

## Outstanding contributions to Adult Literacy and Numeracy

*On the 24th of August this year, an award ceremony for the Minister's Awards for Outstanding Contributions to Improving Literacy and/or Numeracy was held at the NSW Art Gallery in Sydney. The awards were presented by Dr Brendan Nelson, the Federal Minister for Education Science and Training and recognise the personal commitment and outstanding achievement of 5 individuals who have worked to improve literacy and/or numeracy skills in their community. This year's recipients included adult literacy practitioners Robyn Jay, Vione Jorgensen and Nancy Veal.*

### Robyn Jay



Robyn has been working in adult literacy since the early 1990s, leaving the school sector to work with Skillshare, TAFE, ACE, private providers, and also the Higher Education sector teaching in Education and VET post-graduate courses.

Robyn provided support to ELLN teachers and programs across the (ACE) Community Colleges on the North Coast of NSW. That took in around 16 individual colleges between the Qld border and Taree in the south. She used LearnScope funds to develop skills in the use of new technologies to enrich teaching practice. 'We've played with digital cameras, video, PowerPoint, Digital Storytelling, online meeting rooms etc. I was nominated for this Award by Joneen Troup on behalf of the Mid North Coast Colleges.' Robyn told Literacy Link.

Unfortunately reduced ACE funding in NSW meant that regional support roles disappeared. Robyn is now Project Officer for NSW LearnScope based in the TAFE NSW International Centre for VET Teaching and Learning. 'I guess it's a natural progression for me although I do miss ELLN at times! I'd like to see more ELLN programs and teachers making use of LearnScope funds - it's such a wonderful PD program ... you're able to really focus in on the particular aspects of technology that are relevant for you and your learners.'

In 2003 Robyn won a Flexible Learning Leader scholarship and focussed on multimedia/multimodal strategies and tools; things like Digital Storytelling which combined digital images with voice and music into a short mini-movie. 'Digital Stories are a real passion for me. They're pretty addictive! Once you've made one you can't stop. We're

really just starting to investigate how the methodology can be used in our teaching programs but it's pretty clear that they make good use of a true multimodal approach to teaching and learning,' Robyn said.

In 2003 Robyn established the national Technology in Literacy (AL-T) network with Michael Chalk, to connect teachers nationally and she is currently the Secretary of the ACAL Executive. Her latest project is in association with Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre in Victoria. This project sees the establishment of a new virtual meeting room for ELLN teachers nationwide to meet, learn, share and debate.

Robyn Jay hopes the award will enable her to support ELLN teachers to upskill and expand their teaching programs through their explorations into ICT. ▶

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Robyn Jay commented 'The money will enable me to continue my work on the ACAL Executive. We're all volunteers so taking leave and getting to events can get pretty costly. I'm also keen to present at the 2006 Learning Conference which would be out of the question without financial support. Perhaps I will upgrade some of my multimedia hardware/software so I can further my work. ICT is wonderful but is continually evolving. Staying up to date is a bit of a challenge.'

### Vione Jorgensen

Vione currently works with the over 50's who want to learn computer skills but her longstanding involvement in community work means that she has formed associations with all levels of the formal teaching sectors from pre-schools to universities. She has an interest in collaborative, intergenerational learning.

Vione has been associated with a number of intergenerational learning projects. Her current project is to link University of Queensland students who have computing expertise with members of a local Seniors Association. These older learners are enthusiastically learning a new language and new technical skills. Email addresses were exchanged and friendships formed as this community of learners bridged generational and digital divides. Learners have declared they thoroughly enjoy the contact and interaction with their tutors as they catch up on today's technology, living examples of life-long learning in action.

Recently, a widowed senior student offered part time accommodation to an impoverished university student in return for computer tuition. A firm friendship was formed proving conclusively that intergenerational interaction was indeed a most worthwhile learning experience

At a suburban Community Centre in Queensland, TAFE offered literacy classes that attracted migrant and Australian-born mature age students who wanted to improve their reading, comprehension, speaking and writing. Once a week, this literacy group would go into the local primary school library to read the children stories. Sometimes the group would read to pre-schoolers, and sometimes they would be read to. 'The benefits were reciprocal, but I suspect the adults were slightly ahead with their pride in themselves, knowing how highly their efforts were valued, and knowing how their skills were enhanced.' said Vione.



Vione with the Minister, Dr  
Brendan Nelson

She explains, 'There is nothing new about 'Intergenerational Learning'. Knowledge has always been transmitted from one generation to another throughout history. Though today I believe the interaction needs to be more collaborative than it may have been previously. Every teacher will have had exciting experiences in this area.'



### Ms Nancy Veal

Nancy is the Head of the Department for Access Education at the Canberra Institute of Technology. Nancy has worked for the past 27 years in the literacy and numeracy field as teacher, resource developer, manager and activist.

Nancy's work is extremely varied. She is involved in the programming and delivery of programs for literacy and numeracy for people in the community who want to develop their skills. This includes many different kinds of people. Some are quite young, some are mature age, some have disabilities, some returning to the workforce, some coping with the demands of a changing workforce.

Nancy develops resources to support new apprentices (and pre-apprentices) in vocational training. The resources she's produced have significantly improved completion rates particularly in the trades areas. Nancy is actively engaged in community initiatives and is a member of the Adult Community Education Council, the Board of the Hindmarsh Education Centre and the board of Senior Secondary School Studies Curriculum.

'Apart from program directed activity, I am also involved with the ongoing development of the National Reporting System, contributing to its publication in 1996, and in re-working the Numeracy indicators of competence for publication at the end of 2005.'

Nancy has been involved in setting directions and policy for the literacy and numeracy field in Australia through her work as ACAL's ACT representative. She was President of the Australian Council of Adult Literacy for two terms. She is a strong advocate for numeracy to be recognised as an important and empowering life skill.

Nancy Veal will use the award money to undertake further research and document successful literacy and numeracy strategies to assist disadvantaged youth, apprentices and trainees achieve vocational goals. Nancy explains, 'This award has an important impact because it's going to someone in the Adult Literacy and Numeracy field, a field little recognised for its work. The funding will be used to develop distance learning packages for apprentices who are unable to take advantage of the program support we offer at the Canberra Institute of Technology because they come from areas far away.'

With funding increasingly linked to VET outcomes and accredited enrolments, anything that highlights the broader needs of adult literacy learners is great. Awards that highlight new definitions of literacy or multi-literacies and the vital place of technology are a bonus.

Congratulations to these tireless workers. For more information on the awards, and the other recipients visit: [http://www.literacyandnumeracy.gov.au/2005/ministers\\_awards\\_2005.htm](http://www.literacyandnumeracy.gov.au/2005/ministers_awards_2005.htm)

# Henry Sprays it Safe

*Henry Sprays it Safe is a new resource. The CD ROM and Trainer Guide assist market gardeners with chemical spraying. It was funded by Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) Programme in the Department of Education Science and Training. It has been developed to assist market gardeners with chemical spraying. CLAIRE WRIGHT tells more.*

The resource aims to support the development of the language, literacy and numeracy skills required for a number of key units of competency common to Conservation and Land Management; Rural Production and Amenity Horticulture Training Packages.

These units relate to the safe handling, storage, preparation and application of chemicals at AQF levels I, II and III.

The selected units of competency are:

- Follow basic chemical safety rules
- Apply chemicals under supervision
- Prepare and apply chemicals
- Transport, handle and store chemicals

Storing, mixing and applying chemicals are high risk activities where poor understanding of directions for use, safety requirements or miscalculations may adversely affect production, harm the environment or threaten the wellbeing of workers, consumers and the surrounding neighbourhood. The consequences of incorrect storage or spraying and poor record-keeping also include fines for non-compliance and loss of markets for sale of the produce.

