

..... and literacy beyond the classroom

ACAL's approach to literacy as both lifelong and lifewide

Dr Pauline O'Maley, works for the Salvation Army as Co-coordinator of the Community Reintegration Program in Victoria, Australia.

Pauline would like to acknowledge the invaluable help of Margaret Mc Hugh who assisted in the writing about literacy and numeracy opportunities in men's sheds.

This paper was presented to the International Literacy Conference (ACAL Conference) in New Zealand in September 2007

There are three things I would like to do here today, the first is to look at the way in which ACAL has developed its lifewide, lifelong literacy and numeracy strategy, in doing this I would also like to look at the research commissioned by ACAL and the broader research supported by NCVET funding which focuses on literacy from a social capital perspective and on literacy beyond the classroom. The second is to flesh out this idea of literacy beyond the classroom by looking at one specific social program in Melbourne and approaches that are taken towards literacy and numeracy in this one instance, as an example of possibility. The final task is to dream a little dream, to suggest some ideas for ways forward in successfully embedding a culture of foregrounding and supporting literacy development in diverse social settings in Australia.

In 2001 ACAL published a national position paper for the future titled *A Literate Australia* which highlighted the importance of literacy and numeracy for the economy, society and the individual. It highlighted the initiatives of OECD countries in recognising the interrelatedness of literacy and numeracy and broader social and economic issues. The paper concluded with a comprehensive policy agenda which included: embedding adult literacy and numeracy issues in a framework of lifelong learning, addressing social inclusion and community capacity building; and the development of a new national adult literacy and numeracy policy which takes a whole-of-government approach 'that recognises the broader economic, social and health related aspects of literacy, numeracy and lifelong learning' (p.23).

A Literate Australia has influenced the strategic work ACAL has been doing since. This work has included a forum in Tasmania, entitled *Beyond Training: locating literacy in social policy*. which examined issues around social inclusion and the exclusionary effects of poor literacy and numeracy in so many aspects of people's lives. Following this forum, ACAL established a strategy group. The first task of the group was to commission Dr Carolyn Williams to undertake a literature and desktop review of Australian and overseas examples of successful integrated literacy/community welfare initiatives. Dr. Williams found that, although there was growing interest in cross-sectoral and integrated approaches, and that a number of such programs had been developed, not a great deal of attention had been paid to documenting the impact of such programs.

The strategy group felt that the absence of supportive documentation made more urgent the task to clarify and scope the success of examples of a 'life-wide life long' approach to literacy and numeracy development. The group continued to develop and refine the strategic direction and at the same time commissioned Dr Jane Figgis, educational author and former broadcaster, to undertake exploratory research. Dr Figgis' immediate task was to understand the potential for resonance between literacy and other social agendas – to understand advocacy for adult literacy and numeracy from other points of view – and devise advocacy strategies that took advantage of this mutual concern. She set out to understand what literacy and numeracy looked like to potential partners in other sectors: how people in these different domains think about literacy; the language they use in talking about literacy; and the actual literacy and numeracy demands made in their fields. The report, *Taking Literacy to Fresh Fields*, highlighted that the literacy field faces some significant challenges if it wants to build understanding and support beyond the education and training sector. Her findings indicated that literacy and numeracy are not a topic other professionals necessarily think or talk much about.

In 2004 ACAL ran two Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) sponsored interrelated events in support of further clarifying how to achieve broader cross-sectoral engagement and collaboration. The

first was a think tank titled *Let's get serious* held in Sydney in August. The purpose of the think tank was to explore how to develop effective partnerships with other sectors. The think tank was followed the next day by a forum entitled *Responding to Diversity: Building literate and numerate communities*. At this forum Dr Geoff Bateson, Partnership Manager of the Birmingham Core Skills Development Partnership described Birmingham's experience of a joined-up government approach to raising literacy and numeracy standards across his city.

Pertinent research

In 2005 ACAL was successful in securing NCVER research funding to explore the benefits and costs of adult literacy and numeracy across domains in social life. This research was conducted by Robyn Hartley and Jackie Horne (2006), and is called *Social and economic benefits of improved adult literacy: Towards a better understanding*.

