



## What happens when ANTA goes?

The Commonwealth Government recently announced that the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) is to be abolished. For the last ten years ANTA has mediated between the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments in relation to planning, funding, accountability and quality assurance in the vocational education and training (VET) sector.

ANTA auspiced the introduction of Industry Training Packages, the Australian Quality Training Framework, the development of a National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training, and a National Plan for the delivery of vocational training services. Its achievements include gains in the national portability of vocational credentials; a national database of registered qualifications and another one for Registered Training Organisations; an expansion of the training market to include private and community service providers; a national system to commission research; and a national system to report on training delivery.

One of the innovations ANTA has presided over has been the integration of literacy training with vocational outcomes. Approximately ten per cent of the national vocational training effort

currently goes to the delivery of accredited access or general education courses, a large component of which is literacy and numeracy training.

Two Coalition pre-election policies indicate some of the changes that may lie ahead—one proposes to establish an Institute for Trade Skills Excellence (which may take over some of the functions of ANTA) and the other will establish a number of Australian Technical Colleges. These policies can be found on the Internet at [http://www.liberal.org.au/2004\\_policy/](http://www.liberal.org.au/2004_policy/)

A hard-hitting critique of this policy direction is provided in Leesa Wheelahan's article 'Coalition will bypass states to pursue VET vision' (see page 3). It was written before the election and the announcement that ANTA was to be abolished and presents one person's view of the effect of the government's election policies for VET and invites those interested in literacy issues to consider the place of this type of provision in the new world. The literacy field may want to ask questions of its own: Will literacy be embedded in the funding and outcomes arrangements for the new Technical Colleges? Will the advice provided by the Institute for Trades Skills Excellence incorporate literacy?

An alternative viewpoint is provided in the article by Gillian Shadwick 'The winds of radical change' (see page 4). There may be new opportunities for the large publicly-funded public providers to access additional funding and to develop innovative partnerships with industry. Further questions arise: How will the



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## National Adult Literacy Forum—Summary Paper

Professor Rod McDonald has prepared a brief paper summarising the outcomes of the DEST/ANTA National Adult Literacy Forum, conducted in Melbourne on 9 September. To see the paper, look at the 'What's New' section of Literacynet: [www.dest.gov.au/literacynet/](http://www.dest.gov.au/literacynet/)

delivery of general education and access courses be affected? Is there a role for this type of delivery in the new order? Will the Adult and Community Education sector continue to be funded in the same way?

## Have your say

ACAL is interested in generating debate about these changes in national policy. If you would

like to make a contribution to the briefing that ACAL will provide to the new Minister, you can have your say on the ACAL web site Discussion Board ([www.acal.edu.au](http://www.acal.edu.au)) Alternatively send an email to the ACAL Executive, your ACAL State Representative or your state adult literacy council. (See back page for contact details.)

Margaret McHugh,  
ACAL WA Representative

## Recent ACAL activities

**A**CAL members who attended the *Meet the ACAL Executive* session at the ACAL conference indicated they wanted regular feedback about ACAL's activities.

ACAL has responded to the Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) request for feedback to the National Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy action plan. Such an action plan will need to encompass: promotion of the importance of LLN skills to all aspects of society; the availability of appropriate and sustained LLN provision; quality LLN programs which are varied, flexible and responsive to demand/needs and deliver outcomes; quality delivery by trained workers with qualifications and skills appropriate to their role in LLN, and development of varied partnerships.

The ANTA National Adult Literacy Program produces outcomes relevant to each of the above components. What is missing is a formal arrangement between governments that acknowledges the centrality of literacy skills to national social and economic health and to individuals in their communities. Flexibility should be encouraged since innovation is likely to flourish with local solutions to problems. The challenge for funding systems is to support inventive, collaborative approaches, and to guard against an over-reliance on outcomes-based accountability. ACAL recommended

further discussion with governments, industry bodies, community organisations and professional bodies in order to develop a National Action Plan. A high level national summit may be one vehicle to provide the necessary focus.

Another ACAL activity has been to write to the new minister of Vocational Education and Training, Gary Hardgrave congratulating him on his appointment and seeking to meet with him and discuss adult literacy and numeracy provision and needs in changing times for vocational education and training. In this letter ACAL stresses the need for a broad comprehensive whole-of-government literacy strategy. We suggested a national cross-sector summit would send a powerful message about the need to act across government and show the way for future adult and vocational education and training to intersect effectively with other portfolios.

Finally ACAL has been invited to speak with a DEST representative about the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Programme (LLNP) in preparation for the new tender. Aspects of the process of interest to ACAL include: how quality will be guaranteed, teacher qualifications, support for teachers and negative aspects of short term funding. If you are interested in discussing the LLNP add your comments to the ACAL discussion board.

Pauline O'Maley, ACAL Co-President

**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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# Coalition will bypass states to pursue VET vision

*Leesha Wheelahan is a lecturer at Southern Cross University, and a researcher on the relationship between TAFE and higher education, and lifelong learning. As well as her academic publishing, she also regularly writes for 'Campus Review'. Leesha is one of the chief investigators on the Monash Australian Research Council social capital project. This article is reprinted with kind permission of 'Campus Review'. It shows considerable prescience on Lisa's part—it was written before the announcement that ANTA was to be abolished.*

The Coalition government can implement its vocational education and training reforms through either their own majority in the Senate or through the support of Family First without having to make the compromises required of every government since 1981, when the Fraser government lost control of the Senate. Family First education policy seeks public subsidies for parents to send their children to private schools. It will be seduced by Coalition promises of public investment in VET, but these will be to increase choice for and responsiveness to employers. This will result in increased public funding of private VET providers and funding for public VET providers on condition that they become 'charter institutes' responsible to local boards but not controlled by State departments. Family First wants 'character building' education for students, while the Coalition wants VET students to have the attributes and dispositions that employers want. These synergies will be exploited by the Coalition.

In implementing its higher education reforms the last Howard government had to win the support of the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee since this was the condition for winning the votes of the independent senators. The partial consensus needed to achieve those reforms meant that the government didn't get everything it wanted. There is no such brake on the government in implementing its VET reform. The government has three main aims:

- to bypass the States
- to create 'one market' of VET providers, in which public and private providers have the same access to government funding
- to exclude unions and reduce their power.

Education and training is state government responsibility under the Constitution, and VET policy is currently brokered through 'co-operative federalism'. The Australian National Training Authority was established by the state and Commonwealth governments to provide the framework for developing national VET policy. The ANTA agreements are agreements between the two levels of government about VET policy and the amount of funding the Commonwealth will provide to the states and the way in which the money will be spent. This is often contingent on the states agreeing to

match funding or introducing particular policies that the Commonwealth wants. Money expended by the Commonwealth on VET is channelled through the states. The history of ANTA agreements is bitter and acrimonious.

