

this issue:

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by Liam Frost-Camilleri

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teaching situations and how learning
theories explain them by Erica Smith

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diversity by Di Buckley

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Adult Education in
the Community

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Editorial

In our final issue of *Fine Print* for the year, Liam Frost-Camilleri opens the conversation with a provocation: could faith in learning styles be holding students back? Staying with learning theories, Erica Smith reports on research that shows how teachers use learning theories to diagnose difficult teaching experiences in vocational education and training. Then, to round off our Features section, Di Buckley reflects on the ways that “language and power are woven into the fabric of the learning environment, and how that relationship must be addressed so that all learners can be supported in equitable ways.”

In Practical Matters, Christina Evans offers advice for teaching literacy to adults with mild intellectual disability and Linno Rhodes shares what she has discovered about assistive technologies, in particular Microsoft’s Immersive Reader function. Then, following on from Manjit Bhamral’s review of her podcast in our last issue, Ama Omran retraces the steps she took to bring *What the English? The Adult Migrant Learner* into fruition – if you’re looking for a guide to starting up your own podcast, this is it.

Continuing the practical bent of this issue, Lauren Carter’s Open Forum contribution offers tips to help your

colleagues and students avoid ambiguity in plain English. Our Conversation for this issue is with Jo Medlin and Liz Gunn from ACAL and VALBEC respectively. They share their thoughts on the challenges and the silver linings these volunteer-led organisations have experienced in staying connected with members during a pandemic.

Finally, in What’s Out There? Lorraine Sushames reviews Pamela Osmond’s *Developing Social Equity in Australian Adult Education: Lessons from the Past* and Jenny Peck, Suveshan Sathurayar and Fiona Bisko give us a tour of the cornucopia of resources you will find at the Languages and Multicultural Education Resource Centre.

A big thank-you to all who have made *Fine Print* happen this year: contributors, editorial committee members, production team and readers – it wouldn’t happen without you. All the best for a safe and relaxing summer break and, as always, please contact me at fineprintvalbec@gmail.com to comment on this issue of *Fine Print* or to propose a future article.

See you next year!

Deryn Mansell

The Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council (VALBEC) aims to lead the adult literacy field through identifying issues of importance to practitioners and facilitating positive change. This is achieved through networking, professional support, the sharing of information and the promotion of best practice.

It is time to let go of learning styles

by *Liam Frost-Camilleri*

The first time I encountered learning styles was when I was enrolled in my Graduate Certificate of Secondary Education course in 2004. It was one of the many theories that were presented, and my lecturers encouraged me to challenge these theories as much as study them. When I was learning to be a teacher, however, I didn't think too much about the theory. I believed that I had bigger theoretical fish to fry. Concepts like Blooms Taxonomy, Vygotsky's zone of proximal development or Bruner's scaffolding theory were far more involved.

While these theories have occupied my mind, many of my students in coming years have professed a leaning towards learning styles theory for its simple application. Interestingly, I have noticed a certain relief in my students when they have identified as being a certain learning style. In no place is this identification stronger than when a student doesn't like to read. This led me to wonder whether learning styles theory was helping or hindering my students.

To pinpoint the problems with this theory I'll address its definitions and its history, and I'll offer an alternative theory that is more fitting for TAFE students.

Defining learning styles theory

Learning styles theory tends to be simplified into the following four areas:

- Visual – learning by seeing
- Auditory – learning by hearing
- Reading/writing – learning by reading and writing
- Kinaesthetic – learning by physically doing.

However, there are many variations of these areas. In fact, there are reported to be 71 different models of learning styles theory (Vorhaus, 2010), and many organisations seem to confuse learning styles and Gardner's multiple intelligences theory (I will address Gardner's theory later in this piece). Different learning styles theories focus on the process of learning, a preference for information presentation or simply how individuals process information. From an educational standpoint, treating each individual student *as* an individual learner seems the main goal of learning styles.



The problem with labels

"I'm a visual learner, and you're making me read," was a common retort of my students when I taught English in secondary school. To be clear, I am an advocate for adjusting our teaching style to suit our students, but there was something more to this theory. Students who identified as kinaesthetic or auditory or visual learners wanted everything they learned to be presented in their preferred format and many students held strong to the identities of their learning style (Husmann & O'Loughlin, 2019).

Additionally, many of my colleagues (and the general public) endorsed the concept (Antoniuk, 2019). It seems that because we differ in learning preferences, many people believe that learning styles should logically follow (Westby, 2019). The VET classroom endorses this concept, for the preference of VET students (and teachers) tends to be to learn visually (Vorhaus, 2010). But to understand why I believe this theory is flawed, and detrimental to the TAFE classroom, we will need to look at its history and development.

The history and development of learning styles

Modern learning styles theory began in the 1970s with the prevailing idea that some people learn kinaesthetically, others visually and others through auditory means (Osborne, 2017). From here, educational theorists such as Fleming, Kolb and Honey and Mumford are widely attributed for developing the theory further.

Three variations

Neil Fleming developed the VARK (Visual, Aural, Reading/Writing and Kinaesthetic) model. His work contends that students have different preferences for how information is presented (Fleming, 1995). However, Fleming did more than simply describe different learning preferences. He simultaneously helped students who believed they were "different" or "dumb" to see there

was more than one way to learn. He also made lecturers in higher education start to question their teaching approaches (Fleming, 1995).

Fleming's work is not without its critics; many educators have decided to reject his theory for its lack of empirical research (Husmann & O'Loughlin, 2019). While I will say we have a way to go before the pedagogy of higher education institutions is appropriately effective, the abolishment of lectures and tutorials in favour of workshops and labs to better engage students seems to be a step in the right direction.

David Kolb's 1984 work is centred around four learning stages: concrete learning, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation (Glenn, 2009). The concept explains that students must move through these four stages to learn. The theory is quite involved and probably outside the scope of this article, but these stages are best thought of as learning by experiencing, learning by reflection, learning by thinking and learning by doing.

What Kolb successfully achieved with his theory was to highlight that learning is a process that takes time and effort. However, even Kolb warns against tailoring teaching approaches to a student's learning style due to the danger of limiting teaching pedagogy (Glenn, 2009).

Honey and Mumford (1992) developed a learning style approach that considered the attitudes and behaviours of the learner. Their model included four separate styles or personality traits: activists, reflectors, theorists and pragmatists (Honey & Mumford, 1992). Each of these styles is given certain strengths and weaknesses; activists are flexible and openminded but do not tend to think through the consequences of their actions, for example.

Honey and Mumford developed this theory to help managers better understand and cater for their staff. By being able to consider the perspective and learning preference of each staff member, it is said that managers would be able to engage with their staff more effectively (Vorhaus, 2010).

Gardner's multiple intelligences

While Howard Gardner is not always associated with the learning styles movement, his multiple intelligences model is used so often in classrooms that it is important that it is included here. During the development of multiple

intelligences, Gardner was challenging a system that believed intelligence to be very one-dimensional. Given the narrow sampling of these initial intelligence tests (Sternberg, 2015), Gardner's theory was quite revolutionary.

Gardner highlighted eight areas of intelligence: spatial (or visual), linguistic, intra-personal, interpersonal, logical-mathematical, musical, kinaesthetic and naturalist. In fact, Gardner's aim was not to produce or support learning styles, it was to question and pluralise the existing view that intelligence could be assessed in one fixed way (Gardner, 2012). Gardner's work is essential in opening our educational eyes to the idea that intelligence can not only be more than an IQ test, but it can also be developed.

While Gardner opened the idea of different ways of learning, like Fleming he is criticised for his lack of empirical evidence, leading some to believe that his theory is not a good basis for educational practice (Waterhouse, 2006). Given the amount of time schools have dedicated to Gardner's theories since the 1990s, it would be safe to suggest that most of the education profession does not share this criticism.

These four theories are representative of the ideas that are considered responsible for modern learning styles theory. But it must be emphasised that the original intent of these theories was different to their attribution. Reducing the exploration of the complexity of learning to a simplistic model is merely one problem when considering the concept of learning styles.

The problem with learning styles

The biggest issue that we face when considering learning styles is there is no empirical evidence to suggest that a focus on them makes any impact on students learning (Nancekivell, et al. 2020; Osborne, 2017; Newton & Miah, 2017; Kirschner, 2017). Meaning, if we are grounding our educational approach in this idea, we are grounding it in hearsay and anecdotal evidence. Additionally, given the evidence-based approach of most of our vocational educational areas, (i.e., "We do this because we know it works") this theory poses a challenge for educators in the VET sector.

When we start to dig into the theory further, other issues begin to arise. Not only are learning styles considered to be ill-defined and vague by researchers, but disputes are raging over how they are to be reliably determined for learners (Kirschner, 2017; Newton, & Miah, 2017; Santo,

2006). Many different versions of learning styles exist, and there is very little guiding literature as to the core styles or currently accepted styles in terms of educational approach. Additionally, the tools that are used are self-assessed, making accurate measurement problematic (Antoniuk, 2019; Santo, 2006).

Why does it matter?

There are two important negative impacts to the learning styles myth. The first issue is the pigeonholing of students (Kirschner, 2017). Pigeonholing students as “visual” or “kinaesthetic” learners leads to the belief that what they can achieve is finite, or that they are incapable of learning in different ways. Students who are pigeonholed into one learning style might view themselves as “one-dimensional” learners. Even worse, their teachers might view them that way. While I am an advocate for adjusting your teaching style to suit your students, I am certainly not an advocate for minimising student potential.

Second, it is argued that learning styles portray learning too simplistically (Nancekivell et al., 2020). When a student attributes themselves to a learning style and insists that everything is to be presented to them in that style, they are engaging with a narrow view of how learning works (Nancekivell et al., 2020). This narrow view of learning is compacted by educators who reinforce the concept, effectively depicting learning as a straightforward formula irrespective of the content being learned. Learning is an extremely complex process that we are still researching, and concepts such as learning styles do little to reflect its true nature. Despite these issues, learning styles still has unwavering support.

So convenient is the learning styles concept that not only do many people believe in the idea, but a study found that roughly half of educators support it as a pedagogy (Nancekivell, et al. 2020). Another study found that if presented with evidence to contradict learning styles, teachers would still subscribe to the idea (Newton & Miah, 2017). It must be clarified this study found that while 58% of teachers believed in learning styles, only 33% actively used them in the classroom. Meaning, educators are supporting learning styles without using them in their practice.

