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Pollard & the Pecket Learning  
Community Steering Group

2014 vol: 37 # 1

fine  
print

valbec 



a journal of adult english language and literacy education

## Publication Details

Editor: Lynne Matheson

Fine Print Editorial Group:  
Sarah Deasey, Linno Rhodes, Jacinta Agostinelli, Sally Hutchison, Lynda Achren, Lindee Conway.

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

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Layout: digital environs, Melbourne enquiries@digitalenvirons.com

Printing: D&D Digital Printing, Carlton, Victoria

Cover Image: State Library Western Australia, supplied by Jane Jones.



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



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# Editorial

After many years of being a member of the Fine Print Editorial group, it feels a bit strange to be in the driver's seat, as commissioning editor for 2014. Looking in the rear view mirror I can see a line-up of exceptional editors who have ensured that the high standards of Fine Print have been maintained for more than three decades. I know that it is a source of great pride for the editorial group and VALBEC committee, with the ongoing assistance of the ACFE board, to keep producing the only remaining paper-based adult language, literacy and numeracy journal in Australia. The digital archive on the VALBEC website provides a rich resource and reflects the depth and diversity of Fine Print over time.

Fine Print has a wide readership and we are pleased to be able to draw on writers and thinkers, researchers and practitioners from the wider LLN community, Learn Local, VET, EAL, Higher Education, private providers and industry. This spread and the wealth of knowledge and experience our writers bring, is what makes for such good reading to be had in each edition. I trust that this will continue and that you will enjoy the features and regular columns throughout the year.

Recently, I captured images on my phone of the delight in the face of my three year old great-niece when she was being read to by her great-uncle. I enjoy rediscovering with her such favourites as *We're going on a bear hunt* (25<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition this year) and engaging with the rhythms and humour of Mem Fox' delightful *Where is the green sheep?* and *Hattie and the fox*. I could relate to the sense of transformation in prisoners' lives in Jane Jones' article that describes a successful collaboration in Western Australia's prisons. Some of the barriers prisoners face when returning to family and life outside are being broken down through the men developing confidence to read with their children and to improve their literacy and life prospects beyond prison.

We are reminded of the importance of story and capturing learner voices in the Pecket Well College article. In the current environment of regulation and uncertainty of funding, it is imperative to preserve in some form the achievements of a learning community when it has come to the end of its lifespan. Their oral history and digital archive website is well worth a visit.

It hardly needs saying that the joyous nature of music and sharing in singing with others does much to raise the spirits and nurture the soul, not to mention improve brain functioning and language mastery. The research is there and Carmel Davies and Sharon Duff are on to it with their *Sing with me!* books with easy to follow tips that come from years of experience.

Digital literacy is hot on everyone's lips and fingertips with a new resource kit from AMES for CALD learners and two teachers writing of their exploration into Moodle environments to improve VET teachers' skills. We would like to hear more from practitioners who are working with digital literacy or exploring Moodle so please consider submitting written pieces for the next edition.

Lynne Matheson



**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.**

# Reparation Through Reading

By Jane Jones and the Hakea Prison Education Team

Poor literacy is often generational. Parents with low literacy skills struggle to support their children in attaining the experiences they need to develop good reading habits and school readiness skills. A collaborative approach to adult and family literacy in Western Australian prisons, supporting the literacy needs of prisoners gives them a better chance of breaking the cycle.

In mid-2012, the Education and Vocational Training Unit of the Department of Corrective Services (DCS) began a unique collaboration with the *Better Beginnings* Family Literacy program: an initiative of the State Library of Western Australia (SLWA). The goal was to teach parents in prison how to effectively read to their young children using a range of age appropriate activities suggested by Dr Christina van Staden, an early childhood specialist. The *Better Beginnings* program is helping to foster healthy relationships between parents and children, working with staff to ensure prisoners have access to the reading packs and services available outside prison.

*Better Beginnings* is an early intervention family literacy program for children from birth to five years. Recognising the positive impact of intergenerational learning and parental involvement on a child's literacy and education, the program utilises an established network of public libraries, community health services, education, and government agencies to deliver literacy resources to families across Western Australia. In the wider community, it provides a free gift of a reading pack to new and first time parents and to four and five year old children starting school. Each pack contains an age appropriate book, information for parents and activities to support home literacy practices. Since its launch in 2005, *Better Beginnings* has reached over 250,000 families throughout the state.

The *Better Beginnings* program helps to create a rich literacy environment in the home, where books are shared and enjoyed, with rhymes, songs and conversations, helping early language development and fostering the development of healthy imaginations. Parent involvement is vital to a child's success at school and one of the most effective ways of achieving this is through shared reading between parents and children. Children with a parent in prison are vulnerable to missing out on the benefits of such shared experiences, adding to the many other social, emotional and economic challenges they encounter as they grow up (Toohey, 2012).

## Engagement and collaboration

Basic adult education courses are provided in each of the fifteen prisons in Western Australia by the Department of Corrective Services Education and Vocational Training Unit (E&VTU). For many prisoners, this is the starting point on their pathway to further secondary and tertiary education, or vocational training. The E&VTU aims to provide student-centred programs that are both engaging, intrinsically motivating and lead to employment opportunities upon release. The E&VTU is a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) and as such meets Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) standards.

Introducing new initiatives that motivate prisoners to improve their basic skills and engage with education is a key strategy of the E&VTU. This positive approach to learning was a significant factor in establishing the collaboration between the State Library and Corrective Services. When staff from each organisation met at an adult literacy conference, the combination of high quality early literacy resources and a shared vision to assist parents in prison to support their children's literacy and language development, inspired the development of a special relationship and a unique adult basic literacy course.

Adults with family responsibilities are often more motivated to improve their own literacy skills to help their children be better prepared for school success. Capitalising on the notion that prisoners might want to begin to make reparations by learning how to better read and share books with their children, *Better Beginnings* resource kits have been distributed to all prison education centres for use within classrooms. These kits contain multiple copies of books, printed materials and other program resources.

Each centre also received a quantity of the reading packs distributed by public libraries to parents of newborn babies and to children in kindergarten and pre-primary schools. To facilitate this, collaboration has been extended to include prison based family support services. This cross-sector approach has strengthened the relationship



and enhanced the support of early literacy development for families at risk.

### **Linking libraries, reading and prisons**

Libraries are a rich source of reading materials and expertise for recommending appropriate books for sharing with children of all ages. While most prisons have a library, developing community links with a public library may assist with prisoner reintegration on release. The *Reparation Through Reading* program encourages students to visit afresh their concept of 'library' and explore all that a modern public library has to offer. It encourages the prisoners' partners to access library services and prisoners to access their local library, upon release.

Whilst in prison, parents are encouraged to make recordings of themselves reading a story to their child. Where criminogenic histories allow, these recordings are sent home to the child along with a copy of the book. Parents who are not confident readers are given the opportunity to improve their reading and literacy skills before they make the final recording. Research shows that this practice often leads to further learning experiences and assists strengthening family connections in difficult circumstances (Duncan, 2011).

Programs for men have been particularly successful, such as: *Reading with my Father* (State Library of Queensland); *Reading Together* (LINC Tasmania); *Storytime Dads* (UK, Victoria and WA); *Storybook Program* (Canada); *Breaking Barriers with Books* (US) and the New York Public Library's *Daddy and Me at the Library*. It is worth noting that these programs are not limited to fathers, as uncles and grandfathers often choose to participate. Similar programs are also available in many women's prisons.

Several Corrective Services education centres in Western Australia have implemented similar programs on their own initiative. Technology has made the storybook reading model much easier and accessible for prison staff, students, support services and libraries. In some instances Skype has also been used when a family is unable to visit the prison due to distance.

### **From little things ...**

In 2011 and 2012, *Better Beginnings* was approached by the family support service based in three Perth metropolitan prisons, with an invitation to be involved in an event they were organising for prisoners and their families as part of their *Dads and Kids Connect* program. *Better Beginnings* staff read stories and shared rhymes and songs with the families. Reading packs were distributed to the children and many parents commented that they had not received them before.

### **... Big things grow**

In 2013, the Hakea Prison Education Centre Manager saw the opportunity to transform the lives of the students in his care. He encouraged them to take on a greater parenting role and actually spend some of their visit time reading with their children. He facilitated the creation of an assessment tool mapped to accredited curricula and worked with Dr Christina van Staden to create a teaching program and train staff in its use. As some of the men were not confident readers, he invited them to attend sessions in the Education Centre before the event to practise reading the books they would like to read to their children on visit days.

In his role, he was a strong, passionate example of what a good father is, giving the blokes the permission they needed to explore their playful side and overcome any shame they might feel when trying out 'kiddy' things. The response exceeded expectations. One student said:

The course not only makes a huge difference in our lives, it also makes a big, big difference in the lives

of our children. For the first time I'm not feeling as though my children are being punished by the system while they're punishing me.

Other students, in an unprecedented, unheard of turn of events, have requested that their transfers or release dates be postponed so they can complete the course. Students have skipped morning and afternoon tea breaks to stay in class. A great deal of interaction between the students has been observed. Students who were, at first, somewhat shy, have been eager to share their achievements with their peers and have offered assistance to their classmates. The level of constructive talk is remarkably high.

Another student, as a result of this course, expressed for the first time that he would never be coming back to prison. He credited the course with enabling him to feel better about himself in his role as a father, not just a 'useless fifth wheel'. He credited it with changing his marriage for the better and for giving him the skills he needs to ensure his daughter does not suffer the way he has suffered.

### Helping Your Child—The Course

It can be difficult finding reading materials at a level suitable for adults with low literacy. Children's books can be an excellent literacy and learning resource for adults, particularly those with children, as they are colourful; commonly use rhyme, rhythm and repetitive language; introduce new words and sounds; words and pictures tell the story together; and they help to discover the world and encourage imagination. While some adults may feel they are not appropriate for their learning needs, in the case of the Hakea men they proved to be a powerful incentive.

The six week basic adult education course, *Helping Your Child* is targeted at prisoners with low literacy and who have children under five years of age. Students enrol in four Entry to General Education (EGE) and/or Certificate of General Education for Adults (CGEA) units and attend twice a week for an hour. Corrective Services teaching staff deliver the training and can draw on support from prison peer mentors.

The Campus Manager approached twenty-eight men who had participated in the family event, and others with children under five, to register interest in attending a *Helping Your Child* program. Not one negative response was received. Well, who would not want to help prepare their child for school? Who could say no when a course was presented with so much heart felt warmth and conviction?

The course was very popular as each dad realised that what they learnt through the course would not only help them but also their children get off to a better start at school.

The role of libraries as an invaluable community resource is also a key message integrated into *Helping Your Child*. An outcome of the course is to engage prisoners' families in creating a reading culture in the home that will extend to life beyond release. Introducing prisoners and their families to the services and facilities freely available at their local public library can help develop positive community learning experiences to support rehabilitation.

Prisoners' families are encouraged to join their local library. *Better Beginnings* staff contact libraries to supply membership forms and essential information at a visit to the prison. Students get a general overview of library services for families and the wide variety of items which can be borrowed. The session also involves a bit of fun through sharing rhymes and reading a story. Being read to can be a rare pleasure for an adult. Following the library visit, students complete the membership forms which are then posted out to their family with helpful information about joining and borrowing items.

Critical to establishing the *Helping Your Child* education program has been allowing the necessary time for mapping, validation and accreditation which are all key aspects of being an RTO. E&VTU now has the course available to all its education centres, supported by a comprehensive Teachers' Guide and Student Workbook. These resources resulted from a six week trial and staff validation meetings where a variety of feedback was received from tutors, coordinators, prison education coordinators and students.

The course units concentrate on the more important functions of early vocabulary development while incorporating an integrated approach to the curriculum (Hakea Prison & Van Staden, 2013). Developed as a 'working document' the course offers teaching staff flexible strategies and scope to achieve the desired outcomes. Students are guided through topics such as creating nurturing reading environments; making time to read together every day; reading for pleasure; using rhymes; selecting suitable books; building vocabulary; questioning and comprehension; print awareness and activities to develop reading and numeracy skills. Key messages and information are reinforced through parenting sessions provided by the 'Dads and Kids Connect' program.

Throughout the course, students have plenty of hands-on experience of learning through play with activities they can share with their children including craft and maths games. Each student is given the time they need to achieve outcomes and the small group environment allows for one-on-one tuition if required, as the course can be tailored to individual student's needs and learning levels.

Towards the end of the six weeks, a family incentive visit is organised to give students an opportunity to confidently put their new skills into practice and talk to their partners about reading to their children every day. On 'graduation' students receive a box including *Better Beginnings* reading packs, books, craft supplies and games used throughout the course, to give to their families. This enables them to share what they have learnt and take these practices into their homes. On completion of the course, students have acquired units towards their EGE or CGEA and had a great deal of fun in the process.

Feedback from the participants has been very positive. In fact one student has gone on to help mentor the next group. Attendance at each session has been consistent throughout the course and students have indicated they are finding it rewarding. Some have commented that they did not realise they were actually gaining accredited units towards their EGE. As well as the literacy, numeracy and communication skills, knowledge and attitudes towards positive parenting are being put into practice. Learning about brain development and language in the early years is also reinforced through the parenting program the students attend.

