

Minister's Award Winner 2006

On the 25th August this year, an award ceremony for the Minister's Awards for Outstanding Contributions to Improving Literacy and/or Numeracy was held in Sydney. The awards were presented by the Hon Julie Bishop, the Federal Minister for Education, Science and Training and recognised 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 practitioner Carmel Jennings.

Carmel Jennings has worked in community-based adult education programs since, as a young mother, she completed her own education in Dublin in the 1980s. As a high performing participant she next took on volunteer roles in the community project and went on to become a tutor and planner for its continuation. For Carmel, adult education is a form of social action; she has never lost that loyalty to the participants first and foremost. She engenders in the programs she now manages an organisational culture that is genuinely student-centred. "Carmel doesn't see students, she sees people – people have lives, commitments, concerns, families and dreams," one of her co-workers commented. "She often reminds us that students may have any number of other priorities outside of school." The people who work with Carmel and the people who come to her programs recognise that they are dealing with a person of extraordinary dedication and humility, with a seemingly unlimited capacity for hard work.

Carmel manages the LLNP for Centacare Employment and Training in Perth, Western Australia and is President of the WA Adult Literacy Council. Her leadership qualities can be seen in the success of Centacare that is one of the few LLNP providers to exceed its targets. Carmel will typically downplay her contribution, telling students who want to shower her with praise and gifts that she is only doing her job "I get paid to do this" and that they should not feel indebted. No-one is quite sure what remuneration she gets for the 70 hours of work she puts in each week – or where she finds the energy.

Carmel's co-workers describe her as a mentor and an exemplary role model. One says "Carmel demonstrates an absolute belief in the value of each person who walks through the door. It matters not what a person's age, race, religion, history or motivations are. She is comfortable with difference and models tolerance and acceptance without exception." Carmel's genuinely-held belief in each person's ability to

learn creates a positive environment and outlook for both staff and students. She fosters adult learning principles and makes students pivotal in each facet of their learning journey. You might hear Carmel say, "You're the boss," and she means it. Others will point to Carmel's capacity to get the best out of limited resources and the sheer force of her personality and intelligent determination to shape a program to meet students' needs. She creates high-functioning teams by careful recruitment and supportive modeling of professional behaviour.



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Four members of the ACAL Executive are presenting at the National ACAL conference 2006. Three of these presentations are about publishing student writing – in print and digitally. The fourth is about the difference between ‘human capital’ and social capital’ as means of understanding outcomes of literacy learning. Find out more about these presentations in the articles that follow.



A RAW experience: Publishing student writing

Lynne Matheson is VALBEC Co- President and has been the Victorian State representative on ACAL for the past eighteen months. She is currently working as a consultant and pursuing her ambition to be a writer, published of course! Lynne’s session is on Saturday at 12.15 pm.

Affirming and valuing the diverse and individual ‘voices’ of our students is an important element of adult literacy education. In my ACAL conference presentation my goal was to share a story about a particular student newsletter to illustrate the wider value of publishing student writing and perhaps inspire others to use it as a model to establish student newsletters or publish student writing in other formats.

We are all aware of online ‘e-zines’, ‘wikis’ and ‘blogs’ but I would argue that there is still a place for print based publications that tell stories and connect us to communities, be they educational, sporting or special interest groups.

Stories are significant and lasting when the senses are engaged and through some examples and artefacts of early newsletters that I have been connected with, I hoped to connect with participants’ own experiences. The development of the RAW newsletter was concurrent with changing computer technology capability at the Centre. The students’ and my skills in using different software and digital and other equipment evolved over the seven year period. The devolution of control to the students and the increasing independence of the individuals in the group were a valuable part of the journey.

The first edition of RAW was produced in 1998 using Word, Publisher and clip art and printed on the office photocopier. This was wholly teacher driven with the

students contributing their work to be typed and laid out by the teacher, with help from a student who knew a bit more about the basics of Publisher. It seemed a good way to motivate and give a focus for the mostly older male students in the ALBE class. A Fitzroy football supporter in the group came up with the title RAW – Reading and Writing. The lion and book either side in the masthead graphics was a nice ironic play on the words.

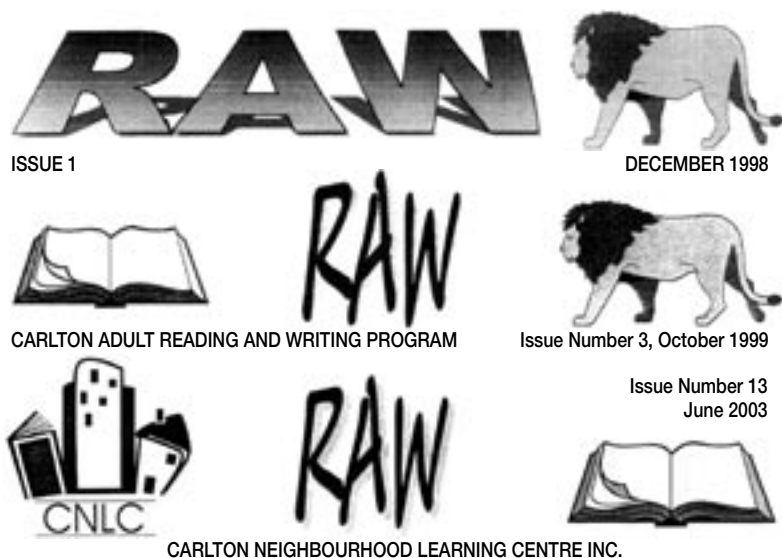
A few more editions were produced over the next couple of years in this way. Then in 2000 a new Digital camera meant that images of students and activities could be included and some CALD students contributed their writing. The students began to see the production of RAW as a valued and regular part of their ALBE class and took on roles in decision making on content and editing. The class agreed that content had to be understandable and have reasonable grammar and punctuation. The students would proof read with the teacher for accuracy and clarity.

In 2001, the centre set up a computer room with internet access so that images and text from the internet could be included in RAW. Students began to search the internet and download images and text to supplement their own writing. The teachers were using RAW as part of class reading material and it was used as part of the initial interview and assessment selection of texts to give prospective students an insight into the centre and its community.

In 2002, the September edition of RAW had an Adult Learners Week focus with more students having input and printing outsourced, funded by a grant. More copies meant a wider circulation and students visiting from Williamstown for ALW were given copies, as were the committee of management and others attending the centre throughout the week.

In 2003 a new masthead with the Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre logo was designed and the Lion disappeared, as had the student. A specifically focused Publications class was set up with designated roles and an editorial committee structure. The typing and design work was now done by students with assistance from the teacher and the final edit was done by a volunteer with desktop publishing expertise.

The standards for quality and content and regular production, 4 editions per year, were now in place and in the hands of the students. Regular features included an interview with a member of the committee, staff or person connected with the centre past or present. An ex-AFL footballer accountant and an 85 year old founder of the neighbourhood house were two popular choices. The interview questions were devised by the group with the interview taped and transcribed or else sent via email for a written response. A student profile became another regular feature and the selection spread equally across classes and



for gender balance. The themed word puzzle generated using Puzzlemaker (<http://puzzlemaker.school.discovery.com>) on the back page was popular with students and their families.