Student needs

Soiferman (2019), a supporter of learning styles, encourages a critical examination of the theory and like many other supporters, believes that the theory has been unjustly condemned for its lack of empirical evidence. These

educators believe that there is no negative impact caused by learning styles. They also believe that learning styles theory is a way to cater for the needs of students and should therefore become commonplace (Soiferman, 2019). This stance on the theory also implies that empirical evidence is not the only type of evidence to take into consideration when choosing a pedagogical position (Soiferman, 2019). It could be argued that empirical evidence is not just important, it is necessary. However, I will focus here on the justification of student needs. There is an alternative theory to this student-centred model, and it is called *student agency*.

Student agency

The research says that students have a need for more autonomy, and that a priority should be given to personalised learning (Vorhaus, 2010). It has been argued that the learning styles theory gave this to students (Soiferman, 2019), however, I contend that student agency is a far more suitable model for educators to adopt. While it is established that learning preferences seem to exist, it is important to note that there is no evidence that pandering to a learning style preference impacts a student’s ability to learn (Santo, 2006). Students need to feel important to their teachers, be treated as individuals, and feel a positive teacher–student relationship to be safe enough to take risks in their learning (Antoniuk, 2019; Osborne, 2017). But this approach needs to be supported with evidence-based approaches to ensure a positive and effective impact is made (Newton & Miah, 2017).

Co-creation of learning

Student agency is the empowering of students to become part of the co-creation of learning, rather than learning being transactional between the educator and the student (Vaughn, 2020). Research has found that increased student agency in the classroom leads to better learning outcomes (Taub et al., 2020). Additionally, the research highlights that developing student agency is the best way to connect with our students, develop autonomy and build a positive relationship with them. Student agency can be developed by creating a student voice in the classroom (Cook-Sather, 2020). This voice can take the form of self-reflection or intentional action from the students (Klemenčič, 2015).

It’s understandable that many teachers in the VET sector feel time poor and may not wish to introduce yet another theory into their practice (Vorhaus, 2010). But student agency isn’t about adding to the load, it is about altering how we conduct ourselves in the classroom to better suit our students and their needs. Let students have a say in how

they learn the material. Have students take some leadership in curriculum, their learning, and the pedagogy you are using as you move through the content (Cook-Sather, 2020). A focus on developing student agency recognises each learner as an individual and allows for a positive relationship to be developed between the teacher and the student. More importantly, theories of student agency cater for the complexity of learning while helping to fight the simplistic pigeonholing that can be seen in learning styles theory.

While more research is needed on student agency to see to what extent these elements assist students in their learning (Taub et al., 2020), the current research helps us to understand that student agency allows students to take control of their educational outcomes (Klemenčič, 2015).

My craft has certainly altered over time. The content that we are studying is discussed and explored in terms of the students lived experience. In my classrooms, students learn just as much about themselves and each other as learners as they do about the content we are covering. This wasn't an easy change, and sometimes I miss the mark, but it is a pursuit that my students appreciate as I work to become a stronger teacher.

Conclusion

Gardner supported the notion that there is more than one way to develop intelligence, Fleming encouraged educators to question our outdated pedagogies, Honey and Mumford discussed attitudes and dispositions and Kolb reinforced the view that learning is a process that takes time. If anything, these four ideas are in opposition to the finality presented by learning styles as a pigeonholing exercise. Acknowledging preferences for different learning styles does have its place in our educational evolution, but as we uncover more about the complexity of learning, we must learn to adapt. Student agency allows educators to be more responsive to the ideas of students and their voice (Cook-Sather, 2020) and is a far stronger method to engage our students when discussing whether they like to read or run outside.

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VET teachers' accounts of difficult teaching situations and how learning theories explain them

by Erica Smith



This paper, originally published in *Research Today*, the journal of the Australasian Vocational Education Training Research Association, reports on a research project conducted in 2020 with vocational education and training (VET) teachers in Australia. The project analysed teacher accounts to describe difficult teaching situations in VET and how learning theories explain the situations. The accounts were from teachers' assignments on this topic in a course (EDTAS2001: *Learning theories: VET in context*) in the Associate Degree of VET at Federation University. The project is currently being extended.

Background

The study of learning theories is almost ignored in the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, the only pedagogical qualification required for Australian VET teachers (except those with higher level VET or adult education teaching qualifications). Only one criterion in one element of one unit of competency (TAEDEL401: *Plan, organise and deliver group-based learning*) addresses this important part of teaching: "2.3 Use knowledge of learning principles and theories to generate ideas for managing session delivery" (<https://training.gov.au/Training/Details/TAEDEL401>). The "knowledge evidence" listed in the assessment part of the unit refers only to "learning theories and principles", with no specificity.

In contrast, a range of learning theories are studied in depth in all university-level VET teacher-education courses. In the textbook produced by the Australian Council of Deans of Education Vocational Education Group (ACDEVEG), for example, exercises in the chapter on learning theories (Hodge and Ollis, 2014) encourage VET teachers to apply learning theories to their own teaching. But there is a gap in the empirical literature on how VET teachers actually do this, although school-education literature (e.g. Runesson,

2015) provides more instances. The lack of concrete examples in Australian VET is a problem for the sector, and affects teaching of the concept at all levels. That is why this research was carried out.

Method

Human Research Ethics Committee approval was gained. The students in the learning theories course were emailed, after the end of the Semester 1 2020, to seek their permission to analyse their work in an assignment which asked, among other matters, students to "write an account of one or more difficult teaching experiences of your own... and (say how) learning theories...help to explain the difficulties you encountered." The email was sent by a third party as I was their teacher. Fifteen out of 29 students replied giving permission.

For this paper, the accounts were analysed by the two research questions:

1. What types of difficult teaching situations do VET teachers encounter?
2. How does learning theory explain such situations?

Data collection is being carried out during 2021 with an additional cohort of students, after which further analysis will be undertaken.

Findings

The types of difficult situations were described as follows by the students (see Table 1). The teachers themselves diagnosed the difficulties (see final column in Table 1).

The main topics mentioned in the teachers' accounts can be grouped as follows:

- Students were disruptive because they didn't see a need to know
- The content was difficult for the students

Table 1

	Industry area	Type of student group	Difficult situation as described	Diagnosis made by their teacher (my student)
A	Plumbing	Apprentices	One student disruptive	Did not have need to know
B	Plumbing	Apprentices	Students disruptive	Did not have need to know
C	Plumbing	Apprentices	Students disruptive	Did not have need to know, and content too hard
D	Pathology	Mature learners at TAFE	Two students brought their babies	College rules precluded this
E	Earthmoving	Short govt-funded course	Some students disruptive	Enrolled for unemployment benefit – low self-efficacy
F	Welding	Apprentices	A student with special needs could not keep up	Content too hard
G	Training & Assessment	Short govt-funded course	Two students had low digital literacy	Content too hard
H	Beauty	Mixed-age learners	1 Special needs student 2 Students' eyes glazed over in theory class	1 Content too hard 2 Content presented boringly
I	Carpentry	Short taster course - teenagers	Some students disruptive	Content presented boringly
J	Plumbing	1 Pre-apprenticeship 2 Mature learners	1 A refugee student angry with playful students 2 One student failed exam twice	1 Feared he would not be able to practice enough 2 Could not identify important elements to learn
K	Internet use	Refugee women with little English	Students were not literate in own language	Needed own-language assistance in order to learn
L	Plumbing	Mature learners at TAFE	Could not understand a particular unit	Content too hard
M	Electrical	VET in Schools (VETIS) student	Students disruptive	Content presented boringly
N	General studies	VCAL (type of VET in schools) students	Students disruptive	Students from disadvantaged background without role models
O	Parenting	Community centre course	Student made inappropriate comment	Attention-seeking

- The content was difficult for particular students because of learning needs or lack of skills
- The teaching was boring
- Students' personal circumstances made learning difficult (refugee status, long-term unemployed).

Teachers then went on to describe how learning theories could explain what had happened, and also how learning theories could prevent similar situations arising in the future. (The latter points are not analysed in this paper.) Some of the learning-theory-related explanations presented by teachers were:

- Plumbing students were not able to see a connection to their own experience (Knowles's adult learning theory)
- Slower students needed to build up to concepts (scaffolding theory – Vygotsky)
- Aggressive refugee student was at lower level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs than other students (motivation theory – Maslow)
- Women were attempting to transform (e.g. Mezirow) their lives, hence came to class even with their babies
- Confiscation of mobile phones didn't work (punishment aspect of behaviourism – Skinner failed)
- Teacher used andragogy (adult learning theory – Knowles) in a beauty class but younger students could not cope.

One comment helps to provide insight into the reflection that was taking place among the students as a result of studying learning theories:

As a new teacher with little or no training in how to handle difficult students my arsenal of weapons for dealing with this type of situation was quite small. While I had over 25 years' experience in industry, with little teaching experience and virtually no knowledge of learning theory I found the firm approach and a pedagogical style was my only way of keeping control of a large class. This would usually work but on rare occasions could lead to a battle of wills or even direct confrontation which in turn could lead to a difficult student leaving the class. It was only after I started to become a more experienced teacher and my understanding of students and their needs grew that I naturally transitioned to a more andragogical/

cognitive approach to teaching, although at the time I had no idea what these words meant.

Teachers described how the theory they were learning had prompted them to reconsider their teaching methods for the future. While the latter point is beyond the scope of this paper, these responses will be analysed later.

Conclusion

The research so far has shown that VET teachers find that using learning theories is a useful way to make sense of teaching situations and consider how to improve them. As one teacher said in the assignment response: "Although I have only just started my Associate Degree, this module on learning theories has given me many tools. By understanding the way successful students learn, good teachers facilitate and the theory behind learning, I can implement these strategies and improve my teaching practice." It is hoped that the study, through provision of current Australian examples, will assist VET teachers and can be used in teacher-training studies at all levels and also in professional development.

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Language and power: supporting diversity

by *Di Buckley*

Language is at the core of our classroom teaching. It is not only our main form of communication with our students but is also a mechanism for our students to access and connect with relevant information. In this article, I explore how language and power are woven into the fabric of the learning environment, and how that relationship must be addressed, so that all learners can be supported in equitable ways.