Market gardeners are often sole operators or single person enterprises from language other than English backgrounds. The language, literacy and numeracy demands of the workplace tasks related to chemical use are considerable. Workers must be able to read, understand and interpret chemical labels and Material Safety Data Sheets of highly technical information and keep clear, comprehensive written records of chemicals storage and spraying details.

In 2004 the Access and General Education Curriculum

Centre at TAFE NSW conducted National Centre for Vocational Education and Training (NCVER) funded research into how numeracy was learnt on the job by chemical sprayers<sup>1</sup>. The research was carried out by Gail FitzSimons and Susan Micek. The research

found that workplace numeracy differs greatly from formal school maths. Key numeracy tasks for chemical sprayers include calibrating equipment (i.e. setting equipment to spray chemical in the right way and in the right amount) and calculating the amount of chemical and water required to spray a given area of crop. To undertake these tasks successfully, workers must draw on technical understanding and must take into account a range of complex variables such as the walking speed of sprayer, spray width of equipment, density of spray, coverage required, weather conditions etc. The research also indicated the need for the learning and application of the numeracy processes to be specific to each individual and every workplace context.

This research was one source of information for the development of the resource. The numeracy tasks are covered in depth and are quite specific to the context of chemical spraying in a small sole operator market garden. The learning activities and tasks are drawn from an analysis of the industry units of competency, from site visits to market gardens, interviews with chemical trainers and market gardeners as well as consultations with bilingual support officers in the field. ▶



**Literacy Link** (ISSN 0158-3026) is the newsletter of the Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL), a voluntary organisation set up in 1976 to support the development of adult literacy, numeracy and basic education in Australia.

ACAL promotes co-operation among interested organisations and individuals, both government and non-government, by undertaking and encouraging appropriate study, research and action.

**Literacy Link** is distributed FREE—for your copy contact ACAL [acal@pacific.net.au](mailto:acal@pacific.net.au). Back issues are available from the ACAL website: [www.acal.edu.au](http://www.acal.edu.au)

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## The CD ROM

The learning sequences and activities have been based around the everyday work of a small enterprise market garden and involve three characters: Henry and Joe are both market gardeners, and Charlie is a chemical re-seller. For authenticity, all three speak English with an accent.

There are 5 sections on the CD ROM, which take the learner through an entire spraying sequence; from identifying the pest, discussing options with a chemical re-seller and reading important parts of the chemical label, transporting and storing chemicals, checking and calibrating equipment, mixing, spraying, cleaning up after spraying and keeping records.

The learner follows Henry, as he deals with the problem of 'Bluefly' on his lettuces. He gets help from Charlie in choosing an appropriate chemical and in transporting the chemical home. Henry gets help from Joe his neighbour in calibrating his equipment for spraying. He then successfully sprays his lettuces. Throughout this sequence of events, Henry seeks help from the learner/user with particular tasks related to his lettuces and other crops on his farm.

While the characters and activities are as authentic as possible, it should be noted that the chemicals, pests and diseases are not. This decision was made because if real chemicals had been used, and there were subsequent changes to the concentration of these chemicals, the calculations carried out on the CD ROM would give incorrect amounts.

The largest and most in-depth section is the one on Calibration. This section covers:

- finding information from the chemical label
- taking measurements
- calibrating equipment
- calculating the amount of chemical per tank / knapsack
- calculating how much chemical is needed to spray an area.

Each part in the process has been broken into small chunks. This is to ensure that the learner has the opportunity to gain an understanding of the process and to develop the required skills in small manageable steps. There is a practice activity to reinforce the learning at every step. In the practice activities learners are given hints. If they give an incorrect response, they have the opportunity to try again. With a third incorrect response they are given the correct answer, so they can continue through the activity.

The learner will also learn and practice beginner computer skills while undertaking the activities on the CD ROM. Navigation has been kept very simple with only a few basic computer actions required. The 'How to use' the CD ROM explains these, and all learners should be directed to use this section before starting the program. However it is possible that some learners may require additional trainer guidance when first using the program.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The full report of *Learning numeracy on the job: A case study of chemical handling and spraying*, by Gail FitzSimons and Susan Mlcek will be available from the NCVER website at <http://www.ncver.edu.au>

## Other features of the resource

Throughout the CD ROM, hints are provided at specific points, for additional information or tips about the topic. These can be accessed by clicking on a flashing red spot on the tool bar. There are a number of printable sheets which can be accessed from the CD ROM itself. These sheets can also be photocopied from the Trainer guide.

These printable sheets include key record sheets on calculation; calibration; spray application and storage. These record sheets are modelled on those currently used in the industry. These are used by the characters in the CD ROM and by learners as they work through the activities.

Where there is a lot of information to be given, one-page summary information sheets can be printed for further reference. There are also a range of information sheets on safe transportation, clean up and wind speeds.

Maths worksheets are provided to assist learners to develop and practice the maths skills required for the calculations in chemical spraying. These relate directly to the activities on the CD ROM and include measurement (length and volume) conversions.

A glossary is provided for learners and is also included in the Trainer guide. It could be photocopied for learners if appropriate.

## The Trainer guide

The CD ROM is accompanied by a Trainer guide which includes detailed information for trainers about the contents of each section of the CD ROM, and how each section relates to the industry units of competency. A large number of related resources which may complement the use of this resource are listed with a brief description.

All the printable sheets from the CD ROM are provided in the Trainer guide to let trainers make copies for discussion and use prior to doing the activities on the CD ROM. The recording and calculation sheets can also provide evidence of learner's competence.

Learning Achievement Checklists are provided so that the learner's achievements can be recorded and used as evidence for assessment against the units of competency, along with the calculation and recording sheets completed in the activities.

For further information on this resource contact Claire Wright, Program Manager, Numeracy Mathematics and Science Access and General Education Curriculum Centre Phone: 61 2 9846 8105 [claire.wright@tafensw.edu.au](mailto:claire.wright@tafensw.edu.au).



# Why CGEA teachers don't need (and probably shouldn't have) Certificate IV in training and assessment

*One of the goals in ACAL's Workplan for 2005 is to promote discussion about professional standards and qualifications in adult literacy and numeracy teaching. JAMES PLUMRIDGE's article included here presents a personal view about the role and impact of the Training and Assessment Certificate IV on the professional skills of teachers of literacy and numeracy. ACAL anticipates that this view may provoke strong feelings in one form or another and we encourage you to become involved in a national discussion.*

*If you want to become involved you could:*

- *write a letter to the Editor for the next edition of Literacy Link;*
- *write an article giving your own views and submit this for publication;*
- *join a discussion on the Literacy Live forum at <http://www.groups.edna.edu.au/course/view.php?id=221>*
- *get together in the Literacy Live virtual meeting room to discuss this topic.*

It should concern literacy teachers that some RTOs may be recruiting unqualified people to teach the Certificate in General Education for Adults (CGEA) apparently in the mistaken belief that having Certificate IV in Training and Assessment plus a non-teaching qualification suffices for that purpose. Hardly less concerning is the insistence that literacy teachers should waste time and resources obtaining Certificate IV when they could be upgrading their qualifications to include postgraduate degrees or diplomas relevant to the teaching of literacy and numeracy.

This article is meant to provoke discussion of both issues and regarding the second issue suggest an alternative requirement on which RTOs would be fully entitled to insist. The basis of the argument advanced here is the idea that those responsible either as teachers or managers for teaching literacy and numeracy via the CGEA must adhere to the spirit as well as the letter of the document. Nothing less will do.