The work was wide ranging in its scope, its focus the identification of economic and social costs and benefits of literacy across contexts including health, finance and small business. It was conceived as an exploratory study, a starting point for further thinking, exploration and research. Little work has been done in this area. Literacy and numeracy impacts are complex, cumulative and interactive, benefits to individuals and communities of learning can be both direct and indirect and there can be sustaining benefits that allow people to continue or improve what they do in communities and/or transforming benefits such as increased employability. I believe this is a significant but unappreciated point that the benefits of learning can be sustaining as well as transforming. In relation to collaborative partnerships Hartley and Horne suggest 'the task of collaboration across disciplines and areas of interest will take time and a willingness to understand each other's worlds to a certain extent' (p.9).

While there is little research in Australia to build this work upon there are some international examples for work that could be used to model further research on, one promising example is Nutbeam's (1999) framework that describes functional, interactive and critical health literacy. The success of such work is dependent on active collaboration across sectors.

As is appropriate for an exploratory study Hartley and Horne give clear details of the research needed to follow. They believe further work needs to be done in addressing conceptual issues, in addressing issues related to measurement, on the interaction between multiple literacies and the different impacts of factors, such as age, gender, life circumstances, and level of literacy and numeracy disadvantage. There needs to be further targeted consultations and there is scope for small and large scale research projects as well as the possibility of buying into existing longitudinal studies. The ALLS data will also be a rich source of data.

Hartley and Horne's work has been followed up by other NCVER research that has also examined the benefits of building literacy capabilities that are pertinent for communities as well as individuals, and stress that literacy and numeracy can be a barrier for fair participation in society, for social as well as economic engagement.

Wickert and McGuirk (2005), focused their study, *Integrating literacies: Using partnerships to build literacy capabilities in communities*, on social and community settings. They assert that literacy needs to take place in authentic contexts, that these contexts are social and that literacy is fundamental for building social capital. Therefore, they posit, we need to have a better understanding of diverse and localised contexts and approaches that suit these situations. They believe there is potential for examining and trialling ways to apply the successful 'built in not bolted on' formula used successfully in workplace delivery to non workplace situations. It is very early days in this thinking but the prospects are very exciting. Like Hartley and Horne, Wickert and McGuirk suggest that success in this type of venture requires viable cross sectoral partnerships, there is a need for more work to be done in the area of sustainable partnerships. They are also clear that as yet we do not have the infrastructure for this work nor have we developed the language to discuss how potential literacy outcomes in these settings can be counted or recorded. Paradoxically once the literacy is embedded into a broad range of social settings it is then difficult to draw it out again to measure. There is the need for further education of practitioners in other social domains, not just in terms of awareness but also in relation to practical strategies. This also has implications for the roles that literacy workers currently fulfill

and the need to expand these roles to include literacy workers as mentors, brokers and facilitators supporting workers in other social domains.

The work of Cumming and Wilson (2005), *Literacy, numeracy and alternative dispute resolution*, in the area of alternative dispute resolution is one specific example of the impacts of literacy in a social setting of the type Wickert and McGuirk are referring to. Cumming and Wilson looked closely at this very particular aspect of legal work and concluded that while alternative dispute resolution is steadily growing, with 70% of disputes going to resolution of this type, limited literacy and numeracy are barriers to fair participation in this service. Parties represent themselves in this process and they are usually isolated from the supportive communities where their literacy and numeracy difficulties can be hidden. Consequently many are reluctant to engage with the law under these circumstances. Cumming and Wilson suggest there is an urgent need to develop resources and that these resources should be developed by literacy and numeracy practitioners in conjunction with the National Alternative Dispute Resolution Advisory Council. They also indicate the need for further research into the way in which messages are communicated. This research could address 'the fundamental principle established in Canadian case law that "a message has not been communicated unless the person receiving the message understands it"' (2005, p.41). Finally they believe there is much work to do in terms of practitioner awareness and education in how to manage working with clients who need literacy and/or numeracy support in the dispute resolution process.

