



The Manly Conference

Approximately 240 literacy, numeracy and ESL practitioners attended the 25th National ACAL Conference in Manly NSW from 1-2 November and, if the forum held the day before is included, the number swells to 350!

The physical environment certainly made for a very pleasant 'meeting place' but the diversity and calibre of the keynote and focus speakers, as well as over 65 workshop presenters, ensured that the professional and research focus of the conference was exemplary. On behalf of the organising committee I would like to thank all the program contributors and to acknowledge the depth of knowledge and expertise demonstrated by the field.

The organising committee endeavoured to feature a number of knowledge strands including adult numeracy, information technology and



English as a second language, as well as social and international policies and their implications. Conference evaluation indicate that registrants were able to participate in a comprehensive range of workshop sessions.

A few additional features added to the nature of the Conference and this included the official opening by Linda Burney, Director General, NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs. Her oratory was inspirational and her message of tolerance, understanding and activism was indeed rousing and reflected perfectly the conference theme.

Students were also involved to a limited extent, notably through the student award presented by NSW TAFE ACCESS Division and the Sydney Morning Herald (see page 5); music students providing entertainment; and banquet management, catering and table service.

The overall aim of the Conference was to inform and challenge as well as to contribute to the debate within the field regarding direction and policy. And debate we did! It was also reassuring to see that many practitioners were being supported by their organisations to attend the conference.

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New ACAL executive

At the ACAL Annual General Meeting during the national conference on November 1, new office bearers were elected. They are: Jim Thompson (President), Jan Hagston (Vice-President), Pauline O'Maley (Secretary) and Suzanne Bozorth-Baines (Treasurer). Four additional people were co-opted to the committee to enhance its range of expertise—Rosie Wickert, Robyn Jay, Jana Scamozza and Karen Dymke. We also welcome new state representatives, Sheryl Sinclair (Vic) and Shelia O'Leary-Woodhouse (Tas) to the committee (see photo page 16).

The Executive is looking forward to the challenges of the coming year and supporting ACAL in providing leadership in a field that has constantly changing demands placed upon it.

Jim Thompson
ACAL President

mark
your
diary!



ACAL President
Jim Thompson

I would like to express the executive's appreciation of the work done by members who retired at the AGM or during the year. Judy Harwood (former Vice-President), Tess Were (South Australia), Philippa McLean (Victoria), Liz Cooper (Tasmania) and Rosa McKenna (Past President) made outstanding contributions to the work of ACAL.

Finally I would like to thank Geraldine Castleton, the outgoing ACAL President for the leadership she provided to the executive in 2001-2.

Fortunately Geraldine will be sharing her expertise and knowledge as the Immediate Past President on the Executive.

Considerable work was put into the development of a strategic plan for ACAL in 2002, particularly in the establishment of portfolios. The executive will continue working in the areas of policy, research, professional development, marketing and media, and governance. Updates will appear in *Literacy Link* during 2003.

*Metropolis to
Desert Sands—
Literacy in multiple
environments*

ACAL

26th Annual Conference

Alice Springs September
2003

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keynote speaker:
Professor Mary Hamilton

The Manly Conference (cont.)

This suggests that there is still a commitment to professional development and hopefully a reinvigoration of support to a field with a very important role in education and training in Australia.

In terms of acknowledgements, thanks must go to the Conference Organising Committee who worked tirelessly for a 12 month planning period - the members were Jill Finch (NSW ALNC President), Pat Hazell (ACAL representative), Betty Johnson (researcher), Jenny McGuirk (NSW

TAFE), Uma Muthusamy (ACE) and Ursula Burgoyne (NSW TAFE). We would also like to acknowledge the support offered by Geraldine Castleton (Immediate Past President ACAL) and Alex Tsakmakis (ACAL Executive Officer).

Of course the value of sponsorship is that it provides opportunities to extend the scope and 'reach' of a conference and the committee would also like to thank NSW TAFE ACCESS Division who were major sponsors and also the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training and the NSW Board of Adult and Community Education.

Christine Erskine
NSW ALNC

Exploring the International Adult Literacy Survey

The forum 'Exploring the International Adult Literacy Survey data' was held 23 October 2002 in Canberra. Guest speakers included: Assoc. Professor Rosie Wickert, Faculty of Education, University of Technology, Sydney (researcher and author of *No Single Measure*); Scott Murray, International Study Director and Director General, Institutions and Social Statistics, Statistics Canada and Project Manager for the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) and the ALL survey; Jan Hagston, Manager, Research and Projects, Language Australia; Dave Tout, the Regional Manager of the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills (ALL) Survey; Louise Wignall, Senior Project Officer, ANTA; Mel Butler, Director, National Centre for Education and Training Statistics, Australian Bureau of Statistics, and Liz Suda, former Victorian coordinator of the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (ALNARC).

Rosie Wickert began by outlining the history of adult literacy surveys in Australia, from Judith Goyen's study of illiteracy among 1000 Sydney residents in 1977 to *No Single Measure* which surveyed 1500 people across the country. Rosie pointed out that levels of illiteracy have remained high for the past 50 years, which points to political disinterest and incompetence in dealing with the problem. For Literacy teachers to address the problems they need to understand current policies.

Scott Murray placed the issue of illiteracy into a global context. The 1985 National Canadian Literacy study resulted in labour market and social outcomes. The Canadian government cited the existence of the same problems within the populations of their trading partners as rendering any internal changes redundant.

