

Publication Details

Commissioning Editor:
Tricia Bowen

Copy Editor: Glen Dower
writer@alphalink.com.au

Fine Print Editorial Group:
Sarah Deasey, Julie Palmer, Debbie
Soccio, Lynne Matheson, Jane
Westwood

Subscription, advertising and editorial
inquiries:

VALBEC
PO Box 861
Springvale South, 3172
Telephone: (03) 9546 6892
Email: info@valbec.org.au

Fine Print is published by the
Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic
Education Council Inc. (VALBEC).

Fine Print is the registered journal of
VALBEC: ISSN No: 0159-3978

No part of it may be reproduced
without prior permission.

The opinions expressed through this
material are not necessarily those
of the Fine Print editorial group or
VALBEC.

Layout: digital environs, Melbourne
enquiries@digitalenvirons.com

Printing: Document Printing
Australia P/L, Port Melbourne.

Cover image concept: Lynne Matheson



VALBEC and Fine Print acknowledge
the financial support of the ACFE Board



features

VALBEC celebrates 30 years

by Lynne Matheson

Much has changed since the days when *Fine Print* was distributed from the back of a car.

3

Learning in community: the theory, the practice and the big questions

by Liz Suda

We need to learn *in* communities, *as* communities, *for* communities.

7

The Healthy Multicultural School Canteen: a site for adult learning

by Frances Newell

The workplace can be an effective learning environment for adult learners enrolled in lower-level TAFE certificate courses.

12

regulars

Practical Matters

Numeracy teachers in particular should be aware of their students' level of understanding of classroom language and terminology, according to Chris Tully and Vicki Doukas.

15

Beside the Whiteboard

Natalie Warren and Lisa O'Farrell talk about their work at North Melbourne Language and Learning.

17

CGEA Update

The Certificate in General Education for Adults continues to be a hot topic, with positive reports from Gail Pratley at Swinburne TAFE's youth program and Lisa Bartels of VU College at Victoria University.

18

Open Forum

The 'Securing our Future Economic Prosperity' discussion paper was released for comment in April. Lynne Matheson urges VALBEC members to stay informed.

21

Foreign Correspondence

The ambitious Skills for Life program makes heavy demands on practitioners in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. James Simpson explains.

23

What's Out There

Jacinta Agostinelli finds *True Blue? On being Australian*, to be a useful collection of essays, comments and reflections for higher-level ESL and literacy students.

27

Editorial

The spring 2008 edition of *Fine Print* celebrates a very significant birthday. VALBEC is 30 years old and going strong. True, the organisation was born at a very different time. The population of Australia was a little over 14 million, the Walkman and the personal computer were still a few years away and Harry Kewell had just been born. Yet as Lynne Matheson suggests in her feature article 'VALBEC celebrates 30 years':

Many of the activities that were set as the core business in 1978 remain the same today. It is the means to achieving them that has changed, for example the distribution of *Fine Print* from the back seat of Heather Houghton's Mini Minor to E-VALBEC circulated electronically on the first of each month.

In this, our first feature, Lynne describes the 30-year commemorative dinner and the 2008 VALBEC conference while paying tribute to those who have contributed their expertise and energy along the way:

That VALBEC has endured is testament to the vision of those who established the council with the stated intention of becoming redundant once everyone was literate. The reality is that many of the issues and conditions remain the same and as we all know, the work is not yet done. Thirty years on and the faces may have changed but the spirit and commitment to represent adult literacy practitioners and learners continues.

In the second of our feature articles, 'Learning in community: the theory, the practice and the big questions', Liz Suda upholds this spirit of enthusiasm and encourages teachers to take learning into the wider world beyond the classroom. In our third feature, 'The healthy multicultural school canteen as a site for adult learning', Frances Newell describes an inspired community of students undertaking work-integrated learning.

The regular features are here. In Practical Matters, Chris Tully and Vicki Doukas encourage teachers, particularly

those teaching numeracy and mathematics, to think about their students' understanding of the language and terms used in the classroom and ask that we remain aware of students' comprehension. Natalie Warren and Lisa O'Farrell provide a look at the joys and challenges of teaching at North Melbourne Language and Learning in their interview for *Beside the Whiteboard*.

This edition continues with a CGEA update. Gail Pratley presents an informative description of the CGEA youth program at Swinburne TAFE while also taking a wry look at the reaccredited CGEA with 'The Ceeja change we had to have'. It's a tale of fine dining not to be missed. Lisa Bartels adds to the mix by shedding light on a CGEA moderation session for Western Metropolitan Region of ACFE providers.

In Open Forum, Lynne Matheson provides information about the Victorian government's 'Securing our future economic prosperity' discussion paper and alerts us to responses that have been made, while urging VALBEC members to keep informed.

Foreign Correspondence tells of a policy initiative in England, 'Skills for life', and how it has impinged on the lives of teachers in adult basic education. In his article, 'Skills for life in England, Wales and Northern Ireland or Be careful what you wish for', James Simpson, from the University of Leeds, presents an account of bureaucratic demands encroaching upon teachers' time and energy. It may have an uncanny ring of familiarity for local practitioners.

Finally, Jacinta Agostinelli reviews a collection of essays, reflections and comments by many well-known Australians entitled, 'True blue—on being Australian' and provides her thoughts as to using this resource with students.

So, a big thank you to all those who have contributed to this edition and best wishes to all who have been part of VALBEC over its 30 years.

Tricia Bowen

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.

VALBEC celebrates 30 years

by Lynne Matheson

The commemorative dinner was a vibrant gathering of the many dedicated people who over 30 years have built VALBEC into the organisation it is today, and the good vibes continued to flow during the next day's 2008 VALBEC conference.

I see what was, and is, and will abide;
Still glides the Stream, and shall for ever glide;
The Form remains, the Function never dies
William Wordsworth, *After-thought* (1820)

When we chose the theme and imagery for the 30 years of VALBEC celebration dinner and conference, we did not fully grasp the significance of the lines either side in the original poem. The Arthur Streeton painting, *Still glides the stream*, was chosen to represent the natural flow and resilience of VALBEC as an organisation. Reflection on the past and the present was an underlying theme embodied in the title and image that became more significant as the two events unfolded.

I see what was, and is, and will abide

At the 30 years celebration dinner, observing the faces gathered around the table of the past presidents and early committee members, it was clearly evident what was—the strength of passion, commitment and camaraderie—and is, in the faces of the current committee, and will no doubt abide into the future. On Thursday May 15 the room at the RACV club was resplendent with white-clothed round tables glowing with orange candles. As people arrived and greeted each other, you could sense the long periods of time melting away as stories and reminiscing, tinged with laughter and shared experiences flowed. Sixty-two people from across three decades, teachers, writers, administrators, academics, editors, colleagues and most importantly, friends came along for the dinner.

The program for the night was loosely framed around the three-course meal to allow for informality and conversation, but to also acknowledge the significance of the occasion with some formal presentations. The digital story prepared by Debbie Soccio provided a visual snapshot of the faces of those who had lead VALBEC as well as the many achievements of VALBEC. It also provided a visual reminder of the evolving format and content of *Fine Print* showcasing cover designs and article titles, writers and themes of the times. Many of those writers were present in the room and others still continue to contribute.

Beginning with Helen Macrae and acknowledging her induction to the Victorian Honour Roll for Women, then each past-president was presented with a certificate to honour their

contribution to VALBEC. The opportunity to speak was not passed up and each person spoke with honesty and humour about their times and the value they placed on being part of the VALBEC community. Several expressed how they felt that they were given more, or gained more, from being on the committee than they contributed. The strong friendships and links forged and sustained were evident in each person's recollections. Tough times of funding uncertainty and cutbacks, the schisms and debates around pedagogy also featured as threads in the recollections.

Daryl Evans, acknowledged as a driving force and one of the founding members, commented that a healthy organisation can speak of past while at the same time acknowledge the shifts and ructions. Spirit and passion in the language of 'the movement' in the early days were acknowledged as healthy indicators of the vibrancy of vision and community activism. Many of the activities that were set as the core business in 1978 remain the same today. It is the means to achieving them that has changed; for example, the distribution of *Fine Print* from the back seat of Heather Haughton's mini minor to e-valbec circulated electronically on the first of each month.

The young jazz singer concluded the entertainment with a version of 'What a wonderful world'. Around the tables attentive faces from the past and present with smiles of recognition acknowledged the many years that comprise VALBEC's 'wonderful world'. As the night drew to a close it was Delia Bradshaw's last words that seemed to encapsulate it all.

V ery
A uthentic
L onglasting
B old
E nlightening
C ommunity.

Still glides the Stream, and shall for ever glide

The 2008 conference was preceded by four workshops that were well attended and served as a taster of the main event on Friday May 16. Shrieks of laughter and much animated talking emanated from the rooms to indicate engagement in the classroom activities around technology, science and numeracy. These pre-conference workshops have become established as an important adjunct to the conference program, especially



Past presidents. Rear: Julie Hurley, Heather Haughton (exec. officer), Sally Thompson, Robyn Logan, Jenny Dyer, Noel Simpson. Front: Eileen Treloar Coates, Robin Kenrick, Fran O'Neill, Helen Macrae, Beverley Campbell, Sam Thomas.

for regional members. We thank Maria Santburn, Jo Ross, Barbara Cockcroft, Lynda Achren and Chris Tully for their flexibility and expertise in providing these sessions.

The 2008 conference began on a tranquil note with the Parkville Ensemble providing beautiful chamber music in the auditorium as people arrived. Lynne Wannan, ACFE chairperson provided the opening address and was generous in her acknowledgement of the role VALBEC plays in adult literacy and ACE in general. The strains of Mozart gave everyone some time to reflect before Bev Campbell presented her work on the VALBEC history publication, *Reading the Fine Print*. Her richly visual slides and selections of authentic texts and artefacts gave a sample of the depth and quality of her research and personal account of events that had everyone captivated and wanting to hear more.

The 2008 conference program was designed with a different format in response to feedback from previous years. The spacious arrangements for refreshments provided views of Docklands and room to move about and chat with colleagues. The program was structured to minimise movement and at the same time provide expanding choice. People responded to this change positively and it was affirming to see the sessions equally subscribed with no overcrowding!

In Session A, a panel presentation on the ALLS was thought provoking and provided several perspectives on the Australian and local levels for action. Positive psychology proved engaging and the applications of learning in community were explored in relation to the Melbourne Museum. People were challenged in Session B with presentations that contained

reports on projects in technology, community partnerships and research findings in relation to social capital and work and global economics.

Then it was lunchtime and everyone enjoyed the wonderful food and opportunities to converse and network. A novel approach to the regular prize give-aways had people gathered in the foyer while a room was created for Session C. This block of six sessions gave a choice of activities that reflect the diversity of learners in the ACE and TAFE sectors. Employability skills in the CGEA featured as did a DEST-funded literacy project using ICT. Innovative approaches to using theatre with low-level literacy students and a paper on the adjustments made to assessment processes for learners with mental illness had particular relevance, while the healthy canteen project and an exploration of language use in the class room with reference to numeracy provided ideas for ESL and literacy activities and projects.

For many the highpoint of the conference was the afternoon keynote address by Kate Burridge. She began by saying there would be no PowerPoint and a collective sigh of relief could be felt in the auditorium. She held everyone spellbound and hungry for more with her lively and wide ranging talk about 'our ever-changing English language'.

