

this issue:

Public pedagogy
By Karen Charman

Attachment theory, neuroscience
and adult literacy learners
By Linno Rhodes

Professionalising our practice
By Karen Dymke

The CGEA: responding to changing
literacy practices
By Nadia Casarotto

fine
print



Publication Details

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

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

This work is copyright. Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, or any amended Acts, no part may be reproduced by any process, nor may any other exclusive right be exercised, without the permission of VALBEC or the individual authors, unless explicitly set out in the provision below.

VALBEC grants permission to a user to reproduce, copy and communicate any articles within this publication for personal, research, study purposes or non-commercial purposes within an educational organisation. All use for teaching materials will automatically fall under Part VB of the Copyright Amendment Act 2002.

Images provided by the author are used with permission by the copyright owner, unless otherwise attributed.

Cover image: Julie Palmer

Editor: Deryn Mansell

Fine Print Editorial Group: Sarah Deasey, Linno Rhodes, Elizabeth Gunn, Manalini Kane, Lynda Achren, Lynne Matheson.

Layout: Sarah Tuke

Printing: Melbourne Polytechnic Printroom

Editorial, advertising and subscription enquiries:
info@valbec.org.au

features

Public pedagogy <i>By Karen Charman</i>	3
Attachment theory, neuroscience and adult literacy learners <i>By Linno Rhodes</i>	7
Professionalising our practice <i>By Karen Dymke</i>	12
The CGEA: responding to changing literacy practices <i>By Nadia Casarotto</i>	17

regulars

Practical Matters Technology tearoom <i>By Kerrie Tomkins</i> Games, tips and tricks for sharpening basic numeracy <i>By Manalini Kane</i>	20
Foreign Correspondent Learning and violence: changing the frame <i>A conversation with Jenny Horsman</i>	26
Open Forum Assessment for pre-accredited language and literacy programs: why bother? <i>By Marj Sjoström and Lynda Achren</i>	29
In Conversation Helping EAL parents to participate in their children's school life and beyond <i>A conversation with Rani Pillai</i>	33
What's Out There Visible learning for literacy: implementing the practices that work best to accelerate student learning <i>Reviewed by Pauline O'Maley</i> Plurilingualism in teaching and learning: complexities across contexts <i>Reviewed by Elizabeth Gunn</i>	36

VALBEC acknowledges the financial support of the ACFE Board



Adult Education in
the Community

Editorial

When I opened the file containing Lynda Achren's interview with Rani Pillai for this edition ('Helping EAL parents to participate in their children's school life and beyond') I was struck by an unexpected connection to Karen Dymke's article ('Professionalising our practice'). Rani was the pioneer teacher at Keysborough Learning Centre's first outreach for parents of children attending a local school and she traces the origin of her involvement to a time when she was a stay-at-home mum; she leapt at the opportunity to volunteer at KLC, seeing it as an opportunity to get back into an educational environment. Similarly (though a few decades earlier) Karen Dymke pounced on an offer of a few hours a week teaching adult literacy in a community house when she '...was at home with little kids and feeling like a failure as a "Kinder Mum"'. I wonder how many other fulfilling careers in adult education have had similarly unlikely beginnings.

Another serendipitous connection reveals itself in Kerrie Tomkins' 'Technology tearoom', which exemplifies the valuing of local knowledge that Karen Charman argues for in 'Public pedagogy'. Yet other connections are entirely deliberate: we sought out Jenny Horsman in Canada to be our foreign correspondent for this edition because she and Linno Rhodes ('Attachment theory, neuroscience and adult literacy learners') are both thinking and writing about the impact of trauma on learning. Also, Jenny is a keynote speaker at the ACAL conference in September, which will be held in Melbourne this year so it's a great opportunity for adult educators in Victoria to get involved in national and international conversations.

No doubt you'll find many more connections both between articles and with your own practice as you read

Nadia Casarotto's outline of the CGEA reaccreditation, Marj Sjostrom and Lynda Achren's provocatively titled 'Assessment for pre-accredited language and literacy programs: why bother?', Manalini Kane's tips for the numeracy classroom and last, but certainly not least, our reviews. In this edition Pauline O'Maley reviews the most recent *Visible learning* title and Elizabeth Gunn finds that *Plurilingualism in teaching and learning* offers food for thought for teachers in linguistically diverse settings.

Eagle-eyed readers will notice a few changes in this edition of *Fine Print*. One change is that 'In Conversation' has appeared as a section title. This replaces the section that was titled either 'Beside the Whiteboard' or 'Provider Profile' depending on the interview subject. We've made the change both to broaden the scope for interview subjects (perhaps it's time to interview some learners?) and to acknowledge that in this digital age the whiteboard is no longer the ubiquitous teaching tool it once was.

And speaking of the digital age—did you notice that the VALBEC logo on our front cover has changed? To celebrate turning forty, VALBEC has rejuvenated its logo to reflect the digital aspect of new literacies. What do you think?

Thank you to Julie Palmer for the cover image for this edition. Julie teaches in the Young Adult Migrant Education Courses Program at Melbourne Polytechnic.

Deryn Mansell

To comment on this edition of *Fine Print* or to contribute a proposal for an article or interview, contact fineprint@valbec.org.au

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.

Public pedagogy

by Dr Karen Charman

The Public Pedagogies Institute (henceforth the Institute) was founded in 2014. As an institute, it is relatively young. The germination for the Institute came from the commitment to bring to the fore teaching and learning outside of formal institutions. We don't exist in a physical location. We have a virtual presence (<http://www.publicpedagogies.org/>) but our work is very much embedded in communities. We hold an annual conference and produce the *Journal of Public Pedagogies*. The Institute is not located in a university or any other organisation. Our membership is very broad, consisting of community workers, educators, artists, students and academics. As a consequence of this eclectic mix we bring to the Institute a broad spectrum of ideas and possibilities.

Public pedagogy is a contested and evolving term (Sandlin, Schultz & Burdick, 2010). The theoretical application of this term occurs in an analysis of public art, museums, public spaces and has been extended to media such as film and television. Gert Biesta (2014) analyses and distinguishes three different conceptual understandings for public pedagogy—pedagogy *for* the public, *of* the public and *in* the interest of publicness. Drawing on the work of the philosopher Hannah Arendt, Biesta (2014) argues for pedagogy in the interest of publicness. He distinguishes this mode from pedagogy for the public that is to educate the public administered by the state, and pedagogy of the public that is enacted by the public itself.

We are living, learning and teaching in formal institutional environments whose educational remit is becoming increasingly reductive. It could be argued that this is the logical conclusion of scientific modernity and its technocratic model of education. In this approach to education everything is capable of measurement. Replication and standardisation is determining of a successful education endeavour but this approach is devoid of people and the past. The implication of what has become educationally valued is knowledge that is compartmentalised, ordered and linear and cannot contend with contradiction or disorder or the inner narrative of the student or the teacher. Critical pedagogy locates this turn as yet another example of the neo-liberal structuring of what is of educational value (Giroux, 2011). Neo-liberalist structuring of education implicitly demands that we



stop attending to history. Instead there is a focus on the present, a return to positivism and an increased focus on objectivity, efficiency and technique (Giroux, 2011). This educational turn has resulted in certain knowledge and skills becoming further cemented as authorised. Where can other knowledges and skills speak from and importantly how can they be valued? This is a question I take up further in this article and it is a central question for the Institute.

Pedagogy is as difficult to define as attempting to precisely locate the moment when learning occurs. The word pedagogy has taken on different meanings but in this instance the Institute understands it to mean 'relational': what occurs between a learner and teacher, teacher and learner or in the context of public pedagogies what occurs between people, between places and people, a space, a moment. The other part of this term pedagogy—knowledge—is the relational that entails coming together to understand and construct knowledge. Instances of learning occur all of the time, in spite of efforts to reduce learning to outcomes that can be measured. People want to tell educators about who they are and in doing that they are resisting splitting themselves or being reduced to their capacity to be numerate or literate (and the reductionist list goes on) yet as educators we are increasingly required to be reductionist. Often someone's story is silenced because the space to reflect this has disappeared; the nuances or the deeply felt experience of belonging that has been engendered through being a part of an educational community is diminishing in significance because it is simply deemed not to count. The Institute has been formed to change this rhetoric, beginning from the position that it is impossible to quantify what a whole person gets out of education.

At the Institute we are interested in undertaking research that is informed by a particular ethical approach; we want



At the Footscray Pop Up School

to assist community educators to make an argument about the value of their work. We are interested in partnering with organisations to make such an argument through research and evaluation about the value of programs and projects that are inclusive of statistical data and quantitative methods, but go beyond these reductionist outcomes to reflect the fullness of work that is being undertaken. Our intent in the Institute is to represent these outcomes in interesting ways from within and not from outside the organisation. From this understanding of research being driven by the community we have embarked on our most ambitious project to date.

The Knowledge Project and Pop Up School

From this commitment to research and a public pedagogy that is enacted by the public one of the central focuses of the Institute is *The Knowledge Project* and *Pop Up School* event. The first iteration of this project occurred in Footscray, an inner west, post-industrialised suburb in Melbourne. This project was initially provoked by reductive approaches to knowledge and learning, deficit conversations regarding Footscray's community and knowledge, and by concern for the ways these representations can shape how a community sees itself and its own capacity for agency. This concept has confirmed an understanding of geographically bounded knowledge. What this means is in the suburb of Footscray there are specific knowledges that are valued and can be engaged with. In order to understand what these knowledges are, the initial part of the project was to engage in conversation with as many people in the community as possible. The question we asked was, "What is important knowledge held in Footscray?" A

small team interviewed residents, community groups and people who work in Footscray. In *The Knowledge Project* a researcher sat in the local library and talked extensively with residents. These conversations were held in public spaces but also with community groups in their particular meeting areas. This process of having a conversation is the creation of an atmosphere where, after a few leading questions, the resident determines how the conversation will proceed. These conversations were recorded and photographs of relevant people, places and objects were taken. During the conversations with community groups, time was spent discussing ways the group or individual could 'exhibit' their knowledge and understanding of learning and teaching at the *Pop Up School* event. The success and quality of this project is dependent on ongoing focused engagement with the community in these conversations in the lead up to the event. During these conversations we asked people if they had something they would like to teach as a part of a *Pop Up School* event. In some instances, people only wanted to have a conversation with us and others had something they wanted to teach on the day.

The *Pop Up School* was a day event held in 2016 in Madden Square, a space set back from the Footscray Mall that Maribyrnong City Council wants to be used more so it suited our idea to invite members of the community to celebrate and teach some of the knowledge held in Footscray. This event attracted people teaching everything from skateboarding and rap to knitting and Trugo (a unique local sport that is part croquet, part lawn bowls). A Vietnamese youth group that wanted to challenge the assumptions surrounding ideas of academic achievement set up a play on the piñata tradition, calling it 'vinata'. Instead of lollies falling from the hanging papier-mâché, cultural assumptions fell and were symbolically smashed (above left).

The culmination of the interviews and the *Pop Up School* event is a publication: *Toward a Footscray curriculum* (Charman, Dixon, Bellingham, Thomas & Cooper, 2017a). This project has had a subsequent iteration in Werribee and at the time of writing we are working on a similar project in Point Cook. What has emerged in these projects is despite major statistical similarities in demographics, the knowledge identified as important is completely different in different geographical areas. The implications of this are far reaching. For instance, in a recently published article on our reading of the knowledge held in Footscray we noted, "There can be a tendency to see the growth

of knowledge through a narrow lens of skills measured by state and national schooling measurements such as NAPLAN and PISA results. We argue these are limited indicators” (Charman, Dixon, Bellingham, Thomas & Cooper, 2017b, p.56). In *Toward a Footscray curriculum* we read the knowledge we had collected through interviews against the Victorian Curriculum to show that the strength of community knowledge far exceeded the determinants of NAPLAN and PISA results. This analysis appears at the end of the document because the significance of the *Knowledge Project* is to shift the dominant discourse of what is valued knowledge.

Revaluing knowledge

Given this emphasis on what is significant knowledge and the relational emphasis of building knowledge through conversation, the ethics of the Institute fits with me as an educator. I work from an educational imaginary that is populated by people who are learning and teaching and teaching and learning. A reciprocal scenario, or as I explain to my students undertaking a Bachelor of Education Studies, teacher–knowledge–student and then student–knowledge–teacher. If I could visually represent this idea, knowledge itself would be a pulsating changing entity that is never static, rather shaped and re-visited by ‘our’ engagement together. Knowledge itself is made anew.

Curriculum theorist Janet Miller describes curriculum as always re-made through every encounter. Miller writes, ‘As a human project, curriculum studies too is full of systematic errors bound up with “nerves and skin” as well as implicated responses of particular individuals who work within and across differing discourses, historical and social contexts, locations, needs and desire’ (2010, p. 254). William Pinar understands curriculum as *currere*, to run the course and “...reconceptualizes curriculum from course objectives to complicated conversation. It is conversation with oneself (as a ‘private’ person) and with others threaded through academic knowledge, an ongoing project of self- understanding in which one becomes mobilized for engagement in the world” (2011, p.47). However, this understanding of curriculum is a long way from the current assessment and outcome driven compliance model governing contemporary educational settings.

I have come to understand that there is no sense to be made from the sort of thinking that renders curriculum and the educational experience as inert and lacking vitality. What this, the current assessment and outcome driven compliance model, creates is a reduction of a knowledge

space. Parker J. Palmer writes that as a professional he was, “...taught to occupy space, not open it: after all, we are the ones who know, so we have an obligation to tell others all about it!” (1998, p.132). This foreclosure on knowledge and the spaces in which it can be realised is becoming increasingly exacerbated. As teachers in schools, in community and in universities we can be in danger of meeting the demands of institutional governance instead of opening up a space where subjectivity is present, as Pinar writes, “Without the agency of subjectivity education evaporates, replaced by conformity compelled by scripted curricula and standardized testing. Subjectivity alongside knowledge experiences creates...expertise and the erudition upon which it depends require the cultivation of subjectivity situated, historically attuned intellectual judgement” (Pinar, 2011, p. 43). The experience of subjectivity and knowledge is a curriculum but one that is a long way from the forms of knowledge constrained to meet assessment and outcomes. This is occurring in every facet of formal educational institutions. This is not to negate innovative responses within these constrained environments.¹ However, it is in part what necessitated the Institute.

I believe one of our most significant contributions to shifting the fixation with compliance and measurable skills and knowledge has been to refrain from directly arguing against these terms. In order to move to a more productive space we must shift focus to where knowledge in all its manifestations is recognised. *The Knowledge Project* and the *Pop Up School* event are emblematic of this shift of focus. I have come to understand that the enactment of education was and is between people engaged in a relational encounter with knowledge and from this basis creating. I am very interested in education and subjectivity because if what we know remains externalised and is never from a basis of internalisation then I wonder if we ever really feel like we know anything. As Pinar writes, “Like art objects, outcomes of study cannot be known in advance, unless, of course, one’s intention is to copy” (2011, p. 57).