Mel Butler spoke mainly on the costs of carrying out a survey such as IALS or ALL. To survey 9000 people the cost is around \$5.1million, for 6000 it is \$4.8million, and for 3500 \$4.5million. Although the Australian Bureau of Statistics could fund such a survey the main sources are usually DEST and ANTA. A survey commissioned now would be ready for release in 2007.

Liz Suda described the ALL survey as a rigorous test, taking an hour to complete, which leads to questions around its viability. There is still a lack of information on where Australia fits in the International context. The IALS research is quantitative; it allows testing and verification of notions not possible under qualitative testing.

There was considerable discussion, and much debate, on the fact that the countries which performed well in IALS moved quickly to address deficiencies in the literacy levels of their adults, whereas Australia, which found 47% at levels 1 and 2, has evidently not devoted any extra funding to improving national literacy levels. Sweden, which has 8% of its population at levels 1 and 2, immediately took steps to address the problem.

IALS raised questions such as the good performances of Nordic countries and the Czech Republic, which both scored higher than Australia. Liz's recent visit to the Czech Republic revealed the perception among its citizens that everybody learns to read and write there.

In summary, Rosie Wickert pointed out that 5 years is too long to wait for another (ALLS) survey. During the panel session some interesting points were made:

- Australians expect to stop acquiring new skills once they've left school, whereas from age 16 to 35 we all keep learning. The challenge for governments is to convince citizens of the economic value of acquiring new knowledge and skills.
- There is a need to change the general perception of the Australian population regarding reading and writing activities on a day-to-day basis.
- Canadian industrialists are moving their factories to Mexico, where elementary schools are producing more technically literate workers who will work for less money.
- Australian industry is not generally willing to invest money or time into improving the skills levels of its workers.
- Training packages are nationally available, but not nationally utilised.
- The only literacy improvement approach which has drawn benefits in Canada is a wholistic one, which provides physical support such as lunches and breakfasts.
- Governments make decisions, whether they are informed or not, so providing governments with information should enable them to make wise decisions. Hence the value of carefully conducted research.
- Increased levels of data should enable cross-sectoral responses, allowing a more wholistic approach to the problem nation-wide.

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President's report—2002

Australian Council for Adult Literacy

The report below was presented by Geraldine Castleton (ACAL Immediate Past President) at the ACAL annual general meeting held at the Pacific Park Royal in Manly, NSW during the recent national literacy conference. 'Literacy Link' would like to take this opportunity to thank Geraldine for her splendid leadership and for the fine effort she has put in over the last two years, and also to wish her well in her new endeavours.

It is with both pleasure and pride that I report on the activities of the Australian Council for Adult Literacy for the last twelve months.

Strategic Planning Process

We have continued work on our strategic planning over the last twelve months by working to implement our internal operational plan, adopted at our executive meeting in November last year. A significant feature of this plan was the adoption of portfolios as a management strategy. Portfolios have been established in the areas of Governance, Policy, Research, Professional Development and Marketing and Public Relations. I believe that this strategy will prove to be successful in streamlining ACAL's management activities and ensuring it stays focused on its goals.

Literacy Link and ACAL View

With the continuing financial support from the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), ACAL has produced six editions of *Literacy Link* over the last year, with plans well underway to produce an *ACAL View* on the implementation of the AQTF in the near future. These publications play an invaluable role in the dissemination of information as well as in the promotion of discussion and debate to people working in adult literacy in Australia.

ACAL Forums

In keeping with our contractual obligations to DEST, two national forums have been held this year. The topic of the first forum arose out of concerns about the implementation of the AQTF expressed at our November forum last year. Titled *Breaking New Ground: The Australian Quality Training Framework Challenges and Opportunities* this forum, held in June, attracted around 100 people who greatly appreciated the keynote address given by Sharon Coates, from ANTA, panel presentations by Louise Wignall, Helen Foley, Peter De Natris and Jane Carnegie, as well as the opportunity to debate a range of relevant issues in round table format, and to participate in an interesting feed-back session when these issues were discussed and recorded.

The second forum took up another concern

among ACAL's constituency and was titled *Recent Arrivals in Australia: Literacy and Living*. (see report page 12) We are indebted again to Pat Hazell and her professional development team for the organisation of these forums.

ACAL marketing and public relations

One of the important initiatives of the Marketing and Public Relations group over the last year was the decision to revamp the ACAL web site, with the intention of making it more user friendly, with improved links and faster download time.

Responses to projects and initiatives

ACAL has responded to a range of relevant national projects and initiatives. Including:

- the draft resource developed to clarify language, literacy and numeracy requirements in AQTF Standards for Registered Training Organisations;
- the project to develop language literacy and numeracy specialist practitioner units of competencies in the training package for teaching and assessment (revised AWT);
- ACER project to develop an adult literacy locator tool.

Taking up concerns about the NCVER-managed 2002 Student Outcomes Survey, ACAL wrote to the CEO of ANTA and to the Managing Director of NCVER, noting the importance of adult language, literacy and numeracy students being captured in this data collection process, but identifying some significant issues that practitioners had identified with this process (see article in this issue).