## The CGEA is not a training package

Unlike a training package, the CGEA is not a vocational qualification. It is 'a curriculum framework for a general education course allowing flexible and customised programs to meet the needs of a range of client groups' (Butcher et al. 2002 p.7). It provides pathways into education and/or vocational training but has no vocational outcomes of its own.

By contrast, training package qualifications are awarded 'through direct assessment of workplace competencies'; training 'suits individual and industry requirements' and must encourage 'learning and assessment in a work-related environment which leads to verifiable workplace outcomes' (ANTA 2004 p.1). Further to this 'Each unit of competency [in a training package] identifies a discrete workplace requirement' (ANTA 2004 p. 2).

Training packages as a rule require precise performance and assessment of tightly defined vocational competencies in relatively predictable workplace contexts. They are designed to bring trainees up to workplace standards of competence. By contrast, the CGEA involves the acquisition of techniques of literacy and numeracy but also

critical and reflective skills applicable to an undefined range of relatively unpredictable cultural, intellectual and practical problems and settings.

The CGEA, while having 'no formal on-the-job training component' (Butcher et al. 2002 p.23), allows students to undertake workplace related modules from training packages as elective modules. In such cases, students are assessed with respect to those options by content specialists rather than literacy/numeracy (CGEA) teachers.

## What qualifies lecturers to teach or to train?

Certificate IV in Training and Assessment was designed to qualify content specialists who are not trained teachers to undertake the instruction of apprentices and trainees. It is neither a substitute for, nor equivalent to, a teaching qualification as awarded formerly by teachers' colleges and nowadays by universities. Qualified teachers are already expert in the teaching and assessment procedures required for teaching the CGEA.

The AQF Implementation Handbook (AQF 2002) clarifies the difference in standing between Certificate IV and a bachelor's degree. Obtaining a bachelor's degree in any field means acquiring 'in significant depth' what the handbook describes as 'a systematic and coherent body of knowledge' (AQF 2002 p.9). It involves the development of research skills and provides a direct pathway to postgraduate studies and/or a professional career, such as teaching. Most teachers hold such degrees.

A qualification at the level of Certificate IV places much more limited demands on candidates. Instead of having to acquire 'a systematic and coherent body of knowledge', candidates need only to 'demonstrate understanding of a broad knowledge base incorporating some theoretical concepts' and to apply their skills and knowledge 'to a wide variety of contexts with depth in some areas' (AQF 2002 p.33). The qualification has vocational but no direct professional outcomes. It does not enable TAFE lecturers to teach in schools. It is not a precursor to a teaching degree nor does it qualify lecturers to teach literacy and numeracy to students enrolled in general education courses. ▶

**JAMES PLUMRIDGE** is a former teacher, teacher educator and TAFE CGEA teacher and manager. As well as Certificate IV, he has degrees (including a Ph D) in Education and an MA in Applied Linguistics. He now works as a consultant on language and education issues and retains an interest in developing the professional skills of teachers.

## Teachers Are Not Trainers

The CGEA advocates that the teaching of reading, writing, oracy and numeracy should be undertaken by qualified teachers, preferably with postgraduate qualifications and corresponding specialist skills 'in adult education, literacy and/or numeracy' (Butcher et al. 2002 p. 25). We would not appoint somebody with a teaching qualification to lecture in Certificate III in Hospitality merely because they cook chops nicely or do a good Caesar salad at a barbecue. Teachers, unless also vocationally qualified, are not trainers. Likewise, being able to read and write, even very well, is not the same thing as being able to teach literacy to adults, which requires a teaching degree and additional specialist qualifications and skills.

## Trainers Are Not Teachers

By the same token, trainers are not teachers. In this respect, AQTF Standard 7 lacks clarity regarding the teaching and assessing of AQF qualifications (like general education or literacy/numeracy courses) that do not aim to produce industry outcomes.

Standard 7 says that RTOs must ensure that training (it does not mention teaching) is conducted by people who have particular elements of Certificate IV (or can demonstrate equivalent competencies) as well as vocational qualifications or competencies at least equivalent to the level at which they are lecturing. This should not be taken to mean that a person who has attained, say, Certificate III in the CGEA (or any other TAFE qualification) and Certificate IV in Training and Assessment is thereby qualified to teach any certificate of the CGEA. The CGEA requires a much higher level of qualification from teachers.

Standard 7 has been interpreted as requiring all TAFE lecturers, including CGEA teachers, to have attained at least part of Certificate IV as a condition of their continuing employment. However, it is clear from the wording of the standard that a person who can demonstrate qualifications or competencies equivalent to (or, by extension, at a higher level than) Certificate IV fulfils the requirements of Standard 7 (see ANTA, 2005 p.9). A teaching degree or postgraduate diploma in education is not only a higher level qualification, it is also a prerequisite for teaching literacy and numeracy and, so far as non-specialist pedagogical skills and knowledge are concerned, sufficient for that purpose. CGEA teachers who hold such qualifications, and are solely engaged in teaching literacy and numeracy, do not need Certificate IV. Unlike vocational lecturers, teachers without Certificate IV cannot for that reason be required to work under the supervision of colleagues who have it.

Moreover, Standard 7 refers throughout to 'training', 'trainers' and 'assessors'. Teachers do not 'deliver training', in the sense conveyed by the wording of Standard 7. The job of CGEA teachers is to educate adults in a general sense and on a broad front, not instruct in specific workplace competencies. Nor do teachers 'assess' in the same way as vocational lecturers. Assessment is involved in the teaching of literacy and numeracy, but the form, purpose and direction of that assessment differ in important ways from the assessment of workplace competencies.

## Teachers are not 'assessors'

CGEA students are not like vocational students. To begin with, they do not have direct vocational reasons for enrolling in further education. Some want to complete the qualification so they can go on to enrol in specific vocational qualifications in TAFE or take the first step on the ladder to university studies. Others want to make a career in the armed services or police using Certificate III of the CGEA as an entry qualification. Still others want to learn enough to help their children with homework, or to improve their own standards of literacy and numeracy, not for work or career reasons but for personal empowerment through intellectual, social and cultural enrichment.

Equally, teaching and learning are not the same in CGEA classrooms as in vocational lecture rooms and workshops. Because the CGEA is a curriculum framework not a training package and does not prescribe activities or resources, teachers and students are able to work collaboratively on designing course materials and on ways of finding out how well students are doing. The determining factors here are not the teacher's pre-conceived ideas about what students should be doing or able to do, or prescriptions from a training package, but the needs, wants, interests and inclinations of students as understood by students themselves and discussed and developed with their teachers. CGEA students are involved in customised learning activities, which give rise to assessment opportunities. That is the opposite of what happens in the vocational context, where the needs of industry and the workplace (as defined in training packages) drive what students are required to do, what resources they are exposed to, what activities they undertake, and how they are assessed.

It is therefore impossible to apply the forms and styles of assessment promoted in training packages to CGEA students without distorting the aims, purposes and educative processes of the CGEA. For example, CGEA studies do not have to be (and usually should not be) sequential. Students may begin in any of the domains included in a particular certificate level and move from one

## ACAL AGM

Friday October 14, 2005

4.30pm following the ACAL Forum

The Greek Club, 29 Edmondstone St. South Brisbane QLD 4101

to another, and from learning outcome to learning outcome, according to need or inclination. As the document (Butcher et al. 2002 p. 21) says:

'The curriculum...provides maximum flexibility for the design of a study sequence to suit the specific needs of students. Students may choose to follow one or more streams to whatever level is appropriate for their learning pathways. They may also work at different levels in different streams, depending on their skill level.'

