



Rethinking Literacies: Literacy and numeracy across the domains of social life

Jane Gunn

After overnight rains and high humidity, nearly 100 participants representing all states and territories assembled amongst the classic Greek columns and blue and white regalia of Brisbane's Greek Club for this year's ACAL forum.

Sharon Brown, from the ACE sector in Murwillumbah, NSW opened the day with an entertaining and challenging presentation entitled 'A Day in the Life', in which she talked about disengaged youth and a literacy project which brought a group of local youth together by using a public art space as its focus. A graffiti art wall which stretches 3 km is seen as the place belonging to youth, and was the starting point from which to expand the literacy project. She described different ways the wall was used in the project, and explained how she came to consider the wall as a metaphor for some of the barriers she encountered throughout the project.

One of the ideas she spoke about was that early on with the group there was often discomfort in learning and growing. By encouraging participants to talk about such feelings she minimised their resistance, and the group members came to know what to expect and recognised some of the changes they were experiencing as they were 'growing into a new skin'. Sharon spoke about a number of learning strategies she used including grounding techniques; teaching martial arts and drama games; and encouraging the use of journals to document their thoughts on their learning. Sharon challenged the group to use their journals to respond to questions such as:

- Who might disapprove of you?
- Who might you grow past?
- What might you lose/gain (by being in this group)?

Much of this was setting a context for the work the project, documenting how the wall had been developed as a public art space, interviewing people and developing a radio show and involving the group members in other ways, depending on their interests.

An interesting example of a literacy and numeracy activity she incorporated for one group member involved going to the hardware shop to buy paint – a first for this young man who had been to the hardware shop before but obtained his paint supplies through less 'conventional' ways. He was given an opportunity to be proud of his work as an artist, and to interact with adults he normally would have

been at great pains to avoid. He used language and numeracy skills such as calculating quantities, and 'grew into his new skin', experiencing some of the changes and challenges which Sharon had encouraged the group to identify and think about.

Sharon's presentation set a positive pace for the day in which ideas and enthusiasm were generated and shared.

Following this session a panel of guest speakers addressed questions related to 'Literacy across Lives'. Catherine Gyngell, the Director of the Adult Literacy Section of DEST was the first speaker and opened the session with a presentation about Essential Skills as Skills for Life, comparing the Australian policy and practice with Canadian and United Kingdom advances which use similar concepts. Catherine indicated that the Essential Skills have two layers: a primary level that incorporates skills such as communication, reading texts, writing, speaking, numeracy and problem solving, and a secondary level of skills relating to social literacy, cultural literacy, civic literacy, ICT, financial, and health literacy.



Sharon Brown

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In responding to the challenges of how to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for individuals through a 'whole of life' approach, Catherine suggested that there needs to be a broad consensus by stakeholders as to what constitutes Essential Skills and with the end result being a national agreement on an Essential Skills Framework. Catherine stated that it would be necessary to convince both government and industry that such an Essential Skills Framework be embedded in all government and industry strategies with funding to support their implementation.



*The panel of
guest speakers*

Dr Joy Cummings, from the School of Cognition, Language and Special Education at Griffith University was also a speaker on the panel. Joy spoke about literacy and the law, her focus was based on recent NCVER research relating to mediation, which she described as being thought of as 'fast, fair and oral'. Joy mentioned that mediation is a process that individuals may be ordered by a court to participate in regardless of what knowledge if any they have of the process or expected outcomes. Joy mentioned the growing trend for mediation to be conducted online, and how this is seen by many to improve the 'fastness and fairness' of the process. Joy pointed out that for those with limited literacy or numeracy involved in mediation there are a number of issues: for example mediators often use a whiteboard to note discussion points and suggest that clients 'jot down a few points' as the discussion occurs. Clients are also expected to be able to fill in various forms and give consideration to financial questions (e.g. to do with determining compensation). In mediation training consideration is given to the relative power of the two people attending, however, issues related to literacy and numeracy are not included in this training. A person who has limited literacy and numeracy skills can be disadvantaged in the mediation process.

In summing up her concerns about the unmet needs of low literacy clients in relation to encounters in which legal matters are involved, Joy cited the instance of a person who was willing to go prison, rather than admit they could not read or write well enough to deal with the situation. This was a graphic example of how people's lives can be affected by limited literacy and the shame which can accompany it. She stated how important it is to be able to talk about one's literacy levels without shame and that those of us who can read many types of text should be open when we have difficulty, to make talking about literacy needs more widely acceptable.

Third panel speaker Robyn Hartley spoke about her recent research on understanding the benefits and counting the costs of literacy and numeracy in different domains of social life.

Taken from her research findings Robyn asserted that there are inherent difficulties involved in collaboration across sectors and that the rapid development in technologies has implications for working lives and social aspects of life. Robyn referred to the sectors which ACAL has identified as those it wishes to develop cross sectoral partnerships with namely the health, small business and financial sectors.

Ruth Henderson, a manager from Community Access in the NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, gave a personal view envisioning a role for ACAL in building a dialogue with industry by forging relationships with a number of peak bodies in the sector. Ruth noted that within Aged Care and Disability sectors, there was a growing complexity in the texts and terminology that staff are required to read and use to document their work practices. Ruth noted that this was becoming a point of staff complaint. She pointed out that within each sector there are also numerous and different services with different operating styles, each having copious documented material to explain procedures, accountability, privacy act information and so on. She believes that many direct care staff are passionate about their work but the documentation they have to deal with creates many difficulties for them. Furthermore, the low status and poor levels of payment of the industry do not attract younger employees who may have skills in using technology to manage some of these tasks. Ruth felt that some of the legislative requirements she outlined have led to reduced involvement of neighbours and friends in giving assistance. She wryly quipped that 'even dying is a high literacy challenge'!

Margaret McHugh, ACAL representative for Western Australia, was the final speaker in the forum. She looked at some of the achievements of the adult literacy field over the last 15 years and posed questions around the direction that would be taken in the future. Margaret noted that Australia was looked to by other western nations in relation to the integration of literacy into the training agenda and that substantial Commonwealth funding has been directed to research, the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) Programme and the Language Literacy and Numeracy Programme (LLNP) program resulting in growing awareness by industry and employers' awareness of literacy and numeracy issues as a result. Margaret suggested that these achievements should be used as a model for the direction ACAL can take next.

On the other side of the balance sheet, Margaret lamented the loss of literacy provision for local community needs and argued that it cannot be overlooked. She pointed to concern in the field that there is little funding for non-accredited training available, and that grass roots provision has been reduced. The example she cited of how this problem is being managed is provision of training at Certificate I and II levels in health education with recipients of these awards being left with unrealistic expectations of how and where they will find related jobs in rural and remote areas. Margaret spoke about this shift to a definition of literacy as purely related to the vocational domain, and ►

being driven by industry. She referred to the phenomenon of 'metrification', which she described as 'measuring the pig, rather than feeding it'.