The Publications class was established under the CGEA General Curriculum options. The learning outcomes related to the work done producing the newsletter and other publications for the centre and were made explicit from the outset. The class became more of a workshop as tasks were allocated to students according to their skills and new skills developed 'just in time'. The staff at the centre began to regard the Publications workshop like an in-house print shop and fed in requests on a regular basis. Promotional flyers, flow charts, signs and learning aids were produced along with RAW. This was a truly collaborative and experiential learning environment and the students responded positively. It was a small group which enabled much one to one teaching, teacher to student, student to student and student to teacher!

The inaugural ACFE region's Adult Learners Week short story writing competition was entered by a number of students with successful prize winners and publication of all entries in RAW. All the stories were printed with minimal editing as the individual voices were valued equally. At this stage the learning outcome : Can identify, analyse and apply the practices of culture was particularly relevant and at each subsequent editorial meeting referred to and reinforced as the students came to value the many 'voices' of the students' writing. The students developed a deeper understanding of the diversity of students' backgrounds and life experiences and contributed to the inclusive and tolerant atmosphere at the Centre.

New computers, digital camera and photocopier meant further enhancement of the quality of RAW and by 2004 there was 'whole of program' input with 4 issues of ten pages each. The Publications core group continued to manage production with assistance from the teacher. The Adult Learners Week short story writing competition was again entered by a number of students with publication of their stories.

In 2005 students were involved in all stages of production of RAW as well as producing promotional flyers, signage and learning materials for the centre and other agencies. Students in the group became competent using Word, Clip art, Publisher, Photoshop, Paint, Internet searching and saving images and text, transferring files on the network, using a scanner, digital camera, photocopier and laminator. They were involved in planning, organising and publicising the Adult Learners Week program and conducted a Carlton Mystery Walk for the visiting students from Williamstown. The timeline for the production of RAW, around 8-10 weeks, and the need to get tasks done was an ever present pressure. The students were able to take responsibility for different parts of the production and gained confidence through positive feedback and acknowledgement of their skills. Their independence in managing tasks increased to the point where they would work unsupervised, come in especially or complete work in their own time.

Postscript

I am no longer working at CNLC but the RAW newsletter continues to be produced each term. The reaccredited CGEA does not contain the GCO and so it will be a challenge to align this kind of project based work with the new units. ■

Conference 2006

A RAW
experience



Connecting voices: new mindsets, new opportunities

Robyn Jay currently works at the International Centre for VET (ICVET) with TAFE NSW where she is the NSW Learnscope Project manager.

For the past 4 years she has served on the ACAL Executive and is currently Vice President. Robyn was responsible for establishing the Literacy Live web-based conferencing facility in 2005 and for organising the inaugural Literacy Live forums. Robyn and Stephen Ridgway's conference session will be held on Friday afternoon at 2pm held at TAFESA Adelaide City Campus.

Adult Literacy has been one of the slowest fields to adopt new technologies, and perhaps rightly so. If you attended the ACAL conference in 2003 in Alice Springs you might remember the informal survey I conducted to gauge current usage and issues. While this highlighted strong interest in exploring the use of technologies, particularly multimedia, the actual take-up was less than 50%. Factors such as lack of technical support, funding, access to computers, as well as a lack of confidence by

individual teachers in their own ICT skills and knowledge, were cited as inhibitors. But in my mind it was equally about the nature of the technologies available at that time. Why adopt something that will not benefit the learners or does not enrich our teaching practice?

From 2004 on, but particularly in the last 12 months, Digital Storytelling (<http://digtales.wikispaces.com>) has been taking the world of adult literacy and English Language provision (as well as VET in general) by storm. Increased access to digital cameras and the introduction of quick and easy to use software options such as PhotoStory3, has lead to growing use of the methodology as a means to both capture student stories and to provide more engaging and accessible instructional material. Digital image and sound is providing new opportunities for learners previously marginalized in a written text-hungry education system. The challenge however has been how to publish and share those stories with a global audience.

Coming from left of centre, but with clear resonance with digital storytelling and what it seeks to achieve, we are seeing the emergence of a new mindset in e-learning; Web2.0 and connected learning, or connectivism as ►

Hearing the Voices – an Aboriginal story project to make a difference



Margaret McHugh is a member of the ACAL Executive and is an adult literacy worker based in the State Training Agency in Western Australia. Margaret is collaborating with two colleagues involved in teacher education in WA schools whose focus is teaching literacy to speakers of English as a Second Dialect (ESD). Their conference presentation will give participants a chance to read the books written and illustrated by

Aboriginal adults and find out how these will be used across sectors in professional development for literacy teachers. Their session takes place on Saturday at 12.15 pm.

In 2005, we began a project to collect stories from Aboriginal people enrolled in adult literacy classes and publish these as reading resources for other teachers and students. What is different about our project is that we wanted to use the published stories to illustrate the diversity

of dialect use among speakers of Aboriginal English: speakers who came from both the city and the bush. We made no attempt to 'smooth out' dialect differences when we got the stories ready for publication. What we wanted from these stories, first and foremost, were books in which Aboriginal people would recognise their stories, their forms of story-telling and their own language.

We also knew that the stories would be of interest to teachers wanting to understand some of the linguistic, cultural, conceptual and generic differences between narrative forms in the Anglo-Celtic tradition and those from the largely oral Aboriginal tradition. The long term aim of putting Aboriginal stories into print and making visible the differences between Aboriginal English and the standard dialect is to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal adults and children as measured by their performance in literacy benchmark testing. Research indicates that the most effective route to development of literacy skills in a second dialect is through the development of literacy skills connected to use of the first spoken dialect together with plenty of explicit practice in learning the second dialect as a spoken, then written, form. ▶

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Connecting voices

coined by George Siemens (<http://www.connectivism.ca/about>).

So what's the shift all about? For me the focus is very much about:

- People rather than content
- Conversations and collective intelligence
- Nurturing and maintaining connections and linkages
- Learning in and across global communities
- User established and controlled spaces and self publishing
- Shared understandings
- Collaborative, dynamic, evolving content/ resources

We are shifting the power base from 'techos' with programming skills and those with the dollars to produce (often biased) content, to all users, to our students, to us, using social software tools and approaches such as:

- Mobile phones, SMS etc
- Blogs (online journals, conversation spaces)
- Wikis (editable collaborative web spaces)
- Online shared repositories and tagging (FlickrR, YouTube, Del.icio.us,
- Subscription filters (RSS)
- Online communities (MySpace)

More than ever, knowing how to access information when needed is vital; far more important than acquiring knowledge and skills that will be out of date before we know it. No teacher can possibly stay up to date with the information and knowledge that learners require. It's also vital to support the development of information literacy skills to remain safe in the big bad world of the internet.