Where do knowledges reside? Of course, there are dominant knowledges but who determines these? What does an encounter with dominant modes of knowledge produce in someone situated outside of these prevailing discourses? In the worst instance, complete alienation and in a ‘not so worst’ instance, varying degrees of feelings of stupidity. As educators we offer reassurance that it is ok to not know and that beginning with a new knowledge base is scary for anyone, but what if we take this further to

re-think what constitutes valued knowledge? You can visit any number of government websites to see what I, and I am sure others, describe as a deficit reading of a community. Writ large is the knowledge a community is failing at.

However, returning to the idea of dominant knowledge discourses, what determines the parameters of knowledge that this failure is measured against? What if knowledge was considered and valued as it exists in a local geographical area rather than at a state or national level? Would this change this deficit reading and further would this mean that what occurs within a community becomes a source of value? I think the answer is yes as *The Knowledge Project* has aptly demonstrated.

Lastly, would this be the beginnings of Biesta's pedagogy of the public that is enacted by the public itself? This re-dress of whose and what knowledge is valued is a complicated idea because it necessitates a break with dominant regimes of power and formations of knowledge. I learned this shift in power when working with students exhibiting stories in social history museums (Charman, 2013). This project titled *Learning and Teaching in Public Spaces* was a response to student disengagement in social history museums. After repeated visits to museums I understood that students did not connect with the public remit or the public pedagogical intent of such spaces. I wanted the students to recognise the content of the museum was in fact arbitrary and that if circumstances arose they could determine what was important knowledge to publicly exhibit. This is what we were eventually able to do; in small groups students took the theme of immigration and researched and curated stories of individuals at the Immigration Museum in Melbourne, Flagstaff Hill Maritime Museum in Warrnambool and the National Wool Museum in Geelong. This proved a powerful experience on many levels (Charman, 2013) but not least because student agency in the project was indicated by a shift in power from the question, "How should I do this?" to the statement, "This is how I will do this". Further, this disconnect is not just from museums; it can be seen in many institutional forms of education. This returns us to the structural determinants of an education that is driven by measurable outcomes. Through the externalisation of information, something that is important to differentiate from knowledge, we are denied any sense of internal authority. This applies to the teacher as much as it does to the student. The Public Pedagogies Institute is then moved to a restorative remit whereby projects, seminars, conferences and publications become reflective of communities' authority over knowledge.

Note

- 1 For example, students in my Bachelor of Education Studies presented on an innovative computer class held in a community education centre where attention was paid to the cultural diversity of adult learners. iPads were used to write, photograph and create a cook book reflecting recipes from different cultures.

References

- Biesta, G. (2014). Making pedagogy public: for the public, of the public, or in the interest of publicness? In J. Burdick, J. A. Sandlin, & M. P. O'Malley (Eds.), *Problematizing public pedagogy* (pp. 15–25). New York, USA: Routledge.
- Charman, K. (2013). 'Education for a new museology' *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 17 (10), 1067–1077 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2012.730066>
- Charman, K., Dixon, M., Bellingham, R., Thomas, M. & Cooper, J. (2017a). *Towards a Footscray curriculum*. Public Pedagogies Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.publicpedagogies.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Towards-a-Footscray-Curriculum-interactive.pdf>
- Charman, K., Dixon, M., Bellingham, R., Thomas, M. & Cooper, J. (2017b). Educational consciousness: breaking open the category of knowledge in Footscray. *Journal of Public Pedagogies* 2, 54–63. Retrieved from <http://jpp.vu.edu.au/>
- Giroux, H. (2011). *On critical pedagogy*. New York, USA: Continuum.
- Miller, J. (2010). What's left in the field...a curriculum memoir. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 32(2), 253–266.
- Palmer, P. (1998). *The courage to teach*. San Francisco, USA: Jossey-Bass Inc.
- Pinar, W. (2011). *What is curriculum theory?* New York, USA: Routledge.
- Sandlin, J. A., Schultz, B. & Burdick, J. (Eds.). (2010). *The handbook of public pedagogy: education and learning beyond schooling*. New York, USA: Routledge.

Dr Karen Charman is a senior lecturer at Victoria University. Her research interests are in the intersections of public pedagogy, curriculum, representation, memory, public history and auto-ethnography. She is the president of the Public Pedagogies Institute, an institute that values learning and teaching outside of formal institutions. Dr Charman is the editor of the Journal of Public Pedagogies. She can be contacted at karen.charman@vu.edu.au

Attachment theory, neuroscience and adult literacy learners

by *Linno Rhodes*



Two years ago, I knew nothing about attachment theory, neuroscience and the world of psychology. Now I feel like I'm totally invested and I can't remember a time before—it has become my new world view and my lens. I became very excited when I first started learning about neuroscience and how we, as adult literacy educators, could better understand what is going on for our students who are often people who have lived with one or more of multi-generational poverty, abuse issues, addiction and interrupted schooling and have learned coping strategies to deal with their lived experience of trauma. These coping strategies follow them into the adult classroom and can easily be mistaken for lack of interest.

I tried hard to make sure my teaching was student centred, about their interests, project based. I never said they failed or were wrong. But nothing changed. I didn't replicate outdated modes of teaching that obviously failed them in their school years, and I tried to be innovative. Still nothing changed. There were some successes and it's true, sometimes success is impossible to see or measure. In fact, a couple of years ago I had a letter from one of those students, telling me what a huge difference that class had made to her—I would never have known because she hardly said 'boo'. So, I didn't really know how to make a difference except that I felt like I understood where they had been and the struggles they knew. I knew that I aligned with transformative teaching and learning methods, and that compassion and understanding went a long way. I was inspired by Freire and theories of strength based teaching, that literacy is a social practice. I had the theories but in practice, change was slow.

I want to say, at this point, it is not an 'us' and 'them' situation. Many of 'us' who work in the helping professions have grown up in families that are affected by abuse, alcoholism, poverty, racism (and other traumatic events or situations) and have become good at helping—teaching, nursing, caring—possibly because of it.

After doing some initial learning about neuroscience, particularly about attachment theory, and some basics about

how our brains work, I began to recognise and relate what was happening for students, to my new learning. Ways of working with attachment disturbances in adults were appealing to me as I could see a correlation between how therapists work and how teachers work.

I knew about the International Specialised Skills Institute fellowships from colleagues who had successfully applied so I thought I would apply to research this idea more fully. I was thrilled to be awarded a fellowship and began planning immediately, contacting people whose podcasts I listened to or whose books I had read. To my surprise, almost everyone said 'yes, come and visit'. So, in April I travelled to Pasadena, California; Austin Texas; Concord, New Hampshire; Toronto, Canada; and Manchester, England.

Pasadena

My first stop was Pasadena, a city just outside of Los Angeles. I arrived at LAX at 6am, tired, scratchy and excited as all get out. To cut a long story short, somewhere in the customs queue I lost (and—fortunately—found) my passport. The experience was emblematic of my fellowship journey—but more of that later.

I had been corresponding with Debra Horii and Olivia Martinez-Hauge from the Center for Connection, Pasadena, in the lead up to my trip and was really looking forward to meeting them. The Center for Connection was founded by Tina Payne Bryson who works with Dan Siegel and has co-authored books with him on parenting with a focus on nurturing the developing child's mind.

Olivia, a family therapist and occupational therapist, works with children with special needs and learning differences. Debra is an educational counsellor. She recognises that by helping students and their families and educators understand neuroscience, they can work together to discover which learning strategies work for each individual and that relationships and neuroscience are connected to learning.

We talked for a couple of hours and then met again the following day. I learned that by using neuroscience as a frame through which to view adult learners' traumatic histories and experience of learning, educators can change the way teaching and learning happens.

Olivia and Debra both approach their young students from a strengths based approach, and talk to them about their learning differences, not disabilities. They both work in a framework that sees 'safety' as the basis for any work they do with their clients. They work with the concepts of attachment, self-regulation, safety and neuroscience. They depict our emotions on a continuum that is created by our autonomic nervous system; green is safe, red is highly anxious and emotionally charged and blue is more shut down and unavailable. They explain that for any learning to occur, students must necessarily be regulated, that is in a *green zone*. If students are taught about regulating and co-regulating, where they can recognise when their co-learners and friends (or by extension, their family members) are becoming dysregulated, they are able to help themselves and others to come back to the green space where learning is optimal.

Adults who have a lived experience of trauma, and who are perhaps still living with the ramifications of that trauma, are under continuous stress, which impacts their ability to learn. Having a vocabulary to understand stress and trauma is key to change. Understanding that 'regulation' is a continuum that we all slide up and down on is understanding that it is not the 'I' that is broken, but that it is common to all people. What a huge sense of freedom from the tyranny of self-criticism!

Teaching students about the zones of regulation is introducing them to, or building on, skills of metacognition. Metacognition refers to an awareness of what we think about a topic. So, if we teach our students about being aware of their learning styles, the learning environment, their strengths, passions, and what 'sparks' them to learn, we are teaching them to be aware of themselves as learners and to be more engaged in owning their learning. Students are then able to become more aware of when they are dysregulated or importantly, *becoming* dysregulated. Then, they are able to intervene on their dysregulation, by doing or by being. Maybe it will just take the self-awareness of dysregulation or maybe it will take more.

Concord

In New Hampshire, I stayed with Kirke Olson and Sher Kamman, both psychologists who own a private therapy company based on the principles of positive psychology and where Kirke works as a school counsellor at the Parker Academy in Concord. I learned so much from the day I spent at the Parker Academy, a school for children who have specific learning differences associated with a diagnosis of autism, anxiety or other mental health issue. In this school, children and staff members have a mindful moment before the day formally begins. The whole school sits or stands in silence, making intentions for the day, or just being mindful of the space they are in. The classrooms are open spaces or else they are small rooms with enough space for a couple of students to work with a teacher. The literacy teacher has a lovely big office, with a window looking out to a sculpture made by the children, and a lovely and lively bird enclosure. She has cupboards full of literacy activities and is a passionate advocate for more phonics teaching.

The hallways in the school are covered with children's work, but also they are adorned by posters that help children navigate the regulation system on their own. Children identify the feelings in their bodies and the way that manifests when they are becoming dysregulated. They identify at which point they may be able to regulate themselves, and when they need help. If only we all learned that at a young age.

The amygdala and the pre-frontal cortex

How can we, as educators, bring about this change in our classrooms and centres? The principles of adult learning already guide the way. Classrooms trigger the coping skills that adult learners used at school. I think of students I have known—the two young men who sniped at each other throughout the class, the woman who sobs when she thinks everyone is against her, the one who complains about everything, the one who just says yes to everything and who cleans the tables at the end of the class. I know that in some ways the learning centre is a safe place for them, but it also represents places in the past that were dangerous and threatening, so they are in a state of hypervigilance when they attend class. The amygdala, responsible for the flight, fight, freeze reaction is on alert; students' old behaviours are necessary to keep them feeling safe. We can probably pretty easily map each of these students on the regulation continuum and I don't think any of them would be in the green zone.

The necessity of the old behaviours is a false one. For learning to occur, the pre-frontal cortex, which is the base for secure attachments and being in the green zone of regulation, needs to be in charge; this is where we are when we are being creative. The pre-frontal cortex is the last part of the brain to be developed. One of the older areas is the amygdala, hence the pre-frontal cortex is known as the mammalian brain, and the amygdala is known as the reptilian brain. If you think about dinosaurs either attacking or running fearfully, you've got an idea of the reptilian brain—the amygdala: the flight, fright, freeze response. When students enter our classrooms and their amygdalae are in charge because of old associations with classrooms and learning, it is necessary for us as educators to flip that.

Ways we can do this are many, and each teacher will know what will work for many of his or her students. Some suggestions are:

- a quiet, activity based exercise at the beginning of class—mindfulness moment, journal writing, intention setting, some gentle stretching...
- mirroring activities—identifying moods and making the accompanying faces with a neighbouring student. This is an activity that requires sensitivity to introduce but is good for matching moods with bodily awareness.
- bringing soft furnishings into class—cushions, blankets if it's cold, curtains hung in a windowless room...
- inviting students to bring in photos or other homely things to place on the walls or on shelves
- other activities that engage the right brain.

Brain science tells us that the left brain controls the linear, organisational skills: problem solving, logic, analysis, communication and lists. The right side of the brain controls the more creative dimensions of our thinking—art making, colour, imagination, daydreaming and spatial awareness. Learning activities that incorporate both sides of the brain are far more likely to be engaged with and more accessible to students.

Learning from LAX

As a child I was the one in the family who got separated from the pack and 'got lost'. As an adult, I still manage to separate from my family during outings so I was a bit nervous about travelling alone. I understand now that when I thought I lost my passport in LAX, I was in the red space—highly anxious, the cortisol hormone flooding my brain, making it nearly impossible for me to calm down and check my bags

and pockets. Instead, I ran back to where I thought I lost my passport, fearful that I would be interrogated and sent back to Australia or jailed. The flight, fight, freeze reaction kicked in, and my implicit memories of being lost had taken over. When I found my passport I calmed down immediately and then recalled how I had shoved people out of the way to get back to the place I thought I'd lost it. I was shocked at my behaviour.

Mirror neurons

Introducing the concept of mirror neurons to students can aid them with the ability to engage in self- and co-regulation. Just having another person talking calmly and speaking quietly may be enough for the mirror neurons to be engaged and take a person who is becoming dysregulated back to a regulated space. Mirror neurons are the root of empathy and engage all of the senses. If we see someone eating our favourite fruit, our saliva glands will get ready for a bite; if we hear someone yelling in distress, our heart races; if we witness someone in pain, our empathy is switched on. This is called emotional contagion and means we are in tune with the internal state of others. We want our students to engage their mirror neurons and for teachers to use this skill to develop empathy for others but also for themselves. If the teacher is looking kindly towards a student who is feeling badly about themselves, maybe the mirror neurons will kick in and allow some self-kindness to come in. Then learning can continue.

Austin

The time I spent in Austin, Texas was centred on the Healing Adult Attachment Conference, led by David Elliot, co-author of *Attachment disturbances in adults* (Brown & Elliot, 2016). I was very interested in how we might understand attachment theory in relation to our adult students and how those early attachment systems manifest in the adult student-teacher dyad. Attachment theory is based on research initially undertaken by John Bowlby and subsequently by Mary Ainsworth and Mary Main. The basic premise of attachment theory is that the primary caregiver is a secure base for an infant. How the secure base responds to the infant's needs is an indicator of how that infant will grow to form relationships in his or her life. At the conference in Austin, I learned that there are four defined attachment styles:

- *Securely attached*. The infant's needs are met at least 70% of the time and they grow up to have a secure self-identity. They respond in a healthy way in relationships with others.