Margaret concluded the first part of the panel session by asserting that ACAL needs to draw a 'line in the sand' and ensure that literacy provision is not solely directed to gaining employment, but is a life-wide, life-long pursuit. She asked how the successful model of literacy provision in vocational training can be extended into other institutions, and for what purpose the Essential Skills might be developed.

Following on from these impassioned and insightful presentations, forum participants were given the opportunity to contribute to these ongoing debates by firstly discussing the presentations in groups at each of their tables and from that discussion, developing two key points and two questions for the panel members.

Some of these questions that emerged were:

- How can we engage the interest of other agencies and find funding?
- What other options are there for developing the field, rather than doing more of the same?
- Who will determine the Essential Skills framework and what is included or excluded? How will life skills be included in the framework?
- How do we work towards more effective cross-sectoral partnerships? Are there discussions happening across sectors and how could these be drawn together more effectively?
- How can projects which develop models of good practice be sustained and disseminated?
- How can literacy teachers resist being driven by policy and curriculum and ensure we are responding to learners' needs?

In the subsequent discussion Catherine Gyngell suggested the Essential Skills Framework would be a good tool to capture the interest of other agencies and find funding. In relation to 'developing the field', Catherine referred to Rod McDonald's paper¹ and indicated the review of the National Reporting System would be the next stage, followed by consultation with the field to work on definitions. A timely

comment was also made that with all this work and the development of this Framework there needs to be a way to draw together key players and to ensure dissemination of ideas – with an emphasis on simple ways to express complex ideas.

In response to questions on cross-sectoral partnerships Robyn Hartley indicated there are people working at an individual level in the Health, Small Business and Finance sectors at the moment, and that ACAL has a longer term

plan to work in the Health sector. Ruth made a pertinent observation pointing out that in a partnership it is important to consider what you will give as well as what you get and posed the question for participants to consider: 'What can ACAL offer her industry, in terms of, for example, workforce training and retention?'

***“Are we
life coaches
or
literacy teachers?”***

Concern was expressed that there was 'slippage' around the term 'literacy' – do we as a field know what we mean? A related question to the panel was 'Are we life coaches or literacy teachers?' Joy Cummings' comment to this was that it is in our interests to 'admit we don't know how to read the term', referring to her earlier points about the importance of modelling that literacy development is an ongoing process.

There was also discussion concerning the many excellent small scale projects which could be built on more effectively through widespread dissemination and collaboration and even some comments about the financial bottom line: that money is saved in the long term if it is committed to literacy across the social domains, and not just aimed by government towards VET.

The forum was an engaging and provocative mix of policy and practice. But the final word must be given to one forum discussion group: *'we must not forget that there are real people at the heart of this debate, how ever much we play with the language of it.'*

NOTES

- ¹ <http://www.dest.gov.au/literacynet/documents/forum/ForumSummary.pdf>

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(Un)Learning Literacy in Canada and the United States: Evidence from the ALL Survey

Tom Sticht is an adult education consultant. In this article Tom comments on the data from 1994 and 2003 surveys of the prose and document literacy skills of adults in Canada and the US. He asks some very tricky questions....

The United State's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is scheduled to release the results of the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL). The data for this assessment were obtained in 2003. Another new report on adult literacy jointly produced by Statistics Canada and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) was released earlier in 2005. It presents data from the international Adult Literacy and Life Skills (ALL) survey of 2003¹.

Changes in skills profiles from IALS to ALL

On page 39 of the ALL report it discusses changes in skills profiles from the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) of 1994 to the ALL survey of 2003 for Canada, the United States and a few other countries. Here I will focus on just Canada and the US. According to the ALL report, 'The ALL and the IALS assessed prose and document literacy skills using identical methods and metrics. This was done so as to permit comparable and reliable estimates of changes in skill profiles between the two survey periods.'

In the IALS and ALL, adults 16 – 65 years of age were assessed using 'real world' tasks like newspaper articles, transportation schedules, and the like. The adults' literacy on prose and document scales were divided into five levels: Level 1 being the lowest level of literacy, and the top level being level 5. In reporting data, levels 4 and 5 are combined in both the IALS and ALL results.

Of most concern to adult literacy educators is the data for the percentages of the least literate adults: adults in literacy Level 1. In the present analyses, I have combined the data for prose and document literacy and present the average figures for these two literacy scales. In Canada, in 1994 there were 17.3% of adults in Level 1 of the combined prose and document scales, while in 2003 this declined to 15.1 %, a drop of 2.2%.

In the US, there were 22.2% at Level 1 in 1994, and this dropped to 20.1% in 2003; a decrease of 2.1 percentage points. From this data, one might conclude that adults in Canada and the US became more literate from 1994 to 2003, and that perhaps this was due to the efforts of adult literacy educators who received increased funding during this period.

However, this position is questioned by another set of findings presented in the ALL report. In this case the findings concern the highest levels of literacy, Levels 4 and

5. In Canada, it was found that the percentage of adults in Levels 4 and 5 of the combined prose and document scales dropped from 24% in 1994 to 20% in 2003. Stated otherwise, this decrease of 4 % represented a loss of 1 in 6 of Canada's most literate adults.

In the US, the percentage of Levels 4 and 5 adults on the combined prose and document scales fell from 20.9% to 13.9%. This is a reduction represents a loss of 1 in 3 of the most literate adults in the United States.

So for Canada and the US, the gain in literacy at the lowest levels is dramatically offset by the loss of literacy at the highest levels. The ALL report comments on these changes and states: *'Improvements in performance at the lower end and reductions at the upper ends of distributions imply less inequality in the distribution of prose and document skills.'*

This raises the question of whether reductions in 'inequality' in literacy abilities of adults is a worthy goal for social policy even if it is achieved by reducing the numbers of adults with high level skills. I think not.

Why have Canada and the United States lost so many of their high level literates from the 1994 IALS to the 2003 ALL? And what does this imply for policy and practice regarding adult literacy education? There is no explanation and little discussion offered in the ALL report, though the authors do conclude that:

*'The results point to significant skill loss in several countries. Given the high costs and returns accruing to skill development, the top priority for further work is to study the determinants of skill gain and loss'*²

The first reports of the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) in the US are scheduled to be released. It will be of interest to compare the findings of the NAAL with those of the ALL to see how they agree or disagree in their representations of the literacy skills of adults there. As things stand now, based on the ALL report, both the US and Canada are losing higher level literates at a faster rate than they are improving the skills of the least literate adults. This would seem to call for some serious thinking about the validity of these assessments and what these findings might mean.

If through our social policies we are going to take credit for the learning of literacy at the lowest level, are we obliged to take credit for the un-learning of literacy at the highest levels of literacy?