The Coalition plans to bypass the states in two ways: by setting up an Institute for Trade Skill Excellence; and by funding VET institutions directly through various means, the most prominent of which is the establishment of its own technical colleges. The Institute for Trade Skill Excellence will be controlled by employer bodies. It will set up its own industry reference groups, and accredit its own trade qualifications and preferred providers, with the hope that employers will favour graduates with 'their' qualifications. While the Coalition has not explicitly said so, ANTA is cut out of the loop, and so are the states. So are the unions. Currently, national qualifications (embedded in Training Packages) must be endorsed by each state in the National Training Quality Council. Training Packages must be developed by the relevant Industry Skills Council which at present has at least some representation of unions. By establishing its own body with accreditation and regulatory functions, the Coalition is in effect setting up its own national VET system in competition with the states. This is something that Prime Minister Paul Keating threatened to do in 1992, but he opted in the end for the establishment of ANTA as a compromise.

The Coalition will establish and directly fund 24 technical colleges for senior secondary school students focusing on the trades. Employers will chair the boards, and principals will have control over hiring and firing and over pay levels. The government is also going to directly fund group training companies to deliver pre-vocational qualifications and school-based apprenticeships. In one fell swoop, the Coalition is establishing three principles: direct funding to VET providers (even though they are at school level in the case of the colleges), thereby excluding the States; one training market which does not distinguish between funding public and private providers; and the development of institutions in VET which not only exclude the unions, but which are in the image of the Coalition's industrial relations policy.

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# The winds of radical change

*Gillian Shadwick is the Chair of TAFE Directors Australia. She offers her thoughts on what the next few years of Coalition policies will bring. This article is reprinted with kind permission of 'Campus Review'.*

The policies announced by the Coalition during the election signal the Australian Government's intention to make some major changes in its approach to vocational education and training. They are likely to have profound implications for TAFE and the VET sector generally. These policies are the Government's response to the severe skills shortages that have emerged in many industries especially the skilled trades.

Some of the proposals have real merit. The initiatives to improve careers advice, extend the youth allowance to New Apprentices, provide more opportunities in Defence industries for apprentices, expand the number of school based apprentices, and expand the New Apprenticeship Access Programme are all worthwhile. TAFE Directors Australia (TDA) supports these directions.

However, the overall approach falls well short of being a comprehensive strategy to tackle Australia's skills shortages. Nor will it position the nation's workforce strategically for the future. Little has been said about training needs outside the traditional trades. To meet the needs of a modern economy and to fill skill shortages, there is a critical need for a comprehensive national strategy across all industry sectors. There is a need to invest more in skilling both youth and older workers in rural and metropolitan areas. The Australian Industry Group's sound suggestion for technology cadetships deserves support.

The proposed plan to set up 24 new Australian Technical Schools has some merit, because it seeks a fresh approach to introducing year 11 and 12 students into trades related education and training. The proposed Technology Schools are, however, an expensive proposal. They will cost nearly \$300 million for only 7,200 'talented year 11 and 12 students' a year. They will duplicate existing TAFE and schools

facilities and infrastructure. The outcomes are uncertain. They will not deliver qualified trades people to meet the skills shortages in the critical short term. The approach is likely to irritate state and territory governments. But if the Australian Technical Schools prove to be workable then some TAFE Institutes will want to partner with industry, schools and others to set up them up. TAFE Institutes are well placed to do so through their trades expertise, industry, regional and school relationships, experience with 15-19 year olds and trades workshop facilities.

The details of the Government's proposed Institute for Trade Skill Excellence are not clear but this slim proposal is radical and problematic. It has the capacity to undermine our current ANTA/industry lead national vocational education system. It would appear to cut across existing nationally agreed systems for registering training organisations, assuring quality and recognising qualifications and the new Industry Skills Councils. Are we to move through this new bureaucracy from a national system in which all RTOs who meet common quality standards are equal, to an alternative national system where some RTOs are 'more equal than others'? (to borrow from George Orwell).

TAFE Directors Australia (TDA) is pleased to see increased funding for pre-vocational training, but we are bewildered that none of it is going to TAFE. The government's policy announcements do not offer a single dollar for the TAFE system. The TAFE network of colleges and campuses and its distance education capacity stretch into every part of Australia. Investing in TAFE should have been at the core of any national strategy to address skills shortages because this would have been smart as well as sensible.

TAFE Institutes will deliver on any new policy direction that is genuinely responsive to their local industry and community needs and to the needs of their students. To do less would be irresponsible. But TAFE has been short-changed in the new government's thinking to date. TAFE's quite formidable capacity to address the skills shortages in conjunction with industry has so far been virtually ignored in the current mix of new Commonwealth VET policies.

*Gillian Shadwick*

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The Coalition has embedded its core ideology within its education and training policy. The Coalition government has dramatically discarded its historical commitment to and defence of states' rights, a cause championed by Howard's hero Robert Menzies amongst several other Liberal leaders. In furthering the market the Coalition has shown that it is prepared to use

centralised regulation by creating its own colleges and by stipulating what will be taught. In riding roughshod over the states and the unions and by giving employers unprecedented power over the inputs and outcomes of VET, the Coalition has guaranteed that the next three years will be conflict-ridden.

*Leesa Wheelahan*



# Connecting Voices

PRACTITIONERS, RESEARCHERS & LEARNERS



## Announcing a joint ACAL & ALM National and International Adult Numeracy/Mathematics Conference

Sunday 3rd July to Thursday 7th July, 2005, Melbourne

The **Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL)** and the international **Adults Learning Mathematics (ALM)** group are co-hosting a special conference in Melbourne next year. As well as being the 12th ALM conference, it will be the annual ACAL conference for 2005. And for the first time ever, this ACAL conference will be devoted entirely to numeracy.

We hope you will be able to attend this joint ALM/ACAL conference, either as a participant or as a presenter. We will be issuing a Call for Papers in the next few months with a closing date in 2005.

This is a chance to catch up on professional development, to share your experiences, to explore current issues affecting numeracy and mathematics education for adults, to meet Australian and overseas practitioners and researchers, and to find out what people are doing in Asia and the Pacific, Scandinavia, the UK, Europe, the US, South America, ...

### Presentation options will include:

- Workshops - hands-on and interactive
- Papers - theory and research oriented
- Round table discussion groups.

