

this issue:

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paper v. screen
By Liane Hughes

Public libraries invigorating
literacy practice
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Reveal, revelation,
reformation: a narrative
framework
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features

- Reading academic articles: paper v. screen** 3
By Liane Hughes
- Public libraries invigorating literacy practice** 8
By Elizabeth Gunn
- Reveal, revelation, reformation: a narrative framework** 14
By Darlene Ciuffetelli Parker

regulars

- Practical Matters** 21
- Build a partnership: the sky is the limit
By Nic McLean
- Daniel
By Edward Riley and Jorge Garcia
- A picture tells a thousand words
Images by Shaira Martinez and Stella Windridge
- Foreign Correspondent** 28
- Yes, I Can! Building adult literacy from Havana to Wilcannia via Timor-Leste
By Ruth Ratcliffe
- Open Forum** 33
- Responses to the Review into Australian Vocational Education and Training 2019
Compiled and introduced by Sarah Deasey
- What's Out There** 36
- The Invisible Classroom
Reviewed by Linno Rhodes
- Workwise English Puzzles
Reviewed by Lynne Matheson

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Adult Education in
the Community

Editorial

Welcome to the first issue of *Fine Print* for 2019, the United Nations International Year of Indigenous Languages. Thinking about indigenous languages reminded me of an interview I heard on the radio years ago with a literacy educator from Papua New Guinea. I don't remember enough detail of the interview to be able to track it down now, but I remember he talked about feeling embarrassed by the high regard his adult students had for his ability to read English.

I could hear the exasperation in his voice when he exclaimed, 'But they can read the clouds!' That comment, and the image it conjures, has stayed with me ever since. Apart from being an eloquent example of academic humility, the quote reminds us that there are many ways to be literate, and they are not all about being tech-savvy or having command of a prestige language.

In this issue of *Fine Print* you will find many examples of different ways to be literate and thoughtful discussions

about what literacy means. As always, we are very grateful to our contributors for taking the time to share their ideas with us. And, as always, we invite you to join the conversation by emailing your responses and ideas to fineprint@valbec.org.au

Finally, a big 'Thank you!' to Lynda Achren who has stepped down from our editorial committee after six years of service. In the short time that I have been with *Fine Print* I have greatly appreciated Lynda's keen eye for detail, willingness to chase up and write stories and reviews, and good-natured insistence that committee meetings stay on track. We will miss you on the committee, Lynda, but hope to see your name as a *Fine Print* by-line again soon.

Deryn Mansell

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

Reading academic articles: paper v. screen

by Liane Hughes



Reading academic articles can be one of the great challenges for the higher education students at William Angliss Institute where I advise students on academic skills. With this in mind, I was interested in finding out what research is saying about the differences between reading in printed and digital formats in an academic context. Is a student actually more likely to understand or retain more if they print out an article? Is there real value in providing students with printed versions of articles?

I recently conducted a literature review which uncovered surprising current research about how students prefer to read, the effects on comprehension and also how the online environment is affecting students' reading. This research will be used to inform our policies about providing printed copies of articles to students.

To give some context, William Angliss Institute is a specialist TAFE for the foods, tourism, hospitality and events industries with an expanding degree program. Like many dual sector or higher education providers, we have a very high percentage of international students, and many of them find it difficult to engage with academic articles in English. Many local students also find the academic reading requirements challenging, including some students with English as their first language, as well as those with English as an Additional Language (EAL). Many of our students (both local and international) come into our degrees via our vocational courses. Often, they have great strengths in practical skills, customer service and team work, but find the abstract and theoretical nature of the reading they are expected to do very different to what was required in their vocational study.

Definitions

I used the broad definition of reading proposed by Singer and Alexander (2017b, p.3): reading is 'the dynamic process of understanding and drawing meaning from written text'. My research focus was on reading academic journal articles. Academic reading requires deep reading, with a need to analyse, evaluate and synthesise materials with prior knowledge and the work of others. Print reading was defined as any reading that is done on paper, including

articles read in hard copies of journals or in books, or those that are printed onto paper from a digital copy. Screen reading, which includes all texts presented in an electronic format, can be very diverse. In the case of academic journal articles, digital versions may include scanned copies of a printed article, downloaded PDFs or articles in e-books. Rose (cited in Walsh, 2016) found that much academic reading material is based on more traditional print-style texts, without high levels of interactivity or links.

Benefits of screen reading

There is agreement among researchers that there are real benefits for students to read on the screen for study (for example, Gilbert, 2017; Lam, Lam, Lam & McNaught, 2009). Most higher education students conduct their research online because there are more resources available. These resources are quicker and easier to find and are accessible remotely. Documents are instantly searchable for specific information.

In a large study aiming to determine how undergraduate students in two Australian universities actually use digital technology in their study, Henderson, Selwyn and Aston (2017) found a high proportion of students identified researching online as being one of the most helpful uses of technology. Many students also find it less expensive to access texts online, even with some self-printing costs, than it is to buy journals or text books (Ji, Michaels & Waterman, 2014).

Further benefits of on-screen reading include easier access to a variety of support tools to aid comprehension of texts, such as online dictionaries or glossaries, search engines for checking or clarifying facts or concepts, or, in the case of some electronic texts, videos, diagrams and photos (Hamdan, Mohamad & Shaharuddin, 2017; Henderson et al., 2017). However, some of the attractive features

that can be used to enhance readers' engagement and comprehension, such as videos and appealing graphics, are less likely to be used when academic articles are presented digitally as they are very often presented in formats such as PDF documents that do not include these features.

Student preferences

As described above, students and academic staff are very aware of the broad range of benefits that reading and researching for study provide. For this reason, it may be surprising to find that a number of current studies conclude that many students, including the young and technically competent, have a preference for doing academic reading on paper, particularly for longer academic articles that require a deep level of comprehension and analysis (Ackerman & Goldsmith, 2011; Gilbert, 2017; Baron, 2017). This view is supported by an international study by Mizrachi, Salaz, Kurbanoglu and Boustany (2018), which surveyed the reading format preferences of over 10,000 tertiary students from twenty-one countries. The study found that the majority of students prefer to do academic reading in print, and that the students' nationalities had little effect on their preferences. The participants reported better focus and retention of information when using printed texts.

Similarly, Baron (2017) surveyed university students in Germany, Japan, Slovakia, India and the US, and found that over 80% of respondents said they would read in print rather than on screen if the cost were the same, a finding that was particularly strong for academic reading.

Hamdan et al. (2017) note that eye strain is an issue for many students when reading on screen, as do others, such as Johnston and Salaz (2018) and Gilbert (2017).

Comprehension

In a review in 2017, Baron, Calixte and Havewala found most research suggests there is little difference in comprehension levels between reading done on a screen or in print. However, Baron (2017) argues that many of these studies looked at reading carried out in very structured testing environments, where students are likely to focus carefully on the text and questions, which are unlike the reading that many higher education students do in their own time. She suggests that students may comprehend less on screen when in less controlled contexts, such as at home in their independent study time. Ackerman and Goldsmith (2011) found that different metacognitive processes come into play when reading on screen, and also suggests that

in self-regulated time students may do less well reading longer texts in digital formats, as they are less likely to manage their study efficiently in this medium.

Singer and Alexander (2017b) argue that reading comprehension levels on screen are not as good for longer texts. The authors conducted a systemic review of twenty-five years of empirical research from 1992 to 2017, about how print and digital media affect reading comprehension. They are critical of much of the research carried out during that time. For example, they claim many researchers failed to define reading or digital reading properly, did not use properly validated reading assessment tools, and only used multiple choice questions which are unlikely to assess the ability to critique or evaluate a text. However, they were able to conclude that for longer texts, which take up more than one printed page or screen, comprehension scores are significantly better for print than for electronic texts (Singer & Alexander, 2017b). Similar conclusions were drawn by Mangen, Walgermo and Bronnick (2013) who investigated how Norwegian students responded to longer, linear texts both on paper and on screen. These texts were in the format that is used for many academic articles. They found students' comprehension was better on paper and proposed that it is likely to be easier for students to get a better global understanding of a longer text on paper as students are more able to build a cognitive map of the whole text.

EAL students

Some researchers have specifically explored how students who are not studying in their first language use screen and paper for their academic reading. Chou (2012) conducted a qualitative study with five graduate EAL students, all from Asian backgrounds. She notes that there has not been a great deal of research into academic reading habits of students whose first language is not English, who face both linguistic and academic challenges. She found that the students did a lot of reading on screen when searching for relevant articles, but when they really needed to understand an important article, they would print it out. This allowed them to use strategies such as annotation and highlighting. Chou found that these students used metacognitive strategies such as skimming and scanning when reading online, which they could also use when reading in print, but they had developed other strategies that they only used when reading online, such as copying and pasting notes from articles, and typing into documents. She suggests that as students' English became more proficient, allowing them to read faster and recall more of what they read, they may be more amenable to reading materials in a digital format.

When examining EAL students' digital reading experiences, Gilbert (2017) found that most students liked the convenience of researching online, but found it challenging for a few reasons: they found it difficult to determine the best search terms, and the language barrier made it hard to sort through results to find what they wanted. Some of the students also described being overwhelmed and intimidated by the amount of information and found they lost track in their reading when scrolling down in longer texts, or when following hyperlinks. He also noted that many of the students had an inflated view of their own digital literacy skills, and in particular lacked sophisticated search skills and an ability to critically evaluate information and sources. While his study was not focused on university students, it is likely that many EAL students in higher education have similar experiences.

Reading in an online environment

An interesting aspect of the relative benefits of reading on screen or in print is the nature of reading in an online environment, where we expect to find answers instantly. Baron (2017, p.19) describes a 'digital mindset' that encourages us to find specific information, to 'use' texts, rather than reflect and comprehend them deeply. In an academic context, students are more likely to use the convenient 'find' function to pick out relevant sections for the required task, rather than read and digest a full article (Baron, 2017).

A student undertaking challenging academic reading in a digital environment can be easily diverted from the task at hand. While social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter can be useful for students to collaborate and communicate (Henderson et al., 2015), researchers also found that students reading online can be distracted and may lose focus when they have easy access to social media. For example, a participant in a study by Hamdan et al. (2017, p.123) describes a common scenario: '...usually I will open one or two tabs for social media site like Twitter and Facebook. If I get bored of reading the articles or journals, I will switch to my social media tab.' Hamdan and colleagues also describe how most participants in their study reported being distracted by advertisements and other pop-ups, with a loss of focus and understanding. This view is supported by Baron's (2017) findings that a large majority of student participants reported they were more likely to multitask when reading digitally, and even more said they found it easier to concentrate when reading in print. Similarly, a range of researchers, including Ophir, Nass and Wagner, Rowlands



et al. and Wallis, suggest multitasking online may result in students processing texts more superficially rather than reading deeply (as cited in Singer & Alexander, 2017a).

Learning strategies

There is little doubt that students will continue to access much of their academic reading online. It is also clear that they need to continue to develop digital literacy skills to critically understand and interpret what they find on the internet in a constantly changing digital environment (Leu, Kinzer Coiro, Castek & Henry, 2017). This includes the ability to read what they find online critically and deeply. A number of writers highlight the need for students to be explicitly instructed in strategies for successful study when working online (for example, Gilbert, 2017; Chou, 2012). Carrier, Rosen, Cheever & Lim (2015) describe the challenge to find effective ways to control our performance in work and in study contexts in a contemporary world where multitasking is entrenched. Certainly, teachers can help students prepare for further study by explicitly helping them understand how the various distractions from their multiple devices may be impacting their study and to develop metacognitive skills to make strategic decisions about how they use technology (Carrier et al., 2015).

Some researchers note that learning strategies do not always transfer easily from paper to print. For example, in their study of the use of text highlighting to aid comprehension, Ben-Yehudah and Eshet-Alkalai (2018) observed that text highlighting only improved comprehension when participants were using print texts, not digital texts.

They found that although text highlighting is known to aid comprehension with printed texts, this strategy may not transfer directly to screen, possibly due to the increased cognitive load of reading on screen. They

noted the act of highlighting on a screen may increase this cognitive load further, but also that this situation might change as students become more familiar with using digital texts.