The day ended with a short review and people were keen to complete their evaluations and collect a souvenir wine glass. The 104 (21 pre-conference and 83 conference) completed evaluation forms were uniform in rating each part of the conference high in quality and relevance. The serving of refreshments in the foyer has become an established and

VALBEC Hall of Fame

Patron

- Joan Kirner

Past presidents

- Helen Macrae
- Sam Thomas
- Noel Simpson
- Aileen Treloar-Coates
- Julie Hurley
- Beverley Campbell
- Jenny Dyer
- Rosa McKenna
- Sally Thompson
- Robyn Logan
- Robin Kenrick
- Fran O'Neill

Executive officer

- Heather Haughton

Fine Print editors

- Heather Haughton
- Graham Simmonds
- Aileen Treloar- Coates
- Dale Pobega
- Louise Wignall
- Bob Keith
- Rachel Wilson/Michael Chalk
- Helena Spyrou
- Jenni Oldfield
- Robyn Hodge
- Karen Manwaring

enjoyable end to the day and provides a last opportunity to catch up with colleagues.

We asked people for one key message that they would take from the conference and some of their responses are listed:

Literacy and language is dynamic and ever changing and our present students are part of this process.

How much it can make a difference to affect a positive psychology approach within the workplace as well as on a personal level.

The importance of people with a passion for life long learning for both themselves and those they connect with through their work.

The wider implications of language and literacy education in connectedness with community.



Present committee. Rear: Dianne Parslow, Don MacDowall, Yvonne Russell, Gail Pratley, Jeannie Turnbull, Debbie Soccio. Front: Kerrin Pryor, Lynne Matheson, Ann Haynes, Pauline O'Maley. Not present: John Radalj Corrina Ridley, Teresa Cusack.

Everyone has something to contribute and should be encouraged to participate.

Adult literacy is alive and strong.

Literacy and numeracy teaching is valuable and valued.

Hope is something we need to renew in the face of so many changes.

Read Fine Print!

We are in a global economy and a global workplace.

Language is changing and we need to learn more language not less.

The value in human terms of literacy is huge in building communities and changing lives for the better.

Teachers are interested in being creative and changing with the flow.

Inspiration to be an open thoughtful educator by knowing that others are still working hard at improving adult literacy and language.

Some extra messages from the evaluations:

Thanks for beginning with the Parkville Quartet. What a beautiful experience to have at the beginning of the day and then again after the initial introduction letting us hear them again, giving us that reflective space—so welcome because we spend all day every day giving out to others it was so good to be given that wonderful gift.



Daryl Evans and Geri Pancini.

The 30 years of hard work building VALBEC has laid foundations and it is my role and every teacher in the field's role to honour this heritage by continuing to do our best for our students, while I now work mostly with NESB clients and refugees, the principles remain the same.

We appreciated all the feedback and comments and were very pleased overall with the success of the conference. A huge vote of thanks to all the presenters for their generous involvement and sharing of knowledge and skills with colleagues who attended from right across Victoria, and even one from NT! Thanks also to Don Mac Dowall for his excellent work in managing these two events and the current VALBEC committee for their ongoing support and assistance.

The Form remains, the Function never dies

The possibility of an annual conference and a regular publication were floated at that first meeting to form VALC in 1978. The range of activities that past committees have engaged in will be covered in more detail in the forthcoming book *Reading the Fine Print*. That VALBEC has endured is



Delia Bradshaw.



Barbara Money and Jude Newcombe.

testament to the vision of those who established the council with the stated intention of becoming redundant once everyone was literate. The reality is that many of the issues and conditions remain the same and as we all know, the work is not yet done. Thirty years on and the faces may have changed but the spirit and commitment to represent adult literacy practitioners and learners continues.

Lynne Matheson was convenor of the 30 years Dinner and 2008 conference and is current VALBEC co-president.

Notes

1. Refer to the VALBEC website for presentations and an audio file of Kate Burridge's talk.
2. Photos by Debbie Soccio.

Addendum

Those who attended the dinner: Helen Macrae, Julie Hurley, Barbara Money, Heather Haughton, Bev Campbell, Aileen Treloar Coates, Sam Thomas, Jenny Dyer, Noel Simpson, Audrey Grant, Robin Kenrick, Liz Suda, Karen Manwaring, Fran O'Neill, Jacinta Agostinelli, Michael Chalk, Sarah Deasey, Helena Spyrou, Gail Pratley, Kerrin Pryor, John Radalj, Yvonne Russell, Pauline O'Maley, Diane Parslow, Debbie Soccio, Ann Haynes, Jeannie Turnbull, Lynne Matheson, Julie Simmons, Luke Treadwell, Dora Troupiotis, Lynda Achren, Paul Learmonth, Lilliana Hajincl, Jan Livingstone, Joan Webb, Cheryl Wilkinson, Mystica Perera, Lynne McDonald, Subha Sriram, Peter Peterson, Sally Thompson, Robyn Logan, Lerys Byrnes, Heather Walsh, Daryl Evans, Sue Casey, Deb Davison, Margaret Simmonds, Don MacDowall, George Papallo, Geri Pancini, Rob McCormack, Miriam Faine, Lesley Farrell, Cathy Donovan, Karen Dymke, Jude Newcombe, Delia Bradshaw, Jill Sanguinetti.

Apologies: Joan Kirner, Rosa McKenna, Rex Ennis, Joe Lo Bianco, Penny Sara, Nick Gadd, Philippa MacLean, Sharon Coates, Louise Wignall, Robyn Hodge, Sheryl Sinclair, Jan Hagston, Dave Tout.

Learning in community: the theory, the practice and the big questions

by Liz Suda

We must teach ourselves how to learn ‘in community’—in the rich and diverse communities each of us belongs to—rather than in ‘the’ community.

The word ‘community’ evokes a range of responses, most commonly the concept of a local community—that network of government and non-government organisations that provides services and support to a local area, or a group of people with common interests; for example, the medical community or the further education community. We can find many definitions of the word ‘community’. It’s a concept that evokes the illusion of some kind of ephemeral social matrix that can cure all ills, solve social problems and reach agreement on what is best for its socially, ethnically and economically diverse members.

Community is a ‘feel good’ concept. It creates a ‘warm and fuzzy’ linguistic ambience that promises to deliver everything our hearts desire. In the field of education it is sometimes presented as a panacea for everything that the education system of the late 20th and early 21st century has been unable to fully accomplish. The concept of learning in community attempts to speak into the complexity of what we understand when we use this broad but rather nebulous term ‘community’.

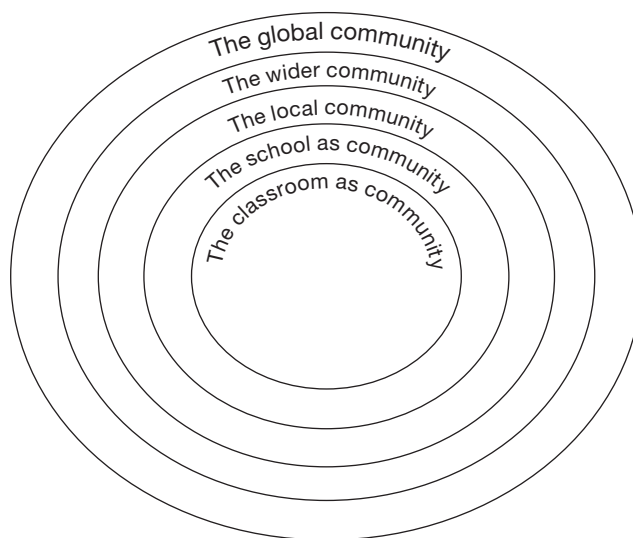
What I would like to explore in this article is the idea that we need to learn how to learn ‘in community’, not in ‘the’ community, but in all the rich and diverse communities that each individual belongs to. That we need to learn *in* communities, *as* communities, *for* communities, is the general thrust of my exploration in this article. An effective community is not an organism that can be assumed as being there; it has to be created, planned for, developed and nurtured. There is a process to learning in community. Given that my current place for learning in community is in Melbourne Museum, I want to use the museum and in particular the Melbourne Story exhibition, as a case study of how we can take learning beyond the classroom community into the broader community and create a sense of connectedness and belonging, our place in the world.

Learning in community: the theory

As a child I played the game of trying to locate myself in the world, to write myself into worlds I had never experienced. This was how I positioned myself:

- Elizabeth Suda
- 6 Reservoir Rd,

- Moe
- Victoria
- Australia
- The World
- The Milky Way
- The Universe



I’m sure many readers would have done the same, but with their own name and place etched into the page. It is a metaphysical yearning that was played out with humour, but it spoke very clearly about our need to connect ourselves to some kind of broader community, to be part of something bigger.

In the same way, we can talk about learning in community as a natural progression of learning in the classroom as a community and then broadening out into the wider community and then the world. A useful way to transpose this metaphysical self into a formal educational context is to think of the world as a giant classroom, a place for learning in, from, with, and for. This kind of learning can potentially engage the student in active, purposeful, experiential learning. As Kolb and others realised, experience is a great teacher, but structured reflective experience provides a systematic means to learning that connects what the learner already knows with what they are yet to know. In the tradition of adult learning principles, as espoused by Knowles and many others, adult learners in particular need to feel that what they are learning has a purpose and builds on what they already know.

Learning in community: the practice

How do we construct learning to facilitate a sense of community within and beyond the classroom?

Enquiry learning, where students are engaged in active research on issues that matter to them, is the most organic way of facilitating a sense of community, of building on what we already know—working in pairs or teams of three or four enables learners to join forces and apply their collective skills to solving a problem. Enquiry learning implies problem posing, dialogue, hypothesis, critical thinking, planning, organising and documenting. Active engagement in framing a project and executing it with a group of people automatically creates a sense of community, a group of people with a shared purpose and a vision for how they might achieve it. Each individual has a clearly defined role to play. Powerful learning can be achieved through a process of open dialogue where all participants have the opportunity to think and talk and clarify meaning. The fundamental principle that applies here is that everyone has something to contribute and has an equal right to participate. Enquiry learning is one type of pedagogy that teaches students how to learn in community. In this kind of community the teacher needs to facilitate collaboration and make explicit the personal, social and collective skills that are required to learn together and work together on real and purposeful tasks. Enquiry learning requires everyone to think in complex ways.

Critical thinking skills include such processes as deductive reasoning, critical analysis, hypothesis, synthesis, inference, deduction and conclusion. In placing the students at the centre of defining their own learning, an investigative enquiry approach allows them to become experts in their given area of investigation; building expertise that can be shared with others.

How can teachers structure and facilitate enquiry learning?

The short answer to this question is that we should encourage learners to ask the big questions, to identify things they want to know about. As Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner argue in their seminal book *Teaching as a subversive activity*: ‘Once you have learned how to ask relevant and appropriate questions, you have learned how to learn and no one can keep you from learning whatever you want or need to know’.

Essential questions are innate and arise from people’s attempts throughout human history, to learn more about the world(s) we live in. They provide foundational understandings and the means by which we frame an enquiry. Essential questions allow us to explore what knowledge is, how it came to be, and how it has changed. They are a vital tool for thinking and acting together, and independently. The essential question is always poised at the boundary of the known and the unknown and automatically ignites the imagination—what, how, why, who, when, where?

Inviting learners to ask questions does not however produce a neat and tidy linear investigation. It can be quite messy. Authentic learning where students are engaged in addressing real life problems and issues through a process of research and development requires the growth of many skills and processes. Students need help in developing those skills, and teachers need to scaffold that learning process. The ultimate aim is to learn by doing something real. But that learning has to be transferable to other situations, so it must include meta-cognitive elements in the course of the process—what have I learned, how can I use this knowledge again, what else do I need to know to do this better next time.