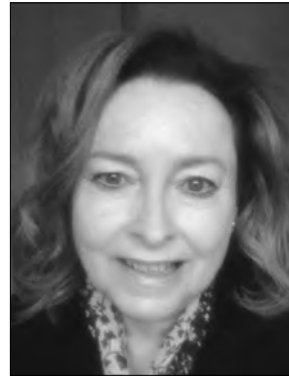
My own professional experiences as an educator have included primary and secondary schools, as well as alternative settings, such as community colleges and prisons. I have taught a range of programs in the TAFE sector, delivering classes in accredited courses, as well as developing learning resources and materials. I also work with medical registrars, many of whom come from English as an Additional Language (EAL) backgrounds.

My interest in language and power has been ignited by an awareness of the complex, nuanced interplay that often exists within the cohorts whom I teach. Additionally, inequities within various educational institutions and frameworks have heightened my recognition of some of the anomalies which exist, concerning access to knowledge, information and educational opportunities. I have witnessed students trying to navigate systems that are unsympathetic to their needs because they are not members of the dominant cultural group.

Connections between language and power

The concept of language and power in society poses authentic, everyday challenges for many people, including educators. Researchers and theorists have established various frameworks to provide clearer understandings about how language is leveraged in different societies: “Bourdieu (1991) conceives of languages as symbolic marketplaces in which some people have more control of the goods than others because certain languages or varieties have been endowed with more symbolic power than others and have therefore been given greater value” (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015, p. 9).

Chomsky conceived of language as “a set (finite or infinite) of sentences, each finite in length and constructed out of a



finite set of elements” (Chomsky, 1957, p. 13). As language is indeed a fluid and changeable form of communication between people, notions of proficiency, evident in the concept of performance versus competence, directly impact a person’s capacity to navigate the “relationship between a specific language and the culture in which it is used” (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015, p. 10).

Speech communities

Being part of a speech community is the way in which people navigate their everyday lives, and an intrinsic aspect of social identity and connection. It is the cornerstone of what our communication through language signifies.

The relationship between language and power means that being part of a speech community necessitates not only a knowledge of the (usually unstated) rules, but also a recognition of the inherent codes used by members of the community. At a core level, this connection to an intrinsic sense of identity can further affect the notion of accessibility, and impact considerably on one’s sense of status within a particular community.

“My English is better than yours”

The notion of how language and power are intertwined, is also reflected in how formal language learning has evolved over time. However, this is not as straightforward as it seems; a number of studies have established that, for example, within the learning of English as a second language, there are a number of precursors that can actually end up excluding certain learners, depending on their perceived quality of English: “In some cases, these speakers are denied employment, solely on the grounds that their English is not one of the high-status varieties of English spoken internationally” (Tollefson, 2000, p. 8).

The relationship of hidden power and social struggle, as most aptly observed by Fairclough (2013), can become

further embedded within a language learning environment: “Language learning is a powerful way to develop new behaviours that express higher status. Thus, the formidable task of learning English becomes a means by which individuals seek higher status” (Tollefson, 2000, p. 10). Yet the ways in which entrenched systems perpetuate idealised versions of English as a “national language belonging to all classes and sections of the society, yet remain[ing] in many respects, a class dialect” (Fairclough, 2013, p. 48) often results in inequality rather than opportunity: “The need to learn English is often a barrier to education and employment rather an opportunity for it” (Tollefson, 2000, p. 18).

This is a sobering observation, perhaps reflective of the layered complexities inherent within the very concept of language and power. Within the context of an educational setting, the observation that “any system of education is a political way of maintaining the appropriation of discourses, along with the knowledges and powers which they carry” (Foucault, as cited in Fairclough, 2013, p. 54) strongly reinforces the notion that within these identified settings, discourses are conducted within a range of speech communities that operate at various nuanced layers of power, and therefore, influence.

The context of classroom learning

One specific cohort I have taught which has direct application to this discussion, is Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) students. VCAL is a Victorian secondary school qualification that provides an alternative pathway to the Victorian Certificate of Education. The cohort is generally aged between 16 and 20. Many students have stepped away from mainstream schooling, with a notable percentage from under-resourced or disadvantaged backgrounds. The importance of social grouping is particularly axiomatic among teenage students; the ways in which they emulate Labov’s (1972) view of a speech community (as opposed to Chomsky’s view of homogeneity), still incorporates broad diversity in culture, social class and learning ability.

There are numerous illustrations of how power and language representations are depicted within this setting; both within the classroom and outside of it. Within their classroom groups, the students exhibit a distinct cohesion in identification within their own cohort as a class of young adults via their language exchanges.

The term “cultural capital” was coined by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in the 1970s to acknowledge that it sits alongside

economic capital as a source of power. Students show their understanding of this through the myriad language choices they make. Common phrases, such as “my bad” and “sick”, coexist comfortably with students regardless of their language backgrounds.

Prestige

Peer acceptance is another significant factor. Students from EAL backgrounds in particular will choose their words carefully; they will often speak very quietly so that not all their words are picked up. Influenced by a number of factors; individual toolkits, idiolects and gender, there are evident cultural scripts that exist within the cohort. Having the cultural “knowhow” as observed by Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015), enables them to navigate their daily living needs. Notably, EAL students tend to speak more freely one-on-one, rather than in the company of their peers or teachers, implying a tacit recognition of a prestige dialect of English.

Furthermore, a hesitancy in contributing verbally in a classroom setting (even with much genuine encouragement) denotes an acute awareness of potential rejection by native English-speaking peers (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015); and the oftentimes harsh self-assessment of personally held language ideologies – notably about “good speakers” and “bad speakers”.

A recognition of the dynamics of language and power conflict is further evidenced when considering student–teacher relationships. This requires respect and understanding: “English language educators must understand the direct and powerful impact of social, political, and economic forces upon their classrooms and how these forces affect students’ lives” (Tollefson, 2000, p. 19).

An interesting assertion of how connections between language and power may be negatively realised, sits within the notion of “othering”; of how value judgements are made “based on stereotyped opinions about [the] groups as a whole” (Palfreyman, 2005, p. 213). This highlights the potentially damaging shunning that can occur, when one group does not fit the required and desired characteristics, often of a dominant culture. This promotes an “Us v Them” mentality.

Dominant cultures in learning

In research exploring Australians’ sense of class identity, it is interesting to note that “Australians are quite acutely aware of their class identity, with self-assessed class membership

reflecting the relative capital and mobility of the objectively measured classes” (Sheppard & Biddle, 2017, p. 513). It is well worth reflecting on some of the broader implications, particularly with regards to Australian learning institutions.

As Fairclough asserts, “Discourse types and orders of discourse vary across cultures. But in such gatekeeping encounters, white middle-class gatekeepers are likely to constrain the discourse types which can be drawn upon to those of the dominant cultural grouping” (Fairclough, 2013, p. 40). This poses ongoing issues in maintaining equity, especially in learning and educational institutions. Though “sensitivity to cultural differences is growing” (Fairclough, 2013), there seems to be an inbuilt discrimination that is still, at times, disappointingly evident.

The ways in which teachers are positioned as either “native” or “non-native” English speakers presents challenges and opportunities for cultural shift within institutions: “Othering is important for TESOL professionals to consider because it shapes perceptions about many of the issues that [teachers] face: classroom interaction, conceptions of what it is to be taught and how it should be assessed” (Palfreyman, 2005, p. 213).

Demonstrating language respect

Encouragement of students’ native language and/or multilingual capabilities, is one way in which each student’s “language base” can be appreciated and celebrated. This provides an important foundation from which all students can develop their language skills in constructive and meaningful ways. Positive feedback, encouragement and (when appropriate) modelling from their teachers, is part of practising a kind of transactional language respect.

Awareness is the key

The concept of language and power is an ever-present consideration that teachers need to be conversant with in their teaching practice. Awareness of the potential power

inequities that exist in learning environments should be a foremost consideration for informed educators. A recognition of the interplay that exists within all learning groups, in addition to individual learning needs, is paramount. Ultimately, this area has additional relevance for teachers with EAL students, who must also contend with additional hurdles in their endeavours to develop English language proficiency, while respecting the worthwhile cultural capital that each student contributes, in the learning sphere.

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Teaching literacy to adults with mild intellectual disability

by *Christina Evans*



I have been teaching literacy to adults with mild intellectual disability for just over thirteen years. In this article, I would like to share with you some of the things I have learned along the way.

Since 2015 I have been at Melbourne Polytechnic, teaching in what is now Work Education Programs (WEP). Our cohort has largely consisted of young adults who have recently completed secondary school within special/inclusive schools or mainstream schools and some who have completed a Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) at Foundation Level. Our students have mild intellectual disabilities and may have other disabilities and/or medical conditions. Many have complex needs. My colleagues and I have noticed that the literacy competence of those entering the Certificate I in Initial Adult Literacy and Numeracy has declined over the last few years.

Literacy needs of adults with mild intellectual disability

Defining literacy is complex, as it encompasses so many aspects of our cohort's daily lives: writing, reading, oracy, life skills, digital literacy, to name a few. What Stone (2015) describes as "functional literacy", is where I believe our cohort sits. The aim of many of our literacy clusters, is to teach our students to be able to write their personal contact details (for the purposes of filling out a form), recognise signs (road signs, toilet signs, supermarket signs), follow basic written instructions (reading a recipe from a cookbook), and write or type an invitation or a birthday card. The way we teach literacy to our students plays a major role in how they are able to function in society.

It is apt at this point to talk about mild intellectual disability and how we define this term. An IQ score of less than 70 is generally accepted as the definition of a mild intellectual disability. However, in recent years, professionals have become more interested in a person's adaptive behaviours: the functional abilities necessary for independence in everyday life (Westwood, 2012, p.3).

Self-care, social competence and self-management are all examples of adaptive behaviours which enable a person to get along in their environment:

- Self-care is the practice of taking an active role in protecting your own wellbeing and happiness.
- Social competence is about creating balance in your life between work, study, time to yourself, and time with friends and family.
- Self-management is the ability to regulate your emotions, thoughts and behaviours.

What we can take from these terms, is that having a mild intellectual disability is not just about an IQ score, but much more to do with a person's ability to function as a productive member of a community or, more widely, a society. This is where teaching literacy to our cohort, is paramount to their everyday lives.

