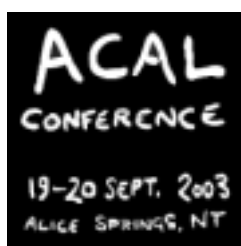


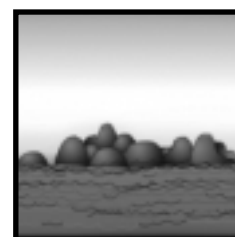


## Metropolis to desert sands... forthcoming national literacy conference

The forthcoming ACAL 26th national literacy conference aims to provide a unique experience to participants by capturing the diversity of provision across the country, and examining the range of delivery modes that allow the needs of individuals and communities to be met. It will provide a window to the methodologies operating in particular domains such as mainstream, Indigenous and multicultural environments where differing value systems and cultures exist.



literacies and numeracies required in these differing sites, such as literacies for society and work, the environmental literacies needed to sustain remote and regional communities, the use of technology in literacy development and literacies for learners with special needs.



The conference will be held at the Alice Springs Convention Centre 19 and 20 September 2003. One of the unique features of this Conference will be an opportunity for delegates to undertake site visits to a range of educational centres in the Alice Springs district.

For further information and registration details visit the ACAL web site—

[www.acal.edu.au](http://www.acal.edu.au)

A particular focus will be the uniqueness of the

ACAL Executive member Robyn Jay from the NSW Mid North Coast cluster of Community Colleges, has been awarded

a Flexible Learning Leader innovation scholarship by ANTA within the Australian Flexible Learning Framework. Leaders receive professional development funding for a year to expand their knowledge and skills in flexible learning and leadership.

Robyn's goal is to research, document and disseminate innovative models of use of new technologies and blended learning methodologies in adult literacy programs. Her study will include site visits, participation in a range of conferences and web research covering pedagogical and equity issues, classroom practice and PD opportunities for literacy teachers. Robyn's search will also extend beyond literacy and VET, and beyond Australia. Even at this early stage exciting community development projects are being unearthed.

During 2003 we'll be publishing 'postcards' from Robyn's journey. If you are doing interesting things with technology, or know of inspiring community projects, please contact Robyn by email at [robyn@gecko-ed.com](mailto:robyn@gecko-ed.com)

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# Beyond Training: Locating literacy in social policy



Friday 2 May 2003  
Great Northern Hotel  
Launceston, Tasmania  
keynote speaker: Lis De Vries,  
Dir. Tas Council of Social Service

This forum will examine the ways adult literacy and numeracy practices are entwined with many aspects of day-to-day life, resulting in the need for literacy policy responses to extend beyond the training sector, into the broader social policy arena.

In the same way literacy and numeracy cannot be described or understood without reference to social practice, so too responses to people's literacy and numeracy learning needs must be grounded in a wider social policy landscape. Literacy issues need to be explicitly addressed in social policy that covers areas such as housing, employment, physical and mental health, finance, and community participation. Literacy practices embedded in these areas need to be highlighted as a vital part of living, training and lifelong learning. Furthermore, there is an urgency to locate issues of cross-sectoral involvement at the centre of the literacy policy framework.

ACAL will use the forum as an opportunity to gather advice to inform its broadening agenda for the coming years as well as to develop strategies for including adult literacy and numeracy concerns as a written part of social policy. Suggested pre-reading for the Forum—'Make Your Own Way There— An Agenda for Young People in the Modern Labour Market' by John Spierings, Dusseldorp Skills Forum (see article in this issue of *Literacy Link*.)

For further information and bookings contact:

Alex Tsakmakis

Phone: 03 9478 3826

Fax: 03 9442 4508

email: [acal@mira.net](mailto:acal@mira.net)

website: [www.acal.edu.au](http://www.acal.edu.au)

Registration Fee: \$66-00 includes GST

## Adult Learners' Week

**H**ave you learnt anything this year? Have you helped someone else acquire a new skill or increase their knowledge? If you have, Adult Learners' Week is your chance to rejoice in your achievements!

Adult Learners' Week, from 1-7 September 2003, is a national celebration of lifelong learning in all its forms. The event will be marked by activities, displays and workshops that honour the accomplishments and experiences of adult learners in every state of Australia. The theme for Adult Learners' Week 2003 is **literacy**.

Through Adult Learners' Week 2003, Adult Learning Australia (ALA) will promote the importance of a wide range of literacies to allow full participation in society, including basic and critical literacy, media literacy, financial literacy and, of course, in this technological age, IT literacy.

'This year's Adult Learners' Week will also put the spotlight on the unsettling fact that 46 per cent of Australians do not have adequate literacy and numeracy skills to function in a sophisticated society,' said Francesca Beddie, Executive Director of ALA, 'something we must all work to rectify.'

With the support of ALA's members and partners, including ACAL and the Reading Writing Hotline, Adult Learners' Week 2003 will include talks from international guests, state and national awards, competitions and debate about literacy. As part of this year's campaign, we are seeking stories of how literacy— or illiteracy— has impacted Australians' lives. If you or someone you know has a story, we're interested in hearing it!

We are also keen to hear literacy tutors' views on which literacies will become more important into the 21st century, innovative ways of supporting the development of these vital literacies, and any messages we should convey to governments or the media about how to support the development of adult literacy. Adult Learning Australia (ALA) seeks to raise awareness among the Australian public - and especially policy makers, the media and socially disadvantaged groups - of the range and validity of different adult learning activities throughout life.

Please contact  
Jane Speechley at [j.speechley@ala.asn.au](mailto:j.speechley@ala.asn.au)  
phone (02) 6251 9887  
For more information log on to  
[www.adultlearnersweek.org](http://www.adultlearnersweek.org)

# 'Make your own way there'—an agenda for young people in the modern labour market

by John Spierings

*John Spierings is a researcher with the Dusseldorp Skills Forum, a non-profit association with a charter to stimulate innovative educational developments, to focus upon the importance of the workforce in the continuing development of Australia, and to reach out to the wider community to promote the formation of skills and personal effectiveness, particularly in young people. In this paper John uses a marketing message, 'Make your own way there', as the basis for comment on how this message impacts on young people in the modern labour market. The paper includes comment on the modern labour market, skills development in this market, risks for young people, policy and suggested policy responses.*

**M**ake your own way there' is the new message to young consumers from the Sportsgirl chain. But like all advertising it reflects a larger social condition—it says 'you are on your own, it's your journey, you are in control, we have no responsibility, it's risky but exciting, and the destination is whatever you make it (provided you buy it from us)'.

'Making your own way there' has been at the heart of our re-fashioned economic system of the past two decades. The major political project of our time has been about placing individual choice and autonomy at the centre of public policy.

