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Editorial

Welcome to the Summer 2006 edition of *Fine Print*. For many of us, it's time to relax and replenish our energies after a year in the classroom or office. The year 2006 has been one of passionate debate, change and reflection in the adult language, literacy and numeracy field, as well as in the wider community. This edition of *Fine Print* explores issues of critical importance from the worlds of policy, classroom practice, and teacher and student motivation.

In the article, Celebration of the Certificates in Science for Adults, Maria Santburn draws on a communal history of the CSA and the reflections of science teachers and learners. From fossil hunting to creating giant bubbles, Maria's article evokes the sense of adventure and wonder that became the norm for so many adults new to science.

In Does the CGEA *have* to be a Training Package, Dianne Parslow navigates a way through the language of the recently re-accredited CGEA. Dianne builds a case for the use of units of competency in the CGEA and argues that they are a logical way of structuring this curriculum.

Continuing the focus on the re-accreditation of the CGEA, Liz Davidson and Lynne Fitzpatrick's article CGEA Reaccreditation 2006, gives an overview of the stages that led to the new CGEA, from research and consultation through to development.

Dharmika Fernando and the AMEP team from Victoria University offer a profile of learners who are newly arrived from Africa. While the team points out that the article contains many generalisations, there is much food for thought for teachers working with these learners, particularly in terms of maintaining awareness of our own cultural backgrounds and expectations.

Practical Matters lives up to its name as Linda Rhodes describes how she facilitated a 'Locomotion' that led her students from their classroom at Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre to the stage of La Mamma's Courthouse

Theatre. This is an inspiring example of the creative and empowering work that is generated in ACE classrooms.

In Open Forum, Manrico Moro describes how Adult and Community Education benefits from union activity. Manrico encourages participation by all in our sector in the NTEU's negotiation of a new collective agreement.

Policy Update describes the three most recent reports from NCVET. These reports give vital statistics on students participating in stand-alone literacy and numeracy courses, the range of literacy and numeracy units embedded in VET subjects and courses, and the nature of provision in ACE non-accredited programs.

Foreign Correspondance takes us to Sri Lanka, where Jose Mott manages a program for the International Women's Development Agency. Jose describes the group-based activities undertaken by women in the south-central highlands of Sri Lanka since 2004—giving women opportunities for economic, social and political empowerment. Skills development and increased educational opportunities are a crucial outcome of the groups that IWDA supports.

In Beside the Whiteboard, Susie Gerard describes how her experiences on Christmas Island led to her decision to work in the adult education field as an ESL teacher. Looking back on this decision, Susie reflects: 'I love it when you can identify the circles in your life coming to completion ... one of the YAMEC students I was teaching came to Australia as a refugee who had landed on Christmas Island in the time I was there'.

This is my first edition as commissioning editor of *Fine Print*. There's a lot that goes into making *Fine Print* happen each season, and I'm enjoying getting to know the ins and outs of working with the editorial and production teams. The adult language and literacy field is so rich—in its people, history, issues and aspirations. My new role gives me the privilege of exploring and investigating it in more detail.

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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.

Celebration of the certificates in science for adults

by Maria Santburn

In the early 2000s several individuals and providers joined the science race. Here, five of them share their stories and those of their students. As one of them said, writing this article is their way of passing on the torch.

The value of science

The journey for bringing science to the people is a marathon relay. The torch needs to be passed on regularly as the participants run their leg of the race. They pass on their passion and wisdom, share experiences and take the torch one step further to its destination. (Maria Santburn)

Dave

Early bearers of the torch took years to convince adult educators of the need for greater science literacy, science education and discussion in our community. Always the realist, I argued 'If you want science to be taken seriously it will need to be part of an accredited certificate', and ACFE listened. We all thought that science could be a fifth stream of the CGEA. Instead we found ourselves with the opportunity (and mammoth task) of writing from scratch a full science framework for adults, to be called the Certificates in Science for Adults (CSA).

Funded by ACFE, a team of five people from CAE, ARIS and NMIT (Leonie Barber and Barbara Gleeson, Jan Hagston and Dave Tout, and Maria Santburn) worked away in a quiet room at the CAE to achieve this unexpected next leg of the journey.

Science, incorporated into a curriculum framework, was to cater for four main areas of need of adult learners—personal, social, employment and further study. The aim was that science content be taught in a holistic manner, where aspects of learning outcomes from across all the modules were integrated. The Reading and Writing, Numeracy and Maths, Exploring Science and Science in the Community modules were the four parts of science literacy we hoped to deliver—and deliver we did.

Supported and encouraged by a strong and critical steering group, we came up with a new science framework that we, and others, believed was a significant and innovative way to describe and teach science to a wide range of adults. Buoyed by the response to the CSA, we were also provided with the opportunity by DEST to develop the science literacy website, Sciweb (still available at www.saalt.com.au/

sciweb). They were a couple of exciting years of developing and writing materials for integrating science into language, literacy and numeracy teaching, and of involving more people in the marathon relay.

Felicity

I have taught in Adult Education in Bendigo since 1995, and first became interested in delivering science in the literacy classroom in 2002, when the Loddon Campaspe Mallee ACFE had funds available to produce a science kit for adults. I took on the task and developed the Everyday Science booklet with the help of my CGEA class at Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE (BRIT).

The students loved being immersed in science. Many of them had negative experiences of secondary school science and it was a revelation to them that science could be fun. They were learning through observation and hands-on experimentation. I also learned a lot in the process.

When the Certificates in Science for Adults were accredited, I approached my coordinator with the idea of offering Certificate I electives in Exploring Science and Science in the Community to CGEA students at BRIT in 2003. Later that year I was asked to contribute to Sciweb, a website promoting scientific literacy for adults which was to become a valuable teaching resource for adult education providers.

Our class in 2003 had only about ten students, but over the next few years our classes grew in popularity. We moved from the literacy classroom into the science lab, much to the horror of the applied science department, and were allowed to use 'real' science equipment. Learning through science challenged the students to think about the world around them. They rediscovered childhood curiosity and enthusiasm, and blew away many of their misconceptions in the process.

Word got around, and new students were asking to be included in the science program and by 2006 we were running two full Certificates in Science for Adults.

My favourite memories of teaching science are:

- fossil hunting in Heathcote and Bendigo
- making giant bubbles in the science lab
- setting up an interactive display about natural disasters in the library, complete with tornados in bottles and lunchtime volcanic eruptions
- dropping Duplo men attached to plastic bag parachutes off the tallest stairwell in the BRIT campus
- working out how many helium balloons you would need to lift you off the ground (a lot!)
- viewing stars and planets on Astronomy Nights run by the Bendigo District Astronomical Society
- having students involved in Conservation Volunteer Australia projects.

Jo

Exciting, fun, dynamic, interesting—these are some of the comments from teachers at Holmesglen TAFE who have taught in the Certificate in Science for Adults since its accreditation.

I teach as part of a team of experienced teachers who are committed to teaching in a holistic way, and who are prepared to take up the challenge of science literacy for our adult learners.

When the CSA was accredited, we at Holmesglen took up the torch and joined the marathon. Interesting science content was used to set up themes and projects that allowed us to integrate Reading, Writing, Oracy and Numeracy. We all agree that it's a good way to integrate these streams and the topics were interesting and varied. They included news articles and social issues ranging from weapons of mass destruction, stem cells, the water crisis and wind farms to smoking, diabetes and pollution. Language was incorporated from different angles and in a variety of projects.

Embracing the challenge of integrating the Science in the Community module into the Certificate III curriculum has had its difficulties, but the rewards we have reaped have more than made up for it.

It is exciting to teach about new developments and be challenged and learn more about developing technologies and sciences. We found it great to be learning and keeping abreast of changes in the scientific community. It proved to be an opportunity to think laterally.

Favourite activities from students include:

- Practical lab work—like making perfume, testing soil, dissecting a heart, making ginger beer.
- Excursions—to Melbourne Museum, IMAX, Aquarium, Scienceworks, Yakult, Rialto and Federation Square.
- Learning about the body and food.



Paula

I taught CSA science modules to students from four CGEA levels at the same time, in one class. This will always be too big a request. The workload on me was enormous. Eight weeks got the students a General Curriculum Option (GCO) pass. The CSA science modules took a year and in this case went nowhere for them.

It was exciting, exhausting, and in the end I gave up after half a year. I made half a year again the next year, but this time I stopped because the number of viable students for CSA was too low (the class was full but too few would be there for a whole year). I had a few volunteer teachers sit in for a few weeks and work with the lower level students who didn't want to drop out even though they agreed understanding was a challenge.

Doing practical work with no store of equipment, no materials and almost no funds is possible but exhausting. Good educationally, but I would need to be paid a lot more to make up for the time I put into:

- researching what to do
- locating suitable experiments
- locating and collecting equipment and materials in sufficient quantities
- carrying it into the room
- carrying all my own tools and fix-it kits to adjust or fine tune as things went wrong
- cleaning up afterwards and carrying it all away
- PLUS all the usual administritivia that goes with teaching these days—photocopying, marking, recording, checking against outcomes, roll keeping and worrying whether a student is homeless or ill or whatever.

So why did I do it? The highs.

There were lots of highs and I think what I was doing and the way I was doing it were successful.

I taught science with no assumptions about student background except knowledge of spoken English. I explained the nature of scientific theory and therefore the nature of scientific experiment, since I believe they are inextricably linked.

Because we had limited equipment, we used real life equipment for our practical work. Dianne Wilkinson, a physics teacher at a local school, lent me equipment and I am forever in her debt for essentials like thermometers and standard acid/base indicators (though at different times we made our own from plants and used ones from commercial soil testing kits).

Students learned the skill of recording experiments formally (though it could be in note or sketch form) and I posed questions and encouraged students to devise theories to be tested. Along the way I introduced generally accepted scientific theories such as atomic, solid-liquid-gas, light/waves/radiation and so on in an historical context explaining why these people had come up with this theory when faced with problems.

We had long-term projects, such as making ginger beer from scratch and learning the scientific theories to explain what was happening. What are those bubbles, and where are they coming from? How does beer-making relate to wine-making? Coffee brewing? Perfume making?

Individual students investigated elements and scientists and reported back to the class, where we all took notes and asked questions!

The biggest high for me, and one of the reasons I keep coming back, was that I think they learnt a lot of good quality science and a lot about the nature of science and its place in our lives. We learnt facts as well, but in their place.

