# literacy link

# Where to from here? —adult literacy beyond 2002

*'The literacy gap is in many ways among the most unjust of all, for it has an impact on our ability to bridge all other inequalities—between men and women; between rich and poor; between the haves and have-nots of the information technology age; between those who stand to gain from globalisation and those who are excluded from its benefits'.*

Kofi Annan, Secretary-General, United Nations
from the 2002 International Literacy Day address



*(United Nations Photo Library)*

The theme of this year's International Literacy Day was 'Literacy as Freedom'. By way of preparing for this year's national ACAL conference (1 & 2 Nov) and the forum preceding it (31 Oct) I would like to make two points: Firstly, I would point to the obvious similarities between the themes of our own conference and forum, and the theme selected for this year's International Literacy Day, 'Literacy as Freedom'.  Secondly we are able to draw links between the message given by Kofi Annan as to what inspires many of us who work in adult literacy. That is the belief that not only is it possible to close the literacy gap, but also that it is our individual and collective responsibility to work towards achieving that goal.

It is now eleven years since the introduction of Australia's Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP, 1991) which included a focus on adult language, literacy and numeracy and resulted in increased funding and commitment.  In the editorial of a recent edition of 'Literacy and Numeracy Studies', Hermine Scheeres and Rosie Wickert (2001, p.1) noted that *'it is only from the vantage point of 2001 that some principal discourses of economics, trade and business; of competitive marketplaces and cost effectiveness; and of workplace reform and national training agenda, can be understood in terms of their pervasiveness and dominance in the field of adult literacy and numeracy'.*

These powerful discourses remain evident in the current federally-funded adult literacy and numeracy programs; the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) Program and the Language Literacy and Numeracy Training (LLANT) Program, as well as in many of the adult literacy and numeracy initiatives adopted by the States. These same discourses are currently engaging many people involved in the implementation of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) and the review of

## contents:

the training package for Assessment and Workplace Training (AWT).

## Some significant gains

There have been some gains for adult literacy over the last decade. The WELL Program, for example is held in high regard and is seen overseas as an effective workplace-based model of literacy delivery. The ANTA Adult Literacy Project, managed by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) has ensured the operation of the Reading/Writing Hotline that provides a vital service to potential adult literacy students. Annual funding has been provided to ACAL to enable it to conduct two national forums each year as well as to produce regular editions of *Literacy Link*.

DEST has also provided annual funding for targeted research [until recently conducted through the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (ALNARC) and now through the National Centre for Vocational and Education Research (NCVER)] and for the ANTA Adult Literacy Innovative Projects that have produced valuable resources for teaching and learning as well as for teachers' professional development. Despite the positive outputs of this project, it lacks continuing security, with the allocation of funds (currently $2 million per annum) highly contested and undertaken on an annual basis.

As part of the implementation of Australia's *National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 1998—2003, A Bridge to the future* (ANTA, 1997) we have seen emphasis given to the integration of English language, literacy and numeracy into vocational education and training products. More recently, the establishment of the AQTF which includes certain language, literacy and numeracy requirements in the standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) means that training providers will have to take up the issue of appropriately addressing the literacy needs of their students more seriously than they may have in the past.

## So where to from here?

How do we move forward to ensure adult literacy is on government agendas? Certainly we want to build on the achievements gained in the vocational education and training (VET) sector; there are a number of opportunities for ACAL on this front. These include being involved in the review of the scope and purpose of the Training Package for Assessment and Workplace Training; having input into the development of the specialisation stream for language, literacy and numeracy within the review of AWT; making critical contributions to the debate about the vocational competencies

required of language, literacy and numeracy professionals; and taking the opportunity to inform the review of the AQTF standards that will take place in July 2003. An opportunity coming up is participation in the consultations that will take place around ANTA's strategic plan for the next five years, beginning in 2004.

There is a need for serious (re)conceptualisation of what we mean by literacy and numeracy within training contexts and beyond. There must be a focus on learners as active, 'knowing' agents, as social constructors, critical consumers and equitable disseminators of knowledge rather than as passive 'performers' of defined and predictable tasks according to some pre-specified standard. With the intent of developing lifelong learners in mind, this goal requires a (re)focusing in vocational education and training on process (the *what* and *how*) rather than an overemphasis on outcomes. It is worth noting that the current ANTA national strategy for VET makes no explicit mention of curriculum, pedagogy or assessment as part of the teaching and learning process.

ACAL should continue to develop links with those who work with people whose literacy and numeracy needs may be interrelated with other, often more pressing issues such as health, housing, welfare, and criminal justice. Here we will find people with similar concerns for social cohesion so that new alliances can be formed to lobby governments. On 1 January 2003, the United Nations will commence a 'Literacy Decade', an initiative to reach internationally agreed goals in increasing literacy levels by the year 2015. ACAL therefore must take up an active role in ensuring that our federal government responds appropriately to this challenge by giving renewed emphasis to adult literacy and numeracy.

I look forward to meeting many of you in Sydney next week, and to the healthy debate that has come to characterise ACAL conferences and forums.

*Geraldine Castleton,*
*ACAL President*

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# Investigating dialogic literary circles in Spain and beyond

*by Liz Suda*

Liz Suda, the Flemington Reading and Writing Program (FRWP) Manager, flew to Barcelona, Spain in May this year to research a movement there called Dialogic Literary Circles. Liz was interviewed by the FRWP multi media class before her trip to find out what a 'Dialogic Literary Circle' is and how it may be implemented here.

*What is a dialogic literary circle?*
Liz: Basically, people who don't have very much education, who can't read, are taken through a process where they study and discuss classical literature. The students talk about the ideas in the texts and bring their own experience to the group. The philosophy is that there is no right or wrong answer or opinion, that everyone has their say, that every opinion is valid.

*So how exactly do they study the literature if they can't read?*
Liz: That's a good question, and it's really the purpose of my trip to find out the nuts and bolts, the process of how they do it. I have learned a lot about the philosophy of dialogic theory and its ideals—that the reading is collaborative and dialogic and guided by seven main principles... but how they actually do it, how the groups run, is what I am going to see.