In his NZ blog, Greg Carroll (http://blog.core-ed.net/greg/2006/07/the_nature_of_literacy.html) cites a post by David Warlick in the 2 Cents worth blog (<http://davidwarlick.com/2cents/>)

These 'emerging characteristics offer to change not only what and how we teach, but the very structure of the education experience, evaporating the definitions of teacher, learner, classroom, textbook, and all of the other firmwares of the institution, and making education an integral part of living. This, by no means, means the demise of the teacher, classroom, student, or even the textbook (though that surely must evolve into something far more networked, digital, and overwhelming). It simply means that what happens in the formal learning experience must look much more like on-the-job training, where we are helping [learners] become life-long learners. Our indication of educational success must be much less a measure of what students know, and much more a measure of what they can teach themselves.'

How do we teach in this new paradigm, with these new tools? In our ACAL conference Friday afternoon computer lab session, Stephen Ridgway and I will introduce you to a few of the easier to use social software tools. Through use of the tools we'll begin some debate around both uses/ opportunities and issues to be addressed.

Further reading:

Web 2.0 – <http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html>

<http://blogs.zdnet.com/web2explorer/?p=5> ■

It is difficult for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to acknowledge and recognise Aboriginal English as a separate dialect, but where teachers become skilled in this recognition they develop the understanding to provide more effective literacy teaching to their students. We hope that the books that we publish from this project will contribute to the development of a much wider and deeper understanding of linguistic difference among educators and among members of the community. It was certainly a learning journey for those of us involved in this project!

Our project is the result of collaboration between adult literacy practitioners and teachers, teacher educators and linguists who had been working with schools over a number years. Our joining forces in this way is an interesting project in itself! Teachers with Aboriginal students from every age group could see the benefit of having more reading material that would engage the Aboriginal readers. Teachers were also keen to validate the language their students used and to have this available as a resource for learning. Teachers from all sectors, including those working in the childcare industry, have responded favourably to the books we have shown them.

Teachers of the adult students involved in the story-writing project were keen to see how their students might respond when given the choice to write using their 'natural voice'. Although

our sample is as yet small, the indications are that this kind of writing experience in the educational context can be transformative for both teachers and students. We are hoping that by telling you about the project and showing you the books you may like to try out something similar for yourselves.

Our session introduces participants to 4 new publications: authentic stories written and illustrated by Aboriginal adults. The stories illustrate some of the artful ways in which Aboriginal English can be used. The presentation also considers data that demonstrates the failure of both the school and VET sectors to produce equitable outcomes for Aboriginal students and links this to an argument for recognition of Aboriginal English as a separate dialect to enhance literacy and learning outcomes for Aboriginal people.

First time readers of stories like these may be surprised by the intensity of their impact. In part this may be due to their directness and in part to the features that the language shares with poetry. For example, in poetry, lines may be measured and the placing of a particular word at the beginning or end of a line gives emphasis or importance to the word. Sound qualities may be given greater emphasis in poetry: in these stories devices like parallelism, repetition and rhyme are used.

The stories also rely heavily on the development of vivid imagery. In part this is achieved in the way in which the text lines are presented on a page. In other words,

the configuration of a text on a printed page tries to call upon images which stimulate the senses to create remembered moments and shared experiences. The use of the Aboriginal English narrative structure moves the story through these moments in what is often a circular or spiralling progression.

Like poems, these stories told by speakers of Aboriginal English, are condensed: details are left out because speakers of Aboriginal English share the cultural knowledge that will enable full understanding. Non-Aboriginal readers will be inclined to use their own imagination (based on their own cultural knowledge) to complete the story. However, the economy with which the stories are written may lead to misinterpretations. A good strategy would be to engage Aboriginal readers in discussions about the meaning of the text. This would enable non-Aboriginal people to

better access the text and such discussions may also assist the Aboriginal reader to develop understandings of how these texts can be (mis)understood by non-Aboriginal people.

Stories told by Aboriginal people are not 'made-up' stories - they are not works of imaginative invention as is much narrative fiction in the Western tradition. These stories are drawn from remembered and shared events or they reproduce stories told by other individuals and kept alive in families or in cultural

groups. Because they are usually based on facts, they are all important to the identity of the individuals that offered them for a wider readership. In choosing to preserve the grammar and words used by Aboriginal English speakers, and allowing for sentences that are often long (a collection of phrases or clauses that build a composite, often visual, impression) but uninterrupted by punctuation, we have given emphasis to the importance of the 'voice' (identity) of the storyteller in the written version. Instead of the usual punctuation marks, the narrative has been arranged on the page in short lines broken at points which give emphasis to certain words.

For all the reasons given above, it was important not to undermine the authenticity of the stories or the meaning intended by their tellers by imposing the 'rules' of Western narrative fiction or attempting to 'translate' them into Standard Australian English. The stories display an entirely alternative way of expressing knowledge and experience.

If you are interested in learning more about the differences between varieties of English used by different cultural groups in Australian society or would like to know more about how to teach speakers of Aboriginal English literacy skills, the *ABC Two-Way Literacy and Learning Project* has produced many resources that give both linguistic advice and ideas for teaching. Please contact Margaret Mc Hugh margaret.mchugh@det.wa.edu.au or Patricia Konigsberg patricia.konigsberg@det.wa.edu.au ■

Stories told by Aboriginal people are not 'made-up' stories - they are not works of imaginative invention as is much narrative fiction in the Western tradition.

The social capital model of LLN: A greater claim to being 'essential'

Professor Ian Falk is Chair of Rural and Remote Education at Charles Darwin University and representative for the Northern Territory on the ACAL National Executive. Dr Stephen Black is Senior Head Teacher of Adult Basic Education at Meadowbank TAFE College in the Northern Sydney Institute. In this article they link the outcomes of their latest NCVER research to the ACAL position on 'essential skills'. They will be presenting on this topic on Friday afternoon at 2 pm.

Essential skills for employment

Currently in one Australian state, New South Wales, TAFE curriculum developers are putting the final touches to new adult literacy and numeracy curriculum which is based on the concept of 'employability skills' and is underwritten by the Business Council of Australia. At the same time, the concept of 'essential skills' (also featuring in the new curriculum) is being promoted heavily by business and industry groups and is threatening to replace the very term 'literacy'. In some TAFE Institutes, adult literacy and numeracy teaching sections fall within newly named 'Employment Preparation' faculties or generic 'business lines'. The adult literacy and numeracy field is indeed in the process of a major shift to a dominant accommodation with the needs of business and industry. On this basis a newcomer to the field could be forgiven for believing that adult literacy and numeracy provision exists primarily to enable people to obtain or maintain employment. We can call this approach, where the emphasis is on employment related skills, the human capital model and it has been building steadily since the early 1990s.

ACAL has already responded to this shift in the previous edition of Literacy Link. It was pointed out, for example, that essential skills for employment may not be the essential skills for 'life' or the needs of diverse communities and individuals. A number of examples were provided of people in need of improved 'literacy', including disengaged youth, social service clients, and those engaged in litigation, and these are not drawn from an employment context. Employment is important, sometimes the most important, but not the only important context for improved literacy and numeracy skills.