Conclusion

Unsurprisingly, researchers agree that students find researching in digital formats extremely useful, and that they will continue to use electronic media in their study, as in most other parts of their lives. However, significantly, it appears that for deep and critical reading of longer texts such as academic articles, comprehension can be improved by reading on paper. It seems that students may recognise this, as current research indicates that many young, digitally competent students have a preference for doing key academic reading in print. Further research could usefully explore the broader effects of studying in an online environment, with all its distractions. For me, this research is an important reminder about the value in explicitly teaching digital literacy skills related to academic reading, such as the use of notation and highlighting tools, and raising students' awareness of the 'digital mindset' concept and strategies that can be used to mitigate any negative effects of studying in an online environment.

As Stoop, Kreutzer and Kircz (2013) suggest, it is likely that academic reading is in a transition phase as we move towards greater familiarity with screen reading and better technology and readability. However, even as technology and students' digital literacy continues to improve, the literature suggests there is an ongoing role for printed articles in the academic context.

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Public libraries invigorating literacy practice

By Elizabeth Gunn

I like talking, I like listening to others, to speak English. I think it's a good way to improve my English. I also like this place. Pakenham library is very friendly.

LiLi Xu (Casey Cardinia Libraries, 2018)



Many readers will be aware that public libraries around Victorian cities and regional centres have been transforming their services lately. Previously repositories of books and periodicals, libraries now seek to engage patrons in multiple modes of creative and communicative expression. Craft projects, multilingual conversations, robotics, 3D printing, PechaKucha¹ nights, community debates, indigenous history talks, and digital music-making are just some of the events hosted by public libraries that I've participated in over the past year.

Libraries are undertaking a quiet revolution in their service delivery, from passive product distribution to active engagement with local communities. Moreover, in relation to literacy education, libraries have identified that community members with low-level literacy are a target group needing support and assistance from their services. To an extent this has come about in response to some patrons' need for one-on-one help in accessing government and social services that have shifted from paper to web-based forms. But more broadly, libraries' interest in people they perceive to have low literacy fits with their change of focus towards active community engagement.

As an outsider to the business of libraries, I started my research for this article by speaking to literacy and library people. I interviewed a manager of a public library, a multicultural and diversity librarian, and also a literacy educator who is part of a network researching the provision of library resources for literacy workers. These distinct perspectives directed me to helpful reports and overviews about recent changes in library services and how libraries are approaching the tasks of supporting people with low-level literacy. My broad mission was to explore how library services understand 'literacy' and explore how they support literacy development in local communities. More specifically, I am interested

in multimodality (Kress, 2010), and how multimodal conceptions of 'literacy' and *text* may help us to see English literacy development as a community-wide activity, integral to libraries' broad mission to support 21st century literacies.²

Transformation of library services in relation to supporting Victorians with low-level literacy is a complex topic. *Reading and Literacy for All: Adult literacy – Victorian Public Libraries in Action* (State Library of Victoria, 2016a) outlines the many varied activities that libraries have initiated to deal with the literacy needs of their local communities.

In the second part of this article I take up one of these activities: a conversation club, which supports people from multilingual communities to network and develop English language and literacy skills. Over the past few years I have been involved in one of these clubs and have taken notes after the sessions to reflect on my observations about the rich array of textual and literacy practices used by participants – both English learners and volunteers – in each session. I've noticed that a range of multiliteracy and multimodal texts and practices are intricately interwoven, shared and practiced at each session. These include translation machine usage, photography, books, written and pictorial notes, internet searches, social media texts, gestures and role plays. My reflective note-taking has sensitised me to some interesting dimensions of participants' use of multimodal resources.

Literacy as more than written texts

What is text and what is literacy? Our understandings of these concepts, and whether we define them within broad or narrow terms, I contend, impacts how we treat low-level literacy. Australian governments, media and industry representatives have a stake in propagating a 'literacy crisis

discourse' argue Black and Yasukawa (2011). The logic of a literacy crisis discourse starts by highlighting results from surveys such as the *Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies* (PIAAC). The *Reading and Literacy for All: Adult literacy – Victorian Public Libraries in Action* report (State Library of Victoria, 2016) establishes its rationale for supporting 'adults ... in our community who have low-level literacy proficiency' by citing PIAAC results which indicate that 14% of adults in Australia

often struggle with tasks most take for granted: reading and writing lists, interpreting medicine labels, understanding road signs, using maps and using instruction manuals and other procedural texts that people encounter in their daily lives. (p.5)

Based on comprehension of texts abstracted from their socially and physically embodied contexts, PIAAC identifies deficiencies in a range of areas such as health numeracy, problem solving and so on.

Although narrowly-conceived, this definition of literacy provides a starting point of sorts for assisting adults in expanding their literacy skills. *Reading and Literacy for All: Adult Literacy Program Recommendations* (State Library of Victoria, 2016b) suggests some excellent services for adults at PIAAC Literacy Level 1 or below, such as 'easy read' collections, conversation classes for multilingual communities, multiple level book clubs, online literacy programs, digital literacy activities, and innovative intergenerational literacy programs. However, I would argue that adults at low levels of PIAAC-defined literacy also need to be included in the provision of mainstream public library activities that facilitate creative output as outlined in the 2013 *Victorian Public Libraries 2030 Strategic Framework* (more on this framework below).

We need to be cautious about definitions that restrict literacy to print text. *Reading and Literacy for All: A Strategic Framework for Victorian Public Libraries 2015–18* (State Library of Victoria, 2016c) defines literacy as 'an individual's capacity to understand, use, reflect on and engage with written texts' (p.5). The report expresses a bias towards print text, and *reading* in particular, as the predominant mode of knowledge transfer in relation to low-level literacy, reporting that:

Nearly half of the adult population cannot read fluently, and many homes are not literacy-rich environments. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (*Programme for*

the International Assessment of Adult Competencies; PIAAC) reports that in 2012 up to 46 per cent of Victorians did not have the literacy skills they need to cope with the complex demands of everyday life and work in a knowledge-based economy. (p.5)

While I am not denying that print literacy does indeed confer significant social, political, and economic capital, Brandt (2015) argues that it is the *production* rather than the *consumption* of written texts that is the mainstay of 21st century literacy work.

Future library 'identities'

This trend towards production of text is anticipated by the *Victorian Public Libraries 2030 Strategic Framework* for the future mainstream direction of library services in Victoria. Its mission 'is to support 21st-century literacies by facilitating dynamic learning and community connection' (State Library of Victoria, 2013, p.7). The future-focused Framework identifies the emergence of five key social trends (creativity, collaboration, brain health, dynamic learning and community connection) that public libraries can benefit from and adapt to in the future. The projected benefits and adaptations for public libraries in relation to these key social trends are modelled via the imagining of two future library 'identities' or scenarios: 'Creative Library' and 'Community Library'.

The Creative Library scenario foreshadows a decline in consumption and a corresponding increase in people's desire 'to explore, develop and express their creativity, ... and a rising interest in collaboration, both on a personal and a professional basis' (p.5). Further, in the Creative Library scenario, patrons will 'unlock, develop, express, record and share their creative interests and *output*' (p.6, emphasis added). This Creative Library scenario is echoed in Brandt's (2015) thesis that text production eclipses text consumption in contemporary work practices.

An even more crucial role for libraries is forecast by the Framework authors in the Community Library scenario when social, economic, and technological changes disrupt 'industries and social norms...and traditional gatekeepers lose their relevance' (p.5). In the Community Library scenario,

[r]apidly changing social dynamics lead to sustained high unemployment, feelings of social displacement, and the desire to reconnect with the local community. In this scenario there is a need to continually acquire

new knowledge and skills as people feel the impact of the transformation from a local, physical economy to a global, virtual one (p.5)

Social connectedness is a key consideration in the Community Library scenario. In parallel with this strategy of supporting community-based, creative text production, the field of Literacy Studies also regards literacies as multiple, plurilingual, multimodal, socially-mediated practices comprised of complex interactions between people and texts in communication (Farrell & Corbel, 2017).

Often ethnographic in nature, socially-based literacy studies account for the ways people produce and consume diverse and appropriate literacy resources for different communicative purposes ‘in conformity with the *needs* of the individual ... and the *expectations* of others’ (Farrell and Corbel, 2017, p.10, authors’ emphasis). In other words, when we understand human literacy as a wide-ranging tool kit of different texts and modes of communication used to convey different messages for different social occasions, we are likely to envisage that every individual’s literacy practices must be creative and complex, inventive and adaptive, and that international literacy surveys such as PIACC might not adequately capture or allow us to imagine the complete picture of a society’s literacy practices.

Multimodality and social connection

Some readers might be perplexed about this broadening of the definition of literacy and might argue that it doesn’t serve people of low-level literacy to be content that any mode of communication at any level of competence will suffice. However, there are a few good reasons for seeing literacy as more than strings of words and sentences. Firstly, in a multicultural context like Australia’s, awareness of multiple modes for meaning-making can open more ways of understanding the superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007) behind the different pathways people take to reach their current point in life, for example: work, education, cultural backgrounds, life history. Individuals use distinct toolkits of communicative modes and semiotic (meaning-making) resources to communicate. These toolkits, for example multiple spoken or visual languages, scripts, icons, kinaesthetic repertoires, gestures, photos, and everyday artefacts are activated and leveraged in the task of mastering new modes.

The six-panel series of screen shots (figure 1) demonstrates how words, objects, gestures, and movements synchronize and facilitate individual agency in the communicative

process. LiLi Xu, Hyun Ju Oh and Anne Jones, participants in the Casey Cardinia Libraries Conversation Club program, appear to be discussing the weather. Although a soundtrack of their words is not attached to this series of actions, much about their communication is revealed by the objects, gestures, facial expressions and movements they exchange.

In the video we see Anne gesturing and touching her hat. The topic ‘Summer in Victoria’ is augmented by a list on the white board behind her (weather, winds, dry season, little rain, can be very hot etc.) While listening, LiLi Xu reaches into her handbag to retrieve a parasol, a common form of sun protection in Asia. Still we don’t know what they’re saying, but Anne’s inquisitive response suggests she’s waiting for LiLi Xu to reveal something unexpected to the group. LiLi Xu unfurls the parasol. Anne’s hand gestures encourage LiLi Xu to continue the action and Anne moves her torso to make space for LiLi Xu. They stand up. Finally, with glee, LiLi Xu gives Anne the colourful parasol and Anne handles the gift with pleasure and delight.

Effective literacy workers like Anne Jones are aware of individuals’ diverse multimodal repertoires and their importance for social connection. At a time when consensus about forms of social interaction is becoming increasingly fractured, Kress (2010) sees a broadened awareness of multimodality as essential for maintaining social cohesion. Kress’ framework for linking social cohesion to people’s access to the full range of communicative resources lines up with the Creative and Community Library scenarios of the Victorian Public Libraries 2030 project. Amongst other points, Kress recommends:

- that members of communities have access to the semiotic and other cultural resources essential to act in their social world on their own behalf and for their benefit
- that as members of a cohesive community they are able to contribute to common purposes by dealing productively with constantly new cultural, semiotic and social problems and be designing, representing and communicating their suggested solutions to them. (p.18)

Important for Kress is caution around metaphors such as ‘mobility’, a concept often allied with multimodal communication and valorised in the context of contemporary digital ‘connectivity’. Kress is sceptical that smart phone technologies for example will deliver all the benefits implied by the notion of mobility, and he poses the question, ‘Are [new technologies] a further instance of social