Our cohort is capable of learning and, with effective teaching methods, can acquire many new behaviours. Adults with mild intellectual disability have areas of strength, as does any person. They vary widely, whether it be in their cognitive functioning, self-management, individual personalities or ability to cope with their TAFE studies.

How we teach literacy in WEP

Within the WEP we teach the following subject clusters (for literacy), which link to individual units of competency from the curriculum we teach:

- Basic Words and Numbers
- Verbal Communication
- Literacy
- Life Skills Communication
- Everyday Literacy
- Reading to Learn.

Embedded in the above subject clusters, are a number of skill sets:

- Reading
- Writing
- Speaking
- Verbal/ Oral/ Visual Communication
- Listening
- Non-verbal Communication (facial gestures/body language).

“Skill set” is a term which many educators in the Vocational Education and Training sector use as a part of their everyday vernacular. It means the skills which students acquire as they are taught any given unit of competency within a curriculum. For example, if a student is studying Hospitality, one of the skill sets they acquire is cooking.

Within our literacy programs, we aim to teach or assist our cohort to improve their skills of reading (from a book, newspaper article, signage, internet, text-messaging), writing (words, phrases, sentences, recipes, invitations), oracy (public speaking, group discussion) and listening (to others, to themselves, being attentive), to mention but a few.

Differentiation

There are many teaching methods and teaching strategies teachers can use to assist adult students with mild intellectual disabilities to learn. I find that differentiation, the idea of adapting instruction to match the differences in the abilities of different students, is the most effective and fair method to employ.

Whether we realise it or not, most teachers use this method while teaching. There is nothing mysterious about it. I came across differentiation when I was studying a post graduate qualification in special education about four years ago. Peter Westwood (2012) provides some examples of how this method is taught which I have paraphrased below:

- Adapting our teaching to suit each individual student
- Jumping from student-centred to teacher-directed methods, depending on the students’ abilities and needs
- Monitoring students’ work, depending on their capabilities
- Providing some students with more or different types of assistance as they are working through a task
- Creating different resources for different students
- Rewarding different students differently.

The question of whether we teach adults with mild intellectual disabilities differently to, say, adults from English as an Additional Language backgrounds, students studying VCAL programs, or those studying in mainstream education, is easy to answer. Yes, we do employ different teaching strategies to teach different students. As teachers, we are differentiating all the time, as can be seen in the list above.

Many years ago, I had the opportunity to run a few VCAL classes at the institute where I worked. One of them was a small group of EAL/VCAL students. I split the class into three sub-groups, based on their literacy competence. With one group, I went back to the basics and taught them the alphabet, using pictures which matched the various letters of the alphabet, getting them to write the alphabet (both capitals and lower case – so, a bit of learn by rote), building their oracy skills, by getting them to talk about specific topics, and helping them to read fundamental words from the Oxford Wordlist.

The second group was able to recognise most letters in the English alphabet, so I worked on improving their decoding skills, by using flash cards from the First 100 Oxford Wordlist and reading and writing short phrases.

The third group had a very good grasp of the alphabet, and were able to recognise, read and write many words from the Oxford Wordlist. At this stage, the students read short novels, with each student’s literacy competence being a little different to the next. The focus was on correct spelling, pronunciation, grammar, comprehension and summarising (both verbally and in writing).

So, in using differentiation with Literacy, all we are doing is using a variety of different tricks from our bag, to teach each student a little differently to the next. We can do this by using different activities, teaching styles, strategies and resources.

Using a variety of literacy learning activities, means that students are kept engaged in the session. Here are some ideas:

- Brainstorming (any topic you might be teaching, which includes all students)
- Writing (to improve punctuation and grammar)
- Public speaking (talking about a topic in front of the class)
- Reading (from an e-book/hard copy book/internet)

- Researching (internet and hard copies)
- Role-play (acting out scenarios/using problem-solving skills)
- Working in small groups (using butchers' paper for theme work)
- Working as a whole class (hangman and charades)
- Working in pairs (particularly good for the beginning of the year for students to get to know each other)
- Timelines (like birthday lines, only students choose an important event in their lives, think about when it happened and put themselves in chronological order, compared to their peers – great for communication and numeracy!)

Literacy learning activities within WEP

Here are some of the literacy learning activities my colleagues and I have utilised within the various literacy subject clusters we teach within the WEP.

***All About Me* book**

The *All About Me* book, as we call it, is a popular literacy learning activity which involves students creating a booklet either in electronic or hardcopy format. Here are the steps involved in creating it :

- Cover page (with title and student's name)
- Contents page (stating what is included in their booklet and page numbers)
- Personal details (stating student's age, where they were born, where they live, physical appearance, etc.)
- Interests, hobbies and favourite things (favourite colour, sports team, song, book, movie, etc.)
- Where and with whom the students engage in their interests and hobbies (I play basketball with my team at a particular stadium)
- Family tree (this is optional, but I find students enjoy this as they get the opportunity to talk about their families)
- An oral presentation in front of their peers once the booklet is completed (this is great for public speaking and building self-confidence in students)
- Lastly, students' peers provide feedback to the student presenting, as does the teacher.

Students are encouraged to provide photos and pictures from the internet, to add colour and individuality to their booklet.

***How to Create a Recipe* book**

The *How to Create a Recipe* book, too, is a popular literacy learning activity and can be produced in both electronic

and hardcopy format. It can be done in small groups, where each student contributes to the booklet by creating two recipes of their own. The students need to work together if they choose a common theme (chocolate, salads, etc.) or can work on entirely different recipes and come together at the end to compile the booklet.

The main areas it includes are:

- Cover page (with title and students' names)
- Contents page (stating what is included in their booklet – names of recipes/page numbers)
- Each recipe, which includes: a title, ingredients, the method, equipment used, how many people it serves and preparation/cooking time
- An oral presentation in front of their peers once the booklet is completed (once again, this is great for public speaking and building confidence in students)
- Lastly, students' peers provide feedback to the group presenting, as does the teacher.

I encourage my students to work on this activity as part of a group, as this provides them with important team-building skills, which are essential in most workplaces. All groups are encouraged to provide photos and pictures from the internet, to add colour and individuality to their booklet.

Invitation to an Event

Lastly, *Invitation to an Event* is a practical literacy learning activity, which, surprisingly, many of my students are not familiar with until they create one in class. Again, students can create their invitations either in electronic or hard copy format. They can be really creative with this one!

Here is how we teach it:

- After an initial brainstorming activity of all the invitation events the students can think of, each student chooses an event (birthday, wedding, Christmas, bar mitzvah, etc.)
- We then discuss the information which needs to be provided in an invitation (recipient's name, name of event, venue, address, day, date, time, dress code, dietary requirements/ B.Y.O., R.S.V.P. date and host's contact details)
- Once the students have gathered all their information and created a draft, we check for correct spelling and grammar
- They can then add graphics and finalise their invitation (this is great for developing digital literacy skills)

- An oral presentation in front of their peers once the booklet is completed (once again, this is great for public speaking and building confidence in students)
- Lastly, students' peers provide feedback to the group presenting, as does the teacher
- Students listening and communication skills are further developed as they listen to their peers' opinions.

Reducing obstacles to learning

Some of the ways teachers can minimise the obstacles to learning that students with mild intellectual disabilities face:

- Adjusting font size on handouts or on the whiteboard (for example, it needs to be larger for students with visual impairment)
- Providing small chunks of information so that students are not overwhelmed and can tackle the task (writing simple step-by-step instructions on the whiteboard or providing visual cues for those who cannot read or are non-verbal)
- Giving simple instructions orally, in writing, or visually, depending on the students' strengths (often one at a time)
- Encouraging students to "give it a go", even if they don't like the task
- Empowering students to be brave and bold (with public speaking)
- Assisting students with spelling words, writing phrases, sentences and paragraphs
- Helping out with pronunciation, punctuation and grammar (sometimes at a very fundamental level)
- Encouraging students to use listening skills to understand their peers and teachers
- Teaching students the basics of using a computer and digital literacy (including word processing, formatting, using the functions of the various tool bars, etc.)
- Researching (students need to be able to read first – I often need to read information on the internet to students who have not yet developed this basic literacy skill)
- Recognising and learning the alphabet (usually within the Course in Initial Adult Literacy and Numeracy).

Literacy resources

Some of the literacy resources I have found particularly useful include:

- A flip chart (with which students create phrases/sentences/short stories)
- Story Sparkers (a box of photos students can choose from and talk about, write about, list things they



A page from a student's *All About Me* book



An example of a student's Invitation to an Event

see in the photos either verbally or in writing. There are also instructions on the back of each card, with starting-sentences to help out with ideas for writing or telling stories)

- PRACE Readers (class sets of fiction short stories, students can read as a group and complete literacy activities on the last page – designed for EAL readers).

Teacher reference texts

Some of the teacher reference texts I have found particularly useful include:

- The What Teachers Need to Know About series by Peter Westwood and others, published by ACER Press. This series includes titles on teaching methods, reading and writing difficulties, students with disabilities and learning difficulties, which are all relevant to teaching literacy to adults with mild intellectual disability. There are others in the series which cover topics relevant to teaching in general. <https://shop.acer.edu.au/what-teachers-need-to-know-about.html>
- *The Practice of English Language Teaching* by Jeremy Harmer, published by Pearson. The edition of this book that I have published in 2007, but much of the contents are relevant today. The book covers topics such as: where English sits as a world language; evaluating new technologies in the classroom; practical teaching methods; issues around teacher development; learner autonomy; and context-sensitive teaching. It comes with a DVD, which shows extracts from a variety of classrooms, as well as discussions involving teachers. A 5th edition was released in 2017.
- *Inclusive Principles and Practices in Literacy Education* edited by Marion Milton, published by Emerald Publishing (2017). This text contains a number of articles, several of them about literacy, a few specifically about inclusive literacy.
- *Language for Life: Where Linguistics Meets Teaching* by Lyn Stone, published by Routledge (2015). This text includes activities and worksheets on grammar, punctuation, morphology and how to teach your students to use dictionaries.

- *What Really Works in Special and Inclusive Education: Using Evidence-Based Teaching Strategies* by David Mitchell and Dean Sutherland, published by Routledge (2020). This text was recommended by a colleague in the literacy field and I have only just started reading it. It outlines 29 strategies, from behavioural assessment and approaches to direct instruction and universal design for learning.