*What do you mean by seven principles?*
Liz: The seven principles are the philosophy that guides the whole process and they are:

- Egalitarian Dialogue: All members of the group are equal; their opinions equally shared.
- Cultural Intelligence: That all people, whatever their age, share the capabilities of language and action, which can be developed further through interaction.
- Transformation: Dialogic learning transforms interpersonal, familiar or work relations. All learning can be transformative.
- Instrumental Dimension: The development of skills and knowledge is more intense when it takes place in a dialogic framework.
- Creation of Meaning: Meaning re-emerges when interaction among people is guided by themselves.
- Solidarity: Collaborative work develops a sense of solidarity and support.
- Equality of Differences: People who come from diverse economic and cultural backgrounds should have the right to hold their own views and be treated as equal partners in collaborative learning.

*Doesn't it sound wonderfully idealistic?*
Liz: It is. The role of the facilitator is to provide everyone with an understanding of the seven principles and open up discussion. Then ensuring that everyone respects one another's point of view. The whole idea of this approach revolves around community building. The opportunity it gives people to learn through literature apparently helps people in other areas of their lives. People's confidence is built up and many go on to further study.

*How did you find out about this?*
Liz: The original research I did on Dialogic Circles was through my work at ALNARC at Victoria University where I have been working part time. I applied to the TAFE travelling scholarship scheme because I thought this might be a good program for FRWP to pilot. The Scholarship Scheme has funded the trip and ACFE has given us funding to find out how it works and to start a group here at FRWP.

*That part sounds very exciting. What is your itinerary? ...because, we plan to publish your journey on the FRWP web site as you go, so we can enjoy the sights and learn more about this wonderful concept as you learn more.*
Liz: Great. I plan to keep a daily journal and email excerpts as I go... The scholarship is for 21 days. Five days in Barcelona visiting groups then nine or ten days travelling to the south of Spain to visit four different groups. Then back to Barcelona to spend time with the original dialogic circle at La Veneda.

From there, I go on to Pais Vasco to visit their literary circle, then on to Prague in the Czech Republic to talk to teachers about English as a Foreign Language and the Spanish experience. There is a small town in the Czech Republic that I am visiting where they have a Dialogic Literary group. I think it's the only one in the Czech Republic, which is most fascinating because they are so remote. I have many questions to ask them.

## IN THE SHOES OF DON QUIXOTE —Travel journal extracts

*Friday May 17*
Arrived in Barcelona at 11.40 to be greeted by three wonderful women from FACEPA, the Federated Association Cultural Education for Adults, a not-for-profit self-funded organisation started by the participants of the dialogic literary circles. It emerges that most of the people working for FACEPA are '20 something' women who are also students at the local university. Forget the idea of Spanish afternoon siestas, these women work until 9pm then go off for a meeting

at 10pm to discuss the meaning of life, well rather, life as a woman *(mujer)* in an academic environment. Fortunately for me a few speak very good English and have been doing a lot of translation work, while I find my ear with this language gets better every day. Despite my jet lag and bleary eyes I was swept along by the passion and enthusiasm of three long-term dialogic participants, two of whom were in the very first *tertulia* started in 1978, around about the time I started teacher education. They are extremely committed and firmly believe that democratic forms of education are most effective with adults. They are devotees of Freire (who visited their group a few times before he died). Talk to these people and you realise how far away we are from truly egalitarian education.

*Thursday May 23*
Greetings from Madrid.
I spent today at a school for adults in the northern part of the city and visited three different classes, so I feel the need to report on it today while it is still fresh. The group I visited in the morning was a classic *tertulia* with a mixture of women, but the facilitator, a teacher, was a man called Carlos. They were reading a book by a Spanish woman writer who wrote at the turn of the century. The book was about a woman who had spent too much time in the sun and had drunk wine. The mixture of the two caused her to have intense sexual fantasies which caused her to reflect on her role as a woman and go through torturous feelings of guilt as a catholic woman. The discussion around this book was quite extraordinary and while I couldn't understand everything that was said, it was very clear to me that a number of women had very strong views about the morality of this woman whilst others were more ´modern´ in their approach. What was interesting however was that they happily argued the case with Carlos—women of

all ages and different walks of life. Feminism appears to be very strong in Spain and I was told by one of the participants, who spoke English (Carlos couldn´t speak a word of English) that about 85% of participants in adult education in Spain are women. Carlos agreed that women appeared to be more interested in ideas and dialogue than men from similar backgrounds. This explains why most of the *tertulias* were made up mostly of women.

Lunch was in a restaurant frequented by locals again with the menu of the day consisting of three course and wine, water and bread thrown in as well for less than A$12.00. So it is possible to live well cheaply in Madrid if you know where to go. I then visited a group of five women who had never had any schooling and were learning to read and write for the first time in their lives. They were all 60-plus and the teacher used a completely different approach. Very structured, very teacher-directed and teacher-centred, which was in stark contrast to the methods used in the *tertulias*. After that I participated in another *tertulia* where the facilitator, actually the director of the whole school, explained that everyone was equal and that if I wanted to speak I had to put my hand up. She was a wonderful facilitator and stopped every now and again to give me a summary of what was being discussed, in Spanish, but slowly and clearly. The dialogue is so rapid one can´t follow. Everyone seems to speak at the same time and the teacher only contains it when a participant puts up their hand because they can´t get a word in edgeways. Alicia told me later that this is the Spanish way of communication—rapid-fire conversation. I was able to follow a bit though and the themes in this discussion were liberty, domestic violence and male honour. They were reading *Don Quixote* by Cervantes. A couple of women identified


• *Gaudi's cathedral*


• *living statue*


• *Liz at FACEPA*

themselves to me as literacy students but they still participated in and were encouraged to relate the ideas to their own experience. I even managed to ask a question when I picked up that the discussion had moved into cultural identity and the separatist movements of the Pais Vasco and Catalan. One participant argued that this kind of fanaticism leads to bloodshed, so the discussion became quite heated. I was completely exhausted by the day's discussions, straining to understand the Spanish, which has improved another 300% in terms of listening. Still a long way to go though folks! Speaking is *muchos difficile* but people are very generous. I showed some of the teachers our web site at flemrw (had a bit of trouble locating the tilde symbol on the keyboard). They are all delighted by the Places Called Home book and one teacher who spoke English said she would translate the stories. Anyway, must fly. It´s now 10.30. Must be time for some *tapas* and c*ervaces* (beer)! *Hasta Luego*

