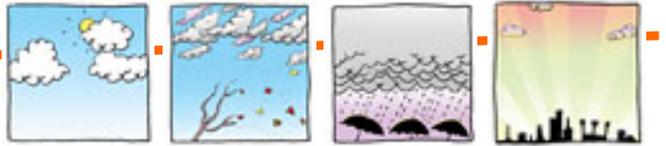


four seasons in one day –

literacies in changing climates

Adult Literacy Conference ■ Melbourne ■ September 10-11, 2004



The Arch Nelson Address

Changing Climates

Daryl Evans

Introduction

Thank you for joining me tonight during this annual event.

First, I would like to acknowledge ACAL, VALBEC, and the Museum of Victoria for the chance provided to me to discuss adult literacy with you. My current research is looking at museum influence on classroom practices in adult literacy and I am gradually learning to appreciate the depth of museum connections.

Second, I ask you to think about the strategic role played by ACAL and VALBEC in providing these conference opportunities for practitioners to meet and to debate. This has now been happening for nearly thirty years.

And third, I wish to state how privileged I feel to be asked to deliver the year 2004 Arch Nelson Address. I first met Arch Nelson in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1966. Now, this was just a few months after the attempted coup of 1965. Nevertheless, travel had resumed a degree of normality and Arch was already organizing the first Australian-Indonesian student exchange visit. I was just passing by.

We met again ten years later in adult literacy work. I found that I had much to learn from him about advocacy for an organisation that was not only educationally effective but also politically viable. His work was strategic in demanding that people in all walks of life take on responsibility for adult literacy and his work was thorough.

As Arch Nelson wrote in 1995 (p.232) in his memoirs about his efforts as Chairman of ACAL...

...to succeed, an adult literacy campaign would need widespread public commitment and adequate finance...There is a need for many people, and a wide variety of institutions – the schools, colleges and universities but also family, churches, political parties, press, radio and television organisations, libraries, community bodies and governments at all levels...

We need to check if our current involvement does justice to the role of advocate that Arch Nelson developed.

The importance of titles

There are people in this world that take delight in playing with words when writing titles for projects, books, newsletters and conferences.

As a recent example so relevant to this Conference, consider Don Watson's *Death Sentence: the decay of public language*. Similarly, the publishers of the recent best seller by Lynne Truss, *Eats, Shoots & Leaves – The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* understood the marketing potential of a clever title [__]. They have been well rewarded with sales reaching seven figures.

The book's dedication is rather adroit, too:

To the memory of the striking Bolshevik printers of St Petersburg who, in 1905, demanded to be paid the same rate for punctuation marks as for letters, and thereby directly precipitated the first Russian Revolution.

In a comparable way, the title of this conference *Four Seasons in One Day* is more than interstate slander. It also proclaims that this is a city with a proud history of managing diversity.

In addition, the sub-title *Literacies in changing climates* reinforces our tradition of providing two meanings for the price of one. The adult literacy profession must be strong enough to change the climates within which we operate. However, at the same time, we have to show that we are flexible and professional in responding to changes in policies and procedures, including the changes that we don't like.

What have you got hiding in your garage (or your office...)?

This Arch Nelson Address will soon seek interactivity through some ten questions which test your knowledge of adult literacy, past, present and future – an activity that is appropriate to a museum setting.

After all, ACAL and state organisation archives could be more than just ancient artifacts filed in wood-grained drawers. The archives need to live - becoming part of your conversations at the photocopier as well as your formal documentation processes. I believe that a couple of state organisations have already achieved considerable success in finding materials and storage capacity for essential artifacts from the past.

In the next few years, ACAL and many of the state and territory organisations might therefore seek **selected** memorabilia to become part of some archival systems. At present, perhaps, these things lie in waiting - in your office and your garage!

Watch out for ACAL and local organisation projects which hope to clear those building spaces for you....so long as adequate hanging space can be found!

Ten trivial pursuit questions - serious, not trivial

Meanwhile, we do need to begin that Quiz!

The ten questions and answers are available as a handout from the Conference as well as through links on the Conference website.