Conclusion

The thing to remember is that even though we all teach literacy to different students, whether they be learning VCAL, EAL, mainstream, TESOL, WEP and so on, we are all employing the teaching method of differentiation, teaching all of our students from an individual standpoint. Whatever the cohort you teach, I highly recommend reading widely, participating in professional development and talking to your peers, as we can learn much from each other. We face challenges every day through our teaching experiences and are continually learning from our students. This is what I believe makes our jobs so interesting and rewarding.

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Christina Evans has taught adult students with mild intellectual disabilities since 2008. Her first job was with La Trobe Lifeskills, teaching the Certificate I in Transition Education and she has taught at Kangan Institute, Olympic Adult Education and Box Hill Institute. Since 2015, she has worked at what is now Melbourne Polytechnic Preston Campus. She is currently teaching a variety of subjects, including Literacy, within their Work Education Programs. Much of the practical information in this article has been drawn from the webinar Christina presented for VALBEC in July, 2021.

Immersive Reader: an assistive technology

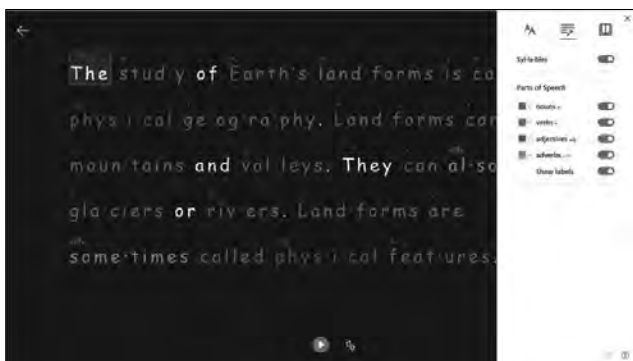
by Linno Rhodes



The Immersive Reader function in the Microsoft Windows suite of assistive technologies, offers people with literacy challenges a user-friendly tool that has many options and is easy to navigate. There are many other digital tools available, such as Claro Read and Claro Write from other platforms that do similar things.

I first discovered the Immersive Reader when I signed up for a professional learning webinar session through the *Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training*. This organisation is funded by the Australian Government's Department of Education, Skills and Employment and hosted by The University of Tasmania. There are heaps of really useful webinars and other resources freely available on the website. I also accessed the Immersive Reader webinar which has similar features to the Reader.

The features include the ability to change the background colour, change font size and type (limited to three choices), divide words into syllables and show the parts of speech through colour coding. The Immersive Reader will read the text aloud, in a range of accents and you can choose a male or female sounding voice. There is also the ability to change the speed of the playback. Immersive Reader can translate from 30 different languages.



Immersive Reader as it appears on screen

The adaptive technologies are available in most of the Windows apps, but the capability is limited depending on which way you access your Windows apps. I consider myself to have reasonably good working knowledge of how to access Windows apps and general digital literacy, however I find it difficult to jump around from cloud-based to web-based to downloaded versions of simple apps like Word and PowerPoint. To get the full capability, you need to access these apps via the web-based versions. I found this version lags a bit, so am unlikely to use it for my day-to-day requirements. The subscription version of Microsoft 365 apps is constantly updating the features, which is important in the accessibility space. Anyone who has an education email address (one with .edu in the domain) should have access to five free copies of Microsoft apps – ask your IT person to check the accuracy of this information for your workplace.

I think these tools are a wonderful addition to the Language Literacy and Numeracy teacher's toolbox and am looking forward to working with them. I particularly like the way the parts of speech are highlighted and also the syllabification of words. Using these tools in the classroom is a good way to scaffold, so that students have the confidence to use them outside of the class as well.

Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training: <https://www.adcet.edu.au/>

For more information on Microsoft Immersive Reader: <https://www.microsoft.com/en-au/education/products/learning-tools>

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What the podcast? A practical guide to starting up your own podcast and its use in the classroom

by Ama Omran



My love of teaching and connecting to adult migrant learners is how my podcast journey began. After researching the basics, I had a rough plan outlined in the space of a few weeks.

This article will explain the fundamentals of podcasting (from my perspective and personal experience) and how you can incorporate it into your teaching and learning. Podcasting can be a great way to enhance and develop communication skills in the classroom, so take what you can from the steps below and make it work for your students.

Step 1: Purpose

It is vital that you have a purpose in mind for your podcast. Ask yourself questions such as:

- What is the message that I want to get across?
- What do I hope to gain from doing this?
- How much time and money am I prepared to spend on it?
- Who is my target audience?
- Why would people want to listen to this podcast?
- Who will I interview?
- What will make my podcast stand out from the rest? (You will need to do some research here to see what is already out there.)

Step 2: Title/description

Play around with titles that are catchy and get the main point across. Create a list then leave it for a few days. When you come back to it you will know which title to choose! Write down a draft of your podcast description. I read many existing podcast descriptions to get an idea of what was required. At this stage of the game I had the description and the introduction (first episode) completed.

Step 3: Podcast cover design

Now this is the fun part. When I created *What the English?* I had a vision of the podcast cover design immediately. It was

almost instinctual – like the idea was there lurking beneath the surface and I just needed that light bulb moment for it to come to life. I can't stress enough the importance of writing everything down. I used my essential Make Shit Happen note book and voila! The power of manifestation.

Step 4: Podcast equipment/interview platforms

This is where Google and YouTube videos become your best friends. When looking for high quality podcast equipment, you not only need to research online, but consider asking other podcasters about their experiences too. I purchased my equipment from Mannys Music in Melbourne.

To purchase good quality audio, you will be looking at anywhere between \$400 and \$600. I recall making a lot of phone calls and noting everything down so that I could make informed decisions later. I also read that some people who are new to podcasting use their smartphones and other recording devices to produce pilots. This allows them to get a feel of it, and ascertain if it is something they really want to pursue. If you decide to go ahead, you need to consider the following:

- Recording equipment (consider whether or not you will be interviewing in different locations)
- Microphones
- Headphones
- Online interview platforms (e.g., Squadcast)
- Podcast host (e.g., Podbean, Simplecast) this is where your episodes are published and housed. Each host offers different packages so once again you will need to do the research and decide which one is more suited to your needs.

Once equipment is purchased, use some time to play around with it. I am not IT savvy in the slightest, but when I put my mind to something, I will find a way. That way for me was through watching YouTube videos. I would sit for hours on end: watching, testing, trialling and then finally putting into practice.

Step 5: Finding a designer/producer

If you are already skilled at designing and editing then you definitely have an advantage over others (like me). Depending on whether or not your aim is to produce a professional product, then you could research producers and designers. The most common editing and publishing software is Audacity and you can also listen to a plethora of music tracks from AudioJungle and GarageBand. Upwork is where you can source affordable podcast cover designs.

I was lucky to find a designer who took on board my insights and followed through effortlessly. My producer was literally discovered in my first google search for 'podcast producers' and I haven't looked back since. Depending on the expertise of your producer, he/she/they should provide information on your interviewing skills, proper use of equipment and general podcasting essentials.

Step 6: Sourcing guests/recording

Brainstorm the first 5-10 seasons. Consider the following:

- Themes
- Topics
- Guest speakers
- Questions (make sure questions are sent to the guest speaker prior to the interview).

Don't rush this process. Ask friends/family questions and brainstorm your ideas with those you trust, to gauge level of interest.

Use of podcasts in the classroom

My ideas for the classroom usually come from almost everything I do during the day. Ideas pop up while cooking, shopping, exercising, showering and the list goes on! I had already envisaged teachers using 'What the English?' in the classroom as a way to motivate students and boost their confidence. Some practical ideas may include:

Lower levels

- Use the podcast cover to discuss title, colours, letters and symbols
- Convert the podcast cover into a puzzle
- Use the introduction episode (and/or guest introductions) for personal themes and topics, e.g. Me, Myself and I
- Matching exercises – match the guest's name to a short description or match the title to a photo of the guest
- Create a mini class podcast – student photo, title and brief story.

Higher levels

- Use the titles as conversation starters
- Listening activities (this can also become a platform for your class to interview one another, or even create their own podcast)
- Draw out themes, topics and main points to use in writing
- Start a mural or collage in your class with student quotes or short stories
- Sequencing the interviews (convert to text): beginning, middle and end
- Employment – discuss aims, goals, aspirations, specific skills. Use information to begin developing a CV

These are some of many ideas that can be generated from a podcast. As educators, your professional judgement and understanding of your students will direct your teaching and the lessons you wish to teach. Teaching is all about exploring different avenues and angles of delivery, and creating lessons that will bring out the best in your learners.

Over to you

To sum up, when you are ready to create your own podcast (whatever your aim may be) prepare to:

- a. Spend your own time and money on the project
- b. Research and read about other podcasts and the equipment required
- c. Conduct surveys before launching, to establish level of interest
- d. Follow through and take chances – you need to be spontaneous and think on the spot, otherwise your interview/s will lack authenticity and flair 😊

There is an endless amount of information out there relating to starting your own podcast. If you have an idea that stands out from the rest, take a chance and give it a go. It's not about succeeding or failing, it's about the message you want to get across. For me, that message is empowerment. We want to empower our learners and help them to understand that they have the skills and knowledge to achieve anything they put their minds to.

Ama Omran currently works with youth, assisting them to identify their goals and reach their full potential. Ama has worked with adult migrant learners for twelve years and created 'What the English?' *The Adult Migrant Learner* podcast to share their English language journey and make their voices heard. You can read about the podcast in Manjit Bhamral's review in *Fine Print Vol.44* (2), 36–37.

How to limit syntactic ambiguity in plain English

by Lauren Carter



A few weeks ago, I read a heading for a short course. It read “Reducing Racism and Human Rights Course”. My linguistic brain immediately had a chuckle – was it a course for reducing racism and also reducing human rights? My logical brain knew otherwise, but it’s interesting that my brain immediately interpreted that meaning. Let’s dive into how our brains work to interpret ambiguity linguistically and logically. By knowing the causes and symptoms of ambiguity, we can better help our colleagues and students avoid these pitfalls and make sure we are champions of plain English ourselves.

What is syntax?