- *Insecurely attached (blue)*. The caregiver was not reliably present and the infant learned to not show that they had needs. As adults they are mostly dissociated and avoidant. This person prefers to do it alone, is independent and proud of being so, and is not so attracted to being emotional.
- *Insecurely attached (red)*. The caregiver was there sometimes, other times not, leading the infant into an anxious state of not knowing. The adult is now anxious about being in relationships with others and is never sure of where the relationship is and how to behave. They are more focused on others.
- *The disorganised*. The caregiver was not present enough to meet the infant's needs and consequently the infant and now adult has trouble forming relationships in healthy ways.

Trauma and literacy

My interest in working with adult students through the lens of attachment theory is because the ways of working with attachment styles are also fundamental for working with adult literacy students who have come from a lived experience of trauma. I have borrowed these ideas and reinterpreted them for the adult classroom:

- Provide protection. If the classroom is an unsafe place make it safe.
- Be aware and attuned to your students' emotional space. Ensure the classroom is welcoming to each student.
- If a student shows distress, help them to come into a regulated space.
- Provide support for exploration of themselves as successful learners. Focus on the process of learning rather than the prospect of passing or failing. Make teaching successful learning strategies a priority.
- As a teacher, bring your best self to each lesson. Be present, reliable, consistent and reassuring. Provide good eye contact.

I met with many educators and people who work in the world of therapy during my time in Austin. I was so looked after by so many generous people. My main contacts there were the hosts of a very accessible podcast (Therapist Uncensored) I listen to regularly that introduced me to all of the neuroscience concepts. They organised the conference and also provided enormous support to me throughout the fellowship. During the time I spent with therapists and educators I learned that we

all have the same goal of providing support to those who need it, while recognising that healing and acknowledging our own shortcomings and wounds also need attention.

Toronto and Manchester

My stay in Toronto with Jenny Horsman, was more focused on adult learning environments and the impact of trauma, specifically violence, on learning. I met with several women who had worked in the field for many years and, as with my earlier discussions, we agreed that a sense of emotional and physical safety is critical in the classroom. We also talked about the need for government to recognise that adult learning in the foundation skills is not a vocational skill and this should be reflected in funding: adults who are learning literacy and numeracy do so with immense resilience and courage, and need the support around them for as long as it takes.

In England, with the generous support of Vicky Duckworth, I visited Edgeworth University, situated between Liverpool and Manchester. I gave a presentation to students and lecturers who study or work in the Department of Teaching Adult Literacy Skills. How wonderful is that! Most of the students were quite young—thirty and below—and they have chosen to be teachers of adults. I am so inspired by them.

And so, my journey came to an end, but also a new beginning—not to be too clichéd. I am so grateful to the International Specialised Skills Institute for the fellowship and to my employer, Olympic Adult Education for supporting me to undertake this huge journey. I aim to continue this work by writing, reading, talking and making good eye contact!

References and suggested resources

- Brown, D. & Elliot, D. (eds.). (2016). *Attachment disturbances in adults: treatment for comprehensive repair*. New York, USA: Norton.
- Buzan, T. & Buzan, B. (2002). *The mind map book*. London, UK: BBC.
- Cozolino, L. (2013). *The social neuroscience of education: optimising attachment and learning in the classroom*. New York, USA: Norton.
- Duckworth, V. (2014). *Learning trajectories: violence and empowerment among adult basic skills learners*. New York, USA: Routledge.
- Horsman, J. (2000). *Too scared to learn: women, violence and education*. New Jersey, USA: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc.

- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco, USA: Jossey Bass.
- Olson, K. (2014). *The invisible classroom: relationships, neuroscience and mindfulness in school*. New York, USA: Norton.
- Porges, S. (2017). *The pocket guide to the polyvagal theory: the transformative power of feeling safe*. New York, USA: Norton.
- Siegel, D. (2016). *Mindsight: change your brain and your life*. London, UK: Scribe.

Podcast

Therapist Uncensored:
<https://www.therapistuncensored.com/episodes/>

Organisations

International Specialised Skills Institute:
<http://www.issinstitute.org.au/>

Australian Council of Adult Literacy:
<https://acal.edu.au/>

Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council:
<http://valbec.org.au/>

Linno Rhodes works in West Heidelberg at Olympic Adult Education. She is one of the 2017 Department of Education and Training Higher Education and Skills Group, International Vocational Training Practitioner Fellowship recipients from the International Specialised Skills Institute. Linno has been on the Fine Print Editorial Committee and VALBEC committee for a number of years. She blogs at literacybetweenthelines.blogspot.com.au and her email address is linnorhodes@gmail.com. She is now preparing for a four-day walk across the three capes in Tasmania with her partner who walks much faster than her.

Professionalising our practice

By Karen Dymke

Thirty years ago I was at home with little kids and feeling like a failure as a 'Kinder Mum'. I had a teaching degree majoring in Chaucer and Shakespeare so when somebody asked if I would be interested in teaching adults I was keen. Anything to get away from Play School for a few hours! Maybe I could get my brain working again. I was surprised when I came for a 'chat' at the neighbourhood house running these short courses to be asked how I would manage a situation if a student had a breakdown in class. Really? I was to be teaching literacy, not psych. I bumbled my way through a response and joyfully looked forward to teaching my first class.

My class of fifteen students was squashed into a converted bedroom in a purple-painted weatherboard called Morrison House. Talk about managing diversity! There was a lovely older lady, a very large and slow man who reminded me of Lenny from *Mice and Men*, a lady who could hardly speak any English, an angry (but nervous) teenage boy with pink spiky hair and an anxious middle-aged lady who chewed her fingers the whole time. The class started well with introductions, and then it happened: the anxious lady chewed passed her fingernails and collapsed with a screech on the floor. I had no idea what to do. Intuitively we all left the room as 'Lenny' sat by her and cooed sympathetically, calming her with his presence. After this startling start we bonded closely and we even snuck in some Shakespeare.

I started where the learners were at, negotiating the curriculum to topics they were interested in and writing self-published books on topics of their choice such as spiders and fishing. I encouraged the angry young people that they could learn regardless of what they had been told at school, calming their anxieties and identifying what success could look like. As far as I could, I sought to address the points of need in the class. It was a sharing, collaborative and creative culture and these were some of my happiest times teaching. But I was making it up as I went.

From intuitive to intentional

In my practice a lot was left to chance; it was intuitive, and there were successes, but it wasn't intentional. I had no

specific training to know how to deal with learning disorders and difficulties like dyslexia, no understanding of how trauma can impact on a learner, or of what strategy to use at what time. Teaching students to be ready for employment and further educational opportunities was a scatter gun approach.

Student centred learning and meeting your students where they were at was the only option for vulnerable learners because otherwise they wouldn't come back. Intuitively we were meeting their needs, but I was acutely aware that we may not be progressing learners as successfully as we might. Students tended to stay on, sometimes for years. It was comfortable and safe.

To build capacity and progress student outcomes in education and employment we need a shift towards targeted and relevant professional development. We need to professionalise our practice.

Researching the research

After many years in the adult and community education sector I returned to 'school' in 2003. I was lucky to land the job as Director of Learning at an independent school after being the manager of a language and literacy program for Donvale Living and Learning Centre and the Eastern Region Language and Literacy Network. When asked if I would be happy with the new salary (which I hadn't even enquired about) I almost stopped breathing. My salary went from \$20,000 to \$120,000! Note the difference (or not) in the two jobs. What does this say?

There were other changes too. I went from presenting professional development days to attending them—at up to \$2,000 a pop, fancy lunches and interstate travel. Hmm, lucky me. I had not had this opportunity or even invitation before. As if I could have afforded it.

It was here I was introduced to the research of John Hattie, among other educational rock stars like Michael Fullan, Dylan Wiliam and Jim Knight. Hattie has spent thirty



years researching the research, through meta-analysis, on what has the greatest effect in teaching and learning. He has now identified 256 different effects on student progress and achievement from class size to the importance of teacher–student relationships, to how effective project based learning is, and whether homework is a waste of time or not. The research has involved over 300 million students, from preschool to young adults, all over the world (Hattie, 2009). No matter where, with whom or what your age the results are so outstanding they can't be ignored. Granted the results do not specifically measure adult learning, and this is an area that needs to be explored, but I think that they give us much to confirm practice, consolidate it and perhaps challenge it.

Some of the research findings, and they are ongoing, have been encouraging. In fact, I would say, adult and community education has been a shining light in what is now described as 'contemporary learning': student centred learning; the relevance and importance of prior learning; identifying what knowledge students bring with them to class; the importance of teacher expectations and especially the need to address students' expectations of themselves. Why are we not surprised that ensuring there are interventions for learning disorders like dyslexia are vital?

What was challenging and surprising was to learn of the very low and often negative effect of student control over learning and ability grouping. It made me really think seriously about practice in the VCAL (Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning) in particular and why those 'casual' youth classes didn't work well.

Professionalising and professionalism

The expression 'professional development' of adult educators suggests that there is—or might be—a 'profession' of adult education. Is that so? And should we be talking about 'professionalisation' or 'professionalism'? The challenge is as big as the mouthful!

Knowing where we are going is partly dependent on where we have been. Knowing the origins of the journey gives us a place to begin and a context for reflective practice. Knowing where we are *at* now is important, so we can also know where we are going.

The word 'profession' indicates special knowledge and skills to carry out a job in a specialised field. When we consider the

challenges of being an educator in the pre-accredited space, it is clear that specialist knowledge and skills are required. Students in this space are frequently, but not always, disadvantaged in some way. They include people with a disability, indigenous learners, asylum seekers, refugees, students with English as an additional language, long term unemployed, older learners and youth at risk. It is easy to see that this target group certainly requires educators with 'special knowledge and skills.'

As an occupational field, adult education is the sector which is most closely connected with sectors such as health and employment. It is diverse, it frequently involves partnerships and is based in the community. Adult education is education of *place*. The sector needs further recognition and support to meet the ever-growing demands placed on it to provide equity, access, education and employability options.

The growing importance of adult training and education is a worldwide phenomenon and the imperative is to begin to give coherence to the curriculums of professional training for the sector. The current unregulated domain sees people from various backgrounds involved as educators and trainers but often with no specific training other than a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. Pay is extremely low, contracts short and conditions often stressful. The sector currently exists largely on good will.

Frequently, educators enter this professional space after a number of years of other work but not everyone is a natural teacher. Upgrading skills and awareness of the latest methodologies in education is important. The research from Carol Dweck on building growth mindsets to overcome fixed mindsets, *Engagement by design* (Fisher, Frey, Quaglia, Smith & Lande, 2017) and the vision described by Bill Lucas, Guy Claxton and Ellen Spencer (2013) in *Expansive education* all contribute valuably to developing capacity for those learners who are often hardest to help. Dylan Wiliam's (2011) seminal work on embedding formative assessment and Jim Knight's instructional frameworks (2013) which are based on the principles of partnership, influenced strongly by Paulo Freire's foundational *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (1972), have a huge amount to offer adult educators. However, these resources and research sit largely in the domain of mainstream education and are unknown in the adult learning sector.

Currently a variety of workshop days are available through organisations such as the VDC (Vocational



Karen Dymke and Cate Thompson travelled to Europe as recipients of an ISSI Fellowship to research disadvantaged learners

education and training Development Centre), which seek to build the skills teachers need to enable them to assess challenges and teach accordingly. Topics have included managing challenging behaviours, trauma informed practice, specific learning disorders such as dyslexia and engaging learners. We have run effective workshops with very positive feedback and it is always a privilege to learn further from the knowledge in the room. But we all know, and the research tells us, that the one-hit-wonder days of professional development have limited impact long term if there is no follow through or further capacity building. I fear sometimes we are just ticking a box for compliance purposes.

Tutors and trainers have big hearts, and I always think we would have been missionaries in a previous life. But it is time things are done better than that. We need a national lifelong policy now. Discussions at the Adult Learning Australia Lifelong Learning Summit reiterated this point clearly.

International practice

In 2017, Cate Thompson and I were fortunate to be granted an International Vocational Training Practitioners Fellowship with ISSI (the International Specialised Skills Institute) supported by the Department of Education and Training, Higher Education Skills Group. My particular focus was on teaching and learning—that awkward word, andragogy: ‘the teaching of adult students in a structured learning process’. I’ve come to learn that research informs policy which supports practice. But policy in andragogy

is very thin. It was exciting to discover that in the European Union there is a current focus on research in adult education and it is very much acknowledged as an emerging field.

In the Hague, a policy paper is being developed which is underpinned by research into social issues from the perspective of three different ministries: social affairs and employment, education, and economics. In Brussels we were introduced to ARALE (yes, they are infected with acronyms even worse than we are!) Awareness Raising for Adult Learning and Education, which profiles European case studies, experiences and ideas on how to raise awareness of adult education among the general public and to target groups and policy makers. The European Association for the Education of Adults has published a manifesto for adult learning in the 21st Century (Ebner, 2015) identifying six key challenges and responses. Through concordeurope.org, Finland is developing towards a more effective partnership with civil society. There was a strong emphasis everywhere on developing policy and pursuing research to underpin practice.

We found that overall our practice in Victoria is a long way ahead. The A-Frame (State of Victoria, 2006) was of great interest, and although not originally part of our intent, became something of a centrepiece in our visits, even though it is more than ten years old here! We also shared success stories from the research done in Learn Local organisations in Victoria.

What recalibrated my focus on the Fellowship was the focus in Europe on the professionalisation of adult education, which was a very serious and intense discussion point at the conference we attended in Tallinn, Estonia. We were welcomed warmly and invited to participate and present. It was exciting to be part of an energetic and passionate forum of educators, sharing where they are at and where to next in adult education.

So where to next?

Structured and strategic professional support or training that addresses the diverse challenges of working with pre-accredited and post-compulsory learners should be made readily available to teachers and trainers.

However, it is unreasonable to assume educators in the pre-accredited sector can meet expensive or arduous expectations for professional learning. Until conditions change, support for professional learning needs to be

flexible, negotiable and, as with any good adult learning practice, practical. In addition, the acknowledgment and recognition of learning and experience is vital.

To further the professionalisation of teaching, a framework for implementing continuing professional development in learning and teaching needs to be designed. The next stage, however, will be effective implementation.

Implementation could acknowledge existing teaching development practices and offer a set of reflective processes for individuals and teams to use to develop teaching and learning in a cycle of evidence-informed practice. It could also offer a map of core development themes to build capacity for educators to progress the student learning experience.

A system of 'badges', now used extensively in Europe, could recognise and acknowledge professional learning. Attendees are awarded a badge for each professional learning attended and completed to satisfaction. These are available for minimal cost and can be contextualised to individual organisations. The University of Melbourne has been investigating this option with recently published findings (Milligan, Kennedy & Israel, 2018).

It is the system's responsibility to provide the opportunity and resources to enable teachers and trainers to be the best educators they can be so we don't teach by chance but by design, not by intuition only but also by intent.