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NOTES

1 Statistics Canada (2005). Learning a Living: First Results of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey. Available online at www.statcan.ca

2 <http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/learnliv/38.htm>

Moving forward on literacy costs and benefits research

Robyn Hartley

*The March 2005 issue of **Literacy Link** reported that ACAL had received funding in the 2004 round of the National Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Research Program for a project to explore the possibilities of obtaining better information about the benefits of investing in adult literacy and numeracy in Australia and the costs of poor literacy and numeracy. The report is now complete and will be published shortly by NCVER. The main report is titled: **Moving Forward—Understanding benefits, counting costs: literacy and numeracy across domains of social life** (Hartley and Horne 2005, forthcoming). A Supplementary Report, which includes a detailed report of the literature reviewed for the project, is also available.*

There has been little research in Australia which attempts to tease out and measure the broad range of social and economic benefits of investing in literacy and numeracy and the costs to individuals and communities of not doing so. We can speculate about the reasons for the relative paucity of research in this area compared with, for example, Canada, the US and the UK—a policy and funding environment where the focus has been predominantly on literacy and vocational outcomes, the absence of a natural ‘home’ for such research, and limited funding sources together with the cost of good research.

However there are some strong arguments for exploring costs and benefits associated with literacy and numeracy. More reliable information about such costs and benefits across a whole range of areas of life and across the individual life span can provide valuable information for policy development. It could potentially encourage governments and funding bodies to look very broadly at language and literacy policy, and increase community awareness and understanding of the many and diverse ways in which literacy and numeracy affect individual and community life.

The ACAL report surveys available frameworks and methodologies for assessing benefits and costs of multiple literacies and brings together research from such diverse areas as health literacy, family literacy, the impact of literacy on employers and employees, financial literacy and literacy/ numeracy and crime. Three areas—health literacy, financial literacy and costs and benefits for small business—are identified as having promise for further development in Australia.

The report acknowledges that the impacts (costs and benefits) of multiple literacies are complex, cumulative, and interactive. Benefits may involve direct change for individuals and communities. They may also sustain individuals and communities, enabling them to continue or improve what they are already doing. The sustaining effect is pervasive, operates at many different levels and is critical for society.

All of these factors make the business of accurately assessing costs and benefits challenging. While it is theoretically possible, it is not always a straightforward undertaking. Multiple approaches—the use of a variety of rigorous quantitative and qualitative methodologies and the inclusion of individual, family and community impacts—are likely to provide the most convincing evidence and

lead to the greatest understanding of costs and benefits. The best of the existing research tends to cross discipline boundaries.

A brief summary of representative studies included in the report illustrates the breadth of work which has been carried out internationally and to a much lesser extent in Australia.

In the area of health literacy, most studies examine what is called ‘functional health literacy’ (the ability to read and comprehend medical information and instructions) from a medical perspective. There is, however, an awareness of the need to go beyond functional health literacy and explore more complex notions of health literacy which focus on people’s capacity to make informed judgements and decisions about their health.

In the range of studies reported, higher health literacy has been linked to knowledge and understanding of such matters of mammography, cancer screening, emergency department discharge instructions, smoking, contraception, HIV asthma and post-operative care. On the other hand, associations have been found between lower literacy and, for example, a higher risk of hospitalisation, not having had a PAP smear or a mammogram in the previous two years, not having a ‘flu’ injection and higher rates of depression in various populations.

Financial literacy has gained some attention and interest in Australia in recent years, especially from the Commonwealth government and a range of financial institutions. A relatively widely accepted definition of financial literacy is ‘the ability to make informed judgements and to take effective decisions regarding the use and management of money’ (Shagen 1997). Much of the existing research on costs and benefits associated with financial literacy comes from a range of work-based and high school financial education programs in the US and from substantial developments around financial literacy in the UK.

Two Australian reports include estimates of benefits and costs associated with financial literacy. The Commonwealth government’s Consumer and Financial Literacy Taskforce modelled the effects of ‘bad’ financial decision-making over the course of a person’s life. A study by the Commonwealth Bank Foundation modeled the effects of improving financial literacy levels on personal income and gross domestic product (GDP).

The ACAL report notes, however, that as yet, there are few well-established frameworks for investigating benefits and costs associated with financial literacy. In addition, there are many under-researched areas, including the role of attitudinal, psychological and 'lifestyle' factors in financial literacy; the complex interaction between lack of income/low income and financial literacy; the impact of financial literacy at different life stages, and the relationship between 'general' literacy and numeracy and financial literacy. Most studies focus on people who are employed rather than unemployed.

Although the main focus of the ACAL report is on areas other than business and employment, the literature regarding benefits of improving literacy and numeracy amongst the workforce was briefly reviewed. Studies typically focus on cost savings and/or productivity gains to the company, although some look more widely and include employee focused outcomes such as levels of promotion and rates of absenteeism. Relatively few studies include measures of factors that impact directly on employees and that also indirectly influence company profits, i.e. employees' job satisfaction, internal promotion, absenteeism, access and take-up of further training and education.

In Australia, workplace education and the skills of workers have received considerable attention. However, the most directly relevant study is Pearson's (1996) evaluation of language and literacy training in the workplace. He found such training was considered to have a positive effect on five aspects: direct cost savings; access to and acceptability of further training; participation in teams and meetings; promotion and job flexibility; and the value of training (which included issues such as worker morale, confidence to communicate). The study included the respondents' quantitative estimate of savings to their companies in these five areas.

The few studies reviewed that investigate literacy and

numeracy levels and crime (rather than the more common and broader focus on education levels and crime) show benefits of decreased recidivism with improved literacy and individual costs, such as a greater likelihood of being picked up repeatedly by police, with low levels of literacy. There are, nevertheless, inherent difficulties in investigating the relationship between literacy and numeracy and crime. Complex individual, social and cultural factors contribute to crime and the diversity of illegal activities subsumed under the term 'crime' make for difficulties of measurement of benefits and costs. There is an unknown amount of 'hidden crime' that is rarely taken account of in studies and data to adequately assess benefits and costs are rarely available.

The ACAL report concludes that developing useful research around literacy and numeracy costs and benefits in Australia will depend on convincing governments and other funding bodies that research into adult literacy and numeracy costs and benefits is an important individual, community and national issue, and building effective partnerships between the adult literacy field, researchers and others in the area of interest and people with expertise in modelling and longitudinal research. The 2006 Adult Literacy and Lifeskills survey in Australia will provide an important dataset on literacy and numeracy. The best strategic use of information from the survey needs to be widely encouraged and promoted.

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*Diary dates
2006...*

Mark these dates in your 2006 diary now.

The South Australian Council for Adult Literacy (SACAL) will host the 2006 National ACAL conference in Adelaide on Friday 6th and Saturday 7th October, 2006. (There may be a related event on the 5th). As plans for the conference take shape, information will be distributed via the ACAL website: www.acal.edu.au and ACAL's enewsletter *Literacy Live*.

