this issue:

Shame: an avoidable barrier to adult literacy learning by Holly Armstrong

True prison break: thinking outside the wall by Leezette Chapman and Tim Dhillon

Creating a community in our classrooms by Tanja Cuka

2021 vol: 44 # 2

fine print

a journal of adult english language and literacy education

fine print

Publication Details

Fine Print is published by the Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council Inc. (VALBEC). The opinions expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Fine Print editorial group or VALBEC.

Fine Print is the registered journal of VALBEC: ISSN No: 0519-3978

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Printing: Melbourne Polytechnic Printroom

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VALBEC acknowledges the financial support of the ACFE Board

Contents

page

Features

Shame: an avoidable barrier to adult literacy learning 3
by Holly Armstrong

True prison break: thinking outside the wall 13
by Leezette Chapman and Tim Dhillon

Creating a community in our classrooms 18
by Tanja Cuka

News and Current Affairs

The ALNPP: a fresh approach to professional development 21
by Laura Chapman, Catherine Devlin, Rohan Kioney, Donal Lucey, Natalie Nawrocki and Tamsin Rossiter

Practical Matters

Screen-casting for more effective remote learning 25
by Irene O'Duffy

Professional collaboration in social media groups and the live video project 29
by Elizabeth Gunn

Open Forum

Closing a career: ending to begin 33
by Rhonda Pelletier

What's Out There?

***What the English? The Adult Migrant Learner* podcast presented by Ama Omran** 36
reviewed by Manjit Bhamral

Sharing Our Stories: series produced by Pearson and SharingStories Foundation 38
reviewed by Deryn Mansell

Off the shelf: *Mind over Math* 40
reviewed by Jim Royston

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Editorial

Welcome to the second issue of *Fine Print* for 2021!

Holly Armstrong opens the Features section of this issue with a powerful argument for paying more attention to the role shame plays in hindering learning. Leezette Chapman and Tim Dhillon follow with an article about adult learning in the prison system, a context where shame, no doubt, plays a significant role. The authors highlight the importance of educational participation in reducing recidivism and seek trainers' perspectives on how this works in two correctional facilities in western Victoria. Tanja Cuka's article, "Creating a community in our classrooms", speaks directly to Holly Armstrong's exhortation that "Helping our students feel emotionally safe must remain our *primary* focus so that our secondary focus of teaching will be possible" (p.3).

In News and Current Affairs, we take a look at the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Practitioners Program (ALNPP). Catherine Devlin and Tamsin Rossiter offer an overview of the program and participants Laura Chapman, Rohan Kioney, Natalie Nawrocki and Donal Lucey share their views.

Perhaps it is a sign of the times that both our Practical Matters offerings are technology-focussed and concerned with remote access. Irene O'Duffy explains why she uses screen-casting as a tool to provide online instruction and feedback to students and she offers tips on using the software. Elizabeth Gunn turns our attention to building a professional learning community on social media, sharing the process that led to VALBEC's Facebook group live video project. VALBEC members are invited to join the group to learn from and support each other professionally. We hope that future issues of *Fine Print* will feature ideas generated in the group (search for "Valbec FB Group" on Facebook to join).

In Open Forum, Rhonda Pelletier reflects on closing a career. She provides an honest appraisal of the role choice plays in the process and offers advice based on her experience and her reading in the field.

Finally, in our What's Out There? reviews section, Manjit Bhamral listens in to Ama Omran's *What the English?* podcast and I catch up on a series of books designed to bring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures to the classroom. And on the back page, Jim Royston offers our first iteration of "Off the shelf". Turn to page 40 to find out what it is.

As always, please email fineprintvalbec@gmail.com if you would like to contribute to *Fine Print* or to comment on an article in this issue.

Deryn Mansell

V A L B E C

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.

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Shame: an avoidable barrier to adult literacy learning

by Holly Armstrong

"Shame rarely originates in the adult or higher education classroom or in the moment of learning. All of us bring early childhood shaming experiences" (Walker, 2017, p. 361).

Connecting the dots

"I stopped going to school when I was 13 so I could work. When I went back to finish in my 40s, I didn't feel good when I graduated. I felt like I shouldn't be there, and I didn't deserve it," one of my students confessed when I shared I was writing about shame's influence on adult literacy learners. "That feeling followed me all those years; it affected how I thought of myself. That's a long time for someone to feel shame for something that happened when they were 13 years old."

My professional experiences developing remedial reading programs, managing district curriculum and instruction, and coaching university students have allowed me to work with learners from five to 65 years old. Observing thoughts of self-doubt, not being good enough, and feeling like a constant failure across all ages of learners spurred my search for any related literature, trying to decipher the root cause and how my students might feel ownership of their learning instead. Time and again, the spiderweb of research I found in various disciplines led me back to shame and, in sum, presented a compelling case for considering its influence in the work of educating adult literacy learners. My student's confession quoted above illustrates the potential consequences of ignoring shame's presence. Simply put, "If people are anxious, uncomfortable, or fearful, they do not learn" (Perry, 2007, p. 26).

In the following sections I will outline how shame can be a debilitating impediment to learning for anyone, and especially when it comes to literacy learning for adults. Focusing first on shame in general, I will describe the basics of shame, how it can affect the body and brain, and its implications for learning. Next, I discuss how some of the cognitive processes needed for reading may not be easily accessible while learners experience shame. I conclude with research-based, practical suggestions to help adult literacy learners identify and navigate their shame, and thus better manage their own learning.

The elephant in the room

"No one wants to talk about it, and the less you talk about it, the more you have it" (Brown, 2010, 4:50).

Shame is universal, and shame does not discriminate. Even though shame is something everyone experiences and, research suggests, can hinder our brain from learning, it is often overlooked as a critical focus in education. It is the elephant in the room: always there but infrequently discussed (Brown, 2007). I intend to expose that elephant more, so that together, we can chase it out of the classroom.

A 10-year-old student once shared with me that the reason he visited the principal's office daily was because he would do *anything* to avoid reading out loud in class. A 20-year-old former student of mine never turned in a completed assignment throughout their education journey because they always had a reason for receiving low grades other than their intelligence. A learner in their 40s retrospectively shared they ignored some of my texts and emails before we met because it felt easier to simply avoid me than have to experience revealing their learning disability. After intentionally creating trusting relationships that enabled these learners to break through shame barriers, I was the first person to hear that 10-year-old student read aloud. The 20-year-old began completing assignments and had one of the highest grades in my class, and my learner in their 40s earned a college degree.

Literacy should be the *secondary* focus for our adult learners. Helping our students feel emotionally safe must remain our *primary* focus so that our secondary focus of teaching will be possible (Ayre, 2021; Perry, 2006).

Ultimately, adults who learn how to think and talk about shame learn to control it, achieve their goals more quickly, and sometimes even use it as more motivation towards their education. Learners that do *not* work towards learning how to control their shame achieve their goals more slowly. They

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sometimes spend so much conscious and unconscious time and energy attempting to hide their shame experience that they are not able to focus on learning, reading, or writing (Brown, 2007; Desautels & McKnight, 2019; Perry, 2006; Walker, 2017). Instead, learners sometimes become so overwhelmed by responding to their shame that they ultimately do not continue with their education.

The basics of shame

Social science researcher Brené Brown (2007) highlights the first three things that you need to know about shame:

1. We all have it. Shame is universal and one of the most primitive human emotions that we experience. The only people who don't experience shame lack the capacity for empathy and human connection.
2. We're all afraid to talk about shame.
3. The less we talk about shame, the more control it has over our lives.

Brown defines shame as: "the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of acceptance and belonging" (2007, p. 5). Guilt and shame are frequently confused and used interchangeably. However, guilt leads us to think "I *did* something bad," and shame steers our thoughts to "I *am* bad." Brown also notes that researchers agree guilt can be a healthy emotion because it has the ability to motivate us to change, yet shame is counterproductive and destructive.

All of the body's responses to shame occur before our conscious minds react (Brown, 2007). Research in neuroscience and psychology indicates that the body responds to shame as a threat to our own physical and emotional safety (Van der Kolk, 2014; Walker, 2017). When we experience major threats to our feelings of safety (i.e. shame), our brain and body can respond in ways to protect us that can leave us feeling paralysed or out of control (Perry, 2006; Van der Kolk, 2014). When the brain is focused on protection, there is not much cognitive power left to focus on anything else. We can feel physically and emotionally sick because of this intense attention on self, shut down our mind and body, and divert our attention to focusing on the lowest levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs; "there is no luxury of being able to learn in such a state" (Walker, 2017, p. 365).

When shame continues for too long, it can become toxic, paralysing, and shut us down from accepting any type of positive affirmation about ourselves. We "can shut off the areas of the brain responsible for learning, emotional regulation, attention, and working memory" (Desautels & McKnight, 2019, p. 9). Threats and stress can cause us to go into states of hyper- or hypo-arousal in which we are forced to operate outside our optimal range of functioning; we become sluggish in our thoughts, reactive, disorganised, panicked, and feel numb in both body and mind (Van der Kolk, 2014).

Our fight-or-flight stress response and increased cortisol levels can cause lethargy, tunnel vision, dry mouth, avoidance of eye contact, nausea, and other uncomfortable physical sensations (Walker, 2017). We can encounter problems with our memory, attention, and sleep, as well as experience abnormal brain activation (Van der Kolk, 2014). Shame hinders our ability to focus on learning or any of the behaviours necessary to learn (Walker, 2017).

How shame influences thoughts and behaviours

"Emotions influence our thinking more than thinking influences our emotions" (Zull, 2002, p. 75 as cited in Taylor, 2006, p. 81).

In school, shame can enter our thoughts in many forms: *I'm not smart enough. I'll never figure it out. I am horrible at reading and always will be. I don't deserve this. I don't belong here.*

Shame is often the core emotion we feel while we respond with other emotions and actions in our efforts at self-protection (Walker, 2017). Dr. Linda Hartling and colleagues (2000) classify people's responses to shame through three main categories of behaviour: moving away, moving towards, or moving against the experience. Brown (2018) describes these as "shame shields" that people use as an attempt to deal with shame. Table 1 provides examples of these three types of behaviours, or shame shields.

Additional *moving away* behaviours in adults include exaggerating their effort, discussing any topic other than learning, and avoiding responding to communication. Additional *moving towards* behaviours include passively agreeing to everything another says, making plans and not following through, and insisting that others' ideas are better. Additionally, *moving against* behaviours include responding defensively, attempting to control in groups, and reacting passive aggressively.

While it may feel helpful in the short-term to "shame" ourselves into doing better, over time this critical self-talk

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Table 1: Shame shields: responding to shame

Response	Authors	Behaviours
Moving away		
	Hartling et al. (2000)	Withdrawing from relationships; silencing themselves; shrinking themselves; trying to appear invisible
	Walker (2017)	Distancing; attributing outcomes to some external cause; denying responsibility for actions; deflection; denial; insistence on being self-sufficient; refusing to speak or ask questions
	Brown (2018)	Keeping secrets; isolating; staying quiet
Moving towards		
	Hartling et al. (2000)	People pleasing; omitting difficult experiences to preserve positive relationships
	Walker (2017)	Demonstrating poor personal boundaries; self-judgement and self-hatred; pretending
	Brown (2018)	Seeking to please and appease
Moving against		
	Hartling et al. (2000)	Directing resentment and anger against others
	Walker (2017)	Becoming authoritarian; patronising others; dehumanising others; desiring to shame others
	Brown (2018)	Coming out swinging; fight shame with shame; trying to gain power by being aggressive to others

is counterproductive since the effects of constant stress and arousal on our brains can hinder learning and growing (Kelley & Neff, 2018). Further, it can cause a singular focus on managing others' perceptions of us (Walker, 2017).

Literacy considerations in the brain

Many adult learners experienced shame in childhood, leading to traumatic stress in adulthood and a sensitisation to the normalcy of deadlines, assessments, and speaking in front of the class, which results in moderately activated stress response systems (Perry, 2006). Perry notes that learning and memory may be impacted from those constant feelings, and "the end result is that many adult learners are doubly stressed as they return to the classroom setting" (p. 20). Adult learners may demonstrate intelligence outside the classroom while performing poorly in academic contexts. Carrying a history of academic failure can lead to expectations of continued failure, creating a state of persisting stress which hinders effective learning (Perry, 2006). Cumulative years of usually unprocessed feelings of shame often make adults quite risk averse and navigating shame related to school requires adults to confront their inadequacies and honestly reveal the knowledge and skills they lack (Walker, 2017). All of these experiences and emotions would be difficult for anyone.

Literacy educators cannot ignore or underestimate how shame may affect individual adults as learners, especially considering all that research indicates about how stress, trauma, and shame affect the brain and body, as well as conceptions of reading as "the almost instantaneous fusion of cognitive, linguistic, and affective processes; multiple brain regions and billions of neurons that are the sum of all that goes into reading" (Wolff, 2007, p. 145).

Experiencing shame may unconsciously hinder current capacity for optimal learning (Perry, 2006; Van der Kolk, 2014). Many of the processes needed to learn to read (and become better readers) are types of thinking that are likely not easily accessed while learners are experiencing shame or other intense emotions. The mechanisms for literacy development are complex, and emotional development and reading appear to have a reciprocal relationship with each other (Wolff, 2007).

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For example, working memory is necessary for foundational reading skills and developing reading performance and comprehension (Peng & Goodrich, 2020), yet research indicates the negative implications that shame and stress can have on working memory (Desautels & McKnight, 2019; Van der Kolk, 2014). Adults with limited skills who experience shame may encounter additional obstacles to efficient and effective phonological processing and decoding. As Peng and Goodrich note, beginning readers rely more on working memory for phonological processing and decoding while they are still learning these foundational rules. If shame causes their brain to shut off areas of their working memory, they will be less likely to decode efficiently, which also consequently limits the additional information that working memory can utilise to support comprehension (Peng & Goodrich, 2020).

