

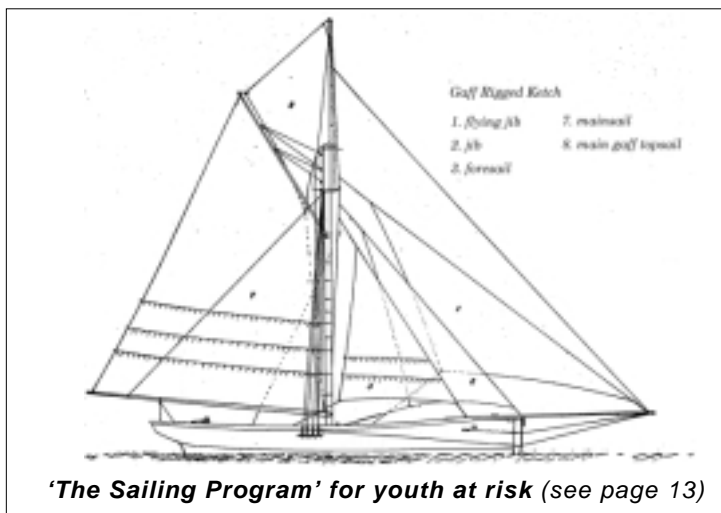


Literacy and community development

In 'Reading the Community' (page 2), Susan Black writes that 'because we (in Australia) have such strong service delivery, (that meets our needs with health, for example, or water and electricity) we have not had to put so much energy into the skill of developing our communities'. Susan offers three important lessons for community development workers based on her experiences both within Australia and overseas.

The article (page 11) describing the Stardale Centre in Saskatchewan, Canada presents a model for community development programs remarkable for its strong sense of purpose.

In Stardale's commitment to holistic education (that is education of the whole self: mind, body, and spirit) it shows clear parallels with Adelaide's Tauondi College described in the previous issue of *Literacy Link*. It also points to the future and the considerable energy that needs to go into the marketing of community programs if they are to be successful.



ACAL Youth Literacy Project

The ACAL Youth Literacy Project concludes in this issue and researcher, Carolyn Ovens, draws together her findings in the final of her three articles. Please find time to read it—it presents our profession with some important challenges and it offers, too, some possible courses of action.

2001—Year of the Volunteer

Next year is the International Year of the Volunteer and *Literacy Link* will devote an early issue to the work of volunteer literacy practitioners. Adult literacy in Australia had its earliest beginnings with volunteering and it was one of ACAL's priorities to dismantle perceptions of the field as the preserve of amateurs. ACAL worked to present the field as a profession with a real career path. Practitioners were to be full-time workers who were not exploitable—respected possessors of a body of knowledge acquired through research.

Literacy Link spoke to a volunteer literacy worker last week who told of her frustration and sense of isolation in her work with Melbourne's poor. She did not know ACAL existed. Perhaps the wheel has turned a full circle and the relationship of ACAL towards literacy volunteers now needs re-examination. *Literacy Link* would welcome your contributions to this area.

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Susan Black spent 6 years as the State Director and Project Officer for Community Aid Abroad's Aboriginal program in Queensland and is currently the coordinator for the Sandgate and Bracken Ridge Action Group (SANDBAG)

The following article is from a paper Susan presented at the ALNARC Forum 11th May, 2000 and is reprinted with permission from the Queensland Council for Adult Literacy. It first appeared in QCAL's 'Write On' June 2000 vol 17 no 4.

What I would like to do this afternoon is to share three stories of how different groups have responded successfully to working developmentally with a community, both overseas and here in Australia. Then I would like to draw out some of the common threads.

These threads relate to some of the lessons I have learnt:

- Recognise the difference between service delivery and community development
- Listen to the community - read it, as best you can
- Learn to hold your agenda lightly

The stories I am drawing on are from my time in Community Aid Abroad and my experience working on the community sector at Sandgate.

Recognise the difference between service delivery and community development.

In Australian society what we usually see happen in our communities is that people come in with a program: it may be health, economic development or jobs, domestic violence or literacy and numeracy. That agenda is then sold to the people, and if it doesn't work, well it's often described as the fault of the community, in that they failed the test in some way. Sometimes in the process of foisting the agenda or service on people, it leaves people with less confidence in their own abilities.

*In Australia...
because we have such strong service delivery, we have not had to put
so much energy into the skill of developing our communities.*

This certainly is similar to Paulo Freire's model of "banking education" where people are seen as empty vessels to be filled. Freire describes the banking line of planning a program as being 'top down'. "They approach peasants or urban masses with projects which may respond to their own view of the world, but not to that of the people."

When I was working for Community Aid Abroad I visited a (primarily) indigenous community in northwest Queensland, and heard the story of how some people in this little township had got together and started their own playgroup. One

of the Aboriginal Childcare services in Mt Isa who provided mobile services to the surrounding remote communities, heard of this and offered to come in and run it,

bringing the mobile van, worker & resources. Within six months, not only did the local people not have control over their own playgroup, but also the service had been withdrawn due to funding cuts, so the playgroup no longer existed. This is not an uncommon story where people who begin to take initiative are over-run by well meaning services. Instead of empowerment of people, there is active disempowerment. This was a good example of a project being imposed upon people without consideration of their view of the world.

In Australia, we predominantly have a system that is based on social development ensuring an effective service delivery mechanism. This is something for which I am very thankful, for instance, when I have health problems or need a reliable supply of running water and electricity. However, because we have such strong service delivery, we have not had to put so much energy into the skill of developing our communities. The loss of community-mindedness or neighbourliness is something which many people decry around Australia.