Professor Ian Falk is chair of Rural and Remote Education at Charles Darwin University. He has been involved in the adult literacy and numeracy field for over 20 years, during that time his teaching has ranged from teaching literacy to adults to teaching in the tertiary sector. He has produced an extensive body of research in the ways literacy and numeracy are used in the lives of individuals and communities and how literacy builds social capital and socio-economic wellbeing. He is the Northern Territory on the ACAL executive. Ian has a passionate interest in how different literacy practices position individuals and groups unequally in modern western societies, and the consequences of this for a good old Aussie 'fair go'.

A personal perspective on the current national agenda and where adult literacy and numeracy fit

I would like to argue that the role of effective adult language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) provision in any context is to enable the participating adult to engage with existing and new networks in domestic, work, community and leisure situations. Current national training priorities and funding arrangements however do not necessarily seek outcomes defined in this way. What happens to the provision of educational services to adults when policy collides with grassroots needs? I'd like here to reflect on the impacts of major national influences in LLN provision as it meets the grounded practice where learners' needs are met by a range of organisations and practitioners.

What happens at the grassroots level?

People come to training providers and community education organisations because they are hoping to improve some aspect of their lives. They may come with a specific educational need or goal, or they may be seeking something not so easily defined related to their roles in the family, the workplace, the community or their leisure activities. Some nominate a health issue; some are seeking personal fulfilment by attaining an educational qualification they were denied earlier in their lives; some are seeking more confidence in everyday transactions. By and large, these folk have expectations about what they will get out of their involvement with learning. They may or may not nominate a specific LLN issue, and this may or may not be directly related to their gaining workplace skills or performing better in the labour market.

For example, on the one hand, people turn up because they are involved in mediation for, say, a domestic violence case and are unable to resolve it because their English language skills or reading and writing skills are not adequate for the situation. On the other hand, an employee of Company X might join a workplace literacy and numeracy course because they, or their employer, identifies them as needing some additional assistance with their LLN skills. A third person might enrol in an LLN course at a TAFE Institute to improve their English language skills, meet new people and develop a social network. So how do these folk experience the national policies – including the way programs are funded - with which we, the professional educators, are so concerned in our daily lives?

National training policy and programs

At the national, state and territory policy level, several agenda are running that potentially impact on what happens at the grassroots level. The two that, in my view, have had a significant impact on the provision of educational services to adults are 'industry-driven' Vocational Education and Training (VET) and the move to outcomes-based policy and resourcing.

Since 1991, LLN provision has been funded and managed as a component of national VET. LLN provision has been largely defined, and its outcomes measured, by its contribution to building skills for work and making people competitive in the labour market. Educational providers, large and small, have been required to become Registered Training Organisations and, if they are to receive public

funding, must now deliver nationally accredited qualifications regulated under the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF). The AQTF is a regulatory framework designed for a system delivering

vocational qualifications – that is, it has not been designed to regulate educational qualifications. Even less does it reflect the issues encountered in maintaining community-based efforts in provision of services to individual adults who determine their own needs for learning which are many and varied. Whereas once Adult and Community Education (ACE) organisations might have delivered a service that was less narrowly focussed on the development of skills for work or on the awarding of vocational qualifications, they have in recent years had to redefine their business as the delivery of vocational training. The VET infrastructure has taken over as the main mechanism for endorsing and resourcing LLN provision.

The last 15 years has also seen a move towards a model that endorses and resources *outcomes* as opposed to models based on *inputs*. That is, governments now pay by results, and less often direct resources towards specific inputs. For example, the state training agencies implemented Purchaser/Provider models of funding for VET whereby the state government agrees to pay providers for a specified number of Student Contact Hours industry by industry. (One 'industry' is General Education). Attempts have been made to measure the effectiveness of what has been purchased by setting benchmarks for Module Completion rates. The funding and accountability relationship between the states and the Commonwealth follows a similar pattern. The Commonwealth labour-market literacy ►

... these folk have expectations about what they will get ...

programs also specify outcomes in return for funding: the outcomes include improved literacy performance in clients as measured by the NRS as well as job-placements. In adopting this approach, no doubt Governments hoped that new providers would be encouraged into the training market and believed that market forces would drive less effective providers out of business. This would encourage innovation and perhaps deliver more effective services more cheaply.

However, it appears that one unlooked-for consequence of pursuing these policies has been to undermine the quality of the *inputs* into service provision. Short-term competitive funding contracts make it difficult for providers to attract and keep high performing staff, and where providers are willing to undercut one another the contract may go to the agency offering the cheapest unit price. This may result in the agency being unable to employ staff with appropriate qualifications and experience, or it could lead to a high staff turnover with the quality of teaching and learning resources compromised. There is a real danger that 'doing more for less' will fatally injure the capacity of the system to meet anyone's needs – individuals, communities, industries or governments.

What happens when grassroots meets the top-down agenda?

Case 1: Many major state systems offer accredited LLN courses resourced through VET funds, that usually have the word 'vocational' in their titles. Yes, there are occasional vocational outcomes, but then many of the 'clients' are along simply 'to improve my English/spelling' etc, with no specific vocational outcomes in mind (needed or wanted).

Case 2: The core business of a large grassroots community organisation is delivering environmental management for community members. These folk all have difficulties with LLN. The organisation accesses VET funding to resource LLN learning and awards vocational qualifications. While learners achieve a vocational certificate and may thereby have an expectation of employment as a consequence, they are often frustrated because there are no jobs.

Case 3: Job network providers are paid by job placement outcomes. One provider told me 'Well, if you've got all these client folders on your desk and you have to place as many as you can to get your money in, which folders would *you* bring to the top first?' This reduces the incentive to (a) place/pay attention to the harder cases (including LLN cases) – favouring easy-to-place clients has immediate financial pay-offs; (b) in addition, there is reduced incentive to refer clients to LLN training, and (c) sharing of resources and information or cross-referrals between providers is negligible because of the competitive environment, which results in inefficient duplications and poor client service. A question has to be asked about the capacity of such a system to deliver services – including LLN teaching – to those with the greatest need. It is likely that the only outcome is that the cycle of poverty is reinforced rather than being broken.

So what's the significance of all this?

Adult literacy and numeracy pedagogical issues

Here I am reminded of the Quality Assurance (QA) process whereby the quality of the outputs is known to depend directly on the quality of the inputs. That is, to achieve significant and effective outcomes for LLN provision, we need significant and effective pedagogy. I was reminded of the essential nature of effective pedagogy in LLN by Sharon Brown's presentation at the ACAL Forum. Sharon ably demonstrated how effective program outcomes depend on the skilful, knowledgeable and flexible integration of learner identity (re-)formation, with a trusting set of pedagogical relationships between teachers and learners, all achieved through carefully constructed pedagogical activities and strategies.