Another critical component of literacy likely affected by shame is inhibition, a reader's ability to ignore irrelevant information, which aids reading comprehension for adults as they control their attention so they can focus on text meaning (Caretti et al., 2004). Cognitive flexibility is likewise relevant as a reader's ability to shift perspectives and attention between different tasks needed for comprehension while reading, such as attending to decoding and word meaning (Cartwright, 2007). Shame can shut off areas of the brain responsible for attention (Desautels & McKnight, 2019) and cause our mind to focus only on incoming information critical to responding to that threat, becoming uninterested in or overwhelmed by new information (Perry, 2006).

Additionally, internalising new verbal cognitive information is dependent on being in a state of attentive calm, which is difficult when different parts of the brain are activated under stress for a traumatised adult learner (Perry, 2006). Instead of experiencing the curiosity, discovery, and practice of learning that leads to pleasure, competence, and confidence, shame may cause learners to create boundaries and avoid taking risks to reduce the negative feelings of facing something new (Perry, 2006).

As readers progress through decoding fluency and automaticity, comprehension becomes increasingly tied to executive processes (Wolff, 2007). Shame and abstract thought live in the same region of the brain, the cortex. The role the cortex potentially plays in helping mediate reading comprehension sounds similar to Perry's (2006) reflections of adult learners who experience a persisting low-level feeling of shame evoked by any learning experience or environment. Although they may have successfully stored specific information in their brain, "this information is inaccessible while the learner feels fearful" (Perry, 2006, p. 26). In these higher states of arousal, a person cannot easily access their creative and problem-solving capabilities mediated by their cortex, and, instead, their behaviour becomes mediated by less-complex areas of the brain (Perry, 2006).

Readers who reach automaticity in their decoding processes have more efficient brain circuitry and can allocate more cognition and "more cortical space to the deeper analysis of recorded thought" to analyse and comprehend (Wolff, 2007, p. 216). Knowland and Thomas (2014) note curriculum development will be more effective by considering the sequence of skills, such as developing fundamental skills like phonological awareness to help support learners' higher-order literacy skill development.

Science has indicated that the brain's plasticity and capacity for learning changes as we age; while "sensitive periods" do not seem to be a major limitation for adult learners, they do indicate a slowing in the expected rate for learning a skill (Knowland & Thomas, 2014). For adult literacy learners, it may take more time and effort to learn specific literacy skills, which may cause more shame, that then causes learning those skills to take longer still, creating a cycle of shame. As educators, we need to remain cognisant of this possibility of a slower progression, helping prevent adults from comparing themselves to others – especially younger learners who may progress more quickly in developing certain skills (Knowland & Thomas, 2014) – and potentially initiating a cycle of shame.

The reading brain has three primary jobs: recognising patterns, planning strategy, and feeling (Wolff, 2007). Brain images of fluent and comprehending readers indicate increasing activation of our emotions in the limbic system and the connection to cognition (Wolff, 2007). Additionally, this region of the brain aids in our ability to prioritise and assign value to what we read. If adults experience strong emotions like shame when attempting to build on their literacy learning, it makes sense that even if decoding and fluent reading are solid, comprehension will likely be affected.

Considering all of the ways that shame can impact learning, memory, focus, and our thoughts, it is our

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responsibility as educators to do the work necessary to develop shame-resilient adult literacy learners.

Developing shame-resilient learners: principles

"Having had years of (often unprocessed) shame experiences[,] Adult learners, especially nontraditional students or those in adult education, are often in educational shaming recovery" (Walker, 2017, p. 368).

We might accelerate our own understanding of the intersections of shame, emotions, learning and literacy, and do the work to help our learners become shame resilient, yet we might not hear our learners articulate their own understandings of shame and self. After all, the parts of the brain dedicated to language and experiencing one's self are almost as far apart in the brain as physically possible; most people can describe others better than themselves (Van der Kolk, 2014). The key is ensuring "a shame-dissipating education is one where students are encouraged to practice, fail, and be gentle with themselves" (Walker, 2017). Providing a safe space to "fail" and aiming to normalise failure as learning are critical for educators in our work with learners.

Brown (2010) analysed decades of research and identified four main actions that shame-resilient people do to deal with shame, albeit not necessarily in sequence: (1) understand it, (2) reality-check it, (3) share it, and (4) name it. Teaching these actions to our learners is a critical component to help empower them to navigate and control their shame:

1. Understand it

Understanding shame is more than simply knowing its definition or that shame is different from guilt. Truly understanding shame also means knowing how it personally affects me: what *I'm* thinking, how *I'm* feeling, and recognising what triggers shame for *me*. Shame boils down to the beliefs that *"I am bad," "I am flawed,"* and *"I am unworthy of love and belonging"* (Brown, 2010).

Recognising the narrative we have, telling ourselves we are bad, can help to determine what triggers shame for us personally. We can also think about "unwanted identities" (i.e., ways that we do not want others to perceive us). Thoughts like, *"I don't want to be seen as slow,"* and *"I couldn't stand people thinking I'm not smart enough,"* are both examples of unwanted identities. Our behaviour is often a response to these unwanted identities; we speak and behave in ways that we hope will prevent others from perceiving us in those ways (Brown, 2010).

To explore how these unwanted identities may provoke shame in literacy, learners can consider questions similar to some that Brown (2007) suggests:

- How do I want to be perceived as a student? (e.g., Organised? Punctual? Focused? Good at reading/ writing?)
- What do I NOT want to be perceived as? (e.g., Lazy? Dumb? Bad at writing? Slow?)
- Why are the positive identities so important to me? Why are the unwanted identities so unwanted?

2. Reality-check it

The narrative we hear from shame is we are unlovable, unworthy, and always will be so; we feel inadequate because we are not perfect (Brown, 2009). Learners can imagine their loved ones and ask themselves, *"What would they say about this?"* or *"What would I tell them if our roles were reversed?"* Likely, instead of agreeing with those shame messages, they would say, *"You are good enough. You've proven yourself before. You're ready for this."* Trying to imagine the people in life closest to us saying, "you are unworthy" or "unlovable" can be an effective way to get in touch with reality and identify the lies shame is telling us.

We often demand perfection from ourselves; paradoxically, learning requires failure. Educators can help learners combat shame by visiting the realities of learning and growth and helping reframe "learning as discomfort" (Brown, 2016). If a student is not progressing as quickly as they desire, their internal dialogue might attribute this to "I'm not smart enough," or "I shouldn't be here." Using questions similar to Brown (2007), we can help slowly dissolve these shame messages by helping learners ask:

- What did I learn about myself?
- What went well? What would I do differently next time?
- What might have been different about how I thought about and completed this task?

3. Share it

Though feeling shame is often the result of our attempts to distort how others perceive us and hide our imperfections, keeping secrets decreases motivation for goals, creates exhaustion, and can cause us to shut down or feel bored (Van der Kolk, 2014). Sharing can improve physical health and prevent stress hormones from causing us to act

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in irrational or embarrassing ways (Van der Kolk, 2014; Brown, 2012).

As humans, we are beings biologically wired for connection, acceptance, and feeling valued; fulfilling these needs is how we survive as infants (Brown, 2007). We can encourage our learners to reach out by asking with whom they feel comfortable sharing and who frequently offers them support. When learners choose to share with you, express empathy and resolve to be non-judgemental to help normalise their experiences that are provoking shame. Let them know if it has happened to you, if you understand what something is like, or if many others have been in that situation. Make sure they know that they are *not the first*, they are *not the last*, and they are *not the only* person who has experienced that.

4. Name it

People who can speak shame, express how they feel, and ask for what they need, have more shame resilience; when we cannot speak shame, it is easy to act out or shut down (Brown, 2007). *Not* talking about our shame can actually cause our bodies to behave in ways that create shame cycles and self-fulfilling prophecies, while talking about shame actually builds our shame resilience.

One of the most detrimental things we can do for adult learners is create environments that don't allow for discussions about past and present shame or that force conversations to discuss it as a feeling rather than simply naming it. Keeping secrets, including reasons we feel shame around learning, has been considered by some researchers as a form of inhibition that can lead to long-term immune function and physical health problems (Pennebaker, 2018). Researchers have found that the effects of not discussing a traumatic event can be more damaging to a person's health than the actual event (Brown, 2012). Even revealing secrets in writing helps individuals advocate for themselves, express how they feel, and ask for what they need.

Helping our learners: tactics

"Education for adult learners often involves courageously confronting one's inadequacies and admitting and revealing a lack of knowledge or competency" (Walker, 2017).

When we base our tactics on these core principles from Brown's research on shame resilience, we can more effectively empower our adult literacy learners. They likely have accumulated decades of difficult thoughts and behaviours in their histories and may resemble Freire's observations that "so often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing, and are incapable of learning anything – that they are sick, lazy, and unproductive – that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness" (Freire, 1970, p. 63). We can intentionally support them with some of the actions below, which help to create safe and empathetic relationships to buffer the stress and anxiety they may experience with changing their ways of knowing (Cozolino, 2002 as cited in Taylor, 2006).

Ensure learners feel safe, valued, cared for

Become a student of your learners: find out how each learner is unique, discover their interests and strengths, follow up on what you've learned to show that you care about them. Aim for them to feel "truly heard and seen" and that they are "held in someone else's mind and heart" (Van der Kolk, 2014). Calming a learner's physiology requires a "visceral feeling of safety" (Van der Kolk, 2014), and complex self-awareness cannot occur if someone feels defensive, stressed, or anxious (Taylor, 2006). Creating learning experiences outside of a traditional and formal educational classroom environment, such as in a cafe or public library, can help adults who may associate the classroom space with their previous failures (Ferguson & Merga, 2021). Additional considerations for creating a sense of safety include privacy as needed, body language and what it communicates, and table arrangements to support a welcoming feeling. Even explicitly encouraging adults to exercise and practice healthy sleep habits will help them understand that these behaviours can alter brain chemistry to consolidate and increase responsiveness to learning (Knowland & Thomas, 2014).

Prioritise emotions and wellbeing first, then academics

Many programs and services aim to support adults' academic needs and provide a secondary focus on their emotional needs and wellbeing, despite the literature on how fear, stress, and anxiety affect our ability to reason (Van der Kolk, 2014). The challenge with this approach is that if an adult is struggling with decades of shame, tackling academic struggles first can compound the emotional challenges and potentially lead to *additional* academic struggles. Focusing on the need to engage the brain's feeling of safety will help our learners promote new ways of thinking (Van der Kolk, 2014), uncover root causes leading to their challenges in literacy and learning, and enable them to feel more competent and confident for overcoming academic obstacles more effectively and more

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efficiently. Focusing on surface challenges rarely creates the lasting and meaningful changes that we should aim for with our learners. Working to find the root cause of these challenges frequently uncovers "shame is often what drives us" (Brown, 2007, p. xvii).

Provide consistency

Educators working with highly stressed adults need to provide structure, predictability, and an environment where adults feel safe enough for learning (Perry, 2006). These adults have frustrating and humiliating experiences in their pasts, and, as a result, Perry notes they may expect only to continue failing; they may physically be present in a classroom, yet not learn. In the self-protection mode created by experiencing shame, novelty and the unfamiliar are overwhelming; when our environment and experiences feel familiar and expected, our curiosity returns. Educators provide consistency through planning predictable routines and structures, following through on their word, and being accountable to their own actions as an educator. An educator intentionally creating consistency in their own actions and ensuring sensitivity to the learner's state of mind provides the necessary sense of safety and optimal learning environment for adult learners (Perry, 2006).

Normalise, normalise, normalise

Help learners normalise - and create a safe space for - failure. Following Brown's (2016) encouragement to reframe learning as discomfort, promote the idea that it is entirely "normal" and uneventful for someone to: seek help; ask questions; take risks; make mistakes; practise and use non-native languages; and express characteristics of any age, ability, race, or identity. Additionally, let your learners know that you are human, too. If you make a mistake, highlight it and use language you would want your learner to use if they were talking to themselves about their own mistake. This will also help illustrate that we all make mistakes and model ways to practice self-compassion.

Develop self-compassion

According to Neff (2011), self-compassion helps prevent us from ruminating, which is often caused by shame and feelings of inadequacy; self-compassion alters our bodies and brains, so we feel safe, calm, and secure, and it allows us to directly counter isolation, fear, and negativity. Educators can use Neff's self-compassion test[1] as a way to encourage learners to reflect, increase self-awareness, and potentially discuss the results and implications with educators. Learners can practise self-compassion by talking to themselves the same way they would talk to someone they love: if they mess up, remind themself that everyone makes mistakes and struggles; when they fail, tell themself that failure facilitates learning and growth; remind themself that they *are* capable, and they *can* do this.

Neff (2011) also shares an exercise to change critical self-talk by:

1. Noticing when you hear your self-critical voice.
2. Actively trying to soften what your inner critic is saying, gently telling it to stop.
3. Reframing what your self-critic is saying into something positive, kind, and friendly (imagining what your best friend would say, if helpful).

Reflection through writing

Using self-observation through writing can help identify and refine our inner thoughts and feelings, find new ways of thinking, and create new thought patterns (Van der Kolk, 2014; Wolff, 2007). Writing can provide a mental environment that feels safe, allowing a space to observe ourselves and identify our self-narratives without the anxiety of social critics (Van der Kolk, 2014). Expressive writing is a great illustration of the connection between expressing – rather than suppressing – ourselves with improved physical and mental health (Pennebaker, 2018).

Intentionally observe without judgement

In conversations about serious topics with our learners, we might notice a complete shift in speaking style, tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language as people "activate distinctly different emotional and physiological states" switching between topics (Pennebaker, 2012 as cited in Van der Kolk, 2014, p. 243). These are important to observe and note as educators as they may illuminate specific topics that are connected to additional areas of stress and shame for our learners. Additionally, on the extreme end of the spectrum, the language area of the brain can shut down entirely and cause someone to become speechless if they become overwhelmed or panicked from triggers of previous or ongoing trauma which has ultimately changed their brain (Van der Kolk, 2014).

