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Editorial

Welcome to the winter 2008 edition of *Fine Print*. We are well into the educational year, and it's an exciting time for VALBEC with the annual conference and the 30-year anniversary of the founding of the organisation about which there will be more in the spring edition

It is fitting that in this edition Lynne Matheson honours Helen Macrae, founding president of VALBEC, and her induction into the Victorian Honour Roll for Women. Reading about Helen's achievements over the past 30 years is awe-inspiring, and reminds us how passionate individuals leading and working together can make a difference.

We hope that all the articles in this edition will inform you about some of the latest developments, and keep your professional knowledge well tuned.

Every literacy teacher needs to know about the results of the International Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey conducted in 2006. Dave Tout's feature article gives us the key findings and points to a number of possibilities for further investigation.

Some of the mysteries of men's sheds are revealed in Barry Golding's feature. The emphasis on the success of informal learning and personal relationships is thought-provoking.

In Practical Matters, Linno Rhodes and her literacy class add another play—this time about the upcoming Homeless World Cup—to their already impressive productions.

Michael Chalk reflects on the flexible learning project he ran through PRACE using audio technologies in literacy classrooms.

There are a number of curriculum and CGEA updates:

- Liz Davidson and Lynne Fitzpatrick, Curriculum Maintenance Managers for General Studies and Further

Education, write about the newly accredited 21859VIC–21861VIC Certificates I–III in *Mumgu-dhal Tyama-tiyt*, formerly 'Learning pathways for Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples'.

- How the new CGEA is being delivered at Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre.
- Dianne Parslow assists us with AQTF compliance when it comes to moderation and validation processes.

This time Foreign Correspondence comes with a view from an outsider looking in, as adult literacy teacher Annabel McDonald from Edinburgh spends time on placement at CAE and compares Scottish and Australian practices.

In this edition a tribute to long time adult educator Nance Hovey takes the place of *Beside the Whiteboard*.

We would also like to advertise our special summer edition, which will focus on student writing. We are asking literacy teachers to help their students submit writing for publication in this edition, and also to submit their own short reflective pieces on the teaching of writing.

Finally, we must regretfully announce that we farewell Karen Manwaring as commissioning editor. Karen started as commissioning editor in 2006. She has been an enthusiastic and dedicated worker and has ensured that *Fine Print* has continued to flourish and strengthen. We wish Karen well in her future teaching and writing.

Sarah Deasey
Fine Print Editorial Group

In the last edition's contents page, we referred to Alex Vardis as Alex Payne. We apologise for the error.

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.

On a roll: thirty years in adult and community education

by Lynne Matheson

The dedication of VALBEC founding president Helen Macrae to the adult and community education sector has been acknowledged with her induction into the Victorian Honour Roll for Women. Over the past three decades, Helen has been an influential and inspirational presence for both educators and learners, and also a tireless advocate for women and disadvantaged groups.

With energetic singing and guitar playing, Debra Conway began proceedings on Friday March 7 to celebrate International Women's Day, one hundred years of women's suffrage, and the Victorian Honour Roll for Women for 2008.

The ANZ Pavilion at the Victorian Arts Centre, fragrant with purple and pink hyacinths, was filled with colourfully attired women of different ages and backgrounds, all representing a broad cross section of Victorian communities and public life. There was a great sense of occasion as women greeted each other, or introduced themselves at round tables set for a beautiful meal showcasing locally produced food and wine.

But first, some background

On May 7, 2001, as part of Women Shaping the Nation, an event for the Centenary of Federation, the Victorian Honour Roll of Women (the Honour Roll) was first presented to the Victorian Parliament. The annual addition of inductees—to recognise the achievements and contributions of women from all walks of life in Victoria—has become a key event, and coincides with the celebration of International Women's Day.

I was fortunate to be invited to this event along with Delia Bradshaw to accompany the founding president of VALBEC, Helen Macrae, who was being inducted into the honour roll. This acknowledgment of Helen's life and work is of particular significance for adult and community education in this, the 30th year of VALBEC's life as an organisation.

The new director of women's policy, Rhonda Cumberland, was enthusiastic in her welcome and introductions. Guest of honour, Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard, (Acting PM as Kevin Rudd was in PNG) resplendent in purple, spoke of the struggles and achievements of Australian women past and present. She stressed the Government's commitment to improve opportunities and pay and conditions for working women and families.

Julia spoke with intensity and poise, and her warmth and authenticity were evident when the time came to present the first group of inductees. Maxine Morand MP, Minister for



Women's Affairs, spoke of the power and determination of Victorian suffragists in attaining the vote despite opposition from many quarters, and related this to the work of the women being acknowledged.

Nominated for honour roll

The nomination for Helen for the 2008 Victorian Women's Honour roll was submitted by Delia and myself on Helen's behalf. Below is an edited version of the text we submitted.

In over three decades of work in adult and community education, Helen Macrae has been influential in the lives of many women adult educators, of learners from diverse backgrounds, and of community and government organisations. She has worked with insight and strategy to influence government policy, governance and structures, as well as in research and curriculum development.

With her commitment to a more just and equitable society, Helen has worked in a range of roles in community-based and government organisations. Her activism and commitment to women and disadvantaged groups is represented in her numerous roles over the years in establishing and contributing to organisations that have made change both possible and achievable. Some examples of Helen's work that spans 30 years are:

- Founding president and committee member, Victorian Adult Literacy Basic Education Council (VALBEC but originally VALC).
- Significant involvement in the establishment of the Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL).
- Founding member, convenor, secretary and website editor, Network of Women in Further Education (now Women in Adult and Vocational Education).
- Foundation committee member and president for five years of Queen Vic Women's Centre Inc.
- Foundation member and secretary, Inner Northern Local Learning and Employment Network (INLLEN).
- Coordinator, Diamond Valley Learning Centre.
- Chair, Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre.
- Secretary, Venus Bay Community Centre.
- Founder, secretary, Friends of Venus Bay Peninsula.

Adult and community education (ACE) as a sector is acknowledged as being under-recognised and under-funded and yet contributes a tremendous amount to communities and social capital, particularly in areas of social and/or economic disadvantage. Helen began full-time employment in ACE as coordinator of the Diamond Valley Learning Centre, and took a lead role in the shaping of the neighbourhood house and learning centre movement. Helen maintained her strong commitment to community organisations and has only recently completed a five-year period as chair of the Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre.

Helen is currently secretary of the Friends of Venus Bay Peninsula Inc and the Venus Bay Community Centre, and chair of the South Gippsland Community Weeds Taskforce. She consciously brings her adult education skills and experience to the work of all three organisations as a writer, governance guide, mentor and meeting facilitator. As well, she is the founder and editor of an innovatory monthly community newspaper, *Matter of Fact*, published by the Venus Bay Community Centre. The newspaper has a deliberate community-strengthening role in the communities of Tarwin Lower and Venus Bay.

After Diamond Valley, Helen worked in teaching, curriculum development and management at the Council of Adult Education in adult literacy, workplace education and women's education, and played a pioneering role in these adult education areas. Following this, as a senior policy officer with the Adult Community and Further Education Division, and later Office

of Training and Tertiary Education in Victoria, Helen was instrumental in changes to governance and the development and accreditation of further education curriculum.

Helen has a gift for putting complex policy ideas into attractive and clear text that communicates well across the wide spectrum of people involved at all levels of ACE. Helen was a member of the ACFE Board and chair of the ACFE Board's Curriculum Committee after she resigned from the public service. Throughout the period 1985–2000, she was connected to the grass roots needs of teachers and learners through her involvement with WAVE.

In all these organisations, Helen's leadership advanced the cause of women in adult and community education who as a group are generally under-recognised for their role in working with mostly women students, often disadvantaged socially, educationally and/or economically. Helen articulates and acts on her commitment to building social capital; she has inspired and empowered many women and organisations to achieve a vision for a more just and equitable society.

Through her work as an author of many influential policy documents and journal articles on adult education and democratic decision-making in community development, Helen has made a lasting contribution that still benefits women. She has also made a significant contribution to community policy and funding debates through insightful, careful and groundbreaking analysis and research. Such work improves the situation for women students and teachers, particularly educationally and economically disadvantaged women. With her experience as a policy analyst, she has worked with groups, largely women, to conceive, articulate and implement a vision in both community and government settings.

Helen is an innovative thinker and practitioner. She was the first to imagine that workplace basic education could make a contribution to the productivity of Australia's workplaces. In every voluntary role and paid position, she has always shown how espousal of continuous improvement, and the steady search to do everything better, lifts the capacity of agencies to extend their sphere of influence. Helen is a great communicator both as a public speaker and writer, and has inspired many with her words and actions. She has also assisted organisations to consolidate and strengthen their structures and systems for improved outcomes for all.

Helen has always worked quietly behind the scenes as much as possible to support and mentor other women into positions of leadership in organisations, in the public service, in adult education and now most recently in the environmental movement. For example, she has helped many women to develop project management skills, she has talked others patiently through people management issues, and she has

coached many in the skills of clear, precise and engaging writing.

Above all, Helen is a long-haul activist. A notable example is her five years from the late 1980s to the early 1990s as president of the small group of women who worked to ensure the Queen Victoria Hospital tower was saved for the use of women in Victoria.

Not only has she pioneered and promoted many adult education programs and policies, but she has also been a generous and wise mentor. She has been equally attentive to women learners, women educators and women managers.

At the heart of good adult education, she has always recognised the power of humanistic and democratic curriculum. With this in mind, she has fostered and circulated research, she has encouraged the development of exemplary curriculum documents and she has supported high quality professional development for adult educators.

In word and in action, Helen has worked for 30 years to make the adult education environment a rich and just environment,

knowing the lifelong benefits for individuals, communities and society as a whole.

It was a privilege to be involved in the nomination and celebration of Helen Macrae's induction to the Victorian Honour Roll for Women and by extension, the recognition of the countless workers and volunteers who have made a difference in the lives of so many people through adult and community education.

Lynne Matheson is co-president of VALBEC, and has worked in adult community education for over a decade as an adult literacy teacher and a coordinator of programs at Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre. She now works as a curriculum development officer in research and development at NMIT.

For more information

www.women.vic.gov.au

<http://www.theage.com.au/news/general/a-vote-of-thanks/2008/03/106/1204779968624.html>

<http://www.theage.com.au/multimedia/2008/women/index.html>



A message from the Fine Print Editorial Committee to adult literacy teachers and students

Please help us with our special Summer 2008 edition

Celebrating ALBE students and their writing

We want to celebrate the work of adult literacy students by publishing their writing. We want to build a picture of the diverse learning contexts, the life experiences, and the goals and thoughts of our learners.

