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Adult Education in  
the Community

# Editorial

Welcome to spring. Take this edition of *Fine Print*, find a sheltered spot in the afternoon sun and share some of the ideas, reflections and imaginings from the adult language and literacy field.

Gail FitzSimons describes an evolving evaluative framework which addresses the major dimensions of numeracy, pedagogy, and technology in relation to adults learning numeracy from perspectives of who learns, why, what and how they learn. She argues that learning mathematics and developing numerate behaviour are two different activities with different purposes and with different pedagogical implications.

Judy Buckingham and Joe Graffam's examination of disability standards is timely. Many ACE providers have to ensure they can move beyond compliance issues, and Judy and Joe argue that providers advocate for their community members with a disability and fight for the money required to adequately support them.

It is always a pleasure to read the work of Delia Bradshaw. In *A Change of Scene*, Delia reflects on evolving and interconnecting worlds of community, technology and learning. Like Farmer Clem, I've (conveniently) embraced some technologies but not others. Delia challenges readers to look to what other communities are out there and operating successfully and innovatively as communities of quality learning.

Many of us have heard a bit about The Scottish Wheel since the CGEA reaccreditation project got underway. Margaret Tierney from the Scottish Qualifications Authority was gracious enough to tell us more about it. It is great to see the wheel in all its glory. Adult literacy practitioners will see a lot of links between the wheel and local frameworks that contextualise adult community education practice.

This edition's Practical Matters is a double bill in every sense of the word. Delia Bradshaw and Michael Coghlan were co-presenters at the VALBEC conference earlier this year. Their presentation at the conference was on the use of voice in adult education; unfortunately a crucial piece of equipment was

inadvertently removed before they were about to start. The informative and useful workshop went ahead with 'think on your feet' professionalism from the presenters. Their article gives us an insight into how they felt after the workshop was over. Delia reveals how she reflects on practice. Michael tells us more about some of the software that proved recalcitrant on the day.

Open Forum is part of the long road to CGEA reaccreditation. On May 19, a forum was held at Victoria University to update teachers on the project. The response was mixed. Jacinta, Venny and Helena share some of their reservations about the (then) proposed changes. The project and the development of the newest incarnation of the CGEA has moved on a lot since then, but readers are invited to consider.

In Foreign Correspondence, Carole Webb takes us to South Africa where she is involved in a community development education project: Training for Transformation. Training for Transformation is based on Freirean principles and helps South Africans who are committed to transforming their communities and building a quality of life through action and community involvement.

Beside the Whiteboard features the irrepressible Judy Tin. Judy's enthusiasm for life, teaching and going beyond her comfort zone is damn well impressive. She's a walking advertisement for lifelong learning and being passionate and positive about whatever you are involved in.

With more than a little sadness I now take off my editorial hat. This is my final edition as Commissioning Editor of *Fine Print*. After two immensely enjoyable years in the job I'm off to push beyond my comfort zones in new work elsewhere.

It takes time and effort to produce a journal of this size and quality four times a year. My thanks goes to the *Fine Print* Editorial Committee who get together on a regular basis to gossip (purely professional mind you), share snippets, chase leads, follow up contacts and scrounge all their collective sources that are transformed into this quality, internationally  
Continued on page 30 ...

**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.**

# Adult numeracy via new learning technologies: an evaluative framework

by Gail E. FitzSimons

**For many adults, a return to learning numeracy can mean a return to childhood stresses and pressures which can be compounded if the learner is studying for work-related reasons. Support, in the form of best-quality teaching resources and a broad and flexible curriculum, is essential.**

Adult numeracy is an essential part of literacies, spanning personal, community, economic and workplace domains. When adults return to study numeracy, they face a range of challenges and may have multiple, yet contradictory, reasons for their decision.

In the personal domain, from a psychological point of view there are the underlying memories of the last time that they studied mathematics. These include how they felt about the discipline of mathematics, how they felt about the pedagogical practices of their various teachers over the period of formal education, whether they chose freely to discontinue their studies of mathematics or faced some form of compulsion or coercion, and what were the reasons. They now have to face (again?) the possibility of losing face in front of strangers as well as possible derision by significant others in the realms of family and friends.

In the economic sphere they are facing opportunity costs of time and/or money which could have been otherwise allocated, even possible cessation of social welfare support. From the workplace perspective they may be studying to maintain or improve their current job/s, be contemplating changing jobs, or further education which requires more mathematics and/or technology. They may have community responsibilities which demand mathematics (especially financial literacy); they may have a desire to improve their understanding of civic issues which draw on logical and statistical arguments.

## **A broad and flexible curriculum**

For all of the above reasons, and more, it is essential that adults returning to study numeracy have the best quality curriculum and pedagogy to support the kinds of investment outlined above. At the macro or bureaucratic level, the curriculum needs to be as broad and flexible as possible in order to meet the various needs and interests of adult learners. This means that the curricular content of numeracy should extend far beyond the so-called basic skills of numbers and simple measurement to encompass the range of activities in which adults might participate, yet not necessarily be restricted to functional mathematics

in which the prime focus is the needs of the labour market as articulated by big business and industry. Accordingly, aesthetics and creativity should also be taken into consideration.

Once the learner has enrolled in a program of study, it is the numeracy teacher/tutor who then has the responsibility of juggling official requirements of government and/or employer in order to accommodate the needs of the learner: to enable them to achieve the credential and to develop the mathematical skills and knowledge to which they might aspire. In recent years there has been a trend towards supporting and even delivering learning through technological means (online, CD-ROMs, etc.). One well accepted reason is that funding bodies assume that there will be some kind of saving on teacher costs—even though this is quite debatable. Another reason is to offer the learner increased access through reducing the restrictions on time and location of study. Of course there are still hidden costs to the learner in purchasing or hiring computers and in doing their own printing.

Not all learners willingly choose distance education modes for their numeracy studies and may face the additional challenges associated with accessing the technology itself, with or without a reliable technical support service. In any case, the technological tools themselves, when used as mathematical teaching devices (calculators, computer software packages), are themselves often far from transparent. Given all of these contingencies, it is essential that adult numeracy courses delivered and/or supported by information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the form of new learning technologies (NLTs) are of the highest quality and grounded in research.

## **Research into adult numeracy via new learning technologies**

The research I have carried out over the last three years has assisted developers in the design of materials to support the learning of adult numeracy via new learning technologies. It has also sought to assist potential users, such as practitioners and individual learners, in the

evaluation of these products. This work-in-progress is towards an evaluative framework with three major dimensions of numeracy, pedagogy and technology.

Questions may be asked as the WHY adults choose (if they are in fact given a choice) to take on learning mathematics/numeracy supported and delivered wholly or in part by new learning technologies. There may be multiple reasons, often in tension with one another, or even contradictory. What are their motives? Are they to:

- achieve a credential?
- develop new and/or deeper understandings?
- prove something to one's self?
- help significant others to learn mathematics?
- support their own or their family's business/financial interests?
- learn more about technology?
- learn more through technology?

## Adult numeracy

What is considered to be adult numeracy continues to be hotly debated internationally. Even the label itself is contested by those who favour other descriptors such as functional mathematics, mathematical literacy, statistical literacy, and so forth. As is the case with any education in the public domain, and even the private domain in the case of in-house workplace education, the issues are political.

This means that what counts as adult numeracy varies according to the stakeholders concerned, with the most powerful voices holding sway. But it is important to ask serious questions such as who are the learners, why are they learning, and how do they learn best. When materials are pre-packaged, and unable to be modified to meet the needs of particular learners, it is essential that research is carried out by developers and practitioners working together to identify as many likely characteristics of learners as possible (ie. the WHO question) and to address these explicitly wherever possible.

An excellent example of this is the CD-ROM *More than just numbers: your pathway to success*<sup>1</sup>. The CD-ROM was produced at the University of Southern Queensland for adults returning to study in preparation for undergraduate mathematics. There are five content topics: numbers, calculations, negative numbers, order of calculations and fractions. Each of these is accompanied by a range of options: video story, group discussion, learn more about ..., examples, and self-test. The producers made considerable effort to address the affective domain through the modelling of different behaviours and expression of feelings by a range of actors reflecting the different cultural and social backgrounds of typical students. The program encourages the cooperation and dialogue which many adults lacked in

their previous mathematics education experiences. There is also a focus on keeping a personal diary to record both mathematical notes and personal reflections. In my experience these characteristics are particularly important for women returning to study.

At the same time, the mathematical content needs to be appropriate to the particular learners (ie. the WHAT question). This means reading recent research (or even conducting research where feasible) into the kinds of activities in which the adult learners are likely to be engaged, or may wish to be in future. This research is critical in order to avoid the patronising kinds of materials which take early school mathematics topics and simply re-present them in more 'grown-up' contexts. Adults are quite capable of seeing through these, and the sense of humiliation deepens.

On the other hand, adults do not return to study mathematics in order to improve their shopping habits or to undertake even more hypothetical home renovations. They probably already feel quite capable in these domains, and don't deserve to be demeaned further by such disrespect. However, contextualisation is an essential factor in much adult learning. When educators and researchers take the time to go deeply into the relevant context (such as the workplace) the outcome can be powerful for all concerned (see FitzSimons, 2000). Learning becomes a truly shared experience and all stakeholders are likely to benefit. Not all program developers have such luxury, and reviews such as the one posted on a European Union-funded numeracy website—the EMMA Portal—may be of benefit (see FitzSimons, 2004).

## Pedagogy

Considering the HOW question leads to a discussion of pedagogy. Pedagogical practice in pre-packaged materials clearly has more constraints than in face-to-face teaching where the teacher/tutor can react immediately to feedback from students and make adjustments to pace, revisit earlier content, and so forth. The kinds of questions which might be asked include the following:

- How accessible is the content for all students, in terms of appropriate language use (terminology, right level)? Does it accommodate the needs of second (or other) language speakers?
- Are text materials written in informal language with little mathematical jargon to make them more accessible to novice learners?
- Is formal mathematical language introduced at a slow pace for novices, with links to glossaries or other nested explanations?
- Are content and activities grouped in small bursts to allow novice learners to experience early success and to build confidence, knowledge, and skills gradually?

- Do all closed activities have fully worked solutions with problem-solving prompts to guide learners through the steps?
- Do some activities, or parts of activities, allow for diversity and originality of possible solutions?<sup>2</sup>

Does the activity:

- Encourage the development and practice of estimation skills?
- Emphasise the use of ‘mental mathematics’ as a legitimate alternative computational strategy, and encourage development of mental mathematics skill by making connections between different mathematical procedures and concepts?
- View computation as a tool for problem-solving, not as an end in itself?
- Encourage the use of multiple solution strategies?
- Develop learners’ calculator skills and foster familiarity with computer technology?
- Link numeracy and literacy instruction by providing opportunities for learners to communicate about mathematical issues?
- Situate problem-solving tasks within meaningful, realistic contexts in order to facilitate transfer of learning?
- Develop learners’ skills in interpreting numerical or graphical information appearing within documents and text?<sup>3</sup>

On a broader scale, some of the issues to be addressed could include the following five points.

### Teaching with technology

Does the activity model the use of appropriate technology in the teaching of mathematics so that learners can benefit from the opportunities it presents as a medium of instruction?

### Interactive and collaborative learning

Does the activity foster interactive learning through student writing, reading, speaking, and collaborative activities so that learners can learn to work effectively in groups and communicate about mathematics both orally and in writing?

### Connecting with other experiences

Does the activity actively involve learners in meaningful mathematics problems that build upon their experiences, focus on broad mathematical themes, and build connections within branches of mathematics and between mathematics and other disciplines so that learners will view mathematics as a connected whole relevant to their lives?

### Multiple approaches

Does the activity model the use of multiple approaches—numerical, graphical, symbolic, and verbal—to help

learners to learn a variety of techniques for solving problems?

### Experiencing mathematics

Does the activity provide learning activities, including projects and apprenticeships, which promote independent thinking and require sustained effort and time so that learners will have the confidence to access and use needed mathematics and other technical information independently, to form conjectures from an array of specific examples, and to draw conclusions from general principles?<sup>4</sup>

However, isolated mathematical skills do not ensure numerate behaviour. Learning mathematics and using numeracy are two different activities, serving very different purposes. Numeracy in practice requires the creative transformation of mathematical knowledge and skills to address problems that are contextually situated in cultural, social and historic terms, and which generally require a practicable solution under real constraints of time and/or money.

Ideally, the persons involved have developed a repertoire of strategies and understand the practical limits or tolerances allowable within the particular situation, but are never allowed to intentionally make mistakes (unlike most learning situations). Communication between stakeholders is of the essence. The following questions extend the parameters for evaluation in this direction.

- Are the learning tasks authentic?
- Do learners investigate issues that are of current importance to the world?
- Do learners use real-world data to understand current events?
- Do learners have access to the arguments presented to government and to current discussions between expert authorities?
- Do the learning activities involve tasks that reflect the way in which the knowledge will be used in real-life contexts?
- Are the learning tasks based on authentic or simulated workplace activities?
- Do the learners have to accept responsibility for their solutions in any real tangible way?
- Are there any real consequences to the learners’ calculations?
- Are there realistic materials available for learners to explore and reflect on strategies for use?

When using new learning technologies, questions need to be raised as to the purpose of the activity. Is it just to reinforce skills and procedures already learned? Is it to learn more about the technology itself, or to gain a deeper understanding of the conceptual processes of the

mathematics—in other words, to support sense-making? Or is it to enhance communication between participants, possibly across time and space? To automate a new routine or to construct a new tool? To support reflection on the activity itself? For adults to develop the capacity for numerate behaviour there needs to be a balance of all three levels: automating routines, developing understanding and fostering communication/creativity.<sup>5</sup>

The following questions, drawn from Slavit and Yeidel<sup>6</sup> relate to utilising web-based resources.

- Are connections made between classroom practice and the ideas in web-based activities?
- Is there integration between lectures, web-based resources, practical exercises, field trips and assessment tasks?
- Are web-based activities visually appealing, technologically transparent, interactive, contextually-based, enjoyable, connected to course content, and conceptual in nature?
- When teaching with web-based resources, are there a range of teaching strategies aligned to the pedagogical perspectives for both labs and theory to ensure learners' success?

When teaching with web-based resources, what pedagogical adaptations are there to meet the diverse cultural expectations of learners?

Communication, interaction and collaboration: Is there synchronous or asynchronous communication through tools for co-construction of knowledge and sharing of ideas?<sup>7</sup> Synchronous communication could include voice and video conferencing, shared whiteboards and live presentation tools (eg. tablet or electronic writing pad), application sharing, live assessment, chat rooms, web safari, and breakout rooms for smaller groups. Asynchronous could include group project activity, assessments, surveys, votes. These may be completely open-ended or constrained. Ideally, the course should be structured to necessitate communication.

