



Young people and adult literacy



The two pieces dealing with young people and the LANT programme (pp. 6 and 14) remind us of the difficulties adult literacy providers now face dealing with youth with high levels of social dysfunction, difficulties we thought we had left behind in the secondary school classroom.

But we mustn't lose heart. *On the silver screen* (p. 8) and the article on the ACT Full Service Schools Unit (p. 12) show positive ways of addressing the needs of young people and actually making a difference.

Finally, the *Conversation with Rosie Wickert* (p. 10) provides an historical overview which points to the many successes of our chameleon-like profession. To be able to see these victories requires this sort of long term perspective, so they are not hidden by the obstacles we still face on a daily level.

This issue of *Literacy Link* invited contributors to look at literacy provision for young people: a theme which sits together with the research project on youth literacy currently being undertaken by ACAL Research Project Officer, Carolyn Ovens, (see Carolyn's article, p. 2, the first of three arising from her research on youth literacy).

ACAL believes a policy window exists with regard to youth literacy; at present there is a wide gulf between the intended outcomes of policy and the actual outcomes (another way of saying the policy is way out of touch with reality).

ACAL intends to bring the issues surrounding youth literacy to the attention of all relevant sections of the community. We hope, too, that other organisations will pick up on this issue and enter into a dialogue with us. Accordingly, three of the articles in this issue of *Literacy Link* are by contributors outside the literacy profession.

The article *Youth literacy and welfare rights* (p. 4) challenges us to consider what priority education might have with at-risk street kids to whom food and shelter are scarcely available.

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Does policy intended to be socially inclusive actually exclude young people?

by Carolyn Ovens

This is the first of three articles, which will feature in *Literacy Link* over the next few editions. They arise from commissioned research undertaken for ACAL into the relevance of literacy: the challenge is to address the fact that more kids are opting not to get involved in institutional education systems – and new ways have to be found for working with young people in this situation.

Policy in 'new times'

There has been a recent call by the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) for policy cohesion in relation to the exclusion from effective participation in society of increasing numbers of young people in its member states. Ministers at the OECD

Conference in London (8-9 February 2000) called for discussion and best practice examples for policy cohesion around the social inclusion of young people. This year's conference followed 'Preparing Youth for 21st Century' Conference held in Washington in 1999. Discussion was directed towards the following:

- *Is there agreement that early and sustained intervention can ensure social inclusion for disadvantaged youths?*
- *Are there lessons to be drawn from integrated and individualised local delivery mechanisms?*
- *How important is the involvement of public authorities, employers, trade unions, local communities and other actors in greater coherence?*
- *What sorts of arrangements are needed to*

bring them together in a sustained and effective manner?

They provide a way of drawing together themes which are emerging with ACAL's goal to position itself in this policy arena. The topic of social inclusion figures prominently in recent publications on youth issues. Youth Policy reaches to the essential professionalism in the field of adult literacy.

Australian literacy practitioners are increasingly implicated in what has become a chain of surveillance of young people's educational achievement and citizen rights. As professional educators, they may have become unwittingly involved in the exclusion rather than the inclusion and empowerment of young people.

Each of the OECD discussion points raises issues for ACAL and Australian practitioners.

- *Is there agreement that early and sustained intervention can ensure social inclusion for disadvantaged youths?*

The use of a term like 'intervention' in the statement as 'inclusion' raises inherent contradictions around what constitutes inclusive policy and practice. Does fining a young person with limited skills for breaching a Mutual Obligation agreement assist them in becoming included? Or is this a form of intervention which may actually exacerbate exclusion?

- *Are there lessons to be drawn from integrated and individualised local delivery mechanisms?*

Discussions around delivery of services for young people necessarily involve adult literacy.

Literacy Link (ISSN 0158-3026) is the newsletter of the Australian Council for Adult Literacy. The Council is a voluntary organisation set up in 1976 to support the development of adult literacy, numeracy and basic education in Australia.

ACAL promotes co-operation among interested organisations and individuals, both government and non-government, by undertaking and encouraging appropriate study, research and action.

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A received wisdom suggests that limited literacy is part of a cluster of deficits that typically describe young people 'at risk'. Practitioners may wish to challenge such wisdom and the deficiency being unproblematically attributed to the young people.

- *How important is the involvement of public authorities, employers, trade unions, local communities and other actors in greater coherence?*

A common theme emerging from the literature is a call for a paradigm shift that removes blame from young people so that it may be better understood how societal factors impact over and above individual action. Some writers (Bentley, 1999; Lewis et al, 1998; Raffo and Reeves, 2000) indicate that the paradigm should shift, for example, from the 'old' safety net delivery mechanism and policy support to networks of safety. Raffo and Reeves (2000: 147) would warn, however, that the effectiveness of these networks is conditional on the quality of the material and symbolic resources available in these constellations.

Many of the youth deemed to be 'at risk' in society have very limited and impoverished resources on which to draw. Furthermore, it could well be that the various stakeholders, themselves, are currently incapable of meeting the requirements of this new paradigm (Nicholson, 2000:8-9).

- *What sorts of arrangements are needed to bring them together in a sustained and effective manner?*

This final point will be used as a way of positioning ACAL within the broader discussion around what a 'sustained and effective manner' might look like for the literacy field in Australia and as its response to the OECD Ministers' challenge.

This paper will deal in more depth with the first of these discussion points leaving the other points for development in later articles.

Discontinuity and Fragmentation

Much of the international research challenges the very starting point of the OECD Ministers' deliberations. Unproblematic use of the term 'social inclusion' denies recognition of the ways in which many young people are excluded as well as included in policy work. In an attempt to address social exclusion in the Australian context, State and Commonwealth governments use 'pathways' (Australia, OECD, 2000) as a mechanism to undertake a national consultation for policy development. This approach immediately raises the question of where 'pathways' lead. In their recent discussion of youth policy in Britain, Cohen and Ainley (2000:83) have questioned the use of the term 'pathways' stating that this metaphor 'displays a preoccupation with a career paradigm based on a definition of labour market participation in various forms of postcompulsory education'.