While the work of Balatti, Black and Falk (2006), *Reframing adult literacy and numeracy course outcomes: A social capital perspective* is focused on classrooms, the focus is on social capital outcomes of LL&N courses, rather than the outcomes that are predominately tracked and measured in these courses, the human capital ones. They used the twelve ABS indicators of social capital to examine outcomes for students in these stand alone courses and found that these courses do produce social capital outcomes but these outcomes tend not to be acknowledged and measured. They believe the National Reporting System 'does not adequately capture the complexity of outcomes when taking into account student perspectives which see course outcomes largely in terms of changes in sense of self' (2006, p.11).

Social capital, they believe, is a resource, one that makes for a healthier society. Their interest is in identifying resources that draw on and build social capital. They conclude 'language and literacy practices are considered the vehicle for various transformations in the lives of people and their communities' (2006, p.9). The implications of this then are the need to make these social capital outcomes more overt. There is a need to identify relevant pedagogical elements that help build these social capital outcomes and experiment with ways to build on these elements. While this work focuses on outcomes from specific courses, it does so from a social capital perspective and therefore it is useful in helping to develop a more nuanced understanding of social capabilities and opportunities.

The final NCVET research I would like to mention here is the work done by Golding, Brown, Foley, Harvey and Gleeson (2007) *Men's sheds in Australia: Learning through community contexts*. This research focuses on men's sheds as sites of informal learning. Men's sheds are 'particularly successful in attracting older men who have proved difficult to engage through conventional health, employment, education and training initiatives. Many of these older men are facing issues associated with significant change, including ageing, health, retirement, isolation, unemployment, disability and separation (p.6)'. The shed provides a familiar context that is also therapeutic, which helps to foster a sense of belonging and well as hands on practical learning opportunities. Participants at men's sheds often also have limited schooling and post school education.

For educational opportunities to be taken up the potential learners first have to be reached and it is clear that burgeoning men's sheds are an exciting new vehicle for reaching this vulnerable, hard to engage cohort. The possibilities for literacy and numeracy enrichment in this setting are clear, it is a setting they feel comfortable in and such a setting offers ample opportunity for incidental literacy and numeracy. Golding indicates the breath of opportunity here when he says '[i]f you called it a men's learning centre, they would run a mile; if you called it a men's health centre they wouldn't come; to call it a suicide prevention centre would be stupid' (2007, *The Australian*), yet it is clearly all these things and more. This research indicates that sheds are proving to be successful 'pathways to older men back to learning, work, and engagement with community' (p.11). I think they also provide us with an example of a successful way in which literacy and numeracy could be integrated into existing viable activities.

The final paper I would like to refer to here is the position paper that ACAL commissioned Dave Tout to write earlier this year in anticipation of the release of the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills survey (ALLS) the first results of which are due in the next couple of months. In this paper Tout (2007) highlights the cost of adult literacy deficiencies in terms of human, social and financial capital terms. He suggests that the ALLS is a rich source of data but that we need to be able to use the data effectively. He outlines a list of possible questions that could be posed in relation to the 2007 data, among these are questions specific to social capital, for example ‘What are the personal, financial and social implications and consequences of poor literacy skills for different groups of adults in our society? What are the implications for government and non-government services?’ ACAL is committed to using the ALLS data to help us develop a more complex understanding of literacy and numeracy needs and ways that literacy and numeracy opportunities can be available for all adults in a lifelong lifewide way.

The Community Reintegration Program, one example of practice beyond the classroom

The Community Reintegration Program is a multi-focused program that is part of the Victorian Homelessness and Drug Dependency Program (HDDP). The HDDP is a joint initiative between the Department of Human Services Victoria, the Salvation Army, St Vincent De Paul, and Hanover Welfare Services. The aim of CRP is to provide individuals with activities and linkages to assist building and strengthening community links. The program has four key foci, therapeutic, employment focused, educational and health and social. CRP is conceived as a safe substance free positive environment.

CRP is a stepping stone to community, vocational education and employment. I think of the program in terms of opening up discursive possibilities to imagine different futures. Gee’s (1996) conceptualization of literacy as mastery of a secondary discourse is significant to the work we do at CRP. Gee sees discourses as ‘identity kits’. Discourses are ways of being “people like us”. They are “ways of being in the world”; they are “forms of life”¹ (1996, p.viii). For the CRP participant the ways of being in the world that have been their dominant discourse for some time, for some up to thirty years, are no longer sustainable and they are seeking different ways of being in the world.