### Register your interest now

If you would like to be kept up-to-date with conference plans and to be sent the latest details, please email your contact details to: Dave Tout at [davet@cae.edu.au](mailto:davet@cae.edu.au)

## ADULTS LEARNING MATHEMATICS - ADULT NUMERACY

### INTERNATIONAL NUMERACY CONFERENCE 2005

**A** CAL is delighted to be co-hosting the first national adult numeracy conference to be held next July in Melbourne. The international group, Adults Learning Mathematics (ALM) is the other host of the conference. ALM is an international research forum which brings together practitioners and researchers in adult mathematics and numeracy teaching, to promote knowledge, awareness and understanding of adults learning numeracy and mathematics at all levels.

ALM is a forum for experienced and first-time researchers to come together and share their ideas on research into the hitherto neglected area of adults learning mathematics. ALM puts people in touch with each other, providing a framework for collaboration and helping to develop research plans. ALM is especially keen to encourage practitioners to undertake research. Web site: <http://www.alm-online.org>

#### Why a numeracy conference?

Numeracy is acknowledged as a crucial skill, but it is often seen as an add-on or an extension of literacy and as such gets less exposure and support. ACAL has a commitment to promote and support numeracy alongside literacy.

The conference will create the opportunity for literacy and ESL practitioners and researchers to look at issues surrounding the boundaries and cross-over between literacy and numeracy. Many literacy and ESL practitioners incorporate some aspects of numeracy in their practice and this conference will provide participants with the opportunity to focus specifically on numeracy.

Just as importantly it will provide a forum for people whose interest is mainly in numeracy and mathematics, enabling them to explore issues surrounding numeracy and maths in adult and lifelong education.

# Why ICT should not be included as a basic skill

*Alan Wells is the Director of the Basic Skills Agency, an independent organisation in the UK working at 'arms length' from their funders, the Department for Education and Skills, and working towards being a national ideas and innovation organisation and a 'source of practice worth sharing'. The Basic Skills Agency describes itself as a critical friend of Government. It has three priorities— 'Improving speaking and listening skills'; 'Improving basic skills at transition points in people's lives', and 'Engaging the disengaged'. The web site of the Basic Skills Agency is well worth a visit: [www.basic-skills.co.uk](http://www.basic-skills.co.uk)*

**T**his is going to be unpopular and I'm going to sound like a Luddite. Although the government's skills strategy proposes to include Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a basic skill in the same way as literacy and numeracy, I think that this is a mistake. Of course, people need to be increasingly familiar with new technology and know how to make the best use of it. So I have nothing against ICT. In fact I'm writing this using a laptop; I use ICT almost every day. A growing number of jobs require familiarity with ICT and even in daily life we're all spending an increasing amount of time looking at a screen.

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***"As more and more children who use ICT at school pass through the school system and become adults, our ICT problem will disappear."***

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The number of families who have a home computer and the use of the World Wide Web are increasing rapidly and most schools and colleges are now a veritable hub of technology. I don't have the figures but I usually conduct a straw poll of children in primary schools when I visit. When I ask 'How many of you have a computer at home?', most hands go up. Even when I make it clear that I don't mean Game Boys etc, only a few hands go down. So why shouldn't ICT be a basic skill?

**ICT is a problem of age**

ICT is very different from literacy and numeracy and the profile of adults who have difficulty with ICT is very different from the profile of adults who have difficulty with reading, writing and maths.

Lack of mastery of ICT is largely a problem of age. I've visited lots of schools in the last few years and have seen how well most children have learnt ICT. Most have mastered basic word processing, spreadsheets and PowerPoint presentations by the end of primary school. They know how to use the keyboard and how the most common programs and applications work. Most children in primary school can produce better PowerPoint presentations for assembly than many of us older adults.

Children who do struggle with ICT usually struggle because they have difficulty with the

other basic skills. It's not the technology that they have trouble with, but the reading and the spelling and the maths. Of course, technology makes the spelling easier but 'spell checks' are not perfect and often they confuse poor spellers rather than help them. 'Grammar checks' have a life of their own and are, in my view, of limited use.

As more and more children who use ICT at school pass through the school system and become adults, our ICT problem will disappear. However, this isn't the case with our literacy and numeracy problem. Despite considerable improvement in attainment in primary schools, a significant number of children still start secondary school with weak literacy or numeracy skills. Some improve because of skilled teaching in secondary schools but all too many don't make progress and some find that the basic skills they have acquired weaken. So some young people continue to leave school and join the adult population with weak basic skills. Again, a number improve through self-help or through adult basic skills programs, but we know that these programs only attract a relatively small minority of those with basic skills needs and the effectiveness of programs is often limited.

The ICT skills problem is very different from literacy and numeracy where the age link is not very strong. Research from this country and other industrialised countries suggests that there is little difference between the generations in under-attainment in literacy and numeracy, except that older adults do worse on the tests. This seems to reflect the nature of the tests and the decline in an older person's short-term memory, rather than any significant difference between different generations.

**Basic skills are about class**

The link between poor literacy and numeracy and social class is high. Across all age groups it tends to be (unfashionable as class analysis is) children, young people and adults from working class families who form the poor basic skills group. In my experience, social class is a more important factor in under-attainment than race or gender. I'm sure that there is a link between weak ICT skills and social class but

# What's that you said?

## —establishing NRS levels in oral communication

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*The resource kit, 'What's That You Said?' an ANTA Innovative Project, was developed to meet the need for accessible oral communication texts of student performance for teachers using the National Reporting System (NRS). Co-project workers, Katrina Lyle and Nadia Casarotto developed 'What's That You Said?' through the CAE and Linda Wyse & Associates.*

The task of assessing and reporting student performance requires increasingly detailed documentation, as teachers strive to meet the expectations of funding providers and the guidelines of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF). Reporting student performance can be a challenging process. It works most effectively when colleagues have the opportunity to compare student responses, and work towards a common understanding of what indicators, levels and outcomes really mean. Passing around student texts, both formally and informally, is a great way to broaden practice and to deepen analysis of possible interpretations of performance. However, sharing of texts is hard to manage when it comes to oral communication—the immediate student response is lost to the ether, and assessor's notes are a substitute for accurate examples of student performance.

The resource kit, *What's That You Said?* an ANTA Innovative Project, was developed to meet the need for accessible oral communication texts of student performance for teachers using the National Reporting System (NRS). In developing oral text which facilitates a shared understanding of the student performance, we hope to promote discussion and reflection on practice and to give flesh to the way that the oral communication indicators and levels of the

NRS can be expressed.

