Foundation or fantasy? Foundation Skills in context
By Allie Clemans

Men’s learning: the conviviality of men’s sheds
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Editorial

On my morning walk, I was heartened by the sight of a massive rainbow that spread its arc across the urban landscape. Admiring the vibrancy of colour against the winter sky, the perfect symmetry of shape in contrast to the built environment, I pondered the nature of knowledge and learning. How do we read the world around us and use our knowledge to live more fully? How do we acknowledge the myriad ways in which we learn from and process experiences? The nature of learning, be it lifelong or lifewide, informal or formal, for life or through life, individual or communal, are themes explored in this edition.

Allie Clemans reflects on the Japanese concept of ‘gift and return’ in building and shaping community, while supporting learners in their lifelong journeys. She questions a model of learning driven by economic imperatives and poses alternative perspectives to adult education and foundation skills in Australia.

Barry Golding celebrates men’s learning and the growth of the Men’s Sheds movement. Men are learning cooperatively from each other, in ‘informal places and spaces’, all over Australia and other parts of the world. He refers to recent research and questions the notions of learning and training that drive government policy and programs.

Susan M. Holloway explores visual literacies and multiliteracies in a research study that exposed students to different ways of seeing and being in the world. Some brilliant images taken by the students provide evidence of their learning.

In our regular sections, we are reminded by several writers of the importance of overcoming numeracy anxiety and developing awareness and skills in everyday life activities. Ways in which literacy and numeracy skills are integrated along with informal learning opportunities in the workplace are explored with examples and links to further resources.

The VALBEC committee was delighted to be part of the sponsorship project for Soraya Daniel to attend the World Indigenous Peoples Conference in Education (WIPCE). Ros Bauer reports on the conference and their presentations.

We welcome the first piece of art work by emerging illustrator, Bianca Raffin who is currently studying Year 12 at Catholic Regional College Sydenham. She is a participant at Jesuit Community College, Artful Dodgers Studios. Her passions include illustration, painting, and music. She is also making a zine for same-sex attracted and gender diverse young people with a few other participants at Artful Dodgers.

With the marking of the winter solstice comes the sense of having scaled the mid-point of the year. From here on the days will get progressively longer as we head towards the warmer months. Before we know it spring will be here. But for now though, enjoy the time spent indoors reading and staying warm. I feel certain this edition of Fine Print will keep you engrossed and encouraged to learn more.

Lynne Matheson
Thank you for giving me the opportunity to contribute to the discussion today. In my presentation, I consider Foundation Skills as part of a broader agenda of lifelong learning in Australia and think through the prospects they hold to achieve their stated purpose. Allow me to get on track in a way that may seem like I am veering off it. I will take you to Japan, more specifically to lifelong learning in Japan. I have been lucky enough to be part of a research network of researchers based in Asian and European countries (ASEM Network on Lifelong Learning http://asemlllhub.org/) where lifelong learning policy perspectives are examined across Asian and European contexts.

Lifelong learning and community

A Japanese colleague has provided a unique perspective on lifelong learning policy in Japan which I find refreshingly different from the Australian context. He writes in this way about lifelong learning in Japan:

In the Japanese community, lifelong learning is not limited to career and upskilling education of people to help them improve employability and face changes in the employment structure, nor is it confined to key competency education for the development of the potential of individuals. Lifelong learning is a framework for people to find ways to change the way this community is and to recreate their being as citizens (Makino, 2014, p. 45).

He explains that through the organisation of lifelong learning events in communities, (be it a cultural or sporting event, a cherry blossom viewing or a festival), residents are exposed and made aware of something special. For residents:

...learning doesn’t simply mean acquiring knowledge and skills and developing one’s potentials [sic]. More importantly, it means the perpetual regeneration of each member’s self in relation with others, which in turn strongly drives him or her to work with others to build up a new community (Makino, 2013, p. 52).

Learning within a community learning centre regenerates the individual within community and exposes the cycle this engenders. It ‘gives birth to a new relationship of gift and return’ (Makino, 2013, p. 52) in which the knowledge one acquires alone is shared within the community, promoting wider forms of exchange and fundamentally reshaping the community. Such a relationship, depicted in this way, represents significant shifts in how we understand the role of an individual in society and in how we understand community. Instead of a vision of lone individuals battling a faceless market, we see those who are:

...positioned in the community, freely and fully live in their relationships with others, and pursue their activities for a better life, and it is all of these activities that are called production and consumption. In other words, when people keep regenerating their selves in their relationships with others and changing themselves, a cycle grows that links the economy, welfare and culture together and supports people’s lives in their existence. This community also creates a dynamism that keeps helping residents to improve their lives and makes this dynamism its own asset (Makino, 2013, p. 54).

The detour I have taken to Japan in order to return to Australia, is to set our approaches taken to lifelong learning, or to the broader context in which skill development is positioned, as a choice that we make which is fuelled by a vision. Japan made a choice to support learning that is relational, to make it relevant across the economy, society and culture and for a purpose which is to foster interdependence among individuals.
Lifelong learning in Australia

What choices have been made in Australia around lifelong learning, as the broader context in which vocational skills and the more general foundational and employability skills have been positioned? To explore this question, I draw on work undertaken by Monash University, Adult Learning Australia (ALA) and the Asia Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (Clemans, Newton, Guevara, Thompson, 2013 http://www.unescobkk.org/resources/e-library/publications/article/learning-work-and-livelihood-in-australia/). This work reviews lifelong learning and employability within Australia, the vision of lifelong learning adopted and the outcomes achieved.

Australia is an example of a lifelong learning system in which employment is the reference point to which education and training approaches are directed. It has shaped funding priorities, training approaches and influenced the kind of skills deemed to be at the core of learning to enhance an individual’s productive capacity and our national productivity.

As Shore and Searle (2009) depict, lifelong learning in Australia is characterised by an education and economic productivity dynamic. In the late 1980s, the education system was seen to be at fault for the economic woes we faced at that point in Australian history. At the same time, education was also positioned as the key to our revival. A proliferation of education and training ensued, with greater recognition and funding, and the promise of opportunities for those who participated in it. Yet our review suggests that the promises have not been as easily delivered.

Education and employment

The Australian training system is built on a fairly narrow logic. It is rhetorically built on an edifice that assumes a direct and positive link between education and employment, that is, the more investment in education made, the more positive the impact on employment will be (Clemans and Rushbrook, 2011). Yet, in reality, it is a system which has stronger connections to tertiary education than to vocational education. A lower social status is accorded to vocational knowledge than academic knowledge, despite the growing attention to, and sophistication of, the VET system (Wheelahan, Moodie and Buchanan, 2012).

The impact of such tensions plays out in labour market outcomes. For example, despite much investment in education and training and an elaborate system of qualifications, graduate destination survey data for 2007–2009 indicates that approximately 40% of vocational education and training graduates were working in the six months following their graduation in a broad occupation group for which they were trained (Skills Australia, 2011, p. 41). Many change their industry and occupation periodically, casting doubt on the strength of the link between people’s formal qualifications and their later career.

Factors other than qualifications influence employment outcomes. For example, the more remotely one lives in Australia or the more disadvantaged one might be considered, the less likely one is to be represented in those participating in training. Additionally, there is greater likelihood for disadvantaged learners to be concentrated in lower level training qualifications and have poorer completion rates or outcomes (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011; North, Ferrier and Long, 2010).

Overall women’s participation in the workforce is increasing but remains lower than males, with 72% of males employed compared with 58.7% of women (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012, cited in Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, 2012, p. 13). Indigenous Australians experience the lowest level of employment of all groups at 48% employed compared with 72% of all Australians (Skills Australia, 2010, p. 30).

Of those employed prior to participation in a vocational program, two-thirds of graduates from lower paid occupations did not move into a different occupation level or gain higher pay following their graduation. In fact, after graduation, individuals from lower paid occupations are more likely to work part-time and be casual, regardless of age or gender. Women graduates are especially likely to be part-time and casual. While the system rhetoric buys into the idea that completion of a qualification offers higher
earnings and job advancement, this does not play out equally. In fact it has been found that motivation to engage in learning is often more about satisfying job requirements and maintaining current job security than securing career progression (Pockock et al., 2011).

These examples suggest that for those participating in learning, the positive anticipation of a direct relationship between education and one’s employability is not as simply realised. Yet, the fantasy of it is proliferated. Clinging to such a fantasy is no more apparent than in Australia’s quest to name and define the skills that would assure an individual (and by implication, employers and the nation) that participation in the education system does, indeed, make one employable.

**What it means to be employable**

The idea of employability is meant to signal:

... a connection to the world of work that is dynamic and long-term in nature. Employability implies qualities of resourcefulness, adaptability and flexibility, and therefore also signals some of the qualities needed for success in work and life as a whole (Curtis and Mackenzie, 2001, pp. vii–viii).

Despite the openness of the concept described above, employers tend to apply narrow parameters in recruitment, requiring direct experience in the job role which severely limits opportunities for entry level novice workers. Research (Cully, cited in Watson, 2011, p. 40) found experience was a requirement in 75% of the job advertisements reviewed in 2005, while qualifications were a requirement in only 34% of cases.

The promised link between training and employment is reasserted around the acquisition of Foundation Skills:

More than 7.5 million Australian adults do not have the literacy and numeracy skills needed to participate fully in today’s workforce. We have set a target that, by 2022, at least two thirds of working age Australians will have the literacy and numeracy skills needed to take full advantage of opportunities afforded by the new economy (SCOTESE, 2012, p. 1).

The importance of strong foundation skills in a modern, knowledge-based society is well established. These skills underpin workforce participation, productivity and social inclusion (Skills Australia, 2011). People with higher language, literacy and numeracy skills are more likely to be employed, participate in their community, experience better health and engage in further training. Research also shows employability skills are critically important to people gaining employment and remaining employed (Skills Australia, 2012). The link between numeracy, literacy and problem solving skills and the central use of technology in contemporary communication means that foundation skills are increasingly important for effective participation in modern workplaces and contemporary life.

Can the promise of what foundation skills are meant to deliver translate into opportunities afforded by the new knowledge economy? And does foundational learning referred to include the skills needed to survive when labour market opportunities shrink, or are not forthcoming?

It is in addressing these sorts of questions that I find the concept of fantasy helpful in allowing me to understand why we cling to the notion that skill building does, and should, translate into employability. Here I draw briefly on the work of Zizek around the concept of fantasy (Zizek, 2008). He talks about the act of clinging to an object of our desire as a fantasy. If we extend this argument, our desire, for example, for a state of employability or for a potential pool of well-educated, fully functional, literate and numerate people who could take up jobs is a fantasy. The fantasy aspect of it is that this state never existed in the first place. The yearning we feel for it is our desire to realise the indefinable thing that we think is missing. But, as Zizek explains, no matter how close we get to achieving the object of our desire, we can never reach it. It lies elsewhere, out of our grasp. There is always a gap between what we desire and what we can have.

**Blaming the Other**

To alleviate the feelings that come with not quite reaching what we seek, we may blame the Other for not achieving it, or not allowing us to close the gap. As an example, young people may be, and have been, blamed for just not being sufficiently work-ready to take up the jobs available. Educators may be, and have been, blamed for not doing a good enough job to produce the kinds of workers we need. We might hear that things will just be better if we can more adequately define the Employability Skills or Foundation Skills we need. Grasping at all of these things, as Hage (2000) explains, helps to prop up the fantasy:

If this fantasy space is to be perceived as possible, it requires something to explain its failure to come
about… It helps them having to face the impossible nature of what they are pursuing, the traumatic kernel of the real, by constructing the other as what stands in the way of its attainment. It is in this sense that the other is necessary for the construction and maintenance of the fantasy (Hage, 2000, p. 74).

Following this thinking, Foundation Skills could be seen to represent an attempt to re-make the *Other*, the potential employee, in the hope that this would bring about that which has been impossible to attain. Our research tells us, however, that as much as we read and hear of the stated relationship between education and employment (the very basis of the vocational agenda in Australia), this is a fantasy. This relationship is not easily realised. Yet we cling to it, thinking that if we can just pin down things a little better or more adequately fix what has been missing, we can achieve the promise of delivering, through teaching and learning, those who can take ‘… full advantage of opportunities afforded by the new economy’ (SCOTese, 2012).

The problem with buying into a fantasy of employability is that we may circumscribe what is needed to attain the very thing we seek to put in place. In perpetuating the fantasy, our arguments are restricted to what Foundation Skills are, about how we define them, measure them, teach them or remember them. Our points of reference stay narrow instead of addressing the wider dimensions of education and its relationship to broader notions of livelihood, and in this context, how Foundation Skills may help to sustain that.

**Closing the gap**

Our research which reviewed the relationship between learning and employability in Australia told us that participation in education and training alone does not guarantee better work or more work. Some of the factors which mediate our prospects include supply and demand, location such as rural and urban, or where one lives in Australia, and the nature of the qualification attained. Employability does not lie in the hands of a learner alone, nor in the work of an educator. If we recognise the fantasy, that is, whatever we do, we can’t close the gap and achieve full employment or employability, then, paradoxically, it may open up spaces of possibility that clinging to the fantasy tend to close down.

Like the lessons from Japan, how we decide to engage with the space opened up by lifelong learning and Foundation Skills in Australia is a choice. Of course we want to improve literacy and numeracy, to strengthen social inclusion and community wellbeing, and research tells us that all of these things emerge from a more literate and numerate population. But can Foundation Skills deliver more? Like Japan, can they be part of a gift and return, to regenerate self in relation to others. Do we want Foundation Skills to build communities and relationships or just allow us to engage in the modern economy?