*Tuesday May 28*
Today I returned to Huerta del Ray where I took Luisa´s English class ( I´ll have to write it up as a lesson for my TESOL practicum Christine!). I used an extract from Nada´s story in our ´Places Called Home´ book and got them to talk about their childhood etc. They are going to write a short piece for inclusion in our web site, in English of course! Then Luisa very kindly invited me to her house for lunch. So I am being quite spoiled. The lifestyle in Spain of having a two hour break in the middle of the day is really nice but one does then work a longer day! The Mediterranean style of eating the main meal of the day in the afternoon is really good and I´ve become quite accustomed to it! By the way Luisa tells me that only tourists eat Paella at night (*es no normale*) as it´s so heavy, so keep that in mind when you are next in Spain!

*Friday May 31    Vitoria: Pais Vasco*
Went out to the prison to visit the *tertulia* Miguel is running there. In fact he has two, one on Thursday and one on Friday. The groups he runs at the prison are mixed men and women, with people from different countries. He has a very inclusive approach to the *tertulia* and has the view that anyone who wishes to, should be able to participate. It was an interesting experience going through the security procedures of a Spanish prison. Going into any prison is an alien experience and in another country even more so—it was like something from a Hollywood movie set.

Over lunch, Miguel talked a lot about the theoretical underpinnings of the *tertulia*. He is a devotee of Freire, who is the guru of the tertulias, but so too is Habermas. Interestingly Foucault is considered to be an agent for the ruling class in that, although he analyses the discourses and systems of power quite comprehensively, he doesn´t propose any alternatives as to how the people might break down the dominance of powerful groups. This is an argument that left-thinking academics must surely address in Australia. Habermas´s notion of communicative action develops Freire´s notion of dialogue in a modern developed society. Food for thought and further investigation. Another tertulia after lunch, and Migel's particular style of facilitation. The books he was reading included Jonathon Livingstone Seagull, Siddhartha by Herman Hesse and The Pearl by John Steinbeck.

The complete travel journal, wth a photo essay, can be found on the Spanish Literacy Circles web site—*http://home.vicnet.net.au/~flemrw*

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• *street musicians*


• *tertulia at prison*


• *signorita in traditional costume*

# Adult literacy identified as priority for improving Aboriginal health

*by Geraldine Castleton*

I represented ACAL at a forum in Alice Springs on 6 September convened by the Central Australian Remote Health Development Services (CARHDS). The forum was held to mark both National Adult Learners' Week and National Literacy Week.

Adult literacy has been identified as a critical issue in Aboriginal health. The introduction of new registration requirements for Aboriginal Health Workers against the National Competency Standards has brought a new set of assessment procedures. Literacy is considered to be a major barrier to the attainment of registration for Aboriginal Health workers.

There is a looming health workforce crisis according to CARHDS, a situation brought about by the mismatch between the expectations of accredited vocational education and training, and the reality of the adult Aboriginal population in the Northern Territory.

The aim of the forum was to use the Aboriginal Health Worker training and assessment situation to address wider adult education issues in remote Aboriginal Australia. The forum was to provide an opportunity for health and literacy professionals as well as representatives from Aboriginal communities to present the issues to key Government stakeholders.

The forum was opened by Ken Kunoth, representing CARHDS and very ably facilitated by Donna AhChee, from the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress. The forum was addressed by the Minister for Education in the Northern Territory, the Hon. Syd Stirling, MLA and the Minister for Health in the Northern Territory, the Hon. Jane Aagard, MLA.

Other presenters spoke on different aspects of the topic: Aboriginal Health Worker training and literacy; Aboriginal adult literacy; the NT context; a policy perspective on education and adult literacy, and a research perspective on literacy and health.

Participants were allocated to groups according to their experience and expertise, and asked to respond to draft Statements of Principle before addressing specific strategies relevant to that area of experience: strategies for improving adult literacy; strategies for improving participation in the health care workforce; strategies for improving literacy in the workforce; strategies for supporting change in pursuit of adult literacy; and strategies for achieving better inter agency links in pursuit of adult literacy.

The agreed Statements of Principle set out the following points:

*English Language, Literacy and Numeracy is an issue across the Northern Territory. Our situation includes many cultures, languages and literacies: this is the context for addressing Indigenous adult English language literacy. In Indigenous communities:*

*1. Adult English literacy levels are below those of the majority of other Australian adults.*

*2. Present levels of adult English literacy affect the capacity of communities to effectively control and manage themselves.*

*3. Present levels of adult English literacy are impacting on successful participation in Indigenous adult vocational education, training and employment.*

*4. English language, literacy and numeracy is an employment and governance issue for Indigenous people as well as for educators, trainers and employers.*

*5. Research suggests that improved Indigenous lifelong education will lead to improved health and, equally, improved health will lead to improved education, employment and social outcomes.*

*6. There is a lack of awareness of Indigenous adult literacy issues by non-Indigenous people.*

A Forum Statement was produced that addressed the need to establish a cross-agency taskforce on Indigenous Adult English Language and Literacy. The forum also recommended that, as an interim arrangement a steering committee be set up. ACAL has representation on that steering committee that will be convened by CARHDS.

The Forum Statement, along with agreed Statements of Principle and Strategies were presented to the Hon. Syd Stirling, who gave an undertaking to put the issues before cabinet.

It was exciting to see adult literacy identified as a priority area, and one interrelated with other issues affecting people's day-to-day lives by people other than adult literacy professionals.

There was also genuine interest in and support for ACAL to hold its annual conference in Central Australia in 2003. ACAL looks forward to not only following these developments in the Northern Territory but also to being actively involved, particularly in seeing how a cross-agency approach to adult literacy evolves.

I would like to sincerely thank CARHDS for including ACAL in this most significant event.