We also want to highlight teaching approaches to writing by publishing short reflections from teachers.

For this purpose we will select a number of pieces from those submitted.

Guidelines for teachers

1. Talk to your students about the reason for this edition.
2. Ask them to write a reflective piece, following the guidelines for students provided below, or provide a piece already complete.
3. Contribute a brief reflection of your own on how you approach the teaching of writing, preferably with reference to the students' submitted writing pieces. We would like to hear how you inspire your students, and how you facilitate the writing process.

4. Word limit for teachers: between 250 and 500 words.

Guidelines for students

1. Write a reflective piece about your learning journey. How have your life experiences contributed to your learning? What classroom experiences have contributed to your learning? Where do you want to go as a result of your learning?
or
Choose a piece of your writing in any genre which you have already completed and would like others to read.
2. Write another paragraph about yourself, and why you have chosen this piece of writing.
3. Word limit approximately 250 words.

Submission details

1. Please email to fineprint@valbec.org.au as an MS Word attachment.
2. Deadline: September 28th 2008.
3. Enquiries to Sarah Deasey: sarahd@cnlc.org.au

Startling stats: adult literacy skills in Australia

by Dave Tout

Literacy teachers should make themselves aware of the results of the international Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey, conducted in 2006. Here are the key findings, and a number of areas that bear further investigation.

I can remember in the late 1980s or early 1990s reading a government promotional booklet about Australia that claimed that Australia had a 100 per cent literacy rate. Luckily, since then a number of adult literacy surveys have dispelled this myth, and alerted Australia to the fact that it has quite substantial challenges with the literacy (and numeracy) levels of its adult population.

This article presents some of the initial data and results from the latest such survey—the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey (ALLS). Some background information is provided about the survey, including how the skills are described, assessed and scored, and then some of the initial results are presented for consideration. Finally, a number of potential questions are raised about the survey results and their implications for education and training.

Introduction

The Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey (ALLS) was conducted in Australia by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in 2006 and early 2007, and the first results were released in November 2007. The summary publication for the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey (cat no. 4228.0) was released by the ABS in November 2007. A data cube containing 24 tables in Excel format was released on the ABS website on 9 January, followed by the release of microdata in the form of a Basic Confidentialised Unit Record File (CURF) and an Expanded CURF on 22 January.

This survey is a large-scale, internationally comparative assessment designed to measure the skills and characteristics of individuals across and within a range of participating countries. The ALLS is the second survey of its type to be conducted in Australia. Its predecessor, the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), was conducted in Australia in 1996. ALLS allows comparison of Australians' literacy and numeracy skills with those of other countries, as well as comparisons with 1996 IALS data for the two domains of prose and document literacy.

ALLS involved a random sample of private households from across Australia in which one person per dwelling participated in the survey. The sample of almost 9000 adults included people

aged 15 to 74 years in all states and territories, but excluding very remote areas. It should therefore be noted that estimates in relation to Indigenous adults is subject to limitation because the ALLS sample size and coverage was not representative of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. Furthermore, it was felt that the content of the survey would need substantial redesign to accommodate cultural differences.

ALLS is an international survey developed by Statistics Canada and the United States' Educational Testing Service and is coordinated by the OECD. ALLS in Australia included two measures of literacy which were directly comparable to the 1996 IALS:

1. Prose literacy—the knowledge and skills needed to understand and use information from text, including editorials, news stories, poems and fiction.
2. Document literacy—the knowledge and skills required to locate and use information contained in various formats, including job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables and graphics.

There were three new measures in the Australian ALLS that were not measured in the 1996 IALS:

1. Numeracy—the knowledge and skills required to effectively manage and respond to the mathematical demands of diverse situations.
2. Problem solving—the knowledge and skills required to identify a problem, search for relevant information and integrate it into a coherent problem representation, evaluate the problem situation with respect to given goals and criteria, devise a plan and monitor its execution.
3. Health literacy—the knowledge and skills required to understand and use information relating to health issues such as drugs and alcohol, disease prevention and treatment, safety and accident prevention, first aid, emergencies and staying healthy. The health literacy proficiency was produced as a by-product of the above domains.

Background to the survey tool

Using household survey methods, a representative sample of 8988 respondents was first asked a series of background

questions (see below) and then presented with a screening booklet containing a small number of simple (Level 1) tasks. If the respondent failed to complete three or more of these tasks correctly, the interview was concluded. This was to identify and take into account respondents who had very low levels of English language and/or literacy ability. If the respondent completed three or more tasks correctly, they were given a separate booklet (the Main Task Booklet) containing a selection of the assessment items. The Main Task Booklets for the ALLS survey are compiled using any two of eight assessment blocks of items. Respondents get different booklets—it is the items that are in effect assessed—not the respondent. There was no time limit and respondents were urged to try each item.

The task items were based on adult contexts, and as much as is possible in a large scale testing situation on real-life scenarios and texts, and were open-ended in that respondents were required to write their response—there were no multiple choice questions. The items were based upon simulated texts such as advertisements, newspaper articles, instructions, maps, photos, diagrams and plans. A ruler and calculator were provided to respondents for use in the numeracy items. (For more information about the methodology and descriptions of some sample ALLS items see Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007a or Desjardins, Murray, Clermont & Werquin 2005.)

Background questionnaire

The initial component of the survey was designed to collect not only basic information from the respondent—age, sex, marital status, country of birth—but also answers to almost 300 questions about:

- Demographics
- Education
- Language
- Parental information
- Labour force participation
- Literacy and numeracy practices at work
- Literacy and numeracy practices generally
- Participation in education and learning
- Social capital and wellbeing
- Use of technologies
- Income.

This data set of background information is collected alongside the assessment of skills, and provides the potential for rich

analysis and research of the results and performance against a wide range of factors and indicators.

Scoring

As in IALS, the literacy, numeracy and problem solving abilities are expressed as a score on a scale ranging from 0–500 points. The score is the point at which a person has an 80 per cent chance (This 80 per cent mastery level is higher than that expected in some similar international school-based surveys such as PISA [Program for International Student Assessment]) of successfully performing tasks at that level. For literacy and numeracy, the scale is grouped into five levels. Level 3 is considered the level adults require to cope with the demands of everyday life and work.

The five ALLS levels do not directly match the five levels of the Australian National Reporting System (NRS) or its revision, the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF), although there are obviously some parallels. For example, one key difference is that the ACSF takes into account the ability of the teacher/assessor to offer a degree of support and adjust the familiarity of the context, whereas all tasks in ALLS have to be undertaken independently with no support.

Some startling statistics

The data and results from the first release of ALLS in Australia (ABS 2007a) provide a broad perspective of the assessed literacy and numeracy skills of the Australian adult population against a wide range of factors and perspectives. Below are a few of these statistics for the reader to reflect on.

Australian results

The results indicate that in 2006, between 46 per cent (7 million) and 70 per cent (almost 9 million) of adults in Australia had poor or very poor skills across one or more of the five skill domains of prose literacy, document literacy, numeracy, problem-solving and health literacy. This means they did not attain skill Level 3 in ALLS, the level regarded by the developers as a suitable minimum for coping with the increasing and complex demands of modern life and work. See Table 1.

The results for Victoria show that Victoria lags in performance behind most other states and territories except the Northern Territory and Tasmania, depending on the measure. These comparative results appear to be consistent with Victoria's

Table 1. Summary of key measures: Number and proportion of persons in each group with skill levels 1 or 2. Total Australian population aged 15–74 years.

Prose literacy		Document literacy		Numeracy		Problem-solving		Health literacy	
'000	%	'000	%	'000	%	'000	%	'000	%
7,002.9	46.4	7,935.6	52.5	7,066.9	46.8	10,591.3	70.1	8,980.3	59.5

reading and mathematics performance in PISA—the Program for International Student Assessment of 15-year-olds in school.

Changes since 1996

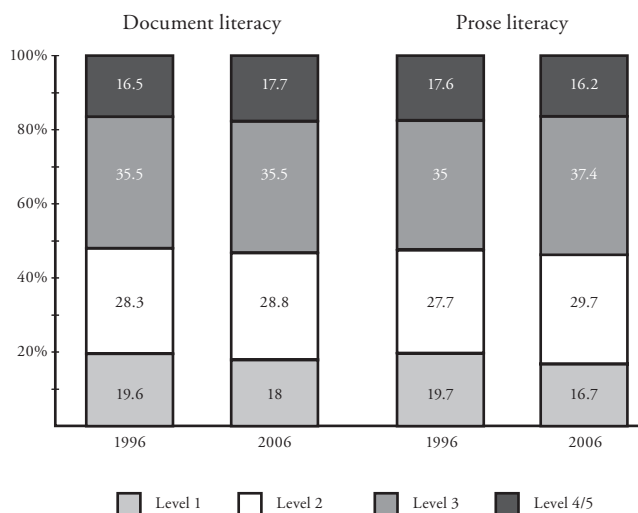
In comparison with the 1996 IALS results, there has been some upward movement in performance at the lowest skill levels. In regard to prose literacy, there has been a significant 1–2 per cent percentage point decrease in the proportion of adults with a skill level of 1, and a corresponding 2–3 per cent increase in the proportion of adults with skill Levels 2 and 3. In regard to document literacy, there has also been a significant decrease in the proportion of adults with a skill level of 1. See Figure 1.

International comparisons

In comparisons with other countries surveyed to date, Australia’s results across all domains were ranked in the middle. Australia’s skill levels are generally higher than Italy and the United States, about the same as New Zealand, Canada and Bermuda, and lower than Norway and Switzerland.

An interesting international comparison worthy of further study and research were the changes in performance from IALS to ALLS in document literacy in Australia compared to New Zealand. Over the same period of time between IALS and ALLS, New Zealand made a substantial 8 per cent improvement in the reduction of the percentage of adults at the lowest two levels. This change was not reflected in prose literacy, and the other countries similar to Australia (Canada and the USA) also did not show the same level of improvement. See Figure 2.

Figure 1. Proportion of persons with each of the skill levels across Australia for prose and document literacy 1996 vs 2006.



Age differences

Age was an area that presented some interesting results. Generally, age and skills were inversely related. The literacy skills of people aged 45 years and over were lower than younger age groups, although the youngest group, the post-school leaving age group, were not the highest performing group—generally those in the 25–34 year age group had the highest level of literacy skills. See Figure 3.

Gender differences

Generally, females performed better than males in prose literacy while it was the reverse for document literacy, although the differences were not great. Males and females performed similarly on the problem-solving and health literacy scales. See Figure 4.