### **Success and opportunities**

Collaboration across sectors has benefited the *Helping Your Child* project and contributed to achieving the desired outcomes. Representatives from each organisation provide their valuable expertise which has been shared in the spirit of helping children. Collaboration contributes to reducing duplication of services through shared resources, resulting in a better return on investment for each government agency and the family support service. This partnership has improved the reach of programs of each participating agency and ensured the likelihood of ongoing sustainability.

Another key to the success of this collaboration has been a shared vision and common goals. Everyone involved in the project shares a passion and desire to reach families who have 'slipped through the cracks' and improve literacy skills



for adults and children. Inspiring parents to do something good for themselves, to build their self-confidence so that they want to engage with their children's learning, literacy and language development and provide a good start to school. Staff are learning to overcome barriers and understand each other's issues. Mutual support and respect with a willingness to continue even with constraints, enables all parties to eventually achieve good outcomes.

Flexibility has also been a critical factor as the program has evolved. Developing initial content for the *Helping Your Child* was undertaken while continuing with existing education courses and day-to-day prison activities. This meant being realistic about expectations and finding ways to keep processes simple in order to make the program 'doable'. Each organisation had its own requirements, such as timelines and reporting, however good communication ensured these were met while working within the range of limitations of a prison environment.

New opportunities have also opened for *Better Beginnings* as it has partnered in the adult literacy program with prison family support services. State Library staff have established a regular program of library visits for younger fathers in another prison. Working with a nearby public library, special family rhyme time sessions are held when the library is closed to the general public. The fathers are escorted to the library to meet their families and spend time reading and playing with their children and having a real library experience. Anecdotal feedback from the dads indicates that they will continue to visit libraries on release and take advantage of the services available to them.

By taking a risk and 'giving something new a go' E&VTU staff aim to help prisoners maintain their family relationships, strengthen the bond between parents and

children, influence literacy practices in the home and link family support services to education. While there are many factors affecting rates of imprisonment, the *Helping Your Child* program is changing lives. Working together we are delivering a replicable model that achieves positive long term educational, cultural, social and economic outcomes by raising literacy levels throughout Western Australia.

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**Jane Jones coordinates the development of adult literacy initiatives to support the *Better Beginnings* Family Literacy program. Her extensive experience at the State Library of WA includes supporting the literacy, information and learning needs of library staff and the wider community.**

**The Hakea Prison Education Team is comprised of the Campus Manager, Early Childhood Specialist, Adult Basic Education Coordinator, Tutors and Students.**

# Training Days: Models of Vocational Training Provision—Lessons from the Victorian Experience

*By David Hetherington and Jarrod Rust*

**Per Capita is an independent progressive think tank, launched in 2007 and dedicated to building a new vision for Australia. This is the Executive Summary of an article published in July 2013 by Per Capita, and reproduced with permission. It raises important issues about the impact of contestability on VET.**

Few areas of Australian public policy have undergone such rapid change as vocational education and training (VET) in recent years. The introduction of private provision, known as ‘contestability’, has radically reshaped the VET sector. Contestability was first embraced in Victoria in 2009 in response to a widespread skills shortage, with other states since following suit. The objectives of contestability were to increase the supply of qualified trainees, while attracting greater private investment and improving quality through competition.

In a 2008 paper, Per Capita called for a new market design in vocational training based on contestability (Cooney, 2008). Now, five years on, we evaluate the experience of contestability in Victoria against its original objectives. We find that it has succeeded in one of its primary goals: dramatically lifting the supply of new trainees. However, there have been unexpected and damaging consequences elsewhere.

The ‘uncapping’ of the market has led to a bubble which has resulted in a \$300m per annum blow-out in public spending on VET. This type of bubble is common in sectors where public funds are newly made available to private providers—employment services and household solar energy systems are two recent examples. A related feature of such bubbles is that new entrants offer variable quality. In the case of VET, employer groups report falling confidence in the quality of skills delivered by the training system.

The response of the Victorian Government to the blow-out has been to cut back annual spending by around \$300m; these cuts have fallen largely on TAFEs, the traditional public training providers. We believe this is a detrimental step as it undermines TAFEs’ ability to deliver their statutory community service obligations which assist disadvantaged and disabled students. In addition,

it weakens the financial viability of TAFEs, which is particularly concerning in thin regional markets poorly serviced by private training providers.

Taken together, this is an unacceptable state of affairs. For the economic and social health of Australia, it is critical that we get this system of human capital investment right. While it is commendable that supply has increased and government has reined in overspending, Australia cannot afford to settle for declining quality in its training sector and the dilution of the distinctive community services offered by TAFEs.

To address this situation, this report proposes four principles that should underpin the next stage in the market design of the VET sector in Victoria. First, we recommend the retention of uncapped public subsidies in skills shortage areas only. Capping should be returned in other areas. Secondly, we call for a streamlined subsidy structure which removes the extraordinary complexity of the current regime and delivers the highest subsidy to skills shortage areas courses. Thirdly, we demand the reinstatement of dedicated public funding to TAFEs to allow them to deliver their community service obligations. This could be paid for by tightening eligibility for Recognition of Prior Learning programs and foundational courses. Finally, we call for an independent Ombudsman to oversee the regulation of the sector. This role would replace the current undesirable structure in which government acts as purchaser, provider and regulator.

We are confident these principles offer a sustainable, high quality future for the VET sector, both in Victoria and in the other states currently redesigning their training provision. Australian trainees and their employers deserve nothing less.

**Continued on page 20 ...**

# PIAAC—a quick look at the data and age

By Jan Hagston

This article looks briefly at the Australian Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) survey results, the skill levels across time and in comparison to other countries, and focuses on the difference in skill levels across age and some of the implications.

In February last year, the ABS released the initial Australian results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) survey, an international survey of adult skills in the areas of literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology-rich environments. PIAAC builds on the foundations of over thirty years of national and international surveys of adult skills and has been designed on the basis of prior assessments and lessons learned from the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills survey (ALLS), the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) (Statistics Canada and OECD, 1996; 2005), and earlier studies (Kirsch & Jungeblut, 1986; Kirsch et al, 1993; Wickert & Kevin, 1995).

In October 2013, the OECD released the PIAAC results for twenty-four countries or regions (OECD 2013a). A second group of nine countries will administer the test this year and a further group of countries will follow (Hagston & Tout, 2013, OECD 2013a).

In Australia, the release of the results received little attention and there seems to have been little analysis or reporting of the results. Perhaps this isn't surprising given that the report is 460 pages, the Readers Guide, the companion volume which contains information to help readers understand and interpret the results

is 124 pages and the Technical report is over 1000 pages. All a bit overwhelming! There is, however, a 32 page summary available at [www.oecd.org/site/piaac/SkillsOutlook\\_2013\\_ebook.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/site/piaac/SkillsOutlook_2013_ebook.pdf). The Australian results can be found on the ABS website: [www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4228.0](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4228.0)

## The Australian results

The overall results (see Table 1) for Australia show that 14.1% of the population have literacy levels at or below level 1 and another 30.1% have skills at level 2. For numeracy 21.8% are at or below level 1 and 32.5% are at level 2. Unlike literacy and numeracy, problem solving in technology-rich environments (PSTRE) has only 3 levels. 44.8% of the population are at level 1 for PSTRE. Another 25% didn't take part in this part of the survey as they had insufficient computer experience or expertise.

## So, what does this mean?

While there are ongoing discussions about what level adults need in Australian society, it is hard to argue that having skills at or below level 1 are satisfactory for individuals or for the community. People at these levels are only able to undertake basic tasks such as locating information in brief texts or carrying out simple processes such as counting, sorting and performing basic arithmetic function with

**Table 1: Literacy, Numeracy and Problem solving in technology-rich environments skill level of persons aged 15–74 years**

	Literacy		Numeracy		Problem solving in technology-rich environments <sup>a</sup>		
	'000	%	'000	%	'000	%	
Below Level 1	615.8	3.7	1081.9	6.5	Below Level 1	2232.2	13.4
Level 1	1745.4	10.4	2549.6	15.3	Level 1	5251.5	31.4
Level 2	5036.0	30.1	5423.2	32.5	Level 2	4135.8	24.8
Level 3	6339.0	37.9	5231.5	31.3	Level 3	541.7	3.2
Levels 4 & 5	2611.9	15.7	2061.9	12.3	Not included	4186.9	25.1
Total	16348.1	97.8 <sup>b</sup>	16348.1	97.9		16704.4	97.9

a: There are only three levels of Problem solving in technology-rich environments

b: Percentages do not add up to 100% due to missing data.

**Table 2: Literacy skill level of persons aged 15-74 years (%)**

	15–19 years	20–24 years	25–34 years	35–44 years	45–54 years	55–64 years	65–74 years
Below Level 1 & Level 1	12.0	10.5	10.3	9.3	13.2	19.6	29.0
Level 2	33.8	29.1	25.5	26.9	29.9	33.5	38.3
Levels 3, 4 & 5	54.2	59.4	62.8	61.8	54.4	43.7	28.1

whole numbers. More information about the levels and the type of tasks located at each level can be found in OECD Skills Outlook 2013 (pages 64–66 and 76–78).

The results show that there are at least 2,361,200 adult Australians who don't have the literacy skills to cope, by themselves, with the demands of our society. For numeracy, the number is nearly 3.5 million.

### From IALS to PIAAC

As mentioned above, PIAAC is the latest in international studies of adults' skills. The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) was conducted in 1996 and the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey (ALLS) in 2006. IALS assessed prose, document and quantitative literacy. ALLS assessed prose and document literacy, numeracy and problem solving. PIAAC assesses literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology-rich environments. Although each has assessed something slightly different, there has been enough consistency across the surveys to allow the comparison of results from one survey to the next.

The Australian results show that the average literacy score of Australian adults rose from 272 (level 2) in 1996 to 280 (level 3) in 2011–2012. While this is good news, it doesn't give us an understanding of whether this is true across all age groups, socio economic groups, gender, education backgrounds, etc. Further 'digging' is needed.

The results, however, show a different picture of the numeracy skills of Australians. IALS didn't assess numeracy skills so the comparison can only be made between ALLS and PIAAC results. The picture isn't a pretty one with the average numeracy score dropping from 272 in 2006 to 268 in 2011–12. But, like the literacy score, this alone isn't enough to tell us much, perhaps only that something is wrong.

### Age and skill levels

The general trend across countries, including Australia, is for literacy and numeracy scores to peak among 25–34

year olds. In Australia, skill levels plateau and then begin to decline from 45 years on, with the oldest age group having the lowest scores. Australian young people aged 15–19 have skills similar to those in the 45–54 year age group and higher than those in the older age groups.

Most of those in the younger age group will still be in some form of education and their skills and cognitive abilities will still be developing (OECD 2013a). In comparison, for older adults cognitive abilities are declining, although when factors such as education levels, work, etc. are taken into account, the level of decline is less, but still takes place (Level & van der Velden, 2013). For all of us over 45 years this is a worry, even more so for those of us who are over 60! But, there are a number of factors that can help to negate the effects of ageing: education, skill use and work experience, and post-school training (Levels & van der Velden, 2013; OECD 2013a).

### International comparisons

One of the main purposes of studies such as PIAAC is to compare ourselves to other countries. International comparisons about the skill levels of different age groups are particularly interesting. Overall Australia's literacy skills are above average with only Japan, Finland, Netherlands and Sweden performing better. Numeracy skills are slightly below average and in problem solving in technology-rich environments (PSTRE), Australia performed well above average. However, comparing those in the 16–24 year old age group we find Australian young people are:

- only just above average for literacy
- slightly below average for numeracy
- average in PSTRE.

In comparison to other countries, Australia's older age groups perform highly in PSTRE. So, it would seem that it is older Australians who are performing better than their counterparts in other countries, particularly in literacy and PSTRE. Initial education has a positive effect on the skill levels of adults of all ages (Levels & van der Velden, 2013) and the relatively higher performance of older Australians

may be due to the relatively high levels of secondary school and post-secondary school participation in Australia of those who are now in their 50s and 60s.

Countries such as Korea and Finland had relatively low participation rates in secondary and post-secondary education of those who are in their 50s and 60s. However, these countries, along with Japan and the Netherlands stand out as having young people with high skill levels, much higher than Australia's young people. While these countries differ from Australia in their characteristics, they do show that it is possible to make significant progress in improving skills proficiency (OECD, 2013b).

### Skills for the Future?

The declining performance of young (15 year old) Australians in reading and maths particularly, when compared with students in other countries, is also indicated in the Programme in International Student Assessment (PISA) (OECD, 2010). The data should 'ring some alarms about Australia's future' (Mendelovits, 2013) as the stock of skills available to Australia is likely to decline in the next few decades.

For this decline in skills to be halted, the proficiency of young people needs to be improved. Given the importance of initial education in skill proficiency, the education of young Australians needs to be reassessed. However, opportunities need to be provided for adults and young people who have left school to further develop their skills. Education and training throughout life is obviously an important aspect of this but engagement in activities requiring the use of literacy, numeracy and problem solving, both in and outside work, is important to both develop and maintain skills.

