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## Editorial

Welcome to edition one of Volume 25. Yes, *Fine Print* has been going for 25 years, which is a significant time in the tenuously funded field of adult literacy. We still have plenty to talk about and much to debate.

The editorial group has decided to trace a number of topics in each issue during 2002. These will include:

- How do we manage the special learning needs of young people?
- What is the place of online learning and technological literacy?
- What do 'New Literacies' mean for our teaching practice?
- Outcomes, standards, and accountabilities: resist, comply, subvert, tolerate or ignore?
- How can we position ourselves in the face of the latest policies?

More will emerge as the year goes on, and we encourage you to respond to issues raised.

In this autumn edition we have a number of articles that reflect current issues and long-standing preoccupations.

We have reprinted UK literacy theorist Mary Hamilton's recently published article *Sustainable Literacies*. Hamilton wants policy makers to understand that literacy is a social practice, ever changing according to context, rather than a fixed set of skills. There are, she says, institutional literacies and vernacular literacies, and while we need control of institutional literacies, vernacular literacies as instruments of lifelong learning are often ignored by educational institutions.

Rob McCormack advocates a framing of language and literacy teaching through the ancient practice of rhetoric where students can learn these spoken and written discourses of institutions and power for themselves in a

formal and explicit way. Jack Frawley writes about a particular vernacular literacy of Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory—images and texts which could be interpreted to outside eyes as graffiti, but are in fact powerful representations of community culture.

Tricia Bowen tells us about her new publication which uses the visual literacy of national and domestic maps to tell the rich, varied and often traumatic life stories of our learners. Jane Casey talks about her work in developing pathways for young people entering the ACE sector. Helen McCrae constructs a powerful genre, a ministerial briefing paper on the needs of young people and the power of ACE to meet those needs, using the foundation of the even more powerful narratives about the lives of some of our young students.

Rosa McKenna brings us down to earth with a description of the Australian Quality Training Framework, and the implementation processes regarding language, literacy and communication for Registered Training Organisations. Margaret Hanrahan gives the sessional teacher some common sense survival strategies while Robyn Tymms tells some refreshing stories about the 'immeasurable' and powerful outcomes she sees with her ALBE students.

This is the last edition for Helena Spyrou, who has edited *Fine Print* for the past year. Thank you, Helena, for your hard work and the depth of knowledge you have brought to the journal, and we look forward to your continued input on the editorial committee. We welcome Jenni Oldfield as the new editor. Jenni has had extensive experience in the ALBE field as a teacher, curriculum writer and researcher.

This edition offers you a balance of theory, policy and practice. We look forward to your responses.

The Editorial Committee

**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.**

# ACE, literacy and LLENs: working together

by Helen Macrae

**Representatives from schools, TAFEs, ACE, local government authorities and employers are joining together around the same Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) table, and talking to each other like they never did before. Helen Macrae elaborates.**

With a hundred years of difference and/or silence to overcome—different histories, cultures, responsibilities, understandings of governance, values, and what have you—the talk isn't always polite. We all struggle with a range of problems particular to our own educational turf. We all feel at least a bit protective of our own patch. We all know a bit more money would make our lives easier. We all come from over a decade of struggles for survival in the so-called level playing fields of competition policy.

## Is the mainstream best for young people?

Peter Kirby, chair of the ACFE Board, spoke at an ACE forum on 16 April 2002 about his consultations prior to publication of The Kirby Report. Bear in mind this story is hearsay—I wasn't present. I'm told he was asked this question by the principal of a secondary college:

When you framed your recommendations, did you consider what benefits young people would get from TAFE, compared with the benefits they get from ACE?

The principal's sub-text seemed to listeners to be this: bigger institutions can offer young people wider, stronger and better pathways. Kirby's reply was along these lines:

Yes, we did consider the different merits of TAFE and ACE carefully. One way we did this was to listen to what young people themselves had to say.

I'll illustrate with a story about a country ACE agency that had no experience in working with disaffected young people. In their town there was a pregnant 16-year-old girl. She'd been kicked out of the local secondary college, didn't live at home, and hung about the town in desperate circumstances. She heard about a place where you could learn things and appeared there one day. The staff was unsure, even fearful. They had no experience helping young people in her circumstances. But they listened to what she wanted to achieve. They decided they could help her towards some of this after all, and since that time 15 other young people have followed her into that ACE centre.

Compare that with what might happen in a big TAFE where there's less flexibility. She might go to reception and whoever spoke to her might say, 'here's our program and here's an application form'. If she replied, 'but I'm not sure what I want to enroll in', she might get the reply, kindly enough, 'come back when you work out what you want to do'.

Kirby concluded by saying that bigger institutions might have something to learn from ACE.

TAFE and ACE each do roughly 50 per cent of the adult literacy and basic education funded by the Victorian government. Jointly, TAFE and ACE in Victoria have a proven track record of nationally—even internationally—respected innovative, cooperative, complementary and progressive adult literacy education. Many, if not most, of the people LLENs are set up to care about are young adults who desperately need literacy skills and say they want to learn them in an environment that respects them as young adults. They get good teaching, good fun and respect from most TAFE and ACE agencies. Yet outsiders, especially in the city, frequently see ACE as trivial, irrelevant or likely to weaken the effort of schools and TAFEs.

## Why does ACE trouble many schools and TAFE people?

- Is it because ACE is local and small and appears to offer few options—even though these options are usually foundation education pathways, and are moulded to the needs of individuals rather than big stakeholders and big systems?
- Is it because ACE teachers are relatively poorly paid—even though the standard of ACE teaching is high and some ACE teachers are awesomely gifted but choose to work in ACE for a variety of reasons?
- Is it because ACE is staffed 90 per cent by women who are poorly unionised and don't go in for enough political (for example, feminist) analysis about how ACE is structured and funded?
- Is it because the stories of ACE success are badly told? Or not told at all?
- Is it because of the way ACE stories are heard? Is it because certain powerful people with vested interests

refuse to recognise that ACE makes a useful and complementary contribution? If it's a turf war, how can ACE/LLENs promote peace?

### The two Darrens

This account was written by Jude Newcombe as part of a submission by Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre (then known as Learning North West) to the Kirby inquiry. When Peter Kirby addressed a Women in Adult and Vocational Education forum (held to collect data for research published as *Room to Move*) he used this story to conclude his address, reading it aloud with patent warmth and tenderness. Note that the two young men have gone on to do their VCEs elsewhere.

'Just come in to say g'day'. It was the two Darrens (as we shall call them), past students in the youth media program. They exchanged a few more comments and then sauntered off into the common room, slapping a few palms as they went, giving a 'yo' here and there to familiar faces, catching up with old classmates and other adult learners they had got to know during their time studying with the organisation. They stayed for about an hour, had a coffee, and then headed off, saying they might be back next year for the Road Rules class.

Since leaving Learning North West, the two Darrens had moved on to a larger provider to do VCE. One Darren had been with Learning North West for two years, following his expulsion from a local school. The other had come to Learning North West at the beginning of 1999, referred by a social worker soon after she had placed him in supported youth housing in the area. From what they said during their visit, the two young men seemed to be hanging in with their VCE study, and developing some life goals.

It's tempting to continue by talking about the earlier backgrounds of these two young men, whose visit to us was so full of good nature and good will. However, so much is already written about at-risk youth—their fractured lives, homelessness and painful life stories, that this becomes the only lens through which we see them. Besides, as the two Darrens looked down on us at the reception counter, polite yet 'cool', it was as though, for the time being at least, all the terrible things that had happened in their lives had receded. The immediate future had opened up enough for them to have a bounce in their step and a sense of future (and they weren't 'on' anything either!).

This incident illustrates a number of things about the context ACE provides for young people. Firstly, the two Darrens regarded our centre as a friendly place, a place to touch base with now and then; a

place where there are people who know them; a place where what happens to them matters; and where they know they'll get a hearing if they need it, and a free cup of coffee. Of course, having past students call in is something we are used to in the community sector. We are accustomed to a new mother popping in to show us her baby, to a job seeker coming back to have their resume updated or a past student just coming in to say hello. However, the young people seem to call in more often, and before last Christmas and over the summer break, it was mostly the young ones who called in to give a Christmas card and mooch about. Some were a bit at a loss and just called by to 'chill out' for a while, or to use the computers.

Why make such a point of this? Because it is evidence of connection between otherwise alienated young people with a community organisation. In some ways, this attachment is as much an indicator of success as the competencies they have gained towards the certificate they were studying with us. Pathways are not only about where you are going next in education, but where you have been. The tendency to stray off any socially accepted or safe pathway altogether is as much a result of the past and having no one around to help you deal with it, as it is a result of the objective possibilities for the future. Young people easily fall into a vicious cycle where alienation and isolation compound each other. Having a 'home' where they can voice their frustrations is vital to their future success.

In his address to the 1999 ACE Youth in ACE Conference, Professor Richard Catalano from the Communities that Care program, described his widely acclaimed model as 'strengthening communities to support young people'. He suggested that a key question to ask was: How can we intervene in their lives to put them on a positive course and deter them from a negative course?

A number of ACE providers have begun to do at least some of that for the young people they have included in their programs. If this sounds a little guarded, it's because we know that while the two Darrens were brimming with optimism the day they popped in, we also know from experience that waves of frustration, anger and depression can also sweep over them.

The other reason to focus on visit by the two Darrens is to point out that they had learned to be sensitive to the kind of culture that exists in a centre where most participants are over 35, most are women, and most are from backgrounds with languages other than English. Certainly the youth participants have changed the culture of the place and put their stamp on it, but they are also

respectful of the rules, if you like. Working with young students who, for whatever reason, did not fit in at school, we know that many are capable of language we would rather not hear, and behaviour that acts out and challenges. Skilled teachers and staff are needed to work through this behaviour and provide the boundaries and support for young people so that they become respected and respectful members of our community of learners.

### Terri and Shane

This story is from *Room to Move*, an account of 36 partnerships between ACE and schools. The partnerships were established to help disaffected young people and helped to shape Kirby's recommendations. It shows that 'school versus ACE' is the wrong way to think. Best to think of schools and ACE working together to secure futures for disaffected young people.

Terri Nitschke was doing VCE Psychology and English at the Maryborough Learning Centre, with the blessing of Maryborough Regional College:

I'm there instead of at school because you're free to be yourself at the learning centre. They expect us to be adults. There's a lady there who's 70. They don't pressure us but still they expect us to get our work done. I came up from Melbourne at the start of last year and the (regional college) teachers would say things like: 'You're here now. You're under our roof so you do things our way, not yours. You'll do what we say'. They weren't flexible. They were no fun at all to be around. The teachers at the learning centre seem to be more happy, because they're more free to be themselves. We have one teacher who teaches at the school too, and she seems more free to be herself (at the learning centre). Our classes are small. There's only about ten in them so we get more individual attention. My best friend is in the class now. I talked to her about it and she came over to join.

Shane Italia was a Year 9 student in Link to Careers at Maryborough Regional College:

Only ballooning was OK. The idea was to get it over from Bendigo, get it tethered at the school, and travel in it. Four kids got in and landed near Carisbrook. We had to communicate, work as a team and capture the attention of other kids. Nothing much captures me. With ballooning I could relax and sit at tables and we (four) could run it ourselves. I felt I could be more mature. Now we're going to get a shipment of wood and we'll make things from it and stain them and make money from what we make. I can't cooperate with a normal school because I don't enjoy it. I only come now for woodwork and to socialise.

