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When the time is ripe

If you had asked me how we decide on the theme of an issue of *Fine Print* I may have said that we don't really decide, but rather a theme emerges from the articles we commission and receive. But on further reflection I have decided things may not be quite so random.

It is probably no accident that two of our feature writers, Bob Broughton and Inge Kral, focus on literacy practices in Indigenous communities. Indigenous literacy is a relatively new frontier for literacy research and practice, and as such poses new challenges, which explains our current focus on it. We know many of the *old* methods don't work in remote Indigenous contexts, and the consequent attention to finding solutions gives rise to new ways of applying old paradigms. Both Bob Broughton and Inge Kral apply literacy as social practice to situations in remote Australia in order to understand present literacy needs of Aboriginal communities, and to show how we might approach the future. It is no accident then that the idea of literacy as social practice will be prominent in current literacy discourse.

It is probably no accident that both Inge Kral and another of our feature writers, Lynda Acheron, are literacy specialists with a background in anthropology. It makes sense that when trying to understand remote Indigenous communities (and other ethnic communities, as in Lynda's article), we may call on the expertise of anthropologists. The collaboration of the two disciplines is an interesting, and necessary, direction as the literacy field moves into new frontiers.

The time is ripe for literacy as social practice to dominate literacy discourse, and so it is not so random that this is exactly what has emerged as the theme for this edition of *Fine Print*: literacy as social practice, read about it once again, and deepen your understanding.

Jacinta Agostinelli
I acknowledge the Aboriginal leaders and community activists who I have been working with for many years now, who have supported the work that I will discuss here. This includes Chairperson, Pat Anderson, and the board of directors of the Lowitja Aboriginal Health Research Institute, who seed-funded this; the chairperson of our Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign steering committee, Donna Ah Chee, who is the CEO of the Aboriginal Medical Service in Alice Springs, the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress; and Jack Beetson, a Ngemba man from NSW who is our campaign coordinator. I also acknowledge Deborah Durnan, my wife and my colleague, who is here today, and who is the senior technical adviser on the literacy campaign.

Popular education

First, although I have a PhD in adult education—which I did by distance learning in the 1990s through Latrobe University in Melbourne—I do not refer to myself as an LLN practitioner, or a literacy studies expert. My field is popular education. This is the term used within the field of adult education to refer to the adult education work which is done in connection with left-wing, socially progressive political and social movements. This term, popular education, while still not widely used in Australia, is common in Latin America, Africa and Asia, and it comes originally from the idea of the people. Popular education is peoples’ education, and it has a long and proud history, though at different times it has been known by different names. For example, in Australia in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, it was called independent working class education, and in the US it was called labour education. Here in Melbourne, the Victorian Labor College, which operated in Trades Hall from 1917 until 2006, was one of the founding institutions of Australian popular education, and you also had a Marx School here in the 1940s and 1950s, which was run out of the headquarters of the Communist Party (Reason In Revolt, 2007; Boughton, 1997).

In the English-speaking countries of the industrialised world, the first popular educators were the working class activists of the Chartist movement, the democratic movement that arose in the 1830s as the industrial revolution took hold. One of the great English Chartist leaders, Henry Jones, was fond of saying ‘A people’s education is safe only in the people’s hands’.

Second, my interest in these matters did not originate as an academic pursuit. I came into popular education, as an activist, not as an academic. When I did my undergraduate degree in politics at Sydney University in the early 1970s, it was a radical time, with the movement against the Vietnam War, the rise of the Women’s Liberation movement, the Aboriginal land rights movement, etc. When I graduated, I went to work in Redfern, the inner city suburb of Sydney, which was a major centre at the time of Aboriginal activism. It was also a place where people lived in appalling conditions, in tiny run-down terrace houses with minimal services, on poverty-line incomes. As a young man in my mid twenties, I was quickly radicalised...
by what I saw. Swept up in the mood of the time, I and quite a few of my friends joined the Communist Party of Australia (the CPA), which is where we learned a lot about how to work in movements for social and political change. As a party member, I got involved with was the independence movement in Timor-Leste, or East Timor as we called it then.

When the Indonesians invaded East Timor in December 1975, the Communist Party set up an illegal underground radio link outside of Darwin so that the independence movement, which had retreated into the mountains, could maintain contact with its leaders who had been sent out just before the invasion to try and build international support. When independence came in 1999, even though the CPA had by this time closed its doors, a dozen of us from the CPA solidarity network were invited to Timor to take part in the first aboveground Conference of FRETLIN, the political party that had launched the independence movement in 1974.

Dili was in ruins when we arrived, and the reconstruction challenge was huge. When we met with the FRETLIN leadership, one of the things they asked for help with was to rebuild their adult education system.

Fast forward a few years, and FRETLIN had become the first elected government in a free and independent Timor Leste. In 2004, Deborah and I took part in the first Timor Leste Adult Literacy conference, which resolved to launch a national literacy campaign. The model chosen by FRETLIN was a Cuban model, called Yo Si Puedo, or Yes I Can, and the Cuban government sent a team of advisers to Timor-Leste to help the government run the campaign. Deborah and I were invited by the FRETLIN Education Minister Rosaria Corte-Real to work on the campaign with the Cubans and their Timorese counterparts, to provide an ongoing evaluation and to help build the capacity of the Timorese adult education workforce. We did that for the next few years, from 2006–2009, supported by a grant from the Australian Research Council. (I presented on this at the 2010 ACAL Conference in Darwin, and you can read more about it in the article based on that presentation in Literacy & Numeracy Studies (Boughton, 2010).

We were joined in Timor on several occasions by our Aboriginal colleague, Jack Beetson, an adult education and development worker with whom we had worked since 1993. Jack, Deborah and I were so impressed with what we saw that we decided to float the idea with some of our old colleagues and comrades in the Aboriginal rights movement of trying a similar campaign in Australia. The Lowitja Institute sponsored a workshop in 2009 in Alice Springs, where a national Aboriginal committee of health and education leaders was formed to lead the next stage. In 2011, the Commonwealth Department of Education Employment Education and Workplace Relations agreed to fund a pilot through the WELL strategic projects programme and IPLAC, the Cuban Institute that designed the model, agreed to send an adviser. Wilcannia was chosen as the first pilot site, where Jack Beetson was working as the local land council CEO.

I apologise for the long introduction, but my strong interest in history has taught me that, unless you know where something has come from, it’s very hard to work out where it’s going. The underlying point, I believe, is that correct ideas, as Mao Tse Tung famously put it, do not fall from the sky, they come from practice. The literacy campaign pilot is occurring now in Australia as a consequence of relationships, understandings and knowledge developed by a group of activists, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, over several decades, through participation in diverse struggles around different issues. This is the nature of popular education: it emerges from and is totally dependent on, the radical progressive social movements that give it life. It is not a method or a technique, in other words, it is a philosophy: a philosophy in which as Paulo Freire taught, education is an essential component of human liberation.

The campaign model
I turn now to the literacy campaign model itself, which we first saw operating in Timor-Leste, and have now been piloting for the last year or so in Australia. The first thing to understand, and this does not come easily to literacy practitioners accustomed to working in a different paradigm, is that a literacy campaign is not a
campaign to get people to go to literacy classes. The word campaign in Australia is often taken to mean *advertising campaign*, or *promotion campaign*. But the word campaign in the phrase literacy campaign comes from a different tradition, the tradition of revolutionary movements for social transformation.

The Indian adult education scholar, H.S. Bhola, who has written a great deal about mass literacy campaigns, defines it in this way:

> A mass approach that seeks to make all adult men and women in a nation literate within a particular time frame. Literacy is seen as a means to a comprehensive set of ends—economic, social, structural and political … (It) suggests urgency and combativeness … *it is something of a crusade* (Bohla 1984, p.35, p.196. My emphasis.)

### Campaigns

In Nicaragua in 1980, for example, the literacy campaign was actually called a crusade. More recently, in Venezuela, it was called a mission, Mission Robinson, named after one of the 20th century leaders of the Bolivarian movement for a unified Latin America. So mission, campaign, crusade—they have almost a military ring about them. But the key thing really is that, not unlike a military campaign or a national liberation struggle, it requires mass mobilisation of people and resources. The goal is a significant raising of the literacy level of a particular group, or a whole region or nation, within a definite period of time.

The campaign model we learned from the Cubans in Timor Leste, and which we are now in the process of adapting to the circumstances of Aboriginal communities in western NSW has three elements, which we call phases. The first phase we call socialisation and mobilisation, because this is a process of engaging the whole community in the campaign. We say socialisation because what you have to do during this phase is help people develop the understanding that:

> While literacy is an aspect of an individual’s history, capability, and possibilities, it is also a feature of the collective or joint capabilities of a group, community, or society. (Luke & Freebody 2009, p.4)

Literacy studies writers (e.g. Street 2001) have been saying this in different ways for very many years now. We are fond of saying, for example, that literacy is not an individual skill, it is a social practice. But when it comes to building literacy, we almost always fall back on the model of individual or perhaps group tuition, with the people who are said to have low literacy.

A literacy campaign includes tuition, but it includes much more as well. In a literacy campaign, everyone in the community is expected to play a role, because we are building community literacy, community capability. We are building a culture where literacy is valued, and where anyone who has in the past felt excluded from literacy practice can join in and become part of a movement to improve things for the community as a whole.

It is equally important to recognise, as Bhola’s definition does, that a literacy campaign only makes sense as part of a wider social struggle, to overcome the conditions which created the situation where some people have not been able to benefit from the education system, where people, to put it bluntly, have been denied their basic human rights. The campaign model recognises that we are not so much trying to change individuals, we are trying to change the society, we are trying to build a more equal world.

Phase two of the campaign is the basic literacy lessons. Now, perhaps this is what will be of most interest to many people here, because this is where the tuition occurs, where it looks like we are doing something quite similar to what is done in other literacy classes. The difference, however, is that we are doing the tuition inside the campaign, and the socialisation and mobilisation work is continuing while the classes are running, and they are an essential part of what makes the classes work.

### A Yes I Can lesson

First, the facilitator, the person who leads the class through the lesson, is a local Aboriginal person, who has been given three weeks initial training in the model, and then receives weekly training and support from the advisers, one of whom is Cuban, the other Australian. The Cuban and the Australian are educators, with professional qualifications, but the local person is not, or does not have to be. The main thing is, the person has to be chosen by the community leadership and have sufficient literacy themselves to be able to help the students in their class build their basic skills.

The basic course consists of sixty-four lessons. During each lesson, the students and the facilitator watch a DVD, where they see a small group of students learning literacy from a teacher and an assistant teacher, using the same workbook
that the live learners also have. The local facilitator turns the DVD on and off at different points in the lesson, so the students in the live class can practice something they have just seen on the DVD, or talk about something that the teacher and students on the DVD have been discussing.

The DVDs we are using in western NSW were developed for a literacy campaign in Grenada, so the teachers and students on the DVD, who are actors, are Grenadians. In Timor, when the campaign started there, we used DVDs made for Brazil, which were in Portuguese. Later, a set of DVDs was developed using Timorese actors, and using the local Timorese lingua franca, Tetum. If the pilot succeeds in Australia, we may finish up making our own DVDs with the help of the Cubans—that hasn’t been decided yet. For the time being, we will continue to use the ones developed for Grenada, which proved very popular with the participants in Wilcannia.

There is a lot I can tell you about the lessons and how they work, and also why they work, but before doing that, I need to emphasise that, once the sixty-four lessons have been completed, there is a third phase to the campaign which kicks in. Actually, the planning of this phase begins when the campaign begins. This is the post-literacy phase, when what we are aiming to do is coordinate a whole range of activities within the community through which the people who have completed the basic classes can continue to build their literacy.

Before the students who have completed the classes start their post-literacy, we have a graduation, where the community honours the students for completing phase two, and hand out certificates. The graduation is part of phase one, really, because this is where the new graduates and facilitators encourage other family and community members to join in, to become part of the next group who will do the lessons, or perhaps to volunteer to do other work on the campaign.

So, phase three. Remember, literacy is a social practice, so you have to practice it, socially. In Wilcannia, we started with a series of non-formal learning activities, including computer classes at the Land Council, cooking classes at the women’s Safe House, work experience in different organisations around town. One graduate volunteered to become an assistant facilitator in the next class starting. The basic idea is that community organisations mobilise to provide opportunities for the graduates to keep building their literacy, ideally for a period of another two to three months. What happens after that is up to the individual and community. In the case of Wilcannia, the Land Council supported the TAFE to run a catering course so the literacy graduates could gain some skills they needed to start a small catering business; while others gained employment and training positions with local organisations. Some simply felt better about themselves, regained some of the dignity they felt they had lost, and began to believe in the possibility of a better future.

What we have learned

I will finish with a short summary of what I think are the main learnings from this experiment.

First, the campaign model is an appropriate and highly effective way to do basic literacy work in an Aboriginal community. To date, sixteen people have completed the basic lessons, and another fifteen are about to start, in a place where no one can remember anyone completing a VET literacy course in the last ten years. We have not tried, but we believe it could also work in other communities in Australia where a significant number of people with low literacy live in similarly difficult conditions, with some of the same personal and social issues.