For many young people within the Australian context, such 'pathways' are a myth as they are excluded from such a pathway due to labour market conditions that provide very little work opportunities for young people with low levels of skill.

*"These days you gotta go to college
And get a degree
To get a job serving coffee
At the brasserie"*

*Tourist-led Recovery Ruth Apelt
'Told You Twice', 1994*

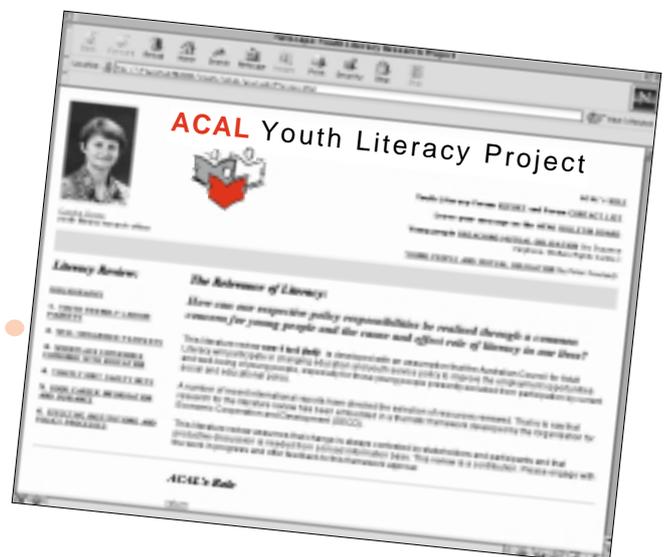
It is also pointed out that terms such as 'pathways' and 'linear transition' misrepresent the situation. It is now identified (ibid: 84) that this transitional phase should be represented as a 'typology of discontinuous life patterns'.

Arguing along similar lines to that taken by Cohen and Ainley, Lewis, Stone, Shipley and Madzar (1998) use the term 'transition' to capture a 'means of socialising youth into the [fragmented] life stages that follow schooling'.

▶▶▶ continued on page 14

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the ACAL website -**

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Youth literacy & welfare rights

by Suzanne Varghese

The Welfare Rights Centre is concerned with youth literacy and numeracy in the context of the Social Security Act.

The Welfare Rights Centre is a community legal organisation that advises and advocates for recipients of social security system. The Centre provides community education about social security rights and entitlements and lobbies for policy changes and law reform in this area.

Since the introduction of Mutual Obligation and the Government's proposal to link welfare payments for young people with literacy and numeracy skills, many concerns about these programmes have been raised. I will briefly outline some of the main concerns before discussing the broader concept of linking income to compulsory action.

We all recognise the need for some young people to have improved literacy and numeracy skills and support the provision of adequately funded literacy and training programmes. A programme to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of young people has the potential to improve the quality of young people's lives, particularly through an increased ability to gain employment.

However, making enrolment in such courses a prerequisite for young people to receive a living income is an unnecessarily negative approach for many reasons.

To begin with, a person who has failed in the education system usually has other structural barriers operating against them such as the

high unemployment rate, homelessness, disability and family and social problems.

Through this programme, the Government is placing the responsibility for the quality of a young person's education on the person themselves, rather than facing up to the problem of a severely under-funded public education system.

To place the onus on training programmes to redress literacy issues without also addressing these other issues is unrealistic.

Compounding this, a number of young people have been unable to acquire skills through the normal education structure, yet the Government's programme often places them back into this structure.

Some young people just don't fit into a TAFE model. We need to look at whether there are better models that can provide (for want of a better term) remedial literacy programmes. When young people are offered choices they take them.

The length of the literacy and numeracy courses is also of concern. How do you fit what takes many years in the regular education system into 400 hours? It strikes me as unrealistic to achieve adequate literacy in such a short duration, particularly given the other barriers mentioned before.

Finally, concerns have been raised about the language that Centrelink uses when discussing programmes with a mutual obligation component. Centrelink couches its material in terms of providing young people with choice. But this choice is illusionary. Instead, young people are punished and pushed to do things.

Of course, this programme is simply the latest of the Government's programmes to emphasise mutual obligations. The Government's Work for the Dole Scheme exemplifies the truism that the corollary of 'compulsory' is 'punishment'. The punishment component of mutual obligations is obviously something WRC is particularly interested in.

This Scheme requires long term unemployed young people to sign a Mutual Obligation agreement which legally commits them to undertake work in the community.

Penalties for breaching Mutual Obligation			
<i>Type of Breach</i> ¹	First Breach	Second Breach	Third Breach
<i>Activity</i>	Total Fine: \$775.95	Total Fine: \$1034.60	Total Fine: \$1326.40
<i>Test Breaches</i>	18% for 26 weeks (equivalent of 4-5 weeks NSA)	24% for 26 weeks (equivalent of 6-7 weeks NSA)	No payment received for 8 weeks
<i>Administrative Test</i>	Total Fine: \$371.40	Total Fine: \$371.40	Total Fine: \$371.40
<i>Breaches</i>	16% for 13 weeks (equivalent of 2-3 weeks NSA)	16% for 13 weeks (equivalent of 2-3 weeks NSA)	16% for 13 weeks (equivalent of 2-3 weeks NSA)
<i>Move to an area of lower employment prospects</i>	Total Fine: \$4310.80 26 Week non payment period		

¹ Assumption that the client is receiving the over 21, single rate (no dependent children) of New Start Allowance - \$331.60. As at 20 March 2000.

Trade and Business Maths 1

(\$35.00)

Sue Thompson and Ian Forster
Longman Australia 2000

This resource is a refreshing resource for numeracy educators. It is the first of a two book series from Queensland. A teacher's CD is also available with tests, worksheets and further teachers' resources. Focusing only on the first book here, it is organised on a thematic basis. The book covers areas such as Maths in the Hospital, Having a Baby, Travelling Overseas, Car Mathematics, Earning Money, Spending Money as well as calculating tax charges.