Teach growth mindsets

Labels are powerful, and learners who have been characterised as anything other than positive have additional mental obstacles to overcome, especially if they have a fixed mindset. According to Dweck (2016), fixed mindsets produce distracting thoughts and challenges

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to focus whenever a stereotype or label is elicited, often unconsciously. We can help insulate learners from the negative influences of fixed mindsets by helping them understand, identify, and develop growth mindsets. This can also help prevent adult learners from lacking a sense of belonging, sometimes prompting a series of thoughts and behaviours that can lead to dropping out of opportunities for furthering their education (Dweck, 2016). A growth mindset, Dweck contrasts, allows learners to feel a sense of belonging, fully learn, and develop their minds. Awareness that the two mindsets exist can help learners shift their thinking.

Take care of yourself

If your learners are frustrated or upset, do what you need to remind yourself that getting frustrated or upset yourself is not going to help anything or anyone in the long-run. In the middle of a conversation, if you observe yourself feeling like the conversation is not safe, calm, or welcoming, pause and take a breath. We respond to indications of safety or danger in others – like calm tones or harsh voices – by relaxing or going into further dysregulation (Van der Kolk, 2014).

Streamline, repeat, answer

Adults experiencing shame or with histories of education failure are more sensitised and, according to Perry (2006), move further on the arousal continuum much faster than others when faced with less challenge. As a result of these changes in their central nervous system for perceiving threat, that person is hypervigilant and filters out any non-critical information (Perry, 2006). As educators, not only do we need to reserve more patience for sharing information, asking questions, or giving directions, but we can help these adults by streamlining information and directions, providing additional opportunities to practise, allowing additional questions and repeating ourselves as needed.

Build confidence alongside competence

Discussing learners' informal literacy learning practices in their typical daily life can help build their recognition and confidence that they are responsible for their learning and developing new knowledge through literacy constantly (Taylor, 2006), which may help to combat messages of shame. The range of everyday literacy activities they engage in might include conversations with their family, using menus and food packaging, navigating a computer or smartphone, identifying street signs, and using forms and resources at work. Acknowledging these activities may help build learners' confidence as they continue learning other literacy skills and activities.

A note on COVID-19 and shame

The COVID-19 pandemic could add to the shame our learners may have experienced prior to 2020. Studies in multiple countries have revealed a variety of reasons that shame surrounds COVID-19: experiencing symptoms of the virus; getting tested; the media blaming specific demographics for spreading the virus; being identified as COVID-positive in a public setting; and impacts on financial security, employment, housing, and more (Burnet Institute, 2021; Travaglino & Moon, 2021; Johns Hopkins Center for Global Health, 2021).

Increased virtual interactions from the major technological shifts caused by COVID-19 provide a different self-perspective from the video displays and magnified audio, which can trigger shame by forcing someone to look at or hear themselves – or even features of their home or homelife – in ways that remind them of their imperfections and thoughts of inadequacy. Additionally, research indicates that delays in virtual conversations are associated with distrust (Lee, 2020). We should be mindful that additional shame experiences our adult learners may have recently encountered, or may encounter in the near future, may exacerbate any of the previously mentioned potential challenges to their learning.

Conclusion

"Stressed brains, and brains in pain, cannot learn" (Desautels & McKnight, 2019, p. 69).

The topics discussed in this article are not intended to confuse or conflate adult educators with counsellors and therapists. Taylor (2006) notes that even though many of the outcomes of attending to emotional states in counselling parallel teaching and learning, such as "greater self-awareness, less anxiety, heightened self-responsibility, increased cognitive complexity," we do not "do therapy" (p. 82). Taylor and Daloz describe an educator's role as "teaching as care … engendering trust and nurturance … caring for growth" (1999 as cited in Taylor, 2006). Other researchers use neuroscience to position educators as mentors since optimal learning is in a balanced space of feeling nurtured and the right amount of challenge and stress (Taylor, 2006).

Supporting our adult literacy learners to understand how shame can affect their brains, bodies, feelings, behaviours, and thoughts will help them feel empowered and relieved (Desautels, 2020); this intentional and explicit exploration of shame with our learners is the

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most effective way for educators to begin helping expose the elephant in the room – and ultimately lead them to literacy confidence and competence. If our learners are aware that they experience things a certain way, then they can also learn it is possible to experience those things differently (Taylor, 2006).

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Note

1 https://self-compassion.org/test-how-self-compassionate-you-are/

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True prison break: thinking outside the wall

by Leezette Chapman and Tim Dhillon

Language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) improvement and vocational education and training (VET) opportunities are keys to preventing recidivism. Here we seek trainers' perspectives from the Grampians region of Victoria.

The context

Federation TAFE, a school of Federation University based in Ballarat, is part of a broader program that provides VET services in two correctional facilities in western Victoria. There are currently 30 staff training across Hopkins Correctional Centre (medium security) in Ararat and at H.M. Prison Langi Kal Kal (minimum security) near Ballarat. There are 13 courses offered to prisoners on entry to these prisons. Subjects include Horticulture, Agriculture, Welding, Information Technology, Hospitality and Food Safety, Engineering and Business. CGEA (Certificates in General Education for Adults), CSWE (Certificates in Spoken and Written English) and FSK (Skills for Work and Vocational Pathways) are available for prisoners with identified learning needs.

Langi Kal Kal Prison is located on a working farm and offers prisoners a practical opportunity to develop their skills and knowledge. The farm runs sheep and stud Angus cattle. The prison has extensive vegetable gardens which supply the kitchen. All prisoners are expected to work unless they are over 65 or medically unfit. There are four prisons of this type in Victoria, which provide prisoners with hands-on agricultural experience.

Prisoners are able to complete both Certificate II and III in Horticulture and Certificate II in Agriculture and can use the farm to implement the skills learned in the classroom. This linking of the VET courses to industry experience is one tool used to give the students a learning pathway and apply new skills in a practical industry.

Research findings

Research in Australia and overseas has shown that participation in VET while in prison has several benefits for individuals and society, as well as the correctional institutions themselves. Studies have shown that prisoners who participate in VET programs have better employment patterns after their release (Lawrence et al., 2002; Vacca, 2004; Roberts, 2011) and are less involved in disciplinary violations during their imprisonment (Gerber & Fritsch, 1995). It has also been shown that VET can be effective in reducing recidivism (Gordon & Weldon, 2003; MacKenzie, 2006; Petersilia, 2003; Wilson et al., 2000).

An important motivation for students in correctional facilities to participate in VET is obtaining new job skills and job qualifications that will lead to secure employment after release and their effective reintegration into society (Alós et al., 2015), thus reducing their potential to reoffend. Many factors affect uptake of VET in prisons, including education, age, health, culture and ethnicity, gender and socio-economic background. However, as observed by many trainers in the Grampians region, it is a prisoner's LLN levels which influence uptake of training, choice of course, persistence and completion of courses.

Based on this research and experience, Corrections Victoria, who manage all Victorian public prisons, has a number of priorities for prisoner education including:

- To increase employment prospects and access to other socio-economic opportunities post-release; and
- To assist prisoners develop personal capacity and life skills so they can function more effectively in society and are more employable [and] minimise employment related barriers (McCann, 2017, S5)

In effect, these factors prevent recidivism.

Education and training in Victorian prisons

The Department of Justice and Community Safety has contracted Federation University, Bendigo Kangan Institute and Box Hill Institute to provide education and training services in Victoria's public prisons. Oversight of these services is coordinated by Corrections Victoria's Education, Training and Employment Branch. Services offered include LLN assessments, vocational assessments, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tuition support, mandatory workplace health and safety, on-the-job training (FSK or Foundation

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Skills), face-to-face teaching and prisoner feedback. Federation TAFE, as part of Federation University, provides these services in the Grampians region prisons – Hopkins Correctional Centre and at HM Prison Langi Kal Kal.

This article concentrates on LLN assessment and VET experiences of staff employed by Federation TAFE and assumes knowledge of the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF).

Corrections Victoria requires an LLN profile of all prisoners entering Victorian prisons within 20 days of entry. The LLN assessment is computer based, takes up to 1.5 hours to complete and uses the Australian Council for Educational Research's Vocational Indicator Tool to assess a prisoner's ACSF levels 1-5 in literacy and numeracy. Figure 1 shows the percentage of LLN results by ACSF levels for literacy and numeracy in Victorian prisons in 2016. Seventy-three percent of total literacy results were at or below ACSF 3 and 68% of numeracy results were at or below ACSF 3 (McCann, 2017, S14).

From trainer observation, these results are reflective of the prisoners at Hopkins Corrections Centre and Langi Kal Kal Prison, however this has not been quantified.

The LLN assessment and resulting ACSF level are used in the following way in VET engagement:

- ACSF levels below 3 – targeted LLN support programs
- ACSF level 3 and above – engagement in VET courses at Certificates II, III and IV level on offer from Federation TAFE
- ACSF level 5 – eligible for Distance Education, supported[1] or non-supported.

At Hopkins Correctional Centre and Langi Kal Kal Prison a comprehensive vocational assessment is conducted soon after the results of ACSF literacy and numeracy testing are received. A learning plan is developed with each prisoner. This gives a clear indication of current skills, training and vocational goals and is reviewed annually. Support is provided for those with low ACSF levels or English as an Additional Language (EAL), through CGEA, CSWE and FSK.

Trainer perspectives

For this article, 15 trainers working across the two facilities were asked about their observations of student participation, educational background and how well course content took into account initial LLN skills. Staff

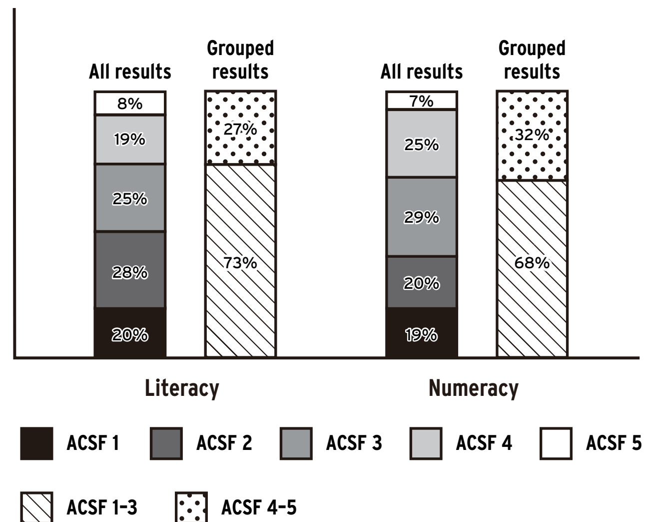

Figure 1. ACSF levels resulting from prisoner assessments during 2016 (Corrections Victoria, Australasian Corrections Education Association Conference Paper, 2017). **Reproduced with kind permission of Corrections Victoria**

have experience varying from six months to six years in a correctional facility. Each staff member delivers more than one training package and has experience in their industry.

It was generally agreed that prisoners are more likely to engage in VET if they can see a link to training received and an increase in the opportunity of employment after release. At Federation TAFE, Welding (engineering), Forklift (warehousing), Agriculture and Horticulture are high demand courses. Trainers felt that, as these courses are 'hands on', prisoners can see the improvement in their skills, which gives them confidence to continue with other training. In addition, as they perform the skills learned in the relevant prison industry – agriculture, horticulture, welding, warehousing and hospitality – the skills are practised, improving their job readiness. Likewise, Corrections Victoria ensures CGEA, FSK and CSWE are delivered with the allocated hours to enable those with EAL and low literacy and numeracy to improve their ACSF levels during incarceration.

Observations of Federation TAFE trainers included that:

- Students entering the system have varying literacy and numeracy skills, generally at the lower end. Some may be illiterate.
- Prisoners of low LLN skills may avoid harder subjects or longer courses, or education entirely. It is assumed that this is due to fear of failure.

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Langi Kal Kal Prison is located on a working farm. Image courtesy of Corrections Victoria

- Prisoners of lower LLN tend to choose courses that are more 'hands on', which may not require higher levels of literacy or numeracy.
- The initial LLN assessment and support from the assessor is an important factor in a prisoner's success in course selection and completion.
- Developing a learning plan in consultation with the student helps them to choose courses which match their educational level, preferred learning style and interest.
- More time could be spent on developing LLN skills, including providing a specific service for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- There could be additional courses provided for prisoners with higher LLN skills.

All trainers recognise the need to modify their courses to ensure students with lower literacy and numeracy skills can keep up with the course content. These changes may include simplifying the language used in delivery, going through the course content more slowly or providing more practical examples. One staff member noted that if students of low literacy or numeracy were encouraged to continue to attend training and were supported by their teacher, then they were generally able to complete courses, which has positive benefits for their confidence.

Improving outcomes

Working within the prison system, it is apparent that improving prisoners' engagement in VET is not as simple as improving their LLN levels. There are usually other factors at play in students' engagement and course completion, including previous experiences with education; mental health issues, drug and alcohol issues; family support; and movement between facilities.

The last reason may appear innocuous but can cause distress due to loss of friendship groups and increased fear for personal safety (Bottoms, 1999). Transfer between facilities significantly disrupts prisoners' training, particularly if the receiving facility does not offer their

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The prison farm provides a practical application for the skills learned in the classroom. Image courtesy of Corrections Victoria

course or one similar. This issue is discussed by Farley and Pike (2016) in their paper on engaging prisoners in education, which considers the impact that the needs of the prison system – particularly prisoner transfers which may occur with little notice – has on education program continuity. It is incumbent on previous and present education providers to maintain timely and open communication with incoming prisoners, flexibility with rolling enrolments and accurate record-keeping, especially prisoner feedback.

A mentor program has been suggested as one solution to some of these issues, using peers to assist in developing basic skills, particularly for those students with EAL. LLN assessments can be repeated annually which is positive for prisoners needing to improve ACSF levels to engage in Distance Education and it enables those with low ASCF levels to regularly demonstrate improvement.