Vocational studies, on the other hand, are more likely to require the cumulative acquisition of knowledge and skills, each stage of training completed and competency acquired dependent on those before.

### **Why CGEA teachers shouldn't have Certificate IV ...**

The training and assessment methods and procedures appropriate to industry-driven training packages have little or no relevance to the CGEA. So far as teaching and learning are concerned, what drives the CGEA is what students want and need to learn, and the process whereby learning outcomes are realized is a creative collaboration between teacher and student working together as equals towards shared educational goals.

As to assessment, the CGEA suggests several assessment methods and insists (like Certificate IV) that assessment 'must be flexible, valid, reliable and fair', allowing students to be assessed as individuals, groups or pairs and states that 'Assessment tasks/activities should be grounded in a relevant context and not culturally biased'. 'Relevant context' here means relevant to the needs and circumstances of the student, not to the needs of industry and the workplace.

There is a danger that CGEA teachers who have completed Certificate IV may, perhaps under management pressure, start to teach and assess students according to the methods and procedures promoted in Certificate IV. They may be misled into thinking that is what they are supposed to do. Not so, but if they are not supposed to do that, why should they bother with Certificate IV?

From the point of view both of CGEA teachers and of RTOs, Certificate IV, while indispensable for vocational lecturers who are not qualified teachers, is a waste of time and resources. However, teachers should not be let off the hook entirely. To teach literacy in the VET sector, a teaching qualification is necessary but not sufficient. RTOs have the right to demand more from teachers as a condition of continuing employment.

### **... What CGEA teachers should have instead**

As previously mentioned, the CGEA stipulates that a teacher should have, in addition to a teaching qualification, postgraduate qualifications and corresponding specialist skills in adult education, literacy and/or numeracy. Study of such topics at postgraduate level would be much more productive for a teacher than a Certificate IV. It might also represent a saving of resources for the RTO.

The least that should be required of a literacy teacher is a Graduate Certificate in linguistics. Better would be a Graduate Diploma in adult literacy and numeracy education or a Master's degree in adult literacy, mathematics education or applied linguistics. These qualifications are offered externally (in some cases, online) by a number of Australian universities. RTOs should be prepared to offer time off and the use of IT facilities to teachers improving their qualifications in this way.

### **Summing Up**

There is nothing capricious in the stipulation that CGEA teachers should, like plumbers, electricians, lawyers, and accountants, be properly qualified in their field. Managers who think otherwise have simply failed to grasp the complexities of this field of expertise and the importance to students and RTOs of 'doing it right'. CGEA teachers, for their part, have little if anything to gain from doing Certificate IV, and nothing to gain that could not be acquired through osmosis merely by a period of exposure to the further education system. On the other hand, students, CGEA teachers and RTOs all have a great deal to gain from the redirection of teachers' energies towards the upgrading of their tertiary qualifications and away from the wasteful and probably counterproductive exercise of obtaining Certificate IV.

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## **ACAL Forum**

### **Rethinking literacies: literacy and numeracy across the domains of social life**

Friday October 14, 2005 • 9am – 4.15pm • The Greek Club, 29 Edmondstone St. South Brisbane QLD 4101

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

# ACAL & ALM conference feedback

## Adult numeracy conference a great success

In early July the numeracy conference *Connecting Voices* was held in Melbourne. The conference, a joint venture of ACAL, the international Adults Learning Mathematics group and the Australasian Bridging Maths Network, proved to be a great success. ACAL was delighted to be part of this partnership.

*Connecting Voices* was the first national and international conference held in Australia about adults learning and using numeracy and maths. The conference covered a range of themes: adults use of mathematics at work, their involvement or pursuit of further study, either vocational or academic at a tertiary level; improving maths skills in order to find employment; or to be more involved as a parent; for personal reasons; or getting passionate about numeracy and mathematics, for a more critical and active participation in their local community or their wider society.

Over 200 participants with almost 50 from overseas countries (NZ, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Spain, Sweden, the UK and the USA) took up the opportunity to attend the conference: connecting with others, networking, catching up on professional development, sharing their experiences, exploring current issues affecting the range of numeracy and mathematics education for adults, meeting Australian and overseas practitioners and researchers, and finding out what people are doing around the globe.

The conference ran over four days with the first two days of the conference addressing issues relevant to literacy, numeracy, English language and vocational education teachers. The third day focused on bridging maths and the final day focused on mathematics and numeracy and their place in society and how this impacts in a political, economic and social justice sense.

The conference was opened by Ruth Cossey of Mills College, Oakland, California who gave an entertaining and thought provoking address entitled 'Mathematics education for social justice: defining a new civil right'. Other key note speakers included Mary Jane Schmitt from TERC, Cambridge, Massachusetts; Janet Taylor and Linda Galligan from the Preparatory and Academic Support Unit of the University of Southern Queensland and Doug Clarke from the Australian Catholic University in Victoria.

Highlights of the conference, beyond Ruth's memorable opening performance included the panel of speakers on Indigenous issues. This was a 'smorgasbord' session which allowed participants to share teaching and learning activities and there was a final panel session in which Keiko Yasukawa, Dave Baker, and Ruth Cossey challenged participants to think about the question 'If we have a

commitment to social justice, what is it in adult numeracy and maths education that we think is worth fighting for?'

ACAL would like to thank all those who contributed to the success of the conference. So many people contributed by speaking, chairing, networking, smorgasbording, listening, responding, not to mention dancing, singing, eating and drinking. Particular thanks goes to the organising committee: Betty Johnston, Beth Marr, Dave Tout, Rosemary Wood, Karen Dymke, Chris Brew and Marj Horne for a very successful, lively and thought-provoking conference. It was a conference that maintained its momentum for all of the four days, one that balanced fun and laughter with passion, challenge and knowledge building and affirmation.

### Just a few comments from participants

*The conference was great and what I really liked was the lack of contrivance, pomp and 'academic-ese' in nearly all the presentations I went to. I also liked the friendliness and informality - well done.*

*Thank you and the team for all the hard work you did in organising the conference. This was the best conference I have attended with a great balance of presentations, wonderful food, terrific company and great fun.*

*I'd like to say that I really enjoyed the 2 days of the conference which I attended. I enjoyed meeting other teachers from around Australia and overseas and gained valuable insights and information about teaching numeracy to adults from the workshops.*

*It was very good, some inspiring, and in a couple of instances, passionate speakers.*

*Refreshing. .... It seems to me that of all the disciplines maths tends to be one of the teaching fields most self-alienated from the broader view.*

*It was great to hear a guy from New Guinea talk about numeracy in logging, and the need for recognition of cultural variants in language and quantifying.*

*The only way to change the status quo was to engage with principles rather than discipline areas, to focus learning on community, environment, fairness, equity.*

*Education should be contextualised to fairtrade rather than freetrade, to inclusiveness and the mathematics of redistribution.*

*Just wanted to say that I had a terrific time at ACAL/ALM and met some great people and ate lots of wonderful food and that generally it was a standout and excellent conference!!!*