After listening to each other tell us their stories, Terri and Shane had this exchange:

Terri: (responding to Shane's last point) You don't learn anything unless you're having fun.

Shane: You don't learn unless you're learning what you need.

Terri: But you need enjoyment as part of your education.

Shane: Why did I learn from ballooning and not from a classroom? In a classroom you sit learning things you don't need, and writing down what's on the board. Trigonometry. Indonesian. You learn percentages, and times, and do calculations. All things I don't need for the everyday.

Terri: I don't need psychology for the everyday but to know how the brain works is useful. To learn you have to have fun. Everyone needs to have fun, teachers and students.

Shane: What I need is room to do everything. With the woodwork you decide what you'll make yourself. It's open. There's freedom.

What do they see as central to their learning? What are the points of similarity and difference? Are there gender differences? What purposes does their learning serve?

How can schools, TAFEs and adult education centres do better at asking students about how and why they want to learn, and hear the answers? How can we make sure all of our organisational and educational practice, including the way we cooperate, is in the best interests of young people?

### The Maryborough ARK program (from *Room to Move*)

ARK uses the literacy and basic education framework known as the Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA) for 20 young people aged 14–18, 15 hours a week. ARK offers core work in reading, writing and numeracy up to Year 10. The electives are art, landcare, drama, computers, and outdoor recreation. Literacy and numeracy are embedded in the electives as well.

The program is funded by TAFE Vouchers and Loddon Mallee Campaspe Regional Council of ACFE. Students are referred from JPET program, Wendy (the equivalent of a MIPs worker), and Centrelink. ARK coordinator, Kate Stewart, said:

Kids who leave school come straight from school to ARK via Wendy. They like the learning centre because they're not treated like kids, they aren't looked down on, they get to choose, and staff has the time to listen. We miss some, but we get most of them.

They don't do a lot of work experience in ARK because they're not work ready or learning ready. They have trouble keeping appointments. A lot of their energy goes into kicking their drug and alcohol habits, finding a place to live, getting abortions and coping with crisis in their lives. In the current group, eight have alcohol and drug issues, two have child protection issues, one is looking for accommodation and two have psychiatric illness. Two have attempted suicide. If they don't stay in schooling, they can't survive.

What positive/negative views of ACE might this description reinforce?

### Workshop discussion

At the workshop, conducted at the VALBEC Conference on 3 May 2002, participants prepared an outline for a typical ministerial briefing paper on ACE, young people's literacy and LLENs.

Typical briefing papers prepared by public servants for Cabinet, their ministers and/or senior managers, are extremely short. The ideal is a single A4 page. A brief will always follow a particular structure. The structure imposes a strict discipline on the writer—though not all public servants master the discipline by any means.

The briefings might be written because an organisation like VALBEC is to visit the minister, the minister is to visit an ACE provider, the minister has asked for advice, the public servant wants to undertake action that requires the minister's permission, and what have you. Paragraphs are numbered for ease of discussion.

- 1 Memo format:
  - To:
  - From:
  - Date:
  - Subject: The subject has to be accurate, short, comprehensive, expressed in terms of purpose.
- 2 Background/context:
  - The facts, the data, the history of the issue required if the reader is to make a judgment about the recommendations.
- 3 Issues:
  - The range of unresolved issues that exist.
- 4 Options for policy/action:
  - Included where there really are different courses of action open to the agents.
- 5 Recommendations:
  - These are self explanatory, stand-alone statements about what should happen.

There's no reason why community-based advocacy groups like VALBEC can't learn how to use the same structure. They can use this art form for internal purposes to clarify their thinking, or they can use them to take a case to public servants and politicians.

The following ideas were all canvassed in the workshop:

To: Hon Lynne Kosky, Minister for Education

From: VALBEC Workshop

Date: 3 May 2002

Purpose: To brief you on the relationship between ACE, LLENs and young people's literacy

### Background

- 1 Victoria has over 450 adult community education (ACE) agencies with over 250,000 enrolments per annum. Government funding for ACE is now over \$35m per annum for educationally disadvantaged adults. For the past 30 years ACE has worked closely with TAFE institutes to provide adult literacy and basic education. From this collaboration have come the Certificates in Education for Adults (CGEA), which are a nationally accredited and nationally used framework for adult learning to Year 10.
- 2 LLENs were established in 2002 following recommendations of the inquiry into post-secondary education pathways chaired by Peter Kirby. They aim to improve planning for education and employment pathways by informing and connecting responsible agencies and local employers. They receive about \$200,000–\$400,000 per annum depending on their size. Funds are used to employ staff and carry out prescribed tasks such as environmental scans and professional development in partnerships for school principals. Any leftover funds are spent on projects.
- 3 Thirty per cent of young people have inadequate literacy skills for secondary education requirements, yet at Year 9 literacy and numeracy levels are the best indicator of future educational success. On the whole this 30 per cent can expect to be unemployed and unemployable. The history of the TAFE voucher shows that, of young literacy learners for whom school is no longer an option, about 50 per cent choose ACE as their preferred educational setting.

### Issues

- 4 ACE is not well known or well understood by many schools and some referral agencies. Many schools fear a loss of students and therefore of funds and teachers' jobs if learners are allowed to shift to ACE. They also fear a second-rate outcome for students in ACE.

- 5 LLENs widely report a poor understanding and/or a white-anting of their role amongst their constituencies.
- 6 The inflexibility of funding arrangements continues to corral young learners in inappropriate learning environments. Untested assertions are made about schools squirreling funds away, fearing ever-rainier days ahead of them.
- 7 The Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs) program is widely seen as a critical initiative to track and shore up pathways for young people but much has to be done to grow a culture of cooperation between the agencies they work with.

#### Options/recommendations

- 8 Develop state-wide performance indicators for LLENs to clarify their role for all, and support them to put a precise and accurate message out about their role.
- 9 Attach funding dollars to individual learners as a leverage mechanism, if not as a wholesale funding policy.
- 10 Use research to probe partnerships skills, shifts in retention rates, and the value of adult community settings for disaffected young people in search of better literacy.

Twenty five people is rather a large group to co-write a briefing paper and no doubt with more work this one could be improved. But it's not a bad effort for less than an hour's discussion.

**Helen Macrae was foundation president of VALBEC. She is chairperson of the Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre committee of management, editor of Converse & Company, the online newspaper of Women in Adult and Vocational Education ([www.converse.com.au](http://www.converse.com.au)) and ACE representative on the Inner Northern LLEN committee of management. Helen can be contacted via email at [helenmacrae@bigpond.com](mailto:helenmacrae@bigpond.com)**

A complete version of Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre's submission to Kirby is at <http://www.converse.com.au/archives/papers/minrev.htm> The full text of *Room to Move* is at <http://www.converse.com.au/Opinion/rmtomove.doc>

# Sustainable literacies and the ecology of lifelong learning: introducing the New Literacy Studies

by Mary Hamilton

**New understandings of literacy have highlighted the importance of social and cultural contexts which must be taken into account when evaluating levels of competence and need. Known as the New Literacy Studies, this approach sees literacy as historically and socially based.**

Recent years have seen a paradigm shift in the study of literacy in contemporary societies. The shift is from a psychological or cognitive model of literacy as a set of skills to one which includes the sociocultural practices associated with reading and writing. It is a social and ecological view of literacy rather than a purely psychological one (Barton, 1994). The essence of this approach is that literacy competence and need cannot be understood in terms of absolute levels of skill, but are relational concepts defined by the social and communicative practices with which individuals engage in the various domains of their life world. It sees literacy as historically and socially situated. As Brian Street puts it, it is a shift from literacy as an autonomous gift to be given to people, to an ideological understanding of literacy which places it in its wider context of institutional purposes and power relationships (see Street, 1995) This approach has come to be known as the New Literacy Studies.

## Cultural contexts

Those of us working with this new approach advocate a broader understanding of what is included when we talk about literacy, suggesting that we should look beyond texts themselves to what people do with literacy, with whom, where, and how. That is, we focus attention on the cultural practices within which the written word is embedded—the ways in which texts are socially regulated and used. This leads us to consider the differentiated uses of literacy in varying cultural contexts. It leads us to consider not just print literacy but other mass media including visual and oral ways of communicating (see Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996) and especially the way that the use of these media, using both old (print) and new (electronic) technologies, is interlinked. Writing becomes as central as reading, and other ways of interacting with print culture are identified.

The focus shifts from literacy as deficit or lack—something people haven't got—to the many different ways that people engage with literacy, recognising difference and diversity

and challenging how these differences are valued within our society. The New Literacy Studies involves us in looking beyond educational settings to vernacular practices and informal learning, and to the other official settings in which literacies play a key role. Learning does not just take place in classrooms and is not just concerned with methods.

## Literacies and their communities

This shift has implications for how we work with literacy. Firstly, we have to recognise that there is not one literacy, but there are many different literacies. What does this mean? As soon as we move away from seeing literacy as simply a set of skills, to viewing it as practices that we are actively engaged with, it becomes obvious that there are many different ways in which reading and writing are used and that people are developing new literacies all the time. In his book *The Social Mind*, James Gee talks about how literacies are linked to different discourse communities that we are all part of. These are made up of people, things, characteristic ways of talking, acting, thinking, believing, valuing, interpreting—and reading and writing are an integral part of these activities and ways of being in the world (Gee, 1992). Often, we are not very aware of the rules of the communities we are familiar with, but we become sharply aware of them when we move into a new group or institution that assumes a different set of rules, and we may suddenly come to feel like a novice in this new situation.

Another implication of the shift in understanding literacy is that it places at centre stage people's own definitions of literacy because there is no one standard that is valid for everyone, for all time. This means exploring both as teachers our own starting points, and with students their starting points and assumptions about literacy.

## Establishing credibility

Applying new views of literacy within educational practice

‘ the essence of this approach is that literacy competence ...cannot be understood in terms of absolute levels of skill ’



also means introducing them into professional development, where teachers can address questions of the role of reading and writing in their own lives and how this affects their professional practice.

In sum, the New Literacy Studies encourages us to be reflective about the everyday practices that we are all part of—to ask questions—rather than to assume that we already know what literacy is.

Despite the progress in theorising a different approach to literacy, there is still a long way to go in making the New Literacy Studies credible as an approach within education policy and practice. In a number of countries (including Australia, South Africa and North America) standardised curricula and assessment systems are being introduced in an atmosphere of anxiety about falling literacy standards and the presumed effects of popular culture and the new communication media. These trends move us away from strategies that would be in tune with the New Literacy Studies. They point backwards to more traditional and prescriptive methods for teaching and learning writing and reading, and attempts to separate print literacy from other media, especially those that prevail in popular cultural forms.