However, the most significant and startling differences were in numeracy. Males significantly outperformed females on numeracy:

- 47.5 per cent of males were at Levels 1 or 2
- 57.6 per cent of females were at Levels 1 or 2
- a difference of more than 10 per cent.

Language background

Compared to 1996 there has been a significant improvement in the performance of adults whose first language was not English. See Figure 5.

Furthermore, of the people who migrated to Australia in the five years prior to the survey whose first language was not English, there was a statistically significant increase in the proportion of people attaining literacy scores of Level 3 or above on both the prose and document scales. On the prose scale, the proportion of this group with scores at Level 3 or

Figure 2. Proportion of persons in each level for Document literacy. Australia and New Zealand.

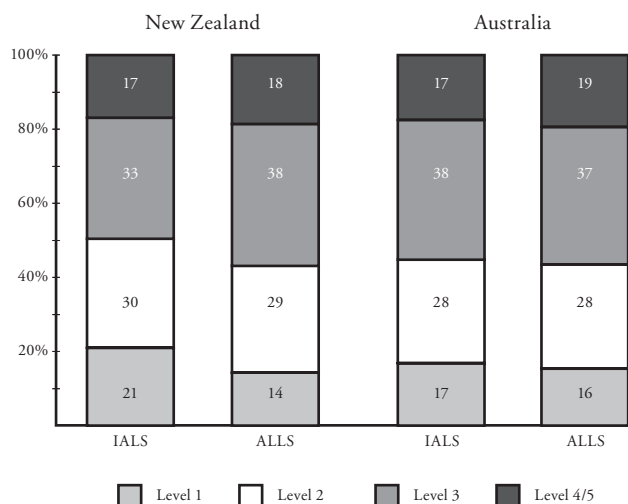
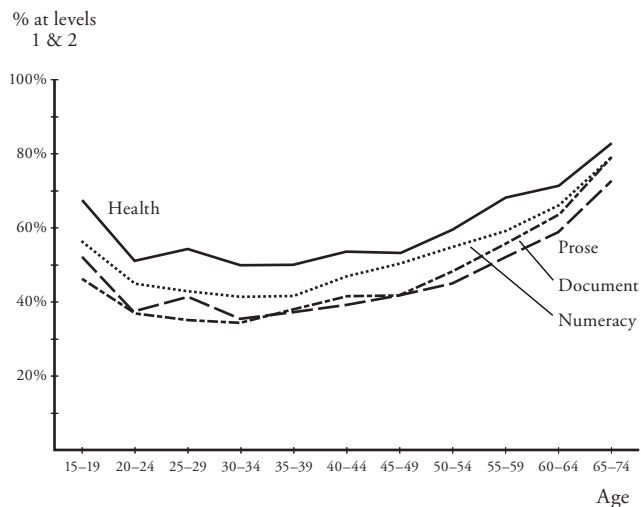


Figure 3. Proportion of persons with skill Levels 1 or 2 across in each age group for prose, document, health literacy and numeracy.



above increased from 22 per cent to 38 per cent, while on the document scale the proportion increased from 32 per cent to 50 per cent.

Educational attainment

There were a range of indicators that directly link the positive benefits of education to higher performance on each of the ALLS measures. The results clearly show that the number of years of formal education has a direct and significant positive impact on an individual's skill levels. See Figure 6.

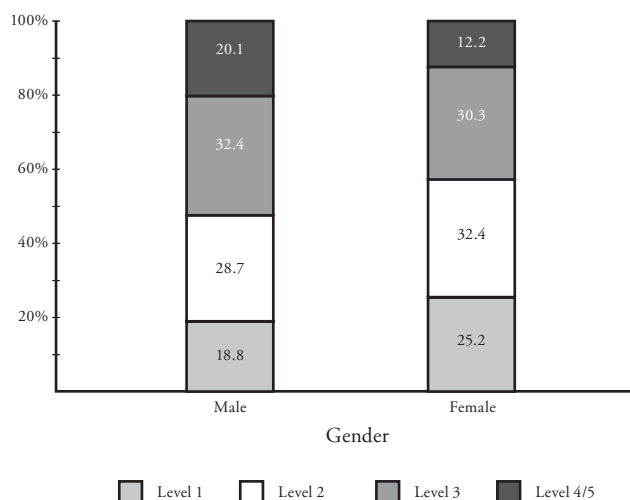
Income

Although there is obviously no direct causal relationship, there are startlingly substantial and direct benefits in financial terms from having higher levels of literacy or numeracy performance as measured by ALLS. For example, those with an assessed prose literacy skill level of 1 had a median personal gross weekly income of \$205 per week less than those with a skill level of 2. The difference between those with a skill level of 2 and 3 was \$192 per week. This gap in income potential remained fairly steady as people moved up the skill levels.

Questions, questions?

Although the above is only a brief snapshot of some of the initial data from ALLS, it provides information to provoke a range of questions. It provides the opportunity for reflection, animated discussions and debates, and hopefully actions in relation to the support for and place of adult LLN in the broader education and training sectors. It has messages for government, industry and business in terms of human capital, economic and workforce issues, but also has messages for government, educators and social planners in terms of social capital, education, training policy and planning. Below are posed some questions that potentially arise out of the ALLS.

Figure 4. Proportion of persons in each level for Numeracy. Male versus Female.



Vocational education and training and skills shortages

In terms of human capital, economic and workforce issues there is a wide number of questions that arise:

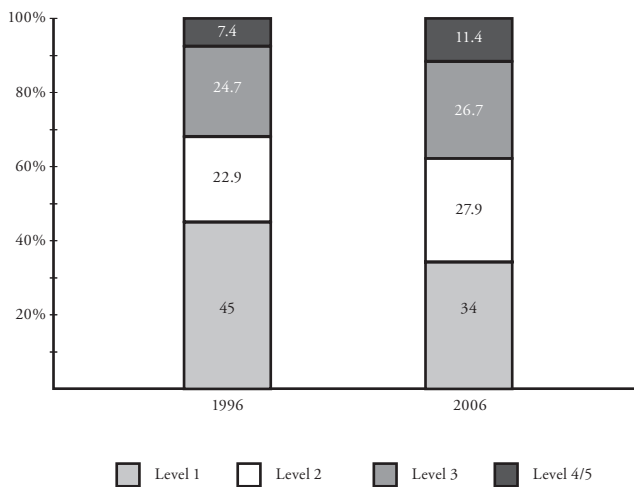
- If, as COAG says, 'With a declining proportion of the population being of working age, and with the premium for skilled workers increasing, Australia needs to increase the proportion of adults who have the skills and qualifications needed to enjoy active and productive working lives', (COAG, 2006, p.4) do the results of ALLS show that the core skills of literacy and numeracy are significant barriers to achieving this aim?
- What are the implications for the training system? Which groups of adults are we targeting in particular industries? What skills do they have or not have? How do we support them? Do we support them?
- What are the literacy and numeracy skill requirements of training, on-the-job requirements, the content of VET courses and Training Packages and training materials? How do these compare with what ALLS is saying about the skills potential learners and participants have?
- Are vocational and workplace teachers and trainers able to cope with learners with low levels of LLN? Are they supported?
- What happened in New Zealand between IALS and ALLS that enabled a substantial improvement in their reduction of the percentage of adults at the lowest two levels in document literacy? What could Australia learn from the New Zealand experience?

Social capital implications

In terms of social capital issues and related education and social policy and planning:

- What are the connections between the literacy and numeracy performance of adults as measured by ALLS in

Figure 5. Proportion of persons with each of the skill levels across Australia for prose and document literacy 1996 vs 2006 for people whose first language was not English.



relation to social capital outcomes? What are the personal, financial and social implications and consequences of poor literacy or numeracy skills for different groups of adults within society? What are the implications for government and non-government services?

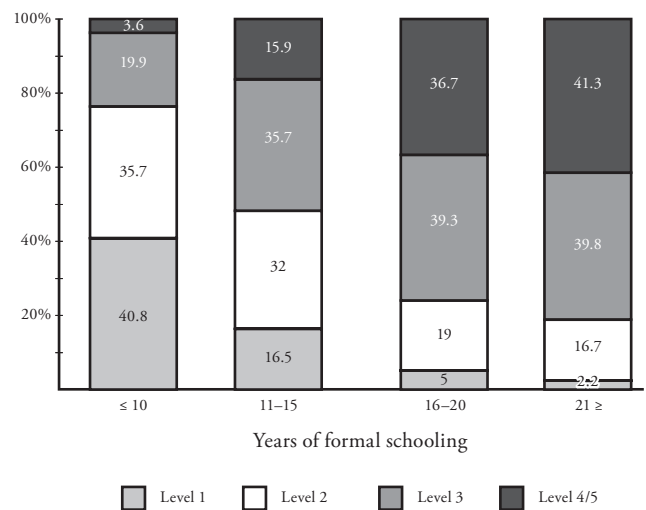
- What, if any, relationship exists between literacy levels and health and welfare? What is the relationship between (self-assessed) health status and health-related literacy?
- Linking the health literacy performance of ALLS and the results in relation to age, what implications are there in relation to Australia's ageing population?
- How do literacy and numeracy levels relate to respondents' income levels, dependency on social security benefits, their involvement in community activities, etc?

Numeracy

Given the results for numeracy, especially with regard to gender differences:

- What do the results mean about the numeracy competence of women? What do we do now in numeracy (and maths) teaching and practices that disadvantages women/girls? What are the social consequences? Can we link this with other research, for example, Bynner & Parsons, 2005? How do we address the gender issues and priorities?
- What policy or program actions have we taken or not taken in relation to numeracy? How does literacy compare with numeracy—at the research, policy, program and funding level? At the provider level? At the classroom level? Is it an equal partnership?
- What is the overlap between literacy and numeracy performance? Are they the same adults with low levels of both?
- What are the population characteristics associated with adults with low numeracy? Are these the same as for

Figure 6. Proportion of persons in each level for Document literacy. Years of formal education.



literacy? Is low numeracy concentrated among some population groups?

- What are the labour market outcomes for those with low numeracy? Are they concentrated in certain occupations? Industrial sectors?
- What are the implications for VET training and curriculum?
- What are the implications for school maths curriculum and teaching?

Education

Apart from the above, for educators and education researchers can we find out more information about teaching and learning:

- What factors impact on success in literacy and/or numeracy?
- What makes tasks and items harder for (some) people and easier for others?
- What factors make tasks and items more difficult?