Training in a correctional facility is also different to training in a conventional classroom. Trainers are, understandably, subject to the policies and procedures of Corrections Victoria and the local facility. They are also subject to the policies and procedures of their own registered training organisation and national quality assessment authorities such as Australian Skills Quality Authority, so need to operate within two bureaucracies which can limit time available for provision of training.

Trainers need to manage their time well and have the ability to seamlessly glide from one set of managers and computer systems to the other, for example course materials, equipment and systems are often unavailable due to restrictions. While classes such as Information Technology (IT), Business and AutoCAD are popular, systems are often not up to date. Prisoners do not have access to the internet which provides particular challenges to trainers. However, the stand-alone prisoner computer system (intranet), the Prisoner Education, Training and Employment System, known as PETES, has provided improvement in IT systems statewide since 2017.

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VET in a correctional facility is not only challenging for the trainers with the unique setting for delivering and assessing, it is also challenging for the students who are looking to set themselves up to reintegrate into the community upon release. As in all VET training, it is ultimately about understanding each student's needs, understanding their knowledge levels and taking them from what they know into what they don't know.

Thinking outside the wall

But what of the students? At Hopkins Correctional Centre and Langi Kal Kal, students can see that, despite what their initial LLN levels are, these levels can be increased though the VET courses offered and students can gain industry qualifications and job skills to improve their chances of gaining employment on release, which helps to prevent recidivism.

We know that preventing recidivism is the core aim and business of Corrections Victoria and its many service providers including the three registered training organisations referred to this article. All are well versed in the mantra: the true prison break is thinking outside the wall; skills-wise, work-wise, further study-wise, confidence-wise and life skills-wise. This thinking starts upon incarceration: setting goals and actions for improving prisoners' LLN skills and acquisition of real skills and knowledge for work are the keys to gaining employment upon release – and keeping it. Our role as trainers is to support our students as agents of their own change to help them scale their own (meta-physical?) walls.

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Tim Dhillon has been a trainer in corrections settings for three years, having come from a farming background. He has delivered Horticulture and Agriculture at two locations, has recently completed his Diploma of Vocational Education and is halfway through the Bachelor of Agriculture Science degree.

Note

1 Supported means the prisoner is financially supported in their studies by the government and organisationally supported (i.e., sourcing resources, contacting the university on the prisoner's behalf etc.) by the Senior Education Officer at the correctional facility.

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Creating a community in our classrooms

by Tanja Cuka

Way back when I first started my teacher education journey, I came across the idea of creating a classroom community where my students felt a sense of belonging and safety. I was captivated by the concept and went on to devote countless hours on the topic in the form of an assignment. An assignment that I almost failed I might add, barely scraping through with 52%. Despite it being my lowest grade ever, what I took away from that assignment has informed my teaching practices ever since.

The importance of a classroom community for children made sense to me while I was training to be a primary school teacher, but it took me longer to realise that adult learners need it just as much, or possibly more so. Something that stands out to me when I conduct initial assessments with students is how often they describe social needs as a reason for enrolling in a class. Many of our students are isolated and some don't have a support network outside the classroom. So, although their primary goal might be learning related, the classroom is an opportune environment to fill that void and provide them with a community.

I don't think it is a coincidence that I am reconsidering the concept of classroom community the year after terms like social distancing and isolation became a core part of our vocabulary! I wish I could revisit that assignment and unpack the research through the lens of my experience. However, it is long gone, either hidden in a box somewhere or recycled into goodness knows what! So, more than a decade later, I am reflecting on my practice and talking to colleagues and students about what a classroom community is, how we create it and why it is so important.

What is a classroom community?

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines community as "a unified body of individuals" and outlines a range of circumstances in which this might occur, such as within a particular area or through common characteristics. However, this definition does not go far enough to describe the kind of community that I envision. I see a community as a group of people who come together with a shared purpose, by choice or circumstance, and feel a sense of belonging, safety and connection. And so, a classroom community is a group of people who come together with the shared purpose of learning, who feel safe enough to take the risks required of learners, and connected enough to keep coming back. It is my goal to create this for each new group of students I am assigned.

When I asked colleagues how they define a classroom community, their responses highlighted themes of warmth, relationships, fun and safety.

"It's a warm and inviting classroom where students develop relationships with each other and learn together."

"A classroom community is one where students and the teacher know and care for each other and are interested in and concerned for the wellbeing of classmates, so they feel part of more than just an English class."

"It's about learning and growing together, we are safe to make mistakes and we have fun."

I asked my adult English as an Additional Language learners to describe positive classroom experiences they have had and, like the responses from my colleagues, my students' responses echoed similar themes.

"When I come to class, I can forget about all my problems and enjoy."

"The other students help me when I don't understand."

"We laugh a lot. We have fun all of us."

"My teacher always encourages me and I try harder."

Why is it important?

A classroom community is important because it provides a learning environment that encourages enthusiasm, commitment, retention and better learning outcomes.

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Although extensive studies have explored the benefits of classroom communities for children, less have studied the concept in adult learning environments. Nevertheless, those who have researched the area, have found a positive correlation between classroom communities and student learning outcomes.

According to Osterman (2000), students who have a sense of community in their classroom are more motivated, engaged and invested in their learning. When we feel welcome, safe and connected to a place, we are more likely to return there and actively participate. Gabelnick et al. (1990) found that a positive classroom community contributed to superior learning outcomes and a greater sense of achievement, while Tinto et al. (1994) demonstrated how supportive educational communities that are committed to student welfare and participation play a pivotal role in student retention. Fostering a sense of belonging and safety, by developing a classroom community, has clear benefits for students, educators and educational institutions that extend beyond better learning outcomes.

Values such as safety and belonging underpin classroom communities and they have the potential to help students meet their more basic needs in order to move onto higher level needs. If we consider Maslow's hierarchy of needs we can see that after our survival requirements of food, clothing and shelter, the next most important needs are safety/security and love/belonging just under the highest levels of self-esteem and self-actualisation (Maslow, 1943).

If a student feels safe and is not worried about being judged they will be more likely to ask questions and participate. When a student feels connected to their peers, there is a greater chance they will work collaboratively with them. There is only so much we can do as teachers to meet our students' survival needs but there is a lot we can do to meet their needs for safety and belonging.

How do we create a classroom community?

There are numerous ways to create a classroom community and it is important to remember it is an ongoing process rather than something we just do at the beginning of term and forget about. The way teachers interact with students, prepare for lessons, organise groupings and structure their classes all play a role.

Freeman et al. (2007) found that educators who encouraged the involvement of all students and were approachable, enthusiastic and organised contributed significantly to students' sense of belonging and perceptions of classroom community. By reflecting on our own practices, and being mindful of their potential effects on our individual students and the cohort as a whole, we can create and maintain a learning environment that enriches all involved.

With this in mind, I have reflected on the strategies I have used and asked colleagues to share their own strategies in order to compile the list below. In compiling this list of strategies for fostering a classroom community I am aware that I am most likely preaching to the choir! I haven't met many apathetic teachers in my life. Most are devoted professionals who care deeply about their students and already do an incredible job of creating supportive learning environments.

What I hope you take away from this is an understanding of how the approaches we use can help create a space where students feel they belong, are cared for and motivated to learn. Please see this list as confirmation that you are doing a great job and that what you do makes a real difference. If there is something new here that you haven't tried, then that is just a bonus!

Teacher actions

- Be warm, friendly and approachable.
- Get to know your students and show genuine care and interest in them.
- Greet every student as they arrive and say farewell at the end of the day.
- Learn your students' names and how to pronounce them and make sure everyone in the class knows each other's names.
- Check in with students and follow up after they have told you about something in their personal life.
- Provide more positive feedback than constructive criticism, encourage students and recognise their efforts and achievements.
- Teach students that mistakes are part of learning and acknowledge your own mistakes and shortcomings as they arise.
- Celebrate both the diversity and individuality in your classroom by keeping a calendar of birthdays and significant cultural days. Acknowledge those days and allow students to inform their peers of important customs.
- Be available to your students before or after class for a chat or to help with other issues so they feel supported beyond their learning needs.

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Activities

- Develop routines and democratically establish class guidelines and expectations based on mutual respect to provide predictability and group membership.
- Make 'getting to know you' activities a regular part of learning.
- Explicitly teach the skills needed for group work and collaboration and vary groupings to allow students to work with all other class members.
- Design activities that enable students to feel a sense of accomplishment and success relatively quickly.
- Ensure students have the necessary vocabulary, grammar and opportunities for meaningful discussions.
- Use a variety of teaching approaches that emphasise interaction and collaboration such as games, debates, role plays, discussion, projects, presentations, incursions and excursions.
- Allow students to choose topics and/or activities where appropriate.
- Facilitate peer-to-peer teaching and feedback.

Interactions

- Ensure all students have the chance to contribute their ideas in discussions and be mindful of students dominating.
- Make time to share food with each other or, if that is not allowed, at least eat together regularly.
- If your students are English language learners, learn some words and phrases in their languages and don't be afraid to have a go at saying them.
- Sit in a circle for small group interactions and even whole class activities if at all possible.
- Assist reluctant students to take part in all activities, especially group work.
- Model respectful listening by appreciating all points of view without judgement.
- Provide time for students to share their stories with each other.

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The ALNPP: a fresh approach to professional development

by Laura Chapman, Catherine Devlin, Rohan Kioney, Donal Lucey, Natalie Nawrocki and Tamsin Rossiter

The Adult Literacy and Numeracy Practitioners Program (ALNPP) is a professional learning program for Learn Local providers. It was developed by Adult Learning Australia (ALA) and Adult Community Education Victoria (ACEVictoria) for the Victoria Government and on behalf of the Adult Community Further Education Board. Last year, Christine Wallis reported on Phase 1 and 2 of the program for *Fine Print (43*(3), p.27). Now that Phase 3 is well underway, we asked project manager and designer, Catherine Devlin from ALA and ACEVic executive officer Tamsin Rossiter to give us a brief outline of the ALNPP. Following that, program participants, Laura Chapman, Rohan Kioney, Natalie Nawrocki and Donal Lucey reflect on what they learned and how it has changed their teaching.

What is the ALNPP?

Catherine Devlin and Tamsin Rossiter: The ALNPP was designed in consultation with a steering committee of literacy and numeracy experts and reviewed by current adult community education literacy and numeracy (ACE L&N) practitioners who work in the pre-accredited space.

The ALNPP is an online program that is theory informed and embeds andragogical approaches and reflective practice. Participants are encouraged to share their own expertise, experience and teaching practice. The program includes opportunities for both self-directed and collaborative learning.

To date, the ALNPP has been delivered twice – with a third phase underway at time of writing (May 2021). Each phase has adopted a slightly different approach.

In Phase 1, 19 skilled ACE L&N practitioners completed the ALNPP, supported by an online learning program and live web events delivered by a team of subject-matter experts.

In Phase 2, 260 practitioners working for Learn Local providers completed the program with mentoring from the initial 19 skilled practitioners.

In Phase 3, changes to the program included:

- centralising the recruitment process
- enabling and supporting ACE L&N mentors to focus on building capability (rather than administrative processes such as attendance, progress, registrations, certificates and completions)
- centrally managing participation and engagement in the online platforms
- enabling ACE L&N mentors to facilitate Q&A sessions in an elected content area.

Aside from developing participants' skills and knowledge, the ALNPP has also:

- built collegiate relationships between Learn Local providers
- developed leadership and mentoring capabilities in the sector
- provided teaching tools and resources
- encouraged good andragogic and reflective practice
- identified opportunities for further professional development.

Some have described the program as the 'complete package' in online professional development.

Practitioners' views

Here, Laura Chapman, Rohan Kioney and Natalie Nawrocki answer some key questions about the impact of the ALNPP from their perspectives as participants and facilitators of the program. Donal Lucey, like many Language Literacy and Numeracy (LNN) practitioners, came to LLN teaching from an adult TESOL teaching background. Below, he reflects on the insights he gained from the ALNPP for teaching adult literacy as a TESOL-trained teacher.

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How do you see the ALNPP content improving the quality of pre-accredited delivery?

Laura Chapman: The broad scope of the ALNPP includes Theory, Frameworks, Literacy and Numeracy Practice, Specific Learning Difficulties and trauma-informed approaches. The beauty of the ALNPP is that it ensures participants have core knowledge across these fields, but also allows them to focus on specific areas of interest relevant to their teaching contexts. Participants have access to highly experienced language, literacy and numeracy professionals, including Rosie Martin, who has a nurturing approach to systematically addressing literacy skills and phonics, and David Tout with his focus on contextualised and engaging numeracy strategies.

The nature of pre-accredited delivery in local community settings means teachers often work in isolation, so participants greatly appreciated the opportunity to draw upon and contribute to professional networks of support. I see the ALNPP as a first step in establishing networks that could be strengthened through further funded communities of practice and evidence-based projects that support teachers to deliver responsive and effective programs in their local settings.

Rohan Kioney: I believe the ALNPP will improve pre-accredited delivery. I found the ALNPP course was successful in that the content was broad ranging and easy to understand. Academic texts and concepts have been cleverly packaged to increase accessibility for teachers. This was a great achievement! It enabled teachers to pick and choose approaches what would suit their students. The course gave teachers a space to reflect and finetune (or overhaul) their teaching. This will benefit inexperienced teachers who are looking for learning theories to guide their teaching, and experienced teachers who are looking to improve their teaching. There was also a surprising outcome that many teachers mentioned, and this was somewhat true for me: the course reinforced teachers' current approaches in the classroom. It was a realisation that their approach was valid and backed up by the literature.

Natalie Nawrocki: The ALNPP content provides participants of the program with a great understanding of theory and practical strategies for teaching adults effectively. This ensures that adults are engaged and retained in their course.