# Integrating WELL with vocational training in the transport industry

*by Veronica Keating*

*In this article Veronica Keating describes how Training Packages, skills recognition and literacy and numeracy are powerful tools in the development of a workplace training culture at TNT, a large transport company at Kwinana in Western Australia.*

The NRS assessment interviews at TNT were preceded by an induction tour for the WELL program coordinator. This involved meeting with each potential participant and getting them to talk about their job function, walking through their work area and describing a typical day. It was conducted without note-taking apart from name and work area.

The induction process was important for several reasons. The training program was to be based around Frontline Management competencies that may vary across AQF levels according to the level of autonomy that candidates have in their jobs. The coordinator had to determine whether it was possible to modify the skills recognition assessment strategy to allow for assessments at AQF levels 3, 4 and possibly 5 under the assessment guidelines in the Business Services Training Package.

The induction tour allowed the coordinator to get a feel for the roles undertaken by potential participants. The coordinator was able to judge the level of delivery that might be acceptable to participants based on their oral communication skills. This would be later confirmed more formally through the NRS assessments. The induction process was also useful because it allowed the supervisors to 'be the expert' for a while and to ask questions about the training program from within their own comfort zones.

## Delivery and assessment strategies

Skills recognition was essential to the success of the program, partly because the participants came from all sections of a large business operation so a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to assessment tasks would have been difficult to implement. Skills recognition was also a process offered to other employees under the Transport Training Package and was considered to be an equity issue within the workplace.

The delivery plan for Frontline Management training was structured to cover the delivery and assessment of five Units of competency at Australian Quality Framework levels 3 and 4:
Delivery of training and skills recognition assessment at AQF level 4
- *Develop work priorities*
- *Show leadership in the workplace*
- *Manage effective workplace relationships*
- *Lead work teams*

- *Implement operational plan.*

Skills recognition assessment at AQF level 3:
- *Organise personal work priorities*
- *Support leadership in the workplace*
- *Contribute to effective workplace relationships*
- *Support operational plan*
- *Participate in work teams*

It was felt that participants would be able to cope with a delivery that was pitched to all ranges of literacy levels (NRS levels 3, 4 and 5) so long as the assessment strategy was flexible enough to allow for their different levels of ability and the impact that that would have on the quality of the evidence of competence presented by different candidates.

The splitting of training delivery and skills recognition assessment strategies has proved successful, mainly because the content of the delivery has been very practical and has strongly related to the everyday experiences of participants in their roles as managers and supervisors. Management industry jargon is kept to a minimum and/or carefully explained in the context of their own workplaces and experiences.

The assessment strategy incorporates skills recognition through the gathering of evidence of existing competency and/or the design of individual work-based projects that allow participants to develop their skills on the job. Thus, classroom based skills development under the WELL program underpins the skills development that occurs on the job in the workplace.

The skills recognition assessment strategy also builds in a fee-for-service component for assessment at Diploma level for those identified through NRS assessments as capable of providing appropriate evidence of competence.

## Reported benefits

One of the main benefits reported by participants in the WELL program at TNT has been the networking opportunity that has allowed regular interaction with other managers and supervisors across this fairly large organisation. Some participants work together on a daily basis. Others rarely interact in the workplace. The training has helped to break down the sense of isolation some have felt when they have been promoted from the ranks but lacked

the experience and/or education levels of the long-term, senior managers. It has also started to break down the departmental focus of most supervisors, encouraging a 'whole of business' approach in their roles as managers.

Their jobs require the supervisors to be able to manage teams effectively, but they have had no post-secondary education and have not previously had the benefit of formal management training. The jargon and theory of performance management, leadership models and team development, is new to most of them. Their confidence levels have increased as they realise that management 'theory' is actually based on common sense practice and that the management tools developed in class can be applied in their day-to-day routines at work.

Most people participating in the training have good oral communication skills. With a heavy emphasis on oral interaction and practical skills, they can offer the benefit of their own experience to the group and also participate in devising practical solutions to common problems that affect all sections of this workplace.

An important feature of the NRS pre-training assessment interviews was the opportunity to ascertain the level of familiarity with Training Packages generally. TNT is in the process of implementing the Transport Training Package nationally and high levels of concern about this issue were detected during the interviews. The WELL program has helped to improve this situation by ensuring that participants became familiar with the language of assessment and evidence as contained in the Business Services Training Package and by stressing the common features with all Training Packages, including the Transport Training Package.

All participants have the opportunity to avail themselves of skills recognition under this program, and the training has been structured so that sessions overlap the outcomes for several Units of Competence. Participants are encouraged to think of evidence-gathering opportunities within their own workplaces and most training sessions have ended with a question and answer session about the assessment process.

Anxiety levels about training and assessment have diminished and the improved confidence about their own assessment is being translated into confidence about the process that their subordinates must also go through within the Transport Training Package. This ties in well with the content of the Frontline Management Units, particularly 'developing work priorities' in which participants consider personal development and the development of team members for improved performance in the workplace.

One participant has specifically used the WELL assessment process to drive a team development process that is linked to performance appraisals and ongoing training of her team members. She has planned a series of meetings to consult with her team members and implement an open monitoring process. Where skills recognition is not possible because of a lack of experience on the part of the participants, the coordinator liaises between the trainee and management to devise an appropriate work based project that will allow them to develop the necessary skills. For example, one participant needed to develop skills in team communication and is now participating in the Occupational Safety and Health committee in a role that is linked directly to their present and future responsibilities at work.

I would like to acknowledge the support of Maureen Hague, WELL program coordinator at WCTS and of Renee Schulyta, Human Resources Manager at TNT, Kewdale, WA.

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# Teaching remote Aboriginal communities using video-conferencing

*by Greg Crowe*

W e are running a series of trial "lessons" from an urban centre, Alice Springs, to remote Aboriginal communities, using video-conferencing technology.