Representation on national committees

ACAL continues to be represented on the WELL and ANTA Adult Literacy Innovative Projects selection committees as well as on the national reference committee of the Reading Writing Hotline. We also have representation on national projects including Access and Equity in eLearning, a Centrelink project to develop more appropriate and accessible material for its clients and projects managed by Language Australia.

ACAL was also represented at a recent forum hosted by the Adult Literacy and Numeracy

Australian Research Consortium, reporting on its program of research from 2001. ACAL also has representation on the Adult Literacy Research Program National Advisory Committee, set up to advise the NCVER on setting and implementing an adult literacy research agenda funded through the ANTA Adult Literacy Project.

One of the more significant events that I was fortunate to represent ACAL at this year was the forum on adult literacy issues and the implications for Aboriginal health, hosted by the Central Australian Remote Health Development Service in Alice Springs. Here adult literacy identified as a priority area, and one interrelated with other issues affecting people's days-to-day lives.

Future Directions

We look forward to continuing professional and efficient support provided to the ACAL executive by Alex Tsakmakis and believe the decision to locate the ACAL office to Alex's home office in the new year will make even more efficient use of the services he provides. We must also express our sincere gratitude to Communication in Education and Training (COMMET), to Rosa McKenna and Lynne Fitzpatrick for providing premises for the ACAL office over the last few years.

ACAL remains faced with a number of challenges, both internally and externally, as it prepares for another busy year. Next year will be a time for concluding the next stage of our strategic planning process. This is important to

ensuring the long-term viability of ACAL so it is well placed to represent your interests in the years to come.

Another challenge for ACAL is to increase its membership base, and having a strong, proactive strategic plan in place is part of that process.

A further challenge will be to consider how ACAL should respond to the United Nations 'Literacy Decade' to start in January 2003, as well as consider what kind of response to adult literacy issues over this decade it will be looking and lobbying for from the federal government. It is imperative that we secure a commitment from both federal and state governments for an increased, authentic and coordinated focus on adult literacy concerns if we are to be at all effective in addressing adult literacy needs within all kinds of contexts within the community.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincerest gratitude to the many people, both within the executive and beyond, who have given me their support and encouragement over this time. In stepping down from the role I know that I take away from it far more than I could ever hope to have contributed.

Thank you for the privilege of serving as your President and may I wish the new President, executive and membership of ACAL every success in the future.

*Geraldine Castleton
ACAL Immediate Past President*

Sydney Morning Herald—TAFE NSW language and literacy student achievement award

The winner of the Sydney Morning Herald—TAFE NSW Language and Literacy Student Achievement Award was presented with his award at the ACAL Conference. Malcolm Roberson from Cooma Campus of TAFE NSW - Illawarra Institute, is a student from the Statement of Attainment in Foundation and Vocational Education.

The award was presented by Robin Shreeve, Deputy Director General TAFE, and Alana Mann, Education Manager, Herald Publications. Malcolm left school early so he could enter the workforce. Many years later he decided that he needed to improve his reading and writing abilities and so he enrolled in TAFE. "He faced substantial learning barriers but persisted until he succeeded. So much so that he is now able to mentor other students in their studies," said Robin Shreeve.

The three Highly Commended students for the



Award winner, Malcolm Roberson (centre) with Alana Mann and Robin Shreeve (right)

award are: Jae Won Kim, Corey Faulkner and Shannon King.

Training Packages—Locked out or invited in?

Training Packages are now a dominant discourse in adult teaching and learning—ain't no doubt about it! What does this mean for workers, learners, second chance students and job seekers with low language, literacy and numeracy skills? This article is derived from a paper Sue delivered at the recent national literacy conference held at Manly, NSW. It describes the Central West Community College's commitment to inclusive training and assessment practice in the delivery of Training Packages.

Training Packages are now the dominant discourse in post-compulsory learning. Government funding and resources are overwhelmingly targeted towards nationally recognised vocational education and training for workers, second chance learners, job seekers, and trainees. What does this mean for post-school learners with low language, literacy and numeracy skills?

The Central West Community College delivers more than 100 qualifications from 23 Training Packages across the central west of New South Wales, in workplaces, small businesses, through traineeships, to job seekers, and in College classrooms.

Training Packages are now a dominant discourse in adult teaching and learning—ain't no doubt about it!

The College's experience

From 1993 onwards, the College implemented partnerships with a range of workplaces through WELL funding, and then on a fee-for-service basis. In the delivery of accredited training to food production, cement manufacturing, transport workers and abattoirs, the College contributed the following expertise:

- delivery of training at workplaces
- development of plain English and reader friendly training materials
- delivery of extra tutorial support for workers at workplaces
- assistance with the development of assessment materials
- implementation of on-the-job assessments that were predominantly verbal

Adopting Training Packages

The College has been an enthusiastic in adopting Training Packages, with a commitment to customisation to each workplace or group of learners. The challenge of inclusion for learners with language, literacy and numeracy (LL&N) needs has been taken up as part of a continuance of what had been done in the delivery of accredited curricula.

Organisational learning about literacy issues and Training Package delivery

In 2000, the College was contracted by the Board of Community and Adult Education to

write *Implementation Guides* for the Administration, Information Technology and Health and Community Services Training Packages. In these Guides, advice about delivery concerned included literacy friendly training strategies, and models of assessment tasks which included the option of verbal questioning as a valid approach for some units of competency. Later that year, a team of experienced College trainers was contracted by ANTA to update *Built in not bolted on: language, literacy and numeracy issues in the delivery of Training Packages*. Both of the above projects involved a team of writers that included qualified literacy and numeracy specialists, and experienced VET trainers and assessors.

