2006, and Balatti, Black & Falk, 2009).

Unlike other forms of capital, social capital is understood to exist in the *relationships* between people rather than in individuals or physical means of production, as is our understanding of the concept of human capital. Social capital has traditionally been most valued in the professional discourse of adult basic education, highlighting, as it does, the development of networks of trust and the resulting sense of personal agency, and of engagement with common goals.

Arch Nelson's community development approach to adult basic education would see those who have been educationally disadvantaged drawn into whole-of-community critical discussions around such urgent issues as public health, the causes and impacts of climate change, the Uluru Statement from the Heart, and workplace reform. Australia needs to hear the voices of those who will be most impacted by these crises. We need them to have the skills, and the confidence to use those skills, in order to join the network of community responses to the problems that we face: this is Nelson's community development approach to adult literacy.

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Pamela Osmond has worked in the field of adult basic education since the 1970s. She has taught in a range of contexts and occupied a number of management and curriculum support roles in TAFE NSW. She has also been employed as teacher educator at the University of Technology Sydney and at TAFE NSW. Pam has had a long interest in resource development and is the author of a wide range of teaching / learning resources, including *So You Want to Teach an Adult to Read …?* **and** *Literacy Face to Face.*

The transformation of the Libraries Tasmania Literacy Service

by Andrea McMahon

'I never thought I could spell something like that.'

Libraries Tasmania's Adult Literacy Service is a statewide service coordinated by 23 Adult Literacy Coordinators based in 17 libraries across Tasmania, and in the Risdon Prison Complex and Community Corrections in the north and south. Literacy clients work with trained volunteers or coordinators to meet self-identified literacy and learning goals in either one-to-one sessions or small groups.

The service was established in 2009 under the Tasmanian Strategy for Adult Literacy, in part as a response to the findings of the international Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey in 2006 which reported that Tasmanian adults had the lowest levels of literacy, numeracy, health and problem-solving skills in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). During this same period, the library sector was undertaking deep reflection and looking to widen its appeal. *The Library in the 21st Century* (Brophy, 2007) proposed a service delivery model that still had reading and accessing information at its heart but also had a strong focus on technology and the global knowledge economy and its demands. It highlighted the need for libraries to understand and encompass literacy as a broad range of essential skills, including reading and writing, information literacy and digital literacy. Moreover, it emphasised the need for the community to see libraries as inviting social spaces that encourage people to learn and interact collaboratively.

In response to this desire for change, the State Library of Tasmania amalgamated with the Archives Office of Tasmania, Adult Education, and Tasmanian Communities Online to become firstly the Community Knowledge Network in 2009 and then LINC Tasmania in 2010. The aim of this new organisation was to build a knowledge-based society, promote lifelong learning and address community learning, literacy, and information needs, especially in rural and regional Tasmania. Also in 2010,

the *Tasmanian Adult Literacy Action Plan 2010 – 2015* was launched. This extended the statewide adult literacy service from seven coordinators to 22 and laid the foundation for Tasmania's collective impact approach to adult literacy and numeracy, 26TEN (named for the 26 letters and ten digits we use for reading and counting).

Libraries Tasmania is the host organisation for, and a member of, 26TEN and supports the 26TEN goals: everyone knows about adult literacy and numeracy; everyone is supported to improve their skills and to help others; and everyone communicates clearly. (26TEN, n.d.).

In 2018 LINC Tasmania was rebranded to become Libraries Tasmania, delivering its adult literacy service as part of a broader contemporary library service. The literacy service promotes lifelong learning and supports Libraries Tasmania's purpose "To connect Tasmanians to knowledge, ideas and community through our libraries and archives" (Libraries Tasmania, n.d., p.2). It aligns with contemporary library policy that encourages and supports equitable and free access to functional, digital and information literacy for all people.

Since 2011, Libraries Tasmania has helped over 8000 clients to improve their literacy. In 2018–2019, there were 610 active literacy clients and 292 active literacy volunteers (26TEN, 2020). Clients come from a wide variety of backgrounds and life experiences and include early school leavers, people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, people who present with dyslexia-type issues, people with intellectual disabilities, prisoners, and offenders on community correction orders.

Libraries Tasmania also runs informal English conversation groups in many locations as well as literacy skills development projects designed to attract and engage hard

to reach learners. These projects cover a range of topics of interest to clients, such as parenting, gardening, nutrition and cooking, and employment skills, and may include accredited short courses to gain certificates, such as First Aid or White Card (construction industry induction). Projects delivered by Risdon Prison Literacy Coordinator, Iona Johnson, have included a slam poetry project, *Tales from the SLAMmer*, and a project that highlighted Tasmania's convict past, *The power of love: contemporary convict love tokens*.

The adult literacy service was established using a 'literacy as a social practice' model with a focus on meeting clients' specific literacy and learning needs and with a strong focus on re-engaging adults in learning. There is no set curriculum but there are endorsed resources and approaches. Learners come to a library to work on their reading, writing, spelling and numeracy with opportunities to develop digital skills and digital literacy available as either part of the tutoring sessions or through the library's existing suite of digital learning courses.

Libraries have been deeply involved with the delivery of digital learning since the early days of electronic communication and the delivery of this learning is embedded in library practice. Perhaps not surprisingly for a service based in a library, the majority of clients who come to Libraries Tasmania for support do so with the aim of improving their reading, writing and spelling skills although some also go on to work on their numeracy skills.

The role of the statewide network of literacy coordinators is to recruit and manage volunteer literacy tutors who work one-to-one with clients or run small groups, and to engage and assess clients using a finer-grained approach to the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF).

TasTAFE delivers the initial volunteer tutor training, CHCSS00101 Language, Literacy and Numeracy Tutor Skill Set. This online course is available free for all Tasmanians and potential volunteers without a relevant skill set are expected to undertake the training. Completion of the full assessment to gain the units of competency is not compulsory but a modified assessment process is available to ensure learning is embedded.

A new approach

In 2013, coordinators around Tasmania began to question the effectiveness of this new literacy service in meeting the

reading and writing needs (and often as a consequence, the numeracy and digital skills needs) of many clients who were attending regularly, were motivated to learn, and who had been matched with trained literacy tutors or coordinators.

These clients were not making the progress that might have been expected and it was clear that something was not working. Library literacy coordinators, who in many instances were new to the world of adult literacy and whose training in the initial years of the service focused strongly on adult learning principles and strategies for re-engagement, began questioning their practice.

They concluded that the strategies being used were the very same strategies that hadn't been effective for our clients when they were at school. These strategies focused on using contextual cues and 'guessing' text rather than analysing the letter/sound combinations in words to decode new words and develop strong sight word vocabularies that support reading fluency and comprehension.

In 2014, Libraries Tasmania contracted speech pathologist, Rosalie Martin, to work with Senior Literacy Coordinator, Hugh Fielding, and Glenorchy Literacy Coordinators, Andrea McMahon and Gail Wilson, to run an action research project to develop the phonemic awareness and letter/sound knowledge of a group of clients who demonstrated a lack of awareness of the properties of spoken words. This research was published as *Sound Systems: a phonemically-based approach to adult literacy tutoring at the LINC* (Martin, 2015) with results substantiated by a second project in 2015 (Sound Systems 2 Closing Report, unpublished).

The findings indicated that even working on only a limited range of phonemic awareness elements (deletions) could result in significant improvements. Feedback from clients during the Sound Systems projects strongly indicated we were now on the right path to guide our clients to better literacy outcomes.

> This participant made exceptional gains and experienced the program as highly successful. In her mid-thirties she presented with a sense of shame, anxiety and ready tears over her reading and spelling problem … She avoided all reading and had never read a book; and only wrote to fill out forms and then only with great embarrassment and anxiety over spelling. (Martin, 2015, p.20)

Image supplied by Libraries Tasmania

As a 30-year-old Glenorchy client said at her final assessment:

> I've read about five books since I saw you last, the house looks like a bomb hit it, I get the kids off to bed and then I just read – I don't even turn the telly on anymore. I get so excited about getting on the library website to put books on hold. Just the other night, I had like, an 'out of body experience' – I was seeing myself sitting at my computer just smiling and smiling and so excited because I was putting books on hold! Who would have thought that I'd be someone who would ever put books on hold! (Anonymous client, cited in Martin, 2015, p.20)

The Big Six Framework

With the establishment of clear policy direction by senior leadership within Libraries Tasmania in support of a more evidence-based approach to pedagogy in the literacy service, in 2017 the organisation began using the Big Six Framework to deliver literacy learning. The 'big six' of reading are oral communication, phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension.

The Big Six Framework has proved invaluable for our service, as it encompasses all of the essential elements identified by scientific research as necessary to become a fluent reader. This has helped us identify the micro-skills that our clients need to build in order to successfully achieve their learning goals. While much of the research into reading has focused on school children, research led by French neuroscientist, Stanislaus Dehaene (Dehaene et al., 2015), has shown that adults develop the same brain structures as children when learning to read, supporting the use of the structured, systematic and explicit phonics-based approaches that are used in Libraries Tasmania.

While a range of resources based on the science of reading are used in Libraries Tasmania, the main resource used to develop phonemic awareness is *Equipped for Reading Success* by David A. Kilpatrick (2016) and for letter/sound knowledge, Michelle Hutchison's *SMART Spelling* (https://www.smartspelling.com.au), along with Lexia Learning's PowerUp online learning program (https://www.lexialearning.com/products/powerup) and other aligned resources, such as the SPELD SA *Intensive Literacy Program* (https://www.speldsa.org.au/intensive-literacy-program) and *Toe by Toe* (Cowling & Cowling, 1997).

Over the past year the focus of professional learning for Libraries Tasmania coordinators and volunteers has been on the truly amazing (but not at all intuitive!) process of orthographic mapping, the process we use to store printed words in long-term memory for immediate and effortless retrieval.

Orthographic memory involves a connection forming process in which the oral phonemes in spoken words are 'bonded' to the letters and letter combinations used to represent them. As tempting as it might be to think that sight word memorisation is visual because it feels like it is, the work of Linnea Ehri (2013), now substantiated by Magnetic Resonance Imaging, tells us that it is not! And while it is possible to memorise whole words, this strategy for learning one word at a time is limited and inefficient when compared to building knowledge of letter-sound patterns.

We now know that advanced phonemic awareness, letter/sound knowledge and phonological long-term memory are needed to produce a long-term orthographic memory of the words we learn (Kilpatrick, 2015, p.96). Libraries Tasmania literacy coordinators knew the importance of phonemic awareness, but just not how critical it was to sight word development. Of the three levels of phonemic awareness, it is advanced phonemic awareness (the ability to manipulate phonemes by deleting and substituting) that is vital for the development of sight word vocabularies.

As David Kilpatrick says:

> There is no age where a student is 'too old' for phoneme awareness training – if the skills have not been mastered, the student should get training. Research has shown that older, struggling readers almost always

have difficulties in phoneme awareness that were never addressed. Such individuals will continue to struggle with reading until this difficulty is corrected … There is no statute of limitations on training phoneme awareness skills when they are weak. If students at any age are poor readers, check their phoneme awareness skills, and address them if they are inadequate. (Kilpatrick, 2016, p.18)

Understanding the orthographic mapping process has highlighted the importance of assessing phonemic awareness in our learners and, if indicated, developing this skill. Many literacy learners come to the library program with limited phonemic awareness.

I recall working with a client, Jack (not his real name), an independent young man living with a minor intellectual disability. It soon became obvious that Jack had no ability to read words that he hadn't previously learned through whole word memorisation. He had no decoding strategies and his phonemic awareness had not been developed. Jack wasn't even aware of the concept of rhyming, the window into phonemic awareness; when asked to think of a word that sounded like butter but started with the sound /m/, without hesitation Jack replied "margarine".

Having no underlying deficit in his ability to develop phonemic awareness, Jack quickly learned to decode and become an independent reader once he realised that spoken words were made up of separate sounds which are represented on the page by different letters and letter combinations.

Developing phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge in learners involves using drills and structured, sequential learning. This often evokes negative connotations but at Libraries Tasmania we have found that as long as learners know why they need to undertake drills they are more than happy to do so. This learning can be easily incorporated into tutoring sessions based on a 'literacy as a social practice' model where the focus remains on learners achieving personal goals, such as writing a letter to the editor, making an informed election vote, or reading to a child.

