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# Editorial

Welcome to the spring edition of *Fine Print*. It is jam-packed with exciting ideas. This edition boasts four feature articles covering a range of topics from the very practical to the theoretical, as well as our regular *Fine Print* sections. For those fortunate enough to have attended VALBEC's AGM in May, we were lucky to hear the first of what I am sure will be many presentations from Bev Campbell on her research about the dialogic struggle for professional identity in adult literacy and basic education. In this article Bev begins to describe the journey she has taken during her research as a PhD student.

Caryl Oliver's paper 'The road to mobile learning' demystifies the role that mobile learning aids are beginning to play in the vocational education and training field. Caryl emphasises the need for teachers to have access to the new technology and time to 'play' before starting to work. Everything you need to know about going mobile is there. Caryl explains how to play, why the mobile learning aids should be used and how to get started.

Ellen Lawson and David Van Heurck reflect on delivering the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP) in two regional settings, BRACE in Ballarat and GippsTAFE. These two writers talk about their experiences and the positive learning that has occurred over the past three years. Included in this article are some success stories that students from these programs have achieved. Michael Cole and Michele Farrar give an insight into a successful learning program in Year 11 and 12 VCAL programs at Ashwood School. The program is built on applied learning principles and a hands-on approach to learning. There's a lot here to help others in getting up programs in their own contexts.

In May, the VALBEC Portraits and Visions conference was held at the William Angliss Convention Centre. Lynne Matheson, VALBEC co-president and conference

convenor, reviews the highly successful conference and provides a general overview as given by participants at the conference. Next year will see some major changes in the area of accredited general studies and further education curricula. As some disappear from the accreditation register and some are rewritten for reaccreditation, Lynne Fitzpatrick and Liz Davidson give us some insightful information into the role of CMM and provide the field with answers to questions about how the accreditation process occurs. In particular, Lynne and Liz highlight that CGEA teachers should start thinking about the CGEA reaccreditation process due to occur in 2006. Maggie Herten's interview brings home to the reader not only a reminder of the diverse range of learners who access adult literacy and basic education, but also the diverse skills, talents and histories that we all bring to our classrooms as ALBE teachers.

This edition's Practical Matters is a joint effort by teachers from North Melbourne Language and Literacy and Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre. Liz and Toni give a snapshot of the programs they developed for high-need CELL literacy learners. At the end of 2005, CELL will cease to be registered as an accredited ACFE course in Victoria. Valerie Astbury shares the success of the CELL, which has been delivered to groups of women at Victoria University. These women share many of the settlement, language and cultural issues that new arrivals face—even years after arriving in Australia! In her article, 'The changing face of basic skills in England', Yvonne Hillier from City University in London talks about a UK project funded to trace the history of adult literacy. This article reinforces the importance of documenting the stories, analysing the archives to ensure that new directions are grounded in the lessons of the past. As you can see, there is so much to read, so, why not get started straight away? Enjoy!

Debbie Soccio

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

# Songs and stories from the field: the dialogic struggle for professional identity in ALBE

by Beverley Campbell

**In all careers, the search for one's professional identity is an ongoing process. Referring to her research into the dialogic struggle for professional identity in adult literacy and basic education, the author describes her own journey in search of her self.**

## One song or many?

... because I sit there and I think 'we still play the same song or the same tune' and then I get torn between saying 'well it's their turn anyway, whether they want to do the same song that's their business, (but maybe they need to do the same song), that's the interesting thing ... what are the forces that might make them sing it a bit faster so that they get onto the next verse? (laughter) So that's the thing that needs to be asked.

With a musical metaphor and a touch of irony, Geoff<sup>1</sup> made this comment about the adult literacy and basic education field in an interview I conducted as part of the research for my doctoral studies on professional identity in adult literacy and basic education in Victoria. It suggests that the adult literacy field is singing one song, a round or song cycle in unison, albeit a bit slowly. But although the adult literacy field may have begun with everyone thinking they were singing in unison, it no longer has a single melody line. Now there are many songs with different tunes and rhythms. From the multiple songs available, teachers sing with and against the available tunes. If the adult literacy field is increasingly multi-tuned, what of the singers who sing these songs? This article is about both the professionals who sing these songs and the choreographing required as they choose which songs they will sing.

## Professional identity

Questions of professional identity frame this article and situate it in a period of thinking where questions of identity, self, subjectivity and agency are concerns of many fields of inquiry. This article offers a way of interrogating the notion of professional identity and the I of that identity. To some, the term professional identity might suggest cohesion and mutual understanding, but at the same time a different interpretation might suggest diverse and often competing images, and multiple and contradictory discourses. Adult literacy professional identity can be read like a novel, with its own distinctive characters and defining themes, plots

and metaphors. The article focuses on two of the themes running through the narratives as stories professionals tell each other to talk about their work, and out of which professional identities are formed. In the process the I of the narrative is being constructed.

In the thesis, I drew on examples from interview transcripts with 13 adult/literacy educators to explore four sustaining but contradictory storylines, permeating the social imaginary of adult literacy and basic education. I illustrated that the personal voices and their stories also represent the social imaginary of the adult literacy field. The two storylines considered here, the metaphor of voice and the image of 'on the margins', are themes integral to the common vernacular of adult literacy. The other two themes explored in the thesis, but not explored here, were the image of 'a proper job' and adult literacy as a secular religion.

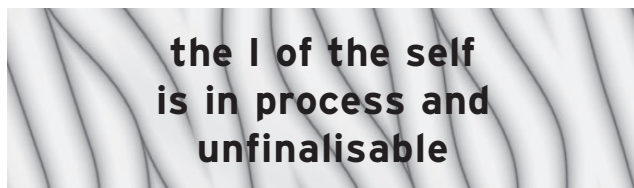
To open up the question of professional identity I have taken Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic self (Holquist ed.1981) and its associated idea of 'the authoring I', to explore some of the stories adult literacy professionals tell to talk about their work. Bakhtin says that the authoring I is enacted in relation to 'the authored other'. In the case of adult literacy education the professional self is authored in relation to the other of the adult literacy learner. The space between the authoring I and the authored other, I called the middle space and as Grumet says 'the middle is hard to sing' (1988:102). This article focuses on the authoring I side of the equation to illustrate that this process is dialogic and unfinished.

'A community ... comes to know itself in the stories it tells about itself' (Kearney 1998:248). However, this coming to know is not always a smooth-flowing, straightforward process. Often identity formation involves juggling the multiplicity offered by these contradictory subject positions. Subject formation, in any domain depends on 'poignant tussles with contradictory legitimising narratives'

(Gunew 1994:113). Similarly, Britzman (2000), in reflecting on her study of learning to teach, has opted for a post-structural reading of the data as if she were reading a novel, and, 'consequently as if narratives of teaching were primarily a complex of contradictory interpretations and competing regimes of truth'. I applied a similar approach to adult literacy professional identity. I read (and wrote) adult literacy professional identity like a novel whose themes are sustaining and idiosyncratic myths, passed on like an oral culture in the stories that people tell each other at tribal gatherings such as conferences and meetings.

### **The I site**

The I of the dialogic self is negotiated through dialogic struggle, in a process of authoring of self and the other. Brodkey describes this 'subjectal space' as the 'I site' at which 'a plethora of discourses clamour for the attention and fealty of actual human subjects' (1996:19). Holquist (1990), in interpreting Bakhtin's notion of the first person pronoun, sees 'the I' as an empty word and at the boundary of lived experience and the systems that precede that experience (p.28). The I of the self is in process and unfinalisable. For Bakhtin, the last word comes only at the point of death (Clark & Holquist 1984).



The self-in-process is also an idea taken up by the more psychoanalytic approach of Kristeva (1984). For Kristeva the I of the subject-in-process 'moves through the linguistic network' (p.126), in an ongoing process of authoring and reauthoring, similar to Threadgold's (1997) idea of 're-writing' and 're-reading'. Bakhtin's theories of self raise two questions: 'How is the self constituted as an entity that performs responsible acts in the world?' and 'How does my "I" and the acts it performs fit into culture as a whole?' (Morson & Emerson 1990:176). As the I acts, the narrative of the authoring self-in-process has an ethical dimension (Derrida 1995).

### **The self as a site of struggle for meaning**

Many of the interviews recounted some involvement in different sorts of discursive struggle. Participants were negotiating and balancing different subject positions offered by a multitude of discourses. What I have called discursive struggles, and what I see as situated in the narrative texts of the thirteen participants, is similar to what Britzman (2000), in her study of being a student teacher, calls 'contradictions ... of chronology, knowledge

and identity'. By using what she calls a post-structural ethnographic approach, her 'hope was to reposition the site of struggle from the individual to their narratives and to pluralise their retellings to account for the competing stories (p.35). To reposition her understanding away from an essentialist self and its memories, she wanted to present the 'second hand memories' of students, rather than the student teachers themselves as the site of struggle.

The interview texts represent the discursive construction of self as site of struggle. An analysis of a selection of utterances illustrate that the text is a site of dialogic struggle. Bakhtin uses several metaphors to capture the nature of this dialogism, this eating metaphor among them: 'Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions' (Holquist ed. 1981:293). I examined the interview texts to find words that have the hint of a flavour of the discursive struggles of the self situated in the broader context. The discursive choices made by participants, the tensions they gave voice to, were in some way reflective of the dialogic struggles they had experienced and which represented their lived experience.

### **Contradictory storylines**

So what are some of the 'contradictory legitimising narratives' of the adult literacy field? The narrative discourses I identified I called storylines (after Gunew 1994), to reinforce the narrative element. The storylines I explored are more enduring, sustaining myths that cut across pedagogical discourses and offer continuity of sorts. This continuity, however, belies the contradictory subject positions offered by conflicting interpretations within the storyline. The struggle is to be found, not between two subject positions in a single utterance, but between contradictory subject positions offered by the competing storylines. I traced them as continuous themes in the participants' narratives, but at the same time they presented different and contradictory possibilities for authoring a sense of professional self. The multidiscursivity of each storyline suggests the possibility of tension embedded within competing interpretations.

The juxtaposition of some of the storylines works with some, but against others, to offer different and competing subject positions within the field. The theme of working towards giving people voice, whether professionals or learners, sits somewhat at odds with the theme of being on the margins. The spatial metaphor of 'on the margins' is a pervasive one in adult literacy vernacular. Different uses illustrate how the images associated with 'being on the margins' might contribute towards shaping particular subjectivities of those who are positioned in the adult literacy field. As the participants tell the stories, in order

to make them their own they draw on other discourses and stories from other times and contexts.

### **The metaphor of voice**

Different uses of the metaphor reflect a storyline that has been stronger at different times than others in the identity formation of the adult literacy movement. As a single metaphor, the metaphor of voice has multiple interpretations; some emanate from Enlightenment discourses of voice associated with an authentic and unified self, some from emancipatory discourses of liberation where the voice needs to be set free from oppressive institutions. Others issue from more post-structural understandings of the self and its voice as being socially situated and multidiscursive. The discourse of voice is complex and multi-layered; at times it draws on the meta-language of discourse and linguistic theory, for example, Bakhtin's notions of 'dialogism', 'heteroglossia', 'double-voiced-ness' (Holquist 1990), Fairclough's (1992) idea of 'dialectic voice' in discourse analysis of interviews, Luke and Freebody's (1997) idea of 'democratic heteroglossia'. But more often the discourse of voice in the interviews draws on the metaphor of personal voice, with its implicit notion of making people feel that their voice counts. The metaphor of voice is used by participants in two different directions: that of the importance of helping learners find their voice, and that of professionals being encouraged to find their own personal voice. But even the metaphor of finding a personal voice is contested, with other discourses of voice embedded within it.

### **Silence or be silenced**

In the constant discursive struggles of the adult literacy field, there are many reasons why one discourse is taken up and gains supremacy over others. Why is one person silenced, another given voice, or yet others claim the space to speak for themselves? Why does one storyline become woven into the narrative of adult literacy education and another silenced? Lather raises these questions in the image 'staying dumb?' where she explores in the context of emancipatory feminist studies 'the processes by which students may accept, integrate and/or reject oppositional knowledge' (1991:107). Whilst it is not possible to answer those questions, I wanted to show that the different voices of the research participants were silenced or called into voice by changes to the accepted discursive constellation. The metaphor of voice has itself undergone changes and has been interpreted differently, to be called into voice or be silenced, by different eras of practice. There was a sense in the adult literacy field that, with the bureaucratic turn and an increasing emphasis on issues of governmentality, the voices of teachers and of students had been silenced. Susan interprets this silence as being caused by policy debates and wants to reclaim space for student voice—'the voices of students are really important in policy debate'

(p.10). Being silenced is a form of oppression and certainly this interpretation of the metaphor of voice is implicit in Susan's comment.

### **Finding a professional voice**

The development of belief in a writing self with a public voice began early in the movement with VALBEC's encouragement of professionals to write from their own experience. Rachel and Susan talk about a time when adult literacy writing pedagogy was based on a belief that writing tutors were more likely to produce writing students. In a field with a limited theoretical base, teachers were encouraged to write out of their practice, or to write up conference presentations, which might be published to make them accessible to a wider audience. As Susan commented there was always 'something to write papers (on)', and in the written form it became available to a wider audience as well as contributing to the growing body of knowledge which the adult literacy field could claim as its own.

Rachel recalls how an article she had published began as a conference presentation and with encouragement became a publishable piece of writing:

... I didn't really get involved in VALBEC until 1990, when there was an ACAL conference ... I remember Heather Haughton rang me and said, 'Do you know anyone through your networks who could possibly give a paper, as a person has pulled out?' And I said, 'Yes, I do, I'll do it', 'cause I'd become very interested in Freire ... and by giving that paper at that conference in Melbourne, was a sort of turning point in terms of my professional involvement.

Both Rachel's and Susan's comments reflect how VALBEC's encouragement engendered in them a feeling of professionalism. They attribute finding their voice, their professional self, and then their place in the adult literacy field to presenting at VALBEC conferences and then writing up their paper for wider distribution. Encouragement from VALBEC gave Rachel a chance to have her say:

... the fact that those conferences were there made me realise that, 'Yes I've got some things to say and to share and to learn from other people' and also to share from my own teaching and thinking about my own teaching and my own bit of research ... and that created a context for me to develop professionally and to develop my thinking and my research, and do a lot more reading and to think of myself as an adult literacy person with a contribution to make which I otherwise wouldn't have done ...

Susan recognises too that without encouragement she would not have made her thinking available to a wider

audience, ‘... I would never have written half the things ... so you would be asked to prepare a paper so we’d write a paper on values and adult literacy or the generation of materials in adult literacy ...’.

### **Orchestrating the voices**

A different interpretation offers another competing thread to the storyline of voice. This interpretation has to do with the recurring binary of the personal and the social and the question of how one takes social knowledge and makes it personal. Holland et al. talk about ‘the space of authoring’ (1998:183), in which a person sorts out and orchestrates the voices (the discourses) available. Bakhtin interprets orchestration as ‘the struggle with another’s discourse’ and the way that a voice begins ‘to liberate itself from the authority of the other’s discourse’: (1981: 348).

Lucy’s comment ‘Well I haven’t had the need to voice it, no-one’s asked me!’ reflects something of this struggle—which discourses would she position herself in and make her own? I had asked Lucy to articulate her educational paradigm, to voice what she saw as important in her educational practice. Her choice of words such as liberation and transformation did two things: it made the knowledge her own ‘personal knowledge’ (Polanyi 1978), and it situated her conceptual framework in a larger social discourse of emancipatory education. Lucy had taken from the discourse of transformatory education and found a voice to articulate it.