This is true of the new adult basic skills strategy in England and Wales, prompted by the Moser report in 1999 where an increasingly formal and standardised version of ABE is being developed, complete with national testing and a national curriculum for adults that is designed to fit seamlessly with school achievement as part of a National Literacy Strategy (Moser, 1999). These developments in adult education, however, are also taking place within a broader strategy of lifelong learning that I believe promises a different vision of what literacy might be—a vision that is much closer, potentially, to the new understandings embodied in the New Literacy Studies. In this paper I will elaborate on this potential for developing sustainable lifelong learning in relation to literacy and suggest that the New Literacy Studies offers a useful theoretical basis from which to proceed. I will do so by addressing three issues:

- 1 The empirical research agenda—the need to develop a more extensive research base on the detail of literacy learning and use in local communities. This research should focus not just on individual learning histories, but also on literacy practices within and between groups and communities.
- 2 The need to clarify underpinning notions of learning and knowing (both at the individual and the group level) that are at work in the New Literacy Studies and how these relate to forms of knowing currently privileged by educational institutions.
- 3 The need to pay much more serious attention to the institutional processes whereby ‘truths’ about literacy

become translated into policy and practice—the intersection between policy and learning theory

In what follows, I will discuss these three areas starting from the perspectives offered by a recent ethnographic study published with David Barton as *Local Literacies* (Barton & Hamilton, 1998).

there is still a long way to go in making the New Literacy Studies credible

#### Developing an ethnographic research base

The New Literacy Studies has begun to gather detailed ethnographic data on the ecology of literacy in everyday life. However, we still do not have enough data—either to begin to identify the range of literacies with which people are engaged, or to begin drawing out communalities and varieties of practice across social groupings of different kinds. We are still talking in very general terms about the roles of literacy in society. We have to further deepen and problematise the notion of ‘community’.

This has been the focus of the *Local Literacies* project. The project has been a detailed study of the role of literacy in the everyday lives of people in Lancaster, England, and is reported in Barton and Hamilton (1998) and elsewhere. This was an ESRC-funded project lasting several years. The study used in-depth interviews, complemented by observations, photography and the collection of documents and records. It included a door-to-door survey in one neighbourhood of Lancaster and detailed case studies of people in twelve households in the neighbourhood, observing particular literacy events and asking people to reflect on their practices. Alongside the case studies were 30 interviews of people in what we called access points for literacy, such as book shops, libraries and advice centres. There were also interviews of 20 adults who had identified problems with their reading and writing and had been attending courses at the adult college. More than a year after the main part of the study in a phase called the Collaborative Ethnography project we took back transcripts of interviews and drafts of our interpretative themes to ten of the people for further discussion.

#### A small town in Lancaster

In Lancaster we have explored a small town, within which there are some close-knit, long standing communities with multiple overlapping ties and concerns. There are also groups and individuals whose identities are not so closely anchored to one locality, who come and go and maintain relationships in a number of different communities outside of Lancaster. There are enclaves of highly educated and geographically mobile people but a great majority who are, based on the evidence from our ethnography, still on the edges of accessing new technologies and their transformative potential. In the UK we have a population still highly differentiated in their access to and attitudes toward new technologies. Some older people may never

move far into this new world. Many of their children will do so, to an extent unimaginable to their parents.

A recurrent theme in the Lancaster interviews concerns people's experiences of situations in their day-to-day life that had motivated them to develop a specialised expertise. These experiences launch them into new areas of learning in which they muster all the resources they can find, including literacy. Often these activities involve encounters with social institutions, dealing with professionals, ways of communicating, acting and understanding that were quite alien to people's previous experience. For interaction with these institutions, and to have access to the knowledge they control, literacy is a key tool.

Deliberate investigations of unknown topics include those to do with ill health where people become expert in the treatment and understanding of particular ailments, and encounters with schools, where parents act as advocates on behalf of their children and deal with educational systems which they find quite mystifying and opaque. There were a number of examples in our data related to employment-related problems such as searching for and applying for jobs, dealing with official bureaucracy when registering as unemployed, claiming welfare benefit entitlements or tax refunds and setting up small businesses. Another common group of practical problems are legal problems involving encounters with the police, courts and insurance companies. A variety of legal problems and consumer grievances arise for individuals at different stages of their lives, and sometimes more general issues affect large groups of people, as in disputes over land ownership and use. In these cases, people may act together to pool resources and develop new kinds of expertise.

### Local literacies

As well as these short-term responses to urgent practical needs, people have preoccupations and pastimes which they pursue over lengthy periods: quests for information about family history, correspondences and leisure activities of various sorts. This leads to a wide variation in what people know about, and it is revealing to look across a community to investigate the types of vernacular knowledge which exist—as Luis Moll has done in his research with Mexican-American households in the United States. Moll (1994) refers to funds of knowledge in communities which are the practical exchanges and responses to the need for information and resources shared across families, between siblings, neighbours, friends. Moll found funds of knowledge in areas such as agriculture, economics, construction, religion, arts and repair. In Lancaster the areas of vernacular knowledge which we have identified include home economics and budgeting, repair and maintenance, child care, sports,

gardening, cooking, pets and animal care, and family and local history. Some people had also developed knowledge of legal, political, health and medical topics.

Ian Falk refers to these funds of knowledge and the processes whereby they are created and circulated within a community as a part of social capital: 'networks, norms and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit' (see Falk & Harrison, 1998:613; Falk & Balatti, 1999). From his research with community-based groups in Australia, Falk has begun to identify the informal processes whereby knowledge is created and circulated. These include organising forums for discussion of issues, working collectively in groups, encouraging wide participation among community members including volunteers, making routes for people to develop and move into new positions, 'passing the torch' to subsequent generations of activists, dividing tasks up into short, recognisable and achievable goals and stages and making results of activities publicly visible and celebrated (Falk & Harrison, 1998:619).

one of the main organising ideas...was a distinction between dominant...and vernacular... literacies

### Developing notions of 'vernacular' and 'institutional' literacies

How can we better describe the learning that takes place outside of formal institutions where more fluid, and roles/subject positions, goals, procedures are not necessarily settled or named? One of the main organising ideas that we used in the Local Literacies study was a distinction between dominant (institutionalised) and vernacular (self generated) literacies. This has a parallel with James Gee's notion of primary and secondary discourses and raises some of the same issues (Gee 1990). Vernacular and institutional literacies are not independent and forever separated categories of activity but they are in dialogue and the boundaries between them are permeable and shifting.

We defined dominant literacies as those which are associated with formal organisations, such as those of the school, the church the workplace, the legal system, commerce, medical and welfare bureaucracies. They are part of the specialised discourses of bounded communities of practice, and are standardised and defined in terms of the formal purposes of the institution rather than in terms of the multiple and shifting purposes of individual citizens and their communities. In dominant literacies there are professional experts and teachers through whom access to knowledge is controlled. To the extent that we can group these dominant literacies together they are given high value, legally and culturally. Dominant literacies are powerful in proportion to the power of the institution that shapes them.

Vernacular literacies are essentially ones which are not regulated or systematised by the formal rules and procedures of social institutions but have their origin in

the purposes of everyday life. They are not highly valued by formal social institutions though sometimes they develop in response to these institutions. They may be actively disapproved of and trivialised and they can be contrasted with dominant literacies which are seen as rational and of high cultural value.

### Secret literacies

They are more common in private spheres than in public spheres. Often they are humorous, playful, disrespectful, and sometimes deliberately oppositional. When questioned about them, people did not always regard them as real reading or real writing. Some vernacular literacies are deliberately hidden. These include those which are personal and private, where reading or writing are ways of being alone and private, ways of creating personal space. There are also secret notes and letters of love, abuse, criticism and subversion, comics, scurrilous jokes, horoscopes, fanzines, pornography—some but not all of which will be revealed to the researcher's gaze. These findings link in with a range of other research which explores the informal literacies of different age groups. (See, for example, Mahiri, 1999, who has documented the uses of literacy in the popular culture of black youth in California; Falk & Harrison, 1998; Falk & Balatti, 1999; Lankshear & Knobel, 1999; Princlloo & Breier, 1996).

In our project we found vernacular literacies involved in a range of everyday activities, which we roughly classified as:

- organising life
- personal communication
- private leisure
- documenting life
- sense making, and
- social participation.

In all of these areas we found examples of people becoming expert, consciously carrying out their own research on a topic of interest to them. A number of points can be made about the nature of vernacular literacies based on the data from the Lancaster study.

Firstly, vernacular literacy practices are learned informally. They are acquired in homes and neighbourhood groups, through the everyday perplexities and curiosities of our lives. The roles of novice or learner and expert or teacher are not fixed, but shift from context to context and there is an acceptance that people will engage in vernacular literacies in different ways, sometimes supporting, sometimes requiring support from others. Identities shift accordingly.

Secondly, the vernacular literacy practices we identified are rooted in action contexts and everyday purposes and

networks. They draw upon and contribute to vernacular knowledge which is often local, procedural and minutely detailed. Literacy learning and use are integrated in everyday activities and the literacy elements are an implicit part of the activity, which may be mastering a martial art, paying the bills, organising a musical event or finding out about local news. Literacy itself is not a focus of attention but is used to get other things done. Everyday literacies are subservient to the goals of purposeful activities and are defined by people in terms of these activities.

“ literacy elements are an implicit part of the activity, which may be mastering a martial art, paying the bills... ”

Where specialisms develop in everyday contexts they are different from the formal academic disciplines, reflecting the logic of practical application. Vernacular literacies are as diverse as social practices are. They are hybrid in origin part of a do-it-yourself culture and often it is clear that a particular activity may be classified in more than one way since people may have a mixture of motives for taking part in a given literacy activity. Preparing a residents' association newsletter, for instance, can be a social activity, it can be part of leisure or political activity and it may involve personal sense-making. They are part of a do-it-yourself culture that incorporates whatever materials and resources are available and combines them in novel ways. Spoken language, print and other media are integrated; literacy is integrated with other symbolic systems, such as numeracy and visual semiotics. Different topics and activities can occur together, making it hard to identify the boundaries of a single literacy event or practice. This is in contrast to many school practices, where learning is separated from use, divided up into academically defined subject areas, disciplines and specialisms and where knowledge is often made explicit within particular interactive routines, is reflected upon, and is open to evaluation through the testing of disembedded skills.

### Examining the differences

As a starting point the distinction between vernacular and institutional knowing has been a useful but it needs to be further developed, especially in terms of the dialogic relationship between the two—how the one influences and articulates with the other. One way forward is to look to other strands of theorising that are concerned to understand the process of 'knowing' as mediated, situated, provisional, pragmatic and contested. These strands include activity theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Engstrom, 1993) where learning is seen in terms of initiation into a community of practice involving apprentice-like relationships between expert and novice members of that community; feminist theory that foregrounds the role of personal experience and the 'knowing subject' in creating theory (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 1997); and organisational learning theory, including 'actor network' theory (as reviewed by Blackler,

1995; Law & Hassard, 1999) that focuses on the interconnected institutional systems and environments within which knowing is achieved.

Casting an eye over these related areas reveals that the New Literacy Studies is just one part of a growing recognition that 'knowing' is not simply the product of individualised skills and understandings but a relational, social process. Nor is knowing simply a cognitive matter, but it simultaneously involves other modes of engaging with the world. We can, for example, identify at least the following (adapted from Blackler, 1995):

- embodied knowing, which is experiential and action-oriented, dependent on people's physical presence, on sensory processes, physical cues and may be only partially explicit
- symbolic knowing, which is mediated by conceptual understandings which are explicit, propositional and encoded through a variety of semiotic technologies—spoken language, and other symbol systems, print and electronic communications
- embedded knowing, which is procedural, shaped or engrooved by practical routines which are configurations of material, technological and social symbolic resources through which knowing is accomplished
- encultured knowing, which is involves the shared understandings that are achieved through social relationships and initiation into communities of practice.