Limitations and benefits

In any such large-scale survey, of course there will be and are limitations about what the survey assesses and how accurately it assesses. ALLS does only provide a statistical 'snapshot' of the performance and abilities of the adult population in relation to a heavily reading-dependent test of literacy, numeracy and problem solving. The emphasis is on information processing via reading.

Survey assessment items used in a testing situation can only imitate real life literacy and numeracy tasks, and authenticity and validity are limited by the requirement for written responses with no allowance for oral interaction or support. As well, the survey only deals with English, and an international/global view of English at that. There is no assessment of writing skills per

se and no writing scale has been developed. Therefore, ALLS is a survey about *aspects* of literacy and numeracy, and not the whole spectrum of literacies or numeracies that are part of today's more complex and information rich society.

However, within the parameters that the survey developers have set out to achieve and measure, which are comprehensively set out and documented in the background and theoretical papers, ALLS data provides a statistical snapshot of the performance and abilities of the adult population across a number of domains. The ALLS data provides the ability to compare and analyse performance against a wide range of population categories, characteristics and attitudes including on a statewide or international basis. This provides the ability to look for factors and influences on performance.

Importantly, it tells a wide range of audiences something they would otherwise not know; for example, it dispels the myth of a 100 per cent literacy rate in Australia. The survey and its consequent research and analysis provides evidence and support for the important and vital role that English language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills play in a range of contexts and situations.

The ALLS data sets that are available from ABS provide a rich source of data for further research and understanding about the role and impact of LLN skill development. Further, the research and theories that have been developed and sit behind the scales—for example, the reading complexity of text and task, the complexity of numeracy tasks—are valuable inputs in to the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy.

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education manager at CAE. Dave helped develop the numeracy component of the international Adult Literacy and Lifeskills survey (ALLS), and was part of the reference group for implementing ALLS in Australia.

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Out the back: men's sheds and informal learning

by Mike Brown, Barry Golding and Annette Foley

Some experts say a mental state of relaxed concentration—when the brain produces alpha waves—is the most conducive to learning. Perhaps this is why the friendly atmosphere and ambience in men's sheds supports the process of informal learning.

Introduction

This paper discusses aspects of men's learning derived from our study of mostly older men who are coming together, talking, working and socialising in community sheds across Australia (Golding et al 2007). The paper looks at the social, informal and autonomous learning and considers the significance of the community work-like settings. Mentoring, coaching, 'sitting next to George' and 'hanging out on the periphery', are common forms of social pedagogical interaction in these contexts as are group discussion, conversations and low-key questioning. In this paper the mostly older men's learning is analysed as a subset of lifelong learning.

The participants in the study are mostly older men—some retired, some recovering from illness or injury, others unable to find full-time paid work. However all share a social space and an undefined but common purpose that due to ageing bodies and faculties is sometimes illusionary as much as real, but that is loosely focused around regular, hands-on participation in traditional, male-orientated, goal-directed activities.

Considered highly significant to participation in the learning and group activities, is the development of male friendships referred to as mateship amongst men in Australia. These friendships develop through participation and inclusion in activity that occurs in social and community spaces. Our research shows that access to, and inclusion in, these male-orientated group spaces provides an avenue for the development of friendships, trust, support and reciprocity. Through our research we found that the associated learning and life-stage development that occurs in these environments leads to self-reported improvements in happiness, health and wellbeing, and feelings of social connection.

The participants in our study are generally considered to be a missing group or cohort in adult education. It also picks up on the trend that we observe in Australia about 'a remarkable explosion in individualised, self-directed and autonomous forms of learning that have occurred without involving adult educators'. Considered central to our study were the places, spaces and faces.

Lifelong learning

The autonomous, informal learning that men are doing through community-based sheds can be located within the broad field of lifelong learning. In this section we identify some significant aspects of lifelong learning with which we can join up the findings of our study. Field and Leicester (2000) acknowledge that the term lifelong learning is a description of learning that goes beyond school and formal education to suggest a learning process that spans the whole of one's life. They suggest that the term originates from policy discourse and so has come to be associated with worthwhile learning and therefore most often used in an approving way.

It is a learning that is considered worthwhile to the individual and to the society to which the individuals are a part. It is a form of learning where some of the informal aspects are facilitated by libraries, museums, art galleries, botanical gardens, motor, garden, leisure, and recreational shows; also by reading books, newspapers, magazines, watching movies, and conversations with tourists, travellers, skilled artists, tradespeople and knowledgeable others. In effect lifelong learning is a kind of learning that has the potential to occur through most social interactions with others.

Lee in Longworth (2003) makes the point that while schools prepare students for the world, in particular for employment, a characteristic of lifelong learning is that the enormous emphasis on career and the world of work is excluded or at least marginalised. Instead critical areas such as the arts, citizenship and personal quality of life are more prominent. As Longworth suggests in its broadest sense learning is social, economic, political, personal, cultural and educational. He also contends that learning means handing ownership of the learning over to the learner and not the teacher. This he argues involves a 180-degree shift of emphasis and power from the provider and teacher to the learner.

Jarvis (2006, p.134) describes lifelong learning as:

the combination of processes throughout a lifetime whereby the whole person—body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions,

beliefs and senses)—experiences social situations, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the individual person's biography resulting in a continually changing (or more experienced) person.

This definition emphasises whole person body and mind learning in order to adapt to changing circumstances.

The five themes

Hargreaves (2004) suggests that five themes can be associated with lifelong learning. The first of these involves a shift away from a content focus, and instead overtly focuses on learning as a process. Here, individuals learn how they learn and therefore how to learn. Self-awareness and understanding of how individuals can learn is considered a means to equip learners for their futures. The second theme is the development of generic and hopefully transferable skills like problem-solving, negotiation, decision-making, communication and interpersonal skills. The third theme involves the pursuing of a project. Hargreaves emphasises the authenticity involved in doing projects. There is also a relative sense of indeterminacy; of there being no one right way or means for achieving desired ends. Rather there are many paths to completion. The final two themes emphasised by Hargreaves are the importance of mentors and coaches rather than teachers. The fifth theme is personalisation. This refers to the need to individualise the learning to the specific needs of the learners.

McGivney (2004) in her book *Men earn and women learn*, looks at the gender divide in adult learning and captures a significant focus. She looks at the gendered nature of adult learning provision and participation, and suggests strategies for bridging the gender divide. She also considers the importance of building social capital and social connection. In addition, and like Finsden (2004) and Longworth (2003), McGivney talks about the need to include and encourage participation and to develop forms of active citizenship.

Probably one of the most powerful markers of what it means to be part of the developed world is that more people are now living longer and on average achieving older age. This stage is described as the third age of life. This third age can be further subdivided into the younger old people and the older old people. The former is often marked by calls for active recreation, while the latter is more about dealing with the onset of frailty and demise of agility and faculty, leading to loss of independence and later to death. Finsden (2005) looks specifically at the learning of older learners, and puts forward a critical form of educational gerontology. In his work he utilises critical theory to explore issues of justice and equality across boundaries of social class, gender and ethnicity.

In short, lifelong learning occurs over the whole of life, including for older learners. It refers to the requirement of adapting to changing circumstances often associated to adjustments around health, mobility, employment, relationships, loss and living arrangements. In terms of understanding, it is possible that during this stage of life, while some understandings might come others may start to slip away. A significant aspect of lifelong learning for older learners is a tendency to shift inwardly, and so meaning-making and episodes within life histories are visited and re-visited through reflection and self-reflection (Brown 2007).



For some, learning is very social, and the mere fact of it being social, even by itself, means that it is contributing to the satisfying of needs. Friendship arises as a support to learning as learners are motivated to attend and interact as part of contributing and maintaining friendships. Mateship is by degree a powerful form of friendship and closeness that can develop between people, yet it can take a number of forms as explained in Edgar (1997). On the one hand, mates and mateship can refer to married couples and life partners. On the other hand, mateship can also refer to very close friendships—most commonly friendships between men. An example of the latter form is a mateship that is forged between soldiers who have endured the hardships, pain and suffering caused by war, or others who may have a friendship forged through shared experiences of hardships and adversaries.

Methodology

This paper builds upon research that was first reported on men's learning in community-based sheds across Australia (Golding et al 2007). Specifically, this paper reports, analyses, and discusses data derived from surveys and interviews with the men in 25 community sheds across Australia throughout 2006. However it should be acknowledged that academic research can become problematic when researchers bring frameworks to bear on data and evidence that are outside the life world of the participants in the study. Recognising this fact has meant that we as researchers have been careful and respectful of the participants in the study, and have interpreted the data in a very naturalistic way. This naturalistic and grounded approach has meant that we have remained with our data.

The findings: who uses men's sheds and why?

Community sheds across Australia are catering for mostly older men. Typically, they are the size of a double or triple car garage. They support hands-on activity like woodwork and metalwork, with furniture making and mending, toy making and welding projects common. Some sheds have a recreation area with a pool table and a few lounge chairs. Most have a preparation area, or at least a sink, for food, tea and coffee preparation area, or at least a sink. Some have annexed outdoor space immediately adjacent to the shed for the location of a barbeque area and even a garden.

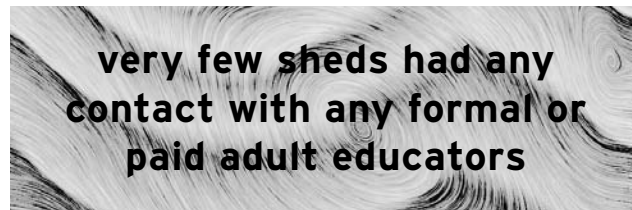
In terms of location, of the 180 sheds identified to be operating across Australia, it is interesting to note that almost all of these are to the south of the continent with sheds most prominent in the states of South Australia and Tasmania, but also in the southern end of Western Australia and Victoria. Significantly, the location of the sheds coincides with Lattimore's research for the Australian Productivity Commission. Lattimore (2007) identifies the geographical locations where large numbers of economically inactive men reside.

The main participants at sheds are mostly retired, unemployed or isolated older men who are outside the labour market and therefore considered to be economically inactive. In the study, one half were found to be over 65 years of age, most were recently retired and others were involuntarily withdrawn from the workforce. Stories were collected from some men who experienced a kind of employment limbo. This included overt and covert age discrimination. One shedder recalled that while nothing was said to him directly by his manager at work he found that he was continually left off the work roster. Three out of four men were on some kind of pension, one in five was not able to secure paid work but hoped to do so, and one in five was a war veteran.