If we are serious about building a 'knowledge nation' we need to build teachers' sense of efficacy—the belief in their ability to positively impact student learning. Teachers and trainers also need to be open to new ideas; sometimes we don't know what we don't know. To be able to achieve this and to build capacity the sector needs to be well equipped and resourced.

If I had a chance I would turn back time (there is a song in that) to when I started out at that purple-painted community house. I wish I knew then what I know now. I would have a much better idea of how to support the students with learning difficulties, I might have been able to observe the brewing behaviours before they blew out, I would have been much more strategic in how I taught. I want to see this learning shared with practitioners now.

Furthermore, cooperation and collaboration with other domains of knowledge is required to build capacity

and outcomes for the students we are addressing. On interviewing a number of experts in the social work field from Melbourne University and The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, I learnt that often social workers saw education as an add-on after primary needs are addressed. As one lecturer described it, 'They can see education as the Gucci handbag'. If social workers were better informed of the power of education as a catalyst for change and promoted it as a priority area, outcomes for students would be greatly enhanced.

Higher education institutions such as universities could contribute to this by providing well trained professionals with theoretical and practical qualifications as part of their initial training. Currently, La Trobe University offers an optional fourth year education subject in alternative education, which serves this purpose. Discussions are underway to investigate a collaboration between the Department of Education and the Department of Public Health at La Trobe, Save the Children, and the University of Tasmania to implement a pilot program that aims to further address this space.

The establishment of professional associations and networks could help practitioners in the pre-accredited and post-compulsory field in the processes of collective development. Policy-makers at state and national levels could support this initiative and see it further facilitated through an organisation such as the VDC which currently administers a range of funding initiatives aimed at building educators' capacity within organisations funded through Skills First.

Practitioners can also create their own centres of expertise, enabling them to carry out research or share experiences, perhaps using social media as a platform to combat the tyrannies of distance and time. They can participate in projects and activities aimed at developing databases allowing for evidence based work. Who knows, they may even achieve better pay and conditions!

ACAL (the Australian Council for Adult Literacy) is calling for action in this space also. Although few programs currently mandate higher level qualifications for delivery of literacy and numeracy courses in Australia, maintaining a workforce of experienced practitioners who have knowledge of theoretical underpinnings of literacy and numeracy teaching and learning is essential.

This work we do is hard and it is full of challenges but it is also incredibly rewarding. One of the joys of being part of the ACAL and VALBEC committees is the opportunity it provides us to see the passion and enthusiasm of adult literacy and numeracy proponents across the country. Our role as teachers and trainers is crying out to be recognised as a legitimate stand-alone profession with the provision of resources and professional learning. We need to professionalise our practice through research and shift from the intuitive to the intentional so that we can close the gap for adult learners with specific strategies, great teaching and quality core instruction.

References

- Ebner, G. (2015). *Manifesto for adult learning in the 21st century*. Brussels, Belgium: European Association for the Education of Adults. Retrieved from <https://eaea.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/manifesto.pdf>
- Fisher, F., Frey, N., Quaglia, R., Smith, D. & Lande, L. (2017). *Engagement by design*. Thousand Oaks, USA: Corwin.
- Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. London, UK: Sheed and Ward.
- Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible learning: a synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Knight, J. (2013). *High impact instruction: a framework for great teaching*. Thousand Oaks, USA: Corwin.
- Lucas, B., Claxton, G. & Spencer, E. (2013). *Expansive education: teaching students for the real world*. Camberwell, Victoria: ACER Press.
- Milligan, S., Kennedy, G., & Israel, D. (2018). *Assessment, credentialing and recognition in the digital era: recent developments in a fertile field*. Melbourne, Vic: Centre for Strategic Education.
- State of Victoria. (2006). *Pre-accredited quality framework*. Melbourne, Vic: ACFE Board. Retrieved from <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/training/providers/learnlocal/program/pqf/pqfaframe.pdf>
- Williams, D. (2011). *Embedded formative assessment*. Bloomington, USA: Solution Tree Press.

Karen Dymke has over thirty years of experience as an educator, including in TAFE and the adult community sector and has a particular interest in literacy, engaging learners and progressing vulnerable learners. She currently lectures at La Trobe University in alternative education models and presents in a range of contexts as a teacher educator. You can contact Karen at karen@thoughtfulworks.com.au or find further details at www.thoughtfulworks.com.au

The CGEA: responding to changing literacy practices

By Nadia Casarotto



The CGEA (Certificates in General Education for Adults) has been an integral part of the adult literacy and basic education field since the 1990s. The CGEA courses are based on a learner centred approach and the application of real learning through engagement with meaningful texts across the contexts of community, learning, personal and employment domains. The CGEA is widely used in Victoria across diverse learning settings and its use interstate has continued to increase over the last two years.

During its lifetime, the CGEA has experienced a number of transformations and responded to various policy developments and shifts both in the broader VET (Vocational Education and Training) sector and in the literacy and numeracy sector. In her book *Reading the Fine Print* (2009), Beverley Campbell documents changes impacting on the CGEA such as the introduction of competency based training and assessment. This has been accompanied by fervent discussion and wide ranging views about the implications for teaching practice.

In addition, the CGEA has operated in and sought to respond to contexts of changing and evolving literacy and numeracy practices combining text mediated literacy practices in social and work contexts as well as multi literacies including written, visual and screen based digital literacy practices. In their working paper, *Literacy practices in the gig economy*, Farrell and Corbel (2017) examine the sweeping changes that are currently occurring in work practices and what this means for the literacy and numeracy practices that will be required to successfully participate in workplaces and more broadly in the community.

In response to these changes and to support learners to develop and engage with a range of multimodal texts, a requirement to engage with screen based texts (in addition to hard copy texts) was introduced as part of the last reaccreditation of the CGEA in 2013. Section B of the CGEA curriculum states that 'Digital literacy skills involve more than accessing digital information. The literature has defined digital literacy as "understanding how the different modalities—word, image, sound—are combined in complex

ways to create meaning..." (State of Victoria, 2016, p.6).

The critical point here was that engaging with digital texts was not so much about how to use a computer to access a digital text but more about the reading skills to interact with the texts to make meaning. It was also not about just reading continuous text on a screen but also actively interacting with the text to achieve a purpose.

Reaccreditation in 2018

Digital literacy

The CGEA was recently reaccredited with a number of significant changes. There was much discussion around the terms 'paper based' and 'digital texts' which were used in the 2013 iteration of the curriculum to describe engagement with hard copy and screen based texts. A number of interpretations were applied to these terms resulting in a significant compromise in the original intention of the curriculum to support learners to develop both paper based reading skills and screen based interactive reading skills. In some cases examples were provided where the digital text replicated the hard copy text in that it was non interactive and did not provide opportunities to perform an interactive reading task.

To address this issue, the term 'web based texts' was introduced in the Engage units of the reaccredited CGEA to refer to interactive websites requiring actions as opposed to screen based word-processed documents.

Reading online requires a different set of skills from reading paper based text and both are important. Online text is multidimensional, as it allows for the combination of a number of features such as text, graphics, audio, video, animation, hyperlinking and other features to add to the reading experience and support meaning making. This supports the development and application of different reading strategies. Section B Part 6.1 (Assessment strategy) of the CGEA curriculum document provides more information about the use of web based texts.

Handwriting skills

Much debate has ensued about the need to teach handwriting in the digital age. Practitioners provided feedback expressing concern that it was possible not to teach handwriting through the CGEA as a number of interpretations were being applied to the terms ‘paper based’ and ‘digital texts’ in relation to the production of texts as required in the Create or Writing units in the CGEA. The requirement to produce paper based texts was intended to promote the development of handwriting skills. However some feedback suggested that word-processed texts were being printed and referred to as paper based thus negating any opportunity to develop handwriting skills. The research on the benefits of teaching handwriting is contentious. Some of this research has supported the benefits of developing handwriting skills including stimulating cognitive processes and supporting the retention of information and concepts. Teaching handwriting is seen as an essential component for effective learning. (Funnell, 2015) The Project Steering Committee which supported and guided the reaccreditation of the CGEA supported

this view and agreed that the teaching of handwriting needed to be maintained in the reaccredited CGEA and be made more explicit. As a result of this decision the term ‘handwritten texts’ appears as a requirement in the Create units in the lower level certificates.

Relationship of CGEA to the ACSF

More information has been provided in Section B of the curriculum to emphasise that while each course in the CGEA is aligned to an ACSF (Australian Core Skills Framework) level, any assessment that is intended to confirm the ACSF level of a learner must reference all relevant performance variables in the ACSF, which include:

- Level of support
- Context
- Text complexity
- Task complexity

Table 1 provides an overview of the significant changes which were made to the CGEA as part of its reaccreditation as well as a rationale for these changes.

Table 1

Change in CGEA	Rationale
New units on oral communication included in all courses except Certificate III	Oral communication skills are an essential part of learning literacy and numeracy and should be made explicit in the curriculum. Although they could be addressed through the Engage and other units, an explicit focus would be more beneficial.
New oral communication units added to Core Skills Reading field in course structure to become Core Skills Reading and Oracy	Although the oral communication units are included in the core skills field of qualification structures, they are not mandated and should be selected according to learner need. Not all learners may need to develop their oral communication skills.
Learning plan units at the lower levels refocused on the development of learning strategies and objectives	Learners at the lower levels still need to develop learning skills, however this needs to be more focused on developing learning goals and objectives.
Higher level learning plan units reviewed but remain essentially unchanged	Development of a learning plan and portfolio is a required skill at the higher level.
Explicit reference to handwriting in the Create units for Initial, Introduction and Certificate I to support the development of handwriting skills	Handwriting skills are an important part of learning literacy. The Project Steering Committee supported the development of handwriting skills at the lower levels in the CGEA. At the higher levels the inclusion of handwriting skills was optional as learners would have developed their handwriting skills at this level.
Explicit reference to engaging with web based texts in the Engage units to support the development of reading skills associated with interactive digital texts	Reading skills and strategies required to interact with web based text are different to those required for print based texts.
Level of support made more explicit in the descriptor of each unit	In any assessment against the CGEA that is also intended to confirm an ACSF level, the performance variable of Support must be evidenced along with the other performance variables.
Additional electives added to some CGEA qualifications	Electives added in response to feedback to provide a wider variety of options and pathways for learners.

Accessing the curriculum

The full CGEA curriculum document can be accessed from the Victorian Department of Education and Training website via the following link: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/training/providers/rto/Pages/courses.aspx>

Click on Service Industries on the home page.

An Implementation Guide for the CGEA will also be available. The guide will contain information to support the implementation of the curriculum as well as some sample tasks across the different certificate levels.

References

- Campbell, B. (2008). *Reading the Fine Print: A history of the Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council (VALBEC) 1978–2008*. Springvale South, Vic: VALBEC
- Farrell, L. & Corbel, C. (2017). *The Literacy 4.0 Project Working Paper1: Literacy Practices in the Gig Economy*. Parkville, Vic: Melbourne Graduate School of Education
- Funnell, A. (presenter). (2015). Is the writing on the wall for handwriting? [Radio program]. In *Future tense*. ABC Radio National. Retrieved from <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/futuretense/is-the-writing-on-the-wall-for-handwriting/6761164>
- State of Victoria (Department of Education and Training). (2016). *Certificates in general education for adults*. Melbourne, Vic: Department of Education



and Training. Retrieved from https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/training/providers/rto/curr22234_22238VICCGEA.pdf

Nadia Casarotto is part of the Service Industries Curriculum Maintenance Manager based at Victoria University Polytechnic. In this role, she is involved in the maintenance and monitoring of Crown Copyright curriculum including the CGEA and the EAL (English as an Additional Language) Framework on behalf of the copyright owner. Nadia can be contacted at nadia.casarotto@vu.edu.au

‘Create’ photo by Kelly Sikkema on Unsplash

Practical Matters

Technology tearoom

By Kerrie Tomkins

Leopold Community and Learning Centre is an unfunded not-for-profit community based organisation that is managed by volunteers from the community and facilitated by a coordinator. The Centre aims to foster inclusivity, promote learning for life, and provide activities in response to the needs of the local community. The Technology Tearoom was developed in response to a particular need identified in the community.



Leopold is located on the Bellarine Peninsula in Victoria and, while in a growth corridor, it has a large population of people over sixty years of age who have retired to the area from other parts of Victoria. Access to public transport is limited on the Bellarine for many seniors as it is a bus service, which many of our patrons complain is not user friendly if you have a walking frame. Consequently, residents who don't drive face the cost-prohibitive prospect of travelling into Geelong by taxi to visit Centrelink, for example. The Technology Tearoom was developed to address this problem; it has evolved to include support for using digital devices, navigating online systems such as MyGov and general troubleshooting and support for seniors when they encounter difficulties with various agencies requiring them to pay accounts or receive their accounts by email.

Identifying a need

Digital technology can be challenging for older members of our community, and many people in Leopold who are over sixty years of age are on fixed incomes, which limits their access to technical support when they encounter difficulties. Chesters, Ryan and Sinning (2013) state that “unless all Australians acquire the technical skills required to use computers and the internet, some sections of the Australian community may become more isolated and disadvantaged” (p.8) and our seniors are very vulnerable in this area.

The framework of the Technology Tearoom was developed to assist our mature aged learners to build their confidence and competence in using a range of digital devices. The program is delivered in a social setting and the curriculum is developed to cater specifically to the needs of individual learners; they identify what they want to learn to do at the beginning of each class.

Many mature aged learners build barriers and have developed a range of avoidance strategies when dealing with digital devices. All of our mature aged learners who participate in the Technology Tearoom stated that they were reliant on younger members of their families to assist them and many express anxiety when using the internet, tablets and smart phones. The majority of our learners stated that they limited the use of their smart phones to just making calls. They found the phones confusing to use and did not really understand how to use the apps.

Understanding the issues

The following factors were identified as the main barriers and issues preventing seniors from engaging with digital technology:

Cost

The cost of technical support is a barrier for seniors on a fixed income. As a consequence, they rely on family and friends who often do not have the time or patience to teach them how they ‘fixed’ something. Seniors tend to avoid using the device for periods of time to avoid bothering their tech-savvy relatives. The cost of attending a computer or tablet course is also a barrier. This cost can include class fees, transport to the venue and support materials.

Physical issues

Two out of five older adults have physical conditions and health issues that aggravate the difficulties they experience using technology. Manual dexterity can be compromised by conditions such as chronic pain and arthritis, Parkinson's disease, stroke and dementia, for example.

The change in visual acuity or the ability to see detail decelerates after the age of fifty. The age-related changes in colour vision and contrast sensitivity means older adults have more trouble seeing small details on a device.

Update frequency

Many older adults respond to technological change with scepticism and feel intimidated. This attitude is often accompanied by self-doubt and anxiety amplified by the regular updates of digital devices and computers which often change the way an app or program works or how it looks. The Windows 10 upgrade caused significant difficulties for many seniors in our community. Many stated that they could no longer use their computers because they did not know where to find anything.