I trialled some sections of the chapter on having a baby with a group of Women's Education Maths students. The students were NRS 1 - 2 and they thoroughly enjoyed it.

The strengths were that it was mapped to the National ATRAC Maths Modules. This gave me a common reference point about where it was pitched. The students were able to follow their interest rather than be focused on the actual numeracy skills. They learnt by doing and becoming absorbed, rather than according to a list of tasks needed to complete the module.

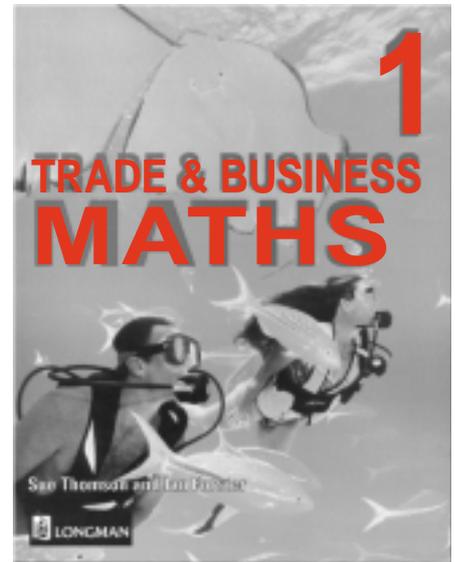
The section on Baby Care included calculating due dates of the baby using a date wheel, tracking blood pressure changes, heart rates and reading weight charts. This was very popular with the students and they became engrossed in a range of tasks covering decimals including rounding, adding, subtraction as well as inter-

pretation and personal research tasks.

The chapter on car mathematics includes work on blood alcohol levels, reaction times, car insurance and car values. This is woven around skill areas such as using formulas, interpreting graphs, and percentage.

Each new section summarized key terms and vocabulary used in the section. I was impressed by this book. It is an Australian resource, relevant to students across a range of ages and successfully integrates language, literacy and numeracy teaching materials into National modules with a thematic approach.

It would be useful to use as snippets to supplement your student programme and as a model to consider integrated Literacy and Numeracy teaching plans. I suspect it may also strengthen the language and literacy awareness amongst some traditional maths teachers. Highly recommended.



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If a person does not fulfill their obligations, Centrelink can impose penalties, called breaches, on them.

The monetary equivalent of incurring such a breach is detailed in the table (opposite).

The punishment for young people who do not comply is extremely harsh and often exceeds the monetary penalties that are incurred by a person who commits a criminal offence. For example, under the existing breach system, not attending a Centrelink information night incurs a higher penalty than a first drink-driving offence.

These fines highlight the considerable irony in the Government's argument that the Scheme is a means of addressing the 'despondency and despair' of the long term unemployed.

Furthermore, in all Centrelink information the penalties for breaches are described in terms of percentages per week rather than the actual

amount of the fine. For example, the penalties for an activity test breach are described as '24% for 26 weeks' rather than 'if you do this, this or this you will be fined approximately \$800'.

Many young people who are breached may not be aware of how much they have been fined, particularly young people with literacy and numeracy difficulties. This raises many questions regarding the usefulness of breaches as a form of deterrence. Furthermore, many breaches can be overturned, and are if a person knows their appeal rights.

In the current climate, it is important that avenues for appeals against administrative decisions made by Centrelink exist and are accessible, particularly to young people with literacy problems. Young people very rarely challenge departmental decisions. For example,



continued over

Young people & the Literacy and Numeracy Training (LANT) programme

by Lois McManus

In March of 1999 Literacy and Numeracy Training (LANT) programme was expanded to include 15 to 18 year olds and 24 to 55 year olds. This programme was widely known as the 'Mutual Obligation' literacy programme and was originally aimed at 18 to 24 year olds.

The LANT programme is not a programme in which there is a sense of focus on the needs of any particular group - youth, migrants, disabled etc. This is a labour market programme and the target group varies according to unemployment in the area. The focus is on accountability, verification and reporting.

The LANT programme is not easy to manage and not easy for teaching staff to work in. All adult education is challenging but programmes with integrated subjects and continuous entry are exhausting. Add in an age range of 15 to 55 and include ESL and ESB, and it's a big ask. I am honoured to work with a group of professionals who, against the odds, remain committed to meeting the needs of each person in the programme.

There are many 'profiles' of young people who come into this programme. If they are 15 to 18 year olds the common factor is that school 'didn't suit them'. They didn't get on with teachers, or they were victims of bullying, or they moved around a lot and got lost in the system. Often they left school with a job to go to but the job only lasted a few months. Often they have been diagnosed with ADD or ADHD, and use medication with varying degrees of success. Some are capable students with obvious potential, others are young people who spent their school years in Ed. Support Units or Special Classes.

In other words, these young people are the younger version of the clients we typically receive into adult education classes - with two major differences - they have not acquired the motivation that adult learners so often have, and they have loads more energy!

Why do they come? Some come because they really do want to attend school but can't cope in

the traditional school environment. Some have tried the 'alternative' programmes offered within schools but have been unable to cope with the discipline or with other students. Many have been refused entry back into the school system. Some can't get into a TAFE course of their choice at the moment. Many of them recognise that they need a year ten Certificate.

Centrelink requires all under 18 year olds (who have not completed year 12) to be in education or training in order to qualify for Youth Allowance.

In some suburbs education and training options are very limited and the commencement dates are often linked to term start dates. Often the referring officer at Centrelink is a social worker or Youth Team Officer desperately trying to find something suitable for a young person. Often the loss of Youth Allowance is going to cause hardship for the whole family - not just the young person involved.

Our staff always had an idea of the type of programme we would like to offer. We knew that we needed small groups. We knew that the content has to be interesting and relevant. We knew that we have to treat these clients with



• Lois McManus



Youth literacy and welfare rights

we've found that the appeal rates for people aged under 25 are very low in comparison to other age brackets. Perhaps this is because young people aren't aware of their appeal rights or are concerned that appealing will have a negative effect on relationship with their caseworker. Provisions must be made to challenge breaches and other decisions related to the reasonableness of the requirements in a particular case.