Some of these modes of knowing are more explicit, abstract and portable, some are much more closely tied to physical localities and individual subjectivities, and they of course vary enormously in the relative value that is accorded to them in different contexts. However, they are all present and affect eventual outcomes.

A further elaboration of learning that is needed is to explore the features of different communities of practice, the processes that go on within them and the resources they draw on (including the physical and material environment) and how people engage with them.

Within the community/ies we have studied, technical literacy skills are unevenly distributed and people may participate in literacy practices in many different ways. However, as the Lancaster research has shown, what counts as expert and what is novice is problematic outside of an institutional setting. People move flexibly in and out of being learners in different roles and notions of exchange and identity are strongly linked.

what counts as expert and what is novice is problematic outside of an institutional setting

The notion of apprenticeship does not fit all situations and we need a more fluid conceptualisation of the relationships experienced outside of institutional settings. Stephen Reder's notion of practice engagement theory (Reder, 1994) may point a way toward this more fluid characterisation. He identifies three aspects of literacy practices—the technologies of reading and writing, the functions of these activities, and the social meanings carried by them—and suggests that people may engage with any or all of these three aspects in shifting, and often unequal ways. Reder's formulation could be integrated with the different modes of engagement identified above.

#### Creating 'truths' about literacy

So far this paper has discussed ways of developing a fuller notion of vernacular literacies, based on a detailed database of ethnographic research. But to make use of this notion of vernacular knowing and literacy we also need to understand more about how institutions produce and privilege certain kinds of knowing as 'real knowledge', how they produce and recognise 'experts', and how, in this process they devalue or re-define the vernacular for their own purposes—a process that Wenger (1999:57) refers to as reification. Much more thought needs to be given to the nature of lay expertise and its relationship to identity and to professional expertise and competence and the tensions between these. What is acceptable as expertise in informal and in institutional settings? What are the significant dimensions of expertise in each case that contribute to a persons credibility (for example, richness of their knowledge base, institutional affiliations, ability to communicate effectively, breadth of perspective, ability to make links between formal and informal networks).

In this section I offer some thoughts about how such an enquiry might proceed. This part of the paper is more speculative as it projects a research agenda, rather than reporting on work already done.

To achieve an understanding of how institutional truths about literacy are created, I suggest that we need to focus less on what the teachers and learners are doing (or need to do) and more on what the administrators, assessors, quality inspectors and government agencies and policy makers are doing in relation to literacy and lifelong learning. That is, our attention and analytic effort has to move to the intersection between policy and learning theory. We should be concerned to make links between the theoretical insights offered by the New Literacy Studies and the public discourses of literacy which inform educational policy and practice—and which in turn enter into popular understandings about literacy.

## Resisting standardisation

To give a specific example, we should be doing more to contest the solidifying international regimes of truth that are developing through standardised assessment and testing and which are, in their turn, organising national and local knowledge about what literacy is. Surveys such as the (IALS) International Adult Literacy Survey (OECD, 1997) organise our knowledge about literacy and the literate subject. They are based on a particular set of social relations and institutions which have both national and international dimensions residing in government, academic and media domains. Such surveys increasingly underpin, model, elaborate and justify educational and policy decisions about funding and pedagogy and they are a prime example of what Gee (1999:191) has identified as 'enactive and recognition work'—an attempt to get other people to recognise people and things as having certain meanings and values with certain configurations or relationships. The surveys draw on a particular discipline—the psychometric measurement tradition—which is dedicated to the search for universal certainties about the relation between literacy, economy and society. They use an information processing model of literacy and attempt to identify levels of literacy skill that are independent of the context of use—the literacy counterpart of the labour skills supposedly possessed by the flexible worker.

Darville (1999) and Hamilton and Barton (2000) have argued that these surveys fit well within the globalising project of the new capitalism. They are re-defining literacy to fit in with the projected needs of an ideal, consumer-oriented citizen who is responsive to multiple new contexts for literacy use. They justify a vision of what literacy should be, rather than being based on people's lived experiences. These activities continue to be developed with large sums of research money provided by the governments of OECD countries. I would argue that this is not a democratic project, but an institutional vision that has little to do with supporting people to use and control literacy for their own purposes. It is important that we reveal the institutional underpinnings and aspirations for IALS, rather than treating the findings from surveys like this as indisputable facts about contemporary life.

Theoretical tools are already available for exploring the ways in which institutions exercise and realise power: from Foucault (1982) and Bernstein (1998) on how knowledge is reframed within a pedagogical discourse when it is imported into an educational context, and from Wenger (1999) on the characteristics of institutional communities of practice. Foucault (1982:223), for example, has identified five institutional 'shaping processes':

- 1 systems of differentiation that define the status of people who have the authority to 'know'

- 2 definitions of objectives that shape what each person expects to do and how to act in relation to others
- 3 processes that offer incentives for compliance with power relations either through force, economics or surveillance systems
- 4 management structures for decision-making, disseminating information and mobilising resources
- 5 the legitimisation process, whereby rationales are offered for the exercise of institutional power.

Methodological tools are also available (for example in actor network theory) which would enable us to trace the threads of an initiative such as the IALS through its creation and dispersion from research contexts to media, policy and practice (see Law & Hassard (1999)). These would help us analyse how literacies are embedded in the institutional relationships and processes that give them their meaning and how vernacular literacies are defined in relation to dominant, legitimated practices.

## Supporting literacies through lifelong learning policy

The fact that some literacies are supported, controlled and legitimised by powerful institutions implies that others are devalued. Many of the literacies that are influential and valued in people's day-to-day lives, that are widely circulated and discussed are also ignored by educational institutions—they do not count as real literacy. Neither are the informal social networks which sustain these literacies drawn upon or acknowledged.

A lifelong learning strategy for literacy can be driven by the needs of institutions or it can genuinely sustain and develop the resources, process and purposes that already exist in civic life. There are many pressures that push literacy policy toward the institutional version. However, at its roots the ideal of lifelong learning has a humanitarian agenda which demands an authentic and democratic response. I have argued in this paper that the research approach offered by the New Literacy Studies provides a framework from which to develop such a response in relation to literacy and we can begin to sketch the outlines of this.

The key to the response is that we need to take a systems approach. It is not possible to separate the individual from the context and resources implicated in their learning. We should see a lifelong literacy funding strategy as designing environments that can supplement community resources and funds of knowledge (see also The New London Group, 2000; Hauteceur, 1997). A social practice approach to literacy demonstrates the changing demands that people experience at different stages of their lives and offers convincing evidence of the need for lifelong learning systems which people can access at critical points. While

community resources and funds of knowledge exist, they also have their limitations. They are often unevenly distributed and can be supported by various kinds of educational response. From this perspective, formally structured learning opportunities are one important component of lifelong learning, but they are only one aspect of a solution to sustaining literacies. The focus needs to be wider. Literacy/lifelong learning funds could be used to:

- increase the physical spaces available for people and groups to meet/exchange ideas/display/perform
- strengthen access points for literacy—libraries/cybercafes/bookshops/advice centres—so that citizens can access information they are searching for through print, video, electronic forms and engage in virtual or actual meetings with experts
- strengthen open local government structures that facilitate consultation and access to existing routes for change or citizen action
- support local media which help circulate and publicise news, events, space for debating issues, ideas
- provide structured opportunities to learn both content and process skills and link up with others interested in the same issues.

In developing this strategy, we have to pay serious attention to the social relationships which frame literacy in schools, colleges, classrooms and other learning groups, and the power dimensions of these relationships in terms of the ability to make decisions, confer value and demonstrate expertise. As long as these relationships remain unexamined and untouched, there is very little possibility that literacies can be sustained within a system of lifelong learning.

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# Revisiting the past: a rhetorical approach to language and literacy education

by Rob McCormack

**The past is another country—as Leslie Hartley says in the opening line of his novel *The Go-Between*—but it is well worth visiting, especially when there are valuable lessons to be learned.**

For 2300 years, ancient rhetoric formed the capstone of language and literacy education in Europe. Anyone who became literate during this era became literate through training in rhetoric. An extensive training in rhetoric was a formative experience shared by all the leading figures of Western civilisation: Cicero, Augustine, Shakespeare, Montaigne, Bacon, Milton. Thus rhetoric is almost certainly as fundamental to the definition of Western culture as Greek philosophy or Hebraic Christianity.

However, over the last two centuries rhetoric has been largely abandoned as a framing of language and literacy education. Comprehensive schooling, by contrast, has almost entirely abandoned the rigorous traditions of rhetoric, and replaced it with forms of expressivism. It is only in the academic streams of academically-oriented, so-called scholarship, secondary schools—especially private schools for the children of the ruling elites—that we still find remnants of rhetoric.

## Frameworks or pedagogy

It is my view that the adult language and literacy frameworks developed during the 90s in Australia and globally are radically deficient. They did not emerge from observation or reflection on the milestones through which students pass, but were instead models of abstract continua constructed theoretically. (I know this from personal experience because I was deeply involved in many of them as a key person in the rejection of the ALLAN Scales, a writer of the Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Competencies, designer of the categories underpinning the CGEA, designer of one set of—misused—categories for the National Reporting System and as designer of a set of categories taken up by national numeracy educators).

But there is a world of difference between the learning path that students actually need to traverse with quite specific difficulties and milestones on one hand, and the theoretically-derived ‘outcomes’ and ‘performance criteria’ of these frameworks, on the other. And when teachers and

learners begin to take these ‘outcome statements’ and ‘performance criteria’ as true descriptions of teaching/learning tasks, then the process of teaching and learning has been radically damaged. I believe this has already happened. It is inevitable that over time untrained or inexperienced teachers in particular ‘teach to the test’ and students demand that they be ‘taught to the test’.

## Returning to rhetoric

For the purposes of this article we can define rhetoric as a training in persuasive speech, speech that persuades through consciously orchestrating argument (logos), emotion (pathos) and authority (ethos). The basic claim of rhetoric as the art of speech is that although we can speak or write well though innate talent or under the power of the emotions of the moment, it is possible to systematically enhance our powers of speech and writing through an explicit pedagogy which studies language for its powers of persuasion, not its grammaticality or conformity with a set of underlying rules. Traditionally, grammar—the study of rules—was taught in primary school separately and before rhetoric. Rhetoric formed the heart of secondary education. Actually rhetoric was keenly interested in the way rule-breaking could be exploited for its shock value or rhetorical effect. In fact, a number of rhetorical figures consist of deliberate deviations from the normal expectations of the reader or listener.

My hope is that a return to the design principles embodied in ancient rhetoric will mean that language and literacy pedagogy can finally emerge as a substantial and important region of adult education with a pedagogy that is sensitive and attuned to indigenous students. A rhetorically framed pedagogy positions students as (potentially) engaged in ethically and politically responsible speech; speech that is intent on articulating differences of positions and resolving these in a larger common sense. A rhetorically framed pedagogy also enables teachers and students to identify and learn the details of language in its full effectiveness as the persuasive speech of power and passion, not just as ‘correct Standard English’ or as ‘mainstream academic conventions’.

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### A training in leadership

At bottom ancient rhetoric was a training for the exercise of leadership and responsibility through language rather than violence or weapons, which is why contemporary elite schools still embrace rhetoric. Learning to exercise leadership through the power and persuasiveness of language was the fundamental imperative of rhetoric as a form of language and literacy education. To this end, ancient rhetoric named, studied, and practiced an extensive range of devices of language ('turns' of thought, 'tropes' of language) to make speech and discourse more powerful and effective.