Maria

As a member of the CSA writers' team, the torch came into my hands in June 2001. While writing the certificates, my folder had on the inside of its front cover, the phrase 'A more understanding partner to Nature'. As well as acknowledging the requirements of the society and culture we live in, I felt this was a good guide to what should be incorporated into the certificates.

In designing the assessment criteria within each learning outcome we deliberately and consistently emphasised the concept of scientific literacy that we hoped to impart. We

had four categories: scientific thinking and/or ethics; language and representation; practical scientific skills: scientific knowledge and understanding. The first of these (scientific thinking and/or ethics) is what set the different tone of these certificates. The focus was on interpreting and questioning the meaning and relevance of science—its personal and community implications and social or ethical responsibilities and consequences.

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These criteria incorporate the ability to develop arguments, and participate in discussions surrounding scientific issues. In the new CGEA science units we have ensured these were not lost. They are now in the elements of each unit.

Much of what was in the CSA science has been retained in the new units, including a range of supporting ideas to assist teachers such as descriptions of possible assessment tasks, and ideas for content and contexts that could be used in teaching. This range is the CSA range revised, added to and generally improved, and then adapted to a new format when the science modules were rewritten as units.

The major differences are that science is now in three 40-hour units, and twelve 20-hour units spread across Certificate 1, 2 and 3 levels, and that you may choose only three or four units at each level to keep to the nominal hours of the special electives section. This breaks up the continuity which existed in the original modules, but it does make it easier for teachers to take up only those aspects of science that their students most need, and I am sure we will find creative ways of extending the science content by carefully integrating modules from other sections of the CGEA.

It saddens us to think that, after such a short and successful lifespan, the Certificates in Science for Adults have become a casualty of the current educational climate where larger, more generic frameworks are the way to go. Science and technology are still areas of skill demand and shortage and skills that are desperately needed in our push to be a more skilled and advanced community.

Equally sad is that, for the past five years there has been a national recognition of science through these Certificates and now this recognition, this status, is gone. Having said that, we now move on to the CGEA.

Student comments

"I will never look at the world in the same way. I just love it".

"I was bored in hospital and I just wanted to come back to school and discuss science".

"Thank you for teaching me science. I loved it and now I can tackle my new course". (not science)

"This course has been a real learning curve. It has given me a lot of confidence. Unlike other courses it is quite unique because you don't only learn Maths and English; you get to do some real cool experiments and go on really exciting and interesting excursions. The teachers explain how to correct our work when we have problems. It's time consuming but in the end it is worth while".

"This course has changed my life! I have learnt a lot of things which I didn't know before. Like—how to write reports, argumentative writing, and even how to speak in front of the class peers".

"I enjoyed doing many experiments in the laboratory about nutrition, healthy diet, and fibre. Not to mention

about English, this course is the best way for me to learn English. Now I can talk as much as I want; I can read and write better".

"I enjoy this course very much. I learnt lots of things about life. The human body was the most important topic. I am so proud that I have learnt to use the computer and I want to learn more. Excursions were very informative and a good experience".

"I learnt a lot of things I never knew before. The topic on the human body was very interesting. The topic on food is very practical. I'm enjoying the course, I learnt more English from this course. I'm very happy this course. I will talk my friend if they want to learn about Science they better come to Holmesglen".

"When I first came for my interview I was very nervous but I soon got over that because the teacher that I had was lovely and helped me go into the right course. The class that I joined has helped me improve my English, spelling, maths, and my grammar".

Whether I taught science as a GCO or as part of the CSA, I enjoyed the experience. My adult students brought, and will continue to bring, science to life for each other and for me.

Imagine discussing:

- nuclear reactors when one of your students lived in the neighbourhood of Chernobyl
- tectonic plates and someone brings the diary of a young man who had been in Japan during one of their worst earthquakes
- medical marvels and they bring in the x-rays of their knee reconstruction or better still they share with you the video of the ultra sound showing their unborn grandchild
- forensics and they tell you about the night their fingerprints were taken
- rock formation and they bring their fossil collection.

Imagine sharing that wondrous moment when someone says 'Is that why? I've always wanted to know that', or when a student returns a year later and tells you how learning science gave them confidence to enrol in a course they have wanted to do for so long. What of the day when a student writes their first report or reads their first science article and they utter those magic words 'I understand'.

Our students can take part in the embryonic stem cell/therapeutic cloning debate now because they discuss it in class, and then if they wish to voice an opinion, they find out how to contact their federal government representative.

It was not all a bed of roses. Students were not always saintly, and I have two trolley-bags with broken axles to attest to the weights I had to carry around in supplying my own equipment. However, success makes pain fade away.

An invitation

We will keep on teaching, developing skills and understanding and spreading the love and enjoyment of science in whatever framework, environment or challenge is presented to us.

The CSA team invites you to join us on this new leg of the marathon. True, it will be different, but we hope no less challenging, exciting or rewarding than the various journeys just described.

The teachers who contributed to this article—Felicity Woodward, Dave Tout, Paula Herlihy, Jo Ross and Maria Santburn—were involved in various ways in the creation of the CSA framework, the supporting Sciweb website, and professional development in support of science for adults.

Does the CGEA *have* to be a training package?: understanding the language of the new CGEA

by Dianne Parslow

While units of competency are the basic units used in training packages, it does not mean they are inappropriate for use in the CGEA. In fact, says the author, using units of competency is logical because they are clear, well laid out and informative units of work.

When the draft modules of the new CGEA were distributed at various information sessions throughout the year, and finally on the SitnTalk website <http://tls.vu.edu.au/cfsitntalk/main.cfm>, the first comment that many people made was regarding the format of the units (previously modules), which had changed to look like parts of a training package.

The simple answer to the question, does the CGEA have to be a training package? is no, the CGEA does not have to be a training package and it is not. This question was posed on the SitnTalk website on 24 August by Helen Keane from NMIT. Liz Davidson, one of the project developers, replied: 'The new CGEA is not a training package. The redeveloped courses will be an accredited curriculum under the AQTF'. What does this mean to practitioners who are unfamiliar with the jargon of training packages?

James Plumridge (18.8.06) also asked why the CGEA was being turned into a training package. He said that the CGEA was a general education qualification, not a vocational course, and pointed out that the ANTA course development handbook makes provision for general education courses to have a non-vocational structure and non-vocational learning outcomes. Sharon Ross (20.8.06) believed that there should have been consultation before instituting such a change.

So if the CGEA is not a training package, why has it been written in units of competence? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this?

Training packages

What is a training package? The following definitions are taken from the VQA and DEST websites:

Training packages form the basis of the vocational education and training system in Australia. They describe the skills and knowledge needed to perform effectively in the workplace. Training packages include units of competency

that describe the skills and knowledge a person needs to perform a specific workplace task, function or role, for example driving a taxicab, operating a personal computer or managing finances. (<http://www.vqa.vic.gov.au/vqa/accreditation/packages.htm>)

A training package is an integrated set of nationally endorsed competency standards, assessment guidelines and Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) qualifications for a specific industry, industry sector or enterprise.

Each training package:

- provides a consistent and reliable set of components for training, recognising and assessing people's skills, and may also have optional support materials;
 - enables nationally recognised qualifications to be awarded through direct assessment of workplace competencies;
 - encourages the development and delivery of flexible training which suits individual and industry requirements; and
 - encourages learning and assessment in a work-related environment which leads to verifiable workplace outcomes.
- http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training_skills/publications_resources/profiles/Training_Package_Development_Handbook.htm

From these definitions, it is clear that any general education package could not be seen as a training package as it is not related to the workplace. It is not written for a specific industry, industry sector or enterprise. And as James Plumridge rightly points out the CGEA is not a vocational course.

Accepting that the CGEA is not a training package and should not be a training package, how should it be written? The Training Package Development Handbook, which applies to all accredited courses, states:

the course must be based on nationally endorsed units of competency where available. Where these are not available, it must be based on competency standards developed in

accordance with the current Training Package Development Handbook (including key competencies) and in consultation with, and validated by, appropriate industry, enterprise, community and/or professional groups (the only exception to this is where the proponent can establish to the satisfaction of the course accrediting body that it is not possible to develop appropriate competency standards, for example in some general education areas). http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training_skills/publications_resources/profiles/Training_Package_Development_Handbook.htm

As James Plumridge pointed out, general education courses do not have to be written in units of competency. So what are the options? Obviously one option is to use the existing format of a module with learning outcomes. Alternatively, it could be written in the form of units of competency or some other format.

Using the existing format has the advantage that many practitioners are familiar with it, but is this a good enough reason to keep that format? I recall the first time I was presented with the current document and felt overwhelmed. Even when I isolated the modules that I was to teach and was given assistance by some very experienced colleagues, I still found it difficult to understand what was required of me and of the students. This was confirmed by recent conversations with two teachers, both relatively new to the CGEA, who expressed difficulty understanding the document and were still not clear about what was required at the specific levels they were teaching.

One option is to continue with the current format but to make it more specific. However, there may be another format which could clarify what is required in an easily accessible format.

Units of competency

The unit of competency is the basic unit of training packages and is recommended for use in other accredited curricula. The format of a unit is very prescriptive but also provides a clearly structured way of providing information. It may be different from what practitioners are familiar with and many people are uncomfortable with change. However, the teachers new to the CGEA, who I referred to earlier, found that the new units of competence were much easier to understand. They thought it was easier to work out the level required, that the language was clearer for those new to the CGEA and that the body of work to be covered was clearly indicated while not being prescriptive.

A unit of competency provides a framework to outline details of the content and assessment guidelines of a section of work in a well structured way, which is accessible to

practitioners in other areas of training. It does not change the nature of the content or the way it is taught.

a unit of competency is made up of elements instead of learning outcomes

Adopting the unit of competency and its components requires an adjustment in terms of the language used. Getting used to new jargon is often difficult, but I have found that within two weeks of immersing myself in the new units I have become quite comfortable with the terminology. The headings used are not obscure; they clearly indicate the content of the section. The first change is that there is a *unit* instead of a *module*. This appears to be mainly a name change, which will become commonplace in time.