Yvonne also struggled to articulate what she thought adult literacy education was for as she mimicked the prevailing discourse of ‘work, social and civic’, but then wanted to move beyond that definition to reinterpret the purpose of adult literacy education in her own words. This is her response to my question:

Well I could just parrot, work, social and civic (laughter). Hang on, we don’t think about this enough, do we? I think it’s for a whole lot of things—it’s for the personal achievement and satisfaction ... but it’s also about participation in society ... being able to access the things that are rightfully yours, as a citizen really ... but it’s also about the personal ...

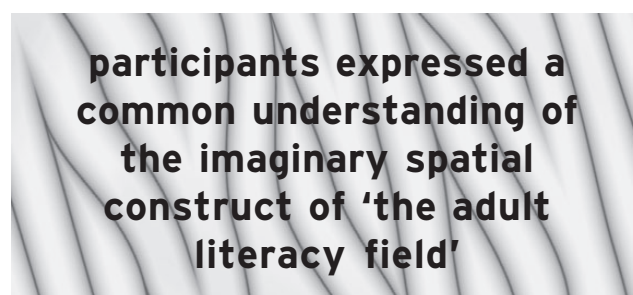
With the use of a ‘but’ Yvonne counterpoints two discourses for literacy—literacy education should be about personal achievement, but also about giving access to society.

Dialogic struggle results from the multiple contradictory subject positions available through the storyline of the power of voice, but it is compounded by another powerful storyline, that of being ‘on the margins’. If the position of being on the margins is a pervading image in adult literacy

mythology, how does that reconcile with the importance of finding or giving people a voice? Set against the metaphor of voice, the image of being on the margins is explored in the following section to show the contradictory ways that professionals think of themselves, the adult literacy field, or their students as being on the margins.

### **On the margins—the problem of positionality**

The discourses of adult literacy have become coloured with some of those markings to do with being marginalised; the spaces and places of work are often marginalised, the funding is marginalised and working with adult literacy students is often perceived as working with the marginalised of society. Yet even within this powerful storyline there are competing interpretations which impact on the formation of subjectivity in contradictory and often ambiguous ways. Marxist and some feminist analysis might see those in such marginalised positions, both workers and students alike, as oppressed and constrained and in need of liberating and empowering.



Participants expressed a common understanding of the imaginary spatial construct of ‘the adult literacy field’. Although there had been dramatic changes in the decades since the movement began, there was still a mutual basis on which the interviews could proceed. Responses were formulated in relation to this imaginary concept ‘the adult literacy field’—in and still in, in but currently out, in-out-in, not in but sympathetic. Russell is one who identifies as having been in the field, then had a spell out and is now on his way back in. His use of the image of ‘field’ suggests this idea of it being a discrete, identifiable space. The range of positions in or out of ‘the field’ also contributed to a sense of struggle. Occasionally participants who did not feel totally subjectified into the adult literacy field talked about how they had resisted being shaped by its discourses. Patricia’s comment ‘I don’t do any adult literacy at all ...’, suggests she is so removed from the field that she does not even feel marginalised from it.

### **Margins as ambiguous signs**

Being on the margins can be either a place of oppression or a site of resistance (Hooks 1990:153). The storyline of ‘on the margins’ is a paradoxical theme lived out both

personally and socially as participants struggled to identify their own discursive position in the adult literacy field, the main game, or struggled to describe the position of the adult literacy field in relation to other parts of the educational sector, another main game. In the 1980s the field was seen to be very firmly positioned on the margins. Since then it has had a variety of positions, in from the margins and more mainstream, but now perceived to be back on the margins.

The following response by Rachel encapsulates the variety of ways the adult literacy field might be considered marginalised:

... it was in the margins of TAFE colleges physically as well as, and the little community houses were sort of on the margins of communities, so it was on lots of different margins ... there was a lot of activity happening but it was all on the margins and none of it was really firmly funded or had a really strong commitment from society about it or from the people who were supposed to be doing the adult literacy learning themselves, so it was problematic from what ever way you looked at it ...

Diane's use of marginal is more in relation to the marginal position of some of her students:

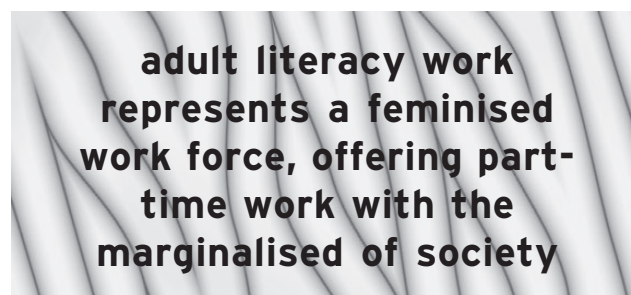
... the West African woman ... she was a single mother ... children by two or three different men and very much living a very marginal sort of a life, and there's no way you could have expected her to appear regularly ...

Lucy sees it more in terms of what is happening to literacy in relation to the VET agenda:

... so that this push towards VET is marginalizing literacy as it's never been before because there is an illusion that you're actually addressing literacy within the Training Packages ... (p.5)

A sense of comparison, of measuring up to something else, is reflected in the various uses of the term 'on the margins'. And the term is contradictory because it represents different discourses used by participants to describe changing spatial locations. The meaning depends on who is talking and who or what they are talking about—which position of marginality they are conveying. Some talk about their marginalised position brought about by structural definition and positioning, in contrast to being on the margins through active resistance and making the most of the possibilities of marginality. Yet others use the term to refer to the client group as being marginalised, those that Rachel refers to as the 'casualties of society and the casualties of education'. Sometimes I intentionally

injected the image 'on the margins' into the interview. Frequently, though, it was a descriptive term used to convey the constantly changing position of participants or the adult literacy field.



Adult literacy work represents a feminised work force, offering part-time work with the marginalised of society, mostly carried out by women who are often juggling other roles and responsibilities, primarily those of mother and care-giver of small children. Seddon interprets ALBE's position on the margins as a positive thing, 'enabling a holistic, just and enlightening education', because it has been defined as the 'other' to mainstream education (1994:6). This marginalised position of adult literacy education is further exacerbated by what Green and Lee see as 'education's marginal position as a specialist field of study in the modern university' (1999:209). That perception places adult literacy professionals in a doubly marginalised position, that is, adult literacy is relegated to a marginalised position on the edge of education which itself sits on the edge of other disciplines.

### **Being marginalised—policy decisions and funding outcomes**

At other times participants express the feeling that they have been marginalised by others, or by circumstantial changes beyond their control. The impact of favourable or unfavourable policy decisions and funding outcomes is seen as one of the powerful forces contributing towards the feeling of marginalisation of the field. Hamilton (1994), in a paper comparing the situation of adult basic education (ABE) in the UK and Australia, says that even after two decades of provision in the UK 'ABE ... still clings to a marginal position and remains largely unrecognised within recent policy decisions' (p.1). Her comparison with the Australian situation was made after a visit here in 1994 when the status of adult literacy education had changed dramatically. At this time the Australian adult literacy field was flourishing with increased provision, vigorous professional networks, and the establishment of a national research network. In their paper 'Back to the margins?: The new scenario for Adult Literacy and ESL', Sanguinetti and Riddell (1997) reflect on this burgeoning phase of the field:

Over the last decade ALBE has emerged from the institutional margins ... since 1987 it has been brought into the mainstream through state and national policy development and recurrent funding (p.9).

The result: the repositioning of the adult literacy field, being brought in 'from the margins', and the repositioning of some of the professionals in the field.

### Reframing the margins

Another way of interpreting the margins is suggested by the work of particular scholars who study the marginalia of medieval paintings—not to focus on the main picture and what it might be portraying but to look instead at the images that create a frame of sorts in the margins. The symbols and iconography surrounding the central picture are the major preoccupation of these scholars and themselves provide spaces for conjecture and interpretation. As several of the research participants somewhat wryly observed, being brought in from the margins had its drawbacks—there were distinct advantages in being in a marginalised position. And if at times adult literacy workers felt marginalised, out of the mainstream and oppressed by the fragmented and part-time nature of their work, there was also a freedom in being on the margins which the field had enjoyed up to this point, away from the demands of accountability of government funding requirements.

In spite of the movement away from the margins into the mainstream, with its increased governmentality and its imperative for professionals to learn new discourses, adult literacy teachers were sometimes able to subvert the discourses. For many it became a juggling act. No longer marginalised, they had to learn to be mainstream, at the same time continuing their work with the marginalised. These new discourses impacted on the nature of pedagogy as well as on the nature of the adult literacy subject. Similarly, being on the margins in adult literacy education might be seen as providing spaces in which the activity of those who occupy the spaces might be more subversive, and in which people feel less constrained and more able to act with a sense of agency, in comparison to the spaces provided within the larger established institutions.

This sentiment was reflected in several of the comments about the early days of the adult literacy 'movement' when people felt more in control of pedagogical practices and processes of adult literacy education. For all the different connotations used about being on the margins, there was a feeling that adult literacy education had come in from the margins, but in that process perhaps something had been lost. While many of the participants had been actively involved in the early days of adult literacy education, in setting in place processes which resulted in it being more

recognised as a legitimate area of education—that is, brought in from the margins—there was also a feeling of nostalgia for the interstitial spaces which were less constrained and less the target of bureaucratic governmentality discourses, that adult literacy education had once occupied.



The image of being on the margins remains a powerful part of the construction of subjectivity of the adult literacy professional identity. How professionals respond to their position of marginality is contradictory. At times others relegate them to marginality; sometimes their positioning is through deliberate choice. Whether talking about the adult literacy field, the learners, or one's own professional position, as oppressive marginalisation or as a space of resistance, the impact of such an image plays itself out in the discursive formation of subjectivity. Participants talked about the benefits of working on the margins, enjoyed more when the choice to be there had been freely made. When they were relegated to the margins as the result of policy or funding decisions, it represented exclusion.

### Conclusion

The notion of an authoring I engaged in dialogic struggles offers a way of exploring professional identity. The two pervasive storylines explored in this article relate more to subject positions taken up by the participants as they author the I of their professional self. The metaphor of voice and the image of 'on the margins' are just two of the powerful storylines that shape adult literacy professional subjectivities. In using these images, professionals are both perpetuating the stories at the same time as they author a sense of self. At times the storylines themselves offer competing subject positions, but even a single storyline contains paradoxes and contradictions offering multiple subject positions that professionals negotiate as part of their professional identity.

**Beverley Campbell has been involved in adult literacy practice and research in the community and higher education sectors for 25 years. She recently completed doctoral studies at Monash University with a thesis entitled 'Acting in the middle: the dialogic struggle for professional identity in adult literacy and basic education in Victoria'.**

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## Endnote

- 1 While I used participants real names in the thesis, where I have quoted from interviews in this article I have used pseudonyms to prevent those participants being identified with their professional writing.

# The road to mobile learning

by Caryl Oliver

**'Just in time, just for me' is the ideal that many learners seek. Can delivering teaching and learning by means of pocket PCs or PDAs and mobile phones deliver this ideal? Caryl Oliver gives a personal account of her journey towards making this a reality for students at William Angliss Institute (WAI) in Melbourne.**

## Introduction

In April 2004 I received an email that advised me I had won a Flexible Learning Leader<sup>1</sup> scholarship. I was just delighted that someone would actually pay me to learn more about my chosen area of mobile learning! With the support of my institute and the amazing group that comprised the flexible learning network, I was about to embark upon a wonderful journey and a rich personal learning experience.

Mobile learning had attracted my attention for two reasons: I had been concerned at the low acceptance of online delivery, and had seen some material about teaching by means of PDAs and mobile phones. In the context of my work it resonated with me as having potential value for our students. I have also had a long-standing interest in new technology and its possibilities. I love discovering new 'toys' but am equally quick to discard them if they are not the right tool for the job in hand. So what better opportunity to combine my work with my passion to influence change?

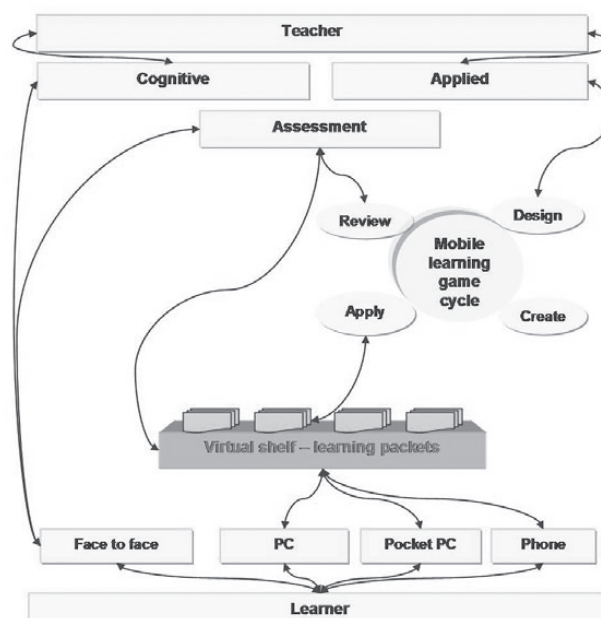
I spent most of 2004 being a sponge! I trawled the internet until my favourites list became almost unmanageable. I attended conferences in Australia and Europe and I unashamedly picked the brains of everyone I met. I actively participated in a great many online discussions and forums. As the volume of material grew and as my knowledge increased, I gradually started to work out what I did not need to pursue in order to focus more on what was going to take me forward.

While I needed to keep up to date on the evolution of mobile and computer technology, it became clear that the means by which the ideas from a teacher's head got translated into a game on a mobile unit was the real challenge. I felt that I learnt more about pedagogy than technology during this time.

Vocational training, with its stronger emphasis on hands-on activity and doing, opens the door to offering learning activities that are game-based. A drag-and-drop computer game for setting a table means that students may present for the first time in the training restaurant with an

understanding of what is required. This means contact time between teacher and student can be spent on the more reflective areas of learning.

With this in mind I formulated the model shown below, where elements of teaching and learning can be turned into learning games and made available on a virtual shelf for students to access when and by whatever means suits them.



This diagram illustrates the ability for mobile learning delivery to take on the more mechanical teaching functions, thereby allowing learners to undertake elements of their learning in their own time, and in small, manageable bites. The time then spent with a teacher may be more usefully used to explore more complex ideas and direct the knowledge acquired by students by means of the technology.

The challenges that this model represents for an institute are many and significant. In December 2004, the Victorian government granted WAI significant funding to undertake a mobile learning pilot project enabling us to start to explore the hardware, software and wetware<sup>2</sup> issues and embark upon mobile learning delivery.

Even though we are still very early in the process, the following is the story so far ...

### **William Angliss Institute context**

WAI is a 64-year-old vocational training college that is the specialist centre for tourism, hospitality and the culinary arts—all industries that operate predominantly 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Our students, both on campus and in the workplace, often work antisocial hours and seek to fold their learning around those hours, hence the attractiveness of delivering teaching and learning in formats that do not rely on having teachers and classrooms on hand.

The industries that we serve all have a high dependence on computer technology, so delivery by means of all forms of technology is appropriate preparation for the technological flexibility with which our graduates will have to operate once in the workforce.

In the 1920s, world knowledge was doubling approximately every 30 years. By 2010, world knowledge will double every 11 hours—University of Durban

### **Changing pedagogy**

Historically, teaching has been a process whereby the teacher imparts knowledge to the students, who subsequently prove what they have learned by repeating the knowledge back to the teacher.