When I say it works, what I mean is that it can make a significant impact not only on the overall level of literacy in a community, but on the capacity of the community to mobilise more effectively to struggle around other issues. For example, in Wilcannia, one of the facilitators has now taken the lead to set up a men’s shed where he is helping local men, including some who were in his class, to deal with issues around violence and men’s health. Other people who the campaign mobilised are working on other issues, at the women’s Safe House, and some are trying to build
an income-generating social enterprise. Still others are now playing an active role in getting the school to work better with the community. Best of all, some of the people who were active in the campaign are now helping us to take the model to two more communities in the region, and are organising to start the next cohort in Wilcannia with almost no outside support.

Second, the experience of this first Australian pilot of the campaign model has given us a much deeper understanding of how it works and why. The overall design of the model, the three phases and the way they fit together, and the sixty-four lessons and how they are structured and sequenced, represent the accumulated knowledge that the Cuban Literacy School has developed over fifty years of working in this field. Some of you will know that Cuba had its own literacy campaign in 1961, but you may not know that after this, the people who took part in that campaign and led it went on to do similar work in several newly-independent countries in Africa and Latin America; and today they are using Yes I Can in twenty-eight countries across the world. This experience, which is unparalleled among any other country’s literacy specialists, has taught them a lot. One of the current literacy leaders, a member of the team that designed Yes I Can, is Jaime Canfux, who is now in his 70s, and was an assistant to Amino Hart, the person who led the campaign in Cuba in 1961. Canfux, on the several occasions when we have met with him in recent years, has always emphasised that the teaching method is only a very small part of the model, that the key issue is the way that the national and local structures are developed to lead and coordinate the campaign. That said, however, there is no doubt that in Wilcannia, the alphanumeric method of learning letters through association with numbers proved very popular, as did the general knowledge about issues and the discussion of values—what the lessons call positive messages—which form an essential part of every lesson.

Third, we have discovered that the great strength of this model is the way it mobilises local people and local resources to lead the campaign. The literacy professionals, and the tertiary educated supporters in other roles are important, but we cannot do it without the community. The Cubans have developed a model that is sufficiently simple and straightforward, where a community with relatively low literacy can take ownership of the process and genuinely lead it. The evidence for this is clear, now, as people from Wilcannia have begun working to get other communities to join the campaign. Moreover, as we know from the experience of mass literacy campaigns from all over the world, they can only work if the people themselves take hold of them, and become the campaign leaders and activists. In other words, if it becomes a genuinely popular education—a people’s education, as Henry Jones said, in the people’s hands.

My fourth point brings me to the subtitle of my talk, ‘A pedagogy of hope?’. Some of you will recognise this as the title of the last book written by the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, before his death in 1997, aged seventy-five.

Most literacy practitioners know in their hearts that the world is not OK. It is not OK that there are 800 million people in the world today who have not had the opportunity to develop even basic literacy in one of their country’s official languages. Here in Australia, while the situation is not nearly as dramatic as it is, for example, in Timor Leste, it is still not OK. Everyday, we work with people for whom life has almost always been a very difficult struggle—not because they have low literacy, though that is part of it, but because their low literacy is an aspect of a much wider set of problems in the hand which society has dealt them. Policymakers are fond of pointing out that higher levels of literacy are associated with higher incomes, better health, more secure employment, better housing, more success for children at school and so on. What they do not say so often is that this cuts both ways, and lower levels of literacy are associated with poor health, low incomes, insecure employment, high risk of incarceration, poor outcomes for your children at school and many, many other troubles too numerous to mention.

I am not talking about individuals with deficits, I am talking now about appalling and unacceptable levels of social inequality, which ruin peoples lives and which reduce many people to a sense of hopelessness, a sense that there is really no way out, that this is fate, that, as some people in Wilcannia told us, they feel abandoned. People with low literacy blame themselves for their situation. They don’t read sociology texts, they don’t realise that the reason things are like they are is that people with a lot more resources than they have, a lot more literacy, a lot more education, choose to turn their backs on their distress, and blame them for it, rather than take the responsibility we really have for creating and benefiting from a situation where some people have almost nothing, and others consume far too much.

What I love about the literacy campaign model is that it tells people that things can change, that they are not forever
going to be left behind, unable to participate in even the most basic community activities like turning up at school on parents night, or coming to a land council meeting and understanding the agenda. And it doesn’t just communicate this lesson to the people with very low literacy, it teaches us all how to work together, to build networks of solidarity and support, so we can start to turn things around. The evidence is there right in front of us, with Yes I Can, which has reached literally millions of people all around the world, quietly pursuing a strategy which the Cubans began over fifty years ago and which has been continuing ever since. It’s a long haul, as Miles Horton used to say, but another world is possible. The campaign is a pedagogy of hope, because the model, the three phases, not just the literacy classes, teaches us all to believe in the possibility of a better future.

What next?
The National Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign committee decided at the end of the Wilcannia pilot that the next stage would be to try to upscale the model to other communities in the same region. In April, we received word that we had been successful in gaining another grant under the WELL programme, conditional on the NSW government making a significant contribution. This has now been secured and we have the funds to continue in Wilcannia while rolling the campaign out into two more communities. Bourke and Engonna, two communities along the river from Wilcannia, have agreed to be the next ones to take this on, and we have just begun the phase one work, developing a local working group and talking to different organisations about the campaign and how they can get involved. Our new Cuban adviser is due to arrive in Australia in a couple of weeks.

We also have a new partner, Murdi Paaki Regional Enterprise Corporation, an Aboriginal-owned and controlled provider of employment and training services across the region, and lead agencies in each of the two communities, the Bourke Aboriginal Community Working Party and the Engonna Local Aboriginal Land Council.

A few weeks ago, the National Aboriginal Campaign steering committee reached another major milestone—securing corporate sponsorship from Brookfield Multiplex, a building and development company—to establish a national not-for-profit foundation, the Literacy for Life Foundation, which will raise funds to support the roll out of the campaign to other regions at the conclusion of our current pilot phase.

Writing this keynote is part of this campaign. We need the support of the ACAL network to keep doing this, because you are the professional association that brings Australia’s LLN practitioners and academics together. We need you to understand what we are doing, and why we are doing it, and we would also appreciate any ideas you have about how we might improve what we are doing.

I will leave you with a quote from Owen Whyman, a young Wilcannia man who has been working on the campaign consistently since it began:

And this is the best thing that ever could have happened for this little town. You know, I think it should expand to more other places along the Darling River you know, ‘cos it’s not only needed here. It’s needed in a lot of other Aboriginal communities … You know, don’t stop at one town. Let’s keep going. Let’s keep it rolling on. You know, and as far as I can see, it’s going to keep going, and it’s going to get bigger and better. The message is going to get around … You know, to me it’s a good thing that’s started. It’d be sad to see it end. You know, you’ve got to spread it along, spread the word, take it to other communities, and keep it alive. Keep it alive.

Bob Boughton has worked as a community development worker and adult educator since the 1970s. He is currently an associate professor in the School of Education at the University of New England in Armidale, NSW, where his research focuses on the role of popular education in development in marginalised and impoverished communities.

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Introduction

Envisage a picture of adult literacy in remote Indigenous Australia and one could all too easily sketch a picture of failure, deficit and marginalisation. While not denying that there is validity in this impression, in this article I want to lead readers to another way of thinking about adult literacy in the remote Indigenous context, by looking at what is happening, rather than what is not happening (Heath and Street, 2008). To do this I will lay out an ethnographic approach that considers literacy from an intergenerational, situational and social practice perspective. And I will weave between theory and case study examples primarily from ethnographic fieldwork in remote Indigenous communities in Western Australia.

Anthropology as an academic discipline encompasses many fields. Notably, literacy has been a key object of study in anthropology. Anthropologists have attempted to understand the links between culture, language, literacy and the sites in which learning is situated. A fundamental tenet of anthropology is that cultural forms (including literacy) are transmitted from one generation to the next through socialisation as well as direct and indirect teaching and learning. Over recent decades studies in anthropology and sociolinguistics have shifted the emphasis away from a traditional, cognitivist view of literacy as a set of technical skills that are possessed or lacked, towards studies of the social and cultural behaviour associated with literacy. James Gee (Gee, 1996) used the term New Literacy Studies to describe the social turn that took place from the 1980s and 90s as researchers started to document literacy practices in community context, (see Heath, 1983; Street, 1993a). In this field scholars take ‘an ethnographic perspective on literacy’ (Street, 1993b, p. 1) embodying the view that ‘reading and writing only make sense when studied in the context of social and cultural (as well as historical, political and economic) practices of which they are but a part’ (Gee, 2000, p. 180).

Ethnographic studies of literacy stand at the interface between anthropology and sociolinguistics. They look at the social practices, social meanings, and the cultural conceptions of reading and writing and have enhanced our understanding of the social and cultural contexts that create opportunities for literacy development. Importantly, they bring an anthropological perspective to literacy that
opens the way to seeing how people actually use literacy in a broad spectrum of contexts outside of pedagogical settings (e.g. Barton and Hamilton 1998; Street, 1993a). Such practice-based ethnographic research has been influenced by anthropologists and sociologists including Pierre Bourdieu, Barbara Rogoff, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger. Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977), integral to this development, takes account of ways of doing and being in the world across generations. *Habitus* as a set of transposable dispositions that are embodied also provides insights into the generation and construction of texts as local practice. In other words, as I now discuss using data from two ethnographic studies of literacy, people engage in situated learning and literacy (Barton et al., 2000; Lave and Wenger, 1991) as a consequence of the interplay between cultural schema and cultural ways of learning and being (Rogoff 2003) and this is played out in the space of practice.

The Ngaanyatjarra setting

In *Talk, Text and Technology* (Kral, 2012) I considered the manner in which one Indigenous group, the Ngaanyatjarra, have taken on Western practices, habits and values, inclusive of literacy. This was not a study of literacy pedagogy, rather a consideration of the acquisition of literate behaviours and practices and how these have been transmitted across the generations. By situating literacy as social practice I posed that literacy cannot be removed from the social, cultural, historical, and political context of use that has ensued over three to four generations since the establishment of the United Aborigines Mission at Warburton Ranges in the 1930s.

For Ngaanyatjarra people, the transition from a nomadic hunter-gatherer existence to a sedentary community lifestyle came relatively late. The geographic remoteness of the Western Desert protected them from the profound ravages of the encounter with Anglo-Australian settler society. The arrival of the mission led to the gradual introduction of Western-style schooling and English communication modes and technologies, initially in the form of alphabetic literacy. By the 1960s, state education had commenced, with a federal policy of assimilation determining that adolescents would be sent away to urban residential secondary schools, although most were to return to their desert homeland. Despite early positive experiences of English language primary schooling and adult Christian vernacular literacy, followed by state secondary education and some vocational training from the 1980s, resistance to institutional forms of learning is now evident in poor school attendance, low retention rates, and uneven levels of literacy and numeracy across the Ngaanyatjarra Lands.

In the mission era, the boundaries of literacy were restricted by the absence of resources outside pedagogical or church contexts. During the assimilation era and the later era of self-determination the genres and domains of literacy practice expanded as adult literates read and wrote according to their emerging roles and identities as church leaders, council members, teaching assistants, health workers, parents, and so forth. Today, literacy practices are embedded in certain everyday social practices, most tellingly in Christian practices for the older generation. And for the younger generation access to new digital technologies is enabling users to experiment with technology-mediated multimodal literacies.

For many older Ngaanyatjarra their sense of being literate, and their comprehension of what literacy is, derives from their early exposure to Christian literacy practice. Nowadays grandmothers and mothers still commonly sing with their children from the Ngaanyatjarra hymnal or read from the Ngaanyatjarra-English Bible in the home domain. Accordingly, in some families, especially the mission families, a very particular type of Christian-imbu family literacy practice has been transmitted to successive generations. Here we can see how alphabetic literacy as a cultural form, and a social practice, has been transmitted from one generation to the next through socialisation and indirect teaching. This is now playing out in the
performance of contemporary cultural practices such as funerals.

Over recent years funerals in this region have become textually-mediated events, evident in the decoding and encoding of text in English and the mother tongue through Bible reading, singing from the hymnal, and the writing of eulogies that are handed out at funerals. Ngaanyatjarra communicative processes and oral genres are apparent in these written eulogies. A travelling narrative story schema deriving from the traditional oral canon forms the structuring principle in many of the texts where the life journey and achievements of the deceased are emphasised. The written genre typically uses a chronological structure to situate the individual’s unique journey within the shared historical trajectory of momentous sociocultural change experienced over recent decades. Funeral texts are thus not only the repository of oral memory, but also a written record for future generations. Importantly, these texts are written locally, for a local audience in much the same way that songs are now produced by young people primarily for a local audience, as I discuss below.