In this article I have drawn on an evolving evaluative framework which addresses the major dimensions of numeracy, pedagogy and technology in relation to adults learning numeracy. I have considered these from four perspectives: who is learning, why they are learning, what they are learning, and how they are learning. I have argued that learning mathematics and developing numerate behaviour are two different activities with different purposes, with different pedagogical implications. Finally, I have recommended that where new learning technologies are utilised they need to accommodate a range of activity levels, ranging from embedding routines through supporting transformative and manipulative actions oriented towards understanding, to enhancing com-

munication and creativity. It is not sufficient to focus solely on the first level.

**Gail taught mathematics, statistics and numeracy to adult students of further and vocational education in community, industry and institutional settings for 20 years. She is now a post-doctoral research fellow at Monash University, and was awarded an Australian Research Council post-doctoral research fellowship for her project: Adult numeracy and new learning technologies: an evaluative framework.**

## Notes

- 1 University of Southern Queensland, (2000), More than just numbers: your pathway to success, (CD-ROM), Toowoomba, QLD.
- 2 Following from Taylor, J. A. (2001), 'Affective research and the mathematics curriculum for distance and online education', in M. J. Schmitt & K. Safford-Ramus (eds.), *A conversation between researchers and practitioner: proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of Adults Learning Mathematics—a research forum*, pp. 50–53). Cambridge, MA: NCSALL, Harvard University.
- 3 Following from Ginsburg, L., & Gal, I. (2000), 'Instructional strategies for adult numeracy education', in I. Gal (ed.), *Adult numeracy development: theory, research, practice*, pp. 89–114, Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- 4 Drawn from Cohen, D. (ed.) (1995), *Crossroads in mathematics: standards for introductory college mathematics before calculus*, Memphis, Tenn.: American Mathematical Association of Two-Year Colleges. Retrieved May 3, 2006 from <http://www.imacc.org/standards/>.
- 5 Kuutti, K. (1996), 'Activity theory as a potential framework for human-computer interaction research', in B. A. Nardi (ed.), *Context and consciousness: activity theory and human-computer interaction*, pp. 17–44, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- 6 Slavit, D., & Yeidel, J. (1999), *Using web-based materials in large-scale pre-calculus instruction*, *International journal of computers for mathematical learning*, 4(1), pp. 27–50.
- 7 Engelbrecht, J., & Harding, A. (2005), *Teaching undergraduate mathematics on the internet, part 2: attributes and possibilities*, *Educational studies in mathematics*, 58(2), pp. 253–276.

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- FitzSimons, G. E. (2000), 'Lifelong learning: practice and possibility in the pharmaceutical manufacturing industry', in *Education and training*, 42(3), 170–181.
- FitzSimons, G. E. (2004), *Adult numeracy and workplace learning*, retrieved February 7, 2006 from: <http://www.statvoks.no/emma/Unpublished%20lit%20review.pdf>

# Beyond compliance: ACE and the Disability Standards for Education 2005

by Judy Buckingham and Joseph Graffam

**Unjustifiable hardship provisions in the Standards can make it difficult for some people—particularly those with high support needs—to gain access to education, but ACE providers like neighbourhood houses should take up the challenge and become agents of positive change.**

The Disability Standards for Education 2005<sup>1</sup> make it unlawful for an education authority to discriminate against a person on the grounds of the person's disability, and providers of adult and community education are specifically noted as education authorities in the Standards. Most adult and community education (ACE) providers, working as they do from a community development basis, would consider themselves to be non-discriminatory. The devil, nevertheless, is in the detail, and it is one particular detail of the Standards that this paper considers—Part 7: Standards for student support services. Research (Buckingham 1998, 2004, 2006), has indicated that this is an area with which ACE providers are likely to have problems.

This paper looks firstly at the place of people with a disability in ACE, and then at some of the provisions of the Standards as they relate to student support. Evidence to support the following discussion is taken from three research projects into ACE provision for people with a disability (Buckingham 1998, 2004, 2006). These studies are outlined before moving to some of the issues indicated in the research. Further, some suggestions are made for compliance, and the need for ACE providers to go beyond compliance and consider advocacy to support the inclusion of people with a disability into adult and community education.

## People with a disability in ACE

ACE providers, including the 350 neighbourhood houses in Victoria, play a considerable role in the education of adults with a disability. Students with a disability make up 5.7 percent of the total vocation education and training (VET) sector<sup>2</sup>. Forty percent of all students with a disability enrolled in VET courses are in the community education sector<sup>3</sup>. The majority of community education enrolments by students with a disability are in the general preparatory courses (74.3 percent), with the next largest enrolment numbers being in language and literacy (20 percent)<sup>4</sup>. Of people with a disability, those with an intellectual impairment (75 percent) have been identified as most commonly participating in ACE programs<sup>5</sup>.

## The Disability Standards for Education 2005

The Disability Standards for Education are legislated under the *Disability Discrimination Act* 1992. The Standards require that providers make reasonable adjustment for students with a disability in relation to enrolment, participation in a course or program and in relation to facilities or services. These adjustments must be made in consultation with the student or an associate of the student and be made in reasonable time. The Standards addressed in this paper are those set out in Part 7: Standards for student support services, which state:

The standards also give students with disabilities rights in relation to specialised services needed for them to participate in the educational activities for which they are enrolled. These services include specialist expertise, personal educational support or support for personal and medical care without which some students with disabilities would not be able to access education and training<sup>6</sup>.

The Standards further require that even where the provider is not in a position to provide such specialised support needed, the provider must take reasonable steps to facilitate the provision of the services to the student by another person or agency. This is putting the responsibility for support provision of any kind on the education provider. There are, however, exceptions. There is no requirement for any provider to make adjustment that is unreasonable. This includes where the effect of the adjustment on anyone else affected, including the education provider, staff and other students, and the costs and benefits of making the adjustment may be unreasonable.

In addition, where the obligation to make a reasonable adjustment nonetheless imposes unjustifiable hardship on the provider, 'it is not unlawful for the provider to fail to comply'. It is clear, however, in the Standards that a claim for unjustifiable hardship cannot be made until after reasonable adjustments have first been considered.

## Research findings

Research suggests that ACE providers, especially neighbourhood houses, already struggle with the concept of support for people with a disability (Buckingham, 2006) and in view of their limited resources, who should fund the necessary accommodations. Three studies are used here to illustrate this.

### 1 Neighbourhood house provision

Report on neighbourhood house survey of provision for people with intellectual and psychiatric disabilities<sup>7</sup>.

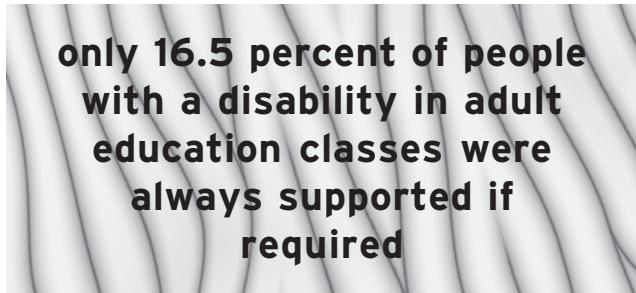
In 1998 a survey was conducted of provision for people with intellectual and psychiatric disabilities in neighbourhood houses in Victoria. Returns were received from 221 of the 300 houses (73 percent). This was a quantitative study, but space was also given for responses of a qualitative nature and many respondents took that opportunity. Of these qualitative responses the area of greatest concern was the lack of support available. From the quantitative data, it was shown that only 16.5 percent of people with a disability in adult education classes were always supported if required, 20 percent were never supported and 60 percent were sometimes supported (3.5 percent did not respond to the question).

### 2 Towards inclusion<sup>8</sup>

In 2004 a study was undertaken to consider the learning and relationships of people with an intellectual disability. This included interviews with 25 participants who were involved with people with a disability in various occupations such as managers, teachers, adult education coordinators and work place trainers. Interviews and observations occurred with 13 pairs of people (where one of each pair had a disability and the other did not) as they worked, learned or took part in recreational activities together. It also involved ethnographic investigation of ten organisations, three of which were ACE providers (their actual identities are concealed, and for the purposes of this article are called Acacia House, Banksia Learning and the Casuarina Centre).

This study found that support provision was mixed. At both Acacia House and Banksia Learning, for instance, support for people with a disability was dependent on whether there were volunteers available or whether the referring agency and/or residential unit could provide support personnel. An Acacia House coordinator stated: 'Everyone is welcome in the house as long as they're able to cope with what's on offer. If they're not, then they are more than welcome if they've got a carer'. And 'if the tutor is willing to accept (that a person may not have a support worker), the person will come in and the rest of group have to be willing, I guess, to accept as well' (interview transcript). In practical terms, unless a person

could provide their own support their welcome would be qualified, and participation in a class by a person with a disability occurred through the goodwill of others, not by entitlement.



**only 16.5 percent of people with a disability in adult education classes were always supported if required**

There seemed to be an underlying confusion as to the role of support workers—were they there to provide teaching support, social support, or act as personal carers? 'Volunteers were being asked to clean up the students, and they had no training or any background in it, so is it their responsibility? Is it the responsibility of the tutors? Is it my responsibility? Is it the Adult Community and Further Education coordinators?' (Interview transcript)

At Banksia, there was an expectation (or perhaps a hope, since it was left to individual support workers to decide their role) that support workers provided by the referring agency would take on a direct teaching role as well as deal with personal care issues. Only the Casuarina Centre trained volunteers to be teacher supports for classes, and had clear guidelines for other support roles. Importantly, they preferred people employed as community support workers not to take on direct training or teaching roles.

This study found that, with the exception of the Casuarina Centre, training for volunteers who took on a support role was a matter of chance and past experience. At the Casuarina Centre all volunteers were given written material when they started and were expected, as a matter of course, to attend the biennial training days covering matters to do with teaching and disability. Acacia House was aware of the need for appropriate training, and set up its own one-day conference on the teaching of people with cognitive disabilities in their region. Attendance by volunteers (and teachers) was, however, optional and not all attended.

### 3 The rest of their lives<sup>9</sup>

This study (Buckingham, 2006) researched the feasibility of brokerage services into further education or employment for people with a disability. Those interviewed included people with a disability and their families, representatives of adult day services and adult education providers. Lack of support was identified as a major issue. Adult day services and families complained that several neighbourhood houses



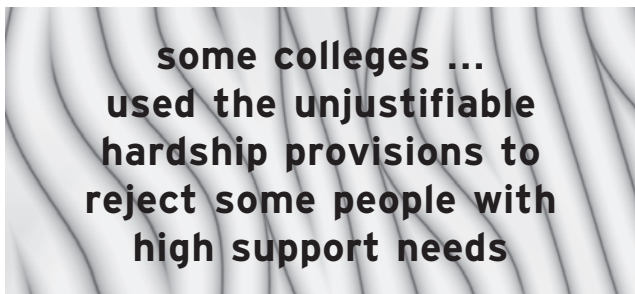
would not accept people with a disability unless they could supply their own support person. The day services did not always have staff available to take on this role.

Of the eight ACE providers contacted, two had no disability access, one only ran social activities for people with a disability, and one house gave access only to people with selected impairments. Of the remainder, one would only take people with a disability if they brought an aide with them. Neighbourhood houses complained about the lack of support available from referring agencies; referring agencies would only provide short term support, if they provided any support at all. 'Dumping', that is, leaving one or more people with a disability at a venue with no support, was also reported.

Representatives from TAFE colleges were also interviewed, and while TAFE colleges managed disability support funds such as Futures for Young Adults, some colleges—according to some parents interviewed—used the unjustifiable hardship provisions to reject some people with high support needs. This use of unjustifiable hardship provisions may have been valid, but this is little consolation to parents trying to find education options for their children.

## Issues

Two recurring issues identified in all three studies were the paucity of support for people with a disability and confusion as to who should supply (and by implication, pay for) it. The introduction of the Education Standards should remove any such uncertainty, and for this and for the restructuring of the *Disability Discrimination Act* 1992 to apply specifically to education, the Standards are a welcome step towards inclusion of people with a disability into adult education.



**some colleges ...  
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high support needs**

The Education Standards, however, have only recently been introduced and their impact is only now being felt by ACE providers. Evidence from the research outlined above suggests that some neighbourhood houses may have difficulties with Standards which not only prohibit the refusal to admit people with specific impairments, but also place the responsibility for finding any support needed

on the education provider. An underlying concern is funding. Many people with a disability are in receipt of support funding of some kind through such programs as Futures for Young Adults, Support and Choice or HomeFirst. This funding, however, is rarely managed by either people with a disability or their families. More often, funds are held by a broker, normally their adult day service or a TAFE college. These brokers must also fund some of their own infrastructure costs from these support allowances. As the CEO of one agency explained, although support funding was intended to be individual, in fact 'one person's support (funding) is not a lot of money, therefore groups are favoured' (Buckingham, 2004). That is, it is cheaper to keep people with a disability in groups and settings which do not require individual support personnel, but only one or two support people for a group of people with a disability. These agencies do, nevertheless, have access to an individual's support funding even if only a portion of it is used directly for support. ACE providers such as neighbourhood houses have no access to any individual support funding. If they did, they would be in a better position to not only attract support people but to ensure that support people were appropriately trained.

Some Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE) regional offices in Victoria provide limited money to those providers that they fund to pay for support for people with a disability. Upward adjustments can be made to the unit cost to acknowledge that providing access to people with a disability incurs additional costs.

However, nowhere is there a statement made, as in the UK, where the Learning and Skills Council's claim was that all support needs for further education colleges should be cost-neutral to the provider (Buckingham, 1999). Support for people with a disability in neighbourhood houses is therefore reliant on the availability of (often untrained) volunteers or an expectation that the person with a disability or their referring agency will provide someone.

The issue of training is also important. The 'Towards inclusion' (Buckingham, 2004) study found that although most volunteers were given general induction and training, this did not often include disability awareness. Along with lack of any clear guidelines as to exactly what support role volunteers were playing, this led to frustration on the part of volunteers and teachers and, in some cases, inappropriate approaches to teaching and support.

## Compliance

The Standards make it clear that selection of people who have specified impairments only, and general statements regarding non-acceptance of people with a disability unless

accompanied by a support worker, will be unlawful. They state that providers must consult with each person applying regarding reasonable adjustment, and make reasonable steps to facilitate provision of support, either learning support or personal care assistance.

The question of what is reasonable is always going to be debatable and unique to each individual and each provider. However, a practical start would be to communicate and negotiate with both the person with a disability and any referring agency who manages their funds as to what support is actually needed (and many people with a disability either do not need support, or need minimal support), what funding is available for this and who is best placed to provide it. In countries such as Canada and the UK many people with a disability have hands-on control of their own support funding (Duffy, 2003) While this would seem to put the onus on people with a disability to provide support, it does at least mean that negotiation for support is between the providers and provided-for with no middleman who also needs funding.