Is it any wonder then, that young people find themselves unable or unwilling to meet the requirements placed on them to access income and are breached for this, losing part or all of an already low income?

WRC believes a better option is to use the carrot rather than the stick. Why can't we use methods that encourage success rather than punish failure (or inability to meet the predetermined expectations)?

Alternative approaches to this issue that are proactive and positive could include more

respect and provide subtle guidance and we believed that most of them would prefer to be doing something more active and productive. Many of the staff have experienced the excitement that can exist when education, training and life skills are combined in programmes designed to meet the needs of this particular age group.

However what we are required to offer is fairly well defined by the guidelines set down in the contract and the funding limitations. We assess clients against the National Reporting System and then must make substantial increases in reading, writing and numeracy (as per NRS) to receive a full payment. We offer the CGEA to Level 3 in order to meet the demands of clients needing year ten equivalent. We can be as creative and as innovative as we want in terms of delivery strategies, within the financial constraints.

For many of our clients coping, surviving, expressing themselves and staying alive are really the priorities and a programme that really addressed the needs of youth would give us a lot more flexibility to recognise this.

In delivering a classroom based programme, predictable issues arise. We run mixed-age classes at all sites because the funding, and the mobility of the client group does not allow for the establishment of cohesive, homogenous groups.

In a mixed-age class teachers see the differences between adult learning styles and the attitudes of youth. It is a difference in motivation that comes with maturity.

The ideal of providing 'relevant' content is really challenging when the group is so diverse. Whilst the young produce endless project material on hotted up cars and hooch, older students have other interests.

In the original proposal there was no expectation that our resources budget would have to stretch to include such a diverse range of clients. Consequently the resource budget is thinly spread across all areas and everyone

feels the pinch.

One of the most difficult areas to manage is the business of appropriate behaviour. The programme is no longer voluntary and it is no longer adult. We now deal with the behaviour issues that are usually the domain of high schools. As one of the staff said to me, 'I left high school teaching to get away from this'. Our role as an adult educators becomes fuzzy around the edges.

Despite these difficulties we have teenage clients who say that this is the first time they have enjoyed 'school'. They love the independence of an adult learning environment. Their parents are thrilled that the youth has finally found somewhere that they feel respected and valued.



• *Where the mature student might reflect on work, discuss and analyse, self correct and evaluate, the young person typically finishes quickly, gives it to the teacher, and waits for the teacher to tell them if it was right.*

LANT providers around Australia will face the issues of young clients in different ways. The difficulties that they experience will depend on the labour market mix in their area and some will do the job better than others. I would like to see the literacy programme less focused on 'labour market' and more focused on recognising the particular needs of groups within the labour market. Funding, assessment and evaluation processes that recognise the diversity of needs of clients would make programmes more effective for the learners and more manageable for the teachers and administrators.

*Lois McManus
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choice in programmes, programmes with a more flexible structure, incentive payments to youth to participate in literacy and numeracy programmes or the introduction of an earnings credit scheme. It is interesting that the current Commonwealth Government has abolished all of these things.

In the era of mutual obligation, much is said about young people's obligations to society and comparatively little about society's obligations to young people. Surely, the very least society must provide to all its members is a living

income. To not do so is to fail to recognise the structural barriers faced by many in Australia and the fact that social security payments are the only income support many people receive for long periods of time.

It doesn't help an illiterate young person to cut their income. It strikes me as a cruel and excessive punishment for an 'activity test breach'.

*by Suzanne Varghese
Welfare Rights Centre, Brisbane QLD
(adapted from a speech presented to Youth
Literacy & Numeracy Forum March 1999)*

Boystown is a residential care organisation where boys live in cottages and attend school on the property. The reading age of the boys varies from 7 to 15+. Most boys turn 15 in Year 10 though there are exceptions.

One of the most famous of all one-liners is 'Go ahead and make my day' It was through no deliberate planning that, one day, I started using such one-liners in my media studies classes. What I did not anticipate, however, was that one of my students would take this to the next step. It resulted in our exchanging lines from movies whenever we met and this was fine. Unfortunately, it was hard to get back to having a real conversation.

This new found discourse could go on like this
'You can't handle the truth'
 [reply] *'They can kill us.....but they can't take away our freedom'*

Sometimes each of us would take turns to say three or four segments of speech. It was like arriving indirectly into a modern play. I have often gone further and reflected on lines such as these and changed them
'They can make us 'mark' all weekend but they can't take away our freedom'

My teaching at Boystown, Beaudesert began nine years ago. It has been an interesting time as I have always been on the lookout for 'what works' for the particular boys at Boystown.

The specifics of Boystown have allowed some latitude of approach.

This has led me to focus on two important aspects:

- to re-define what is said or taught in terms of whether it 'lifts' the student or not
- if students go off on a tangent then take it up if it appears productive

Many students began to express an interest in producing a video. Naturally, it was to be about themselves. As you will appreciate, there is that element of 'there's me on the big silver screen'.

The reality was that the boys just wanted to take the media equipment, shoot 'something' and somehow arrive at an end product. they saw no need for planning or coordinating any-

thing. As we all know, nothing much would be achieved with such an approach and students would soon abandon it.

In response to the students' interest, the group aimed to produce a professionally formatted video. It was to be a 'memory' of their final year in year 10, to culminate in a viewing at their end of year farewell dinner.

As indicated, the student group was Year 10 and this covered classes with ranging levels of age and ability.

In general, boys come to Boystown with limited school backgrounds. Modified programmes cater for minimal attention spans and poor social and interaction skills. Boys can at times exhibit unstable, volatile and unpredictable behaviours. Any change to the immediate environment can trigger off undesirable behaviour in an individual or a group. In general, the boys at times can also exhibit many fine behaviours worthy of any maturing adolescent.