The role of life partners was an interesting aspect of the findings. Younger men who participated in shed activities tended to be single, and were amongst those hoping to return to the paid workforce in the future. Older retired men were more likely to be living with a partner and have experienced less significant recent changes to health, wellbeing, security and financial status than the younger men. Interestingly, we suspect that the retired older men who were receiving support and companionship from their life partners away from the shed, are the same people who are supporting the younger single men at the shed who have experienced significant changes and disjuncture in their lives.

Participants at the shed refer to themselves as shedders. Shedders with life partners typically reported degrees of underfoot syndrome. This is where the newly retired person is spending much more time in the family home and with

their partner to the degree that they get in one another's way, disrupting pre-retirement domestic routines. Amongst the shedders we interviewed and surveyed, half have retired or had major health crisis in the last five years. One-third has been referred to the shed by a health or welfare worker and half of them heard about the shed from a friend.



Of the over 65-year-old shedders, many did not have access to their own shed. Most go along to the shed for social reasons. The shedders reported friendship and companionship to be very important and wanted to share the company, space and activity of other men. It was interesting that one-third of sheds were available to both men and women, one-third welcomed women as visitors and one-third wanted to be men-only spaces.

Forty percent of shedders are former qualified tradesmen. These people often take on leadership roles in the learning process, and are prominent in the running of the shed. Numerous shedders however, also reported that they had worked in clerical, retail or even managerial roles, and had not previously worked with their hands. Occupational health and safety is a significant focus of each and every shed. All are strict, and enforce safe work practices. A number of the sheds told of running formal and informal programs for young and even school-age learners. Some of these were school resisters and others were doing school-related programs. One group of shedders even talked about extending their mentoring role where they were 'assisting young people to make things' into a 'going fishing on Sundays' program.

In terms of learning, men cited the lack of compulsion as important. Rather than teacher/learner relationships, they preferred instead doing projects and developing peer mentoring and coaching relationships with others. While one in four experienced some form of learning difficulties, three out of four men were interested in some kind of further learning through the shed. Most shedders reported limited success with education and learning at school, yet relished the opportunity to learn in informal ways at the shed.

The preferred learning approaches reported by the shedders were for hands-on activity in practical situations, and preferably in informal contexts. 'Sitting next to George' and/or initially observing from the periphery, as with the community of practice model of learning, was very common. Thirty percent have positive recollections of formal learning and 15 percent

had attended some form of formal learning in the last year. Interestingly, very few sheds had any contact with any formal or paid adult educators, though most of the sheds had some form of supervisor whose work can be seen to have a significant educational component to it.

Work-like activities in work-like spaces

McGivney (2004) has shown that men tend to focus on their roles as earners rather than as learners. Through much of their lives, their identities and self-worth is developed in association with their role as workers and as providers. Often they participated in highly gendered, paid work activities working alongside other men, using tools, equipment and processes that many considered gendered. In short, they often work, but not always, with other men in highly segregated occupations. Many workplaces, and more accurately sections within workplaces, often take on gendered cultures and behaviours.

Superficially, sheds as a space resemble paid workplaces. What is different is that they are ostensibly for older, retired, injured workers who like to make, mend and produce things. However there are some very notable differences. Some of these differences are significant and need to be pointed out. First, there is a lack of compulsion at the shed. Sheddens can choose to work as much as they like and go home when they like. Second, there is a negotiated and collaborative running of the sheds. Third, shedders like to do authentic, socially useful projects such as community maintenance, the making of toys, the mending of bikes and even the construction of makeshift wheelchairs for injured people as part of overseas aid programs.

There is a strong sense of reciprocity, shedders talk about 'giving back' to the community and in 'passing on' their skills to others. Similarly, they share brews (tea and coffee), food, knowledge, effort and achievements with one another. They share common ground, doing things together and they talk. Some reflected and reported personal horror stories in their life histories prior to coming to the shed, of contemplating suicide, of alcohol issues through to experiencing extreme loneliness. Instead shedders reported having fun, laughing and enjoying themselves. Across the board they speak about have purpose and feeling better about themselves and their lives as a consequence of participating in the shed. They talk about social connection to each other and with their communities.

We suggest that sheds are popular amongst working class men, and reaping success with other men, because they are work-like spaces with many of the familiarities of work but with very different creative conditions. Sheddens contribute to the community by making things or providing services to others. They are active members of communities building connection and self worth. They are getting out and being relatively active, they enjoy the company of other men.

They feel useful, and some are even managing to do very meaningful work.

Conclusion

Sheds, like many contemporary spaces where social and informal learning occurs, are full of gendered contradictions and complexities. Importantly, the men participating in the sheds are reporting increased happiness, satisfaction and social connection.

Associate Professor Barry Golding, Dr Mike Brown and Dr Annette Foley work in the Researching Adult and Vocational Education (RAVE) group in the School of Education at the University of Ballarat. Their projects include an Australia-wide study of men's learning in community contexts, and RAVE is currently trying to put together an international study into men's wellbeing and learning.

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Practical matters

The Homeless World Cup is an annual street soccer tournament with teams of homeless and excluded people from around the world. With the 2008 playoff in December, Karen Manwaring and Linno Rhodes discuss the work of Linno and her adult literacy class in writing a play—the group's fifth—to celebrate an event that is important and life-affirming for its participants.

Play on: putting the Homeless World Cup on stage

'Let's do a play about it!' has become a bit of a familiar request in Linno Rhodes' Adult Literacy class at Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre (CNLC). There are about 12 students in the three-hour, weekly class—many of whom have a mild intellectual disability (MID). Some are long-term attendees, but there are always new students enrolling. Ages range from about 30 to 65, and backgrounds are varied (about 50-50 male and female; some ESL background; some with a hearing impairment, and some with a mental illness). One student is accompanied by a carer, and Linno also works with a disability support worker.

It all began a few years ago, when a student was looking for a way to express his frustration about being given a hard time by public transport inspectors after he'd lost his ticket. Pretty soon the class had dragged chairs out into the yard of the learning centre and lined them up to create their first set—a train. Since then they've collaborated on four plays—*Delicious Nutritious* (about health issues), *Many Happy Returns* (consumer rights and recycling) and *Locomotion!* (loneliness healed by social skills) and *Bin to Work* (about recycling and employment issues).

Many of the literacy class plays have been performed at la Mama's Courthouse theatre, and the latest one is being produced with the aid of funding through ACFE's Community Learning Partnerships. La Mama is a community partner of CNLC for the project.

'The students now expect that we'll do a play every year', Linno says. This time the theme came from an accumulation of topics from past conversations. 'Sometimes people with an MID get pigeonholed—by family and by society. It's assumed that they can't do certain things. So this play is about breaking free of that "old self" and moving to a new self.'

Linno goes on to explain a bit about the play:

The two main characters come from the country and meet on the platform of Southern Cross Station. They realise that they're both on their way to the CNLC to start their new lives.

The characters are on a mission to work out what it is that they love to do. One gets involved in selling *The Big Issue*. The other is having a harder time working out what it is she wants to do with her life. She tries being a postie and faces the occupational hazards of dogs and 'No Junk Mail' signs.

At a bit of a loose end, she goes along with her friend to *The Big Issue* headquarters and finds out that they're looking for members for the Homeless World Cup Soccer Team. She comes to realise that growing up kicking a ball around every day means that she actually was a pretty good soccer player.

The Homeless World Cup will be held in Melbourne at Birrurung Marr near Federation Square, during the first week of December this year. It is an annual street soccer tournament first held in 2003, that unites teams made up of homeless and excluded people from around the world. It has triggered and supports grassroots football projects in over 60 nations. The Homeless World Cup website states:

The impact is consistently significant year on year with 73 per cent of players changing their lives for the better by coming off drugs and alcohol, moving into jobs, education, homes, training, reuniting with families and even going on to become players and coaches for pro or semi-pro football teams.

The Homeless World Cup supporters include UEFA, Nike, UN, Manchester United, Real Madrid, Ambassador Eric Cantona and international footballers Didier Drogba and Rio Ferdinand.

Linno relates the story of one woman from overseas who played in her Homeless World Cup team and was noticed by football scouts—she is now playing A League soccer.

But back to Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre and the play...

... A tip from Linno for teachers thinking of creating plays, particularly with students with an MID, is that it's a good idea to give students titles that they can really take on as a persona—'Especially roles that have some status. Roles

Practical matters

like manager, head coach or umpire that are supported by language that reflects status. In the play the students have “formal meetings” at their “headquarters” and get a real kick out of that’.

So what about those teachers who are thinking about creating plays with their students for the first time? ‘Go really slowly—at their pace’, says Linno. ‘It may take a whole class to produce half a scene, so don’t be constrained by time lines.’

‘I’ve also learned a lot about the importance of involving everyone in the first scene’, Linno notes. ‘Otherwise people are left to get nervous instead of jumping straight in with no time for stage fright’.

Any more teaching tips? ‘Practice every week and build in lots of different exercises around the play. I found a song on Youtube that related to the play. I created an activity where the students read the words and practiced singing along. Then a singer came along to the class and sang it’.

Another activity was a visit to the headquarters of *The Big Issue* where students talked with some of the vendors, met the editor and the manager and asked lots of questions. ‘Hopefully, we’ll be able to borrow some of their Big Issue outfits for the show’, Linno says with a smile and then adds, ‘We met so many people who have got their life back through selling *The Big Issue*.’

‘They found out that you don’t have to be homeless to sell *The Big Issue*. You might be on a disability pension and just want to sell five magazines a week. As long as you’re linked in with a support agency, becoming a Big Issue vendor is an option’.

A couple of the students are thinking of selling *The Big Issue* themselves, and they’ll definitely be cheering on the teams in the Homeless World Cup in December.

Linda (Linno) Rhodes currently works in literacy education for adults at Carlton Neighbourhood and Learning Centre. This is Karen Manwaring’s last edition as commissioning editor of *Fine Print*.



Technical Matters

Michael Chalk used basic audio technologies like CD players and tape recorders to help his literacy students understand the dynamics of group conversations, and also to find out whether they talked too much or too little!

Can you hear us? Audio technologies in the classroom

Around October last year, Jyothi spoke about her experience recording conversations and interviews in an intermediate ESL classroom. Students had found it useful to listen back to their own voices. It helped them understand their pronunciation better and gave them insight into their language development. This would not surprise many teachers of language and literacy. Listening is one of the four major skills fundamental to language learning.

What surprised us was that students began to understand more about participating in group conversation, and the different levels of participation: 'I didn't realise how quiet I was in the group', exclaimed one student. I'm sure many teachers would appreciate any strategy for making students realise they are participating too much or too little in the group discussion.