Recognising social capital outcomes

Over the past two years some research has been conducted into the outcomes of adult literacy and numeracy courses which reinforces the above ACAL perspective (see Balatti, Black & Falk 2006, Reframing adult literacy and numeracy outcomes: A social capital perspective, NCVER). In this research study students in formal VET literacy and numeracy courses were interviewed to determine their perceptions of their outcomes from participating in the courses. The students (57 in total) were from a range of demographic backgrounds including young people (under 25), non-English speaking background, Aboriginal, and mature-aged (over 45) from three locations: Sydney, Darwin and Townsville.

Many of the outcomes identified by students were direct

human capital outcomes, such as an improvement in the technical skills of literacy and numeracy that were considered important for work opportunities. But a great many outcomes had little to do with employment, at least in the short term. Our specific focus was on social capital outcomes, documenting how students changed in their relations with others, for example, their levels of trust, belief in their own personal influence on others, and the extent of their membership and nature of their relations within social networks. Almost 80% of students could identify social capital outcomes of some kind. These outcomes included young people re-establishing co-operative relations with their parents and siblings and learning to get along with different peer groups and even 'authority' figures. Older non-English speaking background students made new friends, often involving membership of cross-cultural networks. Some started going to their children's parent-teacher nights and joining school excursions, and others engaged in a wide range of local community volunteer roles. Aboriginal students similarly became members of new social networks and changed in their self beliefs, their interactions with others, and their linking ties to institutional networks.

Some of these outcomes can be seen to be employment related, but many cannot, though they are undeniably important 'life' skills. According to OECD indicators of socio-economic well-being, these students demonstrated benefits across the full range of indicators. However, there was greater impact in areas of health, education, time and leisure, command over goods and services and social environment, than there was in employment.

A discursive contest over what is 'essential'

The social capital model of adult literacy and numeracy provides an alternative conceptual framework to one based primarily on employment outcomes. By focusing on connections between people within networks, the social capital model includes all social contexts, including employment. It thus avoids the binary distinction between employment and non-employment related outcomes and is more reflective of the complexities and the importance of people's 'whole' lives. A social capital model demonstrates how literacy and numeracy courses contribute to the capacity of individuals to engage in communities and thus add to community capacity and social cohesion.

At this point in the development of the field of adult literacy and numeracy there is the risk that the employment-related discourse will completely dominate. At a time when the strategic directions for VET include a focus not only on businesses and individual skills but on building inclusive and sustainable communities (see the ANTA 2004 report Shaping our future: Australia's national strategy for vocational education and training) then we would argue that the social capital model has a greater claim to being 'essential'.

The full NCVER publication Reframing adult literacy and numeracy course outcomes: A social capital perspective by Jo Balatti, Stephen Black, Ian Falk can be downloaded from <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/1683.html> ■

A New Identity for the CGEA?

On 31 December 2006, the old CGEA qualifications run out of accreditation. The first draft of the new CGEA was released for comment on 4 August. Literacy practitioners in Victoria and Western Australia – states where the CGEA plays a major role – have recently been getting together in groups to discuss the first draft of the new qualifications. Both sets of practitioners are concerned about the lack of time available to provide detailed feedback especially since the proposed changes are so radical. In the first of these two articles, VALBEC provides an update of their CGEA Twilight Forum.

VALBEC's Winter Twilight Forum, held on Wednesday August 9, focused on the re-accreditation of the CGEA. Members of the VALBEC committee took responsibility for running the session which was well attended by members from TAFE and ACE providers. John Radalj gave an overview of the CGEA reaccreditation process and the role he plays as VALBEC representative on the CGEA Re-accreditation Steering Committee. Debbie Soccio, who attended the consultation session in Mooroopna the previous week, gave an update of the draft document and the main changes to the certificate.

After Debbie had lead the group through the main changes Corinna Ridley, using a comprehensive and detailed chart, gave an overview of the revised structure and details of the proposed reading and writing units. Corinna's purpose was to give an overview of the draft document, to assist providers and practitioners to interpret the new draft units and training package format, examine the progression through the levels (including the new proposed lower level) and identify points requiring clarification. It was emphasised however that the table needed to be read in conjunction with the full document, which includes additional information.

Participants then broke into groups and used the table, draft units and feedback sheets as the basis for a discussion on the proposed changes. The evening finished with the focus groups reporting their ideas back to the whole group. The general feedback from participants indicated that the forum had been a really useful opportunity to get together to discuss the new document and that, in light of the extent of the changes, much more time was needed to consider the overall structure as well as the unit detail. For many, this was the first opportunity they had had to really study the new documents and discuss the changes with

other practitioners. Detailed feedback from the group was provided to the CMM project team and has been posted on the SITNTALK website, the main feedback mechanism being used by the re-accreditation team.

VALBEC believes the availability of the draft units on the CMM website presents an opportunity to have a good look at the proposed changes and urges all those engaged in delivery of the current CGEA to visit this website and register their feedback via the SITNTALK discussion board. The timelines for feedback have been very tight, particularly for the numeracy components. The changes to the CGEA are significant at both the structural and content level and practitioners need to be given ample opportunity to engage in the dialogue about these changes and their ramifications. VALBEC has written to ACFE and the CMM to request an extension of time to the re-accreditation process. The more feedback on the draft units received by the project team, the better the finished document will be in meeting the needs of learners.

SITNTALK continues to offer a forum for practitioners to share their views even if formal deadlines have passed. VALBEC is hopeful that the accreditation period for the old qualifications can be extended and that there will be more time available for consultation about the proposed changes.

Instructions for accessing draft CGEA units and information: <http://tls.vu.edu.au/cf/sitntalk/main.cfm> Click on Certificates of General Education Re-accreditation Login. (Click on new user box if you are a first time user) Click on resources; Draft units and an overview of the new structure can be accessed here. Click on Inquiries/FAQ to see others postings re the new CGEA and to add your own comments. ■

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

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The new CGEA - the Clayton's Training Package?

The Training Package you have, when you're not having a Training Package.....

Cheryl Wiltshire is the Vice President of the WA Adult Literacy Council (WAALC) and the Sate Coordinator for the CGEA in Western Australia. Cheryl provides this personal analysis of the new draft CGEA informed by a number of discussions with practitioners across her state.

As Literacy Link readers have already been informed, the accreditation for the current Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA) expires on 31 December 2006. Since October 2005, an extensive process has been undertaken by the team who were given the task of replacing it. Finally on August 4, 2006, a draft curriculum of close to 600 pages was released and the deadline for feedback given as August 21.

For West Australians, the release of the new CGEA brought a surprise - it was written in Training Package format! Even though, the CGEA Network in WA had read every document released and repeatedly sought briefings, this fundamental change had not been flagged. The project team talked to us for an hour via teleconference in June but did not think it necessary to warn us that the cryptic "meet the requirements of the Victorian Qualifications Authority" in all their documents meant "adopt Training Package format". The only forewarning was in mid-July when a single unit had been forwarded to us written as a unit of competence. When we queried this, we were told it was "for educational reasons". We are still awaiting an explanation of what these are.