Within the context of our broader aims we also attempt to provide literacy and numeracy support that is relevant, contextualized, timely, sometimes explicit, sometimes embedded, on opening up discursive possibilities/vistas. Our purpose is to go beyond the no longer sustainable familiar (and comfortable) discourses. So how does this translate into practice? A lot of the literacy work, the opening up of discursive possibilities is oral work but much of it is also focused on reading and writing tasks, which aim to be situated and purposeful. There is nothing new in the list presented here of examples of literacy and numeracy in practice, yet it is important to articulate them, to examine what they look like. They include but are not limited to:

- 1:1 support with developing confidence with literacy skills (‘I don’t know how to spell’)
- ICT mediated literacy; linking to email, using email as a means of connecting (back) to children, family, friends; exploring areas of interest (old mines and historical societies), job applications
- Digital storytelling; as memory making, as memory holding
- As part of development of ICT skills/limiting of the digital divide, in completing assignments for computer course
- In completing units for other accredited courses, for example Certificate 1 in Vocational Preparation
- In researching areas of interest on the internet, for example recreational activities for the group, camp possibilities
- In preparing to return to study, for example research skills, understanding genre and academic writing, reading of meaning, oral presentations

¹Gee defines discourse as ‘a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and ‘artifacts’, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network’, or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful role (1996, p.131).

- In discussing current affairs
- In doing the quiz from the daily newspaper as a group, following up areas of interest/ dispute on the internet
- In writing letters and filling in documents, for example housing applications
- In reading letters from the government
- In doing resumes and application letters, addressing job criteria
- In creative writing
- In using the phone
- In doing phone interviews
- In practising interview techniques in mock situations
- In engaging in discussions around the recent ABC best speech competition and talking about and reading speeches, in reading the winners
- In reading and discussing literature pertinent to participants lives, for example two participants have fathers whose service in the army in Vietnam had had enormous impacts on their own lives, both read Barry Heard's book about Vietnam veterans *Well Done Those Men* after we had listened to a reading on Radio National and we were able to discuss the book which helped them to contextualize their experiences and those of their fathers, particularly in relation to Post traumatic Stress Disorder ((PTSD)
- In engaging with a participant led word of the day contest and the discussions that come out of an activity of this sort
- In numeracy; in preparation for study, in cooking, in recreation activities, in design making and reading for woodwork, in supporting participants in pertinent courses, for example Cert iv in computer design

As you can see in many ways CRP mirrors the work done in adult education but in many ways it is also very different, our participants do not come to us because they believe their literacy or numeracy skills need improvement, they come to us because they have come to a place that is unsustainable, they have not been able to maintain housing and basic relationships, at this stage the imperatives in their lives don't include literacy, nevertheless many have had interrupted and incomplete educations and when thinking of and planning for different futures literacy plays an important part.

There are several elements of CRP that I think are noteworthy when we think of what is necessary to build and sustain literacy opportunities beyond the classroom

- Skilled staff with dual qualifications: all the staff at CRP have drug and alcohol and counseling qualifications and well as additional other specialist qualifications, in my case adult literacy qualifications
- Time: the program affords us the time to work with participants on a one to one basis, in small groups both informal and formal and in larger groups where necessary, we can usually work with participants for up to three years
- Flexibility; this point relates to the last, we are fortunate enough to be able to work flexibly with both our participants and in concert with their case managers
- Partnerships: we work in very close partnership with case managers from the three services we collaborate with to support our participants in their goals
- Ongoing funding: the HDDP has the luxury of ongoing funding so we are not using our energy to scramble for funding nor is our relationship with colleagues at supporting services marred by the closed atmosphere that comes with competitive funding

I believe this approach that acknowledges and understands specific community contexts, in this case drug and alcohol, but also focuses on opportunities to embed literacy and numeracy is a sound and sustainable model. It is contextualized, can have an individual focus and can easily bypass the debilitating deficit focus that can be difficult to avoid in a single focus program setting.