**Jan Hagston and Pauline O'Maley**  
ACAL co-Presidents



## Relevant to Whom?

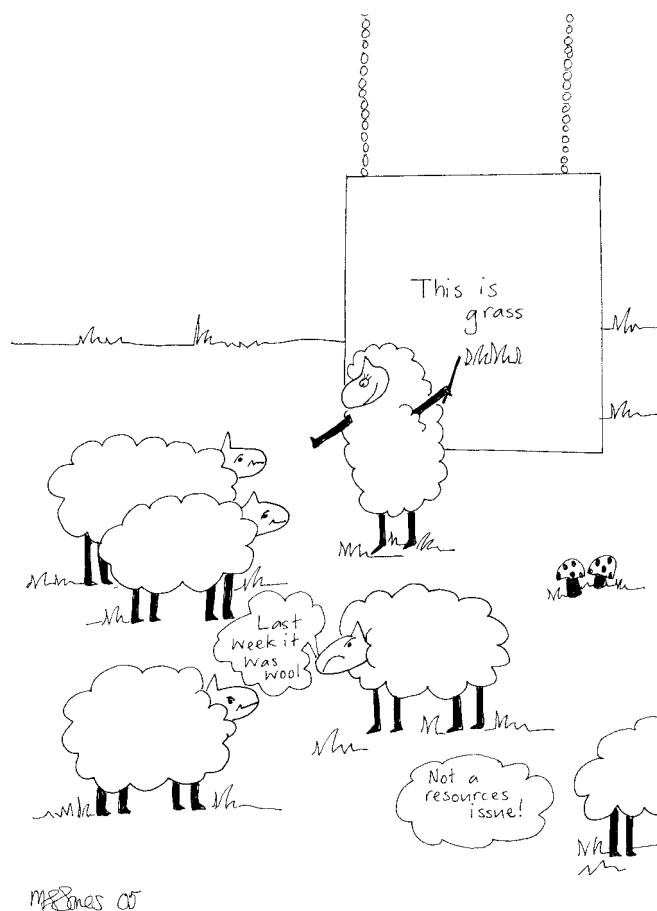
**The question “Whose relevance?” was posed at the conference by Doug Clarke from the Education faculty at the Australian Catholic University. He asked this question in his speech entitled *Current events and learners interests: powerful tools for mathematics learning*. Many of the workshops presented at the conference explored issues of relevance.**

It occurred to me recently that the word relevant may be getting used frequently and understood rarely by Adult Educators. That sounds harsh but it is very important that we take time out to consider what we mean by it and examine the effects our own values, experiences, resources and capabilities have on what we are willing to accept as relevant literacy and numeracy tasks.

One unusual interpretation of ‘relevant’ is a euphemism for proximity. If it’s in the area then it must be relevant right? So if we use the car park or the building across the road as the basis for a task then that will automatically be relevant for students because it’s in or close to where they live. You may well find a worthwhile task using such things but be careful....why is it relevant? Is it the reason your students turned up today? Is it going to help them with the goals they had when they decided to enrol? Are you mistaking close for relevant?

Another pitfall is to believe practical tasks are automatically relevant. By this I mean reassuring ourselves that tasks such as reading phone bills or filling out change of address forms will satisfy the criteria for relevance. They are terrific things to do but if a student can already read their phone bill and is confident with forms then the tasks are not relevant...they are busy work. The same is true of blanket teaching of the basic mathematical operations or where to use full stops to our classes. So what are you supposed to do?

I believe the only thing you can do is create an environment in which the students are owners of their own class and what goes on inside it. To me this means everything is a discussion. The days begin with putting forth ideas and receiving ideas. People must be able to happily express an interest or disinterest and be eagerly encouraged to introduce their own. Sometimes most of the class will have a common goal or topic for the day and at other times everyone is engaged in their own pursuits. In this way chances for working on relevant tasks can be maximised.



It can take a while to create this environment and at times students find it difficult to begin with. The class generally looks very different to previous experiences of schooling. The teacher isn't stuck to the white board and people are not seated in rows. They come and go for tea and coffee or cigarettes. They pop down the shops for morning tea, which they share with the group, they duck off to the library, they go to the local shire or businesses if they think they may be able to help them with an issue and they take the floor if they have something to share or teach others.

Their goals, needs and interests fluctuate – they are adults.

The beauty is that all sorts of things come up as relevant. It may be algebra to help get into a course later on, it may be measurement, it may be job applications, forms, Centrelink letters.....there is no end because nothing falls outside the term relevant if it has been decided as so by the student themselves.

Just some thoughts....

All hate mail can be addressed to me at  
mjones@centacarewa.com.au

**Melissa Jones**

LLNP program teacher  
Centacare Employment and Training

## Literacy Goes Live!

In 2005 ACAL is implementing three eTools to support its strategic directions. The aim is firstly to improve the relevance, accessibility and speed of our communication to the field, and secondly to encourage and support adult literacy practitioners to develop skills in the use of new technologies. ACAL has named this suite of tools *Literacy Live*.

The first two eTools: the online forum and virtual meeting room outlined below, have been funded through a national Flexible Learning Framework eLearning networks project with the generous support of Lynne Matheson and the Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre in Melbourne who are acting as our sponsoring RTO.

The *Literacy Live* forum makes use of an EdNA Group used extensively by VET, community and Higher Education sectors in 2005. The forum is used for planning events, posting links to resources, and asynchronous discussion. You can introduce yourself, ask questions, seek teaching ideas, share great 'finds' and so on. The forum is accessed at <http://www.groups.edna.edu.au/course/view.php?id=221>. To make full use of the Forum you need to register; instructions are available on the site.

The *Literacy Live* meeting room is what is known as a virtual synchronous meeting room. It enables you to talk to others via the web within a private 'room' while also typing messages and viewing files or websites in a shared work space. The meeting room is found at <http://literacylive.ivocalize.net/?p=0>. To speak with others, you need a computer microphone which may be separate, built into your computer or combined with headphones. Headphones enable you to listen to the conversation without disturbing those around you. If this is not an issue, speakers work well, however most people find the combined headphones/mike set is simplest. The equipment is cheap (around \$10-\$20) and easily purchased at any office supply or electronics store.

To use the room you will initially need to download a small piece of software onto your hard drive so that the room can operate. It is accessible to both PCs and MACs. The

process is very straight forward although some workplaces may 'block' access through a firewall. It is possible to talk to technical support staff to have the room made accessible if this does affect you. You shouldn't have this problem via laptops or home computer systems.

ACAL uses the *Literacy Live* meeting room for a number of different meetings as well as for events with online national and international guest presenters. On September 13 ACAL launched the meeting room with an online panel discussion as part of the National Flexible Learning Framework mini-online events *Cool Results in eLearning*. During the session we heard from a selection of adult literacy practitioners who are using technology, in innovative but easy to adopt ways, to enrich their teaching practice and offering to learners.

The room is also available for use free of charge, by any adult literacy team Australia-wide for your own private meetings and events. It's simply a matter of emailing Robyn Jay ([robyn.jay@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:robyn.jay@det.nsw.edu.au)) to make a booking. If you are part of a geographically dispersed network the room may be just what you need! Robyn is also available to provide initial assistance or to meet your group in the room to get things rolling. If the room sounds of interest but you feel a little nervous about trying it out, contact Robyn who will walk you through the process and assist you to get the technology working.

ACAL's third eTool, the *Literacy Live* enewsletter will replace some editions of *Literacy Link*. The enewsletter provides relevant, up-to-date news and links to resources, papers and research etc. The first edition was distributed via ACAL and state based associations' email lists in early September. If you wish to subscribe to the enewsletter email ACAL at [acal@pacific.net.au](mailto:acal@pacific.net.au)

ACAL hopes the eTools will enable teachers to connect and discuss issues and ideas, to access guest presenters, and to obtain support regardless of location or circumstance. *Literacy Live* makes use of email, forums and chat sites selected for their ease of access and range of opportunities. Now it's over to you to make full use of the potential the eTools offer.

**Robyn Jay**  
ACAL Executive

### Dear Editor

The new **Literacy Live** virtual meeting room is already saving ACAL time and money.

The Editorial Committee for this magazine and the new ACAL enewsletter has been using the meeting room instead of teleconferencing for the last month. The phone bill for ACAL is slashed and what's more, we have both audio and written records of the discussion. No-one is having to spend time checking phone numbers and contacting Telstra to organise a conference.