Anticipating that Foundation Skills or Employability Skills will close the gap between unemployment and employment is a fantasy, with prospects not that strong for closing the gap. Should we try? Yes, we should! If a direct and positive link between education and employment is unattainable, it does not make our acts of striving for it necessarily fruitless.

Yearning for it is represented in the efforts we direct to make it possible, through policy, resource allocation, program design and teaching practices. Yearning in ways that are valued by employers and employees would be productive. We should keep trying to imagine that we can close the gap and not stop. But, at the same time, let us also be critical of easy solutions and light constructions of meaning that too easily put blame on the *Other* and which circumscribe possibilities of a more imaginative pursuit of what a solid foundation is, for what it comprises, for what it holds up, and for what may be built upon it.

Japan made a choice about learning *for life*. Australia has tended to step more tentatively by making opportunities for learning *through* life. We know that ‘[t]he decision of what to make the basics of education... depends not simply on the way the world is but on the way we think it should be, on the kind of life we believe to be worth living, and on the kind of society we believe to be worth living in’ (Martin, 1992, p. 19). Foundation Skills represent a response to such an important vision.

**References**


I was delighted to be asked to contribute this feature article on men’s learning with an update on my research with others. The first major development since 2008, is that men’s learning in community settings is thankfully much more evident on the research, policy and practitioner radar. Much of the early scepticism about its value and wider application in Australia and beyond, has evaporated. With a small number of other researchers in the same field in Europe, we are truly at the cutting edge in Australia. However, in terms of research, policy and practice, we have only just begun to scratch the surface.

Some readers will recall our early collaborative research over a decade ago, through the University of Ballarat (now Federation University) on men’s learning in community settings in Victoria, generously supported by the ACFE Board. Along with the ACFE Men’s Learning Research Circle initiatives in 2005–6, evaluated by McIntyre (2007), these research initiatives were important early developments.

Some of this work followed or paralleled, Veronica McGivney’s ground breaking UK research, published in her provocatively titled *Missing men: Men who are missing from education and training* (McGivney, 1999a) and *Men earn, women learn: Bridging the gender divide in education and training* (McGivney, 2004). Along with *Informal learning in the community: A trigger for change and development* (McGivney, 1999b), the die was cast for a more comprehensive interrogation in more diverse national contexts. Primarily, of the mistaken, but widely held belief, that because many adults, in this case men, tend not to enrol in formal courses, they are not interested in, or capable of learning or sharing what they already know with the wider community. These three sources remain excellent and inspirational reading.

It was very appropriate that Veronica McGivney generously contributed the Foreword to our recent book, *Men learning through life*, published by NIACE in 2014 (Golding, Mark & Foley, 2014). The book sets out to provide a definitive account of men’s learning that is temporally and spatially beyond men in paid work. It includes contributed chapters and new insights, not only from academics in Australia and New Zealand, but from Ireland, the UK, Portugal, Greece and China.

**Conclusions about men’s learning**

While knowledge from research and espoused concerns about men’s learning and its relationship to men’s wellbeing has broadened, we have come to three overarching conclusions in *Men learning through life*. The first conclusion is that:

> [T]he opportunities for men to participate in informal and non-formal learning (in particular for unemployed men and men drawn from disadvantaged backgrounds) is quite limited and in decline. This is in part due to the general narrowing of national education and training policies to focus exclusively on promoting education and training for entry and re-entry to paid work. (pp.255–6)

Our second conclusion is that:

Those men of all ages who stand to benefit most from lifelong and lifewide learning are those least likely to access it, particularly if it is packaged and presented
in a way that is patronising from deficit models of provision... [A]lmost counter-intuitively, the most effective learning for most men with limited prior learning is informal, local and community-based, which builds on what men know, can do and are interested in. Learning for such men is less effective if it assumes all men have a problem, that particular masculinities are the problem, or if it requires them to be served up curriculum and assessment for qualifications, vocational training or literacy, as students, customers, clients or patients, which presuppose a deficit. (p. 256)

Our third conclusion is that, as alluded to earlier, while we have only just scratched the surface with our research, there are likely to be rich pickings in building on the known positive intergenerational effects for men and boys between learning, literacy and wellbeing.

Recent shifts in government policy
There is a curious and very concerning irony in the way things are unfolding in Australia as these research insights emerge. On the one hand, the Australian government is espousing draconian learn or earn policies, alongside policies that seek to periodically suspend benefits from young unemployed people. On the other hand, the Australian vocational education and training (VET, particularly public TAFE) and adult and community education (ACE) systems are now in a parlous state. Factors impacting on education are: increasing competition; rorting by unscrupulous private providers; cuts to funding by state and federal governments; fees and deferred debts for university and VET courses increasing; and rising youth unemployment.

Given that around one half of Australian adults are not currently in paid work, and around one half of those that are in paid work have completed no accredited course since leaving school, this is a curiously limited and impoverished approach to lifelong and lifewide learning. Making adult learning, specifically work-oriented training courses, into a form of punishment for those not in paid work is a heartless approach.

From our research evidence in Men learning through life, it is very likely to seriously backfire and be counterproductive for most men not in paid work. It ignores the significant savings from having many other forms of valuable learning available to all adults to help them remain well, active and independent for as long as possible. It also discounts the need for older learners, to enhance their ability to share a rich lifetime of knowledge, experience and wisdom with children, grandchildren, other adults and the community. This is quite apart from the need to stay well enough to undertake paid work well into their late 60s.

The first missing piece of this puzzling policy response, ignored by most Australian policy makers who assume that course completion automatically leads to a job, is that around one half of adults not in work of working age are unwell, mentally or physically, often damaged by work and its excesses, or caring for partners, children or grandchildren. Forcing people to learn does not work for many young people at school. It is much less likely to work for those who are unwell or with limited and negative formal education backgrounds. Further impacts of low formal or functional literacies, limited access to affordable housing or transport to get to work, access to funds to live on, let alone afford the increased education and training fees.

The second missing piece is that the returns from completed lower level accredited courses in Australia are, on average, zero or negative. The third missing piece is that one third of all adults (and a much higher proportion of older adults not in paid work) have such limited functional literacies that they can’t even begin to access the courses they would be compelled, through no fault of their own, to undertake were such courses actually available to them.

Parallels from European contexts
The recently published Older men learning in the community: European snapshots, edited by Marco Radovan and Sabina Jelenc Krasovec from Ljubljana in Slovenia, is a set of excellently researched case studies by researchers from Estonia, Malta, Portugal and Slovenia (Radovan & Krasovec, 2014). It is striking that many of the emergent theoretical and practical issues behind older men as learners in the community in Europe are very similar to those in Australia.

What is different is that many of the same issues in Europe extend also to the greater proportion of younger men unemployed as a consequence of the global financial crisis. This book provides evidence from very diverse European community contexts that ‘the crucial means of developing older men’s interest in informal learning is not learning per se, but the possibility of communicative cooperation’ (Radovan & Krasovec, p. 24) in diverse, informal places and spaces underpinned by approaches that value men’s agency rather than simply doing courses.
The book’s overarching conclusion, contributed by Antonio Fragoso (Portugal) and Marvin Formosa (Malta), draws some interesting parallels between the many ‘diverse, heterogeneous, informal spaces around us [that function] as the means of opening the doors to an educational vision of community’ (Radovan & Krasovec, p. 100), and the idea of dialogue and dialogical relations eloquently exposed by Freire’s (1970) *Pedagogy of the oppressed* and *The politics of education* (Freire, 1985), which situate the learner as the subject rather than the object (and certainly not the customer or client). Fragoso and Formosa also stress the importance of social learning for older men, contradicting ‘the pessimistic categorisation of older people that reifies older citizens as dispensable, non-economic items’ (Radovan & Krasovec, p.101), or worse, as an economic liability.

**Proliferation of men’s sheds**

The second major development since our 2008 article is the way community men’s sheds have spread numerically and broadened in purpose and scope. Men’s sheds are now open in most towns across Australia and Ireland. Shed densities are now remarkably similar, but much higher in rural areas with a higher proportion of older men. The lessons from this new but huge grassroots sector should now be very clear for adult educators, including anyone involved in basic and literacy and numeracy education. Given that the first men’s shed opened in Australia only 15 years ago (and in Ireland barely five years ago) and that the median age of Australian shedders is 68 years, the Men’s Shed movement raises many questions about the wide range of unmet needs of mainly older men not in paid work.

If someone had predicted the rapidity and nature of this spread from a handful of precursor sheds in rural South Australia from the mid-1990s, I would not have believed them. When we penned our 2008 *Fine Print* article, there were no men’s sheds open in Queensland, perhaps a few hundred Australia wide and none overseas. Now there are more than 1,000 men’s sheds in Australia, 200 in Ireland and 70 each in New Zealand and the UK. The Australian Men’s Sheds Association, (AMSA) receives federal funding to support men’s sheds nationally.

The subject of my next book will be how the movement has evolved to be decentred and grassroots, and how men’s sheds are differentially located in small rural communities. I will narrate the story of how and why this happened, what we know from research (Golding, 2014) and what we might conclude from the international men’s sheds movement.

**Men’s sheds revealed**

While I am assuming that some readers have actually visited a men’s shed, what follows for those who have not, incorporates an edited version of a thoughtful blog *The conviviality of the shed*, by a visiting academic, Dr Brendan Hoare, University of Chester, UK (Hoare, 2014). This blog was written in response to a recent forum I presented about men’s sheds, appropriately titled *Terra Incognita*, and is adapted with Brendan’s permission.

A men’s shed is a meeting place for men; it is a place where men of all ages can go to talk, interact, learn and further their general wellbeing in any number of ways. Those men who are no longer in paid employment due to age, redundancy or economic conditions can find a place and a purpose beyond the workplace, the home or the pub; a convivial place (and we shall come back to that word later) where learning may take place, but where there are no rules or expectations except their own. There are no managers, no professionals, no experts, no teachers except themselves, and they have to meet nobody’s objectives or fit in with anybody’s plans except their own. Furthermore, these sheds are mushrooming across the world; an amazing organic growth, driven by the perceived need of those involved, rather than by policy, whether institutional or governmental. Akin to guerrilla gardening in its *bottom up* spontaneity and virtual absence of institutional control, it could almost be seen as a form of guerrilla education; perhaps, a revolutionary new approach to learning.
Brendan goes on to draw parallels with the work of Ivan Illich, considered radical forty years ago but still relevant today, which proposed:

… a total deinstitutionalisation of an education system that was designed to reproduce the status quo and shore up an inherently inequitable society. As Illich put it, ‘School is the advertising agency which makes you believe that you need the society as it is’ (Illich, 1971, p. 113). Illich’s solution was to allow people to decide upon their own goals and their own curriculum within a setting of mutual help and concern, and with access to the resources they would need. As Illich argued:

[Most learning is not the result of instruction. It is rather the result of unhampered participation in a meaningful setting. Most people learn best by being with it, yet school makes them identify their personal, cognitive growth with elaborate planning and manipulation. (Illich, 1971, p. 38)]

Essential to this process, and Illich’s suggested replacement for institutional control, was the development of learning webs and tools for conviviality (Illich, 1971). Of course, the learning webs envisioned in 1971 were not the present world wide web, although Illich did foresee the impact technology might have in freeing education from those who would wish to control it. He was as much concerned then with access to human webs for educational support, as with technological assistance. Illich proposed:

A good educational system should have three purposes: it should provide all who want to learn with access to available resources at any time in their lives; empower all who want to share what they know to find those who want to learn it from them; and, finally, furnish all who want to present an issue to the public with the opportunity to make their challenge known. (Illich, 1971, p. 75)

Illich expanded upon this suggestion in 1973 with the publication of Tools for conviviality, in which conviviality was defined as a dynamic replacement for the control of human activity by institutions, professionals and managers. He expanded by saying that:

I intend it to mean autonomous and creative intercourse among persons, and the intercourse of persons with their environment; and this in contrast with the conditioned response of persons to the demands made upon them by others, and by a man-made environment. I consider conviviality to be individual freedom realized in personal interdependence and, as such, an intrinsic ethical value. (Illich, 1973, p. 11)

[Hoare, 2014]

Conviviality and transformation

Quite apart from their role in ticking many of the social determinants of health, men’s sheds might be seen in this sense as one of many convivial, post-institutional alternatives to formal learning. Additionally, perhaps as a signpost to at least one form that a more inclusive and progressive education might take in the future. It is fascinating (but not surprising) that Freire’s persuasive theorising about learning and power, and Illich’s radical, but still valid arguments for deinstitutionalising schooling from over three decades ago, are unknown to many young adult education academics and practitioners, and completely off the radar of virtually all contemporary education students. With most formal education systems for adults resembling work-dominated markets, with dollar discourses replacing pedagogical ones, and with two of Illich’s three criteria for good education systems now technically feasible via the internet, Illich and Freire are certainly worth revisiting in 2014.

In February 2014, I took this image of Geordie Murtagh with his son Oisin, active participants in the Crann go Beatha, The Tree of Life Men’s Shed in the Falls Road area of Belfast, Northern Ireland. Falls Road is a site synonymous with the Republican community during the ethno-nationalist conflict that wracked this part of the world until the Good Friday Peace Agreement in 1998. At the very same time as, the first ever, named community
men’s shed opened on the other side of the world in Lane Cove, Sydney.