The College also joined a regional assessor network, where strategies for the training and assessment learners with language, literacy and numeracy needs were discussed and shared.

In 2001 the College began to look at the issues of underpinning knowledge and contingency management in the training and assessment of Training Packages. In journals and at professional forums, there had been some debate about the customisation of Training Packages to particular workplaces, and whether this undermined the credibility of qualifications being transferable to another workplace.

Internal thinking among experienced trainers and assessors led to a refinement of our approaches to questioning. At every AQTF level, training delivery and assessment must now include 'Why..?' and 'What would you do if....?' questions. For example, in Food Handling, a question could be:

A co-worker suggests that you defrost some frozen chickens using hot water because of limited refrigeration space. What would you do in that situation? What are two possible consequences of defrosting in this manner?

Some good practice approaches for Training Package delivery

From this ongoing organisational learning, we have developed a working set of good practice approaches for maximising inclusive delivery:

- Look at each Unit of Competency to determine the language, literacy and numeracy

- requirements for demonstrating competence
- Always plan assessments in conjunction with training delivery
- Don't make the literacy or numeracy requirements of the assessment task higher than they need to be for demonstration of competence
- Reader friendly, plain English handouts and training materials will be of benefit to all
- Plan assessment tasks to include a balance of evidence gathering eg; Knowledge Questions, Demonstration, Written Evidence/documents/samples, Supervisor validation
- Ensure that information about assessment, and instructions are plain English and straight forward
- Always include underpinning knowledge and contingency management questions in your training and assessment
- Do not require written answers where verbal answers or a demonstration of a skill is more appropriate
- Use a variety of question types, with a minimum of closed questions
- Always specify the quantity of the answer you require eg; 'Describe the six steps in dealing with a customer complaint'
- Always develop a Marker's Guide for questions and documentary evidence, and an Observer's Guide for Demonstration
- Whilst 'reasonable adjustments' can be made for LL&N issues in the delivery of training and assessment, the RTO must maintain the integrity of its credential by ensuring that all

requirements for the demonstration of competence have been met by the learner.

What we have built into organisational practice to support inclusive delivery of Training Packages

- Where possible, a budgetary allocation is made for tutorial support for learners needing language, literacy and numeracy support
- The College's VET trainers participate regularly in a regional assessor network, at which literacy and numeracy issues are discussed and shared
- The College has regular validation meetings for assessment practice, and assessment tasks are checked for the appropriateness and fairness of the LL&N demands
- The College uses its intranet for the communication of validated best practice assessment tasks
- All College VET trainers are being encouraged to participate in a one day workshop based around *Built in not bolted on*.
- The College is piloting the implementation of the Certificate IV in LL&N Assessment and Training with 12 VET trainers.

In summary there is a recognition that literacy is no longer an 'equity' issue for RTOs, but an issue central to quality training delivery.

Sue Perisce

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NCVER survey of literacy students

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) is looking at ways to better survey adult students who have undertaken literacy training. Part of NCVER's responsibility is to manage a national program of surveys. The student outcomes survey has been undertaken annually since 1999.

The survey has four distinct groups of students: TAFE graduates and module completers; and Non-TAFE graduates and module completers. The survey currently collects a range of information, including some personal characteristics, reason for study, employment outcomes, satisfaction ratings, further study intentions and relevance of course. Most often literacy students undertake only a few modules of a course and are generally included as module completers in the student outcomes survey.

In June and July this year the NCVER consulted with a range of stakeholders on the information collected from the annual student outcomes survey. The NCVER has had further discussions including discussions with ACAL.

In response to these discussions the NCVER is redeveloping the current questionnaire for the Adult and Community Education sector. The questionnaire, which is still in a draft format, was recently discussed at the ACAL national conference. The main change to the questionnaire has been shortening it to 4 pages (down from 10) and modifying the questions to better reflect the needs and learning aspirations of ACE students.

Currently the questionnaire is mailed to students and, after a series of follow-up letters, non-respondents are contacted by telephone. It may be more appropriate for literacy students to be contacted directly by phone in the first instance. Before the new ACE sector questionnaire and survey methodology can be implemented, agreement will be sought from stakeholders through the National Training Statistics Committee. It is expected that these changes will be implemented for the 2003 survey.

Matthew Hardy

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Youth Focus Readers are a set of five 'zines' (magazines) written and designed for young readers: mid-teens and older. Two of the readers, *Body Art* and *Skateboarding*, probably make an appeal to young readers only, however the other three, *On the move*, *Money, money, money* and *At the Gym*, could be used for a broader audience.

Each magazine consists of eight pages of clear and open layout, with photographs and a range of writing genres attractively presented on brightly coloured paper. It might be noted though, that some students have difficulty reading from brightly coloured paper.

The material includes interviews, personal opinion, and factual information. Some contain advice, for example on safety in the *Body Art* zine, and on money in the *Money, money, money* zine. Each reader finishes with a personal opinion section 'I think', presenting eight or ten short viewpoints on the topic. These provide excellent stimulus material for discussion and opinion writing. Inclusion of the photos and personal thoughts will help the reader develop empathy with the materials.