Lesson 1:

Service delivery is very like banking education where the issues are named by the educator and not the people concerned.

In comparison, community development works on the principles of liberation education as defined by Freire, where people act, reflect on their action and name the world for the purpose of changing it.

Listen to the community - read it.

In India, there is a strong tradition of community development, in part because the service delivery, for poor people, is practically non-existent. This strong tradition has been developing over many years, learning from experience and gaining insights into best developmental practice.

When I was in India, in Maharashtra, we lived not far from SNDT, the Women's University in Pune. This University has a School of Adult Education and people from this school were keen to take education out to the rag pickers in Pune. The rag pickers are the people who collect rubbish from the streets and sort the material for recycling, selling various bits to



continued on page 4

Literacy and the Tasmanian Aboriginal community

by Casandra Jefferson

Aboriginal Training Programs is a community oriented education program situated in TAFE Tasmania. The program is funded, primarily, under the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiative Program administered through DETYA. While the program's focus is widespread one of our aims is to increase literacy standards within the community. This becomes particularly important with the implementation of the National Training packages in Vocational Education and Training as there are requirements for underpinning abilities in literacy that could be exclusive.

The Commonwealth funding we receive is currently used to purchase programs from TAFE Tasmania and to employ support persons in the form of Aboriginal VET Officers. The programs that are delivered are chosen on the basis of community need based on feedback from government departments, employment agencies, the industry sector and the community. The programs are developed with regard to future employment opportunities.

Among our numerous initiatives has been the development of a tele-tutoring course called *Tunapi*, which was developed to provide an avenue for isolated communities and individuals to access relevant literacy based education. The word *Tunapi* means 'to know' and comes from the language of the Southeastern Tasmanian people. During its lifetime the initial

course underwent a process of evolution that was participant driven.

Tunapi began, in 1991, as a ten week non-accredited program and developed into a 22 week program with an accredited element. One of the physical outcomes was the publication, in a number of volumes, of collections of students' work. The course is currently under revision as a possible online/tele-tutoring undertaking and the inherent flexibility of the initial program is one of the aspects of *Tunapi* that we hope to

maintain. Information about the *Tunapi* program was contributed to the recently conducted national survey into access and equity online but we are yet to see any outcome from this. *Tunapi* was also used as a prison education course as part of our contribution to the *Mabbye Largenner* project.

Mabbye Largenner is a prison education program that Aboriginal Training Programs assists with in association with The Department of Corrections, DEWRSB and Prison staff. Aboriginal Training Programs involvement includes financial assistance, cultural support, resources and support in an

advisory capacity by participation on the committee.

The program is also involved in promoting partnerships with Government departments. Working relationships have been developed with DETYA, DEWRSB, OVET, ANTA and



Janice Ross (left) and Kim Bishop—Tasmanian students nominated for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student of the Year.

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.

Literacy Link is distributed free to ACAL members. Articles are available online on the ACAL Homepage: <http://www.acal.edu.au>

You are invited to discuss issues raised in **Literacy Link** through contributions to the ACAL Discussion list. Subscribe by email to: majordomo@edna.edu.au with message

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Students working in the Aboriginal Training Programs classroom.

ATSIC on a common-wealth level and the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, DPIWE, The Education Department, Department of Corrections and the Department of Health at a state level. In addition we have worked in partnership with the majority of Tasmanian Aboriginal Organisations includ-

ing the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, Tasmanian Aboriginal Education Association and South Eastern Tasmanian Aboriginal Corporation.

We have a close involvement with a number of colleges working to ensure that young people have options in terms of educational pathways. This involves focussing on developing transi-

tional programs that are comfortable and accessible. The University of Tasmania is another pathway that we encourage students to undertake, if viable, and we provide support for them to access this avenue. In short our role involves communication, negotiation and the development of partnerships with Commonwealth, State



Students having an afternoon nap during a field trip to the west coast. They travelled on the Wanderer II out of Strahan.

and Local Government as well as community organisations.

Aboriginal Training Programs has an integral role in involving Aboriginal Tasmanians in mainstream education and employment. It also aims to involve our smaller community group with the greater Tasmanian community by enabling opportunities for community awareness of the program, its successes and by the provision of reference materials of interest to the wider community.

One of the methods we have used to bring the course to the community's attention was by participation in the making of the video, *We're not lost* which aired on the ABC's *Message Stick* program in May this year. Students from the course contributed to the making of the message stick video while on a field trip to the Furneaux Islands. While the focus was Indigenous Tasmanians there was an emphasis on our contribution to the Tasmanian community and education through TAFE Tasmania. Aboriginal Training Programs hopes to continue our involvement in film making under the guidance of Jim Everett who was the driving force behind *We're not Lost*.

In all of these undertakings, including those still in the planning stages, the team at Aboriginal Training Programs hopes to provide concrete assistance to ensure that the Aboriginal community is fully equipped to play a viable and successful part in the wider community at all levels. Thanks to Michelle Purdy, for her assistance with this article.

Casandra Jefferson
Aboriginal VET Officer
Aboriginal Training Programs, Tasmania

▶▶▶ Reading the community

scrap merchants. The thinking of the University staff was that by offering education and literacy to these people they could better themselves and find alternative work.

As I am sure many of you are aware, India has a very powerful caste system, and rag pickers are the lowest in the caste structure, if not outcasts. They are also mostly women. The educators, whilst also mostly women, had very different life experiences and more importantly came from a much higher caste.

The attempts to start literacy and numeracy classes were unsuccessful. The educators were outsiders to this community and could not understand the realities of the lives of the rag pickers, nor could they see the world as the rag pickers saw it. Literacy and numeracy was not a high priority for the rag picking women.