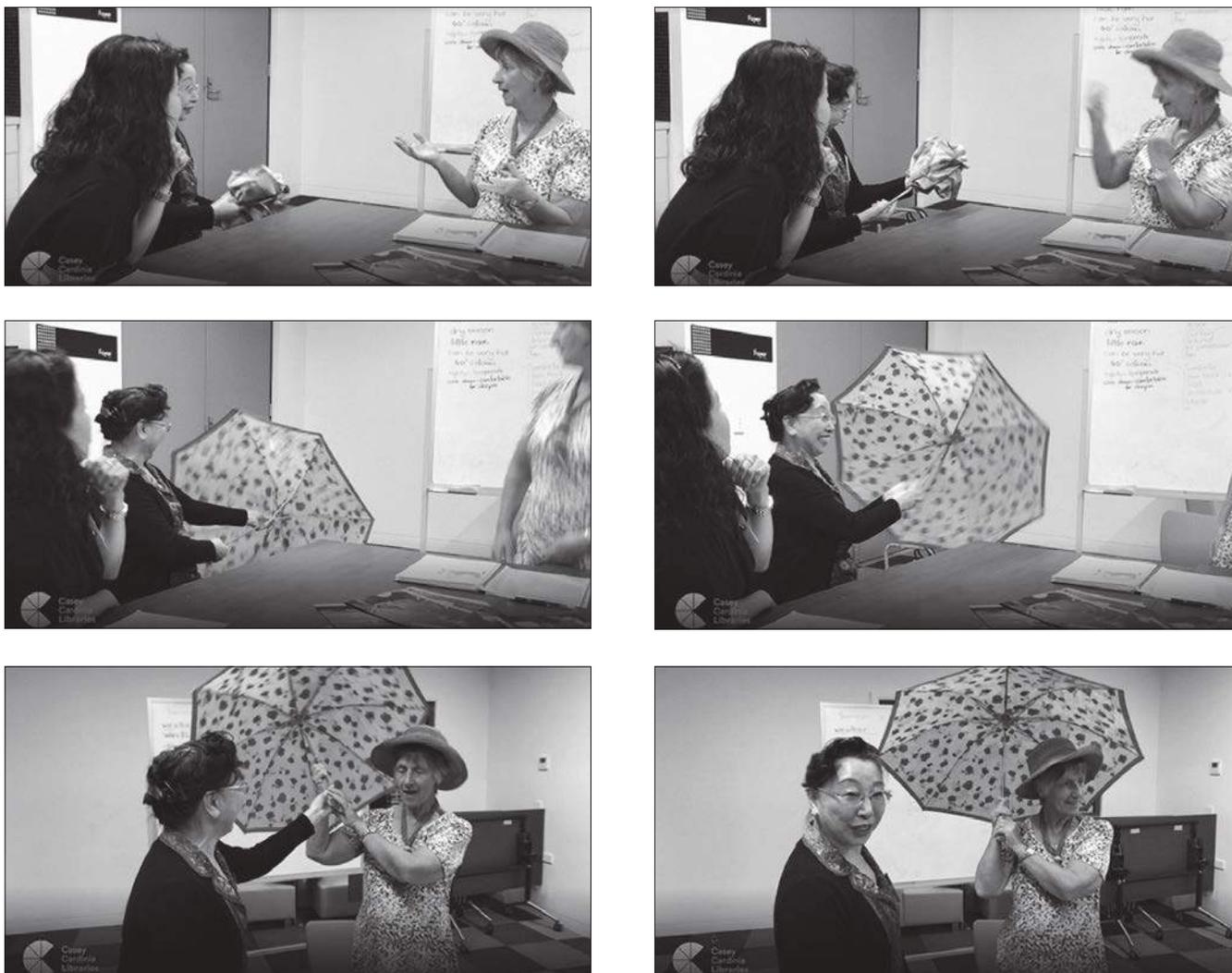


Figure 1: A multiplicity of 'texts'; words, objects, gestures and movements assemble around LiLi Xu, Hyun Ju Oh and Anne Jones' conversation. Montage of screen shots from Conversation Club video (Casey Cardinia Libraries, 2018)

fragmentation and disintegration or are they covert means for dealing with the absence of reliable social bonds?' (p.19).

Public library conversation clubs: local networks for global citizens

As physical presences dedicated to addressing local literacy needs, public libraries seem uniquely placed as agents for mitigating social fragmentation and helping forge new social bonds. Below, I outline an example of how a public library conversation session promotes social inclusion and English literacy development for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and demonstrates how recognition of multimodal repertoires engenders social connection and increases opportunities for literacy development.

Every week for an hour at my local library, I drop in to a regular gathering of 'volunteers' (people who help others

learn English) and 'learners' (people who want to learn more English)³. The group is informal and relaxed. It tends to follow the format whereby people pair up with each other at tables and talk. Paper and pens, worksheets, library pamphlets, name tags, etc are freely available on tables, and people also bring a variety of tools with them to support their conversations including digital devices, books, and personal objects.

My first encounter with Conversation Club was as a teacher bringing a small group of beginner English language students from the nearby TAFE. The purpose of these visits was to encourage students to take advantage of opportunities outside the classroom to learn and practise English. I expanded on these visits in various ways in class; one activity was to produce a small book of biographies based on themselves and their partners at Conversation Club. Fortunately, the Multicultural and Diversity

Librarian, and facilitator of Conversation Club, Christian, had a very relaxed attitude to me suddenly turning up with ten or so students in tow. He would quickly rearrange the chairs and tables to accommodate us, and other participants seemed happy to pair up with the students to help them with the particular tasks I had set.

I must admit that it took me a while to open my mind to the unstructured nature of Conversation Club. In some ways the written tasks I gave students to complete at the sessions were an attempt to apply a written textual structure to Conversation Club. These tasks reflected my conditioning as a teacher; I tend to avoid learning without written structure. However, the written tasks provided me with some insights into the different collaborative and multimodal resources that participants bring to bear on the production of written biographical texts.

At a certain point I realised that the printed texts, offered either by myself or by Christian, were often redundant. On one occasion, amidst the usual throng of lively discussion, a new participant gestured to the printed worksheet on the table. 'What are these papers for?' she inquired. Her partner replied, 'These are just in case we can't find anything to talk about'. They both laughed and went back to their conversation.

On other occasions I've thought that a chatting app might be a good way to practise all important (from my teacherly perspective) writing skills, but many participants highly value the physical proximity of the group and the intrinsic benefits proximity can offer. In one exchange on WhatsApp I suggested to a Conversation Club participant outside the session time: 'Speaking is a challenge. But do you think WhatsApp chatting is helpful in learning new words and phrases?' She replied, 'Honestly speaking, I hate my phones screen,' and went on to outline the benefits for meeting up in person.

Food for thought

As summer approached last year, people started to bring offerings to Conversation Club to share with their fellow participants: fruits from backyard orchards, cuttings from marigold shrubs, propagated pumpkin seeds for transplantation in new homes. The marigold cuttings inspired people to share knowledge about how flowers and plants are used to treat everyday maladies. Participants also brought platters of 'food from their country' to share. These offerings sparked ideas for further discussion. One recent immigrant to Australia told the story of how he brought

Vegemite and avocado – two typical Australian foods – to his school's end of year party 'because it's my country'.

Food is often the realm of women, and in many communities, women's learning and labour around food takes them away from chances to develop other modes of literacy. Mariam⁴, for example, has yet to master print literacy but is skilled at making cassava couscous, the staple food of her African homeland. I was completely ignorant about this food and its manufacturing process and Mariam was happy to enlighten me. First, she took some uncooked cassava couscous out of her handbag for me to examine and taste. Using hand gestures and precise culinary terms (one of her languages is French) she adeptly described the long, complicated process of cassava couscous. I vowed to do some homework about cassava couscous so I can find more ways to connect with Mariam at the next Conversation Club session.

Can these food and plant objects be regarded as multimodal texts, like photos, or songs, videos or plays? When we broaden our definition of 'text', we start to focus positively on the semiotic resources people have developed throughout life and the objects they contribute to build relationships. We can then develop more creative approaches to help people expand their repertoire of textual practices; written words are sometimes central, but more often peripheral to the images, actions and artefacts that hold importance in people's lives.

The following is a promotional blurb for a children's holiday library activity I discovered while researching public libraries:

A slide for Rapunzel? A parachute for Jack? A zip line for Little Red? Help rescue your favourite fairy tale characters from their villains by engineering their escape! (City of Boroondara, 2018)

In this activity, children would imaginatively assemble, and repurpose familiar materials in unfamiliar ways to free heroic protagonists from seemingly intractable problems. Similarly, imaginative approaches are needed for recognising the materials of communication – words, sentences, paragraphs, *and* colours, shapes, rhythms, and gestures – to unleash new possibilities for social connection and literacy development.

Public libraries are indeed invigorating 21st century literacy practices in Victoria, and literacy workers stand to

gain a lot from libraries' examples of multimodal literacy practices. Thus, when we broaden our understanding of literacy and text, we are more likely to imagine how people of *all* literacy levels will connect, assemble, and produce texts in the creative and community library spaces of the future.

Notes

- 1 *PechaKucha* is a type of presentation where each of 20 slides is shown for 20 seconds.
- 2 For further discussion of multimodal literacy, see p.26–27 of this issue
- 3 It is important to note that these roles, of *volunteers* and *learners*, are loosely applied; sometimes a participant might find themselves supporting another's English learning even though they anticipated being in a *learner* role. The issue of participant identity is beyond the scope of this article.
- 4 Name has been changed

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Elizabeth Gunn is an adult English language and literacy teacher and researcher. She has developed her teaching practice through working in a range of educational contexts, from remote indigenous communities in the Northern Territory to urban settings in Australia and China. She likes the idea of ethnography as a way of gaining insights into people's diverse learning journeys.

Reveal, revelation, reformation: a narrative framework

By Darlene Ciuffetelli Parker



I had a conversation with the principal about diversity and looking at the posters of famous scientists. They're all white. For the longest time, having a few women in there was considered diverse. But I look at my students and putting up pictures of old Nobel prize winners who were all white isn't very motivating in my class. We need to come together to understand our students and our population better. (High School Science/Physics Teacher)

Over 15 years ago, my PhD research focused on literacy narratives of youth in the lowest income neighbourhood in Canada. From my early years as a classroom teacher and graduate student, to literacy consultant, and school administrator / vice-principal, and currently as university professor, my school-based research program has broadened on childhood/youth poverty, with inherent intersectionality of such effects on: mental health, literacy, race, culture, inclusivity, safe acceptance, privilege, and belonging in school systems and community settings in Ontario, Canada. The citation above depicts an 'aha' narrative revelation by a high school Physics teacher, fortunate as he said he was, to teach the 'smartest' of the school, making past sense from his unconscious and biased perspective of class, race, and stereotyping. What happens to him, after a year of engagement in my research program and with deep reflection, is likened to a literal 'switch of the mind.' We will come back to his fuller narrative within the body of this paper to explore how leveraging the practice of teaching, learning, and behaving in human situational settings can become a strategy for re-shaping mindset; that is, a reshaping from a biased mindset that has long been 'set in our mind' by societal norms and unconscious prejudices, to a bias-free mindset which 'awakens our mind' to inclusivity and understanding of humanity. Using the 3R narrative framework (Ciuffetelli Parker, 2013; 2014; 2017) will be a theoretical strategy of this article, as positioned from my ongoing research program on poverty and schooling. So why might there be a Canadian connection to Australia?

Canada and Australia

In September 2018 I had the privilege of keynoting at the Australian Council of Adult Literacy conference where I spoke on the topic of poverty and its effects from a Canadian vantage point. What I found in my preliminary

preparation, and across our great geographical divide, was that Canada and Australia have strikingly similar statistics when it comes to youth poverty. In 1989 Canada's federal government committed to the eradication of youth poverty by the year 2000 but thirty years later youth poverty has more than doubled. In Canada, one in six young people live in poverty and poverty exists in virtually every school community (Campaign 2000, 2014).

Similarly, the 2016 report of the Australian Council of Social Services cites national childhood youth poverty also at one in six (Australian Social Cohesion report, 2018). As with Canada, it has been almost 30 years since then Australian Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, said, 'No child will be living in poverty by 1990.' Across the globe, youth poverty has become a crisis not only in developing countries, but also in well-developed countries such as ours. Based on a 2016 Canada census, there are higher levels of poverty within marginalised groups such as Indigenous youth, people with disabilities, racialised people, and women (Angus Reid Institute, 2018). The statistics are shocking, but poverty is not just a statistic and statistics do not get to the poverty phenomenon in ways that illustrate how it plays out in our organisations and communities (Ciuffetelli Parker & Craig, 2017). The time to act is now. This article focuses on youth poverty, on educators, on youth, on education, on the human condition and lived experiences, and on solutions for educational systems, organisations, and communities.