Experience has also shown that often students, particularly adults, don’t know what they want to know, either because they don’t know enough to want to know more, or they are tentative about saying what they want to know as they lack the skills to start an investigation. It is the teacher’s role to stimulate the desire to know more, to provide the framework and processes for developing the skills of enquiry. Student-centred learning does not mean leaving the students to work on their own; significant scaffolding is required. This is where community resources can be extremely helpful.

Community resources

If we look at the wealth of learning resources within the CBD of Melbourne and environs, it is easy to see how one could build a curriculum around such resources:

- Melbourne Museum
- Scienceworks
- Old Melbourne Gaol
- The Zoo
- Federation Square
- ACMI
- Department of Consumer Affairs
- The Electoral Commission
- Immigration Museum
- Parliament
- State Library
- City Museum
- National Gallery of Victoria
- Koorie Heritage Trust
- The Magistrates Court

Each offers stimulating learning environments that can be exploited in a wider learning project. Linking the different experiences is vital. A really important element of this kind of ‘beyond the classroom’ learning is that it provides learners with visceral experiences that can be translated into powerful learning opportunities. It is the framing of such activities that is critical. Preparation and follow-up are central elements to optimising the learning potential of each opportunity. A broader framework, for example, essential questions, can serve to do this very effectively.

The Certificate of General Education for adults suggests areas of learning/ knowledge that active citizens require to participate in work, home and community life in the General Curriculum options:

- Investigate a social issue
- An environmental issue
- Elections and government
- Driving and owning a car
- Arts in Australia
- Consumer affairs
- Community options
- Health care
- The legal system
- The education system
- Indigenous history and issues
- The financial system.

There are close parallels between the topics listed and the cultural organisations that offer learning resources for the community; for example, consumer affairs and the education resources offered by the Department of Consumer Affairs; Indigenous issues are addressed in Bunjilaka gallery at Melbourne Museum and the Koorie Heritage Trust; elections and government at Parliament and the Electoral Commission. Instead of research in the library as the first port of call for information, think community, think experiential learning.

Learning outcomes: skills developed

A cursory glance at the intended learning outcomes of the reading and writing streams of the CGEA certificate clearly shows how the skills required for participating in authentic real life research requires the same skills as stipulated in the certificate. Making phone calls, creating interviews, writing letters, and sourcing directories and information all automatically facilitate the development of the intended learning outcomes of all streams of the certificate. Students develop confidence by making connections with real life learning situations.

The skills required in enquiry learning approaches mirror the sorts of generic vocational skills that adult learners require to become effective workers. Students learn work skills and general knowledge of the world at the same time. Making an appointment with an expert when one is a researcher requires very similar skills to making a phone call to set up a job interview. Each requires preparation, planning and an explicit and clear process.

Enquiry learning gives students the confidence to go out into the world and seek information. One example of this was a unit of work I developed called Dream Holiday. In planning their dream holiday students had to get real information from the internet, travel agents, railways, airports, fellow travellers, all without risking a cent. They had to make phone

calls, negotiate and explain themselves to a whole range of people. This is what is meant by active experiential learning that inspires the imagination and a sense of discovery, but also develops real skills.

Learning in museums

That education is not an affair of telling and being told, but an active construction process ... is a principle almost as generally violated in practice as conceded in theory
John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (1938)

This quote from John Dewey reminds us that the idea of real, engaging, active and purposeful learning has been around for a long time, and it's not always easy to achieve. Constructivist approaches are based on the belief that knowledge is constructed by the learner, that learners are not empty vessels but rather active agents who bring personal and social skills and knowledge to each new learning situation. Constructivist approaches to learning advocate interaction and discovery as the key stimulus for learning. As significant cultural and learning institutions, museums the world over have taken note of these theories in the development of exhibitions and activities. Education programs in museums have adopted interactive and community of enquiry approaches to engaging visitors in learning in museums. Discovery has become the key guiding concept.

More didactic approaches to learning suggest a sequential predetermined view of learning where all knowledge resides outside of the learner. These theories of learning tend more to the 'telling' approach to learning, the depositing of knowledge, the teaching of skills, and the systematic induction into various ways of knowing. It's important to note that there is room for both paradigms of learning. For example, in certain contexts, such as a conference, participants often gain an enormous amount from being told things and shown things. The stimulus response is often what people are looking for, so we should be careful in adopting one approach exclusively at the expense of another. There is a place for both.

Museums have often been regarded as places of showing and telling, and while that tradition has undergone some revision in accommodating constructivist approaches and made exhibitions more conducive to interactivity and social engagement, there are still elements of the traditional paradigms present.

What is an exhibition?

Perhaps the most powerful element of museum exhibitions is their capacity to communicate meaning using a variety of communicative strategies. Using a range of primary source material, text, graphic elements and design features, meaning is constructed in a multilayered approach, each element

conveying some aspect of meaning. Primary source materials used in museums include oral histories, documents, objects, artworks, photographs, film/video, as well as archeological and zoological processes. The design and graphic elements are, however, of equal importance in communicating ideas.

For the critical literacy teacher the museum exhibition offers a rich learning environment for critiquing and enquiring. The Melbourne Story exhibition recently opened at Melbourne Museum is a good example of how history is a matter of interpretation and emphasis. While Melbourne Story offers a comprehensive and thorough overview of Melbourne's history from early settlement to the present day, not all stories can be told. This involves choice and judgement on the part of the many people involved in creating such an exhibition. The Melbourne Story exhibition provides one version of the story, but what other versions are there? This question alone provides a rich vein of enquiry.

The Melbourne Story is told through seven distinct periods:

1. Meeting Place (1835–1850): the meeting of white settlers with the original inhabitants.
2. Gold Town (1850–1880): the gold rush years and the impact it had on Melbourne.
3. Marvellous Melbourne (1880–1900): the Boom and Bust period of Melbourne.
4. Melbourne and the Nation (1900–1920): Federation and the first national parliament held in the exhibition buildings in Melbourne.
5. Electric City (1920–1945): the brightening city, the advent of television, movie cinema, radio, and all forms of electric gadgetry.
6. Suburban City (1945–1980): the growth of the suburbs and the great Australian dream of home ownership.
7. Changing City (1980–present): a film about different perspectives of Melbourne today.

Learning in a community of enquiry

The Melbourne Story provides a wealth of rich information to support a community of enquiry. The essential question one might ask of the Melbourne Story invites one to explore a whole range of themes: What can we learn from the past, to illuminate our experience of the present, in order to imagine a better future?

Students could work in small groups to investigate a theme and then pool their resources as a community to try and answer the question. Themes include:

- Shelter and housing
- Transport and other technologies
- Work, paid and unpaid
- Melbourne's people—identity and population
- Entertainment

- The economy—boom and bust
- Government and democracy.

The key essential question invites a whole range of sub-questions. For example, what can we learn from the transport planners of the past? Did Hoddle envisage the city growing as it did when he designed the grid for Melbourne? Might there have been a better way to have planned transport routes for Melbourne? Each theme invites a host of questions which, if explored thoroughly, serve to answer the key essential question. In this way students become experts in their own area and develop a sense of authorship in the construction of knowledge. The teacher in this instance is responsible for facilitating the process of enquiry and explicitly teaching the thinking processes required to conduct such an enquiry.

Learning in a community of shared experience

The Little Lon section of the Melbourne Story offers the visitor the opportunity to experience life in Little Lonsdale Street as its inhabitants might have lived it in the 1880s. The two houses have been faithfully recreated using the exact measurements of house in the little Lon area, and copies of objects found during archaeological digs conducted before the area was redeveloped in early 2000. The dig revealed detailed information about the conditions that people lived in along Little Lonsdale Street at this time. The two houses illustrate the conditions that a very poor family might have lived in, and a not-so-poor family. The soundscapes tell the stories of different people who lived in the area, including the Italian ice-cream seller Carlo, who tells a colourful tale of life in Little Lon.

This exhibit demonstrates the multi-modal approach of museum design in creating and recreating historical experience. It enables the student to experience learning in a truly visceral sense. The Little Lon exhibit contrasts sharply with the grand buildings that were developed during this same period in the Boom and Bust city of Melbourne in the 1880s and 90s, which the students can also experience by



Little Lon House Melbourne Museum.

entering through a grand façade of the Coles Book arcade, also created in this period.

Visitors can hear the sounds of an old Cobb and Co coach rattling along cobblestones, the crack of a whip and literally imagine the bumpy ride in a creaky carriage.

The Melbourne Story invites visitors to immerse themselves in life in the past and make the connections between the past and the present.

Melbourne Story invites the learner to ask questions

Many questions are raised throughout the exhibition and many stories invite us to explore further. Teachers and students have the opportunity to springboard into all kinds of investigations using the history of Melbourne, as told in Melbourne Story. The City has a diverse range of learning resources that are available to the general public. In order to take learning beyond the classroom, students need to be exposed to the rich learning resources within the wider community.

Moving beyond the Melbourne Story at Melbourne Museum, the learner can discover more information about Indigenous history and culture through Bunjilaka at Melbourne Museum, but then also at the Koorie Heritage Trust and Birrarung Marr at Federation Square. The Immigration Museum fleshes out the story of migration that has been central to the development of Melbourne, while the Chinese Museum in Little Bourke Street depicts the rich cultural and social life of Chinese people in Melbourne since the Gold Rush years.

By extending the research activity further into the community students are given the opportunity to learn in community, exploring together and with experts in the community. The education resources provided on the museum website offer teachers resources to support such an enquiry <http://museumvictoria.com.au/MelbourneStory>.

Demonstrating knowledge in a community of enquiry

An important element in the development of confidence as a learner is to have an audience for newly found expertise in a particular area of study. Communicating ideas is a vital element in the constructivist learning process. There are a number of ways this can be facilitated, using a range of technologies. Students can replicate the museum approach to presenting information, by creating their own exhibition. The following website has resources for creating exhibitions, <http://museumvictoria.com.au/sobs/project.asp>.



Cobb and Co coach Melbourne Museum.

They might use Powerpoint, Photo story or another form of digital story where image sound and text can be employed to communicate ideas and present information. Whichever medium is chosen, the students become active participants in the learning process and gain confidence as experts in a particular field within their community of learners.

There are many different skills which are brought together when we present our learning to others, as the process enables us to reflect, synthesise and draw conclusions from the enquiry. For example, teachers will automatically see that such learning invites the explicit teaching of specific genres of reading and writing and speaking—the research report, recount, personal narrative, the museum exhibition genre, poster presentations, formal talk, letter or phone call. Each of these skills can be showcased in a final presentation that demonstrates student learning outcomes.

The big question: how can teachers learn in community?

There are no hard and fast rules about how one can create a classroom that is a community. Most adult educators understand the need for a safe and positive learning environment. The concept of community and learning *in* community provides a framework for naming that ideal learning environment. A commitment to, a belief in, and an understanding of the value of connecting, collaborating and creating in community is the major ingredient required. The path of discovery will unfold itself in the problem posing and solving activities that accompany such learning journeys. The journey is the destination. Enjoy the trip.

Liz Suda is program coordinator of humanities at Melbourne Museum, where she is responsible for developing programs for primary, secondary and adult learners. She has extensive experience in the adult literacy and ESL field, both in the community and in the tertiary sector, and has recently worked with secondary schools on strategies for learning beyond the classroom.