The range of writing styles, including sentences and paragraphs, interviews, diagrammatic representation, dot point presentation of information, and presentation of statistical information, among others, provide interest for the reader and also provide models for student writing.

Numeracy information is integrated, and points the way to activities for students. *At the gym* contains statistics about weight and shows how BMI (body mass index) is calculated. *Body art* contains a survey with graphs of the results about numbers of people using this art. *On the move* touches a subject close to the heart of many a young person, moving house. It discusses some of the practical considerations and costs—these are illustrated and presented so that a reader might work out their own moving costs.

From a teacher's viewpoint I found these magazines valuable for classroom use, both for individual and group use. They are informative, but not too detailed. They look at the topics from a range of perspectives, and provide interesting ideas for discussion and writing. Two of the readers, *On the move* and *Money, money, money* have a life skills orientation while the other three, *Body Art*, *Skateboarding* and *At the Gym* have a leisure focus.

An activity guide set for two levels provides ideas for discussion, numeracy use, Internet use and extension activities. There are also suggestions about suitable guest speakers. Very usefully, a clear set of guidelines for student production of a magazine, with possible topics, is included.

I am puzzled as to their description as 'zines'. None of the young people to whom I spoke was conversant with this word, and I wonder about the purpose of changing our language in this way.

Young students appreciated the coloured paper, and the layout and general presentation. It was felt that the topics were relevant and that they could relate to the people in the magazines, that they were ordinary people. Locating useful resources for youth can be challenging, so I would see these as a worthwhile addition.



Each Youth Focus Reader costs \$4; discount packs of 5 are available for \$15. Each Activity Teacher Guide costs \$8. Audio tapes cost extra.

Available from:
WEST COAST TRAINING SOLUTIONS
5th floor, 251 Adelaide Tce, PERTH WA 6000
ph 08 9225 4246 fax 08 9225 4259

Kaye Sweeting
Kaye.Sweeting@cit.act.edu.au

Zoe



Zoe is a 22 year-old student. She has had several piercings and a tattoo.

When did you get your piercings?

I got my nose done at 15 and my eyebrow at 16. I pierced my own belly button at 15, but it got infected. I had it re-done by a professional a couple of years ago. Oh, and my tongue I got done at 18.

I was 18 when I got my tattoo.

Why did you do it all?

When I was younger, it was to be a bit different. Now it's art.

Why don't you have anything in your eyebrow now?

I took it out for work, but each time I put it back in it got infected, so I didn't bother anymore.

What wouldn't you get done?

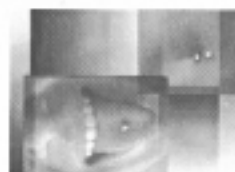
No large tattoo where it would be seen every day. I wouldn't get my nipples or genitals pierced. As far as designs go, I wouldn't have names, people or big ugly dragon-type tattoos.

What do you think is extreme?

I think a lot of anything is extreme. Too many piercings or tattoos just look too cluttered.

Are you still happy with your tattoo?

I love it. I certainly don't want to get rid of it! If I have children, though, it may get stretched – maybe it will change from a dolphin to a whale!



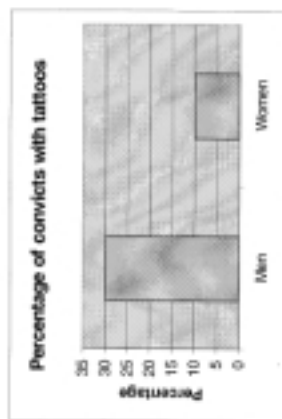
Is the way you look ever a problem?

In some places I still get judged. People look at me like I'm going to steal something.



In Australia...

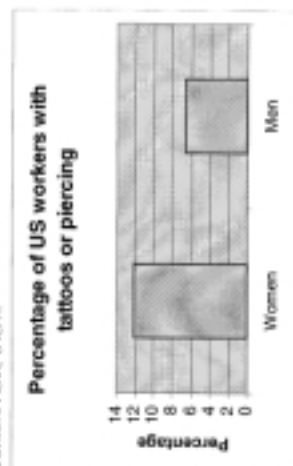
- 30% of convict men transported to New South Wales in 1831 had tattoos. Ten percent of women had them.
- Some of these tattoos had the date of the convict's trial, or transportation. Others had the day the person would be released.



In America...

In a survey,

- 74.6% of workers said a tattoo or body piercing would have a bad effect on their work prospects.
- 48.6% said they would think less of their colleagues if they had tattoos or body piercing.
- 12.1% of female workers have tattoos or body piercing and 6.6% of male workers have them.



• *The EIS MegaLex Macquarie Dictionaries*

Literacy Link recently had an enquiry from a reader who wanted to know if other literacy practitioners used dictionaries with their students, what sort of exercises were useful and whether there was a particular dictionary that stood out for use with the adult literacy students.

Most literacy students reject looking up a word in hardcopy dictionaries. The result is spelling mistakes and poor word choice, and further rejection of acquiring writing skills. The solution might be to have the dictionary on your computer.

The word processor in your computer actually has a dictionary but it is fairly basic and involves just a spell checker that sometimes corrects your work and sometimes leaves you with embarrassing errors. A proper electronic dictionary allows you, mid-sentence, to check spellings, find meanings and synonyms of words, and gives examples of word use in sentences. Some even work in reverse: you input a meaning or phrase and the program finds the word you need.