**Jan Hagston is a consultant with extensive experience in adult and adolescent literacy. In previous roles she has been the executive officer for the Victorian Applied Learning Association and manager of ARIS.**

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# AALL conference insights

By Sally Hutchison

**Academic Language and Learning (ALL) units in Higher Education (HE) have some similar concerns to those experienced in Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) support programs in TAFE. With more students transitioning from TAFE to HE, it is important for practitioners to be informed about what is happening in each sector and to learn from each other.**



I was fortunate to attend *New students, new learning: new challenges?* the 11<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference for the Association for Academic Language and Learning (AALL) at RMIT University, Melbourne in November, 2013. My objective was to obtain a broad picture of the different approaches being taken to Academic Language and Learning (ALL) in universities around Australia. My interest in models of ALL delivery, assessment and strategies for measuring success, was in relation to how ALL skills are approached in Higher Education programs at Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (NMIT). This overview of some of the presentations and workshops I attended and some of the main ideas discussed, may be of use to people working in LLN support and ALL in both sectors.

In the conference opening address, Sophie Arkoudis raised key questions as to the role and positioning of ALL. Many international students are still graduating with low level English language skills, but the student cohort as a whole is diverse. There are students, and increasingly not only international students, who graduate without having the communication skills they need for the workplace or further study. Developing these as part of graduate attributes is critical but these skills have often been overlooked as they are difficult to assess. The role of ALL in relation to this, needs to be clarified with a strategic approach.

Too often educators working in the ALL area feel undervalued, being seen as 'support', and they find it hard to 'break in' to mainstream programs. The focus should be on English language development and on clearly defining what students need to demonstrate in their learning, and setting explicit goals for oral and written communication skills. Critical thinking skills are core and the role of the ALL staff would be to help academics to map disciplinary communicative competence across the curriculum. People need to know what ALL staff do by providing evidence based approaches that can systematically justify their work, and in doing so, place ALL staff in a much better position to be able to start to tell the institutions they work

in what it is they need, rather than the other way round (Arkoudis 2013).

## Student input to their ALL learning needs

Staff from Learning Skills and the Linguistics Department at Macquarie University showcased a suite of videos made for culturally and linguistically diverse communities (CALD) students. Students were involved in the development of videos in which they engaged in a reflective process on the strategies they use to produce good work. Each five minute segment is interspersed with teachers giving comments with a focus on the process rather than the product (Byrnes, Slatyer & Green 2013).

Another group of staff had used student evaluations on academic literacy workshops to delve deeper into what students need and want, and whether the workshop materials were relevant to them. As a result of their findings they changed their name and focus from Study Skills to Learning Skills and instead of talking about 'support' started talking about 'success', for example, 'This is what successful students do' (Ma, Scrimmager & Parker 2013).

There is a gap between students knowing what they need to do and actually doing it. Often they do not have a lot of opportunities to converse with native speakers. Large numbers of international students often do not have a shared sense of humour with local students and this can contribute to the fact that they have no contact with them. For students who want to work in the health sciences, they need to be able to converse with patients about a whole range of culturally entrenched topics, like talking about the footy on Monday morning. Students were surveyed and some of the strategies they use were made available online for other students to access, for example, 'When I'm alone I talk to myself in English', 'I try to think in English' (Benzie, Pryce & Smith 2013).

## ALL Resources

A model of using hybrid texts, rather than academic texts for first year students has been developed at Victoria University.

Hybrid texts are like magazine articles and are often online. These are still authentic texts, but not as academic and are easier to read with lots of hyperlinks. Many academic articles require an enormous amount of decoding and are unsuitable for first year students, being more appropriate for people who already have a lot of experience in that particular discipline. Hybrid texts can be used successfully to provide a bridge to the academic article. This can be achieved by teaching the students clearly defined strategies for how to read a text, ensuring that they can identify the different sections: abstract, introduction, discussion and conclusion, as well as headings, sub-headings, topic sentences, definitions of key terms, points of view, paraphrasing and the argument itself (Custance & Speight-Burton 2013).

Keith Smith from the University of South Australia challenged some assumptions about academic literacies by posing the question, 'What is not an academic literacy?' He suggested there is no satisfactory definition of what academic literacies are and if we cannot define them, how can we possibly go about embedding them? In other academic disciplines, not having a frame of reference would not be acceptable.

Academic literacies are not embedded, they are already there and need to be unpacked and teased out. Perhaps academic literacies are more about teacher development, and not so much about student support. The goal then would be about collaboration that equipped teachers to give feedback about content and language, as the two cannot be separated. This would mean working to build language skills into the assessment rubrics (Smith 2013). A very useful resource mentioned here is the Manchester university computerised academic phrase bank: <http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk>.

### **University preparation and learning support**

Challenges for students who transition from TAFE to university are being examined by ALL Unit staff at Latrobe University (LTU). These students often say that they are overwhelmed by university systems and procedures. Students who come with credits for previous studies often miss orientation and induction into disciplinary cultures. Students may be afraid to ask for help and LTU is addressing this by producing a TAFE to Uni Survival Guide, providing peer mentors, rovers, and student learning advisors. In regional areas, ALL staff conduct sessions at the TAFE which is now much more aligned with the university (Ambrose, Bonne, Chanock, Delly, Jardine & Cunningham 2013).



**Victoria University students at work**

Kate Chanock from the LTU Bundoora Campus, spoke about teaching subject literacies through blended learning. She noted that generic workshops were not well attended and that the distinctions between disciplines in writing conventions and voices highlighted the fact that any ALL work needed to be contextualised. The benefits of contributing to blended subjects to scaffold students' learning can be significant, but Kate also acknowledged the challenge in giving feedback to lecturers who may have set an assignment that has unreasonable expectations of students. The importance of the ALL advisor having access to course resources such as learning guides, assignment topics and instructions is critical in being able to offer well-contextualised support (Chanock 2013).

Cate O'Dwyer and Barbara Morgan from RMIT discussed an academic literacies project to support first year students. A large number of students were presenting at the drop-in centre for support with the same assignment, so the particular discipline area was approached to see how they could best help these students. A four part, online resource on argument analysis was developed that included an embedded tutorial for all students. Any student who did not access the tutorial was followed up to see why, and this was helpful in identifying which students might be at risk. What followed was a big drop in the numbers of students wanting to access support and this significantly reduced the load on the ALL staff and allowed limited resources to be available to those who needed and used them the most. Students were surveyed in tutorials after their first assignments and feedback showed that they liked the deconstructed examples provided and the templates with model paragraphs and that overall the tutorial did help them read more efficiently (O'Dwyer & Morgan 2013).

### **Inspirational keynote address**

A major highlight of the conference was the inspiring keynote address by Professor James Arvanitakis from the

University of Western Sydney, recipient of the 2012 Prime Minister's University Teacher of the Year. He provided a range of insights into how he engages his students, such as treating his lectures and tutorials as events and aiming to entertain his students (Arvanitakis 2013).

Some examples of his teaching strategies can be seen on YouTube and by accessing some of his short videos. He uses a range of media to stimulate all the senses and advocates the use of non-academic reading material, making it relevant to the core concepts and using it as stimulus for discussion. James strives to show the links between the students themselves, the issues and other people. His advice to ALL advisors is:

- don't waste your time with those who are resistant to working with you, as there are plenty who do want to work with you
- ask the students all the time for their input
- market what you do better
- share information
- innovate and inspire
- don't be scared to make mistakes or to learn new skills
- support the teaching of concepts, not theories
- have fun!

For more information about James Arvanitakis: <http://jamesarvanitakis.net/>

His publications, including some intriguing titles such as, 'The Heterogenous Citizen: How Many of Us Care about Don Bradman's Average', 'Kill Your PowerPoints and Teach Like a Pirate' and 'Why Are The Young People Revolting?' provide teaching strategies and ideas. [http://www.uws.edu.au/ics/people/researchers/james\\_arvanitakis](http://www.uws.edu.au/ics/people/researchers/james_arvanitakis)

## Conclusion

Complementary to the presentations at the conference was the launch of the website *Degrees of Proficiency—Building a strategic approach to the development of English language proficiency*, [www.degreesofproficiency.aall.org.au](http://www.degreesofproficiency.aall.org.au).

The website hosts an abundance of resources around good practice in developing and assessing the English Language Proficiency (ELP) of university students, including guidelines for ELP development strategy and key research findings and case studies. Resources include the TEQSA standards and examples of policies from some universities and also a section on challenges and issues. The research presented strongly suggests that where institutes have had a systematic approach, a permanent advisory group and adequate resourcing, the most positive progress has been made.

The AALL conference was a great experience for me, and whilst the majority of delegates were from universities, it was interesting to note that many of the opportunities and challenges we face in LLN support in TAFE are similar to those experienced by ALL educators in Higher Education. It was a surprise to find that the team teaching model that has been used successfully in many TAFEs over the past few years, was perceived as quite a new and novel approach in the HE sector. This suggests that there may be some value in TAFEs sharing their experiences of these programs in the near future.

Refer to the conference website for the full presentations and papers: <http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=4cza1tt911dc1>

**Sally Hutchison is the manager of the Learning Skills and Assessment Unit at NMIT.**

# Learner voices at Pecket: past and present

*By Mary Hamilton, Pauline Nugent, Nick Pollard, & members of Pecket Learning Community Steering Group*

**An oral history and digital archive project aimed at capturing and recording the history of the Pecket Well College, has been coordinated by Pauline Nugent and supported by a Community Steering Group and Pecket Wellians, who were involved in all aspects of this legacy project.**

Back in 1985 when we were at Nottingham University, some of us went on a walk and right across from Nottingham Castle we saw a building. It was called the People's College—we'd never seen owt like that before. We liked the name and we wanted to call our building 'Pecket Well People's College'; but they already had the name so we called ours 'Pecket Well College'. The main difference to other colleges was we ran it ourselves and we had no tutors—we had workshop leaders and often they had difficulties with reading and writing. We had no students either—we called people on courses 'participants'. That got the message through that we were a different kind of college. (Billy Breeze, founder member)

In 1992, Pecket Well College opened with a three day event attended by over 400 people from across the UK. The college was set up as a self-governed centre for adult literacy and basic education courses and it ran for 20 years. Sadly, changes in the political priorities for basic adult education, the availability of funding and approaches to assessment led to the closure of the Pecket Well College building in 2011. Pecket continued its work but on a reduced scale and was reliant on a small team of very dedicated and loyal volunteers. The Pecket's legacy, an oral history and archives (digital and physical) project, was established to preserve the memory of Pecket and inspire others to take control of their education and learning.

## The Pecket journey begins

In 1985, some adult learners who had met whilst attending Horton House Adult Education Centre in Halifax, West Yorkshire had an experience that changed their lives. As members of a Magazine Group set up in the early 1980s, they enjoyed working in a cooperative way and wanted a say in how and what they learned. Subsequently, a student committee successfully fundraised for twelve people to attend Write First Time, a five day residential course at Nottingham University. This was an exciting time in basic education and there was a growing national trend of student focussed and student led work (Frost and Hoy undated).

People who attended Write First Time, loved the residential experience and being given choices in what and how they learned. During the train journey back, the idea for their own user-led residential college was born. None of them had experience of fundraising, running a centre, being a charity director or a company director, but they did not hesitate. Together with their tutor, they became founder members of Pecket Well College to run courses for others like themselves, based on equal relationships, rejecting traditional relationships of 'tutor' and 'student'. For almost a decade they campaigned, challenged negative stereotypes, fundraised and carried out extensive outreach work.

Two joint coordinators and an administrator worked alongside the voluntary directors. They bought and renovated an old co-op building in Pecket Well, set amongst beautiful rolling countryside near Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire. Pecket Well College opened on 11th March 1992 as a small friendly residential centre with meeting rooms and accommodation for up to sixteen people.

Pecket Well became a charity and company Limited by Guarantee. Its constitution always stated that the majority of directors must have literacy difficulties themselves. Other directors were welcomed, including academics, community workers and educationalists committed to



**Pecket Well College Building, Pecket Well, West Yorkshire**

promoting best practice in education, addressing inequalities in literacy and numeracy and increasing awareness of the impact on people's lives, e.g. social, financial, health. At times, there were as many as twenty-six directors and the experience of managing the user-led college together, negotiating differences of class background, culture, education and reading and writing skills, was challenging for everyone.

### **Finding the Pecket Way**

The Pecket Way wasn't invented overnight. Pecket Wellians' learning journeys took time, courage, humility, negotiation and compromise. The unusual dynamic of people who had difficulties with reading and writing, actually managing and evaluating their own building, outreach work, course planning and delivery, was unusual and creative.

The term 'learner' was questioned as inside Pecket Well College everyone was a 'learner'. Pecket turned mainstream approaches to teaching and learning upside down and sideways.

People who had difficulties with reading and writing were often workshop leaders or joint workshop leaders. Most did not have any formal teaching experience let alone qualifications. They didn't start from a position of power, rather they began workshops by stating they were struggling with reading, writing and/or numbers. This peer approach built an atmosphere of empathy and trust that enabled people who often had difficult and painful experiences within the mainstream education system to relax and develop confidence.