With these factors under consideration, it could be anticipated that individual or group work would not be up to the demands of such a project.

The contributing factors to completing this task in an organised manner and to minimise deficit behaviours were:

- inbuilt motivation in virtually all things connected with adolescent boys and video camcorders
- involvement in practical, hands on, spatial and action type requirements
- positive rapport between teacher and students
- responding to students expressing a desire to receive a little recognition in their lives... they were indicating that their life may not have been too flash up to this point but here will be a record of their present achievements
- students seeing this project as non-threatening given in many cases their background in literacy and numeracy skills
- students not achieving in English or Maths can exhibit a high level of computer literacy
- allowance that mistakes will occur in work and behaviours along the way



- elements of a self-directed discovery type of learning associated with such a computer programme

The plan was to incorporate the video production into the basic media course. Each of six units concentrated on a specific aspect or aspects necessary to complete the overall task of producing a video. As the year progressed, it became clear that the enthusiasm and inherent motivation in 'their project' flowed over to media and other classes.

The use of a digital camera, video-camcorder and the computer digital video system *Media 100* made this production possible. The outline adopted appears as below.



1. Cartooning

- use the cartoon or comic model to introduce students to a storyboard
- start collecting 'images' - digital camera shots printed and stored on computer, video-tape live action
- use *Media 100* to digitise small segments of action and save in 'bins'
- use the comic model to show how action is compartmentalised into segments
- establish a bank of video clips of desired time length in *Media 100*

2. Soap Operas

- Unit 1 is action, Unit 2 is sound
- students learn by manipulation of *Media 100* to place a soundtrack via CD or other method
- produce a voice over on a selected video taped extract from a soap opera
- learn by doing and discussion what works best and what sounds best to a specific piece

3. Advertising

The learning strategy is to use the concepts within advertising to show that the successful production of a video is about presentation. It is about length of time, targeted audience and message. therefore producers need

- to be able to select a suitable title and individual title for segments
- to be aware of connecting segments either by sound or title
- to create titles and graphics based on intended audience and on the message that the student wishes to express about their last year at Boystown

4. Crime Dramas

- use the model of crime dramas to show the rise and fall of action sequences
- to use the edit suite in *Media 100* to move clips from bins to the programme
- use edit techniques to cut, dissolve, fade, wipe
- to connect appropriate segments to fit the music soundtrack and allow for a flow of action

5. Infotainment

- take the model of lifestyle shows to show how a production can be entertaining for an intended audience
- list all activities of the year
- list funny, serious, memorable moments
- students examine own collection of photos which can be scanned and included

6. Documentaries

- use the model of a documentary to finish the project
- take a last look at the theme
- view the end product to see if certain parts need to be added or deleted
- include recognition of those who contributed to the production
- be competent in making copies via computer to video and video to video.

This project was a first attempt at providing a practical link between literacy and technology. An evaluation of the process and outcomes will take place.

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Lens on Literacy

An International Conference
for ACAL

Perth, Australia
21 - 23 September 2000

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Reflections on ABE in NSW - a conversation with Rosie Wickert

by Sue Sim

The purpose of this interview, apart from reviewing the history of adult literacy and numeracy in NSW, was to reinject some enthusiasm into my teaching by interviewing a woman whom I had found politically and educationally inspiring at the beginning of my adult basic education career. Rosie Wickert has worked in the area of adult literacy for over twenty years - variously as a teacher, manager, researcher and academic.

The idea was that I would record Rosie's responses to a series of questions. The result is less the illuminating voice of Rosie Wickert and more an intersection of voices and genres that will, I hope, reflect on a decade or so of adult literacy and numeracy in NSW.

Different beginnings for around the states has an historical underpinning. An encounter with an 'illiterate' messenger within the NSW Department of Education inspired Geoff Falkenmire (a senior inspector in the Department) to establish programmes within Evening Colleges and AMES as well as the Adult Literacy Information Office. The strong commitment to ABE through the TAFE structure in NSW has also meant guaranteed funding for programmes, permanency for teaching staff, mainstreaming of ABE programmes, and working with other courses and subjects to increase the profile of ABE.

How is the field looking now?

A difficult question to answer when you've been out of direct contact with the field. From an outsider's perspective the field looks relatively healthy. In NSW we have Reading and Writing for Adults classes, Maths Workshop classes, volunteer tutors, a range of accredited full time courses (Certificate of Adult Foundation Education) and tutorial support through the TAFE system. Most TAFE Colleges in NSW run with an Adult Basic Education section. Distance education has expanded in resource production as well as student numbers. Private providers have been successful in winning contracts from the Government. In the community sector there are more permanent project officer positions to coordinate more stable community classes.

Why then did I ask this question expecting an answer to match my negative perspective? My memory of adult basic education was one of energetic and committed teachers and tutors coming together to fight for the social justice cause that was ABE. In NSW, recruitment for full time teachers was peaking as was the then Institute of Technical and Teacher Education (ITATE) courses to train and professionally develop them. It's not the expanding industry it was ten years ago. However these are the thoughts of someone stuck in the middle of it all. Take two steps back and someone like

Rosie can remind you that maybe all that energy paid off.

Adult Basic Education is safer than it was back then. The integration of literacy and numeracy issues into workplace agendas and vocational courses secures their future. Courses such as CAFE are well and truly accredited and articulation paths are secured. Adult literacy and numeracy are on the agenda in arenas from Centrelink and Job Networks to workplaces and enterprise bargaining.

Some may say we've fought the social justice battle and won.

How do you think the status/role of the NSWLNC reflects the field in general?

Rosie Wickert was President of the Council at a time when it was at the centre of some of the more heated political battles for adult literacy and numeracy from the days of Terry Metherell, who as Education Minister in NSW, inspired protest rallies of proportions I've not seen since, to the burgeoning projects generated through International Year of Literacy and the National Policy on Languages.