• *SpeakThis—turns written text to spoken text*

Literacy Link was invited to check out the *SeniorMag* web site (www.SeniorMag.com) which claims to offer some potentially astonishing technology.

SpeakThis is provided as a service on the *SeniorMag* web site to aid senior adults with literacy or vision issues. It is basically a read-along method to help remove some of the frustrations encountered in reading adult level materials on line.

SpeakThis claims to allow the browser of a web page to simply press a button and have the text read to them without having to download any programs or plugins. It turns the text into an MP3 file which plays on the computer's natural audio programs and can also be downloaded

• *Reading with Numbers*

Vanda Power and Arnold Thompson believe that their new system will make a significant contribution to the solution of the reading problem among adults and secondary school pupils. They have recently published the first text employing the system *Read with Numbers 1*.

It has been taken up by the prison education service in WA and is under consideration by Community Development.

The advantages of *Reading with Numbers* are

The *MegaLex Electronic Dictionary* offers the creative literacy practitioner scope for some interesting activities both within the classroom and on line. The *Sydney Morning Herald's Icon* magazine in its review gave *MegaLex* a five star rating, as the best electronic dictionary on the market.

MegaLex claims to be the fastest dictionary in the world. The entire *Concise Macquarie Dictionary* is compressed to a small 4.5MB and allows users to drag/drop words from any *Windows* application. It works as a reverse dictionary and comes as a smaller version for the kids.

MegaLex Macquarie Concise Dictionary

Price: \$44.95 from Web site (4.7Mb and will take approximately 15 minutes at 56 kbps to download, and much less time with a faster line.) \$59.95 CD-ROM sent in the post

Web site: www.megalex.com.au

EIS offers for evaluation a modified version of the *MegaLex Macquarie Concise Dictionary*. It contains only the entries (headwords) for the letter 'A', and is 603Kb. It can be downloaded free from:

<http://www.ecompress.com/download.htm>

for later play or emailed to a friend as an attachment.

The *SeniorMag* web site (www.SeniorMag.com) claims to be 'all about helping seniors and caregivers access the information that is needed to assist them in the normal aging process'. It is *SeniorMag's* hope that people who have such reading or vision issues will use it to increase their ability to absorb information and facilitate the learning experience.

This writer did check out the *SeniorMag* site, but was unable to get the read along technology to work satisfactorily (This might be because I use a Macintosh computer and many web sites seem to favour Windows-based machines. Or maybe I just gave up too easily.)

Have a look yourself—www.seniorMag.com

as follows:

- It makes it possible for adults and older children to teach themselves to read without any additional help—a great attraction to adults ashamed of their illiteracy.
- It can, however, be used with groups and classes more successfully than other approaches, because the learners never need to ask 'What does that word say?' They can work it out for themselves and progress at their own speed.
- It can be used alongside any other method

- which is already in place.
- It makes all English words readable, not only those which are phonically regular.
 - Polysyllables are as easy to read as words of one syllable.
 - It involves no change to spelling and strengthens readers' awareness of common spelling patterns and the sounds they represent.

How does Reading with Numbers work?

In the middle of page 11 (below), the word holiday is divided into three syllables. Over the first letter the number 13 appears, which refers the reader to marginal box 13 on the facing

page. This contains the heart symbol, and the word heart begins with the sound h, so the word holiday starts with the sound h. The same procedure is then applied in turn to o, l, i, and d. The number 31 appears over the middle of a pair of letters ay (printed close together) because they stand for one sound—the first sound of angel. The last letter on page 11 (in the word time) has no number over it because it is silent.

available from: Vandarno Books

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I've been framed.

10





on ho-li-day

These dots
will help you
to read long words.
Read a part at a time.

11

ACAL Forum

Recent arrivals in Australia—literacy for living

The recent ACAL forum held in Manly NSW, 'Recent arrivals in Australia—literacy for living' was thought provoking and generated many questions about life in this lucky country.

The organisers had made a careful choice of speakers—they were eloquent and represented a broad range of involvement with recent arrivals to Australia, from the asylum seekers currently in the media's focus, to international students at university and TAFE, and market gardeners in mushroom hats bent over in the lettuce fields of Sydney's western plains. The 'literacy for living' part of the forum title referred to literacy for livelihood—not just survival, but for well-being and engagement in all aspects of life in Australia.

In her welcome address Geraldine Castleton (Immediate Past President ACAL) reminded us to keep our definition of 'recent arrivals' wide, a point taken up by keynote speaker, Wendy Bacon, Associate Professor in Journalism, University of Technology Sydney (UTS).



keynote speaker:
Wendy Bacon

Wendy spoke of the unpreparedness for teaching international students at university level; the cut-off point for the IELTS test for admission has been progressively lowered because economic factors drive the provision of university places. Fellow academic staff at UTS commenting on the recent

tragic shooting at Monash University said they were 'not surprised' given the isolation and cultural displacement international students face in Australian universities.

Wendy spoke too about the media's construction of 'other'—that is that anyone in Australia who is not European is 'other' and consequently a 'target'. She talked of the critical role of words—how the word 'refugees' became replaced with 'queue jumpers' or 'illegals'. Wendy reminded us that the media is multi-modal and that the visual portrayals of recent arrivals, too, need to be challenged critically.

A panel session followed which looked at the big picture and addressed pertinent issues for new arrivals with particular reference to social justice, health and finance.