In the meantime ACE providers are relying on volunteers, where obtainable, to take on a support role. The volunteer contribution could be enhanced by two changes. Firstly, providers should supply volunteer/support workers with clear guidelines as to what their job involves; secondly, they should provide training for volunteers in disability awareness and/or teaching people with a disability. Finding time for these innovations is an issue, but there is at least one education package available which has been devised to train support people on the job (Gawith Villa Inc. 2004).

## Beyond compliance

There is a danger, firstly, that some providers, especially those not funded by ACFE, may not be aware of the specifics of the legislation. Secondly, some providers may see the unjustifiable hardship clauses and use them as a means to disallow access to education to some people with a disability. Edwards (2003) for instance, considers that unless education institutions recognise that they have a moral mandate to provide equal access, the *Disability Discrimination Act* (and therefore the Education Standards) may be used as a tool for excluding students with a disability through use of the unjustifiable hardship provisions.

Edwards makes a comparison with the US education services which operate under a legislative framework grounded in a rights-based agenda. Under this US framework, educational institutions have no mitigating clauses, and must provide quality support to all students.

Lack of funds to make a reasonable adjustment such as provision of support personnel might easily be counted as

unjustifiable hardship. Where a person has high support needs, claiming unjustifiable hardship is already seen as valid in some TAFE colleges which can access an individual's support funding. It is likely to be seen as even more valid for neighbourhood houses which have no such funding access. Unjustifiable hardship provisions, while offering reasonable protection to education providers, nevertheless may prevent people with support needs from accessing education.

The Commonwealth Government legislation and the Victorian Government guidelines, encompassed in the State Disability Plan<sup>10</sup>, have promoted the inclusion of people with a disability into education and the community. Such standards and guidelines are a good start, but without giving people the support they might need to access the community, they are not enough. Unjustifiable hardship is already being used as a means of exclusion. This may be valid and lawful, but it also provides a barrier to some people, especially those with high support needs, gaining access to education.

ACE providers, including neighbourhood houses, are where many people with a disability go for adult education. These providers have always played a community development role. They need now to see themselves as agents of positive change towards ensuring equitable provision of education to people with a disability. If they are going to be subject to these Standards then it is appropriate that they start advocating, for themselves and for the members of their community who have a disability, for money for adequate support for those who need it.

**Dr Judy Buckingham and Professor Joe Graffam belong to the Employment and Social Exclusion (EASE) Research Group, a multidisciplinary team of social scientists within Deakin University School of Psychology. Their research focuses on socially and economically disadvantaged groups, including people with a disability, and examines the conditions that exclude them from mainstream activities like education.**

## Notes

- 1 Commonwealth Government of Australia (2005), *Disability standards for education*, n.p.
- 2 NCVER (2005), *Australian vocational education and training statistics*, Adelaide: NCVER.
- 3 Access training and employment centre (2002), *People with a disability: participation in vocational education and training, project report* (2002 update), Collingwood, Vic: Victorian Office of Training and Tertiary Education.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Bentley, T. (2004), *Learning and participation for people with disabilities in the ACE sector*, Melbourne: ACE Disability Network.

Continued on page 36 ...

# A change of scene

by Delia Bradshaw

**Q: What happens when we put Community, Technology and Learning together?**

**A: You can get online mentoring, you might visit the World Café or catch up with Global Voices Online, with its motto, 'The world is talking. Are you listening?'**

Community. Technology. Learning. We hear these words all the time, perhaps too much of the time. Have they become 'Weasel Words', words that have lost their power and meaning *or* are they still words that stir our hearts and heads, words that can move us to action? I think they still have great force. But I also think it is time to revisit and reinvigorate them. Let me explain what I mean.

There was a time when to call someone 'black' was taboo, when the word 'wog' was automatically an insult—but no more. Both words have been reclaimed by their communities and, in this redefinition process, 'black' and 'wog' have come to denote strength and pride. In other words, new meanings have displaced old ones. I believe it is time to do the same, to give the words 'community', 'technology' and 'learning'—overused and often misused words—a whole new lease of life; especially when all three are working together.

In preparation for this presentation I visited a free photo site to look for images that could provide some inspiration for the ideas I wanted to explore. The first word I typed into the search engine was 'community'. I found 16 photos—surprisingly few, I thought—and these included a housing estate, a number of couples, several individuals and even a trail of ants. From those on offer, the one that came closest to my understanding of community was one of an older woman who was participating in a community centre lunch. But even that image did not portray the sense of togetherness I associate with the term.

The next search I tried was 'technology'. By contrast, there were hundreds of photos available, mostly of machines or tools. Human beings were rare in the photos, but if there was a hint of a person it was most commonly a disembodied hand. There was one exception, however, in this dehumanised world. It was a touching photo entitled *Farmer Clem and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. The photo's subtitle reads: 'A farmer, cultivating his crops by hand because his horse died, as his wife calls him on his cell phone'. I wonder if this photo was catalogued under 'technology' for the phone or the hoe?



My third image search was for photos around 'learning'. When I'd typed in 'pedagogy' I was told 'no images here'. Under 'learning', as with 'technology', I found a preference for objects rather than people. When people were present they were mostly very young school children, hardly ever adults. I must confess I was aghast when I found images of empty unpopulated lecture halls and computer terminals. Can it be called 'learning' when there are no people?

The most appealing photos I found featured groups of people—one of the very few, in fact, in this vast repository of thousands of photo images—under the heading Café. These photos, unlike those catalogued under community, technology and learning, featured people who were animated, engaged, absorbed and alive. There's a clue for us here, isn't there? So let's take a closer look at these words. Let's give each of them another chance.

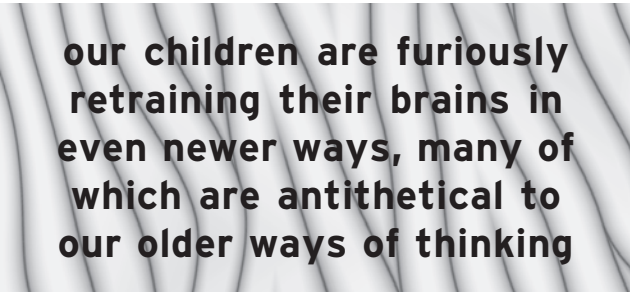
## Community

For me, 'community' evokes a lot of associations. Communities can be geographical; they can be interest-based; they can be culturally-based on values and identity and/or they can be united by a cause. People can be physically present or connected virtually. Communities can be ad-hoc and short-term (like many classrooms) or enduring and long-term (organisations such as VALBEC, for example). Communities are united, hence the linguistic

fusion comm/unity, unity through something shared—a common place, a common interest, a common identity or a common cause. What communities also share in common is a dedication to the good of the whole, and at no cost to any individual. The overall creativity and wellbeing that results from this collective ethos is far greater than a series of isolated solo acts.

## Technology

What about ‘technology’? When I think of technology, I think of tools and techniques. I think of cutlery, paint brushes, pens, whiteboards, DVD players, mobile phones and computers. An aside: my favourite technology is probably the fork. Did you know it was once considered sinful, a tool of the devil, and condemned by the early medieval church? Yet the fork is perfect for its job, just as the spoon and knife are for theirs, each having evolved to meet specific needs. Attempts to blend all three—such as the short-lived splade—have never succeeded. One of our main jobs, I think, is to identify the virtues and limitations of each of the vast array of technologies jostling for our attention.



**our children are furiously retraining their brains in even newer ways, many of which are antithetical to our older ways of thinking**

A computer can cause, and even increase, isolation, antisocial behaviour and narrow-mindedness or it can be a bridge to lifelong, lifebroad and lifedep learning. That is, technology can be a powerful contributor to community building but not automatically so. People’s intentions make the difference. While each technology is potentially very powerful, each has limitations as well. Technologies are not neutral—they come with values, priorities and methods embedded. It is easy to forget how much we have learnt to fit in with or accommodate the technologies we use—from redesigning our workspaces, our homes and our lives, to working within the parameters pre-set by particular ICT programs or equipment.

Consider the current educational debate over SMS English—is it debasing our language or not? Yes, there is no doubt technology shapes language practices, but could it also be shaping our brains? There is considerable support for the view that the brains of young people—who, as Marc Prensky<sup>1</sup> says, have been networked for most of their lives—‘are almost certainly *physiologically different*’. As Prensky goes on to say, ‘our children are furiously retraining their brains in even newer ways, many of which are antithetical to our older ways of thinking’.

So, technologies are not ‘neutral’. They bring about immense change in their wake, including social, educational and linguistic effects; nor are we born automatically knowing these technologies. Do you remember the first time you tried using a knife, or chopsticks? We acquire these technological skills because our culture values them, even requires them. But, not all cultures prize the same technologies for the same purposes. For us as adult educators, this raises critical questions:

- What is it most important for our communities to learn? How?
- Which technologies combined with which educational practices?
- Who will be included? And, most importantly, Why?

## Learning

Let’s now turn to ‘learning’ or ‘pedagogy’, the rather technical or academic word for the synergy between theories and practices, between thinking and doing. Many people in adult education proclaim ‘we are learning all the time’, and this is true. Consider how often you hear the saying ‘you learn something new every day’. Incidental or informal learning is undoubtedly important. It will happen in abundance in classrooms every day.

Equally important, and I’d argue, more powerful, is reflective learning, where evaluation and reflectiveness are explicit, integrated and ever-present. This sort of learning is what is sometimes called ‘deep learning’ or ‘rich learning’ or, a term I’ve recently met, ‘sticky learning’. This method of learning weaves many threads together. It consciously highlights and incorporates skills, knowledge, understandings, relationships and action, for both personal and social purposes. This sort of learning is about, some would say, ‘transforming lives and transforming communities’.

Having considered each of the three—Community, Technology and Learning—separately, what happens when we put them together? Or to put it another way, what synergies are created when we blend all three?

As adult literacy workers, you decide what technologies are going to make your learning communities more creative, more humane, more hopeful and more democratic, and all the other ideals that matter to you. To achieve these ideals decision-making about what learning or pedagogies will be most effective is required. At the heart of these decisions is the need for a clear vision of the sort of learning community you want to create or, in some cases, re-create.

Creative communities are born and flourish in all sorts of ways. I think at once of the Women’s Circus in Melbourne, a community dedicated to ensuring the participation of women of all ages, shapes, ethnicities and abilities. I think

of local junior sports competitions where every player, no matter what the final scores, receives a medal. I think of the world music festival held in Adelaide WOMAD. It's a worldwide community movement where the ethos of multiculturalism and sustainability permeates every activity. And I think of the flourishing community of the Online Mentoring Network, which I joined last year. All of us were simultaneously learners and teachers, sharing knowledge, stories, software programs, insights and tips.

Each of these communities and the technologies and practices each employs are a means to an end, they are not simply ends in themselves. And what is this end, this fundamental purpose? From my observations, the primary aim of all of them is making connections and extending learning, strengthening relationships, deepening understandings, initiating positive change and offering new models of living together. Much like the adult literacy classrooms, I'd venture.

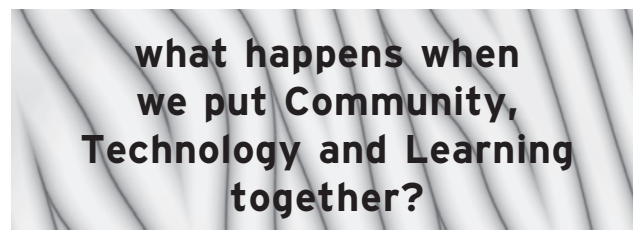
A close study of thriving learning communities shows that some conditions are more fertile for growth than others; attention to the sort of learning fostered is vital. Many thinkers are pondering these same educational questions. In his book, *Visions and pathways for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, futurist Robert Theobald says:

Those of us who are serving as midwives of the change process are experiencing the same patterns of overload that develop for those who assist human births. We keep strange hours. We have too much to do. We sometimes experience patterns we do not understand ... Luckily, we are beginning to understand how and why the world and social systems work as a web. If we are to make the required shifts, we shall have to learn to think in new categories that challenge the thinking and behaviours which humanity has developed over thousands of years<sup>2</sup>.

This next quote comes from *A whole new mind*, a book written by Daniel Pink, one of the guest speakers at this year's e-Learning Guild Annual Gathering in Boston, a worldwide community of practice for e-learning professionals. In his introduction, Pink says:

Today, the defining skills of the previous era—the metaphorically 'left brain' capabilities that powered the Information Age—are necessary but no longer sufficient. And the capabilities we once disdained or thought frivolous—the metaphorically 'right brain' qualities of inventiveness, empathy, joyfulness and meaning—increasingly will determine who flourishes and flounders. For individuals, families and organisations, professional success and personal fulfilment now require a whole new mind<sup>3</sup>.

With these thoughts in mind, let's return to the questions I raised earlier: What happens when we put Community, Technology and Learning together? How does this fusion help us and our learning communities learn, think and act in more creative and humane ways?



I'd like to consider these questions by focusing on three examples: one from recent personal experience and two from my research last year. Each of the three examples I'm about to describe could be describing our lives as adult educators, whether in the classroom or as participants in an educational organisation. All three are examples of learning communities encouraging democratic conversations and collective wellbeing. I find each of them very inspiring. Together, they offer us new ways of thinking about 'learning', 'community' and 'learning communities'. They show us how technology can be a bridge-builder, both locally and globally.

My first example is the Online Mentoring Group<sup>4</sup> (OMN) that I mentioned earlier. The Online Mentoring Network, hosted by the EdNA Group, is a group of teachers and mentors exploring ways of mentoring online. Last year the network met two evenings a week, Tuesdays (usually with *Skype*) and Thursdays (usually with *Elluminate*), for an hour or so each time. We explored how to work with individuals and with groups, both synchronously and asynchronously. As the OMN network website says, it works on the principles of shared leadership and knowledge-sharing, and takes the approach that we are all teachers and all learners.

Activities over the course of the year included:

- setting up individual and group online blogs as spaces for reflection
- contributing to a weekly email newsletter featuring a 'cool tool' of the week, favourite websites, tips and tricks etc.
- having different members of the group join in forums or give presentations on topics they were passionate about
- practising being moderators of sessions
- 'playing' with tools and new methods in a friendly environment
- sharing resources, knowledge, stories, software programs, insights and tips

- telling stories of success and struggle
- posing problems or difficulties as a basis for drawing on collective wisdom
- identifying and discussing emerging technologies and related social and educational issues.

Pedagogically, the virtues of OMN activities are its commitment to:

- offering a diversity of spaces, topics and avenues
- modelling cooperative problem-solving
- providing individual support and assistance
- integrating learning through regular reflection
- encouraging discussion of emerging social and educational issues
- demonstrating the dynamic relationship between theories and practices
- creating a welcome and safe environment
- fostering a democratic community of practice.

The World Café<sup>5</sup> ‘Shaping our futures through conversations that matter’ is a site that I found on an internet research expedition. A Café conversation is a creative process for leading collaborative dialogue, sharing knowledge and creating possibilities for action in groups of all sizes.