Youth and digital literacies

All over the world digital technologies are now altering styles of engagement and learning and catalysing computer mediated communication and multimedia cultural production outside institutional or instructional settings. Internationally, such developments have led to substantial ethnographic inquiry (Ito et al., 2010). In another project (Kral and Schwab, 2012) an ethnographic approach was used to document how youth are acquiring and using literacy in out-of school settings. In the Learning Spaces project we found that youth in many remote communities, including the Ngaanyatjarra communities, now have access to media and computer-based resources during the non-school hours through media centres, youth centres or arts programmes. In these locations, young people are commonly progressing from basic IT experimentation with Mac-based iLife applications, including iMovie, iPhoto and GarageBand, to video editing and DVD production, and music recording and CD production.

An affordance of digital technology is the potential for collective and individual acquisition of expertise. Our findings indicate that where there is access to digital technologies, youth in remote communities, even those with minimal formal education, are voluntarily engaging in self-directed learning and acquiring expertise. In the Ngaanyatjarra Lands the adoption and use of GarageBand (free software available within the multimedia iLife suite on Apple Mac computers) is emblematic of the ways in which Indigenous youth are rapidly gaining expertise in using and manipulating new technologies in community-based learning environments. From 2006, informal GarageBand training workshops were held for local young musicians. After only a few days training, they had typically developed sufficient skill to start recording, producing and teaching others—facilitated in part because the visual interface on the computer screen uses a familiar symbol system and recognisable icons or buttons, redolent of the iconography and visuospatial operations of cassette players or video recorders, enabling even those with limited English literacy to quickly get the hang of it.

These learners, many of whom have incomplete schooling and varying levels of literacy competence in English and Ngaanyatjarra or Pitjantjatjara, are setting high skill attainment levels for themselves that are not based on a programmatic system of institutional learning. They are learning by observation, trial and error experimentation, peer teaching and ongoing practice because the technologies are accessible and the production challenges meaningful and relevant. By using the logic of the symbol system embedded in the GarageBand structure, in concert with situated learning and practice, these musicians became as Lave states ‘learners who understand what they are learning’ because they are ‘active agents in the appropriation of knowledge’ (Lave, 1990, p. 325).

Internationally, studies (Hull, 2003; Kress, 2010) suggest that fresh thinking about literacy has been ushered in by the arrival of digital technologies and the emergence of new social practices surrounding digital media and mobile phone technology. Significantly, another affordance of this change is the increasing prevalence of multimodal literacies. Digital technology is reliant on the intuitive meta-textual skills of alphabetic literacy—standardised alphabetic
symbols, left to right and top to bottom processing interacting with a pictographic symbol system providing a new repertoire of visual codes. It is also multimodal, ‘it is possible now to easily integrate words with images, sound, music, and movement to create digital artefacts that do not necessarily privilege linguistic forms of signification but rather draw on a variety of modalities—speech, writing, image, gesture and sound—to create different forms of meaning’ (Hull and Nelson, 2005, p. 224–225).

Indigenous youth are tending to interact with the artefacts of digital technology (mobile phones, the internet, digital cameras and multimedia computer software) as cultural forms rather than as ICTs to be learned through formal instruction. Multimodality in the case of the young musicians described here incorporated, not only interpreting symbols on screen and paper, but also gesture, sign, eye gaze, and haptic or kinaesthetic signals. The musicians remembered basic tunes and lyrics, and in the recording process, they would overlay improvised tracks, directing one another and making suggestions for ‘making it sound better.’ Later recorded songs were transcribed and translated from the vernacular to English as text for CD covers by those with literacy skills.

Despite new dispositions, Ngaanyatjarra youth are still deeply rooted in their own cultural schema. A schema connected to kin and country and the enduring relationship between place and identity. In their songs we are seeing a contemporary version of traditional oral genres set within recurrent themes. Revealed is the encoding of cultural meaning evinced in songs about individuals who are longing for country or kin, and as one young musician noted: ‘looking after our sacred areas and waterholes and grandfathers’ land’. Technologies are thus enabling young people for whom schooling has few payoffs, to create new forms of expression in the composition of lyrics attuned to local history and contemporary issues. These young musicians are merging the intercultural elements of Indigenous language, gesture and style with global youth culture and English, hence forging and expressing new cultural perspectives, understandings and identities. In this way we are witnessing a blend of cultural continuity, innovation and transformation across the generations.

In conclusion
So lastly, back to literacy and social practice—why does it matter? It matters because while we need to pay attention to improving pedagogical approaches to literacy, in the remote context we also need to pay much more attention to the social and cultural behaviour associated with literacy. And we also need to look at texts as part of a wider social process. To understand how texts, such as the funeral texts or songs described here, are read or interpreted locally and how they are constructed we need to fill in the ethnographic background. By taking an ethnographic perspective on literacy, one that posits that ‘reading and writing only make sense when studied in the context of social and cultural practices of which they are but a part’ (Gee, 2000, p. 180), and by seeing how people actually use literacy in a broad spectrum of contexts outside of pedagogical settings (Street 1993a) we can then view such texts as traces of social practice. Ethnography of the kind discussed here reveals the repeated practices that ‘sediment’ into text-making (Rowsell and Pahl, 2007). This ‘sedimenting’ of practices into texts is a process that contributes to the habitus and becomes normative everyday practice particular to any one setting.

As I showed earlier, in the Ngaanyatjarra context the repeated Christian literacy practices of the mission are now normative everyday family literacy practices, and have sedimented into the making of funeral texts. If we recall that a fundamental tenet of anthropology is that cultural forms are transmitted from one generation to the next through socialisation as well as direct and indirect teaching and learning, then, by finding socially meaningful and culturally relevant applications for alphabetic and digital literacies, literacy as a cultural form, and a social practice, is more likely to be transmitted to successive generations.

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References

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Cultural orientation to Australian workplaces

By Dr Lynda Achren

There is more to English for work than vocabulary lists and imperatives. Linda Achren discusses the role of cultural differences in workplace communication. She demonstrates the need for explicit teaching of workplace expectations and rules to culturally and linguistically diverse learners. Good teaching practice advocates giving learners the tools to notice cultural differences in workplace communication.

The Framework of Good Practice published by ACFE last year as part of the Responding to CALD Learners project emphasises the role of culture in shaping expectations of what happens in the workplace and how these cultural expectations shape successful communication. The framework points out that ‘even where the same industry exists in the CALD learners country of origin, there may be differing cultural understandings of how that industry operates’. The framework suggests that good practice requires ESL teachers and VET trainers to ‘unpack these workplace expectations and explore cultural differences during training and before work placement’ (Achren et al., 2012:16).

Illustrated by action research conducted by Learn Local practitioners during the Responding to CALD Learners project and drawing on broader Australian academic research, this article will explore how this good practice principle can be put into practice, and examine differing cultural expectations of workplaces and the communication that takes place within them.

The hidden hierarchy

As a number of the action research projects demonstrate, one of the most difficult and confusing cultural aspects for many CALD learners/workers is the apparent equality of Australian workplaces. Australia prides itself on its egalitarianism. This value manifests itself in such ideals as equal pay, equal opportunity, gender equity and so on. More subtly, it influences how we relate to our colleagues, how we relate to our boss and how the boss relates to us. It is reflected in the relatively flat structure of our workplaces, in which there is not a huge distance between workers and the boss.

This can be problematic for CALD learners from more overtly hierarchical societies where the line of command is clearly delineated, e.g. where superiors are treated with deference and addressed verbally in terms that demonstrate respect and mark their place in the hierarchy. As a colleague from Egypt remarked recently, “In Egypt it would never do to pass the manager in the corridor, say ‘Hi’ and keep on walking!” Another colleague, who had been working with skilled migrants to raise their awareness of the Australian workplace culture, received the following email from an ex-student after her first few days at work:

Hi Mary,
The first day was really impressive. They welcomed me warmly and introduced me to a small team of about 15 people. Even the CEO works with us closely and is very friendly. As you said, it’s a real flat structure, very different to Sri Lanka. The other strange thing to me is the do it by yourself culture where I have to prepare my tea and do my own photocopying etc which I was not used to.

Thank you for everything my respected teacher,
Mahinda

The email clearly demonstrates cultural differences in workplace expectations. It also emphasises the importance of raising CALD learners’ awareness of the expectations of Australian workplaces. Without this awareness, Mahinda’s expectations may have caused her to make some blunders that could potentially take a long time to rectify.

An example of such a blunder is given by Lizzy Bilogrevic from Diversitat in Geelong, who refers to Australian workplaces as having a hidden hierarchy:
… a hierarchy obscured by workplace communication that has an aura of equality about it. Workers and even the manager or director of nursing call each other by the first name or nickname in a friendly fashion. This caused confusion in determining the line of command for some CALD learners [during their work placement in aged care facilities]. For example, a CALD learner reported that when instructed by a workplace ‘buddy’ to clean up the dining room tables, she thought, “Why should I do that? I’m just the same as her”. Yet when she questioned her about the fairness of the instruction, the buddy turned into a (not very pleased) superior! (Bilogrevic 2012: 36)

As Bilogrevic points out in her action research report, misunderstandings such as this can have dire consequences because successful work placements are a common pathway to employment. Needless to say, the CALD learner in the scenario above did not get offered a job in that aged care facility.

Knowing who, what, why and how
During training, CALD learners need this hidden hierarchy to be uncovered. They need to become very familiar with the roles and responsibilities they will encounter in a workplace and the structure (who reports to whom) made explicit. On the first day of work placement CALD learners need to be introduced to individuals in this hidden hierarchy and the line of command again made clear.

As well as knowing who they report to, CALD learners must be very familiar with what they need to report. Chris Moore from On Track in Eaglehawk pointed out in his action research report that understanding what supervisors and others in the workplace need to know can be particularly challenging for CALD learners/workers with little or no previous work history. Moore describes ‘the propensity of the Karen people to leave work without notification when they need to carry out a personal errand such as taking a sick child to the doctor’. He explains that ‘as subsistence farmers in their own country and having spent years in a refugee camp, and not having an employer before, they are unaware of what employers expect in Australia’ (Moore 2012: 63). Making such reporting expectations explicit is imperative for successful and continuing employment. Explanations of why the reporting is important—the need to replace absent workers so that all tasks can be completed, deadlines met, quotas fulfilled etc.—is an invaluable tool in raising awareness.

Supporting CALD learners also means making sure they are aware that they can go to managers with difficulties that affect their work. For many CALD learners socialised in more hierarchical cultures, this will be both surprising and difficult. For us all, our expectations of how we and our superiors will relate has been learnt over a long period through our socialisation by our families, schools, workplaces and communities. It can take a long time to unlearn previous experiences that have led us to expect certain behaviours in the workplace such as a distant, unapproachable boss. In such cases, Chris Moore suggests emphasising to the CALD learner/worker that ‘the manager doesn’t want to lose you—you’re a good worker and he’s invested time and money into training you—you’re not bothering him if you go to him with a problem’. Linguistically, being equipped with introductory/interrupting phrases such as, Have you got a minute? will be invaluable when the CALD learner/worker needs to raise something with a supervisor. Activities such as relevant and contextualised role-plays will provide opportunities to practise such language and cultural skills in the safety of the classroom before having to use them in workplaces.

Similarly, supporting CALD learners means helping them feel comfortable with asking questions—another area of cultural difficulty for people from more hierarchical cultures in which questioning anyone in authority could be interpreted as disrespectful. CALD learners/workers
need to be continually reassured that asking questions is seen in Australia as a positive thing. One area where this is particularly important is with instructions. It is essential that CALD learners understand that a manager would prefer people to clarify an instruction than get something wrong, because doing the wrong thing could result in loss of productivity or injury. It is essential, then, that CALD learners are equipped with the appropriate language for clarifying instructions. Just saying I don’t understand rarely does the trick: Do you mean…? Did you say…? or repeating what needs to be clarified, e.g. Tomorrow? with a questioning (rising) intonation will be much more effective. Again, practice through contextualised role-plays is invaluable in helping learners to internalise the language and the new cultural expectations.

The issue of instructions is particularly fraught, as the Australian ideal of equality not only gives rise to a hidden hierarchy but also to hidden directives. This means that as well being comfortable with clarifying instructions and having language to do so, CALD learners also need to be able to distinguish when something is an instruction and when it is a suggestion. Yates (2008: 15–16) points out that when bosses couch instructions in language such as You might like to discuss the report with person X beforehand, CALD workers can form the impression that things are more flexible than they really are. Yates refers to this kind of hidden directive as the ‘secret language of communication’. She tells us that in Australia our requests and instructions tend to be more indirect than in many other cultures.

Knowing how to achieve and interpret the requisite level of (in)directness can be very tricky indeed, even for advanced users of English as a second language. Moreover, without the required softening—you might like to, would you mind, when you have time—CALD learners can come across as rude or manipulative (Yates 2008:15), which can impact negatively on workplace relationships and on-going employment. Liddicoat (2000:9) points out that native speakers are often very tolerant of errors in grammar or vocabulary but ‘problems of cultural mismatch often create significant problems for communication and for social relationships, largely because people are much less aware of the cultural rules for interaction than they are of other aspects of language’. Liddicoat states that:

Cultural knowledge is not something that learners can just pick up. In fact, cultural differences may often go unnoticed by learners until they actually create a problem. If learners are going to develop their cultural knowledge about the target language group, they need to be helped to notice when their own culture differs from that of others and they need to notice this before it creates a problem (Liddicoat 2000:10).