The Tree of Life Men’s Shed, lovingly carved out in a former flax mill and supported by Workers’ Educational Association (WEA) in Belfast, now has 120 men through the door each week. The Shed has been effective in cutting across the ethno-nationalist divide and transforming men’s and boys’ lives, along with their families and communities. These transformative experiences are not unlike those espoused by Bradshaw (1997) in her conceptual framework Transforming lives, transforming communities for Australian further education. Chaos theory suggests that something as small as a butterfly’s wing can ultimately cause a cyclone halfway round the globe. I have included this photograph, with Geordie and Oisin’s permission, as proof. The same cyclone blows the same winds of transformative change each day through the lives, families and communities of tens of thousands of Australian men in one thousand different and diverse Australian men’s sheds, nine out of ten of which have no paid staff.

**Lifelong and lifewide learning**

In conclusion, and coming back to the difficult reality faced daily by adult education providers and practitioners across Australia, it is important that we continue to look beyond Australia, particularly to Europe, ‘… to develop policies that include agency around discourses of equity, inclusion, health and wellbeing, and not just a de facto education system that is valued only for vocational outcomes and competencies’ (Golding & Foley, 2011, p. 67).

Most modern educators in Australian formal education sectors, inhabit an increasingly barren landscape dominated by the dead hand of curriculum, assessment, quality and compliance. This nightmare quadrella is justified by the ‘new economistic rhetoric of individual rights and ideologies of “efficiency” and “choice”’ (Welch, 2010, p. 244). Men’s sheds are proof that there are many other learning landscapes where learners are empowered and wellbeing and community are still valued.

I have tried in this article to emphasise that it is critically important to think and act beyond concepts of provision and providers that presuppose that learning is a product delivered to customers, clients and students. Ironically (and thankfully), as our research shows, specifically in relation to men not in paid work, including through men’s sheds, some of the most powerful and valuable lifelong and lifewide learning for adults still occurs through group and community agency. This is well beyond the reach of the formal market and without necessarily being named or foregrounded. The education market, by contrast, is increasingly and narrowly targeted by government interventions, at individual customers with the ability to pay (or the prospect of going into debt for decades afterwards), in order to achieve a qualification that achieves a durable, paid work outcome.

The key to understanding and transforming adult and community learning and literacies requires us to avert our gaze beyond the market. To look and act elsewhere to enhance and facilitate less formal learning and empower learners in the many valuable spaces and practices that remain embedded in very diverse community interstices, … ‘symbolic spaces that frame people’s sense of belonging,… built from symbols that have powerful meanings in the community’ (Fragoso & Formosa, in Radovan & Krasovec, 2014, p. 100).

**References**


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Visual literacies and multiliteracies: an ecology arts-based pedagogical model

By Susan M. Holloway

How we read the natural world was a focus of this Canadian research study. Students taking photographs of their environment opened up a whole range of opportunities for learning, with evident potential for application of this model beyond school settings.

Introduction
This case study explored the kinds of visual literacies and multiliteracies learners experience utilizing photography to read the natural world around them. Falihi and Wason-Ellam (2009) note that ‘… visual literacy, the ability to create, read, and respond to visual images has become an essential concept in a global society’ (p. 410). Visual literacy provides the opportunity to make meaning from imagery with similar levels of complexities as in spoken language. As with any interpretation, visual literacy needs to be understood as socially constructed. Learners’ perceptions are always shaped by the social, historical, political, and cultural contexts in which they are viewing, making, and interpreting visual literacies.

An equitable framework
This case study employed many of the principles of a multiliteracies theoretical framework. Multiliteracies is a term coined by the New London Group (1996) to expand the narrow definition of literacy beyond the ability to read and write. They argue to consider the role of linguistic and cultural diversity, which challenges the notion of a standard norm for any language; and to explore the implications of technology, media, and multimodalities as part of what constitutes literacies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000).

The New London Group believes that literacy attainment is imperative to equity. The ecology arts-based model used in this study does not necessarily ask students explicit questions to decode how they are positioned in relation to society. Nor does it ask them to go beyond their personal experiences to critique the role of larger institutional forces in shaping epistemologies and producing systemic discrimination. Nevertheless, the kinds of critical thinking students engage in, and their ability to express themselves through visual literacies is creative and political in its own way. In thinking about ‘language as a form of social action’ (Lesley, 2008, p. 177), and visual literacy as a kind of language, then the act of photographing, editing, and critiquing their own photos, as well as embedding that artistry within the larger community, can be seen as important steps in critical awareness.

A multi-disciplinary approach
In practice, this ecology arts-based model, designed and implemented by a social worker, in consultation with teachers and community partners, uses digital photography lessons and photography field trips as tools for enriching curriculum-based learning in science and technology, visual arts, mathematics, and Language Arts. Examples of interdisciplinary uses of this model are: mathematics used to calculate depth of field, understand fractions and figures related to shutter speed and aperture, to document and look for geometry in nature; science used to investigate, observe, and document natural features in their local ecosystems; art used to interpret and enhance the photography; and Language Arts used to journal about experiences and observations.

As Seglem and Witte (2009) comment:

Helping students to understand the diversity of print and non-print texts as well as the visual connections that can be made between them is a practical way to connect the concrete and abstract thinking of students who struggle to make meaning from text. (p. 217)

Visual literacy and multimodalities give all students a wider breadth of means and content to develop their own cross-curricular skill sets.

Ecology arts-based model
This ecology arts-based model was implemented in a public school located in a small city within South Western Ontario, Canada. There were five participants interviewed in this case study consisting of teachers, community partners, and the coordinator. While the pilots involved solely school
children, this model could just be applied to educational contexts for older youth and adult lifelong learners.

Other key elements of this model are the involvement of professional community partners such as photographers, farmers and entomologists, as well as bridging between school and the wider community. For example, one class had an art showing in a photographer’s professional studio; other classes had one of the partners accompany them on a field trip to share their professional knowledge.

The use of photography in this ecology arts-based pedagogical model provided many opportunities for the teachers to utilize visual literacy with their students. Yenawine (1997) states:

> Visual literacy is the ability to find meaning in imagery. It involves a set of skills ranging from simple identification—naming what one sees—to complex interpretation on contextual, metaphoric and philosophical levels. (p. 845)

All of the participants remarked on the students’ photography as a sophisticated way of observing, documenting, and expressing their views on the natural world. For example, the organic farmer stated, ‘I was impressed by how much they observed... And how they were able to look at something from a totally different angle, sometimes literally.’ Brill, Kim, and Branch (2007) contend that, ‘visual messages are fundamental to complex mental processing because they provide information and opportunities for analysis that text alone cannot provide’ (p. 51).

Students were given a simple introduction in lay terms, to the basics of line, shape, form, space, texture, tone and colour, which gave them a metalanguage for their photography. On the field trips, the only instruction learners were given was to use these elements of design to guide their photography. Through critiquing their own work and each other’s in a positive way, they built metacognitive and social skills.

All participants commented on the benefits of cross-curricular pedagogy. Teacher 1 used students’ photography to write a creative piece in which they had to imagine themselves as the old bicycle they had seen on the pathway and speak in the bicycle’s voice, answering the question: How did you end up in this predicament? He also used the old farm equipment as a way into talking about local history. Teacher 2 incorporated students’ photos of bugs into a science unit entitled Diversity of Living Things. The photographer spoke about the potential to discuss photography’s technical mathematical side: ‘What if we had to change the depth of field? What if we want to make that look blurry in the background?’ Students were challenged to synthesize their learning in various disciplines.

**English language learners**

A multiliteracies framework tailored the curriculum to better serve English Language Learners (ELLs). Teacher 2 commented: ‘... you don’t need to have a strong command [of English] to go out and take photographs and express yourself.’ Teacher 1 observed that using one of their own photos acted as an important scaffold for learners to start writing their narratives. It meant they were not starting with a blank page. Several participants saw a connection between story telling and the art of photography. Teacher 2 stated: ‘I think students were creating stories in their photography. Some kids were drawn to movement or drawn to things that were still.’

Creating and analyzing photography may augment students’ abilities to imagine. Visuals can generate writing and vice versa. Several participants discussed the globalizing element of photography as visual literacy. As the photographer pointed out, ‘We could take a book of photography across the world—we can all read that photograph—it doesn’t matter if a Polish person took that photograph or an African person took that photograph. Visual language is universal.’

**Questioning discourses**

Multiliteracies critique systemic disparities in wealth, analyze how discourses shape our belief systems, and
examine ways to creatively challenge hegemony. The photographer emphasized that she did not evaluate the learners’ photography. Instead, she asked questions such as: ‘What made you want to shoot it from this angle?’ or ‘What does it feel like to look at these photos?’ As well, the photographer would model professional editing techniques, for instance: ‘This is really good straight off the camera, but watch how when I darken the photos, see how the colours come out more.’

Many consumers accept art or media production in its polished state without considering the many metamorphoses it might have undergone while being created. Learners are forced to reflect on the numerous choices they have to make when they themselves are in charge of the art or media production. This process compels learners to question why and how it is that certain discourses tend to circulate widely and construct commonly held views more so than others, and to ask which discourses have shaped their process of production. They become aware of how the frame they choose inevitably privileges certain discourses, while to some extent marginalizing others.

Multiliteracies help ensure that students’ personal and cultural resources, contextualized in their local, socially situated domains, get taken into account when designing curriculum. For example, Teacher 1 illustrated how access to digital technology is an equity issue, whereby some students are hard pressed to participate: ‘Some of my kids definitely can’t afford it [a memory card for the camera]. Even ten dollars, that’s a hardship.’

One premise of this model is that we cannot expect learners to be concerned environmentalists when they have limited contact with the natural world outside of urban environments. The organic farmer echoed similar concerns when she stated, ‘We are so disconnected to where food comes from, and we are so disconnected from the natural world.’

The photographer said, ‘The camera gets the kids to slow down and really take notice. And that intimate experience of looking more closely at something is what connects you to the wonder of that thing, and I think that can create a respect for, and a love for, the natural environment. I think that is what we need in order to get this generation to actually take responsibility to look after and to care for the natural environment because obligation isn’t enough of a motivation.’ Somewhat ironically, technology and the power of visual literacies may help to innovatively reconnect learners of all ages with what the outdoors has to offer.

Creating stories, constructing identities

For struggling writers, reading and writing often feel like a series of obstacles based on grammatical hurdles, instead of feeling the excitement of ideas that come out of narratives. Photography acts as a medium to introduce the excitement of creating stories. Literacy, whether cursive, printed, audio, or pictorial, ultimately is about how ideas are shaped in meaningful ways. The teachers felt this model allowed students to emotionally and intellectually make connections through art about their local environment. Seglem and Witte (2009) observe:

By teaching students how to critically read and view all texts, not just the traditional print texts, teachers can build upon the skills needed to read and write, increasing students’ literacy levels in all areas.

Enabling students to increase their levels of literacy increases their abilities to socially construct their identities in more powerful ways. Falihi and Wason-Ellam (2009) note it ‘helps learners transform themselves from objects to subjects, from being passive to being active, from recipient to participant, and from consumer to producer’ (p. 415). The emotional element of feeling successful with literacy should not be underestimated.

Visual literacies for ELL students

Digital literacies are only going to increase in demand, and it is people who have historically been marginalized in our society and are more vulnerable who will suffer most as the disparity in literacy levels increases. Digital photography and a critical engagement with visual literacy as a language in, and of itself, may open doors for those students who
are working in several languages. As Cummins (2007) points out, ELL students are always trying to catch up to a moving target in the sense that an ELL student’s peers are also moving ahead in their learning, without the extra challenge of trying to mediate new knowledge and skills through an additional language.

It may also help students to attain what Pegrum (2008) refers to as intercultural competence, which ‘de-emphasises the acquisition of a native-like identity and encourages the learner to carve out a third place’ (Kramsch, 1993) from which he or she will be able to negotiate and mediate between the native and target cultures’ (Pegrum, p. 137–38). By using visual literacy as an integral part of pedagogical practices, all learners are more likely to engage.

**Conclusion**

Citizenry, for youths as well as adults, involves questioning what is equitable and just. Giving learners opportunities to express their views and feelings on the environment through the kind of artistic expression that visual literacies and multiliteracies afford opens up possibilities for them to feel more stake in their claim on their local environments. Multiliteracies deepen learners’ thinking about ecology and multimodalities contextualized in relation to their own lives and societies. Being a citizen in large part is just this—critically and emotionally engaging in the thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs that construct the community, and feeling able to take action and to have a say in how the community will continue to be shaped.

Creativity is a key antidote to hegemony. Engagement with multiliteracies ultimately strives for the ability to imagine a better world, an alternative to how systems of oppression currently operate, and an illumination that reconceptualises current ways of being. The New London Group calls for civic pluralism, which argues for citizens of diverse backgrounds to find meaningful ways to engage with one another and proposes that people need to ‘have the chance to expand their cultural and linguistic repertoires so that they can access a broader range of cultural and institutional resources’ (1996, p. 15). This ecology arts-based pedagogical model gives a concrete means of thinking through how to implement the tenets of a multiliteracies framework.

**References**


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The photos included in the article were taken by students involved in this ecology arts-based pedagogical model and are used with permission.