Pecket fundraised and employed an outreach worker, Florence Agbah, who herself had difficulties with reading and writing. This helped Florence to reach out to others who were reassured to know that Pecket Wellians understood how it feels to be an adult with such difficulties. She remembers:

It was the atmosphere of the place, the way the people welcomed you when you come through the door. The fact that we are all the same and we have the same anxieties about learning—pieces of paper and that kind of thing. Sometimes people don't trust themselves to have anything to say but they do! We encourage each other to be heard. We watch people and see if they look confused. We ask each other 'Do you understand what's being said?' or 'Do you want

to say anything?' When we are in a meeting nobody talks over anybody. We allow each other to speak and people can say whatever they think. We don't judge each other, we don't judge anybody else.

Pauline Nugent explains how the learner voice motivates her as a paid worker:

For me 'learner voice' is an essential ingredient of Pecket and the 'Pecket Way'. One of the things that keeps me going at Pecket is that even as a paid worker—I feel I can be honest and say 'I don't understand' or 'can you explain please?' This means I really learn new stuff rather than fall into the trap of pretending to understand. I also value the fact that learners don't have to give lengthy logical explanations of why they don't like something—people's feelings are respected. Something has to 'feel right' to be ok at Pecket—a rare luxury in my experience, a very human way of learning and working together. Someone not 'feeling right' doesn't mean a decision will be put to one side but there is space and a commitment to discuss and compromise if needed.

### **Working together the Pecket Way**

Changing from traditional roles to a more equal way of working took hard work and commitment. Gillian, a tutor and founder, remembers how she increasingly reflected on her own practice and changed to better meet the needs of her students:

I started off, I held the pen, I had the paper, I made the notes of what we'd decided, whether we were going to have this one or that one. We taped these sessions, and I went home and listened to the tape and realised, because I was the tutor of the group, I could hear myself manipulating things and writing down what I wanted. We didn't vote on anything, it was just my job to note what I understood to be the feeling of the meeting but just listening back, I could hear how mistaken I was. I came back and sort of confessed to the group.

So we set up a system of voting on each piece, taking it in turns to take the notes and we would agree in the group what notes should be taken. What I had been doing was interpreting things as I wanted them to be interpreted and we didn't always agree. So then we'd have a Chair, we'd have a note taker, and there was one book with the decisions, another book with

the actions and who was going to do what. People would take on the task of writing to somebody who had submitted something and telling them what we'd thought about it. We never actually outright rejected anything, we always wrote back and said if we weren't 100% happy with it we'd make suggestions and then they would work on it and resubmit it.

The tutor's letting go of power was part of the foundation of Pecket's educational approach. Many tutors and teachers were supported to make this shift in strengthening learners' voices and at the same time becoming learners themselves.

Colin Neville was a guidance advisor at the University of Bradford Access Unit in 1999 when he visited Pecket Well College. He gave one to one and group careers guidance and attended some course sessions. During his recent interview for the Oral History Project he recalled his experience of seeing 'The Pecket Way' put into practice during a residential course:

The style of teaching was very non-hierarchical and informal and decisions were made collectively. All tutors were very respectful to students. It was obvious they believed in the students' abilities and clearly wanted to help them as best they could. When I think of Pecket I think of the word empowerment. Control moved to the students rather than the teacher leading and dominating. There was a big emphasis on improving students' communication skills both verbal and written. It was very much about improving students' confidence and helping them realise they had something to say. Lots of students didn't think their words meant anything, but Pecket was good at listening and valuing their words.

I think it was a lifeline for many who experienced loneliness and poverty. Pecket helped them move on emotionally and vocationally. I remember during careers guidance sessions asking people about their previous experience of education. People often talked negatively about school and bad experiences had stopped them moving on in life. Pecket helped rebuild the confidence lost at school.

### Changing perceptions

The name Pecket Well College was, and still is, very important to founder members. Sometimes people and funders and potential participants were confused by the



### Outreach event

use of the term college. Many assumed Pecket was run like other mainstream colleges with tutors, students and formal curricula and defined hierarchy. This was far from the truth.

Pecket's not an ordinary college. People are free to move about. If they go into one group and they don't like it they can go into another group. It's not compulsory that they have to stay in that particular group. They've got to find out which is the best for them, what their skills are. (Joan Keighley, outreach worker)

Founder members learned to work collectively to articulate and convince others of the need for Pecket Well College. This involved taking on the responsibility of being a spokesperson and speaking up for learners:

Colleges that said one day a week for 12 weeks was enough time for anyone to learn anything and I said 'No it's not; it could take a lifetime. Everybody has a different level and takes different time to learn.'

They listened to us cos we used to say 'At Pecket we decided things as directors—not just one person deciding and the others follow suit. Every participant could have a say in their own learning and it would be listened to—everybody had that choice.'

We are the little people and we wanted to be heard. We wasn't being dictated to. (Billy Breeze)

Extensive peer outreach led to many previously 'hard to reach' individuals and groups coming to Pecket and finding they were listened to and treated with respect.

Barriers to learning and participation were faced and broken down. One example was the development of training for Writing Hands who wrote down people's own words for them. This does not come naturally as we often think we are listening when in fact we are thinking what we thought the person said. It also takes training to break the habit of correcting people's grammar, language or punctuation. All of which can change the essence of the person and what they are saying. Nick, who learned to be a Writing Hand and director reflected:

I've learned about the capabilities of people with reading and writing difficulties, and often stood corrected. I've learned how to think around the complicated processes of making things understandable. I've been shown strategies for inclusion and I've experienced inclusion, in fact, in being enabled to unlearn some of the assumptions I've made.

Peer training was a powerful way of encouraging learners to speak up and say what they wanted to learn and how. Seeing others like themselves with the courage to talk about their difficulties unlocked something. It gave them permission and safety to tell their own stories.

Pecket Wellians wanted education to be accessible to all and planned inclusive projects costing them accordingly. This meant that on paper course costs looked expensive. Workers and Pecket members had to explain time and time again that inclusion costs, but exclusion costs more. Funders who awarded grants recognised that something different was happening at Pecket.

### **Creating an oral history and digital archive project—the Pecket Way!**

By 2011, the beloved Pecket Well College building was gone and founder members and other Pecket Wellians who had been so involved over the years, experienced profound sadness and a sense of failure. Throughout the difficult years, founder members and other Pecket Wellians lost touch or communicated intermittently through email or by phone. A small team that had fought to keep Pecket going set up an oral history and digital archive project Steering Group and recruited a Project Coordinator, Pauline Nugent. She had supported and worked with Pecket in different capacities at various times which helped her to contact past directors, workers and participants and recruit more members onto the Oral History and Archive Project Steering Group. Pecket Wellians were involved in all aspects of this legacy project.

Pecket recruited Cilla Ross, an oral historian to work with Pecket Wellians to interview as many people as possible by January 2013. Interviews were face to face whenever possible, some by telephone or Skype, e.g. interviews with previous partner organisations in Canada. Cilla conducted initial interviews and trained some Pecket Wellians in interview skills so they could conduct some peer interviews with past participants. A total of 40 interviews contributed to the 99 page oral history and Pecket is also producing a shorter, plain language version.

Early in the project Pauline contacted previous founder members and organized a reunion meal. It was wonderful for old friends to meet, share food and memories of their achievements:

We put our own education on hold to give others like us a chance. (Peter)

We may not have all worked on our own reading and writing but we learned so much along the way. Like how to be a director of a company and a charity and how to be an employer. We went to places we would never have seen. I will never forget that first train journey to London and the terrifying journey on the underground. (Michelle)

### **Pecket website and archives**

Pecket has always used technology to involve people who have difficulties with reading and writing in all operational aspects, the building, its outreach work and courses. Before Pecket heard of 'assistive technologies', meetings were recorded on audio tapes. Members could listen again or catch up if they missed a meeting. Video recordings were made of important events and 'tasters' of courses. The written or printed word has always had a lot of power for many Pecket Wellians and people were reluctant to throw anything away that had writing on it. That has made the archiving very hard work! In spite of technologies changing over the years some Pecket Wellians still need paper copies of all documents, on cream paper and in different sized formats.

Sorting through the contents of the boxes and prioritising items for digitizing was a huge task. Items ranged from papers and reports, audio cassette recordings of meetings and readings, videos, art works, textiles and hundreds of photographs. Over 230 audio cassettes and old VHS videos and other old film tapes were converted into digital formats. The design of the website involved a



### Scanning an annual report

media company working with the Steering Group, project coordinator and Pecket Wellians, who also received training to film some of the interviews.

Coming to Pecket office and listening to the draft oral history being read out loud helped me understand it better. I could ask questions and ‘read between the lines’ better. Even now if I just read it on my own I know I couldn’t read it properly and would miss things. I learned from other people’s questions too. We are all learning together and none of us had done an archive or oral history together. It is the first time I have ever helped design a website and it was hard to imagine how everything would fit together. It helps me understand the website more when we look at it together at the office and all talk about how to do all the different parts of the website. (Corinne)

### Pecket’s legacy

With the college building gone and founder members scattered, the website is an important part of Pecket’s legacy as it contains the oral history, the digital archives and links to relevant websites and publications. Pecket wants the oral history and archives to become free educational resources that explain how we have worked and invite others to learn from us and develop these materials to promote best practice. For example there are guides on how to train writing hands and how to run a magazine group.

Mary Hamilton writes:

It has been a real privilege to be part of the steering group for the oral history project. Over the years I have been involved with Pecket as a visitor and through links with Pecket Wellians who took part in

conferences, research and practice events and teacher training workshops and contributed to publications like *Worlds of Literacy*. I always felt that Pecket was a clear sighted ally working towards the same vision of education that I, and many of my colleagues in adult literacy share.

I am interested in the history of adult education and literacy and especially how it has changed during my lifetime. At first adult literacy wasn’t recognised at all, then it developed with strong commitments to creative, informal and participatory methods. Over the years, it has become more formal and professionalised. It has been changed by the introduction of targets and assessments which have pushed many of its original inclusive aims and ways of working into the background, along with a lot of people it hoped to serve.

The sense of loss and failure that Pauline describes when Pecket Well College closed its doors is shared by many of us who have worked hard for the dream of democratic learning, yet seen the mainstream of education move ever further away from this. It has been important for me to help create this record of the detail of what was achieved and what is possible and to offer this to future ‘dreamers’.

I have seen the oral history and archive take shape in the Pecket Way: the developing of trust, and troubles that are involved when people try to do things together, respectfully; the slow process of discussion and understanding that builds, and the need for everyone to stand back as an individual at different points to allow the collective process to come forward; being patient, attentive to one another and



Converting audio files to digital format

insistent about the detail of working together. This process has made us question assumptions about what makes it easy or difficult to communicate and, on the way, we have learned loads about how to get digital technologies to work for us.

## Final words

With the archiving we didn't think we would ever be able to do it. We can't read all the papers so how could we? We did it and it is part of my life now. I can say to people 'go and read the archives!' (Billy Breeze)

In telling the Pecket Well story, we hope the oral history and archives website will inspire others like us to take control of their own education. It may inspire educationalists, funders and policy makers to find new ways of working. So many people contributed to making their dream a reality and this website is also a thank you to them and a resource for everyone to use.

Please let us know what you think of our website, our oral history and our way of organising our archives, as we continue to add more information. We will add your comments and suggestion in the feedback section of the site! [www.pecket.org](http://www.pecket.org)

### ... continued from page 8

The complete article can be downloaded from the [percapita.org.au](http://www.percapita.org.au) website: [http://www.percapita.org.au/01\\_cms/details.asp?ID=622](http://www.percapita.org.au/01_cms/details.asp?ID=622)

David Hetherington is the Executive Director of Per Capita. He has previously worked at the Institute for Public Policy Research, as a consultant to the OECD and for L.E.K. Consulting in Sydney, Munich and Auckland. He has authored or co-authored numerous



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Pauline Nugent is project coordinator and a disability equality trainer and activist. [pauline.nugent@pecket.org](mailto:pauline.nugent@pecket.org)

Mary Hamilton is Professor of Adult Learning and Literacy, Department of Educational Research, Lancaster University; a Founding Member of the Research and Practice in Adult Literacy network and a project Steering Group member. [m.hamilton@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:m.hamilton@lancaster.ac.uk)

Nick Pollard is a senior lecturer in occupational therapy at Sheffield Hallam University and a director and chairperson at Pecket Learning Community. [n.pollard@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:n.pollard@sheffield.ac.uk)

reports on economic and social policy and he is a regular commentator on Radio National and ABC24.

Jarrold Rust is currently undertaking a research internship at Per Capita. After graduating in 2011 with a BA (International Relations/Development Studies) from the University of New South Wales, Jarrold is now pursuing a career in social research.

## Song Matters

By Carmel Davies and Sharon Duff

**For any teacher, even those who think they are 'tone deaf', incorporating song into their classes will improve student language learning. This article outlines some reasons to integrate song into the design of English as an Additional Language (EAL) curriculum and explains why singing is an invaluable language aid.**

When planning a curriculum for EAL learners, innovative and creative methodologies should be given serious consideration, and incorporating song in the learning program is one such practice. International and local research (Goodger, 2013, Stansell, 2005, Topsfield, 2011, University of South Carolina, 2013) has extensively documented that song is a highly effective and enjoyable way to assist the language learning process. So why aren't more teachers integrating song into their language classes? Often it is because teachers are not aware of the proven benefits of singing as an educational tool. And even if they are aware, they are not confident in singing or conducting classes that involve song.