The healthy multicultural school canteen: a site for adult learning

by Frances Newell

Victoria University's Healthy Multicultural School Canteen provided an authentic workplace setting where students could develop their hospitality, work readiness and English language skills. Of the 15 students who started the course in 2007, 12 obtained Certificate II in Hospitality (Kitchen Operations) and two achieved Certificate I. Only one student dropped out—due to ill health—and she returned in 2008 to complete the course.

Work Integrated Learning (WIL) is increasingly recognised as an important component of post-secondary education. According to McLennan and Keating (2008, p.2): 'This is occurring in the context of both an appreciation of Australia's labour and skills challenges as well as a greater recognition of the workplace as a unique and valuable learning environment for students'. This paper argues that the workplace can be a valuable learning environment not only for higher education students, but also for adult learners enrolled in lower-level TAFE Certificate courses.

A key challenge, however, is to develop a pedagogy which is responsive to student learning needs and maximises the learning opportunities provided by the workplace. The paper draws on Calway and Murphy's (2007) definition of WIL and describes Victoria University's Healthy Multicultural School Canteen as a WIL training platform that meets the needs of adult learners. It concludes by reporting on the outcomes of the Healthy Multicultural School Canteen project.

From 2004 to 2007, Victoria University (VU) managed a Neighbourhood Renewal Employment and Learning program funded by the Department of Human Services. Through this program VU worked with residents, federal, state, and local government, non-government organisations, and community groups to develop a number of community projects including the Healthy Multicultural Canteen at a local primary school.

This WIL project was developed to address three objectives: industry skill shortages; provision of a supportive workplace training environment for disengaged adults, especially sole parents, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD); and to meet the needs of a primary school for a financially sustainable healthy multicultural canteen. The initiative was developed as a partnership between VU, state and local government and the primary school and formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding.

The participants in the project were mature age women, mostly from CALD backgrounds, especially African. The



Anglo participants tended to be sole parents with very little, if any, prior work experience or post secondary education. The trainer, Tracey Lister, is a Melbourne chef with extensive training experience including co-founding the KOTO not-for-profit restaurant and vocational training program for disadvantaged youth in Vietnam.

In this WIL model, the primary school offered part-time paid practical placements in the school canteen to students in Certificate II in Hospitality (Kitchen Operations). The university enrolled the students and trained and supervised them in the school canteen during their six-month part-time hospitality course. This model is in line with a National Centre for Vocational Education and Research recommendation 'for a greater integration of the learners' experiences in the workplace and educational settings. The educational provider might be expected to exercise leadership in bridging what is learnt in the two settings' (Choy, Bowman, Billett, Wignall, & Haukka, 2008, p. 29).

The WIL model is also consistent with Calway and Murphy's (2007) definition of WIL as 'the general term given to learning that occurs through undertaking a component of industry/professional practical experience while studying ... WIL should be expressed through the imperatives of: work-readiness; life-long learning; human and social potential' (Calway & Murphy, 2007, p.18). Within this broad definition Calway and Murphy identify eight types of WIL, including contextual learning and vocational education. Contextual learning aims to give students the opportunity to apply what they have learned to a real-world

example/experience. Vocational education is where most learning occurs on the job (Calway & Murphy, 2007).

In the Healthy Multicultural School Canteen project, the students were enrolled in Certificate II in Hospitality (Kitchen Operations) because the project aimed to equip them with the skills to take an entry-level position in the workforce, or to start an apprenticeship. To achieve this objective students needed to learn specific trade skills, generic work readiness skills and English language skills.

Trade skills

Hospitality trade skills, including fundamental knife skills and basic methods of cookery, were taught one day a week in a community-training kitchen. In addition, two days a week the skills were practiced through the real-world activities required to provide a nutritious, multicultural lunch at the school canteen and to cater for school functions. These skills were mapped against the units of Certificate II in Hospitality (Kitchen Operations). The training model worked well and participants especially appreciated the benefits of constant practice. As one of the students noted: 'When (the trainer) first showed me how to slice the vegetables, I thought I'd never learn, but now after two months, I can do it' (Newell, 2008).

However, the learning that occurred was much more than rote learning by repetition. As Billet argues:

Every day work—'just doing it'—engages workers in an active and constructive process of learning through their participation in goal-directed activities ... This is because the individual has had to identify and select ways of performing the task and then monitor and test these means. (Billet, 2001, p.76)

An example in the canteen was the teaching of knife skills and a standard set of ingredients for wraps. After the standard wraps had been made for several weeks, students were directed to make up additional wraps based on their own selection of ingredients.

Generic employability skills

The authentic workplace environment provided by paid work in the school canteen also ensured the development of generic skills in participants, including: planning, time management, teamwork, communication, personal presentation, and literacy and numeracy. These skills were needed to complete a range of tasks to a high standard and to a tight daily time line. Tasks included ordering stores, implementing a system for taking school lunch orders, timely food preparation to fill orders, implementation of the food safety plan, maintaining hygiene, and banking monies.

In a typical week, schoolteachers would collect lunch orders and money from their students on Wednesday. Then on Thursday and Friday, the hospitality trainer would collect the orders from the school office and the hospitality students, under the supervision of the trainer, would read the lunch orders, record them on the whiteboard and check that the correct money had been provided with each order. The trainer then assigned students to work on different menu items. Once the penne, soup, kofta, wraps, muffins and fruit salad were ready, the students read the lunch orders again and filled each lunch bag with the appropriate items before putting the completed order in the appropriate lunch basket for each class. These literacy and numeracy activities could be challenging for students and some needed assistance from their peers or the trainer, but steadily over the semester, their skills increased.

In addition, the canteen provided an excellent environment for the development of cross-cultural communication skills where participants experienced negotiating solutions to cultural conflicts in the workplace. For instance, a number of cultural issues relating to the wearing of the kitchen uniform were successfully addressed. Strategies included wearing a scarf under the chef's cap, and wearing two aprons over the chef's pants—one at the front and one at the back—to provide appropriate modesty. Another cultural issue involved the handling of pork. For some participants, it was not a problem as long as they were not required to eat it; for others, there was an additional requirement to wear gloves when handling pork, and a minority could not work at all with recipes requiring pork.

English language and literacy skills

Students were prepared for participation in the school canteen through enrolment in Certificate I in Hospitality. This training clarified student literacy and English language skills, and ensured that they had their Food Handling Certificate before commencing work in the school canteen. Victoria University delivered the Certificate I training in a community venue with the support of local government, in order to reduce barriers to participation such as transport difficulties and lack of confidence to attend a university campus. The trainer also responded to the students' low levels of English by using visual aides to reinforce learning; for example, role-playing, and demonstrating safe lifting techniques.

This emphasis on oral communication and visual demonstration of hospitality skills was continued in the delivery of Certificate II in Hospitality in the canteen. This reflected the trainer's sensitivity to the needs of these specific learners. Borland and Mphande in their 2006 study of emerging African languages in Victoria observe that many African languages (p.42) 'are primarily means for oral

communication and relatively few are used for formal education'. Moreover, they say that 'most (settlement) services reported the importance of verbal means of communication (such as radio, one-to-one) given high illiteracy rates especially among women'.

Interestingly, oral communication and visual observation has also been identified as an important component of workplace learning by Billet. He says that learning is enhanced in the workplace because 'indirect guidance provided by other workers (for example comparing, listening, observing) and the physical environment (the workplace and its tools) provide visual clues that aid our thinking and learning' (Billet, 2001, p. 70). This is particularly important to learners whose first language is not English, or who have little experience of classroom learning.

An example from the canteen was when a student packed the meat in the fridge on top of other food items, despite earlier classroom instruction on food safety. When the trainer saw what was happening, she moved the meat and demonstrated correct storage. Subsequently, the lesson about correct food storage was reinforced whenever the student accessed the fridge and saw food correctly stored. Regularly hearing and using the same vocabulary and instructions also enhanced students' language learning. This was documented in the post-course evaluation in which five of seven respondents who answered this question said that their English and/or literacy skills had improved during the course (Newell, 2008).

Assessment

Although generic employability skills and English language skills were developed during the course, students were only formally assessed in the certificate in which they were enrolled—Certificate II in Hospitality (Kitchen Operations). Students' performances were assessed in both the training kitchen and the school canteen. Assessment was primarily done by observation, the use of checklists, and oral questioning, although some written work was required. The school canteen accurately reflected industry standards: students were required to produce meals of consistent standard for 200 students, meet deadlines, use equipment safely, follow recipes and follow the food safety plan.

Development of human and social potential

The school canteen did more than deliver trade skills, generic work skills and English language and literacy skills in a real-world environment. It also developed social and human potential (Calway & Murphy, 2007). Firstly, participants in the WIL project reported that their hospitality training impacted on the food they serve their families. For instance, when the students first began preparing fruit salad for the school canteen, one participant remarked that she had never



cut up fruit before; she later reported that she was now serving fruit at home (Newell, 2008).

Secondly, the WIL project provided a practical strategy for addressing childhood obesity by providing healthy, multicultural and affordable lunches for the school community. As one parent wrote, 'I'm a working mother who flies (sic) by the seat of her pants. I'm so happy my daughter has hot meals for lunch' (Newell, 2008).

Moreover, because the canteen menu has been developed to meet the needs of the multicultural school community, it also broadened school students' cultural horizons. As one of the Anglo primary school students said at a school function, 'Kofta's the best!'

Outcomes

Of the 15 students who commenced the course in 2007, only one dropped out—due to ill health. She returned in 2008 to complete the course. Of the remaining 14 students, 12 obtained Certificate II in Hospitality (Kitchen Operations) and two achieved Certificate I. These training outcomes demonstrated the effectiveness of the project in providing a learning environment which enabled students to achieve success. In addition, seven students subsequently obtained employment and one enrolled in Certificate III in Hospitality. These employment outcomes were pleasing. Experience in similar programs in Australia and overseas, however, suggests that the Healthy Multicultural Canteen program could be even more effective in assisting students

Continued on page 16 ...

Practical matters

In certain classroom situations—particularly numeracy, mathematics and science—many otherwise commonplace words can have different meanings. But as Chris Tully and Vicki Doukas explain, there are strategies that can be applied to this challenge.

Are you hearing what I'm saying?

As teachers we often enter the classroom with perceptions about what our students know. We think, or subconsciously assume, that because we are very familiar with some words the students will also know them. This is particularly so with numeracy and mathematics and science, where many words are not in common everyday use.

A common example is found with simple words such as 'plus'. We tend to believe that most of our students can recognise the word and perform the operation with little or no difficulty. The only time we might not assume this is when a student presents with a minimal mathematical background, or none at all. Indeed, the student may be very familiar with the process of adding but not the word. Had you as a teacher said 'add', then the student would have no difficulties in 'adding'.

Look at the list below. Do you automatically think of the mathematical meaning? Can you think of other meanings? Listed beside the words are some of the meanings we have been given:

- Plane—not pretty, aeroplane
- Volume—loudness
- Acute—very cuddly, severe, immediate
- Obtuse—no idea
- Expand—to grow, enlarge
- Osmosis—surf shop, what plants do
- Function—to work purpose
- Operation—medical procedure, to work
- Mean—not nice, nasty
- Complementary—nice, free, fits
- Odd—strange
- Row—move a boat, in a line, to have a fight
- Prime—first, best, important, main
- Pie—eat with sauce
- Check—to make sure OK
- Tables—eat off

Sometimes students give clues to the fact that they are not following your meaning. For example, I was discussing with a class drawing a repeating graph and asked how long would the graph go for before it repeated. One student responded 'about 30 seconds'. I had clearly not explained the concept well.