To their credit, the teachers did not give up because of the failure. They did not blame the

rag pickers, but instead decided to learn more about the lives of the rag-picking women. They went back to the community and took part in their daily lives. Donning rubber gloves, they went from bin to bin with the women, talked to them about their realities and saw for themselves what was most important in the lives of these women. The real issues facing these women related to how alone and vulnerable to abuse they were in their work and the ongoing poverty.

The Women's University people realised the basic need for collective strength to ensure that the women would be confident and able to stand up for their rights. The women were encouraged and supported to form a union, which allowed them to legitimately press their claims for a safe work environment free from harassment by police or scrap merchants. The union also helped to raise the status and profile of the rag pickers by highlighting the essential service they provided to the city in waste management and recycling. This was achieved

through issuing workers with badges, lobbying local government and demonstrating outside the police station. Through this process, women who had felt alone, fearful and powerless had begun to take their private concerns into the public world, successfully.

The work of SNTD Women's University had, at that stage, little to do with education in the traditional sense. It was not a long time before the rag-pickers began to ask for literacy and numeracy as they saw the need to be able to sign forms, check weights and payments from scrap merchants and middlemen. It was as they took control of their own lives that literacy and numeracy became a part of their journey.

The Women's University proved itself a learning organisation, committed and willing to take risks in journeying with people.

Lesson 2:

This lesson shows how SNTD came in with an agenda of delivering a service but was responsive enough to stop to listen to the community. The university built a developmental relationship with people and worked on the issues that were relevant to them.

"Without dialogue there is no communication and without communication there can be no true education." Freire

Carry your agenda lightly

An example from SANDBAG's work is the development of relationships with the indigenous community.

When I started at SANDBAG in 1997, I began with establishing a Reconciliation group. I also felt strongly that on indigenous issues it was primarily up to indigenous people to take the lead. All too often processes had been badly damaged by interfering whites.

Gradually the reconciliation group began to connect with the local indigenous community and to support initiatives coming from the indigenous community. One of the early connections occurred when the local indigenous health worker organised a celebration in Sandgate around National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Commemoration (NAIDOC). We provided some practical support with transport, and tables and moral support in being there. I remember clearly a conversation on that day when one of the Aboriginal men asked whether we had considered employing an indigenous worker. I replied quite simply "No" as my experience had been that there were too many non-indigenous organisations doing a bad job of trying to provide services, with indigenous money, to Aboriginal people. Whilst it was quite some time before there was any follow-up on that conversation, it certainly got me thinking about whose agenda I was carrying. I needed to think about what was being asked of my organisation, i.e. how I was to respond to the

expressed needs of the community, rather than working from an ideological perspective.

Over the next 18 months, we began to do more things collaboratively and build relationships with local indigenous people. On some issues the initiative came from the Reconciliation Group (such as organising a Sorry Day) whilst other times the initiative was the Indigenous Network's (like the NAIDOC celebrations). Some joint actions were in response to issues of racism in the local community. Several of the indigenous people have come onto SANDBAG's Management committee over the last 18 months.

...my experience had been that there were too many non-indigenous organisations doing a bad job of trying to provide services, with indigenous money, to Aboriginal people.

SANDBAG is now auspicing the indigenous network in some successful funding applications as well as exploring funding to employ an indigenous worker. Currently there is an indigenous playgroup operating, some cultural events and men's outings with the possibility of adult literacy and numeracy to be explored. The thought of auspicing the network and employing an indigenous worker was something that when first approached I had not even considered. My analysis had been that indigenous services needed to be run through indigenous organisations and yet the local community requested a different approach.

Lesson 3:

For SANDBAG the lesson learnt related to responding to requests that were unusual. As we build relationships and hear people's stories, we will need to be prepared to challenge our own rigidities so that we can respond in appropriate and developmental ways.

Conclusion:

1. Our role is to encourage people's own development, not just to provide a service to them.
2. To listen and hear the community's need is critical to building a developmental relationship and this may take us on a journey different from what we expect.
3. To recognise that we will most definitely have an agenda and what that agenda is, will depend on where we come from and who funds us. We need to acknowledge our agenda but hold that agenda lightly if we are to respond to the real needs of people in their everyday lives.

This is a fundamental challenge for all who are working in a society where, increasingly, community organisations are accountable to funding bodies and authorities rather than the communities we serve.

Going for your Ls

(\$59.95)

Central West Community College 2000

If you are a high school teacher looking for a new way to teach literacy skills or a CGEA lecturer looking for an alternative General Curriculum Option (GCO), then *Going for your Ls* could be the resource you need.

In 1988, the Literacy Programs team at Central West Community College in Bathurst, NSW recognised a demand for help from people preparing for their RTA driver knowledge test. In response, they designed a 16-hour course aimed at helping people with language barriers, literacy problems or simply a fear of tests and/or computers.

This resource kit was originally developed in 1991 and since then has been regularly added to and updated. The result is a flexible, user-friendly package which caters for a wide range of students and complies with competency-based training requirements. Consequently, it can also be delivered as a 30-hour GCO. A detailed guide showing how the lesson content relates to GCO level 1 and 2 learning outcomes is included.

The course itself consists of ten modules which cover every aspect of road safety for cars, motorbikes and heavy vehicles. Each has a detailed lesson plan and ready-made worksheets. Extension activities, practice tests and a list of additional resources are also included.