In some ways though we have always made our own way, overcoming or using family, ethnic, educational, locational and other backgrounds to our own advantage. It's just that now the dominant economic and increasingly cultural message is that background doesn't matter; it's your personal qualities and capacities that make things happen. Don't expect a helping hand—if you do, you're a loser. Observe how banks and financial institutions encourage this pitch: their actual product—the financial return on capital invested—is less prominent than their encouragement of risk-taking behaviour among consumers.

Like Sportsgirl and the banks, governments too have become vague about what they are actually selling. There is a disjunction between the political messages of being in a state that is 'relaxed and comfortable', or feeling 'security at home and abroad', and the actual policy agendas that have eroded the role of government.

## **Re-shaping Work in the Modern Labour Market**

A key 'there' for people remains the labour market. It is crucial in determining life's journey. It's instructive then to stand back and look at the shape of the current labour market.

A lot rests on permanent, full-time employment: core tax arrangements, education and training

systems, family and gender policies, personal and family capital formation structure, home ownership culture predicated on a certain income stream, timesharing and the capacity to plan beyond a fortnight. However only half the employed workforce now work fit this category, with nearly half in this group working more than 41 hours, but most of those hours being in an unpaid capacity.

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*'...for occupations other than managers and professionals, the net increase in jobs in the 1990s consisted entirely of part-time casual jobs.'*

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A potent illustration of the restructuring taking place in the labour market is that for all occupations other than managers and professionals, the net increase in jobs in the 1990s consisted entirely of part-time casual jobs. In metal and engineering, for example, non-standard forms of work accounted for less than one worker in ten in the late 1980s. Today, however, approximately one quarter of that sector's workforce is engaged on either a casual, labour hire or contractor basis.

Many sections of the community now have limited access to jobs paying a substantial wage. It has to be said that for many households work no longer provides the basis for family viability, much less prosperity.

## **Skills Development in the Modern Labour Market**

A crucial question concerns not just the amount of work available, but the type of work now on offer. This goes to how Australia is competing on a global scale in the knowledge economy stakes. In a new report soon to be released by the University of Sydney and Dusseldorp Skills Forum (DSF), Australia ranked 16th out of 21 OECD countries with respect to annual average percentage growth in white-collar high-skilled workers between 1980 and 1998. However, in 14 of these countries growth in

professional, technical, administrative, and managerial occupations was higher than growth in all other occupations. Only two other countries had lower growth rate in high skilled jobs. Moreover, Australia's average annual percentage change in total employment in low-skilled jobs was higher than any other country over the period 1980 to 1990. In Australia there was a 1.2 per cent growth in low-skilled jobs; only Ireland and Austria had higher growth rates in low-skilled jobs.

Compared to 11 leading OECD countries Australia's investment in knowledge as a proportion of GDP deteriorated by five per cent and compares to a 15 per cent rise that occurred in the United States between 1985 and 1998. In absolute terms at 8.0 per cent of GDP in 1995, Australia's investment in knowledge ranked third from the bottom out of 13 leading OECD countries; well below the OECD leading country average of 9.2 per cent. In 1997 Australia rated 25th out of 29 OECD countries with regard to direct public expenditure for educational institutions as a proportion of nominal GDP. Combining public and private spending for educational institutions however, Australia ranked 14th out of 23 countries, reflecting the contributions made by full-fee paying students (both international and local) and payments from private industry.

### **Impact on Workplace Learning**

The growth in non-standard work appears to have accentuated the trend of shifting some costs of training from employers to individual workers. Beyond a commitment to formal education, skill development in the workplace and through employer contributions to training has fallen away in the past decade. Overwhelmingly the main type of training that employees participate in is on-the-job training, covering a broad spectrum of different learning activities.

### **The Balance of Risk for Young People**

In today's labour market there has been a shift in risks faced from one side of the economic equation to another, reinforcing the efficacy of making your own way through it. The challenge is to re-adjust the balance of risk and to create a high-skill economy and route to work without diminishing opportunity and individual capacity.

Young people are in the frontline of the employment, education and training consequences flowing from the new economic risk equation. Currently there are about 200,000 teenagers who are neither in full-time work or full-time education. Six months after leaving school a quarter of school leavers are either unemployed, in part-time work but not studying, or not in the labour force. Since May 1995 the broad age group that has benefited the most

from growth the full-time jobs created has been older workers—those aged 25 and over. A failed school-to-work transition is now recognised as an important risk factor in terms of propensity to long-term unemployment.

For decades we relied on the workplace as a site of learning for life, with mentors, career paths, and practical assistance to enable employees to tackle new tasks and develop new skills. Until the 1980s most Australians left school before completing Year 12 to take up an entry-level job or training opportunity. It was assumed that work rather than school would be the best induction for most young people into the ways of the world.

A number of early school leavers appear to be in a cycle where low literacy and numeracy is an important reason for leaving, the anxiety about coping with school workloads and an inappropriate pedagogy increasing as Year 12 approaches. The Australian Council for Education Research (ACER) has found that for young people heading to a vocational or employment pathway as opposed to a academic direction, the nature of the first exposure they have to the labour market is crucial.

Australia urgently needs a national 'second chance' strategy that, among other things, provides greater innovation and flexibility in the delivery of post-school literacy and numeracy programs, and ensures they are available as part of integrated workplace learning arrangements rather than offered in an environment that reproduces the structures and pedagogy of traditional schooling.

While at the forefront of these challenges young people are also among the most adept at responding to them. 'Making your own way there' works for many young people; not planning beyond a fortnight can have appeal. A patchwork of arrangements and combinations of work and study are being negotiated by young people that enable the pursuit of skills, interests and fashions. Skills to negotiate and manage these patchwork arrangements now become crucial, as the notion of 'worker' gives way to the experience of labour and skills contractor.

### **Policy Failure and Young People**

Across a number of primary pathway dimensions for young people—entry-level employment, New Apprenticeships and tertiary education—there are high levels of attrition. For many, especially those from an INDIGENOUS background, those in rural or remote or economically depressed urban communities, significant numbers of boys and young men, those in juvenile justice, those with disabilities,

in chaotic families, the way forward is something of an obstacle course: the preferences are restricted, the skill range is narrow and the hurdles are structural, cultural and economic.

For young people who are unemployed, 'under-utilised' or involuntarily not in the labour market there are substantial policy failures in terms of disconnected education and employment assistance systems, a profound lack of support to encourage informed decision-making about options and alternatives, a propensity to shift costs and obligations between sectors and governments and waste resulting from extravagant competition between pathway providers.

These failures are tolerated in Australia because of a lack of discourse about the underlying skills and threshold foundational attributes considered to be essential in the labour and other markets over the course of a lifetime. It is a story about the failure to realise that a fundamental role of government is to ensure that young people are equipped with these skills so they are not left utterly on their own to make their way wherever.

There is no contemporary national benchmark of educational attainment, training support or employment assistance that governments feel they need to provide to enable young people to become active citizens. The compulsory school leaving age is an anachronism from the Fordist era.