The feedback from learners, coordinators and tutors on using the Kilpatrick and SMART Spelling resources has been overwhelmingly positive. The quotes below, and in the following section, were collected by Libraries Tasmania literacy coordinators while working with clients:

I then suggested that I had a new program *Equipped for Reading Success* which I thought would really help him … We negotiated that I would work with him for 30 minutes, two evenings a week to run him through the Activities [on top of his weekly session with his tutor … In these phone sessions we usually do our drills for about 15 minutes and then we do some *Toe by Toe*. Progress has been steady – we have progressed through syllable and onset rime levels and deletions and are now working on substitution in multi syllable words. Max (not his real name) comments that reading is somehow so much easier now. He feels he has a better understanding of words and his reading speed and fluency have improved markedly. Best of all, he enjoys the drills and thinks they are fun. He is also especially pleased when he is able to get them all right and is more confident as he feels he is not band-aiding his problems but actually fixing them.
Launceston Literacy Coordinator, Jess Panday

I now have a little suitcase of learning skills that I can lean on and correct myself, to be able to spell, read and write.
A 30-year-old learner who, after working with SMART Spelling, *left literacy support to take up a job on the mainland*

I have been learning English for years in lots of different classes, and I've never been shown how to spell English like this before. It makes it easy for me to know how to say the words properly and spell them.
Rukhsana, a Glenorchy learner from a CALD background

James [a literacy client] had an ACSF level 1 in Writing and we had been doing *SMART Spelling* for some time. One day, for a little challenge I asked him to write the word environmental. He laughed and said he could never write a word like that. I told him to give it a try using the *SMART Spelling* skills we had practised. He broke it down into five syllables and sounded it all out correctly. James couldn't stop smiling. He kept staring at the word and said, "I never thought I could spell something like that".
Glenorchy Literacy Coordinator, Josie Chapman

Basically, the learner [a young man with autism] says, "That's brilliant", "I get it now" when I use the *SMART Spelling* grid with him. He's also written a half page of writing which according to his mum is the most

writing he's ever done. From my perspective *SMART Spelling* and the work the learner has done in SPELD has given the learner a 'can do' attitude to attempting spelling and writing. Prior to using these resources his default setting was to say no.

Deloraine Literacy Coordinator, Anne-Marie Loader

Apps and assistive technology

Another aspect of literacy learning that is becoming an important feature of the Libraries Tasmania Literacy Service is the use of apps and assistive technology to assist clients in their literacy journeys. Helping clients to understand how to use the free assistive technologies available on their phones and devices is considered an integral part of literacy learning for those who may benefit from using these tools.

In 2019 a pilot Assistive Technology Project, led by Launceston Literacy Coordinators, Peter Brake and Jess Panday, was delivered to adult literacy clients, seniors, migrants and other public library clients. The principal aim of the project was to prepare and roll out training materials on setting up 'speech to text' and 'text to speech' functions on mobile devices, including iPads, tablets, and personal computers.

An essential part of this training also included awareness raising of free online resources, such as text readers and free OCR[1] apps for phones, allowing instant access to text. Client feedback has been overwhelmingly positive and coordinators have noted that when a client's immediate needs have been met through the use of assistive technology, stress levels often reduce, their confidence increases and interest in tutoring becomes more positive, which in turn enables further literacy progress.

Now I can finally be independent and know what is going on, this has taken a lot of my anxiety away, I now feel connected and included in my school community.
Launceston literacy client on using assistive technology to understand her children's school newsletters

"But I didn't think you could read or write?" – A question from a friend in response to a Launceston client's newfound texting ability. The response from the client: "There's a girl in my phone who can help me with reading and writing …"

Another client immediately put his new skills to use in his workplace, accessing emails and sending texts with confidence. This client also undertook to share his knowledge with his fellow workers.

Jess Panday, Launceston Library

The work of Libraries Tasmania's volunteer tutors and literacy coordinators has shown that it is possible for a service with literacy as a social practice as its underpinning philosophy to deliver literacy learning using structured approaches that are aligned with the neuroscience of reading and which support best practice.

There are of course challenges. In a distributed statewide service, keeping up the professional knowledge of coordinators and tutors is ongoing and requires dedicated attention. An aspiration for 2021 is to develop a suite of tutor tips and videos to make this learning more easily accessible statewide. Another challenge is providing the intensity needed for client progress within the constraints of a one-to-one service where the focus remains on clients meeting their learning plan goals. However, one thing we have learned from living with COVID-19 is that there are many different ways of working, and new online learning opportunities, along with the use of smart phones and devices, have created greater and more flexible access to learning opportunities for our clients.

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Notes

1 Optical Character Recognition (OCR) converts scanned images of hand-written or printed text into machine-encoded text

Soft skills and mindset: the story of John the plumbing apprentice

by Liam Frost-Camilleri

As the literacy and numeracy support teacher at a registered training organisation (RTO) for four years, I spent a lot of my time in training classrooms talking to teachers and students about how they could better meet the literacy and numeracy demands of their courses.

On one occasion, the plumbing staff asked me to 'see what I could do' with a particular student who was having some literacy and numeracy issues. When I met with John (not his real name), he was fidgeting and struggled to make eye contact. His leg was restless, and he spent a lot of time drawing randomly on a blank sheet of paper in front of him. I asked him, "So, what's happening for you?"

John began with an awkward sigh and explained that it didn't matter what the teacher said, or if he took notes, he just couldn't remember the class content. Currently, he was falling behind in his theory work. John told me that he was 31 and the other students were 18. He felt that it was 'sad' that he still lived with his parents given his age, and he was frustrated that this was the second time he had tried to study plumbing and he was having similar issues he did on his first attempt.

What if we changed focus?

I have encountered many 'Johns' in my teaching career, most frequently when teaching in TAFE. John's story highlights an oversight in our pedagogies as adult educators. We have all heard the debate around the 'literacy crisis' or 'crisis discourse' that reinforces the idea that Australian adults struggle with the literacy and numeracy demands of everyday life (Black, Yasukawa & Brown, 2015; Black & Yasukawa, 2011; Black & Yasukawa, 2014). And we have been told that 'normalising' support processes by making them 'non-remarkable' will help us to better engage our students in literacy and numeracy education (Bates, 2004; McHugh, 2011).

I thoroughly agree with these perspectives, and also align with Waterhouse and McHardy's (2011) point that while the information that caused the crisis discourse is good for

flagging the need to change, it's important that we're not alarmed by it. I would also like to take it a step further to say that spotting literacy and numeracy problems in our classrooms is merely a small part of the issue.

I spoke to John for about 45 minutes during this first visit. We spoke about his home life, his stressors and his self-talk. John thoroughly believed that he did not deserve to be a plumber; he truly believed that he was not good enough to be a plumber. After hearing this, I brought out what I call my 'caring' toolbox. I explained to John that he needed to give himself space to 'get ready to learn'. To illustrate my point, I used a car metaphor: if you don't change the spark plugs, or clean the filter, or change the oil, or fill up with quality petrol, then the car will not function. I explained to John that he is the car, and right now, the oil needs changing.

I worked with John to identify how he might increase his capacity in his daily life. We did this by talking about the things he can do to look after himself mentally. He liked to run. After he confessed that he couldn't remember the last time he went out for a run, I suggested he incorporate it into his daily routine. I talked to him about his self-talk and encouraged him to be kind to himself whenever he was telling himself that he wasn't 'good enough'. I questioned his comparison with the 18-year-old students in his class and said that it wasn't fruitful to be in competition with them, it was far more advantageous to be in competition with himself.

I did not give any literacy or numeracy instruction to John the day I met him.

We are pushing back on a pretty rigid system with these ideas. Especially when we consider the compliance expectations on RTOs today. It is important that we remember that pre-testing scores are not the only thing

to consider when we need to support our students. There is so much more to the puzzle and so much more to adult education. It is time that we begin to look outside the neo-liberalist regime of 'deficit discourse' to consider the ways that we can better engage and assist students like John.

What if we change our mindset and develop grit?

Understanding the power of Dweck's (2006) mindset theory and how we can harness it in our classroom is a terrific first step. Many of the students that I have encountered have what Dweck (2006) calls a fixed mindset. A fixed mindset is the belief that failure is permanent; that feedback is a personal attack or that abilities are unchangeable (Dweck, 2006). Having a growth mindset, on the other hand, means that failure is an opportunity for growth; that feedback is a chance to develop your skills and that abilities can be developed through effort (Dweck, 2006). There are two distinct and effective ways that we can build a growth mindset in our classroom: using the word 'yet' and praising wisely.

Institutions are already set up to use the word 'yet' in their everyday work. When a student hasn't completed the requirements of a task, we don't write that they have 'failed', we write that they are 'not yet competent'. When a student announces in the classroom that they can't do this, let them know that they can't do it 'yet'. Try to make the use of the word 'yet' commonplace in your classroom. Additionally, when we praise, we need to praise the effort that has been put into something, not the talent or intelligence (Dweck, 2006). Praising wisely is the difference between saying, "You have done well today, you must be smart," and, "You have done well today, you must have worked hard". These seem like small things to do but they make a big difference in the attitudes they engender, and the messages received by the students.

Angela Duckworth, a student of Dweck, wrote a book concerning what she called 'grit'. Grit is the passionate and sustained pursuit towards a long-term goal (Duckworth, 2016). Given many apprentices complete their course over a number of years, developing grit is arguably the most important strategy a teacher (and the student) can employ. There are a number of ways that we can foster grit in our classrooms: we can do this by leaving no room for helpless behaviours and by letting our students engage in productive struggle (Rissanen et al., 2019). Learning is an uncomfortable journey and becoming gritty requires us to help our students embrace that discomfort.

What if we focus on soft skills?

Students like John are unable to learn new 'hard' skills (task-based, more easily quantifiable abilities), when they don't have enough 'soft' skills (intangible interpersonal and intrapersonal habits and attitudes) to support themselves. Perhaps it is time that these soft skills become more commonplace in our pedagogies, and I would argue that I'm not the only one in the sector who believes this. At the 2020 VALBEC Conference I heard from presenters who pushed some of these boundaries: self-care and compassion (Lynne Matheson) and shame and its impact on adult learning (Holly Armstrong) amongst others.

Many times, when I have talked with teachers about 'soft skills', I am presented with the argument 'we don't have time for this'. If you consider the suggestions above, these techniques do not require additional time, they simply require a change in focus. In an educational environment where disengagement and retention are issues, I would argue it is detrimental to not include a focus on soft skills and mindset in our pedagogy.

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Enacted virtual tours as a language booster

by Serena Cecco and Sabina Fata

Serena Cecco and Sabina Fata presented an engaging workshop at the 2020 VALBEC Conference in which they demonstrated a creative solution to the restrictions that the COVID pandemic forced upon face-to-face learning in 2020. While their project was designed for students learning to be interpreters at university level, the tools and processes involved can be adapted and the task modified for language classes at lower levels. There is potential for such a task to enable learners with English as an Additional Language to use their multilingual skills and recognise that they possess knowledge and skills that monolingual speakers do not.

The problem

Working as a language mediator means being a communications expert with excellent linguistic skills and a great capacity for interacting effectively with others (Cecco and Masiero, 2019). To ensure a positive outcome for each interpreting assignment, the interpreter must be well-organised, thoroughly prepared, and ready to deal with unforeseen events. Therefore, in their formal training, interpreting students need to experience real-life situations (Cirillo and Niemants, 2016; Herring and Swabey, 2017), such as those offered by a mock guided tour, which gives them the opportunity to practice their language and interpreting skills with "head, heart, and hands" at the centre of the process (Soëtard, 2010).

It is well known that the retention of information increases if the subject is emotionally involved (Fabbro, 2004), and, having the students participate actively in the planning process, they feel more committed (Knowles, 1988). Therefore, embodied enactment activities, such as student-led guided tours, are an excellent way of getting the students involved and empowering them in their learning process.

Being aware of the fallacy of 'digital natives', i.e., that our students – born in the late 90s and grown up with computers and the internet – may have good digital lifestyle skills (use of social media, videos, games, etc.), but they also need to be proficient in the safe and effective use of technologies (ECDL, 2014); it is of utmost importance to add formal education and training in digital workplace skills. If our students, the workers and citizens of tomorrow, lack the proficiency in the tools needed in the workplace, they "will be unable to realise their full potential as learners, employees, entrepreneurs or citizens" (ECDL, 2014).

The envisaged project consisted of enacting a virtual guided tour of Padua, a wonderful medieval city in the north east of Italy, 45 km from Venice. The city is very famous for its frescoes that enabled it to reach the final stage of the inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List as Urbs Picta (The Painted City) and it is home to many other famous monuments, which make it a much-appreciated tourist destination.[1]

The students involved in the tour were in their second year of the bachelor's degree at Scuola Superiore per Mediatori Linguistici CIELS (Advanced School for Language Mediation). Here, approximately 600 bachelor students are trained in Language Mediation (LM) – translating and interpreting – specialising in diplomacy, criminology, marketing, tourism, or intercultural studies. For most of them, Italian is their native language, whereas English is their second language, to which they add another compulsory foreign language such as French, German, Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Arabic, to name but a few.