**Noticing as a classroom tool**

Reinforcing the observations of the Learn Local action researchers and the strategies set out in the ACFE Framework of Good Practice in Responding to CALD Learners, both Yates and Liddicoat advocate that teachers and trainers devote classroom time to helping learners come to terms with differing cultural expectations. Indeed, Liddicoat stresses it as being an essential component of language learning and teaching:

To work effectively, language learning needs to allow opportunities for learners to reflect on their own language and culture. Most learners have not had opportunities to learn about the ways in which their own culture works and how their own language reflects their culture. Without this knowledge it is difficult to come to terms with a different culture (Liddicoat 2000:11).

Yates suggests that in classrooms, authentic models of communication together with explicit explanations by teachers and trainers provide CALD learners with opportunities to notice cultural differences in communicative interactions. ‘Noticing is then used as a basis for reflection and comparison with devices and values familiar to learners from the language and cultures they grew up in’ (Yates 2008:31).

This can be as simple as a group discussion to explore the question: How is it done in your culture/in your language? Yates explains that discussing cultural phenomena in this way means they can be explored as ‘culturally relative aspects of behaviour rather than behaviours that are right or wrong, and discussion can then focus on what happens in a context and why; in a way that allows both learners and teachers to step outside their own cultural spaces and have some insight into another’s’ (Yates 2008:31).

Tina Vlahos, from the Melbourne metropolitan Learn Local organisation PRACE, explored some of these issues in her action research project. She reports:

My eyes were opened to the essential obligation we all have as teachers and trainers to share with CALD learners much more than the language. We sometimes choose the safe option because we do not wish to
offend or to appear *culturally imperialistic* (see Yates 2008:2). But if we do this, we are withholding an opportunity for CALD learners to be privy to the cultural knowledge and nuances of language we, as native speakers, know inherently and take for granted (Vlahos 2012:33).

Vlahos’s action research was conducted in a culturally inclusive training classroom of both overseas-born and Australian-born trainees. This demonstrates that discussions of cultural phenomena are not confined to classrooms and training rooms comprised solely of migrant and refugee learners. Indeed, the cultural understanding and insights that such discussions provide are valuable to all learners whether overseas-born or Australian-born because they help to develop the intercultural competence of all involved. Gaining greater awareness of our own culture and how our language reflects our culture, helps us to recognise that there are other, equally valid cultural perspectives, equally valid ways of thinking and doing. Being equipped with tools for *noticing* cultural difference, for being aware that ‘something cultural is going on’ helps provide all language learners and trainees with the intercultural communication skills required for a multicultural society and its multicultural workplaces.

Dr Lynda Achren is a consultant with extensive experience in the field of cultural and linguistic diversity. She was the project manager of the ACFE-funded Responding to CALD Learners project.

**References**


Introduction
In Australia, 1989 saw the first national survey of adult literacy standards, *No Single Measure*, by Rosie Wickert; this was followed by the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) in 1996, the Adult Literacy and Life Skills (ALLS) survey in 2006 and now the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) undertaken in Australia in 2011. We are now in the situation where the preliminary results from PIAAC have been released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2013). This article could just be about those results and the percentages at each level and look at whether Australia's performance has improved or not over the last few decades. But that's not what this article is about.

Most of my career has been in the adult language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) sector in Australia. I have also worked on some of the above international literacy and numeracy assessments: first as a member of the numeracy expert group for ALLS and then on the follow up study, PIAAC. Since 2009 I have also worked on and helped manage the mathematical literacy test development for the international Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) of fifteen year-olds from sixty-seven countries across the world.

In this, and in a second article in the next edition of *Fine Print*, I will attempt to explain what I have learnt from my work on these international assessments, and why I believe there is value and crucial and important lessons for all educators, and others, from the work underpinning these empirically based research endeavours. While some criticism of the surveys is understandable and to be expected, this often blinds readers and the LLN sector from reading between and behind the lines and seeing what value can be generated, gained and learned from such investigations, data and research.

Complexities of international assessments
When I first began working on international assessments, I thought I knew a bit about developing, writing, using, and interpreting assessments for adult numeracy learners. I soon realised how ignorant I was about the complex process and sophistication of international assessments. This not only related to the issue of writing assessments, but also about the methodological approaches used.

My ignorance led me to believe that when I was first approached to contribute back in 1998, I would most likely be asked to sit here in Australia, find or invent some appropriate stimuli and write some good questions covering different numeracy and maths skills, submit them via email and they would be fixed up (a bit) and then used in the international assessments. I soon learnt that this was not the case.

First there was the realisation that you cannot write the items without an understanding of the statistical theory sitting behind the assessments, second that you cannot proceed without an agreed theoretical framework and structure to describe what you are assessing, and thirdly,
that you needed a theoretical construct that will enable you to predict, in advance of an assessment actually taking place, how difficult each item is, and that this needs to be validated empirically. My journey and lessons began, and I am still learning.

**Statistical theory behind assessments**

Item response theory (IRT) is the statistical methodology that sits behind international comparative surveys such as ALLS and PIAAC. The first surprise to me was that the IRT approach turned assessment on its head—it was as much, if not more, about the performance of the items being tested and measured rather than the test-takers—test-takers are not given the traditional feedback with a score of x questions correct out of a total of y and if your x (or percentage correct) is higher than mine then you are better than me. Item response theory (IRT) allows a large number of items of varying difficulty to be developed to assess a wide range of skills across a domain (e.g. reading or numeracy) and test-takers answer different sets of questions.

Based on the performance of a large number of individuals, the test items are placed on a scale of difficulty relative to each other, independent of the ability of students taking the test. Once item difficulties are established, test-takers can be placed on a scale of ability relative to each other—the items and test-takers are placed together on the same scale. This then allows the construction of described scales and the ability of a population can be estimated more accurately against different levels or bands on the scale—what proportions of the population can respond correctly to the type and difficulty of items within that band.

The IRT methodology allows scores across different assessments to be compared via the inclusion of anchor or linking items. These common link items enable comparisons to be made across different tests; across different populations (e.g. different countries); and across time (e.g. different cycles—ALLS and PIAAC).

IRT is generally acknowledged as an improvement over classical test theory as it brings greater flexibility, provides more sophisticated information and provides improved validity and reliability of an assessment compared to traditional methods.

**Test development process**

My second lesson was to learn about the extensive process that sits behind international assessments, which help to guarantee the quality of the stimulus materials and assessment items that make up any assessment developed.

**Conceptual framework**

First, test development and writing does not proceed without an agreed conceptual framework which includes a description of what is being assessed and why and how. These frameworks are developed by teams of international experts from different countries with different cultural and language backgrounds. Extensive consultations take place to ensure that the assessment framework is relevant to the targeted cohort. A framework includes a key test construct which describes characteristics of the items, their type and style, their content and so on. Only once the framework is agreed, does writing of the items commence.

**Quality assurance processes**

Secondly, the development of the assessment items in these international assessments follows a comprehensive process to ensure the quality and validity of the items being developed. The assessments use a team approach to stimulus and question development, whereby a team of experienced test developers write the items and meet together as a panel to critique and review each other’s items, and as such the items are revised and improved. Following that stage, the revised items go through a further comprehensive stage of reviews and revisions.

Next, in the item development process there is a review stage, which involves focus groups and pilots with potential test-takers to get their feedback and opinions on the draft items and the delivery mechanisms. This picks up issues related to interest and relevance, alongside issues related to the meaning and understanding or misunderstanding of the items. In international surveys this stage also includes feedback from participating countries and through a formal translation and review process with language experts. These processes pick up issues to do with the language structure and meaning of items, but also content and cultural issues.

The next crucial stage is trialling. The assessment items go through a final review and revision, design and final desktop publishing and are prepared for trialling in test booklets or for computer-based delivery. Trialling is done with a sample of the target population in each participating country before the final test. The trial data is collected and analysed psychometrically and from these detailed analyses, misbehaving items are rejected on a number of levels including for reliability, fairness and validity. Then for the remaining successful items, any fine-tuning is
undertaken, and a representative set of items are chosen and placed into final forms for each domain being assessed.

This final selection needs to meet the criteria established in the framework and the key test construct, and the range of quality assurance processes followed help to guarantee that the test as a whole is a valid, reliable and fair assessment of the constructs described in the assessment frameworks.

**What did ALLS and PIAAC assess?**

As described above, sitting behind international surveys are theoretical frameworks. In ALLS and PIAAC, the frameworks attempt to describe what literacy and numeracy in the 21st century incorporates, and how this might be assessed in an international assessment. In ALLS (ABS, 2007), there were assessments that were to provide information on knowledge and skills in prose literacy, document literacy, numeracy and problem solving. There was also a health literacy scale reported.

In PIAAC (Jones et al, 2009; Gal et al, 2009), literacy was described as understanding, evaluating, using, and engaging with written texts to participate in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential. Numeracy was described as the ability to access, use, interpret, and communicate mathematical information and ideas, in order to engage in and manage the mathematical demands of a range of situations in adult life. This was elaborated to describe more detailed components of numeracy. More details will be included in the second of my two articles.

**The items themselves**

The tasks are, as much as is possible in a large-scale international testing situation, based on adult contexts and real-life scenarios and texts. Even though these are large-scale international assessments, they are not simply very basic, school like, literacy and numeracy multiple choice type questions devoid of any relevant context or purpose. The assessment requires test-takers to respond in different ways to a range of accessible and not uncommon or unusual situations and documents. They are assessments of the types of interactions adults may need to undertake in the 21st century on a daily basis whether at work, at home, in the community or related to study or training.

Test developers research and find real texts and situations that the target group—in this context adult—may encounter and these form the initial impetus for the writing of the assessment items. The items may then be simulated and often simplified as the real world texts may be too complicated to be accessible to the majority of adults. Texts include artefacts such as advertisements, webpages, labels, newspaper articles, instructions and signs, maps, diagrams and plans, photos, etc.

The assessments are undertaken in people’s homes, and there is no time limit and test-takers are urged to try each question. To support this, tasks are not ordered in the test forms in terms of increasing difficulty and test-takers who cannot answer a particular question may be capable of answering the following questions.

In both ALLS and PIAAC, a ruler and calculator were provided to test-takers for use in the numeracy items (or they could use their own if they preferred). Yes, adults were asked to measure the dimensions of a given item.

**Feedback on the items**

As mentioned above, part of the quality assurance process for these surveys involves focus groups with potential test-takers to gain their feedback and opinions on the draft items and the delivery mechanisms. Feedback and information is also obtained from the participants in pilots, which provide information about how adults respond to the test items and the test situation. Throughout all these processes, and in feedback from people who administer such assessments to participating adults, invariably the feedback from the test-takers has been positive.

**Background questionnaire and screening questions**

In both ALLS and PIAAC, test-takers are first asked a series of about three hundred background questions that are then used in the research and analysis based on the results. The test-takers are then presented with a screening
test containing a small number of simple, low level tasks. If the test-taker fails to complete more than half the items correctly, the interview is concluded. This is to identify and take into account test-takers who, for example, have very low levels of English language and/or literacy ability.

Limitations

Both the ALLS and PIAAC surveys are designed to provide an empirical snapshot of the performance and abilities of the adult population in relation to a test of literacy (reading in this instance), numeracy and the other skills being assessed. These international surveys do have limitations. Survey assessment items can only imitate real life literacy and numeracy tasks and cannot be genuinely socially or contextually situated. Dependence on reading and on information processing via reading rather than allowing for oral transactions and responses, or for accessing support, places limitations on the interpretation of the results. There is no assessment of writing skills per se and no writing scale has been developed. As such, ALLS and PIAAC as described in their frameworks and reports, are surveys about aspects of literacy and numeracy, not the whole range of ways literacy and numeracy are part of today’s modern society.

The reality with the numeracy (and similarly with the literacy) tasks is that the stimuli are shorter and simplified versions of real texts (documents or webpages) adults meet in their life, such as when browsing the internet, when reading and interpreting information at the doctors or infant welfare centre, at Centrelink, in OH&S manuals or standard operating procedures at work, or in an education or training course. As such it is reasonable to expect that a broad set of questions based on such simplified stimuli given to a representative sample of the adult population would provide valid and valuable insights and information about the general literacy and numeracy abilities and skills of the Australian population, especially when it is known the exhaustive quality assurance process the questions and stimuli go through prior to their use.

But what are the results saying?

At the start I said this article would not focus on the results of ALLS and PIAAC and the percentages or estimated numbers of adults performing at each level, as those results are available in the ABS reports and have been and will be documented in a range of other papers. But I am in the privileged position of knowing what every numeracy item was in both ALLS and PIAAC, and all I know is that as a long-time LLN educator, those results, no matter how you read them, demonstrate unequivocally that a significant number of people aged from fifteen to seventy-four years old in Australia do not have access to sufficient numeracy and maths skills to be able to cope equitably with life in the 21st century. The data and results are not about rates of illiteracy or innumeracy, and don’t claim to be.