### Teaching/learning strategies

As an archive of language and literacy teaching/learning strategies, rhetoric addresses weaknesses in current approaches to language and literacy education without undermining their strengths. On the one hand, even though it retains a strong focus on the relevance and engagement that motivates whole language education, this focus is filtered through a highly explicit pedagogy. Moreover the relevance of rhetoric is not merely a personal relevance, it is a rhetorical relevance—an analysis and engagement with the conflicting values and interests at issue in the communicative situation into which one must speak or act. In this sense, rhetoric continues the Frierian concern for formulating the grounds of cultural solidarity and social action in public communal speech.

### The rhetorical situation

On the other hand, whereas both process and Frierian approaches to literacy can neglect the specifics of language itself by a focus on social or personal meaning and context, rhetoric (like 'genre theory') is an explicit training into the forms and meaning-effects of language. However, whereas genre theory often degenerates into a decontextualised rote training in timeless generic formats and standard formulas, rhetoric retains a strong sense of context because of its focus on cultivating responsive and responsible speech that addresses the specific matters at issue in debatable and contested situations.

### Advantages of a rhetorical approach

A rhetorical approach to language and literacy includes the following points:

- explicit attention to the meanings and effects of language at all levels, including sounds, phrases, rhythms, word choice, sentence structure, paragraph structure, method of development and selection of content
- explicit invocation to values, reasons and concerns defining the speech situation

- rhetoric brings speech and writing closer together by using writing to learn the devices of rhetorical speech while framing writing itself as 'speech-like' social action
- the categories of rhetoric also apply to other media of communication besides written text
- rhetoric is focused more on the engaged agency of speech and writing than the distanced criticism of reading and listening, even though it provides the tools for the latter
- rhetoric can address the demands of communication across all contexts, institutions and domains such as home, work, community, academic and civic
- ancient rhetoric was designed to move students from local oral cultures to public text-based institutions
- rhetoric accommodates cultural diversity whilst enjoining reasonable reconciliation and agreement as the task of public discourse.

### Developing a contemporary rhetorical curriculum

CSS104—Communication has been redesigned to explore the contemporary possibilities of a rhetorical language and literacy education. During 2000 and 2001, I developed teaching/learning resources that concentrate on the careful addition of explicitly defined and individually learnt text patterns (rhetorical figures). CSS104 uses ancient European rhetoric as a model for designing the teaching/learning activities for assisting indigenous students master the grammar and text patterns of public and academic English. CSS104 is now very explicitly centred on teaching the demeanours and textual figures of public speaking as an exercise of responsible community leadership in which peoples are called back through public speech to grounding values and principles.

The textual figures comprise a careful selection and arrangement of ancient tropes and figures, a selection and arrangement that form a progression in which each step makes sense on its own as a full utterance yet can also later serve as an element within a larger, more complex utterance. This is the scaffolding principle on which the Progymnasmata is based—one of the three defining curricula of ancient European rhetoric and a document that underpinned the education of ruling elites for 2500 years.

### Telling histories

The Semester 2 Common Unit—CSS102 Telling Histories—is now going to adopt a similar format to CSS104 Communication. This means that first year higher education students at Batchelor Institute will all have had exposure to a year-long curriculum that explicitly addresses their language and literacy skills and demeanours through carefully scaffolded sequence of

Leadership though the power and persuasiveness of language was the fundamental imperative of rhetoric

activities and workbooks. If successful, this rhetorical approach to language and literacy development will constitute a new and potentially important initiative in the Australian and indigenous contexts of literacy pedagogy, nationally and internationally.

#### **Where to now?**

Clearly, there are many directions both practical and research this work on rhetoric could take up. Certainly, at some point in the future it needs to be extended into an enquiry that encompasses indigenous rhetorics and indigenous researchers. However, I think it best to delay this extension until more students have experienced an education in European rhetoric and thus have a detailed ground on which to reflect on its relationship with their own indigenous forms of responsible public speech. Initial student response is encouraging in terms of both engagement and progress. There is also an emergent cadre of indigenous tutors (and potential lecturers) with a strongly developed sense of the explicit teaching and learning tasks required for enacting the language and literacy development of Batchelor Institute students. Over time the vocabulary of rhetoric will hopefully form a shared metalanguage for describing the tasks, achievements and difficulties of language and literacy learning; a shared set of teaching/learning practice, a common sense of rhythms of activities in a workshop and so on. These

shared experiences can act as a platform upon which and against which these Batchelor Institute indigenous educators of the future can form their own language and literacy pedagogies.

#### **Researching comparative rhetoric**

There is thus an opportunity here for fruitful two-way exploration and comparison with indigenous languages, pragmatics, rhetorics, pedagogies of language, education for responsible speech (and silence) and forms of responsible leadership through speech. If European rhetoric is construed as simply one tradition of rhetoric among others, then there is the potential to use it as a platform to articulate the range of indigenous rhetorics and thereby institute a dialogue that changes both European and indigenous traditions of rhetoric by enabling greater reflective insight into their own assumptions and conventions. This should lead to a productive 'both ways' research program grounded in the 'zone of contact' between different rhetorics, their politics and ethics of public speech, and their practices and conventions for the learning and exercise of power and solidarity through speech.

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# More than just graffiti: writing on the surface

by Jack Frawley

**Originally introduced as a tool for ‘civilising’ and converting Aboriginal communities to Christianity, writing is now employed in many different forms. Some are subtle, and some are obvious—and the most obvious of these is what many people would call graffiti. Jack Frawley looks at written communication beyond the keyboards and typefaces.**

When I travel to Aboriginal communities throughout the Northern Territory, I am always struck by the amount of writing there is. It is there when I step out of the plane into the terminal; it is scratched into the dashboard of vehicles; it is at a table where I eat my lunch; it is on a seat I share with a friend; it is scratched into, or written in texta on the bark of a tree; it is on the electricity poles; it is on the walls of houses, council buildings, clubs, clinics, schools, police stations and art centres. It is everywhere. Depending on how this writing is viewed in this community context, it could be argued that it is either unsightly vandalism, or it is a clever use of an introduced technology.

## Not just graffiti

Graffiti is derived from the Latin word *graphium*, which means *to write* and was originally used by archaeologists to describe drawings and inscriptions found on ancient buildings and monuments in the Roman catacombs. Today, in Western society, graffiti is used to describe scrawled signatures, names, statements and images that are most often seen on a suburban train trip, and which is the irritation of most local councils who generally view it as vandalism. Depending on your interpretation, the writing in Aboriginal communities could also be defined as just graffiti, but such a definition would be restrictive.

Image making, with its multi-layer of meanings, has existed in this country for thousands of years. In my opinion, the most spectacular evidence of this is in the stone country of Arnhem Land where in the complex networks of chasms, ravines and gorges can be found dramatic and spectacular evidence that unequivocally attests to the timeless occupancy of this country. Up here are examples of rock art that date from the pre-estuarine period of at least 40,000 years ago to the present day. These images depict the earliest examples of expression such as object imprints of throwing sticks and spears, to more recent images that record the arrival of foreigners such as the images of Macassan perahu, and buffalo shooters astride their horses, holding guns. Each image would have been created for a specific purpose, for

example to record an event, to depict a significant cultural artifact, or as a statement of ownership. The image-maker would have given a particular meaning to its creation.

‘ image  
making, ...has  
existed...  
for thousands  
of years ’

Viewers of the image may or may not have interpreted the image in the same way. Therefore, if writing is viewed as a technology, similar to the process of applying ochre on rock or wood, and if writing is seen as part of the continuum of message-making then it is argued that this public inscription is something much more than just graffiti.

## From rock to wood to paper

The introduction of writing to Aboriginal communities has a diverse history and cannot be easily generalised. Therefore, for the purpose of context, what follows is a description and discussion of writing in an Aboriginal community in Northern Australia. Although this community does not have a tradition of rock art, it does have a strong and ongoing practice of painting onto sculptured wood. These sculptures are used to place in the country, and more recently around the gravesite, of a person who has died. These poles were roughly shaped and relatively unworked due to the hardness of the wood and the limitations of stone axes and mussel shells as carving tools. Nowadays, these poles have become increasingly elaborate with the skilled use of steel axes, chainsaws, and angle grinders. These carved poles are then decorated with abstract designs that are referential rather than representational.

A skilled artist draws on a store of design elements, to make art for a ceremonial audience. The emphasis is on individual attribution of meaning rather than conformity. For example, a pole with a carved paddle shape on top, and depictions of coral-like designs, may allude to the fact that the deceased person was a skilled seafarer, but because there is no grand narrative attributed to these designs the meaning is masked by the individuality of the expression. To understand the meaning, one would need to have an insight into the thoughts of its creator.

Another technology of message-making was introduced from a different Aboriginal group who had come to the

community as workers for a buffalo shooter. This group introduced the letterstick as a way of conveying messages, usually to announce the death of a person. The letterstick was made of carved wood, and replaced the use of certain spears carried by the messengers for this purpose. However, this technology was soon displaced by a much more powerful one after the arrival of the missionaries.

Catholic missionaries introduced reading and writing to this community in the early 1900s. Writing's original purpose would have been to aid the process of indoctrination: children were seen as the conduit for so called civilisation, and at the heart of civilisation was Christianity, so it was essential to establish a system of education. In its early phase, this system was based on the teaching of Catholicism, and as such English was an essential tool. Children were taught to read and write in English as a way to absorb Catholicism and the missionaries controlled the curriculum to serve the aim of conversion. However, by the 1950s in order to receive government financial assistance the mission had to conform to the Commonwealth Office of Education's native education curriculum, which emphasised reading and writing. This technology of writing, like that of making poles, now became fixed in the social and cultural life of the community.

### Free form expression

Currently, writing appears throughout the community in a wide range of forms. The community council publishes a regular community newsletter that is used as a source of information, a way of making announcements and, sometimes, admonishing community members. The church publishes a weekly bulletin which, much like church bulletins everywhere, includes anniversaries, prayers for the sick and special church dates. The store and club notice boards list public announcements such as meeting dates, and display public awareness advertising. The difference between these forms and the graffiti form of writing rests in control. The abovementioned forms are all controlled in one way or another through the writing, editing and publishing process. The graffiti form of writing isn't: it is a free form with few, if any, limitations.

Perhaps one of the most recurring pieces of writing in public spaces involves either allegiance to an Australian Rules football team, such as 'Bombers the Best in 2K1' or the affiliation with a player such as 'Matthew Lloyd as Paul JPK'. On the surface this appears as pure adulation where the writer has allusions of being personally connected with a famous football player. However, if the writing is viewed culturally it becomes something much more. In this community, there is an emphasis on the accumulation of personal names because of the tradition that sees names being changed if it sounds similar to that of someone who has just died. Therefore, community members will accumulate several names during their life.

The displaying of this writing 'Matthew Lloyd as Paul JPK' in the public domain signifies that the name is considered to be Paul JPK's possession, (JPK being an abbreviation of the claimant's other names) and that 'Matthew Lloyd' should not be used by anyone else. This name, then, is frequently used as a term of reference or address and, more often than not, said as one word 'matthewlloyd'.