The reason I interpreted that heading in the way I did is because of syntactic ambiguity. To understand this, we need to first understand what syntax means.

Although it might sound like a really fancy word (and maybe it is!), syntax just means sentence structure. If someone says, “the syntax is very difficult”, they mean “the way the sentence is formed is very difficult”. Here’s an example of two different syntactic structures:

Jonathon hit the ball.

The ball was hit by Jonathon.

While both of these examples include exactly the same main words, they have slightly different uses. The first example is in the active voice and emphasises Jonathon. The second example is in the passive voice and emphasises the ball. Active and passive sentences are just two different syntactic structures we can use in English.

So basically, syntax means sentence structure or the way the sentence is formed. The two examples above are very straightforward examples because the sentences aren’t long, nor are the phrases within the sentences.

What is syntactic ambiguity?

Syntactic is the adjective form of the noun “syntax”. When we refer to syntactic ambiguity, we mean that there is more than one way to interpret the sentence’s meaning (or a part of the sentence) and that the reason for this is because of the sentence’s structure. When we think about a sentence’s

structure, or its syntax, we can use square brackets to show which parts belong to each other. Here are some examples:

- [Jonathon] [hit] [the ball].
- [The ball] [was hit] [by Jonathon].
- [The man with the bird tattoos all over his arm] [has] [a really nice beard].

We can further segment the last example like this to show exactly how the subject is made up syntactically:

[The man [with the bird tattoos all over his arm]]

And again like this:

- [The man [with the bird tattoos [all over his arm]]]

So, in this example it’s clear that we’re talking about a man with lots of bird tattoos on his arm... or is it? I could use exactly the same words and order but have a different meaning.

Let me explain: if I say, “The man with the bird tattoos all over his arm has a really nice beard”, I’m definitely talking about a male who has tattoos of birds on his arm and also happens to have a really lovely beard. The syntactic breakdown is like this:

- [The man [with the bird tattoos [all over his arm]]] [has] [a really nice beard].

But I could also say this: “The man with the bird tattoos all over his arm every Sunday morning”. At first when you read this sentence, you might think it’s incorrect, but it’s completely grammatical (albeit very odd!). Let me show you why. Here’s the syntactic breakdown:

- [The man [with the bird]] [tattoos] [all over his arm] [every Sunday morning].

In this example, there’s a man who has a bird and he is tattooing all over his own arm (or another male’s arm), and he does this every Sunday.

How can the words and structure be the same, but the meaning be so different? It's actually a really simple explanation.

How does syntactic ambiguity occur?

While there are many reasons why syntactic ambiguity occurs, it often happens because of one thing: word classes. If you're not familiar with word classes, it just means a category of words that have similar grammatical characteristics. Sometimes they're also called parts of speech. Nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, and prepositions are all word classes or parts of speech.

When syntactic ambiguity occurs, it's usually because some words can belong to multiple word classes. Like in the examples above, the word tattoo can be a noun or a verb. You can say "she has two tattoos on her back", which is using tattoos as a noun (like in the first example above). But you could also say "she tattoos ten people every day", which is using tattoos as a verb (like in the second example above). This ambiguity happens most often with words that can act as nouns and verbs.

Another common way that syntactic ambiguity occurs is when we use words to modify other words in lists or when using "and". Let's take the example that spurred this whole article: Reducing Racism and Human Rights Course. You could interpret this as having two meanings and syntactic structures:

- [[Reducing Racism] [and] [Human Rights]] [Course]
- [Reducing [Racism and Human Rights]] [Course]

The first meaning is that the course is about human rights and reducing racism. The second meaning is that the course is about reducing both human rights and racism. This ambiguity occurs because it is unclear whether "reducing" is just modifying "racism" or also modifying "human rights".

Different types of syntactic ambiguity

There are two types of syntactic ambiguity: global ambiguity and local ambiguity. Global ambiguity is when a sentence has more than one interpretation and it's not clear which one it is when you finish reading it. Local ambiguity, on the other hand, is when a sentence is ambiguous as you read it, but by the time

you finish reading (or when you re-read it), it only has one interpretation.

"Reduce Racism and Human Rights Course" is an example of global ambiguity (even though it's pretty clear what the intended meaning is, can we REALLY be sure of that?). "The man with the bird tattoos all over his arm every Sunday morning" is an example of local ambiguity.

We need to be mindful of global ambiguity because sentences with this ambiguity don't have a clear meaning. Sometimes from the context we might know what the meaning is most likely to be, but it's not 100% clear what the meaning actually is.

How can I limit syntactic ambiguity in my own communication?

The first step to communicating clearly is to notice. Notice how you write or say things. Notice how others communicate. Be aware and on the lookout for ambiguity. I assure you, once you're looking for ambiguity, you'll notice it more often than you thought you would!

Once you've noticed it, then you'll want to change it so you can make your communication clearer. Every situation is different, so you'll need to be creative with how you remove the ambiguous parts of the sentence, but here are some tips:

1. Be clear which words should be modifying certain words and which shouldn't. For example, add an extra verb ("reducing racism and increasing human rights course")
2. Move words or phrases around in the sentence. For example, move a phrase without a verb to the front so it's clear that the verb isn't modifying that phrase ("human rights and reducing racism course")
3. Completely re-write the sentence. For example, change one sentence into two ("the man has a bird, and he tattoos all over his arm every Sunday")

Of course, this isn't an exhaustive list, but it will give you a starting point.

Lauren Carter is a plain English editor and educator for Australian adult education providers. She is passionate about providing accessible communication to students with low English literacy. For more information, go to www.hilingual.com and www.theplainenglishschool.com.

Pivot: staying relevant in a changing world

a conversation with Jo Medlin (ACAL) and Liz Gunn (VALBEC)

pivot [verb] (1) to turn or twist, (2) to change your opinions, statements, decisions, etc. so that they are different to what they were before.

Cambridge Dictionary <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/pivot>



The Australian Council of Adult Literacy (ACAL) and its Victorian counterpart VALBEC, along with the Councils of Adult Literacy (CALs) in Tasmania, South Australia, Queensland, Western Australia and New South Wales have done a lot of twisting and turning to keep up with changes in professional learning and education delivery since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in February 2020. Lockdowns and physical distancing have presented many challenges and opportunities for these volunteer-based organisations. *Fine Print's* editor, Deryn Mansell talked to Jo Medlin (ACAL) and Liz Gunn (VALBEC) about some of the changes they've seen over the past 18 months.

Deryn: Let's start with the question of who. Who are your audiences?

Jo: Our audiences are adult literacy and numeracy stakeholders; people who teach, academics, other stakeholders, government departments, as well as anybody interested in building adult literacy and numeracy in Australia. These groups can subscribe or become members. So, we have two things going on; we have our membership, but we have a huge range of subscribers as well. Subscribers are people we send our newsletter to. You don't have to be a member of ACAL or VALBEC to get our newsletter. We send that out to thousands of people. So, we have to consider both those audiences.

Liz: VALBEC is the same as ACAL, as in a not-for-profit, volunteer-managed professional organisation that's been representing adult literacy, numeracy and basic education practitioners in Victoria for more than 40 years. It's about providing information and professional development for members. Picking up on Jo's point about broader audiences beyond our membership base, this was the thinking behind setting up a Facebook group, which has been really good. We threw the net out to anyone and said, "Please invite anyone who you think would be interested". It's

been really broadening communicating directly with an audience who's not just Language Literacy and Numeracy practitioners but educators from other fields like academia, secondary education, arts, applied linguistics and so on.

Jo: I should probably point out as well that ACAL is also a voluntary committee. I think that really impacts the way that you can pivot when you are all working unpaid. And I think this is really a big part of the conversation in a way.

Has VALBEC focused only on Victoria, or has it been broader?

Liz: Well, I think this is what's been so interesting about this pivoting to an online focus. It's blurred the line a lot in terms of who you can engage and where they might be. Since last year and through attempting to organise the ACAL conference in Canberra we've been in connection with people from all over the world and around Australia. We ended up having more connection with people from other countries and at the same time reaching even more people within Victoria.

Jo: It's almost like moving into the online world has blurred the roles of the overarching national body and the state literacy councils. ACAL is the umbrella organisation, traditionally interested in national things and the CALs do things for their members within each state. But now that we're online, we can get across to people from everywhere. We're reaching more people. But you've still got your state focus, you know, and your state cohort. It's good to have that local focus and pick up on particular issues in states. It's great to have the connection between the two: national and state.

What effect did the pandemic have?

Liz: Well, to begin with, last year, Jo, Lorraine Sushames, Ann Kelly, Don MacDowall, and I were quite involved

in meeting and organising the ACAL conference. It was going to be in Canberra, wasn't it?

Jo: Yes, that was our big pivot. We were underway, organising a face-to-face conference. We had the venue scoped; we'd been down there. We had started to advertise it. We'd started to think about how we would plan it, who was going to talk. Then it came to the point of deciding what will we do? Of looking in a crystal ball and asking, "Do we need to stop?" Right at the beginning of the pandemic things were so uncertain!

The cost caused us to pivot really. We got to a point where we thought, "If we don't make a decision, we're going to lose money and we can't afford to do that." Although it probably didn't look like a lot of money to a company or a business, for us it was going to be significant. And we said, "We have to pull the plug." We then had to think about what else we were going to do from that point.

It probably took us a little bit of time to get to where ACAL has got now. We've done a total 180-degree pivot and just totally accepted that we won't be doing things face-to-face, that we will have to come up with new ways of working. So, we decided we would stay online in 2021.

And you know, it was partly because we are fatigued, to be honest, because we're volunteers and we're all working. And we had put so much effort and passion into organising a conference in a place where none of us live. ACAL doesn't have a representative in Canberra. It was already a huge effort. We just couldn't face going down that path again. So, although we started to organise a conference with Tasmania, we decided we couldn't take the risk again. And quotes for online conferences at that point were extravagant. We didn't feel confident that managing an online event without a paid convenor was something we could help with at that point. Now I think we're probably all a bit more competent in doing breakout rooms and different types of delivery. But back then, there was the fear of going through that again and putting so many volunteer hours and emotional energy into it.