The strength of this package is that there are plenty of short, practical activities built into each module to keep students motivated. For example, in Module 6 'Intersections, roundabouts and turns', students brainstorm the rules, checking their results in the Motor Traffic Handbook and various RTA leaflets. They then practise the rules using toy cars followed by a walk to a local roundabout to survey road users. Through these activities, the students cover a wide range of GCO learning outcomes such as analysing information, problem solving and team work. They also practise their literacy

skills through reading, comprehension, note-taking and summarising.

As a teaching resource, I found the material to be clearly presented and easy to use. The package is in loose-leaf form for convenient filing and photocopying. The lesson plans are thorough yet flexible and simple to negotiate. The only problem could be keeping up with new legislation. However, this package is designed to be used in conjunction with the current RTA handbook and computer test, so discrepancies should be minimal.



Whether you choose to deliver the whole course or use individual modules to supplement an existing program, this package is well worth adding to your collection.

Christine Sparham
Lecturer in Communications and English
Challenger TAFE WA

"Literacy for sale"

VALBEC Conference

22-23 March 2001 Melbourne (venue to be confirmed)

Call for papers

contact Don MacDowall
phone 03 9546 6892
email valbec@vicnet.net.au



Tutors' Tips first appeared as a series of inserts in the QCAL newsletter 'Write On'



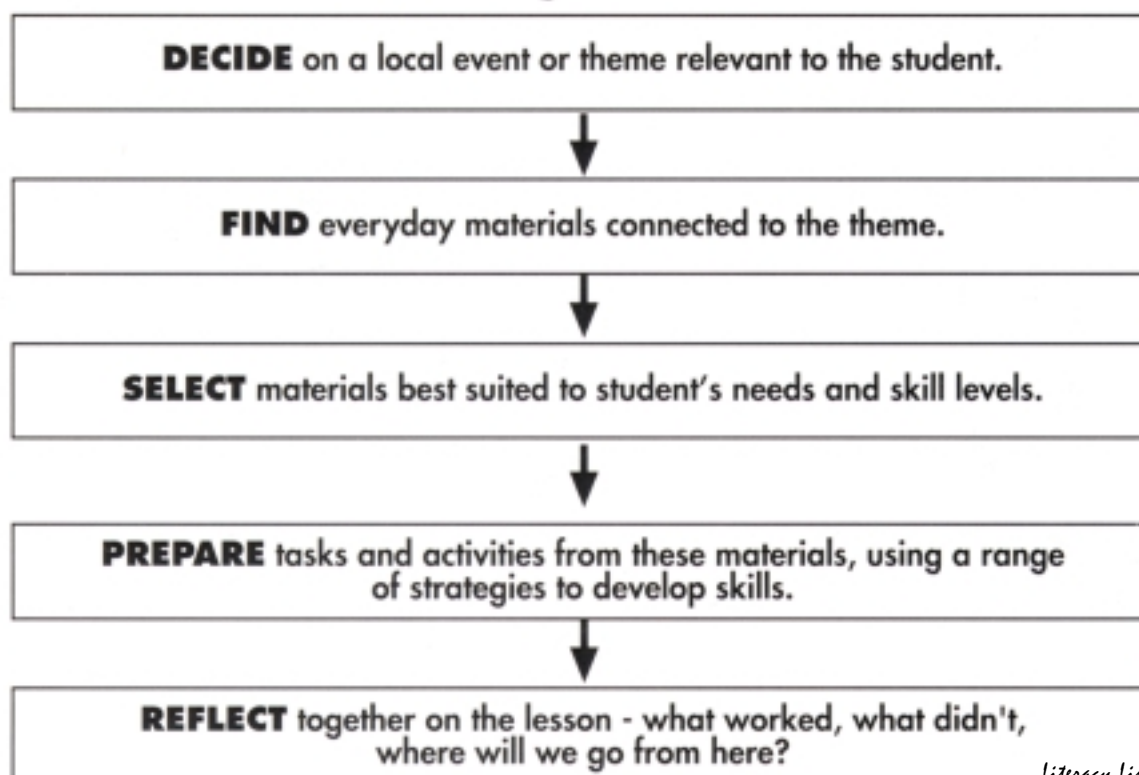
Tutors' Tips

USING EVERYDAY MATERIALS

For this issue the focus is on developing a theme based around everyday materials. Tutors can see from the flow chart the development from an idea or theme to a set of useful resources. The theme of a rodeo has been selected but this could easily be adapted to another idea that more closely matches your own student's interest. Be innovative in your search for an initial idea. Take into account cultural and health issues that affect your student and be prepared to adapt material for your own situation. The mind-map of possible avenues for activities surrounding a rodeo shows some suggestions - once you start thinking, you will have a flood of ideas to add. Finally the lift-out shows two examples of sessions to come out of this planning - one is an integrated literacy activity and the other a hands-on numeracy session. Future lift-outs will address literacy in technology and the millennium.

QCAL welcomes your feedback on this and future editions of Tutors' Tips.

Getting started



READING AND WRITING

Resources

- Posters
- Event advertisements
- Tickets
- Programs
- Entry forms
- Newspaper articles
- Letters
- E-mails
- Clothing catalogues
- Magazines
- Mail orders
- Diaries/calendars
- Songs/poems/yarns

Activities/Strategies

- Skim/scan for information
- Complete forms
- Write opinions/letters to editor
- Summarise
- Use Language Experience Approach
- Complete Cloze Exercise
- Write personal letters/e-mail to friends
- Design a poster/flyer

CRITICAL THINKING / SPEAKING / LISTENING

Resources

- Articles on:
 - safety
 - animal cruelty
 - popularity
 - music styles
 - fashion (US & Australia)
- Advertisements
- Posters, etc.
- Regulations
- Radio/TV programs.