Teaching adults is not the same as teaching children or adolescents and knowing the theory and what works for adults is helpful when planning. For example, adults have a great deal of life experience that can be drawn on prior to providing teacher directed course content. This can ensure that the adults and their existing knowledge is conceived as valuable and relevant and therefore they are respected and engaged in further learning.

Knowing how adults learn and what is effective also means that less time is spent on activities that may not work. It means that trainers are confident when they teach knowing that they are following adult teaching principles. Trainers are able to focus on the content of their course rather than on how they going to teach it to adults.

Were there sections of the course which resonated with you as either a facilitator or participant?

Laura Chapman: As a participant, the program was both validating and inspiring. Practitioners shared their questions and ideas, strengths and weaknesses, aims for best practice and classroom realities, significant challenges and learner success stories. As a facilitator, I observed that participants valued the opportunity to relate theory, frameworks, approaches and practice to their daily teaching in order to best meet learners' needs.

Although the ALNPP is highly structured, the Zoom sessions provided flexibility for us to respond to the upheaval of teaching and learning during Covid-19 lockdowns, when teachers undertook the huge challenge of delivering remote programs to highly marginalised

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learners who were further isolated and disadvantaged by the lockdowns. We explored Maslow's hierarchy of needs as it related to immediate needs; trauma-informed responses relevant to Covid-19; our strategies for micro-moments of connection with learners to reduce isolation; readjusting our priories and focusing on self-care.

Rohan Kioney: There were two areas that resonated most for me during the ALNPP. Firstly, there was the topic of phonemic awareness. As a former primary school teacher, I was trained in the whole language approach, and therefore phonemic awareness has been a weakness of my teaching. Research presented in the course is strong that building phonemic awareness is essential, particularly for those learners with low literacy. This may be because those very learners came out of a school system that predominantly taught literacy through the whole language approach.

Secondly, there was the concept of meta-cognition. My teaching didn't allow any space for students to reflect on their learning throughout the course. While it is true that students do reflect on their learning at the end of the course with the ACFE Learner Review form, it would be beneficial for students to practise meta-cognition during and after each class.

Natalie Nawrocki: I found it very enriching as a facilitator. I experienced a great deal of support and understanding as I heard that the participants were often grappling with similar issues as I was. For example, I find it challenging teaching a class of mixed levels or mixed abilities or finding materials that are at a low level and suitable for adults. This was something other participants found challenging and it was great to share strategies on what helps.

As a participant, I found the reflections after each module very useful as it made me think about how I am applying this theory in my class or where my teaching practice needs to be worked on.

Has the experience of facilitation or participation in the course changed any areas of your thinking and practice in adult literacy teaching?

Laura Chapman: I was constantly reminded of the need for strengths-based approaches that truly value, listen to, and respond to learners. The ALNPP also demonstrated how the same core theories and approaches can be applied very differently according to specific learning contexts – there are infinite ways to learn while still applying evidence-based practice. Every week I learned from the shared experiences and approaches of teachers, coming away with dozens of strategies and activities to try! The course has also heightened my resolve to balance 'heart and rigour': combining a range of nurturing 'whole person' and collaborative approaches with explicit skills development.

The ALNPP supported me to be a more reflective teacher – to step back and see how the big picture theories and evidence-based practice relate to learning in the classroom, which ultimately all relate to the goals and pathways of each learner.

Rohan Kioney: My experience during the course did change my thinking about my teaching practice. It revealed to me that there were areas that were lacking. It also revealed to me that my teaching was camped in a more traditional (behaviouralist) approach than I realised. It is as though the teacher is a product of their educational experiences, and the expectations of the students as well. This can lead to a more restricted style of teaching and reduce the effectiveness of classroom teaching. The breadth and accessibility of this course gave the teacher perspective to reflect on their own teaching and change where needed.

Natalie Nawrocki: As a participant, I gained an understanding of current theories and good quality practice. It has been over 20 years since I completed my teacher training and although I attend Professional Development and read articles on good practice, the course provided me with updated information that is based on current thinking and research intensively with reflection and discussions. I believe that greater understanding and support is provided through conversing with other trainers. I also learned new ideas and activities that worked for others and have considered applying them in my classes.

A TESOL-trained teacher's perspective

Donal Lucey: As a participant, I found the ALNPP to be extremely practical, even though it covered a wide range of issues, contained a wealth of theory and information about teaching practice and methods. It was even delivered online in just four weeks. It was also practical in the sense

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that we were given a wide range of theoretical perspectives to consider, and we discussed how we would apply these theories in our workplaces.

We studied the Pre-accredited Quality Framework (PQF) and the Australian Core Skills Framework. We studied literacy and numeracy (both the theory and practice). The importance the program gave to self-reflection – evidenced by the fact that a module of the program is entirely devoted to it – impressed me very much.

Clearly, the ALNPP impressed me immensely and though I have great respect for TESOL, which I have been involved in for most of my teaching life, I would like to contrast my experience of TESOL to show why the ALNPP was so effective in enlightening me in such a short space of time.

In TESOL practice, which generally incorporates the communicative language teaching method, awareness of the learners' cultural, linguistic and educational backgrounds is considered important, as are learners' motivations for learning English. In practice though, the conditions under which the learning takes place make much of this knowledge unusable for various reasons, not that it is easy to collect in the first place. When I look back at my time in TESOL, I see that I encountered situations where I knew that my training failed me, and I was at a loss to help students that clearly brought their problems into the classroom.

What made the ALNPP special for me was that the concept of "knowing your learners" was stressed repeatedly. The notion of facilitating learners taking control of their own learning through getting to know and understand them was a revelation to me. I had never read any of Paulo Freire's work even though I had read extensively in applied linguistics, which is quite broad. It was he who said, "an adult's life experiences and views are an essential part of developing their literacy and numeracy".

The ALNPP reflected the very essence of the PQF in that the learner is placed at the centre of everything. The dignity of the learners is respected so that they are free to explore themselves and discover what it is they need. This is the essence of learning in tune with the principles of adult learning. This could be anything from learning how to decode graphemes and write simple words to the understanding of basic numeracy, both being vital life skills. We were given amazing presentations on these subjects by experts. Likewise, the presentations on dyslexia and trauma-informed practice were so informative and interesting.

The limited space on this article does not permit me to expand any further on my impressions of the ALNPP but I hope I have been informative enough to convince readers to consider investing your valuable time in supporting and subscribing to this program.

Catherine Devlin is Operations Manager at ALA. Tamsin Rossiter is Executive Officer at ACEVic. Laura Chapman manages the Volunteer Program and Adult Literacy Program at Carringbush Adult Education. She also teaches Learn Local classes for culturally and linguistically diverse women. Rohan Kioney is an Adult Literacy and Numeracy trainer at Preston Reservoir Adult Community Education (PRACE). Natalie Nawrocki is a Skills for Education and Employment trainer and assessor at Djerriwarrh Community & Education Services in Sunshine. Donal Lucey is an English as an Additional Language teacher and acting teaching coordinator at Laverton Community Education Centre.

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Screen-casting for more effective remote learning

by Irene O'Duffy

Teachers and trainers are always investigating and trying new methods to help students in their studies. Always short on time, we're often developing and designing things "on the fly" and testing out ideas that might work and support our students.

One of the key differences between the classroom setting and a fully online setting is that students do not always have the same opportunity to ask teachers for explanation or clarification about information or process. Two different students studying the same units might fare better or worse simply because they approach an assessment task or a learning activity differently or miss the opportunity to speak and clarify in the classroom with the teacher.

In this article, I'll write about my experience using screen-casting as a tool for feedback and general instruction, and reflect on how this has been beneficial for both teacher and student.

Online/self-paced students need guidance

During 2020, I was already facilitating a fully online self-paced program, which was a contextualised literacy and numeracy course at Certificate II level. Even though students enrolled in a fully online program, and wanted all the benefits and flexibility of this, it became apparent fairly quickly that a small number of students required greater levels of explanation, especially with regard to assessments. In a classroom setting, this would have taken just a few easy minutes to explain and then could have been relayed to the full class. In the online only classroom, this is more difficult!

Verbal support is helpful

Consistently, I had one online student who demonstrated difficulty in following written instructions. The student didn't declare any learning issue (and many students never do!) so I asked the student what would be helpful to them. I discovered that they worked better when I was able to verbally explain something to them, while they read the material on their computer. This student, an adult who had left school early, would not turn on their video during any online synchronous sessions, and would often give the phone to their mother to relay information. This presented an enormous challenge.

With this in mind, I started making very short videos for this student. For each assessment that they submitted unsatisfactorily, I created a short feedback video, going through the assessment, which was on the screen, and using the highlight tool or the cursor to show where additional work was needed. I used their name and gave positive and constructive feedback, and then explained the elements of the assessment that needed to be worked on.

Each video was short – no more than two to three minutes – and was emailed directly to the student. The software I used (Screencast-o-matic) is explained further in this article.

Pre-empting student issues can save delivery time

Using that student as my inspiration, I realised that I could pre-empt the sorts of issues that students presented by making a bank of explanatory instructional videos in advance of the delivery of the course. Students could then use both written and audio-visual explanations to support their assessment efforts.

I made it a personal policy that if more than two students contacted me because some element was unclear, then it was probably causing problems for other students as well. These could be issues with:

- Overly complex, vague or poorly-written instructions
- Lack of specifics regarding how much needed to be written
- Lack of examples demonstrating a possible correct answer

During December and January, my colleague and I rewrote the course content and assessments. We also started making two types of short videos: the first set were used for content

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and learning material, and the second set demonstrated written assessments and what the teacher was looking for. This second set became a kind of "virtual" rubric.

Video demonstrates how to approach an assessment task

In the assessment instruction videos, I demonstrate where to locate the assessment and show how to download it. Even though most students are skilled with this process after doing it once, I don't presume any previous knowledge, which means any video could be watched in any order by the student.

I show the blank assessment and "speak" to it in my recording, reminding students along the way what the expected number of words might need to be. I also explain any trigger words and give an example of a possible answer. Most of the written assessments relate to reading comprehension, creative writing, opinion, research or explanation.

Here's a short script of a simple assessment video:

> Hi students. In this video I'll demonstrate the requirements for Assessment Task 2, which asks you to read a newspaper article and answer some questions. On this assessment page, you click on the link here, [Highlight] and if you are in Google Chrome you will see the file download at the bottom left of the browser. [Highlight] Open the file and click on the "enable editing" button at the top of the page. [Highlight]
>
> Make sure you type your name and student ID at the top of the page. [Highlight] This section on the front page outlines the criteria for this assessment, so please read this information first. [Highlight]
>
> Now let's move to page 2 and go through the questions. For the first four questions, you need to click the blue link [Highlight] and read the newspaper article, which will open in a separate browser. Question 1 asks you to skim read the article and suggest what the article is about, in one sentence. Don't forget that you'll need a capital letter at the beginning of the sentence, and a full stop at the end.
>
> Question 2 asks you to find some specific information and write in note form at least five key pieces of information that relate to the topic. This means you will have to re-read the article. You can use dot points, as a full sentence is not required, but the instructions say that you must write at least 20 words.

You can see that the guidance given to the student is spoken in a similar way that you would speak in a classroom: friendly, calm and clear about what is expected. I usually remind students about what a sentence requires once at the beginning, and then refer to that in other questions as needed. I will often say how long the assessment is expected to take. I will go through each question in the assessment in a similar manner, highlighting any examples given in the text or, if needed, provide a statement giving an example of a correct answer:

> This question is asking your opinion on the document and also asks for a reason for that opinion, which means you have to address both parts; for example, "I think this poster design is very effective, I like the use of colour and graphics because it grabs my attention and red is my favourite colour".

The example given may not directly answer the question, but shows what it means to "give a reason". I also find using the highlight pen in Microsoft Word is a useful tool to direct the student's eyes to the question I am referring to in the video. Generally, the cursor in screen-casting software is large and also draws the student's eyes to the part you are discussing. The end of the video would be something like this:

> Once you are happy with your answers, remember to save a copy of this assessment to your own computer, and then submit the assessment through the submission link on the page you downloaded it from. Your teacher will provide constructive feedback within 10 working days of your submission.

Accessibility in course design benefits everyone

By ensuring our courses are fully accessible we can help all students achieve their study goals. This might be subtitles on videos, ability to increase font size in an assessment, alternative explanations or visual aids for students. While many teachers are now used to creating video content for their courses, adding video instructions for assessments can result in a higher success rate and boost students' self-esteem. It opens up a path to success for students who might have had less than ideal experiences previously.

Spending some time pre-delivery in anticipating student questions actually results in more efficiency when the course is running. Think about FAQ pages – if one student has a question, chances are lots of students

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have the same question! Eventually you end up with a comprehensive set of instructions that you can incorporate into your learning management system (LMS) and downloadable assessments.

One useful strategy in development is to create video explanations of assessments at the time that the assessment is created. It adds only 15–20 minutes to the workload and once you have done this a few times, it becomes very quick and easy. You now have your bank of videos for assessments!

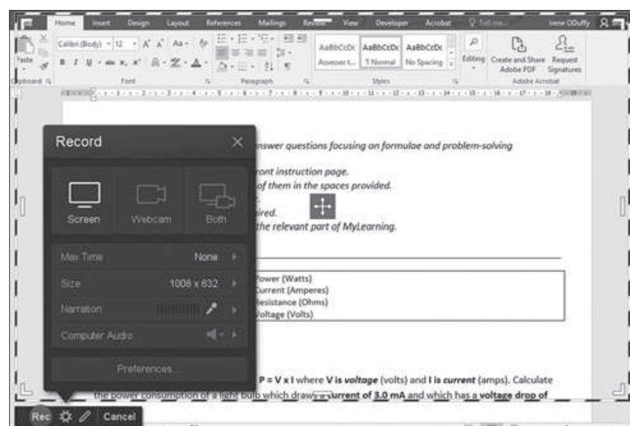
Using screen-casting software

I have used screencast-o-matic (www.screencast-o-matic.com) for a few years now, and I like the simplicity as well as the extra tools it provides as standard. A free version is available online and the paid version is quite cheap. I pay about $20 per year for the software so I can create longer videos and enjoy other benefits, but the free version is totally adequate for this sort of task.