The site quotes William Greider:

Creating a positive future begins in human conversation. The simplest and most powerful investment any member of a community ... may make in renewal is to begin talking with other people as though the answers mattered.

The seven principles of the World Café, (and I’d call them pedagogical principles), are to:

- clarify the context
- create hospitable space
- explore questions that matter
- connect diverse perspectives
- encourage each person’s contribution
- listen together for patterns, insights and deeper questions
- share collective discoveries.

The website explains each of these vital ingredients in more detail.

My third example is Global Voices Online<sup>6</sup>. Its motto is ‘The world is talking. Are you listening?’ Global Voices Online is a non-profit global citizens’ media project, sponsored by the Berkman Centre for Internet and Society at the Harvard Law School. It is an international effort to diversify the conversation taking place online by involving speakers from around the world, and

developing tools, institutions and relationships to help make these voices heard.

A growing number of bloggers around the world are emerging as ‘bridge bloggers’—people who build bridges by talking about their country or region to a global audience. As the website says:

Global Voices is your guide to the most interesting conversations, information and ideas appearing around the world on various forms of participatory media such as blogs, podcasts, photo sharing sites and videoblogs.

Consider the ‘Adventures with Mr. Behi’ from the Global Voices Online site. As an anonymous man living in Teheran, Mr.Behi can:

... report events and ideas that are not actually covered by regular media here. Media from Iran report what they want and what the government says. And reporters from different parts of the world who come to Iran occasionally, they can’t really get a good sense of what’s going on in the minds of Iranians sometimes. So I try to make my role in bridging this gap by getting people in the U.S. informed about regular people in Iran, how they think

It is time to draw all these threads together. I will do this by sharing three quotes that offer pathways to the learning communities we want to create, communities that have so much in common with the ones just described.

The first quote, about quality learning relationships is from Susan’s Blog<sup>7</sup>. Susan Hurley-Luke lives in Atherton Queensland and teaches youth work and community services. In a reflection on a student’s enthusiasm for her class, Susan writes:

What is good for that student is also good for us as teachers. Teaching is about relationships to me. Unless a learner feels safe enough in the learning environment to try new behaviours, new patterns of thinking, how is s/he to learn? Respect in the classroom is a foundation. There is definitely room for humour that does not denigrate or humiliate too.

And I wonder how long I would continue to be a teacher if it was not enjoyable? It is rewarding to me to see the changes in people’s thinking, in their expanding horizons ... They expand my horizons too.

The second quote, about quality communication is a verse by Robert Theobald called ‘Dialogue’. It highlights the importance of listening:

Talk.  
Talk, talk, talk.  
Talk, talk, talk, talk, talk.

The endless flow of words.  
The loss of meaning as they flow over me.  
The sense I have of drowning in infoglut.

I need the silences which come from reflection.  
The surprise as somebody sees something new.  
The belief in the wisdom of the group.

But I war with myself.  
Too often, I add to the words and not the silences.  
I control rather than involve myself.  
Learning to listen  
Learning to trust,  
It goes against the grain.  
But when it flows,  
What an incredible sensation!<sup>8</sup>

The third and last quote, about hope, is from the anthropologist, Margaret Mead<sup>9</sup>. These seem perfect last words:

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world ... Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

This presentation was originally prepared as part of an induction program for the 2006 'E-learning for Creative Community Partnerships', an Australian Flexible Learning Framework initiative. Documents related to this presentation are housed at <http://changeofscene.wikispaces.com>. A multimedia record of the event, made by Michael Chalk, can be found at <http://michalk.id.au/alalaChangeofScene>.

Delia Bradshaw has worked in a variety of roles and contexts in adult education for nearly 30 years and is a life member of VALBEC. In 2005, she was educational mentor for three national voice online projects. The results of that work, 'Different voices, different spaces', are at <http://dvds.flexiblelearning.net.au/index.html>. Delia is performing a similar role with three national e-learning projects this year.

## Photo credits

stock.xchng (free photography site), <http://www.sxc.hu/>

Farmer Clem and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, uploaded by Lumix2004, July 13, 2005, <http://www.sxc.hu/photo/333970>

## Notes

- 1 Prensky, Marc (2001), Digital natives, digital immigrants, part II: do they really think differently?' *On the horizon*, vol. 9, no. 6, NCB University Press.
- 2 Theobald, Robert (1999), *Visions and pathways for the 21st century: speeches, essays and verses*, Lismore, NSW: Southern Cross University Press, p.126.
- 3 Pink, Daniel. H. (2005), *A whole new mind*, n.p., Penguin Group.
- 4 Online Mentoring Network, <http://www.groups.edna.edu.au/course/view.php?id=272>
- 5 The World Café, <http://www.theworldcafe.com/questions/nprinciples.html>
- 6 Global Voices Online, <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/globalvoices/top/about-global-voices/>
- 7 Susanlhl's Blog, <http://susanlhl.blogspot.com/>
- 8 Theobald, Robert (1999), *Visions and pathways for the 21st century: speeches essays and verses*, Lismore, NSW: Southern Cross University Press, p.126.
- 9 Mead, Margaret, Selected quotes: resilient communities, <http://www.resilientcommunities.org/aprilquotes.html>

# Great(er) expectations: Scotland's approach to supporting the adults who want to learn

*by Margaret Tierney*

**A curriculum framework linked to universal core skills standards can offer great benefits to learners. By reflecting on the concepts of formative and summative assessment, the author explains how 'The Wheel' is central to the implementation of this methodology and how the Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) has worked to recognise and accredit learner achievement in a flexible and meaningful way.**

## The strategy

The approach to adult literacies in Scotland is a new and exciting application of the policy focus on learners and learning resulting from the Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland report (ALNIS) of 2001. We have a long history of educational commitment which concentrates more on development than deficit: what one can do and want to do better or more confidently, rather than on what is missing and what 'should' be taught. Adults learn best when they themselves have a reason to learn, usually to meet an identified and immediate purpose in their lives.

The strategy (Learning Connections, 2005) has produced a social practice model based in real-life experiences, which sees literacies as a key dimension of community regeneration and a part of the wider lifelong learning agenda. Such an approach recognises that:

- literacy and numeracy are complex capabilities rather than a simple set of basic skills
- learners are more likely to develop and retain knowledge, skills and understanding if they see them as relevant to their own context and everyday literacy practices.

Tutors are encouraged to negotiate an individual learning plan, selecting the knowledge and skills that are most relevant to the individual learner's goals<sup>1</sup>.

While this is clearly conceptually different from a literacy and numeracy approach followed, for example, in schools, it is one which links with the similarly broad and flexible Core Skill Framework (SQA, 2003) used to accredit qualifications.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority is the national body in Scotland responsible for the development, accreditation, assessment and certification of qualifications other than degrees. The overall aim of the SQA is to manage the qualifications system below degree level to allow learners

to fulfil their potential to participate in the economy, society and communities of Scotland.

Clearly fulfilling potential in real-life practices is a cornerstone of Scotland's approach and this shared commitment from SQA and the Scottish Executive has led to innovative practice in delivery and assessment which can affirm achievement. Such strategies rely on the understanding, commitment and competences of the tutors involved.

## The adult literacy and numeracy curriculum

The adult literacy and numeracy (ALN) curriculum itself is not so much a definition of what must be taught and learned, but is a framework and a tool for dialogue between learners and tutors. People can only achieve a learning goal when they understand that goal and can assess what they need to do to achieve it (Sadler, 1989). This moves away from a prescriptive model of delivery towards a process of individual learning and planning of goals that are transparent and achievable.

In this approach, tutors support the learner to achieve these negotiated goals. They do not focus on a predetermined course of study. We believe this is the way forward. While research supports this, such a model is not without its challenges. This model trusts the learner is:

- active in the designing a program of learning that will realise their goal
- reflective of their achievement
- supported in their learning
- working in a learning context which is meaningful and relevant.

In the research conducted by Black and colleagues from King's College London, the learners involved came to understand what counted as good work by focusing on criteria and on their exemplification; sometimes as a whole





group, sometimes as peer review. What is important in the study is that these activities were helping them to develop their meta-cognitive strategies for learning<sup>2</sup>. Developing such strategies is one of the aims of the approach taken in the ALN curriculum.

This approach is contained in the review of the individual learning plan with its defined criteria, using The Wheel described (page 18), as a 'prompt' tool to encourage a deeper understanding of what goals were set and what success looks like. Core skills areas are included in the ALN curriculum as reference to the broader skills agenda.

The implementation of this curriculum framework needs more than a conceptual model. A training strategy based round community partnerships was developed to ensure practitioners understand what they are doing and why they are doing it. Practitioners were involved in the design and implementation of this—as you would expect—using a social practices model.

We work in a world where accountability has taken the place of professionalism and measurements of progress against visible, quantifiable criteria is the norm. However, the vision and practice in Scotland led to a much more process-based model that does not ignore the skills component included in the process of developing confidence and autonomy with learners. The skills become part of the overall equation but are not central to it. At the centre are the learners and their learning goals.

### The wheel

This brings us to The Wheel—a conceptual tool which places the learner at the centre of things.

The Wheel has been designed to help in the process of working to identify, define and address an individual's learning goals, and to link them in a broad way to the areas of appropriate core skills. It is for both tutor and learner to use in the planning of learning in a holistic way, opening up a whole range of possibilities in the dialogue that perhaps might not have been considered previously. Start at the middle and work out to the edges with the learner and the process becomes very clear. Learning here is for a purpose that is meaningful, immediate and uses resources that suit individual learning needs and styles.

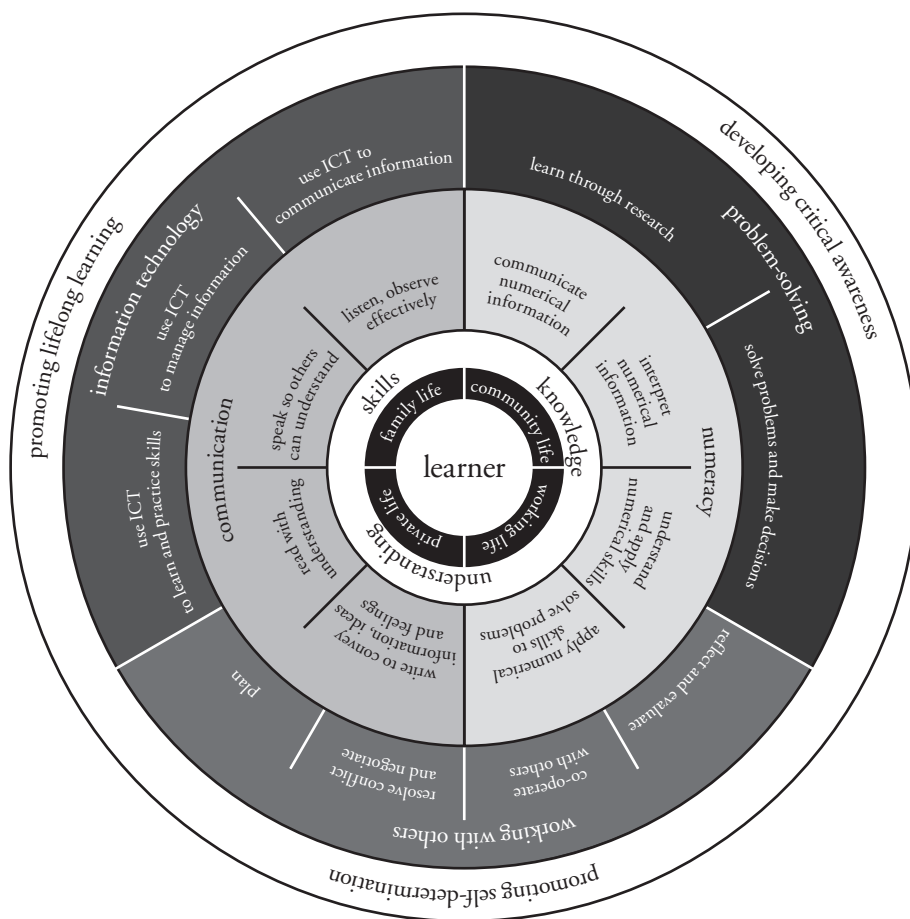
The Wheel is a dynamic tool (the version shown on the next page is static): there is a magnetic wheel available where each segment is separate and can be removed/replaced in response to the identified needs of an individual involved in the process. There are plans to develop an online version that can be electronically manipulated (not yet ready, but eagerly awaited!).

By starting with the individual learner at the centre of all things and with discussions moving out from there, tutors and learners can explore what best fits with the learner's goals and experiences. There are a huge number of variations possible, and moving each section of the circle round it encourages the tutor and learner to focus on what is important in the learner's real-life experience.

The Wheel as a conceptual tool:

- Provides for a holistic planning approach.
- Stimulates new delivery activities and certification options that may not been considered previously.
- Leaves nothing to chance or tutor preference in going round all the possible areas. It does not mean that learners will find something to undertake in every section but it does ensure that they have had the opportunity consider them all and make an informed decision.
- Supports inexperienced tutors. The physicality of The Wheel reassures inexperienced tutors: it is there to help them work with a process which covers all aspects of literacies development.
- Provides links to wider agenda such as employability, inclusion and citizenship.
- Provides a pathway to qualifications and national certification.
- Increases motivation. It is used as the basis for an individual learning plan—constructed from the unique dialogue between tutor and learner. There appears something more engaging about it than a checklist—learning can also be fun!

This is unlike other models which define a curriculum of specific content of what has to be taught, learned and



tested. In contrast to our neighbours in the UK, a shared philosophy was the foundation for our qualifications in core skills for everyday life and work.

### Core skills

It is not surprising that Scotland’s broader and more flexible approach to education has resulted in a core skills framework rather than a set curriculum. The core skills are Communication, Working with others, Problem-solving, Numeracy and Using ICT—referenced in the adult literacies curriculum framework as national standards.

Scotland is fortunate in having consensus on what is understood and sought by this framework. We are keen to keep and to nurture this common understanding across all sectors—it is important that our qualifications have currency no matter where they appear. Individuals, communities, institutions, employers all agree that these are broadly what are required; indeed they are the benchmark for defining levels of literacy and numeracy within Scotland.

### Assessment is part of the learning process

The qualifications that support the ALN framework have defined criteria for tutors to review work against. There

are concrete examples of what success at different levels looks like within the ALN framework document, as well as an online support for tutors in understanding assessment in concrete terms using learner work. They can also practice their skills and gauge their own understanding of applying the criteria online in an interactive way, using feedback provided by specialists. This site, Understanding Standards<sup>3</sup> is one which SQA introduced to assist tutors in developing meta-cognitive approaches to assessment and includes exemplification of core skills work. It is complemented by a reference publication made available free to centres which illustrates learner work that has been assessed as meeting the criteria along with some that has yet to do so<sup>4</sup> (SQA, 2005).