### Singing or speaking?

In recent research, conducted in Canada (University of South Carolina, 2013), sixty participants were taught Hungarian, a language that was unfamiliar to them all. They were divided into three groups of twenty. Each group was given phrases to learn and had different methods of learning:

- speaking
- rhythmic speaking
- singing and speaking.

Which method do you think was the most successful? The group that learnt through singing and speaking achieved the best results of all, while the speaking only group acquired just half the language of those that sang! The researchers believed that different, but related mechanisms appeared to be at work in the brain, with strong links demonstrated between language learning, music and memory.

### The role of memory

Teaching language through song, accompanied by the use of gestures and actions, further helps to embed lyrics in the memory. Canadian French teacher Wendy Maxwell, developed the Accelerative Integrated Method (Lawless, 2013) which enables students to attain fluency at a faster

rate than those who are taught by using traditional methods. Her approach to language teaching incorporates music, gestures, theatre and dance. Language teachers in Melbourne schools are now following this method with overwhelmingly positive results.

Listening to songs and singing lyrics repetitively also assists language acquisition, as it reinforces the linguistic features in the memory (Stansell, 2005). When we hear a song we like, we play it repetitively until we learn the lyrics off by heart. In a language class, the same song can be played many times (using communicative methods) without the learners becoming bored. This enables them to achieve automaticity, which is the all-important ability to know what to say and to be able to speak fluently without pausing (Schoepp, 2001).

### Music, the brain and emotion

When learners are fully engaged in music, numerous parts of the brain are activated. For example, when we listen to music, the temporal lobe is working. Recalling lyrics occurs in the frontal lobe. The occipital lobe is stimulated when we read music, whilst the limbic system in the middle of the brain is connected to the emotions that we feel when experiencing music (Wilson, 2013). To be successful in our



Carmel and Sharon at the launch of Sing with me!

learning, both sides of the brain need to be developed, as the left and right hemispheres work together to understand what is being learnt (Cherry, 2013).

In the case of language learning, the left side of the brain interprets the sounds within words, and the right hemisphere focuses on the rhythms of speech that are important for intonation and stress. Given that music makes important connections between both sides of the brain, it makes sense to incorporate it into our learning programs.

Krashen (1982) states that learning is impaired when students are anxious. Using song in the classroom is one way we can counter the stress that many of our students feel, as it helps to create a relaxed learning environment that contributes to group cohesion. Oxytocin, a hormone that alleviates anxiety and stress is released when people sing. Endorphins that are connected with pleasurable moments are also released (Horn, 2013). Learning songs that the students enjoy, with lyrics they can relate to, can help create a positive learning environment and increase levels of participation and opportunities to practice pronunciation and grammar.

## Teaching about culture

Music plays a central role in many traditional cultures. In our Indigenous communities and within African societies, song, dance and music are integral to daily life and storytelling. Song is embedded in the lives of our students from oral cultures. For many societies, music is not an isolated, tacked on activity, as it has become part of the culture. Given that effective learning takes place when a curriculum is based on an understanding of the cultural backgrounds and existing strengths of our students, we should integrate song into our EAL programs rather than viewing music as 'a filler' at the end of the class.

It is worth reflecting that music is one of the first cultural activities young NESB immigrants willingly engage in. They are more likely to know who Gotye or Jessica Mauboy is than the Prime Minister! Colloquial, informal language is what they hear first and the language of song is much closer to our spoken language than the more formal model students often learn in class.

Research cited in *Music of the Brain* (Wilson, 2013) found that each language has its own rhythm, and music reflects

the rhythm and intonation of language. The music of Claude Debussy reflects the French language, whilst Sir Edward Elgar's music imitates the English language. The inclusion of song and music in the curriculum therefore, can only enhance the students' ability to acquire the rhythm and intonation of the language being taught.

## Value for disadvantaged students

Data collected in Australia between 1994 and 2011 revealed that the performance benchmarks of the poorest Year 8 students, and Indigenous students were 12% and 30% lower respectively, than the students from wealthy backgrounds (Butt, Marshall and Preiss, 2014). In response to these findings, Professor Stephen Lamb from Melbourne University believes that we urgently need a more effective way of teaching the poorest children in our schools.

The Song Room could be the answer to Professor Lamb's conundrum. It provides music and arts based programs for children at disadvantaged schools. At Dandenong South Primary School, where 86 per cent of the students learn English as an additional language, the children have been involved in the Song Room program. All the students who participated made remarkable improvements in their NAPLAN reading scores. Their learning outcomes were twelve months ahead of what was expected at their level. It was as if the students had spent an additional year at school. The students were engaged, motivated and looked forward to attending classes each week (Topsfield, 2011).

According to the Song Room, there are approximately 700,000 children in Australia who do not have teachers with training in music and the arts (Ewing, 2010). This figure may also be reflected in the adult education sector. Teachers are realizing that the dominance of competency based courses may have deprived students of many valuable learning experiences and robbed teachers of a range of effective teaching, stifled by the endless grids, columns and boxes that need ticking.

So, are we disadvantaging our EAL and literacy students by not including song in our curricula? We believe so, but with the findings from recent research, as well as feedback received from classroom teachers, things are beginning to change. Teacher training courses in Melbourne are starting to incorporate the Arts in their TESOL education programs, as they realise teachers need to be equipped with broader pedagogical skills.

## Classroom tips

Using song in class is easy. It is not important for the teacher to be a good singer, as the students will pick up the melody quickly. Teachers can use the recording of the song as a model, as with any other listening activity. Using song in class works best when it is an interactive process, where the learners focus on particular language elements whilst listening to and producing the language. Below are some tips from the teachers' notes section in our Sing with me! books:

### Part 1—Teaching the song

- ask the students to stand in a circle
- you can give the text at this point or teach without text and introduce it later on cards
- listen to the song line by line and find an appropriate gesture or action for the line
- teach each line through repetition and gestures then the class repeats your words and movements
- finish the first four lines then go back and sing them as a chunk
- you can focus on linking and correct pronunciation at this point
- now do the same with the next four lines of the song
- keep the lesson moving along in order to maintain enthusiasm.

### Part 2—Reinforcing the song

- in the circle, give each group of three students a line to sing using both words and actions
- rotate lines between groups, so everyone gets three or four opportunities to sing
- next divide the class into two groups, so each group sings their lines in turn or alternate lines
- divide the group into males and females and each group sings two or three lines in turn
- finally sing the whole song together.

By this point, students will have practised the song many times in different combinations and will have a good grasp of lyrics and pronunciation features AND they will have had fun!

To see a class in action, please view our videos for students and teachers on our website and Facebook pages.

- Website: [www.urbanlyrebirds.com](http://www.urbanlyrebirds.com)



### Song Room program participants

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Urban-Lyrebirds/1384913568413520>

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Carmel Davies has over 20 years' experience teaching English language skills. She has written and co-written numerous EAL resources including *What's the Law?*

Australian law for new arrivals, *Pictures to Words Book 1* and *Sing with me!* She was recently awarded a Churchill Fellowship to travel and research 'ESL through Performance' and is currently presenting workshops on music and EAL.

Sharon Duff has 20 years' experience teaching, delivering workshops, and developing resources for new migrants, including writing materials for the AMEP Distance Learning course *Your Call*. She recently co-founded *Urban Lyrebirds*, and co-wrote the *Sing with me!* series. She is currently writing resources and presenting *Sing for Your English* workshops.

## Using the Foundation Skills Training Package

*By Anita Roberts*

**Where do you find support resources to deliver the Foundation Skills Training Package (FSK)? This is a question that Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA) is frequently asked by training organisations and practitioners. Anita Roberts has been involved in developing resources and delivering workshops to assist practitioners implementing the FSK.**

Off-the-shelf solutions have been sought by many organisations in the process of adding the FSK to their scope of registration. Unfortunately, off-the-shelf resources are unlikely to work for most users of the Foundation Skills Training Package. This training package is specifically designed to support foundation skills development for learners who are pursuing vocational learning goals. The exact foundation skills they need to develop will depend on the nature of their vocational learning.

FSK units are all written with reference to the vocational context. To be true to the intent of the FSK unit, you need to be true to the vocational learning needs of the learner. As an example, the unit FSKRDG08 could be used in many vocational learning contexts. Table 1 uses a series of questions to help identify the type of materials and approaches that could be used to support learning activities.

This type of approach can be applied to any FSK unit that is being used to support vocational learning, either concurrently with vocational units or in preparation for enrolment in a vocational area. Using FSK units to underpin vocational learning outcomes means that learning resources and activities will include vocational concepts. Collaboration with vocational practitioners

will be critical to ensure that vocational requirements are correctly interpreted in any foundation skills learning approaches.

Participants in IBSA's professional development workshops in 2013 shared their insights and advice for implementing the FSK. Here are some of their suggestions:

Take your lead from the vocational practitioner. Get them to help you understand the required outcomes from training. Look at the vocational specifications together to identify underpinning foundation skills demands and exactly what they mean in the particular industry.

Base your development of resources and activities on workplace documents and tasks to ensure that learning outcomes focus on LLN improvement for a specific purpose.

Break down vocational tasks to identify the specific foundation skills that underpin them. It's good for helping learners' understand why the particular skill is important and relevant and it provides a framework for developing learning activities that could involve role plays, re-enactments, simulations, model texts,

# Practical matters

## FSKRDG08 Read and respond to routine visual and graphic texts (Elements & Performance Criteria)

### Contextualisation notes

### Resources and activities

#### Element 1. Prepare to read routine visual and graphic texts

##### *Performance Criteria 1.1. Identify purpose of visual and graphic text*

What types of visual and graphic texts need to be read in this vocational context? Does the vocational unit of competency require the reading of flow charts, diagrams, maps, tables?

Source texts from the vocational program or workplace. Work with the vocational teacher and learners to identify the purpose of the text—what workplace outcomes are expected as a result of reading the text? Is the text intended to inform, advise, warn, instruct, or to elicit a written or verbal response? Discuss with learners the possible workplace consequences of not responding appropriately to the text.

##### *Performance Criteria 1.2. Identify text features*

What text features are used in the vocational context? e.g. colour, symbols, labels, icons, titles.

Create activities or accompanying resources to help learners identify different text features. Discuss the purpose of different features in the particular documents. What is the writer trying to convey? Are some sections more important than others? This discussion will naturally relate to vocational knowledge that learners are developing.

#### Element 2. Interpret routine visual and graphic texts

##### *Performance Criteria 2.1. Use navigation skills to locate relevant information*

What type of information is relevant to the vocational context? e.g. instructions, measurements, customer details, critical dates.

Discuss the vocationally relevant information that learners would expect to find in the text. Make a list of information they want to find in the text and examine the different ways this information might be presented, e.g. time and date formats, numerical displays. Identify whether the vocational area uses a standard layout or structure for different types of texts.

##### *Performance Criteria 2.2. Identify and interpret workplace terminology in texts*

What technical terms, acronyms or abbreviations need to be understood in the workplace context?

Work with learners to create a list of terminology or jargon that would help them interpret the text. Discuss the meaning of key terms within the vocational context.

##### *Performance Criteria 2.3. Use reading strategies to interpret relevant information*

What support is available in the workplace context to assist the reading process? e.g. glossary/list of technical terms, manuals or reference material, summary/overview documents, physical equipment.

Have learners use the resources and approaches from the previous sections to interpret texts from the vocational program or workplace. Help learners to identify other sources of support for the reading process, e.g. prediction activities, discussion with colleagues, related vocational resources (diagrams/photos/video).

#### Element 3. Confirm understanding and respond to routine visual and graphic texts

##### *Performance Criteria 3.1. Check that information is correctly understood*

What opportunities exist in the workplace for checking information? e.g. supervisor, colleague, customer/supplier.

Work with the vocational teacher to identify how texts are used in the workplace. Discuss options for confirming understanding with learners. Work with learners to create a flow chart of actions to check understanding for different texts.

##### *Performance Criteria 3.2. Use information to respond appropriately*

What type of response is appropriate? e.g. completion of report, filling of customer order, filing, schedule adjustment.

Revise discussion with learners about the workplace consequences of not responding appropriately to the text. Build on flow-chart, developed above, to include appropriate actions in response to the text.

etc. The desired end result should dictate the learning activities that will be suitable.

Look at how you can use or extend the resources used by the vocational trainer. The process of unpacking

and interpreting vocational learning materials can be a foundation skills learning activity in itself.

Work with the vocational practitioner to design holistic assessment tasks that give learners the opportunity

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# Numeracy Matters

## ***Building Strength with Numeracy: numeracy session planning***

*By Beth Marr*

The ***Building Strength with Numeracy*** resource materials are being widely accessed, both in Victoria and interstate. Beth Marr has been running workshops and webinars and thought it was timely to discuss how to plan balanced and engaging numeracy sessions.

Rather than attempting to compile a definitive and all inclusive text book for adult numeracy, *Building Strength with Numeracy* content was selected to emphasise aspects of adult numeracy teaching that are not likely to be found elsewhere. Currently, the resource is organised as a series of activities arranged into five sections: Getting Started, Exploring numbers, In the Head Calculations, Fractions and Percentages. It is hoped that additional sections will be added over time.