### Love letters in the sand

Messages of 'true love' are also quite common, such as 'TJK MWM OTLVS'. Again, on the surface this appears as a statement of affection. However, in this community betrothal relationships are determined along strict lines, and therefore it would be safe to assume that TJK and MWM are in proper relationships otherwise such a public statement would be perilous. This statement could be of a future betrothal or of a lover relationship. Either way, 'OTLVS' (only true loves) sets it apart as a lover relationship rather than just a companionable one.

In both of these examples the creators of the texts in this community have, like an artist, drawn on a developing store of design elements—2K1 to represent 2001, and OTLVS to represent 'only true love' are just a couple of examples of this. Like art, these public displays of writing can be interpreted within a cultural framework and, like the artist, the writing depicts a meaning that is masked to an outsider. Also, this writing contains messages that can be interpreted by an audience who have the required knowledge.

This brief analysis highlights the use of an introduced technology in an Aboriginal community—writing. This community has subverted writing to put it to a use far exceeding its original purpose. Although writing takes place throughout the community in different genres, some are more obvious than others. And the most obvious of these is what whitefellas would term graffiti. This writing is culturally defined which displays a creativity that is an extension of image making and, in the process, has become aboriginalised. This technology of writing appears here to stay in this community until, like the letterstick, becomes displaced by a much more powerful one.

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## Open forum

We welcome your responses to the articles featured in *Fine Print*. See the back cover for contact details.

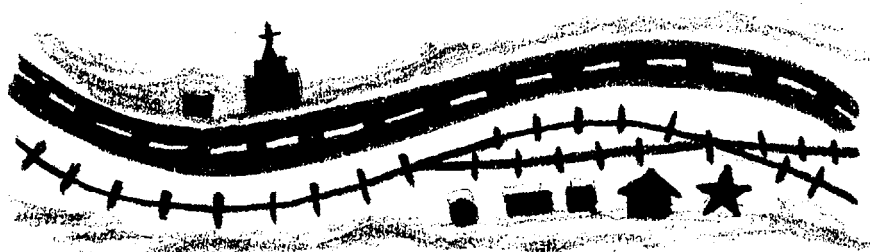
In this issue, Tricia Bowen discusses—and Ana-Maria Espinoza illustrates—a unique program where refugees and others from NESBs find a sense of place, Margaret Hanrahan looks at sessional teaching and offers some handy tips, and Robin Tymms points out the value of those intangible, immeasurable outcomes to be found in a CGEA class.

### On the Map—stories of people seeking refuge in Australia

On the Map began with thick black outlines of Australia that I'd usually draw on the whiteboard when teaching English as a second language. While not to scale and a little skew-whiff, these maps always created a connection between the students and myself. The maps, the symbols on them and the dots and lines and shading, created a common language. Many of those I taught were very new to this country. Some had come by design, others out of sheer necessity. By containing our shared space within strong lines, somehow a link was created.

These simple maps—these birds-eye views—created conversation, connection and a lot of laughter. They also created a strong sense of how much we had in common—long tables in kitchens for families to gather, prized rose bushes in gardens from Iraq to Istanbul, the TV always surrounded by plenty of comfy seating.

Towards the end of 2000, I was employed to teach English to a group of people recently released from detention, asylum seekers, who arrived on leaky boats via Australia's west coast. They'd been detained for many months, and finally given temporary protection visas, short term respite but no long term commitment. There was little common spoken language amongst us, but once again maps were powerful. We used atlases to locate different home towns. We drew maps of neighbourhoods where we grew up.



We'd draw lines across world maps representing where we'd been and where we'd love to go. We'd make dots and lines and squiggles across maps of Australia that told stories of our experience in this country. We'd draw maps of our local area, the space of our everyday experience. Then, floor plans of houses we'd lived in, the intimate personal spaces we'd shared with family. We'd include everything from the placement of furniture in our bedrooms to the names of trees in the garden. We'd compare and contrast the use of space, the names of rooms, the layout and design of kitchens and bathrooms.

Some also drew maps of detention centres—long, thin rectangles for buildings, tight, curly loops for barbed wire.

Some Australians have reacted with suspicion and fear to these asylum seekers. This fear seems to be fuelled in part by huge misunderstandings about the world they have left, their reasons for leaving and the positive contribution they can make to this country. If maps can generate talk and foster connection, what about using them to gather insights from these newcomers and then communicate these stories to a broader Australian audience? With the support of the



Australia Council for the Arts and assistance from the Migrant Resource Centre (North East) the idea became a reality.

For several weeks in 2001 we visited people's homes and worked in classrooms and community centres, always carrying with us bundles of maps, atlases, paper and pens. We'd usually set off with little maps scratched out on scraps of paper to make sure we ended up in the right place. One time we had a playful disagreement with a cab driver who didn't want to believe we could read his street directory. Another time I got very lost, walking through suburban streets in Reservoir. I was holding my home-made map the wrong way round.

We met a diverse group of people—young and old, men and women, mothers, husbands, wives and children. We talked to people from Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Kosovo, East Timor and Somalia. Many had only recently been released after months in detention. Together, we talked and drew maps, floor plans of home, the neighbourhood, our local street. We traced longer journeys across world maps. With permission, we audiotaped our talk. We met great people and heard so much about the extraordinary and often treacherous experiences of people who arrive here seeking our help. While people were keen to offer their stories, most were reluctant to be identified by name. They were fearful of the repercussions that identification may cause. We also worked with many wonderful Australians—teachers, local bus drivers, community workers, nurses, secretaries, librarians—all committed to offering assistance and kindness to these new arrivals.

On the Map describes some of the stories we heard and brings to life many of the maps that were drawn for us. We sincerely hope it contributes in some small way to better understanding and to a brighter future.

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## How to get job satisfaction from sessional teaching

*Take time to sharpen the axe so you can cut the tree down more quickly.*

'That will be a short article. There is not much to say on that issue', a sessional teacher told me when I told her what I was writing about. Another one just laughed. My partner would probably agree with them, as he hears my gripes about the insecurity of whether there are enough students to run the class, withdrawal of funding, not enough time to prepare, little professional development and last of all the poor pay (and that I do not have enough work for next semester). However I hang in there because I do like teaching and believe it is possible to get job satisfaction, though not as easily as for other teachers.

The following ideas are some that my friends and I have worked out. They are a collection of ideas that fall under the heading that it is good 'to take time to sharpen the axe so you can cut down the tree more quickly'. Obviously what works for a one teacher's situation or personality will not work for another and even what works for a sessional teacher of elderly computer students will not work for the same teacher with a group of young unemployed students. Take the ideas that suit and ignore the rest.

### Time and energy management

Time and energy management can be very important so that the sessional teacher can work enough hours to pay the rent. Time and energy management are often mutually exclusive. A very well prepared lesson may run by itself and need little energy input by the teacher. On the other hand if you are not exhausted at night you can sit up late doing more class preparation.

For a long time I thought that there was always a direct relationship between how much time I spent preparing a class and how much the students learnt. I wanted to believe it. It seemed fair. However sometimes spending a few minutes working out a good idea can mean students learn more than hours spend on the computer making worksheets. Obviously you cannot always do that week in and week out, but I think you get the idea.

In the ALBE area it is often good to customise work to suit your specific students' needs but I wonder if, in so doing, we sometimes continually reinvent the wheel rather than using text books or work that others have invented. Besides the big time savers like only working near home and only working at least four hours in a venue, there are a number of small time savers:

- write an exercise on the board rather than typing and photocopying it
- have an activity like journal writing at the beginning that does not require teacher input so you can do any necessary jobs—it covers the late comers and gets the students settled into the classroom environment
- do group work so you can conserve energy and do other things (for example, talk to a student)
- get the students and the administrators into the habit of knowing that you leave when the class finishes so they ask questions in class time
- allow five minutes for the students (and teacher) to pack up before the class ends
- prepare while driving or walking to school
- prepare straight after the class even if it is only writing down the rough outline
- use self-correction or peer correction in class time
- do correction in a way that students will learn from it—possibly only looking at one aspect rather than dotting every 'i' and crossing every 't' which can be very time consuming

- don't push your students more than they want to give—it's very exhausting
- if possible do paperwork as part of the learning process (for example, students take the roll).

Perhaps more importantly, a number of the above suggestions also fit into the category of student-centred learning or learning to learn strategies. The teacher can also act as facilitator in order to encourage learner independence. The result is that, while doing things that save you time and energy, your students will most likely be learning more. We all like to feel needed but that is very different from our students feeling dependent on us.

### Priorities

I do not think it is possible to have it all when you are a sessional teacher. Rather than constantly bemoaning this fact, work out what gives you the most job satisfaction and do that or focus on it once a week. If you need to earn a decent income you will need to work lots of hours, and time and energy management is all important. You may have to focus on the pay packet rather than work out how to get a lot of job satisfaction when you are teaching 28 hours a week.

Conversely, what detracts from your job satisfaction? Resentment for amount paid and the time it takes, a boss who cannot appreciate you or not belonging to the organisation. Some of these you have no control over but changing one or changing how it affects you may make a difference. We need to be aware of why our students are at class. Don't keep hitting your head against a brick wall in an attempt to do the impossible. Certainly there are a few exceptional teachers who can turn a classroom of unemployed students from employment agencies into enthusiastic students who put learning above all the other concerns that usually prevent them from coming to class. However, perhaps you are just a good teacher and have to accept that your students will come sometimes and learn some things. Similarly if the social aspect of the class is why the students are coming, build that into your lesson plan and accept that they will spend time chatting rather than finding yourself always trying to steer them back to work.

Another aspect to prioritise is who is your main responsibility—the funding body, your employer, your students or yourself. If you cannot meet each group's needs, who misses out? Often it is not the funding body. Is that what you want?

### Professional support and professional development

This is one area where you may need to take time in order to save time in the future. For country teachers it is

especially difficult to get professional support. I suspect we have to take every opportunity that comes our way even if it is from friends who will listen. However the funding bodies and employers will often not give time or provide the necessary structures unless they are encouraged to do so. Returning to sessional work at a TAFE, where I am staying back and doing all my preparation at work, I am amazed how much it is seen as just part of an ongoing or contract teacher's daily work life. And so it should be! I remember having a meeting with a professional about my students, in my free time (as I had already used my hour of meeting time for that class for the semester). I pointed this out and he said that perhaps it was worth it to get more job satisfaction. But he was getting paid for the meeting and well paid. Even if he did do extra hours for free he could afford it a lot more than I could. Whenever I have worked at the TAFE I was always welcome at the PD days, but I was not paid and all the other teachers were.

**work out what gives you the most job satisfaction and do that or focus on it once a week**

I think that structures have to be set up so that teachers receive support and PD. Perhaps we need pupil-free days such as the schools have, and funding bodies need to be pressured to give more money for support and PD.

Some sub-regions in ACFE have received small grants for PD in specific areas, and I received my first computer training using such a grant. I am aware there is not much money coming this way but if it did it could help a lot. The funding did not cover all the time spent in learning but it was enough to take away the resentment and the learning gave me a lot of job satisfaction. If we do not receive support and professional development we will continue to 'cut down the tree with a blunt axe'.