There is much less tension between formative and summative assessment in the core skill collection of evidence for three main reasons:

- The evidence is not constrained by the methods used to collect it—the work is happening anyway. Learners develop and show competence as a result of their activities.
- Criterion referencing is used in National Qualifications which informs tutors and learners on how well someone has done and how they can move on. It does not reduce

complex performance into scores or encourage competition or rank with peers.

- Summative assessment is not the end of the road in learning—it is seen as part of the journey. It is a pit stop, to take stock and plan next steps. Learning caused by summative assessment is similar to formative—no difference is made in the process. All that has happened is that a judgement of completed activity has been judged and moderated against external standards.

We are aware that there may be impact on learning when recognition of the achievement is made explicit in qualifications. However we believe that in the social practices model learning is more likely to stop when needs have been met than when an award is made.

SQA need to ensure that the standards are understood and valued by those using them in adult literacy work. Few community-based providers are familiar with the core skill national standards, and indeed some are wary of making links that are seen as threatening the social practice model. Assessment against criteria within the individual learning plan can and should run easily alongside the feedback given to a learner. With integrated guidance, tutors can initiate dialogue about the certification option where and when appropriate. For some, it is at the beginning of a learning journey; for others, it may be halfway to their goal; while for others it may be once their personal learning journey is nearing its end.

### **Aligning adult literacies practice and core skill qualifications**

What we have done at SQA, in partnership with Learning Connections (our sister organisation responsible for the implementation of adult literacies policy in Scotland), is to show how the two systems are complementary, enhancing each other. Those following a more traditional approach can take much from the learner-centredness of the social practice model, and feel more encouraged to trust learner judgement of their own needs, goals and measures of success. There has been considerable research conducted in this area, which leads us to believe that we have been successful in aligning the two systems—meeting the needs of, firstly, the learners for improved learning; and secondly, the public for a credible award indicating achievement<sup>5</sup>.

Practitioners in adult literacies can use the flexibility of the qualification system at SQA to accredit learning to build confidence and self-esteem of learners through national recognition, which can change self-identity of learners who are worthy of a certificate they know is valued by others. Using core skill standards in this way can open routes to college or workplaces which depend on such qualifications as (for example) entry-level requirements.

Together with colleagues at Learning Connections, we have delivered a series of Roadshows to address a recognised need and training priority of practitioners themselves.

The Linking Together Roadshows have been hugely successful in meeting aims of:

- allaying fears and promoting benefits of having learners' work accredited in a transportable way that is nationally understood
- showing how important certification is to many learners as a boost to self esteem and confidence
- ensuring that tutors can begin to recognise achievement of national standards and feel confident about discussing the possibility of qualification with the learner as part of ongoing guidance.

### **Support for tutors**

This process is similar in approach to training support and development of adult literacies practitioners deliver in community partnerships. The overall aim is that communities take responsibility for provision that is developed with the learner at the centre.

The issue of trust has been one questioned by those wary of an approach which makes learning more collaborative and less teacher-focused, moving away from teacher control and a deliverer-recipient relationship to one of partners in pursuit of a shared learning goal. Are tutors competent to do this? Do learners really know what they want/need? Support must ensure that the negotiated delivery, individual and peer review of goals and formative assessment, which can be worked on to improve understanding and application, is common practices for tutors.

Tutors require support and training, using external standards to gauge performance, fluency and confidence alongside personal learning goals. Resources and a real enthusiasm for change are needed if the two approaches are to be genuinely aligned.

As part of the strategy to develop professionalism within the workforce, the SQA launched its first national qualification; the professional development award Introduction to Teaching Adult Literacies Learners (SQA, 2003). This award targeted tutor assistants and those new to adult literacies teaching. Further work has started on the development of two new qualifications: the teaching qualification Adult Literacies and the professional development award Workplace Literacies.

### **Learner choice and right to certification**

SQA and Learning Connections firmly believe that every learner has the right to certification for their work. They should be able to get appropriate recognition for their

achievements and tutors should be in a position to recognise when national standards have been reached. This has involved a program of staff development, which confirms that tutors are keen to make these links and that learners are often involved in activities which naturally cover the work which is certificated in other contexts, such as colleges. Clearly, not all learning is able to be certificated, nor do all learners want this. What we are clear on is that the choice should be that of the learner and it should be informed through integrated guidance of the tutors.

For some learners, getting a certificate to progress to a job or to college is central and at the forefront of their negotiated program, and is recorded as a goal in their learning plan. In this model, the learning activities are most easily developed with the learner—a qualification may be used as the structure upon which can hang relevant learning materials, with continuous assessment being built in or taken ‘off the shelf’ from a context that suits. For other learners, the challenge is to identify their own learning goals. The tutors are given tasks which use a methodology that will encourage learners to voice these goals, tutors then use their professional skills to define and address the learning needed. Sometimes this is not clear cut, or interrupted by life events, or merely changes, and these are the ever present challenges for the tutor / learner relationship.

Research with young people has shown that the change in the distribution of responsibility as a result of the restructuring of formative assessment has in fact increased active pupil engagement in learning. Learners are more aware of when they were learning and when they were not—one class pulled a teacher up for going on to another topic when they had not grasped the first! It is more than likely that adult learning will bring similar results and, in this way, assessment for learning and certification are aligned.

If you think about the goals that learners have, the programs that you devise with your learners to meet those

goals, and the activities that you are engaged in, many of these will meet the standards of core skills. The core skills qualifications are context-free and broad in their outcomes, leaving plenty of room for the learner to decide on the context, the way that their skills are shown and assessed as valid and reliable. The tutor has to be confident that the learner can achieve this level of performance with support, if this is acceptable in the qualification.

Scotland is an exciting place to work in the spheres of adult literacies and core skills. And we expect to give positive reports on developments in coming years!

**Margaret Tierney is a project manager at the SQA with responsibility for core skills. Margaret is committed to adult literacies learning and accreditation of achievement, through appropriate national qualifications and assessment methods.**

## Notes

- 1 Learning Connections (2005), Adult literacies curriculum framework for Scotland, *www.lc.communitiesscotland.gov.uk*
- 2 Black P. (2003), Formative and summative assessment: can they serve learning together? Paper presented at AERA, Chicago.
- 3 *www.understandingstandards.org.uk*
- 4 Scottish Qualification Authority (2005), Guidelines on building a portfolio of evidence for core skills in community settings, n.p.
- 5 Black P. (2003) Formative and summative assessment: can they serve learning together? Paper presented at AERA, Chicago

## Further references

- Sadler R. (1989), ‘Formative assessment and the design of instructional systems’, in *Instructional Science*, 18, n.p.
- Scottish Executive (2001), *Adult literacy and numeracy in Scotland*, n.p.
- Scottish Qualification Authority (2003), Core skill framework, *www.sqa.org.uk*

## Different voices, Different spaces: 2006 conference workshop afterthoughts

... and Different equipment, for Delia Bradshaw and Michael Coghlan after a vital sound cable was inadvertently removed just before their demonstration of voice technologies at the VALBEC Conference in May. Cool as a bushfire, they located a replacement and the presentation went ahead. Then software ...

### Delia's workshop reflections

In Australia these days we pretty well take electricity, water and gas for granted. This has not always been so. In my lifetime, I can remember power failures, blackouts and water being cut off due to accidents or malfunctioning. Most people in the world, if they are fortunate enough to have access to electricity, gas and water at all, experience uncertainties, irregularities and unreliable connections on a daily basis.

So it is with using the internet and being online. It is another utility in transition; it is still evolving; it is not universally accessible; we cannot assume it will be 'on tap' for us at all times. This became dramatically obvious at a workshop Michael and I co-presented at the 2006 VALBEC conference in May.

The workshop was called Different voices, Different spaces. This is also the name of a collection of resources—a website and a CD—featuring online voice technologies in a range of settings including workplaces, AMES, ACE organisations and TAFE institutes.

The Different voices, Different spaces resources explore:

- the relationship between online voice technologies and 'good educational practice'
- the educational virtues and limitations of particular voice technologies
- the place of educational mentoring in educational research and development.

Naturally, as part of the VALBEC conference workshop it was vital to demonstrate some voice technologies, primarily as a basis for participation in discussion of their various merits and limitations. The examples we chose were Podomatic, Audacity, Phone blogging, Skype and i-Vocalise, a virtual classroom. On the day, we were able to introduce three of these examples. For different reasons, two proved inaccessible. Hence my opening reference to all utilities being unreliable.

So for those who were there and those who weren't, let me take you through the workshop. Firstly, our workshop plan. Here is how Michael and I pictured the session:

- Welcome and introductions (5 minutes)
- Voice: what and why? (10 minutes)
- Demonstrations (20 minutes)
- Connections to your circumstances: (10 minutes)
- Need to know? (5 minutes)

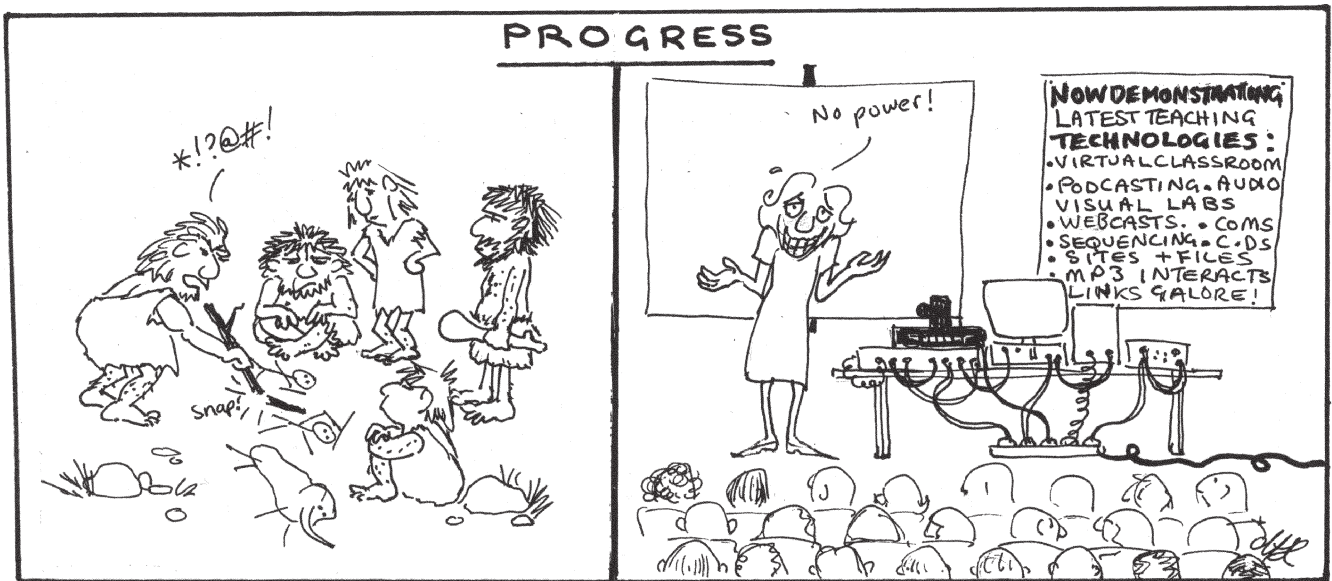
In designing this plan, and the allocation of time, we were keen for a balance between theory and practice, between demonstration and discussion, between the general and the particular.

As all the manuals stress, we had checked and double-checked the relevant technologies and equipment well beforehand. In fact, we had spent nearly two hours on the Wednesday evening before the conference with the very helpful William Angliss staff, testing the programs we wanted to demonstrate and locating the websites we wanted to visit. We were delighted to learn there seemed to be no technical barriers to what we wanted to do.

On the day of the conference, as we were organising our handouts and preparing to begin the show, a breathtaking discovery was made. Someone, in the short time between the opening event and our session, had accidentally removed the sound cable when they scooped up their belongings from the table where it had been placed in readiness. The person was nowhere to be found. I need not emphasise that the sound cable is absolutely basic to recording and playing the spoken voice. Without this cable, we could not demonstrate any of the voice technologies on our agenda.

All of us, as adult educators, have had this experience. What to do now? While the relevant William Angliss staff were located and asked for a replacement, (they found one in about ten minutes—an amazing feat), Michael and I quickly rearranged our plans. All the while, of course, I

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Moira Hanrahan

was wrestling with my own anxieties. When running conference workshops, two fears stand out.

The first is: 'Will the technology work?' It is no comfort that others share horror stories of the times they have encountered technical impediments, to be told 'Don't worry. It always happens'. I try hard to avoid reinforcing doubts about technology, these feelings often expressed as, 'Oh, it's too hard or temperamental or unreliable. If experienced people can't make it work, what chance do we have?' And in technology, I include whiteboard pens, overhead transparency projectors, video recorders and DVD players as well as laptops and data show projectors.

The second fear is: 'Will people regret having chosen this session?' Professional development opportunities, particularly these days, are rare and precious. It's usually difficult to choose from the array of inviting workshop proposals on offer. I hate to think people could be regretting their decision, wishing they had chosen something more valuable. (Michael often tells people that he is quite happy for people to leave part way to visit another session!)

Regrettably, I had to begin our workshop with an explanation and an apology, always a dampener at the beginning when anticipation is high. As Michael masterfully plugged in cables and primed the machines, I confessed that the loss of a cable was an eventuality we had not foreseen. I decided it was important to engage with the patiently waiting group as quickly as possible. I was genuinely curious to know participants' prior experiences of computers, online learning and voice technologies in both educational and life contexts.

In retrospect, I regret not spending more time in these crucial, initial explorations. I fear I made incorrect assumptions about what people knew in terms of tools and equipment as well as definitions and language. I wish I had concentrated more on clarifying basic concepts such as audio files, blogs and podcasts, iPods and mp3 players. I also wish I'd gathered participants' prior experiences: 'Who has a blog? Who uses an mp3 player and for what?' Part of the reason for my distraction was wondering how Michael was progressing and if/when we would be ready for the next stage, the demonstrations.

I love co-presenting but it requires close cooperation. As this was the first time Michael and I had worked together in this way. We were also learning to read each others' rhythms, gestures, tone of voice and all the other cues that indicate what the other is thinking. While most of my attention was on the group, part was also on Michael, trying to assess how he was progressing and whether he was ready. As soon as he was, I thought it wise to proceed with the demonstration phase.

In hindsight, I think I acted prematurely. My relief at having access to the technology blinded me to the need to lay firmer foundations for the immersion that was to follow. I firmly believe that some familiarity with the discourse enhances the new experience. And, conversely, if there is insufficient understanding of key terms and concepts, much is lost or missed due to a sense of being overwhelmed with too much newness. If I were to replay this workshop, I'd spend more time sharing understandings and experiences of e-learning in general. The mishap at the beginning had lost us

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valuable time, but it was false economy to minimise the discursive groundwork.