I believe that the evidence about this is real and valid. This is independent of the issue as to which level of the ALLS or PIAAC scale is used as a baseline or minimum measure or standard. What actual LLN skill levels people need for what job, for which qualification, for which life purpose is arguable and debatable (and is a good argument to have) but, on my reading, there is an issue with the lack of literacy and numeracy knowledge and skills of far too many Australians. And my recent work on PISA and the abilities of fifteen year-olds is, I believe, consistent with the messages from the adult surveys. The ability to be empowered to have the capacity to make considered decisions, whether they be on the spot decisions at a workplace or when out shopping, or following written instructions about a medical or health matter, or making decisions about financial matters, or understanding the implications of gambling, require good foundational LLN skills. The results of these surveys show that millions of Australian teenagers and adults do not have such foundational LLN skills and they are, potentially, disempowered.
One impact of surveys—support for LLN

As an adult numeracy educator working in the adult LLN field for many decades, I have always been passionate about the crucial, and often under-recognised, role that LLN skills play in empowering and enabling adults and young people to continue to learn and develop, to participate fully in society and to be productive in their work. We, as practitioners, are aware of how low LLN skills can be a barrier and can disenfranchise people from accessing and enjoying the many benefits of the world as we know it—my ability to understand, use and critically apply my mathematical (and literacy) skills gives me, and my family, a range of choices that provide various pathways and options for success in life. And we believe all people should have that access and choice, and this is the reason why many of us work in the sector.

However, in most of the eras I have worked, there has been a frustration that the adult LLN field was marginalised, under-resourced and under-supported, with a highly casualised and underqualified workforce. I could not understand why everyone else—other teachers and trainers, government, industry and employers, unions—weren’t as equally passionate about the vital role that LLN skills play in empowering and enabling adults to succeed. Through my work on the international surveys I have worked with and shared conversations about the surveys and their results with a wide range of personnel including researchers, bureaucrats, economists and statisticians, journalists, and more. It is the results and research from the international surveys that make them sit up and notice about adult literacy and numeracy.

There is now extensive evidence of the value of having higher literacy and numeracy skills—our society values these skills and rewards them. This extensive research and conclusions are based on the data from the background questionnaire and the skill performance in the surveys. A good example of related research was that a health literacy scale was created as a by-product of ALLS. Based on such international data considerable research related to health literacy has been undertaken overseas:

The international research on health literacy is considerable. Studies have found links between lower literacy and a higher risk of hospitalisation, higher rates of depression and an inability to understand and comply with the use of prescription drugs. (Hartley & Horne, 2006)

There has also been considerable research about the impact of low literacy and numeracy skills on the economy and productivity and on a country’s GDP. No matter the stories about the unique (and extremely rare) successful individuals who say they have made it without being able to read, write or do arithmetic, for the vast majority of individuals low levels of literacy and numeracy skills will have a negative impact on both their social and economic future. It is therefore of value to support and enhance an individual’s literacy and numeracy skills—from all viewpoints—individual, societal or economic. Evidence of this has resulted directly from research from the adult literacy and numeracy international assessments, and which supports our own personal experiences and anecdotal evidence from our teaching as LLN practitioners.

It is quite clear that the results and research resulting from the ALLS survey (ABS, 2007) has seen the beginning of a set of significant responses and investments in adult LLN. Both government and industry have begun to argue for and acknowledge that the core skills of LLN are important and need to be addressed and supported on a national basis. In the last few years a considerable number of reports and initiatives have been published and introduced which contribute to meeting these needs. These include the Industry Skills Councils report, No more excuses—an industry response to the language, literacy and numeracy challenge; the research by the Australian Industry Group, the National workforce literacy project: report on employers’ views on workplace literacy and numeracy skills; the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practitioner Scholarships Programme; the National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults released by the federal government; the development of new higher level LLN qualifications for VET trainers and the development of a new Foundation Skills Training Package.

There’s lots that needs to be done, especially in relation to supporting and up-skilling the LLN skills and knowledge of the VET and LLN workforce. But at least the above is evidence that the adult LLN sector may look forward to getting some of the recognition and support it deserves and needs. And this has arisen out of the ALLS results and related research.

Teaching and learning lessons

There are other lessons that can be learnt from the work and research resulting from these international assess-
ments, and these have impacts in terms of teaching and learning of LLN skills. For example, their conceptual frameworks often include a meta-analysis of existing research and related LLN issues and as such can be a useful source of relevant international research and theory. There are a number of clear messages for teaching, that result from the empirical data, about how and what adults can and cannot do. The expert groups, in conjunction with related research, have identified factors affecting task, text and item complexity and difficulty. Further description of these aspects and benefits of the assessments will follow in the second of my articles in the next edition of Fine Print journal.

Conclusion

Combined, I believe that the results, the research and the underpinning conceptual frameworks for international assessments such as ALLS, PIAAC and PISA add to the expertise and knowledge of not only the education and research communities but also to the awareness, understanding and valuing of LLN skills by government, industry and the workforce. As well, the empirically based research emanating from such assessments, alongside associated theoretical works such as around text and task complexity, can and do contribute to understanding about the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy.

There are particular issues relating to numeracy. In No Single Measure back in 1990, Rosie Wickert stated:

… it is clear from the results that when people have poor literacy skills, they have even worse numeracy skills. The need to upgrade numeracy skills in the context of literacy must be taken into account of in all decisions to raise the level of adult literacy in Australia. (Wickert & Kevin, 1995. p. x)

I don’t believe the situation has improved significantly since then in relation to numeracy in LLN, and numeracy has been, and still is, the poor (and lost) cousin in LLN; this is despite research that indicates that numeracy may have a stronger impact than literacy. The ALLS and PIAAC data also indicate to me that it is possible that the bar is set lower for numeracy. We should not lower our standards or expectations: we need to counter the community and cultural attitude that it’s OK to not be good at maths.

And to conclude, I’d like to again say that the data and results from ALLS, PIAAC and PISA should be taken seriously. My involvement in this international work has made me even more committed and passionate about the need to empower all learners, no matter their age and background, to have access to the wide world of numeracy and mathematics (and literacy). ALLS, PIAAC and PISA have been instrumental in providing the evidence to argue to invest in and improve LLN skills across the whole population.

Dave is an experienced numeracy educator who is particularly interested in making mathematics relevant, interesting and fun for all students especially those students who are disengaged from mathematics. He has worked in a range of programmes in schools, TAFEs, ACE providers, universities, AMES and industry. Over the last fifteen years he has also been involved in the development and writing of the numeracy components of the international Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey (ALLS) and the Programme in Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). Dave joined the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) in 2008 where he is now the manager of Vocational, Adult and Workplace Education Services.

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Continued on page 39 ...
There is nothing new that poor numeracy skills are prevalent among children and adults, with headlines in countries like Australia and the UK providing constant reminders: ‘Poor numeracy is a problem we must tackle now’, or ‘Poor numeracy is affecting the life chances of children and adults alike’, invariably catch the reader’s attention.

Writing in The Guardian, Belinda Vernon, the head of research at New Philanthropy Capital ('Poor numeracy is a problem we must tackle now', 2010), says much of the commentary on numeracy skills today focuses on the below-par standards achieved by children in schools, but there is little attention given to the alarming consequences of poor maths teaching on adults. ‘In England, one adult in five is innumerate. These adults can’t work out their change when they go shopping, or help their children with homework. And they are twice as likely to be unemployed as people who are numerate. This is the shameful legacy of a system that provides free education to all children from the age of five to at least sixteen … ’ she writes.

VET workforce capacity
To illustrate how this impacts business in this country, the Australian Industry Group’s National Workforce Literacy project in 2010 found that forty-five per cent of employers identified labourers and process workers as those most affected by low level literacy and numeracy, and that the low skills were affecting their bottom line. The need for all to be both numerate and literate is the motivation behind the Australian government’s 2012–22 National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults. Clearly, the delivery of this programme depends on appropriately skilled practitioners. But there is a nagging suspicion that VET practitioners are not well equipped to deliver the numeracy aspect of foundation skills. To better understand this growing concern, Seeking the N in LLN, a report released by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), examines the capacity of the VET workforce to address workplace numeracy skills needs.

The authors, Tina Berghella and John Molenaar, focused on the process manufacturing industry, one that relies heavily on numeracy proficiency of its semi-skilled workers. And although limited in scope, the questions raised are likely to have broad relevance. The VET practitioners’ level of experience, their teaching qualifications and to what extent they value the importance of numeracy skills of working-aged Australians in the said industry, heads the list of questions. The critical issue is the capacity of VET to address the numeracy skills needs of Australian workers.

Using qualitative (self-assessments, focus groups and interviews) and quantitative (numeracy assessments) approaches, forty-four VET practitioners from Melbourne and Sydney, who deliver workplace-based training, were involved. Of those, twenty self-identified as language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) specialists, with the remainder identifying as vocational specialists. In this study, the term VET practitioner refers to LLN and vocational specialists collectively. Of the participants involved in this study, none had a specialist adult numeracy training qualification. This was unsurprising given the only qualification available is a Graduate Certificate in Adult Numeracy Training, which is offered by the University of Technology, Sydney; and the take-up of this course is low. However, six participants had an adult training specialisation that included a numeracy.
component: one with a vocational Graduate Certificate in Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practice; and another with an Advanced Diploma of Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practice in VET. The research found that in general, the participants had limited experience in delivering workplace numeracy training.

These findings raise a concern within the process manufacturing industry. Without an appropriately skilled and experienced VET workforce—skilled in the identification and delivery of numeracy skills—the VET sector cannot effectively respond to the numeracy demands of the workplace. With this in mind, the authors argue that if the importance of workplace numeracy skills is under-represented, there will not only be a shortage of workplace numeracy specialists, but VET practitioners currently delivering in the workplace will provide inadequate numeracy support. The dearth of LLN programmes focusing on numeracy skills for learners and LLN specialists not highly skilled in numeracy, only adds to this growing problem. Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA) found that LLN specialists often lack the capacity to contribute to the development of numeracy skills of workers.

And a 2006 study of WELL (Workplace English Language and Literacy programme) practitioners found they were recruited for their language and literacy specialisations, not numeracy, with few WELL practitioners being numeracy specialists (Berghella et al 2006a).

Berghella and Molenaar believe there is a mismatch between what is required to address numeracy skills needs in the process manufacturing industry, and the current capacity of VET practitioners in terms of their understanding of numeracy requirements, their qualifications, skills and experience. It is likely that this issue goes beyond the process manufacturing industry. They add that until now, there has been limited attention focused on the workplace numeracy training capabilities of the VET workforce. And the assumption that LLN specialists are numeracy specialists, has limited our understanding of VET capacity in this area.

Models of workforce skilling

In looking at overseas models, the authors identified the adult numeracy specialist qualifications in the UK’s Skills for Life Programme (launched March 2001) where there is a separate diploma level qualification for each specialty area. They also note that VET practitioners seeking to qualify as an adult numeracy specialist must undertake a numeracy proficiency entry test. However, while the aforementioned programmes have boosted skills, they have been less successful in tackling poor numeracy. In her *Guardian* article, Vernon says ‘in fairness, the UK Government has recognised the need to improve adult skills, focused attention on the problem and established programmes such as Skills for Life, Employability Skills Programmes and Train to Gain’. She concludes by saying what’s needed is a National Numeracy Trust on similar lines to the National Literacy Trust. This would foster more positive attitudes to maths, and promote initiatives to improve how maths is taught and increase numeracy in adults and children.

In Australia, there is much anticipation with the launch of the National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults. The strategy, which has been endorsed by state and territory governments, highlights that jobs of the future will increasingly be highly skilled and it’s imperative that more Australians are able to access quality training to improve their LLN skills. A major priority is to enhance the quality of foundation skills training on offer and to build the workforce that delivers the training. But its effectiveness will be under much scrutiny and there is still the over-riding issue that we must have qualified and experienced adult numeracy specialists to reach any of these goals.

A career journalist, Howard Salkow has been extensively published in South Africa, London, Canada and Australia. He has edited a number of business publications, written numerous features about captains of industry and leading personalities, assisted in the compilation of a book to mark the 40th anniversary of the 1969 moon landing which included interviewing Buzz Aldrin and authored the History of Test Cricket. His corporate communications experience includes the tertiary education sector, state and local government and vocational education.

References


A copy of the publication, *Seeking the N in LLN* is available at: www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2627.html
Practical matters

Approaching team teaching

By Sally Hutchison

Language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) support and team teaching tools work well in the Certificate III in Aged Care and Certificate III in Home and Community Care courses.

Preparation

The Aged Care course at NMIT is run over thirteen weeks full-time, the last four of which are a work placement. Early in 2013, well in advance of course commencement, the aged care teachers requested a language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) teacher to provide classroom support in certain targeted areas of the course.

While we often refer to this model as team teaching it is essentially driven by the vocational teacher, with the LLN teacher adapting to and working in and around what the vocational teacher plans and prioritises. It is a requirement that LLN teachers are flexible and responsive in this regard, but also able to be proactive, making suggestions and contributing wherever possible. This is often a fine balance.

Three LLN teachers were allocated to the course and a planning meeting was arranged with the aged care teachers. This first meeting was a key component in ensuring that teachers got to know each other before working in the classroom together, as well as to talk about how the support might work. The LLN teachers were provided with copies of the main textbook as well as the units of competency to be delivered and what would be delivered in each session.