Several members of the CGEA Network in WA are also closely involved in unpacking Training Packages; one person has been delivering Certificate IV Training and Assessment (TAA) and its predecessors for ten years. It was these practitioners who pointed out that what you have here is a Training Package that is not a Training Package but merely pretends to be.... a Clayton's Training Package in Australian parlance. The new CGEA is different to a Training Package in at least five ways.

1 The course aims to develop general educational competencies rather than industry-related, vocationally-specific competencies

The project team report that their research showed strong support for the retention of the general education aims of the CGEA and claim to have listened to this advice and retained these aims (see CGEA Accreditation 2006, The first draft, Slide 8, 04/08/06). The *Australian Quality Training Framework, Guidelines for Course Developers* (ANTA, 2002) states that "If a course has no clear workplace or vocational outcomes, the development of units of competency may not be appropriate" (page 11).

2 The 'Units of Competence' proposed for the CGEA do not meet the definition for units of competence

A Unit of Competence is a concept defined as "the specification of knowledge and skills, and the application of that knowledge and skill, to the standard of

performance expected in a workplace" (ANTA 2002, p 6). The new CGEA as a suite of courses designed to meet developmental needs in reading, writing and mathematics is not referenced to "a workplace".

3 The range statements in the draft units are generic not industry specific

Experienced Training Package users point out that a well-written Training Package provides clear information in range statements about specific industry contexts where the elements and performance criteria will be applied: hence showing the 'range' of situations where the unit will apply. The range statements in the draft CGEA curriculum are very vague, reflecting its generic nature.

4 The administrative arrangements surrounding the curriculum are not those applying to Training Packages

When new Training Packages are developed, States and Territories have some control over when they are implemented in recognition of the work needed to manage the transition. The CGEA as an accredited course has no such flexibility and will lapse on the 31 December 2006 leaving systems and providers wishing to use the new qualifications with a matter of weeks to put into effect fundamental changes.

5 The CGEA is not the type of accredited course that needs to be written in units of competence

Accredited courses designed to describe workplace competencies not yet defined in a Training Package must be written as units of competency. It is expected that these qualifications and/or individual units of competence will later be incorporated into a Training Package (ARCAB Standards 27.2.e.i). There are essentially 3 different kinds of 'training products': Training Packages (always nationally developed and endorsed); Accredited Courses (industry focus); and Accredited Courses (education focus). While all 'training products' are now written in an outcomes-based format, those Accredited Courses developed under state systems can take the form of 1 of 2 different structures: units of competence (vocational) or modules (educational). The 2 structures share a great many characteristics, but there are some critical differences, including that of terminology. The CGEA clearly falls into the category of educational.

To answer questions about why the CGEA has been written in this format, the project team simply refers us to Standard 27 and 28 of the AQTF Standards for State and Territory Registering/Course Accrediting Bodies known as the ARCAB Standards, (see the FAQ questions that was placed

on SITNTALK on August 22). It is strange that they feel this needs no discussion nor explanation. These Standards state a) that a need must be established for courses, b) Courses can only be accredited if they do not duplicate Training Packages and are not “made up of modules that ultimately achieve the competencies of a Training Package qualification”. While the use of the negative does make this rather hard to read, Standard 28.1 explains that there is an exception: areas where “it is not possible to develop appropriate competency standards, for example in some general education areas”.

Does it matter?

Is this just a philosophical argument? Does it really matter if the CGEA masquerades as a pale imitation of a Training Package? There are two areas where clarity is important.

First – requirements for course development and on-going monitoring. If a qualification has a vocational outcome then the course developer and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) using the course must consult with industry representatives about the course. If the course has a non-vocational outcome (ie general education) then consultation takes place with ‘community’ rather than industry. ‘Community’ is not clearly defined in the ANTA publications but is clearly differentiated from ‘industry’. A range of stakeholders might be consulted when the course is to produce a non-vocational outcome. These could include: schools, universities, TAFE/RTOs, migrant organisations, lobby groups for disadvantaged people, professional organisations, community education organizations and possibly employers. The interests of and input from each of these stakeholders will be distinctly different from those of ‘industry’ and far more diverse – i.e. ‘industry’ usually provides input from the point of view of a prospective employer.

Second – assessment and delivery. A number of sub-components of AQTF Standards 7, 8 and 9 relate specifically to qualifications with vocational outcomes written as units of competence. For example, 7.2.i; 7.2.iv; 7.3.a.ii; 8.1.v; 9.1.b; 9.3.iii; 9.3.iv; 9.3.viii; 9.3.ix. Moreover, much of the advice that has been developed for ensuring the consistency of assessment has been done with reference to courses that produce a vocational outcome. Some of this advice is not applicable to teaching and assessment in non-vocational contexts. The language and structure of the course is of paramount importance for both providers and AQTF auditors in determining how AQTF Standards should be interpreted for different courses and different client groups. If the CGEA were to be written in units of competence, this would indicate that it was to be treated as a qualification that produced a vocational outcome.

What drives this decision?

The responses on SITNTALK suggest that most Victorians are as puzzled as Western Australians about the format change. A number of questions remain unanswered as at the time of writing:

What are the “educational purposes” served by writing the CGEA as units of competence?

Why does the Victorian Qualifications Authority (VQA) provide a form to ask course developers to justify which parts of their course will be written as modules if developers have no option but to submit a course written as units of competence regardless of purpose?

Why does the VQA, like other state accrediting bodies, provide the AQTF Guidelines for Course Developers if its clear advice about writing educational courses as modules with learning outcomes and assessment criteria is no longer valid?

Is there any research or consultation that provides a justification for this change?

Do reviewers of the draft curriculum believe that the writers have proved that it is “possible to develop appropriate competency standards” for the CGEA?

Is this decision simply the personal preference of a few individuals who are blaming the VQA for forcing their hand to escape the need to debate the biggest change made to the CGEA in the past 15 years?

This is an issue wider than what happens to the CGEA. It will affect accredited courses with general education outcomes all over Australia. If one of the most well-recognised general education courses in Australia is contorted to fit into Training Package format, then those of us who have been working to define the place of general education in the VET sector can only despair. Perhaps we need to lobby to return to funded non-accredited literacy training focused on individual and community needs? Perhaps the battle to provide recognised credentials that are useful and relevant to adult literacy learners is lost and the whole course development process is simply a colossal waste of money?

My ever optimistic spirit refuses to succumb to this bleak picture. If these changes go through, the CGEA will be forever diminished as the star of Australian adult literacy courses and its use will inevitably fade as more appropriate courses are designed. The new Maths short courses recently accredited in Western Australia prove that it is still possible to accredit general education courses written in module format. From the ashes of the CGEA, something better will arise. ■

The new CGEA -
the Clayton's
Training Package?

Breaking News

Providers please note the CMM General Studies & Further Education has received confirmation from the VQA that expiry date for the following courses

- 21249Vic Certificate I in General Education for Adults (Introductory)
 - 21250Vic Certificate I in General Education for Adults
 - 21251Vic Certificate II in General Education for Adults
 - 21252Vic Certificate III in General Education for Adults
- has been extended to 31st December 2007.