A unit of competency is made up of *elements* instead of *learning outcomes*. When learning outcomes first appeared in the curriculum, some adjustment was required, but now the term and its meaning has become commonplace. The learning outcome is now being replaced by an element. An element is the *basic building block of the unit of competency specifying the critical outcomes to be achieved in demonstrating competence* (From TAA04 Training and Assessment Training Package www.vetinfonet.det.wa.edu.au/home/docs/Glossary%20of%20Terms.doc)

Each element has *performance criteria* which describe the criteria related to performance of this skill, i.e., what the learner has to do to achieve competence in the element. This allows the writer of the unit to specify different aspects of the element which may be required, the level of skill or difficulty and the context for the element. Most of this was provided in the old CGEA, but in a different format. To assist practitioners even further in understanding the unit, crucial terms in the performance criteria are highlighted and italicised, and explained in more detail in the *range statements*.

Range statements can be used to define specific terms in relation to the element or give a range of situations. For example, the term *Complex text* is defined in more detail in Create Texts at Certificate III, giving a range of possible texts to be included. In numeracy, the term *calculations* is used at several levels, but the range statements allow for very clear indications of which operations are included at each level.

These range statements make it very easy, especially for new teachers, to see what level and what complexity is required

at each level. This is the section that was commented on by teachers looking at the new units. Newer teachers found it much clearer than the old curriculum while one experienced teacher commented on the usefulness of the extra clarification. This section will also be of great value when undertaking moderation. The *evidence guide* then follows with advice on assessment, including the context, method and guidance information. Where a list or range of items is included in the range statement, the evidence guide provides further information about how many of these are to be included in the assessment.

**newer teachers
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old curriculums**

A unit of competency also has a section called *Required skills and knowledge* which specifies the skills and knowledge needed to undertake this unit. This information is helpful when placing new students, particularly if practitioners are not familiar with the lower level of the certificate.

Conclusion

So using units of competency for the CGEA seems to be a logical decision. Although they are the basic units used in training packages, that does not make them inappropriate for use in the CGEA. From my perspective they allow for clear, well laid out and informative units of work. The content is another matter and should not be confused with the issue of the style of presentation of the curriculum.

Helen Keane said that teaching literacy and numeracy was an ongoing (sometimes a lengthy ongoing) educational activity rather than a training package that was delivered once and that's it. A unit of competency does not differ from a module in this respect. A unit of competency in an accredited curriculum can be repeated in the same way that a module in the CGEA or a unit of competency in a training package for plumbing or nursing, could be repeated if the student is not competent.

... Continued from page 2

Wherever you are over the summer months, I hope you find interest and enjoyment in the great variety of articles in this summer's *Fine Print*. Thanks to all the fantastic workers, teachers, researchers and policy makers who've taken the time to write for us. If you, dear reader, are lamenting that you didn't see an article on a particular

I encourage all practitioners to embrace the new format and feel that you will soon forget about modules and learning outcomes while terms like units, performance criteria and range statements will come more easily. This change does not need to change the way the CGEA is taught, what is taught or how it is assessed. However it will make it easier for new teachers to access the curriculum and it will make moderation a simpler process.

Cert IV in TAA

Another question posed on the SitnTalk site related to the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. If the new CGEA is not a training package, why must teachers have the Certificate IV? Most of us have obtained the Certificate IV in AWT, do we now have to upgrade to the TAA?

Because the CGEA is an accredited curriculum, it must follow the standards set out in the AQTF. Item 7.4 in The Standards for Registered Training Organisations, which are part of the AQTF, states:

The RTO must ensure that training is delivered by a person who:

- i) holds the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment from the Training and Assessment Training Package or is able to demonstrate equivalent competencies or
- ii) is under the direct supervision of a person who has the competencies specified in standard 7.4 i and
- iii) is able to demonstrate vocational competencies, at least to the level of those being delivered. http://www.vetab.nsw.gov.au/docs/AQTF_2005_RTO_standards_1_.pdf

However the small print also says that the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training will be accepted. So you can rest easy that having gained your Cert IV in AWT, you do not have to gain the Cert IV in TAA.

After working in TAFEs for many years Dianne Parslow has recently taken up the position of literacy coordinator at CAE. Dianne was involved in the reaccreditation of the ESL framework and part of the team that wrote the numeracy units for the new CGEA.

topic, please write to *Fine Print*, either to suggest a topic or to write your own contribution. We welcome your ideas and responses. See the back cover for contact details.

Best wishes to all
Karen Manwaring

CGEA reaccreditation 2006: meeting learner needs for the next five years

by Liz Davidson and Lynne Fitzpatrick

With courses undergoing final revisions, reaccreditors' hopes are high that the new CGEA certificates will be ready for publication by the time you read this article. Here is an overview of the stages that led to the new CGEA, from research and consultation through to development

Practitioners will be familiar with the Google program called Google Earth, which enables you to 'visit' anywhere on earth for a bird's eye view of the places where you live and work, and how these are positioned in relation to the rest of the world. Researching the CGEA has been something like viewing the world with Google Earth. Examining all of the feedback (surveys, emails, telephone conversations, focus groups, interviews, statistics, reports and so on), the project team has been able to observe the diversity of CGEA delivery and its learners and teachers. Having this bird's eye view and listening to the many voices of students, teachers and relevant others has helped to shape the reaccredited certificates.

VALBEC and ACAL members have had an opportunity to read the views of individual members and others posted on the SitnTalk website, and in *Fine Print* and *Literacy Link*. It is hoped that this article will clarify some of the issues which have been raised via these impressions and refocus the discussion.

The context for reaccreditation

Accreditation of curriculum in adult general and further education in Australia occurs within the context of vocational education and training, under the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF). The Certificates in General Education for Adults are crown copyright courses, owned by the Adult, Community and Further Education Board (ACFEB) in Victoria. The accreditation of courses is conducted by the Victorian Qualifications Authority (VQA).

The VQA accredits courses under Standards 27 and 28 of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) Standards for State and Territory Registering/Course Accrediting Bodies.

Under these standards, accredited courses:

- must be based on clearly established industry, industry sector, enterprise or community needs (Standard 27.1a), i.e. they must relate to the realistic industry

and workplace or community needs the course is addressing, and take into consideration the current and future skill requirements in the industry or community

- must not duplicate, by titles or coverage, AQF qualifications or outcomes of endorsed Training Packages (Standard 27.1b).

The standards also specify criteria that accredited courses must meet in terms of the use of units of competency, assessment, qualification requirements, access and pathways, flexible learning, articulation and credit transfer, customisation and ongoing monitoring and evaluation (Standard 28.1).

Since July 2004, all ACFE-owned curricula have been maintained by the General Studies and Further Education Curriculum Maintenance Manager (CMM) based at Victoria University. In February 2005, ACFEB released its ACFE Curriculum Strategy which states:

Funded further education accredited courses must now comply with Victorian Qualifications Authority accreditation requirements and processes that are linked to the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) standards 27 and 28. These are effectively the criteria for development of accredited further education curricula. (p.5)

Under its contract with the ACFEB, the General Studies and Further Education CMM is responsible for the review and redevelopment of the ACFEB-owned crown copyright courses. During 2004 and 2005, the CMM reviewed and consolidated the suite of ACFEB courses and developed a new framework based on enhancing pathways to further education, employment and community engagement for the diverse learner groups in adult further education.

A 'new look' curriculum document

Practitioners may have read some of the discussions posted on SitnTalk, and in particular a feature article in *Literacy Link*, expressing the opinion that the new CGEA is a 'Training Package.' Standard course accreditation templates have been used in the development of the CGEA. These

were also used in 2005 for the reaccreditation of the ACFE-owned Certificate IV and Diploma of Further Education. Similar templates are used across Australia.

There has also been discussion about the move from module format to unit format. In the adult general and further education field, it is a requirement that teachers are able to use both unit and modules to deliver and assess, and to be able to unpack the requirements of accredited courses. Most accredited courses now contain units from Training Packages, so that literacy teachers must be able to equally effectively interpret the requirements of Elements and Performance Criteria as they do the requirements of Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria.

**in very rare
circumstances the module
format can be used**

Since the CGEA was last accredited, the formats for both competency modules and units have undergone much revision. In very rare circumstances the module format can be used if developers make a special request to the VQA. The CMM has examined the format for both modules and units. Apart from the terminology, for example 'element / learning outcome', the current module template differs from a unit template in two places: the module provides a list of learning outcomes and the unit includes a section 'Application of the unit' which allows for additional advice. The rest of the templates are identical. It is considered that the unit format is the better option, given that it allows for more detail under the Application section.

CGEA course development

In February 2006, the General Studies and Further Education CMM commenced the project to reaccredit the CGEA. It established a representative project steering committee in consultation with the VQA. This committee was made up of experienced and expert stakeholders representing a range of learner groups using the CGEA in ACE and TAFE, literacy experts, and others with community and further education expertise who could advise on pathways to further learning and employment. VALBEC, as the peak professional organisation, is represented.

Stages of the project

1 Research and consultation phase

- Conducted initial research into the need for the courses (Standard 27).
- Conducted consultations with a range of stakeholders including teachers of the current courses, students, a

range of providers in diverse settings, LL&N experts, people involved in education and training relevant to CGEA graduates.

- Researched the strengths and weaknesses of the current courses in relation to current learners; to learner pathways through the courses; to pathways from the courses into employment, to further education and community engagement; to content (skills, relevance, currency); to learning and assessment; and to the flexibility of structure to meet learner needs.
- Obtained statistical information on course completions which indicated large numbers of learners are not successfully completing the courses.
- Reviewed current courses in light of changes in the accreditation of courses since 2002 and AQTF Standard 28; for example, advice on assessment tools and processes, flexibility of structure and delivery advice in relation to learner needs.
- Conducted a review of national and international LLN theory, and current research on the needs of LLN learners in adult settings and disseminated selected readings to focus groups for discussion.
- Examined how we read and write in a range of contexts in 2006, and how this differs from five years ago, and whether the courses allow learners to develop the skills of reading and writing required now and for the next five years.
- Elicited from practitioners and students current and new/additional skills which needed inclusion in new courses.
- Reviewed the numeracy needs in consultation with numeracy and mathematics experts.
- Examined the TAA04 standards and other relevant documents for current advice on assessment principles, assessment tools, adult learning theory, conditions of assessment and reasonable adjustment.