The resource consists of a video displaying five student scenarios, each followed by an assessor analysis, and an accompanying written guide which draws out and elaborates on the issues associated with each scenario. The selection of the student scenarios was influenced by the fact that a very useful resource, *Check One, Two*, which focuses on ESL students in the process of acquiring functional spoken English, had already been developed.

To maximise the scope for professional development, it was important to create a complementary resource which explored other perspectives of oral communication performance within the NRS framework. If ESL speakers are confined in the use of language by a lack of adequate pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary, what issues influence effective oral communication for native English speakers? In exploring this question, we have displayed and described the language skills of literacy students who are native speakers in four of the five scenarios. A fifth scenario includes a Language Other than English Background (LOEB) student who is a long term resident of Australia. We felt this would be a useful addition, as students with this profile form an important part of our literacy *continued over*

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it's more likely to be a link based on access to ICT rather than inherent lack of ability.

### It's easy to teach ICT

It's also pretty easy to teach ICT. In central London where I work, there are hundreds of private companies offering ICT courses. Most suggest, probably accurately, that you can master the ICT that's necessary for work and life in about 20 hours. Of course, most people master the ICT they need for life and work without going on a course. They get a simple book (there are lots of them), learn from friends or colleagues or use the helpful programs that come with most computers.

Mastering literacy and numeracy are much more difficult and take much longer. In fact children spend long periods in school on just this and we know that it takes many hours of

instruction for an adult to become fluent in reading, writing and basic maths. It also takes skilled teaching, certainly more skilled teaching than is required to ensure that an adult is fluent with ICT.

Now I'm not cynical. However, including ICT as a basic skill will make it easier to hit the targets for participation and outcomes. Older middle-class adults who only missed out on ICT because they were born too early will probably flock to join courses. Including them in the statistics for participation and outcomes as soon as they pass an ICT test, will certainly make it look as if we're having a major impact on reducing the number of adults with poor basic skills in our society. This 'major impact' will be an illusion, not a reality.

Alan Wells  
Director, Basic Skills Agency UK

programs, and the stabilised English they often present with creates particular language learning needs and challenges.

We also believed it was important to display situations that reflect assessment situations as teachers find them in practice. The NRS is commonly used to report student performance at an initial interview, and we have included two pre-training interviews in the resource kit. Initial interviews can be emotionally difficult for students and can create particular challenges for assessors. Assessors need to be supportive as they create a communication bridge with students which will allow for the adequate description of students' skills. Scenario one shows a mature age student returning to study after a long absence who is dealing with memories of negative school experiences. Scenario two shows how challenging assessing students' oral communication skills can be when the student is reluctant or hostile.

The resource kit also includes a post-training assessment, and two ongoing/in-class assessments. The post-training scenario features the LOEB student, and prompts consideration of how much credence should be given to pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar in mapping oral communication skills to a particular level. The first of the ongoing assessments follows a student as he responds to the language requirements imposed by differing registers and roles. The second ongoing assessment displays the language features of three students engaged in the same task who are working at the same level and yet have quite distinct approaches. This scenario also shows the importance of supporting students to grow in their use of language, particularly in their ability to express abstract thought.

The evolution of these five scenarios from the idea-on-paper stage to finished video footage was quite a lengthy process. Our commitment to genuine teaching situations, using real students presented us with several ethical dilemmas. First, it was important that prospective candidates for the scenarios understood the purpose of the video, and how the footage would be used.

Particularly problematic was the scenario involving the hostile or reluctant student. In these circumstances, it would hardly have been appropriate to ask permission to film, so we compromised and used an actor to role play the part of Cam, featured in scenario two. Although Cam is an actor, he is well acquainted with literacy and adult learning issues. This led to some interesting footage albeit unscripted, which we hope will lead viewers to reflect on the range of strategies available to support both assessors and interviewees.

It is valid to point out that we all behave differently in front of a camera and that film is therefore never truly an accurate reflection of real life. In fact, such observations are known to have leverage in sociological studies, but in terms of capturing language features in relation to the NRS, the camera can reasonably be seen as an extension of the registers that are imposed by the formal teaching situation and the tasks. In any case, the students seemed to readily accept the presence of the camera and sound crew and went about their tasks in an engaged and unselfconscious way.

When filming of the five scenarios was complete we had many hours of video footage to shape into a digestible format. A lengthy process of repeated analysis, editing and review began. Because the scenarios were not scripted, nothing was certain; we had an expectation of the levels and the indicators, but could not be really confident of these until we had analysed the language features demonstrated by the students. It was also important to retain the integrity of sequence in each scenario so the sense of purpose and meaning were maintained. Scenario four was shot in two locations and traced one student, David, in a number of different roles as he engaged with various participants. The unedited footage offered a rich field of interesting language, but made an optimum approach hard to define.

Some weeks later, it was the assessors' turn to front the cameras and participate in an unpacking of the language responses demonstrated in the scenarios. The assessors include NRS verifiers, Philippa Mclean, Linda Wyse, Jenny Skewes and Cath Brewer. Their analysis of student performance is given at the end of each scenario, either individually or through a panel discussion. We chose to incorporate panel discussion as a way of opening up the scenarios to a number of different perspectives. The video analysis is supported by an accompanying written guide where the descriptions of the language features of each student response are presented in table form, indicator by indicator.

It is neither likely nor desirable that explanations of oral communication can be reduced to one single, universally accepted interpretation. Assessment of oral communication needs a broad assessment base. It needs to be seen within its social, emotional and functional contexts and is tied up with identity, and levels of support. As a reporting mechanism, the NRS acknowledges this complexity. We hope that the scenarios presented here reflect a breadth of assessment perspectives and will provide trigger points for reflection and debate among practitioners.

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# Accepting Aboriginal English

## —the ABC of two-way literacy and learning

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The ABC project is founded on the idea that if teachers and education systems are serious about improving literacy and other educational outcomes for Aboriginal people, the rightful place of Aboriginal English must be recognised and validated.

Aboriginal English is spoken across Australia by many Indigenous Australians. It is a mother-tongue, a first language, accomplishing for its speakers what all languages accomplish. It is not the same language as Australian English. Despite regional differences in the lexicon and some differences in pronunciation, it is a *lingua franca* among Aboriginal peoples.

Since Aboriginal English and Australian English are different dialects of English, they employ grammatical structures that are related to each other but operate differently. To an Australian English user's ear, some of the rules may sound ungrammatical, but in fact Aboriginal English obeys consistent grammatical rules – just like all languages. These structures do not break rules of English grammar; they are a result of re-invention and adaptation through a history of conflict, dispossession and resistance to oppression.