Mental health, youth poverty, youth voice, and lived context

The intersectionality of youth poverty and mental health has been a consistent finding in the research program especially over the last six years and I will comment here on

the Canadian context. Mental health in youth influences deeply whether a person will be successful in school and in life in general. Over one million youth suffer from mental health issues in Canada and adolescent suicide rates are the third highest among the OECD countries, with suicide as the second leading cause of death for those aged 15 to 24 (Kutcher, Hampton, & Wilson, 2010). The effects of mental health on education success and the intersection between poverty and mental health issues have been identified as barriers to the most vulnerable students in Canada (Kutcher & Wei, 2012; Tilleczek, Ferguson, Campbell, & Lezeu, 2014). Although prior Canadian school-based research on poverty has garnered much attention (Ciuffetelli Parker & Flessa, 2011; Ciuffetelli Parker, 2012; 2013; 2015), as has Canadian school-based research on mental health issues (Kutcher & Wei, 2012; 2014; Wei & Kutcher, 2012), there has been very little research on the intersection of poverty and mental health (Dutta-Bergman, 2004). Especially missing in the literature is narrative inquiry school-based research (Xu & Connelly, 2010). Storied data are useful in deconstructing unconscious assumptions and lived experiences to help remove systemic barriers related to education and youth poverty related to mental health (Canadian Association of Paediatric Centres et al., 2010; Lipman & Boyle, 2008), as well as how emotional and social conditions are related to academic success. The relationship between poverty and its associated risk for mental health issues in youth needs deeper attention because it 'is both straightforward and complex in its pervasive reach' (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2007, p.1).

We are naïve to think in our current global state that poverty does not exist – in fact, poverty exists in all schools and neighbourhoods, no matter the assumed socio-economic circumstance of youth and families. My prior research (Ciuffetelli Parker & Flessa, 2011) focused on teachers' work in high poverty communities. The findings awakened educators to steer away from deficit based off-the-shelf explanations and quick fix remedies. Instead, educators began to engage in school inquiry to best target educational strategies, without blaming students or their families for their poverty. My current research has added to the intersectionality of and focus on youth voice in secondary school settings and neighbourhoods, with a larger research collaborative network of two large school systems. Important to the current research is that neighbourhood context matters (no matter the poverty statistical rate), youth voice matters, and so does the work done in schools. The current research program adds further dimension by implementing deeper knowledge through a *community of*

practice with wide-ranging schools and systems, as well as to its innovative reach in teacher education because it places, for the first time in Canadian poverty-school-based research, youth voice at its centre.

The community of practice

A community of practice can be defined as a group of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. This definition reflects the fundamentally social nature of human learning (Agrifoglio, 2015). The purpose of a community of practice is to create, expand, and exchange knowledge, and to develop individual capabilities. Think here about personal learning interest communities you might join: reading clubs, fitness communities, sewing clubs, volunteer organisations, charitable groups, and so on.

The community of practice of which I am lead researcher comprises two district school boards in southern Ontario and eastern Ontario, a university and social justice institute, a regulatory professional standards organisation, and over 25 non-profit prosperity (anti-poverty) organisations (such as Habitat for Humanity, Big Brothers and Sisters, YMCA, United Way). As a community of practice, we seek to enhance public confidence and awareness on the importance of a human rights framework for youth in secondary school settings and as it applies to teaching, teacher education, and learning. The research is guided by three principles: changing mindset; shifting practices for learning and leading; and fostering youth voice and community engagement. By committing to a community of relational knowledge and practice, the network mobilises knowledge by committing to four key guiding questions:

1. What do we do about the stark reality of deficit thinking and practices, including discrimination, bias, and systemic barriers in school systems and communities?
2. How can we leverage our practices towards changing mindset?
3. How do we change mindset in our changing world (by educators, leaders, community, systems) to leverage practice and achievement?
4. How can we form authentic relational cross-sector partnerships that attend to the mission of equity and eradicating systemic barriers, for the trust, respect, integrity and care that all students, educators, communities, and families deserve?

The 3R narrative framework

Within the research component of the community of practice, we sought to use narratives that explored

participants' core values to more deeply understand the narrative of the school community. Approximately 180 participants were involved in sharing narratives, including 48 secondary school students; 24 teachers, 12 administrators, 24 parents, 20 community service providers; and 29 members of two collaborative school board advisory teams comprising consultants, psychologists, mental health leads, administrative staff, and community outreach workers. The principles of appreciative inquiry during subsequent visits to the school allowed for participants to imagine a school of success, where all students could succeed no matter their living conditions. The storied data was analysed by culling all sources, reading and coding the issues, coding the issue-relevant meanings as patterns, and then collapsing the codes into themes (Creswell, 2005). The method that underpins the research collaborative is narrative inquiry as it represents stories of systemic barriers as lived and told through participants' own life experiences (Ciuffetelli Parker, 2014; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Dewey, 1938; People for Education, 2013). Narrative inquiry gives first-hand and authoritative voice to the life stories of students, educators, parents, and community members. The use of a 3R narrative framework (Ciuffetelli Parker, 2014) was first developed from my earlier research program on poverty and education to apply narrative ways of excavating storied experiences and unconscious assumptions from the stories shared by research participants. The terms *narrative reveal*, *revelation* and *reformation* are useful to help burrow deeply into issues of bias and systemic barriers in educational landscapes. Observing from a wider perspective using the elements of reveal, revelation, and reformation, helps untangle how teaching and learning get enacted when assumptions also get

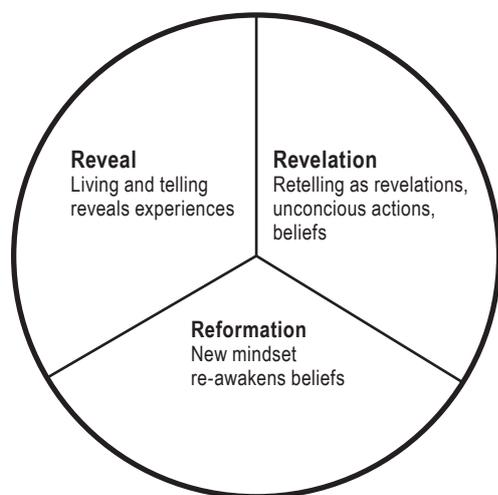


Figure 1: The 3R framework

enacted in classrooms, schools, and the larger community. Conle's (1999) metaphorical description of *hardened* and *frozen stories* helps us better understand how we might get 'hardened to' or 'stuck' within biased notions of our world, which then affects how we behave in our world. Conle asserts, 'Stories can harden in this way; some of them may even shrink to one-liners and serve to order our world stereotypically' (p.18). The 3R narrative framework helps to deconstruct our lived experiences and behaviours in order to not 'get stuck' or to not 'harden' into our biased patterns of behaviour that feed further into various systemic barriers which youth face today in schools and elsewhere. Figure 1 illustrates the storied framework of:

- *narrative reveal* to help excavate unconscious assumptions that surface in the living and telling of experiences of teaching or learning;
- *narrative revelation* to show, once a storied revelation has surfaced, how we can interrogate further our own experiences to gain perspective of the 'hardened' story; and,
- *narrative reformation* to show how we can begin to reform new understanding through an awakened belief or mindset.

The examples that follow in the next two sections give evidence to this process, one from a youth's lived experience, the other from a teacher's lived experience.

Youth voice: narrative revelation of inequity

Jade¹ is a Grade 11 student attending a very diverse urban high school east of Toronto. She lives in poverty in Canada but is not afraid to describe her life before immigrating from Jamaica as a life of extreme and dire poverty and she is grateful for the schooling system she is able to access now, and the better living conditions for her family. She shares her prior experience in Jamaica as it relates to poverty:

Well poverty. I've experienced two different types of poverty. Poverty in Canada is not the same as poverty in Jamaica, by far. What you guys consider poverty... if we lived that lifestyle in Jamaica, we would be considered as middle class. Because poverty in Jamaica is like you can't go to school, you can't buy books for school because you have to buy books for school. You can't pay your electricity bill, you can't pay your light, your water, so basically you have no light and no water. You have one pair of shoes. There's no food in your fridge, nothing. And I talk about nothing, you guys say you have no food in your fridge but you got

those cans, bottles of water. I'm not talking about the water bottles that you buy, I'm talking about a jug. It's totally different than the poverty here, where it's like yeah you know you can come to school because school is free. You live in a house, you can pay your light, your water, maybe not for the extra stuff but you can pay for your necessities, just to get you by for the next month. Yeah even though it's a tight month.

What was immediately revealing about Jade was that she was not fearful of speaking the truth of her experiences in front of me or in front of her peers. She spoke with authority, claiming her experience and describing it in full, sharing with those she spoke to that she came from a worse place than perhaps they knew. She admitted that being a participant in the research study itself was an opportunity for her to finally express the injustices she was feeling within the school in many of her classes – the loneliness she witnessed from other students, the care or lack of care from many teachers, or the indifference by adults in her school community towards students' lives outside of school. Jade was a high achieving student while managing two part time jobs to help support her parents and siblings, and was striving to do well in school in order to succeed in life. The ability to work part time and as well go to school were both privileges for her, something that would be considered a luxury in Jamaica, despite her now having little in Canada compared to her peers. When she shared one issue that might have seemed a trivial matter to many, she was able to make poignant and alive how systemic barriers play out for her at her own school:

I had a project the other day and it was a brochure. And the teacher was like if it's not in colour, then you lose marks. I don't even have a computer at home. I told her. And she was like 'um,' well that's not her problem. She said, 'Well you're going to have to find a colour printer if you want full marks.' And I'm like, 'You guys don't provide a colour printer at school.' I'm like, 'Where am I supposed to print?' And she's like, 'Well you can go to Staples to get your thing printed.' And I'm like, 'Are you going to drive me to Staples?'

Jade's *narrative revelation* is an important one because it depicts two matters: first, the uncovering of what is likely a repeated habit by many educators, and society by association, who assume that a student like Jade would have all the resources at her disposal outside of school – printer, paper, a car, and so on in order 'to make the grade' and,

furthermore, to place a middle class notion of privilege on a success criteria of any assignment; and second, the teacher's complete unconscious ignorance of the issue at hand – that the criteria for the assignment provided is inequitable for many of the students in Jade's class. What we do with this revelation, in hope that there might one day be a reformation of lived experiences in schools for educators and students alike, depends on systems as a whole, which will be discussed in the discussion/recommendation section of this article. Let's turn next to teachers' *narratives that reveal* school practices which cause them tension, and ultimately through the participation in the research project, offered an awakening, or a *narrative revelation* to some unconscious assumptions within their own practices. I highlight one teacher's awakening to unconscious beliefs and assumptions and what transpires because of it.

A teacher's narrative revelation: an 'aha moment' of practice and mindset

The article opened with a citation by a teacher participant of the research program, Charles, a Physics Grade 11 and 12 teacher. Charles, alongside other peer teachers in focus groups, was very quiet the first few times we interacted with him, preferring to listen rather than to participate immediately in the conversations with his peers on the topic of poverty and its effects on many of the students at his school. He shared and described his expertise as an advanced academic Physics teacher who rarely had students whose problems we were discussing, chalking it to his students being middle income 'white or brown students.' During early discussions, Charles' stereotyping was unmistakable, especially in contrast to what we witness in Jade's story above – a very intellectual student who pinpointed a unique example of marginalisation of the already oppressed students at her school, like herself.

Charles listened to his colleagues' stories of teaching marginalised students, and he wondered why he was included in this group of teachers to speak with me in the first place. According to him, he rarely taught marginalised youth; however, as time passed, he began to reveal his unconscious assumption, 'So the Black students, I don't know them very well. But the Brown students, I have lots of Brown students! I know them well.' The bias here in his thinking-out-loud moment is the undeniable stereotype of 'Brown students' being academically intellectual while (wrongly) assuming that 'Black students' were not, and thus his constructed narrative of being unfamiliar with

them. Curiously, he continued his discussion of his Brown students, ‘They’re recent immigrants and they’re not that well off.’ In this little moment of reckoning, of awareness that even his ‘smart Brown students’ were not well off, Charles was led to reinterpret his classroom strategies on inclusion and diversity. He came to realise that, though he does have bright students in his class, many do indeed struggle financially; moreover, they are not fully represented by Charles as they should be in his diverse classroom. As he claims this *narrative revelation* for the first time amidst his peer teachers, Charles shares a story of practice,

I once made the mistake of talking about an electric toothbrush, and nobody has an electric toothbrush, not in my class. I wanted to talk about transformers you know?... It got me thinking though and I started looking around the cafeteria and I thought ‘oh, yeah there are quite a lot of Black students!’ And I started counting how many Whites, how many Blacks.