In April 2006, the first project steering committee meeting was held to report on the phase I research and consultation, and to establish course development processes. The steering committee signed off that Standard 27 had been met. It also supported the team's findings that there were changes to be considered; for example, to improve the flexibility of the courses (dividing content into smaller units); to make the courses more learner-centred with the inclusion of a learning plan unit; to include a new entry level. These and other changes are discussed below.

2 Development phase

This stage was spent working towards a draft structure and content and involved further consultation with providers. The first draft structure was presented to participants at the VALBEC Annual Conference in early May. The structure and a draft unit were trialled at a

meeting of practitioners on 19 May. The concept of including a learning plan unit and project unit as core were explored with this group. The project team also trialled the concept with individual practitioners and received comments from a range of providers on the approach. The main concerns with the structure as it was presented were that there appeared to be too much choice for students, that the essential skills of LL&N would not be covered, and that it was not very workable for a number of larger providers. As a result of these consultations, a refined structure was developed, ensuring that the core skills of Literacy and Numeracy were central. Feedback on the sample unit was used to guide development of units.

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A first draft of the course structure and units was sent to the PSC in early July. It was agreed at the second PSC meeting on 20 July that after some modifications the draft structure and units should be posted on the CMM website SitnTalk for wider consultation. A structured feedback sheet was provided to enable practitioners to provide focussed input. The PSC members presented the drafts to their 'constituents' as part of the consultation process. The CMM conducted a regional consultation during this period.

All feedback received, plus any comments posted on the SitnTalk discussion board, were considered in the revision of the drafts which were then sent to the PSC for review in early September. A meeting of the PSC was held on 14 September to review the courses structure and revised units. At this meeting, the course structure was endorsed. The chair of the PSC advised the PSC that correspondence had been received from VALBEC raising concerns that there had not been adequate time to give feedback on the draft courses. As a result additional consultation time of two weeks was agreed to by the PSC. VALBEC representatives met with the project team during this period to provide 'critical friends' input to the draft documents. Notes from this meeting will be tabled at the final PSC meeting on 12 October.

Summary of the development of the courses

Space precludes the writers from incorporating details from the courses. Practitioners are referred to the SitnTalk site where documents being submitted can be viewed. The following seeks to outline the key aspects of development.

Retaining the aims of the current CGEA

Development was based on the need for literacy, numeracy, general education courses for a wide range of learners. The revised curriculum retains the aims of the 2002 CGEA.

The Certificates provide:

- a curriculum framework for a general education course allowing flexible and customised programs to meet the needs of a range of client groups. While the focus of the Certificates is on literacy and numeracy, it also provides a framework for developing generic skills, and skills in a range of general and vocational areas (CGEA 2002, p.7).
- skill development in reading, writing and numeracy, and skill development in a variety of areas to meet personal needs and facilitate participation in the community, or other workplace and further education and training (CGEA 2002, p.11).

Strengthening the flexibility of the courses and pathways

In 2002, the reaccredited CGEA recognised the need to strengthen the flexibility of the courses and pathways. It provided new opportunities to do this by the inclusion of imported modules and units of competency as electives. This was done to provide greater flexibility, better meeting the needs of learners and providing stronger pathways to VET and further education courses (CGEA 2002, p.8). The inclusion in the redeveloped CGEA of a range of units as electives has been to provide easier access for practitioners to what is available. In all cases, the General Interest Electives are suggestions only, and at each level students can concentrate on the LLN units if they choose, with the possibility to build in specific topic areas within those units.

The new development has further enhanced the flexibility of the courses by enabling learners to have some choice about the contexts of reading, writing and numeracy to meet their needs. Student and teacher surveys gave the developers a strong sense of the diversity of learners and the settings in which they are learning. The new structure will cater for a range of learners with a range of learning needs in a range of settings.

Strengthening the adult literacy and numeracy pedagogical underpinnings

While the context in which accredited curriculum is developed may be different from the past, the accreditation under the AQTF ensures that adult learning principles, principles of access, fairness in assessment and other quality measures underpin course development. The development, guided by the consultations, has also ensured that adult literacy and numeracy pedagogical underpinnings of the

current certificates are retained, and that the new courses are enhanced by new understandings of literacy having been informed by research undertaken in the last five years. The new courses seek to place the adult learner as central and to strengthen their role in their learning. This is applied through the Develop a Learning Plan units.

Retaining the levels and building on the content

The CGEA levels have not altered. The reading and writing core skills units are based on the current modules, and descriptors of the complexity of the reading and writing texts use the same language from the current courses. The NRS has also provided descriptors for these units.

The current certificates include a number of genres. These are included in the new courses. Additional reading and writing skills identified by practitioners in the initial consultations and in student surveys are also included. Development of the units has been based on developing the capacity of learners to engage critically with texts, and to create texts in a variety of contexts and for a variety of purposes and audiences.

The four social contexts

The four social contexts of literacy—Family and Social Life, Workplace and Institutional Settings, Education and Training Contexts, Community and Civic Life (CGEA 2002, p.63)—from the current courses have been used to develop the four reading and writing units at each level. In each of the reading and writing units the application of reading and writing skills follows the same principles as the current document: knowing the purpose and audience of the texts, the structure, processes and conventions of text and the critical engagement with the meaning of text.

The new courses place more emphasis on the contexts in which texts are read and written. Current research shows that we live in an increasingly complex era of information which requires skills not only to process text, but critical skills of deciding what not to read, to deal with the greater demands to engage with and produce many types of text at home, in the educational environment in the community and at work. Integrated delivery and assessment advice is also retained in the redevelopment, particularly with reading and writing, but also to ensure that it is applied to real contexts, relevant to the learners.

Numeracy and mathematics

The development of the numeracy and mathematics units has been conducted by working groups of CGEA numeracy practitioners and experts. The development of the units has been based on the content in the current courses.

Incorporating the concept of the GCOs

Employability skills are replacing the Key Competencies. The GCOs were included in the current CGEA to allow learners to develop the skills identified in the Key Competencies. Teachers liked the GCOs because they could teach ‘anything they liked’—in other words, they could do subjects or activities of interest to their learners. The GCOs were designed in such a way that it was not possible to retain them. In order to translate them into the unit template, the developers designed the Complete a Project unit. The unit (one at each level) allows for practical application in an activity of a range of literacy, numeracy and oral communication skills for the purposes of further developing those skills in a context or around a specific content area.

additional reading and writing skills identified by practitioners are also included

The project also provides an opportunity for learners to develop personal skills, such as working collaboratively with others, planning and organising self and others, problem solving, and using technology (in other words, the Employability Skills). The project can be completed either individually or as a member of a group. Content for the unit can be drawn from any area of learner interest or need. Each unit provides suggested projects in the range statement.

Enhancing the Learning to Learn

Consultations indicated the need to develop the learning skills of students in the CGEA. An important part of the current certificates is the development of learning strategies of learners returning to study often with negative attitudes to school. Research into approaches to adult learning in LLN overseas and into post-compulsory education research (e.g. NCVET reports) suggests that focussing on the learner as central and having a sense of purpose or developing pathway is important.

It is also important to move away from the deficit view of literacy and numeracy learners. For this reason, the Develop a Learning Plan unit was included as core at each level. This allows learners to identify their strengths and what they bring to the courses as well as to acknowledge the need to develop other skills. The units at the lower levels of the certificates are very supported, all activities being scaffolded, and involve mainly discussion. At the higher level, there is opportunity for

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New arrivals from Africa: a learner profile

by *Dhammika Fernando*

It is important to have a flexible approach to teaching, as the Adult Migrant English Program team at Victoria University found with newly-arrived learners from Africa.

Our educational centre is a small unit catering exclusively to new immigrants through the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP). A significant number of students are Africans from Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Liberia, Eritrea, Sierra Leone, Burundi and the Congo. The centre employs a part-time bilingual support worker who is Sudanese and speaks Arabic and Dinka, and around 90 per cent of our African students are from Sudan, and they are humanities entrants.

The statements included in this article are largely generalisations made through observations in the classroom, through surveys, writing tasks and interviews. We are creating a learner profile here for the sole purpose of heightening the awareness of those who teach students with the characteristics described below. It must be kept in mind that as teachers we are looking at these learners from our own cultural backgrounds and expectations, and see differences which we feel we need to address in order to help them integrate into life in Australia and achieve their goals. However, we are also looking at changing our ways of teaching in order to accommodate the learning styles of people from this learner profile.

As you read, you may feel indignant or even angry that such generalisations can be made about a racial group. Please keep in mind that these statements are NOT results of research—they are merely observations made about a particular learner profile and do not apply to all students from Africa. These observations should not be used to form assumptions about all African students as there is considerable diversity among them, as in any other such group.

Family bonds

African families are large and not always 'nuclear' as we know it. Many men have several wives, concurrently or consecutively, so siblings may have different mothers, both belonging to the same family unit. Students will often refer to a first or even second cousin as 'brother'; 'uncles' and 'aunts' may not be related by blood or even marriage, but just be from the same village community. Family loyalties are high, although we have observed several such extended families falling apart in the first few months in Australia.

Usually, a Sudanese man will not be seen in public with his little children if his wife is not present. Fathers looking after children while their mother attended English classes was an

alien concept, but we ran a successful dove-tailed program where one parent attended a morning session (usually the father), then went home to be with the children while the mother attended class. This worked well until the afternoon group folded due to lack of numbers because of pregnancies!

african families are large and not always 'nuclear' as we know it

Many female students are sole parents with two or more children (who may or may not be her own) to rear alone. Many have come to Australia as refugees under the Women at Risk category, and may not have any other family or friends in Australia. The African students at our centre are from traditionally patriarchal societies, and single mothers miss the traditional influence of significant male relatives and elders over their sons, particularly during the teenage years.

We find that women have generally had less access to education, both in their homelands and in refugee camps. It is the women who queued for rations, cared for children and performed domestic tasks.

Parenting in this new environment is a huge challenge for African refugees. Local laws prohibit many of their usual practices, and parents find themselves confused and at a loss when faced with disciplining their children. The freedom experienced by women (who are the recipients of child allowances) for perhaps the first time in their lives, and children getting an allowance at age 16, can sometimes cause an imbalance in the family dynamic. Family relationship centres and churches provide a valuable service here.

The community at large seems to be very tolerant of infringement of regulations by refugees from Africa. We have had to contact Telstra, Citilink and other organisations about infringement notices which, once they felt that the African new arrival was informed and aware of the rule/law, the organisation was happy to waive (if not the actual fine, at least the late fees).