Literacy Loses an Ally

Margaret McHugh



It is with great sadness that ACAL bids farewell to Catherine Gyngell who has been the Director of the Adult Literacy Policy department at DEST since 1995. Catherine has been a strong policy presence on behalf of adult literacy over a decade that has been characterised by constant change and not a little turbulence about the place of adult literacy

in industrial reform, an open training market, globalisation and small government. Catherine retired at the end of September and is planning some travel, time with a new grandchild and maybe something 'quite new' next year.

When the Coalition Government took office in 1996, the generous funding for adult literacy under the Labour Government's Special Intervention Program disappeared. While the WELL Program survived, the introduction of the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program in 1997 was in part because Catherine was in a position to show the Commonwealth how literacy gains could be 'measured' using the newly developed National Reporting System (NRS).

In 2006, the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL Program) and Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP) are still going strong with a combined annual funding of over \$70m.

Catherine served as the Commonwealth representative on the Ministerial Taskforce for Adult English Language and Literacy which had overseen the development of the NRS and the National Collaborative Adult English language and Literacy Strategy (NCAELLS) in 1995. Catherine continues to see the NRS as a key resource in negotiating for Commonwealth funding for adult literacy and as one of her final legacies, has been instrumental in commissioning its recent revisions.

After ANTA was established in 1994, (and she was there for both its beginning and its end) Catherine persuaded them to take on an adult literacy project worker to produce professional development resources to assist with the integration of language, literacy and numeracy in Training Packages. The result, *Built In, Not Bolted On* became an important tool in showing the way in which language, literacy and numeracy should be a crucial part of vocational competencies. The project worker also worked with the industry advisory bodies to develop other resources. With Catherine's encouragement ANTA created a senior project position that supported the integration of language, literacy and numeracy issues into policy documents such as the Training Package Development Handbook, *Shaping our Future* the VET National Strategy 2004-2010 and the AQTF.

As Director for Adult Literacy Policy, Catherine has also been responsible for the Adult Literacy National Project worth \$2m annually. Once again, she has had to fight off various attacks on these dedicated resources as literacy had to compete for fiercely contested national VET funding. Using these project funds, Catherine took over responsibility for the development of the *Reading Writing Road Show* in collaboration with the ABC; many *Life Be In It* campaigns; the establishment and maintenance of the *Reading Writing Hotline*; and the production of the national literacy magazines *Good Practice* and *Literacy Link*. Catherine has worked with NCVER to manage over \$300,000 for adult literacy research each year. She has been responsible for handing out annual funding in the region of \$420,000 for small and medium scale innovative projects which has resulted in a suite of high quality resources and case studies.

When asked what she most remembered of this array of innovative projects, Catherine fondly described one of her favourites which was a small-scale, community-based project designed to give support to the residents of a caravan park. These people were poor, unemployed, under-educated and isolated. The project engaged a social worker to work with them initially to help them make sense of their interactions with various bureaucratic institutions. What happened instead was that a communal breakfast was initiated and the beginnings of a mutually-supportive communal life for the residents, was established. In the end the community was growing its own vegetables. Catherine described her initial dismay on learning that the project had spent its money on providing breakfast! But when she saw the videos she understood the profound changes that had been made in people's lives and realised that sometimes "a little bit of money in a small community is all you need to effect a real change for the better". Since that time she has sought out opportunities to provide funding to projects that will make that kind of immediate difference.

As one of her last efforts on behalf of literacy, Catherine has worked to ensure that the needs of adults with low educational skills are taken up in the agenda of the Coalition of Australian Governments (COAG) for the new wave of reforms to the VET sector.

"With the changes to the NRS, the new Essential Skills Framework, we have a world class tool that helps us measure literacy across all aspects of life, both in the community and in the workplace. In the last ten years we have learnt a lot more about approaches that work and I think we are now well placed, with the new Framework and the recently accredited Advanced Diploma in LLN, to face any future challenges. The most important thing is to keep literacy relevant and make it part of the mainstream." Catherine said.

Catherine, you will be missed by many people, including your staff and members of ACAL who have worked with you over the years. We wish you well in your retirement and we applaud you for your determination to maintain a strong voice for adult literacy in what were often, difficult circumstances. ■

Literacy Link Readers survey

Lynne Matheson

As part of ACAL's review of activities and accountability requirements, the Literacy Link readers survey was devised and sent out as an insert in 1,800 copies of Literacy Link in late June 2006. Responses were requested by July 21 and a summary of responses was prepared on July 28, 2006. ACAL would like to thank the sixty-three respondents who sent the survey via fax, mail and from the web site and trust that the four randomly selected respondents enjoy their book vouchers.

As with any newsletter it was important to establish just how much of Literacy Link is read on a regular basis and what aspects of the newsletter were most valued. The reader response showed that 62% scan for specific articles of interest, reflective perhaps of time constraints in the workplace, while it was encouraging that 24% read Literacy Link from 'cover to cover'.

Readers were asked to rate each element of Literacy Link on a scale of 1 to 5 for quality (1 = low quality 5= high quality). For overall content and range of articles there was a general level of satisfaction, in that the rating averaged at 3.8 with comments such as

*Broad range of theory, research and practice
Excellent quality on relevant and interesting topics
Useful, informative*

Several comments indicated that time to read and process articles was crucial and also that the readability factor was a consideration.

*I wish I had the time to read more of the articles more fully
More "short and sweet" and to the point, we are all busy people with a lot to read
Articles too often lack readability through over-use of technical jargon, acronyms*

In relation to the format – length and layout, and relevance and timeliness, the results were much the same in the mid range. Some comments indicate that some attention to design elements could enliven articles and make them more reader friendly.

*more adventurous sub-headings might capture the attention
Columns too wide for a quick read*

To ensure a national readership is kept up to date is a daunting task, as is keeping the content relevant and engaging. Comments indicate success in this area, although sometimes deadlines expire before publication.

*Captures the myriad of change occurring in ABE while retaining educational integrity
About 50/50 -some old warhorse and some cutting edge stuff*

ACAL was interested to see what type of articles people were most interested in reading to ensure balance and appeal. The results indicated readers want an emphasis on practice and research which gives a framework for future planning.

Practice 79% Research 67% Current Projects 54%
State activities 48% Policy 35% Letters 32%
International 30% Comment 22%

ACAL is keen to respond to reader interest so asked the question of what people would like to read more about in Literacy Link. This brought a range of responses that again provides input to the editorial committee. Feature articles that document successful projects and research were most referred to. Also the desire for information about professional development activities and new resources was a recurring request.

Another request was how non-literacy professionals (who are interested) can incorporate literacy and numeracy into their field of expertise/practice with more confidence.

I rely on ACAL to provide the main source of PD information for me.

Good news stories -e.g. award winning driver ed. Project. Well done.

New resources, review of resources e.g. Internet sites, texts, Upcoming professional development in ABE area. More articles about what practitioners are doing at TAFE, ACE colleges, etc.

Successful classroom activities and why they worked in that setting.