Sometimes we have to give ourselves our own PD. Often we are constantly taking new classes in new areas of teaching or with different client groups. Many of us are very experienced. Instead of focusing on what we do not know about the client group we should look at our own experience and find something that has worked before. At one time I was teaching very diverse groups of students—from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, others with a serious mental illness and young refugees. I was aware that every teacher I came into contact with knew far more about each specific group than me. I felt somewhat inadequate. This feeling of inadequacy was increased by some professionals who thought I did not understand their client group. Instead of dealing with inappropriate behaviour using the skills I learnt when teaching in secondary schools, I thought I just had to understand the students' condition more and so initially made little progress. I focused on what I did not know rather than what I knew about teaching. With more confidence in my own skills and using my own skills I would have had the PD I need in this area.

Sometimes having to learn a new certificate can work as a PD. It can make you rethink about what and how you teach. Also it may be possible to be given time to learn it. Recapping on what I said about priorities above it is not always possible to have it all. Sometimes we do have to just do the best we can and use text-books that are not as good as our customised lessons. Other times teach 'out of the filing cabinet' in some classes in order to take time to develop in other areas. At any given time work on one aspect that gives you satisfaction, rather than feeling that you are behind the eight ball all the time.

### Positive feedback

Often we work alone and do not get any positive or negative feedback (except for the dropout rate). You need to work out how important it is for your satisfaction and if so to work out ways of getting it. Possibly you have to make a note of telling yourself what has gone well in each lesson or get the students to say what they have learnt or what is good about the class. Feedback may have to be on less obvious aspects as in some classes the students learn slowly even with an exceptional teacher. If your satisfaction is only from how much your students have learnt you may well be setting yourself up for failure.

Margaret Hanrahan has worked for 8 years as both a sessional and a contract teacher in the TAFE and community sectors. She can be contacted via [margaret@nashcc.com.au](mailto:margaret@nashcc.com.au)

## The importance of immeasurable outcomes

During the busy teaching year we occasionally experience the luxury of some quality reflection time. This time is invaluable as it enables us to think about exactly what our students have achieved with their learning from a macro perspective, whereas our time is usually taken up with the more immediate pressures of what skills to hone in on the next lesson.

During one of these special times, I was reflecting on my group of level 3–4 adult literacy learners. As far as measurable CGEA learning outcomes, they had achieved very little. However, with regard to immeasurable outcomes this group was remarkably successful. As educators we should not discount the importance of these outcomes because they perhaps impact on the students' lives in a deeper and more meaningful way with attitudinal and lifestyle changes compared with the measurable CGEA outcomes.

I would like to share some of the special achievements of my level 3–4 group with other teachers. Each of you can probably say, 'yes, this has happened in my class'. Rather

than bore you with similar anecdotal information you may have already experienced yourself, I hope by reading about my students' achievements you will recognise and value just that little bit more your own students' special immeasurable outcomes.

One student who had been in my group for most of last year withdrew earlier this year because she was suffering panic attacks and was unable to leave her home. Despite invitations to come to class for morning tea or a short visit, this student was unable to return for several months. I felt frustrated that I had lost a student who was quite committed to her learning. I also felt powerless about getting her back. Then a few months ago she started visiting me in the office, accompanied by a small dog. After a few of these visits, I invited her for morning tea with the class. She came with dog in tow and stayed for the rest of the session. She is now back in class full time, but with the dog. We are now working on weaning her off the dog in small steps. What an achievement for her that she was able to return to class despite the obstacle of her psychological problems.

In this group there is also a 17-year-old woman who had very bad experiences in school as a child. She describes school in one of her writing pieces as being like 'doctors' waiting rooms'. This gives the reader an idea of the negative impact that school had on her. Within the adult education sector this student has blossomed and is very active and enthusiastic with her learning. She has joined extra classes, such as computers, is part of the editorial group for our centre's newsletter and is the student representative on the committee of management. She has a vocational direction and her life has a focus. The outcomes for this young woman are extensive and life changing.

At the opposite end of the age spectrum we had two women in their late 60s who left school at a very early age join the class. The new energy and thirst for life and learning which these women display is quite evident in their facial expressions. Both were very nervous about returning to learning at an older age and after such a long break from a formal learning situation. They were able to overcome their nervousness and one woman thanked me 'for opening her eyes to a better life'. Again, what great outcomes for these women.

During the year I borrowed the video of Ruth Park's novel *The Harp in the South* for students to watch as a stimulus for writing a character analysis. I would have preferred to use the actual novel but I felt the cost for these students to purchase the novel was prohibitive. Before playing the video I explained to the students that the video was based on the novel and showed them my copy. Next week to my amazement and delight, three students arrived in class

“ I hope by reading about my students' achievements you will recognise... your own students' special immeasurable outcomes ”



with copies of the novel. They had gone to the trouble of borrowing the book from their library or getting it from other sources. These copies were then shared with other students who were keen to read the novel. What an outcome! Students were innately motivated to read without being told. Isn't that what we as teachers are trying to instil in our students—a desire to read?

Our centre is situated in an area where there is a high migrant population. Most of the students in the level 3–4 adult literacy group are from an Anglo-Saxon background and have an ingrained racist attitude. However, any person from another culture is welcomed by these people into the centre with courtesy and friendliness. The racial discrimination clause of our centre's code of conduct has never had to be discussed with these students. It is almost

like, 'if you come to our centre, you are one of us and you are accepted as a fellow student even if we can't speak your language'. Perhaps in time this outcome of racial tolerance will gradually expand to these students' lives in the wider community.

Hopefully, these anecdotes will serve as a reminder to all of us involved in the field of adult literacy teaching not to discount the importance of our immeasurable outcomes. This can easily happen when we get bogged down with helping students satisfy the requirements of the CGEA modules and don't look at each student as a whole person.

**Robin Tymms has been involved in adult literacy for 12 years and currently works at Olympic Adult Education as a teacher and language and literacy coordinator.**

# *Fine Print* announces

## 'Practical matters'

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## Policy Update

After much planning and consultation, the Australian Quality Training Framework will come into effect in July. Rose McKenna discusses some of the issues that arose during the development of the AQTF. A second article on the framework will appear in the next edition of *Fine Print*.

### The Australian Quality Training Framework—a national approach for quality outcomes

The Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) will be implemented in July 2002. State systems and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) have been preparing for its implementation for some months. A number of questions were directed to ANTA in regard to language, literacy and numeracy issues in the *Standards for Registered Training Organisations and Auditors*. A project to develop supplementary resources for language, literacy and numeracy was tendered. The project is being undertaken by Rosa McKenna of Communication in Education and Training Pty Ltd

The first resource, *Language, literacy and numeracy requirements in the Standards for Registered Training Organisations* identifies the issues for language, literacy and numeracy in Standards 1, 6, 7, 8, and 9 of the 'Standards for RTOs and Auditors'. It provides a detailed interpretation of the standards and provides links to resources, support materials and samples of evidence to meet the standards. This document is currently in draft stage. The second resource is a set of case studies of different types of RTOs showing how they build in language, literacy and numeracy to deliver quality training. This resource includes samples of evidence for standards 1, 6, 7, 8 and 9.

This article introduces readers to the AQTF and discusses some of the issues that have arisen in the consultation to develop the resources. A second article will continue the discussion in the next edition of *Fine Print*.

#### What is the AQTF?

The Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) and training packages together make up the National Training Framework (NTF). The NTF is endorsed by ministers for vocational education and training and applies nationally.

The AQTF seeks to ensure nationally consistent and quality provision of vocational education and training (VET) by registered training organisations (RTOs) and quality training outcomes.

The AQTF includes two sets of standards:

- 1 Standards for Registered Training Organisations
- 2 Standards for state and territory registering/course accrediting bodies.

The *Standards for Registered Training Organisations* provide a single level of registration of training organisations, a five-year registration period and 12 clear standards. This comprehensive set of standards provides the benchmarks with which the broad range of RTOs must comply to gain and retain registration.

RTOs are registered by a state or territory registering body in accordance with the *Standards for Registered Training Organisations*. In registering training organisations and conducting audits for compliance, states and territories comply with the *Standards for State and Territory Registering/Course Accrediting Bodies*.

#### Features of RTOs

Nationally recognised vocational education and training is provided by RTOs registered in accordance with the AQTF within a defined scope of registration to issue Australian Qualifications Framework qualifications. RTOs can vary considerably. An RTO could be a publicly funded education provider such as a TAFE college or institute, a school or tertiary education institution, a community-based organisation, a provider of adult community or further education, a business or enterprise whose core business is not training or a commercial training business.

On registration, an RTO's scope of registration is defined identifying the particular products and services that can be provided. This scope can cover assessment and delivery of training to meet units of competency and qualifications in training packages, as well as the assessment and training conducted as general education, including access and pre-vocational courses, further education and adult community education. RTOs can also be registered to provide assessment-only services. The scope of registration is defined by training packages and accredited courses entered on the National Training Information Service (NTIS) database.

#### Language, literacy and numeracy in the VET system

There is no specific industry training advisory body or training package covering language, literacy and numeracy.

Under the *Standards for Registered Training Organisations* all RTOs have responsibilities in regard to language, literacy and numeracy across their scope of registration. Assessment and training under the National Training Framework is based on training packages or, where they do not exist, accredited courses.

Training packages are based on a concept of competency that specifies knowledge and skill, and the application of that knowledge and skill to the standard of performance required in the workplace. Where communication is central to performance in the workplace, training packages have included core units that provide detailed description of the language, literacy and numeracy skills required within that industry context. That is, the sorts of reading, writing, speaking and listening skills used, for example, to provide information, deal with customers, prepare budgets or manage work teams, etc. These reading, writing, listening and speaking skills also underpin all aspects of work performance such as working in a team, following instructions, following operating procedures, planning training. The skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking are also crucial as the means for learning in a classroom, on the job or online. These generic language, literacy and numeracy skills are articulated throughout the components of the training packages

Accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy courses are delivered in the general education category of the VET system. The delivery of these courses is funded by the Commonwealth as part of programs to implement the mutual obligation of job seekers, and by state and territory training authorities and adult community education bodies as access, further education or pre-vocational courses or pathways programs

#### Links to the AQTF

Specific language, literacy and numeracy requirements appear in the *Standards for Registered Training Organisations*. Firstly, in terms of quality there are language, literacy and numeracy requirements in regard to the capacity of the RTO to produce written documentation for compliance with the AQTF, and to communicate with their customers and staff in Standard 1; ensuring that staff have the capacity to deliver quality services within the scope of registration in Standard 7.1, 7.3 and 7.4; assessment in Standard 8.1 (v); and learning and assessment strategies in Standard 9.3 (v). Secondly, in terms of access and equity, language, literacy and numeracy are clearly an issue in assisting individuals from identified target groups participate in vocational training in Standard 6.

#### A quality issue

Training packages are based on a concept of competency that specifies knowledge and skill, and the application of that knowledge and skill to the standard of performance required in the workplace. Competency standards must therefore cover all aspects of work performance including:

- task skills—performing individual tasks
- task management skills—managing a number of different tasks
- contingency management skills—responding to irregularities and breakdowns in routine

- job/role environment skills—dealing with the responsibilities and expectations of the work environment, including working with others.

Each of these aspects of work performance incorporates the language, literacy and numeracy information within the competencies to specify the required workplace communication.