## **Five Suggested Policy Responses**

### **1. A legislated national youth commitment guaranteeing a foundation level of education, training and employment assistance.**

Legislation based on framework agreements between the Commonwealth and each of the states is required to underpin a national entitlement of all Australians to at least a foundation level of education, training and employment assistance. Legislation would articulate in clear terms the obligations that would fall on governments to guarantee such access with particular support for early school leavers or those facing other disadvantages to: [i] complete Year 12 either at school or another recognised provider; [ii] obtain an education or training qualification that is at an equivalent level such as a TAFE certificate or apprenticeship; or [iii] obtain a full-time job that is linked to education or training.

Effectively this is the equivalent of the existing minimum level of at least two years full-time education in the post-compulsory years. One direction being considered includes legislating a state-sponsored entitlement for young people to participate in schooling, training or the labour market up to the age of 17 years, with schools responsible for negotiating and monitoring participation in these diverse options.

Nearly all state post-compulsory education systems are undergoing major change to devolve funding and providing support to enable schools, TAFE, Job Network providers, local government and others to achieve improved outcomes and stronger accountabilities. While there is consensus about directions and the need for improved transitional support arrangements for young people, there is not yet an agreed framework about priorities, funding, delivery mechanisms, and implementation strategies.

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*These failures are tolerated in Australia because of a lack of discourse about the underlying skills and threshold foundational attributes considered to be essential in the labour and other markets over the course of a lifetime.*

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Legislation must also facilitate local stewardship or social responsibility for the destinations and pathways of young people. New sets of relationships are being forged that ask a wide range of players—parents, teachers, employers, local government, and centralised agencies based in communities (such as Centrelink)—to share the risks and responsibilities involved in the development, guidance, learning and maturation of young people. Brokerage, pathways negotiation, mentoring, career and vocational guidance and teacher advocacy—those elements that involve personal relationships and engagement, that stand alongside young people as they make their own way—are growing and there are real outcomes to show for this. The results are there in pilot projects in terms of school retention, access to training, and negotiated outcomes with individuals and families. But resources are thin, fragile in life span and in terms of supporting professional development, and their capacity to effect system wide change in education is presently limited.

### **2. We need a national second chance or alternative learning strategy.**

The risks involved in forfeiting a place in the labour marketplace to improve skills needs to be minimised. A key variable in the motivation to re-enter education is the time involved—finding time without injuring family, work and other commitments.

### **3. We need to consider the skill structure of the workforce, the opportunities for decent and rewarding work and sources of economic well-being that encourage more diverse and demanding skill repertoires.**

VET policy should be concerned with training outcomes as well as inputs and moving beyond an 'enterprise orientation'—the deployment and

*continued on page 13*



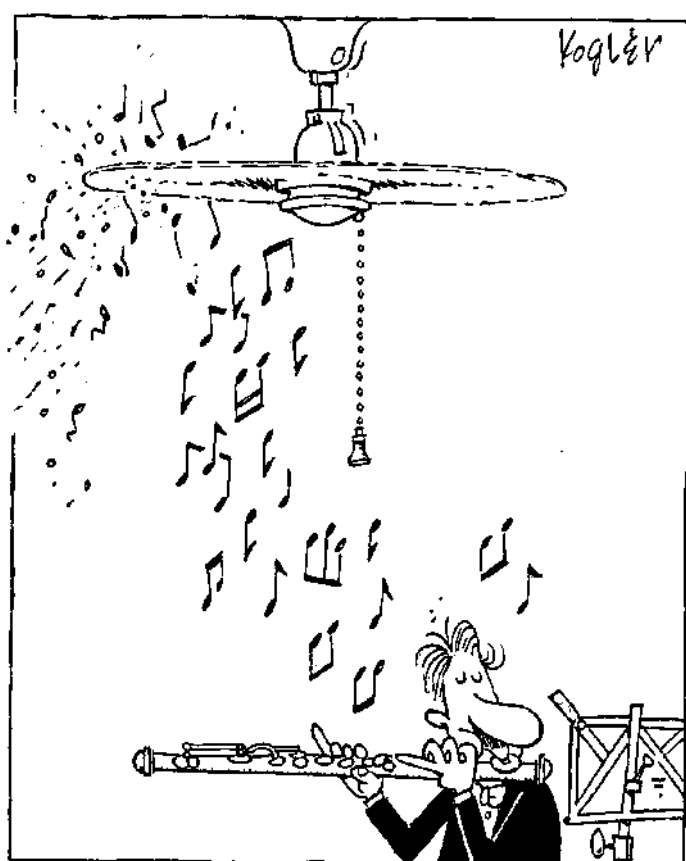
# Drawn and quartered

## —cartoons in the adult classroom

by Brian Kogler

Brian Kogler's cartoons have appeared in 'The Sydney Morning Herald' and 'The Sun-Herald', (where his weekly comic strip 'Thin Ice' ran for six years) and magazines, including 'The Bulletin', 'Women's Weekly', and 'Dolly'. The Australian Black and White Artists' Club has awarded him eight Stanley Awards for Best Single-Panel Cartoon and Best Cartoon Strip. He currently teaches literacy, numeracy and computing at both Gosford TAFE and Ultimo TAFE, and uses cartoons to enrich adult education. This article first appeared in 'Literacy and Numeracy Exchange' the newsletter of the NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council.

**W**hy is the cartoon good for the classroom? We look to tasks that guarantee success and build confidence. A cartoon has immediate appeal. It is the most disarming of all texts.



When a teacher shows a cartoon to a class, interest levels are usually high. Allow room for interpretation. Try not to ask 'Why is this cartoon funny?' It urges that the cartoon is funny and that the teacher knows exactly why it is funny. Students often feel uneasy when trying to reply. It might be better to first ask:

- what do I see in this cartoon?
- what do I see first?
- why do I see it first?
- what is missing and why has it been left out?
- what happened in the lead-up to this cartoon?
- what might happen next?
- who might read this cartoon and why?
- who might be puzzled by it? (cultural concepts)

### How can the cartoon assist the literacy teacher?

- **focus**—students' writing has no clear focus. Main ideas are obscure or implied.

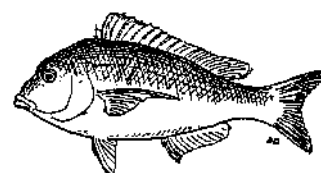
A cartoonist controls the attention of the viewer by ensuring that some parts of the image are noticed before others, leaping out at the viewer to point up connections. A teacher can present cartoons which attract the eye to the meaning—making elements. Once students have appreciated this device, they can attempt to revise their work so that the main ideas are encountered early (in the title or opening sentence) or are in some way emphasised.

- **The writing process**—students undervalue the four-stage writing process

Learners need to know that a version of the writing process—prepare, draft, revise, copy—is used by all who create. Like a writer, the cartoonist spends long hours thinking about content and presentation. The resulting thumb-nail sketches are worked into roughs, which generate a master upon which the finished art is based. Have learners identify the stages and relate them to their own writing.