How it works

Older adults learn best with one-on-one and hands-on tutorials and need to take a slow pace when using new gadgets or system, practicing over and over again. Many need to take notes to remind them of the steps to take to perform what might be considered a simple task such as sending a text message.

Information overload

The internet can empower users as it provides access to vast amounts of information. However, information overload can get dark and full of terrors for people who are just starting to get familiar with the internet and they can become lost or have difficulty getting out of a website.

Behaviour adaptation

Seniors require assistance in learning to use hand-held devices and digital services. Aside from the physical and health related factors that may prevent the success of seniors using technology, they will also need help in adapting to a new behaviour of using gadgets and digital tools. For example, they often tap screens in an overly vigorous manner.

It is worth noting that while computer and internet usage is shown to be lower in older age groups, this is likely to be partly a cohort effect. As the birth cohorts currently exposed to computers get older, the proportion of people of a specific age who have never used a computer will decline. However, while low use among older Australians will decline as cohorts age, it seems unlikely that usage will change much in the current cohort of older Australians (Chesters, Ryan & Sinning, 2013).

Learning Model

A constructivist learning model was used to develop the framework of the Technology Tearoom as it was perceived that using the existing knowledge and experience of each individual senior would support them to build their own



Technology Tearoom participants

learning framework and reduce the levels of anxiety they experience using digital technology. The social context of the Technology Tearoom facilitates peer teaching and learning and has been a key aspect in developing individual strategies for our mature aged learners.

Constructivism is a theory about how people learn: “people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. When we encounter something new, we have to reconcile it with our previous ideas and experience, maybe changing what we believe, or maybe discarding the new information as irrelevant.” (Bada, 2015, p. 67)

The characteristics of constructivist learning environments (Tam, 2000) that we used in implementing the tearoom are:

- Knowledge is shared between tutor and students.
- Tutors and students share authority.
- The tutor’s role is one of a facilitator or guide.
- Learning groups will be small.

The Tearoom

Tearoom participants are between sixty-five and ninety years of age, the majority being in the sixty-five to seventy range. The social aspect is important, as participants have said that they find it more relaxing and are not so stressed—many say they do not cope with a classroom environment as they are concerned they will look stupid in that setting.

The Technology Tearoom encourages seniors to help each other (peer-to-peer support). This has helped to boost confidence and reassured people that it is alright to ask for help and acknowledge their issues. Learning new things is challenging and takes concentration. People need time

to try things out, make their own mistakes and work out how to fix them. The Tearoom operates on a weekly basis for two hours, we charge \$3 per person and morning tea is provided. Currently, participants attend on a needs basis and they bring their technology issues to the group; they are assisted by the tutor, but the tutor does not do it for them, rather shows them how.

The flexibility in attendance is attractive to this cohort as many seniors no longer drive or have health issues to be managed and therefore cannot commit to classes. The other features of the Tearoom include:

- support to resolve their issues (it is not done for them)
- support to use the Be Connected¹ resources and tutorials
- a welcoming, relaxed atmosphere to help make learning less intimidating
- morning tea to give people a break from learning and a chance to socialise
- materials and activities that people can relate to and are interested in.

FAQs

A number of issues have proved to be consistent over the time the Technology Tearoom has been operating. With smartphones the frequently asked questions have been about how to store phone numbers and what the icons are for and how to use them. With tablets, issues have generally been about navigation to and from the home screen, finding document notes, setting up emails, and taking and printing photos. With computers, getting used to an updated operating system and the cascade of issues it presents (new ways to navigate, different icons etc.) are the most common issues. Interacting with the MyGov website and the NDIS Portal has also been a common source of problems to solve in the Technology Tearoom.

Outcomes

The Technology Tearoom does not have a set curriculum but it sets out to achieve the following outcomes:

- Participants are supported to achieve a level of confidence and competence in using their digital devices.
- Participants will be supported to develop a social network to assist them to solve/address their technology issues outside the tearoom.
- Anxiety levels for participants are reduced when using digital devices.

While the digital technology age has many benefits and has the potential to reduce social isolation through the various social media platforms, it is not necessarily the case for seniors in our population. They grew up in an age without computers, tablets and mobile phones and are facing real challenges interacting with these technologies.

The Technology Tearoom is one model for supporting our seniors to gain skills in using these devices and there will be a continuous need to support our older population in this area, especially because the constant updates required by the devices are contributing to the expanding digital generation gap. The Be Connected resources have proven useful to seniors involved in the Tearoom but they have all stated that the patient support from the Tearoom tutor and the social atmosphere are the most valuable aspects in helping them to be more confident users of the technology.

Note

- 1 The Be Connected Network is an online hub for community organisations working with digitally excluded people: <https://www.beconnectednetwork.org.au>

References

- Bada, S. O. (2015). Constructivism Learning Theory: A Paradigm for Teaching and Learning. *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education* 5 (6 ver.1) 66–70 retrieved from www.iosrjournals.org
- Chesters, J., Ryan, C., & Sinning, M. (2013). *Older Australians and the take-up of new technologies*. Adelaide: NCVET retrieved from <https://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/publications/all-publications/older-australians-and-the-take-up-of-new-technologies>
- Tam, M. (2000). Constructivism, Instructional Design, and Technology: Implications for Transforming Distance Learning. *Educational Technology and Society*, 3 (2).

Kerrie Tomkins has worked in education for over twenty years, with the last five years focused on adult learning. She has undertaken research into constructivist learning theory and developed a learning model using the theory to assist adult learners to build their own framework. Currently the Coordinator for Leopold Community and Learning Centre, Kerrie was previously a Regional Education Officer working with business, local government and community organisations in sustainability education for the Victorian State Government.

Games, tips and tricks for sharpening basic numeracy

By Manalini Kane

‘Do not keep learners to their studies by compulsion, but by play.’ This famous quote from the great Greek philosopher Plato has always convinced me to follow his advice while teaching basic numeracy skills to adult EAL (English as an additional language) learners.

As an LLN (language, literacy and numeracy) teacher with several years of teaching experience in the community and TAFE sectors, I found teaching numeracy very challenging, especially at the basic level. My friends and colleagues seemed to teach and practice basic numeracy skills in very traditional ways by using day-to-day problem solving activities, so I decided to explore and design games, with tips and tricks to educate and engage adults while sharpening their skills in addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.

I am happy to share with you some of the games I have devised that can be played in a non-threatening and motivational way in the adult EAL classroom.

Numchum

This game is similar to the ‘numbers’ segment on the SBS television show, *Letters and Numbers*. The game requires one deck of playing cards without kings, queens, jacks or jokers, leaving you with forty cards. This game can be played by two players or by four players playing in pairs.

Begin by laying out the cards, face up, in eight columns and five rows. To start the game, a non-participant player (a teacher, maybe) starts counting from one to 100, out of earshot and sight of the seated players.

One player says ‘stop’ and the non-participant declares the number they were up to and sets the timer for one minute or two, depending on the level of the group and/or the decision of the players.

The first player or the first team puts cards together so that their face value can be multiplied, added, divided or subtracted to reach the declared number, or as close to it as possible, in the time allocated. The ace is valued as one.



Suppose a non-participant declares fifty-seven as the target number then you may put the following cards together:

$$10 \times 5 = 50, \quad 50 + 7 = 57$$

$$9 \times 6 = 54, \quad 54 + 3 = 57$$

Or

$$8 \times 4 = 32, \quad 32 \times 2 = 64, \quad 64 - 7 = 57$$

To score, you count the numbers that you have used from the displayed cards. So in the first combination above, the score is twenty-two ($10 + 5 + 7$), in the second combination, the score is eighteen ($9 + 6 + 3$) and in the third it is twenty-one ($8 + 4 + 2 + 7$). The aim is to score the maximum points possible. All the used cards go back to the columns and rows for the next round.

Continue with a different target number for every turn, recording a score for each round and declaring the winner after eight or ten rounds, as the time permits.

Variations

The playing team puts together as many variations as possible to reach the target. In the example above, a team could play all three combinations with a total score of sixty-one, so long as they present these in the allocated time limit.

The teams play at the same time (each with their own set of cards) to reach the same target rather than taking turns.

Once players are familiar with the ‘100 target’ version, increase the target to 1,000 and add kings, queens and jacks, worth thirteen, twelve and eleven respectively.

DAMS (division, addition, multiplication and subtraction)

DAMS is a game to be played when your learners have progressed with Numchum.

DAMS is played with four players as individuals or by forming two teams of two. You need one deck of playing cards with no jokers. In this game, king is worth thirteen points, queen twelve, jack eleven and ace one.

Shuffle the deck and distribute twelve cards to each player (or team). You will then be left with four cards that you place in the centre, facing up.

Player A takes a card from his or her hand and places it face up on the table with the four cards that are already there. Player B must try to add, subtract, multiply or divide the face value of some or all of the cards on the table to equal the face value of the played card. If Player B can do this then all the cards used are given to Player A. Player B then plays a card and the roles are reversed. If there are no cards on the table or a player can't use any of the cards on the table, they play a card and the players continue to take turns to add cards to the table until one of them can give away cards.

An example

Suppose Player A plays a two when there is a king (worth thirteen points), nine, eight, five and three already on the table (figure 1).

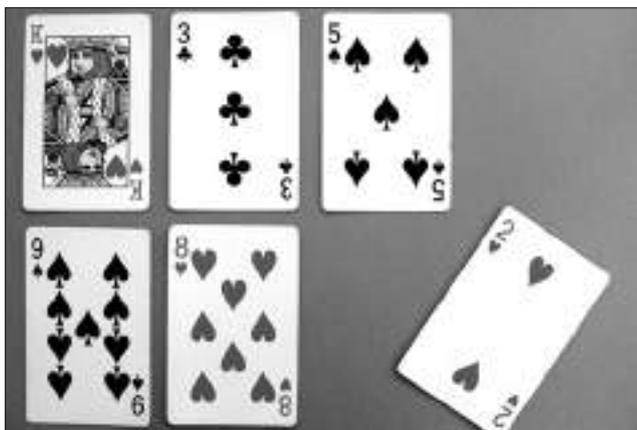


Figure 1

Player B could come up with $5 - 3 = 2$ straight away, but the aim should be to give as many cards as possible to Player A.

How can you give all five cards? Try this:

$$9 + 8 = 17, \quad 17 - 13 = 4, \quad 4 \div 2 = 2$$

$$\text{and } 5 - 3 = 2.$$

Player B then gives all the cards used to Player A who places them face down in a stockpile to their left, making sure to keep them separate from their hand of remaining playing cards.

In this scenario there are no cards left on the table so the players continue to take it in turns, starting with Player B, to play a card until one of them can use some or all of the cards to do a calculation that equals the face value of the card their opponent has just played.

When all the cards have been played, the players add up the total value of the cards in their stockpiles. The player with the lowest total is the winner.

Lexicon Rummy

For this game, you need a pack of Lexicon cards, which can be bought at a games shop or online. Lexicon is a pack of fifty-four cards but instead of regular playing card suits, it has fifty-two A to Z letters and two master cards, with allocated points for each card.

Lexicon Rummy provides scope to practice addition and subtraction while also building vocabulary skills. It is a game for two players with one pack of cards or four players with two packs.

How to start

Separate vowels and consonants, putting the two master cards in the vowel pile. Shuffle the two piles separately and place face down in the centre of the table.

Each player chooses a card from the consonant pile and turns it over. The player whose card is closest to the beginning of the alphabet is the first dealer. Everyone returns their cards to the consonant pile and the dealer shuffles the pack again.

Each player is dealt a hand of thirteen cards: nine cards from the consonant pile and four from the vowel pile. Turn over the top card of each pile in the centre and leave it, face up, by the side of the respective pile. The face-up piles become the discard piles and the piles facing down are the stockpiles.

How to play

The aim of the game is to make words out of the cards in your hand. To win, a player must make a minimum of one four-letter word containing no master card (called a 'pure word') and the rest of the letters must form words of at least two letters. A master card can be used to represent any letter. Proper nouns are not allowed.

The first player picks either a vowel or consonant from the stockpile then discards one card from their hand, face up on the appropriate discard pile.

When a player can form words with twelve of the cards in their hand they place their thirteenth card face down in the centre and declare themselves as the winner of that round. If the player can do this without first picking up a card from the stockpile, they get fifty bonus points. The winner shows all the formed words and adds up all the points of their own cards.

Following the winner's show of cards, the other players show the words they could form and leave the unused letters on one side. Then they delete the points of their unused letters from their score to get their individual final score. (This way, both addition and subtraction skills are developed).

When the points have been added up, all cards are returned to the stockpiles to be shuffled for the next round.

An example

This player (figure 2) can use twelve cards to score fifty bonus points. How? They can form 'whips' (for the pure word), 'hook' (using a master card as O), and 'air'. Letter L can be put facing down to declare as the winner. Or 'whirl', 'shake' (using the master) and 'pi'. How about 'risk', 'how', 'oh', and 'pit'? 'Whisk', 'rail', and 'pot' are also possible.

Tips

This game allows the participants to practice addition and subtraction while building vocabulary in a playful and enjoyable environment.

It is a good idea to decide in advance how many rounds you plan to play before you start. I suggest a minimum of eight rounds to provide sufficient practice. Everyone should



Figure 2

try to form words that will give the maximum points with the letters in hand. If you like, you can also allow the use of a calculator and/or an online dictionary so learners can practice using technology as well.

Would you like to know some interesting facts and observations about playing cards and their mathematical connection to the calendar? Look up this very interesting page: <https://medium.com/@52ftwb/the-mathematics-of-playing-cards-4710dd38a216>

Manalini Kane's twenty-eight years' teaching experience includes the teaching of English and Humanities in the secondary sector as well as English and EAL in the community and TAFE sectors. Currently she teaches English and EAL online and face-to-face, and manages Tribhashi Consultant, a translating and interpreting service certified by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters. Manalini can be contacted at tribhashi.consultant@gmail.com

Foreign Correspondent

Learning and violence: changing the frame

An interview with Dr Jenny Horsman

Jenny Horsman is a researcher and educator based in Toronto, Canada. She has a passion for deepening her own and others' understanding of the impact of violence, trauma, and neglect on learning, and finding ways to address these impacts to support learning for all. Jenny will be visiting Australia in September where she will give a keynote address at the ACAL Conference in Melbourne. *Fine Print* caught up with her before her departure.



The last time you visited Australia, twenty years ago, you had just completed your first big study in the area of violence and learning. In your observation, what has remained constant in this field in the intervening years and what are the key changes?

I was introduced to the issue of the impact of violence on learning during my doctoral research in the eighties. At that time, I planned to interview women in adult literacy programs about how they hoped their reading and writing practices would change. I was startled when many of those women told me about the relentless violence in their lives from childhood, continuing in adulthood. Most told me they had never spoken to anyone else about these experiences.