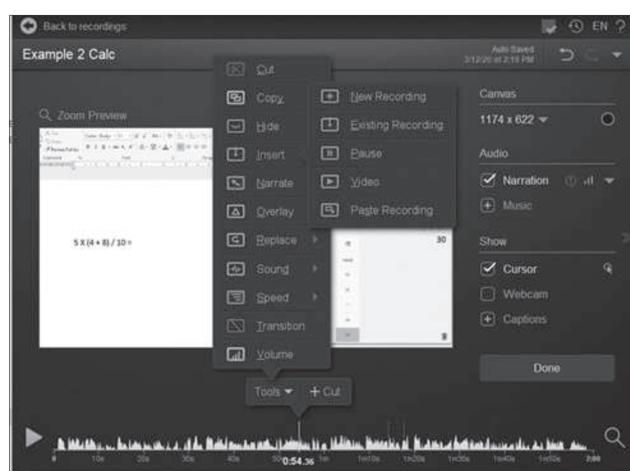
Practise first for a few hours, until you become comfortable with it. A dotted outline shows the recording area, and it can be useful to get comfortable with the pause button, so you can take a breath or collect your thoughts during the recording. Before too long, you'll be doing a video in one take and require the barest amount of editing.

Here are my top tips for using this software effectively:

- **Have a rough script prepared** – this could be on a separate computer or even just written on paper in dot points.
- **Use a podcast microphone if you can** – the sound is much better than what you can get from a laptop or webcam and about $100 gets you a decent microphone.
- **Use the pause button frequently** – even in a single recording session, use the pause button when you change your screen image; it will be seamless in the end product.
- **When you make a mistake, stop talking for a few seconds then start again** – you'll be able to delete the speech that didn't sound right, and it will be obvious in editing where the new speech starts. Combine this with using the pause button and you can get everything done in one take.
- **A brief edit at the end is possible** – you can cut speech, add overlays or highlights in the software and the learning curve is not too steep.
- **Give your recordings a useful name and file them on your computer** – for example "VU22412 AT2 instructions" makes it easy to find videos that relate to that particular unit of competency.



An example of screencast-o-matic software overlaying a Word file



Screencast-o-matic allows you to edit your videos, but with a rough script and judicious use of the pause button, you can make a video in one take.

Once you've practiced a bit, you'll be able to create a short instructional video in less than 15 minutes.

Hosting / streaming your videos

Some institutions may already have the facility to host and stream your videos in the LMS, others may not. Loading the full video into your LMS can be problematic because when students go to that page, their browser will often download the full content. This can cause bandwidth issues which may affect students with limited internet access.

A better strategy is to create an "unlisted" YouTube account under your department or course name. Manage this with

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your work email account and add any other colleagues in your team. You can even group things together in course playlists to keep materials organised.

Unlisted means that people can only see the videos if they have the link, and this link can be embedded into your LMS so that it plays in the frame (your LMS developers/team will have a method for this). That means that the student actually doesn't see the link as text; they see the frame with the video in it, but the video doesn't use bandwidth until they click on it.

Real benefits experienced by teachers

So far, in 2021, my colleagues and I have noticed a substantial reduction in phone calls and email questions from students about how to tackle an assessment task.

Another benefit is an increase in successful first attempts at assessments. Previously, assessments often had to be resubmitted due to basic mistakes such as not writing the required number of sentences for an answer. Explanation through a screencast video gives students almost the same experience as in a face-to-face classroom, where teachers often answer questions on how to approach an assessment.

I hope sharing my experience inspires you to try out something new with screen-casting software.

Irene O'Duffy is a Learning & Teaching Specialist at Bendigo Kangan Institute.

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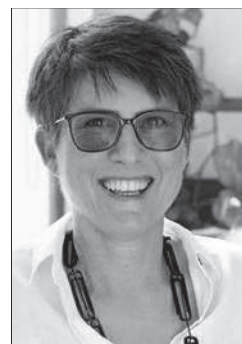
Professional collaboration in social media groups and the live video project

by Elizabeth Gunn



"Hi Lindee, let's do a pilot Facebook 'Live Stream' video conversation this Friday at 4pm. I know it's mad but let's just give it a try."

And so, in early April 2021, VALBEC's Facebook group live video project was born.

First times are exciting, a mix of dread and anticipation. I talked myself through these feelings and forged ahead. But fellow adventurers Lindee Conway and Ama Omran were confident. They dived in! I thank them for their faith. Looking back at our first video I see Ama and Lindee gazing out, supportive, as I gesticulate wildly, hardly able to contain the nervous energy.

I got the idea to do Facebook Live videos from social media marketing expert The Digital Gal (https://thedigitalgal.com/). The Digital Gal is Amanda Robinson, a glamorous and knowledgeable Facebook specialist who, in a recent webinar[1], advised her audience that the all-powerful Facebook analogue's ranking system looks very favourably upon live videos. Where a text-based post might attract one point, a live video scores hundreds. Amanda urged her audience to get busy and start making live videos. I thought I'd give it a try.

Indeed, rubbing digital shoulders with Amanda and other social media marketing superstars, has been an unexpected pleasure of expanding my digital literacy horizons in 2021. Unexpected because I'm not usually drawn to pink stilettos, enhanced eyelashes and sequined power dresses. But these women exude enthusiasm for their subject as they generously impart wisdom via free webinars and live videos. I can't help being swept along by their energetic "Yes, we can!" attitude as they teach their strategies for "telling engaging stories", "increasing organic reach" and "getting your message out there" into the noisy marketplace of ideas of the internet.

Video is an open and fluid medium for expressing diverse ideas in multiple ways. As I see it, VALBEC Video is a collective experimental media platform we can use to understand and expand digital literacy practices for professional learning and community life more generally.

In this article I touch briefly on some recent studies of social media-based educator groups and video creation in the context of professional and student learning. I then outline some of the ways experimenting with live videos on the VALBEC Facebook group has expanded my own digital literacy practice. Finally, I invite VALBEC members to collaborate and experiment with creating and sharing their own live videos within the privacy of the VALBEC Facebook professional learning community.

Facebook and professional learning

"Groups" has been a feature of Facebook for more than 10 years. It aims to facilitate community-building. Groups contrasts with "Pages" which is designed for organisations to promote themselves to Facebook's wider audience. In Groups, audience participation is contained within the group and kept private from the wider Facebook environment. Within the group, settings can be open to enable access to a range of functions such as members being free to invite new members, post content to the group, and host/broadcast group videos (more on that below).

The use of Facebook Groups for professional learning (PL) in education contexts has received some academic attention over the past decade. For example, Liljekvist et al. (2020) found that for Swedish secondary mathematics and language teachers, the requesting and sharing of pedagogical content knowledge dominated their involvement in social media PL groups. In a Flemish study (Muls et al., 2019), educators' exchange of teaching ideas, experiences and materials via their Facebook PL group revealed that social media environments stimulated practitioner collaboration and idea generation, and enhanced social informal learning processes, self-management and reflection. In a Kenyan study (Bett

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& Makewa, 2020), it was shown that for teachers in under-resourced communities, Facebook PL groups enriched their professional practices when other avenues for PL provision were unavailable. In all, Facebook Groups seems to have some acceptability as a platform for PL and practitioner collaboration in educational contexts[2].

Academic research into learner creation of videos for educational purposes in social media contexts was not as easy to find within the short time span available to write this article. Initial searches revealed that research on video usage in education tended to focus on learner *consumption* rather than *production* of video texts. A couple of studies revealed that dialogue and collaboration between post-secondary learners, either co-viewing dialogue-based tutorial videos (Chi et al., 2017) or co-creating course content videos (Doyle et al., 2020) significantly enhanced learning. These studies remind us of the importance of learners being actively engaged in the learning process. Active co-construction of learner understandings of key concepts and information helps them retain knowledge and increase their sense of self and social efficacy.

Learner creation of video texts can also enhance digital communication skills. Advances in audio-visual technology means people carry video production equipment in their pockets. Platforms like Facebook Live complete the creative cycle, letting rudimentary videos flow swiftly into the virtual streams of friends, peers and colleagues.

Experimenting with live video

My initial goal for the VALBEC group videos is encapsulated in my words to Lindee; "I know it's mad but let's just give it a try." Like most literacies, digital literacy learning is a process of trial, error and communal support. Once I'd set the weekly wheels of VALBEC Videos in motion, I had to keep them rolling. Community support to continue was crucial. Ama joined to talk about her podcast. Liam Frost-Camilleri jumped aboard to talk about his *Fine Print* article. Jo Medlin's support in that early phase also bolstered momentum considerably.

I drew on contacts on LinkedIn and new friends from the VALBEC Facebook group. I contacted members who watched the videos to see whether they would consent to be interviewed. I approached new group members to find out about their work. I communicated with researchers and experts in the VALBEC community to share their deeper knowledge of the field.

Creating a community atmosphere with a model of dialogue and discussion informed the conceptualisation of the videos' format. COVID-19 had caused physical separation among colleagues in 2020. In 2021 it seemed urgent for VALBEC Facebook videos to emphasise connectedness of professional networks and community relationships.

Although Facebook Groups has been around for a while, online video connecting within Groups is a recent Facebook phenomenon. The company only introduced "Messenger Rooms" for Groups in May 2020. At that time, demand for online meeting software had exploded. Rooms was a response to this sudden uptick in the need for online community connection.

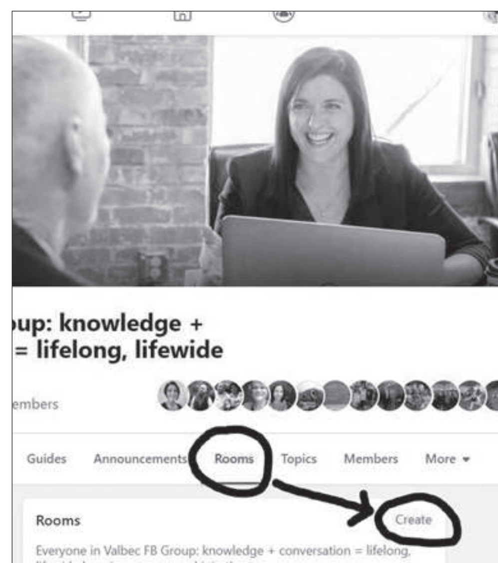
Rooms operates within the Facebook Groups ecosystem. Although similar to online meeting platform Zoom, Rooms is more like Google's "Meet". It has basic functionality such as camera and microphone mute, screen share and chat, but lacks extra features like breakout rooms. However, most important in Rooms is its "broadcast live" function. Broadcasting live conversations in Rooms is how I've created all the VALBEC Facebook videos so far.

Starting a video discussion in Rooms

There are a few different ways to start a video discussion in Rooms.

This is how I usually go about it:

1. Go to Rooms in the horizontal menu of the Group Home page. From there, click on "Create" in the top right corner of the pop-out panel.



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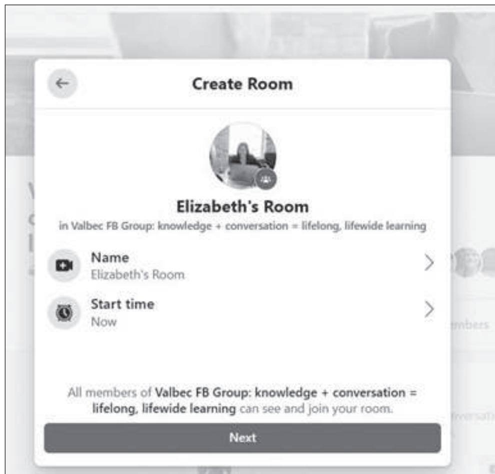
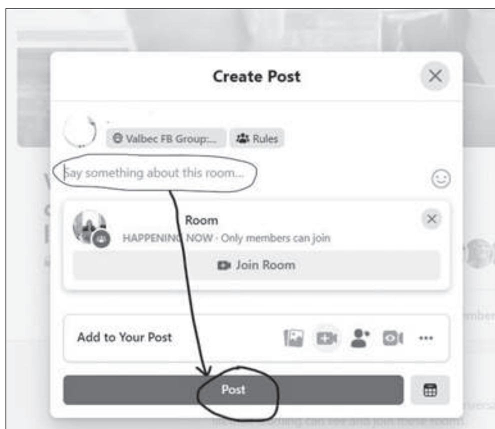
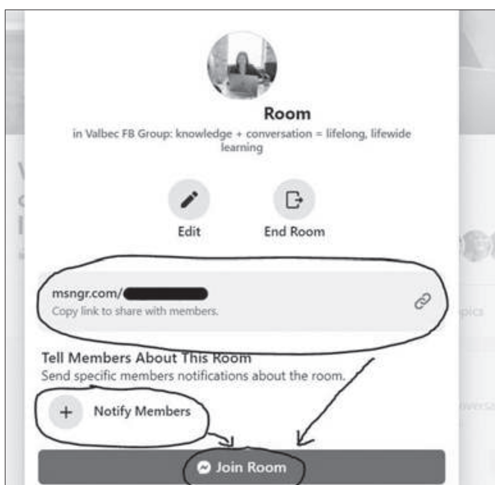
2. Set Room name and schedule start time. Click "Next".