The more current approach, student-centred learning, recognises the phenomenal growth in knowledge and the sheer impossibility for teachers to genuinely expect to know more than the students at all times. Teachers are now one part of the facilitation process for students to acquire knowledge. While teachers have always encouraged students to undertake their own research, the ease of access to the volume of information has changed the issue to one of management. The real value that the teacher now brings is greater life experience and guidance. The internet is largely responsible for this growth in knowledge, but it also provides some very good tools to help students and teachers manage learning.

Blog and community sites have become a rich source of opinion on a range of topics as well as a forum for students to share their work. Instead of preparing an assignment that only the teacher will see, work may now be uploaded to a community forum for everyone to see. The results are higher levels of literacy and improved presentation. Learners tend to read the postings on a forum site where they would not otherwise have read each other's written assignments; such collaboration is demonstrative of student-centred learning.

Students wanting access to their learning when it suits them, availability of technology that permits that access, and

teachers wishing to provide flexibility in delivery, are some of the drivers that make mobile learning a viable and practical element in the teaching and learning process.

### **Introducing the hardware**

Teachers were going to be exposed for the first time to some new technology, and be asked to think differently about how they go about teaching. My first priority was to distribute a dozen or so XDAs to selected teachers in a range of departments. At the end of December 2004 I gave them the units in their boxes and offered absolutely no instructions. The idea was to give each person the challenge of opening the box and working out how get their new 'toy' operational for themselves.



**The XDA IIs is the most advanced Pocket PC Mobile Phone combination, and includes camera and voice recording as well as all the expected phone functions. It also has a 512 Mb memory card. This unit offers significantly greater functionality than any other in the marketplace, and is seen by teachers as a prize rather than a burden. Given the rapid nature of technology change, it was decided to place the starting point as near to the leading edge as possible.**

Many teachers came back with basic questions about specific functions but generally the level of intuitive engagement was extraordinarily high. It became clear that where many people are somewhat diffident when it comes to dealing with new computer software or hardware, there was no such diffidence in the enthusiastic uptake of the XDAs.

By the time teachers gathered again after the holidays, we were immediately presented with some interesting ways in which teachers were starting to use their Pocket PCs. As anticipated, the more computer-literate found a whole range of games and functions that they were able to download. This was fine as anything that ensured familiarity was seen as a positive. Others had already worked out some business solutions and one or two had started to see the educational opportunities.

## First experiments

The first teacher to use the XDA as a tool managed to convert all the records of his apprentices from the student management system into an Excel file and then download it to his unit. When he went out to the workplace to visit the students, he had all their history and records to refer to when in discussion, and could add notes to update those records.

Another teacher used the camera function to take photos of students' work and record a commentary from himself or the student to be saved and used for assessment. In a food preparation environment, this provides a rich source of images and feedback on what the students are actually doing in the workplace.

We produced our first rudimentary learning games through the enthusiasm of our Coffee Academy, who designed four learning activities that we produced as games where the task is to select the elements to make a latte, cappuccino, and so on.

Our failed experiment came when we tried to undertake some transactional games using Bluetooth. One person took the role of a traveller; others were assorted airlines, hotels and travel agents. The traveller would submit a request, the supplier a quote. Once an itinerary had been completed, the purchases were made and transactions turned into accounting records. All of this being done using the XDAs and transferring information to one another using the Bluetooth communication link. It seemed like a great idea at the time, but Bluetooth simply could not cope with having numerous units trying to talk to each other at the same time!

The first student group to use the units was a class of ecotourism students who worked in pairs using an XDA to gather information while on a field trip. They took photos and videos as well voice recordings on the XDAs and brought all the data back to produce movies that became their assessment. The enthusiasm of those students was fantastic, not just because they had shiny toys to play with, but because they knew they were breaking new ground and wanted to prove that it was something that could work.

This activity also provided the first challenge to the IT department, as they had to make Movie Maker and Photo Story software available on the student network. Then they had to ensure that Media Player 10 was available throughout the whole network so that we could view their work on computer as well as on the XDAs.

## Stop playing, start working

Having laid this groundwork, and with some 75 XDAs now in the institute, we have turned our minds to the real work of applying the technology to teaching and learning. About 30 teachers now have XDAs for their own personal use on the proviso that they actively look at elements of their work

that they can turn into mobile learning opportunities. A small number have gone to support areas such as IT and multimedia, so they can be called upon for infrastructure support, with the remainder in class sets for student usage.

## Connectivity

Connectivity is the most significant challenge as we are mindful that, while we can distribute material outwards with relative ease, students cannot be reasonably expected to pay substantial costs to upload assignments or stay online for large downloads. With this in mind we have turned to wireless for on-campus connectivity and the internet for our virtual server.

It is now possible for anyone with one of our XDAs to access the internet anywhere on the campus. We have established a dedicated server for the mobile learning project and have now proved the concept through wireless. This means that we can prepare a test and load it onto the server. Students then gather in any classroom and the teacher brings a class set of Pocket PCs (may not be XDAs in this instance) that are distributed to the students. They connect to the server by means of the units, undertake the test and return the units at the conclusion. All the activity is saved directly on the server and the teacher has immediate access in order to assess the work.

This means that we have a mobile computer room for the purposes of accessing the server for tests or learning activities at about one-tenth of the cost of a normal static computer facility. This is not to say that this option replaces fully functional computers, but it does provide a service and facility much needed by WAI.

## Learning games

As mentioned earlier, our first tilt at learning games were for our Coffee Academy and, while still fairly rudimentary, they have provided the much-needed demonstration that we can actually deliver a genuine learning outcome. A number of students have returned from playing these games with an improved understanding that they can apply directly to their practical work.

There are not many of us in Australia that are developing learning games in this way so the collaborative circle is still small. I hope that it will grow as we increasingly demonstrate the potential of mobile learning as well as lowering the barriers.

I have consistently used some learning games provided to me by Cambridge Training and Development (CTAD) in the UK to demonstrate the scope of what can be done with some simple flash files, and remain grateful for these as the launching pad for much of our current work.

PowerPoint presentations convert extremely well to Pocket PC format, but they are designed to punctuate a presentation rather than stand alone. To improve effectiveness we will be

recording the face and voice of the teacher to be embedded with PowerPoint to make it a complete lesson. This is one step further than what is currently possible in PowerPoint 2003.

With this in mind one teacher has now combined the presentation on Australian Destinations with a learning game, where the names of towns and landmarks can be dragged onto the appropriate map. In learning format the game will not allow mistakes, so if you drag Sydney onto where Cairns should be it springs away for you to try again. When the game is in assessment mode this feature will not apply, so you can put the names where you like and they will stay for the teacher to assess. We have also developed a simple crossword game that changes each time it is opened to test knowledge on specific subjects, as well as a true/false game. In this game a statement is presented and if the answer is correct it moves to the next statement; if incorrect it provides an explanation.

All of these learning activities, while seemingly disconnected at the moment, are illustrative of what can be done in a range of ways as well as providing examples to share with other teachers to encourage their creativity! Gradually gaps will become smaller and a culture of considering learning games as a part of the lesson planning process can start to grow.

### Making it easy for the teachers

Each new semester, teachers are exposed to changes in curriculum, different subjects to deliver and/or new ways of delivering teaching and learning. When faced with changes in technology they are frequently expected to both learn the new systems and change the way in which they prepare in order to accommodate these changes.

It is my intention, with the introduction of mobile learning as part of the delivery mix, to minimise the impact of change. We are in the process of developing a series of 'wizards' or templates that guide the teacher intuitively through the process of creating learning activities with instant results.

For example, if a teacher wants to produce a multiple choice game for students, the construction is the same for a great many subjects. The wizard will allow the teacher to import images and text from their own files according to prompts. Once the teacher has completed the process they have an immediate preview of what they have created so they can check and edit. Once they are satisfied, it can be immediately posted to the virtual shelf for distribution. The technology in the background will carry out the formatting changes for the different download options. This software is in development now and should be ready for testing during the second half of 2005.

### Preparing for multi-platform delivery

Interestingly, the deeper I delve into mobile learning the more it becomes about teaching and learning, and less

about technology. The challenge is about making all elements of delivery available in as many formats as possible, so there is real learner choice and flexibility. From my original model, I have delved a little deeper into the structure of delivery and am now breaking it down further and further into manageable bites.

The first stage is to break down all study into three key aspects:

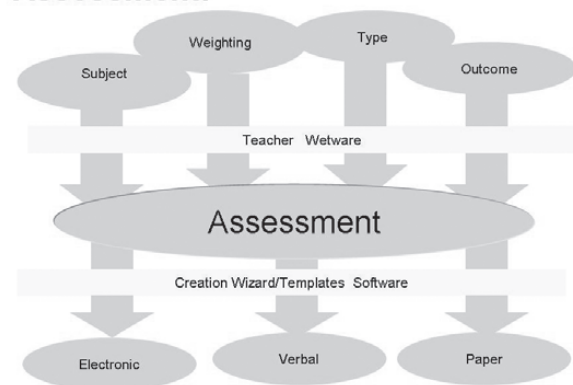
- Underpinning knowledge
- Learning activity
- Assessment

Underpinning knowledge is the largest and least containable aspect, while assessment is the smallest and most manageable. Learning activities sit in the middle. A single assessment, test or exam will incorporate a relatively small number of learning activities fed by underpinning knowledge from a very large range of sources.

The course we have chosen to develop first as a multi-platform delivery course is the Diploma of Event Management. Currently the course is in great demand.

We are starting at the assessment point and working subject by subject. Subject X has four units, two of which have two assessments and two of which have one assessment.

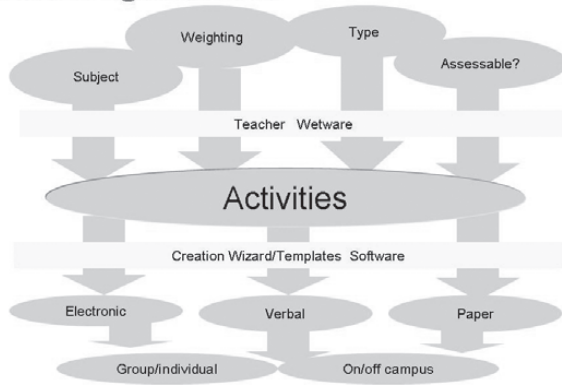
### Assessment:



It remains entirely up to the teacher to decide what the assessment should be, but we do ask the question 'how many ways can it be undertaken?' The technology only takes up the task once the teacher has made these decisions. While the assessment in its current form may be adequate now, we will challenge teachers to think more flexibly in order to assess more flexibly.

Behind each assessment are three or four elements of learning. These elements already take many forms and some lead directly to the assessment, while others are more indirect.

## Learning activities:

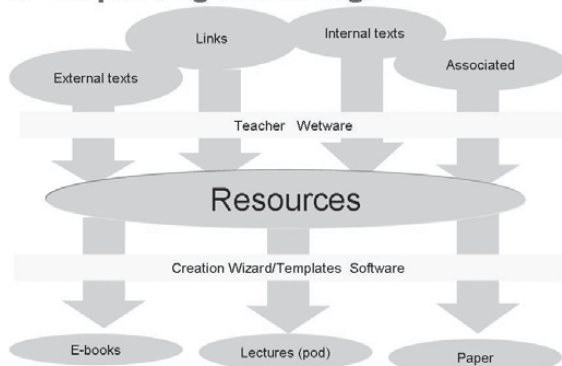


As with assessment, it remains up to the teacher to decide on the learning activity but we do ask the question 'how many ways can it be delivered?' This is the level of learning games where the student can repeat them often and make mistakes.

In both the above areas, the object is not to remove the current delivery options but to augment them with further options. In order to make both the learning and the assessment transferable from one form of delivery to another, the basic way in which they are set up may require some alteration. The single focus amidst these changes will be to ensure that students are competent to do the tasks in hand, and not just be competent at playing the games!

Underpinning knowledge for all these elements can be delivered in a variety of formats, from printed texts through teacher-created resources to the internet. E-books represent the most desirable way of producing resources as they can be easily stored and saved on mobile devices, referred to regularly, book-marked, annotated and saved, as well as being less expensive.

## Underpinning knowledge:



The WAI Library is also exploring the options of having resources in electronic format available for hire or purchase.

The plan for this project is now almost complete, and as you read this we are unpacking the course to identify individual elements and map delivery options. The work then begins in actually building the elements from the teacher's perspective, and producing the materials in all possible formats. We hope to be doing some serious testing with students towards the end of the year, and have it as a true delivery option in 2006.

## Where to next?

We are still at a very early stage in a process that, if we are to succeed, must be undertaken at a measured pace. Despite that, there is a real sense of excitement and this is driving our enthusiasm. Each time we make a breakthrough we celebrate. When IT proved that the tests by wireless on Pocket PCs worked, I was elated. Each new game that is developed is circulated for everyone to play with and hopefully further inspire.

Technology will continue to renew every 90 days but we now have the framework within which to manage those changes and, more importantly, we can now look at each technological change with more informed questions as to whether it enhances our ability to deliver teaching and learning, or whether it is change for change sake.

To have clearly defined subject breakdowns available for delivery on multiple platforms such as this makes learning in complete courses or in smaller skills-sets a reality for anyone, anywhere.

There is still a great deal to learn, and there is still an enormous amount of work ahead, but I hope that more and more educators are infected with my enthusiasm, not just for mobile learning but for the whole idea of embracing every means possible to deliver learning to students. If this concept is proven and adopted more broadly by educators then the ideal of 'just in time, just for me' can become a reality.

Caryl Oliver is manager of travel and tourism at the William Angliss Institute in Melbourne. She also manages the institute's mobile learning pilot project. Before joining WAI Caryl ran her own tourism business for 18 years and was a champion fencer who represented Australia. She now enjoys less ferocious pastimes like swimming, reading and cooking.

## Endnotes

- 1 Flexible Learning Leader (FLL). Funded by ANTA, some 200 educators from the public and private sectors have been given scholarships to study various aspects of flexibility in teaching and learning. This has spawned

Continued on p. 19 ...

# Doing sums I've never done before: language, literacy and numeracy programs

*by Ellen Lawson and David van Heurck*

**Across Victoria, providers of the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP) have been quietly going about their business. Ellen Lawson from BRACE in Ballarat and David Van Heurck from GippsTAFE give an insight into the work being done.**

The Language Literacy Numeracy Program (LLNP) is a federally-funded Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) initiative. Before July 2002 two separate programs—the Literacy and Numeracy Program and the Adult Migrant English Program—targeted two client groups: those needing support in literacy and numeracy and migrants needing support with language. These two programs were combined to service both needs within the one program, the LLNP. Clients are interviewed/assessed according to the National Reporting System (NRS) and become eligible for LLNP assistance if they meet Centrelink eligibility and are Level 2 or below in at least one macro-skill. There are five macro-skills: reading, writing, oral communication, learning strategies and numeracy.

## **The BRACE experience**

BRACE Education, Training and Employment commenced LLNP delivery in 2002. Since commencing, there has been a continual increase in demand and participation rate for the program. Pre-enrolment, intake and exit of students is on an ongoing basis, so there is a continual turnover of students. This creates a learning environment that is focused on delivering individual outcomes. Referral to the program is via Centrelink or a Job Network agency. There is a well-established relationship with Centrelink Ballarat, with a designated officer who is prompt in offering assistance, and the first point of call for coordinating contact with other officers.