Increasing demand for learning with technology

Early in 2007, the Access ACE project revisited earlier studies into the uptake of technology within adult community education (ACE) classrooms and organisations around Victoria (Flexible ACE, 2004). Evidently things had changed within three years. Teachers and managers in focus groups said that demand for integrated and clever use of ICT for e-learning and e-business had increased significantly amongst learners, teaching staff and management. People in communities around Victoria are opening more and more to the idea of using technologies for learning.

Many teachers and learners in ACE have access to time in a computer room, and work with word processors, the interweb, and language-learning software such as Protea's Issues in English. However, the use of audio technology for communicative purposes has been limited, even though listening is such a crucial skill for ESL as well as literacy learners. At PRACE, we didn't have access to one of those huge language laboratories that the big colleges have; we had CD players and tape recorders.

We all know that technology is becoming more integral to our lives, and also more portable. It's not merely the networked computer (in a laboratory) any more, but rather how small devices can bring connectivity and function to daily life—the mobile phone, digital cameras, the GPS gadget and

the increasingly ubiquitous mp3 audio player. Access to the internet is seen as a basic right, and not only via computers as small devices become more networked too. Most new phones are multifunctional devices with built-in mp3 players and cameras, and according to recent studies, Australia now has more mobile phones than people.

However, the internet is not accessible to everyone, even when they have the right equipment. Rhonda Daniell found that 'the literacy skills of more than six million Australians have been shown to fall short of those which software developers, web designers and others in the ICT industry often appear to take for granted as normal and in the natural possession of all users' (Learners with English literacy needs).

According to Daniell, more accessible web design demands that people think more about using audio format and multimedia documents, amidst a range of other factors.

Dreams and goals

It was our intention that teachers would develop their abilities with technology, and that learners would improve their speaking and listening skills. Working with audio technologies in the past had led to increased teacher motivation for e-learning options. This motivation can be a driving force in both development and engagement. We wanted to:

- re-imagine the possibilities for using sound and voice in learning
- raise awareness of a range of recent projects which have explored audio in language and literacy classrooms
- improve skills with selected softwares, including audio editors, podcasting tools, web conferencing and internet telephony
- expand awareness of digital storytelling options (DST).

So what happened in class?

At the end it seemed that plenty had occurred, for such a small-scale project. For example:

- Jyothi used both laptop and portable mp3 recorder (an iRiver¹) to record and play back conversations and interviews by students.
- Rohan recorded a set of books to mp3 format for students in his adult literacy group. One student would take away these recordings on a mobile phone.

- Franca recorded student stories to mp3, and also embedded the audio into PowerPoint with text and images.
- Panayota and Jill from Carlton worked with their ESL learners in the kitchen to make videos from images and sound samples, while developing language skills through cooking (Digital storytelling).
- Lauren used podcasts on the web (*abc.net.au*) to achieve Certificate of General Education for Adults (CGEA) outcomes with her Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) students, and also recorded vox-pops during excursions to a youth radio station (SYN-FM).

People on the project also:

- learned about Audacity², the open source audio editing software
- brainstormed ideas around how to use audio and voice technologies in class
- explored other people's podcasts
- joined in virtual meetings at a distance, using Skype
- uploaded our own conversations and reflections to podcasting services.

One terrific outcome for us was that toward the end of the project, teachers who hadn't been involved at the start were keen to join in and find out what was happening. Interestingly, it took the intervention of our mentor, Delia Bradshaw, for us to fully appreciate our strengths and accomplishments. *Fine Print* readers will be well aware of our good fortune in having Delia to guide us, with her renowned expertise in adult literacy, strengthened by involvement in research into audio technologies (for example, Different voices, Different spaces).

Issues for consideration

Information overwhelm

The field of audio technologies is remarkably wide and deep. There's a lot to learn, so it was important to keep the focus straightforward and accessible. Most teachers found it demanding enough to learn the basics of using an mp3 player in class, without venturing into Web2 communication strategies.

Choosing hardware

In selecting our portable mp3 gadgets, we wanted a machine that would record directly to mp3 via a built-in microphone and connect easily to computers without requiring additional software. This led us to choose the iRiver over the iPod (which needs extra equipment to record live conversation).

In retrospect we could have chosen the more expensive model with easier controls. Teachers reported that the iRiver model we selected (the T30) was not intuitive to control. In the twelve months since that decision, the iRiver with more accessible controls and a larger screen has halved in price—down to the \$120 mark.

Teacher time

Naturally, small ACE organisations that want to expand their knowledge in the field of 'technology-assisted language and literacy learning' need to invest in teacher professional development. Unfortunately, while the ACE sector remains so under-funded, sessional teachers are stretched for time over the course of such a project.

Conclusion

This research may have been innovative and new within the context of our organisations, however there have been other investigations into audio technologies. Innovation within an organisation, and within the classroom, depends on filtering this mass of research into practical and bite-sized chunks so teachers on the run can digest the information and integrate it easily into their own practice. We were very fortunate to receive this funding and to find that teachers could work so well together.

Michael Chalk is an adult educator (language, literacy and numeracy) at Preston/Reservoir ACE who supports and encourages teachers using technology in learning. He has been involved in state and national e-learning projects such as LearnScope, Flexible Learning Leaders and Community Engagement. More details at <http://michalk.id.au/>

Notes

1. iRiver: A different brand of mp3 player; 'iPod' has become the generic label as well as a brand name.
2. Audacity: Open source software for editing audio files.

References

- Can you hear us?: <http://canuhear7.wikispaces.com/>
 Access ACE: <http://www.acfe.vic.edu.au/>
 Passion for ACE: <http://conversationsinace.wikispaces.com/passion>
 Different voices, different spaces: <http://duds.flexiblelearning.net.au/index.html>
 Learners with English literacy needs, access and equity in online learning: <http://accessequity.flexiblelearning.net.au/>

Open Forum

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

With funding for cross-provider moderation seeming to have dried up, Dianne Parslow says some RTOs are wondering how they can meet the validation and moderation requirements of the new AQTF regulations. Meanwhile, Sarah Deasey and Linno Rhodes ask that perennial question: How's the new CGEA?

Moderation, validation and the AQTF 2007

AQTF 2007 has three standards, the first of these relates to the RTO providing quality training and assessment. The *User's Guide to the Essential Standard for Registration* states that staff members are required to maintain and improve their competence; that is, to continuously engage in a range of activities to improve their teaching and assessing. Records must be kept of all the activities undertaken. At this stage, this does not mean that teachers are required to upgrade to the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, but this would be one way of keeping up to date.

Evidence that teacher and assessor competence is being maintained and improved could include:

- participating in ongoing professional development
- engaging with professional associations
- participating in peer reviews of training and assessment materials
- attending moderation meetings
- meeting the requirements of the curriculum
- participating in networks and communities of practice
- reading industry journals (such as *Fine Print* and *Literacy Link*)
- consulting with industry.

What does this mean for language, literacy and numeracy teachers and assessors?

Many of the activities listed above are aspects of validation. Validation can also include internal audits, client satisfaction surveys and using an assessment tool bank. Moderation is just one aspect of validation. Moderation can include discussion of the assessment task, the process and/or the student work. Moderation must occur, but it can be done internally as long as teachers liaise with other providers for some kind of validation activity.

For literacy, numeracy and ESL teachers and assessors, industry consultation is more difficult to define because language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills underpin all areas of industry. LLN teachers and assessors need to be confident that what they are delivering is current and relevant. Some ways that this can be achieved include working with other providers and professional associations

such as VALBEC, working with VET trainers, and delivering workplace training.

The definitions of moderation and validation below are taken from the users' guide:

Moderation of assessment

A process which involves assessors in discussing and reaching agreement about assessment processes and outcomes in a particular industry or industry sector. It enables assessors to develop a shared understanding of the requirements of specific training packages, including the relevant competency standards and assessment guidelines, the nature of evidence, how evidence is collected and the basis on which assessment decisions are made.

Validation of assessment

A process for ensuring that the way a unit of competency or group of units is assessed, and the evidence collected through these assessments, are consistent with the requirements of the unit or group of units, of competency and of industry. It includes validating the assessment tools and instruments, the evidence collected using tools and instruments, and the interpretation of that evidence to make a judgement of competence in relation to the same unit(s) of competency. Validation may be undertaken before, during and after the actual assessment activity occurs, and may include both formative and summative assessment (The latter includes assessment for the purpose of granting RPL).

Dianne Parslow is coordinator of literacy and numeracy at the CAE. She can be contacted at: diannep@cae.edu.au.

References

AQTF 2007, Users Guide to the Essential Standards for Registration:

http://www.training.com.au/documents/aqtf2k7_usr-guide-ess-std_final2.pdf

Learning and assessment strategies, part 1, the how-to kit:

http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/E816D019-9150-40AB-8D58-EF29FAD22AEE/11542/how_to_kit.pdf

How's the new CGEA in May 2008?

The Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre (CNLC) is an adult community education (ACE) provider with approximately one hundred language and literacy students. Most are enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) Frameworks, but we also have two Certificate of General Education for Adults (CGEA) classes: the Everyday Literacy class for students with a mild intellectual disability at Initial and Introductory level, and our ALBE group at Certificate levels 1 and 2.

In order to promote more of a 'learning to learn' culture, we have also enrolled all our ESL Frameworks students from Certificate 1 to 3 in the learning plan units of the CGEA. This will act as part of their ESL Frameworks electives, and provide a focus for their learning to learn skills through the development of an individual learning plan and portfolio.

It is still early in the teaching and assessment cycle, after a very short term one. We have been meeting new students, familiarising ourselves with new units, finalising our record keeping procedures, setting up individual learning plans and student portfolios and planning the content around the varied needs and interests of the students.

This is a short snapshot of the CGEA experience so far for one student cohort, giving a simple outline of their program and any emerging issues.

We have a small adult literacy and basic education (ALBE) group of native speakers, and some longer-term resident CALD background students with high oracy who are enrolled part-time at Certificate 1 and 2 for nine hours per week. Their program is outlined in Table 1 on the next page.

We have been setting up student portfolios, with new cover sheets for the new CGEA learning outcomes. We are at the beginning of the assessment cycle, with the collection of work samples, and will have more to report after moderation in June.

If this short piece stimulated questions, comments, or more ideas to share on the new CGEA, please email me at sarahd@cnic.org.au and we can use the feedback for future articles.

Sarah Deasey is further education coordinator and Linno Rhodes is ALBE teacher at the Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre.

Table 1 follows on on page 22 ...