Activities/Strategies

- Discuss safety issues
- Research a theme
- Look at gender issues
- Write letters to editor
- Canvass for opinions
- E-mail a website
- Interview, role play
- Practise pronunciation
- Clarify jargon

RODEO/HORSE SHOW

SPELLING

Resources

- Personal lists
- indexed notebook
- Dictionary/Thesaurus
- Glossaries
- Adult spelling texts
- Scrabble, Boggle
- Crosswords

Activities/Strategies

- Find:
- Syllables/word parts
 - Phonic patterns and variations
 - Word origins
 - Common beginnings and endings
 - Little words in big words
 - Rhyming words
- Develop:
- Word families
 - Mnemonics
- Build vocabulary
- Practise Look, Say, Cover, Write, Check Method. Choose words from Language Experience Approach.

NUMERACY

Resources

- Maps (showground area, state)
- Price lists
- Catalogues
- Sizing charts
- Measuring tape
- Menus
- Tickets
- Weather charts
- Local papers
- Brochures
- Yellow Pages
- Calendars
- Advertisements
- Bus/train timetables

Activities/Strategies

- Cost your day out
- Measure travel distances
- Time rides
- Estimate weights (riders, bulls)
- Give and take directions
- Compare travel costs
- Research accommodation costs
- Construct graphs [competition results]
- Calculate discount purchases
- Measure for clothing



Everyday materials

- Rodeo hat/hats
- Bean bag filling
- Water
- Range of containers for comparison, eg
 - milk cartons
 - soft drink bottles
 - buckets
- Calibrated measuring jug/cup
- Measuring tape
- Conversion charts
- String
- Advertisements for hats
- Sizing charts

THE TEN GALLON HAT

Set up a context

- Where does the ten gallon hat come from?
(Think of movies, magazines, country music where this item of fashion is prominent.)
- Do you prefer ten gallon hats to five or one gallon hats?
- What's the difference?

Numerical skills

estimation, $>$ $<$, addition, multiplication, rounding, circumference, imperial/metric measurement, volume, extracting and interpreting mathematical information in context

Activity

Look at some concepts:

- What's a gallon?
- Do you remember older family members using the term?
- What do we use for measuring here?
- 4.8 litres = 1 gallon.
Look at containers to get an idea of 4.8 litres.
- Look at rounding up to 5 litres for convenience.

Activity

Test out ideas:

- Use bean bag filler to compare measurements of calibrated containers and our hats.
- Look at the dimensions of our containers and hats.
- Measure the circumference and the height of the bucket and the hat.
- Can we find a relationship between the increase in the circumference and the height of the container?

Reflect on the session/Take the lesson into other areas the student finds interesting

- Check head circumferences and advertisements for hats
- Estimate volume of other cylinders such as feed containers
- Find other imperial measurements in the world
- Look at smaller cylinders (eg worming syringe)
- Look at bigger cylinders (eg water tanks)
- Look at patterns in hat braiding.

Acknowledgments:

- Community Literacy Program, DETIR
- QCAL (Queensland Council for Adult Literacy)
- Queensland Country Life
- Geraldine Castleton, Jeanette Daly, Helen Foley, Leonie Fox.

Stardale—learning and healing for women in Saskatchewan, Canada

by Helen McPhaden

Stardale is a learning and healing centre for Aboriginal women and women of poverty, serving the communities in Northern Saskatchewan.

Our mission in Stardale is to provide life skills and literacy education, as well as advocacy to women living in poverty and abusive situations, towards empowering their lives, their families, and their communities, thus overcoming systemic barriers.

We strive to provide, in our centre in Melfort, a special place which safeguards the clients' safety and comfort in expressing their feelings, past experiences, traumas and hurts within the confines of a friendly and caring environment that respects their individuality and freedom of thought.

The four components of the holistic Stardale Model encompass the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of life. As building blocks to a journey of awakening, healing, self-respect and empowerment, the Stardale Model encourages development of skills and enlightenment by healing with compassion.

Our Learning and Healing Centre opened in January 1998. There is now a great demand for the current programs we offer, and long waiting lists already for some of the programs.

Activities & accomplishments

Our inaugural program, *Honouring Ourselves*, was a 24-week program - which began with a 14-week Life Skills program, coupled with a 4-week literacy component, followed by a 5-week delivery of a child care worker certificate program. This first program was based on the results of the needs assessment that identified the lack of training in the day care area.

A needs assessment entitled *Aboriginal Women and Women of Poverty* identified high degrees of reported abuse/violence among aboriginal and women of poverty, and situations where women are placed at risk. As a result, the Life Skills component of the program concentrated on the healing and empowerment of women to overcome the barriers and the marginalisation within which they subsisted. Thus, we initiated a Life Skills program, which is specifically designed to include self, family, job/education, community, and leisure. All of these elements combined are critical first steps toward self-empowerment.

The second very important component of the Life Skills program vital to the women's healing, growth, and transformation is literacy. Women

who have been abused and neglected (as in the case of all of our participant clients), severely lack literacy skills. This factor, teamed with the low self-esteem that has been generated from life-long abuse, as well as their lack of personal skills, has kept these women oppressed and unemployed with no hope. As we all know, literacy opens doors to the world, and the knowledge gained begins to create access to positive alternatives for women. As a result, learning and knowledge encompassed in the development of literacy skills is a critical part of our Life Skills Program.