Essential skills

My comment here relates to the on-going search for the underlying 'generic' skills that seem so elusive and slippery to identify and address educationally. The current national agenda is tending to use the term 'essential skills', though the term may change as national consultative processes evolve. My comment is this: after being involved in over 200 national research projects in the area of LLN, VET, ACE and communities, I have found that *the narrower the focus of the 'course' on job outcomes, by and large, the less well it prepares learners for the essential skills of work*. Such programs are so focused and short, lacking continuity, that there is little chance for real and useful learning to be built. After all, what the 'essential skills' boil down to is a sound, all-round education. In my view, this is not achievable through a pastiche of sporadically focused, short, training courses that have been designed for short-term job-placement or 'readiness', but *not* designed for desirable workplace knowledge and skills. It is no accident that the top corporations around the world head-hunt top graduates from courses such as university philosophy degrees for their key places.

Poor match between demand/supply

There is a significant disparity between the reasons learners come to courses (demand) and the types of provision that are officially recognised and therefore 'offered' (supply). The needs that drive people to come to LLN courses are not just job-related. In fact, I am aware of no recent research that provides a national picture that can tell governments and providers *what proportions of people come to LLN and related courses for what reasons*. This information is necessary if we are to match supply and demand better, and obviate some of the current issues. Surely learner demand should be the source of information to guide the types (and resources) of provision. Vocational training meets the needs of many individual adults (as well as responding to industry requirements). LLN training delivered as a component of VET is also meeting the needs of many people who want to gain educational qualifications. However, there will be others who require a different focus for their learning and the nature of the 'VET product' may mean that we are often trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. How much more effective and

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Dr Kaye Lowe is currently Senior Research Fellow at Charles Darwin University. She recently returned to Australia after completing four years as Visiting Professor in literacy at the University of Kentucky where in the last five years, there has been a concerted effort by legislators, schools, and the communities to address the major illiteracy problems. As the second-most illiterate state, Kentucky has more than 40% of the 2.4-million working-age adults functioning at the two lowest levels of literacy. Alarming, in 2000, only 5% of adult Kentuckians functioning at the lowest levels of literacy were participating in adult education programs. While in Kentucky, Dr Lowe designed and created an online curriculum, Read on the Web, to assist illiterate adults to read using voice recognition, screen readers, and interactive activities. She was one of three coordinators for Kentucky’s Adult Educators Literacy Institute (KAELI). The institute was the states first online course designed to improve the education qualifications of adult literacy educators. In Kentucky, the minimum requirement to be an adult educator is a degree – not necessarily a degree in education.

A friend brought ‘Hank’ to the learning centre because Hank said he wanted to learn to read. Hank would not attempt to write his name on the registration form, so his friend completed it. He was unable to give any correct answers on a given literacy test.

Hank had never touched a computer before. Using the virtual desktop, he learned to manoeuvre the mouse quickly and move from activity to activity. He was pleased with his instant success with the reading activities. He worked with them all, including ‘find something to read. ...’. When it came to the activities, he enjoyed the Kentucky map activity, especially since he had been a truck driver and recognised the names of cities.

When Hank was tested (in October) on the TABE Literacy test, he could do nothing other than print his name. He started coming to class in November and never missed a class. This level of attendance is very rare for our students on any level. In mid-January, he retested and successfully completed 19 out of 26 in the pre-reading and 8 out of the 27 activities in the reading. Great progress indeed.

Read on the Web (ROW) is an online curriculum designed to support Kentucky adults with low literacy skills achieve literacy success through the unique combination of technologies. The intention of the program is to build in many layers of scaffolding that allow the adult learner to operate independently. Learners access voice recognition technology that is used to generate texts; screen readers make it possible for learners to choose what they read; interactive reading activities allow learners to explore how reading works; and the virtual desktop explains the components and how to use the word processing program.

The Council for Post Secondary Education in Kentucky funded the project and as the subject expert, I was responsible for designing the program. The satisfaction for me was watching discouraged and jaded learners become excited about learning. Once they were aware of the options the program had to offer through the use of the virtual desktop tour, and the voice recognition software, they were no longer reliant on another person for assistance. With screen readers they could read what interested them, for example, the local newspaper or a self-selected book. These texts were set as default texts.

Using voice recognition software, they generated and printed stories about their families and friends.

The components of ROW are:

1. Voice recognition and text creation

With voice recognition, learners witness the direct connection between oral and written language - as they speak their words are instantly translated into words on the screen. There are no bounds to the texts they can create. The texts are saved and reread by learners at their leisure. With screen readers to assist them, learners have the opportunity to recognise their own errors in their self-generated texts and make editorial changes.

2. Interactive reading activities

The purpose of these activities is to reinforce the four cueing systems - semantics, syntax, grapho-phonics and pragmatics. These activities reinforce what good readers do when confronting unknown words. The importance of reading for meaning, using contextual clues, and deliberately seeking out visual/sound clues are encouraged through these activities. The activities are intended to be non-threatening and fun. Responses that are not correct revert to the original format so that the learner can try again. The emphasis is on having learners succeed rather than being reminded of their failure.

Two of the most popular activities are scrambling sentences and piecing them back together again and the pragmatic texts. With unscrambling sentences, learners view the sentence as a whole, with or without the assistance of the screen reader. Learners click the scramble icon and the words move into incorrect sequence. The topics of the sentences are of interest to adults and there is an emphasis on using high frequency words. A ‘speaking’ dictionary icon is available when reading unfamiliar words.

The pragmatic text activities use a variety of common text types such as letters, menus and maps. When the mouse runs over the text, the text is read aloud. Once familiar with the text, learners scramble the whole text and then piece it back together making them familiar with the components of the text, for example, the components of a menu, and places on a map.

3. Text selection with screen reader

Learners select texts that they would like to read and highlight sections to be read by the screen reader. Eight texts are selected with the learner and preset as default texts. Additional texts and internet sites are identified as a personal selection geared to the learner's interests.

4. Word processing

Aided by the virtual desktop tour, learners can use word processing to write their own texts.

5. The virtual desktop

This orients the learner to computer functionalities and the program.

ROW was trialed in four adult literacy sites in Kentucky over a period of eight months through the Kentucky Virtual University. The feedback from the 10 adults at the sites was positive. Learners were excited about the prospect of using the computer. They did not appear hesitant in getting started and the virtual desk top was identified as being an 'excellent way to introduce learners to using the computer.'

As Frank explained:

'It improved my interest. When I quit school I had nothing to pick me up. I had been called a 'dumb idiot' and they called that moral support. The computer picked me up. I felt really important. I don't think just any computer has obituaries (He had set his local newspaper as a default text.) The way it talks and read the obituaries is great. That really helped me. ...When it responds to me, you go really fast. It really interests me. I loved everything about it.'