## Why flexible learning?

1. We are participating in a project managed by the Flexible Learning Advisory Group of ANTA (Australian National Training Authority). The project is examining the implementation of the resources and services that have been gathered by the Flexible Learning initiative. Our project is examining the 'Access and Equity in On Line Learning' resource as it applies to remote Indigenous communities. At the time of writing we are at the half-way mark.
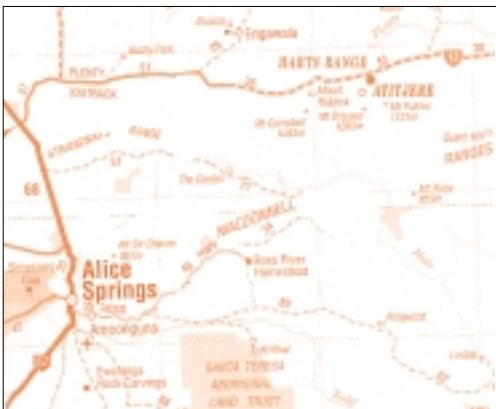


2. After a period when the technological infrastructure in the bush did not keep pace with urban centres (and we are still behind), there have been developments which now allowseducators to investigate the use of emerging technologies as a supplement to existing learning/ teaching endeavours.

3. We have been challenged to discover the best practice pedagogical principles and practices which will add value to the links provided by the technology between different centres. We want to find ways to make the use of video-conferencing a different (from "talking-heads") and new interactive learning experience.

## What is the technology?

1. Networking the Nation (a Commonwealth initiative), through the Optus-managed "Electronic Outback Project", has placed video-conferencing (and other) facilities in several remote communities. These are satellite-based operations.

2. DEET (Dept. of Employment, Education and Training) has established the Learning and Technology in Schools (LATIS) project. This has placed satellite dishes on each school in the Northern Territory. It is worth noting that these two initiatives have been implemented separately so that some communities have both systems in place, but they are not connected or co-ordinated.

3. The main urban centre, Alice Springs, has several sites which provide access to video-conferencing facilities. Most of these are with Telstra, but the two systems, Optus and Telstra, interact with each other.

## What were we testing?

1. The technology was scrutinised for reliability, availability and suitability for providing a scheduled lesson to a group in a remote location. Did it work when we wanted it to and did it give the required quality of transmission/reception?

2. Was the technology appropriate for the clientele in that they could use it and did it assist in providing access to an educational experience they were otherwise deprived of?

3. Were the teaching methods, the pedagogy, able to provide something new, enhanced and Interactive so that the learning experience added real value to the overall education of the student?

## How did it work?

We aimed to get together senior school students and health centre staff in the Optus EOP facility and deliver a health-based lesson. A lesson plan and a 'running sheet' were prepared. These and other materials were sent by mail prior to the event.

## Who are we?

The main people from the project point of view are really the staff and students in remote communities. In town, three people are pursuing the project. Matt Skoss, from DEET, is on the LATIS implementation team and has a maths education background. Christopher Brocklebank from Big Fat Productions has produced innovative multi-media based health/eduction resources and has participated in Learnscope and Flexible Learning Leader programs in the past three years. The author of this piece is with the Dept. of Health and Community Services (DHCS) in the Workforce Development (Training) section.

## An example lesson

Greg and Matt prepared a lesson on 'Body Parts' to be presented to Harts Range (Atitjere) School - secondary students and Peter Humphries, Principal and Seniors Teacher. The lesson plan and running sheet were prepared. The lesson (once started) was well received and the students were involved in

| Stage | Timing- [approx] | Activity | What is happening at... Alice Springs | Harts Range? |
|-------|------------------|----------|---------------------------------------|--------------|
| 1 | 4 min | Introduce each other | Pin the name on the person. | Kids try to guess who is who |
| 2 | 7 min | Show Part 1 of Body Story (twice). | Explain what to click on. | Click on Part 1 of Body Story. Kids watch. Repeat. Once more if necessary. |
| 3 | 5 min | Oral activity - Heart...using cards, ordering words to make a sentence | Which is the first word? Last word? How do we know?<br><br>Go through digital version of activity on screen on Matt's laptop. | As a whole class, students work on making a sentence. Read sentence out when done. Student feedback to Matt about what to do next. |
| 4 | 7 min | Show model of body, video feed to Harts Range | Matt/Christopher to draw kids' attention to heart, lungs, veins, arteries. Game: pin the label in the right place. | Quiz students on body parts on model. |
| 5 | 3 min | Show Part 1 of Body Story again. Oral activity - Arteries...using cards, ordering words to make a sentence. | Go through digital version of activity on screen on Matt's laptop. | Students work in pairs on activity (similar to Stage 3). |
| 6 | 7 min | Oral activity - Veins...using cards, ordering words to make sense | Go through on screen on Matt's laptop. | Students work in pairs on activity (similar to Stage 3). |
| 7 | 7 min | Missing letters | Go through on screen on Matt's laptop. | Kids offer answers they see on screen. |
| 8 | 15 min | Find-a-word | Discussion about the lesson, what worked, what we would do differently next time. | Kids work on Find-a-word to release Peter & Priscilla to contribute to discussion. |
|   | Total: 60 min | | | |



• **Matt and Oscar, the dummy, in class**

activities. [Because the content was covered in time, an additional CD, 'Scoundrel Spoons', a literacy program, was shown to the students.] The lesson followed the running sheet (see box above) quite well and activities were engaging for the students.

**What were the problems?**

1. There was a delay (almost an hour) in making the link-up. This was partly due to some simple procedural activities which were listed for inclusion in our final report. Essentially, the EXACT procedures for link-up at each end have to be understood by BOTH ends. Trial runs are an obvious solution but cost of these must be included in overall cost (usually $210 per hour using the current Optus system).

2. Phones did not always work. While we were waiting, several attempts, some successful, were made to identify the problems. Lines to remote areas are limited so some negotiation to have a line available is essential.

3. Much of the content had been already covered by the students so there was a risk of losing their interest. Fortunately, the novelty of a first experience overcame this problem. A more consistent delivery of course would require more negotiation with the teacher.

4. The CD did not arrive at Harts Range in time. Earlier mailing is required and it is not good to

• *English Spelling—a phonics-based approach*

Hazel Davidson & Dorothy Court have been frustrated for many years because they could find no systematic, substantial phonics material suitable for their adult students. What they were looking for was material which:

- used vocabulary suitable to adult ESL learners
- had no babyish illustrations: no teddy bears, children's cartoon characters etc
- taught the learners the most common sound-symbol relationships in English
- introduced some basic spelling rules
- provided enough exercises for sustained practice
- allowed teachers to insert their students' names into the exercises
- used the target words to reinforce English sentence structures appropriate for low level learners
- provided ESL & Adult Literacy learners with enough scaffolding to move onto writing short continuous text

Ultimately they decided that the only way to find what they wanted was to write & illustrate it themselves. *English Spelling Vol. 1* is the result.