There are other differences between the two dialects of English. Some Australian English words have different meanings in Aboriginal English. There are many original coinages. Pronunciation, which can vary greatly from region to region and speaker to speaker, also differs from pronunciation of Australian English.

Perhaps the most important differences between Australian English and Aboriginal English are not in the features that can be seen or heard. Important as these surface features might be, the most important differences may be found in the conceptual frameworks (cognitive and cultural) that make meaning in language possible. The Aboriginal world view is difficult for non-Indigenous people to understand or even imagine. The ABC program suggests that educators should start by paying more attention to what Aboriginal people are willing to tell non-Indigenous people about their language and the conceptual and cultural experiences that underpin it.

The program's long-term goals include improved outcomes for ESL/ESD students as demonstrated through a range of assessment tools, the development and implementation of strategies to enable functional and formal differ-

entiation of dialects, and improved retention and participation rates of Aboriginal students.

### What is the **ABC of Two-Way Literacy and Learning Capacity Building Project**?

The ABC Project is a professional development and capacity-building program devised by teacher educators from the WA Department of Education and Training, and by linguists with expertise on Aboriginal English. Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators, linguists and language workers work in partnership. Glenys Collard, a Nyungar woman, has contributed vital linguistic and cultural expertise. She has also been instrumental in mobilising and empowering other Aboriginal people to enable a truly two-way partnership between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators.

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### What does ABC stand for?

**A— accept Aboriginal English;**  
**B— bridge to Standard Australian English; and**  
**C— cultivate Aboriginal ways of approaching experience and knowledge.**

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Professor Ian Malcolm and associates have published widely for over 30 years on Aboriginal English. Together, the academics and the educators (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) have been working for ten years to raise awareness of and understanding about the language that many Aboriginal people use as their first language. They have produced a range of resources to help teachers and community members develop more effective means to teach literacy to Aboriginal students. These include academic research publications, professional development and teaching and learning resources and videos. Some of you may have seen *Ways of Talk*, *Ways of Being* screened on the *Message Stick* television program.

### What are teachers learning about?

In 2004, teachers and Aboriginal educators have participated in 12 days of intensive workshops which are underpinned by the principles of two-way learning but which have a strong focus on linguistic analysis of formal and functional distinctions between dialects. The ABC Project provides teachers and educators with formal linguistic tools to analyse and compare dialectical differences between Aboriginal English and Australian English. Professor Ian Malcolm and Dr Farzad Sharifian presented a summary of these differences. Aboriginal English includes features from Aboriginal languages as well as from English. It also includes

features that belong neither to the former nor to the latter. At the level of vocabulary, research has shown that even everyday words such as *home* and *family* may be associated with different cultural meanings for speakers of Aboriginal English and Australian English. The Aboriginal English vocabulary is mainly composed of the following categories of words:

- Aboriginal words with Aboriginal meanings (e.g., *moorditj* meaning something like 'good' or 'excellent')
- Aboriginal words with new meanings (e.g., *monarch* originally meaning 'black cockatoo' is used for 'policeman')
- Aboriginal words suffixed with English morphemes (e.g., *yorgas* composed of *yorga* + *s*, meaning 'women')
- Modified English words with English meanings (e.g., *unna* – isn't it?)
- English words with Aboriginal meanings (e.g., *deadly* meaning 'great' or 'terrific'.)
- English words with additional meaning (e.g., *learn* meaning 'learn' as well as 'teach')

At the level of syntax Aboriginal English appears to be more variable than Australian English. Among the syntactic features of some varieties of Aboriginal English are:

- regularisation of subject verb agreement (*I jump, you jump, he jump.*)
- use of *gonna* to mark future tense (*We gonna have a feed*)
- use of intonation to signal questions (*You comin?*)
- optional marking of plurality and possession (*Tim boat*)
- marking of pronouns for dualisation/plurality (*menyu*) and exclusion/inclusion
- optional marking of gender (*e big woman*)
- use of resumptive pronoun (*That man he...*)
- post-clausal use of adjectives and adverbs (*...yellow one; ...quick-way*)
- interchangeable use of locative prepositions (*in, at, on*).

Lexical and syntactic features are two of the surface features of language but there are other features where differences also occur. The pragmatics of Aboriginal English are determined by other social practices that belong to and maintain a collectivist culture. For example, one way of managing privacy in a collectivist culture is to avoid the use of direct questions. Indigenous people may feel no obligation to answer a direct question— or when they're asked to choose, for example 'Do you want a drink—tea or coffee?' they may simply answer with a 'yes.' A lot of classroom interaction is governed by question and answer routines, and these may be quite foreign and uncomfortable for Indigenous people. These distinctions in pragmatics can be easily forgotten or ignored when speakers in a conversation believe they are speaking the same language.

Similarly, language cannot be used as a communication tool successfully unless the cultural conceptualisations that govern language practice are shared. Dr Farzad Sharifian pointed out in a presentation at *The ABC of Two-way Literacy and Learning Capacity Building Project 2004* that—"*Aboriginal English is a repository of how Aboriginal people have viewed the relationships between human beings, environment, animals and social organisation. Even the basic notions of 'time', 'space' and 'possession' are often conceptualised differently by Aboriginal and Anglo-Australian speakers. These differences in conceptualisation of experience have consequences for inter-cultural communication between speakers of the two varieties*"

The work of Professor Malcolm focuses also on an understanding of genre in Aboriginal discourse and the schemas that underpin those genres. Among the schemas that predominate in Aboriginal English narrative are *Scary Things*, *Hunting*, *Travel* and *Observing*. Typical of a *Travel* schema is a moving ('going along, going along') and stopping rhythm. When there is stopping there is also *Observing*. Many Aboriginal recounts refer to *Scary Things*, and it is very difficult to find Standard Australian English equivalents to the terms and the concepts in a *Scary Things* narrative because both 'time' and 'reality' are constructed by Aboriginal experience in ways quite unlike the constructions used in Anglo Australian culture.

Why is it important to recognise Aboriginal English in classrooms?

The *ABC Project* does not advocate teaching Aboriginal English, rather it suggests that if teachers are able to facilitate the use of home dialect in schooling this will have significant advantages in terms of improved self-esteem, attention, desire to learn, sense of place in the learning environment, and retention among non-standard dialect speakers. A key element of successful bidialectical programs is that teachers make sure their students 'notice' the difference between home dialect and standard dialect. The use of the non-standard dialects in schools does not interfere with the acquisition of the standard dialect. In fact, the research on second language/second dialect acquisition suggests that rather the opposite is true—students benefit from the use of Aboriginal English as a basis for learning the standard dialect.