ROW encourages risk taking. Prior to ROW, the learners had not used a computer and most had thought that the world of technology was out of their reach. One learner mentioned that he had seen computers on television and that was the extent of his experience and knowledge. All learners expressed confidence in their ability to access the components of the course and it was reported that

on more than one occasion, learners took the mouse out of the teacher's hand and assumed responsibility for showing him/her around the program.

'Tom' was another reluctant learner – he had not attempted to use the word processing program. After his instructor showed him the space bar and the enter key, (as well as assuring him that everything could be corrected) and that the words would not drop off the line, it was suggested that he write something. With much ado, he reluctantly started. He was nervous, but was left alone for ten minutes. He wrote three sentences about himself. Tom's instructor was surprised by his writing ability. In that short time Tom had visibly grown in confidence and was excited when he printed the text. He said, 'You got me going now' and he continued to write while another adult learner sat watching. She had not used a computer before. Tom invited her to take his chair and then proceeded to show her how to use the word processor.

For most students, particularly the male students, the use of technology changed their perception of themselves as

learners. Their history of learning had been one of failure and fear. The same sense of anxiety and fear attached to learning was less evident when it came to the computer. The fact that the computer could be blamed for making errors eliminated the learner from being 'wrong'. This provided a safeguard. For many, the sense that it was not their fault if something was written incorrectly when using the voice recognition software allowed them to make jokes about the computer trying to speak Spanish. No longer were mistakes seen as reminders of their inability to read and write. The use of technology seemed to elevate them to a new level of learning, one that they believed put them beyond the learning level of their friends and family. They wanted to take home their published work and tell their friends that they had used the internet.

ROW had a strong motivational impact on learners. The learners discussed the importance of being able to read things they enjoyed. They identified the 'for sale' advertisements, the obituaries and the children's book selection in the "find something to read" component. Others mentioned that they had never read a menu or understood how a map worked. All learners stated they felt a sense of the enjoyment when they made a choice about what activities and text they selected.

There were benefits in terms of learning outcomes. After little more than 12 hours exposure to the program, learners showed improvements in the demonstration of understanding of tasks associated with reading assessments and performance in writing assessments conducted at the centres.

Learners progressed from computer illiterate to being able to log on and complete fundamental computer tasks like click and drag. Student attendance also improved. 'Joe' started coming to class regularly when he started ROW. Since October, he rarely missed a class and when he did he called and told us his diabetes was out of control. This level of sustained attendance had been rare for previous literacy programs.

Learners became aware of what screen readers combined with the internet could do for them. It gave them access to reading materials that were beyond their reading skills, but within their interest level and comprehensive capacity. One learner stated:

'It can do all these different things about knowledge and understanding what is going on in the world.'

As a result of the work in the program, three learners expressed an interest in obtaining a computer so they could work at home.

6. Dumbing-down vs. upskilling

It became apparent that learners were often capable of performing at higher levels than their current instructional level. Educators were surprised by some learners' responses to working on the computer and their willingness to experiment with a new approach to learning.

I realised that he can read more than I thought. He has been enrolled in GED for 14 years. He came up almost

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Outstanding Adult Learner Nominee – Kylie Dureen

Kylie has been a student with Adult Literacy at TAFE in Hobart for 2 years. In 2004 she obtained excellent results in Year 10 English and Maths. In 2005 she is studying Year 11 English and will commence a Tertiary Preparation Course later this year with the goal of university in the future.

Kylie has cerebral palsy and is paralysed on her right side. She is unable to speak and cannot use her right arm. She also has other health problems. Kylie communicates with a LightWriter where she types in sentences and the machine translates these into a synthesised voice. She also communicates by writing and with gestures. She writes with her left hand and this means that interaction with other people is slow and often difficult. Kylie is not worried about this and is keen to express her ideas and opinions. She often arrives at class with her concerns or ideas already written down. If she does not complete work in class she takes it home and spends many hours writing and re-writing assignments.

Kylie writes 'Homework is rather easy to sort out in my head. However the actual writing is very time-consuming. I can write all day in 40 minute periods and I can take breaks to keep my mind focussed and fresh. A normal size assignment would take me 2 days to complete whereas it may take other students anything from 1-2 hours.'

When Kylie came to TAFE in 2004 she had not been at school for 19 years. She had attended D'Alton Special School for most of her life but she did not have a Year 10 Certificate. A few years ago she decided to return to education. A rejection from a senior secondary college made her lose some confidence in her quest for further learning. However she was not discouraged and in 2004 she approached Adult Literacy for help. She has not looked back since.

In the Year 10 Maths course Kylie was a model student who was determined to complete every activity even though physically challenged. Despite the fact that she found the use of rulers and protractors very difficult, she did not want any allowances made for her. She struggled with Algebra and did not get the mark she would have liked at her first

attempt so the next term she returned to do that module again and achieved a higher mark.

A whole new world has opened for Kylie in English. She knows that lack of speech does not mean that she cannot communicate with words. She writes with passion and certainty. She has written poems which express very powerfully her feelings and emotions. She has now the

confidence to enter her poems in competitions. As part of a learning task for Year 11 English she has organised an interview with the Greens politician, Peg Putt.

When Kylie began at TAFE she had no knowledge of how to use a computer. Despite having to rely on one hand, she has persevered and is now starting to use the computer confidently.

Kylie has overcome many barriers to achieve at TAFE. As she wrote at the end of her poem: 'I am speech-impaired, not dumb.'

Kylie also wrote 'I can sit in a room filled with people and feel so isolated and lonely. Because there's nothing wrong with my inner voice. In fact it runs all the time, I cannot turn it off. It talks all the time. Other people call it thinking. In my case my inner voice is trapped inside of my body. Yes, I do tend to answer people with my

inner voice when they speak'.

Kylie typifies what is best in adult learners. She is motivated, enthusiastic, determined, is keen to express her opinions and has a great sense of humour.

Wendy Stothers – ACAL Executive

Kylie says

TAFE Tasmania's teachers really are the cream of the crop. After getting to know me they found out I was very determined and motivated. However sometimes I lack confidence so they have POWER BOOST TALKS with me which drives me to succeed. The TAFE teachers really have the ability to make each student feel special. Now I am doing several computing classes and also an Adult Tertiary Preparation course at TAFE with another wonderful teacher Sandra O'Neill who is my company for the day. Special thanks must go to my mother, father and family for their support and also my year 10 and 11 English teacher Dianne Carington Smith and my year 10 Maths teacher Jenny Seaton. They brought out the best of my capabilities so I can continue my educational quest which is hopefully enrolling at the university next year.

news snippets



***"... there's nothing wrong
with my inner voice."***

Adult literacy innovative projects

Tracey Murphy is the Assistant Director of the Adult Literacy Policy and Programmes Section of DEST. Tracey tells us about the completion of a number of Innovative Projects funded in 2004. Full access to the respective projects' final reports and other supporting documentation will be available shortly on the DEST website at www.dest.gov.au/literacynet.