And it must be emphasized that use of the term *Trivial Pursuit Quiz* does not imply that I consider the adult literacy content of the questions to be trivial.

First, some house rules.

One: many questions consist of a long text - to do with self-expression, practical purposes, knowledge or public debate - which is then followed by a comprehension or extension question.

These introductory texts are not always brief and so you may make notes before each question.

Two: you will record your answers in writing. With a couple of exceptions, approximately twenty seconds will be allocated to inter-group moderation and text messaging.

Three: the judge's decision is final and is not available for deconstruction.

Four: the winning group receives a small prize ... but everyone gets a warm inner glow.

Are there any questions or concerns?

Then let us proceed with the first question, a question which is general and which facilitates recognition of prior learning.

Good luck with the *Four Seasons in One Day Trivial Pursuit Quiz*!

The symbol [] indicates that an 'artifact' will be shown to the audience and [] indicates use of an audio tape

The Questions at Last

1

Over the years, famous composers have acknowledged the importance to life of the passing of four European seasons. Here, for example, are several stanzas from Joseph Haydn's work, *The Seasons* [] or []. Or I could have looked for an excerpt from Glazunov's ballet of the same name.

However, most of us are more familiar with another four seasons' composition which has been used extensively in concerts, in children's music lessons and even as part of television commercials.

The name of that composer may rapidly come to mind. Please note, though, that you also need to think very carefully about geography and seasonal choice right now.

Question One: *what is the surname of that composer and, if we take note of the approaching equinox, which seasonal excerpt is appropriate to play to you at this precise time of the year?*

2

In the early days of writing (thousands of years ago) vowels were not used. Consonants only were written. The writing, to our eyes, looked to be in some form of code.

Now, in the early days of adult literacy tutor training under Kath White [], one exercise she provided was written in code. Our struggle to de-code the information in that exercise helped us to appreciate the predicament that students faced in not being able to read.

Copy down and then struggle with the following coded information from a well known law of popular science. It does, however, sessionally employ a particular vowel on two occasions. Let's find out: are you literate in science?

quls mc squrd

Question Two: *decode that message now to prove your science literacy.*

3

From early days, the general public has asked: how many adults in the community can't read or write? For example, Dr Judith Goyen conducted a study in western Sydney in the mid-70s that found that 10% of adults couldn't read.

Then, in 1978 during the second ACAL national conference, one of the conference conveners was interviewed on the ABC radio current affairs program AM. He suggested that at least 100,000 adults over the age of 25 years could be retrenched due to various circumstances such as economic restructuring and lack of basic education skills [__].

Years later, somewhat more recently, a comparative international study showed that *...over 6 million (approximately 47%) Australian adults don't have adequate literacy skills to cope with the demands of everyday life and work.* (Hagston, 2002, p.8)

However, perhaps it was the publication of Rosie Wickert's major study following ILY that convinced the general public that there was no one-way to conceptualize or measure literacy, or difficulty in reading.

Question Three: *what does the abbreviation ILY stand for, in which year was ILY conducted, and what was the three-word title of Rosie Wickert's published research?*

4

Given the focus on 'reading', lots of abridged and simplified readers have been borrowed from that essential support facility, the Adult Education Resource and Information Service, ARIS. Some of those readers you will have bought for your programs.

We relate strongly to these readers – as we do to our own school classics which we have carried forward from our student days. Some of those books have been made into films.

The play by Robert Bolt *A Man for all Seasons* is one such book.

If I were to choose my favorite excerpt from the film version, I would cite the moment when Paul Schofield as Thomas More expresses concern about the way in which the middle level manager Richard Rich has caved in to pressure in the workplace from Thomas Cromwell, his CEO, and made a sale with commercial advantage to the organisation but at the possible expense of ethical principles.

Whatever!

We all do have our favorite books and stories and no one can take that away from us.

Question four: *over the years, simplified readers have been written for and by literacy students. For example, we have read stories such as Strike Morning [__] produced at the CAE or, more recently, Stud, produced as part of the Preston-Reservoir: PRACE series.*

For one point in response to question four, your group must be able to write down the name of two such 'story books', or two 'readers'. They must be books which you could confidently argue have been greatly enjoyed by students in your programs.