Literacy dreaming

So now is the time for me to dream the literacy dream I spoke of earlier, what happens when we look beyond institutions, when we shift our focus from thinking that we need to bring prospective participants to our literacy classrooms and think instead of increasingly taking literacy into setting they are already comfortable

with? The work of Wickert and Mc Guirk (2005) gives us some guidance here when they talk of expanded roles for literacy practitioners as mentors, brokers and facilitators. But we also gain insights from the other researchers mentioned above; Cumming and Wilson (2005) point to the need for resources to support this exploratory work; Balatti, Black and Falk (2006) stress the importance of social capital in community capacity building; Golding et al (2007) focus on settings where individuals and communities can feel safe and Hartley and Horne (2006) give details of impacts which are complex, cumulative and interactive and sustaining as well as transforming. There are definite themes here, funding is a significant challenge, roles needs to be conceived broadly, resources need to be developed and fruitful partnerships need to be developed because as Wickert and Mc Guirk point out there are 'possibilities inherent in current national and international policy interests in joined up/whole of government/cross –sectoral approaches to addressing social issues' (p.10).

The imperative is there but I think we still struggle with what it would and could look like, so let me give another example from the work I am familiar with. In the Homelessness and Drug Dependency Program case workers are employed to work with clients for up to three years on issues around harm minimization, sustainable housing and future planning. They would benefit from also knowing about, and being about to support and help expand the literacy and numeracy repertoires and strategies of these clients. If the case workers had a kit they would be able to begin to broaden their awareness of literacy and then extends this, perhaps with some training, into incorporating literacy and numeracy strategies into their work. There could also be a literacy professional, employed as part of a multi-disciplinary team, in much the same way as mental health professionals are, to provide support, education, strategies and secondary consultations.

There are challenges to this approach as Wicket and Mc Guirk (2005) point out, once the leaning is embedded we would have difficulty in extracting that embedded learning to measure. It would be so entwined in the learnings about relapse prevention, budgeting, handling payday temptations and other strategies learned in the new discourse of establishing and maintaining transitional housing. Ironically our very success could make this measurement more elusive.

What would it look like if we bought a focus on literacy and numeracy to the work being done in one of the settings referred to in the research above? I find the men's sheds idea exciting, perhaps because I work predominately with men who are in the 40s and 50s and often feel redundant and I have seen them blossom when they are working with wood. The men's shed is a terrific vehicle for providing purposeful activity and building self confidence.

The research of Golding et al (2007) indicates that for a lot of the men who use men's sheds the touchstones by which they define themselves, work and relationships, have gone. As a result of this they struggle in the process of negotiating the new world in which they find themselves. The shed offers a safe and familiar place to support this new negotiation process. As I have indicated earlier, the opportunity to work positively with these men on a number of levels is clear, so now let me be more specific about some of possible literacy and numeracy work that could be done in this setting.

Let's imagine a man, let's call him Frank, who has been referred to a men's shed by his local community health clinic. I am going to flesh this out with some details, Frank is 54 years old, he has been made redundant from his manufacturing job, a job he has done all his working life. His kids have left home, his wife has left also. Frank is suffering from depression and he is increasing his drinking. The social worker at the community health clinic has referred him to the shed as a way of connecting with others in his community and giving him an outlet for purposeful activity.

The foremost thought in Frank's head at this time is not, 'ah I must work on my literacy and numeracy!' his thoughts are on 'reading' the world he now finds himself in, on coping with his new situation. The Freirean notion of 'reading the word to read the world' is, I think, very pertinent in this situation.

So what specific work might be done with a literacy and numeracy focus with Frank? It strikes me the most valuable and pressing work would be to ensure he understands the discourse of Centrelink, an organisation he will now be working closely with at this stage in his life. He may need support in understanding his rights and his obligations, in understanding what services are available and how to access them, with the paperwork associated with this relationship, all critical literacy tasks. The first step for Frank will be to apply for

Newstart. He will need to go to Centrelink to fill in the appropriate forms, before he does this he would be well advised to read the 24 page booklet entitled *Information you need to know about your claim for Newstart Allowance* which can be found on the Centrelink website. Once Frank has signed up to Newstart he will have participation requirements. The most likely scenario is he will be sent to a Job Network, here there will be more forms to fill in. He will also potentially be required to fill out a job seekers diary, in this diary he will have to give details of his job search activities, he could be required to list up to ten jobs a fortnight.