ACAL invited readers to make other comments at the conclusion of the survey. It was evident from the comments that Literacy Link is effective in serving practitioners who may be working in isolation or outside formal settings. There is an obvious need to keep up to date with information, research, policy changes and examples of good practice that is not met by limited funds for professional development. Collegiality is an essential element and Literacy Link serves an important role in maintaining connections nationally.

With limited opportunities for PD, especially for P/T ABE practitioners -Literacy link is very beneficial for me to update my knowledge of policies, research and practice

ACAL is most useful to me working in a 'stand alone' context to feel I am part of something bigger -can serve an inspirational role

As a non-literacy professional, I find Literacy Link interesting and useful, although do not always fully appreciate the significance of some of the articles - especially National Reporting System and similar.

About the reader survey respondents

The larger states, NSW, QLD and VIC made up the bulk of the survey sample but the other states were all represented. Thirty five percent identified themselves as ACAL members while thirty eight percent identified themselves as members of a state association. Around a third of respondents worked in TAFE institutes, with an even spread of the rest across RTOs, ACE organizations and other institutions, with a few from the secondary and tertiary sectors. While a relatively small sample, it does reflect the diversity and spread of Literacy Link readership.

Thank you to those who participated in the survey. The editorial committee will consider the results in more detail in their planning for 2006-2007. ■

new snippets

ALL Survey Update: More on numeracy

As noted in the April 2005 issue of *Literacy Link*, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) will be conducting the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills (ALL) survey across Australia in 2006.

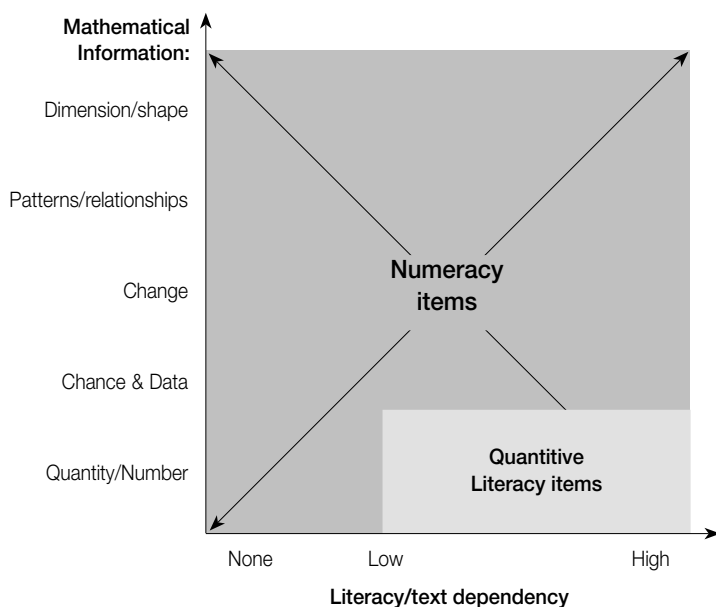
Dave Tout of Multifangled P/L and CAE in Melbourne is a consultant on the Numeracy Working Group of the ALL survey, and member of the Australian Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey Reference group for the ABS.

With the first international comparative report from the survey published in May last year (Desjardins, Murray, Clermont & Werquin, 2005), it is opportune for *Literacy Link* to keep readers up-to-date with survey developments and outcomes via a regular series of short updates on the ALL survey to be included in *Literacy Link* until the data is officially released in 2007.

Why numeracy and not Quantitative Literacy (QL)?

This update reflects on why numeracy was given the opportunity to be part of the ALL survey and why the QL Scale of the original International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) was considered inadequate as a measure of adults' numeracy skills.

Diagram 1. Numeracy versus Quantitative Literacy



For more information about the ALL survey visit:
<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/all/>
<http://www.ets.org/all/>

Go to the Education and Training Statistics National Centre at the Australian Bureau of Statistics: <http://www.abs.gov.au/>

The ALL survey numeracy team saw numeracy as the bridge that links mathematical knowledge: whether acquired via formal or informal learning, with functional and information-processing demands encountered in the real world. An evaluation of a person's numeracy is far from being a trivial matter, as it has to take into account task and situational demands, type of mathematical information available, the way in which that information is represented, prior practices, individual dispositions, cultural norms, and more. The numeracy framework therefore defined numeracy as:

...the knowledge and skills required to effectively manage and respond to the mathematical demands of diverse situations.

However, since an assessment can only examine observed behavior, not internal processes or capacities, the numeracy framework (see Gal et al, 2003) uses a more detailed definition of "numerate behavior" as a means to guide the development of items for the survey:

Numerate behavior is observed when people manage a situation or solve a problem in a real context; it involves responding to information about mathematical ideas that may be represented in a range of ways; it requires the activation of a range of enabling knowledge, factors, and processes.

In comparison, QL in IALS was defined as a measurement of the respondent's ability to apply arithmetic operations to numbers embedded in diverse texts.¹ While this scale produced useful data, the survey developers recognised that it was limited in scope, and so the numeracy scale of the ALL survey was designed to go above and beyond the QL Scale. While there is a clear connection and relationship between numeracy and IALS' QL measure there are significant differences: numeracy covers a much wider breadth of mathematical skills and purposes and is not heavily dependent in all cases on literacy skills by (not always) having tasks embedded in text.

Diagram 1 illustrates the differences between the QL in IALS and the Numeracy scale in the ALL survey.

These differences can be easily demonstrated by reference to the Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA) Numeracy and Mathematics stream. The IALS QL scale parallels the Numeracy for Interpreting Society domain of the CGEA; leaving the other three Numeracy and Mathematics' domains of the CGEA untouched in the IALS. The numeracy in the ALL survey will address the numeracy skills of the other three domains: Numeracy for Practical Purposes, Numeracy for Personal Organisation and Numeracy for Knowledge.

It is hoped that the numeracy scale of the ALL survey will, for the first time, give us some measure of adults' numeracy (and mathematical) abilities and skills. Indications from some of the initial results from the first wave of ALL survey countries is that numeracy competence is at least as important as literacy as a key indicator of human and social capital.

But more of that in the next instalment on the ALL survey in the next edition of *Literacy Link*.

VALBEC is turning 30

In 2008 VALBEC turns thirty and Beverley Campbell has been commissioned to produce a history of the organisation to be published ready for the VALBEC conference in May 2008. Bev has recently completed her PhD thesis *Acting in the middle: the Dialogic Struggle for Professional Identity in Adult Literacy and Adult Basic Education in Victoria* and has amongst her many publications the seminal *More than Life Itself: A handbook for Adult literacy* published by VALBEC in 1991. Here Bev gives a preview of the history project and forthcoming publication.

The organisation now known as VALBEC began in 1978 as the Victorian Adult Literacy Council (VALC), but a name change in the early 1980s incorporated basic education. The new name, the Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council, gave it the acronym, VALBEC, by which it is known today.