Other times though students don't give indications that they do not understand the concepts in the same way as you. This sometimes happens because both you and the student think that it is understood, and it is only down the track that it falls apart. Or alternately the student is not willing to ask for clarification for whatever reason.

So what can we as teachers do? Some things that we could do include trying not to make assumptions and explaining the concepts both orally and pictorially. We need to do this on more than one occasion. It must be reinforced.

There are some other activities that we can do as teachers to help students and ourselves overcome this problem. This is by no means the definitive list. Word association can work. Have students give you other meanings or words for a particular term or concept. For instance the operation 'add' is also referred to as plus, sum, total, and, together—just part of the possible list. Interchanging the various meanings throughout both written and oral work will reinforce the different terms that have the same meaning.



Practical matters

As teachers we need to recognise that students learn differently. We must ensure that our use of language is linked with activities that cover a range of learning styles (auditory, visual, kinetic) and abilities. Students working with other students can sometimes assist with understanding different words and terms. A student might explain or demonstrate a word in a manner that you had not considered as a teacher, but it clicks with another student.

The use of fellow teachers from a variety of learning areas as 'sounding boards' is a good way of trialing the language used in activities. Getting feedback from teachers that do not deal with mathematical or scientific terminology in their daily teaching environment, will give you a good indication of the points of difficulty that the students would encounter with the chosen activity.

Starting with activities and examples that are familiar to the students can help overcome difficulties with words. Because they are familiar with the concept they can work out the unfamiliar word or term. That could be as common as shopping or banking. This means that you as a teacher need some understanding of the background of the students, again not assuming that all students in the group shop or bank. Framing questions and concepts around these everyday activities may facilitate better understanding of the mathematical links. It would then be possible to progress into some unfamiliar activities.

You need to ensure that the student understands the work that you are covering. If this is not the case, they may not be able to progress in the subject. This could be a result of just

... continued from page 14

gain employment if students were enrolled in a program of longer duration, with the opportunity to further develop their hospitality, work readiness and English language skills in an authentic workplace setting.

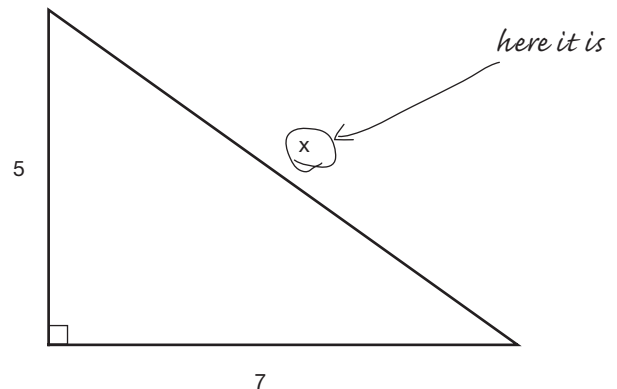
Frances Newell is a research fellow in the School of Education at Victoria University. From 2004 to 2007 she managed a state government contract to increase employment and training participation in a disadvantaged area. Previously, she coordinated youth programs at a TAFE institute and VCE and VET programs at a neighbourhood learning centre.

References

- Billett, S. (2001), *Learning in the workplace: strategies for effective practice*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
Borland, H. & Mphande, C. (2006), *The numbers of*

missing the meaning of a couple of words. It would not be an indication of the student's ability, even though you may perceive it as such; completing the work may merely be an issue of language. So we as teachers need to assume that each class is different even if they seem to be of similar ability. We need to constantly review our language practices and be aware of students' comprehension. So, in closing, look at this example:

Find x:



The teacher clearly has an idea of what they require, but the student's response is a valid one.

Chris Tully has taught at Kangan Batman TAFE for 15 years in various areas of numeracy and mathematics, including all levels of the CGEA and some VCE. Vicki Doukas has been at Kangan Batman TAFE for four years teaching science and numeracy in the CGEA and biology at VCE level.

speakers of African languages emerging in Victoria, Office of Multicultural Affairs report, State Government of Victoria.

Calway, B. & Murphy, G. (2007), The educational imperatives for a work-integrated learning philosophy, *Journal of cooperative education and internships*, 41(2), pp. 12–22.

Choy, S, Bowman, K, Billett, S, Wignall, L, & Haukka, S. (2008), *Effective models of employment-based training*, report from National Centre for Vocational Education Research NCVER, Australian Government.

McLennan, B. & Keating, S. (2008), Work-integrated learning in Australian universities: The challenge of mainstreaming WIL, <http://www.usq.edu.au/resources/nagcasaltsymposiumprereading120608.pdf>

Newell, F. (2008), unpublished evaluation data, Victoria University, frances.newell@vu.edu.au

Beside the Whiteboard

North Melbourne Language and Learning (NMLL) is located under the high-rise government housing estate in Alfred St., North Melbourne. The majority of students are women from the estate or the nearby area. A large percentage of these women are balancing study with raising children and caring for families. Students come from a huge variety of cultures and backgrounds with African and Asian women in the majority. Fine Print spoke with teachers Natalie Warren and Lisa O'Farrell.



NMLL is on the ground floor of the building

Professional background and pathways

Both Natalie and Lisa were initially from a primary teaching background. Natalie did a Graduate Diploma in ESL after teaching English as a foreign language in Japan. Natalie has been teaching ESL in the community sector for ten years on a part-time basis. Lisa decided to complete an ESL qualification at night school after leaving the state system to have a family. She has also been teaching at various ESL providers for almost ten years.

What are the challenges of teaching at NMLL?

Natalie: In this sector, fulfilling the professional obligations of the Frameworks curriculum, including the record keeping and assessments, is often challenging because there is little paid preparation and administration time due to lack of funding. I am currently teaching at a pre-entry level where the progress of students who are often pre-literate in their first language can be disheartening at times. At NMLL I find the improvements in the women's self-esteem and confidence to be incredibly satisfying.

Lisa: I often encounter difficulties when balancing the needs of students to learn skills which are useful and relevant to their daily lives with the sometimes abstract and formal outcomes of the set curriculum. The informal and friendly environment of NMLL for both staff and students makes teaching here a really satisfying job.

NMLL fosters a friendly and supportive atmosphere, which both Nat and Lisa enjoy and appreciate.

What have you learned here?

Natalie and Lisa: We have both learnt that in the community sector, the social and emotional benefits of attending class can be equally or more important and beneficial to the students than their formal qualification. A flexible, secure and welcoming environment is essential to foster language learning.

As for computers, what works best and what are the benefits of IT in the classroom?

Natalie: I have found using the laptop connected with the projector (or VDU) to be very useful for my low-level students. It provides a clear graphic focus with pictures to support text. The VDU is also really useful in the computer lab to give tutorials and examples of how to navigate the software, including Picture Dictionary, That's Life, Issues in English and The Alphabet. The photos taken on excursions are displayed to enable follow-up and revision. By presenting concepts visually, the students can often deal with more complex or detailed concepts. The ability to provide the same concept in a variety of ways by recycling language helps enormously with retention and understanding.

Lisa: I find the computer and VDU an essential tool for my computer-based reading and writing classes. I can preview the content and make sure I focus all of the class on important teaching points before they then individually complete the task at their own pace. Reading and comprehension questions are filed and retrieved each week and work samples and assessment tasks are stored in individual student files on the system. As the students complete the English tasks on computer, their IT skills are reinforced and developed.



Natalie (right) has taught at NMLL for ten years, and Lisa (left) has taught there for five years.

CGEA Update

As part of a team delivering the Certificate in General Education for Adults to a Swinburne TAFE youth program, Gail Pratley reports that despite the increased administration and assessment requirements the new CGEA offers many possibilities. And Lisa Bartels discusses a CGEA moderation session that was run as a professional development activity with Western Metropolitan Region of ACFE providers, while also giving feedback on assessment tasks brought along by teachers from Victoria University.

The new CGEA offers many possibilities

1. CGEA youth program—Swinburne TAFE

The CGEA youth program is delivered over four days a week from 8.30am to 12.30pm at Swinburne TAFE's Wantirna and Croydon campuses. About 70 students aged 15–17 take part. For timetabling purposes, unit clusters are loosely divided into four main areas aimed at covering at least one section of the core units within each session. The areas are English (and Learning Plan), Employment, Numeracy and Projects.

The English cluster concentrates on the personal and learning units with a selection of electives, including Health and Wellbeing. Employment includes Workplace Documents and the employment and community units. Electives related to job-seeking skills such as interview techniques are also provided here. Numeracy delivers the required two units as well as an ICT elective. Projects include e-presentations in conjunction with the planning and conducting of a project.

The majority of daily sessions are held in two blocks of approximately two hours each—one in a classroom, the other in a computer room. Integration of all units within an ICT framework is encouraged. This includes access to WebCT for a range of activities using a mix of teacher-developed worksheets and links to sites for research for learning, community and employment topics. Microsoft Office 2007 is used for workplace documents, the 'created' texts and e-presentations. Students can also use PhotoStory or similar software for creating digital stories and class presentations. In the computer room in Numeracy, each student works on an individual computer-based program to improve basic skills, which also provide activities to meet some of the learning outcomes.

With any major curriculum change there are always positive and negative responses from students and teachers. The introduction of the Projects unit, for example, opened up a world of opportunities. At Wantirna we offered the students a selection of activities requiring them to plan and prepare in areas such as mask-making, chocolate-making, a city excursion and

the production of a giant photo board (500 photos!) showing a snapshot of life on campus.

In another class an end of term Winterfest provided a fitting finale to some of their Employment units, with the students putting on a selection of activities for the whole campus, including making fairy floss, a sausage sizzle and entertaining us with some very loud music. Croydon campus ran a very successful bike project, where the students gathered old bicycles and learned to repair and maintain them. Excursions to the refugee experience, Immigration and Jewish museums were also part of this unit, with many interesting activities and students' responses developed as a result.

But, and there's always a but, when asked, 'How's the new CGEA going for you?' the almost unanimous comment has been, 'Overwhelming!' The clusters of units (in some cases six to eight instead of the two in 2007) have meant much more paperwork—more rolls, more record keeping, a multitude of student folders and more late nights trying to figure out more assessment tasks. For the students the structure is confusing—and the language! (Whoever invented the unit names may like an opportunity to explain to a group of 15–17 year-olds what is meant by 'engaging and creating').

In the past, the CGEA has provided flexibility in both content and structure to meet the special needs of these students. Despite the increased administration load and assessment requirements, we can see in this new CGEA many possibilities for integrating a variety of units within the numeracy, literacy, work skills and ICT areas to provide an increased hands-on approach for our students. In Semester 2 both campuses have such activities planned and, with increasing numbers of this age group requiring access to TAFE as a viable pathway to further education and training, will hopefully develop more for 2009.

2. The Ceeja change we had to have?

Ceeja was a grand old restaurant. Ten years in business and going strong. It had maintained its original signature

dish, the Sunday roast, every day since opening. Intended as a venue that provided a dining experience for the initiated and unfamiliar with restaurants, the old Ceeja had served the community well. Now Chef was unhappy. Management insisted changes had to happen and, without consulting Chef, staff or diners, designed a new menu. Staff were overwhelmed with the new system and were finding it difficult to keep up with the greater choice of menu items and the extra paperwork generated by the change.