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Practical matters

Teaching and assessing conundrums

By Lindee Conway

In a teacher’s working week, there is often the recurrent question of where to get inspiration from? Additional to this, is how to turn inspiration into a lesson that’s instructive, informative, fun for the learners, not too hard, nor too easy, and one which can be assessable. There is a lot to be considered and not all of it is about teaching and learning.

A familiar scenario

A teacher thinks of a great idea to help her class learn English, as well as find out something relevant to their life in a new country. The topic is résumé-writing and so she prepares a couple of résumés appropriate for jobs her learners might apply for: a kitchen hand, a volunteer at a school cafeteria, and a waitress in a restaurant, where the first language is an advantage.

In one of the résumés, she deliberately includes some spelling errors and writes up the second résumé to be heavily formatted and not tailored for the particular job in question. She and her learners go through these résumés and discuss how the errors will work against the aspirants getting an interview, let alone a job. She sets up role-plays for cold-calling and she encourages the class to ‘sell’ themselves. They practise useful phrases, pronunciation and non-verbal communication. All good stuff, authentic and relevant.

Then she realises the assessment cycle has come around (again? So soon!). So, she gives her learners an assessment about the steps involved in baking bread. Her learners are a little confused by this sudden switch. They were having fun playing the busy kitchen-manager and the cold-caller, trying to appear friendly and hard-working, all in the first five seconds!

What’s with the bread-making test? The bread-making assessment task has been moderated and ticks many internal and external compliance boxes. The résumé reading and role-playing hasn’t been moderated. The teacher isn’t confident to develop the material into a formal assessment task, nor does she have time. Where can she turn to for support and not lose her inspiration?

The LOVe project

In 2013, the Faculty of Further Education at Northern Metropolitan Institute of TAFE (NMIT) set up a project which proposed to make more overt the links between teaching and assessing. The brief for the project was to set up templates to support and simplify dual assessment which describes the accredited units of the ESL Frameworks (now EAL) and the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) indicators. The project’s intention was to simplify the process of dual assessment and thus encourage teachers to assess both together, rather than separately, and thereby avoid the classroom becoming a crowded assessment zone.

The project was called LOVe: From Learning, to Outcomes, to Verification. From this last word, readers will realise that part of the motivation was the Skills for Education & Employment (SEE) program and its Key Performance indicator. This is something that only teachers can achieve, and it can weigh heavily when they are trying to turn their inspiration into good teaching and learning, as well as ensure full and sufficient outcomes.

The LOVe project turned out to be fun, along with the many hours of hard work. I was able to take materials from an existing task-bank of assessments and add ‘bits and bobs’ so that they met the criteria for both EAL Framework’s units and the ACSF. I was also able to spend time capturing fleeting ideas for good lessons and work them into properly written-up, re-usable lessons and assessment tools.

The set of seven sample assessment tools were based around a variety of topics, among them:

• The error-laced résumés, mentioned above, which focussed directly on nuances of English and job-seeking which our learners don’t always see or understand.
• The Glenroy Gorgeous Hair Salon that took an idea from our task-bank, based on job-rosters and written messages to which we added syntax and vocabulary such as scruffy, tidy, gorgeous and personal writing. (One young, Iraqi woman, with long auburn tresses wrote this gem of a sentence: Lindee is short hair, why I don’t know.)
• Back to the Doctor’s was based on making and changing appointments and focussed on intelligibility, and assessed speaking and listening as part of a longer lesson cycle.
In all cases, we tried to make teachers more confident that their good ideas could become, with some extra work on their part, an assessment tool that met compliance requirements and aligned with the learning outcomes for their learners.

**Up in Smoke**

One of the lesson and assessment tool samples was called, *Up in Smoke*. It was broad-ranging in that we related the idea to each macro-skill of the ACSF, as well as EAL Frameworks. This idea germinated from the huge number of cigarette butts on the ground at the NMIT Broadmeadows campus. My original lesson, *Let’s talk about rubbish and count the cigarette butts on the grounds of our campus*, left the students more than a little bemused. However, they humoured me by going outside on a cold day and staring at the ground to count the ciggies, at my request. That part of my lesson didn’t work very well, but later in the class we discussed the pros and cons of smoking and the learners themselves brought up the health issues. (Incidentally, smoking is still a legal activity and I tried very hard not to be judgemental and focus on costs and litter only.)

Discussion about prices and affordability was vigorous, even at low levels. Some thought there was nothing to discuss: ‘Every man in my country is smoker’ one student told me. Some humour was created when another student explained that he was going outside for a smoke mid-lesson. Many of our learners smoke, so talking about the cost of cigarettes was topical for them, something our verifiers like to see, ‘topicality & relevance’.

The topic lent itself to numeracy activities such as the following problem:

Joe decides to ‘give up’ smoking. His children, the television advertisements, even his English teacher, all tell him it’s not good for him. Usually he buys two packets a week, Holiday Kings 30 pack @ $24.40 and Longbeach 30 pack @ $20.45. If he doesn’t smoke for one week, how much money has he saved? If he doesn’t smoke for four weeks, how much has he saved?

As well as numeracy, we included starter questions for discussion and writing, and comparative questions on prices:

Did you notice things were more expensive here than in your country?

This was a topic the learners enjoyed and had a lot to say and write about. Material on websites such as Behind the News (http://www.abc.net.au/btn/story/s3502474.htm), which has an excellent graphic on rice prices across the world, can be incorporated into lesson activities. Information on rice and other grain prices can be found at IRRI Rice Science for a better world (www.irri.org). This site has some useful data on rice and other grains and photos which our learners may recognise from the rural areas of their home countries.

**Using incursions and exemplars**

An incursion from Hume City Council’s Environmental Health team who came and talked about litter, in particular cigarette butts, resulted in fantastic discussion, listening and learning exercises. The learners were very engaged, especially as they watched buckets of clean water turning brown, then black, as butts and other junk were thrown in.

We also used materials from the Not a Good Look website (http://www.notagoodlook.com.au) which is dedicated to the safe disposal of cigarette butts. This is a good site for low-level learners to access because the texts are short, while for higher level learners, text may have nuances.

This story is based on one written several years ago by a Bosnian learner. It is useful both as a reading prompt and a writing exemplar.
My last cigarette, by Gordana

My name is Gordana, I come from Bosnia. I came to live in Australia about 20 years ago. In Bosnia, when I was a teenager, I started smoking. My mother said it was bad for my health, but all my friends smoked. Cigarettes were cheap—less than $1.00 a packet, if I convert the cost.

The first day I arrived in Australia, I had travelled by plane for more than 30 hours. I was tired, confused and in shock. I really wanted to smoke. My sister-in-law picked us up from the airport. I asked her for a cigarette; it was wonderful, although I thought it was strange I had to wait until I was in the car park. She told me she had a big shock for me: cigarettes were nearly $5.00 a packet! See, it was long time back—$5.00! That was the last cigarette I smoked—the price was too much for me to bear.

Later, when another teacher trialled some of the re-written worksheets related to the activity of counting butts, she reported that her learners got really involved and had a great time as they walked around, scouting for litter. So, the moral of the story is to keep going. If an idea inspires you, don’t be put off if the first attempt is not successful. Almost every teacher who takes an idea into class thinks at some stage of the lesson: ‘Oh, I should have put an extra step in there. Never mind, next time, it’ll work better.’ An opportunity to work with tried materials and review the teaching and learning with colleagues, where practicable, is invaluable.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACSF Skill &amp; level</th>
<th>Performance Criteria</th>
<th>EAL Units</th>
<th>Element</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Litter</td>
<td>Estimating Reflecting Maths knowledge Prediction</td>
<td>VU20940</td>
<td>Recognise &amp; use basic mathematical symbols and processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral Communication</td>
<td>Asks simple questions Clarifies meaning</td>
<td>VU21466</td>
<td>Give and respond to a range of straightforward information and instructions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean Up Australia Day</td>
<td>Begins to understand key information</td>
<td>VU 21464</td>
<td>Examine current issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CHCVOL201B</td>
<td>Be an effective volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>VU21503</td>
<td>Listen and take notes for research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Reading</td>
<td>Identify main ideas</td>
<td>VU21459</td>
<td>Read and write simple instructional and informational texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a Good Look</td>
<td>Begin to use surrounding words to identify unknown words</td>
<td>VU21448</td>
<td>Read and write short, simple informational and instructional texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Learning</td>
<td>Evaluating information and services</td>
<td>VU 21354</td>
<td>Implement and review a project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of Living</td>
<td>Comprehends longer oral texts with limited complexity</td>
<td>VU21465</td>
<td>Engage in casual conversation and straightforward transactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Writing</td>
<td>Plan, draft, proof and review writing</td>
<td>VU21469</td>
<td>Read and write straightforward descriptive and narrative texts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Practical matters

Facilitating learning programs in the workplace is challenging. Staff are busy, under pressure to meet production deadlines and have limited time to leave their work area to participate in formal training sessions. But do we necessarily need them to leave their work areas to develop their LLN skills? Informal learning accounts for approximately 80% of adult learning. As we work, we naturally develop our reading, writing, numeracy, oral communication and learning strategies. Informal learning and language, literacy and numeracy skills have characteristics in common, in that they both:

- occur in authentic environments
- develop naturally as we complete daily tasks
- are skills that can develop anytime and anywhere
- are unique to each person.

Out of the training room

Learning in the workplace is different to learning at a TAFE or RTO. We can’t just take our best practices from classroom based learning and transfer these to the workplace. We have to think beyond the idea that people can only learn by being taught. To be effective, facilitators of LLN skills in the workplace require an understanding of the daily work tasks, procedures and routines, to contextualise and integrate the learning program with the objectives and needs of management and staff. Every workplace has its own unique literacy and numeracy. We can only become familiar with this literacy and numeracy if we leave the company training room and spend time with staff as they complete their daily work tasks. This will enable us to target the specific LLN skills required by staff to build their skills and confidence.

Teachable moments and training opportunities

Teachable moments are opportunities to engage in teaching and learning at the time that skills are required. They refer to unique moments when a particular interest or skill need arises that we can use to develop new skills. These moments in the workplace occur as we engage in our regular work activities. A teachable moment might be described as:

When the timing is right, the ability to learn a particular task will be possible. This is referred to as a teachable moment. It is important to keep in mind that unless the time is right, learning will not occur. Hence, it is important to repeat important points whenever possible so that when a student’s teachable moment occurs, s/he can benefit from the knowledge. (Havinghurst 1952, p.7)

Maximise the learning: look for opportunity

By Debbie Sperandio

What do informal learning and language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills have in common? How can teachers develop learning programs to capture more of incidental learning in the workplace? It makes sense to consider facilitating the development of LLN skills in the workplace by adopting a model that reflects informal learning principles.

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Facilitation strategies for learning in the workplace

These facilitation strategies will help guide learning and teachable moments in the workplace.

Strategy 1: Recognise the development of learning strategies through incidental learning

Incidental learning is learning that takes place without any intent to learn. It is a by-product of another activity. This is how many of the key skills in the learning domain of foundation skills develop.

Strategy 2: Identify LLN skills in job tasks

Language, literacy and numeracy skills are embedded in most tasks we complete in the workplace. Every workplace has its own unique requirements. A key teaching strategy is to identify the specific LLN skills that are needed for each work task. This will enable you to teach these specific skills as they are needed by workers on the job.

Strategy 3: Identify specific LLN skills development needs using a tool like the LLN Matrix

The LLN matrix can be used to report your facilitation activities on the job and can be adapted to suit any context and needs. The LLN matrix provides a systematic way of recording daily work tasks, embedded LLN skills in work tasks and ACSF levels.

Strategy 4: Plan and implement LLN skills development on the job

Look for ways that you can link your learning program into the wider workplace. Your program should not be at odds with the training that is occurring in the workplace.

Let’s be collaborators in learning

Here are some simple strategies to ensure LLN learning takes place in the workplace and encourages wider participation in training:

• becoming partners or collaborators with staff in the learning process
• working together to ensure training objectives are met
• allowing the learner autonomy and the empowerment to negotiate when they will participate in training; where the training will take place and the content and skills that will be covered
• constantly looking for and identifying teachable moments
• finding opportunities for incidental learning that allow us to facilitate the development of new LLN skills
• drawing out information from within the learner to raise their awareness
• questioning rather than telling; listening rather than giving answers and guiding our adult learners to correct information through further questioning and discussion
• engaging the learner in a discussion about his/her development needs
• encouraging the learner to be an active partner in the learning process through critical thinking and reflection.

Example 1

David is a process worker in a manufacturing business. David’s daily work tasks include having to read job sheets to identify job specifications, materials and quantities needed for the production run. David struggles to read the job sheets and is often seen at the job board in the office as he struggles to understand the orders.

Formal / training room based model

Lucy, the workplace LLN practitioner has arranged training sessions on reading and interpreting job orders for 10.00am in the training room.

David is unable to attend as he is too busy. He is often behind in his work as it takes him longer to interpret the orders.

David misses out on this learning opportunity.

Teachable moment / training opportunity

Lucy, the workplace LLN practitioner, leaves the training room and goes to the office so that she can be near the job board to assist staff to read the job sheets to complete their work orders.

David is taking a long time to read through the job sheet and so she offers her assistance (the training opportunity). She assists David to read the job sheet at the time that he requires the skill (the teachable moment).

David does not miss out on the learning opportunity.