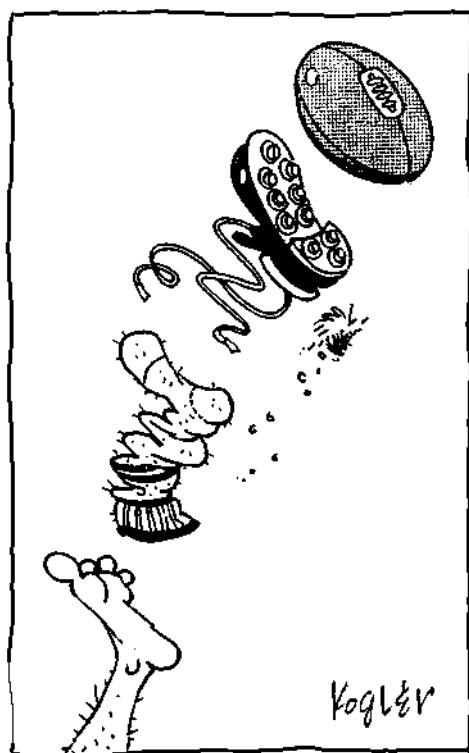
- **Formal v. informal**—learners have a poor grasp of the differences between formal and informal writing

Present the class with two images of the same object eg, a fish—one image a faithful drawing, the other a cartoon. In what ways do they differ? Which would go in a letter to a friend and which in a letter to the Tax Office? What qualifiers come to mind: cool, distant, warm, open?



- **Simplify**—students' writing abounds in secondary detail; many words are used where one would suffice

When a cartoonist draws a brick wall or a tiled roof, only a few bricks or tiles are shown. The intelligent viewer automatically closes the gaps. If learners view good examples of simplified cartoons—toggling between the cartoon image and their own writing—a sense of 'less is more' should develop.



- **Exaggerate**—students produce bland written work

The hallmark of the cartoon is exaggeration—distortion that somehow preserves meaning. Show students how the artist amplifies certain elements of the cartoon—facial features, body proportions, gesture—thereby increasing interest. Go directly to a sample passage and try 'going big' with a few text features: enliven the heading, expand a phrase, use a thesaurus to intensify a verb, introduce a simile or metaphor.

- **Crop**—students are unwilling to edit their work, especially if they believe that everything they write is equally important
- Cartoonists (and photographers too) 'crop' or frame the image, trimming away unnecessary content. 'What', they ask, 'is the maximum amount of information I can omit without altering the meaning?' By showing the class a series of similar (or identical) cartoons, each one more severely cropped than the last, the teacher can return to the students' writing and ask, 'How much text can you reasonably abandon and still preserve your meaning?'

#### Further activities

- 1 Ask learners to bring along a favourite

cartoon and to explain to the class why they enjoy it. This initiating activity will reveal their cultural or personal preferences.

- 2 What constitutes humour? Rank a variety of cartoon illustrations along a continuum marked 'least funny' to 'most funny'. Begin by ranking three different images and increment over several meetings to fifteen. Students work in pairs and must orally justify their decisions.

- 3 Find cartoons depicting the three basic stages—before, during and after—of an event (eg, a man slipping on a banana skin). Which stage works best? The first stage (man striding boldly towards banana skin) anticipates the outcome; it is suited to cause—and—effect humour drawn from common experience. Stage two (man slipping dramatically) performs the outcome and is therefore rich in the humour of movement and change. The third stage (man in crumpled heap with banana skin on his head) encrypts the outcome; it allows the viewer to reconstruct the story from clues in the final image.

There is always a story embedded in a single—panel cartoon. The skill in revealing the tale lies in selecting the best narrative stage to represent it. Each stage has great potential for humour, but not all stages best tell the story. Using the anticipating and encrypting stages, have students construct the story implied in the stand-alone image.

- 4 Divide the class into pairs or trios and ask them to recount a single-panel cartoon from the different standpoints of its participants. Choose cartoons with no more than three persons/animals and with a minimum of text. After agreeing on the meaning of the cartoon, each member of the group records the thoughts of a different participant (eg. One hundred and five kilos? There must be something wrong with these scales. . .). Each group then reads out its viewpoints to the class.

Alternatively, students can compare two cartoons—same subject, different points of view—and write from the two perspectives. Political cartoons are best avoided when preparing this task.

- 5 Demonstrate to students that many cartoons are about misfortune. Present them with a cartoon rich in humorous writing possibilities, for example:

*A seeing-eye dog leads its visually inconvenienced owner off a cliff.*

- letter of complaint (owner denounces dog)
- recount (from hospital bed)
- accident report

(continued over)

**L**iteracyNet is a web site where you will find up to date links to useful literacy information from across the Education and Training Sector including:

- Resources

[www.dest.gov.au/ty/litnet/resources.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/ty/litnet/resources.htm)

—find information regarding resources developed using funds from the ANTA Adult Literacy National Projects and/or the Workplace English Language and Literacy Program.

- The National Reporting System (NRS)

[www.nrs.dest.gov.au/](http://www.nrs.dest.gov.au/)

—a nationally recognised mechanism for reporting outcomes of adult English language, literacy and numeracy programs. Sample activities include workplace-specific examples and cover language, literacy and numeracy skills that may be found in a range of occupations and levels of employment across industries.

- The Workplace English Language Literacy (WELL) Program

[www.dest.gov.au/ty/well/default.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/ty/well/default.htm)

—designed to provide workers with the English language and literacy skills they need to meet the demands of their current employment and any training requirements, particularly in the context of workplace reform. Funding proposals applications can be discussed with State or Territory WELL Coordinators.

- WELL Training-benefits for all

[www.dest.gov.au/ty/well/casestudies.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/ty/well/casestudies.htm)

—Developed by Linda Wyse & Associates as a 2001 National WELL resource. A series of 10

case studies, together with a snapshot summary of the advantages of WELL training. The case studies describe the implementation and outcomes of WELL training in a range of organisations and industry sectors around Australia. They are a valuable resource to promote the versatility and responsiveness of the WELL programme to workplace training needs.

- The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA)

[www.anta.gov.au](http://www.anta.gov.au)

—ANTA supports the development of a national system of vocational education and training in cooperation with State and Territory governments, the Commonwealth government and industry. Has a listing of the Innovative Projects from previous years under the ANTA Adult Literacy National Project.

- Education Network Australia (EDNA)

[www.edna.edu.au/EdNA](http://www.edna.edu.au/EdNA)

—provides access to Internet sites for the education and training community. There are lots of links to literacy related web sites.

- The Reading Writing Hotline

—funded by DEST and managed by Access Division, TAFE NSW, is a national adult literacy telephone referral service. At the cost of a local call, the Hotline can provide advice and referrals to over 1200 providers of adult literacy and numeracy across Australia.