The Council, as was the industry, was dynamic and exciting. The growth of activity and the need for an advocate made the Council's purpose clear. Social justice themes ran through meetings and organised activities and the voice of the adult literacy student was a large component at the 1985 NSW Adult Literacy Conference.

The increased mainstreaming of adult basic education means that perhaps there's less need for the Council to be that social justice advocate. Now, as in the past, the Council continues to provide professional development opportunities to teachers and tutors. Some may say that since the closure of the Adult Literacy Information Office, the Council is the mainstay of such activities and provides one of the few opportunities to the more isolated adult basic education people to come together and network. In an increasingly casualised field the importance of these educational/professional development events is even more important. However, we rarely see the great gatherings of ABE teachers at the Conferences in the previous decade. It is more a case of lack of opportunity than lack of motivation.

Do we achieve diversity needed to meet the multiplicity of needs and contexts for adult literacy and basic education/

We're doing what we did ten years ago but with

more legitimacy. We've reached respectability. We had small reading and writing classes in the community as well as in TAFE ten or more years ago. We still do; however, in TAFE these classes are slowly transforming into earlier stages of the Certificate courses. They have curriculums and learning outcomes to achieve. Perhaps for the teacher we are still working with the needs of individual students but to the bureaucrat we are producing courses that translate neatly into efficiency requirements. The recurring message historically is adult basic education has become more mainstream.

Rosie's point was that ultimately it is better to have that security and voice within the system than not. But have we done so at the expense of the fringe element?

As teachers we deal with referrals from Centrelink and often feel confronted by that disenfranchised group who don't fit neatly into the mainstream. The other day a Vietnamese woman arrived to be interviewed for literacy classes. She had no English however so was not an ABE student. She wasn't a TAFE Language student either because beginner oracy classes don't run very often. She had been here over 10 years so she wasn't an AMES student. She had no phone and spoke no English. She also wasn't the only one.

Where are the women's programmes, the Aboriginal programmes, the youth programmes? There are isolated projects going on which appease our sense of meeting the needs of the disenfranchised. Make way for the TAFE restructure for this translates to destabilising permanent programmes and hiring staff back as consultants to recreate smaller scale versions of the same programme.

The Jigsaw Picture of ABE in Australia

Rosie referred to the different beginnings and different terminology used throughout the States for adult literacy and numeracy in 'Questions of Integrity'. Do we speak the same language now? Have policies, legislations created a common language for us? Does the NRS achieve this? Can we demonstrate our effectiveness as teachers, in our programmes?

A lot of work went into researching and producing the NRS and although it's a daunting task, it's an impressive and thorough reading of adult language, literacy and numeracy.

Rosie expressed concern, however, at the way the NRS is used in the Literacy and Numeracy Training (LANT) programme. An extensive series of descriptors have been shorthanded to meet the needs of bureaucrats in defining job-seekers and quick fix solutions to longer term problems.

How we judge ourselves is probably best reflected in our students no matter what organisation you work for. From the perspective of

our minds, it is a little tricky to get too attached to the accountability game as it changes according to the flavour of the politics. The idea of being judged through efficiency is not an easily translatable adult basic education formula as it relies on student enrolment turnover. As we don't operate in the arena of 'teach 'em fast, move 'em through' (although our students don't hang around as long as they used to) the efficiency scheme often shows us in a poor light.

Nonetheless the autonomy of teachers has



• Rosie Wickert

been challenged with such reporting mechanisms and there is an advantage to being able to communicate in a common language and losing a little of our preciousness regarding understanding the abilities and needs of our students.

Professionalisation of ABE Teachers

As we talked more, Rosie reflected on the more sober picture of adult basic education. She commented that we're an ageing group of professionals (thanks Rosie) and that maybe this contributed to the loss of a sense of future.

With retirement, redundancies and redeployment there is an exodus of teachers who take with them some of the energy that had gone into those years of campaigning for an expanding adult basic education profile. There's still a reservoir of energy left behind but it's not being replenished with that group of people who volunteer to do everything, who may lack experience and the wisdom of hindsight, but have a sense of optimism that renews the rest of us to keep fighting for the ideals of public adult education.

The demise of ALIO was quietly done and has had a slow-to-build response from the people who accessed it. Does this mean that it wasn't really utilised widely enough to justify its existence anymore? It had actually changed significantly in its makeup and purpose in line with other mainstreaming. In those early days it operated as a clearing house for resources



continued over

Marginalised young people & school and the community - the ACT Full Service Schools project

by Sandy Menadue

Marginalised young people experience complex welfare issues which can involve a diverse range of services and case managers. Since school is often the one constant and supportive environment in young people's lives, the ACT Full Service Schools Unit (FSSU) has recently supported the maintenance of a unique school-based programme that coordinates the various interventions that involve these students and their families.

Schools as deliverers of community services

The 'Bay' Canberra College, provides a practical demonstration of the benefits derived from promoting schools as the hub of community involvement. The project has acted as a catalyst in forming effective partnerships between various health, welfare, employment, education and religious community organisations and the school itself, to enhance accessibility of community services for young people.



Visiting nurse at Canberra College, Weston

The FSSU responded to a need to develop a case management service for marginalised young people in the ACT. The

service acknowledges the needs of those who are not engaged in any form of education, employment and or training activities. The FSSU programme at Duffy Primary School has provided case management support for 176 young people over a 9-month period. The service avoids duplication of effort and the need for young people to visit a multitude of services.

Building healthier communities

The FSSU has formed alliances with ACT Community Care - Youth Health Section, The Gilmore Clinic, the Drug Referral Information Centre, ACT Family Planning, Healthpact and the Canberra College to enhance the accessibility and delivery of health promoting services and learning experiences to students living in the Weston community.

In addition to the co-location of services, the programme incorporates a monthly thematic approach to relevant youth health issues, and invites a wider range of services to deliver programmes through conventional school curriculum and welfare structures.