Chef and the kitchen staff couldn't figure out why the old menu needed such drastic changes. A slight adjustment a few years back had proved effective in meeting diners' requirements and everyone was happy. Management however thought the menu didn't provide diners with the wherewithal to move on to further dining experiences. Chef tried to explain that the old Ceeja was not created to do that. Its main aim was to deliver substantial fare to the inexperienced and even disadvantaged. There were plenty of other restaurants around for those who could already manage more complicated menus and challenging dining experiences.

Old Ceeja's four main dishes catered for all tastes and wallets. Each dish was accompanied by pumpkin, with or without potatoes, and a choice of greens. For the low-level wallets, the meatloaf was a nourishing and tasty choice, and particularly popular with diners new to the country who had never tried English-style food and who didn't want to lash out on expensive things they might not like. It was also an easy dish for people who may not have been to a restaurant for a while and who wanted a reintroduction to dining out.

The juicy pork roast with its stunning crackle and tangy apple sauce was the next level in price. Chef knew just how long to cook the shoulder to keep it moist, and how to get the crackle just right with a secret blend of vinegar, salt and impeccable timing.

Despite a substantial jump in price, the lamb roast was a firm favourite with diners. Dotted with garlic cloves and rosemary sprigs with a side of honeyed carrots and gravy made from the pan juices it was a meal enjoyed by many.

Roast beef was the most expensive dish and the least ordered. As with all other dishes the chef could vary the presentation according to the client. Some liked 'surf and turf' stuffed with oysters, scallops and prawns; others opted for the Beef Wellington, with a generous layer of pate snuggled under the pastry, or just plain with gravy was always an option.

Management changes kept the four main levels (with a separate entrée of small starters), but instead of a main dish a cluster of choices was presented. In place of the meatloaf, a range of different flavoured hamburgers with choices of buns, fillings and condiments was offered. A selection of pork chops, ham steaks and BLT toasted sandwiches replaced the pork roast. Lamb shanks, rack of lamb and Rogan Josh were poor substitutes for the once popular lamb roast. And the succulent beef, once the proud pinnacle of Chef's expertise, was replaced with a range of hotpots and curries. Certainly they were all delicious and carefully prepared, but the staff were losing heart as they juggled their preparation and cooking with the added record keeping and superfluous paperwork.

Where there had been two or three vegetables in each level there were now seven or eight. One main meal had become four and choices had trebled. Keeping tabs on diner habits required extra database entry and extensive inventories. More than one kitchen staff person was heard to complain, 'I didn't do hospitality training to become an administrator!'

Staff argued that the old Ceeja's menu allowed for flexibility, creativity and initiative while the new Ceeja, although appearing diverse, actually stunted any resourcefulness by prescribing set dishes. Diners were confused with the choices and unhappy with the smaller servings. Creating their own meal by engaging in discussion with staff and planning what to eat was not an attractive option for many, particularly the younger diners.

Chef, desperately unhappy, complained to Management that they had turned the beautiful roasts into a conglomerate of stews.

'We prefer you call them casseroles or hotpots', replied Management.

Chef looked helplessly at the ceiling and picked up the large boning knife. 'Better get to it then, I suppose. Bills to pay, mouths to feed'.

'Of course', said Management. 'The new Ceeja will be just fine. The staff will conform. They always do. Their contracts depend on it. And when does yours come up for renewal?'

Gail Pratley has taught for four years in the Swinburne TAFE youth programs unit at the Croydon and Wantirna campuses. She teaches in the literacy, employment, projects and numeracy areas, and uses ICT wherever she can.

CGEA moderation with Western Metropolitan Region of ACFE providers

Marcia Guild convened the session and Lisa Bartels, Senior Educator Literacy, Victoria University College, acted as the facilitator. About 20 teachers from a range of providers in the ACFE Western Region attended.

The session was run as a professional development activity in order to discuss issues relating to moderation with the reaccredited Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA), and to look at assessment tasks contributed by the teachers from Victoria University and brought along by the participants for feedback and discussion. The session also aimed to plan for future moderation sessions.

The session was particularly valuable for those who were the only teachers delivering this curriculum within their provider. Participants took part in a range of tasks, such as:

- Looking at a range of moderation cover sheets constructed by other organisations, and discussing the advantages and disadvantages of each.
- Working through an activity that focused on the completion of a cover sheet.
- Looking at a number of completed cover sheets and discussing the information to be placed in each section.
- Discussing various tasks for the core unit, 'Develop an individual learning plan and portfolio', and outlining the successes and challenges of the inclusion of this unit.

Teachers were generally positive about the opportunity for a more consistent approach to customisation of courses to individual goals and pathways. All participants identified the ten-hour time allocation as being inadequate. Some participants also identified as presenting a challenge, the lack of resources to undertake the unit. Those who had developed something for use with their students shared their resources with other participants

Padmini Samarawickrama, numeracy teacher from the General Education Programs and Services at Victoria University, led the participants through an example of an integrated numeracy task, including the features of the cover sheets, the task sheet and the students' completed work sample.

Much discussion centred on the Create and Engage with Text units. Teachers expressed some difficulty in attributing particular tasks to particular social contexts (such as

learning, community, personal and employment). There appeared to be particular difficulty identifying texts for the Learning context. While the range statement provided a comprehensive list of possible text types, teachers debated where texts such as novels and poems might belong, given that they are frequently incorporated into higher-level study. Interpretation of language and the purpose of particular performance criteria were also a feature of discussion, and a cause of some confusion in completing the cover sheets.

Some teachers expressed difficulty in finding key information relating to assessment in the new structure of the units. Participants stressed the importance of looking at the unit as a whole, particularly the range statement, the required skills and knowledge section, and the critical aspects of evidence section. These areas provide important information and guidance for designing assessment tasks. Familiarisation with the detail of the units was valuable for all participants.

Teachers indicated that while the smaller units provided more flexibility and allowed for credit to students upon completion, the record keeping and associated administrative tasks were proving to be onerous for many. There was still some confusion about the number of texts of different genres required for each unit, and the fact that not all elements needed to be addressed within one assessment task.

The moderation of electives was discussed. The majority of teachers who had undertaken an imported elective were using an IT module. There was some concern about the future moderation of these units from various training packages, particularly as participants were not certain about the processes used in moderating these units.

Many teachers suggested that they would benefit from examples of completed cover sheets and validated tasks, and clear guidelines for the completion of moderation task cover sheets. They were particularly interested in models of integrated tasks beyond those provided in the implementation guide.

Lisa Bartels is an adult literacy and ESL teacher and the senior educator (literacy) in the VU College at Victoria University. She has worked in the field for 15 years. Lisa teaches and coordinates the CGEA within general education programs and services. She has delivered a number of professional development activities focusing on the reaccredited CGEA.

Open Forum

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

The 'Securing our future economic prosperity' discussion paper was released for comment in April. As Lynne Matheson reports, VALBEC, among others, took the opportunity to contribute responses to the discussion of future delivery of vocational education and training.

Watch this space! Responses to the 'Securing our future economic prosperity' discussion paper

The Victorian Government's four objectives described in the executive summary of the discussion paper are:

1. Boosting numbers of individuals and businesses accessing training, which will increase the skills of Victoria's workforce.
2. Developing a VET system that engages more effectively with individuals and businesses and is easier to navigate.
3. Ensuring the system is more responsive and flexible to the changing skills needs of businesses and individuals.
4. Creating a stronger culture of lifelong learning.

A summary of the reforms included in the discussion paper:

- Increasing access for eligible Victorians to a government-supported training place, and increasing investment from those who benefit most from training: government, businesses and individuals.
- Strengthening our TAFE and Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) sectors.
- Improving choice and contestability by enabling individuals and businesses to access government-supported training at a broader range of public, private and community providers.
- Improving information to make it easier for individuals and businesses to understand and use the training system.

The direction of the reforms is in line with the policy directions identified in the Federal Government's 'Skilling Australia for the future' discussion paper and COAG aims of overcoming skills shortages and increasing skills and educational opportunities where socioeconomic factors disadvantage individuals and communities. It is timely and pertinent to have these debates with the new Federal Government foreshadowing an 'education revolution' and placing social inclusion on the agenda. In their education

revolution paper they clearly link literacy achievement to social outcomes.

Several articles in the media have critiqued the Victorian Government's assertions and much of the response from the TAFE sector has been critical of the government's agenda that appears to be shifting the responsibility of VET funding more to the individual and industry and setting a more competitive atmosphere for funding. There is no argument that a much greater investment of funding to support adult and community education providers, to ensure delivery of services to those people seeking to re-engage with education and training, is urgently needed to address the fact that Victorian funding is lagging well behind other states, while ironically at the same time outperforming in learner outcomes and innovative programs.

In this context we focused our comments on the implications for adult literacy, language and numeracy provision and access to learning. VALBEC expressed concern about the focus of education being linked so strongly to employment while ignoring the many individual, social and community benefits. Some of the main points in the VALBEC response follow.

VALBEC supports the Australian Council of Adult Literacy (ACAL) position of whole-of-life, whole-of-government policy for the provision of adult education programs as outlined in *A literate Australia* (2001) http://www.acal.edu.au/publications/papers/acal_view/ALitAustOct01.pdf.

VALBEC acknowledges that those most in need in disadvantaged and marginalised sections of the population often have most difficulty engaging in and valuing lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is a key goal of COAG and VALBEC recognises its importance in the framing of adult education policy.

The research findings of Balatti, Black & Falk (2006) on the wider benefits of learning show that participation in accredited adult literacy and numeracy courses produced

social capital outcomes for 80 per cent of the students interviewed. Other research makes the salient point that many long-term welfare recipients need basic educational skills before they can embark on more job-oriented training and finally move on to paid work.

It is essential to first support language, literacy and numeracy skills before supporting individuals in undertaking specific VET training.

We question the simplistic equation regarding fees that is not fully explained in the discussion paper. Higher fees would make education and training inaccessible for many disadvantaged and low socioeconomic groups. With increasing rents, petrol and food prices, fees will put education and second-chance vocational training courses out of the reach of many people, especially older students, women, migrants and those in rural and remote communities. Research shows that disadvantaged groups are already missing out on VET. If fees are increased, these groups will be even further marginalised. There are many younger students undertaking VET courses who need support in literacy, language and numeracy and funding provision for this support should be a priority.

The first and most important step is parity of funding. For years ACFE providers have been delivering education and training on shoestring budgets. With increasing demands of AQTF standards and accountability the pressures for appropriate infrastructure, governance and administrative support have multiplied for the small provider.

The ACE sector is known to have a higher proportion of disadvantaged students, those from lower income families, those with disabilities, and those who find the larger TAFEs overwhelming. It is important that the ACE sector continue in its present form to allow for variety and choice for such students. But it is also vital to acknowledge the work of the ACE sector that is largely hidden and undervalued.

Students with disabilities or health or welfare issues in the ACE, TAFE and broader vocational educational sector require more educational support and thus more financial support to achieve the outcomes desired by the government.

Teachers in TAFE and ACFE are delivering comparable education and training courses so deserve the same wages and conditions. The pay scales should reflect national standards and Victorian teachers across the board should have parity of pay and conditions accordingly.

Professional development funding and collegial support is crucial to the standing and sustainability of the teaching workforce as well as for quality of educational outcomes. VALBEC recognises the importance of choice and diversity

of adult education provision but is concerned when sectors are set up in competition rather than in a collaborative and complementary model with equity and security of funding from government.