So with everything hooked up, we proceeded to the demonstrations. Audacity, a digital audio editor described in an earlier edition of *Fine Print*, worked well. (As one participant said to me later, ‘who could resist a resource with a name like that?’) We were also able to introduce two others, Skype (an internet telephony) and i-Vocalise (the virtual classroom used on the ACAL website, Literacy Live), without difficulties of any kind. But two proved otherwise. Podomatic, a podcasting and audioblogging site that had never let either of us down before, puzzled us completely. Michael’s post did not appear on the site, even after ten minutes. Usually, it takes only a minute or two. So, resourcefully, Michael turned to another form of audioblogging, this time from a phone rather than a microphone.

Again, there was a hitch. This time, inadvertently, I was the cause. When Michael first dialled, the overseas number was engaged. As he tried again, I decided to initiate a discussion on some of the different types of blogs. When Michael did connect, he was too polite to interrupt and as there is a time limit for starting the post, once more he lost the connection.

By now, as time was running out, only a few minutes could be devoted to the worksheet designed to encourage participants to reflect on one of the voice spaces demonstrated with regard to their own practices and priorities. Again, I wish this part could have been longer. This is the time when new ideas and insights can be named and incorporated, an absolutely vital step in integrating learning. One consolation was that I had prepared a range of handouts that described the virtues and limitations of six key voice technologies, captured some of the debates, and pointed to some of the key websites.

I want to stress at this point that Michael is considered a pioneer in online voice. He is extremely experienced and highly regarded, both nationally and internationally. It is hard to imagine a more qualified presenter for this purpose. Yes, some of the missed connections were due to human error, but even he was surprised when ten days later the Podomatic post we had created during our session suddenly appeared on his Podomatic site. When he told me, we laughed and laughed at this utterly inexplicable absurdity.

The Saturday after the conference, I felt quite despondent. When a friend asked, ‘How did it go?’ I replied,

‘About 65 per cent’. I spent some hours writing in my journal, wanting to evaluate the experience, trying to identify lessons for future workshops. I posted some of these as ‘Some conference afterthoughts’ on my own Podomatic site.

So, what did I learn from all this, what resolutions did I make for next time?

Firstly, I would prepare a more comprehensive conceptual map (and companion PowerPoint slide) of the online voice technologies domain, illustrating key terms, particular voice spaces, distinctive features and educational relationships. Then, as each technology/voice space is introduced, preferably with a handmade sign (such as ‘Podomatic’ or ‘phone blogging’), I would point to it on the conceptual map, thus naming and positioning it quite explicitly. Then, if the sequencing of demonstrations had to change for any unexpected reason, I could always return to the map to ensure participants had their bearings.

Secondly, I would spend more time clarifying terms and definitions. For example, I would check how much participants understood about blogs, and the different sorts of blogs. I would draw attention to the sub-category of audio blogs that can be posted from the computer through a headset or away from the computer by phone. I would seek out prior experiences of any of these technologies; for example, downloading Radio National programs as podcasts.

Next, I would want people to leave with some sense of what audio online can do for them—teacher to learner, learner to teacher, learner to learner and teacher to teacher. I would ensure there was time for each participant to articulate one possibility.

Finally, I would strongly urge people to visit my Podomatic site (<http://deliab.podomatic.com/>) where there is a live link to all the websites mentioned. I would stress that I would love visitors to make a comment, be it written or spoken.

I am grateful for the chance this article has given me to reflect and evaluate. The clearer perspective I have gained reminds me that its intention was never (in less than an hour) to skill people in using these technologies. It was not a hands-on session in which people could learn all the steps. Hopefully, the handouts (listed in the references) can guide those who want to take this path. Rather, it was to offer a glimpse of other pedagogical possibilities, a snapshot of new educational horizons. I hope, despite the interferences that marred the view, that some caught that vision.

## Postscript

When I showed Michael what I'd written, he sent this thoughtful reply:

I actually think your reflections raise a whole other issue about demonstrating technology in conference sessions. If we had spent more time on the discursive aspects we would have had even less time for the demos. Ideally one should have time to do a thorough intro, discover people's level of knowledge and prior experience and then, towards the end, after the tech demo, discuss possible application. BUT YOU ARE NEVER ACTUALLY GIVEN ENOUGH TIME TO DO THIS. The only way we could have done intro, demo, and application properly in the time we had was to have chosen just one tool. Skype, for example. Maybe that's what we should have done? I know I tend to err on the side of 'show them the technology in action' because for most people this is the only time they will ever see it. So even if they don't quite understand it, or understand the context, they have at least seen it.

I agree with Michael, that glimpsing the vision is very important and, I'd add, an important practical matter. But for those who would prefer some step-by-step advice on how to use at least one of the technologies we wanted to show, Michael will now explain more.

## Podomatic—A DIY podcast site

Podomatic is a free website that enables users to create and publish their own podcasts. A podcast is an audio or video file placed on the internet for anyone to see, hear and subscribe to. You can listen to or view podcasts on an internet-enabled computer or on any device that plays mp3 files (for example, an Apple iPod). When at your computer, you use a headset (headphones and micro-phone) or your computer's speakers and a plug in microphone.

### First steps

Before you create your first podcast you must go to <http://www.podomatic.com/> and

- register
- choose a template for your podcasting page
- log in.

Once you have logged in, go to your 'My podcast' page and select 'Post an episode'.

### Creating audio

You now have two choices:

- Create your audio files in an external application (for example, with Audacity, <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>, an mp3 player or a digital recorder).
- Record directly into Podomatic.

If you use the first method, you will have to save the audio file you create as an mp3 file and upload it from your computer or storage device. To upload audio files to Podomatic, use the 'Import' button.

### Posting your episode

Before you post your episode, you will notice that the Podomatic webpage requires you to provide some other information to accompany your audio:

- Episode title: the name you give to your podcast.
- Tags: key words you compose that assist others search for your podcast.
- Comments: the information you provide about the length/topic of your podcast.
- Import a picture (optional) Note: images will not be seen if your podcast is listened to on most current mp3 players, but they will be seen on more sophisticated players like the latest iPods. However, they will be seen if you are listening at your computer.
- Import or record audio (as described above).

To post:

- Click 'Post episode' button.
- Choose whether to distribute: Podomatic asks if you want to notify contacts by email that you have a new podcast (This is optional).

Note:

- Your Podomatic site has own its own URL.
- All posts to your podcast site have their own URL (Permalink).
- All audio (mp3) files within the post have their own URL (for direct linking to the audio file).

### Comments feature

When people visit your Podomatic site they can respond to any post in writing or by audio. They can do this by:

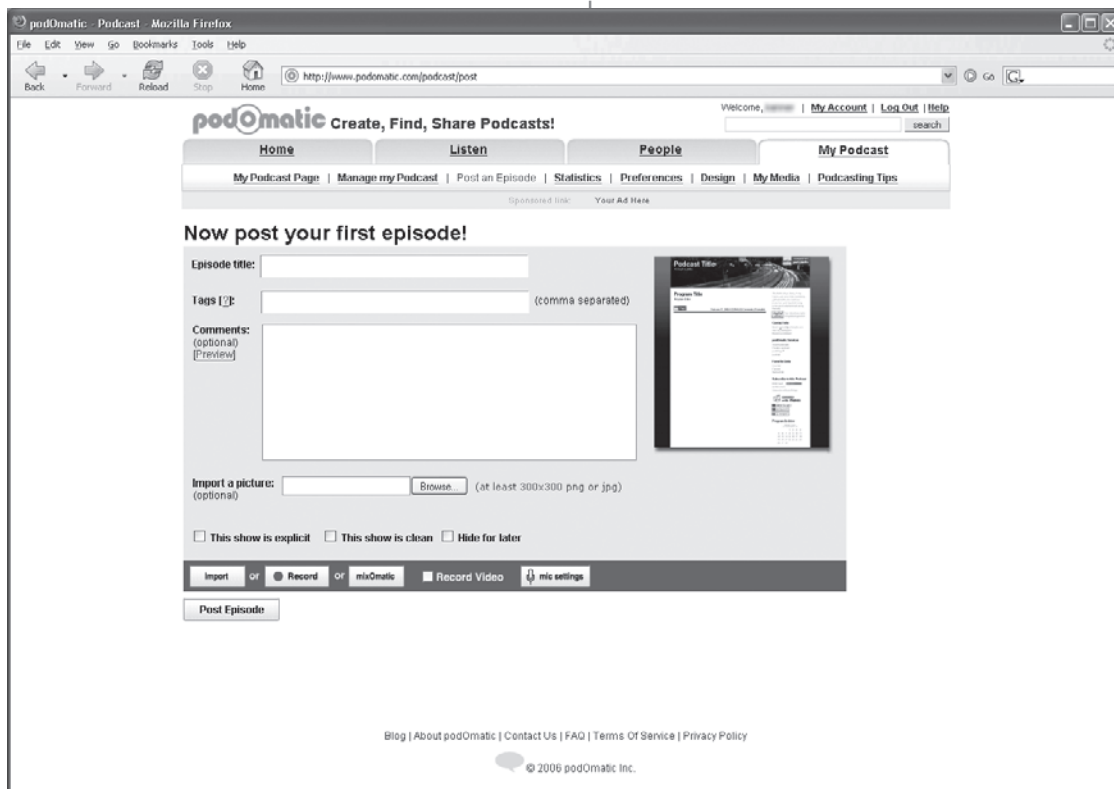
- Clicking 'Comments' and submitting written comments. These appear on the site immediately and are public.
- Going to 'Contact info' and clicking 'Record a comment'. Audio comments are sent to the owner of the Podomatic site via Podmail. (All Podomatic users get a Podmail account automatically) and are *private*. (Your Podmail account can be used separately as a voice email tool.)

### Editing posts

It is possible to edit or delete posts at any time. If you go to your 'My podcast' page you will see each episode posted there with accompanying 'Edit episode' or 'Delete episode' buttons.



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Podomatic is a new site and is becoming very popular and frequently 'misbehaves' (it is a free tool after all). The site is still evolving; it occasionally changes its appearance and layout and adds new features. This can be quite confusing, but it should stabilise in time.

To see Podomatic in action, you might like to visit: <http://michaels.podomomatic.com/> (Michael's site) or <http://deliab.podomomatic.com/> (Delia's site).

Live links to the online resources connected with the workshop Different voices, Different spaces, are assembled as a collection at <http://snipurl.com/rm7l>. (Biddyjournal is Delia's blog). For free Different voices, Different spaces CDs contact [Annette.Geikie@westone.wa.gov.au](mailto:Annette.Geikie@westone.wa.gov.au)

Michael began teaching ESL online when 28.8 kbps was a fast internet connection. He learned that students could, with motivation, independently use the internet as a tool for learning, and that its greatest potential in education lay in its ability to bring people together to communicate. Michael is an e-learning coordinator for TAFE SA.

Delia is dedicated to creating a world that is more just, compassionate, harmonious and hopeful. In 2005, Delia was educational mentor for three national voice online

projects. The results of that work, Different voices, Different spaces, can be found online at <http://snipurl.com/t7iq>. In 2006, she is educational mentor, researcher and critical friend for three national e-learning projects.

## References

Different voices, Different spaces website, <http://dvds.flexiblelearning.net.au/index.html>

Some conference afterthoughts on Podomatic: [http://deliab.podomomatic.com/entry/2006-05-07T00\\_18\\_43-07\\_00](http://deliab.podomomatic.com/entry/2006-05-07T00_18_43-07_00)

VALBEC conference workshop live links on Podomatic: [http://deliab.podomomatic.com/entry/2006-05-01T22\\_37\\_41-07\\_00](http://deliab.podomomatic.com/entry/2006-05-01T22_37_41-07_00)

VALBEC conference workshop paper, Different voices, Different spaces: <http://www.valbec.org.au>

## Audio tools

Audacity: <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>

Audioblogging:

- <http://audioblogger.com/>
- <http://npaudio.blogspot.com/>
- <http://mikecogh.blogspot.com/>

Podomatic: <http://www.podomomatic.com/>

Skype: <http://www.skype.com/helloagain.html>

Continued on page 36 ...

# Open Forum

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

A forum to update teachers on the CGEA reaccreditation drew mixed responses when it was held in May. As readers will see, Jacinta Agostinelli, Venny Smolich and Helena Spryou also had reservations. Much has changed since then, but readers are invited to consider.

## The long and winding road to CGEA reaccreditation

The process for developing a new version of an existing qualification is a torturous one. Those who are entrusted with the task serve many masters. The project workers must balance the demands of a knowledgeable workforce who have (rightly) critiqued every phase of the project with the demands of an accreditation authority that expects protocols and procedures to be closely followed. On May 19, a forum was held at Victoria University to update teachers on the project to date. The response was mixed. In this edition's Open Forum, Jacinta, Venny and Helena share some of their reservations about the (then) proposed changes. Readers should note that the reaccreditation proposal has evolved since then\*.

### Jacinta

Designing new curriculum requires skill in deciding what to hold on to and in what form. One way of making sure value is retained is to consult with those who know. On this note I would like to commend the Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA) reaccreditation team on their efforts to consult with a broad cross section of teachers and interested educators.

I recently attended a workshop organised by the curriculum redevelopers, where teachers were asked for their views on the new curriculum as it stands, and to apply the new framework and learning outcomes to two hypothetical students. This is good consultation. At the workshop we were given an overview of what the new CGEA looks like so far before being asked to develop a course and lesson plan for two student profiles. This was a hands-on workshop plus there was time for small group and larger group discussion.

In appearance the CGEA will change. We will have a different meta-language for talking about the CGEA. Modules won't be called modules, but rather Core, Electives Group I and Electives Group II. Core will not mean core modules as it means now, but will refer to the centre, or core, of the Scottish Wheel model of adult literacy learning<sup>1</sup>. Reading will be called 'Engage with

texts', and writing will become 'Create texts'. Oral communication remains, and what was General Curriculum Options becomes part of the Core and will be called 'Complete a project'. Learning Outcomes will become Units of competency. The domains we knew as Personal Expression, Knowledge, Practical Purposes and Public Debate will give way to more learner foci such as For Personal Purposes, For Learning Purposes, For Work Purposes, To Participate in the Community. Although they sound like name changes only, I think more is involved here. A new articulation of the reaccredited CGEA will be the Individual Learning Plan. When reading the new CGEA it would be best to not try to compare it to the old CGEA.

The articulation and formalisation of an Individual Learning Plan is a gain. This ensures the learners' needs are placed first. I think most teachers do this anyway, but it will make the interview process more meaningful and will add meaning to student pathways. Pathways will have to be considered and recorded. This will mean more time spent on pre-course assessment paperwork, so funding bodies will need to be aware that the reaccredited CGEA will require more of their money if it is to be applied well.

There will need to be much discussion around the interpretation of Individual Learning Plans and how teachers will integrate them into their lessons. Will the change be just an articulation of what already happens? That is, will it mean students are to be viewed as individual learners with their own learning styles, personalities, strengths and needs? Or will it mean a change in reporting methods, so that we must tick boxes to show that student A wanted to learn to write an incident report for work and by the end of the course she can? The idea of Individual Learning Plans is a welcome one if it is accompanied by an interpretation of what a Learning Plan exactly involves, and by the resources to implement it. Pro formas would be a useful tool to maintain consistency across the sector.