Renewal of the Spirit was an 8-week Life Skills program with 1-week collective kitchen leadership component. This program was initiated through the months of May and June 1998. The participants were all poor women who receive social assistance. Community groups in our area had identified that community kitchens are a positive method of addressing poverty and hunger. Proper nutrition on a shoestring budget is a challenge for our participant clients. Food, safety and nutrition are being addressed in the collective kitchens. A manual has been developed and is now being used also by the Health District for their projects in developing food security initiatives.

Women in the surrounding community hearing about the *Honouring Ourselves* program by word of mouth, requested a similar program again within which they could participate. Upon this request, a second program in the series, entitled, *Illumination From Within*, commenced in September 1998, with a Life Skills component, followed by a literacy component, and concluding with a certification as an office worker with computer skills. On June 5, 1999, the first group of talented women graduated from this program very successfully indeed.

Our next endeavor was the commencement of another program entitled, *Transcendence To The Future*, which was based upon the

Breaking the Cycles by Creating the Circles



Stardale Holistic Model

We believe in:

- Each woman heals in her own time and place
- Say what you mean, mean what you say, and do it
- No one person is better than the next
- Being respectful of the experience of each woman
- Experiential learning & healing
- Releasing the victim's conscience
- Wisdom is shared in storytelling
- Embracing ourselves & embracing each other
- Self-discovery process of the woman making art
- Support & unconditional love
- The warrior woman who battles her own destructive patterns & tendencies
- Tears are healing
- Laughter is enriching

overwhelming numbers of poor women who have been on our waiting lists, or who were referred to our organisation by other service providers. In this program, the women who previously had suffered many atrocities in their lives, started to transform themselves by acknowledging their pain with honesty and a commitment to change. They began to achieve harmony, balance and freedom of thought. It was a slow process rebuilding their lives. Yet, they were willing to conquer life's challenges and heal their past. One of the women from this group has started a new business at James Smith Cree Nation, which is a greenhouse operation.

To meet the needs of many of our youth, Stardale also has undertaken a 3-phase program entitled, *Exploring Our Options*. This was a cooperative project in collaboration with the East Side L.I.M.B., Human Resources of Canada, Melfort Ministerial, James Smith Cree Nation and Stardale. This project focused on education and community development.

In September, Stardale offered another program entitled, *Rediscovery of Self*, which commenced with a 14-week Life Skills program. The format of the program concentrated on nurturing the women and dealing with many sensitive topics. This program ended on December 17, 1999, as the women moved into two other programs entitled, *Framework For Change-ALAPS*, an *Aboriginal Family Literacy Program* and *Harmonious Learning* – an individual one on one and group literacy/GED program. We are enthusiastic about the endless possibilities for the women as they begin this new course in their lives.

The Talking Quilt

In order to address the emotional and personal needs of our women, Stardale designed a pilot project utilizing various personal and emotional healing methods, and implemented a program entitled, *The Talking Quilt*. This endeavor encompassed the medium of color, texture, pattern, touchability and artistry, with visual and mental stimulation. It provided a spark that ignited the flame of reconciliation for all the women and youth who participated in the designing and the stitching of the Quilt.

As the Quilt was stitched, group counselling sessions were held and videotaped; oral and written life stories were logged from the beginning to the completion, in order to record the full intensity of the momentum of healing, growth and change in each participant. At the conclusion of the project, a video production was developed incorporating the quilting process, the counselling sessions/discussions and the eventual celebration together with a narrative telling their stories.

The method of approach in the Quilt project

focused on the element of "council sharing" that is a traditional way. Thus, the council of women formed a circle and discussed their lives' hurts, joys, traumas and experiences giving way to individual awakening, emotional healing and development that manifested itself through the Quilt as the speakers of truth.

At Stardale, we focus on individual expression of the self in all art forms whether in pictures, paintings, sculpture, weaving or quilt making. We feel that the expression of thought of each participant in these projects manifests itself in an expression of artistry, skillfulness and immense talent, which all women have. Their unique talents also have been exhibited on *The Talking Quilt*.

Community supports, partnerships and linkages

Partners, associates and sponsors of the Stardale Centre include: Human Resources Development Canada, CanSask, Cumberland Regional College, James Smith Cree Nation, Aboriginal Women's Council of Saskatchewan (PA), The Aboriginal Healing Foundation, Pasquia Health District, Melfort Ministerial Association, & Porcupine Opportunities For the Disabled. Stardale also represents the community organisations of the North East sector on the Provincial LINKS board.

Stardale also works closely with Victim's Services, North Central Health District, East Side L.I.M.B., Prince Albert Against Family Violence, Prince Albert Grand Council Women's Commission, Sask Energy (Aboriginal Affairs), Melfort Food Bank, N.E. intersectorial; and is associated with Sask Native Housing (Saskatoon), Alberta Life Skills & Literacy Ltd., Y.W.C.A (Calgary)

Where to from here?

Our team of partners are continuously searching for funding for the undertaking of the successful programs at Stardale. Recently, (March 2-5, 2000), the Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women held a conference in Toronto with 110 women in attendance. The Stardale program coordinator was invited to present a paper on the impacts of trauma and violence on women's learning: a program model.

As a direct result of these presentations, more and more discussions are taking place with other NGO's from across Canada wanting to use Stardale as the hub and an exemplary model in structuring their programs. This process is now being strategized.

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The sailing program

In Melbourne's northern suburbs, Preston Reservoir Adult and Community Education (PRACE) has worked with the Darebin Youth Resource Centre Bay over the last year to run two courses for young people combining literacy with sailing an old schooner, the Zephyr, on Port Phillip.

The first program involved kids who responded to notices placed in local community agencies. The second group of a dozen young people were each referred to the program and were all in the 'at risk' category—marginalised by family breakdown, truancy, substance abuse and petty crime.