The transformation of knowledge was not so sudden but, in fact, it was a process of deep knowledge and discussion within the focus group, which allowed for a safe vulnerability to share positive and not-so-positive practices within what had manifested as a true community of practice within the focus groups. More time passed, and Charles reflected deeply about how his teaching practice leveraged, or not, the success of his students. Charles realised that he assumed many things about his students’ life experiences, which he was wrong about – the electric toothbrushes to explain transformers was one example. He began to take notice of the school’s student population and broaden his perspective while burrowing deeply into his own teaching practice. He followed through and took action, as revealed in the citation that opened this article.

The research phenomenon here was that the teacher focus group became its own community of practice that created, expanded, and developed individual capabilities and school capacity. Charles’ *narrative reformation* re-awakened his beliefs and mindset, which translated to school reform too, as he shared further discussion and solutions with his peers and the school principal to ‘come together to understand our students and our population better.’

Leveraging practice: three pillars of opportunity

The narratives by youth and educators above are but a snippet of the larger longitudinal research project, but these stories are significant and represent substantially the

overall narrative findings that helped identify, from the four key guiding questions above, three pillars of opportunity². The three-pillar framework is a positive youth strategy to support youth, educators, families, education systems, organisations, and communities, to enhance programs and policies in order to eradicate systemic barriers related to poverty and its effects on youth success. In this effort, the research community of practice informs a systems-based implementation plan based on three pillars of opportunity:

Build a Culture of Care – within the classroom, within the institution, in the professional learning available to educators, in system-wide accessible and relevant learning opportunities, in the allocation of funding.

Develop Partnerships and Relationships – adopting a resilience rather than a deficit view of marginalised youth, building trusting relationships with youth services and community partners to create a living curriculum for youth, pay attention to the life narrative of youth.

Enhance Practice and Knowledge – offer professional development on poverty and equity topics, implement equity-based action research projects by practicing educators alongside youth, seek inquiry learning opportunities that challenge the values and assumptions society makes about youth and how values and assumptions affect pedagogical choices, offer tutoring and peer tutoring and educate with high expectations.

In summary

The community of practice that has been developed through this research continues to enhance public confidence and awareness by committing to and sustaining the community of practice. Using the 3R narrative framework that analysed the storied data, the research informs a systems-based and community implementation plan based on three pillars of opportunity that enhance professional practice and knowledge; build a culture of care; and develop community partnership and relationship. Recommendations that fall under each pillar help mobilise knowledge and action in order to eradicate systemic barriers for marginalised youth.

Notes

- 1 Names have been changed
- 2 The Three Pillars of Opportunity is taken with permission from a larger summary report by same author Ciuffetelli Parker (2018) for systems of education entitled ‘Positive Youth Development.’ Durham District School Board, Ontario, Canada.

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Practical Matters

Build a partnership: the sky is the limit

By Nic McLean

One of the great things about EAL teaching is that with a bit of creative thinking and messaging you can create a context for learning for your students in so many different places and ways.



For over 12 years I taught in a youth program at a TAFE in the northern suburbs of Melbourne. It is a flagship program for young adults with refugee or migrant backgrounds who are past school-leaving age. As a result it is very well-networked and I had the challenge and joy of working in partnership with many different organisations to deliver an engaging and relevant program where we were able to develop skills across many areas to make our students more adaptable and employable. We ran 16-week programs with Foundation House and the Centre for Multicultural Youth; projects with local community health centres; local government and migrant resource centres; theatre projects and a myriad of workshops and excursions across an array of topics over those years.

Then I moved to a newly established campus where the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) was being delivered for the first time and my students were mature adults. I knew nobody from the area and had no networks. It was a great challenge for someone who has a passion for partnerships and collaboration.

You'd think working in TAFE, it would be easy to create partnerships and find collaborative ways to deliver programs with other departments because we all work for the same organisation. But I have found the opposite is true. Sometimes it's about leadership, it's always about budget, but it's also a case of 'What's in it for me?' Getting other departments to work collaboratively with you and your newly arrived English as an additional language (EAL) students, on the off-chance some might pathway into their classes, and because you want to give them an experience in a real-life context, doesn't happen often. So, when Joel Rainford, the program lead from the photography programs at Melbourne Polytechnic, came into my office one morning and told me she wanted to run a project with the Diploma of Photography students, students from the Diploma of Writing and Editing, and my EAL students, I jumped at it.

One of the first things I remember being taught when I first delved into TESOL teaching 22 years ago and did my Cambridge CELTA course was to create a context. Adult learners need a context they can relate to, that makes the learning meaningful. It's a simple concept really but it's surprising how often this is limited to topics around living in Australia such as government and the health system and special days such as ANZAC day or the start of the footy season. These topics or contexts are the bread and butter of EAL teachers working on the AMEP and programs that work with new arrivals. It gives a clear enough framework to hang our creative energies from with our day-to-day planning.

In an age of rolling enrolments and assessment task banks, teachers struggle to know who they'll be teaching on any given day and need to ensure the tasks they set meet the requirements of the program that funds them and the organisation that employs them. We learn to design and deliver reading and writing tasks and speaking and listening activities within clear, contextualised daily or weekly topics. The skills we assess are necessary and important but to some degree also prescriptive and their application to the contexts outside of the classroom can be difficult to quantify.

However, as the prioritising of pre-employment programs and employability skills continues, the contexts for much of our delivery seems to be changing and the skills we expect our students to engage with are far greater than the four macro skills within the confines of a classroom. It seems a big ask, and it is a big ask, to expect EAL teachers to support students with their basic settlement needs, develop skills that assist with their transition into Australia, teach English skills that help them 'fit in' and equip them with skills such as initiative, problem solving and teamwork so they can step into a job. In fact, I think it's impossible on our own. It has potential if we work collaboratively with other classes but it's very doable if we actively seek out partnerships.



The launch of the *Under One Sky* exhibition

The *Under One Sky* project was in its second year when Joel came to see me. The project outcomes are a coffee table book and a print exhibition, both of which showcase the skills of the Diploma of Writing and Editing and the Diploma of Photography students by telling our EAL students' stories accompanied by their photographs. An excerpt from the book is reprinted on p.24–25 of this issue.

The challenge as a teacher was to bring students along for the journey, so they felt that it was directly contributing to the development of their language skills and that it was also valuable for their settlement in Australia. We were lucky that it was the second year of the project, so we had the first *Under One Sky* book which we could use in class. This really helped turn what was an abstract idea for many of our students into something concrete. Many of them have left countries and societies where new and emerging communities are not necessarily supported or welcomed, so they found it amazing to be part of such an inclusive project.

The process involved a meet-and-greet with the project leader, Joel Rainford. This meant from the beginning students knew they were being asked to move away from the comfort zone of an EAL classroom into a wider context. Then all the teachers met, and we grouped the EAL students with their photography student and writing student and set a date for the groups to meet. Students were interviewed so that the writers could work on their draft and the

photographers could develop ideas for their portraits. They were all then required to exchange phone numbers and email addresses to continue the talks and future arrangements outside of the classroom.

One of the challenges from the beginning was the balance between students over ownership of the image and story. The writers and photographers needed to feel they had some control over the creative process, but the subjects also needed to have a say in the final product. One of my students wrote his story out and gave it to the writer expecting him to just correct the mistakes and another was disappointed that *everything* she told her writer wasn't included.

The language and stages of negotiation was something I became aware was crucial and this is something I developed and delivered in my classroom through role-play and script-writing from different scenarios. It was really effective in reducing the break-down of relationships and ensuring all parties were happy with the final outcomes. Many of the writers and photographers also found the process hard as they were required to work with people with limited English or very different world views.

Also, because students were required to consent to a project where their stories and images became public property, we had to unpack the language of consent and confidentiality to ensure they still felt empowered with the final process.

Another challenge was ensuring the hours spent with the project could also result in course outcomes for our students. However, as I stated at the beginning, I have always found the advantage of EAL teaching is that matching learning outcomes to your context is never too difficult. My students were enrolled in the Certificate II in EAL (Access), so using the project to develop tasks that prepared students for assessment tasks or portfolios for units such as 'participate in simple conversations and transactions' and 'write simple personal communications and transactional texts' was not something I found difficult. The ideal outcome would be to have time to create a set of assessment tasks that have been mapped against both the Certificate and Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) specific to this context, but time is a too much of a luxury in this job.

Learning another language as an adult is really difficult, especially against the backdrop of settlement, and sometimes I think quantifying improvements in our students' English language ability is harder than many of us are prepared to admit. After all, English language teaching is at the heart of what we do, but there are so many variables beyond our control that impede learning and its final outcome that it becomes important to look beyond ACSF levels and formal assessments. For me, it is also important to measure the improvements in self-confidence and personal wellbeing, knowledge around the nuances of living and communicating in Australia, and the networks students build so that they feel like they're fitting in just that little



EAL student writing was featured in the exhibition

bit more. Building partnerships helps you achieve this, and *Under One Sky* is a testament to the value of these measures; all our students improved in these areas.

Nic McLean has worked for over 20 years as an EAL teacher. He currently works on the EAL youth program at Chisholm Institute in Dandenong. Before that he worked for 14 years at Melbourne Polytechnic on the Young Adult Migrant Education Course (YAMEC), where he specialised in working with young adults from refugee backgrounds whose education had been disrupted. He has also had extended working experiences in Laos, Arnhem Land and elsewhere in the Northern Territory.



Daniel

Story by Edward Riley

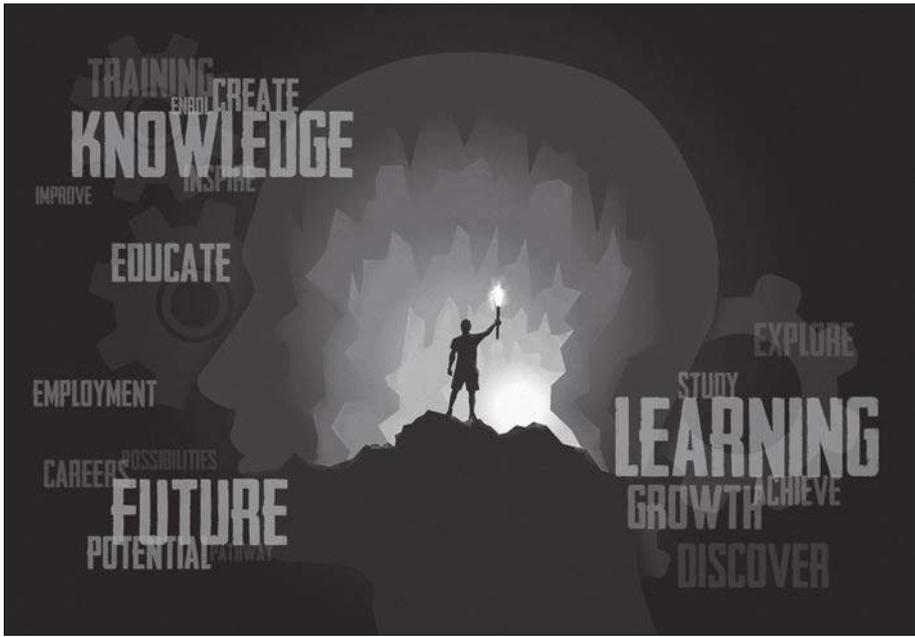
Image by Jorge Garcia

This story is reprinted from the *Under One Sky* book, produced as part of the project discussed by Nic McLean on p.22–23 of this issue.

Originally born in a village in the North-Eastern African country of Eritrea in 1985, Daniel moved to Sudan in 2009 where he worked as a taxi driver and met his future wife. However, life in Sudan was so hard for him that he decided to travel to Israel, and had to take a two-month-long journey through a desert with limited food and water. But Israel would prove to be another hard life for him, as he was forced to learn ‘a new language and different culture’ that was unfamiliar to him. He kept in touch with the woman he describes as a ‘loving, caring, supportive lady’, and they decided to elope. By this time, his partner had moved to Australia, but travelled to Israel for the marriage before they both settled in Australia.

Daniel describes his life in Australia as a ‘big lifestyle change’ compared to Eritrea. ‘I like Australia because it’s a quiet country, very interesting for me, and safe for my son, my wife and me.’ He says that the country is ‘very nice and comfortable’ for raising his infant son. Compared to his birthplace, he finds he has, in his own words, ‘too much opportunity here.’