Continued on page 35...
Numeracy matters

Getting started: building positive attitudes to numeracy

By Beth Marr

The way in which you get started with a new group of students is vital to the success of any adult numeracy class. Beth shares some of the thinking behind the Getting Started section of the Building Strength with Numeracy resource. These ideas are important in any setting and apply equally to beginning numeracy within a literacy or English language program, commencing to work with a group of apprentices or starting a new workplace training program.

Attitudes to maths

One of the important things to consider at the very start of a program is allowing everyone to express their attitudes towards learning mathematics. Why? Before you go on reading, take a moment to consider your own feelings about maths. Think back to your school days and what the maths classes were like. Did you feel good about them? Did you hate them? Were you happy with your mathematics learning or were you frustrated by it? Why? And finally, think about whether any of your past attitudes affect how you feel when asked to teach numeracy?

As a maths teacher I have become used to people’s reactions when they learn for the first time what I do for a living. The moment of shock or the step backwards when it came up at a social event was almost tangible—a bit like the recent ‘I am a banker’ ads on TV. Everyone has a reaction. In most cases that reaction is negative, sometimes defensive and sometimes downright aggressive. I don’t think teachers of other subjects experience this kind of reaction to their disciplines, nor the lingering scars that seem to have been inflicted by the subject and its teaching methods.

When reflecting in more depth on these reactions, I became aware that people were often talking about very different things: some were talking about calculus in the final year of school, whilst others referred to the beginning of algebra; others were talking about fractions or ‘learning their tables’ in primary school. Yet the strength of the reactions was the same, and no matter what level they were referring to, they all said ‘I can’t do maths’.

An aside on maths anxiety

A few decades back, in an effort to try and understand why women and minority students dropped maths as soon as they possibly could, several people undertook research into people’s attitudes to maths and the effects on future choices. They realised that many people suffered from what they termed maths anxiety. They also discovered that some of the results of this anxiety could be extremely debilitating, including nausea, headaches and even panic attacks. The most common result, however, is avoidance of mathematics or anything that involves engaging with it. For adult students, this means opting out of numeracy classes where possible, or, if compelled to attend, displaying more negative behaviours than in their language or literacy classes.

Not only are many adult students affected this way, but many primary teachers and literacy teachers also exhibit classic signs of maths anxiety, thus limiting their scope of teaching; primary teachers staying with the lower years and thus limiting their career progression and literacy teachers being afraid to tackle numeracy and excluding themselves from many teaching opportunities.

More recently, during professional development sessions, I have been surprised that although the phenomenon of maths anxiety has been well known in my circles for a long time, many teachers and trainers have not come across the idea before. For them it is a startling revelation. So I now realise that issues of maths anxiety and its effects need to be re-introduced into the conversation about numeracy teaching. It is also worth mentioning the more recently identified phenomenon of invisible numeracy and its unfortunate effects on numeracy learning and confidence.

Invisible numeracy

Workplace numeracy research has uncovered an interesting tendency by adults to overlook the maths that they use on a daily basis. Even though many of their work practices rely on their mathematical skills and knowledge, the maths they use is embedded in their work tasks and tends to be invisible to them. When asked if they use maths or numeracy at work they will say that they don’t, and furthermore, they are no good at maths and hated learning it at school. It seems that many adults have such negative
perceptions of themselves in relation to school maths that they view it as all of the things they cannot do, relegating all the skills and knowledge they use regularly to the category of common sense.

This corresponds so perfectly to the personal experiences I referred to above, that I think it is worth taking a moment to reflect on the question: What is ‘maths’ in your mind and what is it you just take for granted as something everyone knows? Think back—when you took those minutes to reflect on your own maths classes, which classes were you actually thinking about? Was it primary school, secondary or university? Does a particular topic or knowledge area stand out in your memory? Do you have one particular awful memory that stands out in your mind?

**Discussing attitudes with students**

These are the things that are important to find out about from your students before you start teaching them because attitudes play a huge role in future learning. Let learners have a chance to express their feelings and share them with each other. Many adults think they are alone in their fears towards maths. It really helps for them to understand that their problems are shared, that their anxieties are so common that there is a name for them, and what’s more, that maths anxiety is commonly caused by the methods used to teach the subject at school. It is not their fault.

You might also use the opportunity to let new students know that you want them to cooperate and help each other, rather than working alone. To talk and discuss their thinking will be a welcome change to being silent and competing with one another, as they probably did at school. Also use this time to assure them that numeracy is not about seemingly irrelevant, abstract processes, like maths at school often seemed to be, but about using maths for real, everyday aspects of their lives.

**Uncovering students’ strengths**

The other positive aspect that needs addressing early in a numeracy program is what students can do. It is our job to tease out students’ strengths without making their anxieties worse or adding to the ever present negative self-images. Testing is highly likely to accentuate feelings of inadequacy, so should be avoided at all costs in these early stages. The sentence starter: ‘I’m good at …’ is designed to steer students towards the positive aspects of their numeracy self-identity. It may take some work on your part, but it deserves significant attention. Similarly, the final prompt ‘I’d like to learn how to …’ is a way of finding out what is important to the students. This information should help you set some of the priorities for future sessions.

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Write whatever comes into your head to finish these sentences.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Maths makes me feel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Maths at school was</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I’m good at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I’ve never been able to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’d like to learn how to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Observation during early activities

Another way of getting to know students’ strengths without testing is to observe them during a selection of non-threatening initial activities. The Getting Started section contains several suitable activities. For example, Moving Numbers is a collection of number puzzles with moving pieces, ideal for working together in pairs and small groups, thus allowing you to observe learner’s basic number skills and glimpse their problem solving strategies.

Likewise, the game Multidigit is an activity that students usually enjoy, as it allows observation of students’ understanding of place value and addition skills. A particular favourite activity of mine for a first class is Number Patterns, another indicator of students’ existing number awareness and ability with arithmetic operations. I have a number of sheets of increasing complexity prepared, but I give them to students one at a time, progressing to the second only if they find the first easy. The advantage of this approach is that you can collect the sheets at the end of the class and use them to get an idea and record of students’ relative strengths.

If students seem at all threatened when confronted by the practice sheets alone, they should be encouraged to work in pairs until they relax. There are several Practice Sheets of number patterns in the resource. Others can be created by yourself, based on the particular skills you hope to observe in your new group of students.

If students need time to settle in as a group before tackling number-oriented tasks, then the Cooperative Logic activities, which focus on location, direction and shape, are ideal. These problem solving activities advocate a highly structured form of group-work and so are extremely useful for introducing students to the idea of working together. Wherever possible, I like to use some of these in my first session before doing the Number Patterns.

To sum up, the first few adult numeracy sessions should allow students to share feelings about learning maths and have some input into future class content. They should also encourage pair and small group interaction between students as they engage with non-textbook like activities. In addition, the session design should allow for informal observation of students’ number skills.

Beth Marr has worked in adult numeracy over several decades and developed Building Strength with Numeracy. She has conducted numeracy training in a range of sectors across Australia and is keen to continue to inspire a new generation of numeracy teachers.

Integrating literacy and numeracy

By Lidia Interlandi and Chris Tully

Why is it important to integrate literacy and numeracy? What are some of the contexts for integration, while also adjusting materials to a range of levels? A workshop with CGEA teachers explored some solutions to these questions.

A professional development session was conducted by Lidia Interlandi and Chris Tully for the Curriculum Maintenance Manager (CMM) for Service Industries: General Studies and Further Education, to explore integrating literacy and numeracy at different levels. At the start of the workshop, the audience of mostly CGEA teachers, were asked to identify some of the reasons for integrating literacy and numeracy. They came up with a list that included:

- makes sense to the students
- difficult to separate out the literacy from the numeracy and vice versa
- numeracy and literacy are integrated in real life
- uses a holistic approach to teaching
- reinforces concepts
- reduces the number of assessments.

Discussion followed around the variety of ways to integrate literacy and numeracy and approaches that have proved successful. Contexts for an integrated approach included:

- a theme such as My Community
- planning and implementing an excursion
- a project such as Countries
- a text or article from a newspaper, magazine, the internet or television
- student interest or learning need
- current news or events of high interest to students.

Designing tasks

The following tasks were used as examples of integrating numeracy and literacy using a combination of a theme, excursion and student interest. The sessions were planned as separate numeracy and literacy classes using the same
Both the literacy and numeracy teachers worked together to plan the content and delivery for the class. The first task integrated digital literacy and required the students to answer questions using a simple website. It is designed for the Course in Initial General Education for Adults.

The literacy units were:
- VU21283 Engage with short simple texts for personal purposes
- VU21284 Engage with short simple texts for learning purposes
- VU21286 Engage with short simple texts to participate in the community

The numeracy unit was:
- VU21292 Recognise, give and follow simple and familiar oral directions

The task covered all elements of each unit, but it is important to note that this may not always be the case. There is often a temptation to add to a task so that more elements from the unit or other units of numeracy can be covered. Doing this can often change the task from being a real task that students can engage with, to a contrived task that loses its relevance.

The students were given the link to the Hume Mobile Library website and the timetable (Figure 1) to refer to when completing the worksheet (Figure 2). This activity was for students living in the Broadmeadows area. It could easily be modified to use a different council location so that the information is familiar and relevant. The class work was followed with an excursion to the local library.

Using maps
The Hume Mobile Library website was used to access maps of the local area to complete a range of tasks related to the unit:
- VU21292 Recognise, give and follow simple and familiar oral directions.
  Recognise and follow simple and familiar oral directions in highly familiar situations.
- 1.1 Identify and use simple concepts of position and location to identify an explicit and relevant location.
Recognise and give simple and familiar oral directions in highly familiar situations.

- 2.1 Describe orally the relative location of two or more objects using *highly familiar, informal language of position*.

**Instructions:**

Look at the maps from the Hume Council website.

Use the maps to answer the questions below:

Select from the words below to complete the following sentences:

- next to
- between
- to the left of
- beside
- behind
- to the right of
- on the corner of
- in front of

Dallas is …… Westmeadows.

Greenvale is …… of Campbellfield.

Coolaroo is …… Meadow Heights and Campbellfield.

Gladstone Park is …… Jacana.

- 1.2 Read and use *simple diagrams and maps of highly familiar locations* to identify an explicit and relevant location.

Complete the following on the map of Hume:

- Draw a circle around the name of the suburb you live in.
- Draw a circle around Broadmeadows Station and Hume Global Learning Centre.

- 2.2 Use simple, highly familiar, informal language of position to give oral directions in a *highly familiar situation*.

Give directions to the person next to you on how to get from Broadmeadows Station to the Hume Global Learning Centre. (We will be following this route on our excursion)

Tell the person about any features (parks, shops, schools) and where they are located (next to, behind, to the left of, on the corner) as you walk.

You could start your sentences with:

- Walk down ……
- You can see …… on your right.
- Turn ……

- 1.3 Follow simple *highly familiar oral directions* for moving between known locations.

Listen to the directions given by the person next to you. Trace their path on the map.

The students found these activities engaging and valuable in finding out more about their local area. It was important for the teachers to talk about the literacy and numeracy skills they were using and relate to how they use these same skills in real life situations.

**References**


Discover Your City Map Broadmeadows and Craigieburn. pdf (1541.73 kb)

Lidia Interlandi is currently working as coordinator of CGEA at Kangan institute in the Centre for Foundation and Language Skills department and has over twenty years’ experience teaching and developing resources.

Chris Tully is currently the Learning Skills Coordinator at NMIT in the Learning Skills and Assessment Unit.
This second instalment of Open Forum for 2014 comes to you from China. I’m in Deyang, a small city by local standards, with a population of close to 4 million people. It is about an hour up the road from Chengdu, the capital city of Sichuan province.

I’m teaching English at the Sichuan College of Architectural Technology, delivering the Certificate of English for Business and Global Communication. This is just one component of the Diploma of Building and Construction, which my students are undertaking through Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (NMIT). I have four classes, each with between 45 and 48 students, ranging in age from 19 to 22 years. Of these 185 students, just three are female. I have been here for seven weeks and will soon be heading back to Melbourne.

In the previous edition of Fine Print, I wrote about the value of reflection, taking time to consider the many critical incidents that occur as the processes of teaching and learning unfold, so as to inform, shift and guide our teaching practice. Over the past seven weeks I’ve endeavoured to do just that—reflect on the language teaching and learning with which I have been engaged, both within the classroom, and in the world beyond the formal learning environment. I’d like to share some of that thinking with you.

My local neighbourhood in Deyang is alive with colour, movement and bold neon signs. There is the occasional English word, but by and large, I feel completely illiterate when I am heading to the local park, restaurants, supermarket, hairdresser, fruit and vegetable market, crossing the road or walking through the College campus. I’ve been to China before, so this feeling is not new. Nevertheless, I’ve still been struck by how ill-informed I feel through this sense of being disconnected from the language in my environment.

Ironically, on my first day of teaching, I was struck by the amount of English in my classroom. I walked in to meet the group of young men and quickly noticed that well over half of them had English slogans blazing across their t-shirts. Suddenly I was reading plenty of English, Life is Beautiful, Just Do it, Follow your Dreams, on and on the aphorisms went. Most of the students had no idea what their bodies were saying to me. Here were the signs and symbols of English, my native language, used exclusively for their aesthetic and cultural value.