If he believes his depression is making it difficult to work, Frank could at this stage be given a temporary exemption with a medical certificate, he may be able to, with medical evidence, obtain a second temporary exemption. After his exemptions run out he will be referred for a Job Capacity Assessment, and will need to take medical evidence to this assessment, it is Frank's responsibility to obtain this medical evidence. Frank will then receive a letter from the Job Capacity Assessor telling him to go to an appointment with an Employment Service Provider. This will either take him back to a Job Network provider or if the illness is deemed to be major, unlikely with depression, this could be a provider with the Disability Employment Network, the advantage of this is no diary, and more intense support, but of course there would be more paperwork.

Let's assume Frank does not have a lot of experience of dealing with bureaucracies and handling paperwork. His job in manufacturing was very hands on and the only kinds of work-related paperwork he dealt with were timesheets and ticksheets pertinent to quality control. At home his wife took care of running the household, dealt with accounts, did the shopping and the cooking. Frank left school when he was fifteen. He was born in Australia but his parents were Italian migrants and he spoke Italian as his first language. He never mastered the English phonics system properly because, when he went to school, in Australia, he was still learning English and he was speaking it with a heavy accent and it was difficult for him to match sound and symbols—he didn't have either the sound or the sense that makes phonics possible to learn. He never caught up. Every year at school, he got further behind. He never learnt to read fluently, so he does not really enjoy reading, and because he doesn't read, he was denied access to varied linguist experiences and the kind of language-expanding, vocabulary-building experiences that reading gives you, and he was denied as well, access to a range of information. Frank has had to keep pace with a rapidly changing world without the help of strong reading skills to do it. As the whole world gets more bureaucratic Frank, like everybody else, is required to use literacy skills to navigate through it. Moreover, Frank has this idea about himself that he is not a good learner and the last thing he would ever think of doing is enrolling in an education course.

The last thing that Frank wants—now that that he has found a refuge in the Men's Shed—is to meet someone who reminds him that his educational skills aren't up to scratch. He likes feeling comfortable and competent using the wood-working equipment, he is taking pride in his creativity and he is making new friends and finding that other men are in the same boat as he. How can a well-meaning literacy expert make Frank an offer that he does not want to refuse, an offer that goes beyond the literacy of survival of Centrelink and offers rich, situated and forward looking opportunities? It is a seriously difficult question to answer.

Here is one way to approach literacy work with Frank, and others in the shed—it, like all possible approaches in this context requires 'literacy experts' to find different ways of working.

The Coordinator of the Men's Shed, could be approached about the possibility of starting a project, requiring Shed members to work as a team to produce something (an object of wooden or metal fabrication) which is more complex than any of the members could currently undertake individually. The project might make a contribution to the neighbourhood, or another community, and bring a sense of achievement and a degree of public recognition. The project is complex because it requires interaction with Local Authorities and knowledge of by-laws and legislation, financing, budgeting, purchasing, project management, public health and safety liabilities etc. Most team members will have to learn more trades skills. Team members will also require quite sophisticated reading, writing and maths skills to undertake the tasks and bring the project in on budget and on time, and to work efficiently as a group of volunteers. As a group they might have the skills they need, although all members—like Frank—may not have all of them.

To make sure that the project is successful, the Shed Coordinator will source a range of expertise and schedule regular meetings attended by these experts so that the team begins to build the skills and knowledge they need as they undertake the tasks in the project. One of the experts is really good at maths and

understands how maths is applied in trades contexts. The maths expert and the metals expert will run a series of skills workshops to show the men how to measure, cut, weld etc. The maths expert will then be on hand for the duration of the project. (Experts can be sourced from within the group.) If anyone, as a consequence, wants to learn a bit more about maths, the maths expert can arrange that (he does it himself as a volunteer or paid tutor, he arranges for a volunteer, he recommends a class where he knows the teachers and will introduce Frank or anyone else to the teacher.)

Similarly, team members have to get to grips with planning requirements: the Coordinator persuades someone from the Local Council to come and explain planning regulations, but these documents, and plans themselves, are not easy to read—for anyone. So, the Coordinator also brings in a person who is good at teaching people how to approach complex reading tasks, but who is also interested in finding out a bit more about planning regulations themselves. This person will be available at scheduled times when the team is meeting to work on the project to help out with interpretation. If this person is someone who is part of the team, so much the better.