The full VALBEC response is available at www.valbec.org.au

ACEVic is the peak body for Adult Community Education organisations in Victoria with 200 members. Their response to the discussion paper has a strong focus on access and equity, and the needs of learners with whom language and literacy educators are very familiar. These are learners who are only at the beginning of a vocational pathway and learners with often complex needs. In the face of the perceived urgent need to train as many people as possible in the shortest possible time for the smallest amount of money, the learning needs of these groups could be at risk. ACEVic points out the need to maintain non-vocational, pre-accredited training as a vital pathway for vocational learning.

The ACE Vic recommendations include:

1. The need to market pre-accredited training as part of the whole VET system as it often provides an entry point for learners, and to increase resources for pre-accredited training.
2. Acknowledgement of the strength of ACE in developing generic employability skills and the need for a focus on this in skills reform.
3. Develop action from the ALLS data, which reveals that investment in improving the skills of adults with lower levels of literacy has a greater return on productivity per capita.

The full ACEVIC response is available at <http://acevic.org.au/Content/wp-content/uploads/2008/06/acevic-response1.pdf>

The Victorian TAFE Association is Victoria's peak employer body for the public providers of TAFE in Victoria with members being all of Victoria's TAFE institutes, four Victorian multi-sector universities, and as an associate member, AMES. Their response to the discussion paper focused on the systemic flaws and implementation implications of the reforms and was critical of the lack of detail and research evidence to the claims of a fully contestable VET market.

In summary the VTA makes five recommendations:

1. A package of reforms must be aligned to Commonwealth Government and other state policy initiatives to ensure consistency and clarity in accessing governments' supported funding for vocational education and training.

Continued on page 28 ...

Foreign Correspondence

The Skills for Life program brought welcome resources to adult basic education, along with demands for standardisation, inspections and audits. As James Simpson from the University of Leeds reports, this bureaucratic imposition encroached on teachers' time and energy.

Skills for life in England, Wales and Northern Ireland or be careful what you wish for

This article concerns a policy initiative in England, Skills for Life, and how it has impinged on the lives of teachers in adult basic education—in particular teachers of ESOL—English for Speakers of Other Languages. Historically, adult basic education in England was characterised by a lack of cohesion and overall coordination; funding was patchy and ad hoc, and teachers' conditions and pay were often poor. In the 1980s and 1990s in particular, adult and community education was felt by practitioners to be particularly threatened. Hence the general welcome of a new policy for adult basic education at the turn of the century, one which promised to improve both its funding and its organisation.

Now imagine you are an English teacher, just returning to England after spending ten years teaching English as a foreign language in countries around the world. You have enjoyed teaching, and want to continue now you have come home. You want to put your talents as a teacher to good use; the private sector is very poorly paid, and teaching in higher education holds no appeal for you. A friend tells you about teaching ESOL, English for Speakers of other Languages, to new arrivals to the UK. These students, says your friend, urgently need to learn English. With eyes wide with hope and idealism, you apply for a job teaching ESOL at your local College of Further Education. Preparing for your interview, you do some background reading, and discover that ESOL is part of something called Skills for Life.

Skills for Life and ESOL

The policy directing the funding of adult basic skills—literacy, numeracy, ESOL and more recently, ICT—in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, is Skills for Life. Early in Tony Blair's first New Labour government, a review of basic skills (DfEE 1999) recommended the launching of a national strategy to reduce the number of adults with low levels of basic skills.

ESOL was not originally included as a 'skill for life'. ESOL activists lobbied hard for its inclusion: here was a chance for proper funding, as well as an opportunity to be taken seriously. Pressure from practitioners contributed to the government working group report (DfEE 2000) which led

to ESOL entering wholly into the adult basic skills agenda for the first time. Skills for Life brought with it the creation of statutory core curricula for ESOL, literacy and numeracy, new teacher training and inspection frameworks, and qualifications mapped against national standards. Literacy educators Mary Hamilton and Yvonne Hillier have this to say about Skills for Life (2006: 14):

By 2001, Skills for Life had emerged as a cornerstone of the newly integrated Learning Skills sector. Basic skills were claimed to be crucial not only for employment, but—in line with New Labour's commitments to social inclusion and 'joined up government'—also to personal, family, citizenship and community participation.

At your job interview, your future manager asks you about your qualifications. You are keen to stress your degree in English, your diploma in teaching EFL to adults, and your experience teaching abroad. You are surprised to be told that you will probably have to do a post-graduate teaching qualification and a subject specialist course for ESOL.

Standards and standardisation

In a drive to set standards across Skills for Life, teachers are required to hold or be working towards standardised qualifications. These are a Certificate of Education, together with a Level Four (post-graduate) subject specialist qualification in their area. So no matter how well qualified they already are to teach in other contexts, teachers entering Skills for Life are obliged to follow courses designed to ensure that they are qualified to a standard—and standardised—level. This can cause resentment among practitioners. As one ESOL manager said recently:

On the whole, the drive to standardise qualifications in the sector—obligating often highly qualified practitioners to assign precious time to a course which they feel has little worth—has had a substantial negative impact. Anecdotal evidence includes: experienced teachers leaving the profession as they feel their commitment is not worth making on a fractional contract; resentment towards 'management' imposing the requirement and a resulting downturn in good vibes; lack of time and inclination to

do other, more relevant (?), CPD (continuing professional development) options; and probably more.

You are offered a job by the college, as an hourly-paid ESOL teacher, on condition that you spend a day a week working towards your Certificate of Education and Level Four qualifications. You have 12 hours teaching, and you begin to realise that you are going to struggle financially. But you enjoy your work, your students like you and respond well to your enthusiasm. You have two different classes, each meeting for six hours a week. The students in your ESOL beginners' class have little or no literacy in their first language. Teaching them literacy in English proves very challenging, and you arrange to attend an ESOL literacy training course in addition to your other courses. Your ESOL and Citizenship students are desperate to pass their upcoming exam. They are mostly refugees, applying for permission to remain in the UK, and to be eligible they have to demonstrate progress on an ESOL course that has a citizenship component.

You have developed a bank of materials and lesson plans from your previous work teaching EFL abroad, and you spend time every evening adapting them to your current students' needs. At the end of your second week in your new job, your manager observes a lesson. In the debriefing, she asks why your lesson plan is not mapped to the ESOL curriculum.

The Adult ESOL Core Curriculum

Literacy, numeracy and ESOL in Skills for Life each have a statutory curriculum. In ESOL prior to Skills for Life, there was a dearth of resources and direction for teachers. This was to change drastically with the introduction of the national Adult ESOL Core Curriculum (DfES 2001) and the subsequent publication of materials to accompany it.

The curriculum is organised around reading, writing, speaking and listening (though with little reference to beginner ESOL literacy). It is a functional curriculum with an integrated grammar curriculum. Areas of the curriculum are identified with codes (for example, 'Ws/E1.1a'—Writing sentence/Entry Level 1, section 1a), with descriptors and sub-descriptors (for example, 'Skills, knowledge and understanding/Adults should learn to: 1a. construct a simple sentence, using basic word order and verb form/show understanding of: (a) the concept of a sentence and that sentences can be put together to make text;' etc.) Examples and sample activities are also given. See Image 1.

The curriculum as a tool to help teaching is dauntingly dense and complex, and is currently undergoing a review. It was originally meant to be used as the basis for placement, program design, and assessment. Over time its status has

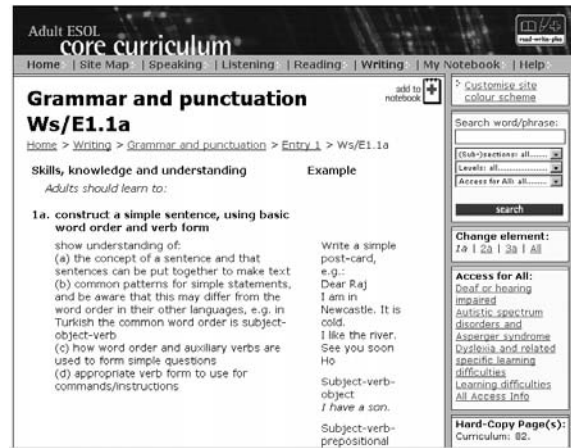


Image 1: www.dfes.gov.uk/curriculum_esol/tree/writing/grammarpunc/e1/1a/

shifted from being a source of advice and recommendation to become a prescriptive document. Inspection and audit, and the need to provide 'evidence' for learning, has resulted in some managers demanding full referencing ('mapping') of lesson plans and materials to the curriculum.

Your manager also asks you why you are not making more use of the Skills for Life materials. These are the professional-looking materials which you were told were circulated by the government to all teachers of ESOL. You have not used them much because you feel they do not quite fit the needs of your students, particularly those in your beginners class, who are learning to read and write for the first time.

Skills for Life materials

The curriculum is accompanied by learning materials for each level. Just as ESOL materials of earlier times were influenced by prevailing attitudes to immigrants, the Skills for Life materials reflect current concerns with multiculturalism, integration and social cohesion. They therefore show thriving multicultural communities in which migrants are welcome to maintain their traditions and identities, but within a framework of integration and social responsibility. Thus there are activities which draw on festivities such as weddings and traditions from various cultures and religions alongside examples of harmonious interactions between neighbours from different ethnic backgrounds using English as a lingua franca. There is coverage of 'survival' English in subjects such as local transport, finding a doctor, and phoning the emergency services.

The response of ESOL teachers to the Skills for Life materials was mixed. In some institutions the materials were used from the start as the syllabus for ESOL courses; this tended to lead either to slavish adherence to the materials or to their outright rejection. Confusion reigned over whether inspectors would

demand they be used to the exclusion of other materials. One teacher commented:

Because when it was inspection earlier this year we were discouraged to use EFL-type books when the inspector was around because they had to be ESOL materials for ESOL students. So I go and use the ESOL books, the Skills for Life stuff, and I got inspected in one of the classes, in the community, and it was fine. But one question she did ask was, 'Do we just use Skills for Life material?' and I said, 'No', because we use other books as well. So, I was able to give examples. I didn't like to say, 'Oh, this is one of the very few lessons I've used this, and that's only because you're here, otherwise I wouldn't have used it.

More typically though, teachers were given the materials as a new resource which they could use as they deemed fit. There was more criticism than praise amongst teachers for the materials, especially in their scant coverage of grammar and functional approach to literacy. Teachers have since found themselves spending hours supplementing and adapting the very materials that were supposed to be an answer to their problems.

As well as making some use of the Skills for Life materials, you continue to use your home-produced materials, but you ensure they are mapped against the curriculum using the correct code. Referencing your materials and lesson plans means that you are spending even longer hours at night on planning, to satisfy bureaucratic, rather than learning, needs. The following month, your manager tells her team during a staff meeting, 'We are having an inspection next month, and I need to see your ILPs'. You are not surprised to hear groans from your colleagues.

The individual learning plan (ILP)

Individual learning plans have been a central part of ESOL teaching since 2001; 'how to write an ILP' features on all teacher training programs, and in the pages of a handbook on ESOL (Schellekens, 2007). NIACE, the National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education, has this advice on ILPs:

This [the ILP] is based upon screening, initial and diagnostic Assessment, and follows agreement with the learner on goals and targets. A completed ILP should include:

- Results of assessments;
- The learner's long-term goals;
- The goals of the program to be followed, cross-referenced to the national standards or core curriculum;
- Any other goals that the learner wishes to achieve, both social and personal;
- Targets and dates for meeting them;

- A programme of dated progress reviews;
- Space to record achievement of targets and any developments in the ILP;
- Signatures of learner and teacher.