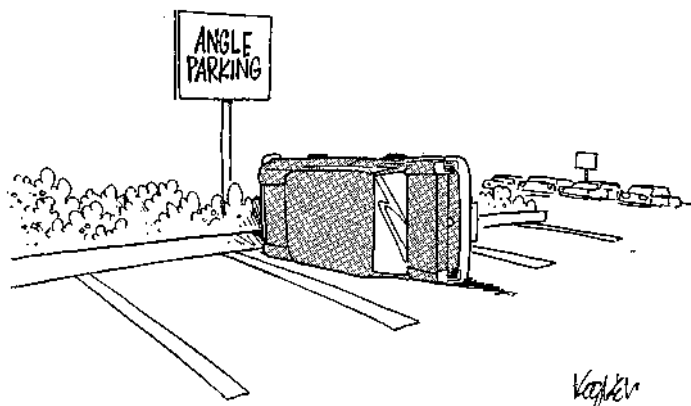
Call the Hotline...1300 6555 06 OR email [info@literacyline.edu.au](mailto:info@literacyline.edu.au)

- The Adult Education Resource and

## Cartoons in the classroom

(cont.)

- dog's diary
- How to Get Rid of Your Master (procedural text from dog's point of view)



6 Try this activity with a cartoon-literate class. Read a short text (e.g., The Queensland Cane Toad) and decide on the main idea. Write it as a phrase (cane toad populations are growing). Which words in the phrase are easiest to draw—toad? growing? Form pairs to discuss (but not necessarily draw) text-free interpretations of the main idea:

- One large cane toad fills the panel, its body pressing against all sides.
- One large cane toad stands composed of many tiny toads.
- A framed close-up of a cane toad shows one large eye and a part of a smile.
- A large cane toad squats in profile on the horizontal axis of a graph, its back and head boldly outlined to plot the 'trend' line.

As writers, students try to accurately set down their visual concepts.



Information Service (ARIS)

[www.aris.com.au/search.html](http://www.aris.com.au/search.html)

—the ARIS database holds details of almost 4000 print and non-print resources and incorporates materials developed under the Commonwealth WELL Program (Workplace English Language and Literacy), and more recently, ANTA adult literacy national projects. There is also an ARIS database of relevant journal readings.

- Language Australia National Resource Centre [languageaustralia.com.au/lanrc](http://languageaustralia.com.au/lanrc)

—a one-stop shop for people wanting to find out about publications and resources in languages, literacy and cultures for both children and adults.

- ACEWeb (Adult Community Education Web) —provides teachers, workers and organisations in the field with a means to contribute their knowledge and Web-based projects to the site itself, use the site as a place for their own Net-based learning or use the site as a forum to discuss community and educational issues.

- Adult Learning Australia (ALA)

[www.ala.asn.au/](http://www.ala.asn.au/)

—peak body for adult learning providers and a voice for adult learners. At its site you can explore our projects, add to the calendar of events, participate in one of thirty interest group discussions, buy publications, join ALA, or link to adult learning organisations and the world.

- The Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (ALNARC)

[www.staff.vu.edu.au/alnarc/](http://www.staff.vu.edu.au/alnarc/)

—funded until recently by DEST/ANTA to undertake adult literacy and numeracy research. Reports on a number of the projects are available on the ALNARC web site.

- The Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program

<http://llnp.dest.gov.au/default.asp>

—provides language, literacy and numeracy training for eligible job seekers whose skills are below the level considered necessary to secure sustainable employment or pursue further education and training. It is designed to help remove a major barrier to employment and improve participants' daily lives.



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### Apology—

The article which appeared in the previous issue of *Literacy Link*, 'Defining vocational competence for literacy practitioners using specialist practice units in the Training and Assessment (TAA) Training Package' by Lynne Fitzpatrick was originally written for *Fine Print*. It was published by ACAL without acknowledging the permission the Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council.

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**Creating a morgue**—a morgue is a homemade reference book, usually containing clipped newspaper articles and photographs. An artist's morgue contains picture references of all types, cartoons included. A literacy teacher's cartoon morgue collects found cartoons into useful departments: entirely visual (no text), brief text (symbols, signs, balloons), image and caption, text—dependent image (ie, a cartoon which cannot be understood through the image alone). Many other categories are possible (animals and humans, domestic activities, medical/professional, misfortune, social comment).

Remember: most learners cannot create in a vacuum. A good cartoon will provoke good responses. If we are to make meaningful connections between cartoons and writing, our resources must be chosen carefully. The world abounds in cartoons; collect those with every-

day themes and shared references. Narrative cartoons should have very defined stages (e.g., orientation, development, complication, conclusion) if they are to assist discussion, comprehension and writing.

For teaching purposes, slapstick is one of the most accessible forms of humour. Slapstick cartoons are non-textual and non-intellectual. They speak directly to the brain stem and are therefore easy to grasp and write about.

In general, avoid cartoons that are optically challenging (visual trickery), those with historical and cultural assumptions, and those that are politically, sexually or racially loaded. Consider, however, that in certain contexts a cartoon with these kinds of loadings can be a challenging focus for critical literacy work

# Timelining—encouraging personal writing

by Sheryl Gwyther

Sheryl Gwyther describes a tried and true way to encourage and stimulate your students to write. Sheryl, freelance writer, artist, teacher, is involved in adult literacy teaching; art; and having fun in the mud, teaching at Nudgee Beach Environmental Education Centre. A recipient of the Australian Society of Authors Emerging Writers Mentorship Program 2002, Sheryl is enthusiastically working on a novel with author and mentor, Sue Gough. This article first appeared in the QCAL newsletter *Write On* in December 2002.

If you believe in the importance of learning to write by writing, then you probably also believe that one of the best ways to get those words down on paper is to write from personal experience...that is, writing about what we know and care about. Mem Fox, noted Australian author and teacher of writing, describes this writing as one 'which re-creates the varied impressions and perceptions of our individual experiences'. And what works for writers who learn to write well can also work for those who struggle with the written word.

Adult literacy teachers face a continual battle coming up with ways to enthuse their students enough to commit to some form of writing. One method, which has the potential to encourage writers of all levels and the added benefit of being relevant to individual students, is Timelining.

## What is Timelining?

Timelines track a line through an individual's life, using important dates, memories, and contemporary history, and recording them on paper. It can be done in a class as a group project, or be an even more personal document when taken on by an individual student.

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*Some of the buzz word terms in writing circles in the U.S. and in Australia at the moment are 'Scrapbooking', 'Inner Dialogue Journals', and 'Writing the Journey'—catchy words for the writing of personal experiences, or memoirs. The trend is popular because it works—it gets people to write...*

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Skills used and developed in Timelining involve not just writing, but reading different genres like letters, official documents, history books and old magazines; remembering and recording past events, talking and listening to family members; searching out old photos, birthday cards, letters and anything else that may be useful in the quest for information; thinking skills, organising data, researching relevant dates in pictorial history books, eg. What happened in Australia on the day you were born? The list of literacy and other skills involved in Timelining is limited only by the amount of time a student can put into the project.