The CD is written in both Word 2000 and Word 6/95 (on the same disk) and is available from The Language People tel. 07 3844 8700 langpeop@dovenetq.net.au

The *English Spelling Vol. 1* CD contains:

- teachers' notes with suggestions for using the materials
- teaching materials such as hand cards, wall charts, songs for learning both the sounds of the alphabet & the names of the letters in alphabetical order, sheets for teaching letter formation
- 66 pages of exercises based on the 5 short vowels, plus a few 'stupid' (irregularly spelt sight) words. The exercises proceed from sound to word to sentence to continuous text. Many of them provide an opportunity for teachers to insert their own students' names into the examples.
- answers to the exercises
- a summary of the vocabulary, grammatical points and spelling rules covered in the exercises
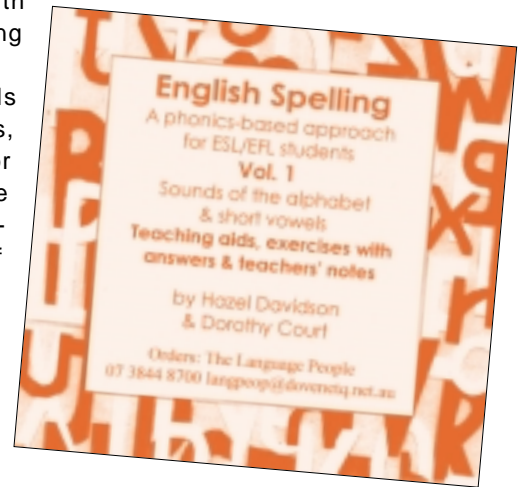
RRP $22   For further information contact hazeldavidson@email.com

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**Omission**

In the article 'How WELL are the teachers at Petersham—research into workplace teaching', published in the previous issue of *Literacy Link*, acknowledgement of the contribution to the project made by Kerry Mitchell was omitted through an editorial error. Kerry carried out the research with the part-time staff in the Adult Basic Education section at Petersham College.

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rely on the last possible mail. This may have been a bonus in that the 'Body Parts' was transmitted from Matt's laptop screen, through the video-conferencing camera to the Harts Range screen. This transmission was very clear.

5. The exercises were too easy for the older students but the manipulation of words around the screen at their direction was effective.

**What worked well?**

1. The pictures and sound were clear. The laptop picture was picked up clearly and transmitted clearly. The sound was satisfactory and the time delay was adjusted to as participants became use to it.

2. The mix of the CD 'Body Parts' (lava on sand drawings, the use of an anatomical model, Oscar, and human demonstration was a re-enforcing learning experience.

3. Interactivity was significant and gave insights for further development. Oral responses to questions, directions to Matt for the forming of sentences from a words mix, and excitement as new words and concepts were introduced were encouraging.

4. The material offered scope for follow-up in the classroom, especially when the CD arrived.

5. The pre-setting of camera angles allowed for smooth transition from one segment to the next.

**Where to next?**

This Hart's Range experience was one of several from which we are developing some practical management tools and some pedagogical practices which will enhance the accessibility of remote Indigenous communities to quality education from a distance.

Contact details are provided below in case readers have ideas or experiences that they can share or questions/issues to discuss. We hope we are past the crawling stage but feel that we are more toddlers than walkers as yet.

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# Meeting ESL needs with a nationally endorsed Training Package

*by Judith Miralles*

There are times in one's life when different skills and experience are able to coalesce, with the result that powerful synergies are created. Such a confluence occurred last year when Hass Dellal, Executive Director, Australian Multicultural Foundation (AMF) and I secured funding from ANTA's Adult Literacy National Project to pilot a capacity building program targeting women from culturally diverse communities.

A study jointly undertaken by Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs (VOMA) and the AMF found that for many people from diverse cultural and language backgrounds, voluntary work within their own ethnic groups is the first step on the way to broader involvement in the wider community. Hass and I were also aware that in some communities, the number of women involved in ethnic organisations either as leaders, as members of committees of management or providing practical support, was very low.

I still think as a teacher consequently I had no doubt that a training program was the way to go. My experience as an ESL specialist has led me to believe that language instruction works best when it is integrated into content—a tool to negotiate meaning. If we were to really open doors for the women who participated in our program, we had to make sure they could speak the language of community work. Community organisations and their volunteers function within a very specific philosophical, ethical and professional context. It was this context we wanted to unlock.

## Rationale

Industry endorsed national competencies now cover the community services sector. This is now the *lingua franca*—entry and movement within the industry are predicated on showing evidence of having attained the relevant competencies.

We began a search for appropriate modules from an existing pre-packaged national set of generic competencies. The needs of our participants would be very localised and we judged, different depending on the community. In the past I would most likely have developed a particular curriculum for this target group. Why not now? Why try to fit a specific program into a 'one size fits all' Training Package?

In my mind, the reason is very clear, there is already enough marginalisation and exclusion. Small ethnic organisations struggle with inadequately trained staff and volunteers. Many migrants and refugees struggle to have skills (let alone qualifications) recognised.

## The power of pathways

We were resolute that our training program not be locally developed and accredited with no links to industry recognised frameworks. We believed it was important to show that with willpower and expertise, 'mainstream' outcomes could be successfully achieved.

We should also not forget that education and training provide far more than access to the labour force and economic self-sufficiency. Education and training are powerful enablers of citizenship and foundation stones for a strong participatory democracy.

## Why a Training Package?

Why were Units of Competency from a Training Package selected? Why not use an existing ESL framework such as the Certificates in Spoken and Written English (CSWE) or a course locally recognised through the Victorian Further Education Curriculum Framework? The program targeted women who were clear in their desire to participate actively in the community. To move into mainstream organisations such as the Red Cross, St Vincent de Paul and meals-on-wheels, recognised vocational outcomes would have greater currency. Some of the women might also wish to work in the sector as paid staff. Competencies from an endorsed National Training Package (NTP) provided them with direct pathways into further study and base level employment.