The 55 students participating in the non-compulsory two-hour activity studied English and German as a second language and were enrolled in interpreting courses. Their English and German level is B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

The pilot project of the year before (April 2019) was carried out in-person as a mock guided tour through the

Figure 1: Visual created by students to support their virtual tour

Figure 2: Tour map created by students

city of Padua. In 2020, we faced a major disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic and had to move the project completely online. Besides the challenges, this was a great opportunity for the students to improve their digital skills even more.

The project

The whole project was planned as a creative, collaborative, student-led activity. The students shared the tasks and allocated the different roles: terminologists who were in charge of finding the correct English and German equivalents for specialised terminology, guides who prepared the itinerary in Italian, interpreters who prepared and studied for the interpretation into English or German on the day of the tour, photographers and media managers who were in charge of the photo-shooting, graphics and visuals during the Zoom meeting, editors for the PBworks space, a coordinator for every role-group, and the audience.

We as instructors only served as a procedural guide and content resource (Knowles, 1988): we created the almost empty PBworks space http://visitaguidatapadova2020.pbworks.com/, wrote down the schedule (date and length of the tour), and the roles needed. Of course, we were available in case of questions or doubts, and approximately four weeks and then two weeks before the virtual tour, we

held Zoom meetings with the students. During the first meeting, we explained how to use PBworks and outlined the organisation of the project, whereas during the second meeting we mainly answered the last-minute questions of the students.

The whole project was planned and organised using PBworks, an extremely easy-to-use collaborative authoring tool, which provides not only a Wiki for planning, organising, and sharing but also a cloud storage for texts and multimedia. It offers the possibility to be kept private and visible only to a certain group of people, thus the access rights can be adapted to specific data protection rules.

Initially, the PBworks space was private and access was granted only to the students and lecturers participating in the project, then it was made public to allow other trainers and students to use it as a template and for inspiration.

The textual descriptions of the places and monuments to be presented by the tour guides in Italian were written collaboratively by the students in Google Documents stored in a shared Google Drive (GD) folder, and the link to it was then placed in the PBworks space.

Terminology work, on the other hand, was carried out using the tool Interpreter's Help (IH)[2]. The features of this web-based application for professional interpreters include automated terminology extraction, glossary creation, flashcards for the memorisation of terminology, as well as a personal profile.

Finally, all visuals, i.e., mainly the backgrounds (images of places and monuments, a map of the guided tour), and photos of the Zoom meeting of the virtual guided tour were created by the students acting as photographers and media managers (Figure 1 and Figure 2). The whole meeting was recorded by the trainers and then made available to the students via a GD link on the PBworks space.

On the day of the virtual tour, the students showed up on time in the Zoom meeting, acted very professionally and the tour went smoothly without interruptions or off-topic comments (which would have ruined the real-life situation); it was a high-quality, realistic guided tour. The students acting as presenters introduced the tour, sharing their screen with the appealing tour map they had created – demonstrating their technical skills and creativity (Figure 2) – and then handed over to the first group of

Italian-speaking guides and interpreters for English and German.

Each group described a different place of interest or monument of the city of Padua, sharing their screen showing beautiful images (perfectly suited as a background). During the whole tour, the person speaking was visible in the top right corner on the backdrop of the shared images or visuals.

The trainers only intervened in the role of the audience asking questions and – only once – to remind the students to stick to the timetable, when we realised that we were falling behind schedule.

Results

At the end of the activity, the students were asked to fill in a questionnaire to reflect on their learning and 23 out of 55 responded. Overall, results were positive: most of the responding students enjoyed the activity (Figure 3) and felt they had improved, to a lesser or greater extent, some of the key skills of an interpreter (Figure 4 and Figure 5): note-taking, speaking in a foreign language, research and terminology, teamwork, public speaking, use of digital tools, and anxiety management.

Half of the guides and the interpreters performed in a very professional and spontaneous way, far above the average, probably due not only to the type of activity but also to their personal resources (they are very extroverted persons, used to speaking and singing in public). The students were in their second year, it was their first 'real-life' experience, so their active participation is a great result.

From the point of view of language skills, there were some problems both in English and German, mainly related to grammar and pronunciation (lack of fluency), while the use of terminology was almost always appropriate (style and adequacy). Speaking and communicating in a language implies many different skills, and this activity added an enjoyment factor and increased the effectiveness, as students were more focused on getting the message across and performing the task rather than on grammatical accuracy.

The most positive answers regarded teamwork, which surprised us as there had been some organisational and communication problems leading to time mismanagement and disappointment both for the people who did not have time to present their parts, and for their fellow students.

How much did you enjoy this experience?
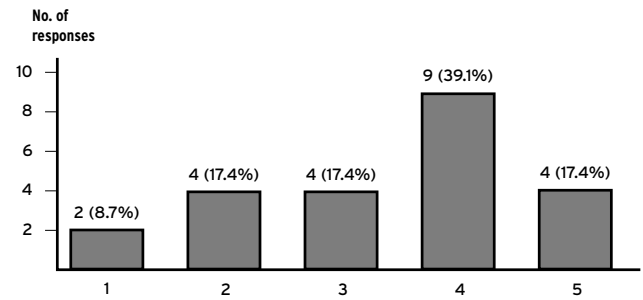
Figure 3: Measure of enjoyment (5 is the highest rating)

I have improved my public speaking skills
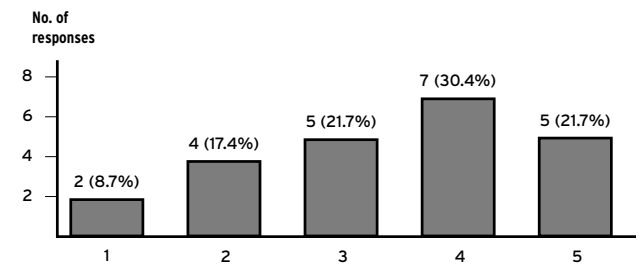
Figure 4: Perceived improvement in public speaking skills

I have improved my anxiety management
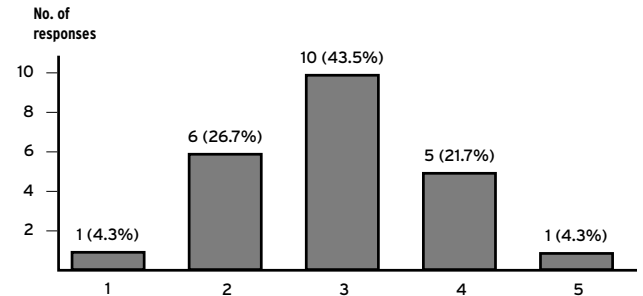
Figure 5: Perceived improvement in anxiety management

The students reported positively on teamwork both in their oral and written feedback. Their commitment in organising the virtual tour was impressive, they were decidedly independent, which probably led to the aforementioned time mismanagement, but it was positive to see they could experience this 'little setback' in first person; it was a lesson they learned from experience, hence a more effective one. They experienced first-hand all the preparation that goes behind an interpreting assignment, which will be a valuable lesson for their future career and it is something that is difficult to simulate in a traditional in-class lesson. The frustration with time management did not diminish the educational

value the students perceived in this project, which was completely their own. Despite the challenges, the students felt very proud of the final result.

The following is a selection of some of the students' most significant comments expressing common issues:

Student #1: It was a very engaging and useful activity for the university career. However, I am not totally satisfied with the actual enactment, as the time was not well balanced and divided. As for the preparation, I must say that I found myself in a group very willing to collaborate and ready to discuss. I am sorry that not everyone had the opportunity to report their work during the visit.

Student #2: Overall, I found the experience very interesting. Personally, I felt very stressed both as a guide and as an interpreter, however, I think I managed my anxiety well. The experience itself was very nice, the only thing that I regretted is that unfortunately not everyone had the opportunity to do their part, so maybe I would propose to make the visit last a little longer. As for the preparatory phase, in my opinion, there was a lot of effort and I am very happy with the results obtained, both by myself and by my teammates.

Student #3: Thanks to this guided tour, I had the opportunity to experience a work situation. I expanded my vocabulary, I experimented with new ways of working (digital tools) and it was all very engaging and dynamic! It is a very 'challenging' experience, which I would recommend to all Language Mediation students. Thanks for this wonderful opportunity!

Student #4: In general, it was a good experience, it was a pity the short time available did not allow some guides to report their work in a complete and exhaustive way, […]. However, the preparation was carried out in the smallest details even with many curiosities and particular references to the monuments visited. The online guide was a peculiar and innovative experience, all the interpreters did an excellent and thorough job.

Student #5: I would have given different answers if we had made the visit live, but I think that even virtually it was an interesting and constructive experience. The use of digital tools could be especially useful in the workplace.

These are just a few comments. However, they give an idea on how deeply this activity reached into their learning process and made them reflect.

Conclusions

Unfortunately, only 23 students filled in the questionnaire, and only those having taken part as 'active' participants (guides, terminologists and interpreters). The students in the audience did not find it necessary to reflect, though they might have learned something too. In fact, reflective practice can be very useful, but it is not an easy activity (Jenert 2008); it requires planning on the trainers' side and reflective knowledge and practice on the students' side. In the next edition, it will be interesting to invite all students to participate in the reflective process and to compare the answers of both groups.

Despite working online, being apart and not able to meet face to face, students worked very effectively together, and the tour was really a collective achievement. Everyone had their tasks, and each group found their way to interact.

PBworks was a useful tool to gather all necessary information in one place, accessible to every participant so that anyone could update or check the progress any time if they had any doubt. IH was a valuable tool not only for guides, terminologists and interpreters in their preparation work but also for all other students who now have a specialised glossary at their disposal forever. As the students added new Italian terms and their English and German equivalents while preparing the itinerary, interpreters could look up terms and the trainers could assess and correct in case of mistakes as work went on, without having to download the glossary and then upload it again.

We think that selecting and proposing a limited number of digital tools with specific characteristics for specific tasks fostered collaboration. However, in our experience as trainers these kinds of activities, which are creative, collectively task-oriented, and not routine, tend to enhance teamwork regardless of the tools used or the actual content. The students have learned how to cooperate and negotiate on shared tasks, and while the result may not always be perfect, when everybody is willing to cooperate, the process is enjoyable.

This activity proved very positive for learning language and new vocabulary in context. The students have acquired many different skills without realising it. In our opinion, this is a very inclusive activity, as students feel more shielded behind the screen, and participants with disabilities can access more easily, though we had no students with disabilities in this group to testify to

that. Moreover, this lesson plan can be adapted very easily to different language levels and contents. It can be performed in just one language, it can be focused on different topics and it can use images associated with words, phrases or simple sentences up to more complex and detailed descriptions or improvised interaction.

The good thing about this activity is the 'final product' that gives students a sense of achievement and can be included in their portfolio: the Wiki in the PBworks space and/or the photos and video recording of the enactment itself. It is a learning experience that will be a long-lasting memory.

This is a very flexible and scalable lesson plan, which is highly effective as it builds on experience and active engagement.

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Notes

1 For further information: http://www.turismopadova.it/en/context/399
2 For further information: https://interpretershelp.com/.

Reading Writing Hotline research: helping clients fill in forms

by Vanessa Iles and Robin Miles

This article highlights key findings of the *2020 Helping Clients Fill in Forms Report*. The full text of the report is available on the Reading Writing Hotline website: https://www. readingwritinghotline.edu.au (via the "About Us" tab) or via the URL in References at the end of this article.

In 2020 the Reading Writing Hotline partnered with the NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS) to undertake research conducted by Social Equity Works into the demand for, and impact of, form filling support provided by community service organisations around NSW to clients with literacy challenges. The research found that the demand for literacy mediation support for clients is high and increasing due to bushfires, drought, and COVID-19. This work impacts on staff, services, and clients across the community service sector in NSW. It also found that this impact is further exacerbated by the move by government departments to make their forms accessible online. Clients' literacy challenges can disadvantage them in accessing essential government services.

'Leanne' and the impact of COVID-19

'Leanne' has recently started working as a family wellbeing support person but is struggling with reading and writing. Literacy has always been her big challenge, but she was never able to attend classes because she needed an income. Leanne started her new job two weeks before the COVID-19 lockdown. Now she is working from home, and suddenly there is an increase in emails, case notes and forms for financial assistance, in addition to other online demands. Centrelink was unable to help her. "I don't want to give up my job," she kept repeating, "but I feel like a failure."