## Steps to successful Timelining

Each student will need to draw up a list of the years between date of birth and the present date. Significant happenings throughout those years can be jotted down beside each year, eg. where student was born, what hospital, exact time of birth if known; arrival of siblings; date of starting Year 1, date of the final year at school; apprenticeships, jobs, where and what; first boyfriend or girlfriend, names etc; first kiss; first car, what make and year model; marriage; mortgage; death of close relative; travelling; babies; grandchildren; and the list goes on.

Next stage requires the student to start looking for photos, old letters, birthday cards, or anything relevant to add to the pictorial effect of the finished Timeline. This helps to keep the student interested and committed to the project because this is also the stage where most first draft writing takes place. Each of the significant dates throughout the timeline now needs a short piece of written information—i.e. to put flesh on a day in history, to make it interesting. The amount of information, and type of personal information will depend on whether the project is a whole class activity, or done individually. A word of warning—digging up old memories can be a cathartic and confronting experience for some students.

Once all the personal writing is completed to final draft stage, the final research can be done. This takes the student beyond personal memories to a much broader view of history. Significant national and international events occurred throughout that timeline, so using the many pictorial history books available (usually conveniently organised in year by year layout), the student can decide what events would be of most interest to include in the Timeline project, and then photocopy chosen excerpts about people and events for later inclusion in the document.

The final stage of the Timeline project puts everything together. Layout of the Timeline can be done in several ways. One method is to run the actual timeline itself across the middle of each page of the scrapbook, or project book, so that the student's writing, the photos, letters, drawings etc, and the photocopied history excerpts can be stuck on either side of the

timeline. Another layout method is to concertina the pages so that the final project can be unfolded in one long timeline.

### Where to next?

Once the Timeline is completed to the satisfaction of the student, the document can be used for extending the experience. Photos of relatives, or holidays, a favourite car or a pet, can be used to write more stories about events and people. Make up little booklets of these memories and put them in a pouch at the back of the Timeline book, or start another Timeline project dealing specifically with people that the student has known through life.

LIN. 1930. BORN IN CANTON, CHINA ON THE 29.5.30.

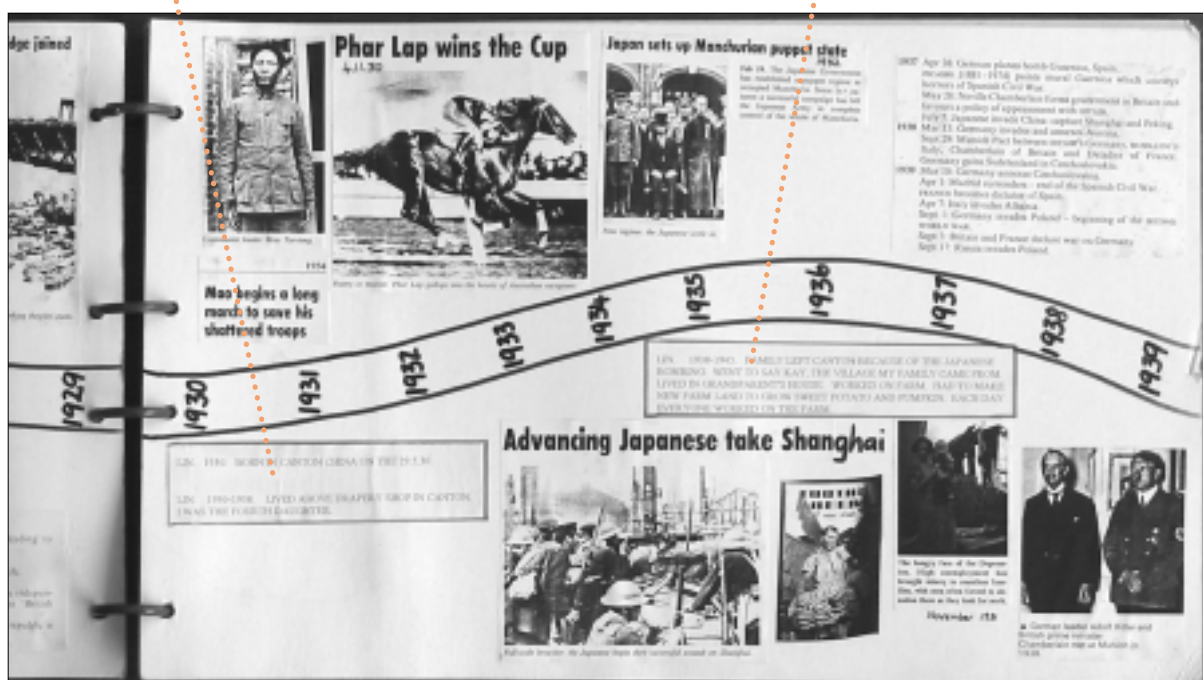
LIN. 1930—1938. LIVED ABOVE DRAPERY SHOP IN CANTON.  
I WAS THE FOURTH DAUGHTER.

Timelining is currently popular because it works; it is immensely enjoyable at all levels of writing ability. Timelining has the added benefit of getting literacy students to read genres that they may not have attempted before, providing opportunities to consider the past, and to become more aware of their own connections to history.

(Many thanks to Lin Sue Tin for the use of her Timeline.)

Sheryl Gwyther

LIN. 1938—1945. FAMILY LEFT CANTON BECAUSE OF THE JAPANESE BOMBING. WENT TO SAY KAY, THE VILLAGE MY FAMILY CAME FROM. LIVED IN GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. WORKED ON FARM. HAD TO MAKE NEW FARM LAND TO GROW SWEET POTATO AND PUMPKIN. EACH DAY EVERYONE WORKED ON THE FARM.



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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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The Reading Writing Hotline—a national telephone adult literacy referral service funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training and managed by TAFE NSW Access Division—is now in its tenth year of operation and will very shortly take its 90,000th call. Steve Golberg describes the extraordinary range of calls from people seeking advice and information about literacy classes.

Over the entire life of the service, the Hotline's callers have been extremely varied. Since October 2000, when I took over as Hotline Coordinator, the Hotline has had calls from famous people, octogenarians, people living on the streets of our major cities and people living in remote parts of regional Australia and its offshore territories. Also notable is the high number of callers ringing on someone else's behalf.

The diversity among the people helped by the Hotline is vast. Many however, have the following things in common:

- They are seeking help for the first time
- They are aged between 25 and 34
- They are employed and are citing work-related reasons rather than personal or social reasons for needing to improve their literacy skills
- They did not go past year 9 at school
- They are seeking a referral to one of the 1200 providers of language, literacy and numeracy courses listed on the Hotline database

To illustrate the wide range of enquiries, here are twelve callers who telephoned the Hotline in a single day in March 2003.