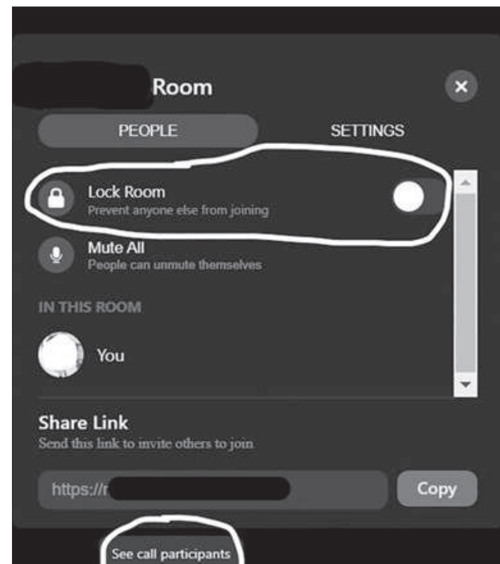
3. Next is the "Create Post" panel where you can write something about the room. Click the "Post" button to create the group post and alert group users to join your conversation.



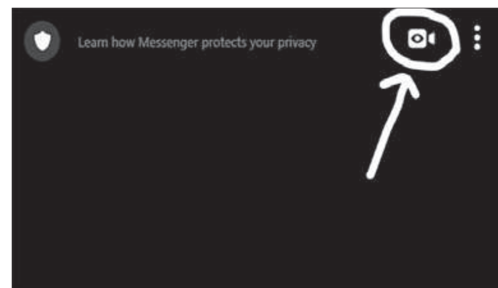
4. Copy link to share with members in chat, posts, and so on, or notify members by clicking the "+" button. Finally, click the "Join Room" button to activate the video meeting in Messenger.



5. When in the Messenger Room (i.e., the video meeting), go to the "participants" icon (bottom menu) and make sure "Lock Room" is switched OFF, otherwise the room will appear as "not available" to other members.



6. When you are ready, click on the "Broadcast Live" icon (top right corner) and enter details in the prompts. Your discussion partners need to consent to joining before you finally start your broadcast to the group.



Now you're in business!!!

An open invitation: Join VALBEC's maker community

There are other ways to set up "a Live" (a Facebook Live video broadcast)[3]. Facebook's community resources page lists four short steps:

1. Go to your group and open the composer tool
2. Click the Live button to start your Live
3. Keep an eye out for comments and you can respond live
4. Post your Live after you've finished for continued engagement!

"*Open the composer tool?!*" I hear you wonder. I wondered too and discovered the "composer tool" is the space that

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asks you to share "What's on your mind". Always learning dear reader, always learning …

In the end I'm reminded of Bakhtin and his notion of the dialogic imagination: "Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 81).

I sincerely hope this article will trigger multiple dialogues about video creation between members of the VALBEC Facebook community and beyond. Let's invite our colleagues to leap madly into video making and try our hand at live broadcasting. And if you're already experienced in the art of live video, then consider mentoring a colleague. Or, alternatively, you may think this project is mad. Please let me know that too. We need all perspectives to further our understanding of digital communication and literacy. You will find the VALBEC Facebook group here: https://www.facebook.com/groups/777918429799163 or search for "Valbec FB Group" on Facebook.

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Elizabeth Gunn is an Australian educator and writer in the field of language, literacy and numeracy practice. She is currently researching the digital literacy practices related to social media marketing and the use of social media groups for professional and student learning. She is a member of the *Fine Print* editorial team and VALBEC President.

Notes

1 Unfortunately, the webinar is no longer available. For further insights on the Facebook algorithm see https://blog.hootsuite.com/facebook-algorithm/

2 For more information about Facebook Groups see https://www.facebook.com/community/

3 For more tips, see https://www.facebook.com/community/keeping-your-group-active/how-to-create-captivating-video/

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Closing a career: ending to begin

by Rhonda Pelletier

Closing a career doesn't always involve real choice. Any number of circumstances can intervene to interrupt a well-laid career plan. Planning gives you a sense of control or agency but really, it is limited. In this piece I am reflecting upon the experience of leaving education, the teachers I have worked with who have left and how organisations retain the deep knowledge of learning, student psychology, and institutional practice that senior practitioners have developed.

As I wrap up my career it is clear to me that there are many levels of loss – loss of income, distance from long-term colleagues and friends, loss of contact with a student body, loss of access and use of the intellectual property developed over months and, possibly, years of building programs with colleagues.

In recent times I have had to make changes to how and where I worked and, finally, transition to an early retirement. It was a stop/start process and in discussing what I was doing and planned to do, I probably sent out a lot of contradictory messages. If I had to retire again, I'd be surer of the path. So, it was enlightening to come across William Bridges' book, *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes* on the bottom shelf of my bookcase. I hadn't looked at it for many years.

Bridges notes that at some stage, a person will no longer find that demonstrating their competence is a motivator to work. I did make the effort to reinvigorate my classroom skills. It worked for a while and I received generous support from my colleagues. I continued as a member of VALBEC, but the sense of connection I had to developments in education policy, methodology and pedagogy was harder and harder to maintain.

> Whether the source of the transition is an external change or your own inner development, the transition always starts with an ending. To become something else, you have to stop being what you are now; to start doing things a new way, you have to end the way you are doing them now; and to develop a new attitude or outlook, you have to let go of the old one you have now. Even though it sounds backwards, endings always come first. (Bridges, 2004, p. 80)

Institutional change

At this time, past colleagues come to mind. There was the disgruntled maths teacher, who regretted not taking a package when he had the chance, at the secondary college during my graduate diploma; the teachers who were made redundant when the TAFEs were merged in the 1990s; and the teachers who "moved on" when a whole delivery unit was shut down in the 2000s. Common to them all was the impact of a change to their careers that either they didn't see coming or was thrust upon them. All of it was disruptive, disturbing and de-stabilising. The organisational processes for those changes were either non-existent or hasty and poorly communicated, leaving many teachers and trainers distressed and bitter.

In 2013, I was working in TAFE when it was forced to make drastic staff reductions. No department was left untouched and the shock to the teachers was plain to see. However, on this occasion, the TAFE handled it much better than the aforementioned examples and many staff went on to other jobs in education, making a career change rather than leaving the profession.

Nonetheless, the disruption was extensive. It affected everyone, not just those who were either resigning or being made redundant. So many left that, on one occasion, I met an old friend who had been asked to return to support the necessary changes to a new training package. The organisation had to work hard to maintain its "message" to build staff belief and to provide a new image that staff could align to.

Organisations don't go through the life stages as such. They go on delivering the same kinds of skills they always have and when new skills are required – digital literacy skills, for instance – they incorporate them into the current organisational structure. Organisations have to change to meet the funding and contract requirements they are given. In the process, the organisation's staff must change too, or leave.

Retaining staff "memory" is critical. Much of the teachers' technical knowledge can be captured in documents

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saved to shared folders for all to access. However, no one works at a profession for very long before they start accumulating tacit knowledge – that almost instinctive and intuitive ability to "read the play".

Over time, you learn to anticipate and understand what is happening and what is needed. You start by shadowing, listening and copying; it's an unofficial apprenticeship. So, the staff room conversations of old. But there isn't a lot of time for staffroom conversations anymore and casualisation has taken its toll on who is in the staffroom day to day. There are strategies in place to combat this skill loss. For instance, organisations are establishing mentoring programs for newer, younger teachers as a means of retaining senior teachers' knowledge.

Doing change differently

What was understood better in 2013 is that significant changes within an organisation can cause high levels of disruption and distress for people. Because change does not always come at convenient stages of your life: "Your work life, like your relational life, has its own natural rhythm. The task is to find the connection between the change in your work or career and the underlying developmental rhythm of your life" (Bridges, 2004, p. 86).

The idea of going through a divorce was useful for me to think about what was happening. It was just a neat psychological trick to have a sense of agency in the process. Within the rhythm of my life there were personal changes and, as in the past, I was choosing to withdraw rather than wait until it became urgent to leave. If you can leave because you have reached a natural turning point in your life – age, changes in family requirements – you have agency and, perhaps, it is easier to let go. But there will still be the withdrawal, loss and a rebuilding process.

Sometimes I am intrigued by developments I hear from VALBEC and ACAL. It was heartening to see several pages dedicated to the debate about literacy teaching in schools – phonics or whole language's offspring (Baker, 2021). The Macklin Report (2020) is promising. However, there will be teachers of my generation who can easily say, "we've seen it all before."

Of course, collaborative learning and team teaching won't be exactly the same as the 2000s. What will be challenging is implementing the recommendations in such a way as to allow departments, teachers and students to achieve the desired outcomes. This often takes much longer, and costs much more than bureaucracy understands or is willing to sustain. As I read the Macklin Report, I am intrigued and know that were I younger, I'd be excited by the possibilities it offers. But as an older teacher who has seen similar aspirations in the past, I am not so sure excitement is what is called for. It looks like a new beginning that promises a focus on student and teacher development. But, as the advice with new beginnings and transitions suggests, it is best not to look too far ahead.

Finding a "participial" role

Where once I was all over the journals in print and online, I am no longer interested – and have been disconnected from them for some time. I find the current emphasis on neurodiversity encouraging and wish it had been available when I was teaching. My interest lasts while I'm reading but doesn't spark an enduring drive to follow up. It isn't my argument anymore.

Bridges notes that it is unwise to think you can go back to the things that stimulated you in your youth, that you left behind when you entered the adult/householder phase of your life. As far as being in education goes, I can see his point. However, I have a personal promise to keep. When I became a teacher, I promised myself I would resume writing when I turned 60, whether or not that would be another "career" (a question still to be decided). In describing this part of his own transition from teacher to coach, Bridges mentions his increasing acceptance of "a 'participial' identity" to say what he was doing. It was all part of him letting go of his old identity. Bridges calls this period the "neutral zone"

> You encounter the neutral zone – that apparently empty in-between time, when, under the surface of the organisational situation or invisibly inside you, the transformation is going on. Everything feels as though it is up for grabs and you don't quite know who you are or how you're supposed to behave, so this feels like a meaningless time. But it is actually a very important time. (Bridges, 2004, p. 80)

When organisations begin creating team teaching roles, professional learning communities etc, they will need to understand how their senior teachers and trainers are feeling in their participial roles. They may not feel like mentors or experts but may feel much more comfortable to be seen as developing mentoring and expertise skills.

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What does this halfway stage look and feel like?

I like being at the participial stage of the neutral zone – perhaps I can think of it in my old profession's terms – I'm in the zone of proximal development – scaffolding myself to a new beginning. So, for now I'm caring, gardening, volunteering and writing, while I wait for the new beginning to arrive. Although Bridges would say it might already have arrived and I've just not woken up to it yet.

Beginnings are untidy. Bridges' account of it sounds like, "the universe will provide". Of course, what seems to happen is that you notice the opportunity when you are good and ready, and no one else can make it happen. Often, he notes, people feel prevented from starting a new venture because they feel they don't have the skills, the time or the money to do so. However, it is possible to overcome those obstacles and, perhaps, that's where the neutral zone's role of living a participial life comes in. I'm hoping, you see, that I can creep up on competence and avoid too much financial commitment until the practice starts to bear fruit.

> Much as we may wish to make a new beginning, some part of us resists doing so as though we were making the first step towards disaster. Everyone has a slightly different version of these anxieties and confusions, but in one way or another they all arise from fear that real change destroys the old ways that we have learned to equate to 'who we are' and 'what we need'. To act on what we really want is the same as saying that 'I, a unique person, exist.' It is to assert that we are on our own in a much deeper sense than we ever imagined when we were originally setting up shop as adults. That earlier process involved only independence; this involves autonomy and the firm individual purpose on which that is based. (Bridges, 2004, p. 165)

The next step

At some stage soon, I will find myself at a new beginning. I will stop saying I love gardening and say I am a gardener, maybe. That feels very exciting and rather satisfying – and very relaxing. This is such a different feeling to being at work. But there is no clear indication of what that actual beginning will be at the moment. Brenda Reynolds (TEDx Talks, 2017) recommends not trying to see too far ahead. The idea is to go one step at a time and be patient, to move slowly.

There is also the recommendation to acknowledge how far you have come. As an example of that last point, I finally nailed succession planting of vegetables this summer – we were never out of lettuce, tomatoes, spring onions or parsley and now, with four veggie beds set up, I will work on crop rotation. And I am writing – at a snail's pace to be sure, but words are appearing on pages.

Tomorrow, I will log in to be a conversation partner for an ESL student at the organisation where I last worked. Me the volunteer in an educational setting – who could have guessed?

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Conversations with colleagues and friends helped enormously in composing this text.

Rhonda Pelletier retired from Education in 2019. She enjoyed a varied and challenging career in education, starting as a secondary school teacher in 1991. Two years as an Australian volunteer teacher in Thailand taught her a lot about what she didn't know about teaching English as a second or other language. Later, teaching adults in the workplace was often challenging and hilarious, and hugely rewarding. Six years as a member of the VALBEC committee gave her contact to some fabulously intelligent, forthright and passionate colleagues. And working as a coordinator/manager/senior educator at various providers increased her esteem for teachers and trainers. Returning to the classroom in 2017 was a joy.

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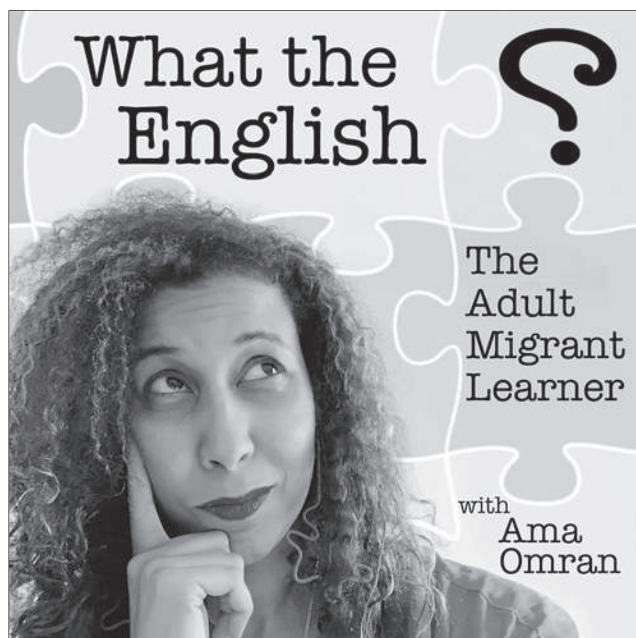
What the English? The Adult Migrant Learner podcast presented by Ama Omran

reviewed by Manjit Bhamral



The first time I heard about Ama Omran's audio podcast, *What the English? The Adult Migrant Learner*, it made me smile – what a cheeky and catchy title! It also interested me as an Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) teacher of newly arrived adult migrants because it was an Australian English as an Additional Language (EAL) podcast featuring adult EAL learners from various cultures and backgrounds, perhaps the first of its kind. It was great to hear straight from the adult migrant learners about their English language learning journey – their struggles and challenges, and achievements. What a great idea!