The program is delivered weekly in two-day blocks. Participants generally have the choice of attending either Monday/Tuesday or Wednesday/Thursday. Participants have mixed ability across the range of macro-skills and fall within the NRS NYA1 to NRS Level 4. Students are expected to attend 11 hours per week. In some circumstances this is reduced to six hours per week. There is a maximum enrolment of 20 students per class.

## **Program participants**

All participants must meet the eligibility requirements of the LLNP and include those in receipt of Centrelink

parenting payment, disability pension, and Newstart allowance. The participants are of mixed age, gender and literacy and numeracy ability. There are some who have until recently been members of the paid workforce, and others who have been absent from the workforce for an extended period of time because of various reasons. Some participants are yet to join the paid workforce.

Most participants share a common history of lack of achievement during their schooling years. The majority left school during Years 7 to 10. Many report that they had experienced difficulties with their learning while at school. Some report they received additional support, others say they did not. For many, their early primary schooling was interrupted as a result of relocating to more than one other school.

As a group, they are disengaged from learning, and view themselves as having inadequate literacy and numeracy skills and many complain of low self-esteem as a result of this. Many have highly developed strategies for dealing with their poor literacy and numeracy ability, and there is an absence of developed learning strategies amongst the group.

## **CGEA and LLNP delivery**

The delivery of a general education qualification such as the CGEA to this diverse group is important. It is an acknowledged mechanism to benchmark literacy and numeracy abilities. The CGEA serves the real need for participants to gather a nationally recognised level of general education ability that can allow them to engage in a variety of options on exit. It enables them to make future choices for more specific educational and vocational options.

A CGEA pathways flowchart is given to every student at the pre-enrolment interview, along with details of delivery, assessment, etc. The students participating in the program see the relevance of the qualification to themselves. They view the CGEA as a way of measuring their competency.

From the outset a clear definition of the program is provided to participants and they are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. Throughout their training, students chart their progress through the various learning outcomes. Student results are recorded on individual record sheets, and these sheets provide the map for the planning and monitoring of their training program. Students have access to their individual record sheets at all times, and the sheets accompany the teacher into the classroom.

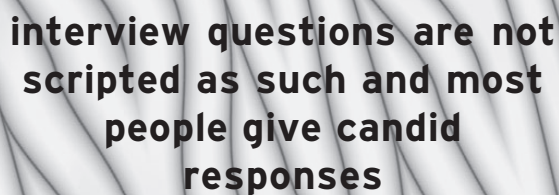
### **The training environment**

For most participants, LLNP would be their first experience of a learning environment based on adult learning principles. Efforts are made to create an environment where people feel comfortable taking risks to extend their capabilities. It is a learning environment where the participant's life experience and knowledge and skills are utilised in the learning process.

### **Initial interview**

The pre-assessment interview is the first opportunity to establish a positive relationship and gain the trust of a student. The interviews are conducted one-on-one and usually take 1½ hours. Whilst there is an outline of information to be gathered, interview questions are not scripted as such and most people give candid responses.

Participants are informed about the interview procedure before commencing, and told that they will be questioned regarding their past experiences and their expectations of the program. Care is taken to explain to participants why the information is collected at the interview regarding their background, learning strategies and sample tasks, and who has access to this information.



**interview questions are not scripted as such and most people give candid responses**

At the interview participants are encouraged to reflect upon and evaluate their experience of traditional education. Most acknowledge that their employment pathways are obstructed, and that their independence is compromised by their limited literacy and numeracy skills.

Participants are also informed about the program. The learning environment is also discussed to help them develop an understanding of what the classroom experience will be like. Pre-enrolment information includes discussion

of the class dynamics and demographics in terms of delivery and competency levels. From the outset, there is a clear delineation of responsibilities for students, BRACE, teachers and the program coordinator. The focus of the program is clearly on developing abilities. The approach is one of 'where to from here'.

### **The educational setting**

BRACE Ballarat is housed in the old Urquhart St Primary School building, located close to the central business district. There is access via public transport and there is also ample car parking available.

LLNP is one of a range of other activities being delivered at this site. These include VET training delivery, Job Network Agency, disability programs and NEIS. Physically, the environment is rather formal.

The offices for the program coordinator and administrative officer are located in close proximity to the classrooms used by participants. Access to the program coordinator is encouraged. Participants are given the program coordinator's direct telephone line.

### **Record keeping**

The monitoring of hours, while mandatory under the delivery contract, is viewed as advantageous to the students, ensuring their full utilisation of the allocated hours. For one participant, a single father who needs to leave 15 minutes earlier than class finishes to pick up his child from school, this adds up to an extra week of training. Our experience is that most participants will notify of absences, and make arrangements to complete any work they have missed.

### **Timetabling**

Inclusion of IT in delivery of the program at BRACE Ballarat is to encourage IT as a learning tool to be utilised. IT is timetabled for three hours per week, out of the total 11 hours. Flexible access and use of computers outside of these times is available to students. The focus is the development of independent users and acquisition of logical knowledge. The program aims to foster the development of critical thinking in the use and application of technology.

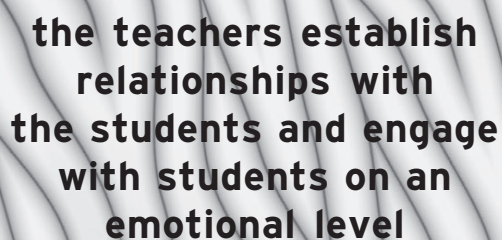
Students are encouraged to familiarise themselves with IT and to become proficient users of technology for the purposes of their training. Training is focused on the application (rather than simply mechanics) of specific programs, such as a word processor, desktop publishing program, and internet browsers. The starting point is the student identifying what it is that they would like to do and the learning begins from there.



An average LLNP participant would use a word processor to produce documents, desktop publishing program to produce a pamphlet, an internet browser to research information and interactive learning sites, such as BBC Skillswise. It is within the context of the learning outcome that mechanical knowledge such as formatting text is acquired.

## Classroom culture

Teachers of the program, the students themselves, and staff of BRACE are involved in creating the educational environment. The relationship between the teacher and adult student seeks a cooperative approach to learning. Ongoing student intake and exit results in perpetuating an established classroom culture that is conducive to learning. Students are encouraged to participate, and their mix of personalities, viewpoints and learning styles play a real role in classroom dynamics. Settled students, well versed in the program, provide positive role models to others, actively participating and taking ownership of their progress. They act as mentors and supports to students just commencing.



**the teachers establish  
relationships with  
the students and engage  
with students on an  
emotional level**

There are phases observed in the students. For example, at the initial interview it is not unusual to note the trepidation of prospective students. Student confidence develops exponentially with increase in ability. The teachers are flexible, practising mixed-level delivery—with a focus on catering for individual student interests—including whole class activities, small group work, individual and pair work. The teachers establish relationships with the students and engage with students on an emotional level. As a teacher in the program there are many positives.

While positive performance outcomes are seen as a measure of success, feedback from participants is welcomed. This is garnered through ongoing discussion with participation of teaching styles, delivery strategies and learner preferences with them as well as student satisfaction surveys.

Teaching within a flexible curriculum structure that values and encourages student interests means there is infinite variety in the contexts you are delivering. To illustrate this point a student opinion piece topic can vary from the pros and cons of mulesing<sup>1</sup> to a critique of the new-look Volkswagen. The structure also encourages students'

creativity, as in a recent procedural text, *10 Not So Easy Steps to making Chocolate*, (which includes details on airfares to South America).

LLNP offers people the opportunity to develop their generic literacy, numeracy and learning skills. As a general education program it develops intrinsic skills that enable participants to create change in their life.

## GippsTAFE

GippsTAFE was successful in tendering for the LLNP delivery at four sites within the Gippsland region: Warragul, Leongatha, Moe and Morwell. GippsTAFE has campuses at all of these locations and the LLNP was to be a much-needed boost to already existing programs aimed at focusing on literacy and numeracy needs at each campus. GippsTAFE has delivered English as a Second Language (ESL) classes in Moe and Morwell areas for over ten years. LLNP language referrals would be placed directly into ESL classes based on individual needs. We have had very few language referrals, probably due to existing classes meeting most of the community needs.

The literacy and numeracy program already existed in the Moe area, and GippsTAFE took over the operation from the previous organisation. LLNP started with five carryover clients in the Moe site delivering on a two-days-per-week basis. All other sites were to be activated as clients were referred. Relying totally on referrals from Centrelink, numbers increased slowly to the point where we had to increase days and then split the group to encompass delivery at Morwell. Warragul was also commenced after six months and the last site to kick off was Leongatha. Unfortunately, due to low numbers of referrals, the Leongatha site was closed down after 12 months.

Since August 2002, we have had nearly 300 clients referred to LLNP. Almost half of these have been between the ages of 16 and 25. Over 200 have participated in our classes. Sixty clients have completed the program and either gained employment, elevated to a higher NRS level or gone on to further study. There are currently 43 clients still attending. Students from 16 years through to mid-60s have been involved. Not all stay but most do and during their time in the program a common comment from them is 'I have learnt so much in such a short time' or 'My teacher is fantastic, I can now read and do sums that I never could before'. The small group atmosphere, combined with specialist teachers and direct educational focus based on student needs, help to set up a successful involvement with LLNP.

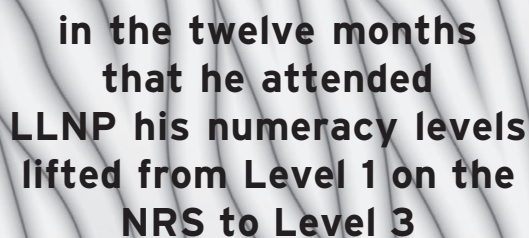
## Success stories

The following histories reflect a dedicated teaching staff who challenge each new student to take control of their

learning experience, regardless of their academic levels at the commencement of the course. Names have been changed to protect confidentiality of past students.

Paul from Moe was a shy young person who sat in the class and worked quietly on his own tasks. Group discussions and class driven activities gradually drew him into class involvement, allowing his confidence to grow and self esteem to develop. On entry level he was struggling with simple sums. Reading was at around Year 8 level. In the twelve months that he attended LLNP his numeracy levels lifted from Level 1 on the NRS to Level 3, a mammoth achievement. He left us and was successful in achieving full-time employment. Everyone in the group is encouraged to support each other and celebrate such achievements. Each time a student completes their allotted LLNP hours a certificate is awarded and a small celebration is held to recognise achievements.

Mark from Warragul was also a quiet young man with a dream to become a mechanic. He worked incredibly hard to achieve the required standards necessary to prove to local employers that he was worthy of the opportunity to become an apprentice. Eventually an opportunity came up with a local mechanic and a short work experience placement was set up for Mark. After a week he was offered the apprenticeship and he hasn't looked back since.



**in the twelve months  
that he attended  
LLNP his numeracy levels  
lifted from Level 1 on the  
NRS to Level 3**

Jennifer from Morwell always wanted to get involved in nursing but was a long way from the required academic levels necessary to be accepted into our (GippsTAFE) nursing course. After approximately nine months, Jennifer applied and was successful in gaining entry into our aged care course (mature age entry) as a prelude to joining the nursing course (upon completion of the aged care certificate). Jennifer was over the moon. While holding onto her dream, to actually have it come true was a major boost to her self-esteem.

Pauline from Moe joined the LLNP at the age of 54. Struggling with literacy and numeracy, to look beyond her support needs was difficult. After completion of her LLNP hours, Pauline moved into a further class of the Certificate in General Education of Adults. Within a very

short time she was successful in applying for the aged care course at the Yallourn Campus. Pauline will complete her certificate this year and go out into the workforce with a renewed confidence in her own ability.

Rhonda from Morwell joined the LLNP at 62. She was full of confidence but required one-on-one support to rebuild her foundation literacy and numeracy levels. Rhonda was a great influence on the younger students who respected her opinions and past experience. Rhonda had been a worker all her life and wanted to improve her levels. Now, having left the workforce, she had more time to invest in further education. Rhonda achieved an increase across the macro-skills of one whole level in the NRS.

### **A work ethic**

Many students come into our LLNP classes for different durations, most attending two days per week, those being Tuesdays and Thursdays. A few different variations to this were tried, but with many students also attending to family and personal pre-existing commitments, the current arrangement worked best at all delivery sites for both students and teachers. It has never ceased to amaze me how quickly our LLNP students adopt a strict work ethic in class. Regardless of age or personality or past history, I can visit any site and discuss program-related issues with teachers, and the students work unsupervised and diligently towards their goals.

Often I visit the classrooms before classes begin. Students walk in early, say 'good morning', sit down and begin to work. I believe that we have a collective of excellent teachers who connect with each and every one of the students, and the students know that this a great opportunity to revisit foundation areas of their academic past, fill in the gaps, and refocus on new horizons or goals that were previously out of reach.

The mix of students is often critical to the potential output of individuals and collectives of students. We often have a wide age range in classes which, more often than not, enhances the learning experience for all concerned. Young ones learn from their older peers that time in class should not be wasted. Discussions in class on all sorts of topics, both current and historical, are capitalised on by teachers who know that the best time to learn is when the question is asked. A balance of bookwork, group discussions, and partnered activities fosters a dynamic, enthusiastic learning environment. Students are encouraged to be tolerant of the enthusiasm of young people and respectful of experienced mature age ideals.

Students are given the opportunity to participate in TAFE tours that I conduct. We try to hold these at least once

every year to accommodate for the new students, but not overkill the existing LLNP students. We spend a day visiting all departments at both the Yallourn and Morwell Campuses to peel back the blinkers and give them a first hand insight into what is being taught and how, in each department. I believe that this activity is important in developing goals and opening possible pathways for students.

To walk into the actual learning environment and see for themselves initiates further classroom and peer discussions about future options, which is so critical to goal setting and career directions. It is from activities such as this that teachers are able to harness individual strengths and weaknesses, and challenge each student on what they think is their goal and why. The pathway is then set in place and learning in the classroom has further attached meaning and relevance.

For some students, completion of their allocated hours in the classroom, task-focused and without distraction, is a major achievement in itself. The statement at the end 'I did it!' is as big for that young student as the milestone achievements discussed above. We have had students from all campuses move into varying options after leaving LLNP. Further study and employment opportunities include apprenticeships, small business courses, pre-apprenticeship courses, aged care, nursing, abattoir worker, retail, carpet cleaning, security guard, builder's labourer, horticulture, hospitality, Certificate in General Education for Adults, home help and setting up their own small businesses. We have had various family and generational combinations of students in class including a mother and son, partners, father and daughter, cousins and siblings.

We measure our successes by NRS indicators paralleled with individual growth and maturity. Personal success is measured by student satisfaction with all factors of the learning environment they are provided with. To have students come back after a period of time and catch up with their friends from the class, or to touch base with their teacher and let them know what has been happening, signifies to me that they have not only been connected to the LLNP administratively, but also personally. Past students are welcomed back into the classroom as an indicator to new students that there is a life after LLNP, and that perseverance is a valuable quality to develop. It also enhances the confidence in returnees who have achieved certain goals, because they have been there and worked hard to make the most of opportunities that came their way.

**David van Heurck has been teaching in the disability/ adult education/ TAFE sector for 18 years. Much of his involvement has been in developing young people's work ethics, skills and attitudes, and literacy/numeracy levels through preparatory employment programs and courses.**

**Ellen Lawson is coordinator of general education (literacy and numeracy) at BRACE. She has over 19 years experience in adult education and community services for various community-based organisations.**

## **Endnote**

- 1 The removing of wrinkled folds of skin around a sheep's anal area to prevent fly and maggot infestation.