1. A 47-year-old woman in Launceston. She tells me she has spent years developing the courage to get some assistance with her reading and writing. She is self-employed as a domestic cleaner and wants a referral to a literacy class. In describing her readiness to take the next step and enrol in an adult literacy course she says 'I'm not afraid anymore. I have been too timid to do anything about [my literacy problems] but at 47, I don't care. I just want to learn.'

2. A woman aged 44 in living in Melbourne's northern suburbs. She emigrated from Turkey more than 20 years ago and never learnt to read and write English. Her children are grown up and are not always available to assist her with forms and other everyday tasks. She would like 1:1 help at home as she has limited mobility because of a back problem. I suggest that a volunteer tutor may be able to assist her. I give her some contacts in her local area who train volunteer tutors who work in her local area.

3. An employer who sells plumbing supplies in Melbourne has a long-term male employee who

needs better literacy skills so that he can do data entry, paperwork and general calculations relevant to his job. He intimated that he had a good working relationship with this employee and had raised the issue of literacy help with him prior to telephoning the Hotline on his behalf. He says he may consider WELL later on but for now, he wants to help this one particular employee 'get up to speed.' He tells me he is willing to give his employee an early finish time for him to attend literacy classes in the evening.

4. An Adult and Community Education provider on the NSW north coast telephones to request a few Hotline brochures. The literacy program they offer is small and limited in scope and not always suitable for all prospective students who enquire. They would like to be able to refer some of the people who enquire to other providers via the Hotline.

5. A Workcover private provider in the Melbourne CBD. He is one of our regular callers. Today, he has a client who needs literacy help to retrain. He came from Iraq fifteen years ago and was injured while working in a factory. His client has very low oracy in English and almost no literacy. He is given two referrals to classes in the Broadmeadows region.

6. A social worker in based in Taigum in Brisbane is seeking an English class for a woman refugee aged 32 who has recently arrived from the Sudan.

7. A male caller in his 60s living in Port Macquarie tells me he is a phonetic speller. He had just attempted to write a letter but could not find a words in the dictionary. Could I spell three words for him? I spell the words and ask him if he would consider face-to-face classes. He is not prepared to attend classes face to face but warms to the idea of enrolling in distance education. I give him two referrals to distance education providers and suggest a couple of self-help spelling resources.

8. A general practice physician in Brisbane telephones. He seeks a referral on behalf of a male patient in his forties who mentioned in a recent consultation that he was unable to read the literature he was given concerning his medical condition and would like some help.



9. A new youth literacy provider in Mackay in Queensland. She is soon to start a program for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders aged between 15 and 20. She is seeking contact with other youth providers who can help her devise an appropriate program and suggestions for suitable resources to use with her group. I give her both contact names of other youth providers including that of the National Youth Literacy Providers Network and describe a variety of resources that she may wish to purchase.

10. An Italian man aged in his 50s lives and works in North Melbourne as an upholsterer. He is looking for a part time course to enable him to 'function better in work and life.'

11. A women's refuge worker in Kings Cross in Sydney seeking literacy help for a 29-year-old resident. Her client had been moved from school to school when she was young and had very poor reading and writing skills. I give her the names of two Language, Literacy and

Numeracy Programme (LLNP) providers accessible by public transport.

12. A nineteen-year-old car detailer in Darwin. He was recently offered a sales traineeship with his employer but is very worried that his weaknesses with writing and spelling will be discovered when he has to complete the necessary paperwork accompanying all vehicle sales.

For more information on the services provided by the Hotline, please call 1300 6555 06 or visit [www.literacyline.edu.au](http://www.literacyline.edu.au)

Steve Goldberg  
Coordinator, Reading Writing Hotline



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## 'Making your own way there'—an agenda for young people in the modern labour market

*(continued from page 5)*

utilisation of skills by employers in workplaces must become a key focus of future policy. This is likely to be encouraged through mechanisms that stimulate stronger employer commitment to training and skill formation—if employers have a greater investment in the cost of fostering skill, it is likely they will make better use of workforce skills and seriously reconsider job design opportunities.

### 4. An active government role in terms of labour market risk management.

A possible approach is to re-conceptualise the role of casual work for those seeking more sustainable employment and for employers seeking access to a better labour pool. One way is to harness labour hire arrangements for social ends; use the group training principle of core and host employer with award wages and entitlements; and to sequence pieces of casual work for the benefit of employees and employers.

Risk and risk-taking is a critical part of wealth creation in our society. In social policy we tend to see all the down side of risk, rather than the enterprise in the best sense of the word, that it can create. It is instructive to consider the way some markets have adapted to accommodate varying exposures to risk, to create mediating structures and institutions that attempt to minimise the cost and fallout of failure.

In terms of adult learning we could re-think and

build on existing entitlements such as long service leave, a benefit that fewer people are likely to access in future due to labour market turnover and fragmented employment experiences. Long service leave could be partially reconstructed as an on-going and more generous learning entitlement drawing on all of an individual's employment experiences provided it was taken to re-enter education or training.

### 5. We need to consider the business, organisation and conduct of government.

We have reached the limits of the purchaser-provider model of government. Increasingly partnerships between government and other sectors, whether private or not-for-profit are being considered as mechanisms through which to develop public infrastructure or deliver local services, in health, justice and education.

Community building, social capital, capacity enhancement are all popular notions at this time. The challenge is not so much to develop a national and state community partnership policy as the recognition of the contribution of community partnerships in policy.

A complete version of this paper including referenced footnotes is available from the internet at [www.dsf.org.au/](http://www.dsf.org.au/)

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# Adult Numeracy assessment and curriculum—limiting or enhancing the possibilities?

by Beth Marr

*This article is an edited version of the talk Beth gave at last year's national literacy conference. It looks for synergies and tensions between the teachers' views on holistic competence and the numeracy described by the National Reporting System (NRS) and the 'The Certificates of General Education for Adults' (CGEA).*

During the Holistic Adult Numeracy Assessment Project, a range of experienced adult numeracy teachers were asked by Sue Helme and I about their notions of numeracy competence. The common themes in their responses led us to develop a model of Holistic Numeracy Competence in the form of a jigsaw, as shown below.



• *Model of Holistic Numeracy Competence*

The seven interlocking, or interdependent, components of this model are seen as integral to the full picture: a developing 'identity' as a more numerate person. A change from an 'I can't ..' to an 'I can..' type of person: a shift towards an identity as a more numerate individual.

## Holistic Numeracy Competence—Cognitive aspects

### —Skills and Knowledge

Three aspects were highlighted:

- Repeated demonstration—students able to confidently demonstrate skills more than once
- Understanding—understanding of concepts that goes beyond just demonstration of skills and processes. For example, considering the formula for the area of a triangle, 'Oh yes, I can see the triangle's half of a rectangle'.
- Integration—fitting different pieces of knowledge together and connecting new mathematics skills into repertoire of past knowledge; different aspects of numeracy drawn together—seeing numeracy as related competencies rather than isolated skills.