As an educator herself, Ama is aware that teachers are always looking for new resources to help their students develop their language. However, she is thinking about the learner – did somebody ask the learner how they wanted to learn? What is their perspective on their learning in class?

Last year provided that opportunity. Lockdown made 2020 a challenging year for Ama (as it was for so many of us). Because of COVID, she was living alone in a studio apartment – working from a very small space and being cooped up was not very pleasant! So, she decided to do something meaningful with her time; she thought of providing a platform to newly arrived adult migrant learners. Ama wanted to give them a voice so that they felt valued as learners and could marvel at their achievements. So, she asked some of her past students to help her. She met them in the local library, or she went to their homes and recorded them. Thus, was created this audio podcast: *What the English? The Adult Migrant Learner.*

The first series of the podcast has four episodes. The first episode is an introduction to the podcast and to Ama Omran. She was born in Sydney to Egyptian parents and grew up in Melbourne. She always wanted to be a teacher, so she completed her Bachelor of Education at RMIT University and taught in primary and secondary schools. However, she loved challenges. So, she completed a Certificate of English Language Teaching to Speakers of Other Languages (CELTA) course and got a scholarship to complete a post graduate certificate in TESOL. Since then, she has been a teacher, a compliance officer, a pre-training assessment officer, a coordinator in the Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) and AMEP Programs.... And now a podcaster – the host of *What the English? The Adult Migrant Learner*, speaking to adult migrant learners about their English language journeys and all the challenges and success stories that came along with them.

Each of episodes two to four is a conversation with a guest in which Ama asks questions about:

- their background – where they are from and how long they've been in Australia
- challenges they faced when they first arrived in Australia
- what help / support they received
- their experiences in the class
- their advice for other newly arrived migrants.

As a teacher it was great for me to listen to the three students talk about their experiences – a validation of the things I do in class or advise my students to do to improve their English.

In Episode 2, "Cindy – 'Do not give up language learning'", Cindy from Vietnam says that watching cartoons was her "first step" to learning English. "It's not only for the baby,"

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she assures us. She got a lot of emotional support from her family and her "gentle and friendly teachers," so she could overcome her learning disability and other obstacles in her quest to improve her English language.

Cindy urges listeners to talk to the teacher about the weaknesses one might have as a student – to not have any shame or feel bad. She encourages learners to have a friend from a different culture because that helps us learn a lot from each other. She recommends using more than one dictionary – get the meaning of a word in the first language (L1), but also in English and the pronunciation.

I love the advice Cindy gives the other newly arrived migrants – to leave the past in the past and live for the present and future. "Do not give up in language ... you can holding your mother language and English at the same time." Her advice at the end is very poetic: "Now I wrap up all my gift ... I leave on the table ... it now depends on you to open or not open."

Her journey has not ended – she is constantly learning.

Episode 3, titled "Ibrahim – 'English is very important'", gave me some great insight as a teacher – that just giving many worksheets to the students is not learning! Ibrahim said that his teacher wrote on the whiteboard, and he copied but he didn't understand. For him, talking with other students and learning from each other was more important. Repetition or revising things was the key to learning. He would prefer if the teacher went over the content of the previous lesson. He also pointed out that students need to be in the appropriate level otherwise they can struggle to achieve their best.

Ibrahim's advice to other newly arrived migrants is very simple and clear "Welcome ... study hard ... no have English, no have job; no have job, no have money." So, learning English is the most important thing.

Mariam's determination to keep on learning is very inspiring in Episode 4: "Mariam – 'Inside the class, English language only'". She talks of how the teacher as a facilitator can make a student hate or love the subject. She loved learning English when the teacher was willing to take the time to support and help her.

Her advice to the other newly arrived migrants while learning English is to seek help – Go to Google, use a dictionary and, of course, go to the teacher! People will not come to you; you have to make the effort! "Just start talk ... people will understand you." I tell this to my students all the time – don't worry about the grammar – just talk.

Mariam encourages using only English in the classroom. However, English-mainly as opposed to English-only would be my way. I do encourage the use of L1 for vocabulary discussion or to discuss instructions and ideas in groups in the classroom. Mariam has made me realise, though, that I need to be explicit about the relative advantages and disadvantages of L1 use in the classroom with the students.

The best advice that Mariam gives us is the need to laugh – not to be serious. This does create a very relaxed atmosphere in the classroom and great learning is achieved. So true!

As a teacher it was so important for me to hear about what newly arrived students have to say: their challenges and their successes; their courage and determination to keep learning English. It has also made me reflect on my teaching, that it's not just about teaching the curriculum, it's about building trust. Once students trust you, they make an effort for you. It is also important for the students to hear how other students have fared on their English learning journeys and the importance of not giving up!

Many thanks to Ama Omran for such wonderful stories and looking forward to many more episodes as Ama intends to have conversations with practitioners and managers too. In fact, the first episode of Series 2 was released on May 24, 2021.

This podcast is already in the top ten in Australia. Please subscribe and share this podcast with your network. You can find Ama's podcast website on Podbean: https://amatullahomran.podbean.com or search for "What the English?" on your podcasting platform of choice.

Manjit Bhamral is an AMEP/EAL teacher. She has taught in India and Africa and has taught in Australia at Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre for the past 15 years. She is passionate about teaching newly arrived migrants; she coordinates the volunteer tutor program and is also the resources officer.

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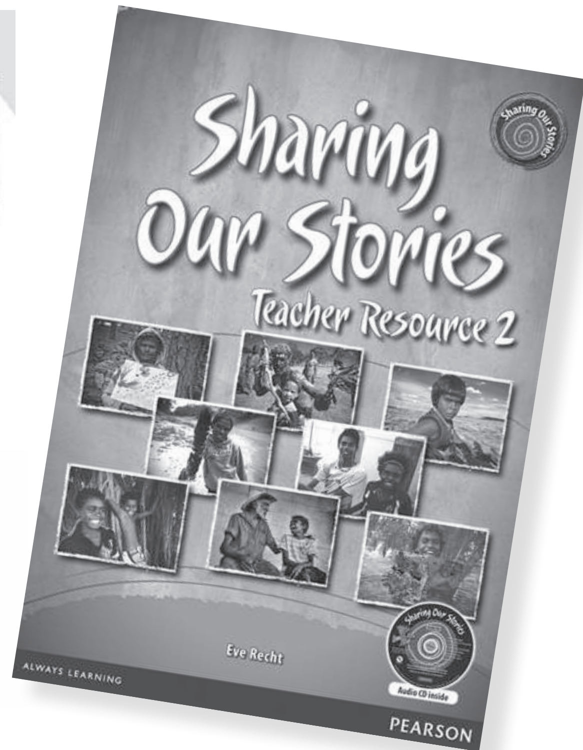
Sharing Our Stories: series produced by Pearson and SharingStories Foundation

reviewed by Deryn Mansell



Sharing Our Stories comprises two series of books designed to bring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures to the classroom.

There are six books in Series 1 and eight in Series 2. Each book focuses on one Indigenous Australian community and is centred on a story that is significant to that community. Storytellers, children and elders from the community speak directly to the reader. They introduce their community, explain their choice of story and its importance to the community, then talk about what the story means to them.

Photographs of community members and significant places accompany the text and the children's artwork illustrates the stories. Together with the conversational text, the images draw the reader in and reinforce the sense that these are present day stories, even as they are thousands of years old. Complex or unfamiliar words and concepts are written in bold type and explained in a glossary that runs along the bottom of the page. At the end of most of the books, the story is told in its original Indigenous language.

All the text is presented as quoted speech in the voices of adults and children in the featured community. This stylistic decision gives authority to voices that are not usually privileged in educational texts. So, apart from being an authentic source of information, the books may encourage adult learners to recognise their own wisdom and authority. Also, the authenticity of the language means that, while packaged as a resource for primary school classrooms, the series could easily be used in adult learning settings without any sense that the learners are reading juvenile literature.

When introducing their story, many of the storytellers begin by saying something like, "This is a story told to me by my grandmother." As well as giving the reader insight into the oral traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, such statements open the way to discuss the oral traditions at the heart of every

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culture – another opportunity to consider wisdom and authority from a different perspective.

The first series of Sharing Our Stories, published in 2008, featured stories from communities in Western Australia and Northern Territory, while the second series, published in 2011, expanded the sources to also include communities from Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland as well as Saibai Island, located less than five kilometres from Papua New Guinea in the Torres Strait.

The inclusion of stories from the Jaara community in central-western Victoria (*Bunjil the Eagle*) and the Neonone people of Bruny Island in Tasmania (*The Creation of Trowenna*) is welcome. It is often difficult to find resources that represent Aboriginal communities in the southern states as living cultures. There is a lot to learn – for teachers as well as students – from all of the books in Sharing Our Stories.

For each series there is a Teacher Resource book written by Eve Recht. This contains a synopsis of each story, maps and information about the communities, learning outcomes, suggested activities, black line masters and an interview with Liz Thompson, the photographer, writer, radio producer and documentary filmmaker who collaborated with the communities to create the books. The Resource also includes an audio CD featuring community members telling the story in English or its original language as well as environmental and everyday sounds from the community.

The learning outcomes and black line masters are more relevant for primary school teachers than other educators but the suggested activities for each title offer some great ideas that would be readily adaptable to an adult setting. The story synopses, maps and community information give an excellent overview of the content of the books in the series, so teachers can use this to decide which titles in the series to seek out.

The interview with Liz Thompson in Teacher Resource 2 offers insights into the making of the series and the principles behind it. When asked why Sharing Our Stories is an important project, Thompson replies in part:

> We are losing the old people who carry the stories and songs. Many young people no longer speak the languages that the song cycles are sung in. As Alistair Djalolba James said in *Turtle Dreaming*, "That old man Jimmy (Bungurru), he knows the story, but it's like some of the pages are missing. So already we've lost some, now we're trying to hold on to the rest."[1]

While this reminds us of the importance of recording the stories before they are lost, the books themselves are not weighed down by a sense of loss – the inclusion of children's voices and artworks give the stories vibrance and hope.

Short films from the eight communities featured in Sharing Our Stories Series 2 are also available on the Pearson website: https://www.pearson.com.au/educator/primary/browse-resources-online/cross-curricular/sharing-our-stories/support-materials/ and a range of resources related to the series are available on the SharingStories Foundation website: https://sharingstoriesfoundation.org/sharing-our-stories/

Sharing Our Stories was the overall winner of the Educational Publishing Awards Australia in 2009 and Liz Thompson was awarded the Judges Award for Innovator in the 2021 Pro Bono Impact Awards.

Books from Sharing Our Stories are published by Pearson. Visit https://www.pearson.com.au/educator/primary/browse-resources-online/cross-curricular/sharing-our-stories/ for more information.

Deryn Mansell is editor of *Fine Print*

Notes

1 Quoted on p. 9 of *Sharing Our Stories: Teacher Resource 2*

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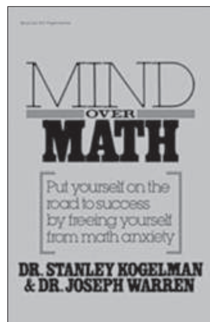
Off the shelf: *Mind over Math*

In the last issue of *Fine Print,* Lindee Conway wrote about *A Time to Learn*, a book published in 1993 that had a lasting impact on her teaching practice – see *Vol.44*(1) pp. 35–36. Her article reminded us that it can be just as valuable to find out about teaching materials that have stood the test of time as it is to find out about the latest releases. In this issue, Jim Royston is our inaugural reviewer for Off the Shelf, an occasional series of short reviews of titles that you're more likely to find in a second-hand bookshop or a library than on the "new releases" table. If you would like to contribute a review to Off the Shelf, please email fineprintvalbec@gmail.com with your idea.

Mind over Math by Stanley Kogelman and Joseph Warren (McGraw-Hill, 1979)

reviewed by Jim Royston



I have been progressively reading this book for two months now – it takes as long to read and do it justice as it does to follow its advice.

One of the book's key messages is to replace alarmist thinking about maths with realistic thinking about learning maths: that it takes time, many different approaches are valid, and it can be done!

The authors, both experienced practitioners and communicators, demystify the mental blocks we place on ourselves, often very naturally stemming from initial bad experiences, which are legion. Everything from classroom humiliations and being repeatedly told we're incapable are tackled.

The authors encourage readers to keep a maths diary covering the gamut of learning from kindergarten to university. When I stop to think about it, my own experiences which have led to a career in numeracy were so bad I just can't believe I kept going!

Adding a helpful feel to the book, the authors both state that even though they are proficient in their fields, they still suffer from maths anxiety and maths issues in general, such as people not knowing what to say to them at social gatherings. That everyone has some kind of maths issue is reassuring indeed.

The central message is one of hope – that learning is a vital human need which all too often is blocked by events beyond the control of the learner, leading to avoidance and poorer life quality. These blocks can be managed if not beaten with the first step being the hardest: seeking help, from a book or group or adult learning program.

As the authors state, adult learners bring a wealth of practical experience to their learning, and once progress is being made towards realistic goals, the taste of success can be very rewarding as a motivator to keep going and overcome early adversity.

Jim Royston has been in education as a student or academic or teacher for many years, and now mostly works supporting electrical trades students with their numeracy needs.

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