5

But we also continue to be interested in teaching students to write – from process writing methods to genre-driven programs, from newsletters produced on the spirit duplicator to print-on-demand. And within that range, many of us continue to be influenced by our teaching histories and our concern for correct Latin-based grammar, correct punctuation – the stuff that we were taught at school.

Some of you may, in fact, belong to the Association for Abolition of the Aberrant Apostrophe. If so, you can surely answer the next question, especially if you have read that bestseller *Eats, Shoots and Leaves*.

And I do realise that we might find contradictory interpretations from various authorities.

Question Five: *what punctuation mark is referred to in the following quotation?*

Only one significant task has been lifted from the workload of [this punctuation mark] in recent years; it no longer has to appear in the plurals of abbreviations or plural dates...(Truss, 2003, pp.46-47)

6

Things sometimes go badly for adult literacy.

The counter-productive cutback in service organisations is one such example. The loss of ALIO from Sydney, from NSW and beyond, provides a specific example. The potential loss of similar services in other areas is equally worrisome.

Question Six: *what was the full name of the organisation ALIO?*

7

As you well know, this conference is concerned with four seasons in one day. Some of us here are more likely to think in terms of four seasons in twelve months.

By contrast, this calendar [] produced in western Arnhem Land is built around local experience in the Top End which nominates six seasons within a year.

Now, I always thought that there were only two seasons per year Top End but this calendar contributes to my learning a little bit more about life up north. In fact, this is a further reminder to me of how little I know - and how much research I should undertake.

Over the years, people have made sure that there has been a continuing program of adult literacy research on many issues and practical matters, including research that refers to adult literacy and indigenous communities.

Much adult literacy research can be found on the ALNARC web site. (p.10)

Question Seven: *what does the acronym ALNARC stand for?*

8

Adult literacy contributed to plain English campaigns during the 1990s which began, in part, in association with a major insurance company. I repeat: an insurance company.

In a way, the insurance industry and you have been allies in some of our literacy campaigns. Arch Nelson would have approved.

However, even while we are talking about insurance, I want you to also think about the Fire Brigade Museum which is located just several hundred metres from here.

At that museum, you can read the following sort of information. I need to warn you that this is a long caption.

When the insurance company fire truck arrived at the burning building, they looked for the insurance mark [] of that insurance company on the outside wall of the burning building.

If the insurance mark was there, they put out the fire.

If the mark of a competitor insurance company was on the wall, they went back to base or, for some real value-adding, deliberately got in the way of their competitor's fire truck once it had arrived.

There is a lot of information you have to juggle for this question.

I also want you to think back to the language of linguistics introduced to us through the influence of Michael Halliday and applied linguistics only fifteen years ago.

Question Eight: *which linguistic term (a single word of fourteen letters) describes the process of change in language in the following sentences?*

The insurance company told the clients what to do in order to be eligible for company's fire brigade services. They were required to display the insurance company mark on the outside wall of the building.

...which is then changed to the following single sentence:

Eligibility for the insurance company fire brigade services required display of the insurance company mark on the outside wall of the building.

9

We have always been concerned, and correctly so, with other general community issues.

For example, imagine that I had got the bright idea earlier this evening of looking for the relevant old cassette tape at home with my home-made recording of that 1978 national conference radio interview on the ABC... so that I could play it to you two hours later during this Quiz. Right now, in fact.

Question Nine: *technically speaking, would I have I infringed copyright regulations by spontaneously playing that excerpt to you this evening? Yes or no? (And you might like to write down the reasons for your opinion)*

(Permission to use the (sound) excerpt from the Radio Current Affairs program AM (1978) given by the ABC)

10

Adult literacy groups have worked with students for many years on projects from worm farms to digital histories, from cooking books to community radio broadcasting.

Many of these have been projects which have given credibility to the notion of multi-literacies at work in the wide world outside the classroom. In fact, they have been projects respected by people with no particular interest in adult literacy *per se*.