### —(Use of) the Task Process Cycle

To reflect realistic uses of numeracy, students need to find a pathway through whole tasks, not just perform, out of context, mathematical skills. Before using the mathematical skills, they must select the information they need and decide on the appropriate strategy; after performing the mathematical operations, it is essential to reflect on the result, decide how reasonable it seems in real-world terms and consider likely implications.



• *The Task Process Cycle*

The 'Task Process Cycle' can be conceived of as four related components as shown in the adjacent figure. Many teachers referred to the importance of fostering this

'thinking about thinking' approach to numeracy at all levels, and very early in the teaching program: 'So to solve that problem, what do I have to do?' and reflecting afterwards whether the solution makes sense.

### —Transfer and Application (of skills and knowledge)

Being able to apply numeracy in the world outside the classroom in a variety of situations, to real-life problems that may involve skills from a number of numeracy areas as well as the problem solving process. 'Would this person, in a shop, be able to deal with the money, would they be able to find their way around the world ... and could they recall, if the need is there?' Teacher comments such as: 'When I feel that they've gained the skills, can apply them over a variety of situations and have the self esteem and the confidence to do more ' indicate that the affective components of the model are considered essential.

### Affective aspects

#### —Confidence

The most interwoven component of all: the word 'confidence' arose constantly in descriptions of all other aspects. Since mathematics anxiety has a detrimental effect on students' learning, experienced teachers look for more positive self-talk and confident body language.

#### —Personal Connections

This aspect touches on students' emotional relationship to their learning. It might be a connection with their personal lives, interests and goals that motivates students to learn. Sometimes it is the ability to see how their learning is useable in their life outside the numeracy classroom that indicates real learning taking place. For example, finally having the confidence to give the correct change when selling the 'Footy Record'.

#### —Awareness

Another component of competence highlighted by practitioners was students' awareness of the skills and knowledge they had gained - 'to recognise what they know and understand ...' rather than having someone else telling them.

#### —Autonomy

This dimension of competence describes a growing independence in the learner. 'Their



move from dependence to independence'; 'taking some control over their learning'. For example, taking class investigations home and extending them, or saying to the teacher 'I really don't know this well enough. What can I do to be able to do it better?' 'the confidence to ask you questions about their learning'. Growing autonomy is also evident in students' willingness to have opinions and take risks, to get started on new tasks with less assistance than before.

### The model as a framework for reflection

Reflecting on the model now, it seems essential to spend more time on the affective side. It is important to find strategies that encourage learners to acknowledge their positive achievements, not just their problems.

Hopefully practitioners, practitioner-researchers and curriculum writers can pause to look through objective eyes at their current educational circumstances, and ask themselves how the components of the model are developed through their curriculum, and their teaching and assessment practices.

### Some reflections on the NRS and CGEA

In Australia we have worked hard to differentiate between 'numeracy' and school mathematics. The CGEA and the NRS are both based on an approach that encourages mathematical applications relevant to the various real worlds of our students. Both documents stress the 'transfer and applications' aspects of the model by keeping realistic, whole-tasks uppermost in their learning outcomes, indicators and examples of assessment tasks.

We have also been keen to counteract the limited vision of numeracy as number calculations, broadening it out to encompass a wide range of practical functions: from measurement and design to analysing data; from money handling to navigation.



- *There is a strong resonance between the 'indicators' of the NRS and 'the suggested 'Task Process Cycle' of the model.*

The fourth step, reflecting on the outcomes of mathematical processes(see above), is unani-

mously supported by the teachers as well as being highlighted in both the NRS and the CGEA.

### Limiting or expanding the possibilities?

Whilst most teachers appreciate the form of these curricula, they also say that, given the funding limitations on the time available for teaching, it is difficult to 'cover' the curriculum. These documents were devised within a Competency-Based Training framework, originally underpinned by the ideals of flexibility. Unfortunately, newer financial considerations demand efficient return for dollars invested in education—measurement of achievements in specified time frames. 'Recommended hours' were attached to curriculum 'modules', and have become the funded student hours per module. 'Completion rates' not only measure individual students' achievements, but also influence the 'success' and funding of the program. This take us a long way from the underpinning philosophy of the original frameworks.

The affective aspects of the model suggest that, rather than focusing on the number of numeracy outcomes achieved, it might be better to encourage students to work towards the most rewarding or relevant 'applications' for each individual—try to encourage their 'personal connections', build 'confidence' and so begin steps towards their new numeracy identities. Alternatively, not connecting with learners' motivating forces can be a disincentive to learning: 'I won't use any of this stuff—I just get my brothers for things like that (building or painting). I would learn it better if I could see how it connects with things I might use in the office!' Elements of compromise and negotiation are important in these instances but this demands time set aside for communication and reflection.

We can view curriculum as an external motivator to broaden learners' outlooks, expose them to interesting and important aspects of numeracy, and assist them to make meaningful choices about their areas of interest. Or we can view it as a requirement that forces teachers and students to spread their attention too thinly and limits their sense of achievement.

### Reflections on assessment and reporting systems

The project allowed us to refine teachers' ideas and describe a variety of assessment strategies. For example, at lower levels, assessment through observation of real or simulated practical activities is essential so that low literacy levels will not get in the way of realistic numeracy performance. At higher levels, we describe written student responses to realistic tasks, combined with records of teacher observations of practical tasks. These assessment strategies, following from the model, are far removed from short-answer tests and rote-learned

# literacy contact lists



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processes applied to sets of abstract exercises, especially if these are centrally dictated by distant government officials, as in many overseas systems. Australian policy makers must be congratulated on keeping assessment in the hands of teachers. However, from comments in teacher interviews and PD workshops, the richness of the teachers' processes is not fully captured by these systems. Requiring examples of written assessment is especially problematic at lower levels. Verification procedures also exclude observation of students working on practical tasks or cooperatively. Teachers reported their attention is diverted from student needs by increasing demands from quality assurance procedures.

## Strengthening our community of practice

Many new adult numeracy teachers must attempt to interpret curriculum and reporting documents in isolation, without support networks of experienced colleagues. It seems

timely to find the means to revitalise our community of practice. If we want to maintain our place as a world leader in forward thinking adult numeracy teaching, we need to explore these issues further and share the good practice that exists. It is essential that resources be devoted to continuing professional development, including time for discussion and debate around curriculum and implementation that will enhance rather than limit learners' possibilities.

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Beth's new book (with Sue Helme & Dave Tout) is *Rethinking Assessment—Strategies for holistic adult numeracy assessment. A resource book for practitioners, policy makers, researchers and assessors*. Available soon from ARIS— [www.aris.com.au/search.html](http://www.aris.com.au/search.html)