The cooperation and sharing of ideas between both teams of teachers continued throughout the length of the course with all teachers building on each other’s skills and expertise. The aged care teachers were responsive to ideas that the LLN teachers put forward and gave them opportunities to run activities/tasks that consolidated key learnings or assisted with challenging concepts in the materials. In fact, in that very first meeting the LLN teachers were asked to give feedback about an assessment booklet that had been prepared for the students and as a result some details were fine-tuned before the booklet went to print.

The LLN support was targeted against specific topic areas within the Aged Care course: HACC (home and community care), diversity, dementia, personal care, implementation of care plans, palliative care, and grief and loss. This involved developing understandings and concepts about contemporary views to aged care in Australia. Key concepts were duty of care, standards, ageism, maintaining independence, and ethics.

During the first three weeks of the course the LLN allocation was intensive with one LLN teacher (T1) in the class from Monday to Thursday and another LLN teacher (T2) teaching in a tutorial session on Fridays. The incorporation of the tutorial session into this model was particularly successful. As the weeks progressed the amount of LLN support timetabled against the aged care classes was scheduled to reduce significantly, with only certain sessions covered.

Tutorial session model

The tutorial session, which ran on Fridays, was essentially student driven. This gave students an opportunity to identify areas they found challenging or needed clarifying. There was also space for further discussion, writing practice and some practical role-plays to consolidate learning. This session, in contrast to the classroom sessions, was driven by the LLN teacher, but with the vocational teacher present for consultation. In effect, it was like the LLN support model in reverse.

To provide ideas to students about what they might prefer to focus on and to give the LLN teacher adequate time to prepare, the LLN teachers communicated with each other by email during the week, with T1 providing T2 with an overview of what was covered in the classroom sessions and what areas some students found challenging, with suggestions of how they might benefit from revision and consolidation in relation to these. Following the tutorial T2 emailed T1 going over what was covered and any issues that could do with further development in future classroom sessions.

Some areas that T2 covered with students were:

• strategies for summarising written text using the core textbook
Practical matters

Table 1 Definition matching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mobility</td>
<td>All activities involved in movement. These include walking, transferring in and out of bed, sitting to standing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infection control</td>
<td>Planned ways of minimising the risk of spreading germs and disease.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Free from the control of influence of others; able to do things on your own and for yourself, including making decisions for yourself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>Developing the confidence and ability to make decisions for yourself, assert your own rights and have control over your own life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>Functional loss to a person that results from impairment, for example, a person with only one leg may have difficulty walking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dementia</td>
<td>Symptoms that may include changes in or loss of memory, intellect, rationality, social skills and physical functioning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palliative</td>
<td>To do with improving the quality of life of older people and those around them when they are dying. This includes physical, psychological, mental, social and spiritual needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural diversity</td>
<td>People from different cultures, religious and/or language backgrounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive ageing</td>
<td>To treat people unfairly because they belong to a particular group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td>Promotion of the concept of growing older by focusing on abilities and what people can do rather than on disabilities or what they cannot do.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LLN strategies for the classroom

LLN teachers used the following methods in classroom delivery:

- Key words and phrases were written on the whiteboard as the teacher taught content. Words and phrases were sometimes taken from Powerpoint presentations or directly from what the vocational teacher was saying.
- LLN teachers asked the mainstream teacher clarifying questions.
- During individual, pair or group work the LLN teacher mingled among students. At this time many students had questions, which LLN teachers addressed directly or re-directed to the mainstream teacher.

- At the end of each session, the LLN teacher often made a suggestion about an activity that she could develop for the following class to revise and consolidate content that had just been covered. Table 1 shows an example of a revision activity, Definition matching. See Table 1.

Feedback

Some comments from course participants.

I have thoroughly enjoyed every session with the LLN teachers. I have come to establish a better understanding of areas within my practice that may lean on the verbal side and the great benefits of providing visuals to deliver concepts and to also create opportunities for learners to revisit or review material with many of the different approaches that the LLN teachers bought to the classroom.

The team of LLN teachers were actively engaged in our programme, including being pro-active in developing strategies to assist our participant cohort with our content. We didn’t have to get assistance, they provided it. The tutorial sessions for participants were particularly useful for understanding assessment tasks.

In writing this article, the author would like to acknowledge the help of the following teachers: Catherine Davison, Continued on page 40 ...
Pre-accredited computer course

By Josie Rose

You may remember an article in Fine Print 2012 vol 3, where Allan Cormack briefly discussed the Centre for Adult Education’s EmployabiLit-E project. Here, Josie Rose gives further detail to aspects of the project that would be of most interest to teachers wishing to develop learners’ digital literacy skills.

Background
To recap, the EmployabiLit-E project aimed to increase the employability and develop e-literacy skills of a group of learners who experienced chronic housing issues. The project developed out of a partnership with Elizabeth Street Common Ground (ESCG) and Hanover in offering pre-accredited courses onsite at their premises. This pre-accredited practical computer skills course was offered to residents twice a week from 11:30 to 2:30 pm. It offered simple activities to increase digital awareness and foundation computer skills.

The project aimed to systematically embed digital awareness and a core set of e-literacy skills into this CGEA based programme. It did this by:

• being highly personalised and learner centred
• being contextualised and integrated into the delivery of the content, i.e. having an e-literacy specialist work with the teacher in the LLN or life skills class to provide e-literacy skills and knowledge on a just-in-time and just-for-me basis
• providing teachers and learners with a range of appropriate and accessible resources.

The learners
CAE’s partners in the supported housing initiative in Melbourne work with people who have chronic housing issues. The residents at ESCG for example, are a mixture of previously homeless and low-income earners, who typically had few opportunities for education and employment.

Recruitment: come on down!
Information sessions were held at both Common Ground and Hanover to attract learners. After the information sessions, CAE held an open day, which gave learners the opportunity to visit the CAE, meet the teachers, coordinators and other learners informally while chatting about the programme and its potential benefits. For many learners it was a significant step to move from the relative security of onsite delivery to the much more formalised surrounding of the CAE. To create an informal setting refreshments were supplied. Not surprisingly the open days generated excitement as potential learners began to see the possibilities the course offered. For example, one lady learnt that through attending the e-literacy class she could learn the skills to use the computer as a tool to research specific topics. After a demonstration she was confident enough to enrol in two classes.

The learning space
The classes were held at the CAE Independent Learning Centre (ILC) so the focus was very much learning by doing and working as independently as possible, facilitated as necessary by one of four people: the project coordinator, the teacher, and two ILC staff as required. The Independent Learning Centre is a place where any CAE learner can come and has the option for individual support in completing homework tasks and doing research on the internet. This project provided the impetus for us to set up a specific digital literacy programme in the ILC.

Each session followed the same structure:

• Each new topic, such as social media, was introduced through group demonstrations and/or presentations.
• Students worked individually from the wiki (http://eliteracy.wiki.cae.edu.au/TASK+BANK) on assessable tasks related to unit competencies. These tasks combined
created the bulk of each student’s personal portfolio used for the final assessment.

- Students did individual or pair work on extra activity tasks (tasks for fun), such as YouTube videos. The idea of these tasks was to let the student relax a little and just play on the computer, while teaching them computer skills—learning by stealth!

- Facilitators supported individual students by working through a task or problem the student was facing.

- A twenty minute break in the middle of the session—a very important part of the session.

Embedding employability skills

Here is how we embedded some of the employability skills:

Learning to learn
We created a culture of learning through structured social interaction during pair and team activities, as well as during breaks. Teachers facilitated informal discussions during break time by asking learners to talk about specific learning challenges and what strategies they used to overcome them.

Communication skills and teamwork
The informal discussions heightened learners’ awareness of their peers’ learning styles and in some instances provided a turning point in individual approaches to tasks. For example, one student read all the information on a webpage, including the menus the same way you read a book, from left to right. This proved very time consuming and often confusing as information on websites does not always adhere to this convention. In discussing this with the group this student learnt to scan webpage information pertinent to the task at hand.

Planning and organising
It was important for us to know that although we were working in a highly personalised and supportive environment, we had expectations in terms of attendance and completions. We did not want the students to feel that this was just a drop in centre. It also meant we had to be responsive to their needs. We discovered that more regular assessment periods as experienced by those doing the ICDL the students were more confident and many of them passed the test with flying colours. More information on the programme can be found here: http://www.microsoft.com/about/corporatecitizenship/citizenship/giving/programs/up/digitalliteracy/eng/curriculum.mspx

We also trialed the Intel Easy Steps with another group of students with similar learning needs. This curriculum allowed for more flexibility for both teacher and student and suited the learner group very well.

Using Web 2.0
The teachers in the EmployabiLit-E course also opened up the potential of Web 2.0 for their students. Web 2.0 refers to websites and applications that allow users to share information or material they have created. Web 2.0 doesn’t require web design or publishing skills; examples are Facebook, YouTube, Dropbox. As the students’ confidence and skill in searching for information grew, they were active on Facebook, created podcasts in PodBean, and hung out in Google Hangouts. They used a wiki every week to select their tasks. They created a range of short videos and explored YouTube. For weekly updates on how the class developed their skills and confidence, visit the project updates page at: http://employabilite.wiki.cae.edu.au/Project+Updates

Lessons learned
Below are some lessons learned from the project:

- Develop an easily accessible online tool as a resource repository: the wiki served as a resource hub and platform to share ideas.

- Have high expectations of the learners.

Continued on page 40 ...
Increasingly, over the last few years I’ve been required to provide evidence to justify different aspects of my work. No longer is it OK to suggest something based solely on experience and/or a theoretical approach. For instance, I have needed research to justify using a problem solving approach in one context and a direct teaching approach in another, or group work as opposed to individual activities, contextualised vocabulary development as opposed to decontextualised, etc. While I welcome this move to having an evidence base for education programmes and materials, it has meant consulting relevant literature. And we all know that takes time!

At times I have cursed this but overall it has been rewarding. Apart from new knowledge, there have been other benefits:

• I have become a big fan of good literature reviews and meta-analyses.
• I have had to modify some of my ideas and views.
• I have started to think about the relationship between evidence and theory.

Literature reviews and meta-analyses

I’m not someone who reads research for the sake of it; I need a purpose. But a few years ago I came across a report from the US called Reading next (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006), which looks at the literacy demands on middle and senior high school students and examines the research to recommend how to develop the reading skills of students. I found this report at the right time: I was just starting to do more work with secondary school teachers and their students and as the report analysed the research it meant that I didn’t need to wade through research paper after research paper looking for information about how best to help young people struggling with the reading demands of school. And, it was very readable.

So, if there was a report on reading, was there one on writing? Yes! Writing next (Graham & Perin, 2007) also existed and, if anything, was more what I was looking for as it focused on specific teaching techniques that work in the classroom and it used meta analysis—a statistical technique that determines the consistency and strength of effects of different studies to identify patterns among study results. Writing next looked at studies of instructional practice related to writing and highlighted the strongest and most promising ones. I was hooked!

Let me give you an example of how I have found these reports to be useful. A few years ago I was asked to do some work with secondary school content area teachers whose students were struggling with the literacy demands of the subjects they taught. Having not worked with this group of teachers before, I checked to see if anyone else had the answer to their problems. To my delight I came across What content-area teachers should know about adolescent literacy (National Institute for Literacy, 2007), a summary of the research in this field and a great starting point for my work in this area.

Last year my big discovery was the work of John Hattie. His book, Visible learning (2009), synthesises over eight hundred meta-analyses related to achievement of school students. I can’t claim to have read all of Hattie’s book or all of the literature reviews and meta-analyses I have come across since first discovering Reading next, but I have found it extremely useful to dip in and out of them. They serve to make you reflect on what works in practice and on its relevance to adult education and literacy. And the research done in the areas of children and adolescent literacy impacts on the work and thinking in adult literacy. For example, the report Adult education literacy instruction: a review of the research (Kruidenier, MacArthur & Wrigley, 2010) relies heavily, but with discretion, on the research undertaken in children and adolescent literacy, as the body of research in adult literacy is relatively small. The report is
also partly structured around topics established as being the cornerstones of children’s reading (National Reading Panel, 2000)—phonemic awareness and word analysis, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension.

A rethink
Reading such reports has introduced me to new ideas, reconfirmed existing ideas, made me ask questions of myself, helped me rethink my ideas and modify some of them. It has also made me very conscious of the huge gaps in my knowledge. This is obviously what reading is meant to do, but unless there is a need, I don’t do it. I do, however, welcome the need arising—well usually!

So an example of how this reading has impacted on my thinking. For some time I have been a keen advocate of inquiry based and problem solving teaching and learning approaches. I tend to incorporate these into most of the programmes that I help to develop. But, after reading Hattie’s analysis of teaching strategies and approaches, I have become more careful of when to use these approaches in relation to the desired student outcome. So if I want students to develop new knowledge, then problem based learning alone may not be the best approach; but if I want the outcome to be skill development or understanding of the underlying concepts, then problem based learning is a great way to go.

Evidence and theory
As you can no doubt see, I have been seduced by evidence. But there is so much evidence! Which evidence to use?