The initial search for appropriate competencies focused on the Community Services Training Package Qualifications Framework. Within a broad range and diversity of Units of Competency, a number were seen to incorporate the skills-set identified as crucial during the community consultations.

It was above all the very broad and generic nature of the Competencies and their accompanying Elements that was a major factor in the decision to use a Training Package. It meant that it was possible to make competencies relevant by contextualising them to meet the needs of the participants. The fact that many of the Performance Criteria identified underlying language and literacy skills was also a key point.

The Range of Variables and Evidence Guides also stipulated that language used may be English or a community language.

### *Step into voluntary work*
*—implementing the 100 hours from the Certificate II in Community Services (Community Work)*

The ANTA funding covered the development and piloting of a training program and a proto-type resource kit providing a blueprint and some exemplars for the design and production of a culturally inclusive training methodology to support the delivery of Units of Competency from the Certificate II in Community Services (Community Work).

Fifteen women from Iranian, Afghan, Egyptian and Vietnamese backgrounds enrolled in the program. Students undertook a number of Units (100 hours in total), from the Certificate II in Community Services (Community Work). The participants received Statements of Attainment for the following Units/Competencies:
- Communicate with people accessing the services of the organisation (15 hrs);
- Undertake work in the community services industry (70 hrs);
- Support the activities of existing groups (20 hrs); and
- Identify and address specific client needs (15 hrs).

### Assessment
A dual assessment regime was in place. Whenever possible, for those participants who were undertaking work experience within their own ethnic communities, the assessment of course content was done in their first language (L1) in the workplace and in consultation with their supervisor. Assessment was also conducted in English to assess functional progress.

The act of balancing the need to develop subject and linguistic competence is a difficult one. For people from a language other than English background, the lack of English skills is often seen to reflect a lack of understanding of the subject matter.

Even for those of us who recognise that English language skills are not always the best way of assessing vocational knowledge, it can at times be tricky to differentiate in our assessment practices, vocational competence as opposed to linguistic competence. In a nutshell, what does one really need to do the job? A person needs to understand the notion of confidentiality but does s/he need to present a report on it?

### Issues
*Step into voluntary work* raised a number of questions to be further considered by industry.

- The diversity in our community necessitates a far more flexible training delivery. Whilst I believe that the 'one size fits all' nature of a Training Package does not preclude flexible and customised programs, I want to make it clear that the flexibility inherent in Training Packages is destroyed when there is a homogenous approach to training delivery. This has always been endemic in VET.

- There is usually not a close correlation between the language of instruction and the language of the workplace. The written materials often use complex language and grammatical structures. Their language demands are far above the skills required of persons working in an entry level position.

- There is a need to increase the bilingual/bicultural expertise available by encouraging ethnic organisations to become involved in providing work experience place-ments. Bilingual/bicultural workers are able to act as mentors and models and to facilitate the progress through the sector for people of their ethnic background.

- It is now timely to review the National Reporting System (NRS) with respect to its value in assessing the language competence of people whose first language is not English. As an ESL specialist, I have used the Australian Second Language Proficiency Rating (ASLPR) scales. For this program, I used the NRS as a diagnostic and assess-ment tool. Having used both, I remain convinced that the ASLPR scales remain a richer diagnostic and assessment tool for ESL where a person's English language skills are underpinned by a range of L1 literacy backgrounds.

### 2002—producing and piloting a Professional Development Kit
This year's project seeks to consolidate the out-comes of *Step into voluntary work*, funded last year under the Adult Literacy Innovative pro-jects. It takes the initiative to the next stage through two practical objectives:
• To produce professional development materi-als to support culturally and linguistically inclusive training and assessment in the CS&H Training Package.
• To ensure their wide availability by submitting the materials for noting by the National Training Quality Council (NTQC) and subsequent listing on the NTIS.

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# Learning for life—exploring relations between adult literacy, numeracy, lifelong learning and socio-economic well-being

*by Sue Shore*

In May 2001 the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (ALNARC) negotiated a research workplan with DEST based on exploring the relations between adult literacy, numeracy, lifelong learning and socio-economic well-being. The research program was designed to integrate new research with an analysis of past policy and practice in order to provide a body of evidence for future policy development in the adult literacy and numeracy field. The following four areas of research findings were identified:

1. population competence;
2. literacy and numeracy provision in training;
3. professional support for educators and trainers;
4. policy and systemic issues.

For a more detailed overview of the program and downloadable copies of the project reports visit the ALNARC web site
http://www.staff.vu.edu.au/alnarc

## Population competence

Australia's involvement in the International Adult Literacy Survey provided evidence that current Australian profiles do not meet the necessary literacy and numeracy levels to respond to training, workplace and citizenship demands placed on people in contemporary times. Widespread commentary on the issue indicates the 'problem' is not simply one of improving the quality or length of compulsory schooling, as literacy and numeracy capacity on leaving school is only one indicator of continued competence throughout the lifespan. While some researchers question the transfer of school literacies to the workplace others argue that contemporary work and citizenship demands create new forms of literacy and numeracy practice. Therefore ongoing literacy and numeracy competence is best conceptualised under a model of 'lifelong learning', with the requirement for support in terms of policies that address whole of life education, rather than schools based policy initiatives alone.

Empirical studies in Australia indicate that literacy and numeracy are considered variously as communication practices, generic skills, innovation or enterprise skills, entry level skills and context specific skills. Whilst each umbrella term addresses skills critical for living and working in the twenty-first century, each umbrella term refers to a different, but equally important, aspect of 'core' skills, how they are taught, when they are integrated with training and lifelong learning and what aspects of their profiles are 'core' across the terms. Hence, whilst different research points to different skills for different contexts and purposes, there is no single framework for explaining the ways these different research outcomes fit together coherently. However, uniformly agreed as important are the critical skills of literacy and numeracy that underpin all aspects of life and work.

Survey data suggest that Australia occupies a 'middle ground' in literacy rankings when compared to countries of similar industrial and developed profiles. While knowledge of Australian numeracy levels is ambiguous at best, there is increasing evidence that poor numeracy performance has a significant impact on labour market participation (Bynner, 2002). Further, that more information about the aggregation of performance around gender would be helpful in understanding future needs regarding numeracy provision generally, and workplace training in particular.