Finding optimal conditions to enhance and nourish language learning has been on my mind, as I adjust to living and working here. My Mandarin language skills are very poor, which was highlighted to me just after I arrived. On my second day, when I jumped into a taxi after sharing dinner with a local teacher, I was put in the position of giving directions to the driver. My colleague had given me instructions earlier in the night. I’d practised it a few times in the restaurant, but suddenly the pressure of having to recall it, to say it out aloud to a stranger, was terrifying. Repeating the words in the restaurant without real context was one thing, but having to be understood, in order to get to where I needed to be, was something entirely different.

I have had regular reminders as to the importance of relevant and engaging content in the classroom. Complex course material about safe lifting practices suddenly made more sense when my students practised how to say knees, and legs, and back, and learned what bending actually looked like. They enthusiastically copied down specific vocabulary about building, construction and design. It’s been no surprise that lessons about how to send text
messages in English, and singing along with the lyrics to American pop songs have also proven very popular.

When the need for the language arises, the learning comes easier. This has been reinforced by my experience of ensuring I had a cup of coffee each morning. I knew there was a gas stove in my apartment, so I’d brought an espresso pot and enough coffee to last for two months. However, when I arrived I discovered the pot was too small to rest safely on the existing trivet. I panicked as I knew that picking up a latte on the way to work was simply not part of Chinese culture! I grabbed my phrase book, the coffee pot and headed to the local general store in search of a metal pot holder on which to rest my precious coffee pot. A very boisterous pantomine ensued with me making gurgling noises like coffee rising in the pot, grabbing at words such as water and boiling and coffee. I showed them a photo of the existing trivet and mimed the fact that my pot was too small to rest it on. What struck me most during this crazy performance was the degree of kindness and assistance with which my request was met. Most of the staff at the store and several customers were furiously speaking in Mandarin, attempting to solve my problem. We all wanted the communication to work. Eventually, a woman shopper with a basket full of groceries, ran to the back of the shop and returned with the perfect sized metal pot holder. There was a round of spontaneous applause. Back at my apartment, that first cup of coffee sure tasted good!

Then of course, the day to day teaching and the many thoughts and questions surrounding my teaching practice, have filled my mind, both during classes, and after I’ve finished my long teaching day. Why didn’t that work? How can I get students more involved? How can I re-word those questions? How do I vary the pace? Slow it down or speed it up? For every question, I’ve come up with some sort of solution. I then try it out, which inevitably precipitates a whole new set of questions.

After seven weeks, I recognise the pattern, the continuing cycle of action, reflection, revised action, and then back to reflection. But no doubt it has also been about persistence and asking myself the questions in the first place. Continuing to find ways to understand and to examine what happens in the classroom have kept me engaged in learning. It’s also about remembering that with every group, and with every different context, despite the same content being covered, the teaching changes. Of course there are other variables that have nothing to do with me. The time of day, the day of the week, the existing dynamics between students, their level of interest in English, all have some impact on the learning. While I have a significant role in this narrative, I know I am just one player.

The success that does take place, as is the case with any meaningful endeavour, is informed and enhanced by the relationships that exist. The longer I have been here, the more of those 185 names I have learned. The more backstories I have heard, and the more personal stories I have shared, have all influenced the power and potency of the teaching and learning experiences.

The final comment I would like to make centres on a chance encounter I had with Harry, with one of my students. As I was walking home after a particularly long day, a cacophony of negative rumblings was circling in my head. I was frustrated with the outcome of my afternoon lessons, and no doubt I was also feeling just plain tired. Harry bailed me up and was on for a chat. He wanted to tell me about his plans for the future, his intention to travel to Australia and his dreams of constructing grand buildings and bridges. All at once he looked at me and said, ‘I’m very glad I’m studying English. It will be so useful for me in my future. I want to do so many things’. There was a new lightness in my step as I continued on my way.
home. I am sure I will remember Harry and my time here and the learning that we have shared.

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

From LLN to Foundation Skills forum
By Sandra Wolfe and Jan Hagston

In March 2014, VALBEC partnered with Adult Learning Australia (ALA) to offer a half-day forum to look at the journey from LLN to Foundation Skills and beyond. The forum, attended by 60 adult educators, explored different perspectives on national policy designed to improve adult literacy and numeracy. It also looked at the relationship between the Foundation Skills strategy, workforce participation, employability and the impact of low literacy on those outside the mainstream economy.

After the opening presentation by Allie Clemans, participants heard a number of short presentations:
• Alec Wickerson from the Federal Department of Industry provided an overview of the Foundation Skills Strategy
• Robert Bluer, Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA), spoke about the Foundations Skills Training Package
• Kate Perkins, Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), gave a snapshot of the Core Skills for Work (CSfW)
• Dave Tout, ACER, provided a glimpse of what the Foundation Skills Assessment Tool (FSAT) will cover and look like.

Following the presentations, participants formed small groups and were given the opportunity to reflect and briefly discuss these developments. Using a Y chart to aid discussion, each group considered the impact and benefits of four emerging areas of the Foundation Skills Strategy and the direction, moving forward, they would like to see developments take in the future.

Discussion summary
What follows are some of the comments recorded from the discussion groups:

Foundation Skills Strategy
Impact: aspirational but uptake difficult; need to up

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Foundation Skills Strategy
Impact: aspirational but uptake difficult; need to up

skill numeracy teachers; PIACC data will be used to look at impact; marries foundation skills & VET; raises national awareness -addressing targets; focussed on high need areas and work.

Benefits: acknowledges the need for improvement in LLN; overarching for practitioners and learners; improved support for learners; more equitable for learners; enrichment of VET.

Moving forward: long term commitment to increasing LLN; can it be revised? will it impact on teaching in schools? are targets realistic? broader knowledge by general public needed.

Foundations Skills Training Package
Impact: awareness increasing; issues around implementation; value adding LLN to VET delivery; new discourse; idealistic; funding changes may impact on uptake.

Benefits: good resources for teachers; flexible—can cluster units; good examples; links LLN to work skills; tailored to VET sector; addresses problems teachers face; complementary to workplace delivery.

Moving Forward: funding needs to improve; still issues finding support for implementation; PD needed for VET trainers to improve their LLN teaching; requires buy in from teachers; need more time for data to accumulate.

Core Skills for Work
Impact: provides greater awareness of students’ strengths and weaknesses; teachers and trainers need up-skilling; problematic; subjective; better articulation required; skills through work only.

Benefits: clear descriptions; a better framework;
Moving forward: professional development needed; identify gaps; need time for reflection and discussion to plan full adoption.

Foundation Skills Assessment Tool (FSAT)

**Impact:** assists the validation process; tool could be used in the pre-training review; reduces teacher assessment time; may be too narrow in scope.

**Benefits:** consistent LLN assessment; free; ability to tune in to the student’s level; incorporates digital literacy; interactive; may be applicable to the SEE program; greater consistency.

Moving forward: responding to real need; teachers need training; continue to build tasks; testing needed; can it be customised? how are results communicated?

Moving forward

The workshop discussions revealed that overall, practitioners were positive about the direction of changes through the National Foundation Skills Strategy, and the Foundation Skill Training Package (FSK). Although many of the TAFEs and larger RTOs delivering vocational training have already accessed training or professional development since the implementation of the Foundation Skills Training package, the uptake and implementation of this package into smaller RTOs, and in particular ACE organisations, remains largely unknown and possibly cost prohibitive. However, most participants could see the benefits that the FSK will bring by its complementary nature to VET qualifications and delivery in the workplace.

Participants indicated that the Core Skills for Work (CSfW) will provide teachers, educators and employment agencies with a good picture of a learner’s strengths and weaknesses, guiding coordinators to make informed decisions for suitability and course placement. However, as this framework is relatively new to the market, participants felt that more professional development and information sessions are needed to fully realise its potential. Similarly, participants were pleased to have more information regarding the FSAT, agreeing that as it is intended to be cost effective, this will offer a uniform assessment opportunity to providers who may not have adequate resources.

The ongoing issue of the need for professional development opportunities was evident for the successful rollout of each new initiative. The call for communication channels to be widely accessible, together with access to up to date information was also clear from the discussions. We hope these concerns are taken on board and addressed in the development of the National Foundation Skills strategy into the future, so that all practitioners can make informed and constructive contributions to the discussion.

Sandra Wolfe is the Education Program Leader (Tertiary Options) at CAE College, Centre for Adult Education and VALBEC co-president. Jan Hagston is a consultant with extensive experience in adult and adolescent literacy and until recently a member of the VALBEC committee.

Professional conversations

*By Sally Thompson*

One of the challenges of providing professional development for teachers is striking a balance between *what is* and *what could be*. A lot of professional development events and conferences feature researchers, consultants or commentators talking about an idealised best practice. In the current policy and funding environment, practitioners are often constrained in accessing the support they require to achieve these ideals. This can be frustrating, particularly for new practitioners who are looking for ideas to work effectively within the current parameters of funding and compliance requirements.

Alternatively, professional development activity focused entirely on the possible, on actions that can be implemented now, may be removed from what the overwhelming body of research tells us about how adults develop their language, literacy and numeracy skills. Such activities may be helpful but can also be demotivating for those who have higher aspirations for their professional practice.

I believe that professional bodies have an obligation to support their members with their day-to-day professional work but that they also have an advocacy role. Adult Learn-
ing Australia (ALA) has an obligation to act on behalf of learners, to ensure that they are not simply passive recipients of poorly devised, centrally proscribed educational services. Our aim is to facilitate professional conversations about what is possible and what is ideal whenever we can, in a respectful way, recognizing that there are limitations on all of our work. VALBEC is an organization that shares these ideals, so we were very pleased to partner with them on the From LLN to Foundation Skills forum.

As the name of the event indicates, it was based on a recognition that the dominant policy narrative only makes room for language, literacy and numeracy where it provides a foundation for workplace skills for those already in the labour market. As a field, we are committed to providing workers and potential workers with these important foundational skills. However, the tradition that most of us come from, and the aspiration most of us share, is for language, literacy and numeracy education to be available to all Australians for a range of work, personal, social and civic purposes.

Seeing the bigger picture

Allie Clemans’ opening presentation reminded us that Australia is fairly unique in the Asia South Pacific region in its utilitarian approach to learning and work. While policy support for literacy learning for personal development, civic and social purposes has had few advocates in Australia, (or arguably in the US and Canada), the dominant view of adult education in the region is that literacy is essential for personal development, civic participation and social cohesion.

While Clemans quoted Japanese researchers on the topic, a similar policy perspective can be found in China, where most major cities have plans to become learning cities and in South Korea, where learning for life has strong philosophical support. New Zealand also has a long-standing humanistic approach to adult education focused on learning for democracy, citizenship and personal development. While it is true that in the 1980’s and 1990’s New Zealand, like Australia, saw an increased emphasis in public policy on learning for business and economic imperatives and on standardised assessment. However, these reforms have generated a lot of popular criticism and there is some evidence of a return to a more inclusive, holistic approach to literacy and learning. The large, articulate and politically effective Maori and Pacific Islander communities in New Zealand have been at the forefront of the demand for intergenerational, locally determined and culturally appropriate English language, literacy and numeracy education. This is also the case for Maori and Pacifica language education.

In addition to the reminder of the bigger picture, the forum included a range of speakers focused on various aspects of current Foundation Skills policy and initiatives. I think that participants valued hearing about all of these important initiatives together in one place, without having to attend different professional development sessions on each one.

Interpreting PIAAC

The final session of the day was a panel featuring Dave Tout from ACER, Barry Golding from ALA, Anthony Shomos from the Productivity Commission and Linno Rhodes from VALBEC. The panel session provided an opportunity to dissect the recent Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) findings from a range of perspectives. PIAAC, like most major surveys, seems to elicit different interpretations depending on who is assessing it. I have been interested to hear a number of public presentations on PIAAC, some from very senior policy makers, suggesting that Australia has done very well in the survey and needn’t worry. My response to these types of observations, is that if it were the speaker’s kid, or sibling or mother entering the globalised workplace with less than level three on the PIAAC scale, they might feel a stronger sense of urgency for action.

Not surprisingly, the panellists were concerned about some of the messages emerging from PIAAC, including the low scores in numeracy, and the very low levels of both literacy and numeracy found amongst older Australians. It was also interesting to hear from the Productivity Commission about how they make recommendations about the most appropriate points at which to intervene, from a policy point of view.

Continuing the conversation

Finally, it was terrific to have a representative from the Foundation Skills Branch of the Department of Industry taking part in the day and welcoming input from participants into the ongoing policy process at the Commonwealth level. Australian adult education seems to be Continued on page 37 ...
Foreign Correspondent

*E Mau Ana Ka Mo’olelo — our narratives endure*

By Ros Bauer

As foreign correspondent, I will be focusing on two aspects of my work this year; the sponsorship project that enabled Soraya Daniel to attend the World Indigenous Peoples Conference in Education (WIPCE) and a summary of our conference presentations and observations.

Introduction

I have been living and working in Yuendumu, a remote Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory for the past three years. When I received the Excellence in Adult Language Literacy Practice Award in November 2013, I made a professional commitment to myself that I would put forward a proposal to present at the World Indigenous Peoples Conference in Education (WIPCE). The WIPCE conference is held every three years and in May 2014, it was hosted by Kapi’olani College, in Honolulu on the Island of Oahu. The conference theme was *E Mau Ana Ka Mo’olelo* — our narratives endure.