Our African students purchase cars as soon as they can. However, this does not mean they all have valid drivers'

licenses. Driver education courses and learners' licensing organisations need to be alerted to this so they can highlight the fact that L does not stand for licence. A police officer who has attended several accident scenes caused by people with this learner profile says the most common reasons are the driver not giving way and the driver entering intersections when it is not safe to do so.

Respecting elders

Disciplinary issues are very rare at our centre. Most African students respond to elders and people in positions of authority. They are appalled at what they perceive to be a lack of respect towards elders in Australian youth in general. This could be a reason why many parents of African origin go to extremes when parenting, in an effort to teach their children to respect elders. It must be extremely frustrating when a recalcitrant child is seen to be rewarded by the government and encouraged to be independent, when all their lives they have lived by the maxim that family is everything.

While the African students we have known seem to choose to ignore the emphasis we put on time and punctuality, they are very trustworthy where material things are concerned. Most will not take anything that is not given to them. However, the concept of borrowing seems to be a hard one for them to understand. Libraries have problems with borrowed items not being returned, and class sets of materials have to be given out with explicit and often repeated instructions for return. As almost all refugees receive many expensive 'gifts' from the government, the misconception that 'everything that is given to them is for keeps' is understandable.

For most Africans, breakfast is usually a drink. They will have a small meal around 11am and then go until dinnertime (7pm) without any other food. Teachers explain and demonstrate to them that Melbourne's tap water is drinkable and that bottled water and fizzy drinks are an unnecessary expense, but Coca Cola seems to have a certain prestige attached to it. Butter, margarine and sugar are heavily consumed by Africans in Australia and exercise is not a priority beyond a certain age. African students would add three to four teaspoons of sugar to tea or milk. Where there is a choice, brown sugar and brown bread are never chosen over the white counterpart. Most Sudanese come from cattle rearing areas and enjoy drinking milk, and said they dislike prawns. When asked why, they laughed and said prawns look unappetising.

Most men from this learner profile are unfamiliar with the kitchen and cooking terminology. We have a qualified chef from Sudan who does not enter his kitchen at home, unless his wife is ill. It is considered shameful for both husband and wife if the man does anything in the kitchen. Usually, a female relative will cook for all-male Sudanese households and leave food in the fridge. When discussing customs,

one class described how in Sudan, a wife will bring the food to the husband, carrying it in both hands, and move towards him on her knees, offer it to him and leave the room moving backwards on her knees. While this type of traditional practice may seem subservient to observers, they seem to play a vital role in family dynamics.

most African students respond to elders and people in positions of authority

Absence due to health issues is high among new arrivals from Africa at our centre. However, more visits to medical centres are for ante- and postnatal issues than for sickness. Students whose English is adequate quite often have to accompany family members to medical appointments to act as interpreters, and therefore miss classes. All entrants are screened for health problems before arrival, but as there is a gap between the health check and departure, rarely they may contract diseases which the Dept of Immigration would not be aware of. Also, those who come under the Special Humanitarian Program, who are sponsored by people already in Australia, seem to have fewer checks and require health services more on arrival, according to the observations of local Health Services. Optometry seems to be the area where most people are treated from our centre, and some southern Sudanese people choose to get partial dentures to replace the front teeth that were ceremoniously extracted by their elders.

Nutrition is a theme we teach in our classes. There are many education programs aimed at raising nutrition and health awareness, conducted by local organisations. Shopping is done by women and Sudanese men will not carry food or shopping bags. This has implications for parties and excursions as well as vocabulary in teaching materials.

Packing a lunch is a foreign concept to people of this learner profile, just as eating from a communal plate would be to people from western cultures today. Community organisations and schools run workshops for mothers with school children on how to prepare healthy lunch boxes.

Most new arrivals are under a lot of pressure from families overseas to support them and even sponsor them to come to Australia. Therefore, many try to get work as soon as possible.

Observations in the classroom

We have found that learners between the ages of 22 and 34 seem to have had less opportunity for formal education. The younger people have had some learning in refugee camps, and the older people have had some schooling in their homeland, unless they were from very rural areas.

People of this learner profile are not shy or reticent; they will ask for what they want, and expect the teacher to do it for them. They love performance and respond well to an over-the-top style of teaching. Most young people have a thirst for knowledge, but they like to have that knowledge given to them. They seem to respond well to modelled teaching, and this may cause a problem once they go to mainstream education where they are expected to do independent learning and research.

most students of this learner profile prefer to be corrected individually

Older students initially do not respond well to games, but can be coaxed through perseverance on the part of the teacher. They show a sense of urgency to get on with their lives, but this seems to dissipate once they get into a mainstream course of study. Men especially have very high opinions of their skills if they have had previous education, and are reluctant to accept critical feedback. Most students of this learner profile prefer to be corrected individually than have a whole class correction session. Initially they have to be persuaded to do group work, and do not enjoy peer-corrections or teaching.

African students who have not had western education prior to arrival in Australia can be difficult to teach. Having had limited opportunity in their homeland to be formally educated they may not have learning strategies that teachers take for granted, and may need coaching on copying, matching, underlining, filling in the gap and other such classroom actions. Many have relied solely on their oracy skills up to now. Having acquired languages aurally means that they are unfamiliar with written text and are often unable to read their own language. Some students need to be taught pre-literacy skills such as pencil-holding, learning the alphabet, shape/letter recognition and left to right script orientation.

The following has been observed mostly in students from southern Sudan. If you greet a student, "Hi, Thomas!" be prepared for the response, "Fine, thanks". This is unremarkable, as we do it, too! However, it has been noticed that when answering questions on a text, Sudanese students will not focus on the question words, 'who', 'when', etc, and will often provide an answer which bears little or no relation to the question. Sometimes they will provide a whole chunk of information which may include the requested item quite by chance. A lack of precision is apparent in written tasks, although in oral exercises based on texts, they may demonstrate understanding of question words. Teachers who are aware of this can focus on question words based on spoken and written texts, and teach the skill of answering what is

asked, particularly if the students are in pre-tertiary classes. This is an area which could be researched, as this is a trait observed by many teachers of new arrivals from Africa.

Learning the lingo

Students who have had some formal education in Africa do not like contractions. They will not write them, and will read aloud the written sentence 'I can't go' as 'I cannot go'. Such students usually have a high level of comprehension and oral language, and need significant reassurance and reinforcement if they are to overcome this habit. Why does this trait need to be overcome? Assimilation into a new culture is encouraged by 'speaking the lingo', and 'bookspeak' doesn't encourage 'mateship'! If they have learned English in Africa, it can be formal and at times somewhat archaic. This is particularly evident when writing letters.

In the computer room the teacher may start with a set of instructions, perhaps with a demonstration. The students are asked and expected to follow the instructions and ask for clarification when needed. It has been observed that the African students will not follow instructions given to the class in general. They will not alert the teacher, either. The teacher has to go to each student in turn and repeat the instructions. Even if they are sitting next to each other, they will not listen to the instructions if they think the teacher is addressing the other person. This has been observed by teachers in mainstream information technology courses, where the teacher may spend up to 80 per cent of his class time with the African students, as well as in other programs. An interesting observation is that in the AMEP classes, our bilingual aide repeats the teacher's instructions to students individually, too.

The problem can be somewhat alleviated by addressing such students by name when giving the general instructions, and this too could be a very worthwhile research project.

Teachers of IT classes have also noticed that their African students can follow written directions to solve sample problems given in text books, but have trouble applying the learned techniques to other problems. The teachers have noticed that students of this learner profile tend not to revisit their textbooks until they are back in the classroom the following week and asked to open their books.

One of the hardest concepts to teach to new arrivals from Africa is the mapping of space. Switching between a three-dimensional world and a two-dimensional diagram is as foreign to them as is kissing in public! We are generating teaching material with a scaffolded approach in an effort to address this, as map reading is a skill that goes hand in hand with their passion for driving vehicles!

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Locomotion!

Using a popular Sixties song that celebrates dancing and togetherness, Linda Rhodes and her students danced their way from a classroom at Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre to the stage at La Mama's Courthouse Theatre. The song was 'Locomotion', and here is the story.

Everybody's doing a brand new dance now,
Come on baby, do the locomotion ...
I know you'll get to like it if you give it a chance now,
Come on baby, do the locomotion ...

Move around the floor in a locomotion,
Come on baby, do the locomotion ...
Do it holding hands like you got the notion,
Come on baby, do the locomotion ...

Many of us are familiar with the tune made popular by Little Eva and later by Kylie Minogue. It's a song that invites a group of people to dance together; it celebrates community. It is also the name of the latest play Carlton Neighbourhood and Learning Centre's (CNLC) Everyday Literacy class staged recently at La Mama Courthouse theatre.

The Everyday Literacy class is an Introductory to Level 1 CGEA class, and regularly attended by six men and four women. A couple of other students attend more sporadically. Some of the students have been coming to the class for many years, while others are new this year. The students all have a mild intellectual disability, and as with any small community, it is not uncommon for a student to come to our class for the first time and already know at least one other student from another group or class somewhere else. CNLC employed a teacher's assistant, Catherine, for the class, who had been with the group for a number of years when I first started teaching at the beginning of 2005.

The students already had an established relationship with her and a familiarity with each other. The class was structured and had a rhythm, which allowed me to join in and observe until I understood the students expectations of the class. Being new to teaching, this time was valuable and I appreciated the familiarity already established. I followed the pattern of news sharing, some work with written texts, and time on the computers writing simple emails or diary entries, followed by footy tipping (in the season).

Reflecting reality

Early in the year during news time, one student told the group about being harassed by the transit police that

morning and how he saw another passenger being treated badly as well. The whole class had something to say about this issue, so we role-played some of the different possibilities of dealing with similar situations. We discussed our rights, and how to go about getting help. When another student suggested we 'do a play about it', I thought it was a great idea and everyone else seemed keen, so we 'did a play' about it.

In my mind it was going to be about how people with a mild intellectual disability can suffer discrimination because people don't understand their disability, and often their disability/ies can be invisible. The play ended up being about a passenger who lost their ticket and nearly got arrested, until someone else came along and helped. I wanted the play to examine discrimination, but they wanted the cops involved, arrests, courthouses, jail and guns if possible. Well, fair enough, I thought, after all, it's all about reflecting real situations in their lives and not about my agenda of examining systemic discrimination. Discrimination would have to be dealt with much more subtly than I'd planned. Going to court came up in news sharing from time to time for more than one student, and some of the students lived in supported accommodation programs for offenders.