Question Ten: *Discuss your possible answer within your group. Then write down the name or description of any adult literacy student project that has received general community recognition beyond the world of adult literacy.*

The answers will now be provided and you can give your team a score out of ten for its performance.

Conclusion

I hope that you enjoyed your participation in a serious Trivial Pursuit, a distraction from quality assurance systems or over-blown policy rhetoric. After all, Arch Nelson did know what it was like to become distracted! As example, I quote from a 1963 Annual Report in which he was involved:

With the increasing demands on the staff...to carry out the administration...there has been a reduction in the amount of teaching which members of staff can undertake.

Howard, A. in Nelson, A. (1995) p. 204

I guess that sounds all too familiar.

May I finish with an excerpt from another Annual Report, this one written in London about museum activity some years ago?

...by proper arrangements a Museum may be made in the highest degree instructional. If it be connected with lectures, and means are taken to point out its uses and applications, [then, the Museum] becomes elevated from being a mere unintelligible lounge for idlers into an impressive school room for everyone.

Hooper-Greenhill, E (1995), p.50

So, with that good advice from the 1850s, I invite you to spend some few minutes during the rest of this evening, idly lounging, while you contemplate what archival material you will be contributing one day to ACAL and your local organisation, and what plans you already have to make sure that all your local and distant museums, both real and virtual, become impressive school rooms for adult literacy students.

Thank you – and prepare to dig deep for those archives

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ALNARC: <http://www.staff.vu.edu.au/alnarc>

I would like to acknowledge, without providing names, the many people who helped in developing this Arch Nelson Address: from searching the garage for archives to wielding the blue pen in search of greater clarity. (Why blue?)

Also, I realise that the genre in which I have written is a significant departure from the more formal way in which Arch Nelson would have written things!

Answers to the Trivia
Questions follow.

Changing climates – questions and answers

Question One: what is the surname of that composer and, if we take note of the approaching equinox, which seasonal excerpt is appropriate to play to you at this precise time of the year?

Answer to Question One

(Antonio) Vivaldi ... Summer (equinox 21st or 22nd September)

gnib mc squrd

Question Two: decode that message now to prove your science literacy.

Answer to Question Two e = mc² (e equals mc squared)

Question Three: what does the abbreviation ILY stand for, in which year was ILY conducted, and what was the three-word title of Rosie Wickett's published research?

Answer to Question Three: International Literacy Year; 1990; No Single Measure

Question four: over the years, simplified readers have been written for and by literacy students. For example, we have read stories such as Strike Morning [] produced at the CAE or, more recently, Stud, produced as part of the Preston-Reservoir: PRACE series.

For one point in response to question four, your group must be able to write down the name of two such 'story books', or two 'readers'. They must be books which you could confidently argue have been greatly enjoyed by students in your programs.

Answer to Question Four: as per group's judgment

Question Five: what punctuation mark is referred to in the following quotation?

Only one significant task has been lifted from the workload of [this punctuation mark] in recent years; it no longer has to appear in the plurals of abbreviations or plural dates...(Truss, 2003, pp.46-47)

Answer to Question Five: the apostrophe

Question Six: what was the full name of the organisation ALIO?

Answer to Question Six: Adult Literacy Information Office

Question Seven: what does the acronym ALNARC stand for?

Answer to Question Seven: Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium

Question Eight: which linguistic term (a single word of fourteen letters) describes the process of change in language in the following sentences?



Answer to Question Ten: as per group's judgment

Question Ten: Discuss your possible answer within your group. Then write down the name or description of any adult literacy student project that has received general community recognition beyond the world of adult literacy.

Answer to Question Nine: Yes (need to obtain clearance or information about then clearance terms and conditions of usage ... beforehand)

Question Nine: technically speaking, would I have I infringed copyright regulations by spontaneously playing that excerpt to you this evening? Yes or no? (And you might like to write down the reasons for your opinion)

Answer to Question Eight: nominalisation

Eligibility for the insurance company fire brigade services required display of the insurance company mark on the outside wall of the building.

...which is then changed to the following single sentence:

The insurance company told the clients what to do in order to be eligible for company's fire brigade services. They were required to display the insurance company mark on the outside wall of the building.