Jake's battles with jargon

Forms are difficult for Jake to understand due to the legal jargon and complex language used. There is also a lot of stress about misunderstanding a form or requirements and making a mistake.

Jake says that communicating with NSW Housing can be very overwhelming and there is a lot of pressure to "not get anything wrong". He says the community service worker not only explains and helps him to fill in forms but also advocates for his needs.

Jake thinks he could fill out the forms by himself "if they didn't have such complicated language" and "if there were no 'trick' questions" that made him second guess his answers. He contacted NSW Housing to ask for assistance and was told it was "not their job" to assist people to fill in the forms.

A growing problem

Form filling is a vital and basic step in accessing government services. While many of us can find digital and paper-based forms hard to navigate, people with lower literacy skills find that without assistance, forms can be a barrier to accessing housing, bushfire relief and COVID-19 financial assistance.

The requirement to complete increasingly complex, paper-based and online forms in order to access services and support means that individuals with lower literacy levels are at an increased risk of disadvantage. Data collected from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) Survey of Adult Skills in 2013 suggests that 14% of Australians aged 15 to 74 (almost 2.8 million people) have very low literacy levels, which may make it hard for them to cope with the literacy requirements of everyday life. Another 30% have literacy levels which would make it difficult to complete the majority of the top ten forms listed in the report (Reading Writing Hotline & NCOSS, 2020, p.4), which require literacy levels above Australian Core Skills Framework Level 2 to complete.

Many government departments offer little or no support to fill in their forms. Recently, forms have increased in number

Jake shared his story in the 2020 Filling in Forms Report.
Image supplied by Social Equity Works

and difficulty, and are now mostly digitised/online. People with lower literacy and digital skills are now even more vulnerable to disconnection from crucial services like health and housing. They seek help with forms from frontline workers in community organisations and public libraries.

The research suggests that difficulties accessing online forms and services are exacerbated by digital exclusion, especially in rural and remote locations. Digital exclusion can include:

- no access to home computers
- no email address
- inability to afford data
- limited access to public computers due to COVID-19 closure of public libraries
- inexperience in using computers.

Digital exclusion was particularly noted as an issue for older adults and in communities that lack basic resources and infrastructure. This may include Aboriginal communities and those with high proportions of refugees and recently arrived migrants.

The Reading Writing Hotline has seen an increase in calls from community workers seeking assistance for their clients facing literacy barriers. Clients reported finding the forms difficult to navigate. They said the forms displayed too much information on each page, used technical language and gave confusing instructions.

COVID-19 and bushfires have created greater demand for support from people who may not have accessed services or engaged with the social services sector before.

Insights from the research highlight that the community sector has responded in innovative and flexible ways to provide literacy support to clients and assist them to engage with complex processes and access essential services. The different ways that this support is provided include through one-on-one casework; offering a regular stand-alone 'form filling' service; and deploying an outreach model where a community worker is based in a library. However, community organisations also indicated that their literacy mediation role is generally not recognised by their funding bodies and has to be 'squeezed in' among other service offerings, funded through donations or delivered by volunteers.

Social Equity Works has used Sally Thompson's 2015 research with Neighbourhood Houses in Victoria as a launching point for this work. This research found that staff from Neighbourhood Houses acted as literacy mediators and were spending "around 10 hours per week on the provision of this informal literacy support." (Thompson, 2015, p. 485). Thompson's research also found that the time spent on this assistance was increasing and that the digitisation of many bureaucratic documents adds another layer of difficulty for people with low literacy levels. Much of this work performed by Neighbourhood Houses staff is informal, unfunded and largely hidden. It is absorbed in the day-to-day support services provided to clients and therefore adds an unreasonable burden to staff and to budgets.

Project focus

Social Equity Works examined the extent of demand for, and impact of, form filling support provided by community service organisations around NSW to clients with literacy challenges. Services were asked to comment on these questions:

- How much literacy support is provided to clients of community organisations to help them with forms to access essential services?
- What extra demands are placed on community services by this assistance?
- Which forms are most problematic?
- What models of support are services currently providing?
- What would help reduce the impact of lower literacy on services and their clients?

Methodology

The project used a mixed mode methodology involving an online survey of 70 community organisations from across NSW and eight libraries in the City of Sydney library network; a focus group and follow-up interviews with six

An ABC News story on 26 December 2020 highlighted the complexity of some government forms. The story can be viewed on the Reading Writing Hotline Facebook Page (video uploaded on 29 December 2020). Image supplied by Reading Writing Hotline

survey respondents; and two case studies which included interviews with clients, volunteers and staff. Advice was also sought from the NSW Council for Intellectual Disability on practical ways to improve the form most frequently cited by survey respondents as necessitating literacy mediation. (Reading Writing Hotline & NCOSS, 2020, p.1)

Findings

The report found that filling in forms creates demand for literacy assistance that presents issues for individuals, community organisations and governments.

Issues for individuals
- Understanding the purpose of the form
- Interpreting instructions
- Completing all fields accurately
- Accessing support material
- Scanning and uploading documentation
- Overcoming digital exclusion – no home computer, can't afford data, can't access public computers, no email address, no experience using computers.

Issues for community organisations
- Helping clients with forms is a significant task – workers may spend up to six hours a day supporting individuals.

- The literacy mediation role is not recognised by funding bodies – must be 'squeezed in' or done by volunteers.
- 100% of respondents report that digital literacy is a barrier for their clients accessing services.
- 92% say literacy and numeracy challenges affect clients' quality of life.
- Areas requiring most support with forms are: social housing, disability support and NDIS, personal identification, Centrelink, medical services.

Issues for governments
- Guidelines have been developed by governments to ensure material is easy to read and accessible but these do not seem to be consistently applied.
- Other practical supports are needed for people with low literacy.
- Community organisations' literacy mediation role needs to be recognised and resourced.

The recommendations, based on the findings, are to encourage government agencies to develop forms that can be more easily understood and completed by those who face literacy challenges; provide other practical supports that will make it easier for people with low levels of literacy to access essential services; and recognise and resource community organisations in their literacy mediation role.

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Adult Migrant English Program delivery during COVID-19

by LWA

A nationwide survey of students, teachers and managers in the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)[1] during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 provided insight into perspectives, activities and recommendations for future delivery.

Background

The first Australian case of COVID-19 was identified in Victoria at the end of January 2020. A sharp rise in the number of new cases resulted in the Australian National Cabinet introducing restrictions on social and economic activities in order to flatten the COVID-19 transmission curve. These restrictions significantly affected the delivery of AMEP nationwide.

In order to capture and learn from the experiences of this period of unprecedented disruption, the Department of Home Affairs commissioned LWA, the AMEP quality assurance provider, to conduct a survey on the effect COVID-19 had on the transition of AMEP from face-to-face (F2F) delivery to virtual participation (VP) and mixed mode delivery during Term 2, 20 April to 26 June 2020.

VP involved delivery of English language tuition on a virtual platform or digital app, such as Skype, Zoom or WhatsApp, in contrast to F2F tuition delivered in a classroom. Mixed Mode involved a mixture of virtual, phone and paper-based delivery methods.

Methodology

AMEP managers, AMEP teachers/assessors and AMEP students nationwide provided responses to online surveys which were accessible through the web-based application, SurveyMonkey, in May 2020. Interpreting services were also made available to support students with low levels of English to participate in the survey. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for survey questions. Responses were received from 2,282 students, 380 teachers and 62 managers.

In addition, between 27 April 2020 and 15 May 2020, manager/s from each of the 13 AMEP service providers across the country participated in a one-hour interview to describe the experience of moving AMEP provision from F2F to VP and/or mixed mode delivery.

LWA's findings stem from data collected using the online surveys delivered to AMEP managers, teachers/assessors and students nationwide and the phone interviews conducted with manager/s from each AMEP service provider.

Student survey

Responses from 2282 students (representing over 20% of all enrolled students) were recorded. Survey respondents included visa holders in the Family category (52%), Humanitarian category (24%), Skilled category (4%) and other visa categories (20%). The most common country of origin was China, with 366 respondents (16%), followed by 262 from Iraq (11%), 130 from Iran (6%), 112 from Thailand (5%), 110 from Vietnam (5%), 93 from Afghanistan (4%) and 74 from Syria (3%).

The survey largely reflected the views of students who were studying from home, thus having the hardware and
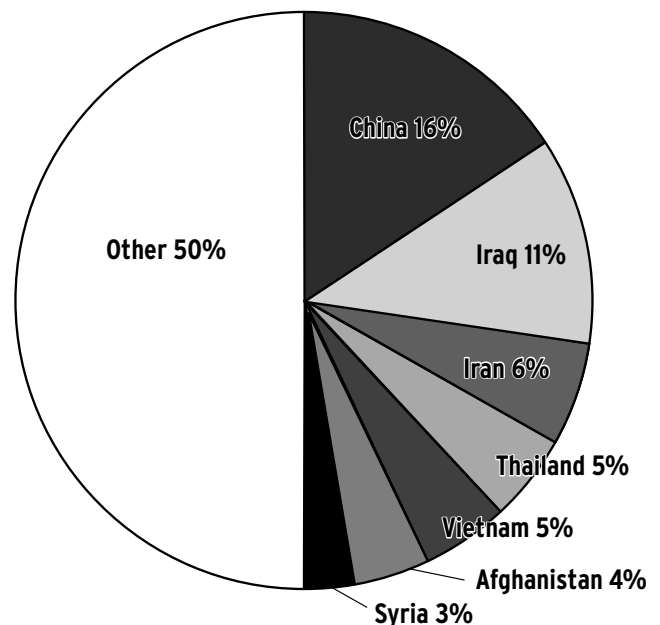

Figure 1: Students' countries of origin

software and having or developing technical abilities to participate. Ninety-six percent of respondents were engaged in AMEP delivery from home. The most common devices used to engage in AMEP outside the classroom were mobile phones (39%) and computers (41%).

Reasons for students not studying at home (4% of respondents) included having no internet connection, and not being able to study at home; the most common response was that they did not like using technology to engage in AMEP from home – they preferred classroom study.

Positive experiences for students

The survey results indicated a number of positive features relating to the changes to alternative delivery of AMEP through VP and mixed mode.

Sixty percent of respondents liked studying at home. Reasons included flexibility to study at different times allowing more time to work (72%); and more time for family commitments, especially for those home schooling children (80%).

Seventy-seven percent thought that their English language skills improved during this period, however when asked to compare studying at home and in the classroom, 72% thought that their language improved more in the classroom. Forty-one percent indicated they would like the opportunity to have classes online and F2F.

Students recognised their improved skills and confidence from the changed modes of delivery. "I have improved my technology skills as well as my English skills," is representative of several comments received.

Challenging experiences

Although much effort was put into preparing students for VP, a number of respondents did not like learning English at home, with a small portion disliking the use of technology to learn English.

Many service providers "did as much preparation and trialling with students as possible," in the last weeks of Term 1. Teachers helped students download and use applications such as Zoom, WhatsApp and Skype while they were still attending class.

Students who had difficulties engaging in VP included:
- those without digital technology
- those sharing a single device in the home
- those sharing devices with children involved in home schooling
- those with low levels of English for whom person-to-person contact is particularly beneficial (such as students on humanitarian visas).

Students' perspectives

The AMEP student cohort indicated a clear preference for a flexible delivery model which permits a combination of classroom F2F as well as learning at home through VP and mixed mode.

Teacher survey

Survey responses were received from 380 AMEP teachers.