Whilst the service is located at the Weston Campus of the Canberra College, feeder high schools are actively encouraged to access the wide range of health promoting activities and services. After six weeks of operation, 126 stu-



A conversation with Rosie Wickert

and was run by Kath White and Kate Johnston. It grew in number of staff and housed various project officers, the NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council and developed a formidable profile in publishing and training. ALIO provided a common ground for ABE folk to network and become informed of the big picture. You could step outside your square and for someone like Rosie it was an important mechanism to see adult literacy teachers as part of a social movement.

ALIO no longer exists though many people are not sure how and when that happened exactly. The library exists somewhere in TAFE though again I'm not too sure how you can access it. So in six months time because no-one is using any of those resources, there'll be justification to get rid of them as well.

The alignment of a service such as this with market forces seems a little skewed. People use a service when they know about it, when there's time to use it, when there's a structure or organisation to support staff in pursuing resources and staff development.

Accountability is good but when it is the primary focus other things fall into gaps.

In a similar way, the market for ABE teacher training courses has also decreased. In the days of ITATE, there was a rigorous interview to go through to secure a place on the Post Graduate Diploma in ABE Course. This qualification also gave you a good start to securing a permanent teaching position in TAFE.

The Institute amalgamated with UTS; however, the increased casualisation of the adult basic education teaching profession has had an impact on the numbers of students now going through the equivalent course. There are fewer people training to become ABE teachers through higher education.

Is Volunteerism likely to rise again?

As Rosie pointed out we would be an arrogant bunch if we thought only professional teachers could teach adult literacy and numeracy.

The main issue around volunteerism has been around resources, support and training and that it shouldn't be used to replace teachers. The fracas over volunteer tutors working in TAFE Colleges has calmed and was more an industri-

dents have accessed the co-located services, 1000 students have participated in the health promotion activities and six high school students have been referred to the services through their feeder high schools.

The National Community Service Training Package for teachers

The FSSU has also formed a commercial and strategic partnership with the Community Youth Sector Training Council to develop a nationally accredited case management training programme; this has been delivered to ten ACT teachers over a five-week period.

There is a strong belief that (community service) training should be incorporated as an integral component of teacher training and professional development.

The teachers who participated in the programme stated that the training was supportive of the changing roles of teaching and that there were mutual benefits in forming partnerships with various agencies and services.

Developing vocational education and training

The FSSU is currently in the process of brokering a commercial partnership with the HTC Vocational Training Institute to facilitate nationally accredited training outcomes for marginalised year ten students in a local Canberra high school. This will meet the needs of students in gaining vocational education and training whilst staying engaged in a mainstream school

setting.

The FSSU is in the process of establishing a vocational training programme at Canberra High School. Working in partnership with the school and the HTC Vocational Training Institute, the team has been able to establish the frameworks upon which this innovative high school programme will be established.



Canberra College, Weston,

The programme will provide students with a nationally recognised qualification in customer service at Certificate two level. This will enhance students' transition beyond the high school years through the provisions of vocationally articulated learning outcomes. The programme also recognises the need for work skills development in the traditional high school setting.

The unit has thus far experienced success in assisting young people to gain the skills needed to live independent and productive lives. The programme at Duffy Primary School has achieved this with young people at risk whilst the systemic programs are focusing on preventing risk and retaining young people in education.

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al issue than an educational one. Though we may have come full circle with the pending TAFE project to train highschool students in peer tutoring.

Changing Focus of Education

Official Government support for access/equity issues was given in the early 70's through the Karmel Report (1973) and the Kangan Report (1975). This changed to the 'human capital thesis' and new vocationalism. We were called upon to adjust education to meet the needs of a changing labour market.

Rosie commented that ABE practitioners at that time may not have been prepared for the (economic) pressures about to shape their practice. We were reluctant to hear the new tunes. Are we still reluctant?

If you listen to my voice in this article you'll hear lots of reluctance. I'm clinging to an educational philosophy that inspired me to become a teacher. I'm sure I'm not the only one. But as Rosie points out, our integrity doesn't have to be sacrificed when we ally ourselves to the new agenda (educational and political).

We may talk in a language that is bureaucratically pleasing but we teach with the same energy and desire to meet the needs of our students. Teachers still question the approaches adopted in the more mainstream courses.

A student dropped in yesterday, just to say hello and to ask for some literacy support. He was in his second year of a Welfare Diploma course. He commented that our course was more relaxed than the Diploma course but he still managed to pass his exams. He said that he'd nearly given up last semester but that an old teacher had stopped and had a coffee with him and encouraged him to keep going and to keep asking for help when he needed it.

People like Rosie Wickert have a better grasp of the big picture and have been instrumental in educating us about the benefits of learning the politics of educational survival. We need to keep working within that big picture but I also need to hear the individual stories of teachers and students to be reminded of our integrity.

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Calls for tenders for LANT programmes in a town like Whyalla would be more realistic if an integrated, holistic programme was asked for.

Whyalla is celebrating its 100th year in 2001. It is an isolated industrial city in rural South Australia, a BHP town, known mainly for its steel industry. In its heyday, around 1976, Whyalla's population was 34,000. With the closing of the shipyard, the restructuring of industry, downsizing of the workforce and the disappearance of government and business service offices, there has been a steady decline in population and increase in unemployment. The latest ABS figures (July 2000) show Whyalla as having the highest regional unemployment in Australia, as well as one of the biggest declines in population.

It would be expected that the unemployed being referred to the Literacy and Numeracy Training (LANT) programme would reflect the ageing population of a city in recession. But for the first 18 months of the contract over 95 per cent of the clients referred have been on Youth Allowance and the majority been under 18 with a high percentage being 'youth at risk' - young males living independently with social, economic and drug problems. It has been a challenge. To have some of them to come to classes regularly, is to me a success. To have a few return this year, preferring to self fund their literacy numeracy education is again a success.

As far as successful outcomes go, under the terms of the Literacy and Numeracy Training contract, there have been only a few. But with the advantage of living in a small community, it is possible to keep track of previous students and it is pleasing to find that some have moved and gained employment or traineeships; others have gone on to further study and sadly a few are in juvenile detention.