<http://www.niace.org.uk/projects/learningfromexperience/EBS/Good-Practice/ILP.htm>

ILPs were first used in literacy classes configured as 'workshops', where students learn individually, at their own pace. Government policy rhetoric lays heavy emphasis on 'individualisation' and more lately 'personalisation' of learning, and ILPs have been promoted tirelessly by the Government and inspectorates for use across Skills for Life. They are, however, far from accepted as 'common sense'. Many ESOL teachers know they have no theoretical basis, and are not suited to the group processes through which much ESOL learning happens. As one ESOL teacher educator commented:

It is this idea that, somehow, they are good practice, and I feel that there is no evidence to show that they improve learning or don't. I mean, they might, but do we know? And I think that is what really exasperates me, the way that they have been kind of taken on as the gold standard, for no reason.

Beginning life as a recommendation, the ILP has become interpreted as a prescription by inspectorates and by managers faced with inspection. The ILP continues to be the subject of considerable controversy and resistance across ESOL. Responses to ILPs amongst teachers vary from rejection to resignation or a kind of 'strategic compliance'.

Your manager assures you that the ILP is necessary to ensure that you differentiate between learners of mixed abilities. But you argue that your differentiation is done mainly in ongoing classroom talk, not months in advance on a learning plan. What is more, you know that the students in your beginners' class cannot articulate their needs in English in any depth. You also know that there is little point spending time writing ILPs for all the students in the class when most of the learning they do happens in groups. Nonetheless, you acquiesce to your manager's demand, and ask how best to complete an ILP. She says that you need to state the learners' goals in terms of SMART targets.

SMART targets

In writing ILPs, there is a frequent requirement that students' aims be expressed in the form of SMART targets. SMART is an acronym from management training, and stands rather neatly for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound. Applying SMART targets to language learning and teaching opens them up to critique, as they encourage a disproportionate focus on atomistic aspects of language

which are easily observed, at the expense of less tangible, more profound language needs.

Teachers in the debate over ILPs have drawn consistently on their own knowledge of language learning. There is much evidence to show that language learning is neither unidirectional, nor linear, nor uniformly paced. As Patsy Lightbown and Nina Spada say in *How languages are learned* (2006:189):

Learners may use a particular form accurately at stage x (suggesting they have learned that form), fail to produce that form at stage y, and produce it accurately again at stage z ... Language development is not just adding one rule after another. Rather, it involves processes of integrating new language forms and patterns into an existing interlanguage, readjusting and restructuring until all the pieces fit.

It is also clear that the rate at which development takes place is highly idiosyncratic and varies greatly from person to person. Here one teacher appeals to knowledge gained through observation of her own students' learning when making criticisms of SMART targets:

Learners are quite inconsistent with their mistakes. So, you know I get three pieces of writing, and I think I could make some SMART targets according to these pieces of writing. But if I look back at the previous ones, they didn't make the same mistakes then, and they keep changing.

You have now been teaching ESOL for a few months. You are becoming tired of the long hours spent preparing lessons, handling the bureaucracy which you regard in many cases as unnecessary, trying to maintain your integrity as a teacher in the face of a mountain of paperwork. You are starting to wonder whether ESOL in Skills for Life is actually the best career path for you.

Bureaucracy

In a recent interview a teacher talked about the paperwork involved in her job:

We have the scheme of work for the year and a lesson plan for every lesson. They've got their ILPs, that has to be filled in with all their personal information, their assessment results and diagnostic results from the initial assessments, their learning goals, what they're working towards. There's some information, such as asking asylum seekers how long they've been here, all that kind of personal information. Then they have a sheet that has the course objectives, the group goals with curriculum references and then their individual targets for half term. We have a review form to do at the end of every lesson

and then for every student we have to say what stage they are at. That comes from the inspection when they said we weren't keeping formal records enough. There's also a bit to put any test results on, for each student and whether you're taking any action on their ILP. There's an evaluation on the end of the lesson plan and for every student, an evaluation of every student's progress during that lesson. At the end of term there's all sorts of other forms ...

The teacher continued in this vein, giving a lengthy description of the bureaucratic tasks she undertakes every academic term. In total she described 17 separate pieces of paperwork that have to be completed.

The last word

Along with many ESOL teachers, you display a strong sense of vocation in your practice and in the way you talk about your work. Vocation and commitment are the reasons you decide to stay in ESOL teaching, despite unhappiness with other trends. Strong commitment to students, although a common characteristic among teachers, does not always sit easily with the managerial demands which have crept into the field in recent years. Skills for Life undoubtedly brought much-needed resources to adult basic education, but the price appears to be a bureaucratic imposition on you and your colleagues, prompted by heavy demands of standardisation, inspection and audit, demands which practitioners seem unable to resist.

This article was originally printed in *Literacies*, #8 (spring 2008) and is available online at: http://www.literacyjournal.ca/literacies/8-2008/readers_s08.htm.

James Simpson is an applied linguist specialising in research into the teaching and learning of English for Speakers of Other Languages. Since 2004 he has been a Research Fellow at the Centre for Language Education Research at the University of Leeds. Some of the text in this article is from a book he co-wrote with Melanie Cooke, *ESOL: A critical guide*, to be published by Oxford University Press in 2008.

References

- Cooke, M. & Simpson, J. (forthcoming, 2008), *ESOL: A critical guide*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Department for Education and Employment (1999), *A fresh start: Improving literacy and numeracy* (The Moser report), London: Basic Skills Agency, available online at http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/Skills_for_Life_policy_documents
- Department for Education and Employment (2000), *Breaking the language barriers: The report of the working group on English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)*, Continued on page 28 ...

What's Out There

Jacinta Agostinelli reviews *True blue? On being Australian*, a collection of short and accessible pieces by well-known Australian writers.

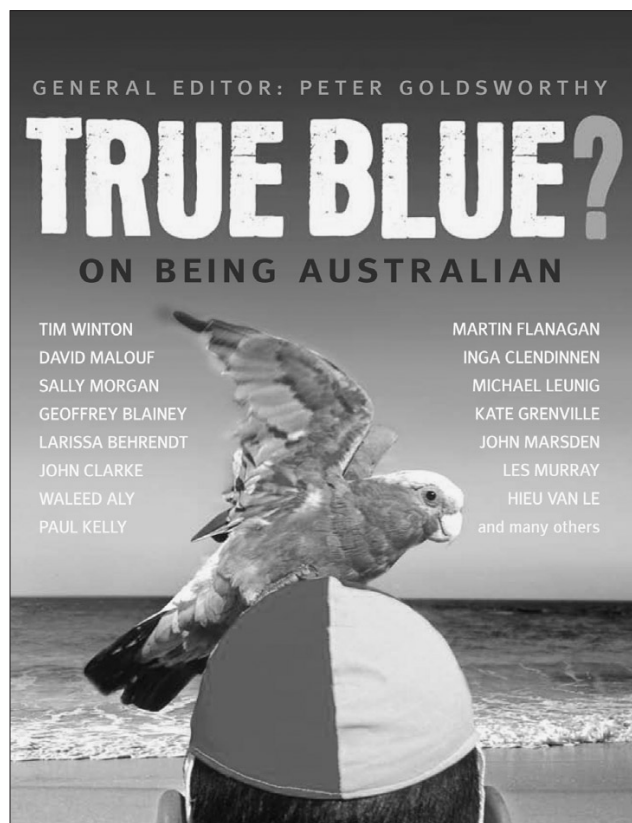
As the title suggests, this is a colourful collection of reflections, essays and comments that explores the question of what it means to be Australian. It is edited by Peter Goldsworthy for the National Australia Day Council, which is administered by the Department of Education, Science and Training. The inside cover indicates that the views expressed are those of the authors and are not necessarily representative of the Government department or of the National Australia Day Council. I would agree with this statement and was impressed that the writings ranged from humorous to provocative.

The authors themselves represent a wide cross section of the Australian community—sportswomen and sportsmen, politicians, multicultural Australians, the indigenous community, artists and writers—but unfortunately there is an over-representation of male writers. Among the 200 pages are names that teachers and students would recognise, such as Michael Leunig, Sally Morgan, Tom Roberts, Dawn Fraser and John Howard. The juxtaposition of diverse views however, offers the reader a lively reading experience.

The selected texts have all appeared in other, generally academic, publications including newspapers, journals and novels.

True blue? is divided into five themes: people, symbols, place, sport and words. Sport seems to be the odd wording out here, as the other wordings are more metaphorical. It is a necessary inclusion however, as no exploration of the Australian identity could be complete without a mention of sport. The book is probably best read thematically, although each text is complete in itself and can be read in isolation. Alternatively, as some authors are represented more than once, the book could be read by author. Entries vary in length with most being between a half-page to one page long.

Most teachers would find the shortness of the texts attractive. The thematic structure also means teachers can locate texts easily. As might be expected however, most pieces are written in the evaluating genre and use complex language structures that make them difficult for ESL and literacy students. These texts generally use nominalisation, metaphor and abstraction. A few of the texts follow a story



genre, and are typically easier to read. I selected a few of the pieces under Sport for a higher level literacy student (CGEA III) to read for a research report to do with the importance of sport in Australia, and the student understood the gist of the pieces and used the information in his report. I chose another half-page text by Arnold Zable from Place to read together as a class with the purpose of elaborating on nominalisation, metaphorical language and building vocabulary.

I would recommend selective use of this book for higher-level ESL and literacy students.

True blue? is published by Allen and Unwin and can be obtained through bookstores, or contact the Curriculum Corporation in Melbourne on +61 3 9207 9600, www.curriculum.edu.au

Jacinta Agostinelli is a teacher and language and literacy coordinator at Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre.

... continued from page 22

2. Reforms to increase fees payable by students accessing Victorian government-supported VET programs cannot proceed until all processes are in place to enable income-contingent loans.
3. Implementation of any package of reforms must be accompanied by at least 12 months of intensive communications with prospective students, industry, communities and RTOs.
4. Implementation of an investment model based on competition and contestability must include rigorous, transparent quality criteria for RTOs to be entitled to deliver government-supported VET places.
5. A staged approach must be used to implement any demand-driven model of VET provision in Victoria commencing with a pilot program in the first year and full implementation over at least a three-year period following evaluation of the pilot program.

The full VTA response is available at <http://www.vta.vic.edu.au/>

The government will report on the outcomes of the consultation and we urge VALBEC members to keep informed about these issues.

Lynne Matheson is current VALBEC co-president.

... continued from page 26

available online at <http://www.lifelonglearning.dfee.gov.uk/esol/index.htm>

Department for Education and Skills (2001), *Adult ESOL Core Curriculum*, London: Basic Skills Agency/DfES, online version available at http://www.dfes.gov.uk/curriculum_esol/

Hamilton, M. & Hillier, Y. (2006), *Changing faces of adult literacy, language and numeracy: A critical history*, Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.

Lightbown, P. & Spada, N. (2006), *How languages are learned* (3rd edition), Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schellekens, P. (2007), *The Oxford ESOL handbook*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Web resources

NATECLA (the National Association for Teaching English and other Community languages to Adults): <http://www.natecla.org.uk/>

RaPAL (Research and Practice in Adult Literacy): <http://www.literacy.lancs.ac.uk/rapal/>

The ESOL-Research email list: <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/ESOL-Research>