As well as supplying numerous practice sheets for applying the requisite number skills, the resource strongly encourages practical, hands-on activities, interaction and discussion between students, and an emphasis on language and meaning as crucial components of effective numeracy teaching and learning. It steers away from encouraging students to apply rote learned, but ill-understood procedures (algorithms) for calculating, but rather introduces the techniques for *in the head* calculation and estimation. These skills are much more useful in a modern world and are based on the understanding of numbers and how they work developed through the other activities.

So how does all this fit together in planning a numeracy session? There are several principles that I think are important to keep in mind when you plan your sessions. These can probably be summed up in one overarching statement:

Plan for variety: variety in content, variety in activity and variety in interaction.

### **Why variety in content?**

It takes time for students to gain confidence in newly acquired mathematical skills. Skills and number facts need to be developed, practised and applied in small chunks or stages, with time allowed for use and revisiting before they can be built to the next level of complexity. This is sometimes referred to as a spiral curriculum approach.

### ***New Resources***



### **'Building Strength with Numeracy'**

However, pressure to cover the curriculum can influence teachers to present each skill or topic in isolation, a rapid journey from beginning to end, followed by a speedy assessment before learners have time to forget.

Unfortunately, skills acquired in this way are seldom applied in meaningful situations because they have not become part of the learners' repertoire of confidently usable skills. In my opinion, skills and knowledge can be built more gradually if a few content areas are interwoven within the sessions. For example, understanding and applying fractions might be spread over a period of time, simultaneously with measurement activities and developing *in the head* calculation skills or learning useful number facts. Each would occupy part of the session as a major or minor component.

### **Why variety in activity?**

A session plan which truly engages students for the whole time will always have some change in the type of activity during the class. Students of all ages have a wide range of concentration spans, but we all have limited tolerance for doing the same thing for a long period of time. This applies to listening to a teacher, practising skills through paper and pencil exercises, or working with others in a group or team. Change in activity type during a session has a noticeable effect on students' energy levels, thus helping to maximise the valuable learning time.

Variety of activity type also allows for different styles of learning within a group. Active learners in particular will thrive on hands-on, tactile experiences, while others will enjoy the interactive learning. Other more reflective learners, will appreciate time working alone to process their thoughts. Each section of *Building Strength with Numeracy* contains material that lends to this type of variety. It is important to put it together so that each session contains a balance.

The 'Getting Started' section contains suggestions for activities, such as games, problem solving or quick skills reviews that are effective for getting students focussed at the beginning of each session. These are valuable in planning an effective, engaging session.

### **Why variety of interaction?**

It is my experience that adults have more than just learning needs when they attend adult numeracy classes. They also have social needs, the need to interact and talk with others and connect to the group during the session. If this is catered for within the learning activities then it can also have a valuable numeracy learning focus. Otherwise some students will engage with each other in chatter around other topics, likely to be a distraction from learning. Students who are shy or socially isolated for other reasons, may be left out entirely from these interactions.

Including at least one structured, pair or small group activity during the session will mitigate isolation and encourage students to interact with one another about numeracy and learning. Mixing students around so they

interact with others is also helpful in creating a cohesive and constructive classroom atmosphere.

I advocate some structured pair or small group activity, even in mixed ability classes when learners may be working on their own individual tasks for much of the session. It could be a group problem solving task, such as cooperative logic (see the 'Getting Started' section) or a matching activity to introduce new ideas or revise concepts touched on previously.

At the same time it is important for students not to be working with a group all of the time. Everyone needs time alone to consolidate their own thinking, and to practise or apply their skills at their own speed. I recommend trying for a mix of individual time, pair and small group activity and whole class, teacher led discussion, where appropriate, during each session. The main thing is to be mindful of the learning needs of your students in planning an engaging numeracy class.

You can download sections of the *Building Strength with Numeracy* resource as required. <http://www.valbec.org.au/building-strength-with-numeracy/index.htm>

**Beth Marr has worked in adult numeracy over several decades and developed *Building Strength with Numeracy*. She has conducted numeracy training in Timor-Leste and delivered workshops across Australia. When she can make time she likes to travel, but is drawn back to numeracy work and inspiring a new generation of numeracy teachers.**

# Technology matters

## Moodle training in VET

*By Gilda Alavuk and Hilary Dolan*

Increasingly, teachers across the Learn Local and VET sectors are working in Moodle with their students. During 2013, Gilda Alavuk and Hilary Dolan, Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) teachers within the Learning Skills and Assessment (LSA) Unit undertook Moodle training with the VET e-Learning Group at Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (NMIT).

The Moodle training project consisted of four workshops which covered the following: introduction to the NMIT Moodle, forums, quiz creation and assessment. During the workshops, staff members were given the opportunity to set up a unit in Moodle; add to the Digital Object Repository (DOR); and learn about resizing images using Photoshop. Attending the workshops was a good opportunity to get to know the e-Learning staff as well as other VET teachers. Forming these partnerships has also allowed for the sharing of resources and learning materials.

I chose a unit from Bricklaying to work on, because as the LSA teacher working with the pre-apprentices every week, I was curious to see whether using Moodle could offer a more user friendly format, as an alternative to their current workbooks. Within Moodle, I was able to upload video lessons as well as practice questions and quizzes. One of the quizzes was trialled by a student with dyslexia with positive results. The student commented that the drag and drop feature was very helpful for students who have difficulty in reading and writing. This illustrates how traditional assessments, which rely exclusively on reading and writing, can have an identifiable impact on students with specific learning disabilities.

Since completing the workshops, I have worked with the scaffolding teacher assisting him to develop assessment questions on Moodle for the Restricted Height Scaffolding unit. The responses from the students have been positive. The benefits to students include: the resource is provided in a different, more engaging format, the activities can demonstrate the knowledge they have gained, and they can be completed at their own pace.

A considerable amount of time was needed at the beginning of the training, as with all new skills. It was necessary to become familiar with the Learning Management System (LMS) and the numerous steps required to set up each section. However, once the process was completed a few times, it became easier to manage.



I have discovered that Moodle can be particularly helpful in areas where students are working at their own pace. For example, where apprentices are working at different levels of their apprenticeship and it is not suitable to run formal classes. By creating short video lessons and uploading onto Moodle, students are able to view the lesson independently and the VET teacher can spend more time assisting students with their practical work and be more time efficient. This also places greater emphasis on the student to be responsible for their own learning.

Teachers can also add summative and formative assessments, which are graded. The students can attempt a particular assessment and receive instant feedback/results and can then undertake additional or supplementary assessments if required. Another advantage for teachers is that they can readily examine student progress and performance. Further to this Moodle training, I would like to explore how to best use blended learning and assist VET teachers in trade areas with adding resources to their Moodle sites. (Gilda Alavuk)

Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests.  
I'll dig with it  
(Seamus Heaney, Digging)

One of my favourite Irish poets, Seamus Heaney, in his poem *Digging*, talks about his forbearers who were farmers who used a spade to farm the land. There is a hint of melancholy in tone as Seamus realises that that is not his future. He must break away from the past and use his pen to create. There is also a hint of danger as he alludes that his pen is weapon-like, or perhaps embodies unsprung potential.

This quote nicely sums up my new relationship with Moodle: it is an immensely valuable educational tool, to be used cautiously, in so far as it requires careful planning and is not a fix-all solution. Yet, like Heaney, we must move with the times and adopt a fresh approach to engage students who are already fully immersed in the digital world.

During 2013, I was part of the development team within the LSA unit at NMIT, who designed and delivered a series of four teacher development workshops mapped to the TAELLN401A. These workshops were delivered to a wide range of departments with the intention of equipping VET teachers to respond to the LLN needs of their students.

The VET teachers worked towards unpacking their units of competency and assigning an Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) level to the unit and the associated assessment tasks. Assessment tasks were modified if they were above the appropriate ACSF level. The VET teachers were given a comprehensive overview of LLN strategies that can be used to support their students to achieve their goals. A key objective of the workshops was that they were practical and interactive.

I had the opportunity to work with one of the VET teachers who attended the TAELLN401A workshops to examine a unit of competency that she developed for a fully online unit on Moodle but from a LLN point of view. We both completed the Moodle training at the same time, so it was a great learning opportunity from both our perspectives. The VET teacher had mapped the assessment tasks from the unit of competency in the teacher development workshops and came to the conclusion that the assessments were above the appropriate ACSF level. Therefore, she requested some feedback on how to modify the assessment tasks so that they were at a suitable level.

I was enrolled in the VET teacher's class and explored the assessment tasks from a LLN perspective. I used

the Performance Variables Grid of the ACSF as a guide to ascertain whether the support, context, text and task complexity could be modified. I consulted the results of the online LLN assessment that her students completed that year and compiled a pie-chart of the LLN levels of the students. I was able to use this as a way to explore what strategies needed to be put in place to support learners, for example, providing sample answers for a particular task that students found challenging.

I was able to offer suggestions on how to vary the mode of literacy in order to include all learners. For example, using the Voice Board function of Moodle to allow students to critically analyse an image together, as opposed to completing a written piece. This strategy would also have covered the communication skills aspect of the unit of competency which is difficult to implement online. I think that it is particularly important to foster a sense of community in courses that are fully online and explore how we can humanise Moodle and make it as engaging as possible.

Switching to a new Learning Management System such as Moodle, provides an opportunity to restructure and incorporate more participatory learning. I am keen to work with VET teachers to explore strategies to make this happen. I am also interested in using already known pedagogical models, for example, Bloom's Taxonomy, to encourage higher order thinking in regards to Moodle. Moodle has many features that are excellent to promote when collaborating with VET teachers on ensuring that the LLN demands of the training are addressed. (Hilary Dolan)

**Gilda Alavuk has worked in Further Education for over 20 years, particularly in Adult Basic Education, Workplace English Language and Literacy and Youth programs. Gilda is currently a LLN teacher at NMIT working with construction and other trade areas. She has a strong interest in digital literacy and is committed to developing resources that suit a diverse range of learners.**

**Hilary Dolan works at NMIT with a range of VET teachers in support of students' LLN needs, as well as developing resources used in LLN Teacher Development programs. Hilary has taught across a diverse range of educational contexts including secondary schools and TAFEs in Victoria and Ireland. One of Hilary's interests is how digital technology can be used as a tool to engage students in participatory and meaningful learning.**

# Open Forum

This is the first of our 2014 guest columnist series of articles. Tricia Bowen will adopt a reflective 'lens' to look at learning and teaching experiences and provide insights for LLN practitioners.

## And the conversations continue...

By Tricia Bowen

Finding the time to reflect on our teaching practice and recognising the intrinsic benefits to students' learning is the focus of Tricia's first piece. We welcome your feedback and comments.



When I was asked to write the Open Forum column during 2014, I saw it as a great opportunity to continue a conversation about teaching and learning, a conversation that Fine Print has managed to sustain for over 30 years. For inspiration I turned to my own recent work in teaching and learning.

For the past two years, I've been involved in the design and delivery of professional development programs for VET teachers. The focus of these programs has been on the intrinsic role that language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) plays in all VET courses, and how teachers can support students in developing and refining their LLN skills.

During this time, I've met many dedicated, creative and inspiring teachers, one of whom I'll call Tom. He contacted me when classes were finished, assessments submitted and he was in the process of making plans for the year to come. He expressed his concerns that some of his students hadn't grasped elements of the content he'd covered, and he was trying to work out why.

He wanted advice as to how he might change his approach, and ideas about how he could adapt the resources he used, so that they could work more effectively. He described particular teaching moments, how the students had reacted at the time, and how he imagined 'better' might look. Together we came up with an action plan as to how he could address this challenge and do things a little differently.

Just a few days later, I came across a couple of articles that reminded me of my conversation with Tom. The first, *Teaching Practice in the Making—Shaping and Reshaping in the Field of LLN Teaching* (Widin, Yasukawa, Chodiewicz, 2012) examined a range of ideas about what makes an expert teacher. One of the conclusions the writers draw is that expert teachers are those who demonstrate a willingness for reflection and conscious deliberation.

In the second article (Shaughnessy, Moore 2008), John Hattie suggests that challenge and feedback are essential elements of teaching and learning. He describes the need to encourage teachers to identify and reflect on what is not working in their classroom, as well as what is, in order to continually develop good teaching practice and promote positive action. Hattie claims that good teachers are always looking out for what they can actually do in a classroom, so as to consistently monitor their own pedagogy.

My conversation with Tom and my reading around these ideas of building expertise in teaching, led me to start thinking about the power of reflection and reflective practice. I believe it offers potential to create what Eurat (2002) refers to as a chance to pull us out of autopilot, in order to examine our teaching.

Schön (1987), a pioneer in the field, wrote about reflective practice as being two pronged. First, he described reflection *in action*, shaping what we are doing as we are doing it. It refers to all that thinking on our feet we do when we are in the moment of our teaching, sensing what's working and what's not, and shifting and moving and accommodating accordingly. A friend of mine refers to this as her tap-dancing when teaching, a musical metaphor to describe the many instinctive decisions she makes, as she reflects in action, in order to facilitate space for optimum learning.