Since the play about the train, we have done three other plays—one about health issues, called *Delicious Nutritious* another about consumer rights called *Many Happy Returns* and now, *Locomotion!*

I was aware that my aims for doing the plays in the classroom environment needed to weave in the learning outcomes, and that they needed to reflect real life situations and have an element to them that allowed the students to reflect on episodes or moments in their lives. Using plays as a learning tool allowed the students to critically examine real life events. The plays started with a broad theme like healthy eating or loneliness, and then the floor was thrown open in the classroom to allow anyone to have input in to how the story would unfold. The scripts were written in between classes by Catherine and myself, usually making amendments after rehearsal as scenes were added, characters changed or different ideas

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came up. It was my aim to weave each student's experience in somehow and allow his or her voice to be heard.

Staying healthy

The aims with *Delicious Nutritious* were to simultaneously educate about a healthy diet and the different ways of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. While this hasn't changed one student's habit of bringing a large packet of salt and vinegar chips to class for breakfast, it did give us all a way of workshopping what healthy eating means and introducing other ways of being healthy, like exercise and being able to talk about what other things we do in our lives that are healthy. One student has been practicing tai chi for a number of years and he was very happy to give a demonstration of his tai chi skills and lead the class in some basic movements. This particular student is usually reluctant in joining in any group activities.

The next play, about returning damaged goods to a supermarket, took us all to a new level with writing a play. While talking in class about what happens when you take goods back we realised that different shops have different policies, so we undertook research and went on an excursion to the local supermarket. The manager was very accommodating and took our group on a tour behind the scenes. This led to many discussions about the different jobs involved. A couple of the students work part-time in other supermarkets, so they demonstrated to the rest of us what sort of work they do that involved flattening huge cardboard boxes and stacking shelves. The students also had prepared questions to ask the manager of the supermarket. We met the manager of the meat section who said he 'was just like you guys and now I'm the manager of the meat section!' He was very proud and the students shared his pride and talked about him quite often after that trip.

The idea for *Locomotion!* came one day on an excursion when one student told me that she feels lonely when her housemate, who is also in the class, goes to work on the other four week days. Loneliness is an issue for most of us at some point in our lives, and an issue that is difficult to talk about and resolve. I wondered how it must be for people with a mild intellectual disability, many of whom do not have partners or the social skills required to resolve feelings that can be difficult to deal with. We talked a lot about it in class and decided we would do our next play around the theme of loneliness.

The play started to take shape in first term with the working title of *A Play Called Loneliness*. We started rehearsals in term two, after a period of research and

discussions. We made a trip to the Holden Street Neighbourhood House and interviewed staff and participants there about their strategies of dealing with loneliness (CGEA—Oracy for Exploring Issues and Problem Solving). The students rehearsed the play each week for term three, culminating in a performance for Adult Learners Week.

It was important to include the interests of the students in the play, after all it should be meaningful and about their lives. It should allow the students the opportunity to reflect on situations in their lives and an opportunity for success in their learning.

The interests of the students in the group centred on other organised activities like basketball, singing groups, tai chi, and all the participants have (or had) some responsibility for an animal or have an affinity with animals. They love seeing animals, and talking about their pets, whether they have passed on or not.

Preparations

In preparation for the play, each student researched a topic of their choice from the activities represented in the play; basketball, dogs, singing or tai chi. The students used the internet to research and PowerPoint to present their projects. We also watched a couple of segments from ABC TV's 'Behind the News': one about an actor, and how he learnt his lines and the other about caring for dogs, so they were both relevant and interesting research tools (CGEA—Writing for Self Expression/Reading and Writing for Knowledge/Practical Purposes/Oracy for Knowledge and Practical Purposes.)

The class regularly played word bingo with words taken from the script, and we incorporated some physical movement in the class via ball games and tai chi-type exercises.

The ability to read the script word for word did not matter so much as understanding that the script remained the same unless we made an active decision to change it ourselves.

The students had ownership over the play—they understood they had the ability to change the course of the action—and at each rehearsal something (minor or major) was changed. One student, who at each lesson changed his mind about whether he would be in it or not, eventually embraced it wholeheartedly when he worked out the role he wanted to play, which basically involved a speaking part in every scene.

Practical Matters

This play took a lot longer than the others to take shape. The idea of loneliness was much more abstract than dealing with trouble on the train, healthy eating and returning goods to the supermarket. We had a few different students taking the lead roles—ones that required confidence and a desire to be the centre of attention. The students we initially chose were new to the class and had more developed literacy skills than most of the other students. We discovered these students did not desire centre stage, and didn't seem to cope with the pressure of being in a leading role. Eventually we chose two students whose oracy skills are low level—a man who stutters and has difficulty completing sentences when he is nervous or excited and a woman with Down Syndrome and who similarly has speech difficulties. This created a need for a narrator, which meant we found a role for the person in the class whose reading abilities are strong and who is loud and needs to be noticed, but not necessarily the centre of attention. Having the narrator role was an effective way to let the story unfold and allow the students to play their roles with integrity. Each student had at least one scene in which they had lines to say, or a role to perform.

The story of Chris and Dora

The play tells the story of Chris and Dora who share a house and most of their activities. Chris feels lonely one day after listening to the radio and tells Dora he is going to find out what other people in the world are doing. She tells him she's going to watch 'Home and Away'. He goes off each day and discovers people in the park engaged in a group activity. He returns and tells Dora about each activity at the end of the day and says none of them interested him for various reasons—basketball is too fast, tai chi is too slow and he doesn't have a dog to join the dog walkers. Finally Dora shows him a brochure that arrived in the mail about a singing group at the Neighbourhood House and they both go along and join

in. The singing group ask Chris his favourite song and he replies, 'Locomotion'. The cast all join hands to hips to form a conga line and sing 'Locomotion' while encouraging the audience to join in.

We sent out invitations to friends and family members and students made fliers advertising the play for the centre (CGEA—Writing for Practical Purposes). Performance day was not without its glitches and surprises; the singing teacher was sick and unable to make it for her part in the performance. Luckily Mary, the CNLC manager, came to the rescue and enjoyed her cameo performance as the singing teacher. The house was packed with friends and family of the students, as well as students from the English language classes at CNLC. There were many camera flashes going off and cheers for the cast. We even went against the rules of theatre and used a real dog for the dog-walking scene, Catherine's Australian terrier, Eureka, who already is known to the class.

The students in the class got a real kick out of performing. They were able to reflect on how nervous they were and talked in class the following week about how they dealt with the nerves. They were able to report on how proud their friends and relatives were of their performance, and gave themselves resounding applause and congratulated each other.

We're going to work on a retrospective program next that chronicles each student's roles and performances.

There's never been a dance that's so easy to do,
It even makes you happy when you're feeling blue,
So come on, come on, do the locomotion with me.

Linda Rhodes works in literacy education for adults at Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre, and in the VCAL program at PRACE.

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learners to investigate possible pathways and to put together a portfolio which can be used as evidence to gain access to work or study options.

Conclusion

This article provides an introduction to redevelopment of the CGEA. It will be followed in the near future by professional development and support for implementation. VALBEC members are encouraged to read the course submission document where they will find a list of references and other

details which cannot be included here due to space restrictions. Please contact the project team for any further advice.

Liz Davidson and Lynne Fitzpatrick are part of the curriculum maintenance manager team for general studies and further education in Victoria, based at Victoria University. Liz has taught for many years in secondary and adult ESL programs, and Lynne has worked in various roles and on a number of national projects in the adult literacy field since 1979.

Open Forum

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

The Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector benefits from the work of the National Tertiary Education Industry Union, says delegate Manrico Moro, and everyone in the sector should participate in the union's negotiation of a new collective agreement.

Adult and Community Education benefits from union activity

I have just been elected to the Victorian Division and National Council of the NTEU. It is the National Tertiary Education Industry Union, of course, but we only ever call our union the NTEU.

This is my first national council meeting. I am here with 200 other delegates from all over Australia. The other delegates are mostly academic and general staff from universities.

I have been elected as the representative for the combined TAFE electorate, which covers TAFE and ACE in Victoria. It is a fine title, but there are precious few NTEU members in this area, so this is the smallest section of the union.

I have been received very warmly by the other delegates and by the officials of the union. The union is facing many battles right now, mostly as part of the united front of all unions defending workers' rights and conditions against the Howard Government's very serious attacks against most fundamental rights to organise.

Some battles are in different universities, and some are on social issues. The NTEU is very prominent in defending and promoting Aboriginal rights and culture, not just for its Indigenous members, but in discussions over history and policy and laws and when necessary, marching in the streets.

Our area of the union is very small, but it is receiving a great deal of attention from the union. A new industrial officer has been appointed to support members and prospective members working for adult education providers. He is Rhydian Thomas, and he has a good reputation and is very dynamic and energetic. His second comment to me (after saying hello) was that he was very available to visit groups of workers to talk about the union and its activities.

And there are some important issues to discuss. The NTEU has been negotiating a new collective agreement that will cover all workers in the sector if it is supported by them.

This agreement is very important because the new industrial relations laws have decreased the scope of, or simply removed, our awards. Many employees will find themselves with no access to current conditions without the new agreement, and they may be forced to negotiate individual contracts (called Australian Workplace Agreements or AWAs) which could be very inadequate in many areas such as sick leave, holidays, superannuation, grievance procedures and penalty rates.

The NTEU is organising and negotiating a collective agreement, because otherwise our alternatives are to negotiate hundreds of AWAs or dozens of Enterprise Bargaining Agreements (EBAs) with individual employers.

This would be a logistical nightmare, and really foolish as well, for us and for our employers, who have few resources and better things to do than develop almost identical negotiations in workplace after workplace over months or years. A sector-wide agreement immediately allows all workers equal access to conditions and pay rises.

Our collective agreement is being negotiated by the NTEU, which represents professional, administrative and teaching staff, together with two other unions in our sector: the Australian Services Union (ASU) which covers welfare and community development workers, and the Liquor and Miscellaneous Workers Union (LHMU) which represents childcare workers and cleaners. This means that all workers in the sector will be covered by this agreement.