If you based a programme of any sort on evidence alone, it is likely to be completely ad hoc. Green (2000), in relation to health education, observes that without ‘theoretical principles we risk being submerged by a post-modern morass of empirical evidence, which on its own, can do little to guide practice’ (p. 125). This seems to be to be as true for adult and adolescent literacy education as it does for health education. We need to have a strong theoretical base to hang the evidence on so that we can be critical and can create coherent programmes that work. We need theories that underpin our practice and which guide our reading of evidence, helping us to develop and put into practice programmes that work.

And finally
It concerns me that adult literacy educators don’t have the time to dip in and out of the evidence that exists about what works, nor easy access to professional learning that supports the development of theoretical understandings and concepts. I don’t have any easy answers to either of these issues but I would like to see a way in which we can all continue to develop our knowledge, skills and concepts as professionals.

References

A brave and bold experiment

By Audrey McAlindon and Susan Bates

With an emphasis on assessment and framework the Australian approach to adult literacy provision is very different to Scotland’s social practices approach. The two countries intersect however, at the point of trust.

In collaborating on this article, we drew on our experiences coordinating the Scottish Adult Literacies initiative for Renfrewshire Local Authority in Scotland from 2000 to 2011, and our experiences in the Australian field since then.

Background
Scotland and Australia are not that different from each other. They are both modern, industrialised countries, actively participating in the global economy. There are
cultural, societal and political similarities. People’s ways of life, family structures, values and expectations are similar, as are structures in terms of primary, secondary, vocational and higher education.

There are also parallels between Scotland and Australia in that despite of having up to twelve years of compulsory schooling, a significant percentage of the population leave school without acquiring the reading, writing and/or numeracy skills to cope with the demands of everyday life and work in modern, developed societies.

Despite these similarities, the two countries have taken two very different paths in addressing adult literacies. This paper is in response to the questions by Australian adult literacies practitioners about how adult literacies provision is delivered in Scotland. In writing the article we also took the opportunity to provide an overview of how adult literacies is delivered in Scotland, using a social practices approach.

In Scotland, the plural literacies is used to not only include numeracy alongside reading and writing but also to reflect a more holistic view of the basic skills required to function in society. Adult literacies is defined as ‘the ability to read and write and use numeracy, to handle information, express ideas and opinions, to make decisions and solve problems as family members, workers, citizens and lifelong learners’ (Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland (ALNIS) Report, 2001).

Social practices is a broad term that refers to the recognition that language and literacy practices emerge from society, in particular the interactions between social institutions, communities and individuals. The social practices approach is expressed in teaching strategies that place the learner at the centre of the learning process, and where the learner identifies the skills they want/need to learn, and the context for learning those skills. The approach emphasises a shift away from a curriculum that is externally devised, and not necessarily relevant to the literacies practices used or needed by the learner. It also recognises that relevance and meaningfulness are essential for learning to be successful, and for people to be able to apply new skills to other contexts. When an adult identifies as ready to engage with the delivery, the next step is to join the provision. There is no pre-determined course or curriculum to be enrolled in. The learning content is devised and agreed as appropriate with each individual learner’s needs.

There is no summative assessment of learners’ skills, either prior to, or following a learning activity. Learners are not assessed against any kind of skills framework (There is an Adult Literacy and Numeracy Curriculum Framework for Scotland, however despite its name it does not include learning outcomes or competencies. It provides guidance for tutors working with learners to identify, define and address their learning needs.), or by testing. Programme outcomes are collated throughout the year and reporting involves working with learners to identify and collate qualitative data on the impacts, and differences, that literacies support has made on their personal, family, community and/or working lives. In terms of funding-related reporting requirements, each of the thirty-two local authorities in Scotland (local government) report to the Scottish government on total numbers of learners supported each year.

Commitment to social practices approach

There is a strong commitment to the social practices approach to literacies among Scottish providers, and interestingly the approach is talked about as if everyone is confident that their understanding of the term is absolutely shared by everyone else. However, in my experience, more in-depth conversations reveal that there is no specific agreed definition, and furthermore that the term is still contested among practitioners, depending on the purpose of the discussion. As always with practitioners, their primary focus is on tutoring and on their learners, and it is my belief that a significant number of practitioners would be surprised to learn that the concept of literacies as social practices is not a new, Scottish development.

However, I have to admit to feeling proud that the Scottish
field has taken up the spirit and what might arguably be the political intent of the concept, that is essentially the recognition that literacies practices are organic within our society, and that the practices, and the people who use them are as valued as everyone else.

**The crucial relationship**

The relationship between teacher/tutor and student/learner is a crucial element and the central part of the whole learning process for all learners, but particularly for adult literacies learners, who are, after all, adults. The relationship is complex, and has to be equal in the sense that learners have to know, and trust that they are at the centre of the whole process.

An essential aspect of the social practices approach to literacies teaching is that tutors are absolutely aware of, and manage, the development of their relationship with learners. Tutors must demonstrate to the learner that their role, and their relationship, with learners, is central, and they have to demonstrate that intention and commitment over and over. Everything tutors do under the social practices approach is organic in that it generates the next conversation, the next piece of work, the next challenge for the learner and so on. An important point to be noted here, is that it is the tutor’s responsibility to create learning opportunities (not to mention confidence and enthusiasm) for learners. The last piece of work, conversation or event can often be the starting point for all of those creations.

What is important about the whole relationship is negotiation, but in the real, genuine sense of the word, not the over-used, misappropriated sense where negotiation has come to mean spoken out loud, therefore agreed.

**The real social practices approach**

Our challenge as tutors, is to continually strive to make sure that the learners are fully convinced that it is their right to effect the tutors’ practice. That knowledge has to be reiterated at every opportunity, in a variety of ways, not only verbally: it is often in the little things, and conversational throw-aways. In formal learning environments, the teacher’s power is maintained in every action. When the teacher says ‘Take a seat.’ or ‘Will we have a break now for coffee?’ students absolutely recognise it as part of traditional classroom discourse, where it is well understood by everyone that the teacher makes the decisions. The teacher doesn’t have to state that they’ll be making the decisions, they just go ahead and do it, and the students accept. Such is the power!

As an adult literacies tutor, I have to actively refuse to take this power, and instead respond as we would with colleagues (that is, our equals). So those invitations are issued as ‘Stick the kettle on please—I’m busy!’ or ‘Can you photocopy that—I haven’t had time!’ and learners take the cue (just as any adult would) and more importantly realise that they are not breaking rules by taking the initiative. Thus the social practices approach begins.

These are often small subtle interactions, all done deliberately, but naturally, for a specific purpose. They are indicators for the learners of how we would like them to feel and behave in the learning session. It’s not easy, or necessarily possible, to teach tutors how to produce these indicators, depending on the register they use with the learners. It is a mix between facilitation—using your teaching expertise—and not taking the power. To be honest, you have to create a good balance. You have to make judgements, and it’s about timing and appropriateness in order to create the balance. A word of caution though: as tutors we can be very motivated by our judgments, however that doesn’t give us leeway to treat one person differently from another.

When it comes to teaching literacies in Scotland, each individual learner is your best resource, as long as we can find ways to develop their confidence. The process I used for doing that is to encourage learners to break what are well-ingrained rules for learning environments—never call the teacher by their first name; never determine what you learn; never ask how, or if, it is relevant; and never give real input or feedback, even if you’re invited to, and the list goes on.

It is vital that as an adult literacies tutor, I get learners to break these invisible barriers. This is because in their perception they are failures when it comes to literacies. The only thing they have to sustain them for another attempt at learning literacies is the hope that something might be different this time. So one of the first things I have to do is, by my every action and interaction, insist that they break all their assumed rules, to give them confidence that this is really a different setting—radically different, and that it will stay different.

**Trust**

We have talked to learners many times, informally, about what they want from a tutor, and many different views were expressed in many differing ways! However, one theme kept recurring: trust. That’s not to say that they would trust us with their car, or their money, but they were
articulating a trust in us not to make them feel stupid, and maybe a trust in us to have confidence in their capacity to achieve their learning goals.

From conversations with practitioners here, our impression is that many adult literacies teachers working in the Australian field also understand the importance of trust, and do continue to teach each learner and not just deliver the course, while actually still managing to meet reporting and compliance systems requirements.

And this, interestingly enough, brings us back to the beginning of this paper. Scotland and Australia are not that different from each other. Adult literacies practitioners on both sides of the world recognise trust as central to adult literacies teaching.

Merrifield has quite rightly termed the Scottish approach to adult literacies as a grand experiment, and grand it is. But from the inside, we know it to be a brave and bold experiment, which has been proving its success for more than ten years now.

Susan Bates has been working in adult literacy in Australia since 1981, in professional and curriculum development, including the Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills (CAVSS). Her current role is senior policy officer, literacy for the Western Australian Department of Training and Workforce Development.

Audrey McAlindon has worked in adult literacy in Australia for the last twelve months, since moving from Scotland in June 2012. Her experience in adult literacies in Scotland is extensive: practitioner, professional development and policy development. She currently provides integrated literacies support, delivering the Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills (CAVSS) in Perth, Western Australia.

References

Reaccredited CGEA honours past and future
By Nadia Casarotto

While streamlining the document and explicitly including digital literacy as a critical component, the reaccredited CGEA holds on to the notions of literacy as social practice and literacy as a tool for developing human and social capital.

The Certificates in General Education for Adults have experienced a colourful journey from when they were first accredited in the early 1990s up to their most recent reaccreditation in 2013. In the last twenty years the provision of adult literacy has seen ongoing tension between literacy as a means of personal development, active citizenship and social transformation, and literacy as a tool for developing human capital with an emphasis on the critical role of literacy in obtaining employment. The inclusion of accredited adult literacy curricula, such as the CGEA, within the VET sector has tended to further highlight the focus on a human capital approach as also evidenced in a number of papers and policies such as the recently released Future focus: National Workforce Development Strategy (March 2013) and the No More Excuses report by Industry Skills Councils (2010). The Foundation Skills Training Package (FSK) endorsed in 2013 is designed to integrate language, literacy and numeracy into vocational units to support the achievement of vocational outcomes.

Reaccreditation of CGEA 2013
Within the above context, the CGEA has sought to maintain a balance between the human and social capital aspects of lifelong learning. The curriculum supports the mission of the Adult Community and Further Education Board to ‘increase the level of educational participation and attainment and improve social inclusion and boost human and social capital’. The design of all iterations of the CGEA has
been based on the conceptualisation of literacy as a social practice in which four key domains (community, personal, employment and learning) interact dynamically to shape the what, where, why and how of the way in which literacy practices (purpose, audience and context) are used. The reaccredited CGEA maintains and strengthens this focus on the interaction between the domains by highlighting the natural relationships between them in the application section of each engage and create unit.

**Digital literacy**

The 2007 iteration of the CGEA acknowledged that, ‘We no longer live in a world of print only. When working with texts, we also need to focus our attention on the multimodal textual practices intrinsic to screen based reading and writing … ’ (CGEA 2007). In response to this, providers were encouraged to build digital literacy into their programmes with some examples being given in the range statement of relevant units, however it was possible for a learner to complete their programme/s without ever having been exposed to information through a digital literacy medium.

The project steering committee guiding the reaccreditation strongly advised that digital literacy should be made explicit in the curriculum so that all learners would gain a broad general education that included digital literacy as one of its critical components.

**What has changed?**

There have not been major changes in the reaccredited CGEA. The number of qualifications remains unchanged as well as the course structure with the exception of the Course in Initial General Education for Adults, which now has a sharper focus on language, literacy and numeracy as the elective requirement has been removed. All other qualifications retain their flexibility in the selection of electives from within the CGEA or from nationally endorsed training packages or other accredited curricula. Each qualification now specifies the total number of units that must be completed.

Key changes include:

- Explicit inclusion of digital literacy in engage and create units—digital literacy has been built into the following components of each unit: unit descriptor, elements, required skills and knowledge, critical aspects for assessment.
- Review of ACSF alignment across qualifications—adjustments made to engage and create unit titles for Certificates II and III to complex and highly complex respectively.
- Teacher and assessor requirements for the CGEA have been revised to define vocational competence as demonstrable expertise in teaching literacy and or numeracy which can be evidenced by holding an AQF Level 7 or above teaching qualification with a relevant method; and/or demonstration of relevant knowledge of the theory of literacy and numeracy development and its application.
- Selection of electives is based on a definitive number of electives not on a range of hours.
- Electives are packaged in specific AQF qualifications rather than across all qualifications.
- Delivery and assessment advice on integrated delivery and assessment has been strengthened in the application statement of each unit. There is advice on integration included in Section B, 6.1.

The reaccredited CGEA (22234VIC–22238VIC), is available on the Training Support Network website, http://trainingsupport.skills.vic.gov.au

Nadia Casarotto is the Curriculum Maintenance Manager for General Studies and Further Education based at Victoria University and is responsible for the maintenance of the Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA) on behalf of the ACFE board.

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Volunteer tutors say
Compiled by Jacinta Agostinelli

The 2013 VALBEC conference, Literacies in a Diverse World, happened to fall in National Volunteer Week, so VALBEC decided to offer a number of free places to volunteer tutors to attend the conference. But there’s no such thing as a free lunch, and in exchange for their free place volunteers were asked for comment on the conference.