Left reeling with the implications for schooling, and adult literacy, I worried that if we didn't understand this issue and learn how to address it, adult literacy programs might fail students who had already been failed once by the school system. I became passionate about persuading the literacy movement to take it on. That led me to the national study I completed before I visited Australia last time, and to facilitate online discussion with adult literacy workers internationally. I wrote up all I had discovered in *Too scared to learn*, in hopes this information could lead to major change.

The longer I focus on learning and violence, the more convinced I am that we *must* turn towards this issue if we are to create equitable educational environments, ones where all of us have opportunities for successful learning, and for satisfying teaching. I think the most disappointing thing that has stayed constant is that this issue is still on the margins, something most people think is too much, or is not their problem. People often tell me how important my work is, but rarely see how it might be vital for them to address in their own setting.

A powerful example of that tendency was when I worked for an anti-violence organisation creating an online course for elementary teachers on supporting students exposed to violence in the home. I insisted, over some resistance, that we encourage the teachers to look at the support they would need for success, given that many likely had their own experiences of trauma, violence, or neglect. Although the organisation agreed, I could not convince them to add a note to all the courses they offered acknowledging the impact of violence and how participants might support themselves. Addressing the impact of violence on learning remained something seen only as relevant for a specialised course.

The recognition that education broadly needs to change is still not commonly accepted. I find that many people's immediate assumption when I speak of my work is that I must mean either immigrants coming from war, or some group of students from some particularly poor, violent area. In either case, they are viewed as a special group, not sufficient to lead us to change all education. Instead they are expected to need experts to help them 'recover'.

Sometimes people think I am talking only about bullying in schools, as if it is the only site of violence that could affect learning. The ways schools, communities, families, and even places of worship are all too frequently sites of violence, is still mostly ignored. People want to believe that violence happens to somebody else, somewhere else.

One change though is a new visibility of the prevalence of violence against women as the #metoo movement, and discussion of rape culture, is hitting the headlines. In the United States there is also much attention to shooting violence in schools. Though the recent activism gives hope for acknowledging the realities of violence, the

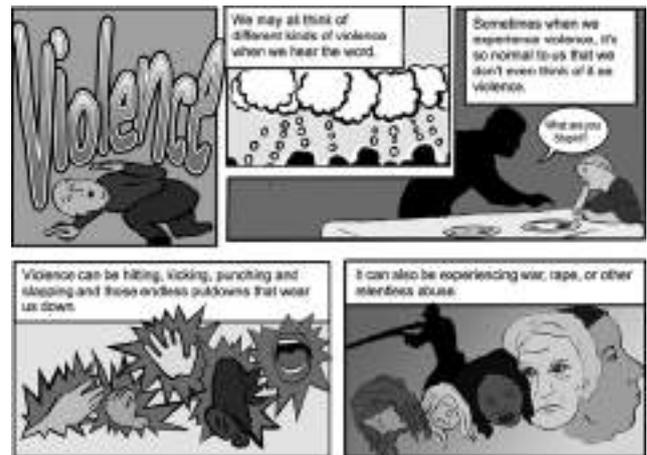
way such disturbing experiences, and the threat of them, affect the challenge to be present enough to learn, is still largely ignored.

Here in Canada, there is a new focus on students' mental health problems, and a call for educational institutions to address this issue with better mental health services for students. I do think that can be helpful, but I worry that it moves away from making real change in the institutions themselves. I dream of greater recognition of the impact of all levels of violence in people's lives, especially those who are racialised, Indigenous, queer, transgendered, or gender non-conforming, poor, disabled, or in some way don't fit mainstream versions of 'normal' and are exposed to insidious and ongoing violence.

When I began my work in this area, there was very little written that linked trauma and learning. Over the years I have hunted out thought-provoking research from neuroscientists and interpersonal neurobiologists. As we learn much more about the brain, how we relate to each other, and how impacts of violence or trauma can be passed from generation to generation, there is growing awareness of fight, flight, and freeze reactions. Many researchers are learning new details of the mechanisms that shape brain and body in the presence and aftermath of difficult experiences, but the integration of this knowledge into reforming education is limited and often problematic.

There is a developing trend, particularly in the United States, to think about trauma-informed institutions of all sorts, including education. How this trend might re-shape schools, and which schools will be seen as ones in need of becoming trauma-sensitive, remains in question. Although I am glad to see more attention to trauma, I worry about the way this approach may be implemented without support for educators to find their own voice and do this challenging work in the face of their own experiences of trauma. I worry too that the locus of the problem is still seen as in the student, rather than the educational system, and that social inequalities that contribute to ongoing violence, trauma, and neglect are not brought into view.

Can you expand on what you consider to be the key ideas in addressing the impact of violence on learning? Initially, I thought that turning towards the impact of violence on learning meant working directly on issues of violence. Gradually I came to see that creating conditions to support learning for all was key for supporting successful



Artwork by Susan Tiuhonen

learning. Acknowledging the existence of violence in many people's lives, recognising the impact of these experiences, and creating a safer learning environment are all important elements of those conditions.

I often say this issue is too obvious—of course violence impacts learning, how could it not! But also, too difficult, too large, because if we really pay attention to it then we need to rethink all educational interactions. When we recognise that it is not students who have experienced violence who have barriers to learning, but educational systems that set up barriers in the way they function we begin to approach the changes needed.

Even when we are not in a position to make fundamental change in our organisations, if we simply pay attention to the impacts of violence, we will shift how we see students and their behaviour. Changing the frame is key and can be life-altering for student and educator alike.

I want people to work on what they *can* change in the learning environment to make it conducive for everyone to learn, even when there are also many constraints.

What do you hope to get out of your trip to Australia? My early research led me to many action-research projects with educators, to support them in exploring change in their own settings, and to grow our body of knowledge. On this trip, I would love to be talking to people who also want to explore change. Instead of trying to convince people that we must pay attention to the impact of violence on learning, I would love to be digging deep together, exploring the details, seeing what works in that person's setting, exchanging ideas with others, asking the difficult questions.



Artwork by Susan Tiihonen

I hope people will be interested in hearing what other educators I have worked with have tried as they turned towards this issue. I want to know what has made a difference in their setting. I would like to meet people who have read some of my writings, who are excited, and making connections to their own work, who want to know more. I would like to connect with and support people who are convincing others to take on this work. I hope to grow the network of people addressing this issue, people interested in connecting with others around the world.

Can you tell us a little about learningandviolence.net?

In 2006, I began learningandviolence.net as a tool to further my dream to reach people everywhere and increase understanding of this little-known issue. I drew in other educators from colleges and community programs to help create resources.

In a chapter I wrote, published in 2012, I summed up the vision for the site and my hopes for what it might accomplish:

There is no real-world equivalent to the combination of education, networking, and collective development of new meanings that the site makes possible. It is a training course, a library, a file cabinet full of workshop handouts and classroom resources, a symposium of researchers and educators, an art gallery, an installation, a discussion, and much more, all in one “place,” easily reached from anywhere in the world, by anyone with access to the Internet and the interest to explore. Whether it can become the catalyst and resource for a broad social movement may become clearer, as the site continues to grow and hopefully becomes better known. At present the

possibilities of effective mobilising for social change through the website continue to be both enticing and elusive. (Horsman, 2012)

When government funding was cut for adult literacy infrastructure in Canada in 2014, the National Adult Literacy Database closed its door and we had to find a new home for the website. Since then it has been a struggle to find funding to keep the site functioning fully, let alone add new resources and grow a movement.

Now another six years after I articulated that far-reaching vision, it is time for new development. The way people use the internet has changed, and the technology that was used to construct those wonderful interactive experiences is now outdated. With a trip to Australia in the offing, I found new energy to search far and wide for funds to redevelop the site. Now, along with colleagues in a small non-profit, I am beginning to re-imagine what the site needs to look like to reach people world-wide, in all areas of education.

We have recognised that people use phones and tablets, as much as computers, and need resources that load quickly and answer immediate questions. Instead of browsing deeply through one site, as we had envisaged, we now tend to put key words into a search engine and follow the trails it takes us on across the internet.

We know we must re-imagine our multi-media resources, and our spiral site design, to make it easier for people to find all the hidden gems. We have grand plans to re-create the site and re-ignite the vision of growing a network of people who are turning towards a deeper understanding of the impacts of violence, trauma and neglect on learning. Check out learningandviolence.net in the next few months to see where this fresh focus takes us. Will you join us?

Acknowledgment

The cartoons accompanying this article were created by Susan Tiihonen for the ‘easy to read / learner friendly materials’ pages of <https://learningandviolence.net>

References

Horsman, J. (2012). *www.net: Quest(ion)ing transformative possibilities of the web*. In L. Manicom & S. Walters (eds.), *Feminist popular education in transnational debates: Building pedagogies of possibility*. New York, USA: Palgrave Macmillan.

Continued on page 32 ...

Open Forum

Assessment for pre-accredited language and literacy programs: why bother?

By Marj Sjostrom and Lynda Achren

Marj Sjostrom and Lynda Achren have spent a good part of the past year developing an assessment kit specifically for the pre-accredited context: the Pre-accredited Initial Assessment Kit (henceforth PRIAK). In this article they explain why they think it important enough to have spent so much time on it.



There is currently no requirement to assess the initial skills levels of learners enrolling in pre-accredited L&L (language and/or literacy) programs and, as a result, there are many teachers of such programs who have no experience of assessment. We hope to convince Learn Local teachers and managers of such programs that conducting initial assessments is a valuable use of time that leads to more efficient teaching and more effective learning. We believe that initial skills assessment, when conducted using an appropriate tool, can enhance the teaching and learning experience, primarily by reducing the number of mixed-level classes. However, we are not implying that classes should never be mixed-level, and acknowledge that when enrolment numbers are small, they are inevitable. In this article, we will discuss why, even in these circumstances, conducting assessments is a valuable use of organisational time because it provides the teacher with vital information that informs planning, which ultimately leads to a more efficient use of learners' time. Finally we'll turn our attention to the newly-developed, purpose-built PRIAK. But first we'll talk briefly about the research journey that led us to this point.

Our research

Our awareness of the value of initial assessment is based on our experience as assessors of accredited L&L programs. It is also grounded in the findings of the Word for Word research we conducted for KLC (Keysborough Learning Centre) on behalf of the ACFE (Adult Community and Further Education) Regional Council of the SMR (Southern Metropolitan Region). In the research, we looked into the range and quality of pre-accredited L&L programs in the SMR through a survey of all LLOs (Learn Local Organisations) in the region, classroom observations and in-depth interviews with managers, teachers and learners in ten LLOs.

The Word for Word Project Report (Achren 2016) threw light on the extensive delivery of language and literacy programs across a region in which 67% of LLOs delivered pre-accredited EAL (English as an Additional Language) programs and 82% delivered pre-accredited literacy programs, including literacy for learners with a disability. Among these many LLOs delivered both EAL and literacy.

The research revealed that approximately half of the LLOs assessed the skill levels of their language and literacy learners before placing them in pre-accredited classes. Difficulties arose, however, in talking about these levels because there was no standard assessment tool in use. Organisations used a variety of tools, including kits they had assembled themselves. But what was described as intermediate level (for example) in one organisation did not necessarily relate to an intermediate level in another organisation. Without a commonly used assessment tool there was no common language for talking about language and literacy levels and, therefore, no common understanding of what learners can do at each level.

Of course, if approximately 50% of LLOs in the region conducted initial assessments, then approximately 50% did not. Our follow-up interviews showed us that this had a significant impact on the teaching and learning environment.

Enhancing the teaching and learning environment

One of the prime reasons for conducting initial assessment is that it informs decisions about class placement: what class will best serve individual learners' needs, goals and interests; and what class will make the most efficient and

effective use of learners' time. In terms of language and literacy skills development, it is widely acknowledged that learners' needs are usually best catered for when learners with similar skills levels are grouped together rather than in classes of mixed levels and abilities (see, for example, McPherson 2007). Of course, some skilled teachers have considerable expertise in conducting mixed-level classes and can draw on a range of strategies to do so. However, in our research, we found that others were struggling:

Mixed levels means more preparation and I can't teach as much. It sometimes means that it's difficult to pace the class so that it suits everyone's needs. (pre-accredited EAL teacher) (Achren 2016, p.32)

Planning is time consuming. Sometimes I'm planning activities for five different levels. Explaining each of these activities in class also takes time. (pre-accredited literacy teacher) (Achren 2016, p.32)

These words exemplify the difficulties faced by many teachers of mixed-level classes, often the inexperienced, who find themselves overburdened with planning and aware that the learning environment they are providing is not the most efficient or effective.

One way to help teachers is through professional development, for which we believe there is an ongoing need. Following our research findings, KLC was funded by ACFE SMR to deliver a one-off series of workshops and to develop best practice guides and resources, including ones for teaching mixed-level classes. These are available on the KLC website at www.klckey.com.au/best-practice-guides.

Another way to assist teachers and so provide a more efficient and effective learning environment is to reduce the number of mixed-level classes. Although mixed-level classes are sometimes unavoidable, the incidence of these was unnecessarily high among LLOs taking part in the Word for Word research. For example, some were offering three literacy classes, all of which were mixed-level. Clearly, for such an organisation, the introduction of an initial skills assessment would enable it to continue offering three classes, but within those classes, learners' skills levels would be more homogenous, leading to a more efficient use of teacher planning time, a more efficient use of class time, a more efficient use of learner time and, ultimately, to better outcomes.

Mixed-level classes can be particularly problematic if one learner within the group has distinctly different needs to the others. Initial assessment can prevent such a situation from occurring by providing the organisation with information on which to base decisions about not only what level of tuition is most appropriate for individuals but also what type of tuition they can provide that will most effectively and efficiently address their needs and goals. For example, using PRIAK, KLC recently determined that a potential learner had advanced-level literacy skills, but low confidence in his ability to write the reports needed for his work. Having no other learners with such needs and, therefore, no class to accommodate him, KLC matched him with a volunteer tutor who could cater effectively for his specific needs.

Similarly, even in a class in which there are a number of beginners, it is very difficult to cater effectively for absolute beginners who are still coming to terms with letters of the alphabet and perhaps cannot use a pen with any dexterity. As one EAL teacher told us:

I have mixed levels. It's very challenging because some of them are pre-beginners [pre-literate] learners and so they're not independent learners. They are very demanding of my time. (Achren 2016, p.32)

The needs of such learners are so significantly different, and they require so much individual attention, that if there are insufficient numbers to provide a separate class, it may again be more appropriate to place them with a volunteer tutor(s) than in a class group with even slightly more advanced learners.

What if there's only one class?