Daniel is currently undertaking English as an Additional Language at Melbourne Polytechnic, and is currently focused on learning until he feels he is fluent in the language before he commits to a full-time job. Currently unable to study full-time, he hopes to take a full-time course to improve his skills in both the English language and in qualifying for a job. ‘Because my English isn’t that good, I want to upgrade. I want to learn full time,’ he says. ‘Without the English language, I can’t do anything.’



Shaira Martinez



Stella Windridge

A picture tells a thousand words

Images by Shaira Martinez and Stella Windridge

In 2018, we invited graphic design students at Swinburne University to submit illustrations for *Fine Print*. The brief was to respond to themes of communication, language and literacy. The images on these pages were created by Shaira Martinez and Stella Windridge who both graduated with Diplomas of Graphic Design last year.

These images could be used as conversation starters in the staffroom for a discussion about multimodal literacy. In the classroom, students could compare the images and discuss how the artists have taken the same prompt but used different symbols to convey different messages. Tuned in to the use of images as symbols, they could then take a walk around the campus and each bring back a photo of a 'visual text' to discuss as a group.

A useful resource for teachers to explore visual literacy and multimodal texts more generally is the Literacy Teaching Toolkit on the Victorian Department of Education and Training website. It has an overview of multimodal literacy at <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/english/literacy/multimodal/Pages/multimodaloverview.aspx> and from this page there is a link to information about visual metalanguage and ideas for creating multimodal texts. See also Elizabeth Gunn's article in this issue (p.8–13) and Amanda Hiorth's article in Vol.41 #3 (p.22–28) in which she discusses, amongst other things, incorporating students' visual communication skills in a 'funds of knowledge' approach to teaching literacy.

Responding to text

Some examples of how you might use the text from Shaira Martinez's image into your teaching:

Question generator:

Ask students in groups to choose one or more words and make a question to ask another person in the group.

What is the difference between learning and training?

Take turns to come up with an answer by reframing the question: The difference between learning and training is

What can you do to improve your study skills?

I can improve my study skills by _____

Sentence chains:

The first person takes a word from the picture to come up with a sentence: e.g. 'In the future I would like to have my own business.'

Go around the group so that everyone has a turn using the sentence starter: In the future I would _____

The next person then starts a new chain: e.g. 'I would like to achieve _____'

Contributors

Shaira Martinez is now a graphic designer and illustrator who hopes to start her own illustration company one day. You can contact her at shairamartinez25@gmail.com.

Stella Windridge is a graphic designer and textile designer who is inspired by the colours of the Australian landscape. To see this in the original (colour) version of her illustration, read the May 2019 edition of *eValbec*. You can view more of Stella's work on instagram at [@stelwind](https://www.instagram.com/stelwind)

Thank you to Lynne Matheson for the 'responding to text' teaching ideas and to Rosangela Care, Coordinator, Diploma of Graphic Design, Swinburne University.

If you have students who are talented visual communicators and might like to provide artwork for *Fine Print*, please email fineprint@valbec.org.au

Foreign Correspondent

Yes, I Can! Building adult literacy from Havana to Wilcannia via Timor-Leste

by Ruth Ratcliffe

'It gives you a lot of confidence, you know and builds the self-esteem up in all of us. We're quiet people out here and ever since we've done the Yes, I Can! campaign we just open up to everyone. You know we just speak out on behalf of our kids you know. We've done a lot and its done a lot for us too.'



This snippet from my first conversation with Shona¹ came after I turned up on her doorstep in Wilcannia in 2016, having been directed to her home in the unique small town way, no numbers or street names, just 'turn down the street where you see the painting of an eagle, then it's the third house on your right'. I was at the beginning of my PhD journey, had never visited Wilcannia before and didn't know anyone in this over-researched, somewhat notorious town in far-west New South Wales. But when I explained that I wanted to find out about the impact of the adult literacy campaign which ran four years prior, people were happy to direct me to Shona and others who had participated. Shona joined the campaign as a literacy student. After graduating she won a role as classroom facilitator, then became the coordinator and today, seven years after the literacy campaign moved on to other towns, is still in full time employment, as are many other graduates. These are huge achievements in Wilcannia.

Wilcannia is built on the lands of the Barkindji people and was once a busy river port. The paddle steamers that brought wool down the Darling River or Barka to Adelaide are long gone and the Barka has been reduced to a series of putrid pools where mass fish kills made national headlines earlier this year. The Barkindji (which translates as people of the river) have known their Barka was being killed for a long time. In 2017 Badger Bates, a Barkindji artist, educator and elder wrote:

For the last five to eight years, we say the Barka's buka. That means the Darling River's dead. It stinks of the dead fish. It's rotten... In the last five years, our elders are giving up and dying. Then our young people are committing suicide and it's hurting, because of the river (Bates, 2017).

The social conditions for the Barkindji and other Aboriginal nations across far-west New South Wales reflect this environmental degradation. The Aboriginal unemployment rate across the region is 24% compared to 6% among the non-Aboriginal population. The rate of family violence is five times the state average (Freeman, 2018). Education and literacy rates are far below the state average. Yet as Unangax scholar Eve Tuck wrote, 'even when communities are broken and conquered, they are so much more than that – so much more than this incomplete story is an act of aggression' (Tuck, 2009, p. 416). There are many stories of cultural strength, solidarity, survival and achievement. The Yes, I Can! Aboriginal Adult Literacy campaign is one of these stories.

The campaign started as a pilot in Wilcannia in 2012. Over three intakes, 23 adults graduated and 17 more who couldn't complete the classes also reported benefits and positive outcomes. Communities up the river heard of Wilcannia's success and in 2013 Bourke and Enngonia launched their own campaigns. They were followed by Brewarrina, Walgett, Weilmoringle, Boggabilla, Toomelah and Collarenebri. By the end of 2018 over two hundred people had graduated from the campaign shifting people from an entry level Pre-Level One or Level One to an exit point at Level One or Two on at least one performance indicator within the Learning, Reading and/or Writing domains of the Australian Core Skills Framework (McLean, 2012).

Community support for the campaign has been strong, and comments such as this are typical: 'At last, at *last* there is some program that really makes an impact on our people lives.' But what is the Yes, I Can! Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign and how did it come to outback New South Wales?

Yes, I Can! (*Yo, Si Puedo!* in Spanish) was developed over 15,000 kilometres away in Havana, Cuba. Since it was developed in 2001 it has been deployed across 30 countries allowing 10 million people to develop basic literacy (Valdés, 2015). It has been translated into many languages including English; French; Portuguese; Guinea-Bissau Creole; Quechua, Aymara and Guarani (indigenous languages spoken variously in Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador and Paraguay); Swahili and Tetum. Given the global reach of this campaign, remarkably little is known about it among adult educators, particularly in the English-speaking world.

From 2005 until 2010 Yes, I Can! was deployed across the new nation of Timor-Leste. Operating with the Tetum name of *Los, Hau Bele!* it allowed 70,000 Timorese (one fifth of the total illiterate population) to develop basic literacy. Kirsty Sword-Gusmao, a leading Australian-East Timorese activist, and former First Lady praised the campaign:

The Cuban adult literacy program has been remarkably successful and has shown responsiveness to the needs and wishes of learners in terms of its language-use model (cited in Hannan, 2012, p. 45).

It was while working on the evaluation of the campaign in Timor-Leste that three Australians became alerted to the potential for a similar campaign to be implemented here (Boughton & Durnan, 2014).

Addressing a need

The Australian government has been aware of the need for a national Aboriginal adult literacy campaign since at least 1988 when the Aboriginal Education Taskforce recommended a national campaign to raise adult literacy levels. The report estimated that over 50% of adults had significant literacy difficulties yet this recommendation has never been acted on and Aboriginal communities continue to struggle with low rates of adult literacy. As part of the roll-out of the Yes, I Can! literacy campaign 880 people have been surveyed and 63% of these people self-identify or are identified by family as not being able to function independently due to low literacy.

Aboriginal-led research has continued to point to the important role of literacy in improving education, health and other life outcomes (Bell, Boughton, & Bartlett, 2004). After working on the evaluation of the campaign in Timor-Leste, Professor Jack Beetson, a Ngemba man from north-west New South Wales decided such an

approach should be trialled in Australia. Along with Dr Bob Boughton and Deborah Durnan who also evaluated the Timorese campaign, and other Aboriginal leaders including Pat Anderson AO, and Donna Ah Chee, Beetson spearheaded the Wilcannia pilot project and has subsequently established the Literacy for Life Foundation (LFLF) to coordinate the roll-out of the long-needed Aboriginal adult literacy campaign.

However, in Australia as in many other countries, governments are reluctant to fund programs which address the problem of adult literacy on a community-wide scale. Instead literacy programs tend to be associated only with entry to the employment market. The idea of a campaign which achieves total adult literacy as a human right has receded from the conceptual universe of policy makers across much of the world. Yet until the 1980s such campaigns were standard development practice in many countries (e.g. China 1949–54, Tanzania 1971–83, Nicaragua 1980). It was organisations such as the World Bank and their control of significant aid funding which influenced the international community to prioritise universal primary education in place of such campaigns (Boughton, 2013; Jones, 1990).

My PhD research explores the ways in which adult literacy impacts on the relationship between communities and schooling and how the prioritisation of basic schooling will struggle to achieve significantly improved outcomes while the adult population lacks sufficient literacy. The Cuban campaign is associated with many, although not all, international efforts which have retained a determined focus on achieving full adult literacy. In fact, Cuba has proposed to the international community that it could eradicate illiteracy globally within 10 years at the cost of just \$1.5 billion (Canfux Gutiérrez, Corona González and Hickling-Hudson, 2012).

Internationalism

It is impossible to do justice to the story of Cuban literacy education and internationalism here however much has been published about Cuba's own 1961 literacy campaign, including the recent *Rebel Literacy* by Mark Abendroth (2009). *The Capacity to Share* edited by Anne Hickling-Hudson, Jorge Corona González and Rosemary Preston (2012) details the various international health and education missions of the Cuban people. A strong focus on human development means Cuba has some of the best education and health outcomes in the hemisphere and a large cohort of trained professionals. This focus on

human development lays the basis for Cuba's 'capacity to share' professional expertise across the globe. Compared to the dominant values operating in international relations Cuba's focus on exporting education and health care are testament to the humanitarian, ecological socialism which Cuba continues to work for.

While Cuban expertise and personnel are integral to the campaign, Yes, I Can! is far from a 'one size fits all' approach which imposes a singular method across the world. Rather than 'one size fits all', a more useful conceptualisation of Yes, I Can! is as a scaffold which has been designed based on extensive international experience. One of the most important aspects of this scaffold is that local leadership and staff be employed and supported to localise and contextualise the campaign thereby creating a new, highly specific cladding for the scaffold in each location.

Local ownership

This process of developing local ownership of the campaign begins well before any classes start. The LFLF, only takes the campaign to communities which invite them in. A series of meetings are held with all Aboriginal leaders and organisations in a town to ensure there is community wide support. Then a steering group is established which includes all factions of a town's leadership and LFLF staff. This group is responsible for beginning the first phase of the campaign known as 'Socialisation and Mobilisation'. The purpose of this phase is captured by the slogan, 'Literacy: everyone's right, everyone's business' and aims to shift the community's understanding of low literacy from an individual to a community problem. A household literacy survey is conducted in which local people are employed to go house to house to ascertain literacy needs and let people know about the campaign. People were asked whether they would like to join as a student, apply to work for the campaign or contribute as a volunteer. All organisations – the Land Council, Community Working Party, schools, health service, local government, media and so on, are encouraged to publicise and contribute to the campaign. Consequently, low literacy begins to be seen not as an individual shame, but a social problem which impacts the entire community and which all community members have a responsibility to address. This approach continues throughout the campaign.

Local staff take the lead

The second phase of the campaign is the literacy classes which are delivered via a unique combination of DVD



Literacy for Life Foundation students at work in Brewarrina.

lessons and a local facilitator. Reflecting the educational reality of communities where education outcomes are well below average and schools struggle to retain students beyond the compulsory years, the literacy levels of the facilitators is often not high (selection criteria for the roles requests a Year 10 equivalent). However, the fact that facilitators are known to participants and are sometimes family members, provides important reassurance and familiarity for people who are understandably anxious about re-entering a classroom. Facilitators are carefully selected and provided with an initial period of training as well as ongoing capacity development. Literacy students and the wider community take enormous pride in the development of those who step up to teach in the campaign. Consequently, the process is also one of huge learning and personal development for the facilitators. For example, one facilitator reported: 'It's certainly built up my confidence. I didn't think I'd be able to stand up in front of everyone and after doing it a few times it was like I'd been doing it for years.'