Positive experiences

The responses indicated several positive features relating to the new arrangements for AMEP delivery resulting from COVID-19 restrictions.
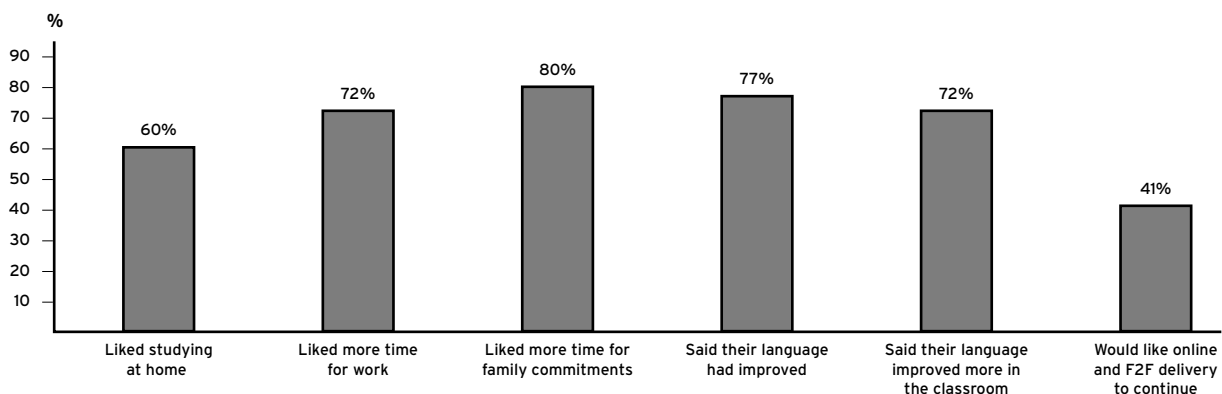

Figure 2: Student responses to virtual participation

**Table 1: Student survey questions with response options**

|	
1	Are you doing AMEP at home? [Yes / No – I prefer going to the classroom/it is not possible to study at home]
2	How do you do AMEP at home? [Mobile phone / Computer / Home phone (landline) / Paper sent by my teacher]
3	Do you like doing AMEP at home? [Yes / No / Sometimes]
4	Reasons students like doing AMEP from home [Learning English at home / Using technology / Being able to study at different times]
5	Reasons students do not like doing AMEP from home [Learning English at home / Using technology / Being able to study at different times]
6	Learning English at home is [Easy / Hard / Flexible / Interesting / Fun]
7	Which do you prefer? (Choose one) [Learning English at home / Learning English in the classroom / I would like to do both]
8	During COVID-19, is your English improving? [Yes / No]
9	Does your English improve more in the classroom or when you study at home? [Home / Classroom]
10	Do you think AMEP at home would give you more time to work? [Yes / No]
11	Doing AMEP at home gives you more time to care for your family [Yes / No]

Teachers indicated that the flexibility of using technology to deliver AMEP worked well for many students. They noted positive changes in the virtual classroom environment with development of students' literacy skills and improvement in digital technology skills. Fifty-five percent indicated that the change had a positive impact on students' English language progression. Seventy percent found students who were employed and/or seeking employment benefited from the flexibility provided with changes in delivery. Fifty-six percent found students with caring duties benefited from the flexibility provided by the changes in delivery.

Teachers also developed creative and flexible approaches to online delivery and assessment. Sixty-seven percent recognised ways to measure gains in digital literacy skills (e.g., evidence of work completed online, participation in virtual classes, uploading and sharing information, using functions such as whiteboard, chat rooms). Fifty-six percent identified new ways to measure English language progression (e.g., interactive online assessment, receipt of photos of written work, before and after diagnostic assessment, regular questionnaires/ surveys, completing curriculum units).

Thirty percent of teachers said they would like mixed mode of home-based and classroom-based delivery to continue.
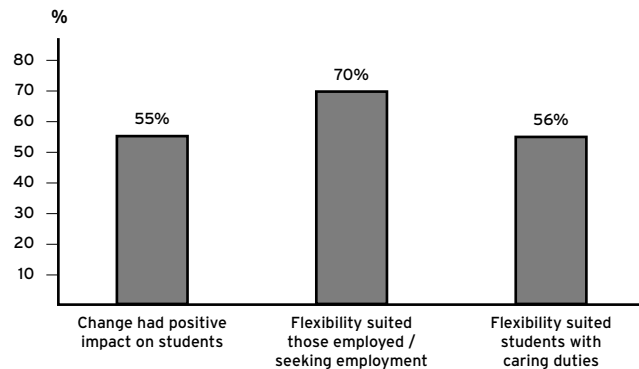
Figure 3: Teacher perceptions of benefits for students
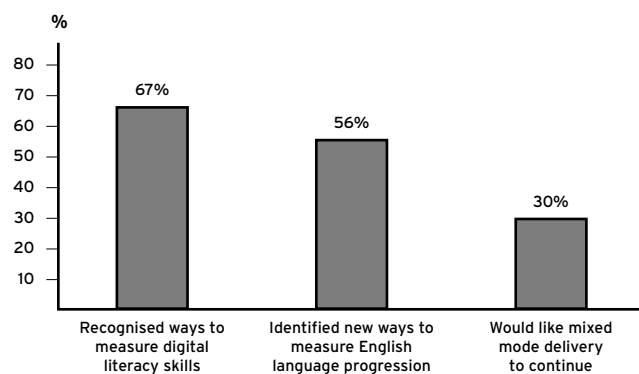
Figure 4: Benefits for teachers

Challenging experiences

Teachers reported challenges experienced during the rapid transition from F2F to VP delivery. Fifty percent indicated the transition period was difficult with "stressful" (41%) as the most common response.

Forty-four percent indicated that their students struggled with the changes in delivery, noting technology (62%) as the most common challenge for their students. The low levels of English and technology skills, and difficulties in accessing devices/internet were issues that prevented some students from participating in VP.

Fifty-six percent of respondents indicated the needs of Humanitarian cohorts (students on Humanitarian visas) could not be met satisfactorily with AMEP delivery outside the classroom. "Far from ideal," represented the most common response at 47%. Online assessments and session delivery to students with low level English language skills presented additional challenges.

Thirty-four percent identified the difficulty they experienced managing online delivery (responses included lack of confidence/ability to deliver online, no control over authorship of work submitted and limited resources immediately available to support online delivery).

Professional development

Training on delivering in this new context was provided internally. The Department of Home Affairs also approved support activities to assist providers and teachers in their transition to VP and MM:

a. LWA adapted the Streamlined Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Initial Assessment Kit for VP and mixed mode delivery.
b. Workshops on delivering in this new context was provided by LWA through national workshops conducted via Zoom.

Teachers' perspectives

There were several challenges associated with the rapid change to the new methods of delivery, however, many teachers found the changes in AMEP delivery to be rewarding for them. The application of a variety of technology devices, web-based platforms and apps resulted in an improvement in their own digital abilities and their skill in teaching English language online using digital technologies.

Management survey

Sixty-two managers in the AMEP across Australia completed the survey on SurveyMonkey. In addition, between 27 April 2020 and 15 May 2020, 13 AMEP Service Provider Managers (representative of each Service Provider delivering the AMEP nationally) participated in a one-hour interview to describe the experience of moving AMEP provision from F2F to VP and/or mixed mode delivery. In the interviews, managers addressed two points: describe the experience for you and your company; explain your concerns.

Positive experiences

Managers' responses indicated several positive features relating to COVID-19 delivery changes.
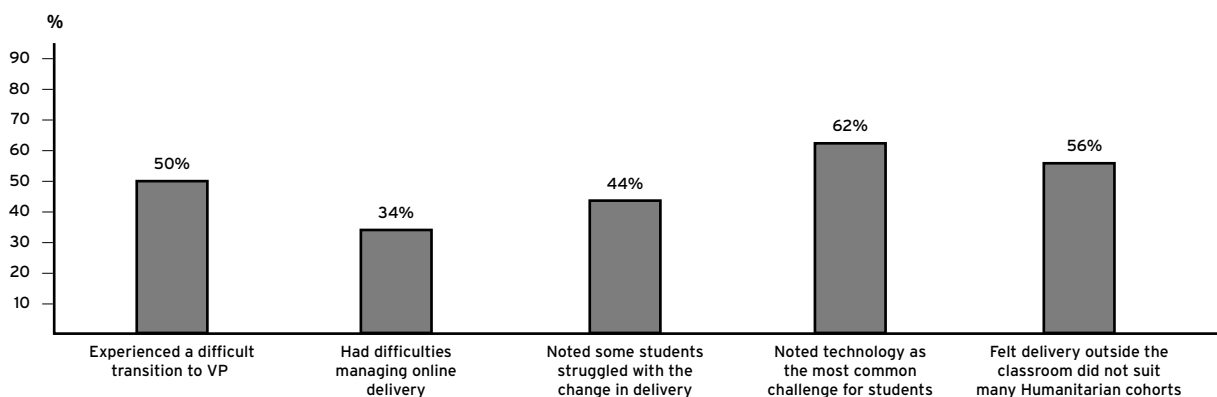

Figure 5: Challenges faced by teachers

They considered the changes improved AMEP delivery in a number of ways; the most common responses concerned student engagement and diversity of delivery, equally represented at 36%. Many students embraced VP enthusiastically, with some students who had disengaged from AMEP prior to COVID-19 restrictions re-engaging with the introduction of VP delivery. Managers indicated digital literacy skills for both teachers and students improved.

Sixty-eight percent of managers felt the change to AMEP delivery had a positive impact on students' English language progression with 55% identifying new ways to measure the progress (e.g., through interactive and electronic activities such as using online platforms like Zoom, web chat, MS Teams; recording evidence of writing, speaking and listening skills; using teacher developed and validated locally contextualised assessments; completing curriculum unit/s). Sixty-nine percent identified ways to measure digital literacy in the new environment (e.g., digital technology skills test, teacher observation/other evidence of engaging in virtual classroom activities).

Eighty-seven percent identified benefits for those employed or seeking employment, as studying at home gave students more time to work or look for work. Sixty-eight percent reported AMEP delivery outside the classroom enabled students to accommodate caring responsibilities / family commitments.

Sixty-two percent would like the flexibility in AMEP delivery to continue after COVID-19.

Table 2: Teacher and manager survey questions

**Teacher survey:**

1 Please identify
    a three ways AMEP tuition has improved under the new arrangements
    b three challenges associated with your teaching during this change to AMEP delivery
    c if applicable, successes and/or challenges associated with delivering an Initial Assessment during this change to AMEP delivery
    d three aspects of the new arrangements that worked well for students during this change to AMEP delivery
    e three challenges for your students during this change to AMEP delivery

2 Do you think AMEP delivery outside the classroom meets the needs of
    a Humanitarian cohorts?
    b those with caring responsibilities?
    c those who are employed or seeking employment?

3 Have you measured English language progression during this period?

4 Can you identify
    a new ways to measure English language progression in this environment
    b ways to measure digital literacy in this environment?

5 Do you think the change to AMEP delivery has had a positive impact on students' English language progression?

6 Did professional development sessions provided by LWA assist you/your teachers?

7 Can you identify professional development sessions you would like offered in the future?

8 How would you describe the transition to the change in delivery?

9 How would you describe AMEP delivery during this period?

10 Please identify three AMEP activities you would like to continue after COVID-19.

Manager survey:

Managers responded to the same questions as the teachers without 1(d) and 1(e)
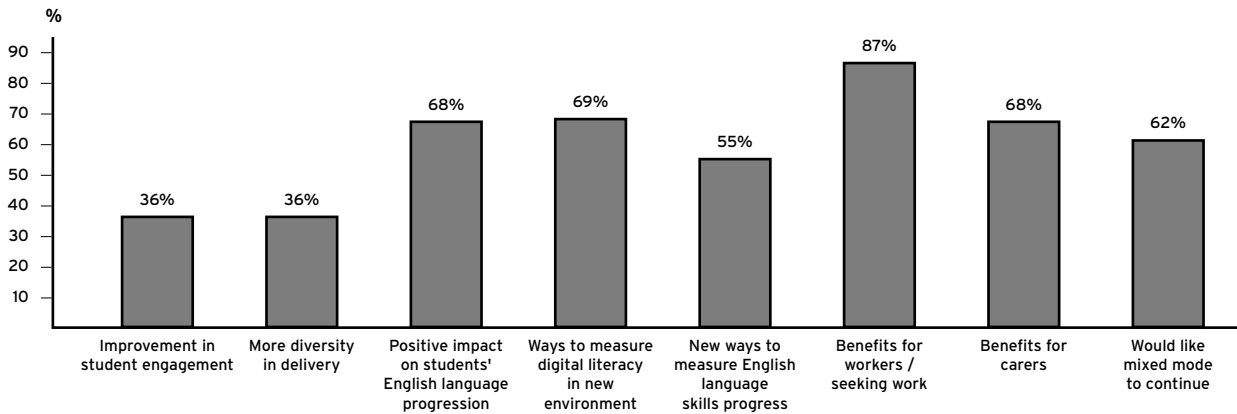
Figure 6: Positive experiences noted by managers

Challenging experiences

Seventy-four percent of respondents described the changes in AMEP delivery as challenging with 35% identifying technology as the greatest challenge. It was particularly challenging to conduct online Initial Assessments with students who have low English language ability.

Sixty-three percent of managers indicated the needs of Humanitarian cohorts could not be met with AMEP delivery outside the classroom. Lack of F2F (with the associated social interaction) represented the most common reason (37%) for not meeting the needs of Humanitarian cohorts.

Professional development

Sixty-six percent of respondents indicated training sessions provided by LWA assisted their teachers. "Valuable" represented the most common reason at 40%. Managers indicated more training sessions were required. Seventy-nine percent of respondents identified topics for future training sessions with IT the most requested professional development topic at 38%. Managers also indicated Case Studies and Assessment as future training session topics.