But Schön also referred to the importance of reflection *on action*, a more introspective approach, where teachers take time after the act of teaching to think about how things happened, why they may have happened, and how they might do things differently if confronted with a similar situation. It was this idea of reflection *on action* that Tom worked through in order to re-imagine his teaching practice.

Just as there are many definitions of reflective practice there are also many descriptions of how such a process may be

undertaken. Jennifer Moon (1999) describes a series of five steps that teachers may work through in order to learn and practise the skill of reflection. In summary, those steps are:

1. Description—What happened at the time?
2. Feelings/Thoughts—What were you thinking at the time? What were you feeling?
3. Analysis—What sense can you make of this? Why did it happen?
4. Conclusion—What else could you have done at the time?
5. Action Plan—If it occurs again, what would you do, or could you do differently?

But of course it does come back down to the question of time. While Schön refers to the necessity for teachers to take the time, many of those same teachers I've worked with over the past two years have spoken about how little time they actually have for professional development. They described what they have to do, produce, record, monitor and assess in any given day, week or year. The demands on their time are onerous.

But if we are committed to excellence in teaching, which educational institutes claim as a given, then providing time for teachers to reflect *on* action is crucial. Teachers need to be able to step back from what they do, and look at how they do it. The imperative and the responsibility is that we offer our students the very best, so as to ensure their education provides the very best for them, and the very best from us.

The final comment I would like to make comes from Alain De Botton's latest book, *The News—A User's Manual* (2014). In it he explores our current appetite for news, and

examines how this so-called news is presented to us. I was struck by one of his closing remarks, as it echoed much of the theory around the power and potential of reflection and reflective teaching practice.

We will have nothing substantial to offer anyone else so long as we have not first mastered the art of being midwives to our own thoughts. (De Botton, 2014)

**Tricia Bowen is a teacher, writer and researcher with over 20 years' experience working in the area of LLN. Over this time, she has designed accredited curriculum, created resources to be used in conjunction with training packages and contributed research and publications. She has also taught in a wide range of settings including workplaces, the corporate sector, TAFE and recently, in China.**

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# Foreign Correspondent

## An extraordinary event: the launch of the United States national action plan for foundation skills

By Michelle Circelli

The 2013 Fulbright Professional Scholarship, Vocational Education and Training has enabled me to extend my investigations into how the success of adult literacy and numeracy programs is measured and how this information is used for continuous improvement; essentially, what is being measured to show what works for who, how and why. The scholarship provided a wonderful opportunity to learn, not just about different means of measuring the outcomes of adult literacy and numeracy programs, but also to be involved in current issues and key events in the United States. I wrote about legislation impacting upon adult education in California in *Fine Print* (vol.36, #3). In this article I will outline a key event that occurred while I was at the Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE), formerly the Office of Vocational and Adult Education, part of the federal Department of Education, Washington D.C.

Towards the end of November 2013, I attended the national engagement session for the development of a United States national plan for improving the foundation skills of low-skilled adults. This was the 'kick off' session for a consultation process that involved regional sessions in five states during December 2013 and January 2014.

### Why was this event extraordinary?

The national engagement session was introduced by Arne Duncan, US Secretary for Education, and involved high-ranking speakers and panellists representing not just the Department of Education, but the Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor and Commerce, as well as the National Governors Association and the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics. This extraordinary involvement of, and commitment by, departments and organisations other than education demonstrates a recognition that adult literacy and numeracy is not just an education issue but one that impacts on many facets of government and community. Having the areas of justice and immigration also represented would have made this an even more amazing event.

This type of cross-agency collaboration directed at improving literacy and numeracy outcomes for adults is



rare, both in Australia and the US. But there was acknowledgement across the agencies represented, that given the dire situation US finds itself in with respect to adult literacy and numeracy skills, collaboration is imperative. It was acknowledged that it is not going to be easy, nor will it mean there are more dollars available for adult literacy and numeracy. There is an urgent need to act by doing more with what is currently available: working better and smarter together to stop the decline. Participation of agencies in all five regional sessions demonstrated the level of cross-agency collaboration and commitment to the issue of improving the skills of low-skilled adults.

### What is driving the national plan?

The development of a national plan for foundation skills is in response to the declining literacy and numeracy skills among the United States working-age population (16–65 years) as highlighted by the most recent international survey, the Survey of Adult Skills, conducted for the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC).

The first round of the Survey of Adult Skills was conducted in a number of OECD countries and partner countries during the period of 2008–2012, including in Australia where it was managed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Another nine countries, including New Zealand, are participating in the second round between 2012 and 2016. The survey assesses the cognitive and workplace skills needed for success in the global economy of the 21st century with the focus on literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology rich environments (which refers to the ability to use technology to solve problems and accomplish complex tasks). The intent is for the Survey of Adult Skills to be administered every ten years with this survey providing baseline data against which future surveys can be compared, hopefully demonstrating improvements.

The United States was ranked 16th out of twenty-three countries (for which data was reported) for literacy with

around half the adult population having literacy skills at level 2 or below. For numeracy it was ranked 21st with around 60% of adults having numeracy skills at level 2 or below. These results are concerning as low literacy and numeracy skills are associated with lower wages, a lower likelihood of participating in adult education and training, and lower levels of reported health: ([http://www.oecd.org/site/piaac/Skills%20volume%201%20\(eng\)--full%20v12--eBook%20\(04%2011%202013\).pdf](http://www.oecd.org/site/piaac/Skills%20volume%201%20(eng)--full%20v12--eBook%20(04%2011%202013).pdf))

At the request of the federal Department of Education, the OECD prepared a report analysing the United States findings from the Survey of Adult Skills and the economic and social implications of these findings. The report, *Time for the U.S. to Reskill? What the Survey of Adult Skills Says* (OECD, 2013) highlights that the literacy and numeracy skills of US adults have generally stagnated in the last ten years, whereas other countries have shown improvements in helping their adults gain the skills needed to be productive. Of particular concern for the US, is the very large number of adults with very low literacy and numeracy skills.

## Recommendations

The seven recommendations from the OECD report are to:

- take concerted action to improve basic skills and tackle inequities affecting sub-populations with weak skills
- strengthen initial schooling for all, ensuring that all children receive an adequate standard of education, with effective interventions to support the basic skills of those in difficulty
- ensure effective and accessible education opportunities for young adults, using the strengths of the community college system to support and develop basic skills and offer substantive career options
- link efforts to improve basic skills to employability, recognizing that good jobs open up further learning options, while basic skills can often be more readily acquired in practical contexts
- adapt adult learning programs to better respond to the diverse challenges of different groups with different needs, work across all levels of government and across the public and private sectors to achieve better outcomes at all ages and stages
- build awareness of the implications of weak basic skills among adults, their links with other social factors, and the need to tackle this challenge in the interests of all
- support action with evidence: build on US excellence in research and data-gathering to construct evidence-based policies and programs.

Those familiar with Australia's National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults (SCOTESE, 2012) will note the similarity between some of the OECD recommendations and the four priority areas of Australia's national strategy, which are to:

- raise awareness and commitment to action
- ensure adult learners have high quality learning opportunities and outcomes
- strengthen foundation skills in the workplace
- build the capacity of the education and training workforces to deliver foundation skills.

The OECD report highlights Australia's strategy as an example of a coordinated nation-wide effort to address adult literacy and numeracy (OECD, 2013, pp. 50–51). Following the launch of Australia's strategy, there has been a particular focus on workforce development. Australian governments are implementing the \$1.5 million Foundation Skills Workforce Development (FSWD) project ([www.dfeest.sa.gov.au/FSWD](http://www.dfeest.sa.gov.au/FSWD)) that includes a number of actions, such as the development of a Foundation Skills Champions Network and a series of workforce development workshops, aimed at building the skills of the education and training workforce.

This work is welcomed and, in light of the change in federal government, one can only hope the momentum continues and that an emphasis is now placed on the other priorities. For as demonstrated by the reference to the National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults in the OECD report, and the high regard by which OCTAE holds the strategy, there is international interest in Australia in terms of innovation within the adult literacy and numeracy sector.

Indeed, those at OCTAE with responsibility for developing the national plan have given great consideration to how the priority areas of Australia's strategy, and the objectives within each, translate to the US context.

The key elements of the framework for the United States national plan are listed below:

- build awareness that foundation skills development affects all areas of life
- expand opportunities for adults to improve foundation skills
- maximize emerging technologies for multiple purposes
- strengthen the link with the economy (foundation skills and employment)
- scale what works
- improve quality of teaching and instruction.

The timeline for the development of the United States national plan is tight, with April 2014 set for the anticipated release. I'll be watching with interest how the plan is then actually implemented and how the cross-agency collaboration continues.

For more information about the United States national plan and its progress: <http://timetoreskill.org>.

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**Michelle Circelli is a Senior Research Officer at the National Centre for Vocational Education Research.**

## ... continued from page 25

to demonstrate vocational skills and foundation skills at the same time.

Look for resources that have been developed for the vocational area, or for resources that can be adapted from a related vocational area. You can draw out the underpinning foundation skills in the resources that focus on a vocational activity.

IBSA have developed an online resource to support the FSK—Building Strong Foundations. It contains a series of video segments, practical tips and advice and examples for practitioners.

It is accessible on the IBSA website: <https://buildingstrongfoundations.ibsa.org.au>.

The IBSA website also has links to foundation skills resources and initiatives from other Industry Skills Councils: <https://ibsa.org.au/industry-skills-councils-fsk-resources-and-information>.

**Anita Roberts is a VET and LLN consultant who has worked closely with Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA) on the development of the FSK Foundation Skills Training Package and related support resources.**

# Beside the Whiteboard

## Transformation through learning

*An interview by Lynne Matheson*

**A passion for teaching was ignited in Jill Lewis during her experiences of learning Italian and teaching English to adults on a working holiday in Italy. With over 25 years of teaching experience in ESL and ESL Literacy, she has gained expertise and insights from her work with adult learners and inspirational LLN practitioners.**



The Journals café was abuzz with Friday afternoon conversations when Jill Lewis and I met to talk about her long career in adult education, and her ACFE 2013 Victorian Learn Local, Excellence in Language Literacy and Numeracy Provision Award. Jill has an open and relaxed manner and her warmth is evident, especially when she refers to her students and the satisfaction of seeing them make significant strides in their learning, and their lives. She commented that it may sound a bit cliché to talk of education as being transformative, however her experience has been that education has transformed the lives of many of her students. She continues to observe such transformations with the health professionals she now works with in advanced English classes at the Centre for Adult Education (CAE).

### **Tell us about your professional background and career pathway?**

Like many LLN practitioners, I began my career in secondary teaching, in the western suburbs of Melbourne in the early eighties. My first adult teaching experiences were with Labor Market Programs, teaching ESL Literacy to retrenched Textiles Clothing and Footwear (TCF) workers, generally older migrants who had worked their entire adult lives in factories and many of whom had little formal education. The compulsory attendance requirement in these programs, as part of the retrenchment package, caused some resentment and at times, proved difficult teaching in the classroom. However, there were some incredible transformations that I observed in people who had had little formal education. They were well-rounded in many respects but it seemed like suddenly a light went on and they were switched on to learning with a changed mindset. For some people, it was a transformation in that they started to really read and write and even read for enjoyment, with a changed world view that emerged as a result. For others it was a more general openness that hadn't been there before.

The TCF program was well resourced and large in scale so that there was collegial support amongst the teachers

and some autonomy over content and delivery. This was pre-CGEA and yet some of the content areas had parallels in areas such as civics and Australian history and culture. It was a formative time for my teaching practice in that there were many challenges to engage these older learners. I used experiential and peer assisted learning approaches that involved physical manipulation of words and sentences, as well as puzzles and games to engage them in different ways of learning. It was intuitive for me to employ physical approaches as the students were used to manipulating and constructing things with their hands. I still use experiential strategies and techniques that are effective time and again, with learners at all levels.

In my fifteen years at the CAE, I have worked in different roles: ESL and ESL Literacy teacher (CGEA and ESL Frameworks) Program Leader, running and teaching in industry programs, teaching pregnant women at the Royal Women's Hospital, and most recently, English for health professionals. I have been involved in projects that looked at implementing online LLN testing and CAE wide online curriculum design.

A year spent teaching ESOL in England in a community college gave me insights into a different system. There was a stronger emphasis on teaching practice that focused on techniques and involved regular classroom observation and feedback. Compliance requirements were still foremost, however funding was available for registered assessors and peer mentoring that strengthened teaching practice. Time was set aside at staff meetings for discussion, often heated, on topics of interest and relevance to what was going on in classrooms.

Upon returning to work at the CAE, I could see similarities with the UK and felt more confident to best navigate the QA systems and endeavour to do good work despite the compliance driven environment. I have recently completed studying the Diploma in English Language Teaching



### **CAE students using Moodle**

(DELTA) Cambridge. One of the benefits of the course was having somebody watch my teaching again with a critical eye and give constructive feedback.