As well as the facilitators, a local coordinator is also employed to oversee the ongoing socialisation and success of the campaign. The work of local staff is supported by professionally qualified staff from LFLF and a technical adviser from Cuba.

A simple low-cost method

The DVD lessons are prepared by expert literacy teachers and depict a demonstration literacy class played by actors. These classes start at very basic level, building letter and sound awareness and simple punctuation, and develop to a point where participants can independently fill in forms, write a brief descriptive letter and a short paragraph expressing opinion on a familiar topic. An 'alphabetic' approach is used in which letters are associated with numbers as even in communities with very low literacy

people have some familiarity with numbers through shopping so using numbers allows people to move from the known to the unknown. The classes are also organised around a series of positive messages (about learning, family, environment, health, music and so on) which contain the key letters or sounds which are the focus of that lesson. The characters and the stories of the actor-students develop almost like a soap opera that the literacy students follow. Importantly the DVD lessons provide a demonstration for both the students and facilitators of how to learn and how to teach in a classroom setting. This is very important in communities with limited positive experiences of schooling.

The facilitators are responsible for playing the DVD, they pause it at various points to allow the real-life literacy class to discuss what they have just watched and complete various literacy exercises which they have just seen demonstrated. Facilitators answer student questions and help those who need it. Prior to each class the facilitators work with a local coordinator and other LFLF staff to preview the topics that will be covered, clarify any questions and develop local examples for words or discussion topics where necessary. The use of DVD lessons allows the literacy classes to be led by locals and minimises unnecessary duplication of resources.

The version of Yes, I Can! being used in Australia was initially developed for use in the English-speaking Caribbean island of Grenada. It is not uncommon for Yes, I Can! to be piloted with a version of the campaign prepared for another country with a shared colonial language. For example, in Timor-Leste the campaign was first piloted with a Portuguese version created for Brazil. Subsequently a new version was created in one of the main local languages Tetum which is far more widely spoken than Portuguese (Boughton, 2010).

So far, in the Australian context, the 'foreignness' of the Grenadian lessons appears to be a strength rather than a weakness. Very few people in Wilcannia, particularly those with low literacy have any opportunity for international travel. The literacy lessons in the DVD are interspersed with scenarios from daily life in Grenada which participants find interesting. In Wilcannia, the community built on this cultural education by adding an extra session to their weekly schedule in which they asked the Cuban technical adviser to teach them about various aspects of Cuban culture and participants reciprocated by sharing Barkindji culture. The internationalism of the program appears to cut

across the isolation and demoralisation that people with low literacy often experience. To learn that there are other people in a far-off island who also experience low literacy in the wake of British colonialism helps people understand that their low literacy is not their fault and instead see that it is the result of specific historical events. Students also learn about the overall reach of Yes, I Can! which further strengthens their sense of being part of an international literacy community.

Where to from here?

The literacy classes are followed by a third phase, known as Post-Literacy which was discussed in detail in a previous edition of *Fine Print* (Durnan & Boughton, 2018). Beyond Post-Literacy there are still big challenges for the new literacy graduates. Their communities have survived decades of injustice at every level and without the development of sustainable economic infrastructure this will continue to be the case. It is not that there is not work to be done in these communities – the ecological repair of the Barka and surrounding ecosystems, on country care for the elderly and sick, rebuilding the shamefully sub-standard housing and, not least, beginning to address decades of educational injustice by rolling out the adult literacy campaign on a much bigger scale, are just some of the employment opportunities that could be provided across the region.

Yet, every person who graduates from Yes, I Can! makes these already strong communities even stronger, another step closer to realising the true human potential that an ongoing process of colonisation has done so much to destroy. In the words of a local staff member,

'They [the students] no longer think "I failed school", they realise "school failed me" and then I went back and learnt with Yes, I Can!'

Note

- 1 Name has been changed

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Image courtesy Adam Sharman.

Open Forum

Responses to the Review into Australian Vocational Education and Training 2019

Compiled and introduced by Sarah Deasey

The federal government has conducted a review into VET with consultations across the sector taking place between November 2018 and January 2019. Steven Joyce, the former New Zealand Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment, has conducted the review on behalf of the Morrison government. The findings are to be presented in March 2019 and *Fine Print* will keep readers posted in the next edition about the outcomes of the review. Government updates about the review are available at <https://www.pmc.gov.au/domestic-policy/vet-review>

The stated objectives of the review are to find:

... how the Australian Government's investment in VET could be more effective to provide Australians with the skills they need to be successful throughout their working life. It will also focus on ensuring Australian businesses, including small and family businesses and businesses in rural and regional areas, have the skills they need to support their business growth... The review is focused on practical steps the Australian Government could take to improve our VET sector, alongside a longer term road map for the future. (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2018)

One item in the Terms of Reference is particularly relevant to the adult literacy numeracy and basic education sector:

5. It may review whether additional support is needed for vulnerable cohorts, including those currently unemployed and at risk of unemployment, or those with low literacy and numeracy skills. (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2018)

Adult literacy, numeracy and basic education provision is delivered by many different organisations across Australia. In Victoria, these are TAFE Institutes, and Adult Community Education (ACE) organisations, which include Community Colleges, Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres, and Learn Locals in Victoria.

Responses to the review, which are relevant to the adult literacy sector, include those submitted by the Australian Council of Adult Literacy (ACAL), Adult Learning Australia (ALA) in conjunction with Neighbourhood Houses Victoria, Community Colleges Australia (CCA), and the Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA).

ACAL is a national association for the promotion of adult literacy policy and practice. The ACAL committee includes representatives from state associations such as VALBEC. The ACAL submission is reprinted, with permission, in full below. We have also provided brief summaries of some other relevant responses and links so you can read the responses in full on the organisations' websites.

ACAL submission to VET review

<http://acal.edu.au/vet-review-acals-response/>

The Australian Council of Adult Literacy (ACAL) supports the provision of literacy and numeracy services within VET. However, literacy and numeracy (LN) provision in the sector needs to go beyond focusing on the most vulnerable people in the workforce and in vocational training. ACAL strongly contends that in addition to addressing obvious disadvantage, literacy and numeracy support is a crucial component of all learning environments, regardless of AQF level. Literacy and numeracy development is a necessary component of all skill development and these skills will be acquired more effectively when specialist LN staff are included within the teaching teams.

What is working well in the VET sector?

- There is growing awareness of adult literacy and numeracy in vocational education and training (e.g. National Foundation Skills Strategy [NFSS], Australian Industry Group reports, Professional Standards Framework for Foundation Skills, and the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies [PIAAC]).

- The additional LN focused units in the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment have been beneficial in raising the understanding of student LN needs by the VET workforce.
- Funded programs delivered in VET that focus on LN provide sound models for services across Australia (e.g. Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills in Western Australia; 26TEN in Tasmania).
- Continued funding and development of the Reading Writing Hotline enables adults to access LN services wherever they are across Australia.

What are the key challenges in the VET sector?

Access to qualified literacy and numeracy specialists: There is a demonstrated need for specialists with LN qualifications and experience, but qualifications to become a specialist are limited and lack funding. There is also a lack of incentive for people to undertake a specialised qualification in LN. This could be rectified by driving demand, recognising the value of LN specialists, and increasing the requirement on RTOs to employ some LN specialists to oversee LN support. Workplace based LN specialists are also needed.

The implementation of the Foundation Skills Training Package (FSK TP):

The FSK TP has caused a narrowing of the offerings for LN in many states and territories, which is highly problematic. If a jurisdiction decides to use the FSK TP to support vocational students, it needs to be funded broadly to encourage use and to enable RTOs to employ LN staff to deliver the units in a variety of contexts, including but not limited to, team teaching, support, online and in the workplace.

The FSK TP has given some visibility to those with aspirations to enter or re-enter the workforce but it represents only one component of need. The others include employed workers who need to upgrade their knowledge and skills with programs that are located in workplaces and people in the community who need improved literacy and numeracy skills for their daily lives. For example, the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program was consistently well-reviewed and there are models of such good practice available. However, one of the serious limitations of this program was that it was most successful in those larger-sized sites that already had well-established training programs. We need to develop new ways of helping all workers who need to re-skill and up-skill in all types and sizes of workplaces. In the past, community literacy programs appeared to be successful in

helping people manage their everyday lives better. Now there needs to be new thinking about this group and how their needs can be optimally met.

Literacy and numeracy assessments are an essential component of entry into VET. The process to assist a potential student to feel comfortable enough to undertake this, and to ensure that it is a worthwhile experience for all involved, requires expertise and time. Currently there is no consistent funding model to support the process of pre-assessment for VET students.

What changes would you make to the VET sector?

- Develop a LN policy to drive and shape LN within VET
- Drive demand for specialised LN qualifications for staff
- Fund LN support for all VET students
- Fund the National Foundation Skills Strategy
- Acknowledge the VET sector's role in preparing adult students for university and in contributing to the adult education needs of families, the community and individuals, beyond its core employment and workplace focus.

How can VET help Australians prepare for the future workforce (as industry requirements and job patterns change)?

Fund literacy and numeracy and general education in the VET space to teach transferable skills, learning strategies and to promote life-long learning engagement. Having such a narrow focus on what industry wants now, or what industry *thinks* they want, is doing a disservice to students and more broadly to society. Industry needs to go back to taking some responsibility to train new staff, rather than making VET a training ground for a here and now skill. A focus on skills PLUS general education and LN provides graduates with portable skills, critical thinking, and the ability as global citizens to transfer and adapt a broad skillset.

Adult Learning Australia and Neighbourhood Houses Victoria

<https://ala.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ALA-VET-Review-Response-2019.pdf>

ALA in conjunction with Neighbourhood Houses Victoria make a strong case for the critical role of ACE in the provision of adult literacy, general training to vulnerable cohorts, and the need to resource ACE

provision to a level that is sustainable. ALA also emphasises the need for more flexible approaches to learning for these cohorts:

Adults with low literacy are often the products of poor formal schooling, poverty, family dysfunction and a myriad of other issues that can impede their ability to learn. A better approach for adults with very low literacy is purposeful, locally determined, non-formal adult literacy programs that address the issue from a holistic perspective and embrace an intergenerational approach if required. (NHVIC and ALA 2018, cited in ALA 2018, p.9)

Australian Council of TESOL Associations

http://www.tesol.org.au/files/files/598_ACTA_submission_to_the_VET_Review_-_January_2019.pdf

The ACTA submission includes specific reference to the AMEP (Adult Migrant English Program) and SEE (Skills for Education and Employment) program and calls for the discontinuation of the use of ACSF (Australian Core Skills Framework) in measures of learner progress pending a detailed review. The submission also calls for the improvement of working conditions and facilities for teachers. ACTA also questions the need for the TAE (Certificate IV in Training and Assessment) as a requirement for higher or equivalent TESOL qualifications.

Community Colleges Australia

<https://cca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Community-Colleges-Australia-Submission-to-National-VET-Review-25Jan2019.pdf>

The CCA submission provides extensive evidence to demonstrate the strength of community provision in VET in reaching vulnerable learner cohorts.

Australia's community providers do some of the heaviest lifting in adult literacy and numeracy with concentration on lower level training. Yet funding for foundations skills – both the rate of funding per student contact – as well as the total amount available – continues to languish. (p.21)

CCA also points out the enduring digital divide in Australia and the place of community providers in addressing this, particularly in rural and regional areas.

Reference

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (2018). *Terms of Reference – Expert review of Australia's vocational education and training system*. Retrieved from <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resource-centre/domestic-policy/terms-reference-vtec-review>

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The Invisible Classroom: Relationships, Neuroscience & Mindfulness in School

By Kirke Olson

If you are looking for a text that introduces you to the key concepts of neuroscience (the structure and function of the human brain and the nervous system) and how it applies to the classroom situation, look no further.