The collective agreement has a number of important features, including a structure for pay rises, which are otherwise left to the unpredictable decisions of the Office of Fair Pay that has just been set up by the federal government.

Other features of the agreement include classification descriptions, with a classification process and appeal rights, improved wages and protection for casual staff and increased severance pay. For the first time it establishes a minimum rate of pay for teachers and tutors. More importantly perhaps it will give us a standard agreement that will give all workers

and employers a document that will set out rights and obligations, without having to send all issues into protracted discussions with management and committees.

The NTEU is negotiating the collective agreement with the employer associations in our sector. This has been a very cooperative process because it is recognised that this document will be helpful in the process of developing funding submissions and agreements and preparing organisational budgets, as it will give everyone a very clear standard for the cost of employing any staff members in any position.

The situation that the Howard government is creating, where wages and conditions are always up for negotiation, or at the discretion of employers, is not in fact promoting choice, but it simply causing uncertainty and overwork. The collective agreement being negotiated by our union will create a much better situation for employers and workers and also for our students and communities.

We work professionally and diligently and usually very hard. We all deserve a collective agreement that gives us reasonable compensation, good working conditions and proper protection, without having to stress and argue for every basic issue like pay, holidays or sick leave. You can download a copy of the proposed collective agreement at: <http://www.nteu.org.au/bd/lace>

If you would like to have more information on this agreement or on union membership and activities you can contact Rhydian Thomas directly at the NTEU on 03 9254 1930 or at rthomas@vic.nteu.org.au

My own role is to represent our sector in meetings of the union to the best of my ability. At the moment this consists

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Teachers of this learner profile should be aware of possible signs of torture and trauma, which can be accessed at the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture <http://www.survivorsvic.org.au/home.php>

Information on assisting Sudanese learners is at <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~sail/index.htm>

Fact sheets on different countries and learners from them can be found at <http://www.nceltr.mq.edu.au/pdamep/factsheets.html>

We want to reiterate the fact that the observations above are based on how we as teachers view education, what we believe is good teaching practice at the moment, and our

of helping to publicise the next big ACTU Day of Action, which will be on Thursday, 30 November, when we hope to fill the MCG in Melbourne and hundreds of community venues across Australia.

We want to remind Mr Howard and everyone else that we strongly disagree with destroying workplace structures and protections, and that we will organise to defend our rights and the rights of all workers.

My main concern in this campaign has been to ensure that participation by our communities and our students is supported by our union. In our sector we typically work with people who are the least able to negotiate their own work contracts, particularly if they face an unscrupulous employer. We need to remember that the first people who lose their workplace rights in a deregulated economy are those who are not so articulate, or not so literate, or not so informed about laws and regulations.

We know that everyone deserves their fair deal, and working together with our unions we will be able to defend our rights and conditions, for ourselves and for everyone in our communities.

In solidarity,
Manrico Moro
Council delegate, NTEU

Manrico Moro has recently been elected to the Victorian Division and National Council of the National Tertiary Education Industry Union. His role is to represent our sector within the NTEU. He can be contacted at manrico@bigpond.com

own views of success in an educational environment. This very vibrant and visible student cohort and how they learn will have implications for future teacher training programs and professional development for teachers. People of this particular learner profile are shining a light on the way we do things, and perhaps the ways they learn, once illuminated, will change the way we teach.

Dharmika Fernando leads a team of ten teachers and support staff at the Sunshine Campus of Victoria University, where the Adult Migrant English Programs are being offered. This article was written by Dharmika with substantial input from the rest of the team—Anne Jorgensen, Ibrahim Diab, Dianne Wilson, Christina Pavilidis and Gulhan Yilmaz—and is based on her belief in reflective practice.

Policy Update

Building a picture of literacy and numeracy skills development in Australia

Three reports from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) are due for release: one has vital statistics on students in stand-alone literacy and numeracy courses; another looks at the range of literacy and numeracy units embedded in VET subjects and courses; the third report covers the nature of provision in ACE non-accredited programs. Joanne Hargreaves describes the reports.

Building a picture of the total provision of language, literacy and numeracy training in Australia is not an easy task, and coming up with a total figure may not be possible. However, NCVER is attempting to fill in some of the knowledge gaps that exist on the full range and extent of literacy and numeracy activity through three reports which examine:

- 1 The number of students participating in stand-alone literacy and numeracy courses.
- 2 The range of literacy and numeracy units of competency embedded in vocational subjects and courses.
- 3 The nature of provision that occurs in community-based non-accredited programs.

Even a rudimentary scan of the educational marketplace reveals a wide range of organisations offering some sort of support for the development of adults' English language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills.

NCVER will shortly release the report, *Australian Vocational Education and Training statistics: Adult Literacy and Numeracy Courses 2002–2004*, which provides data on courses in the vocational education and training (VET) sector that are generally described as adult literacy and numeracy. This includes general education programs, social skills courses, employment skills courses and other mixed field programs. Some of these programs are at an advanced level (university preparation, for example).

This report shows there were 188,300 students enrolled in literacy and numeracy courses in 2004, which represented 11.8 per cent of the total VET student population in the publicly-funded VET system. Overall, literacy and numeracy activity has grown—from 11.3 per cent of total VET annual hours in 2002 to 12.8 per cent in 2004.

Another project, *Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Provision Embedded in VET Courses*, examines the extent of LLN activity across all training packages, not just general or mixed field education. It identifies literacy and

numeracy activity in VET courses by examining the extent to which it is embedded in modules and units of competency that lead to a nationally recognised training package qualification.

While this does not quantify the precise extent of literacy content, it will at least provide an insight into the spread of literacy and numeracy training within the 'built in, not bolted on' policy environment.

The aim of the third project, undertaken by Darryl Dymock, is to map another particular sub-sector of provision: non-accredited community adult literacy and numeracy. The extent and impact of this sub-sector has been somewhat overshadowed in recent years by the emphasis on accredited education and training.

External reporting of non-accredited community education courses in Australia is much more piecemeal than for the accredited provision, and tends to happen only for state government-funded programs. Dymock's work is an exploratory study to discover the dimensions of the sub-sector including the types of providers, the nature of the programs and the sorts of learners who seek that kind of assistance, and the perceived outcomes for individuals and the community.

All three projects will be finalised by the end of 2006, and NCVER also intends to develop an 'At a Glance' publication which will summarise the results. This will be useful in the lead-up to the results of the *Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey*, to be released towards the end of 2007.

For more information about these projects, contact michelle.circelli@ncver.edu.au. To be notified when these reports are published subscribe to *NCVER News* via <http://www.ncver.edu.au/newsevents/news.html>

NCVER acknowledges the funding provided by the Australian Department of Education, Science and Training under the *Adult Literacy National Project*.

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Beside the Whiteboard

Susie Gerard's experiences on Christmas Island led her to work in the adult education field as an ESL teacher. Looking back on this decision, Susie reflects 'I love it when you can identify the circles in your life coming to completion ... one of the YAMEC students I was teaching came to Australia as a refugee who had landed on Christmas Island in the time I was there'.

Now working with NMIT Youth Unit (Young Adult Migrant Education Course) in Collingwood, Melbourne, Susie talks with Julie Palmer from the *Fine Print* Editorial Committee.

Some people can recall defining moments in their lives that have shaped their life course. Are there any moments that have shaped your professional career choices?

In this century, it was standing on the shores of Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean wearing a hand-painted tee shirt emblazoned with the words *Let Them Land*, as the *Tampa* sailed back and forth along the Australian marine border with its precious human cargo of shipwrecked refugees seeking asylum.

That hand-painted tee shirt was eventually presented to Arne Rinnan, the captain of the *Tampa*, but not before the incident nearly divided the previously harmonious community life on Christmas Island. There was certainly a lot of misinformation that was quickly circulated about the so-called threat of asylum seekers and refugees and community members stood divided on the issue.

When the federal government closed the port of Christmas Island, so the *Tampa* was excluded, the lives of the local Malay and Chinese who were unable to launch their fishing boats were affected. Most of the food on Christmas Island is flown or shipped in, and preventing people from fishing in this way directly affected so many that would have liked to avoid the whole *Tampa* incident. But that day of local island protest, in late August of 2001, brought many of the community together. It was an amazing sight for many of us down on the foreshore when the whole Islamic school—students, teachers and imam marched behind their banner to lend support to the protest.

Community support for asylum seekers and refugees continued as the first razor wire detention centre was built on Christmas Island. A silent vigil was held on the neighbouring cricket club oval to contemplate the plight of the refugees being detained behind the razor wire. From there we walked along the wire and waved and shouted hello and tried in some humbling way to offer support to these displaced people. Island children left toys hanging from the razor wire to be collected later by the guards and given to the children that were being detained. To see first hand what these refugees go through, how we treat them, what they must have come from and to endure all that

they have to live in peace and freedom, is an experience I wish every Australian could have because it is a life changing experience.

They were the incidents that motivated me, once my husband and I came to live in Melbourne in 2004, to upgrade my teaching qualifications to work in adult education as an ESL teacher. The practical teaching component of my Graduate Certificate placed me in the ELICOS department on Level 5 of Collingwood NMIT under the expert tutelage of Irene Comer. One morning half way through my prac, I had the good fortune to have morning tea with two teachers, Fran MacMahon Sers and Dianne Frankish from the other side of that floor who worked in YAMEC (Young Adult Migrant Education Course) with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. That was exactly where I wanted to be! We negotiated for me to continue my practicum with the YAMEC team and then I continued on as a sessional and now as a contract teacher.

I love it when you can identify the circles in your life coming to completion. This happened earlier this year as I found out one of the YAMEC students I was teaching came to Australia as a refugee who had landed on Christmas Island in the time I was there.

What took you to Christmas Island originally?

That circle started in the late 1980s when I transferred to an inner city primary school in Perth, Western Australia. That school was an ESL hub school where migrant children were bused in from surrounding suburbs to benefit from the ESL centre 'womanned' by two ESL teachers. The 125 students at that school originated from 25 different countries. As a Year 1 teacher (Prep for you Victorians) with 20 of my 26 students Stage 1 (no English) ESL students, I became an ESL teacher. It was considered that because all six-year-old students were beginning formal education they needed the least amount of support from the specialist ESL teachers. I embraced it because I had discovered big books and language-based learning and they were delightful Year One students who loved life and learning, and it was fun if not hectic!