... continued from p. 14

a vibrant community of people who have continued to learn and who are incredibly willing to share their knowledge and research long after their FLL year is over. [www.flexiblelearning.net.au](http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au)

2 Wetware = brain power

# Urban adventures in VCAL

by Michael Cole and Michele Farrar

**The Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning, which was just a pilot program in 2001, is fast gaining momentum. At Ashwood School for secondary students with a mild intellectual disability, the VCAL is delivered through a hands-on program that uses applied learning principles.**

As learners and educators, it is most important and in our best interest to continually update knowledge and explore initiatives in teaching methodology, as well as revisiting and revamping appropriate learning tools for students. This article gives an overview of how Ashwood School responded to these challenges in their delivery of the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) to the senior secondary students. The most interesting and exciting aspect of its implementation was through the evolution of the Personal Development Strand as it relates to the STEP (Student Transition Education Program) students, teachers and our school community.

VCAL is a hands-on option for students in Years 11 and 12. Less than four years ago VCAL was only known as a pilot program in pockets around the state. It is now fast gaining momentum. The VCAL gives students practical work-related experience, as well as literacy and numeracy skills and the opportunity to build personal skills that are important for life and work. And like the VCE it is a recognised qualification.

It is important to understand what the applied learning principles are:

- 1 Start where the learners are. Build on their interests, skills and learning needs.
- 2 Negotiate the curriculum. Engage in a dialogue with learners about their curriculum. Remember negotiation is a two-way process.
- 3 Share knowledge. Recognise the knowledge that learners bring to the learning environment. Use and build on the skills of the learners. The teacher isn't the fountain of all knowledge—engage learners in the learning process, including learning from each other.
- 4 Learning will be more meaningful for the student.
- 5 Build resilience confidence and self worth—consider the whole person.
- 6 Integrate learning. In real life we use a range of skills and knowledge. Learning should reflect the integration that occurs in real-life tasks. Don't separate learning into sets of unconnected skills.
- 7 Promote diversity of learning styles and methods. Everyone learns differently. Accept that different

learning styles require different learning/teaching methods, but value experimental, practical and hands-on ways of learning.

- 8 Assess appropriately. Use the assessment method that best fits the learning content and context.<sup>1</sup>

The reason Ashwood saw the VCAL certificate as a 'shining light' was that its central building block was the applied learning principles and a 'hands-on approach' to learning. We believe this approach has been widely recognised as the most successful teaching/learning style in most specialist settings. The certificate had transparency to move directly over the already existing STEP curriculum, which then enabled staff to take on a new education initiative without having to reinvent the wheel.

Before we go any further, it only seems logical that we give you some background on Ashwood School. Established in 1976, Ashwood School is a specialist school with a fine reputation in catering for students with a mild intellectual disability, aged five to 18 years, who will benefit from the school's range and diversity of quality educational programs. The school is geared to maximising individual students' self-esteem and skills of independence to ensure a successful post-school life. Students come to Ashwood from a wide geographical area. Those in nearby suburbs are provided with free and supervised bus transport while others travel independently or with family assistance.

Situated in landscaped grounds between High Street and Highbury Road in Ashwood, the school's well maintained modern facilities provide an excellent venue for teaching and learning for both primary and secondary students. The school is organised into three departments: the primary school (5–13 years), the secondary school (13–16 years) and the STEP program (17–18 years).<sup>2</sup>

## Student Transition Education Program

Students in their final two years at Ashwood School undertake the multifaceted Student Transition Education Program (STEP) program that develops the key competencies proven to be necessary for post-school life. These years are a true transition, and aim to assist students with disabilities and impairments to develop confidence and competence in the

skills needed to function in post-school employment, further education and training, leisure, and recreation and home and community living.

Students are grouped into one of two pathways, VCAL or modules from the Certificate I in Transition Education. Learning outcomes from a wide range of subject areas are selected to suit the needs of the student. These include literacy and numeracy skills, personal development, work-related skills, travel, orientation and mobility, technology for life.

## Organisation

Students are allocated to pastoral groups for educational programs. The pastoral care teacher plans an educational program that links continuing literacy and numeracy with the necessary independent living, community access and vocational skills.

Each student is also allocated to a work station to practise pre-vocational skills and enhance personal social skills in a cooperative work environment. Each semester, for two days per week, most students are placed in one of a number of work stations.

## Catering

Involves baking and preparing food for a local school canteen, managing and collating lunch orders and maintaining food supplies, complying with the strict requirements of the Victorian Department of Health.

## Industry

A work-centred program comprising of collating and packaging items, managing the school Waste Wise recycling unit and car washing and detailing.

## Landscape/grounds maintenance

Tasks include the general maintenance of the school gardens and grounds at Ashwood School as well as developing new garden and landscape projects. Familiarity with the use and care of tools and equipment is an essential component of this work station. The group is also part of a monthly mowing and grounds maintenance program at Garfield Outdoor Education Centre in Gippsland.

## Textiles

Storage King allow us to use a fully serviced facility on the ground level in Evans Street, Burwood, where students produce canvas goods such as chairs and library bags for use in schools throughout Victoria. STEP students who are posted to the annex for a semester learn how to measure, cut, sew and finish the goods under the watchful eye of their teacher and the sewing machinist and teacher aide.

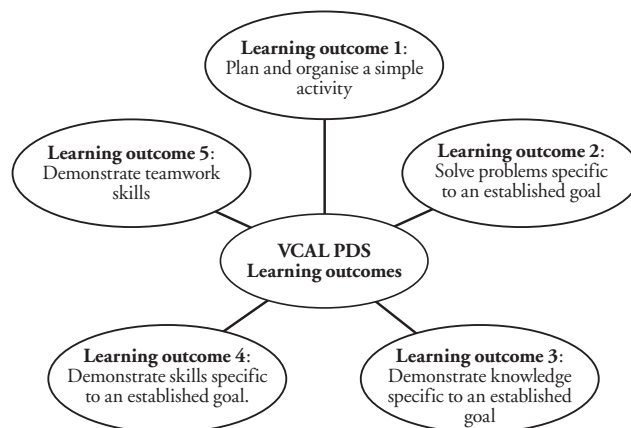
In addition, some VCAL students attend a TAFE college for a full day session per week while other students undertake modules from the Certificate II in Hospitality over one year. All STEP students are expected to gain an acceptable level competency in OH&S before being placed on work experience in a range of settings over two years.

At the end of the year a valedictory dinner is held for all leaving students, all of whom will have been placed in the Futures for Young Adults Programs, local TAFE courses and/or open employment. As you have gathered, the programs and curriculum at Ashwood School are very much aligned with the needs of the students.

## Back to the PDS task

As previously mentioned the senior students from the STEP follow one of two pathways. However with the delivery of VCAL we realised that the learning outcomes for the personal development strand were relevant to all the STEP students.

Each year the STEP students and staff look forward to our trip in October. The destination alternates biannually between an interstate trip and an Urban Adventure in the Melbourne CBD. The planning and organisation that these trips entailed fitted neatly into an assessment task that would encompass the learning outcomes required for the VCAL personal development skills unit at Foundation Level.



In 2004, the Urban Adventure—a real life activity—became our formal assessment task for Unit 1. Perfect! The Urban Adventure actually involved the students staying in a youth hostel in Melbourne for four days and three nights while exploring the fun and affordable activities available to young people their age.

## Urban Adventure 2004

The students will select one recreational activity to plan and organise for the whole student group as part of a

three-day trip to Melbourne CBD .The focus will be on the development of organisational and planning skills, knowledge, practical skills, problem solving and interpersonal skills. The individual projects will be presented in each student’s chosen media. However the assessment task will be carried out in small groups.

Students will also create a page to be inserted into a 2004 Urban Adventure Booklet. See ‘STEP Melbourne Urban Adventure 2004—Suggested timetable MASTER COPY’.

Student role and responsibilities in relation to the task is to contribute to an investigative project that involves planning one recreational aspect of the end-of-year Urban Adventure school trip to Melbourne CBD.

- Formulate small groups with teacher assistance.
- Brainstorm ideas.
- Use consensus to reach decisions.
- Choose an activity to research from the student survey.
- Complete set tasks.
- Present their projects through chosen media—visual diary/PowerPoint presentation.
- Create a page to be inserted into 2004 Urban Adventure Booklet.
- Complete a self-evaluation.

Level of teacher support:

- Guide students with group work.
- Facilitate a student survey of popular activities.
- Facilitate excursions to explore venues and services.
- Monitor and provide advice in regard to budget and timelines.
- Facilitate student action plans.
- Liaise with appropriate contacts.
- Provide structured self-evaluation proforma.
- Overall supervision of Urban Adventure in November 2004.

Evidence of successful completion of the assessment task to be collected for the student portfolio included:

Student Evidence*	L01	L02	L03	L04	L05
Action Plan	✓	✓			
Internet research/ communication/pamphlets	✓	✓	✓		
Journal/Power Point Presentation	✓		✓	✓	✓
Self Evaluation sheet		✓	✓		✓

\* = refer to Portfolio of Evidence in section 1

## Learning outcome 1: Plan and organise a simple activity

Description of what the student will be required to do in order to demonstrate successful completion of the learning outcome.

As a group students will:

- Brainstorm the type of recreational activities possible to put in a student survey.
- Complete the survey and prioritise the six most viable and popular activities.
- Form small groups and select an activity to organise.
- List the steps involved in an action plan and the resources required.
- Assign a role to each group member.
- Decide how projects will be presented and to whom.
- Set a date for the start, development and completion of the task.
- Develop an overall calendar of events for the three-day CBD trip in which each individual has made a contribution towards its success.

### Assessment criteria

The assessment criteria are demonstrated when the student can:

- 1.1 Develop a goal plan for a simple activity that involves a limited number of steps within a defined period of time.
- 1.2 Select resources appropriate to carrying out the plan.
- 1.3 Carry out the plan effectively.
- 1.4 Reflect upon the personal and/or community benefits of the plan.



## Learning outcome 2: Solve problems specific to an established goal

Description of what the student will be required to do in order to demonstrate successful completion of the learning outcome.

## STEP Melbourne Urban Adventure 2004—Suggested timetable MASTER COPY

Date	Morning session	AM Activity	Lunch	PM Activity	Dinner	Evening Activity
MON 18 <sup>TH</sup> OCT	9.30am: Depart Ashwood by public transport	Tram to Vic market approx. 10.30am. Cost: 1. Register at Queensberry Hill YHA—Drop Bags 2. SYN FM Radio tour—RMIT. No Cost	12 noon: RMIT Food court	1. 1pm: City Sightseeing (s/s) bus tour around Melb. (90 mins) student—staff free 2. 3pm–5pm: Melbourne Aquarium 3. Unpack bags at Hostel and relax	Dinner in Lygon St Carlton. Cost: Walk to hostel	TV viewing & pool table
TUES 19 <sup>TH</sup> OCT	Breakfast 9.15am: Pickup s/s bus at Vic Market to city area.	1. 10am: Bowling at STRIKE in Little Lonsdale St. Cost : incl shoes Walk/tram to Bistro	12.00: Lunch in QV Centre	Tram to Docklands 1. Tour of Telstra Dome Stadium 2. Swimming at City Baths	Southbank Restaurant—Automatic Cafe. Cost:	7pm: Rialto Observation Deck. Cost:
WED 20 <sup>TH</sup> OCT	Early Breakfast 1. Other students to get to No.1 bus stop at 9am. 2. Puffing Billy for STEP Laity ALL DAY. Cost:	9 am: Sight seeing bus tour of South Melbourne & beach area	Packed Lunch at own venues	1. 1pm: All group—Essendon Club Football Museum. Cost: 2. 3pm: Walk in Fitzroy Gardens. Cost : free	4.30pm–5pm: STEP Laity returns. Rooftop BBQ area at hostel Pack bags	7pm: Old Melb Gaol Night Tour
THU 21 <sup>ST</sup> OCT	Breakfast Pack up bags for departure	11.30 am: Yarra River Boat Cruise upstream	Packed Lunch at Birrarung Marr	Train Return to Ashwood School by 2.30pm	At Home	Big glass of wine / beer/ brandy!

Students will :

- Discuss the concept and dimensions of the Three-day Urban Adventure.
- Explore the resources available within the school and time required to research and complete the tasks.
- Negotiate with individuals and other groups throughout the planning process.
- Problem-solve appropriate alternatives when necessary.
- Reflect on progress at the end of each session by checking the status of the action plan.

### Assessment criteria

The assessment criteria are demonstrated when the student can:

- 2.1 Identify an issue or social concern related to an established goal.
- 2.2 Explain possible solutions to the problem identified.
- 2.3 Contribute to an activity that is aimed at resolving the issue or social concern.
- 2.4 Reflect upon the effectiveness of the action taken to resolve the issue or social concern.

### Learning outcome 3: Demonstrate knowledge specific to an established goal

Description of what the student will be required to do in order to demonstrate successful completion of the learning outcome.

Students will:

- Research their activity and collect information using the internet, city information centres, directories, telephone books, digital cameras and brochures.
- Interpret collected data to compare and ascertain suitable locations, costs, availability and access.
- Select the targeted activity through group collaboration and make the booking.
- Record information and details as a one-page insert for inclusion in the Urban Adventure Booklet 2004.
- Evaluate own contribution to the final product using self-evaluation sheet.
- List any problems encountered and possible improvements to share with other groups.

### Assessment criteria

The assessment criteria are demonstrated when the student can:

- 3.1 Identify knowledge that will contribute to the achievement of a goal.
- 3.2 Interpret information to predict steps required for completion of a goal.
- 3.3 Access information required to complete a goal.
- 3.4 Gather necessary resources using research and study skills.
- 3.5 Reflect on own performance and outcomes achieved.

## Learning outcome 4: Demonstrate skills specific to an established goal

Description of what the student will be required to do in order to demonstrate successful completion of the learning outcome.

Students will learn and use the following skills:

- Interpersonal, communication and research skills when making personal visits to seek advice and collect information.
- Comply with occupational health and safety guidelines while participating in city-based activities and in preparing their project using a variety of technologies.
- Photocopying, scanning and specific computer skills to research the internet and Microsoft applications such as Microsoft Word, Publisher, Power Point.
- Recording and editing images on digital camera.
- Develop an appropriate telephone technique to obtain information and to book activity arrangements.
- Mastery of technological skills will be demonstrated through the use of computers, scanners, laminators, bookbinders, digital cameras or microphones in the presentation of their projects.

### Assessment criteria

The assessment criteria are demonstrated when the student can:

- 4.1 Identify skills that will contribute to the achievement of an activity.
- 4.2 Demonstrate mastery of skills relevant to an established goal.
- 4.3 Use and comply with occupational health and safety guidelines.
- 4.4 Use specified technological equipment and materials proficiently to suit the conditions and the level of personal and physical ability.



## Learning outcome 5: Demonstrate teamwork skills

Description of what the student will be required to do in order to demonstrate successful completion of the learning outcome.

Students will :

- Contribute to group discussions and decision-making processes.
- Meet on a regular basis outside of class time with group members to complete tasks and check progress.
- Complete a self-evaluation report.
- The group will assign tasks for individuals/partners— computer researchers, telephone research, excursion planning, photographer, transport coordinator, and costing.
- The group will decide on the layout and design of their final presentation and their page to be submitted to the Urban Adventure Booklet.