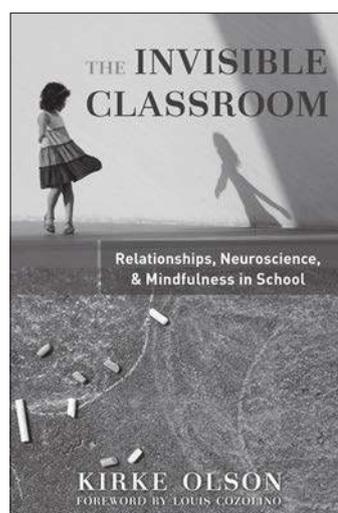
I was excited to read this text, not only because it breaks down difficult concepts of neuroscience into easily understood ideas, but also because it is very easily adaptable for the adult learning environment. This gave me cause to wonder and question my own work setting: my practice, workplace culture and student difficulties.

Each chapter introduces a new aspect of neuroscience and how it can be applied in a learning environment. At the end of each chapter, Olson offers 'Tools for Schools' – practical tips and exercises for educators to use to create safe classrooms and relationships with students.

The main premise of the text is that optimal teaching and learning occurs as a result of the relationship between teacher and student which is created through connectedness and a sense of safety, belonging and acceptance.

The Invisible Classroom refers to the '... web of neurological and human connections that create the context for teaching, learning and living' (p.xiii). From this point in the preface we are guided to understanding key concepts of neuroscience with examples from Olson's experiences as a school counsellor interacting with teachers, students and their parents at Parker Academy, a private school in Concorde, New Hampshire for children in years 7 to 12 who have a diagnosis of anxiety, ADHD and/or autism, or have needed to attend a 'non-mainstream' school.

Olson weaves the stories of two students, Tucker and Jimmy, throughout the book; both have come from mainstream schools because they didn't fit in. Olson uses examples of interactions they have with each other, their teachers and their families to show when they are uncomfortable or in otherwise difficult situations, so that we can understand the link between behaviour and neuroscience.



At Parker Academy, when a student arrives at school for the first time, they have often been referred from a mainstream school because their initial school didn't work for them. A key to successfully working with students whose experiences and ideas of school are negative is to offer 'disconfirming experiences'.

Olson explains that whatever our experiences, the neurons in our brains wire together to encode those experiences, creating a sort of map. Each time we have a similar experience, the layers on the map become more embedded. This is known as Hebb's Law, or 'What wires together, fires together'. Students who have many negative experiences of schooling will, without being conscious of it, always be looking for threat and have a negative bias towards school. When neural pathways have been created by numerous negative learning and/or school experiences, it takes a lot of work to challenge and recreate those neural pathways into positive ones. The culture of the school must also be a safe place and that must start with the leaders and teachers.

Olson outlines the importance of 'disconfirming' experiences that educators at all levels can take to alter a student's neuroception (the non-conscious that acts to influence future actions) of their sense of place and value in the classroom.

A concerted effort is made by all staff (administration and teachers), to welcome new students by warmly greeting them and their families. This may be the first step in offering a disconfirming experience, a beginning to creating new neural pathways.

Students' strengths are used to promote learning in other areas. One student found success after many years of struggling with reading because his strengths in sports was nurtured until he felt more confident, which allowed him to have a more 'growth mindset' attitude toward learning.

Olson explains the roles of the brain's functions, such as fight, flight, freeze, and how that fits in to the classroom environment. Our brains are pre-set to look for connection with other humans; we are social animals, and connecting with others serves many purposes. However, for those people who may *have a reason* to be looking for danger, the brain is also scanning for threats. Because of past experiences, what one person perceives as a warm welcome, may be perceived as a threat by others.

Attachment theory, initially developed by John Bowlby and further developed by Mary Ainsworth and Mary Main, explains the primary caregiver's role in nurturing the infant's personal development by attuning to their needs. The style of attachment the infant developed would depend on how the primary caregiver attuned to the infant's needs and would result in a secure attachment style or an insecure attachment style. This 'style' would usually follow children into their adult relationships. Olson explains that students with a more insecure style of attachment may look to their teacher to be an attachment figure. Teachers who understand that they can be an emotional base for their students are in a position to effect some positive change by reassuring students enough to let them know that they are a safe and secure person in their learning lives, and that real changes can occur to allow a calm brain state where learning is possible.

Olson explains the key concepts of neuroscience and how it affects relationships in learning environments – students, educators, leaders and administration staff.

Through his rich storytelling prose we learn about the difference between being told we are safe to feeling a sense of safety. We learn about what builds a safe and secure relationship and how our brains are wired to look for safety and connection as well as for threat and danger.

In reading this text, I have gained a very welcome understanding of the brain and how it works in our relationships with others, not just in the work and learning environment but also in life more generally.

I read this book after successfully applying to the Institute of Specialised Skills Foundation for a fellowship grant that explores neuroscience and adult literacy teaching and learners.

This book became the basis for my research and led me to explore the concepts outlined for an adult literacy context. It is easily adapted and I would strongly recommend it to any educator, teacher or otherwise, who is interested in understanding more about the brain and its relationship to learning.

The Invisible Classroom: Relationships, Neuroscience & Mindfulness in School (2014) is published by W. W. Norton & Company.

Kirke Olson is confirmed as this year's keynote speaker at VALBEC's annual conference on May 17. See www.valbec.org.au for further details.

Linno Rhodes works at Olympic Adult Education in West Heidelberg. She has been on the *Fine Print* Editorial Committee and VALBEC committee for a number of years.

What's Out There

Workwise English Puzzles by Clare Harris

Reviewed by Lynne Matheson

Doing puzzles is good for your brain. As someone who has done crossword puzzles for most of my adult life, I can vouch for that sense of satisfaction when the puzzle is completed, and all the clues are solved. At the same time, I like to know that some new words have been added to my personal word bank (*etui* is one new word I doubt I will ever use). I also admit being a *Words with Friends* addict – don't get me started on some of the bizarre words that come up in the course of a game. Whether I am staving off the effects of ageing while sharpening my cognitive skills is a matter for the researchers to continue to puzzle over.

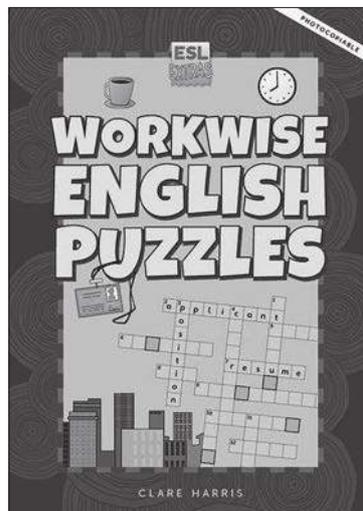
I do believe that regular engagement with word puzzles leads to increased word knowledge and language skills. Back when I was teaching, the nine-letter word challenge was a kick start activity for my Monday morning adult literacy class. It stimulated a whole range of language exploration and practical activities that would lead to further reading or writing. I would also create basic word puzzles using an online tool. Life would have been much easier at the time if I had a resource such as *Workwise English Puzzles*.

The hidden word payoff

With over twenty years of teaching experience, Clare Harris has created engaging and authentic reading materials for EAL students through her publishing company The Book Next Door. Readers will be familiar with her *ESL Extras* series of readers.

Clare decided to include simple puzzles in the activities for her reading books and the next step was to create a photocopiable puzzle book, based on 'magazine-style' puzzles. She liked the format as it has the added attraction of that 'find a hidden word' payoff.

The first book she created was *Extra Easy Puzzles*, which proved to be very popular, and the second one, *Workwise English Puzzles*, is certain to be really useful across EAL, VET, VCAL and adult literacy classes with workplace skills as their focus. It makes for some great teaching and



learning opportunities in the one package of printable and projectable puzzles that can be used in a variety of ways, with the added bonus of saving some precious preparation time.

What's in the book?

The aim of *Workwise English Puzzles* is to provide engaging and fun activities as learners review the language of job-seeking and employment. Additionally there are opportunities to learn some new vocabulary and explore the kind of idiomatic language common to the workplace.

The puzzles are in sections:

- Jobs and applications
- Starting a new job
- How's it going?
- Getting it right
- Talking to workmates
- Think about it (includes pair work puzzles and a board game)

The puzzles are aimed at the pre-intermediate to low intermediate level with suggestions as to how they may be used for individual or pair work. Of OH&S relevance are the puzzles that deal with safety; 'Stay safe', and awareness of appropriate protective clothing; 'What do we wear?'. There are some good communication activities; 'Which word? Get the email right', and practise for talking on the phone that could be extended with partner work or

whole group discussions. The 'Quick Quiz #4: What do they mean?' has some examples of acronyms that are commonly used and likely to cause confusion OTJ.

The Start Talking! game can be copied onto A3 paper and is bound to provide lots of casual conversation practice. There are sample pages you can download on the website and these give a good sense of the language level, format and range of puzzles. You will also find one of these pages reprinted overleaf.

You can also read a little more on Clare's blog at: <https://clareharris.com/workwise-english-puzzles-looking-at-workwise-language/>

Workwise English Quiz videos

Teachers have told Clare how much they like the quizzes in the puzzle books; they use them at the end of term, at the end of the week, as team activities etc. (quiz nights and quiz shows are an authentic part of our culture). Feedback has shown that teachers like the language discussion that arises, and they'd like to do more quizzes. However, often their students aren't quite ready for the quick reading skills required of 'on-your-mobile' competitive online quizzes.

So, Clare has created some quiz videos with a Workwise flavour. They are basically slide shows with 20 questions, each with a photo and just three short answer options. Each set of 20 questions runs as a 10-minute video. There's a timer, so that students have 20 seconds for a group to read the question and make their decision before the buzzer goes off and the answer pops up. The videos can also be left playing in a classroom during the break, or on the screen in the foyer. At time of printing, the videos were not yet available but information about these and other resources can be found at <https://www.thebooknextdoor.com/>.

The need for some instant resources with an Australian English focus is an eternal one and *Workwise English Puzzles* makes a well-considered contribution to this space.

Workwise English Puzzles (2018) is published by The Book Next Door. A list of suppliers is available at <https://www.thebooknextdoor.com/suppliers/>

Lynne Matheson has been a member of the VALBEC executive committee since 2000 and *Fine Print* editorial group since 2002, with a term as *Fine Print* editor from 2014 to 2017. She currently works in Learning and Development at Melbourne Polytechnic.

CHECK THE AD!

Do you know the language of job advertisements?

Match the job with the job description, using the 'answer letters'. Then read down (↓) the answer letters to find a new word.

- 1. Hairdresser
- 2. Childcare Worker
- 3. Gardener
- 4. Cook
- 5. Waitperson
- 6. Software Developer
- 7. Truck Driver
- 8. Youth Worker
- 9. Concrete Worker
- 10. Dental Assistant

Working with 'at-risk' young people. **u**

Must have HC licence. **o**

Certificate II or III in horticulture preferred, plus pest spray licence. **c**

Applicants will work in both surgery and reception. Excellent patient care a must. **d**

Plan and prepare nutritious meals and snacks. **k**

Superior cutting and colour skills. **b**

Are you a recent IT graduate? **r**

You will have previous experience working on construction sites. **n**

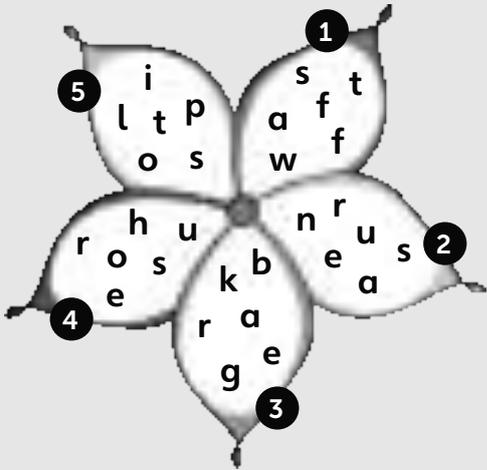
Correctly take and deliver orders to tables. **g**

Dedication to working in the early learning environment. **a**

THE NEW WORD IS: _____ **(WHAT'S YOURS?)**

MIXED UP WORDS #1

Find the 5-letter word in each petal of the flower. There will be one extra letter. Use the extra letters to find a new word.



- 1. Workers in a business: _____
- 2. Works in a hospital: _____
- 3. Makes and sells bread: _____
- 4. Working times: _____
- 5. Flies planes: _____

THE NEW WORD IS:

Look at job ads and find 3 new words or phrases.



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www.valbec.org.au

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