We can see how the project could be a great success, with some of the team wanting to work together on another project and they how they could begin to put together the resources they need to undertake the new enterprise. They would want the maths and reading experts in again because they help solve the problems in the group and this saves time and costly mistakes. Other members of the original team would have all found something new that they are each interested in and may want to do some formal learning or join another group working on something in their area of interest.

Everyone would have enjoyed the challenge so much that they want to continue taking on things that are difficult and learning new skills—some of these skills are ‘educational’. They involve formal abstract learning—reading, writing and maths skills—some team-members want to help other people undertake similar group projects and offer themselves as mentors. They would be on the look out for problems that could get solved if a reading or maths expert was included in the group. Some members of groups may decide that they are going to get some help so that they can become the reading or maths experts.

This literacy and numeracy that is embedded in the work related to skill exchange in these projects will lead to skill development and renewal through volunteerism, which could provide one possible pathway back to employment if this is what Shed users want.

And I think we could continue to tease out many varied scenarios here, what about one that involves Martin who is actually quite good a reading and/or maths and begins to understand that not everyone is. He could see an opportunity to make a particular contribution to taking minutes of meeting associated with the Shed project and take up the challenge of learning to do this directly onto a laptop. There are many possibilities for thinking of other individualised scenarios of Shed users, and I believe we need to do this thinking, so men like Frank and Martin are given abundant opportunities to develop their repertoires of personal resources, take pleasure in their capacity to learn and achieve more of whatever it is they want to achieve so that an unequal distribution of language resources no longer contributes so powerfully to socially constructed inequities.

In many ways we could say these are outcomes about health and wellbeing, about human connections and renewed confidence in skills. Indeed that is true but they are also rich sites for literacy and numeracy enhancement, work that can be done in a natural integrated way. So who would do this work? It could be done by a literacy professional working in a multi disciplinary team, like the example of the Community Reintegration Program above or it could be done by a welfare worker who has some literacy training and has the support of a literacy professional for secondary consultation.

If we are to take the next steps towards strengthening literacy and numeracy beyond the classroom and redefining adult literacy and lifelong learning not only in terms of welfare, social rescue and vocational preparation but as a necessary component of social cohesion, social capital and community capacity, we need to think laterally about the possibilities that emerge from the historic link between adult education community capacity and community development, and to think beyond institutions. We need to set in place a system in which literacy professionals can work alongside others in a host of work and community contexts, to support colleagues and friends who need help with literacy. We need to find a way of mobilising the store

of skills and public and private good will in communities and workplaces, to create new hybrid models of learning that are community-based and contextually embedded. We need to keep talking, and to keep envisioning the possibilities.

References

ACAL (2001) *A Literate Australia* Australian Council of Adult Literacy.

Balatti, J., Black, S. and Falk, I. (2006) *Reframing adult literacy and numeracy course outcomes: A social capital perspective*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Bateson, G. (2003) *Moving the Mountain: Halfway there? The whole city approach to basic skills developments* accessed May 2004 www.coreskills.co.uk

Cumming, J.J. and Wilson, J. (2005) *Literacy, numeracy and alternative dispute resolution*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Gee, J. (1996) *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideologies in Discourses*, Taylor and Francis, London.

Golding, B (2007) *Sheds network a boon for blokes*, The Australian Higher Education Supplement 30/05/07

Golding, B., Brown, B., Foley, A., Harvey, J and Gleeson, L (2007) *Men's sheds in Australia: Learning through community contexts*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Figgis, J. (2004) *Taking Literacy to Fresh Fields* accessed April 2005 www.acal.edu.au

Freire, P (2005) *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach*, Westview Press, Colorado.

Hartley, R. and Horne, J. (2006) *Social and economic benefits of improved adult literacy: Towards a better understanding*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Nutbeam, D. (1999) 'Literacies across the lifespan: Health literacy', *Literacy and Numeracy Studies*, vol 9, no 2, pp.47-55.

Tout, D. (2007) *Moving Forward: Towards a Literate Australia*, www.acal.edu.au

Wickert, R. and McGuirk, J. (2005) *Integrating literacies: Using partnerships to build literacy capabilities in communities*, NCVER, Adelaide