This research tells us that letting learners engage in real and meaningful use of the target language does promote acquisition. Learners are more able to understand complex language if it is in a contextualised rather than a de-contextualised setting. The more context-embedded the initial second language/second

dialect input, the more comprehensible it is likely to be, and paradoxically the more successful a learner will be in ultimately developing second language/second dialect skills in context-reduced situations. The direction of language acquisition is from the deeper communicative functions of language to the surface forms (and not the other way around) and isolated 'error correction' is usually ineffective in changing language behaviour.

It is for all these reasons that the *ABC Project* is teaching educators how to validate and affirm the language spoken by their Aboriginal students and create in their classrooms the conditions of receptivity, acceptance and approval that will enable Aboriginal students to feel at home there. More than that, teachers must learn how to understand the differences between the two dialects and be able to point these out to students as a means of staging and supporting students' acquisition of second dialect language and literacy skills. Professor Malcolm has written a paper entitled 'Some Applications of Eight Principles of Two-Way Bidialectic Learning' in which he lays out in some detail practical strategies for classroom teachers and curriculum developers that will change current practice and contribute to developing more productive and inclusive learning environments.

Does it have application for teachers of literacy to other groups of students?

The *ABC of Two-Way Literacy and Learning Capacity Building Project* is a comprehensive program to support teachers wanting to make the changes described above in their classrooms. Participants in the Project are becoming both researchers and educators of other teachers themselves and are at the same time able to use their work towards completion of a Post-Graduate Certificate in Applied Linguistics at Edith Cowan University. The program responds to the needs of teachers who teach Aboriginal students, but there may be wider application for this model of teacher support and in-service training, not only in respect of its processes but also because of the linguistic expertise that is being produced. Teachers who become aware of the linguistic complexity of different dialects operating in their classrooms are likely to become more effective language and literacy teachers. Perhaps there is an opportunity for teachers of language and literacy in the adult sector to develop a more comprehensive range of skills in their field(s) of expertise by learning more about Aboriginal English, an opportunity unique to teachers in Australia.

Already there has been significant interest in the *ABC Project* from teachers of language and literacy in the adult sector. Not all of them are

teachers of Aboriginal students. The Project Leaders received an invitation from staff development officers from the Adult Migrant Education Service in Perth to devise a workshop for the teachers whose students come from the Horn of Africa. The aspects of the *ABC Project* that were most relevant to the AMES teachers were those that dealt with cultural and conceptual underpinnings of language (the nine-tenths of the language 'iceberg' that is submerged). It was not so much that an understanding of some aspects of Aboriginal culture or conceptualisations are likely to transfer directly to the language(s) and world view(s) of students from the Horn of Africa. Rather, being invited to look at the Aboriginal world view however partially and momentarily, offered participants a method to separate themselves from their own language practice: the outcome was one of 'defamiliarisation' of Standard Australian English users with their own language. This was an opportunity to see themselves and their linguistic practices as others see them: what they once took for granted became strange. This is a very exciting prospect for language teachers and offers wonderful opportunities for insight: to find out what it is that educators don't know that they don't know!

When teachers attend the *ABC* workshops, they must do so in pairs. An Aboriginal and a non-Aboriginal educator must work as a *two-way team*. The exchange of linguistic and cultural and conceptual information is central to the program. As soon as these teams begin to collaborate on matters of language use and language teaching, unrecognised differences in each of their perceptions and assumptions begin to emerge. Attention to language enables an exchange that can pin-point matters where miscommunication and misunderstanding are likely to take place. The participants from two different language groups and two different cultures are required to consider themselves and the practices and beliefs they take for granted through the eyes of strangers. This may be more difficult for people who belong to the dominant culture. Non-Indigenous people have had to make no effort to understand cultural practices that are unlike their own because they had the power to require that the other culture and its people adapted to their own. Could it be that Aboriginal people may be better at 'reading' non-Indigenous people than vice versa? After all, it is they who have created a language with which to talk to non-Indigenous people.

To learn more about the *ABC of Two-way Learning and Literacy* program and its associated resources please contact Patsy Konigsberg by email [patricia.konigsberg@det.wa.edu.au](mailto:patricia.konigsberg@det.wa.edu.au)

Margaret McHugh and Patricia Konigsberg

# Nomadic mining life leads to writing

I grew up in a mining towns in NSW. The older members of my family had had little formal education, so I was aware from a very young age of the relative powerlessness which comes from marginal literacy. By the time I was eight years old my mother got me to write any notes to my teacher because she felt ashamed of her writing skills.

Then, as an adult, life in remote mining towns in the NT and WA introduced me to the even greater literacy problems faced by NESB immigrants and many Aboriginal people. I was fired with the desire to do something to help but had no appropriate specialist training and no idea where to start. (I was a French and Latin teacher!)



Consequently, when we left the Territory and moved to Melbourne, I took advantage of the city facilities and did my first TESOL training. This stood me in good stead when we moved to another remote mining centre in the Pilbara region of W.A. It was here that I first became aware of the serious dearth of reading materials suitable for adult learners.

My frustration at the lack of suitable reading materials for my low level ESL students led me to the conclusion that the only solution was to write some myself. I teamed up with a similar-minded ESL colleague, Dorothy Court, who had the additional, invaluable ability to illustrate in a meaningful way. We wanted to introduce our students to information about Australia, which they could not readily access because of the limitations imposed by their English skills. At the same time we wanted to help them learn to read as proficiently as possible.

We decided to start with early Australian history and ultimately produced *The Great South Land*. This had three graded reading texts in one volume, a separate volume of worksheets at the three levels and an audio cassette. The concept of the three levels came from a very successful experiment I had conducted with an ESL literacy class a couple of years earlier, where I had written a short text on Ned Kelly and then rewritten it several times, gradually increasing the information, vocabulary and complexity of the sentence structure.

After *The Great South Land*, we began to draw on my experiences in remote Australia. I had spent countless hours in the bush and at the

beach with Aboriginal women when our children were small, learning about the plants and animals, the customs and skills of the local people. This was one of the most intellectually stimulating periods of my life. The cultural differences between modern, urban Anglo-Celtic Australians and traditional Aborigines are immense—far greater than any I have encountered in my 20 years of teaching immigrants. So *The First Australians* was born.

Using the Davidson family photo albums as a reference point, Dorothy and I set out to give our students reading practice and at the same time information about the culture and skills of my Aboriginal friends. We refined the format we had used in the first reading kit but kept to the same basic pattern of three texts with accompanying workbook and audio cassette.