Managers' perspectives

It was a rapid transition to adapt the program to VP and mixed mode in a very limited time frame. Managers indicated being well prepared and engaging in collaboration supported the transition. Many managers expressed surprise that the students engaged as much as they did. Innovative teaching practices abounded, with teachers and students trying an array of virtual teaching/learning strategies and resources. The introduction of VP delivery resulted in a return to AMEP for some students who had disengaged from AMEP prior to COVID-19 restrictions.

AMEP managers indicated the change to AMEP delivery with VP had a positive impact on students' English language progression, describing the period as a significant upskilling which has been rewarding in the AMEP field. AMEP managers clearly indicated their preference for ongoing flexibility in AMEP delivery and advocated for a model which supported a diversity of delivery methods.

Suggestions to guide future delivery of AMEP

Based on the findings from the surveys, recommendations include the following:
- Flexible delivery model
- Continue to support a flexible delivery model, with flexible delivery methods, flexible classroom times to meet the needs of clients, including those with employment and caring responsibilities.
- Continue to accommodate classroom F2F delivery for cohorts who require a high levels of learning support and social interaction.
- Continue to support ongoing development, trialling and application of innovative delivery methods, specific to AMEP cohorts.
- Professional development and program development
- Provide targeted and bespoke training where required, such as upskilling in IT for teachers in the AMEP.
- Investigate the further use of online assessment tools used during COVID-19 delivery.
- Consider implementing a Digital Literacy Skills Framework to report digital literacy skill progression of students.
- Communication and sharing information
- Consider provider feedback and identify opportunities to further improve communication and guidance to service providers.

- Facilitate an AMEP Virtual Hub on the Assessment Task Bank secure site, to house the volume of innovative resources and professional development materials, resulting from this period.
- Conduct a follow-up survey to drill down on specific cohort trends and engage with the providers and teachers to further understand the support required.

Conclusion

AMEP students, teachers and managers were all challenged by the extent and speed of change to delivery in response to COVID-19. Despite this, many positives were reported, such as increased innovative practices, knowledge sharing and flexibility in delivery methods.

In the surveys, AMEP students, managers and teachers clearly indicated their preference for ongoing flexibility in AMEP delivery. Flexible delivery models, flexible delivery methods and flexible session times maintained interest and engagement and met the needs of many students, including those with employment and caring responsibilities. For Humanitarian cohorts and students with low level English abilities, however, high levels of learning support and social interaction are required. For these cohorts, classroom F2F delivery should continue.

Technology was the most influential change agent during COVID-19 delivery. Students, teachers, and managers responded well to aspects of the VP experience in AMEP COVID-19 delivery. Improvement was noted in AMEP teachers' creative and flexible approaches to online delivery and assessment, and in students' digital literacy skills through the use of technology devices, web-based platforms and apps. A continued focus on professional development of AMEP teachers and training that included upskilling in IT was reported. Capturing and reporting AMEP students' digital literacy skill gains, for example through implementing the Digital Literacy Skills Framework, was suggested.

The data gathered during this period has provided all AMEP stakeholders with insights into the needs of the AMEP service providers and student cohorts, and ideas on the actions and support needed to guide AMEP in the future.

LWA is a Registered Training Organisation formed in Victoria in 1990. It specialises in adult English language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy training. LWA is the Quality Assurance Provider for the federally funded AMEP and Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) Program. Visit https://www. lwa.net.au/ **for more information.**

Notes

1 For more about the AMEP go to https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/settling-in-australia/amep/about-the-program

Adult Literacy Connect: the public library and education sector working together

by Sarah Deasey

Adult Literacy Connect is a network of adult language, literacy and numeracy professionals, which was formed after a one-day Adult Literacy Round Table convened by Public Libraries Victoria in 2016. Members include VALBEC representatives, staff from public libraries and other interested practitioners. The group's mission is to:

> strengthen the collaborative capacity of libraries, adult educators and the community to support adult literacy learning

Accessibility of resources

One of the key issues identified at the Round Table was the lack of access to resources for teaching adult literacy. Currently there is no central, curated and quality online site for adult literacy resources in Australia. Many important and useful resources developed in the past are no longer publicly available or sit with specific organisations and are difficult to access.

Examples include resources funded by the Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Capacity and Innovation Fund (CAIF), or those developed in the 1990s by the Adult Basic Education Resource and Information Service, the Australian National Training Authority and the Workplace English Language and Literacy program.

This lack of availability of resources has a significant impact on the service that organisations such as TAFEs, Reading Writing Hotline, learn locals, libraries and others are able to deliver.

Teachers, volunteers, librarians and others who wish to assist adults with literacy skills rely on their own networks and internet search skills to augment the resources available at their organisations.

Consequently, the resources provided to learners and those who support them can be ad hoc and vary in quality. The Adult Literacy Connect network agreed that a centralised system would ensure that all people who support adult literacy learning can easily find and use quality resources.

The resources and expertise of libraries for this concept is crucial. Library expertise includes the implementation of web-based data systems set up for searching and the infrastructure for hosting. The education providers hold the content and knowledge for sourcing quality resources.

With support from the Reading Writing Hotline and a State Library of Victoria grant, Adult Literacy Connect commissioned a project aimed at establishing an online portal of quality curated teaching and learning resources.

Surveying the field

The first step was to conduct a survey with both library staff and practitioners; and then follow up with a project report. The survey was designed to ascertain what resources people use to support adult literacy learners and where there are gaps in the availability of, or access to, resources.

The survey was circulated through Reading Writing Hotline e-news and email list, VALBEC e-news, the Public Library Victoria Network email list, the Certificate for General Education for Adults email list, Queensland Council for Adult Literacy e-news, and, at their request, through Adult and Community Education Aotearoa in New Zealand.

For the purposes of this survey, the term 'adult LLN' was used to encompass 'language literacy and numeracy' as well as English as an Additional Language (EAL). There were nine questions in the survey:

1 Where do you go to look for adult LLN resources/materials to support your practice? Tick all that apply:
Specific websites; Google search; Library (public); Software applications; Library (educational institution); Own hard copy resources; Hard copy resources at

workplace; Colleague's ideas/worksheets; Other (please specify)

2 **What adult LLN resources do you use the most?**

3 **Do you feel you have access to enough adult LLN resources to support your practice?**

4 **What adult LLN resources would you like to see more of?**

5 **What describes your working area the best? Tick one:**
Adult LLN teacher at TAFE; Adult LLN teacher at AMES; Adult LLN teacher in Community Sector; Librarian at a public library; Library officer at a public library; Librarian in an educational institution; Library officer in an educational institution; Workplace literacy teacher/trainer; Volunteer Tutor – EAL or Literacy Volunteer at a public library; Other (please specify)

6 **Are there any websites that you use regularly to access adult LLN resources or that you would recommend to others?**

7 **What are the top search terms you use to find LLN resources? List up to five terms in the order you are most likely to use them from most to least likely.**

8 **Would a single online portal be useful for finding resources?**

9 **Do you have any other comments around adult LLN teaching and learning resources for adults? If yes, please outline them here.**

Survey responses
Adult Literacy Connect received a total of 414 survey responses, with a number of comments.

The most common theme of the comments was that adult-specific, basic-literacy teaching materials are hard to find through simple searches. For example:

I find I often have to rely on and adapt LLN resources that are designed for children in schools. Would much prefer to have ready access to a bank of resources specific to adult learners.

We need free, online resources for adults that are Australian and relevant to Australian situations, such as work. Activities that are related to ACSF and give clear instruction, information and practice.

For anyone other than an experienced professional adult literacy practitioner, it would not necessarily be clear where to start from a Google search alone, and while Australian-specific sites provide some comprehensive information, the Australian literacy resources are not always apparent at first glance, requiring more search time. Time

being a precious commodity, it is understandable that these resources may be more difficult to find.

Ninety-one percent of the respondents agreed on the need for an online centralised portal:

Pooling resources is a wonderful idea!!!!!

It would be wonderful to see free digital resources for Adult LLN purposes here in Australia. It should be one's basic right to learn the English language without the need to pay, and although public libraries do offer such services and cover the subscription costs of these resources, a website that is accessible to all and free would be ideal.

There are lots of resources but not accessible all in one place. I think the idea of a single portal is absolutely fantastic and a brilliant initiative to be collaborating with the library sector.

The project is now in the final stage, trialling the portal navigation and adding content.

In the meantime ...
While we wait for this resource, here are some links to websites with recommended resource treasures. The goal of Adult Literacy Connect is to make resources like these easily accessed with a simple search.

VALBEC
https://valbec.org.au/. Here you will find a Resources page with links to a broad range of both practical and reference materials

WA Read Write Now
This page is for volunteer tutors and has quality worksheets and reading materials as well as outside links: https://www.read-write-now.org/resources/for-rwn-tutors

Adult Learning Australia
There are three categories listed here: ACSF Information, General Information and Research. https://ala.asn.au/lln-resources/

Reading and Writing Hotline
This site provides a comprehensive resources directory, with great tip sheets for students on spelling, workplace reading, academic reading, and handwriting

https://www.readingwritinghotline.edu.au/student-resources/

https://www.readingwritinghotline.edu.au/teaching-learning-resources-and-workbooks/

Learn locals

Many learn locals have used ACFE CAIF projects to develop resources for teachers and these can be found on organisational websites. Most are free and downloadable.

Keysborough Learning Centre https://www.klckeys.com.au/resources links to *Word for Word* by Lynda Achren and Marj Safstrom

Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre http://www.cnlchub.org.au/ is a Literacy Resource Hub developed for teachers and volunteer tutors with a range of links. It uses the sections from Literacy Face to Face to classify material (https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A15089)

Carringbush Adult Education offers high quality reading materials and professional development content developed by Carringbush staff.

https://www.carringbush.org.au/resources

https://www.carringbush.org.au/carringbush-reading-series

https://www.carringbush.org.au/pathways-guidance-resources

Prace links to the wonderful PageTurners https://pageturners.prace.vic.edu.au/ and a resource developed with funding from Cancer Council Victoria https://prace.vic.edu.au/cancer-council-victoria-screening-resources/

AMES Australia

The AMES Bookshop offers both recent and tried and true resources developed by AMES Australia: https://www.ames.net.au/ames-bookshop

Urban Lyrebirds

This site provides quality reading materials for EAL students as well as teacher reference materials: https://www.urbanlyrebirds.com/

Acknowledgement

Additional information was provided by Meg Cotter, who has been volunteering her time with the Adult Literacy Connect project. Meg is Education Projects Coordinator at Wyndham Community Education Centre and a member of the Australian Council for Adult Literacy Executive Committee.

Sarah Deasey is a member of the *Fine Print* Editorial Committee and Education Manager at Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre.

Remembering, loving, dissenting, changing and learning how to teach

by Lindee Conway

... why I love doing what I do.

That's a line from an article in the final 2020 edition of *Fine Print*. It's how educator Eudi Blakeman starts her story about teaching in "Meet me at your learning threshold" (Blakeman, 2020). What a beautiful comment about her work, and how it reminds me of myself. I haven't taught English or literacy for several years now, but I still think of myself as a Foundation teacher. That part of my life has such a strong pull on my memory and my heart.

Young teacher

When I was a new, youngish, teacher I was energetic and curious. I wanted learning to occur and held this at the centre of my planning and delivery. I had some whacky, and probably impenetrable, ideas from time to time. One day I remember deciding that tomorrow we'd all cook hamburgers, in order to explicate some now forgotten function of English. Luckily living in Footscray in inner Melbourne meant I could get halal pork, beef and veggie burgers, all before class began. My not very clean Sunbeam electric frypan was hauled into public scrutiny (a Vietnamese woman took it away and washed it thoroughly at the end of the cooking and placed it, shining and dry, on the central table where we'd cooked). Crazy stuff – but at least I had ideas. I relied a lot on Mario Rinvolucri, whose books such as *Grammar Games* (1984) offered suggestions about getting the learners to have fun while learning.

I loved the fun. I used to tell the students that when they laughed, I got a dollar, and when they made an "oh" of understanding, I got fifty cents from "the Prime Minister". I wasn't the worst teacher around, but probably, frequently, a confounding one. When a lesson didn't work, I usually felt a bit flustered in the classroom, but afterwards it gave me much to think about. I'd analyse what I wanted to happen and try to work out why it didn't and decide to either try a variation or drop it and start afresh. For the record, and almost any teacher reading this will already know, what was usually missing was scaffolding and steps so that the teaching become learning.