Parents as Literacy Support – Stella Maris College

PALS (Parents as Literacy Support) project was a collaborative, cross-sectoral partnership between an Stella Maris College and a Manly-Warringah Pittwater Family Support Service: a women's community centre in Sydney. The objectives of the project were to:

- assist a group of mothers to achieve a functional level of English literacy and numeracy so that they are able to play a role in the development of the English literacy and numeracy skills of their pre-school age children.
- empower these women to access information and services related to child development, education and health.
- build esteem and increase confidence on the part of the mothers in English literacy and numeracy practice so that they can further engage with their local community and school and feel that they belong to a community which respects their needs.

Participants indicated they had derived a lot of benefit from the PALS program, not only in terms of the development of their reading and writing ability but also in their knowledge of the Australian school system and in their ability to assist in their children's literacy and numeracy development.

Skills for living programme – Bremer TAFE

The St Vincent De Paul Family Support Centre of Inala in Queensland approached Bremer TAFE seeking assistance in helping their clients to be less reliant upon their services.

The clientele needed assistance with basic living skills and there was some concern that the low literacy levels and commensurate low self-esteem intimidated the students and prevented them from either engaging in or finishing a course. In response to this Bremer TAFE devised a short practical course to

- minimise the clients' anxiety
- provide them with a positive learning experience
- help them take more control of their lives in relation to budgeting and preparation of food.

The course chosen was developed from the module Literacy for a Personal Focus from the Certificate I in Vocational Access 15051. This module has six outcomes and its structure informed Bremer TAFE's decision to run the course for six weeks, addressing 1 outcome each week. Ten clients started the course and all ten clients finished the course. The course feedback was overwhelmingly positive, resulting in further requests from community groups in the Inala area for similar courses.

Linking literacy to information literacy - Newcastle region library

This was a pilot project targeted to adult Aboriginal learners which combined literacy teaching with information literacy teaching in a public library setting. Based around the theme of family history, the selected course content of the project was culturally affirming for participants and appropriate to their needs.

The objectives for this project were to:

- improve the literacy and information literacy skills of participants
- demonstrate the practical applications of these skills
- allow participants to become familiar with the library and its services
- build partnerships between the Aboriginal community and the library.

Participants benefited from the project in a multitude of ways: their literacy skills were tested and built upon, they became familiar and comfortable in the library, they learnt how to find and use information to achieve set tasks, and benefited from the cross-generational social interaction. The project also enabled the library to build valuable and lasting partnerships with Aboriginal organisations and community members. This is a project that could be easily replicated throughout Australia by public libraries who wish to provide targeted training opportunities for their Aboriginal communities.

Tracey Murphy

Literacy Live ACAL's electronic newsletter

Literacy Live is ACAL's electronic newsletter with links and short, sharp national and state news. It's available to anyone interested in adult literacy and numeracy and emailed quarterly.

To receive a copy just email acal@pacific.net.au with your name and 'Literacy Live Subscribe' in the subject line. It's completely different material to *Literacy Link*, the quarterly print newsletter you're reading now.

Making a Difference: Adult Learners' Week at Barrier Reef TAFE

The theme for Adult Learners' Week (1st – 8th September, 2005) at the City Campus of Barrier Reef TAFE in Far North Queensland was 'Making a Difference'. The theme was developed by a working group of adult literacy students, in collaboration with their teacher. The idea to host activities as a community event was developed over several months, with planning and preparations beginning 2 months prior to the community event. The connection between adult learning and the theme 'Making a Difference' can be encapsulated in the concept of adult literacy as a vehicle for personal empowerment and community access. It also incorporates the notion that learning is more than knowledge and skill, it encompasses our attitudes, views and values. The learners developed a 'Tree of Knowledge' display showcased their thoughts on what adult learning meant to them; highlighting important concepts of learning such as taking risks, dialogue, links in the chain, learning as a part of life, independence and critical thinking.

At first, our literacy students were so enthused that they wanted to include a number of different activities in different locations. However, the planning, logistics, time and effort required to carry out this project plan were discussed and it was agreed by all to focus on 2 main activities: a BBQ and guest speakers from a variety of local and community organisations speaking on the connections between adult learning and literacy. The planning and preparation of the project developed as part of the literacy students' project work and included the design and printing of invitations to guest speakers, the construct of the Tree of Knowledge, working rosters, meeting minutes, itineraries, the design and printing of certificates of appreciation, website postings, Powerpoint presentations about adult learners entitled 'Who am I?', and the scripting a radio announcements aired on local radio. Some students chose to present their creative writing as guest speakers at the BBQ & community day event.

A numeracy display and quiz activities were designed and presented by TAFE numeracy teacher Checha Chacko generated considerable interest and participation. Most interesting were the guest and student comments about the week's activities, these were recorded in a guest log:

'I thort it was a very eye cashing display'(sic),

'Thank you so much for your time and your stories',

'Anyone who missed this morning, missed something very special'

'Today has shown learning and fun can go hand in hand'

'Congratulations on the great event today...we are all adult learners'.



The Tree of Knowledge display at Townsville City Council Library



Nothing like a BBQ!

A significant aspect of the community day was the interesting range of guest speakers: Alistair McDonald, a literacy tutor and volunteer tutor for 5 years at BRITAFE, spoke about being a what it meant to work with adult learners in literacy. Andrew Scholl, a BRITAFE and local High School teacher and author spoke about the process of becoming a writer and what it took to publish his own book. Dr. Jo Balatti from James Cook University gave a snapshot of her research into adult literacy programs; highlighting cultural capital outcomes. Renee White is an IT teacher at BRITAFE she spoke about her journey as an adult learner and the impact of technology on modern day learning.

Anita Berry, President of The Writers in Townsville Society, talked about how easy it is to become a writer, if it is a passionate interest and how a Writers' Society could support budding authors' development and publication.

The success of these events was the result of the concerted efforts of the working party and staff, volunteer tutors and students. The event has helped to promote the importance and significance of learning for adults accessing educational opportunities in our local community. This celebration offered a significant opportunity for students to meet community access outcomes to plan, organise and host a community event. Their learning was much more than improved reading and writing skills; it enabled people to feel valued within the community and have access to our cultural capital.

Margaret Crowther and Alistair McDonald

news snippets

New NCVER project: Mapping community adult literacy and numeracy provision in Australia 2006

According to the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), over the last decade the contribution of non-formal, non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy (ALLN) programs has been overshadowed by the focus on accredited training and registered training providers. With the support of a research grant from NCVER Dr Darryl Dymock is to map literacy and numeracy provision in community settings in Australia. Darryl tells Literacy Link readers a bit about the project and how they can help.