This second group is the focus of this article. These young people were typically referred by their case managers from the Department of Justice. Twelve young people agreed to put down their names for the Sailing Program.

Some attended only sporadically, drifting in and out of the program in between bouts of homelessness. But the attendance of three girls and five boys was 'fairly regular'.

'None of these kids had been at school for a long time,' said Stella Avram, Coordinator of the Darebin Youth Resource Centre. 'The Education Department often refers young people to PRACE-five 14 year olds were referred in October alone.

'Their literacy levels are really, really low. Together with PRACE we noted their resistance to filling in the forms at the beginning of the program, and decided to cut back on literacy and to focus instead on engaging them. For these kids, aged 14 to 17, just having them get up early and attend on time can be regarded as a success,' said Ms Avram.

The focus of the ten week program was activity based. Participants attended two days a week. There were built-in incentives to attend such as swimming (you have to be able to swim before going on the boat).

Four questions aimed at increasing knowledge about Port Phillip Bay formed the basis of discussion:

- Who were the original owners of the Bay?
- What can be found in the Bay?
- What is the Bay used for?
- What dangers threaten the Bay?

The program started off with the young people

addressing these questions through a drawing exercise. Eventually participants were finding answers from researching the Internet. The program made these activities fun by coming up with a quiz game along the lines of 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire?'

On completion of the course participants received a certificate from PRACE and a level 1 First Aid Certificate.

Ms Avram, whose background is in criminology and corrections, offered the following rationale for the cutting back of the literacy component in the program: 'These kids really are marginalised: our first priority is to secure their health and safety.

'But, if we can successfully engage with these kids, over time we hope to introduce them to more intensive literacy programs, such as the one we run for 16 year olds going for their learner's permit. This is totally literacy based and supports the kids right through to the test for their learner's permit.'

Not all the programs the Darebin Youth Resource Centre run in partnership with PRACE are intended for young people who are at risk and marginalised. They run a range of community literacy-based programs for very different target groups in the 12 to 24 age group.

There is a Somali group. There are Young Achievers programs run in partnership with local schools.

There is a Young Mums group which has five week program of intensive literacy for women aged 18 to 23. This involves vocational training and personal development arising from encouraging the participants' playing with and reading to their children.

The young women produce a story book for their children and this involves computer skills development, looking ahead to the time when the women are seeking work.

David Dickson

Savaad Wells, a crew member on the *The Zephyr*—Australia's oldest yacht. A gaff rigged cutter based on a copy of a Bristol pilot cutter, *The Zephyr's* 15 metre hull was constructed of Tasmanian huon pine in Adelaide 127 years ago. Call 9489 0406 for bookings.



The ACAL youth research project

by Carolyn Owens

This is the final article in the series of three arising from commissioned research undertaken for ACAL into *"The Relevance of Literacy: How can our respective policy responsibilities be realised through common concern for young people and the cause and effect role of literacy in their lives"*.

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 the "Preparing Youth for 21st Century" Conference held in Washington in 1999. Discussion was directed around 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?*

These discussion points strike a chord for this project. They provide the researcher with 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 (Svendsen, 2000, McClelland et al, 1999, Melbourne City Mission, 1999).

Youth Policy reaches to the essential professionalism in the field of adult literacy. Australian 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.

A sense of alarm pervades research

The Dusseldorp Skills Forum produced *Australia's Youth: Reality and Risks* in 1998 and, in the following year, *Australia's young adults: The deepening divide* (Spiering, 1999)

providing commissioned research from leading research agencies and community organisations with histories of service delivery to marginalised young people. Comparative studies are beginning to emerge with findings which should alert the Australian government to the fact that other countries are doing better in levels of post-school qualifications (Curtain, 1999, Lamb et al, 1999).

Discussions around early school leaving for young people necessarily involve adult literacy. A received wisdom suggests that limited literacy is part of a cluster of deficits that typically describe early school leavers as those who are "at risk". This is a theme taken up by Australian research (King, 1998; Sweet, 1998; McClelland et al, 1998; Kellock, 2000; and Kelly, 2000) identifying that the record here as regards young people without apparent means of support is alarming and intransigent when compared with other OECD countries. The level of young people "at risk" in Australia is beyond sustainability from an economic point of view, as well as being a social tragedy.

The research is missing the margins

To understand more accurately what lies in front of today's fifteen year olds, an international assessment is currently under way in Australia. This follows on from northern hemisphere testing. The *Performance International Student Assessment* authorised by the OECD has been enhanced by a detailed survey of 15 years olds known as *Youth in Transition Survey*. It seeks to research performance on a range of school subjects, and also to understand aspirations and background as well as parental expectations of schooling. This is school-based research, consequently many Australian young people will be excluded (in Victoria, for example). School-based research will also fail to recognise adequately those young people whose attendance is irregular. (Gray, Hunter & Schwab, 1998). Other countries such as Canada are putting an enormous amount of resources into this survey, especially for regions where levels of social exclusion is known to be high (Canada, Statistics, 2000).

In Australia the ACER has been selected by the OECD, and is conducting the research for DETYA. For marginalised groups the choice of the ACER is problematic since the advisory body steering the research consists of systems personnel (ACER, 1999)—this does not meet the OECD benchmark for social inclusion (OECD, 1999). Other stakeholders need to be included in decision making in such a survey. ACAL, for example, should be involved. Written

text and telephone interviews (ACER research methodology) are not suited for uncovering the needs and views of marginalised people (McClelland et al, 1999).