Table 1. Certificate of General Education for Adults class—ALBE group: program.

Class Title	Units of Competency	Comments / Issues
Pathways Class 2 hrs	VBQU142 research pathways & produce a learning plan and portfolio VBQU146 Engage with texts for employment purposes VBQU150 Create routine workplace documents	<p>This class has a specific focus on employability skills, so these units of competency suit the class content. As part of a broad topic about community enterprises, the class had an excursion to “The Big Issue” office, where they were able to see a workplace in action, and hear about the production and marketing process for the magazine. The visit was successful with two students now wanting to work as vendors. This intense look at the magazine has opened up possibilities for all the students in terms of discovering workplaces that will cater for different needs.</p> <p>The students have also been working on their Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) in this class. We are attempting to do this electronically with an ILP template for each student, which they have saved in their own folders on the student server of the CNLC computer network. Each student has now set up their ILP in this way so they can review and add to it regularly.</p>
Numeracy 2 hrs	VBQU152 Investigate and interpret measurements and related formulae for everyday purposes VBQU153 Investigate, interpret and produce numerical and statistical information	<p>This is a mixed ESL and Albe group: with Initial Intro and level 1. They are working in much the same way with the previous certificate, integrating numeracy into topics and everyday life. They have been working on their basic number concepts, and the language of numeracy</p>
Reading and Writing 3 hrs	VBQU143 Implement & review a project VBQ145 Engage with texts of some complexity for learning purposes VBQU147 Engage with texts of some complexity to participate in the community VBQU149 Create texts of some complexity for learning purposes VBQU151 Create texts of some complexity to participate in the community	<p>“Engage with range of texts of some complexity to participate in the community” has meant that in the classroom we have looked at a varied text type including newspaper articles on different issues such as cycling laws, racism in sports, and an article from the RSPCA magazine about tail docking laws. We will also be looking at ways people can access different texts through street text such as graffiti and magazine posters, and zines.</p> <p>The class projects will be personal zines, which will allow the students to work on a project of personal interest as well as ensuring an integrated task with VBQU 147, 149, 151.</p>
Computers 2 hrs	BSBITU201A Produce Simple Word processed documents BSBMN107A Operate a personal Computer	<p>These units of competency do not have quite the focus we would like. Under the GCO we had more latitude and there was more multimedia involved in this class, where the students were making our CNLC student magazine ‘RAW’ using Word powerpoint, publisher, and learning moviemaker. We are on the lookout for another more suitable unit which could be used as an elective for this class.</p>

What's Out There?

Sarah Deasey reviews 'The literacy wars: Why teaching children to read and write is a battleground in Australia', by Ilana Snyder, and finds it to be an accessible and well-written book that offers support against 'the prevailing negative perceptions of what is going on in Australian classrooms'.



Ilana Snyder is an associate professor in the Faculty of Education, Monash University. She has written and lectured extensively on the impact of information and communication technologies in language and literacy learning.

In this book, Snyder turns to a broad issue—the current social, political and pedagogical context of literacy teaching in Australia—against the backdrop of the media 'crusade' by *The Australian* newspaper, beginning with the appearance of articles and editorials in *The Australian* in 2005 and 2006 attacking current teaching methods in English and literacy education.

While the book is about teaching literacy in schools, it is of interest to all literacy teachers.

Definitions of literacy are central to the book. In the first chapter the author makes the important point that literacy is a 'highly contested word'. There is the psychological, cognitive, concept of literacy involving encoding and decoding through the use of grammar, phonics and cognition. Then there is the view of literacy as a social practice: 'reading and writing can be understood and acquired only within the context of the social cultural political economic and historical practices to which they are integral' (p.11). Both understandings, says Snyder, are useful, but there will always be competing understandings and changing definitions.

Competing definitions have come to a 'battleground' created by politicians and the media, with the politicisation of the debates on the 'right and wrong ways to teach English and Literacy' distorting and oversimplifying the many complex issues around literacy learning. The metaphor of 'wars' and 'battleground' may seem extreme, but according to Snyder the feeling that exists on the issue is high. Teachers as a profession have been denigrated, politicians have weighed in to capitalise on the debates, and parents are fearful.

The book is well constructed, beginning with the warlike imagery of Chapter 1 'Literacy under attack', and ending with the more optimistic 'Literacy fights back'. In between, each chapter covers elements relevant to literacy teaching: reading, grammar, culture, gender, testing, technology.

Snyder methodically addresses all these issues. She patiently defends teaching practices; for example, despite what critics say, grammar is taught but not necessarily in the traditional

1950s sense. Students learn about how language works and 'how it varies in different social and cultural settings' (p.40). Despite the current scarifying campaign that phonics is the only solution to literacy problems, research shows that a balanced approach to the teaching of reading, already taken by most teachers, combining phonics, meaning making and writing, contributes to the development of capable and critical readers. Literacy standards are not declining and critical literacy, seen by critics such as Kevin Donnelly as 'all that is wrong with literacy education' (p.71), is essential for readers in understanding the origin and intent of any text. Snyder points to the subtle and complex interplay of 'gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, poverty and rurality' which impact on literacy learning and test results; ignored by the media who prefer blanket recommendations for solving poor performance such as 'teaching more phonics to boys' (p.111).

The literacy wars counters the representations of literacy in much of the media. Snyder presents the complexities of literacy teaching in a broad context of schooling and society today:

Literacy teachers ... do not ignore basic literacy skills, traditional grammar and the books of the canon ... Literacy teachers across Australia draw on rich and flexible repertoires of skills, resources and professional knowledge to meet the needs of the socially culturally and linguistically diverse students in their classrooms (p.213).

Snyder's last chapter is relevant to everyone teaching literacy, with a section called 'Literacy education for the future'. She urges literacy teachers of the older and younger generations to connect and make the best of the past and the present. And looking at current community practices and student identities, she sees teachers 'finding constructive ways to teach in a multilingual, multicultural multi-mediated world'.

For literacy teachers who believe in a dynamic and complex curriculum, this book is a welcome support and defence against what many of us have been despairing over—the prevailing negative perceptions of what is going on in Australian classrooms. It's an accessible and readable book, while grounded in up to date references to literacy theory. It's a book that both educators and the lay community can read and learn from.

Continued on page 27 ...

Curriculum Update

Liz Davidson and Lynne Fitzpatrick describe the newly accredited 21859VIC–21861VIC Certificates I–III in ‘Mumgu-dhal Tyama-tiyt’, formerly ‘Learning pathways for Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’.

New curriculum for indigenous learners

Launch day

Thirty-five teachers and community members attended an information session on newly reaccredited indigenous courses at Chisholm Institute’s indigenous programs unit in Dandenong on April 18, 2008. They came from Gippsland, Warrnambool, Bendigo, Swan Hill, Palm Island (Qld.) and across the metropolitan area.

The session opened with a ‘welcome to country’ by local Dandenong elder Doug Smith, of the Wiradjeri land. Kathy Travis, from the management committee of the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association (VAEA), then officially launched the courses.

The VRQA has reaccredited the formerly named curriculum, ‘Learning pathways for Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’, as 21859VIC–21861VIC Certificates I–III in *Mumgu-dhal Tyama-tiyt*. The information session was the conclusion of the reaccreditation project, which was started in 2007 by the CMM General Studies and Further Education, with funding from the Victorian Office of Training and Tertiary Education.

Those attending the launch welcomed the change in the titles of the certificates. The course reaccreditation project steering committee (PSC) members were committed to changing the course title to an indigenous name that matched the course outcomes. The intention of the qualifications is to provide skills and knowledge for indigenous Australians to enter a range of education and/or employment options. The members

of the PSC summed up these outcomes as ‘message stick of knowledge’. In the absence of a common indigenous language, the Chair of the PSC, Neville Atkinson from VAEAI then approached the Victorian Council of Aboriginal Languages for their advice on an appropriate language for the title.

Mumgu-dhal tyama-tiyt is a combination of two Victorian aboriginal languages: *Woiwurrung* (*mumgu-dhal* = message stick) and *Keeraywooroo* (*tyama-tiyt* = knowledge). In her speech, Kathy Travers thanked the language committees for giving permission to use these words.

The look of the new curriculum is stunning. Arbup Ash Peters, a Wurunjeri/Yorta Yorta man, is an acknowledged artist, Koorie liaison officer and a member of the course reaccreditation PSC. He has provided an artwork, *River spirits*, for the cover.

We are forever walking the pathway of knowledge with the guidance of our elders and spirits. We walk in the footprints of our elders who in turn receive the guidance of our ancestors. Arbup Ash Peters, Wurunjeri/Yorta Yorta
© 2006

Speakers at the launch emphasised the flexibility of the new qualifications. The opportunity is there to include a range of electives developed for the courses, as well as units from Training Packages or from accredited curricula. The PSC provided advice on suitable units from a range of Training Packages. During the information session, Arbup Ash was able to illustrate first hand how Chisholm Institute was including





units from the ATSI Art and Design Training Package in its new courses.

The participants were given a tour of the Indigenous Unit, met teachers and students from the unit, and viewed the artwork. Artwork included that of elder Doug Smith who has been with the unit for 12 years, first as a student, and for the past four years as a teacher. Ash Firebrace, a student in the Chisholm unit who took the photographs on the day, is a winner of the Lin Onus Art Prize.

What's in the new curriculum?

The new curriculum built on and updated the current courses. Development of the qualifications took into account the VAEAI 2007 Koorie State Training Plan recommendations for:

- more Koorie people undertaking vocational education and training and at higher levels
- pre-employment programs
- corrections Victoria Koorie Employment, Education and Training Strategy: education and training for offenders
- pre-apprenticeship taster courses needed
- health workforce training
- confidence building for young Koorie learners.

The focus of each of the certificate courses remains the consolidation and application of cultural knowledge as central to learners being successful in developing a range of skills to enter further education, community or employment options. Each of the three certificate levels has its own 'orientation' and a student can enter at an appropriate level (It is no longer necessary to work your way through the three certificates as prerequisites have been removed).

Content of the three certificates

21859VIC Certificate I in 'Mumgu-dhal Tyama-tiyt'

- Cultural knowledge units. There are three core units which focus on identity issues:
 - VPAU104 Explore your story.
 - VPAU105 Profile an indigenous person or community organisation.
 - VPAU106 Participate in activities related to current indigenous events of significance.
- There are lots of literacy and numeracy units, core and elective, which would also work well in CGEA courses. Some examples of these are:

- VPAU110 Use basic measuring and calculating skills.
- VPAU116 Calculate and communicate sports scores.
- VPAU117 Read and communicate information from newspapers.
- VPAU107 Use presentation skills.
- The project units remain as one unit (VPAU111), as an elective. At this level, participation in a project is seen as a supported activity.