The purpose of this community adult literacy and numeracy provision mapping project is to obtain as full a picture as possible of non-accredited ALLN provision across Australia. In addition to basic demographic data about the students, information will be obtained about their motivations and outcomes, about what forms of assessment, if any, are used, and about pathways to other education, training and employment, and about quality control and professional development. The results will provide the first comprehensive national profile of this important sub-sector.

I will be working part-time on the project under the auspices of the Centre for Learning Research at Griffith University, Brisbane. With the support of the Caboolture Community Adult Literacy Group based in the northern suburbs of Brisbane an initial questionnaire will be developed and piloted for the study. An invited national reference group will oversee the project, along with a monitoring panel from NCVER.

Literacy Link readers may well be aware that Australian non-accredited ALLN programming is typically offered

through community organisations. One of the challenges of mapping this sub-sector is ensuring that the diversity of community organisations' practices is sufficiently captured. This project is driven by the fact that Australia does not have a sufficient picture of the importance and value of non-accredited ALLN programs. Without this information the contribution of non-accredited provision to overall ALLN provision in Australia can not be sufficiently acknowledged or adequately supported. One of the key research questions is how community agencies can best be assisted to maintain, expand and improve their services to ALLN learners and extend this positive impact to the wider community.

The project team will be undertake a national survey of all potentially eligible organisations in 2006, working as much as possible through umbrella organisations to try to make the survey results as comprehensive as possible. The ways language, literacy and numeracy provision are defined within the types of programs delivered is problematic for researchers trying to identify and reach all ALLN 'providers'. Consequently, the project team is also appealing for advice from individual people, organisations and clusters for the contact details of other organisations that might otherwise be overlooked.

In addition to the survey, which will be in the form of a short questionnaire, beginning in February 2006, the project team will be undertaking interviews with a small number of selected providers, from several states and across different types of organisations, with an urban/rural mix. Regular progress reports to NCVER are part of the process between December 2005 and completion of the final report in September 2006.

The outcomes of the project have important implications for policy and planning at local, regional and national levels. I am keen to hear from any individuals or organisations who might want to be involved, or offer comments or suggestions. I can be contacted by email: d.dymock@griffith.edu.au or by telephone: 07 3716 0372.

Darryl Dymock was Secretary of ACAL in its formative years and undertook the first national survey of adult literacy provision in Australia, which was published by ACAL in 1982. He now works in Brisbane as a researcher, writer/ editor and as a part-time lecturer in adult and vocational education at Griffith University.

Darryl Dymock

Food for thought: a personal view

◀ PAGE 8 efficient (and socially productive) would it be to build on learner strengths and needs to produce better outcomes for society? This is summarised by a mature-aged LLN client: 'I came along for help with my English and all they wanted was to get me a job. I don't *need* a job, but I do need better English to help with Meals-on-Wheels'. We need a good strong evidence-base for policy and provision in LLN, and we just don't have it.

It seems to me that there is a difference between, on the one hand, *targeting resources* to the point in the delivery of services which will produce the best outcomes, and, on the

other hand, *paying by outcomes*. The former has a greater chance of achieving the desired outcome and, frankly, is no more difficult or costly to carry out. But we do need to know what the demand is so we can better tailor policy, strategies and resources to supplying those demands. In this way, we can more effectively and realistically plan to achieve an outcome whereby adult language, literacy and numeracy provision in any context is designed to enhance engagement with existing and new networks not only for work, but for social cohesion, family, community and leisure pursuits.

Dear Editor

I have read with interest the article submitted by James Plumridge for Literacy Link of October 2005: *Why CGEA teachers don't need (and probably shouldn't have) Certificate IV in training and assessment*. Firstly, my background does not include 'teaching' qualifications. I 'only' hold Cert IV in Training and Assessment (TAA40104), and have been delivering this qualification (or its earlier equivalents) for various employers to various students from a variety of backgrounds since the mid 90s. There are many points that Mr Plumridge makes that I consider to be quite valid – particularly in regard to the implementation of Training Packages, and the clarification that the CGEA is not, in fact a Training Package.

My thoughts are that we need to take into account that the CGEA is a qualification for 'adults', and therefore that it is delivered to 'adults' and in an 'adult learning environment'. Having worked with many, and trained many individuals who hold 'teaching' qualifications, I find (in general) that they have great difficulty implementing 'adult learning principles' due to the methods they themselves have learned, and particularly if they have been working in a secondary school system for a period of time. Let us keep in mind, that the CGEA will (generally) be delivered to adults who did not succeed in a high school environment, and therefore are a target group which we can expect to have fear and anxiety about learning. If 'teachers' of this qualification, approach

this target group with a 'teaching' mentality, and do not work hard at implementing adult learning principles, then the students worst fears can be confirmed. The bottom line is, that if a student with negative schooling experiences approaches an adult learning environment that is similar to their negative school experiences, a sub-conscious wall immediately goes up – a barrier to learning. I believe that the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment offers 'teachers' an opportunity to learn about 'adults' as learners, and to hopefully look outside of the square – particularly when it comes to difficult behaviours (usually stemming from negative learning experiences in the students past). I believe that 'teachers' AND 'trainers' of adult qualifications, should always be open to learning new things. I think that when we sit back and think we can't learn something new, that it could be time to rethink our career path. So Mr Plumridge believes that 'CGEA teachers, for their part, have little if anything to gain from doing Certificate IV...' I actually believe that CGEA teachers have the most to gain from doing Certificate IV.

Thank you
Jacqui O'Callaghan
Training Coordinator
Upper Hunter Training
uht@uhcs.org.au

◀ **PAGE 10** *two full levels and before that he had not made any progress. He came to GED for 14 years and would stop, and start, and get frustrated. He said, "I did better. I didn't think I could do that.*

(Adult educator)

Notably one learner commented on his sense of accomplishment in being able to tell the microphone what to do when creating texts using voice recognition. He felt a strong sense of control over his learning as he could demand the microphone to turn on and off. For learners who have felt out of control, and the victims of bad learning experiences, the emotion and sentiment of these observations are extremely powerful.

I love that mike. You tell it on and off and it kicks on. Sometimes I have to tell it three times to go off. Have to say "Mike Off" I had to say it hateful that was the only bad thing. I loved it when it responded to my voice. It made me feel like an important person.

Implication for future instruction

Educators at four sites agreed that ROW has the potential to replace the approach traditionally used with beginning readers. It was seen as being flexible and learner centred.

ROW is deliberately designed to allow the learner to select from a variety of opportunities and was never intended to be a hierarchy of skills learned in sequential order. It was suggested at all sites that the program be made available for home use. It was reinforced many times that not only would this be beneficial to the learner but also for the learner's family. Children could read along with parents using the screen readers and the activities could be completed together. In addition, the voice recognition software could be used to create accounts of family events to be shared.

ROW is a successful instructional aid that opens up new possibilities for learning to read. It creates options for learners and takes them into 'new worlds' of print, literacy and success.

'You got me going now':
Read on the Web

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