### **What has influenced you most in developing your teaching philosophy and practices?**

In the broader sense, I see the importance of building on the skills that adults already have and valuing the fact that these are adults who have done, and can do, so much. It is about respecting and working with, as well as reaping their considerable skills. I have maintained a strong belief in literacy as social practice and the importance of context for learning that may well stem from my encounters with the work of Freire, integrated with 'on the job' experiences and professional learning. Certainly, working with pregnant women in the waiting room at the Royal Women's hospital was one such experience from which I gained skills and understandings.

In ESL teaching, I really try to focus on spoken language in the sense of enhancing speaking skills through speaking, not just teaching spoken writing. I think we focus so much on written language in our teaching and it can be easier to do that, but ESL learners so often want and need a focus on speaking and pronunciation.

The importance of lifelong learning and engagement in a community of learners are key drivers for my practice, even though the emphasis has shifted to employability skills. It's fantastic that we have pre-accredited delivery to provide wider opportunities for more diverse groups; one example being a group of now elderly Russian women attending pre-accredited classes at CAE whose enthusiasm to improve their language and stay engaged is nothing short of inspirational.

### **What are some of the challenges and highlights of your work?**

The main challenge has to be meeting and reconciling compliance requirements, which increase all the time. So much more time is taken up with ticking boxes and filling in forms, some of which have so little relationship to learning and teaching. The challenge is to keep learner-centred learning and teaching centre-stage, that is, to be able to meet compliance without being ruled by it. It is important to keep conversations about learning and teaching happening in corridors and staff meetings.

I've been lucky in that I've been able to work with fantastic people and continue to learn about language, learning and education. I've had opportunities working on the English Online Project using Moodle and Voice Thread with Josie Rose at CAE. This project developed online resources and tools to assist health professionals with their speaking skills, principally using Voice Thread. These resources gave students experience recording their speaking, then listening to each other and commenting in an online environment. These interactions were monitored by the teacher and could be used in class to improve pronunciation. I've loved the challenge of different projects that have been such a learning curve for me.

Students are always the highlight for me and I really enjoy being a part of that educational journey through language and literacy to another place, even if it is a really small step. It is a great privilege to have met and worked with so many wonderful students and been part of their journey.

I always enjoy working with learners either in a specific context or who have a very specific purpose, such as teaching workers in an Aged Care facility. The main goal for them was to know how to make small talk with the residents or fill out their documentation. These workers were not at all keen to start with, as the management had made attendance compulsory, but they ended up asking for more classes and opportunities to practise speaking and interacting.

### **How do you ensure that your teaching relates to real life contexts?**

I tend to gravitate towards teaching and learning that relates to a real life context anyway, as that's what interests me most. I am interested in the importance of keeping oral language 'front and centre'. This doesn't mean that I ignore written language, as the spoken language is often people's first interface with the world, the community, an employer or colleague.



### **CAE students working on pronunciation**

Real pronunciation problems in an otherwise skilled individual, for example, can have devastating effects on their life prospects. For some, it is the most important facet to language learning, along with understanding of cultural conventions. I'm really trying to improve the way I teach pronunciation, especially intonation and rhythm, which can be fairly slippery to work with, but so important. Similarly, digital literacy is another area for development and I welcome its inclusion in the new CGEA. Digital literacy has to be given a focus and as teachers we need to keep learning and moving with the changes.

### **What are your thoughts on accredited courses you have taught over the years?**

Both Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA) and the new English for Adult Learners (EAL) have been put together by committed educators with a great deal of thought and knowledge of their respective fields. I have used ESL Frameworks more than the CGEA and have

found them both accessible and comprehensive. It is an adjustment to work with 'training package speak' but necessary due to the VET context in which we operate. At times, it can be frustrating working with some aspects of these documents. They are written in such a way so that they are very flexible and can be adapted to a lot of different groups, which is good. However, there are times when you feel you are teaching and assessing things that are not important for your learners. It's important to try to understand the essence of the unit or the element, or the performance criteria and ensure you don't get bogged down in detail.

### **What are the challenges of working in the LLN field into the future?**

Funding changes to foundation courses obviously are critical. In terms of accredited courses, it's squeezing the market and means that the principle of lifelong learning is harder to achieve. It is great to see that diverse groups of learners are still being catered for through pre-accredited programs.

### **What advice do you have for someone starting out in LLN teaching?**

Don't let compliance dominate!! It's there, it has to be done, but it is still possible to focus on our learners and what they want and need to achieve.

Thanks to Jill for her time and valuable insights. We hope that others are encouraged to nominate for the 2014 Learn Local awards. For information <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/awards/Pages/learnlocal.aspx>

Nominations for all Award Categories close Friday, 6 June 2014.

# What's Out There

## ***Sing with me! Books 1 & 2* by Carmel Davies and Sharon Duff**

*Reviewed by Chris Falk*

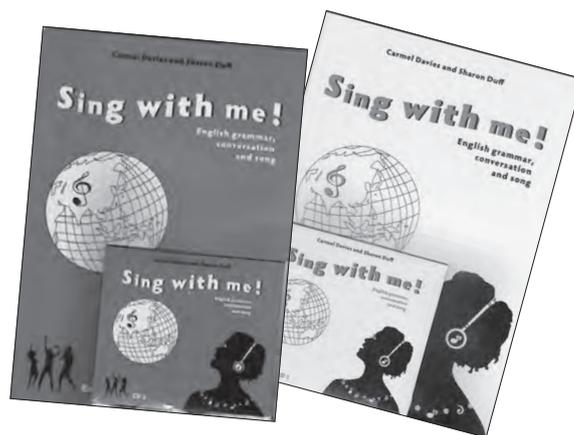
I was very excited when I saw the notice for the launch of *Sing with me! Books 1 & 2*. For several years, I had made vain attempts to construct my own various, lower standard versions and wished I had access to resources like these. However, I was heartened when I heard at the launch, that it was the culmination of twenty years of work by Carmel Davies and Sharon Duff, both of whom have worked extensively in the ESL field and are known for their outstanding work.

*Sing with me! Books 1 & 2*, are a fabulous resource for English language learning, engendered through the fun, inclusive, and health giving medium of music and singing. The songs are also a representation of the journey people make who are new to Australia, by recognizing their experiences and challenges.

With a very accessible layout, the table of contents, outlines the songs, the themes, the vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, reading and writing projects that can grow out of the songs, as well as many conversation possibilities. Each song has three pages following, with charts and drawings, that offer ways to work with learning objectives.

The songs themselves are musically interesting and engaging. There are several different genres: funk, blues, folk, and a little bit of country, to convey teaching and learning points. They are fun, clever, often cheeky, and carry a message or two about how to make a better world. The songs are original and quirky, yet have an accessible familiarity in the melodies and musical progressions, that make the tunes interesting, and also easy to learn. One of the strengths of the songs, is that they are written in conversational language.

Topics such as new friends and food, worries and working, are all covered. The funky health advice song of 'Walk a K every day' is delivered with light heartedness, advising us that we won't be able to do up our zips if we let certain food pass our lips. In 'I'm Lost', being lost is looked at with a very calming melody that seemed to make me feel much less panicked at the possibility of losing my way.



My group, Singlish, have primarily worked with the *Sing with me! Book 2*. We have been singing together for nearly four years and this book is a refreshing addition to our repertoire. Some of our current favourites are, 'I left my home', 'I'm going shopping', and 'There's a Possum Inside'.

When asked what they think about the songs, my group said; "they're jolly", "great melodies", "everyday items", "the feeling of happy days". Overwhelmingly, they enjoy 'I left my home' as it tells the story of so many of them. They say; "I love it", "a dreaming for a better future", "sad cos I left my home, but also optimistic", "it's a song of acceptance".

The singing on the recording is great. It is high quality, professional and engaging. As the singing group leader, I appreciate the music notation, the melodies and delicate harmonies. The solidness of the material is reassuring, so that if very new English language speakers come to our singing sessions, I know I have material that will work, and contains ways of explaining the meaning and function of the words.

I asked two of my colleagues, Ana Balica and Barbara Anderson to comment on their experiences with the *Sing with me! Books 1 & 2*:

Personally, it is the resource I have been waiting for, because of its unique approach to topics usually covered in an adult ESL class in Australia. The songs are a good way to start the lesson in order to introduce the new topic, and the students enjoyed the listening comprehension activities, listening for general information or for detail. For learners, it was a text they enjoyed 'singing', simple, catchy and fun to learn. Done on a regular basis, these texts have become a good way to start the day or to conclude the lesson.

By learning the songs, the students have learnt new vocabulary. For example, the students really enjoyed learning words such as: barbie, bikkies, bestie, sunnies or cos, words which could hardly be found in textbooks, but which the ESL students might have heard in an informal setting. To extend this idea to a larger context, by becoming familiar with this type of vocabulary, the ESL learners gain confidence to bond with the community they are part of, through participating in conversations in an informal setting.

ESL students might not be used to singing in class, but they are familiar with the types of activities included in the book. In unit 7 the focus is on Shopping, but introduces a range of grammar concepts: plurals, determiners, and articles/numerals. Some of the grammar structures in the songs are briefly explained and there are some activities for further practice, including some numeracy tasks.

One of the most important aspects covered by this book is the focus on spoken, melodic language. And what better way to fall in love with a language than through song?

(Ana Balica is an ESL teacher at Community West Neighbourhood Learning Centre, Deer Park.)

With my class of Vietnamese mothers, we have sung 'I'm Not Sleeping' and 'I'm Going Shopping'. They related to both these situations. They found the shopping one to be a bit hard, but learning about some new vegetables was interesting.

My Egyptian student enjoyed singing the shopping song, and we even tried writing our own verses. I have used singing with my students in the past, but the



### Chris Falk and Singlish

songs in *Sing with me!* have given the most success so far.

(Barbara Anderson is a volunteer English teacher with AMES in St Albans, and English Language coach with mothers of children in a play group at Delahey Community centre)

The *Sing with me! Books 1 & 2* are outstanding value, there is nothing else around like them. They are rich with teaching and learning activities. The clever interweaving of words, phrases and melodies is very entertaining and engaging. The works are imbued with the combined wisdom and humanity of decades of work and experience of these two inspired teachers. We can't wait for the next instalment of book three!

**Chris Falk is a singer, songwriter, singing-group leader and Alexander Technique teacher. She leads Singlish which is a singing group established for people to come together to practise their English through singing at the Delahey Community Centre in north-western Melbourne. Chris has had a long involvement with Community Music Victoria, and runs a Voice and Alexander Technique studio in Northcote.**

## Digital literacy for mobile phones Resource Kit

A new suite of resources, *Digital literacy for mobile phones*, has been produced by AMES to support culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) learners in developing their digital literacy skills using one of the most common and accessible devices: the mobile phone. An ACFE Capacity & Innovation grant supported the development of these materials which aim to build initial and transferrable digital literacy skills, as well as providing the context for

developing language skills and socio-linguistic knowledge. The resources were developed by a project team that AMES funds both to support internal programs and develop ESL resources for commercial distribution.

Using the technologies most CALD learners have access to, the project sought to develop a best practice, transferrable model; diagnostic and evaluation tools; resources to

develop and enhance digital literacy skills for use both in and beyond the project, by trainers and learners in adult ESL, Access Education, VET and foundation skills programs. It was based on observations of CALD learner groups that indicated that many only knew the most basic functions and needed training to use the technology to its full capacity.

*Digital literacy for mobile phones* is modular in design with five stand-alone units which consist of separate teacher notes and student worksheets. Teachers can choose to use all the modules or just those that are most relevant or useful for their learners. The modules serve as an introduction to digital literacy that teachers can build on depending on the needs of the students.

The topics of the five modules are:

#### *Module 1 Getting started*

- vocabulary for navigating and using basic functions
- phone security and use of passwords
- phone etiquette
- consumer awareness: prepaid versus mobile plans.

#### *Module 2 Voicemail and calls (includes 4 separate audio files)*

- what is voicemail? including vocabulary
- setting up voicemail, and creating an appropriate voicemail message
- using voicemail
- phone etiquette: leaving appropriate voicemail messages
- mobile phones and driving laws.

#### *Module 3 SMS and address book*

- appropriate use of SMS
- using SMS abbreviations appropriately (who can you use them with?)

- predictive text, spellcheck, autocorrect (use of and pitfalls)
- responding to SMS: appointment reminders, scams
- ICE: In Case of Emergency (contact numbers).

#### *Module 4 Using your phone camera*

- taking photos (permission and privacy)
- saving photographs
- sharing photographs (via Flickr or other online service)
- posting photographs online (eg Facebook) and privacy.

#### *Module 5 Voice memos and calendar*

- using voice memos, voice recorder for improving English fluency, pronunciation
- saving, editing, storing and transferring recordings
- protocols of recording
- storing online (Google drive, SkyDrive, Dropbox)
- using a calendar effectively
- calendar events and punctuality.

The model used in developing each module focuses on activities that introduce the mobile phone functions; introduce and provide practise to relevant vocabulary and discuss cultural and social knowledge associated with those functions, including digital safety issues and acceptable or common usage practices. A Learner needs analysis survey, a Teacher-use glossary, a Personal vocabulary and pronunciation builder are included along with Teacher notes and Student worksheets and audio files.

*Digital literacy for mobile phones* is available for download from the AMES Bookshop <http://www.ames.net.au/ames-bookshop> under Free Resources or from <http://diglit-mobile.amesvic.wikispaces.net/home>