Here in WA, where we are all very conscious of the tyranny of distance, we are already planning to hold some CGEA Moderation meetings in the room. The only thing holding us up at the moment is the difficulty that people experience in accessing the room from their workplaces. Very little is needed by way of hardware: a pair of headphones with a microphone is all that is

needed (\$5 - \$15). More obstructive are the firewalls set up in big organisations. In my own case, I was told by my Department's technical support that "the application was not supported" and that a change of policy would be needed to give me access to it.

However, if you can find a technologically adept person sitting close to you – an ex-programmer, for example – it is possible, in a remarkably short time, to find that s/he has wormed a way through the server into the room. Bryan at the ivocalize support desk is also a very helpful person to contact: [bryan@ivocalize.com](mailto:bryan@ivocalize.com). I would encourage everyone to take the extra time and effort needed to establish contact. The virtual meeting room is out there!

**Margaret McHugh**  
ACAL Executive  
WA state representative.

# Supporting Indigenous VET students

**NARELLE MCGLUSKY is a Project Manager with the Indigenous Studies Product Development Unit at the Tropical North Queensland TAFE in Cairns. Narelle provides some background and findings on an investigation into the support of Indigenous students working in VET.**

The Indigenous Studies Product Development Unit located at Tropical North Queensland TAFE recently undertook a research project to identify the current systems for literacy and numeracy support for both teachers and Indigenous students, in the vocational education and training sector. The project was funded by the Department of Education, Science and Training under the Adult Literacy National Project through the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). The research entitled '*Literacy support for Indigenous people – current systems and practices in Queensland*'<sup>1</sup> has been completed and the final draft report is currently being reviewed by NCVER, prior to publication. This article provides a summary of the research findings.

The aim of the project was to identify and develop concrete, practical information for teachers and administrators, which will lead to improved results for Indigenous students. The study produced a set of best practice guidelines for designing and developing literacy and numeracy support systems.

## Background

Since the introduction of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy by the Commonwealth of Australia in 1989 (AEP), Indigenous participation rates in the vocational education and training sector have increased substantially. However, literature reveals that this is a qualified success as higher numbers of Indigenous students are concentrated in lower level courses and their graduation rates are still considerably less than those of non-Indigenous students. A number of contributing factors were identified for these trends. Difficulties with the literacy and numeracy demands of training were recurring themes. While support systems which can overcome these difficulties exist, they were often underutilised or accessed in an *ad hoc* manner. At times, little consideration was given to matching student needs to the most effective solution. A more coordinated approach needs to be implemented to apply the best practice model for Indigenous adult education to support systems for literacy and numeracy.

A best practice model for Indigenous adult education indicates the need for flexible, innovative and supportive delivery. It promotes the use of co-operative, experiential learning, which acknowledges students' cultural and language background. Indigenous participation in decision making is also considered essential, as is delivery by teachers trained in cross-cultural awareness. For literacy and numeracy programs to succeed they should incorporate relevant features of the best practice model.

## Methodology

Teachers, students and community members were interviewed across Queensland from urban, regional and remote areas. They were selected from three TAFE Qld institutes and one independent RTO at sites in Brisbane, Cairns, Thursday Island, Bundaberg and Mt Isa.

Teachers were delivering both Indigenous-specific and mainstream courses ranging in qualification from Access to Certificate IV. Students were undertaking both Indigenous-specific and mainstream courses, apprenticeships and traineeships and completing courses from Access to Advanced Diploma.

## Best practice model

A best practice model for Indigenous adult education was recently articulated for the VET sector in the publication *Gettin' into it! Working with Indigenous learners*<sup>2</sup>. It is informed by six principles:

- intercultural competence
- respect
- negotiation
- meaningful outcomes
- relationships
- Indigenisation.

These principles acknowledge the need for a culturally supportive environment which is flexible and incorporates the principles of best practice for adult learning.

## Findings

The study identified the organised and coordinated literacy and numeracy support systems available to Indigenous VET students and determined which systems were effective for both teachers and students. The study revealed that a limited number of teachers were utilising learning support centres but that the majority were attempting to deal with support issues in the classrooms. Of the organised and coordinated systems available the most successful were peer tutoring arrangements and in-class tutors.

The majority of teachers interviewed questioned the effectiveness of learning support centres for Indigenous VET students. These types of centres were not always available but when they were, their geographical isolation and hours of operation proved problematic. Students were often reluctant to seek out the assistance available, especially when it is located in an unfamiliar area of an institute. Further, it was difficult to expect students to voluntarily attend sessions out of hours when they had already put in a full day's study. One vocational teacher ►

provided an example where the literacy tutorial was run at 3pm. His students were undertaking block training and his own class did not finish until 5pm. If students opted for the literacy support tutorial they missed out on vital industry content and there was no extra time allowed for them to make up that lesson.

The two forms of literacy and numeracy support for Indigenous VET students, which both teachers and students maintained were effective, were peer tutoring and in-class tutorial support. Peer tutoring both formal and informal, was encouraged and endorsed by many of the teachers that were interviewed. Trained peer tutors were utilised wherever possible, but students with the ability to help their fellow students were also identified and supported. Many students indicated that they relied on informal peer support relationships and networks. In-class tutorial support was advocated as the most effective and successful literacy and numeracy support system for Indigenous VET students. This type of support offered immediate help with both class content, assignments and assessments.

Both teachers and students have identified the relationship between the teacher/tutor and student as one of central importance to successful results. Teachers emphasised that knowing their students well and acknowledging them as adult learners with existing skills and knowledge was essential. Students also required a culturally supportive environment, which accommodated differing perceptions of time, family and community. Recognition of Indigenous languages was important and one teacher demonstrated how the use of Torres Strait Islander Creole words and linguistic conventions could aid students.

The common denominator in the teachers' interviews was the need to contextualise the learning experience for students requiring literacy and numeracy support. Rather than recommending individual resources, they emphasised the need to adapt resources from real life texts to individual student needs. Teachers used relevant material to individualise programs for students within the classroom situation.

## Literacy Live ACAL's new electronic newsletter

*Literacy Live* is ACAL's new 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](mailto: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.

Teachers and students agreed that the most effective delivery method is one-on-one. Teachers explained that this can be accomplished by the use of tutors in the classroom. However, there is concern that changes to the ATAS tutoring program will make this difficult in the future. Students see 'out of class' tutorial support as 'punishment' or 'remedial' and teachers confirmed that students rarely utilised this type of service even if it was readily available. Teachers maintained that small groups are most effective and students expressed concern that large classes make it difficult to get individual attention.

Teachers and community members repeatedly drew attention to the importance of ownership of the training and learning process. Students' input should be sought to determine what they want to get from the learning experience and the program tailored to meet those needs. Community can, and does, identify training needs and cooperation is required between community and the VET sector to ensure relevant programs are put in place.

## Conclusion

The research has confirmed the findings of the literature review with regard to applying the best practice model for Indigenous education to literacy and numerous support systems in VET. It has provided concrete examples of how the best practice model can be implemented while indicating that where difficulties arise, those practices have not been followed. The literature stressed an experiential, cooperative, learner-centred approach delivered in a culturally supportive environment. The learning must be relevant and contextualised as well as culturally appropriate. Teachers advised a holistic approach which was highly visual, slow, cooperative and explicable.

The study has identified in-class tutorial support and peer tutoring as being the most effective forms of literacy and numeracy support for Indigenous VET students. However, it has also identified underlying issues, which are hampering the successful delivery of training to Indigenous VET students, including effective literacy and numeracy support. The allocation of nominal hours, the formulae used to allocate funding, difficulties with ABSTUDY and the inflexibility of the VET system, are all areas of concern.