By this stage we found that Adult Literacy teachers had started to use our materials and, to our surprise, primary and secondary teachers were also interested because the content fits in with the Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE) syllabus and can be used by students whose reading and language skills do not cope easily with more traditional textbooks. As one secondary remedial reading teacher from Far North Queensland said to me, 'If you had ten kits like this, I could cover my whole SOSE program.' This induced us to read the SOSE documents and, returning again to the Davidson movements around Australia, to write *A Very Big Country* on basic Australian geography. Our next project is on the history of gold mining in Australia, entitled *Gold! A life of moving around the minefields of Australia* has engendered yet another set of reading materials.

Reading materials published by Hazel Davidson & Dorothy Court:

*A Very Big Country*, readers, workbook and choice of audio cassette or sound CD ISBNs 0 9750668 3 8, ~ 4 6, ~5 4, and ~6 2.

*The First Australians*, readers, workbook and audio cassette ISBN 0 9750668 0 3, ~1 1, ~2 X

*The Great South Land*, readers, worksheets, audio cassette and sound CD ISBNs 1 86408 693 9, ~ 699 8, ~ 724 2 & ~859 1.

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Qld: The Language People 07 3844 8700 lang-peop@dovenet.net.au

NSW: Bridge Bookshop 02 9211 1660  
books@elt.com.au

WA: The Language Centre Bookshop 08 9328 8965 language@iinet.net.au

Hazel Davidson

# Ensuring consistency of assessment: literacy, moderation and the AQTF

*Requirements for moderation in the Certificate of General Education for Adults (CGEA) curriculum document focus attention on ensuring consistency of assessment outcomes. These requirements anticipated by a number of years the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) Standards relating to assessment. Where CGEA Moderation Networks thrive, these can provide a best-practice example for the rest of the VET sector. Three people involved in moderation processes in WA reflect how a well-run moderation process can be used to demonstrate compliance with AQTF Standards on assessment and suggest quality improvements in the process of moderation. This article has been adapted from 'CGEA inter-regional moderation: where to from here?' first published in 'CGEA Network Newsletter No.2' Sept 2004.*

Moderation has underpinned the Certificate of General Education for Adults (CGEA) assessment from the outset. The process was established with the goals of ensuring standards were met and facilitating dialogue amongst practitioners about what the standards actually mean, and their parameters. This process has developed into a sound working model and CGEA moderation has been used as an example for other areas now working to establish moderation.

The recent arrival of the AQTF has provided a useful re-evaluation opportunity for the CGEA moderation process. It has encouraged the inter-regional moderation group to identify the components of the moderation process and to formalise and record the moderation activities. We have re-defined what we do in AQTF terms as:

- validating assessment tools
- offering induction for new lecturers
- maintaining connections with our industries to help assure the quality of our product.

My experience with the AQTF has led me to believe that a number of aspects of the CGEA moderation model need further development. The first of these is the level of participation in moderation by teachers. We need a mechanism that ensures that all individuals delivering the CGEA submit samples of work on a regular basis for moderation. The quality of our delivery, and the value of the course to our students, depends on moderation. Moderation needs to be seen as the bedrock of the course, not just a good opportunity for a 'nice lunch' (something that was said to me as a new lecturer— not that I'm against a good lunch as a by-product). Inductions for new staff should highlight the value of attending and participating in regional moderation meetings.

The second aspect that I feel needs improvement is feedback to teachers about the outcomes of moderation. Teachers who submit work need to receive the type of feedback that can inform their practice, including detailed

feedback on the assessment task used and its relevance to the student.

The CGEA offers quality general education to a diverse group of students and facilitates their entering the workforce, changing jobs or going on to further study. The moderation process is the means by which we ensure this continues.

*Beverley Carr*

Moderation— what does it achieve?

At the Inter-regional moderation meeting in July, participants considered the purposes of moderation for the CGEA. There was agreement that moderation is the process by which teachers contest the judgments they make as individuals about how the criteria nominated in the curriculum are demonstrated in a piece of student's work. The purpose of moderation is to achieve a consensus understanding as a community of professionals about the judgements that should be made on student performance.

Moderation should be understood as a process rather than a product: consensus is an unachievable goal, but the process of contestation (presenting argument and evidence to a jury of peers) enables professionals to refine and adjust the judgements they make. The investment of time in moderation is an investment in the development of teachers' skills. It is this investment and effort that produces assessment outcomes that are reliable, valid, fair and flexible.

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***“Moderation needs to be seen as the bedrock of the course, not just a good opportunity for a nice lunch . . .”***

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The process of moderation allows teachers to refine their judgements about two different but related things. Firstly the design of moderation tasks is reviewed. Does the task provide the student with enough scope to demonstrate the criteria at the nominated level? Is the task well-designed and appropriate to the learning outcomes? Is the task authentic—does it relate

meaningfully to the adult student's life? Secondly, the moderation participants consider the judgements a teacher makes about the student's performance. This can present problems for the process of moderation if there is insufficient information about the conditions under which the task was undertaken or if the task is not one which yields the kind of documentary evidence that is easily reviewable.

This moderation process does NOT validate student results: it validates (or contests) teachers' judgements and their capacity to design appropriate tasks. (This invites a question about how to give feedback to a teacher whose judgement is not validated.) Secondly, moderation does NOT produce standardised assessment tools (although some of its products may be used as exemplars that help teachers refine their judgements and their skills in assessment design and thereby contribute to the striving for consensus). And thirdly, the moderation process does not guarantee that a teacher's assessments are valid, reliable, fair and flexible unless the individual is fully engaged in the moderation process. Fully engaged means submitting work for moderation and attending moderation meetings regularly and consistently.

The moderation process provides participating Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) with evidence to demonstrate compliance with the AQTF and may well obviate the need to use alternative means of ensuring consistency of assessment (e.g, pre-assessment validation, schematised assessment plans, standardised assessments and version control applied to all assessment material). If the moderation process is central to the quality and consistency of assessments for the CGEA, we need to consider how the moderation process can best be used to demonstrate AQTF compliance for a number of the outcomes that are nominated in different Standards. We need to apply the quality process to the conduct of moderation rather than to every individual teacher assessing every individual student.

*Margaret McHugh*

Let's focus on exemplars

The Western Australian CGEA inter-regional moderation model is well known throughout the VET sector in WA as being a model of best practice. It has achieved this reputation because it provides practitioners from all over the state with the opportunity to moderate as a group face-to-face twice a year. As a by-product, day-to-day considerations in the delivery and assessment of the CGEA can be examined. Solutions to common problems are often found through the group discussions. I feel this strength needs to be further utilised in

the development of annotated exemplars or sample assessment tasks.