### Assessment criteria

The assessment criteria are demonstrated when the student can:

- 5.1 Contribute to a collaborative activity involving a group/team.
- 5.2 Reflect on factors that influence group/team behaviour.
- 5.3 Describe factors that contribute to group/teamwork.
- 5.4 Evaluate the effectiveness of group/team processes for achieving goals.
- 5.5 Evaluate own contribution to group/team goals.



### Evaluation

The students were asked to complete a self-evaluation that would reflect their feelings and attitudes towards their own learning, the Urban Adventure and the personal development strand. Their PowerPoint presentations demonstrated not only a great increase in knowledge and



skill, but also a great sense of pride and engagement in their own learning process. For example, earlier in the year one student was extremely nervous and lacked the confidence in presenting to an audience. By the end of the year he was able to look up, stand up and speak up demonstrating significant personal growth as an individual and a team member.



The team response was ... that the accommodation was ideal, the food was fabulous, the activities were very entertaining and guess what?—we even learned a lot about Melbourne and ourselves!

The students were interested, and together we negotiated in every possible way. We shared our knowledge, we certainly connected with communities and real life

experiences, and the increase in the students' confidence, resilience and self-worth became more evident as time progressed. Integrated learning and the diversity of learning styles was the only way for students to carry out the research and to be able to report back on an individual or team basis, and finally the assessment took the form of a presentation that the students chose to take on. Applied Learning is making sense to our students!

**Michael Cole** has worked in mainstream and special education for 12 years, focusing on a P-12 curriculum, and has been involved in vocational education over the last five years. He is currently the VCAL coordinator at Ashwood School. Michael believes that all students need an environment where they feel respected and receive every opportunity to be successful.

**Michele Farrar** has taught in a range of settings for more than 35 years in Melbourne and the Gippsland area, particularly with mildly intellectually disabled students. It is her unbiased view that Ashwood School is one of the most supportive and professional settings for any teacher to work in.

## Endnotes

- 1 Applied Learning Grid—VCAL PD and Learning Program, Eastern Metropolitan Region, 2004.
- 2 Please see additional information available from the school about these departments and the programs undertaken at <http://www.ashwoodscho.vic.edu.au/>

# Working with ESL literacy students

At the end of this year, Certificates in English Language Literacies (CELL) will cease to be registered as an accredited ACFE course in Victoria. In the meantime, Liz Skinner from North Melbourne Language and Literacy, and Toni Lechte from the Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre, tell us about the innovative programs they developed for high-need learners.

Teachers from North Melbourne Language and Literacy and Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre have developed a number of units of work based on the needs and interests of their ESL literacy students, who are predominantly women from the Horn of Africa. The CELL curriculum and philosophy provided a framework for their teaching. With the assistance of project funding from Central Western Region of ACFE, the teachers used reflective journals and attended regular collegiate meetings to develop materials for learners who had little formal education but many skills and interests which provided a focus for learning. Liz describes a unit of work she delivered on using calendars and diaries in the classroom, and Toni explains the evolution and classroom production of a quilted wall hanging.

### Keeping track of time with calendars

In my role as a teacher at North Melbourne Language and Literacy I was asked in 2003 to take part in a project with teachers and the managers from Carlton Neighbourhood Centre and North Melbourne Language and Literacy. At the time I was teaching the CELL I Foundation Level, and it was the first time I had used the CELL curriculum. The time we spent working on the project was very valuable to me professionally.

### Class profile

The class was all women, mostly from the Horn of Africa. There were two Vietnamese and most women were aged over 45 and had little or no formal education. We had two, two-hour sessions per week. The women clearly relished coming to classes. It was a very social time for them. Although I enjoyed very many aspects of teaching this class and getting to know them, it was at times a very difficult and frustrating process. They believed that if they were writing a lot then they were learning, so it was difficult to get them to try anything new. They were very slow to make progress and very reluctant to try anything new.

### Process

We had been doing daily routines and the weather, and so on. My goal was for them to become more independent

learners and eventually to be able to write a few sentences independently or with the help of a support sheet. I was walking past the reject shop and saw some calendars on sale for one dollar and I thought this might be a way to encourage this, so I introduced it to the students. They thought that it was a lovely gift, but had no idea of its use and thought the pictures were pretty good. We spent some of the first session just looking at the animals and the months of the year and the days of the week. This in itself was quite interesting and many sequencing skills (for example, left to right, before and after) were enhanced.

From there we went on to locating the date—yesterday, two days ago, tomorrow. They had to also locate dates and write in information, such as numbers, Easter, Chinese New Year, Ramadan, birthdays, excursion dates.

Then we went on to writing in the weather and temperature. If students finished, they would write a sentence or two about what they had done on the weekend. This is when I introduced the independent reading sheet, which had a list of sentences that were familiar to the students about daily routines and the weather. The students kept this sheet (which I laminated and they thought was pretty 'snazzy') in their calendars.

I would encourage them to join two sentences with a simple conjunction, such as 'and' or 'but'. Eventually the students would be able to write a sentence or two using the sheet for support. Some of the more able students would make up a sentence of their own that was a bit more creative and ask me to spell a word. For these students I introduced word banks (a collection of their own words on slips of paper stored in a box).

The calendar work was consistent with the focus in the CELL document which stresses that the outcomes relate to real life situations. It is very teacher-friendly and easy to use more than one outcome in a session. For example, from one worksheet on daily routines, the students were able to cover a number of learning outcomes in oracy, reading and writing, numeracy and diagrammatic texts. As it was a survey,

## Practical Matters

students were reading short phrases, writing, discussing and locating numerical information, and expressing personal information in a diagrammatic text.

### Assessment and conclusion

At this level most assessment is anecdotal and teacher-

observed. I collected worksheets as evidence, with outcomes covered on the sheet. I also had an individual sheet with outcomes achieved marked. I have since begun teaching the CELL at Level 1 and 2 and again I find it very teacher-friendly, very student-appropriate for low-level literacy learners and flexible to use with other programs.



## The Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre quilt project

### Background

This project started in 2003 after a couple of short knitting workshops run by Denise Collin and I, which we followed up with a pin cushion workshop which involved a simplified weaving exercise. We noticed that students didn't have any vocabulary for even the most basic sewing

techniques, such as needle, thread. However, the grammar and reading and writing exercises that arose from those workshops were successful and stimulating. We also noticed how enthusiastic some students were about learning something new, while for others it was showing off their design and colour skills, not to mention the scope

# Practical Matters

for socialising. The hands-on nature pleased some and the activities tapped into many students' previous experiences and allowed for the free exchange of ideas.

Sarah and Lynne, coordinators of the language and literacy program at the centre, saw the possibilities for extended practical 'kinaesthetic' projects, so Sarah applied for funding at the end of 2003. Then we decided to base the project on different sewing techniques of embroidery and appliqué. Thus it evolved from there.

## Getting started

The next decisions were the materials. We used felt, because it is thick and manageable even if you are inexperienced. Also it has a great range of colours that we knew the students would love and respond to. We began with various embroidery stitches with only one colour silk thread—orange, because that's what we had found cheaply at the Japanese Warehouse. The students didn't really question this and seemed happy. The idea was to start with simple but practical projects that the students could take home. This was a first needle case, a little like a book. The outside was to be decorated with the different stitches as the students learnt them—easier said than done!

Even when we showed the students, some of them, particularly the African students, didn't seem to be able to take in the purpose of such a project, but over time the students began to use the needle cases—a real example of the 'language experience' method. I suppose the interesting thing about this was that every student had a different response. Some used the booklet of diagrams as a guide, while others were very reticent and unsure because they'd never seen such texts before. Others, however, quickly realised that we were very happy for them to work independently to create their own design using stitches they had used many years before. So eventually each student was able to finish her own needle case with varying degrees of simplicity and complexity.

During this time Denise and I made up a reading booklet with simple texts about embroidery, appliqué and threads with clear instructions for the various stitches. Even so, the text was too complex for Denise's class, so we modified it. Also, I made up worksheets to accompany these booklets. Most of our information came from a couple of old sewing manuals and the internet. This was the culmination of the first step of the project, from which we worked out which direction to continue in.

This leads us to the second mini-project which was a small appliqué piece for each student. As they progressed with a

simple, usually floral design, the idea of putting all the samples together in wall hanging evolved.

The idea was that they use the stitches they had learned to attach one piece of material to another, and it was immediately obvious how enjoyable they found using their own choice of colours and design, probably tapping into their love of bright colours and patterns so often visible in their dresses. This is where it all took off. So, the aim of producing a wall hanging from each student's appliqué piece began to seem achievable.

We gave each student a similarly sized rectangular felt, each one choosing a colour they liked. They were also very pleased to use a variety of thread colours, some even bringing thread from home in their enthusiasm. There was quite a considerable difference between Denise's students, some of whom were older, and mine, in what they produced and the way they worked. Denise's students were very loud and enthusiastic often asking to do more sewing, while my students were needing more written language work, such as reading, vocabulary and grammar exercises, based on what we were doing to reinforce the purpose of the project—that is, to learn English through these activities.

## Reflections

There were a number of really wonderful observations that stood out during the project. There was a young mother of five who had never done any sewing. She picked it up very quickly and was enthusiastically getting involved. She had never had the opportunity to be creative because she had been in so many refugee camps, whereas her mother, in Denise's class, was an expert. Then there was the very stern and serious student who had a lot of back pain, who completed not one but 16 absolutely beautiful exotic and simple pieces. She spent quite a lot of time at home resting, but was very proud of her achievements. Also, the Chinese girl who wasn't interested but still felt a sense of achievement with her designs which only evolved after a lot of worrying and indecision—probably because there were no guidelines and she'd definitely never done any sewing before. So there was a fascinating range of responses to the open-endedness of the design brief we had set them.

## The product

So, to the wall hanging! We decided on a black background and found a large piece of heavy fabric perfect for the job. At a couple of sessions we pinned the pieces onto the background to try to demonstrate to the students what the final product would look like. It worked, as they

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# Policy Update

Reminding CGEA teachers to give some thought to the reaccreditation process, due to occur in 2006, Lynne Fitzpatrick and Liz Davidson offer some insights into the accreditation process and explain the role of curriculum maintenance managers.

## Keeping learners in sight using accredited general studies and further education curriculum

### The accredited general studies and further education curriculum

Language and literacy practitioners across Victoria and in other states will be familiar with some aspects of accredited curriculum and the training system. Most of us have taught accredited courses such as the CGEA and CELL, and many are working with training package units as well. Changes to the arrangements for Victorian accredited curriculum over the past 12 months have impacted on how practitioners are supported in delivering courses to learners. In addition, a number of older courses like the CELL have been reviewed and changes have been made to what is available.

### What is a CMM and what does it do?

The Victorian Government has established a network of curriculum maintenance managers (CMMs) to maintain Victorian crown copyright curriculum and support all organisations in their delivery of curriculum and training package qualifications. These are funded by the Office of Training and Tertiary Education (OTTE) and located within several host TAFE institutes. The CMM for general studies has been located within the service industries CMM at Victoria University since 1992. It has responsibility for a number of crown copyright courses like learning pathways and the ESL framework certificates.

### What about further education curriculum and ACFE's role?

Another set of crown copyright courses was managed by the Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) board until the VQA (Victorian Qualifications Authority) became responsible for all crown copyright course accreditation. The ACFE board purchased CMM services through a tender process from Language Australia/ARIS for a period. Following a review in 2003, it was negotiated that the CMM arrangements for further education would be undertaken by the Service Industries General Studies CMM.

### Putting it all together

Victoria University is now the CMM General Studies and Further Education. During the transition since July 2004

the CMM has restructured to incorporate further education. A priority for the CMM is to support and enhance the profile of further education (FE), to support the ACE sector as key developers of FE curriculum and to ensure that learners and their needs are central to this process. The team currently consists of Liz Davidson and Lynne Fitzpatrick.

### How does accredited curriculum work—what do learners get??

All crown copyright curricula are linked to the Australian Qualifications Framework, and therefore all courses are national qualifications. Learners can enrol in courses and gain certification which is portable across providers within Victoria and nationally. Courses can provide pathways to further education and employment. Learners are able to gain statements of attainment for completed units or modules that can be credited towards recognised qualifications.

### What courses are covered by the General Studies and Further Education CMM?

In 2005, the CMM General Studies and Further Education has been responsible for maintaining 54 courses, and two training packages (BSZ98 and TAA04). This CMM covers all Victorian crown copyright courses in the following areas:

- pre-vocational courses
- pathways to education, training and employment
- language, literacy and numeracy
- teacher education.

### The CMM's role

#### 1. Provide advice to key stakeholders

These include the ACFE board and OTTE and other stakeholders concerned with vocational and further education. Advice is provided through the General Studies and Further Education CMM Board, and the newly constituted further education sub-committee of this board. The CMM gives advice on curriculum review, reaccreditation, development of new courses, and allowing courses to lapse.

## 2. Review, reaccredit and maintain crown copyright curriculum

Accredited courses must meet national standards:

- AQTF Standard 27: Under this standard, course writers must establish via research and consultation that there is community need for the course. The course developer must also check that there is no existing AQF qualification or outcomes of endorsed training packages that meet the desired learning outcomes. Where these exist, they must be used, rather than an accredited course, unit or module.
- AQTF Standard 28: The accredited course must meet course design criteria, namely VQA standard templates for units and modules. The course cannot limit access and pathways based on age, gender, employment, social or educational background.
- Further education courses reaccreditation processes also take into account: Ministerial Statement, 'Future Directions for Adult Community Education in Victoria, June 2004' and the ACFE Curriculum Strategy, 2005.

## 3. How does the CMM support to providers and practitioners?

### Free phone advice service

The CMM provides a free phone advice service to all organisations that deliver or intend to deliver courses under General Studies and Further Education. Advice includes:

- resource information and professional development information
- answering questions about teaching and assessment of modules and learning outcomes
- helping providers choose the right course for their learner group
- networking—putting teachers and organisations in touch with each other
- how to use the TSN website.

This service is available 9am–5pm every day.

- Phone: 9919 8327 (Liz) or 9919 8375 (Lynne)
- Email: [sicmm.generalstudies@vu.edu.au](mailto:sicmm.generalstudies@vu.edu.au)
- Teacher Support Network website: <http://training.support.otte.vic.gov.au>

This is a useful site to locate:

- curriculum documents
- curriculum summaries
- teacher network news
- service industries CMM quarterly newsletter.

### Teacher networks

In addition, the CMM supports teacher networks and forums. The role of these CMM forums is to provide advice

to CMM on curriculum maintenance requirements, new initiatives, delivery issues and professional development needs. They meet approximately four times a year. Minutes and activities are posted under Teacher Networks on the TSN website.

Teacher networks also facilitate networking across providers, including moderation.

There are currently teacher networks for the following courses: the ESL Framework Transition Education, Work Education, Diploma of VET, Diploma of Liberal Arts, Science for Adults. Contact Liz and Lynne or visit the website.

### News

This is provided through the service industries CMM quarterly newsletter, available via email to all providers. Call 9919 8376 to be included on the list. It gives up to date information on availability of courses, and news about professional development and resources.

### Clearinghouse service for crown copyright courses

The clearinghouse for all general studies and further education crown copyright accredited curriculum is located at Newport Campus of Victoria University. The clearinghouse maintains current list of curricula and a database of providers so that we can notify providers about amendments to curriculum and new courses.