Moira Hanrahan

One of those mornings began as I was placating a newly arrived Filipino child. As his mother tried to leave the classroom another fair-haired, blue-eyed, six-year-old girl was ushered in wearing a school uniform bearing the emblem 'Denmark'. I pleadingly asked the adult at her side if she spoke English but only received quizzical looks. As the classroom settled into the morning routine I had time to ponder the child from Denmark. Denmark, Western Australia, you had to laugh!

From that ESL teaching experience I applied for and was seconded to work on the staff of the Christmas Island District High School as the ESL specialist teacher. That was in 1990, the inaugural year, when they set that school up as a Western Australian school. Previously the school was administered and staffed by Canberra teachers as it was a territory school. That year the services for health, policing and education came under the governance of Western Australia which made sense as the only way to get to Christmas Island was to fly from Perth.

Why was working on Christmas Island seen as an ESL teaching position?

Christmas Island is a territory of Australia situated 360km south of Djakarta, Indonesia, and about 2300km north-west of Perth. Prior to 1888 it was inhabited mainly by red crabs and seabirds. Phosphate mining by the British

brought to the island Chinese workers recruited from mainland China. Malaysian people also settled from neighbouring Cocos Island and were recruited from Malaysia and Singapore. This eclectic mix continues today with the majority of the population Chinese, around 20 per cent Malay with the minority of Anglo-Australians mainly servicing island administration, health, education and the police force. There were about 1200 people living on Christmas Island during the two periods I lived and worked there. Over 400 of them were school-aged children.

The children of Christmas Island spoke the language of their parents and only spoke English at school. Until recently they all lived in very defined ethnic communities. Historically the Malay people lived in the kampong flats by the ocean, the Chinese lived in flats on higher ground and the minority of Anglo-Australians lived in housing scattered throughout the prime real estate areas of the island. Since the late 1990s government control of housing changed and property could be privately purchased on Christmas Island. This has changed the demographic slightly over the last ten years but the defined communities are still there observing strong cultural customs, traditions and languages specific to their family's country of origin.

Although I was initially appointed as the ESL specialist teacher, upgrading my teaching qualifications to include

ESL wasn't mandatory then. We were all seen as teachers of ESL students and none of the teachers had ESL qualifications. One of the selection criteria was experience in isolated and remote teaching, and being Western Australian teachers that just about includes everyone. The principal that headed our new Christmas Island school, Paul Kovalevs, was one I had worked with previously in the Kimberley, predominantly with aboriginal children.

You mentioned two stints of living and working on Christmas Island...

Apart from Christmas Island being that island paradise everybody dreams about, it continues to pull you back. After finding my husband in the rainforest of Christmas Island researching the effects of the red crab on the rain forest for his PhD, we left, married and returned eight years later, in 2000, with three small children. Pete had gone up to study and help eradicate the yellow crazy ant 'an illegal immigrant' that was threatening (and still is) to wipe out the red crabs and the nesting seabird populations and change the rain forest forever. Christmas Island at that time became a political hot spot as the Australian Government stemmed the flow of Middle Eastern 'illegal immigrants' arriving by fishing boats from Indonesia by tightening its border control.

With a young family, I was tentatively re-entering the workforce. I had found that having my own children, and especially having had them in my forties, had changed my perspectives on working with young children. I managed to still find work within the school but out of the classroom, and worked on some terrific early literacy and intervention projects. One of these projects involved making trilingual reading books for the junior primary school. We took photos and made readers about Christmas Island life. We produced the same reader in English, Malay and Mandarin. This brought me into contact with the very talented Chinese and Malay teaching aides working in the school. They translated, modified and helped write the texts. Meanwhile I was catapulted into the world of digital photography, desktop publishing, and I even ended up typing in the characters for the Chinese readers, but I was primarily working with adults all day and loving it.

At the same time the RTO on Christmas Island, the Indian Ocean Training Group, recruited me to teach ACE and VET courses. That was the beginning of the shift into adult education.

What were your first experiences with teaching adults?

I first started teaching Beginning English classes to a small group of mainly Chinese women who had been enrolled in the course for between five and ten years! My brief

was—anything I would like to do would be good. OK, so I had seven years of primary ESL teaching and a sound grounding in genre theory and away I went. Reading and writing skills were almost non-existent, so these classes were very oral-focused and we laughed and laughed and laughed. But I very clearly had my first example of NESB students that had plateaued as they tried to learn English. Really they just wanted a social event that took them out of their very domesticated lives. What I discovered was that my path on the trail of lifelong learning was taking me up a huge mountain. I became aware of 'cultural differences' and how they 'affected learning' for 'adult learners' and how in 2005 when I started my TESOL qualification these terms would leap from the pages. I was also learning about how many mistakes I would make in the arena of migrant adult education.

What type of experiences were they?

Simple things such as one particular group of women who would not change seats for the partner work activities I had planned because the seat was 'warm'. They would perch on the edge of the edge of the chair that someone else had been sitting on. Partner work quickly became a standing-only activity.

Once I organised to take a class of women to the new Island Café for a language lesson in the outdoors. I found out that one of the women was very agitated because her religious beliefs precluded her from being seen in public without her husband. Then another woman ordered a bacon and egg sandwich with total disregard for accommodating any religious sensitivities other students may have had! Another student refused to come at all because it wasn't what they considered a learning environment.

Has the transition from primary teaching to adult education been rewarding for you?

The transition for me was evolutionary but it has had its fraught moments. Primarily the hiccups along the way were associated with that 'losing your confidence after being out of the workforce on maternity leave' thing. When you had had what you thought was a successful career and all of a sudden everything you thought you knew felt like it had flown out of the window. Especially after 28 years teaching I had to go on a practicum to upgrade my qualifications! I was studying, settling our family into life in Melbourne, working with mildly intellectually disabled students, and not doing things by halves! But it all worked out in the end because that practicum put me in the right place at the right time for the next part of my life. It built empathy in me for people studying and making changes in their lives and how hard and frustrating it can be. It makes me question everything

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I do in the classroom and how I do it. Most importantly, it put me in a working environment with teachers I admire and feel a common humanitarian bond with. It's great to find and work with like-minded people.

So is this the beginning of a new circle?

Well, it closes the very first circle from when the seed for teaching migrants was embedded in me as a child. Back then my cousin Marilyn, a newly graduated secondary school teacher, was enlisted to help me overcome a lisp. She would impress me with stories about her night-time job which was teaching migrant adults. Later, when I

entered teachers' college, she was one of my lecturers and fostered my interest in taking on the subject closest to teaching migrant English. This unit also included studying aboriginal education and my very first teaching practicum placed me in Kununurra in the far north of Western Australia. It was the association with the principal of the Adult Migrant English Program, Paul Kovalevs, that opened the door to getting the job on Christmas Island.

I have been in Melbourne now for two years and as I meet more and more people in this field of work, I'm very happy about where I'm going.

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Joanne Hargreaves works at the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), which is Australia's leading provider of vocational education and training research and statistics. NCVER, on behalf of the Australian Government through the Department of Education, Science and Training, manages the Adult Literacy National Project.

Foreign Correspondence

The International Women's Development Agency: bringing dignity to Sri Lanka's rural women

In Sri Lanka's south-central highlands, local women's group-based activities create opportunities for economic, social and political empowerment. As Jose Mott explains, skills development and increased educational opportunities are a vital outcome of this work.

Walking through the green, undulating hills to one of the villages, Weligepola, about 3km off the road, two of Kantha Shakthi's community mobilisers, Sirima and Malini, pointed out different activities carried out by women as a result of their membership in Kantha Shakthi savings groups. I saw a roof on a house being built and a small vegetable garden being cultivated for crops, thanks to the loans that the women had borrowed. (Jose Mott)

As the International Women's Development Agency's (IWDA) overseas program manager for Sri Lanka, I was able to experience first hand the energy and commitment of the 12 community mobilisers employed by IWDA's partner organisation Kantha Shakthi, during my monitoring trip to Sri Lanka in May. The social mobilisers bring about

positive change to the hardships that poor, rural women encounter in their daily lives.

IWDA has supported Kantha Shakthi to empower women in the south-central highlands of Sri Lanka since 2004. As of May 2006, 558 women have been mobilised into 109 small groups, which provide opportunities for the economic, social and political empowerment of women who have long been relegated to traditional roles in society.

Membership in these groups provides women with easier access to credit, skills development, education, capacity building and labour sharing. Furthermore, it provides women with awareness raising opportunities, which lead to participation in activities relating to women's rights issues





at community and national level, such as peace building and women's leadership. The prevalence of domestic violence has been highlighted as a critical issue by the community mobilisers and women themselves. Women are able to examine barriers and strategies for change in a safe space.

We arrive at our destination, a humble house in the village, where this week's meeting of Sirima and Malini's savings group 'Nagenatharu' (Shining Star) is taking place. There are six women members present: Sophia, Somalatha, Ranmanike, Sepalika, Rupawathi and Premawathi. Sepalika, a 27-year-old woman, is sitting on the floor in the centre of the room. She and her mother are members of the group and this is their house. Sepalika has a chronic disability and is unable to walk. She has never been able to go to school, because it is too far away, the road is too poor for vehicles to pass through and her parents cannot carry her.

Rather than despair at her situation, Sepalika started to learn carpentry from her father, who is a carpenter. The results are beautiful handicrafts and intricate engravings on her father's wooden cupboards. Support and solidarity are strong among these women. Sepalika's colleagues take her handicrafts to sell in town every Wednesday at the women's market, which was initiated by Kantha Shakthi to provide women with market access for their products.

When asked about the benefits of participating in this group, the women included access to loans to cover costs for medicine and education for their children, loans to cover shortfalls in times of scarcity, and loans to start passionfruit cultivation. The benefits of education and self-reliance were also identified: 'Younger women in the group learn things from the older women, and no one in the group needs to ask for money from the outside'.

The community mobilisers also told me that women in their groups talk about the increase in respect showed to them by their husbands and other male relatives, now that the women were economically active. Many women mentioned that this had resulted in some men assuming a greater share in household and childcare duties.

It is evident that life is hard for these women. They bear the brunt of rural poverty, gruelling work and discrimination. But walking back from the village, passing rice paddies and men shepherding their buffalos, I could not help but marvel at what these women can achieve, with a little support from people who care.

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