Exemplars are a great opportunity to capture the group consensus and discussion and make it available to all CGEA practitioners in the field. Exemplars serve to benchmark what is considered the minimum performance required as well as show-casing the range of student performances which meet the performance criteria of a particular module.

In WA our current sample assessment file needs extensive revision to match the new Certificates of General Education and show this spread of acceptable performance. After I examined the research available on the use of exemplars, I can see improvements for our current file to create a much more useful tool in all areas of delivery and assessment. All moderated borderline samples, depending on numbers, could be included in the file as these define the bottom line of what is acceptable. Currently our file has very few examples of borderline work.

An on-going task at our moderation meetings could be to select examples to be annotated and analysed at a later date, for inclusion in the file. The form this annotation takes can be in-depth and include some of the following: comments from the moderation group at the time of selection, concepts illustrated by the sample which support a judgement and links to other curriculum or courses.

An analysis of the linkages between 'where the student is at and where they are hoping to go' would help inform our daily delivery and also assessment of students' work. For example the various types of Writing for Knowledge in the file could be highlighted, in view of the student's identification of the study area they hope to enter one day. Over time we could build up a clear picture of the kind of writing we are asking the student to produce, depending on the students' goals (for example a report geared to Childcare Course format) .

*Lillian Whitmarsh*

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# Update on NCVER research projects

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In the May 2004 edition of *Literacy Link* I reported on seven new research projects funded under the Australian National Training Authority Adult Literacy Research Program. As these projects are nearing completion it is timely to update readers on the messages emerging from this valuable suite of research.

## Teaching and learning practices

Rosa McKenna and Lynne Fitzpatrick investigated ways in which trainers and assessors integrate literacy practices into their vocational training program. An important observation in their report, *Investigation of the integrated approach to the delivery of adult literacy*, is that there does not appear to be a major difference in delivery strategies between facilitators with a vocational background and those with a specialist literacy background. A greater repertoire for structuring activities to facilitate language development is an advantage for those with a specialist background while those with direct experience working in the industry bring a familiarity of the professional industry standards required. The research reiterates firmly held views about an integrated delivery approach first articulated in the Australian Language and Literacy Council model. Some new features have emerged since the development of the Australian national training framework in which language, literacy and numeracy have become more explicit and delivery options have become more flexible.

TAFE NSW-Access and General Education researchers, Susan Micek and Gail FitzSimons investigated numeracy practice in relation to chemical spraying and handling by workers in horticulture, and other industries. Their report, *Chemical spraying and handling: teaching and learning numeracy on the job*, highlights the complex set of variables associated with workplace numeracy. This is in marked contrast to the traditional concept of mathematics education as an abstract, rule-bound, individual activity, with one correct answer, and where mistakes are temporary setbacks. As a result, workplace numeracy education requires a fundamentally different pedagogy, which needs to reflect workplace practices and communities of practice. It would incorporate authentic problem solving in real or simulated tasks, in small groups with shared responsibilities.

Ilana Snyder, Anne Jones and Joseph Lo Bianco undertook a project aimed at understanding adult learners' digital communication practices and the implications for adult literacy programs. Their report, *Using ICT in adult literacy education: new practices, new chal-*

*lenges*, suggests adult literacy educators need to take account of the complex ways in which the use of technologies influences, shapes, even transforms, literacy practices. The challenge is to produce learners who are prepared to contribute actively, critically and responsibly to a changing society that is increasingly mediated by the use of information and communication technologies.

## Impact of poor literacy and numeracy skills

Lynne Gleeson's research confirms that, while individuals with low numeracy are most disadvantaged in terms of skill levels, they are also the least likely to receive any assistance in gaining additional skills. The results in her report, *An analysis of the economic returns to training for adult with low numeracy skills in the US and Australia*, indicate that individuals with low numeracy skills are able to achieve higher earnings if they do continue with education programs, or if they participate in on-the-job training programs.

Joy Cumming and Jan Wilson investigated literacy issues in the increasingly common legal mediation process. While mediation is promoted as a primarily oral process, in reality this is not the case, with most participants requiring reading, listening, writing and speaking skills as well as an ability to understand complex pre-mediation written documents, processes, concepts and sometimes complex financial outcomes. A survey of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) practitioners indicated awareness of equity and power imbalance issues in the process. The practitioners recounted various strategies they had developed to minimise negative impact of limited literacy and numeracy. However, these practitioners had developed awareness and strategic responses for the area of literacy and numeracy individually, not as part of their formal ADR training. *Literacy and numeracy demands of, and disadvantage in, legal mediation processes* is a report that breaks new ground in the Australian context and raises issues that are critical to the fairness of the dispute resolution system.

## Contradicting the stereotype

Peter Waterhouse and Crina Virgona's project began with the observation that some individuals are able to succeed in life and employment despite continuing difficulties with literacy. Such people are *contradicting the stereotype*. The study identifies and explores the strategies and behaviour of ten individuals who agreed to share their life stories (which will be available in digital form). The study reveals individuals adopting success strategies despite their

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literacy difficulties. However, the strategies they have adopted to achieve their ends have often been indirect and cumbersome. Such strategies also depend upon a large measure of determination, resilience and creativity in overcoming the obstacles put in place by those who make no allowance for non-text means to achieving goals. It is not an easy path. It is hoped that these digital stories and the report, *Contradicting the stereotype— case studies of success despite literacy limitations*, will encourage literacy educators and policy makers to re-think some of the assumptions and taken-for-granted 'truths' about what it means to experience difficulties with literacy and what the consequences of such difficulties may be.

### Taking partnerships seriously

The aim of Rosie Wickert and Jenny McGuirk's research was to develop a clearer understanding of how literacy and numeracy outcomes are being, or might be achieved in cross-sectoral and cross-portfolio approaches with agencies for whom education and training is not their core business; and how approaches to literacy and numeracy skill building might be further developed through such partnerships.

The researchers looked at five community projects as well as a selection of successful work-related programs to see what can be learnt from these about cross-sectoral partnerships. The study also explored some of the issues related to reporting and outcomes that arise when literacy is not the core purpose for the activities of the agency or project concerned.

The report suggests that there is great interest in, and potential for, literacy and numeracy development through cross-sectoral and cross-portfolio initiatives. However, careful thought needs to be given, amongst other things, to how pathways develop from such initiatives, to how literacy professionals can work to support such initiatives and to how the training of other 'front-line' workers could better prepare them to engage with literacy learning issues.

This research is funded under the ANTA Adult Literacy Research Program through the Department of Education, Science and Training. It is expected reports will be available from Feb 2005. For more information contact—

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