During my time working in Yuendumu, I have formed collegial and personal relationships with Soraya Daniel, case manager for the Remote Jobs Community Program in Yuendumu; and Isabel Osuna-Gatty, from the Australian Network of Team Services (AUNTS). Together we worked on the conference presentations and raising the funds to travel to Oahu.

Soraya Daniel is from Bamaga in the Torres Strait Islands and is a Meriam woman of Darnley Island. Whilst she was still a student, Soraya participated in the Indigenous Youth Parliament. Early in her working career she contested the local council elections. She has previously worked in service industries but feels her true vocation lies in the community services industry, working with and supporting her people. She has an inherent strength and deep abiding commitment to the work she is doing. Her capacity to realise her aspirations in becoming a role model to other young women, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, is self-evident.

At the ACAL conference in Melbourne ten years ago, I attended a session facilitated by Leanne King Coordinator of the Aboriginal Community Education program in the Bachelor of Education in Adult Education course at University of Technology Sydney (UTS). She shared the presentation with a group of women from the Torres Strait who were undertaking Language Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) studies. I recall the first woman who spoke explained that she had nine children, spoke English as her fourth language and was in the final year of her degree. Soraya’s mother was greeted with robust applause. If you bore witness to Margie Daniel Cowley’s strength in that presentation in 2004, then you can imagine a younger version of Margie in her talented and capable daughter.

**Soraya’s sponsorship project**

When I mentioned to Soraya my intentions to attend WIPCE, she was emphatic that she would like to attend also but financial constraints would impede this reality. I suggested to Soraya that we could work together to investigate possible sources of funding. However, despite many phone calls and emails, the likelihood of securing funding from philanthropic or government sources looked increasingly dim.

One of the best pieces of business advice I have received from LinkedIn is to source future work opportunities from my existing network. I have found this to be especially true in my journey as a sole trader. I realised this could be applied to a fund raising venture, whereby people who already knew and trusted me, either by first-hand knowledge or secondary sources, would have confidence in my proposal. I began by circulating a series of appeal emails to my network colleagues, accompanied by short video messages from Soraya.

The Australian Network of Team Services (AUNTS), a newly established social enterprise committed to community capacity building, receipted donations, held all monies and also circulated the appeal through their respective networks. The appeal was given an *up front* boost from five main sources: Centrecorp (Alice Springs), Central Desert Shire (Yuendumu), the Human Services Training Advisory Council (Darwin), ACAL and VALBEC. This
was critical because after these initial pledges were made, there was a steady trickle of pledges from other colleagues who could see the progress of the appeal through the email updates. The other benefit of partnering with AUNTS was the connections they and Isobel Osuna-Gatty have, that enabled the appeal to reach a wider audience. Most of the donations in this case were from men, who recognised the value of the project. They had trust in Isabel’s commitment to the appeal and acknowledged the significance for Soraya, as a young Indigenous woman.

During the six months of fund raising, I really got a sense of my women friends and colleagues who just got it. Maybe they had experienced some sort of disadvantage themselves, or had met Soraya and could see her potential as a leader. Certainly a sense of social justice or feminist ideology, were motivating factors for an immediate belief in the endeavor. As well as the sources previously mentioned, there were a number of individuals who demonstrated their confidence in the project through their generous financial support.

A comprehensive feature article on Soraya, providing inspiration for other young people on leadership, governance and work in local government will appear on the Northern Territory (NT) Human Services Training Advisory Council website and in EQUIPD magazine for young people undertaking Year 10 career planning in 2015. Soraya will share some of her experiences:

Attending the WIPCE 2014 in Honolulu, has been a very rewarding opportunity that I believe will assist me through my career. I have learnt that many of the other Indigenous nations such as the Dakota First Nation people and the traditional knowledge holders from the Native American Academy who attended the conference have redefined their universities and educational schooling system to suit their Indigenous people in regards to language and literacy. (Soraya Daniel)

Our presentation and workshop
I have worked closely with Isabel Osuna-Gatty since she brokered the Workplace English Language Literacy (WELL) funds for the first project I worked on in Yuendumu. She was instrumental in securing subsequent funds for the Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation and has visited Yuendumu on several occasions to volunteer her services.

Isabel’s strong cultural links with her own Venezuelan Indigenous heritage are motivating factors for her commitment to Indigenous community service organisations. Isabel’s sense of identity shaped the topic of the first conference presentation: Cross-cultural bridge building or the Psychology of Collaborative Partnerships – from the plains to the desert across the sea. The presentation described collaborative partnerships and how indigenous knowledge and cultural dynamics can help bridge communication in different cultures.

Isabel had the lead role, outlining some of the adult LLN projects she has been involved in with Indigenous community organisations across Australia. I provided a supporting case study based on a small workplace literacy project in remote Yuendumu that led to the establishment of an adult learning centre under the auspices of the Warlpiri patu Kurullangu Jaru College. Set in Warlpiri country in the Tanami desert of Central Australia, the initiative was driven by local Warlpiri women who recognised the link between engagement, education and economic independence. The establishment of the adult learning centre created a whole of community learning focus with job opportunities for the women to work as tutors and support other Warlpiri people in community, accredited vocational training and volunteer experiences for aspiring literacy teachers. By creating learning spaces that weave through culture and language, and embedded in the social world, the learning centre experienced exponential growth, with the women at the heart of its governance.

WIPCE was a fantastic opportunity to showcase how literacy projects can create change in all types of communities. There is a strong relationship between literacy and general wellbeing and anecdotal evidence suggests an improvement in a participant’s confidence as their literacy develops. Using the Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation as a case study we were able to provide participants with tools on how to create collaborative and innovative partnerships and demonstrated how advocacy, perseverance and determination can transform a community. (Isabel Osuna Gatty)

The first presentation set the background to the second presentation, Aha Wahine Kuhinapapa (women’s business), exploring the synergy in working relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women. The original plan was to co-present with one of the young Warlpiri women from Yuendumu, but unfortunately family commitments prevented her attendance, so I invited Soraya to co-present with me. This workshop had its genesis earlier in the year...
when I participated in a two day learning forum with Australian National University (ANU) researchers Inge Kral and Jerry Schwab. Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) hosted this forum as part of the ethnographic research Inge and Jerry have been doing in remote communities on the emergent literacy practices of young people creating learning spaces outside the traditional domain.

The coordinators from each of the BIITE learning centres were challenged to map, draw, explain or diagrammatise how we perceived the learning was evolving in our respective communities. I worked on this task with Georgie Stewart from the Central Lands Council and our concept map worked from an inner circle in which the Yapa (Warlpiri women) and Kartiya (non-Indigenous woman) worked together ‘two-way’. We felt that learners demonstrated incremental levels of engagement based on identifiable characteristics, working through what we described as the emotional, social, intellectual and aspirational levels of engagement.

Since that time, I have been working on a paper with Dr Samantha Disbray from Charles Darwin University for the Journal of Culture and Social Interaction, on the learning attributes of this model, loosely based on the design principles proposed by Kral & Schwab (2012). However, I have been increasingly drawn to the heart of the matter: the relationship between the Yapa and Kartiya women as central to the learning centre or learning space development, and subsequently to the literacy practices of the learner. I can only reflect on my own personal experiences working in remote communities. However, I believed that this was an idea worth exploring in a workshop format that provided an opportunity to gather ideas, drawing on their own experiences, from other Indigenous and non-Indigenous women working in cross-cultural contexts.

In an economy where human capital is increasingly measured against Kartiya (white fella) constructs, Aha Wahine Kuhinapapa celebrated the women’s journey and resilience and illustrated how collaboration happened in meaningful and respectful ways between Kartiya and Yapa (Indigenous) women. The purpose was to identify the strengths that engender two way working partnerships between women of different cultures to support others on similar trajectories in the adult learning and leadership space.

To ensure the voices of Warlpiri women were heard, I recorded a series of interviews across disparate age groups to show at the presentation, along with some interviews from non-Indigenous women, who have worked extensively in community and have credibility and respect among the Warlpiri people. (These will be available on the VALBEC site subject to permission.)

On reflection, my attempts as a community researcher for the workshop were much more complex than I anticipated. Guenther and Falk (2007) (cited in Guenther, Osborne, Arnott, McRae-William, Disbray, 2014) caution of the tensions in research between the objective outsider and the involved insider. Subsequently, when I asked local women focus questions for the workshop video, they really wanted to provide me with what they considered to be the kindest answer. The focus seemed to shift from relationships between women, to include advice for non-Indigenous women coming into community to work. This was certainly a more logical concept for the women and provided real value in the messages of culturally and socially appropriate behavior, regardless of the initial intention.

Unfortunately, this workshop had a late afternoon time slot on the last day of the conference, which did not auger well for participant numbers. Despite the schedule, about 15 brave souls attended. After a week of very intense conferencing it was a challenge to transform the energy in the room. On a positive note, the experience affirmed for Soraya her capabilities and definitely provided her with the confidence to speak up at future forums.

I think it went alright. I was grateful people were there and we did have some interaction. In my previous experiences, I have noticed that there are always different responses from Indigenous people from the city compared to Indigenous people from the bush. This was also what I observed during this session.

(Soraya Daniel)

Conference highlights

Space does not allow me to provide summaries of all of the presentations I attended but I cannot finish without acknowledging Linda Burnie MP, in her presentation entitled The Politics of Aboriginal Education. She was very dynamic, capturing the audience with her passion and energy, premised by her own guiding principles of truth, compassion and pragmatism. She offered the following tips and strategies, equally applicable for the Indigenous and non-Indigenous audience, which you might find of value in the current funding environment:

• join women’s groups and education groups
• make yourself known to your federal member – develop a personal relationship
• tell your member what he or she should be thinking about for their electorate
• if you have a local idea or issue, take it to your member with a solution – you can influence policy platform this way
• prepare a reasonable budget to go with your proposal
• participate in parliamentary inquiries
• use media for positive politics for your MP.

In summary, there was an enormous range of sessions at the conference around themes of health, early childhood, higher education, culture, politics, lifelong learning, language, research, funding politics, and literacy, of course. Further information can be found on the WIPCE website. I encourage people to consider attending the 2017 conference in Toronto.

Professionally, I found enormous value in learning about the strengths of other Indigenous nations, particularly with the emphasis on language revitalisation and bi-lingual education. From a personal perspective, it was incredibly rewarding to see Soraya’s confidence and total absorption in the conference proceedings. Her enthusiasm for how she could apply some of the learning to her current context and her connection with other Indigenous people from around the globe will continue to grow.

References
http://www.hstac.nt.gov.au

Ros Bauer is the Parent & Community Engagement coordinator at Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation.

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New WELL resources
In August 2013, I received resource development funding under the WELL (Workplace English Language and Literacy) Program to develop a suite of resources about informal learning and LLN skills in work based learning (WELLRES13044). The suite of resources includes a DVD, Facilitator Guide, LLN Matrix and Learner Guide. It provides a learning framework, facilitation strategies and practical hints about how to overcome some of the challenges we face in facilitating learning in the workplace.

The aim of the suite of resources is to:
• challenge the way we think about teaching and learning in the workplace
• review and reflect on why we take the approaches we take
• consider if there are alternative ways to effectively facilitate learning in the workplace.

Due for completion and release in October 2014, the resources will be available for free. However, the funding only allows for a limited production run of the DVD. The LLN Matrix is included in the suite of resources and can be downloaded for use. The DVD demonstrates how to use the LLN Matrix and the facilitator and learner guides provide detailed information about the LLN Matrix.

If you would like to receive a copy of the DVD, please contact: Debbie Sperandio info@educationlearningcareer.com.au

All resources will be available as a free download at www.educationlearningcareer.com.au

References

Debbie Sperandio has successfully facilitated LLN (WELL) programs in a range of industries and runs a small education consultancy specialising in LLN skills in the workplace and professional development for the VET Sector.
Beside the Whiteboard

Making learning real
An interview with Susie Sullivan by Lynne Matheson

It is often middle of the night inspiration that Susie uses for the design of learning activities for her students in the Introductory and Certificate I levels of the Certificates General Education for Adults (CGEA) program at the Gordon. Her life experiences and knowledge of the local region enable her to contextualize their learning.

In remnant winter sunshine, Susie Sullivan and I sat outside at the appropriately named 63 degrees café in Geelong. We spent a couple of hours talking about her numeracy teaching and the changes in the sector she has observed over time.

How did you become an adult literacy and numeracy teacher?
I have been a numeracy teacher for about twelve years and in the role of coordinator of General Education programs at the Gordon for just on four years. I began my career as a primary school teacher, then moved into special education schools. After completing my Graduate Certificate in Special Education, I worked with adults in programs that focussed on literacy and life skills such as travel training. This work illuminated for me the way people utilise skills in multiple ways in everyday situations. My students were able to navigate around Geelong using complex timetables and maps but had not recognised these literacy and numeracy skills that they used each day.

How do you ensure your teaching relates to learners’ needs and real life contexts?
My teaching is grounded in real life experiences, often from my own life, with activities such as menu planning, checking grocery catalogues and online shopping sites to compare prices and plan shopping lists. Being able to budget is critical, as the majority of my students are on Centrelink benefits or concession cards. Through discussion of issues and financial calculations, I hope that I help them to make better choices about how they live and how they spend their money.