Baden Offord, Lecturer in Cultural Studies, Southern Cross University, talked about identity, people's sense of belonging, and how this can be blocked by the embedded assumptions of our institutions. Our major institutions have their own way of portraying Australia and the world, a sort of taken-for-grantedness, that excludes anyone not from the dominant culture. Baden spoke of 'cultural literacy' and how the pedagogy of cultural studies through its examination of power relations enables people to see behind the embedded assumptions of the dominant pedagogy.

Lisa Osborn from the Service for the treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS) reminded us of the implications for literacy learning of students affected by trauma and violence.

This point was echoed by recent arrival Farshid Kheirollahpoor: 'You cannot learn if you do not have safety in your life'. Farshid, an electrical engineer originally from Iran, spent three years in detention after arriving at Perth airport in 1998 before gaining a temporary protection visa (TPV). His story provided the audience with evidence of the misery many recent arrivals face. When asked what was the most practical way people in his position could be helped, Farshid's reply was, 'Provide hope—most of them suffer from depression. Challenge them, bring them out of their shells—many of them just do not want to do anything.'



recent arrival:
Farshid Kheirollahpoor

Kaldoun Hajaj, Financial Services Consumer Policy Centre, Faculty of Law, University of New South Wales, comes from a refugee background and was displaced from his land Palestine when a boy. He pointed to the

vulnerability to financial rip-offs of ethnic communities and the Indigenous community and argued this vulnerability deepened as governments moved away from the welfare state towards economic rationalism.

Another panel session after lunch provided detailed exchanges of experiences from three literacy practitioners working with recent arrivals: Ann Bell, Young TAFE; Maya Cranich, Asylum Seekers Centre; and Francis Parker who works with Chinese, Italian and Vietnamese market gardeners in the Sydney basin. Francis talked about the problems faced by some NESB farmers where there is a lack of registered pesticides for the 'minor' crops and very little information the farmers can access.

Ann Bell has offered to write for an upcoming *Literacy Link* about her experiences mobilising the community at Young, NSW to assist the 60-odd Afghan Hazaris working at the local abattoir. This story achieved national media prominence a few months ago and reveals what is possible even if it means, as Ann suggests, disregarding some rules and breaking a few too.

Summing up the day as a prelude for a discussion on possible action was Mary Hamilton, Professor of Adult Learning and Literacy, Lancaster University UK (see also page 2) this issue). Mary commented first on policy implications. She called for greater flexibility so that issues could be addressed across agencies and in partnership with other organisations, including the media.

She made the point that not all literacy support needs to be in the form of formal courses: [i] advice sources would benefit from plain English advocacy, [ii] interpreters, [iii] using the skills of the newcomers themselves to provide work, advice on legal, health matters and so forth, [iv] and mobilising brokers between newcomers and



forum panellists: (l to r) Baden Offord, Lisa Osborn and Kaldoun Hajaj

local communities (along the lines so splendidly described by Ann Bell (see above).

Mary Hamilton also teased out some of the implications of the day's discussion on practice and pedagogy and asked us to consider:

- how best to create a safe, respectful environment for teaching and learning
- how to fuse the emotional, cultural, financial and practical issues facing new arrivals
- how to extend cultural awareness between groups using literacy as a vehicle for this
- how traditions of oral literacy and testimony provide an important healing process and a vehicle for raised cultural awareness.



forum panellists: (l to r) Ann Bell, Maya Cranach, Francis Parker

Literacy Link (ISSN 0158-3026) is the newsletter of the Australian Council for Adult Literacy, 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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Moving Memories—an ANTA Innovative Program to develop young people's technical literacy through digital storytelling

Moving Memories is a pilot project with the aim of developing reading, writing and oral communication skills in a participative learning environment, which focuses on harnessing young people's existing and developing technological literacy skills.

The group of participants is made up of eight young people between the ages of 15 and 20 who have had incomplete and negative experiences of learning, and require support to develop their language and literacy skills. Participants engage in the project for 20 hours per week over three days, for 20 weeks.

The major objective is to promote the growth of community connections, feeling of empowerment and the desire to continue learning through a two-way mentoring system where older people are assisted to share their stories through the digital medium.

There are four main components which make up the 20 week program:

- the integration of the Reading and Writing, Oral Communication and General Options Streams of the Certificate of General Education for Adults into the project;
- the effective pairing of older mentors from the local community with the participants, to encourage positive development of literacy skills and the sharing of 'life' stories for a few hours once a week;
- the incorporation of a weekly Learning Circle to allow participants and mentors quality time, and in a focused group environment, to further explore issues, experiences and ideas that have arisen during class time;
- and the main integrated project which is the production of 'digital stories' by the participants about their mentors, using computer technology and drawing on all their developing skills and Key Competencies.

The first week of the project entails the participants taking part in a 20 hour induction period focused on gaining the maximum benefit from the learning situation. This centres on developing an awareness of the different learning models to be used throughout the program including mentoring, digital story telling and effective participation in a Learning Circle.

The following four weeks concentrates on the creating of the participants' own digital stories, which enables them to learn the elements of good storytelling as well as the fundamental

concepts of visual composition and design. Producing a digital story familiarises the participants with *PhotoShop* and *Premiere* software, enabling them to assist their older mentors to use digital imagery, text, voice, sound, music and video animation to tell their stories. The mentors during this period undergo induction and training sessions in mentoring 'at risk' young people as well as basic education tutor training. The remaining fifteen weeks centre on the production of 'Moving Memories'. The mentors and participants meet once a week, and the rest of the program integrates relevant components of the CGEA.