Teachers showed how a best practice model for Indigenous education can be implemented in a broad range of settings and students confirmed that it works. The consistency of the information from teachers, students and community members from across Queensland and in diverse training programs indicate that the model is effective. The publication of this research will promote the model and ensure practical ways it can be implemented across the VET sector.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> NCVET (in press) *Literacy support for Indigenous people – current systems and practices in Queensland*. Funded under the ANTA Adult Literacy National Project by the Commonwealth through the Department of Education, Science and Training and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research. <http://www.ncver.edu.au/workingprogress/projects/10342.html>

<sup>2</sup> ANTA 2004 *Gettin' into it! Working with Indigenous learners* DEST. Available from Australian Training Products



# NRS Review

Three members of the ACAL Executive met to discuss the *NRS Review Project* with some of the project team. Project team members are Linda Wyse and Kath Brewer from Linda Wyse and Associates, Philippa McLean and Katrina Lyle from CAE, Victoria and Kate Perkins from Kulu. The work, which is Phase 1 of the NRS review project will be finalised before Christmas and it is ACAL's understanding that the project report that goes to DEST will include:

- recommended revisions of the NRS
- two proposed 'layers' of the NRS that summarise or simplify the construction of language, literacy and numeracy competence the NRS embodies for use as communication tools with personnel who are not LLN specialists
- recommendations about possible broader applications of the NRS beyond its original purpose as a reporting mechanism.

It is unclear at this stage what Phase 2 of the project will involve.

The project team conducted a survey of NRS users drawn from the Workplace English and Language and Literacy (WELL) Program, the labour market Language, Literacy and Numeracy

Program (LLNP) and some other LLN practitioners. There were approximately a hundred and fifty responses and the NRS revisions will be informed by an analysis of the questionnaire responses. One question in the survey canvassed the views of these users of the NRS about other possible applications of the NRS by asking them to make selections from a list of possible additional stakeholders.

A round of consultation workshops has already begun and the primary purpose of these consultations is to validate the outcomes of the survey and test the subsequent revisions of the NRS as the reporting tool for use in the DEST-funded programs. There may also be an opportunity for people to comment on a new suite of documents – the 'layers' – based on constructs used in the NRS, that are designed for the purpose of creating clear messages about language, literacy and numeracy competence for a range of other stakeholders that may include, but is not limited to, industry training managers, Centrelink staff, volunteer tutors, industry peak bodies and curriculum developers.

It is unclear at this stage whether the current project has sufficient resources or time to conduct intensive consultations with the full range of additional stakeholders nominated as potential users of the NRS in some form or other. Although not clearly specified at this stage, ACAL understands that there will be further consultations of some kind. It is not clear either how much thinking has gone into an analysis of the problem of transforming a 'reporting' framework, devised with a single purpose in mind, into a multipurpose tool for use in a range of as yet unspecified contexts. The proposals in the project brief suggest that the NRS could be applied as: an assessment

tool; a tool for measuring Employability Skills; or an agreed framework for describing the LL&N competence of the Australian population. Each of these proposals invites a host of questions and, because of the complexity inherent in the NRS – and indeed, in any issues related to language performance – would require that consultations be conducted on a grand scale.

The outcomes of this project could help shape a discussion on how to achieve a consistent national approach to reporting language, literacy and numeracy outcomes. The advice it provides to DEST about the suitability of the NRS for any or all of the additional applications nominated in the project brief must include an informed and considered discussion about likely impacts. There is a danger that the research that has been undertaken with the current users of the NRS, seen by the researchers to reflect positive

attitudes towards the NRS as a reporting tool, is understood to be an endorsement of the various suggestions to expand the use of the NRS into new environments. Each one of these suggested new uses for the NRS would impact on practitioners, training organisations, state training organisations, education systems and on the recipients of literacy

services. Teachers and others employed in the DEST-funded labour market programs have a limited capacity to give the researchers considered advice on impacts in other sectors and institutions if the NRS is to be applied for purposes not yet properly determined.

The ACAL Executive has expressed an interest in developing a formal role in the provision of advice to the Australian Government about the development of a consistent national approach to reporting language, literacy and numeracy outcomes and the role the NRS might play in this undertaking. There is no formal ACAL representation on the Steering Committee for this project. The Executive has offered assistance to the project team in developing a broader consultation process.

We encourage readers of Literacy Link who are interested in this project to read the report of the initial review of the NRS: *Reframe, Rename, Revitalize; Future directions for the NRS* by Kate Perkins. This can be downloaded from the NCVER website [www.ncver.edu.au](http://www.ncver.edu.au) We also encourage readers to contact the project team who have told ACAL that they are happy to answer queries. ACAL also encourages state and territory literacy councils and associations to organise local meetings to consider the findings of the project so far. The project team will be able to assist with material and may also be able to attend meetings. The number for Linda Wyse and Associates is 03 9429 7551.

**ACAL Executive**

***"The outcomes of this project could help shape a discussion on how to achieve a consistent national approach to reporting language, literacy and numeracy outcomes."***

# In conversation with

**ROBYN JAY from the ACAL Executive talks with Michael Chalk from Preston Reservoir ACE in Victoria. Michael has recently returned from the 2005 Learning Conference in Granada, Spain.**

**Welcome Michael and thanks for talking with us. A lot of people probably have not yet heard of the Learning Conference, so can you tell us first of all exactly what it is?**

It goes back around 15 years now... I can remember first hearing about the conference at least 10 years ago...there was one held in Alice Springs and the year after in the Greek Islands... it seems to be in their brief to hold it in exotic locations...

It (the Learning conference) all emerged from Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis I think, deciding that they wanted to turn their work on 'Literacies' into a yearly event where they throw as many people together as possible and try to stimulate discussion in the corridors.

**They're part of the New London Group aren't they? What's your understanding of that Group and what they do? What are their interests?**

Well my understanding is still pretty hazy but they are a group of people who came together in the 1990's to further the idea that the concept of 'Literacy' needed to be updated. I suppose in the 70's and 80's we had a progressive approach to writing and they decided we should start to look at how texts operate within social contexts and how 'texts' themselves can be powerful within society. Literacy was so often taught with personal stories and journals and people never really tackled politically significant texts. So it was Cope and Kalantzis, James Gee and colleagues building on the work of Halliday and systemic linguistics, looking at how all the bits and pieces of language add up to create meaning and a powerful message within the social context, and looking at how to teach that to people learning literacy ...

**So what sorts of people go to these conferences?**

Well there's people from all around the world; that's part of the excitement of it. Originally it was mainly people from Australia, the UK, Canada, New Zealand and a bunch of people from the (United) States. This time there were people from all over the world; places like Malaysia, Greece, South America ... and there seems to be a mix of teaching practitioners and researchers ... there's quite a strong contingent of people from universities ... but

quite a lot of teachers looking for a mix of current research plus practical tips ... and also to meet people from other contexts and places.

Canada has such a strong literacy and adult literacy tradition, and it's great to sit there and hear a woman from Canada say, 'Wow Australians are so innovative in the literacies – what do they put in the water?' She could reel off a whole bunch of Australians who had been influential in literacy.

The people who I found most useful though were the teachers who had done a bit of research. People who reeled off about all the research they'd done, and the coefficient values and alpha this and X that - that really didn't make a lot of sense to me ... I was looking for practical classroom connections and that wasn't always clear.