Data drawn from population surveys must also be analysed in the context of the limited rural and Indigenous raw data provided. Given this population profile it is unlikely that findings drawn from the surveys are an adequate representation of specific population needs.

## Literacy and numeracy in training

Across public and policy contexts literacy and numeracy are constituted as entry-level skills necessary for many employment profiles. However, many trainers are working with tacit assumptions about workers' literacy and numeracy skills. While often not named as such, literacy and numeracy also underpin many higher order employment and citizenship activities.

Data from previous ALNARC research into issues related to the implementation of Training Packages, indicates that access to training is often limited to full-time workers; that literacy and numeracy use is usually context specific and dependent on the task at hand; accessing systematic literacy and numeracy support is difficult for some trainees despite the fact that they have already been accepted into training programs; and, training provision at lower levels of the Australian Qualification Framework is not well established as an entry pathway for people with low levels of literacy and numeracy. Whilst there is evidence to suggest that literacy and numeracy demands in training and workplaces are increasing there is some concern that the causal link between literacy/numeracy capacity and employment has not been more

critically evaluated. Such an evaluation would have different nuances across rural and remote communities, and for people from non-English speaking backgrounds, for example.

On the matter of general preparation for work and lifelong learning there is increasing evidence to suggest that competencies are not simply 'transferred', rather, they are re-contextualised through new forms of learning that are situated in the relevant context. Similarly, this research on non-standard work practices in contemporary workplaces suggests speaking and 'personal presentation' skills are the leading communicative practices (Falk and Millar 2002).

**Support for educators and trainers**
Literacy and numeracy competence is perceived by governments to be critical to lifelong learning and VET productivity. As such, knowledge of literacy and numeracy practices and associated issues of provision are concerns for all stakeholders. Literacy and numeracy provision involves issues associated with general training and the detail and specificity of literacy and numeracy involved in each context. The challenge for developers of materials is to conceptualise without becoming too specific, and at the same time indicate to trainers that delivering training will involve a much more detailed response to local context. The challenge for educators and trainers is to develop a specific body of knowledge around literacy and numeracy and acquire skills associated with more generic adult and vocational education delivery. Current reviews of The Training Package For Assessment & Workplace Training (NAWT Nov. 2001) and associated studies (Thompson and Chan Lee 2001) suggest that current preparation for workplace training and assessment provides insufficient training in integrating literacy and numeracy into vocational training delivery.

As in the wider VET sector, there are increasing concerns about the casualisation of teachers' work and the impact this has on quality teaching. Increasing deregulation and casualisation of educators/trainers, in combination with an increasing tendency to privatise provision and promote 'user pays' responsibility for their initial training and ongoing professional development is problematic. Various projects raised issues about the funding available in tender documents for professional development, especially professional development that moves beyond compliance with systemic accountability measures to 'curiosity driven' investigations about teaching and learning.

**Policy and systemic issues**
A mapping of provision over the past 10-15 years suggests a demise in formal procedures for organising and coordinating Australian literacy and numeracy provision nationally. However, there is substantial evidence emerging from over a decade of activity within vocational education and training regarding the integration of literacy and numeracy in the wider VET and lifelong learning domains. Despite this extension of portfolio responsibility within VET, responsibility for 'whole-of-government' responses to adult literacy and numeracy rests largely within one department, DEST.

A number of tendencies appeared in the data across projects. First, there is a tendency to amalgamate diverse areas of provision resulting in generic areas of program management and responsibility. A second tendency is associated with short term funding cycles, although this is not a phenomenon unique to the adult literacy and numeracy field, nor is it something easily resolved given the budget process associated with education and training provision. An allied issue is the relative increase in time spent on documenting compliance with funding process compared with actual provision of education and training. In systems far wider than VET these tendencies present challenges for educators and managers as they impact on the changing nature of education and training work.

**The way forward**
In any democratic society, governments accept responsibility for basic education for all citizens. There is a particular challenge here in that whilst the 'problem' of adult literacy and numeracy education is not one residing in a poor schooling system, the solution must of necessity begin with systemic change and innovation. This challenge has been taken up in previous decades through sustained Commonwealth funding. It was this funding innovation through previous Australian national policy that provided the scaffold for coordinated provision. More recently, the VET sector has provided innovative models of intra-sectoral collaboration, and a Ministerial Declaration on Adult Community Education is explicit about government responsibility for providing pathways to lifelong learning and work.

Any response to the body of evidence produced from the ALNARC 2001-2002 National Research Program requires recognition of the complex layers of governance involved in such provision. A number of challenges are evident in addressing these exigencies:
1. Complex systems require responsive forms of policy development. In the case of adult literacy and numeracy no single response will deal with the complexity of learning and training issues revealed by the existing research. The research does, however, imply a whole-of-government approach to adult literacy and numeracy, which is consistent with parallel

# literacy contact lists

innovations in other areas of social policy. Simply reinstalling policies from the early 1990s would be inappropriate, as would a call to a policy that addressed literacy and numeracy in isolation.

2. The VET sector provides a number of models of integrated policy responses to such complex relationships. Literacy and numeracy delivery has achieved some degree of success with the intra-sectoral 'built in not bolted on' model of articulation into vocational training and may provide a basis for future cross-sectoral integration.

3. Adopting a lifelong learning approach must take seriously the political and economic exigencies of adults' lives. It is important to listen to the concerns of employers and business; however there is danger in thinking these views will be easily prioritised or reconciled with those of individuals and groups of learners.

4. There are enormous challenges involved in using diverse knowledges and cultures as the basis of an integrated system of learning for life. Such diverse experiences and knowledges have much to offer in terms of their positive contributions to the socio-economic and cultural life of a society; nevertheless the challenges of implementation should not be underestimated.

One of the major challenges emerging from this body of research is to understand the range of complex functions required to be achieved by literary and numeracy provision, and continue to develop forms of governance that respond to this range of functions. Approaching the 'solution' in this way foregrounds the iterative relationship between the range of policy initiatives available and the variety of purposes they are required to serve.

The views expressed in this summary do not necessarily reflect the views of the Commonwealth of Australia.

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