In the next round of tendering, some consideration should be made to have a separate tender with different criteria for Youth at Risk. In the current situation, different organisations are funded for a variety of reasons to meet the

needs of these kids. These organisations work independently of each other, not in partnership and collaboration.

There is a need for a holistic approach to these students' training, so they develop social skills, life skills, and a work ethos as well as their literacy and numeracy. With JPET, where we have shared clients, we have shared activities, for example teaching and financing students to gain their L plates. But anything we have organised is *ad hoc* and done in our own time, consequently it lacks proper planning or continuity.

The tendering process in a town like Whyalla should be developed so that an integrated, holistic programme is asked for: one which brings together all the various groups involved with youth services in this particular region. Planning could then be better integrated by the various bodies with their different expertises. By adopting an integrated approach I think we would better meet the needs of our local youth and achieve a higher percentage of positive outcomes. It is unreasonable to expect employment to be the major outcome when unemployment is so high, but it is possible to achieve positive outcomes for these young people in other ways.

Our programme caters for both community and LANT clients and in the last few months we are beginning to get a greater diversity of age, with more mature and motivated students coming to the course. A few are coming from Centrelink but more are coming from Employment Agencies whose clients have recognised a need for Literacy/Numeracy Training as they have experienced its negative effect on their employment and training prospects. Having this diversity of age will, I hope, have a positive impact on the young school leavers.

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▶▶▶ **Does youth policy exclude young people?**

Arnett (2000) suggests that a great deal of change, experimenting and instability characterise the period between adolescence and adulthood.

When writing specifically about the literacy needs of young people, Luke and Elkins (2000: 397) have noted that there is a need to

re/mediate traditional literacy education. They suggest this 'involves staging the conditions for students to rethink and reenact their social and semiotic relations'. In this case, literacy professionals need to consider the multi-faceted contextual variables that impact on young people's lives. This point has significant ramifications for literacy practitioners when considered alongside other recent work. Gee

On a topic such as youth literacy, it is imperative that young people's opinions are made central. . .



I attended the ACAL forum on youth literacy issues held in Canberra, Friday 26 May. I was one of the invited 'young people' as a student of Arts/Law at the University of Melbourne and as someone who has been involved in a number of different youth organisations. I want to give my impressions of the forum as well as some thoughts about young people and literacy issues more broadly.

Given that the majority of the participants were articulate and well-educated adults, some of the youth participants felt uncomfortable contributing to discussion.

Perhaps a more effective manner in which ACAL could glean youth views on literacy would be to empower young people and youth organisations to run their own forum on youth literacy with youth participants only.

Agreement is developing amongst young people that the most effective way of achieving youth participation in policy formulation is to empower youth towards self-mobilisation. This level of youth participation entails a transfer of control over decisions and resources to youth.

Projects affecting youth should be youth initiated and directed such that youth are involved in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of the policies. Such participation ensures that policies are relevant and successful.

ACAL should perhaps embrace this philosophy in relation to youth literacy issues and lobby the government to adopt a similar approach so that young people would determine the focus of youth literacy policies and projects.

It is important in this process to obtain both articulate young people and young people who have directly experienced the problems being discussed so that both can work in partnership together.

It has become a cliché to say that young people are 'voiceless' and need to be consulted on issues of importance to them, such as youth literacy. What is required is brave leadership by actors within society, such as ACAL, to genuinely empower youth to positions where they can initiate and direct policies, rather than merely recommend.

With this in mind, I would suggest that ACAL consider employing young people to deal with youth literacy issues (I am not personally interested so no cries of self-aggrandisement please!) and resource youth organisations to establish a youth conference whose outcomes ACAL would promote and implement in partnership with young people.

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▶▶▶ (2000: 414) for example has discovered that students from different classes fashion themselves differently through language within the 'new' capitalism readying themselves as either 'knowledge', 'enchanted' and 'backwater workers'.

The significant work of the OECD in identification of the key features for effective transition systems (refer www.acal.edu.au) attempting to address young people's successful movement into the workforce is acknowledged. However, some nations and regions may not have the prerequisites in their systems to offer young people the suggested strategies. Australia has a particular challenge in this regard. Recent data collected through (admittedly) inconsistent state databases by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER, 2000) indicate falling apprenticeship capacity in regions where there is a young demographic. Economic features such as the prevalence of labour hire firms, high levels of casualisation and part-time employment further impact on young people's

opportunities to participate in vocational arrangements. This situation is similar to that found in the United States where the youth labour market is described as being at the margins of the economy (Lewis et al, 1998: 269). Lewis and colleagues note that within the USA there is no social commitment to employing youth, and neither is there commitment to helping the young establish long term connectedness with the labour market. Furthermore, they found that US employers have limited trust in the capabilities of young people. In Australia, Curtain's analysis (1999) of young people's transition from education to work describes a similar picture.

While some writers (Aronowitz and di Fazio, 1994; Christie, 1999; Lewis et al, 1998) approve the call for greater attention to future [backwater] workers, there is also disquiet that early vocational education is promoted by the OECD as the policy panacea. Furthermore, Nicholson (2000), Christie and Mensah-Coker (1999) and McDonald (2000) question that the skills exist at the local and community level to implement the

literacy contact lists



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Does youth policy exclude young people?

strategies. Bentley and Gurumurthy (1999) indicate policy cohesion should begin at the centre for regional effectiveness. On the other hand, Hazard and Lee (1999:349) suggest that young people can deal with the levels of dysfunctionality which constitute their world, should they have the social skills to identify and deal with the risks. The participation of young people in decision making as well as the identification of these social skills is essential.

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The writer wishes to acknowledge, with appreciation, the support and assistance from Dr. Geraldine Castleton in reviewing early drafts.

c. 420 BC

Socrates argues against reading. For him, books are useless tools, since they cannot explain what they say but only repeat the same words over and over again.
from *A History of Reading* by Alberto Manguel