A time to learn

So, I was slightly crazy, but curious, energetic and analytical as a teacher. I loved the students and my job, and I set up opportunities for learners' language production and acquisition despite my willingness to try anything. But I was relentlessly, endlessly, unimaginatively and unimaginably *teacher centred*. It didn't occur to me for several years to take the focus off me.

Eventually, the adulation which many demonstrate to their teachers as a matter of cultural and courteous practice became irksome. That realisation took too long, but at least it came. I think conversations with other teachers enabled me, finally, to be more curious about my learners. And so too, did this book: *A Time to Learn*.

Its focus was the practice of evoking story-writing by learners. I'm so glad I found it and read it and became inspired: it helped me to become – at last – learner centred in my approach.

Stories

One term, we got onto the subject of bicycles. Over the course of a few weeks, we evoked /elicited the necessary language to write and enunciate. It started, I recall, because I (being teacher centred!) wrote my own story for the learners to read. It was about my parents surprising me with a bigger bike to ride to school, after my hand-me-down bike had become way too small. My new bike was a gold and purple Malvern Star and I had never seen its like. This story, which may have started as a hook into the term 'remember' or 'memory', was a good one to model.

After that, it emerged that everyone had a bike story to tell and the learners didn't let their limited English get in the way of telling theirs.
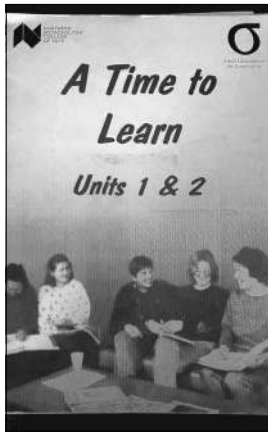
***A Time to Learn* was published in 1993 by the Northern Metropolitan College of TAFE and the Adult, Community and Further Education Board. It is available for download: https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED389235**

Ren, a man in his 30s who grew up in Shanghai had a sad story. His father bought him a bike – the ubiquitous black Flying Pigeon – so he could ride to high school. In the first week of his life as a senior student, it was stolen. Ren had a great sense of the dramatic and declaimed the story in low, emphatic English. Anh, a Vietnamese woman, told the story of the bike her family shared to conduct its work and school life and the travails that occurred during breakdowns.

Another term, we wrote and spoke about water. This was a great topic, because it could go so many ways: water to drink; water to swim in; water containing fish to catch, cook and eat; water to grow food in. One student wrote about the fish he caught with his father and brothers and proudly carried home to be cooked. One student wrote about arriving in Sydney and drinking water from the tap.

Ajok, from South Sudan, conveyed her anger with her new country of Australia. She discovered a love of Coca-Cola here and its easy accessibility in the supermarket. But everyone, including her nosy teacher, kept telling her to drink water. "But I not like!" she told us unambiguously. So, I helped her write that down in her new country's language.

I loved this work: it was a great way to evoke language from heartfelt stories. And there was beautiful flow as each class member began to realise they did, in fact, have some mastery over their language and had something to say.

Reflecting

After teaching, I became a coordinator and then program manager. Reflecting on my teaching self from a coordinator's perspective, I had some irritating qualities. I tended to ignore the requirements. Rather, our subject matter evolved from how the classroom discussion evolved. I sometimes ignored every requirement of an assessment, usually because I knew some, or many, of the learners would find them baffling. To be frank, I'm appalled at my cavalier attitude; at the time, there were occasional pointed conversations with my manager.

This ignoring of formal assessment requirements was sometimes viewed as me – a youngish, bolshie, loud-voiced teacher – expressing dissent. But it wasn't that, really. I saved dissent for other battles, real and imagined. The real reason was that I got so caught up in the language acquisition and expression that I often ran out of time to plan, deliver and record all the assessments. However, just as listening to others, reading and reflecting helped me become a better, less teacher-centred teacher, through listening to others, reading and reflecting I got a lot better as an assessment designer.

It's good to know that thinking about things can lead to change.

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Lindee Conway now works in supporting teachers to build their practical skills. She has always been, and remains, curious about what works well for learners and what builds teacher confidence, and what saves them time and anxiety.

Call-out for learner stories
Lindee Conway's reflection on her career in education highlights the pleasure of story sharing and the importance of stories coming from the learners themselves. We would love to publish more learner-generated stories in *Fine Print*. If this sounds like something you and your students would like to be involved in, please get in touch: fineprintvalbec@gmail.com.

Solving the digital puzzle

Online learning specialist Michael Burville in conversation with Elizabeth Gunn
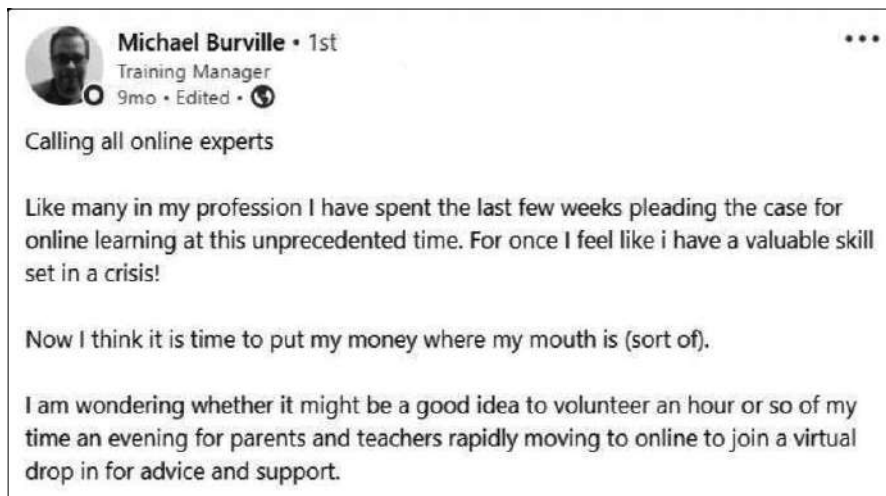
I'm not sure how Michael's post "Calling all online experts" came into my LinkedIn feed at the beginning of the first COVID-19 lockdown in Melbourne. It certainly wasn't that *I* was an online expert. On the contrary, like many of us in early 2020, I was frantically trying to *become* expert. Lurking around online experts on LinkedIn seemed like a good way to learn more about the world of online education that I had been thrust into.

Michael is a passionate educator who has worked in a range of educational roles: from teaching English to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) learners in the community learning sector to assisting academics transfer courses to online learning environments. He kindly made time for me one May morning before sunrise last year. In the background of his Zoom room, I could see his household trying to quietly have breakfast; our discussion ate into Michael's family time and I'm grateful for their donation to the cause of furthering my knowledge of online education.

I had much to learn from Michael and didn't yet know what I didn't know. Listening back to our conversation as I write this article, I can sense my excitement and anticipation at the prospect of learning more from him. But alongside my eagerness, I detect a sense of the overwhelming scale of the task. Overnight, teachers were thrown into online education. Never had I been so dependent on my technological inventiveness *and* home internet both functioning simultaneously at peak performance! Michael was a beacon on the night ocean.

Here we talk about the fundamentals of designing online learning. Michael also introduces the concept of 'agility'[1] as an important consideration for digital literacy education. According to Michael, digital agility focuses on people's confidence, motivation and incentives in developing digital skills. Agility frames digital literacy as a diverse, personalised repertoire of practices with the task for teachers being to develop students' emergent knowledge. Read on to find out more.

Michael, tell us about your background in the adult literacy and community education sector.

About ten years ago I was based at North Melbourne Language and Learning. At the time, they were rapidly transitioning into a more compliance-based system, which presented a lot of challenges. My role was to try and help them work through that because they had interesting challenges with different cohorts of students who are not used to a traditional 'come to class' model. Some of my work in that time was trialling different pedagogies to see what worked and what didn't work with different learners, with different experiences. And I was teaching at the same time in those different places. So, my test lab was my classroom and my students, trying to work with them on bits that worked and didn't work.

I learned by trial and error, like people are learning [online teaching] now. I went forward with what I thought worked and very quickly learned from listening to my students when something didn't [help them learn].

What are the most important aspects of online learning design in your view?

One of the most important things is to be clear about instructions. For people with learning challenges, that's actually a really good thing. We sometimes forget that we cannot always see when we're leaving people behind. So, we have to give students the learning resources and atomise what we want them to do – for example, this reading, this set of instructions, this activity – and say, "We're going to support you in that and facilitate you learning from that, but we're not going to talk at you for two hours in an online classroom. We're actually going to let you sit quietly and learn. And if you need to watch or read that resource backwards and forwards and ask questions about it after, that's what we hope you will do."

I hope that that's what we'll get out of being forced into this [online teaching] space.

As a teacher you recognise that not all of teaching needs to be synchronous. It's actually okay when people are remote to say, "I won't even use online, because remote doesn't necessarily mean online". If people are remote, you have to be more explicit and you have to be clear about what you want them to do. And once you can do that, I think you can interrogate a course and go, well, actually this is a reading. I want them to reflect on it and do this. And that's the learning outcome. The learning outcome isn't them talking in a chat room or responding in class. Some of that helps the teacher feel validated and get their feedback, which is really important, but it isn't necessarily the learning.

I remember this in teaching English as a Second Language; someone watched my lesson once and pointed out, "Those people were talking. But those two people there never got a word in and you never engaged them. You never went to them". It was a big learning moment for me. My feedback was people talking, and that person's talking to me so [I thought] everything's going well. But it wasn't, necessarily. I was leaving people out. I needed to be engaged in different places.

And I think potentially online teaching can be more equitable. For some people, the language divide can be overcome by giving people more time. So, if students know clearly that they need to engage with this resource – for example if there is pre-reading and we're holding them to doing that – by the time they are called on and they've had their time to read it or watch a video backwards and forwards, I think we're setting CALD learners up a little

bit more than we would if we're in a classroom where only the fastest and bravest can speak.

I found myself feeling uncomfortable with the silence of online classes – I'm not getting the same feedback from students that I was used to. Do you have any suggestions for dealing with that?

I think that's one of the hardest things. Things need to be uncomfortable. We can learn to be comfortable with silence. And silence doesn't mean people aren't learning. What I've found in online spaces is that getting feedback from the students is a different process. Actually, if students are quiet, they might be working away on something. Lots of students, particularly CALD learners, once they can work at their own pace, they will speak up because they feel more comfortable.

Let them consume the material at their own competent pace first, and then get them together. I found that people who don't always talk, suddenly do. But when we present, present, present and then ask, "Now, what do you think?" – and I'm guilty of this as well – people don't talk. They absolutely won't, I wouldn't either! They're probably secretly looking the words up like they do in the class, you know, so they haven't had time to consume it. And now suddenly they're on the spot and they're uncomfortable with the tech already.

Something like collaboration, flipped collaborations, in English and different subjects, are hugely successful because they give people a chance to consume the content and get comfortable. And then they speak. I've found that with that model, traditionally quiet learners actually suddenly get a little more vocal. Or if they have an anonymous place to post, you will get a lot more input. And then I think the mindset shifts with that. Teachers can support that mindset shift.

This is the idea of giving people more of a hybrid and blended learning experience. You can do active learning online. You can set a problem-based challenge at the start of the week, give all the tools to do it and then come together to talk about it. And you're there when you come together. And it's hyper-focused on talking about a challenge after students have had a week to work on it.

I guess this gets back to the idea of digital agility. Could you talk a little bit more about that?

Yes, I've been looking at this a lot lately. This pandemic reveals that we've talked about literacy in terms of, 'you

need to learn these things', and digital literacy is about logging into a computer and knowing those things. But all the time we've been talking about digital literacy, the usability of digital technology has been improving and improving and improving. And we get this from research and from employers as well, that it's more about being able to pick up the digital tool that suits you. It's not about having to learn this set of skills or this language. I think we're past that now. It's not a language anymore, it's an attitude or an incentive.

So, does digital agility mean having a positive attitude?
I think it's about a confidence and it's about incentives and motivation. When you look at barriers to technology, I don't think the major incentive is the skill, and I don't think it has been for a while. I think the major barrier is more around motivation and incentive. When people are motivated to connect with the technology, the learning of the skills happens pretty quickly because computers have been designed over decades to be more and more intuitive, particularly apps and online.

Digital agility is about adapting to what different tools do and how they are useful or not useful, rather than how do I log in and how do I find this or that. Although those details need some attention, digital agility means practicing with the tools outside class. If you don't get to digital agility, then digital literacy doesn't stick. It's like learning a language; if you don't have any incentive to use it, you won't remember it. You can memorise a language, you can learn the structure of a language, but if you don't have an opportunity to use it or the incentive to use it, you probably won't remember it.