So, in 2021 ACAL went to a totally online conference. However, it's been in a very staged way because we've got to be able to manage our work lives and personal stress and the general stress of lockdowns and border closures and everything else. And also, be mindful of the fatigue people are having with online learning. We've looked at doing a whole day or a couple of days but decided that people are

tired of being online all the time. So, every month we've sent out a webinar or a recording or we're making sure our newsletters are chock-a-block full of information and links and activities, you know, to keep people interested and engaged in their work. And I guess that's how we've pivoted really.

Liz: I feel that VALBEC has done pretty much exactly the same as that. We did have a whole day conference online last year, which was a Herculean effort by everyone, especially our conference organising team led by Rhonda Pelletier. You wouldn't expect something like that to be so effortful, but it really is for some reason. And you're right, Jo. People were completely tired of online delivery by December last year. A lot of practitioners I spoke to said, "Oh, look, I just couldn't face a whole day," which was fair enough.

I loved ACAL's stretched conference this year. It showed that you don't need to have the conference all put into one day. If you're doing it online, you can stage it across the year. And then it comes in bite-size pieces that everyone can digest easily. But the other great thing has been that when you do it over the whole year, rather than concentrated onto one or two days together, it enables you to pick up on all the current events and issues that are going on.

Like for instance, SBS is launching that documentary that Jo is in. And so, we can quickly go, "Right! Well, let's have a little seminar about that." You can respond to what's going on at the time and people can come together quickly and much more easily, rather than having to concentrate everything onto one day.

Jo: Absolutely. I think that's why I was thinking that it's important to reference that we're working as volunteers, because it is kind of how we need to manage it. It's turned out to be a really good solution.

It's turned out that you can balance things more easily if you stretch a conference over the year. Because I had taken leave from my substantial job to work on the TV show, it meant that I was only doing a few days a week. I realised that I had capacity to do some recorded interviews with people, and then we could stagger them and send them out so that we didn't have to be doing live things continuously. It was a way to avoid one big intensive workload. And I think the way that VALBEC has got the live Facebook off the ground, they've got more people interested in taking

on some of that workload. I don't know if that could have happened with a traditional face-to-face conference.

Liz: But having said all that, VALBEC is going to have a face-to-face conference this year* because we do really miss those get-togethers, just being *in situ* with each other and, you know, sharing some food together and sharing some drinks and just looking out the window at Flagstaff Gardens, all that incidental stuff that you don't do so much when you're coming together on a zoom webinar, which tends to be a bit more formal. With the face-to-face conference, I feel we're looking forward to picking up on that, but also hoping to have some ways that we might have cameras operating to reach out to people who can't, obviously, come all the way to Melbourne and connect.

Jo: On the other hand, as somebody who's not in a capital city, I think the move to online professional learning has been a really nice experience. ACAL has had feedback from people saying it's so good to be able to be involved in more professional learning over the past 18 months.

The other thing that occurred to me about why this move has been so good is that we've all become more comfortable with it. It's much more accepted now, and I'm not sure that a lot of employers are going to go back to funding people to come to face-to-face conferences because there's so many casual workers and their budgets are tight. For ACAL, trying to think about how we will get, say, everyone in Australia to go to Queensland or everyone to go to Perth or something like that, you know, it's almost like an impossibility.

Liz: And even post-pandemic, when the borders are open, I think it's going to be a whole new landscape of what people expect from professional development and what they're willing to pay for. Whereas that's the beauty, I guess, when you haven't got interstate travel. It's not as expensive. I would like to see something a bit innovative, perhaps in the sense of that term, *glocal*. Something like

local groups getting together, but then everyone tuning into a central hub. Because I think that, on one hand, the online world is great for connecting, but there are certain valuable connections that proximity gives us.

I feel that there's a lot more to explore in the online world. I'd like to see webinars and online offerings be a lot more about participants. Being able to work in groups together, have talks with each other. I'd like to see more exploration of merging the different platforms going forward. Video, social media, all sorts of crazy, crazy things.

Jo: Yes, it's the networking that we're missing out on. But I think it is important to look at the silver lining; we've started to experiment, and we will become braver. But also, in the past, if you did a webinar or something, we used to pay someone to sit behind the scenes in our everyday webinars and help us run them. Now we think, well, we can probably do it ourselves. And if the presenter freezes or whatever, nobody's going to think, oh no, this is terrible. It's made us a little more open to experimenting. We've started doing some recordings and I think it's opened a huge door for us in professional development.

* Alas, while a face-to-face conference was hoped for, lockdown uncertainty made it impossible to plan for such an event this year, so the conference was moved online.

Elizabeth Gunn is an educator, writer and advocate of post-secondary literacy, language and numeracy education. She's interested in multimodality, digitisation, and helping students manage learning in complex environments. She is a member of the *Fine Print* editorial team and VALBEC President.

Jo Medlin is an Australian adult literacy and numeracy advocate. She volunteers in a number of advocacy roles, including as President of the ACAL and as a member of the Reading Writing Hotline National Steering Committee.

***Developing Social Equity in Australian Adult Education: Lessons from the Past* by Pamela Osmond**

reviewed by Lorraine Sushames



In *Developing Social Equity in Australian Adult Education: Lessons from the Past*, Pamela Osmond traces the journey of adult literacy in Australia. She examines and communicates the influence of outside drivers, actors, agendas and discourses, highlighting the “inseparableness of the economic and socio-political background from the educational practice and provision” (p. 3).

Osmond points out how the terminology used to describe adult literacy has morphed over time, with terms such as Adult Literacy, Adult Basic Education (ABE) and latterly, Foundation Skills used interchangeably. Osmond herself applies the term, ABE. While she uses a case study of the ABE field in New South Wales as her focus, within the broader context of Australia its conclusions reverberate and resonate.

The chronological order of the book’s chapters leads the reader through the work in an organised and sequential mode. Chapter 1: About the Book provides a useful orientation to guide the reader and frames the discussion within a broader context. It reflects on how learners perceive adult literacy in terms of addressing their individual needs at an individual and/or social level. In presenting a response

to the question, “What is adult literacy for?” the book articulates ways that thinking about this have diversified over time, through the lens of Schuller’s three capitals (2004) – human, social and individual.

Osmond challenges the notion that most adults participating in adult literacy classes do so for purposes related to employment. Where there are other learner groups with needs unrelated to employment, she wonders whether adequate, quality programs are still available to them and what the learner profile in adult literacy classrooms is today. Drawing on the experiences of adult literacy practitioners to interpret the philosophies that are directing the current discourse, the book begins to explain the multifaceted nature of the field and seeks to provide a framework to inform responsive and appropriate approaches to adult literacy provision.

Chapter 2: Preparing the Fertile Ground traces the evolution of the adult literacy field through the decades, outlining the changing messaging around the topic, through references to influential organisations and writers that contributed to the discourses of those times. It takes a social justice, human capital and civic rights view, situating it alongside a backdrop of economic reform, including the development of the Australian Vocational Education and Training (VET) system and reports such as Kangan (1974), Richardson (1975) and Cadman (1976), all of which influenced today’s adult literacy landscape.

Acknowledging that the local and the global are inseparably linked, other actors such as Friere and UNESCO are mentioned as having influence on much of the policy of the 1970s. I wonder if perhaps this approach was a product of its generation – a time when adult literacy practitioners were consulted about their views, as an important and valued part of policy development processes.

The underpinning ethos which framed and sustained the formation of ABE in Australia is captured in Chapter 3: The Foundation Years. It describes the environment as informed by learner centred, humanist and social justice

philosophies in the 1980s to early 1990s, a socio-political period which supported equality in education. Osmond continues to reference the role of the reports and influencers mentioned in Chapter 2 as motivators of government action. She also references other advocates who were instrumental in placing adult education on the government and public agenda, for example, Arch Nelson, initial Chair of the Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL).

In New South Wales in the 1970s to mid-1980s, adult literacy programs were underpinned by strong collaboration between providers and statutory bodies and comparatively well resourced, including relevant professional development for teachers. Freirean philosophies and humanist professional discourses typified the agenda of the time, which was to respond with a needs-based approach.

Osmond describes the ABE sector in New South Wales as actively engaging in provision of non-formal programs. The sector comprised part of a broader community of practice in Australia, drawing on successful UK models of humanist, learner centred approaches and the valuing of practitioners' specialist knowledge. This knowledge informed a growing body of literature related to the field.

This chapter describes as a backdrop, the emergence of the Commonwealth funded Adult Literacy and Information Office (ALIO) and the National Policy on Languages, a time when professionals moulded the national policy discourse with government and when Australia was identified as a global leader in ABE. It describes the social justice, human capital agenda sustained by a range of actors, such as UNESCO, and local influencers, such as Lo Bianco, Wickert and Dymock. Although the flexible approach of non-formal ABE programs was difficult to align with the formalised accountably measures of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) structures, heralding changes ahead.

The reframing of adult literacy in the 1990s is well articulated in Chapter 4: *A New Discourse Emerges*. The relevant influences towards a human capital ideology are clearly identified. Early international surveys provided the data to capture the extent of need, to inform policy and funding, but also served to accentuate links between literacy and the productivity agenda. The substantial industrial changes of the 1990s highlighted a need to reskill the Australian workforce, with industry, the OECD and unions becoming more engaged in the VET sector. Adult literacy barriers were identified as an

obstacle to people obtaining a qualification, and the role of adult literacy became redefined and embedded within the VET system.

Osmond reveals the interconnectedness of factors impacting the field in a time of flux, shaping a new dialogue of adult literacy. The National Training Reform Agenda and Competency Based Training caused a level of angst as practitioners attempted to address the needs of learners within new strictures. The introduction of competition in the training market to include both public and private providers surfaced. Osmond describes the impact of the changes as "a moment of translation" (p. 29), a point on the continuum towards a human capital discourse surrounding the field, and activism from ABE practitioners for funding renewal.

The introduction of the Adult Language and Literacy Policy in 1991 continued this trajectory, with many initiatives being funded for referred job seekers to improve work readiness, and for those already in the workforce to develop their skills. This chapter elucidates the situation of the self-referred ABE learner within this context as being less provided for, and the role of practitioners as being situated in a world of different qualification requirements, philosophies, objectives and terminology.

In Chapter 5: *What Have We Learnt? Some Lessons from Our History*, the trajectory that began in the early 1990s is shown to have led to many consequences, some anticipated, others not, such as the restrictions on the diversity of provision. In this context, Osmond illustrates how ABE became subsumed in VET and perceived by certain stakeholders as a vehicle for human capital development.