In some cases mixed-level classes are inevitable. For example, KLC conducts outreach classes in primary schools for parents whose children are at the school (see 'In Conversation' in this edition). At each school, the number of parents enrolling is small and so to offer more than one class would be unviable. However, our follow-up interviews convinced us that, even where a mixed-level class is inevitable, initial assessment is an essential component of good practice because of the valuable information it provides teachers. PRIAK initial assessment not only determines reading, writing and (where appropriate) oracy levels but also incorporates an interview or conversation that builds a profile of individual learners—their backgrounds as well as their goals, interests and needs. This is information that feeds

into the Learner Plan, but having been collected at a pre-course interview, it assists the teacher to engage in more efficient and focused planning from day one.

PRIAK

The Word for Word findings convinced us of the value of initial assessment for pre-accredited language and literacy programs. A follow-up survey indicated that 93% of responding teachers and managers in the SMR agreed with us. However, they were concerned about time, additional paperwork, the effect of assessment on vulnerable learners, and a lack of assessment expertise. Many, however, suggested that a kit would be extremely useful. Buoyed by regional support and armed with knowledge of the concerns, KLC applied for Capacity and Innovation Funding (CAIF 9) from ACFE to develop a purpose-built kit.

The result, PRIAK, was developed by a working group of five whose experiences encompassed EAL, learners with a disability and 'straight' literacy. Four of us were experienced assessors while one had no experience and, consequently, provided the all-important questioning voice. Together we grappled with how to make the assessment process accessible to inexperienced assessors who may not have the benefit of professional development before using the kit. We grappled with how to make the whole process a non-threatening one for potential pre-accredited learners.

We decided that the kit would be based on the ACSF (Australian Core Skills Framework) (Department of Education and Training 2015) and its pre-level 1 supplement (Department of Education and Training 2017) because they are a thorough analysis of the stages of language and literacy skills development. However, using them is complex and time consuming. They also focus on exit levels, which can confuse assessors who need to determine entry levels, i.e. what people can do before tuition. PRIAK extracts and embeds the essential components of the ACSF level descriptors to make it accessible and manageable for the pre-accredited context.

PRIAK is written to support inexperienced assessors—be they managers, teachers or volunteer tutors. It provides:

- a brief and accessible introduction to the principles of assessment in the pre-accredited context
- a clear but simple explanation of what language and literacy learners can do at each level of skills development
- an explicit guide to the PRIAK four-step assessment process with emphasis on strategies

for putting the interviewee at ease and minimising anxiety

- a bank of assessment tasks specifically tailored for the pre-accredited context
- guidelines on how to evaluate interviewees' reading, writing and oracy levels
- short, simple forms for class placement and the learner profile built during the oral interview.

Our aim is that PRIAK can be used in a number of contexts by:

- designated assessors for the LLO
- classroom teachers
- volunteer tutors.

Whoever they may be, we urge assessors to familiarise themselves with the whole kit before embarking on the approximately 30-minute assessment process. Ideally, assessment takes place before the class starts, but where this is not practical or possible, as is the case in the KLC outreach program in which the school recruits the parents, alternatives need to be employed. For example, KLC is discussing with its partner schools the possibility that on enrolment, each parent is allocated an individual time to attend on the first day so that the teacher can conduct one-on-one assessments of skills and needs before the whole group meets. Another possibility was devised during the PRIAK trial by a teacher with a ready-made mixed-level class who enlisted the assistance of volunteer tutors so that between them they could withdraw each learner from the class group on the first day for a one-on-one interview. Another possibility, when a learner has been placed with a volunteer tutor, is that assessments can be conducted during the first session, or perhaps over the first two sessions. All of these possibilities have the advantage of enabling the learner to meet and get to know the teacher in a friendly, one-on-one situation.

Whoever the assessor, we advise everyone, including administrative staff, to refer to the process as a 'chat' or a 'time to meet the teacher or tutor and talk about what they need'. Any mention of assessment is likely to scare off pre-accredited learners!

PRIAK is currently available on the KLC website at www.klckeys.com.au/ll-assessment-kit

More information about the Word for Word Project is available at www.klckeys.com.au/WORD-FOR-WORD-PROJECT

References

- Achren, L. (2016). *Word for Word Project*. Melbourne, Vic: Keysborough Learning Centre. Retrieved from www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/research/acfepublications/ACFEwordforwordreport.pdf
- Department of Education and Training. (2015). *Australian Core Skills Framework*. Melbourne, Vic: Department of Industry and Science. Retrieved from https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/acsf_document.pdf
- Department of Education and Training. (2017). *Australian Core Skills Framework Pre-level 1*. Melbourne, Vic: Department of Education and Training. Retrieved from https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/acsf_prelevel_1_2017.pdf
- McPherson, P. (2007). *Course planning for preliterate and low-literacy learners*. Sydney, NSW: Macquarie University.

Marj Sjostrom was the Learn Local Practitioner of the Year in 2016. As well as being a language and literacy teacher and teacher mentor, she is the Delivery and Assessment Manager at Keysborough Learning Centre. She has been involved in a range of projects in the Learn Local sector.

Dr Lynda Achren is an independent researcher in the field of language, literacy and culture. She has worked in Laos and Vietnam on a range of AusAID projects; in Australia as a lecturer at Melbourne University, La Trobe University and Victoria University; and as a project manager at AMES. She can be contacted at lachren@gmail.com

Lynda Achren and Marj Sjostrom have worked together on projects since 2015.

... continued from page 28

Horsman, J. (1999/2000). *Too scared to learn: women, violence and education*. Toronto, Canada: McGilligan Books/Mahwah, USA: Lawrence Erlbaum.

To find out more about Dr Jenny Horsman's research and publications, visit jennyhorsman.com. She will present a keynote address at the Australian Council for

Adult Literacy Conference on Friday 14 September and we invite you to continue the conversation with her at the conference. Visit <https://acal.edu.au/2018conference> for more information.

Dr Jenny Horsman talked to Deryn Mansell, editor of *Fine Print*.

In Conversation

Helping EAL parents to participate in their children's school life and beyond

A conversation with Rani Pillai

Seven years ago, Rani Pillai was the pioneer teacher in Keysborough Learning Centre's first outreach program for parents of children attending a local school. She was also instrumental in establishing a second program at another school. Since then the Parental Program has gone from strength to strength and KLC (Keysborough Learning Centre) now conducts outreach programs in ten schools. *Fine Print* recently caught up with Rani to find out how and why the program was set up, some of the challenges involved and what she sees as the keys to success.



Tell us a little about your background, Rani, and how you came to teach on the Parental Program.

The Parental Program is important to me personally because I have a lot in common with my students, and my background means there is a lot I can bring to the program. When I first came to Australia as a young married woman, I found it really hard to get work in my field. In India I was working in a college in Kerala after having graduated with a Master in Computer Applications. In Australia, I couldn't find a job doing this so I worked in an automotive factory. But I always wanted to teach. All my family are teachers and I wanted to follow in their footsteps. My break came when I was a stay-at-home mother with my baby and met a woman who volunteered at KLC. I went along to see if I could volunteer too because, although I didn't expect to be teaching, at least I would be in an educational environment. I am really grateful that KLC took me on as a receptionist and as volunteer support in a computer course. After a while, Mary Fox, the Education Program Manager suggested I do a Certificate IV in TAE [Training and Education], and soon after that I started teaching the computer course. I also now have a Graduate Certificate in TESOL and a Diploma in Vocational Education and Training. I have been teaching for nine years now.

How did the Parental Program start?

The program started when the principal of St Gerard's Primary School in Dandenong North approached KLC to see if we could help them with a group of parents who they were having difficulty communicating with. Mary (KLC's Education Program Manager) asked me if I would be interested in teaching English and computers at St. Gerard's Primary School. As it would be my first time teaching in an outreach location, I wasn't quite sure about it, but took it as a new opportunity.

The following year when my daughter started school at Fleetwood Primary School in Narre Warren, I could see that when parents came to drop off or pick up their children, many of those with EAL (English as an additional language) backgrounds were isolated. All the English-speaking parents were talking to each other and talking to teachers, but those with EAL backgrounds were just standing on their own waiting for their children. I spoke to a few of the Indian and Sri Lankan parents and found that many, like me, had high qualifications, but they had little understanding of the school system and lacked confidence to talk and ask questions. So I went to the principal and, after explaining my background, suggested that I could run English and computer classes for these parents. The principal said she had also been concerned about the lack of participation in school life among some of the migrant parents. So she presented the proposal to the school committee and when they approved it, I spoke to my manager and she set up a meeting with the principal. A partnership was born with the school recruiting the parents and providing a space, and KLC mounting a pre-accredited program and providing a teacher (me). In the same year, KLC set up a program at St Anthony's Primary School in Noble Park so I started to teach there too.

How do the parents get to hear of the program?

The schools initially recruited by advertising through their newsletter and by making some flyers for the children to take home to find out who was interested in computer or English classes at convenient times around drop-off and pick-up. As it turned out, at first, some wanted English and some wanted computers so that was a challenge for me but after a while more were interested in English so the focus of the classes was clearer for me to prepare. Over time, the schools' wellbeing officers also became involved

in the recruitment process. They now personally approach parents who they think might not have enough English. And word of mouth also plays a big role now with previous students recommending the program to their friends.

How does a program for parents in a school differ from other pre-accredited courses?

The distinguishing feature of the Parental Program is the content. I focus on the school curriculum so the students can understand what their children are doing. The program is built around what happens at the school and in the children's classroom—the system here is often very different to what parents have experienced in their own schooling. I help them understand NAPLAN, for example, or if there's an excursion to Science Works, we'll focus on what Science Works is and how the children will learn from that excursion. The school takes a genre approach to the children's literacy so if the school's focus for the term is on writing recounts, then that's what we focus on too. Then the parents understand what their children are doing and they're able to help them with their homework. This is important to most of my students. If parent-teacher interviews are coming up we'll focus on that—the purpose of the interviews and what kind of questions they can ask the teacher, how they can ask those questions. This is a big issue for my students, because they lack confidence to ask the teacher questions and they don't know how to ask questions politely in English. Another big thing is that a couple of years ago, some of the schools changed their communication policy. Now everything is done online so parents have to know how to log on if they are going to let the school know their child will be absent. They also have to know how to write what they want to say, of course. They have to do payments for excursions online. The newsletter is online. Our program develops the parents' language and literacy and also an understanding of the school.

How did you go about developing the program content?

What to teach was a challenge in the beginning. I talked a lot to the principal and other members of staff about what they saw as important. At one stage I was on the council of one of the schools for a couple of years so that helped too. And, of course, my daughter being at primary school has given me a lot of insight. I still engage with members of staff and the life of the school—I think that's very important for a program like this. It's important to keep up the profile of the course among the staff. I talk to them not only about what they're doing in class but also about what we do in class. I talk about changes I see in individual parents and I ask staff what changes they've

seen, or after parent-teacher interviews I might ask how a parent went. It's important that everyone is committed to the program. I think anyone working on a program like this has a role in maintaining that overall commitment.

But mainly I take my cues from the students themselves. I develop my overall course plan from discussion with the class to develop the Learner Plan in the A-Frame [the pre-accredited curriculum document]. That gives me an overall direction and then I incorporate things that come up afterwards. I always have a session plan but sometimes someone comes in with something they want—maybe they have a note from the school saying that parent-teacher interviews will be 1.30pm–5pm and they don't understand what that time means. If it's urgent I deal with it as a whole class there and then, if possible. If it's not urgent or I'll need to plan something in order to deal with it, I say, "Can I get back to you on that next week?" And then I have time to gather all the tools I need.

Developing the parents' confidence is a huge part of the program—it's the key to success really. Some of the success comes from improved language and literacy but a lot comes from improved confidence. Creating the right atmosphere in the group, a friendly environment so that the students feel comfortable to speak up, is vital.

I also talk to them about lifelong learning, about how they might achieve their goals and dreams. This is where my background really helps because they can relate to it—I am a parent, a migrant, I've worked in a factory. I talk about how volunteering helped me get into a job I like. I tell them about my life and encourage them to talk about theirs too. This gives them support and the confidence to think about what they might do after this class. It can have a huge impact on their life.

We also involve the students from all the school programs in activities run by KLC—excursions, Harmony Day, Biggest Morning Tea and so on. The parents get to know more about KLC and the various programs and get a chance to talk to students from various classes. Many of the parents have enrolled for classes at KLC such as CGEA, MYOB, Art and Craft and Sewing.

What are some of the other indicators of success?

When a student comes to class after going to a parent-teacher interview and she is aglow and eager to talk about it, I know we have achieved something. When they talk about how they have helped with their children's

homework, or read a bedtime story, I know we have achieved something.

The principals are very pleased with the way these parents interact with the school community now. They see them having conversations with others before and after school. Some parents are volunteering to help with the school reading program. We've had parents volunteering to help with excursions, with sausage sizzles and other fund-raising events. They are no longer standing in the margins of school life.

The parents' changed expectations are also an indicator of success. Parents who had previously only had the confidence to think about factory work, have gone on to

do aged care or hairdressing or other choices. Many see how volunteering can help them along a pathway to their chosen employment. For example, one of my students, who was interested in nursing, volunteered at a hospital to get experience of the system, gain more English and increase her confidence.

Overall, I think the indicators of success are increased confidence and increased connections with each other, with the school, and with institutions outside the school. I think the program helps them broaden their horizons and broaden their networks.

Rani Pillai talked to Lynda Achren, a member of the *Fine Print* Editorial Group.

What's Out There

Visible learning for literacy: implementing the practices that work best to accelerate student learning

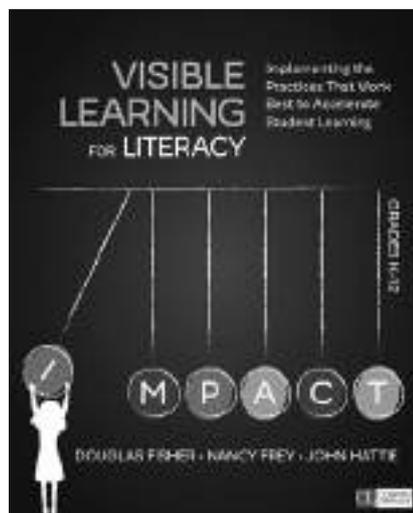
by Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey and John Hattie

Reviewed by Pauline O'Maley

This volume is primarily written by Fischer and Frey, American educationalists and academics, based on the research work of Hattie. It draws specially on Hattie's texts *Visible learning* (2009) and *Visible learning for teachers* (2012). *Visible learning for literacy* is a textbook and it adheres to the generic features of this book type. It is an easy read, nevertheless it clearly articulates its link to research. It provides plenty of examples throughout and has a companion website that gives readers access to videos and reproducibles. It is a textbook concerned with learning and the important role teachers play in student learning, and doing this through the application of Hattie's research. It clearly states its purpose as maximising the impact teachers have on students. The authors are interested in enabling learning to ensure it is greater than would be expected just by the 'passage of time'. They argue that rather than using approaches that either don't work or the evidence suggests have little effect, teachers can 'embrace the evidence, update their classrooms, and impact student learning in wildly positive ways' (p.33). While the use of the word 'wildly' in that sentence belies it, this book is, for the most part, tempered and gives a balanced account of learning. It does not fall into the trap of ignoring the impacts on learning of the students themselves and of family and environmental impacts.