Workplace communication is an all-encompassing term affecting all aspects and conditions of work. Without it, work cannot be effective and in most cases, it cannot happen at all. It involves the reading, writing, listening and speaking skills of employees and their ability to apply mathematical concepts to work and adapt to ways in which they interact and communicate in specific industries, organisations and workplaces. This includes the increasing use of visual material and the use of electronic modes of communication.

Competency standards are intended to provide unambiguous guidance to their users on the language, literacy and numeracy requirements embedded in work activities. To ensure the training and assessment processes reflect these requirements, users of training packages are responsible for addressing language, literacy and numeracy in:

- development of learning activities/training
- delivery of training
- development or sourcing of learning resources
- development and conduct of assessment, and
- reporting on workplace competence.

Assessment and training activities are based on interaction between the assessors/trainers and the learners/trainees using oral, written and electronic forms of language. The training context makes its own literacy demands, and these are different from and sometimes greater than the demands of the workplace. The nature and modality of these assessment and training events, available for selection by RTOs within the NTF, are a matter of professional choice and available resources.

International comparative research on the levels of literacy among the adult populations of OECD countries indicates that half the adult population in Australia can be expected to have difficulty coping with the information processing of everyday life.<sup>1</sup>

From this perspective, RTOs need to ensure that, within their scope of registration, they have:

- a thorough understanding of the context of the workplace or educational environment in which the assessment and training will take place
- the capacity, skills and professional knowledge to analyse the training package or accredited course to identify the language, literacy and numeracy skills involved

<sup>1</sup> ACAL View—Surveys and Beyond, Australian Council for Adult Literacy, 1998

- the capacity to identify the abilities, skills and knowledge that learner already has
- the capacity, skills and professional knowledge to select activities and modes of learning and assessment to promote the development of the language, literacy and numeracy skills needed for gaining competency.

### **An equity issue**

It is important that all Australians have the opportunity to participate in vocational education and training to meet their personal aspirations. In addition to this are the needs of their employers' RTOs who deliver quality training, and will need to ensure that all clients have access to information about its services through culturally and linguistically appropriate communication strategies. Furthermore, the assessment and training services offered to clients should be developed using planning processes that take account of the diversity in the community.

The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) has set targets and endorsed strategies to increase the participation of under-represented or marginalised groups in VET (*Achieving Equitable Outcomes—A supporting paper to Australia's National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 1998–2003*). All RTOs must commit to meeting these policy targets and must comply with anti-discrimination, equal opportunity and human rights laws as applicable.

Access and equity principles set out how an RTO should respond to an individual from one of these target groups

to allow them to participate in VET. The thrust is to ensure individuals have information on what is available, how they can be assisted and how they can be confident their rights are upheld. RTOs need to demonstrate they are capable of accommodating, identifying and providing appropriate forms of support to these client groups and of maintaining commitment to specific target groups nominated in their own business plans

### **Staff competency**

The minimum standard for all RTO staff outlined in the *Standards for Registered Training Organisations* is equivalent to Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training plus the vocational competencies in the subject area. Vocational competency for language, literacy and numeracy staff is not covered by a training package qualification and has not at this stage been defined. In the long term the issues will be resolved in the development of the Trainers and Assessors Training Package currently being undertaken by the Business Services ITAB.

For further information about the AQTF visit the ANTA website and download documents and resources at [www.anta.gov.au](http://www.anta.gov.au) or look out for an ACFE publication, *AQTF Evidence Guide for Accredited Further Education Provision in ACE Providers*.

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## Beside the Whiteboard

In late 2000, the State Government announced a new program called Managed Individual Pathways. Funding was made available for schools, TAFEs and ACE centres to provide vocational support and guidance, including pathways planning. This was one of the recommendations of the Kirby Report of the Ministerial Review of Post-Compulsory Education and Training, which found that young people faced serious and complex issues in their transition from school to education, employment and training.

Jane Casey is the Managed Individual Pathways Worker for three ACE centres in the Northern Region of Melbourne. She talks here to Rachel Wilson.

**Tell us about your background and how you came to be working with young people in adult community education programs.**

For the past 15 years I have been a youth worker in residential, recreation and education. As a youth worker I see my primary role as advocating for young people and providing accurate and relevant information and skill development, as well as empowering young people to make positive life choices.

I have worked in schools, conducting personal development and peer education programs. Over time it became evident that there were a lot of kids leaving school prior to, or as soon as they reached the compulsory school attending age of 15. They were in many cases ill prepared for what lay ahead, and had little or no support or access to resources.

When I commenced my formal training as a youth worker in 1985—International Year of Youth—there was great interest in youth participation. I feel it is the wider community's responsibility, not only the individual young person, to assist young people to make decisions based on accurate and relevant information. Only then can they make a valuable contribution to their lives and society.

The Managed Individual Pathways project has allowed me to continue my ongoing commitment and interest in assisting young people to plan and map out their future—to take control. As young people become more and more detached from school and family, there is a growing cynicism that develops amongst them. My job is about developing the person, taking them on a journey—it is the process that is important.

When you give a young person value for who they are, not what they will become, you see the growth and the rewards it brings. It is important to teach them by example and with respect, to stand alone in an adult world and yet be able to work collectively with others. When young people own their future, then and only then can you influence them as a teacher. It is a privilege to empower young people to grow into tomorrow's citizens.

**Describe what issues are faced by the young people you work with and how they have come to be in ACE centres.**

Young people enter ACE learning for a variety of reasons, some of which are:

- to seek Centrelink benefits (Youth Allowance and TAFE vouchers)
- to remove themselves from bullying
- because they have been asked to leave school due to antisocial behaviour
- because they are experiencing mental health issues
- because they want to develop literacy/numeracy skills
- because they want to develop English language skills.

### Youth Allowance

For early school leavers to receive Youth Allowance (a Centrelink payment) they must be studying, training or job seeking. The majority of young people we see at ACE have left before Year 12 and do not have parents whose income and assets are over a certain amount, which makes them eligible for Youth Allowance.

If they are 16–17 they can receive TAFE vouchers. TAFE vouchers entitle a young person to up to 400 hours of accredited training. Most who are enrolled in the Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA) are on TAFE vouchers. TAFE vouchers can also be used to gain a certificate in any job-related training such as hospitality, office skills and retail. ACE provides an affordable option for young people.

Even though ACE is a voluntary education setting there is an element of compulsion for the young person if they want to receive financial assistance. This can lead to behaviour problems as the young person sees it as an imposed situation. This perceived imposition can cause antisocial behaviour, non-conformity, a resistance to learning and/or erratic attendance. Sometimes the antisocial behaviour is linked more with the developmental

stage of non-conformity and rebellion that goes with youth culture.

### **Bullying**

It is important that bullying not be tolerated in the classroom, as this has been an ongoing stressor for many young people who have chosen to leave school and seek refuge in an adult learning classroom in the hope that they will have more positive experiences.

### **Mental health issues**

Many young people engaged in ACE have significant emotional and mental health issues. It is important not to stereotype them as loud, impulsive and disruptive. More often they present as moody, inattentive, fidgety, sleepy and withdrawn. These are all often signs of mental health problems.

When young people come to ACE, they are making a new start and they need to be turned on and re-engaged. Teachers need to respond not only on a cognitive level, but need to also take into consideration the emotional, social, family and community factors that impact on each person. Don't misinterpret negative attitudes, which are often a cover for the helplessness and anguish they are experiencing in their lives and the uncertainty they may feel regarding their unknown future.

Young people entering the ACE learning environment can have great difficulty adjusting because of the expectations and social norms that come with to their new surroundings. Rather than being treated as a child about to enter an adult world in the future, ACE is the adult world. They may have been taught about democracy while at school but it should not be assumed they know how to act democratically. It is the teacher's role to facilitate this process.

### **What is the Managed Individual Pathways project and how does it work in ACE?**

Making decisions about the future can be scary and even surreal. 'Do I want/need to go back to school...to work...to a course? Can I handle what's involved? What is involved in this? How do I find out information? Who can help?' These are some of the questions young people are faced with upon leaving school. It is the Managed Individual Pathways worker's role to assist young people to address these and other questions.

Many young people have been influenced in their career choices by their parent/s. Often the career preference of the parent for the child is inappropriate and squashes any aspirations the young person may have.

It is important that time be allowed to build rapport and to gather as much information about each young person.

This provides the young person with the opportunity to fully explore their career choices. This can be done by allowing young people to assess career options through looking at course material, finding opportunities to talk to people and conduct personal research or attending career expos and traineeship/apprenticeship information sessions.

Young people often leave school without giving clear consideration to their future, particularly if it is a sudden/involuntary decision to leave school due to an illness, expulsion, bullying, failure or poor performance. Due to the multiple issues that the young people present with, the Managed Individual Pathways project is often case managed. The service provided depends totally on the individual needs of each person.

### **What have you observed about what engages the young people you work with in reading and writing and learning in general?**

A community-based organisation such as ACE is an ideal setting for young people as it allows them to self-pace while having links to other activities and groups. In an ACE environment young people are valued as being part of the larger community.

ACE provides a warm and inclusive environment. People can come and go at various points, which is appropriate for young people who are experimenting with different options. There is a focus on learning as a holistic approach, with personal development and support being a key component.

Some young people can feel intimidated when they congregate with others who attend courses at an ACE centre, so it is important to consider this during breaks. Other ACE students often need to be educated about young people in an ACE environment, and visa versa, in order to alleviate any problems or concerns that may arise.

It's important for the teacher to explain their role in the classroom. A teacher may see themselves as assisting the young student, but young people may see teachers as symbolising the authority figure of school. Time is needed for the transition from school to an adult education environment.

I work closely with teachers. Teachers can assist my work with young people in providing opportunities to develop career pathways by assisting students' access to published sources and internet sites. But it is not sufficient to just give young people a list to explore on their own. Teachers need to use these sources in the classroom to develop resumes and letters of application.

Consultation and flexibility are essential in working with young people. Resources and materials developed around youth culture and interests are the most successful. This is

why youth media has been so successful for the past six years at Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre. What young person does the media not impact on? It is real, it's in your face, and they know it. They might not understand it, or the impact it has on them in making their daily choices—but then it is the teacher's job to help young people understand how the media impacts upon them.

The curriculum needs to be relevant and young people need to be allowed to ask *why*. This is why they respond so well to the adult learning environment as it works in partnership based on a need-to-know basis.

Teaching practices need to be flexible to accommodate young people. They are still very much coming to terms with being an adult, they are in an 'acting' role. They need to apply learnt skills in a challenging project. Young people are natural 'risk takers'. They love a challenge if they are given it.

**What do you like about working in adult community education? What do you wish was different?**

Managed Individual Pathways is about empowering young people to think beyond today—to dare to dream and set about achieving their planned pathways to their future as they see it. This means asking the right questions, listening to young people's dreams without judgement, perhaps giving a little wise advice and heaps of resources and information. It is an honour to be in a position where young people entrust you with their thoughts about their future aspirations. For many it is the first time they have shared their thoughts, concerns and hopes with anyone else.

Young people have not given up on learning. I'm inspired by their eagerness to learn, their high attendance and the quality of work they produce. That has to say something. Traditional schooling is not relevant to them and the lives they are living. It has given up on them, yet they are not so ready to give up. Marginalised young people under 15 years are not catered for. They remain lost in the 'too hard' basket. What are schools doing to engage these young people? Is ACE the appropriate setting for these young people? That is a discussion for another whiteboard.