**So what were the main themes of the conference this year?**

This year the theme itself was 'designed learning'. Mary and Bill have just done some work on the subject ... designing the learning environment ... how the world of design impacts on the world of literacy. The conference always has a set of different strands. Things like 'literacy and literacies', 'the visual and the verbal', 'multiliteracies and multi-modal communication', 'multilingual learning', and a whole strand on technologies and literacy.... new tools for learning, crossing the digital divide and that sort of thing. They cover a huge range of different topics and themes, it's pretty much anything goes so long as it relates to literacy learning and research I think.

Presenters mainly have half an hour and they cram as many in as possible so you get a wide variety of ideas.

**I guess if you get a taster in the sessions you can follow up the conversations afterwards...**

Yes, lots of business cards are exchanged!

**All that seems to fit very well with the kinds of directions ACAL is taking..looking at the kinds of literacies or essential skills that people need right across and throughout their lives, in various contexts ...**

I think these guys really set the agenda in the early to mid 1990s changing the whole direction of literacy and research. I'm sure if it wasn't Cope and Kalantzis it would have been someone else like Gee or Kress who came up with the concept of multi or multiple literacies.... looking at how literacies operate in the real world. I find that there's a good mix of the research and the practical at this conference.

# . . . Michael Chalk

## ***Are you noticing that their work is evolving; that they're changing direction in any way?***

I'm not sure I know their work well enough to say. Sometimes it sounds like the same old stuff but at the same time it's still new in a sense, because they are such complex concepts, you've always got to get your head around it again... I think it's just the complexity of literacy in the world. There's a new way to frame your understanding. From what I can gather the structure of the conference has been pretty much the same over the years.

## ***So what were some of the highlights for you this year?***

One guy from the UK was looking at how 'text' and writing in literacy were now being highly influenced by the world of design; that in fact, text is now designed. He was saying designed rather than written but I was thinking written, and then designed. In terms of what is written on the page, the layout is now so much more crucial in a text than it was a while back. Even in terms of producing texts, learners need to understand so much more about the visual impact of their published text.

There was a terrific session from a woman in Manchester who was working with a group of West Indian immigrants (I think) who were making a television program. There's a huge thing for community television across Europe but in Manchester particularly. Part of the brief was to instruct people in literacy as they went and to help them to learn about the processes and context of making television. She was comparing two teachers: one of them was extremely into the group and was really on about taking it at their pace and making sure that they understand everything, doing things hands on, discussing ideas as they went and wasn't that fussed about getting the perfect product...but the other teacher who took over half way through the project was very concerned that the product had to be good and polished because that was her job to get it to a polished published sort of output so s/he wouldn't let the group do as much, didn't instruct them much along the way and actually shut them right out of the editing process. It clearly had a strong negative impact on the group and the group wasn't impressed with the final product. They had lost control.

A couple of people from Canada were looking at how (according to Kress) the screen has become the dominant site of texts, and that it is increasingly visual. They were teaching a group of youth and they wanted to bring that screen based literacy back into the printed text. They'd put together what they described as multi-modal printed texts based on a screen layout. That was interesting!

There were also some pretty strange sessions! One woman from the UK was exploring how Blogs, as hybrid texts that work with mixed modes, pull the reader from the familiar to the unfamiliar. She likened it to Freud's theory of the

uncanny and Gothic literature. She blew a few conceptual boundaries for me!

## ***Mmm thanks Michael – it's an interesting taste of what goes on there. Were there any new resources that you can share with us?***

Not much in the way of resources really – more ideas and good contacts. For example there's a woman in Queensland who I've known for some time who has moved into computer games design. She mixes game design and literacy development and she calls herself a double agent. She works with literacy teachers to help them understand how to use games to develop literacy in things like problem solving and critical thinking. There's been a bit of research into how video games really stretch people's thinking. You're learning how to immerse yourself in a new world; you're learning the rules of that world. She also works with the game designers to build games that will fool the literacy teachers. She's very much on the side of people who want to play games and have a great time.

I've always felt that Australia is a place rich with innovative thinkers. It's great to see the Flexible Learning Framework supporting this although generally in Australia not enough money is put into research and development. While we have great ideas often we have to go overseas to get them to market, and I wonder if that also applies in the education field.

## ***How do we sell this notion of multiliteracies to the public?***

I think the public even has trouble with the notion of 'literacy'. In a sense it's still about reading and writing, it's just that reading and writing are much more complex than people usually think. Reading and writing now involve multiple skills, multiple texts, multiple contexts. 'Multiliteracy' is an effective idea for teachers and researchers but I'm wondering if in terms of selling the ideas to the public and to learners we've gone around it the wrong way inventing a new jargon word instead of re-explaining the old.

## ***So tell us a bit about Granada, sounds like a great place to go!***

Granada is absolutely beautiful. They do seem to pick very exciting places. Last year was in Havana in Cuba and that was a fairly extreme experience. Granada was a bit more comfortable. It's a university town of 60,000 students with people from all over the world. The conference was at one of the University campuses around 5 minutes from the centre; it's a small town and you can walk everywhere.

**Dear Editor**

I am pleased to see that the Department of Science and Technology (DEST) has increased the recommended qualifications for staff for the 2006-2008 Language, Literacy and Numeracy Programme (LLNP). See the Final Operational Policy Position Paper on <https://llnp.dest.gov.au/> for more information. Many of us responded to the position on qualifications suggested in the Discussion Paper circulated by DEST early in 2005.

We at the Western Australian Adult Literacy Council (WAALC) are particularly pleased that Certificate IV Training and Assessment (TAA) is not listed in the range of acceptable qualifications for assessing and teaching staff. It is still listed for tutors/mentors and volunteers. I hope this is because DEST see 'tutors' as being staff who teach vocational elements of courses rather than as untrained literacy teachers working under supervision. If a tutor's primary role is as support staff for literacy and numeracy teaching processes, there are much more useful qualifications available in most States including qualifications in LLN tutoring, and qualifications for teacher's assistants.

I continue to be puzzled by the differentiation the DEST paper makes between assessing and teaching in terms of the qualifications required. I understand that pre-training literacy assessments are sensitive and need a very experienced person with a particular set of specialist skills in both teaching and assessing. However, the gap in required qualifications for assessors and teachers is substantial, and surely it is the case that teachers are also the people doing the in-course assessments in an adult literacy class. If this is the case, the qualifications DEST is suggesting for teachers is surely inadequate.

I am also worried about some of the wording, especially

the description of the recommended skills for teaching staff. A number of practitioners have suggested to me that the guidelines for LLNP teaching staff actually exclude some of those most qualified to teach basic literacy and numeracy. The specification of 'an undergraduate degree of three years duration' could be read to exclude those teachers who completed Diplomas of Teaching (since these are not always considered an undergraduate degree). Does DEST mean to exclude these primary trained teachers: usually with many years of additional experience and professional development in teaching literacy and numeracy?

Additionally, does DEST mean to send the signal that anyone who has an undergraduate degree can learn enough about teaching literacy in any 'recognised specialist TESOL qualification or specialist Adult Literacy qualification'?

Why is there a blanket exemption for all current LLNP staff? While this allows for the possibility that DEST has got it wrong and allows some time to fix the anomalies, it also allows for basically unqualified staff to continue working, without even the requirement to seek qualifications to recognise the skills their students will be teaching them.

I request ACAL to seek clarifications about these issues and publish them in forthcoming issues of **Literacy Link**. I hope ACAL has the opportunity to work with DEST to improve the specifications of adequate minimum qualifications that they use in tendered programs. This is an important issue: adult literacy and numeracy students deserve and need well-qualified teachers. Funding bodies like DEST have a pivotal role in establishing minimum standards for Registered Training Organisations in a competitive funding environment.

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