- [sicmm.clearinghouse@vu.edu.au](mailto:sicmm.clearinghouse@vu.edu.au)
- Kim Tairi, 9919 8413

## What's been happening in 2005?

A major review of existing further education curriculum. The CMM reviewed the following courses in early 2005:

- \*21046VIC Certificate I in English Language Literacies (Foundation)
- \*21047VIC Certificate I in English Language Literacies
- \*21048VIC Certificate II in English Language Literacies
- \*21032VIC Course in Introduction to Psychology: Return to Study
- \*20097VIC Course in Introduction to Cross-Cultural Communication
- \*14797VIC Course in Further Education Art Studies
- \*2003ACC Course in Creative Writing
- \*14794VIC Course in Family Literacy
- \*14795VIC Course in Women's Access
- \*13135VIC Course in Employment and Living Skills
- \*12882VIC Course in Introduction to Bookkeeping Concepts for Financial Management
- 21014VIC Cert IV in Further Education
- 21015VIC Diploma in Further Education.

Processes followed by the CMM in reviewing these courses:

- adhering to requirements under AQTF Standards 27 and 28 for course development
- consideration of research and recommendations made by ARIS
- extensive mapping of learning outcomes of courses under review to existing accredited courses and training packages
- development of a pathways overview to ensure access and pathways are maintained, improved and extended for all learner groups
- review of statistical data, and information from training providers to establish delivery patterns and current needs.

## Results of the review

As a result of the review, the following courses will lapse, and there will be no new enrolments after December, 2005:

- 21046VIC Certificate I in English Language Literacies (Foundation)
- 21047VIC Certificate I in English Language Literacies
- 21048VIC Certificate II in English Language Literacies
- 21032VIC Course in Introduction to Psychology: Return to Study
- 20097VIC Course in Introduction to Cross-Cultural Communication
- 14797VIC Course in Further Education Art Studies
- 2003ACC Course in Creative Writing
- 14794VIC Course in Family Literacy
- 14795VIC Course in Women's Access
- 13135VIC Course in Employment and Living Skills
- 12882VIC Course in Introduction to Bookkeeping Concepts for Financial Management.

The 21014VIC Certificate IV in Further Education and 21015VIC Diploma in Further Education are currently being reaccredited. This project is being conducted by the CAE. The project manager is Cate Thompson. Part of this project is developing ways to incorporate aspects of the course in Further Education Art Studies into the new structure. This course is due to be ready for reaccreditation in October.

In another initiative, the CMM is developing additional modules to be included in 21625VIC Certificate I in Vocational Preparation, which will be useful electives for students transferring from courses such as Women's Access.

## What happens for learners who want to enrol in courses in 2006?

ACFE is funding a professional development and resource program to support providers and teachers in making the change to other courses. Anyone currently delivering the expiring courses will be able to attend these sessions and obtain a resource kit to support the transition. This program is being conducted by the ACFE eastern region in conjunction with the CMM. Information on dates, locations and the program will become available during third term.

## Future activities—the CGEA

The CMM has recommended to ACFE that the Certificates in General Education for Adults be reaccredited in 2006. These certificates were last accredited in 2002. During the second half of 2005, the CMM will be establishing a CMM CGEA network to begin discussions and gathering preliminary advice on the review of these courses. Other methods of consultation will also be employed in 2006, including focus groups and online discussion. Any input from providers is welcome, and we encourage providers to start thinking about the courses now.

Some questions to start thinking about are:

- Is the course structure flexible enough to meet the needs of a range of learners?
- Is the course content meeting the needs of all potential learners?
- Is there another way we could group core and electives?
- Are the levels still meeting the needs?
- How do we need to take account of how technologies have changed and the impact on literacy and numeracy?
- What can we learn from international developments?
- What can we learn from current thinking and research into language and literacy?
- What is the 'general education' in the certificates?
- Where do the new employability skills fit in?

Do you have questions? Please give us feedback on any aspect of the CMM and accredited curriculum.

**Lynne Fitzpatrick and Liz Davidson, with over 50 years of ESL and literacy practice between them, are curriculum maintenance managers—general studies and further education—at Victoria University. Liz worked on the writing of the ESL framework, and Lynne has conducted a range of research and curriculum projects in VET.**

# Open Forum

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

The Certificates in English Language Literacies (CELL) program will no longer be offered after 2005. Since 2002, many groups of women who struggled with the many challenges faced by new arrivals benefited from Victoria University's CELL program, as Valerie Astbury explains. And VALBEC co-president and conference convenor Lynne Matheson reviews last May's VALBEC conference, 'Portraits and Visions'.

## Vale CELL

Women's Programs at Victoria University, Footscray, has offered the Certificates in English Language Literacies (CELL) from 2002 until 2005. We adopted the CELL course in response to the particular needs of a significant group of students who had very uneven skill development and shared a similar lack of educational background.

Some students in this group were long-term residents but had been involved in work or raising children and had no time to acquire English literacy skills. Others had recently completed their government-provided 510 hours with AMEP, but came to us with a very mixed level of skill development. Of these students, many had developed oral skills but were only just moving on from basic letter formation and alphabet recognition.

A marked characteristic of the group was also the need to learn how to learn and to understand the processes and practices of learning. They needed a slower pace of instruction and learning, incorporating time management and organisation of work folders. They needed to become familiar with classroom routines and the purpose of tasks and activities. They needed to become confident with using classroom tools and equipment, especially computers. They also needed cultural knowledge and the understanding of the contexts and conventions of learning.

### So many trials and challenges

All the women shared a background of very little, or no opportunity for, schooling in their country of origin. Many had experienced extended periods in refugee camps and some had endured traumatic situations. Many of this group of students were experiencing ongoing settlement issues. They faced problems with accommodation, financial issues, lack of child care, chronic health problems and family problems—many of the women were single with a number of dependent children and no extended family support. All these issues impacted on their ability to attend classes regularly and develop skills in a consistent way. Any one student at any one time may have been coping with a sick or truant child and the resulting medical or

school appointments, a dysfunctional stove or heater or other inadequate housing issues, appointments with Centrelink, immigration issues, copious forms to fill out or a disconnected telephone.

The CELL course was written with this group of learners in mind, making it appropriate for our students who were experiencing such difficulties in their lives that affected their learning. We initially decided to offer the CELL course to these students because it recognised the need for additional time for this group to move through the stages of language and literacy development. There is also no assumption that the learner has previous educational experience. The older learners in our groups, with little or no previous school experience, inevitably took longer to achieve English language and literacy proficiency and required a course with gradual achievable outcomes suited to their skill levels. The CELL course provides for these students, particularly women at a beginners level who, when provided with an appropriate achievable course of study, will be more likely to be able to enter into, or remain in, further education.

### The importance of flexibility

The CELL course also offers a wide scope and flexibility for curriculum delivery in that the outcomes are broadly defined and the course directs that they be realised across the personal, learning and community domains. The outcome statements are neither lock-step nor overly prescriptive, which enables the teacher to meet individual student needs and to present a flexible curriculum that can be revised and recycled. This element of the CELL course has been appropriate for our students whose irregular attendance inevitably prevents a delivery of modules in an intensive, continuous or sequential manner.

The CELL course provides three levels or certificates that cater for students with disparate skill development. In recent years many of the beginner students coming to women's programs have been women from the Horn of Africa, who present with levels in listening, speaking, and sometimes reading that are higher than their levels in



writing. As a consequence, teaching practices and strategies for writing should give the learners a lot of support and make use of their oracy skills. The CELL course directs that learning should relate to the learner's own experience and background and that diverse cultural considerations be incorporated. The CELL course also recognises that the students in this group require support and scaffolding of all tasks, so they can experience success and develop the confidence needed to continue learning and consolidating the skills required to become independent learners.

### **A gradual process**

It is important not to place overt emphasis on assessment with this group, as developing confidence and successful experiences are imperative to their ongoing engagement with the learning experience. The CELL recommends that assessments be integrated informally, with teaching and learning using a range of methods. In this way students are not intimidated or threatened by assessment processes. By keeping a collection of each student's work and a running record of their performance of classroom tasks and activities, teachers were in touch with individual student progress and needs. This information was fed back into the program planning and discussed with students at an individual level.

In vocational education and training packages and other curriculum frameworks, there is a much greater emphasis on formal assessment that is inappropriate for this group because the use of formal assessment methods is in fact detrimental to their progress.

Now in the fourth year of delivery of the CELL course, we can look back and see the importance of recognising that this group of women learners in our programs benefited significantly from such a course. It allowed them time to consolidate their skills and gave them the confidence to become independent learners and move into other accredited courses. If these students had been discouraged early on when so much else in their lives was so difficult, they may not have persisted and remained in further education. It has been imperative to provide them with an appropriate, achievable curriculum that caters to their needs and to give them a positive educational experience they can build on in further education.

**Valerie Astbury teaches ESL classes in women's programs at Victoria University. She has taught CELL classes for the last four years.**

## **Portraits and visions: keeping the learner in sight**

### **VALBEC conference May 30, 2005**

At the initial planning meeting in January it was envisaged that the conference focus would be on the ALBE learner, but as the program took shape it became evident that 'the learner' was also the practitioner. The collective opportunity that the conference provides to reflect and consider future directions is not to be underestimated. Bringing practitioners together to listen, talk, share and consider other's perspectives and engage in thinking about the wider issues were all essential elements of the Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council (VALBEC) conference this year. The 2005 VALBEC conference proved to be a successful event. It was a one-day event held in the William Angliss Institute of TAFE conference centre in Melbourne's CBD. The conference was attended by 138 people. VALBEC was very pleased to note that 33 per cent of attendees came from regional Victoria. Three people came from interstate (Qld. and Tas.) and of course we had one attendee/speaker from New Zealand.

Celebrated artiste 'Pierre le Guerre' and his willing muse provided a burst of energy and laughter to start the day. In commissioning this performance, some vague suggestions about portraits of learners were taken up and improvised

and developed into this performance that tapped into the language and characters of the ALBE field. Responses from the audience indicated that they were spot-on.

Great intro after travelling a distance on public transport on a cold morning.

Excellent! A highly imaginative way to capture our clients, the ALBE learners.

They woke us up, challenged our terminology and were brilliant!

A successful conference will always have at its core the needs and interests of the target audience. With such diversity in the ALBE field it is a challenge to find the right mix of theory, research and practical approaches to take back to the workplace.

This year the personal perspective blended with the broader picture was well delivered by our first keynote speaker, Peter Waterhouse. Perhaps a tad too long for some people, but for others so absorbing, with his visually luxurious presentation of powerful images accompanying

challenges to our thinking about personal, public and critical literacies.

Inspirational.

Warming but provocative.

Food for thought and wider philosophy.

Subsequently, the three focus sessions were unfortunately shortened and there were comments that this did detract from their effectiveness. The three sessions were chosen for the focus they provided and their distinct areas for contemplation. Merv Edmunds again captivated his audience with 'New thinking, better results—the Human Givens approach to teaching and learning', and was engaging and challenging.

This session could have been twice the length.

Would like to have listened to him all day.

We were pleased to have instructional designers/curriculum writers Narelle McClusky and Lenora Thacker from Queensland presenting their NCVER-funded research project, 'Who's supporting who?—literacy and numeracy support systems for indigenous students' and their areas of expertise.

Some interesting insights into Aboriginal culture and issues.

Good luck in disseminating this valuable knowledge to teachers around Australia.

It was timely to have an ACFE presentation this year, and Cheryl Wilkinson took people through ACFE research priorities and sought feedback in small group discussions.

Having a chance to feedback our concerns in the form of questions for research was satisfying.

Some useful info, but not much that was new. Wanted to know some findings of the research projects.

Morning tea was a buzz of conversation, 'fortune-telling', scones and muffins.

The second keynote speaker, Cathy Kell, unknown to many in the audience, directed us along a path through her research and experiences in South Africa discussing some of the broader implications for learners and practitioners.

Very academic but stimulating.

Just fascinating. I felt I wanted to read what she had put in her articles.

The two blocks of workshops provided broad choice and high quality sessions that were well received. It was hard to identify highlights, but it was evident from comments in the evaluations that there was an appreciation of practitioners talking about their practice, as much as the analytical and more theoretical approach of researchers. The singing session was well received, especially being toward the end of the day.

Useful material and practical ideas for teaching.

Real life stories—good to see.

Nothing new to gain from this workshop.

Important to remind teachers of the importance of journal writing/reflection.

The final review session was well attended, and it is always heartening to get immediate feedback. Participants in the final review session referred to the importance of coming together and networking, and this connectedness and energy was evident throughout the day.

Reinvigorating, inspirational, 'we are not alone'.

(There was a) ... balance of theory and practice.

When working in geographic isolation—(it was) great for refocus.

(It provided) ... time out to reflect.

The final review session also gave time for all to consider the day's activities and ruminate on 'where to next'. The overall feeling was that finding the right timing of sessions and balance of content is the challenge for conference organisers. We will continue to try to solve this conundrum in creative ways.

More 'hands-on' stuff.

Professional conversations, facilitated workshops.

The pressure of time seems to be a constant overshadowing things.

Longer sessions/interactive.

Fast, pacy, interesting, technical experts/ great speakers.  
Food also very good.

We asked for perceptions of the challenges for the field, and how we should plan for the future. That brought a mix of responses. However, they have given VALBEC insight into where we might put our energies and resources.

Integrating everything to meet goals of the learner as well as professional requirements, etc.

More practitioner-centred research (become more vocal and participatory group).

Keeping ALBE on political agenda.

Regional or rural conference (book a train to go up the Hume).

Some conference papers have already appeared in *Fine Print*, winter 2005 edition, and further articles will be published in future editions so that people can follow up from the conference. Further professional development sessions later in the year will hopefully pick up on some of the comments and requests from members.

On the whole a productive day.

I think you do a great job in meeting the needs of a diverse group.

Thanks once again to all the presenters for their contributions to the success of the conference, and to all those who took the time out of busy lives to attend and be part of the VALBEC 2005 conference.

**Lynne Matheson is co-president of VALBEC and VALBEC 2005 conference convenor.**

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realised what it was that they were working towards it motivated those 'slackers' who'd lost their way over Ramadan, and gave them the impetus to hurry up and finish. Many even began to do homework.

Having a product that all the students contributed to gives the group a very powerful feeling of achievement. No one anticipated the impact of the wall hanging until it was actually unveiled at the end-of-year certificate-giving

ceremony. There in front of us was such a vibrant expression of all the students' personalities and cultural backgrounds through their simple designs and rich colours.

**Liz Skinner has taught at North Melbourne Language and Literacy for nine years. Her background is in primary education. Toni Lechte has a background in primary teaching and arts education, and teaches adult ESL at Carlton Neighborhood Learning Centre.**

# Foreign Correspondence

## The changing face of basic skills in England

**Yvonne Hillier, from London's City University, discusses a project that traces the history of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL in England from 1970 to 2000.**

Who would have thought that a BBC program called 'On the Move', broadcast in 1975, would have been part of an adult literacy campaign that has shaped a multimillion-pound activity in 2005? People in Australia may be aware that in England we have funds today to pay for the professional development of basic skills practitioners. We have funds to help adults acquire qualifications in literacy, numeracy or English language, and we have a government agency, the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit, to help oversee these activities and identify how to best ensure that people can improve their basic skills in the most effective ways possible. Research and development in the field is supported by the government-funded National Research and Development Centre (NRDC) in adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL. Yet we have not always been so fortunate in being to the fore of government thinking around adults and their level of literacy, numeracy or language.