The creation of a lower level than the current Introduction Level is beneficial and will be most applicable to students

with an intellectual disability. It has the needs of these students in mind.

Again, the project concept has merit; however it also will need to be accompanied by much discussion and professional development. Projects don't suit all contexts and all learners, and teachers will need to know how flexible they can be with a project. The project idea may help overcome the diversity of learner goals. For example, students could choose their own subject area to implement the language features that are being taught. This may work more easily with independent learners. Teachers would need to see the concept of a project in operation with a class of diverse learners with diverse learning goals before they would be confident using the project concept. The way I see it, just about any creation of text (writing), which necessarily follows engagement with text (reading), is a 'project'. I think a project is the end product of many processes—teaching, learning about language, analysis and synthesis skills, reading and writing; i.e. the old GCO. A project could probably end up being a mural or a paragraph about wind power. I hope I'm right.

At the May 19 forum we discussed potential problems and made suggestions for improvement. The idea of Individual Learning Plans has some drawbacks. How will we enrol learners? If we need to enrol learners into the individual units, this may require a number of rolls. Time consuming. Then, if a student is enrolled in Engage with texts I, II and III, and another student is enrolled in Engage with texts II, III and IV, what do the students do when the unit they are not enrolled in is being taught? Leave the room? Not come to class for those weeks? I think there are some practical aspects to iron out. Plus, how is a teacher supposed to manage teaching towards specific learner goals if the learners have identified different goals in their pre-course assessments? Do students who have elected to study For Work Purposes need to stay in class when For Learning Purposes is being addressed? When we tried applying the new structure to the hypothetical students during the workshop, the Individual Learning Plans and Learner Goals presented a problem for us. The curriculum developers will need to provide some guidance in how to overcome these problems. I believe they can be overcome.

If we are to teach only towards learner goals, as indicated in each student's Individual Learning Plan, do they exit the course at that point or do we go back to the plan and add to it so the student can continue in the course? These matters need to be decided upon so the administration is not too time consuming and student contact hours can be worked out. Funding is tied to student contact hours, so we need to be sure how the new curriculum and student contact hours are going to fit together.

As a teacher I know that even though there are multiple literacies, there is still a need to take an integrated approach to teaching literacy. Literacy cannot be defined as simply a set of skills we apply to different contexts. Literacy is about text, and text is a representation of culture and culture. It is not something that can be broken down into units without looking at how those units interconnect. As a sector we need to be attentive about holding onto this integrated concept of literacy when implementing the reviewed CGEA.

If the curriculum developers continue to consult with teachers and researchers in the field, I think the new CGEA will work. When introducing anything that is new we just need to be careful not to throw the baby out with the bath water.

### Venny

Like Jacinta I attended the CGEA Reaccreditation Forum on Friday, May 19. Afterwards, I wanted to articulate my concerns regarding the new proposed structure of the CGEA.

The current CGEA framework is a sound and substantial curriculum document based on sound pedagogical principles and adult learning principles with a solid theoretical foundation. It has a lot of flexibility within it and opportunities for customisation to suit many different situations without diminishing the substance of the core modules. The GCO units in the current curriculum allow for versatile customisation of delivery, and they offer opportunities to deliver a vast array of different types of content to suit very different groups of students. They are a very useful and convenient vehicle to deliver content which would otherwise not be able to be offered to students. There appears to be nothing like these GCO modules offered in the new proposed CGEA structure. Bringing in the generic skills from the current CGEA GCOs into the Complete a Project unit does not offer the same flexibility and versatility.

My reading of the general feedback from the forum held on November 18, 2005 was that it was generally positive about the current CGEA. I believe that there was an expectation that the structure and content of the CGEA would not change significantly and so the feedback was mainly around minor changes to further improve the current CGEA.

The structure that was proposed at the May Forum seems to confuse learner-centredness with offering students the possibility of enrolling in many different electives. In my mind, learner-centredness is more to do with pedagogy—how a teacher teaches in the classroom. Being learner-

centred means relating the topic to students' life and previous experience; using examples that are appropriate for and relevant to the lives of the students in the class; giving students projects and topics which are meaningful to them and their particular interests and circumstances and so on. I don't see learner-centredness as being about the opportunity for a learner to enrol in lots of different electives.

The CGEA project team cited feedback from previous consultations with providers regarding the need to reduce the nominal hours allocated to modules. This can be accommodated within the current structure; there is no need to completely abandon the current CGEA structure. Similarly the feedback about including more specific computer technology-related skills could be added to the current version. The same could be said about the feedback indicating that too much evidence was required to satisfy assessment criteria in numeracy modules.

The two items which form the core in the proposed course structure, Individual Personal Plan and Completed Project, seem to me to be tools and activities which can assist the student in achieving their learning outcomes rather than being core modules. The four different domains (personal, learning, community and working life) seem to be fairly arbitrary and artificial divisions with many areas of overlap; for example, a student needing to learn how to work with percentages can do so for personal purposes, for learning purposes, for work purposes or in order to participate in the community. The divisions do not seem to be the most useful means of organising the relevant content.

The Scottish Wheel appears to be a visual representation of the many interrelated and important principles relating to adult learning. I don't disagree with any part of this wheel but I think that it is possible to incorporate all the aspects of the wheel within the current CGEA—it doesn't necessitate throwing out the whole CGEA curriculum. With the current CGEA curriculum it is clear what skills a student could reasonably be expected to have if they have completed at a particular level. This is acknowledged by employers and other agencies. With the proposed new structure it will not be clear at all which skills a particular student has, unless you see their particular academic record.

With the proposed structure, the biggest issue for teachers will be managing many different students doing many different modules in the same class. This will not be an effective method of delivery and the amount of preparation, admin work and record-keeping required in maintaining up-to-date records of all the students will detract from actual teaching in the classroom.

The proposed structure seems to me to entail students being able to be independent learners and self-directed learners. At the higher levels students may have sufficient skills to enable them to be independent learners and self-directed, but I don't think this is true of the lower levels. Most students at these lower levels need a lot of teacher direction and they are generally not independent learners, and therefore will find it quite difficult to successfully negotiate their course.

I understand that it will be possible, and indeed necessary, to structure courses so that particular cohorts of students will be able to be enrolled and 'auto-loaded' into a group of particular units as set by teachers. It seems to me that this will be the only feasible way to deliver the proposed CGEA. If this is the case, as it will be in our TAFE areas, then why create the impression that students will be able to select their modules individually and that we will be able to cater to their particular individual needs?

## Helena

As a teacher in the workplace context, I have seen how quickly education in its broader sense—a site for determining, acquiring and contesting knowledge gained—has been reduced to instructional training for skill acquisition. This has led to a narrow definition of what constitutes knowledge and a focus on meeting industry needs for a flexible, skilled and competitive workforce.

Currently, I work in the Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia and I teach units from the Textile, Clothing and Footwear (TCF) Training Package to workers and outworkers (people who sew at home) in the TCF industry. The students in our classrooms are workers and they are also members of communities and families and many have aspirations for further study. They want to engage with their world in emotional, political, functional and informative ways. They need both specific skills training and a broad and rich general education.

The majority require English language, literacy and/or numeracy support. Modules from the CGEA taught in conjunction with units from the TCF Training Package provide this support. Our union's Registered Training Organisation (RTO) chose to work with the CGEA because it offers scope for broad content and text types used and a structure to explore these text types, thus offering greater potential for a holistic general education and the development of knowledge and not just skills.

From consultations, the CGEA project team identified the inflexibility of assessment, that modules were 'too big', and the need for an 'entry' level certificate as key issues. From the research they concluded that a 'broad definition

of literacy', including 'communications technology' with the learner at the centre, needs to be maintained in order to provide 'integrated, holistic, real learning', and to consider 'skill sets' as well as whole qualifications. In addition, the developers have been constrained by VQA requirements. There is no doubt that the developers have had an onerous task.

In a CGEA reaccreditation update in May 2006, the developers presented a proposal for a 'new look' CGEA. The course aims—to provide a general education—will be retained. The current levels will also be retained with an additional 'entry' level to precede 'Introductory' level at Certificate I. The four social contexts of literacy—'family and social life, 'workplace and institutional settings', 'education and training contexts' and 'community and civic life'—will be retained but the four literacy domains will no longer be explicit.

In the current CGEA document, the literacy domains and social contexts are inextricably linked. It states: 'for people to be able to participate effectively in the four social contexts they need to have competence in all the literacy domains'. But the four domains aren't autonomous and each literacy domain contains traces of the other domains ... 'to have competence of the literacy domains requires an understanding of the social purposes of the texts and the social contexts in which they are used' ([www.aris.com.au/cgea](http://www.aris.com.au/cgea)).

Other fundamental changes in the 'new' CGEA will be the inclusion of two new units 'individual learning plan' and 'complete a project' as the only two core units. The GCOs will no longer exist as separate modules—their outcomes will be replaced through training package units, embedded in the core unit 'complete a project' and in the literacy and numeracy units.

Reading and writing, numeracy and oral communication will each now be electives, with reading and writing split into two separate electives. Each of these four electives can be chosen in one of the four social contexts. What is not clear from the information given by the developers to date is how many electives students will be required to select, and in how many of the four social contexts the students will be required to work.

If the broad aim of the CGEA is to continue to provide a general education, how does the change of the current core units into electives achieve this aim? Equally, if one is not required to develop 'knowledge, skills and attributes' in all the four domains and their corresponding four social contexts, how will they achieve a general education? Placing the GCO competencies in the core unit 'complete a project' is far from satisfactory. In addition, the push to

introduce 'skill sets' to replace whole qualifications (as is also happening in Training Packages) will water down the integrity of the qualification itself. The danger of skill sets is that individual Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) can fashion their own mini-qualification to meet their own particular client or industry need. The CGEA will be changed in such a fundamental way that it will bear little resemblance to the current document. I agree with Jacinta—it seems that the baby has been thrown out with the bath water.

When we teach the unit 'Organise and plan own work in a home-based environment' to outworkers, for example, our aim is to teach the English language needed to assist outworkers to improve their language, literacy and communication in their dealing with employers, in everyday life, and to better understand the industrial context of their work (fashion industry, tariffs, awards, codes of practice, community and union campaigns) and know their legal rights and obligations. Mapping the CGEA onto this unit provides outworkers with the opportunity to gain knowledge about their unfair conditions and lack of bargaining power, and about their employers' legal responsibilities in regard to working arrangements.

In addition, outworkers learn to articulate their experiences and develop strategies for how they might demand their legal rights. By covering all the four literacy domains we can ensure that we provide a broad and holistic education. Outworkers can then be simultaneously assessed against the criteria of both the unit and modules from the CGEA. We have found the assessment process in the current CGEA very flexible in that Learning Outcomes can be combined, a number of criteria can fit into one task and assessment can be ongoing.

Bringing the CGEA in line with Training Packages is indicative of the systemic constraints facing education at present. Currently, Australian education policy, in line with Western nations globally, is influenced by human capital theory and economic rationalism. Its aim is to fulfil the demands of neo-liberal ideology to create competitive education that focuses on economic outcomes, controls content and regulates assessment processes (Marginson, 1997). It does this by constructing broader education objectives as the problem and training as the solution to national economic problems, arguing that skills training will improve national productivity and international competitiveness in a global market (Black, 2002). What training has done however, is reduce these broader goals to mere skill formation for economic advance. This shift highlights the implications for the development of knowledge and ironically, education is the only viable site to challenge this shift and to provide opportunities for

critical education in order to fulfil egalitarian goals in a diverse and pluralistic society.

This restructuring of education has culminated in the development of industry training packages essentially intended to meet the needs and requirements of the training reform agenda and industry restructuring. These requirements focus predominantly on meeting industry training needs for a 'flexible', 'skilled' and 'economically competitive' workforce.

Training Packages are sets of training materials that offer competency standards for each industry (<http://www.dest.gov.au>). Three components make up what is known as the core (endorsed) section of the Training Packages: competency standards—skills and knowledge required for workplace tasks, developed for each industry; assessment guidelines—advice on how the competencies can be assessed; and qualifications—combinations of competency units to form nationally recognised qualifications.

My broad educational goals are to help students learn how to learn, and to develop their reading, writing and critical thinking skills through engagement with a broad knowledge base and the theories of seminal thinkers, not just job-related instructional skills. This requires both a combination of dialogue and conventional pedagogy. It also requires subversion of the current competency-based training curriculum. For example, I cannot just teach the elements and performance criteria of the unit Occupational Health and Safety and do justice to my students who also want to learn English through a broader engagement with

... Continued from page 2

respected journal. Even bigger thanks goes to all of those special, special people who say 'yes' to sharing their professional expertise by writing articles and reports and (it never fails to impress me) get them in on time.

And lastly, a very special thanks to Glen, Mick, Moira and Don, who all have a hand in putting the magazine together

a range of ideas about life, politics, culture, history. Combining the current CGEA with the TCF Training Packages offers the scope to provide English language and literacy support and to teach using a broad definition of literacy.

Jacinta Agostinelli is a teacher and coordinator at Glenroy Neighbourhood House. Venny Smolich is a program manager of women's programs at Victoria University TAFE. Helena Spryou is vocational education and training officer at the Victorian branch of the Textile Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia.

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## Notes

- 1 See Margaret Tierney's article 'Great(er) expectations' in this edition of *Fine Print*.

The most recent forum on the reaccreditation of the CGEA was held at Victoria University on August 4. Feedback to the material presented at that forum was sought and received. Those wishing to find out more about subsequent phases of the project are encouraged to view the material at <http://tls.vu.edu.au/cfsitntalk/main.cfm>

and getting it out to you. The fact that *Fine Print* always looks so 'together', is because of the many skills each of them bring to their work for the journal.

Thanks to you all and happy reading.

Robyn Hodge

# Foreign Correspondence

## Training for transformation in Southern Africa

**In South Africa, Carole Webb is involved in a community development education project called Training for Transformation, which uses Freirean principles to help local people transform their communities.**

Since January, I've been working at a training centre in Kleinmond, South Africa, a small town not far from Cape Town on a beautiful narrow strip of land between the mountains and the ocean. I'm the coordinator of the Training for Transformation (T for T) program which is a year-long program (three phases in residence—13 weeks in total, and three home phases with the support of a mentor) that is recognised by Kimmage University in Ireland. Kimmage grants a diploma in Community Development for those who successfully complete the program.

The course is based on the methodology of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator, philosopher and author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He developed a training methodology which used a series of pictures (codes) that enabled the learners to read words and also to 'read' the reality of their lives.