The book is written for teachers of students in primary and secondary school, and it makes reference to the American curriculum. However, in a time of increased focus on assessment and accountability it is pertinent to the Australian context. While the title suggests a specific focus on literacy, a lot of the material has a broader educational, rather than specific literacy, focus.

Chapter one, 'Laying the groundwork' focuses on general learning principles. It also outlines what it calls 'the evidence base'. This is where it is underpinned by



Hattie's research. I have not read the two aforementioned texts by Hattie that underpin this practical text—you may not have either my gentle reader—and while this text whets the appetite to know more about the meta-analysis Hattie has done, it also gives a highly readable overview of Hattie's research and then puts it to work. The worth of Hattie's meta-analysis appears to lie in the sheer volume of the research data sourced, in this case the work of over 800 researchers. The authors suggest 'it has been claimed to be the most comprehensive review of literature ever conducted' (p.14). Thus, when they focus on the effect of a specific approach, say teaching problem solving or peer tutoring, they feel very confident of the statistical significance of their figures. Throughout the book there are indicators in the margins of the effect of the specific practices and strategies that are being discussed.

The next three chapters of the book focus on different types of learning; surface learning, deep learning and learning for transfer. The authors argue a lot of assessment focuses on surface learning and thus its value is distorted. They make clear surface learning is important but not sufficient. Its importance lies in its capacity to allow students 'to take stock of the broad outlines of an area of study' (p.57) without which deep learning is not possible. The authors make good use of examples to reinforce their message. They use the example of learning to drive to demonstrate both the interrelationship and the differences between surface and deep learning, the importance of both and the

significance of timing, context and monitoring in learning as well as feedback.

The book reinforces the importance of teachers being clear about their purpose, knowing why they use specific methods and observing their impact and 'readjusting' their work. The chapter on deep learning focuses on strategies to enable its achievement. The authors believe teachers can cultivate deep learners by encouraging them to 'plan, investigate and elaborate on their learning' (p.74). Again though, they stress teachers need to be aware of the messages they convey to students suggesting, 'Whatever you pay attention to is what your students will pay attention to' (p74). Some of the tools suggested to enable deep learning include concept mapping, discussion and questioning, and reciprocal teaching. Again, specific examples help readers see how these tools are put to work in classrooms, and the authors reinforce the message that students need to have their learning made visible if they are to deepen it, and stress a significant part of this process is feedback.

The chapter on moving from deep learning to transfer follows a similar path with strategies and examples. It discusses two types of transfer, near and far, how to establish conditions for knowledge transfer which 'propels' learning and highlights the significance of transfer in consolidating surface learning as well as its foundational role in deep learning. Again they make use of analogy, in this case driving a rental car to show how knowledge is transferred and how a learner can identify similarities and difference in the new situation.

The final chapter of the book is 'Determining impact'. It argues we cannot determine the impact of learning unless we pre-assess, so when post-assessment happens we can distinguish what is learned from what a student already knew. It also promotes continual daily assessment to help teachers monitor impact. This approach is in keeping with the primary focus of making learning visible and understanding the impact of our teaching.

So, given the focus of the book is on primary and secondary settings what is the worth of this book for the adult educator? The examples used are all specific to schools and there is an underlying assumption about the sort of supports teachers will have access to that are simply not available to adult educators; nevertheless its worth lies in the way it synthesises research, shows us how to put it to work and reminds us to reflect on the types of learning needed to achieve different outcomes and strategies to achieve this. Like all texts it encourages the reader to reflect on her own work in her own classroom and it does this in a way that is clear and engaging. But nevertheless I have reservations. As I have indicated above Fisher, Frey and Hattie foreground the usefulness of analogies, suggesting they are like coat hangers. Their coat hanger analogy is a useful one to identify what troubled me about this text. Putting that analogy to work, I think their book presents a lot of interesting, sometimes beautiful and classic clothes, but they are hanging in space. This reader would expect a book like this to give details of its coat hanger, the way in which it conceptualises and theorises literacy. It does not do this work and, therefore, I think, is in danger of being a compendium of bright ideas to use in the literacy classroom without a unifying and underpinning logic of literacy development.

Visible learning for literacy (2016) is published by Corwin. Unless otherwise specified, page references in this review refer to this title.

References

- Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible learning: a synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses related to achievement*. New York, USA: Routledge.
- Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible learning for teachers: maximising impact on learning*. New York, USA: Routledge.

Pauline O'Maley is a former adult literacy teacher and has most recently worked in academic support and development at Victoria University. She is now retired and focuses on reading and contemplation!

Plurilingualism in teaching and learning: complexities across contexts

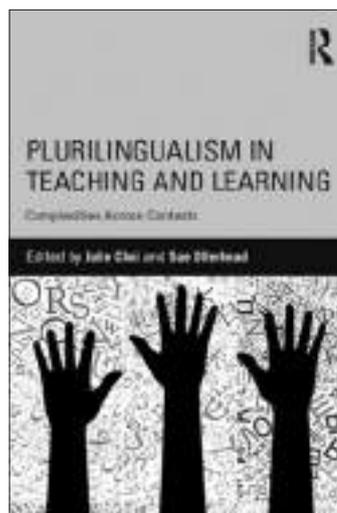
Edited by Julie Choi and Sue Ollerhead

Reviewed by Elizabeth Gunn

Strength based approaches are a focus for many foundational literacy and language teachers. We want to recognise and implement students' pre-existing literacies and funds of knowledge as much as possible in the learning process. Developing approaches that build on students' strengths is a key aim of *Plurilingualism in teaching and learning*. This ground-breaking volume warrants an extended review here because it addresses concerns which are being increasingly voiced in professional development forums (e.g. at the 2018 Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education conference) about the need to value students' linguistic diversity in adult education contexts. Teachers wanting to learn more about transformative approaches for improving Australian adult education will find *Plurilingualism in teaching and learning* highly relevant.

The plurilingual stance

Before diving into the volume's research, we need to understand its guiding concept: *plurilingualism*. Piccardo and Galente point out that, 'Heterogeneous communities are the norm rather than the exception in many parts of the world' (p. 148). *Multilingualism* has been a common term for discussing communities' language diversity. However, multilingualism can be misleading. It reinforces the idea that languages divide up naturally into comfortable, discrete categories. Institutions may divide languages (e.g. schools teaching English, Chinese, French, etc. separately). But this is problematic in the face of individuals' language use which tends to flow into and around institutional categories, defying strict boundaries. *Plurilingualism* is a conceptual turn away from language separatism to a focus on how people use their language repertoires for interaction. A plurilingual stance is interested in how languages, and their technologies, are intertwined to influence each other—in families and online, in communities and schools—in ever-diversifying global networks and zones of contact. Plurilingualism also considers multimodal repertoires—people's photos, sketches and diagrams, their use of space, drama, and machines—the rich semiotic resources that people accumulate and deploy in the business of communication. However, plurilingualism is



not without caveats. The editors and authors are mindful of the power of dominant languages and the tensions that occur when this dominance is disrupted or questioned. Choi shares her practical experience of this:

I have seen heated classroom scenarios where students from Hong Kong, mainland China, Taiwan and who are Chinese residents of Korean descent, have had to work together while each of them disagreed passionately on the other's interpretation causing tension-filled silence and hostility in the classroom (p. 9).

Plurilingual standpoints mean teachers and students can draw deep understandings about language from practical experience. Plurilingualism invites a spirit of curiosity and experimentation into language learning environments. It asks participants to apply a kind of sociolinguistic sensibility to the task of learning and teaching, a sensibility that may already be part of their plurilingual toolkit.

Plurilingualism in teaching and learning is a diverse volume. The twelve chapters address plurilingualism in myriad educational contexts—community language schools, vocational and tertiary settings included—with a focus on exploration of teacher beliefs and practices. It is eclectic in its contributors, from well-known scholars of applied linguistics; Ofelia Garcia, Joseph Lo Bianco, Emi Otsuji and Alastair Pennycook, and Mastin Prinsloo, to PhD candidates from New Zealand, Australia, Canada, South Africa, and the US. Alongside its eclecticism, its chapters are consistently accessible, and their findings transferrable to learning contexts from pre-school, to tertiary settings

and beyond. Each chapter puts forward different ideas about language diversity enhancing learning, and these ideas make good educational sense—for instance, teachers utilising students’ diverse multimodal repertoires to guide them towards full participation in a variety of educational practices. This is sound educational practice. But in addition to their practical applicability, the studies in *Plurilingualism in teaching and learning* have a critical agenda. They share a vision of education and research that disrupts the ‘monolingual mindset’ (Clyne, 2005) which often influences mainstream language policy. In Australia, Lo Bianco notes, language education ‘is beset by a crisis of underperformance in provision, [and] weakness in policy conception and reasoning’ (p.33). *Plurilingualism in teaching and learning* puts forward the notion of *translanguaging pedagogy* as a way through the current crisis. Its critical intention is encapsulated by Garcia and Wei (2014):

Translanguaging for us, however, is part of a moral and political act that links the production of alternative meanings to transformative social action. As such, translanguaging contributes to the social justice agenda (p. 37, cited in Hetherington, p. 56).

Translanguaging pedagogy in different contexts

Theories around linguistic diversity in language learning have generated a range of terms over decades, referred to by Otsuji and Pennycook as ‘super-poly-hyper-transmetro labels’ (p. 72). Piccardo and Galante warn that this ‘maze of terminology...risks to overshadow the potential of [the plurilingual] shift’ (p. 158–9). One of the greatest strengths of *Plurilingualism in teaching and learning* is its refinement of terminology. The key concepts are eloquently captured by two main terms: plurilingualism and translanguaging pedagogy. This clarity of focus makes the volume highly accessible to practitioners wanting to apply its many relevant pedagogical possibilities and recommendations.

The studies reveal translanguaging pedagogies through analysis of teachers’ practices and attitudes to language diversity in the classroom. Here I focus on studies in the volume that highlight issues, methods and strategies that are likely to resonate with adult educators. These particular studies highlight how translanguaging pedagogies can operate, in Australian Indigenous and international contexts, in formal and informal settings; and how linguistic and multimodal repertoires are mobilised to improve language and literacy acquisition.



Artwork by Azhar Meften

One of the few widely-known facts about Australian Indigenous languages is their decline in number since white colonisation. Through interviews with four Aboriginal language educators, Hetherington reveals Indigenous Australian perspectives of translanguaging, and their key points of agreement and disagreement with the pedagogy as a force for social justice. Maintenance and teaching of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages is difficult. Existential threats to remaining languages abound; from government policies removing bilingual education programs to the low social status of Aboriginal languages. However, Indigenous languages are resilient and, as interview participant and academic Davina Woods points out, they are essential because:

...the translations into English of specific concepts is fraught with difficulties. [...] there has never been a true understanding of a lot of concepts from Aboriginal traditional cultural ways because there is no English equivalent (p. 60).

Through contact, Indigenous and outsider languages have long influenced each other, demonstrating the role of translanguaging in language change (and the myth of language separatism). Aboriginal language educators use translanguaging strategies, such as using multimodal land-based and human resources to expand students’ language knowledge, as part of their teaching practice. But they are unsure whether, from a policy perspective, translanguaging pedagogy is beneficial. They fear that the already abysmal funding of their language programs will be further eroded if they embrace a pedagogy that blurs boundaries between languages.

This case highlights the contextual sensitivities around translanguaging as a pedagogy. On one hand translanguaging may reflect individuals’ language use and thus

have educational value, but for vulnerable communities it might be seen as eroding language rights. In his study of vocational education delivery in East Timor, Newman outlines how lecturers use translanguaging practices to *centre* community needs when presenting disciplinary jargon. One lecturer guides students to engage with the language of the people in the communities they serve, saying ‘*sempre liga ho comunidade* (“always links with community”)’ (p. 194). For the lecturer, accurate translation is less important than students’ using plurilingual repertoires to link with East Timor’s different language communities. Another lecturer channels plurilingualism’s spirit of inquiry when he presents key concepts, saying:

It’s not: I’m the lecturer, I’m the correct one, or you are the correct one. But I also say that this is interesting—means that we are willing, you know, to develop our language (p. 196).

Here we see how translanguaging pedagogy fosters new lines of collaboration in language development. In the US, Vogel, Ascenzi-Moreno and Garcia work with a Grade 6 student to understand how he uses his translation machine to start his English writing journey. Through a process of comparing his own words, in Chinese or English, with texts produced by Google Translate, Fu-han produces and ‘evaluates’ an ever-expanding bank of texts which he integrates into his plurilingual repertoire. Rather than using the machine to cut corners, Fu-han uses it to craft his English writing and refine his understanding of his new language.

Recognising people’s skills in assembling technological and human tools for communication is vital to translanguaging pedagogy. Another widespread literacy practice these days is photography. In Rigby’s participatory visual research project, Ghanaian child, Amina, uses a camera to document her world of text and learning, and to explain the processes that help her develop literacy. Rigby identifies ‘copying’ as a key element in Amina’s growing confidence with literacy. Amina’s camera traces the different contexts

she moves through: home, school, mosque, English, Dagbanli and Qu’ranic Arabic, giving us insights into her literacy practices in each situation. And Amina has audiences beyond herself and Rigby’s research. According to Amina’s mother,

It’s united the children because those who have the cameras, anytime they went out to take their pictures, you see the others just follow them to observe and see how they are taking them (p. 121)

Plurilingualism in teaching and learning’s greatest value lies in the range of voices and perspectives it presents, of different people enriching education through language diversity. This review provides only a sample of these different viewpoints. *Fine Print* readers will bring their own plurilingual experiences to approaching language diversity in their specific educational contexts. Therefore, I highly commend this volume to you as a guide for your investigations into language diversity and how it best fits within your practice.

Plurilingualism in teaching and learning (2018) is published by Routledge. Unless otherwise specified, page references in this review refer to this title.

References

- Clyne, M. (2005). *Australia’s language potential*. Sydney, NSW: University of New South Wales Press.
- Garcia, O. and Wei, L. (2014). *Translanguaging: language, bilingualism and education*. New York, USA: Palgrave Macmillan.

Elizabeth Gunn has been contemplating plurilingualism in Australian education throughout her career—from two-way bilingual education in the Northern Territory to Arabic learning at home—she finds there’s always something to think about. Her contemplations have led her to reconsider her own identity as a monolingual individual.



Visit our website
www.valbec.org.au

Contact VALBEC at
Box 861
Springvale South VIC 3172
Ph 03 9546 6892
E-mail: info@valbec.org.au