Mary Hamilton, from Lancaster University, and I decided that it was important to capture the history of basic skills when we met at a conference in July 1998. At this time, we were about to find out what a committee, chaired by Sir Claus Moser, was going to say about the state of basic skills provision in England, and we realised that we were in danger of losing the practices of the past in favour of a future that had no 'institutional memory'. We were also aware that people in the field were not getting any younger, and as people retired, so would their stories and experiences with them.

We decided to apply for research funds to help us capture this history and examine it, to help us deal with the future implementation of whatever policy was going to arise from Moser's report. The result was our project, 'Changing Faces: A critical history of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL 1970–2000'. The project was conducted between January 2002 and June 2004 and was jointly shared between the University of Lancaster, City University and the Institute of Education, London University. I would like to share some of our research with colleagues here in Australia, where you will recognise many similarities with your own stories.

### The project

How do you go about gathering a history of a field? England is a densely populated country, and in each of our 104 local education authorities (LEAs) there are adult and community learning centres, further education colleges and a host of voluntary and work-based learning organisations which are involved in the delivery of adult basic skills programs. We realised that we could not ask every practitioner who had ever been involved in the field to participate in our research, but we did know that there were some key players and centres that had been influential in shaping the field.

We decided to use a case study approach, and chose four areas in England that were representative of some of the diversity of provision. We decided upon

- a northern urban area with a history of student writing, Manchester.
- a county that had urban and rural areas and a community education structure, Leicestershire.
- a rural area, Norfolk.
- a London region, north-east London.

In addition, we worked with two satellite centres, Gatehouse and Friends, both involved in student writing and in the latter case, with volunteers and staff who subsequently progressed to influential careers in adult education or adult basic skills.

We realised we needed to talk to the key people in the field, and there were people in each region who were key to their local history, even if they had not been players on the national stage. We conducted semi-structured interviews with all these key people and practitioners, asking them to tell us how they had become involved in basic skills, what experiences they had of teaching, organising and management. We asked them about their views of the volunteers, learners and other practitioners and policy makers. We invited them to tell us about high points and low points in their careers, and to identify key moments that they felt had influenced their practice and the field in general.

We also wanted to find a way to gain an understanding of basic skills from the perspective of learners. We managed

to do this by working with members of a longitudinal study, the National Child Development Survey (NCDS), comprising people who were born in one particular week in March 1958. Of the original 17,000 members, there are approximately 12,000 still in the cohort. They have been subject to surveys at different times throughout their lives. In 1983, when they were young adults, they were asked as part of the survey if they felt they had difficulty with literacy or numeracy, and from the number who declared that they did, it was estimated how many people in the country may have this problem. A ten per cent sample of the whole cohort was subsequently asked to take part in literacy and numeracy tests in a later survey of the cohort and, of those, some people who did not self-identify in 1983 were found to have low basic skills according to the test results.

There were three other groups: those who had not identified any basic skills problems and did not demonstrate any in the test; those who did identify basic skills problems and testing confirmed this; and finally those who did not show any difficulty with basic skills from their test results but felt that they did have difficulty. We were able to interview 78 people who were drawn from these four groups, and who lived as near as possible to our four case study regions. Again, we asked people to tell us about their lives over the past three decades, but here we were interested in what learning they had done, whether they remembered any of the campaigns, and what they felt about education provision for their families compared with their own experiences. These interviews provided us with an insight into the way in which any basic skills initiatives over the past 30 years have influenced their learning.

Finally, we asked people to donate materials and documentation for an archive, that we have gathered for future researchers to make use of. People up and down the country have boxes stored in their lofts and garages, in community centre cupboards and on bookshelves in libraries, with copies of materials and learning resources that they made, or books that they used to use, and even floppy discs from obsolescent computer hardware. We now have some of this in numerous boxes in our offices! This archive is being collated and systematically recorded on a website that was created for the project, so that anyone who is interested can find out what we have gathered, and can eventually make use of once it is stored at the University of Lancaster.

### **What did our data tell us?**

It is enormously difficult to make sense of nearly 200 interviews and archive material. We began by creating a series of timelines, where we could date key events from documentation such as government papers and agency

newsletters. As we conducted our interviews we added to a general timeline which provided a backbone for our project, and we then created a series of thematic timelines, such as the involvement of media in literacy campaigns and initiatives, or professional development of practitioners. These timelines have helped us examine more critically how the practice of basic skills has developed in the past 30 years.

We then analysed our interviews by using software called Atlas-ti, where we coded all our transcripts and began to develop themes and families of codes. These, too, helped us to identify some of the key moments and key interactions between the three groups of stakeholders in our research—policy makers, practitioners and adult learners. We are still analysing our data, and expect to do so for many months to come, as the depth and wealth of resources available to us have not yet been fully mined.

So what are the key moments in our history and what major themes have we uncovered?

### **Key phases**

We have identified four policy phases which demonstrate shifting power between the different agencies involved in the field.

- Mid-1970s: Literacy campaign led by a coalition of voluntary agencies with a powerful media partner, the BBC.
- 1980s: Provision developed substantially, supported by local education authority (LEA) adult education services and voluntary organisations with leadership, training and development funding from a national agency (Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Agency, ALBSU, later the Basic Skills Agency, BSA).
- 1989–1998: Depletion of LEA funding and control, statutory status of ALLN through a more formalised further education system, dependent on funding through a national funding body.
- 1998–present: Development of Skills for Life policy. New government strategy unit created and £1.5 billion of government money is committed.

During these phases we identified major influences on the way basic skills were perceived, how they were practised and how they were supported or ignored by government at national and regional levels. For example, during the 1980s there was massive unemployment for young people and adults, and basic skills provision was often used to help unemployed people find work. By the 1990s, information technology was affecting the world of work and now basic skills were expected to help people use technology, particularly in areas of work that previously had not required the high levels of literacy or numeracy that the technology demanded.

We also identified a number of tensions that practitioners experienced. Some of these are deep-seated, such as the reason why people need basic skills tuition, and whether a functional or social practice approach is the most appropriate way to help adults meet their learning goals. Others relate to more national and international influences, including the move towards greater accountability to central government, and the use of accreditation as a measure of learning outcomes. For every person we interviewed who approved of accreditation as it empowered their learners, there would be someone else who was scathing of the kind of qualifications being offered, and the effect it had on people's life chances.

Our learner interviews have also given us an interesting paradox. The NCDS data in the past has been used to exhort government to take action and identify funding and an infrastructure to help people who have, according to the statistical analysis, a high likelihood of suffering from poor health and employment prospects if their basic skills are low. However, when we interviewed our small sample of such groups, we found that they were leading full and satisfying lives and finding ways to manage their situation. Our interviews, with opportunities for them to tell us about their lives in a very different way from their previous encounters with the NCDS survey methodology, will help us in our claim that a social practice view of literacy is of paramount importance.

### **What does this tell us about the current regime?**

We have begun to capture the dynamic, changing nature of a heterogeneous field. However, we are aware that the current situation in England creates further demands for prac-

tioners. We now have a Skills for Life Strategy (SK4L), and a national curriculum for learners, a set of standards to which practitioners must aspire, and targets to ensure that we measure up to the aims of the policy. Again, accreditation is a source of tension, where we now have targets on how many adults should improve their basic skills. To meet these, we must ensure 750,000 people between 2004 and 2007 gain basic skills qualifications. However, it is not clear that gaining a qualification is the same as improving basic skills, particularly as the literacy tests used do not even ask adults to write, but merely to read!

We would predict that the implementation of the current strategy will be both fraught and subverted, particularly where it challenges the deeply held values and beliefs of practitioners in the field. We are also aware that we have never enjoyed so much funding as we have now, and that we do not want to lose an opportunity to fully equip ourselves to work with as many people as effectively as possible within this current government policy. The field of adult basic skills will continue to change, but we hope that our research has provided a rich resource for future practitioners and researchers to use so that they will know and understand the foundations upon which their current practice stands.

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To find about more about the Changing Faces project visit: <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/ifs/projects/edres/changingfaces/index.htm>

# Beside the Whiteboard

Maggie Herten has been treading the boards at CAE in the Access Education and Training Department for many years. There's not much she doesn't know about teaching literacy. Robyn Hodge from the *Fine Print* committee speaks to Maggie and finds out a little more about the different work roles she has taken on.

## Can you tell us a bit of your professional background and your career pathway?

I started out as a very reluctant primary school teacher ... reluctant because I couldn't afford to go to university, but I was given a studentship to Frankston Teachers' College. I hated teachers' college so spent most of my time trying to escape it. When I finished college, I went on to a degree in philosophy. Needless to say, there weren't many job prospects in that field so I was forced back into the very conservative environment of a school. I taught in various primary and high schools in Melbourne, Albury and London. I did extra qualifications as a remedial teacher, which was the starting point of my later work in the adult literacy field.

## How did you come to be involved in adult basic education?

When I went on maternity leave for my second child, I was determined never to return to a primary school. That led me to look for alternatives. I enrolled in a TESL course at Monash, and Yarraville Neighbourhood House took me on as a very green ESL teacher. A year later I started working for CAE in a workplace literacy program. I taught garbos from Melbourne City Council in a depot across the road from the lost dogs' home. It was quite a challenge trying to teach over the constant baying of the dogs!

## What have been some of the highlights and challenges during your time at CAE?

The highlight has always been working at an institution that promotes a passion for life-long learning. It has been great to see people in their eighties trot into CAE for their weekly music, mahjong or English lessons. I hope some day I will be able to block the lifts at lunchtime with my violin case and Zimmer frame.

Perhaps one of the biggest challenges was to become computer literate in my forties. I was once the laughing stock of the office because I kept looking for 'Computer Courses for Dickheads'. Now I teach computers, and especially love digital photography. It is great to discover a new obsession in middle age.

## What other projects/work have you been involved in?

During my time at CAE, I've also taught overseas in China (twice) and Vietnam. My kids went to a local primary school and childcare centre in Wuhan, China. These stints provided large doses of culture shock, which were very useful for me as an ESL teacher.

## Tell us about VACCHO and the work that you do there.

VACCHO stands for Victorian Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Organisation. It is the peak Victorian health organisation for Aborigines and has a membership of 27 Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations across Victoria. VACCHO is also an RTO training Aboriginal health workers statewide, and is involved in all kinds of health and health workforce development projects like providing cultural training to overseas-trained doctors.

I started working there last year. I provide tutorial support two days a week to adult students who are doing courses to become qualified as Aboriginal health workers. Many of the students are already working in the field, and attend classes in blocks of roughly one week per month. They return to their jobs in mainly rural Aboriginal community-controlled health co-ops for the intervening weeks. My job involves driving around to the various country towns helping the students. I usually stay overnight in these towns, so I feel like I'm having a little holiday each week.

## What have you learned as a non-indigenous worker within an indigenous organisation?

I've learned heaps about Aboriginal culture but I still need to learn a lot more. When I'm working with the students they often talk to me about their histories and their communities. I'm gradually starting to know the different groups within Victoria and what their issues are. I feel embarrassed that before taking on this role I knew so little.

## What advice would you give to those starting a career in adult literacy education?

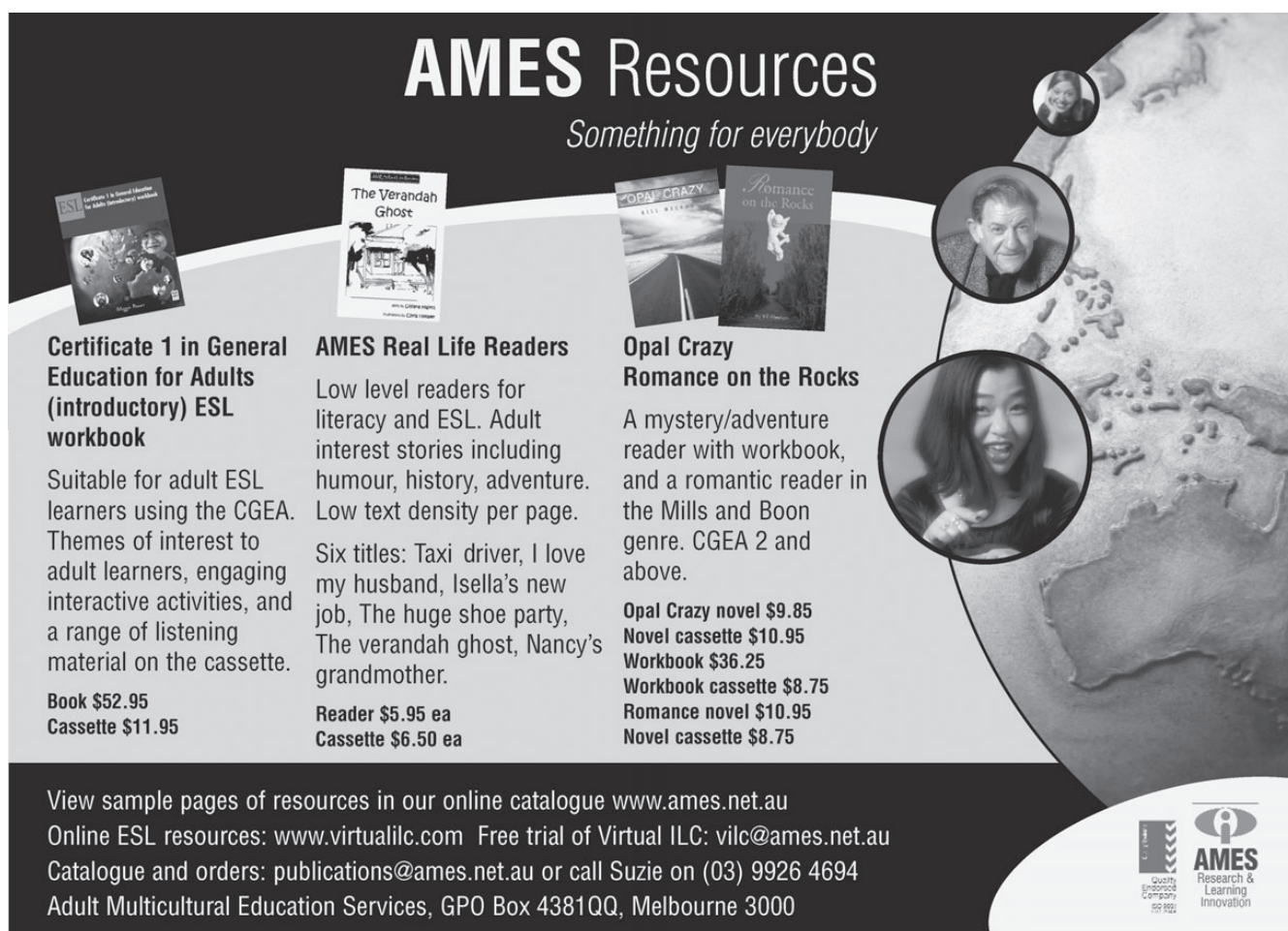
From a practical point of view, I would be reluctant to recommend it because there are so few permanent full-time jobs in the field. If you want to make a living, you

must be prepared to work across several employers. On the other hand, if you care about social justice more than money you can learn a lot.

### What's next for Maggie?

No plans at the moment. My job at VACCHO is the biggest challenge I've had to face so far. It's still very daunting!

**Thanks for your time Maggie, I think it will be some time yet before you take on the CAE lunchtime lifts with your violin and Zimmer frame.**



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