When Freire went into exile, he taught in Boston and there worked with two women, Anne Hope and Sally Timmel. They took his insights and turned them into a training course and a series of four handbooks called *Training for Transformation*. Anne first worked with Steve Biko in South Africa and then when she was exiled, she and Sally started working in Kenya in the 70s. Since then this methodology has found its way through many parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

In 2003 and 2004, international training programs were held here in Kleinmond—to develop a new generation of trainers who are proficient in this method. From those trainings, a centre has been started in Uganda for East Africans. Plans are underway in West Africa and also for an Asian/Pacific program and several workshops have been held in Eastern Europe and the United States. We're doing some workshops this month with a group of women in Afghanistan.

So what of the current course? In 2005 we ran week-long workshops in all the provinces of South Africa and also drew in participants from Swaziland, Lesotho, Zimbabwe and Namibia. From the 309 workshop participants, we invited more than 40 to apply for the course. In March of this year, 33 men and women arrived in Kleinmond from eight South African provinces, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. All have

completed their matriculation certificate, and are able to communicate to some degree in English. All have shown a commitment to transforming their communities and building a quality of life for all Southern Africans through action and community involvement. They do HIV/AIDS work, work for unions and cooperative movements, are paralegals that take on women's cases in relation to domestic violence, property and inheritance rights, do environmental and cultural work, organise school tutors and work with local justice and peace committees in Catholic parishes. They are named S'phelele, Nkululeko, Nqobile (the first sound of that is a click which I can almost make as a part of the name rather than a separate sound), Keamogetsoe, Nobuzwe, Fuluphela, and so on. Learning to say the names without stumbling was big work for the first couple of weeks. Together we studied gender, adult and popular education methodologies with a concentration on those of Paulo Freire. We worked with Max Neef's theories of economics and fundamental human needs; looked at issues of development and under-development, unemployment and poverty. We built teams and did community listening surveys.

Because we are training trainers who will work with other community activists and leaders, we also focus on building skills such as animation/facilitation, problem-solving and negotiations, conflict resolution and mediation, organisational development, strategic planning, advocacy, campaigning, communication styles and skills, and knowing and understanding their own leadership skills and styles. All of this work is done in the simplest, most active way possible using codes, strategic questions etc, so that participants take on lots of big subject matter, but in a language that is understandable.

The leader/trainer of the group in T for T is called an animator (read here something more than a facilitator because the role is not neutral). To be a good animator you need to be skilled in not only the frameworks and skills mentioned above, but you also need to be conversant with theories of globalisation, class, race, and other ideological models that will help you to assist the group in digging more deeply into the root causes of the problems presented through the codes. You need to help the group participants to be critical, thoughtful and to go beyond what they know. Freire would refer to this as people reading their own reality in order to write their own

history, and enabling them to take up the true human vocation—which is to become more human.

Everyone is expected to participate in all the sessions and a weekly tutorial. In each of the residential phases they also work with a team to design a training session. They are required to write a paper every weekend that explores the themes of the week. This was a big challenge, for one can still see the effects of the Bantu educational system of the apartheid era—surely one of the worst legacies of those terrible years. We've been working on remedial measures to try to make up for the neglect, but it's very hard work.

The materials for the course come primarily from the four *Training for Transformation* handbooks which are written in simple English, and these are supplemented by readings chosen and simplified by the staff. But because the course focuses on training trainers to use Freire's and other popular education methods, the sessions start with the experience of the learners and allow the participants to connect their own experience to the theory and concepts that we introduce in the course.

One of the key roles of the animator is to build on the group's experience and then take the group beyond that experience through her own knowledge and experience. It's critical that the connection to their experience not be broken so that learners can link their new learning to what they already know. For example, if you wanted to talk about the World Bank, you might start by asking the group to speak about how people make their living, and what poverty looks like in their communities, and what they know and understand about why that happens. And you can continue to make connections until you reach the World Bank. One of my own principles in training is that I try never to say anything first that someone else might say before me. My role is to build and expand on what has been said.

But let me back up a bit and write about the key principles or intuitions of Freire, as these form the basis of the conceptual as well as the practical framework of our program. There are six of them.

- 1 The purpose of education is radical transformation—of our own lives, our communities and all of society. Education should be liberating rather than domesticating.
- 2 Relevance and emotion are critical to learning so it's important to begin with issues that people have strong feelings about. Freire used listening surveys in communities to find out what the 'generative' themes were—the things that people talked about with emotion/passion. In using these themes in the methodology, you link people's feelings to what they learn which can generate hope and energy.

- 3 Dialogue is essential. This methodology is participatory. It's not just about passing along information (what Freire called banking education). It is through dialogue with each other and with the world that we transform it.
- 4 The approach is one of problem-posing. With the use of the 'code', problems/issues in the community are put before the learners and they analyse them, going to the root causes of the problem and looking for solutions together. Education, therefore, is about developing critical consciousness—analysing the world and looking to the root causes of current problems and oppression.
- 5 The educational cycle is one of action/reflection/ action. After analysing a particular situation, it is important then to act to make change. That action is reflected upon and another action is taken.
- 6 Education is not neutral. It is *for* something—it is about transforming the world.

The practical framework looks like this:

- A listening survey is done – where is the anger, frustration? What do people talk about with energy and passion? These become the themes of the educational practice.
- The theme is captured in a 'code' which could be a drawing, a film, a skit, a song. The theme is presented back to the community in this code which enables them to look at it objectively.
- The code is debriefed with the help of the animator in a six-step process: what do you see in this code? Why is it happening? Does it happen in your situation? Why is this happening (the search for root causes)? What issues are related to the one you've identified in the code? What can we do about it?
- Actions are chosen and plans are made to carry them out.
- The group meets again to reflect on the action and to plan the next steps and the cycle continues.

As I mentioned above, this methodology is used all over the developed and developing world to build critical consciousness through reflection and action. So if you're an educator who is interested not only in gaining new knowledge but also in creating a new world, it would be worth your while to delve more deeply into *Training for Transformation*.

**Originally from the US, Carol taught ESL to adult immigrants/ refugees in California and did labour/ community work liaising between trade unions and community organisations before coming to Australia. From 1997 to January 2006, when she went to South Africa, Carol worked as the National Training Coordinator for the Finance Sector Union in Australia.**



# Beside the Whiteboard

**Judy Tin is passionate about extending her skills and stretching the boundaries of her ever-expanding comfort zone. She's a walking advertisement for lifelong learning and being passionate and positive about whatever you are involved in. *Fine Print* committee member Lynne Matheson caught up with Judy and asked her to share her story.**

## **Can you tell us a bit about your professional background?**

Looking back over my working life, my first major career opportunity took place in my early 20s when I was offered a position as a trainee journalist for two years at the Summer Institute of Linguistics located in the beautiful, semi-rural setting of Kangaroo Ground. I was privileged to have the opportunity to work with a talented and dedicated team in their media department, and gained valuable skills and unique insights into cross-cultural communications and aspects of media production.

In 1986, I married and began my new career as wife, mother and homemaker. Raising four children, born just six years apart, has been a hectic time of challenges and delights.

When my youngest child started kindergarten, I began working part time as a clerical assistant for a neurologist. I enjoyed returning to work two days a week, but only did so at the insistence of a friend who spoke to her boss and set up the job for me. I lacked confidence to re-enter the workforce but thanks to her support I moved out of my comfort zone and made my way back into the paid workforce again. In the end, I stayed in this job for several years.

I also took on an active role in my community as a volunteer, coordinating the Safety House of Victoria Rosanna Committee for five years and serving at the state level for a year.

Some people may not include parenting and volunteer service within the scope of professional background, because it's not paid employment, but I do. The years spent at home with my family and serving in the community have provided me with a host of valuable attitudes, skills and experiences that continue to influence my interpersonal relationships and in many ways shape my current teaching practice. Therefore, these roles should be recognised and validated in the wider arena and not set aside or devalued.

## **How did you get involved with adult basic and literacy education?**

The choice to return to full-time study and begin a new career came after a series of life-changing events. In 1996,

I underwent open-heart surgery for a serious, but previously undetected, congenital heart condition. I was very fortunate; if this condition had remained undiagnosed I would have suffered permanent lung damage.

Within months, my health improved and I began to have energy instead of feeling tired all the time. I started to reflect on my life and began to ask myself two critical questions: 'What do I really want to do?' and 'What am I prepared to do to achieve my dreams?' I took a long time to answer these big questions. To help me find my way through this confusing time, I enrolled in a variety of classes at different Neighbourhood Houses and gradually explored the idea of completing further studies.

The turning point came when I took on a Certificate IV of Further Education at Diamond Valley Learning Centre and Nilumbik Adult Education. This course allowed me to explore different career pathways, develop study skills and compile a personal portfolio. Because my secondary education had been interrupted by health problems and was incomplete, I found this course an excellent alternative to VCE. I particularly enjoyed the reflective and practical assessment tasks and the way I was supported through the VTAC application process.

At the time I was writing extensively so my tutor encouraged me to enter the Northern Metropolitan Region ACFE 2000 Adult Learner's Week writing competition. Much to my great surprise I won first prize in the creative writing section! I still remember the day I attended the certificate ceremony held for students, teachers, family and friends from various ACE providers across metropolitan Melbourne. It stands out so vividly in my mind because that was the day I made a promise to myself that I would do all I could to achieve one of my lifelong dreams—to go to University and complete a tertiary degree. I knew I wanted to become a teacher and work with adults in literacy education.

With much fear and trembling, I applied to RMIT University as a mature-age student. At the time it was the only tertiary institution offering a Bachelor of Education with training in both primary and adult education. My application was successful and I quickly began to enjoy the challenges associated with full-time study, especially

being an active participant in the many extra-curricular activities! I completed an extra course load in the first two years and then finished the adult training early, which included a 'Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training' and my first placement at Thornbury Women's Neighbourhood House. In 2003, I commenced working at Olympic Adult Education (OAE) in West Heidelberg after completing a professional practice placement there.

When I graduated in the top 15 percent the following year I felt a tremendous sense of achievement. I was proud of this major milestone and my pathway from further to higher education. Now, I love sharing my story with my new students and telling them that I was sitting in their seat just six years ago—literally. I hope to inspire and encourage others in achieving their goals and dreams. As the saying goes, 'Inch by inch, life's a cinch'.

### **What are your current roles?**

My teaching load is very full at the moment. Currently, I am teaching a wide range of literacy and computer classes in Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA) at OAE including Editorial Group (General Curriculum Options [GCO], 2/3), Introduction to Computers, Special Needs Cooking, Current Affairs (CGEA Oral Communication, Intro/1) and Reading and Writing (CGEA Intro/1). This semester I am teaching two more evening computer classes, something I feel a bit nervous about as I haven't taught these software applications before. In addition, I started teaching at CAE earlier this year and have two classes: Humanities Studies (CGEA GCO 2/3) and Intermediate Computers (CGEA GCO 1/2).

One of my strategies to extend my 'personal comfort zone' has been to accept every challenge that comes my way. While this can be a bit overwhelming at times, I feel am consolidating my craft and developing good practices.

### **What have been some of the highlights and challenges during your career?**

Teaching can be a very humbling experience. For me, it is a privilege to come along side another person and ask them to trust you enough to allow a meaningful exchange to take place, this amazing and complex thing we call 'teaching and learning'.

Catering for the wide range of learning abilities within a single class, especially with lower-level literacy learners, continues to be a challenge for me. Also, I can over-plan, but I am learning to be more spontaneous and trust my intuition. I often find the most significant lessons are the incidental learning events, cues given by the students themselves that have rich personal meaning. I am constantly learning from, and with, the students as I move

beyond my own assumptions about what is important towards a more meaningful connection with each person as an individual.

One of my greatest joys in life is working at CAE. Coming into the city energises me; I feel I am able to take something new and fresh to my other classes each week. In addition, I like attending Moderation and PD events. These are often enjoyable opportunities to met with my peers and hone my craft in a supportive environment.

### **What other projects/ works have you been involved in?**

During my teacher training, I was invited to attend the 2002 ARIS Curriculum Day as a guest speaker. The theme was Pathways through Curriculum and when I was asked to speak about the Diploma of Further Education. I jumped at the chance. I enjoy public speaking and what better forum than to address my peers and superiors—and get to sit in on the other sessions for free (I was a poor student, don't forget). Being able to mingle with so many teachers and learn from their collective wisdom at that early stage in my own growth was a great kick start to my career, giving me a taster of the real world of teaching and adult education.

Meanwhile, completing four years of full-time tertiary study, raising a family and commencing ABLE teaching has kept me very busy. But I always find some time for an artistic outlet, whether it be dabbling in creative writing, family history or drawing.

### **What kinds of challenges and future pathways do you see ahead?**

During my studies I discovered a hidden talent for research and academic writing, so I am keen to explore this in the future. I also enjoy being creative and doing things that are fun, like attending belly dancing classes. It's important to be playful and keep the fun in life.

I think this is a very exciting time to be involved in education. Watching my own children grow up in the digital age made me want to be a part of all that. Ten years ago, I was afraid to learn how to use a computer. When my children began to communicate using all sorts of information technologies, I felt almost illiterate. I realised I had a choice to make: learn the many languages my children speak, or become isolated from them. So I chose to become a lifelong learner.

Developing my own computer and ICT skills is an ongoing challenge. I find it hard work. Committing time to mastering a new skill is not easy. But I want to keep learning in this area so that I am in step with, or at least well in sight of, emerging educational practices.

I see education as having a huge role to play in the way we relate to others. Learning ways to effectively integrate information communication technologies with our understanding of language and literacy learning, be it with children or adults, is a huge responsibility. Ultimately, these (multi)literateacies will shape our understanding of both the wider world and our inner landscapes as we continue to move forward in the twenty-first century. I feel in many ways we are adrift in uncharted waters where the maps cease to exist and the warning reads, 'Beyond this point there be dragons ...'

So in this spirit of exploration and adventure, I hope to sustain an integrated approach to education and adopt

the role of teacher-researcher in the classroom. I maintain reflective practices and action research, usually in the form of a personal journal and learning log, so that I can gain a better understanding of each learning experience and its implications for all the stakeholders involved.

However, my really big, ten-year plan—the one that prompted me to go to university and start a career in the first place—is my deep desire to visit Scotland, the homeland of my forebears. Maybe sometime in the near future, if I am brave enough, I will find a way to combine travel, research and adult education to fulfil this dream! I certainly hope so!

# AMES Resources

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### Related resources

ACAL: <http://www.groups.edna.edu.au/course/view.php?id=221> (ACAL's Literacy Live website)

Michael's sites:

- [http://users.chariot.net.au/~michaelc/mater/easy\\_voice.htm](http://users.chariot.net.au/~michaelc/mater/easy_voice.htm)
- [http://users.chariot.net.au/~michaelc/nz/CLESOL/keynote\\_language.htm](http://users.chariot.net.au/~michaelc/nz/CLESOL/keynote_language.htm)

New practices in flexible learning 2005: <http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/flx/gol/home/projects/2005/pid/54> (Resources for Beyond text, Connecting the dots and Social interactions packs)

Podcast directory for educators: <http://recap.ltd.uk/podcasting/index.php>