Progress and reflections to date...

We are currently into the first few weeks of the project and the atmosphere of the learning environment is positive, enthusiastic and also full of challenges. The participants are a mixed group of 15 to 17 year olds who have had differing experiences of learning, school and the accessing of support networks, and although there was initially a tentativeness and almost reluctance to relax and settle into the learning environment, they are all now making a conscious effort to engage in the project and take up all the challenges offered to them.

Most of the participants have had negative schooling and learning experiences and all struggle with their literacy skills and oral communication. The main task they tackled first was to compose a written version (by process writing) of their own life's experiences.

The sessions they are spending on training in the *Premiere* and *Photoshop* software is giving them a new means to 'publish' their own work for an interested audience.

Already there is evidence of a sense of pride in the work produced, the need for it to be 'perfect' in structure, spelling and mechanics; also that it is interesting for the reader/viewer.

Although there have been a few struggles in this area (mainly the students having a bit of trouble breaking old habits in their approach to written tasks) the environment that has been developing in the classroom has allowed for frustrations and problems to be sorted out and

dealt with in quite a mature way.

We have engaged in two Learning Circle group sessions where we focused on the topics of 'values and morals in the community' and 'ways of learning'. Participants nominated a student facilitator for each of the Learning Circles and they took it on themselves to find any relevant reading material to distribute to the group to be read before the Learning Circle session. The participants will have had quite a positive experience in the classroom and in a Learning Circle.

The scheduling of the training of the software early in the project has given the students a positive focus and a need for them to settle very quickly into the learning environment. They experience rewards every day because the 'digital' aspect of the course gives them a 'visual' reward and a sense of accomplishment.

Outcomes

The proposed outcomes for this pilot project is the production of a report in two parts: the first a professional development resource kit for tutors, highlighting the curriculum framework and methodology used, providing concrete examples of learning activities that can be used to model the project; and a reflection upon the theoretical underpinnings and lessons learnt from the project, including recommendations and resources for future programs.

Participants will produce digital stories that will be distributed electronically and these will act

as a positive marketing tool to incite interest in the program.

The project model lends itself into integration into the current VET system in the prevocational area. It provides the basis for developing the necessary literacy and social skills required for entry into the modern workforce. The use of the Certificate of General Education for Adults as a means of formally recognising competencies gained through the project, illustrate how effectively the model can be incorporated into existing literacy curriculum.

The provider and innovator

SkillsPlus Peninsula Inc. is a not for profit, Registered Training Organisation with a history of providing quality programs to the community. Our experiences highlighted a need for interactive youth programs that support literacy development, promote community connectedness and address social and life skills development. This led to the creation of 'My Story', a computer mentoring project (2002) and Learning in Circles (2001) that were funded by DEST (formerly DEETYA) under the ANTA Adult Literacy Innovative projects initiative. The outcomes of these programs exceeded the objectives and highlighted the importance of developing community linkages for young people at risk.

Anna Hagan

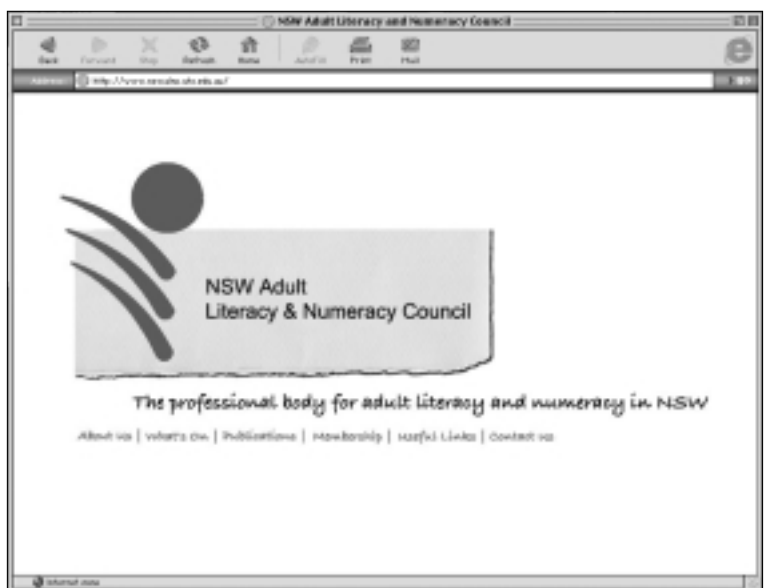
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New web site & new look for the NSW ALNC

Congratulations to the NSW Adult Literacy & Numeracy Council (NSW ALNC) on launching its new web site <http://www.nswalnc.uts.edu.au> at the recent ACAL conference in Manly.

The NSW ALNC is the peak professional body representing teachers, workers and others interested in the field of adult literacy and numeracy in NSW. It was established in the late 1970s and is affiliated with the Australian Council of Adult Literacy (ACAL).

NSW ALNC members includes representatives from ACE, TAFE, community organisations, AMES, Corrective Services, LL&N providers, workplace programs, youth programs, libraries and universities. Membership is made up of practitioners, policy makers, program makers, researchers and academics across the adult literacy and numeracy field.



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