The cost of missing the mark

There is recognition that more must be done if today's 15 year olds are not to meet the same fate as their older counterparts. Research indicates that funds released by the Commonwealth in the past, which were targeted to involve early school leavers in vocational education to at least international levels, have completely missed the mark. The targeting of funding could be improved at minimum cost (Sweet, 1998). The most recent policy changes to address inclusion of 15 - 19 year olds in VET have yet to be captured by data. Past policy failed to identify clear lines of activity and accountability at all levels (Ball & Robinson, 1998) and indications are that recent innovations will meet the same fate.

Research indicates that youth development, not youth management, would improve policy nationally (Sweet, 1999, Kellock, 2000). Lately, strategies in the youth area have been identified as youth development. There is, however, no consensus about what this actually means. AUSYOUTH has been contracted by DETYA to consult nationally in this area, and is challenged to reach agencies working with excluded young people and in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The observation that districts are being further marginalised by each new youth in transition strategy is of further concern (Sweet, 1999; Kelly, 2000; Pocock, 1997).

A youth friendly labour market

Some writers conclude that lower wages and higher wage subsidies will stimulate demand by employers for early school leavers (Wooden, 1998; Sweet, 1999) even though the income of 15 - 19 year olds has fallen by 30% since 1982. On the other hand, detailed analysis suggests that the industry sector and its economic performance, and the nature of that particular labour market in relation to young people, has more impact than youth wage levels and subsidies to employers (Belchamber et al, 1999). Another area of concern is the negative effect on employers of the complexity of arrangements around employing teenagers (Wooden, 1998).

Neighbourhood and Pathways

The Jobs Pathways Program (JPP) has recently been evaluated by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum (August, 2000). This evaluation has much to offer literacy practitioners within schools and also those working with youth agencies and community based organisations. Kellock (2000) is the most recent researcher who has entered into the issue of literacy and numeracy and social exclusion of young people. His conclusion is that there is much potential in the JPP to bring neighbourhood participants together,

especially if they are not impeded by bureaucratic barriers, and if they are provided with the skills and resources to collaborate (Nicholson, 2000). Others across business, industry and education research identify a number of players who suggest that involvement of stakeholders has been minimal and inadequately focused (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 1999). There is consensus that more must be done. Sweet (1996) suggests federalism, over-bureaucratisation and employers having little say, have all compromised the outcomes of the reports into vocational training of the 80s and 90s.

A plethora of agencies

The sheer number of agencies involved with young people in any one region (education, health, taxation, social welfare, juvenile justice and employment) is a major inhibitor to the local integration which the OECD indicates is central to good advocacy and delivery. This has prompted the term "networks of safety" (Raffo et al, 2000). In southern Queensland a suburb such as Inala has fifty-eight organisations represented at its regular interagency meetings for programs for non-English speaking and indigenous people. Initial research in regard to a nearby suburb suggests that there are more than 1,400 agencies working across three levels of government with some program responsibility for young people. In the past five years, Queensland has registered over 1,400 training providers for a state with a population of 3.5 million. The privatisation of the job seeker network further compounds the number of delivery points and dilution of skills in a workforce, which of necessity is engaged on short term contracts. An unstable and transient supply of assistance for young people takes its toll on the young people and the agencies involved.

Examples of 'Good Practice'

Recent youth policy has a total lack of literacy practitioner input. Mudaly (1999) describes a pilot project within a particular migrant community in outer Melbourne dealing with health issues. Effective practice would have this project underpinned by a language and literacy program. Mapstone (1999) also describes an intervention program for young people in Perth, facilitating off-campus access and outreach. Literacy practitioners attached to such initiatives could gauge whether the school refusal was based on lack of educational skills or inadequate curriculum. Mudaly (1999) identifies a lack of documentation of models where youth services link with schools to deal with a range of issues effecting young people, consequently little is known of their efficacy. Flowers (1998) discusses the difficulties which may arise from working with youth workers who in their discourse reveal strong optimism about outcomes, but belie their actions in ambiguous and vague rhetoric.

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330 BC Standing before his troops, Alexander the Great
silently reads a letter from his mother, to the bewilderment of
his soldiers, who have only seen reading done aloud.
from *A History of Reading* by Alberto Manguel

While the examples above are from the coal-face, so to speak, it begs the question of whether one can judge if this is 'good practice'. The critical literature would rather look for 'effective' practice and reflect aspects which could be taken up more broadly. It must be accepted, however, that the diversity of regions in Australia, the inconsistency of provision caused by three levels of government, as well as the condition of the local economy, all effect young people.

Where to next?

OECD discussion (see previous two issues of *Literacy Link*) centres around emulating good practice. Research into practice is long overdue to inform policy. The OECD suggests that the bottom line is a 'network of safety', that is, policy cohesion for each young person until aged twenty years at least. Australia has a long way to go to meet that vision, but that does not mean we cannot lever our considerable systems, their programs and good will to achieve this within a five year timeframe.

Australia can and must improve its performance in regard to inclusiveness for young people.

Literacy practitioners, youth workers and their organisations must begin to work together more closely. In the past decade a number of youth agencies and organisations have disappeared, at the same time as the number of service delivery agencies have increased.

ACAL might consider focusing on local networks, and documenting effective practice which clearly involves literacy practitioners. Some activities are already emerging amongst literacy practitioners and youth agencies which build 'networks of safety'. Such networks can identify and track young people for the purpose of support, not surveillance. ACAL research into emerging local networks and identification of agencies likely to cooperate with ACAL may provide an opportunity for shared approaches to government.

Carolyn Ovens

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

Bibliography

available on the web at <http://www.acal.edu.au>