So digital agility is very personal. Like I need this thing, not that. And there are plenty of examples where if people find an incentive to do something, they learn what they need to know. For example, my father is on Facebook because his family is on it. He wouldn't learn anything else, but he saw the reason to get on Facebook. He wanted to connect to people, so he's learned it, and he's in his late eighties.

I've seen it time and time again; when we labour digital literacy, we leave people behind. I remember back when I was working in Neighbourhood Houses, the government was constantly rolling out digital literacy programs: 'how to open a document', 'how to write things in Word'. I was teaching to migrants and refugees who, at the time, didn't need to use Microsoft Word.

Often when you labour technical skills over something useful, it blows people's confidence, and if they see that as what computers are about, they lose interest. On the other hand, there are plenty of reasons to use Facebook. So, I think people have an incentive to communicate with digital tools, but we sometimes mix up digital literacy as [only] technical skills. You might teach them how to use computers and how to log in to things, and this broad set of skills. That might be great for an office worker, but in many communities there's no need for it.

Sometimes I think we look at technology to just do the whole thing. We need to step back and ask, "Why? What is the interrelation between the technology and the pedagogy?" We need to ask, "How is technology enabling and empowering the pedagogy, and how can the pedagogy inform the technology?" There's a loop there that says these are interrelated. The technology should never be sitting at the front or trying to solve the whole problem. There's a whole kind of digital puzzle to put together. And this is where digital agility and digital skills come in. They are all interconnected. You can build digital literacy, but if you don't talk digital agility as well, it's not enough. We need to look at what people are doing and where, especially for people going into the workforce.

What can teachers do to promote learners' digital agility?
We know lots of people had an awful experience online [in 2020], but that isn't necessarily the fault of digital technology. There are people who have reported benefits from online teaching. It's important to hold onto those [benefits] and ditch the rest. And that's agility as well. I had lots of conversations with teachers, and many were agile and said, "Look, I'm just going to try and do it this way. And I'm going to ditch that if it doesn't work". They were really embracing it. They did really well in that space.

And I hope that's what we'll do now. I hope that after being forced into this situation, we'll adapt and ask ourselves, "What I did learn from that?" and "Are there elements of online, particularly for ESL or disadvantages of different types of learners, that are better than face-to-face?" And I hope we'll pick up things like having a video to watch in your own time and being really clear and explicit and short in our instructions.

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Thanks for these insights Michael. I love that idea of saying we, as teachers, need to be digitally agile. I love the idea of

it being thrown back to teachers and that, as teachers, we need to be lifelong literacy learners alongside students. It seems that, as far as online learning goes, there's no ceiling as to what you can do to promote students' digital agility.

We look forward to further conversations with practitioners about new teaching practices developed through experiences of online education in 2020. We also hope practitioners take heart in the fact that teaching practices are constantly evolving and adapting in time with the rhythm of social and technological change that's swirling around us. It's certainly an exciting time to be working in education.

Reference

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Elizabeth Gunn is a teacher and writer who likes to explore new possibilities in adult learning. She finds the collaborative writing process, as in this article, a rewarding form of professional learning and is currently working on a project to find out more about teachers' attitudes to professional learning. She welcomes all opportunities to listen to colleagues and share their knowledge and experience of lifelong learning.

Notes

1 'Digital agility: use and experience of technology influenced by use of a wide range of strategies; levels of familiarity with technology and confidence levels' (Seale et al., 2010, p.450)

Teaching and learning in 2020

interviews with Sharon, Jim and Urmi

Way back in April 2020 when COVID normal was still not quite fully imaginable, *Fine Print* embarked on a project that was, itself, not quite fully defined. We wanted to make a record of teachers' impressions as we entered into a brave new world of remote teaching and learning, so we could remember how it felt at the time, without the cushioning of hindsight.

Three adult literacy and numeracy teachers, Sharon, Jim and Urmi, responded to the initial call-out sent via e-VALBEC and LinkedIn and kept in touch with *Fine Print* editor, Deryn Mansell, over subsequent months via email. Sharon and Jim teach in Victoria and Urmi is in New South Wales. In the interests of confidentiality, and to keep the focus of attention on the teachers and learners, rather than the institutions, we have chosen not to identify their workplaces.

April 2020

I began the conversation by asking; "What do you expect the biggest challenges will be for you, your learners and your colleagues?" Sharon, Jim and Urmi all identified technology and maintaining student engagement as major challenges they expected to face. Reading their emails, I could sense them holding their breath.

Sharon: Expect things to go wrong when beginning remote teaching and learning and providing learning skills support. Developing new ways of teaching and learning and supporting students in a short time frame will be challenging.

Urmi: A typical adult LLN class like my class consists of folks from different age groups, values and backgrounds and last but not the least different levels of learning capabilities. In face-to-face training we have extra cues, i.e., gestures, body language etc. by which we conduct ongoing needs analysis. Whereas learning remotely requires self-determination and ownership. So, the remote teaching/learning process is posing an extra challenge for the trainers on top of the existing ones.

Jim: Learning to treat home as a place of work is especially hard for me. The extra time online learning seems to take is also a challenge.

However, they were also seeing possibilities from online learning.

Urmi: It's liberating for [students] to be able to use modern ways of learning. They feel the ownership and therefore become more open to learning.

Jim: It is an additional skill set which is especially useful for helping those with problems attending classrooms.

Sharon: A positive is utilising students' expertise with technology to promote peer support and positive engagement. It's a chance to celebrate the work and learning achieved together and the many new skills developed.

May 2020

A month later, I contacted the teachers again, to see if the challenges they anticipated in April had been as they expected.

Jim: What worked best for me was using explanations on a virtual whiteboard that had worked on a whiteboard in a real classroom. I found it hard to pitch my explanations at the right level (I work in numeracy support), and it was harder to maintain the feel of teamwork with the classroom teacher I was supporting.

Sharon: It is much harder to have a strong teacher presence and provide positive engagement for students online [but] regular communication via Zoom classrooms, forums and email did keep the students feeling connected and supported. A student-centred learning focus meant the use of chat and breakout rooms had to be a priority, not just presenting PowerPoint slides. Shorter online sessions were more productive.

Urmi: I have followed the way I planned to help my students and it has worked with most of them. For some, I had to provide face-to-face support as well as [teaching] remotely since they genuinely struggle to navigate the online learning platform. [One member of] my class is above 60. She struggles to join online classes via Teams. Recently she's come to school one day a week to see me, two days joins remote classes and is quite satisfied with the process.

Photo by Zhuo Cheng you on Unsplash

August 2020

If you were in Victoria in June and July of 2020, as I was, you might remember them being messy months. Circumstances were changing so quickly that it was hard to focus on anything beyond the next 24 hours. I got back in touch with the teachers in August to find out how they were travelling.

Sharon: Technology has definite benefits and has provided positive learning experiences that may not have been practical in a normal classroom setting. In an Agriculture class that Learning Skills were supporting, the VET teacher had an incursion during the Zoom class whereby a farmer from north east Victoria was able to join the Zoom class and could walk the class around his farm like we were there with him. Students got the experience and insights from an industry leader and could see the farm and speak to him in real time.

Urmi: Our RTO is still operating through online delivery using Teams/Canvas and phone coaching wherever needed. Students complete activity booklets and return/collect new sets fortnightly. For extra support, trainers make arrangement to see the students on site once or twice during the fortnightly period. While in NSW, the number of daily confirmed cases remains low, the news about clustered infections and other similar narratives from media are keeping us far away from living a normal life.

As for the students, they seem to have adjusted well with the new normal and most of them are following instructions and working accordingly. Some students have refused to be a part of the new delivery system since the beginning. They have been working with their booklets and relying on phone coaching and popping up on site for extra support.

Jim: My observations from my role in classroom numeracy support are that engagement is still an issue, as well as the difficulty identifying where the students are at in their learning, as the ones who are struggling are usually the quietest ones. I am a little at the mercy of the trades teacher in charge of the class in terms of initiatives I can take, although I am gradually becoming more confident in being proactive in reaching out to students, and coordinating with trades teachers – not so easy now that informal staff room catch-ups are not possible.

I have had the dismaying experience of not being able to answer all questions put to me in online classes which has fuelled my desire to be better prepared each time and have more and clearer resources ready to share-screen with – again confidence is a big issue and I have been careful to keep in mind the mantra we are all learning together!!! In particular, my Learning Skills colleagues have shared with me strategies for engagement put together by Andrew Douch which have influenced how I try to teach, especially the tip to keep PowerPoint slides limited to one or two points at a time.

January 2021

While the intent of this project was to record experience "without the cushioning of hindsight", it didn't feel right to end the conversation until the teachers had had a chance to sit back and reflect on the year (from a short distance at least).

Urmi: If I recap 2020, the health and wellbeing aside, we were exposed to a variety of learning spaces throughout the year. Teams within my organisation have come closer

in the virtual world. Understanding has developed among my students as well as with me, their teacher. I had some enthusiastic students and a great team at work who helped me get by. Students have developed their skills in using media independently. Some even have endeavoured to take control of their learning. I am glad that I struggled to keep up and I believe with this experience my students will be more open to learning than they were ever before.

Jim: I can't back up my analysis with statistics, however it appears that of my students from last year, the stronger ones survived and coped with access to online teaching. The more reticent ones were hard to reach and didn't do nearly as well. One secondary teacher put it well saying he had ghosts and gurus in his class last year – the ghosts were the invisible ones, and the gurus adapted and flourished. For many students it was a year to forget, and for me it's important to keep in mind that they all need understanding as they try to pick up the pieces this year. I am hoping to be back in a real classroom as soon as possible.

Sharon: The three terms that come to mind when reflecting on teaching and learning in TAFE in 2020 are adaptability, flexibility and professional growth. Having developed skills of effectively delivering online, the focus for 2021 will still be on maintaining effective student engagement, further refining our student-centred learning best practice teaching, staying connected to the classroom in whatever form it takes and celebrating student learning and growth. As we take a breath from 2020 all teachers should congratulate themselves on the way they reimagined the way they worked, adapted, rose to the challenge, and as always, put the student at the centre of all they do.

Thank you Sharon, Jim and Urmi for sharing your thoughts with us.

Because Internet: Understanding how Language is Changing by Gretchen McCulloch

reviewed by Deryn Mansell

Gretchen McCulloch is a linguist who "lives in Montreal, but also on the internet". It is clear from the outset of *Because Internet* that she is an internet local and is more than happy to guide the reader through the history and geography of her neighbourhood. As any good tour guide would, she handles her subject with a light touch and a good dose of humour, yet her writing is grounded in thorough linguistic scholarship.

I first encountered Gretchen McCulloch in 2019 when I heard her interviewed on *The Allusionist*, a podcast about language hosted by Helen Zaltzman (https://www.theallusionist.org). The focus of their discussion was internet etiquette, and I was somewhat dismayed (as a fan of the correctly-punctuated sentence) to discover that a full stop in a text message could be read as being passive-aggressive.

I was reassured, upon reading *Because Internet*, to learn the more nuanced truth (based on a study of 157, 305 text messages) that the full stop is rare in short messages, where its presence may be viewed as a sarcastic way of terminating the conversation, "but still often found in messages longer than seventy-two characters or containing words like told, feels, felt …" (p.113).

Because Internet is an accessible read from cover to cover but the chapters that appealed to me the most were "Typographical tone of voice" and "Emoji and other internet gestures". These were the most 'language-y' parts of the book. They dealt with a central problem of internet language, particularly on social media, which is that it straddles the forms and conventions of written (formal) text and spoken (informal) text. These two chapters survey the creative ways that internet people have manipulated the tools of the internet to make written text more like talk, and the debates that have raged around their innovations.

While the book is concerned primarily with English, it does not present English as a monolithic entity and McCulloch puts her access to international linguistics networks to good use to provide insights into different internet languages. The discussion of Arabic and how it interacts with English script on the internet, for example, is fascinating.

I would recommend *Because Internet* to anyone interested in language and language change and to anyone who feels that a map might be handy for navigating the internet. For teachers, it is a particularly valuable resource for understanding the fluidity of language. It is also a place where you will find well-crafted rhetoric. For example:

> Perfectly following a list of punctuation rules may grant me some kinds of power, but it won't grant me love. Love doesn't come from a list of rules – it emerges from the spaces between us, when we pay attention to each other and care about the effect that we have on each other. When we learn to write in ways that communicate our tone of voice, not just our mastery of rules, we learn to see writing not as a way of asserting our intellectual superiority, but as a way of listening to each other better (p.153–154).

Gretchen McCulloch is also the co-host, with Australian linguist Lauren Gawne, of the podcast *Lingthusiasm*: https://lingthusiasm.com. It is recommended listening for word nerds.

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