This chapter deals with funding changes as adult literacy provision is directed towards economic priorities and access reduced for cohorts who are not jobseekers. It explains, in parallel, a reduction in the availability of specialist qualifications to teach ABE, leading to de-professionalisation of the adult literacy workforce, and diminished government funding for broad adult literacy research.

Developing Social Equity in Australian Adult Education: Lessons from the Past is insightful. It excavates the incremental moves, and international and national drivers that have led to the dominant discourses, values and policies within which the field of adult literacy is currently framed.

Osmond takes the reader back to the 1970s, when the field of adult literacy was in its infancy – an exhilarating period when viewed through the lens of policies and their effect on practice today. The book explains the vision of those early practitioners, whose knowledge and experience contributed to its establishment, and which shaped provision. Their humanist approach, and vision, was to support the empowerment of adults and address inequities through teaching programs which responded to personal, cultural and community needs and values.

The following wave of adult literacy practitioners entered a vibrant community of practice, with a discourse centred on high quality, learner centred teaching. Funding supported a range of initiatives that addressed the diverse needs of adults, through community based and other programs – a time before the dialogue shifted towards a focus on adult literacy as a vehicle for economic participation, and when teachers had far more agency over their practice than now.

Coincidentally, this book is released at a time when the Senate Inquiry into the importance of adult literacy in Australian is underway in each state and territory. It

remains to be seen if those activities will result in an outcome which redirects policy, funding and programs, to serve all learner cohorts, as advocated by Osmond.

Developing Social Equity in Australian Adult Education: Lessons from the Past by Pamela Osmond is published by Routledge (2021)

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Lorraine Sushames has extensive experience as an adult literacy educator and has led the successful delivery of major educational projects in Australia and overseas for 20 years. Her particular interest is the role that English literacy plays in the economic advancement of remote populations and in post-conflict settings.

The Languages and Multicultural Education Resource Centre (LMERC)

an overview by Jenny Peck, Suveshan Sathurayar and Fiona Bisko

The Department of Education and Training's LMERC is a free library and resource advisory service for Victorian educators working in all sectors and levels. Its focus is English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D), languages, cultural diversity and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives. For more than 30 years, LMERC has played an important role in supporting the delivery of education curriculum and multicultural affairs policies and strategies across schools and other settings in Victoria.

The LMERC library is often described by visiting teachers as a treasure trove. It houses an abundant range of practical resources for teachers, such as learning units and lesson plans, and professional reading to build teacher capability. Staff are available to find resources in all formats at the library and through the new LMERC e-book platforms and online catalogue. The library is at Level 1, 189 Faraday Street Carlton. The full library catalogue, shortcuts to resources for teaching adults and e-book and audiobook catalogues can be accessed online: <https://lmerc.softlinkhosting.com.au/oliver/learnpath/home>.

LMERC's origins lie in the 1980s with the Richmond Community Education Centre (RCEC), who set up a small library for newly arrived migrants in the area. RCEC closed in 1987 and the resources became part of the newly established Multicultural Education Resource Centre (MERC), within the Ministry of Education's Statewide Multicultural Education Coordination Unit. This unit coordinated English as an Additional Language (EAL), languages and multicultural education in Victorian government schools. MERC was open to teachers, tertiary students and others in the education community. At the same time the Ethnic Schools Resource Centre was operating in Brunswick. It provided resources and support for teachers in community language schools. In 1991 this collection was merged with the MERC collection (Blyton, 2018).

The integration of these collections supporting newly emerging communities coming from waves of migration over decades have uniquely placed LMERC as a go-to

support for teachers of adult EAL learners. LMERC also has an expanding collection of resources to support teachers working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners and to offer First Nation's perspectives for all learners. The LMERC collection now consists of around 28,000 items and includes many resources that are written specifically for teaching EAL/D learners, including adults.

LMERC provides resources for learners of all ages and levels whatever their prior experience, heritage or educational background. Furthermore, LMERC promotes and makes available resources which celebrate and validate diverse identities and assist in the maintenance and utilisation of first languages (as an end, and as a bridge to learning English) with materials in over 79 languages (at last count). This article provides examples of some resources that are available for borrowing at LMERC. Please note that we do not endorse any particular title or publisher.

Teachers who are looking for helpful reference resources that provide evidence-based strategies and approaches for EAL learners will find many examples at LMERC such as *Classroom of possibility : Supporting at-risk EAL Students* by Jennifer Hammond and Jennifer Miller, *Scaffolding Language, Scaffolding Learning* by Pauline Gibbons, *100 Ideas for Secondary Teachers: Supporting EAL Learners*, available in both hardcopy and eBook format, and *Teaching Proficiency Through Reading and Storytelling : An Input-Based Approach to Second Language Instruction* by Karen Lichtman. An e-Book added to the LMERC Overdrive eBook collection is *Beyond Repeat After Me: A Guide to Teaching English Language Pronunciation* by Marla Yoshida.

Practical resources available at LMERC include books with ideas for activities and teaching strategies, course books, and texts in all genres for all levels – many in hard copy and digital formats. Examples include dictionaries in English and over 50 languages, high interest / low language readers, abridged novels, graphic novels and posters. These resources cover the full range of language needs and modes (reading, writing, speaking and listening), providing engaging stimuli for practising and

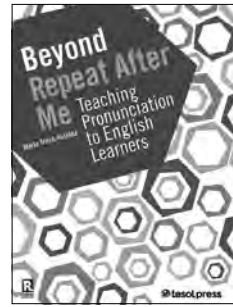
extending conversational and everyday English, literacy and numeracy for different industries and workplaces as well as introducing and developing proficiency in academic language.

Visual, auditory and kinaesthetic resources such as flash cards, bilingual and monolingual dictionaries with audio, visuals, decodable readers and games are available for teachers introducing the alphabet and sounds, and decoding at letter, syllable and word levels. Other materials available that may assist students to further develop their reading and comprehension strategies include visual sequencing activities, graphic organisers, engaging readers, audiobooks, and videos. There are resources available to build subject specific vocabulary such as in shopping and maths, or resources to teach functions in English for instance requesting items, enquiring about services or employment, asking and giving directions or suggesting recommendations. Follow this link to view some examples of these resources in the LMERC catalogue: <https://tinyurl.com/yhejvy88>.

LMERC staff catalogue digital resources and websites so that patrons can find lesson plans, activities and reading materials to support a blended learning approach, and to supplement the physical resources available at LMERC. A further selection of online EAL reference resources for teachers can be found on the LMERC Learnpath EAL pages: <https://lmerc.softlinkhosting.com.au/oliver/learnpath/guide/EALD>

LMERC has a range of curated numeracy resources to support the teaching of mathematical language and concepts to adult learners beginning their numeracy studies or interested in industry-specific maths. One example is the A+ Pre-apprenticeship Maths & Literacy series which contains graduated exercises and exams with answers. This series covers the industries of building and carpentry, aged care, hairdressing, plumbing, electrical and beauty therapy.

The Numeracy Workbook and *Everyday Numeracy* give learners opportunities for basic numeracy practice activities. If educators are looking for bilingual maths glossaries or activities our multilingual resources online list may be useful: <https://tinyurl.com/t3pc8mr>. Resources related to money and denominations can also be found at LMERC with content and activities across the formats of workbooks, readers, money sets, posters and games. Follow this link to view some examples of these resources in the LMERC catalogue: <https://tinyurl.com/yevscq5e>



The EAL course book collection at LMERC ranges from beginner to advanced levels, with content relating to everyday experiences or global issues. Some examples include:

- *Passages to English 1-3* by Maggie Power – beginner to lower intermediate EAL workbooks for class or individual study. “Each of the 15 units begin with a short story such as fictionalised and relatable life stories which also explores different elements of the English language. Each unit culminates in a written passage generated by the students” (Urban Lyrebirds, 2021).
- *New Headway* – aimed at young adults has grammar, vocabulary and communication activities including role-plays.
- *The Impact Foundation* (student’s book) by Katherine Stannett – uses National Geographic videos featuring contemporary adventurers to introduce English language learning while incorporating global perspectives and promoting active participation.
- *World English* and *21st Century Reading* course books – similarly use freely available National Geographic and Ted Talks videos. The audio for the listening activities is available from the publisher’s website.

Reading material aimed at adult beginner EAL learners is not always easy to find. Over the years, LMERC has built up a collection of fiction and non-fiction texts for teaching vocabulary, grammar and reading comprehension. Many of the reader series are supplemented by teacher books that contain activities and lesson plans.

Resource sets such as the NSW AMES kits *Soccer Game*, *Soccer Club*, *A New Hairstyle* and *Coffee Time* may be useful for working with beginner level students. Each kit includes a reader, vocabulary and sentence strips on cards,

photographic illustrations in A4 size, an audio narration of the reader and teacher notes with worksheets. Another reader series is Carly and Kumar, a series of short stories by Karen Slikas Barber. These readers are available at three different language levels making the series useful for classes with students of differing reading levels. Introductory notes, discussion questions and definitions for new words are included.

Reader series with Australian and everyday themes include the May Street Stories by Carmel Davies and the PageTurners series published by PRACE. These readers are designed by experienced teachers to suit the needs of adults learning to read. They are aimed at beginners and present topics of interest to adults that are relevant to Australian society and history. More advanced readers include the Oxford Bookworms: World Stories series and the Pearson English Readers, Easystarts.

Other supplementary resources include games for communication, reading, grammar and vocabulary practice such as *Conversation Cubes*, *Mastertalker* (a board game with questions and action prompts at four levels) and *Guess Who*. For teaching English through songs, LMERC holds the full set of Carmel Davies and Sharon Duff's Sing with Me! publications. These feature songs about everyday topics and include relevant vocabulary and grammar activities. Follow this link to view some examples of games and songs in the LMERC catalogue: <https://tinyurl.com/yenvu55m>.

LMERC is open to suggestions and requests for new resources to support adult EAL teaching. Please contact us



if you have any recommendations: lmerc.library@edumail.vic.gov.au. For more information about LMERC and to join, please go to our library homepage at <https://lmerc.softlinkhosting.com.au>

Reference

Blyton, J. (2018). *LMERC turns 30*, Department of Education and Training, Victoria.

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