21860VIC Certificate II in 'Mumgu-dhal Tyama-tiyt'

- Cultural knowledge units. At this level, these focus on historical issues and require learners to investigate and present on events in indigenous history and contemporary events.
- 'VET tasters'. These electives are drawn from Induction units across many Training Packages. Learners have the option of exploring a number of different VET areas or working within one area to explore it in some depth.

21861VIC Certificate III in 'Mumgu-dhal Tyama-tiyt'

- Cultural knowledge units. At this level, these focus on researching and sharing information.
- Mentoring and leadership units are included as core activities.
- The suggested electives are drawn from Training Packages in industry areas that have been identified in the 2007 Koorie State Training Plan. These include health, community services, cultural arts, hospitality and training/teachers' aides/school support, among others.

All the Certificate levels include a core unit on developing a learning plan and VPAU103 Develop Study Skills.

The qualifications for teachers and assessors are consistent with the AQTF 2007, but the delivery and assessment of the cultural units also require participation by indigenous community members, either as teachers or assessors, or as part of a team.

The curriculum can be downloaded from the Training Support Network. <http://trainingsupport.otte.vic.gov.au> or a hard copy purchased from the SICMM Clearinghouse (9919 8413 or email sicmm.clearinghouse@vu.edu.au).

One of the day's aims was to start up a network of teachers using the curriculum. The CMM team would like to thank all involved in organising the session at Chisholm, and those who attended.

For more information contact Lynne or Liz at sicmm.generalstudies@vu.edu.au.

Liz Davidson and Lynne Fitzpatrick are Curriculum Maintenance Managers for general studies and further education at Victoria University.

Foreign Correspondence

When literacy teacher Annabel McDonald made a sudden shift from theories, books and lectures to working with 'real live students', the change also took her across the world from her native Scotland to the CAE centre in Melbourne.

I have spent the last 15 weeks at the CAE in Melbourne doing an adult literacy placement. I'm studying for a BA in Community Education in Glasgow, Scotland. My main reasons for coming to Australia and to Melbourne were that I wanted to go somewhere different, see how they did literacies, and Australia had the added bonus of being a big adventure.

Due to the nature of my course, the placements that students go on vary widely: youth work, family work, Princes' trust, street work and various forms of adult literacies and ESL. In our three years at university we have to undertake two placements of 15 weeks to prepare us for work, and to go and engage with people on graduating. These are such valuable experiences, and put all of our learning and hard toil at university into context. My third year specialism and dissertation revolved around adult education and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), so it seemed only fitting that my final placement should be in a literacy context.

In Scotland I'm used to the community education department at Strathclyde University with the jargon, the Scottish Executive (the devolved Scottish government) policy and our education and social systems. So going from the comfortable world of books, hypothetical students and curriculum plans, theories and letting my tutors tell me about their experiences, to actually working with real live students has been a big learning curve. One of the highlights of being on placement has been getting to know students' motivations and experiences of learning. My experience prior to placement was very much second-hand (if not third and fourth), and being on placement has put into context what I have been studying and reading about.

Starting from scratch in a new education system was a challenge. It took a little while to work out the meanings and gain an understanding of all the acronyms and abbreviations. Once I had a big list of meanings pinned above my desk, things started to make a bit more sense and I could relate different organisations, bodies, and so on to a Scottish equivalent, and things started to become clearer.

On one of my first days I sat down and Googled the Certificate of General Education for Adults (CGEA). I'm lucky on placement to be able to be a part of such a variety of classes: English, science, supported numeracy and computers. It has given insight into such a wide range of skill levels,

backgrounds, ages and personalities of the students. It has also given a good overview of the certificate from the various subjects and levels.

In getting to know the ins and outs of the CAE and the Australian education system, I found I was constantly relating everything back to Scottish examples in order to understand things better. But the structure of the CAE seemed unique in that it had a balance between the formal and the informal education sectors that I hadn't come across before. In Scotland there is a gap between literacies being taught in community-based adult education projects (the equivalent to community houses), and in formalised colleges (like TAFEs).

In my opinion, there seems to be a gap where the CAE should fit into the Scottish system. Somewhere that offers a structured delivery, allows for flexibility, and is learner-centred in a more informal setting and structure, but can provide the stability and opportunities for progression that doesn't seem to be available in some informal education systems. This optional accreditation and assessment allows the learner the option of starting out quite informally (not being assessed) and then having the option later of being formally assessed.

In Scotland, adult education sits alongside community, family and youth work. Graduates of community education are qualified to work in adult education but not in secondary or primary schools. There has recently been a qualification piloted called Teaching Qualification in Adult Learning (TQAL). Along with this new teaching qualification, literacy has gained recognition amongst the general public with television promotion, literature drops in newspapers and through local authority promotions. The Big Plus is a large government-funded organisation responsible for the promotion of learning opportunities across Scotland. It also offers a helpline to contact and find out what learning opportunities are available in any particular locality.

The Scottish Executive has social capital and lifelong learning at the forefront of most of its agendas, increasing Scotland's wealth, security and prosperity as a small country. This seems to be mirrored in the contexts that the CGEA is based on: social, work, education and community development. In Scottish literacy there is a big emphasis on adults learning basic skills such as reading, writing and numeracy, but also



building up on previous knowledge, life experience and other aspects of lifelong learning such as personal fulfillment and confidence. There is also a drive towards social practice of literacies, and making literacy learning relevant to everyday contexts for their learners (which the CGEA allows for in the flexibility of curriculum choices).

The flexibility in the CGEA in regard to assessment is similar to community-based adult learning (CBAL) in Scotland, with the opportunity for students to achieve competency rather than specific targets, and to choose when they are assessed. This learner-centred approach is similar to the

Scottish system, where the focus is on knowledge, learning preferences and skill development/transfer, but the CGEA offers the option of an accredited certificate for learning in competency-based assessment which, to my knowledge, Scotland hasn't offered as yet.

On a more personal note, vowels were one problem I came across in the first few weeks. When spelling words out loud, I would say 'a' and 'e' would get written down; say 'i' and 'a' would appear on someone's page. It took a little while till I figured that 'i' for ice cream and 'a' for apple work as a good solution!

While my accent is not as strong as some typically Scottish accents (think Billy Connolly, Taggart and the rest), there is an issue in Scotland with the dialects and colloquial speech for ESOL learners. A resources bank called Sound Scotland (www.aloscotland.com) has gone some way to tackle this, with listening and speaking activities designed to develop skills for those who have English as a second language and are living and working in Scottish communities.

My time at CAE and in Australia has been great. I never thought I'd get so many opportunities, or learn so much more than I expected. CAE has been a great place to work (the post office nearby has been very handy for sending postcards home) and it has been a privilege to teach and be taught here. I think I'll go home with a lot more than just good memories and a stuffed koala.

Annabel Macdonald will return to Glasgow in June, with a view to going back to university in September to finish her honours year.

... continued from page 23

I felt it affirmed and brought me up to date with the latest in understandings of what literacy teaching is at this point in the century, with reference to history and reference to the future.

The literacy wars: Why teaching children to read and write is a battleground in Australia, by Ilana Snyder, Allen and Unwin, 2008.

Sarah Deasey is the further education coordinator at Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre.

The passing of a literacy pioneer: a tribute to the late Nance Hovey OAM

Earlier this year, VALBEC was saddened to learn of the death of VALBEC life member and adult literacy stalwart Nance Hovey, whose work in adult literacy began more than 30 years ago and was recognised with an awarding of the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM). As VALBEC celebrates its 30th anniversary this year, it is fitting to honour the life of one of the pioneers of the adult literacy movement in rural Victoria.

Nance spent many years as a coordinator in the north-west of Victoria, and made a major contribution to professionalism in adult literacy work and advocacy on behalf of rural programs. She began working in adult literacy education before the Victorian Adult Literacy Council was formed in 1978.

Nance was a regular contributor to *Victorian Adult Literacy News* and then later to *Fine Print*. One way to honour her work and to share this history with practitioners of today is to quote some words written by her in *Victorian Adult Literacy News* and in *Fine Print*. The chosen excerpts illustrate Nance's untiring commitment to her community, to supporting volunteer tutors and to adult literacy work in the region.

One farm worker who was keeping pigs as a sideline was helped by studying feeding tables, keeping a journal of income and expenses. Articles in farm magazines were put on tape for him to read and follow ... (Excerpt from article by Nance Hovey, 'Hints from Horsham', in *Victorian Adult Literacy News*, no.6, 1978)

If anything was needed to confirm my faith in the ability of people to 'love their neighbours as themselves', the loyalty and dedication of the group of voluntary tutors working at the Horsham Reading Centre has done just that. Without them we could not exist—the outreach into the community is becoming stronger and more varied as time passes ... (Excerpt from article by Nance Hovey, 'The Horsham Reading Centre', in *Fine Print*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1983)

There is one aspect of the Wimmera that is accepted by those living in this 'best spot in Australia'. This is the problem (for me as the new sub-regional coordinator, the problem) of the great distances to be covered between localities, towns and cities ... What brings results in Ballarat might be a great flop in another town. After trying several approaches I realised that the prime movement must come from the community itself if it was to succeed ... (Excerpt from article by Nance Hovey, 'Reflections of a Regional Coordinator', printed in *Fine Print*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1985)



Three tributes to Nance follow.

Nance Hovey was an amazing person, very much loved in Horsham and surrounding districts. She nurtured the members of those small groups, both tutors and students, with a deep understanding of the dynamics of small communities and with compassion. When she was no longer able to drive to cover the distance the local committee funded an assistant to be her driver. Although structures changed, her values were true and enduring.

We used to be in awe of her energy ... she used to get up at 4am in order to catch the train to come to Melbourne for meetings, and she always came: she was determined (by example, without saying so) to keep up with events and information.

Nance was a very gracious person and symbolic of those early days of the adult literacy movement. She was an astute listener, committed to volunteers and committed to furthering adult literacy work in the country. She is representative of the sort of woman the movement was founded on—generous with her time, a community developer in the best sense of the word, committed to second chance learning and nurturing of tutors and students.

Nance's legacy will live on in the Horsham community and beyond for the many years she gave to furthering the cause of adult literacy education in rural Victoria.

Compiled by Daryl Evans with contributions from Heather Haughton, Aileen Treloar Coates and Beverley Campbell—all of whom have been active in the adult literacy field for many years.