Five volunteer tutors took up VALBEC’S offer and we share their thoughts here. All the tutors found the conference stimulating and enjoyable. Christopher Roff, who volunteers in an ESL class at Pines Learning Centre in Templestowe, thanked VALBEC for the opportunity and said it was very good to get exposure to aspects other than what we see in our own class situations. He loved the ‘Youthworx media’ session by Jon Staley and Ann Haynes from NMIT, finding it inspirational, and although he doesn’t work with young people now, the knowledge may be useful in the future. The message to keep it simple that he took away from Jude Alexander’s session ‘Presenting scientific information in a low-literacy format’, reinforced Christopher’s own experience of tutoring in the ESL classroom.

Laura Stevenson, who tutors one-on-one at Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre, and Nikola Sharp, a volunteer at SPAN Neighbourhood House in Thornbury, both attended ‘Learning: the first Core Skill’ by Jennifer Myles. Says Nikola, it was good to rethink your perception of learning and yourself as a learner. She liked the idea of identifying how students perceive themselves as learners. Laura also liked the way Jennifer Myles stressed the importance of engaging students through their own interests.

The ‘Deadly Ute project’ presented by Robert Millar from Wimmera Hub was a favourite of Laura’s. She was impressed by the way Robert co-ordinated the project and how he engaged the students and encouraged them to continue learning.

Nikola’s comment regarding ‘EmployabiLit-e: embedding e-literacy into pre-vocational skills development’, shows that our volunteers are listening and learning themselves: We forget, she believes, that many people don’t have the technological skills to keep up with a world that increasingly relies on technology and the internet to access information. Jennifer Garret, tutor at AMES enjoyed the practicality of this same session.

The keynote address ‘Mass literacy campaigns: A Pedagogy of hope?’ delivered by Bob Boughton was a winner all round. Jennifer hopes the campaign in Wilcannia (see the Features section in this issue of Fine Print) will be funded to be available more widely as it has the potential to change indigenous communities in Australia. Inta Broze, volunteer tutor from Holmesglen TAFE, was very impressed by the good news aspect of Bob’s presentation. Literacy has a far-reaching impact so it makes sense to mobilise the whole community, Inta said.

Most professions rely on acronyms to speed up communication and the language, literacy and numeracy field is no exception, however as teachers in adult education we are probably more aware than most that acronyms can be exclusive. One tutor pointed out that presenters need to be mindful of this, perhaps even made aware that some conference participants might not be familiar with the acronyms commonly used in the field. Good feedback that Continued on page 40 ...

Laura Stevenson, Volunteer Tutor; Sarah Deasey, Further Education Coordinator; Toni Lechte Volunteer Tutor Programme Coordinator, Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre.

Elspeth Collie, Volunteer Tutor Coordinator and Inta Broze, Volunteer Tutor from Holmesglen.
In January 2002 I took on the role of coordinator of what was then called, Banksia Gardens Community Centre, in Broadmeadows. The Banksia Gardens Association was formed in 1979 and has its origins as a tenancy organisation. Prior to my appointment, there were serious discussions about disbanding the organisation. In the centre at that time was a work for the dole part-time administration officer, two cleaners and a handful of tutors. With very few formal programmes, we had an income of approximately $72,000. However, we also had the most wonderful community and endless possibilities.

Today I am the CEO of Banksia Gardens Community Services. This new name better reflects who we are and what we do. We have thirty-seven full time/part time staff and an income close to two million, manage fifty-five contracts, deliver approximately one hundred programmes from eight venues and services, and in 2012 had over one hundred thousand people attend our centre in Broadmeadows. Our centre operates seven days a week from 8:30 am to 10 pm each evening. We are an organisation committed to being leaders in the areas of youth services, children and family services, adult learning, public housing advocacy, community development, human rights, environmental sustainability and employment and training. I am very proud of the work we do in one of the most disadvantaged areas in the state.

I believe the key elements that make the condition right for this type of growth include:
- a clear strategic vision
- a board of governance that understands their role and the role of management and is willing to take risks
- policies, procedures and quality assurance.

The Broadmeadows population has a significantly high rate of disadvantage with extremely low rates of employment and education. A large majority are disengaged youth, newly arrived immigrants and refugees, and are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds with thirty-six per cent of the population speaking a language other than English. These disadvantaged groups access Banksia Gardens Community Services programmes and services daily, and form the vast majority of our client base. In 2012, there were 105,000 users of this centre.

The centre is located on the Banksia Gardens public housing estate, which comprises 143 units with a population of approximately four hundred people.

Here are some quick facts about the housing estate for you:
- 46% of the estate’s population is under eighteen.
- 37% of tenants have internet access at home, 20% lower than the state average.
- 24% of 15–19 year olds are disengaged, compared to the state average of 15%. By disengaged I mean they don’t go to school or uni or have a job, and some are homeless.
- 29% of people over 25 have a tertiary qualification, compared to the state average of 51%.

The housing estate has been considered by senior Victorian police to be one of the most dangerous in the state. It is violent, petrol bombings are not uncommon, drug dealing is on a massive scale and domestic violence is still a major issue. DHS and Banksia Gardens have worked collaboratively for the past three years to reduce crime, improve public amenity and increase training and employment opportunities.

In 2012 Banksia Gardens Community Service won the prestigious Australian Crime and Prevention award for
the work we do on the public housing estate. We were invited to a ceremony in Canberra to receive our award. Banksia Gardens Community Services has also received a state award for an outstanding programme working with participants from the Department of Justice, and recently a senior member of staff, Jaime de Loma-Osorio Ricon, was announced winner in the 2012 Hume Outstanding Teacher awards. For the past three years, we have been a finalist in the Learn Local awards in the categories of Outstanding Organisation and Outstanding Pre-Accredited Programme. In 2011 we launched ourselves as an eco demonstration centre. This 1.4 million dollar redevelopment program was funded from four sources and required vision, planning and determination and took three years for the idea to reach fruition.

People come to participate in our Learn Local programmes such as children’s services, environmental sustainability, theatre and performance, and IT training. They come to our work experience programmes to learn about building maintenance and horticulture.

Young people come to be entertained, nurtured and informed in our school holiday activities. They come to us when other secondary schools will not enrol them to study in our VCAL programme run in partnership with Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre. They also come to our Prism 10 and SSAFE programmes, for young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

People of all ages come to Banksia Gardens Community Services to learn sewing, jewellery making, yoga, karate, playgroups and Turkish dance. They come to our free weekly community lunches, which we began two years ago with the Tibetan Buddhist society; we are currently making 1,400 meals per year.

The Banksia Gardens homework programme, which we initially fully subsidised, began in 2005. In 2012 we averaged over 150 primary and secondary students each week, tutored by paid and volunteer tutors. This is the biggest study programme in Hume, and one of the largest in Melbourne. It is now partially funded by the state Department of Education and Early Childhood, and the federal government’s Communities for Children Programme, but still heavily subsidised by Banksia Gardens Community Services.

Currently there is a twenty per cent gap in Year 12 completion between Broadmeadows and the Melbourne average, and almost a thirty per cent gap when it comes to tertiary education. We believe that programmes like Aiming High, introduced to our study programme this year, and which encourages four key schools in the area to refer students who are aspiring to achieve ATAR scores above ninety, will significantly contribute to improving these statistics as well as change perceptions about what young people in this area can achieve.

For the past six years we have been contracted by the federal government to support families and children in playgroups. We assist in supporting 130 playgroup sessions that run every week in Hume City. This project has been further supported by additional funds from the Scanlon Foundation and a combination of additional local, state and federal government funds.

Banksia Gardens Community Services is also the proud host of American undergraduate students, who come from Worcester Polytechnic institute in Massachusetts each year, to work in a science project which incorporates community development.

Recreation and sporting activities have always been an important way to connect with community. One of the great pleasures at Banksia Gardens Community Services is playing soccer on our makeshift soccer pitch out the back, between staff and kids—and I can assure you there have been some pretty serious matches played. Banksia Gardens Community Services is looking forward to developing even more and stronger connections with the local community in the future.
As Aboriginal people we have always been learning through sight and sound. Our learning is enhanced by using this modern technology of the digital media. This book shows the excitement of young people participating in projects in which they are accessing literacy and learning in new ways. (Shellie Morris, singer/songwriter)

In *Learning spaces*, ANU researchers Inge Kral and Jerry Schwab share the results of a three year ethnographic research project into education in Indigenous communities. The research was funded by The Fred Hollows Foundation and the Australian Research Council. They did not explore education ‘in school’ but in ‘ongoing learning in the out-of-school hours, and ongoing learning across the lifespan.’ (p. 2)

Kral and Schwab approached the research from an anthropological, rather than an educational, perspective. It’s interesting to note that literacy has been a key object of study in anthropology. They explain that anthropology emphasizes the social and cultural behaviours associated with literacy rather than seeing literacy as a ‘set of technical skills that are possessed or lacked.’ (p. 5)

Kral and Schwab began their project—the Youth Learning Project—with a plan to write a community handbook of best practices offering a range of practical examples and suggestions to promote literacy and learning in Indigenous communities. They also began with a lot of skepticism about current approaches to literacy and schooling in those communities.

Once into the project, they realized that the Indigenous young people they met were ‘… quietly yet deeply involved in … an international, and generational, change among youth facilitated by new media.’ The result of their documenting of this involvement is a book that they hope is of value ‘… not only to Indigenous community members but also to youth workers, government officers, policy makers, students, educatory and academic colleagues.’ (p. 15)

*Learning spaces* reflects the richness of learning, particularly using new media, in Indigenous communities and also aims to get the reader thinking and reflecting. It is not *text dense* and the layout includes plenty of photographs (including stills from a film project, *Stories in land*), Indigenous language materials and break out boxes that summarise key points. Most pages make as much use of space as of text. As well as giving a sense of life and learning in the communities involved, the design encourages the reader to make links between different stories and approaches. The richness of learning opportunities offered by new media and so readily taken up by young people make up the *productive learning* that takes place in learning spaces like arts projects, youth centres and media organisations in Indigenous communities.

Teachers working with Indigenous youth and those working with youth from other diverse backgrounds would have a common interest in the research-based observations in *Learning spaces*, particularly the chapters and appendices that offer ideas for designing productive learning spaces, supporting and sustaining those spaces, valuing a range of outcomes and linking with other projects in Australia and around the world.

Caitlin Burman, a teacher who works with Indigenous children and adults in the Northern Territory, found much to interest her in *Learning spaces* and commented:

*Learning spaces* is a refreshing departure from the doom and gloom that is often the focus when reporting on Indigenous educational results and remote Indigenous communities.

While the majority of mainstream media reports emphasise bleak outcomes and dysfunction, Kral
and Schwab’s Learning spaces offers rare insights into positive, empowering learning environments and programmes that foster a sense of productivity and meaning for Indigenous youth.

As a teacher, I believe this book is a great resource for both educators and academics who wish to be able to design more culturally appropriate curriculum which incorporates both Indigenous pedagogy and perspectives towards the digital and social climate of the future.


Karen Manwaring has been teaching adult literacy and language for over thirty years.

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References


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• Building trust and confidence takes time.
• Keep the learning environment friendly, open, structured and exciting.
• Employ well qualified, empathetic staff with an interest and passion for technology and its potential to support educational attainment.

Regular attendance and growing familiarity with the ILC and its staff increased the confidence of the participants within an educational setting. The students’ exposure to a range of online and Web 2.0 tools also increased their knowledge of current and emerging technologies used by the wider society and equipped them to access technology to further their formal and informal learning.

All the learners completed individual and personalised learner plans that documented their aspirations, progress and achievements. Each learner has a full record of their work on a USB—for many their first attempt at a portfolio.

Where are they now?

By and large the confidence of the learners has increased and their outlook on further education is more positive. Seventy percent of regular attending learners had plans to continue studying:

• Three learners enrolled in vocational education
• One student has put in an application for Certificate IV in TESOL

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VALBEC and presenters could take on board for next year.

Thank you to the volunteers who willingly let their coffee

• One student has a leaning plan that includes taking up a certificate course for next year
• One student is in the process of developing a learning plan which will include future training
• One student has been able to address a major health issue.

For the teachers the project also highlighted the benefits of embedding a structured digital literacy programme across the organisation. Their knowledge and understanding of how to embed and make the teaching of digital literacy skills explicit across various curricula has been invaluable. They have shared this knowledge with colleagues in other departments, including VCAL and language, literacy and numeracy staff.

To find out more about the class and the project visit our wiki at: http://employabilite.wiki.cae.edu.au/home

Josie Rose is Team Leader, Delivery Innovation at the CAE. She oversees the daily operations of the Independent Learning Centre, and manages a range of e-learning and curriculum development projects.

Daniel O’ Hara is a teacher in the VCAL and literacy departments. Daniel’s work with this challenging group of students was recognised last year, when he won the Box Hill Institute Excellence in Adult Education award.

or lunch grow cold while participating in this interview.

Jacinta Agostinelli is the editor of *Fine Print*. 