Teaching students how to expand out their costs—daily, weekly, monthly, yearly, demonstrates for them the long term impact of waste. Students become motivated by the immediate impact of changing habits and buying patterns. One student announced recently that she had given up smoking, once she worked out the long term costs. Through providing a model, I had prompted her to make the decision to channel the money saved into things she really wanted. Real life examples give students practice in balancing consumption and sustainability.

Dave Tout’s presentation at the recent VALBEC conference inspired me to set up a class activity looking at population density and quality of living indicators for neighbouring countries. I chose to have the whole group examine the figures on a large sheet on the whiteboard and engage in categorising, largest to smallest, highest to lowest. At the same time, I was challenging them to think differently about these countries in relation to their own lifestyles. There was much lively discussion and broadening of perceptions as a result.

I am excited by the flexibility of using news events as starting points for a range of literacy and numeracy activities and skill building. Unable to sleep one night, I heard a 3am news item about sinkholes in the US. This inspired me to plan a class on volume that challenged students to think about what had happened and the numeracy skills they could explore. It was a pretty amazing context for teaching concepts of volume.

What are some of the strategies you use with your students?
The General Education program I work in has students from quite diverse backgrounds with varying learning and health issues, and ranging in age from 17 to 87 years. I encourage them to build relationships and take responsibility for their learning, and that of others. Building a strong and supportive community leads to better continuity and cohesion. For many of our students, the classes are their main social contact in the week. It is not just the study allowance that keeps them attending.

In my role as coordinator, I meet every student when they undertake an initial assessment. Each week, I make a point of going around to classes and speaking with students and teachers to maintain a strong connection and provide visible support. When students ask why things have changed, I sometimes find it hard to explain the
changing rules that determine the curriculum and what students can study. Conversations with colleagues play an important part in my work to build resilience in an environment of uncertainty.

Part of my role is to provide LLN support to plumbing teachers. This has its challenges, however, I know that the students recognise the importance of developing their literacy and numeracy skills. Many of the trade students have the goal of owning their own business one day. I reinforce the critical importance of moving beyond bare minimum skills and trying to see each interaction from a customer perspective.

Framing numeracy skills in a real context is a way of overcoming some of the negative attitudes they may have developed in school. I aim to build on their existing expertise and give them experiences of success. Working with the trade teachers, I encourage and model different approaches to questioning and feedback. I have seen a shift in their teaching in that they are now more concerned with checking for understanding and giving positive feedback to the students.

I was alarmed by the PIAAC data that highlighted the decline in numeracy skills across the population, and in particular for women. In a tough labour market, low numeracy skills will limit career choices and earning power for women, unless something is done to change the way maths is taught in schools. This is of concern, especially with industry closures in the Geelong region.

What are your thoughts on working with the CGEA?
I have seen changes to the CGEA lead to a broadening scope to do a range of activities and develop more integrated curriculum. Increased compliance requirements are a necessary part of the work. By setting up templates and modelling good practice, I demonstrate that I am doing the record keeping too and expect the teachers to do the same. Using a simple approach of asking, how do I know I am meeting the learning objectives of this unit? will then ensure that it is verifiable and authentic. At the end of the day, the qualification should mean what it says.

For many of the students in the program, it is the social connections that bring them back to study each year. Lifelong learning is a motivational factor rather than seeking a formal qualification. For many of the students, the jump from Certificate I to Certificate II is too big for them. There is not a strong motivation to progress students to the next level when they are not likely to experience success.

What do you see as the challenges and rewards of working in this sector?
The challenges continue to be limited funding and a casualised workforce. There does not seem to be an upturn to the cycle of change, with more of a push down pressure. By providing a solid induction and positively influencing teachers, I aim to maintain standards and balance expectations, especially for sessional staff.

My main motivation that keeps me going is that I love working with my students and find them so receptive and wanting to learn. Making learning real is something of a mantra. I enjoy the support of my team and gain much from talking with colleagues. Even the simple pleasure of a regular lunch time walk to bounce ideas and moderate tasks or debrief, cannot be underestimated.

References

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at a particularly dark point of the neo-liberal theoretical trajectory and it can be tempting to despair at ever returning to more humanistic approaches to the value of learning and literacy and numeracy education. However, as the saying goes, history is made by those who show up. I think most people were glad they showed up to the forum and are looking forward to continuing the conversation about how much better LLN policy and practice could be in Australia.

Sally Thompson is the CEO of ALA and has extensive knowledge and experience in adult education.
When I worked in the manufacturing industry, I was responsible for process improvement and product development. My role included supporting existing workers to adapt to changing job skill demands resulting from process and product innovations. For example, introducing a new coating meant that workers needed to be able to mix the coating correctly and safely, measure and adjust the viscosity of the coating to meet process and product quality requirements, and manage a limited coating shelf-life to minimise waste. Often, the training required a strong focus on strengthening workplace numeracy skills.

Once I moved into the VET sector, I observed that compared to my previous experience in industry, building workplace numeracy skills was not a strong focus. This concerned me and sparked my interest in workplace numeracy and VET. In a recent NCVER report, *Seeking the N in LLN* (Berghella & Molenaar, 2013), we suggest that there may be a mismatch between the importance of numeracy skills in the workplace and the capacity of the VET workforce to address numeracy skills needs in the workplace.

**Building on numeracy expertise**

VET practitioners have free access to two, soon to be three, WELL Program funded resources called *Numeracy in Focus*, *Numeracy in Practice* and *Numeracy by Measure*. These self-paced professional development resources enable users to review and strengthen their own skills so that they can be more responsive to the numeracy skills needs of their learners in the workplace. The resources focus on three key areas of VET practitioner expertise needed to deliver workplace numeracy training effectively:

- a deep level of up-to-date and confident numeracy skills to best challenge and engage learners while instilling a positive attitude towards mathematics
- specialist adult numeracy teaching skills and knowledge to effectively support adults to develop numeracy skills
- an in-depth understanding of the workplace context and the context specific numeracy demands.

Users actively engage with the resources by identifying and working with a trusted peer or mentor, undertaking self assessment, engaging in reflection, maintaining a professional development journal and completing professional learning activities. The resources are designed to be used by VET practitioners who want to:

- update their basic numeracy skills in relation to changing technology and numeracy practices
- contextualise numeracy to the world of work
- increase their numeracy confidence
- overcome reluctance to assess and teach numeracy skills in the workplace
- ensure their numeracy skills are sufficient to complete the Graduate Diploma in Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practice.

The roles and responsibilities of VET practitioners involved in assessing and delivering workplace numeracy skills vary. They may include vocational specialists, language and literacy specialists, numeracy specialists and employers. The resources are designed so that each user can adapt them to their own job role and work context.

**An overview of the resources**

*Numeracy in Focus* is designed to build practitioner workplace numeracy awareness, including:

- identifying maths anxiety
- understanding the importance of numeracy
- raising awareness of numeracy in the workplace context
- raising awareness of workplace numeracy in the VET sector.

The Guide provides an overview of the importance of numeracy skills in the workplace and the VET products and systems that support numeracy skills development in the workplace context.
Numeracy in Practice is designed to support the development of practitioner numeracy proficiency skills and numeracy training skills, including:

- overcoming maths anxiety
- using the ACSF in relation to workplace numeracy skills
- building numeracy proficiency skills
- building specialist adult numeracy teaching skills
- building knowledge of numeracy in the workplace context.

This resource comprises a Guide, a Numeracy Proficiency Assessment Tool—Process Manufacturing Industry, and six Snapshots. The information and activities in the resource are generically relevant to all VET practitioners working across all industries.

The Guide provides an overview of the importance of numeracy skills in the workplace, professional development guidance for developing the skills needed to effectively deliver workplace numeracy skills and an overview of the Numeracy Proficiency Assessment Tool—Process Manufacturing Industry, a collection of 24 questions that VET practitioners can use to assess their numeracy proficiency skills in the context of the process manufacturing industry. It is strongly recommended that VET practitioners undertake an upfront numeracy assessment using the tool or another assessment tool used to assess the numeracy proficiency skills listed in the Guide. By this process they will learn something about themselves and be better prepared to prioritise their professional development needs.

The Snapshots provide detailed guidance to support the skills needed to effectively develop and deliver workplace numeracy skills relevant to six selected questions from the tool. Topics covered in the Snapshots include: reading instruments; using ratios and metric conversions; using rates and performing time calculations; measuring length; calculating quantities and reading specifications. A Snapshot template is provided in the appendices of the Guide.

VET practitioners are encouraged to use the template to build their own Snapshots for other questions found in the tool and for numeracy problems encountered in their practice, contextualised to the industries they work in.

Numeracy by Measure is currently in development. It will be designed to support the development of practitioner measurement skills, including using the ACSF in relation to workplace measurement skills. It will also focus on building measurement proficiency skills, specialist adult numeracy teaching skills and knowledge of measurement in the Australian workplace context. As with the other two resources it will comprise a Guide and a number of Snapshots. The Guide will provide an overview of the importance of measurement skills in industry and in the workplace, and professional development guidance for understanding and developing measurement skills. The Snapshots will provide detailed guidance relevant to selected authentic examples of job tasks requiring measurement skills in the workplace.

Numeracy in Focus and Numeracy in Practice are available for download from http://oggiconsulting.com/resources/.

References
Berghella, T. & Molenaar, J. (2013). Seeking the N in LLN. NCVER, SA.

Tina Berghella is a consultant with a background in manufacturing and project management. She has worked on a range of WELL funded strategic, resource and training projects, and has a particular interest in workplace numeracy. She is a member of the Training Package Quality Assurance Panel, the WELL Quality Assurance Panel and the Foundation Skills Champions Network. Contact: tina@oggiconsulting.com.au.

Men Learning Through Life by Barry Golding, Rob Mark and Annette Foley (eds)
Reviewed by Pauline O’Maley

In the interests of full disclosure, I will start by acknowledging my personal interest in the subject of this book. I worked for ten years in a day program for men who were part of a homeless and drug dependency program. In the course of this work, I realised that the environment in which learning takes place, both formal and informal, is vital. Often the most favourable environment is not the traditional classroom. Over the years, I have pondered why we have been slow to look beyond classrooms for places to engage with learners and...
learning. So this is the book I have been waiting to read and it does not disappoint!

The focus of the book is men’s learning, particularly informal learning in community contexts. Specific emphasis is on engaging, and making learning accessible to, older men who are not in paid work; in supporting them to make sense of the world beyond work and in doing this in places and spaces that appeal to them. The dominant discourse of human capital does not feature in the book. Rather, the authors frame their work explicitly within a social capital framework, around the link between learning and social determinants of health and wellbeing. They espouse humanist approaches to learning and conceptualise learning in broad and generous terms. It is refreshing the way Foley’s chapter about learning situates itself in terms of moral questions about human worth beyond economic value, using Martha Nussbaum’s work with human rights and Amartya Sen’s capabilities approach, to make a strong argument for the importance of these spaces as enablers of agency.

In Part one, Golding, Mark and Foley examine the available research and provide a framework for the discussion that follows. After situating men’s learning, the remainder of Part one looks at specific examples and sites of men’s learning. McDonald’s chapter is based on his experience as director of a drop-in centre, The Shed, for predominately indigenous men at risk of suicide. He, like others, points to the importance of positive interactions and the significant link between learning and social determinants of health and well-being. Mark’s chapter focuses on literacy learning for men in informal, familiar settings in Ireland, including community centres and a hostel for the homeless. Golding uses the concept of third places to frame his discussion about diverse spaces for engagement with men in informal learning.

Part two gives us an international perspective of men’s learning. Both Mark and Soulsby’s history of men’s adult learning in the UK and the chapter by Carragher, Evoy and Mark on learning in men’s sheds in Ireland, acknowledge the importance of building on the success of men’s sheds in Australia. Golding and Foley focus on Australian men’s sheds as sites of learning. They highlight the lifelong and life-wide learning benefits these sheds provide, and stress that understanding the difficulties some men have beyond work has only been understood in the last decade.

Their vignettes of good practice showcase learning work happening in football clubs and volunteer fire brigades.

Findsen also uses vignettes of good practice to highlight the importance of learning partnerships in New Zealand. Fragoso, Marques and Lança report on fishing clubs as a site for informal learning experiences in Portugal and Jin, Tingyan, Hua and Golding explain that China is in the early stages of this work. In the face of unprecedented social transformation that has impacted on traditional family structures, gendered community learning spaces in China have yet to emerge.

Zarifis contextualises his work within Greece’s economic crisis and highlights its impact on men and boys. He stresses the need for safe and familiar learning spaces, where men and boys can be received with warmth and have peer support in their learning. He suggests young men are learning different ways of meaning-making in this new environment, and poignantly quotes a young man grappling with his sense of self-worth. He is dependent on others and questions whether this makes him any less valuable in society. Zarifis affirms the importance of this complex and necessary work, tied up as it is with issues of identity and masculinity, in these difficult and uncertain times.

The authors are sensitive to the gendered nature of their research. My feeling is they are a little too sensitive. They provide the evidence of men’s reluctance to engage in traditional learning spaces, like neighbourhood houses, and they make a strong case for alternative settings. This is an important and refreshing book that urges us to take male-friendly learning spaces seriously. But it does more than this. It gives both research evidence and concrete examples of how this can be, and is being, done in Australia and internationally. As Finsden says these spaces give men a place to feel safe to be themselves, surely we want this for all our learners.

Men Learning Through Life (2014) is published by NIACE and can be ordered online at www.footprint.com.au with free delivery, or ordered through local bookshops.

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