As a professional organisation VALBEC has moved with the times. From its beginnings as a relatively cohesive and monolingual field, it has had to transform itself many times to accommodate increasing pedagogical diversity and multidiscursivity. Changes in its financial situation have also resulted in significant changes to its identity. The history will not only document some of the major changes that VALBEC and the adult literacy field have experienced, but it will also look at some of the key themes of change.

This will include some of the key pedagogical changes, the changing nature of VALBEC's role as a professional organisation, the different physical spaces of VALBEC's location, VALBEC's role as a provider of professional development and conferences, changes in Fine Print and the increased professionalisation of the field.

The publication will draw on three main sources: interviews with key people involved with VALBEC in those thirty years, trawling the VALBEC archives to locate significant changes in the adult literacy field, and a selection of significant Fine Print articles which illustrate the major changes in the adult literacy field. The project officer will work closely with a reference group to identify people to be interviewed, to locate archival material, and to identify key Fine Print articles. Respondents will also be sought to write short pieces related to these articles. The final publication will be a significant account of thirty years of adult literacy education in Victoria.

What does it mean to turn thirty? VALBEC has come of age, but is being thirty still too young for a midlife crisis? What will the future hold for a thirty year old VALBEC?

Turning thirty does offer an opportunity to reflect on the past, to remember the good times, and the bad, of the adult literacy field. But it will also be an opportunity to use these reflections to examine VALBEC's identity and position itself as a professional organisation for the next thirty years and beyond.

As a voluntary organisation VALBEC has been able to survive and to transform itself when circumstances demand it, because of the energy and commitment of many people. This publication offers a timely opportunity to document some of that commitment, as well as some of the organisation's struggles and achievements. ■

new snippets

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Endnotes

¹ [For an analysis of Australia's performance in the Quantitative Literacy scale, see Joy Cumming's article 'The Quantitative Literacy Performance of Australians: Implications of Low Skill Levels' (Cummings, 1997).]

From page 1

Carmel is hoping to be able to spend the award money on publishing a book written by students participating in her programs. The book will have high quality production values and will be available for sale. She hopes that the award will therefore in effect be 'seed' money to support an on-going student publishing program. She also wants to purchase high quality audio recording equipment so that teachers can tape whole lessons and use these for self-analysis and reflection.

Carmel acknowledges that the LLNP provides educational opportunities for many people who might not get the chance, but she is only too well aware of the amount of time and effort that must be given to the administrative and accountability processes which she describes as a "constant counting of minutiae". Carmel also believes that the labour market programs would be even more successful if the funding were allocated on a longer term basis and staff were not distracted by the need to tender for a new contract every three years.

Congratulations to Carmel and the other award winners for 2006. For more information on the awards visit: http://www.literacyandnumeracy.gov.au/2006/ministers_awards_winners.htm ■

Minister's Award
Winner 2006

Well Resources And Adult Literacy National Project Outcomes And Reports

The Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) Programme and the Adult Literacy National Project (ALNP), administered by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) provide funding for language, literacy and numeracy projects associated with the delivery of training activities. The resources developed facilitate learning and adult literacy projects that provide input into existing national policy initiatives and research.

Information about the resources and outcomes can be found on the DEST website www.gov.au/literacynet. LiteracyNet is also undergoing major improvements and the new look and feel website will be live shortly.

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) also manages the collections and bibliographic databases for WELL and ALNP on DEST's behalf. The publications and resources produced from WELL and ALNP are indexed in the VOCED database. VOCED is a research database for technical and vocational education and training and is available free on the web at www.voced.edu.au. It is international in scope, with an emphasis on Australia and the Asia Pacific region, which contains over 30 000 high quality abstracts, many with links to full text documents about vocational education and training research, policy and practice.

All resources from 2006 can be borrowed from the DEST library and all publications can also be borrowed from the NCVER library.

Contact: DEST Library Services, Dept of Education,
Science and Training,
Location 702, GPO Box 9880
Canberra ACT 2601
Ph: 02 6240 8848; Fax: 02 6240 8861
Email: library@dest.gov.au

Contact: National Centre for Vocational Education
Research
PO Box 8288 Station Arcade
Adelaide SA 5000
Ph: 08 8230 8400; Fax: 08 8212 3436
Email: voced@ncver.edu.au

Dear Editor

I would like to comment on the recently released draft re-accreditation document for the CGEA.

Like many others, I was surprised and disappointed to see that the CGEA is morphing into a training package based on units of competency. No clear warning had been issued that this was going to happen. There is no good reason why it should happen and many good reasons why it shouldn't. The proposed change in the design of the program will not benefit either students or teachers.

As its name implies, the CGEA is a set of general education qualifications. Until now, this has been reflected not only in its title but also in its modular structure. It has never been a vocational course. Students enrolled in the CGEA are not vocational students. They are not, as CGEA students, associated with a particular industry or group of industries. That is why the CGEA has always been based on learning outcomes, not units of competency. The latter relate solely and specifically to training for workplace activities. CGEA learning outcomes do not.

The ANTA course development handbook (still current) recognizes this distinction. It makes provision for general education courses to have a non-vocational structure and non-vocational learning outcomes. There is no obligation for developers of general education programs to adopt a training package structure. Why has that happened in this case?

Initially, I assumed that the proposed changes in the structure of the CGEA were based on empirical research. I posted some comments on the SITNTALK website. Others made similar comments. Mine included a request for the authors of the document to publish their research. By way of reply, we were directed to a website setting out AQTF Standards 27 and 28 for State and Territory Registering/Course Accrediting Bodies (2005). This direction was accompanied by the assertion that 'Courses being accredited...must comply' with those standards. Apparently, research had nothing to do with it.

I followed the link to the website. It turned out to be a journey through the looking glass. I read Standard 27. In summary, Standard 27 says that course accrediting bodies must make sure training packages are based on an industry or community need and proper consultation with key stakeholders. Nowhere does it insist that all accredited courses must be designed as training packages. What it does say is that courses must not be accredited if they consist of modules 'that ultimately achieve the competencies of a training package program'. The CGEA is not and never has been such a course. Clearly, Standard 27 is not relevant to the design or re-accreditation of the CGEA.

Bemused, I turned my attention to Standard 28 (course design criteria). This was just as perplexing. The standard says that courses 'must be based on nationally endorsed units of competency where available'. To the best of my knowledge, no such units are available for the CGEA. Otherwise, the standard says, 'courses must be based on competency standards developed in accordance with the current Training Package Development Handbook' except – mark this well, readers – 'where the proponent can establish to the satisfaction of the course accrediting body that it is not

ACAL conference Papers
will be available soon at
www.acal.edu.au

possible to develop appropriate competency standards, for example in some general education areas' (my italics). That exception would certainly cover the CGEA.

I am still trying to work out why the authors of the draft document believe that their work must comply with the requirements of AQTF Standards 27 and 28. They must have interpreted the standards quite differently from me. I would be very interested to read compelling arguments that support their interpretation, but I won't be holding my breath.

I do not believe that the draft re-accreditation document should be even considered for accreditation without major structural changes. As it stands, it is a horrible, impracticable hybrid of training package and general education programs. It does not represent a useful and sensible approach to general education for adults. It is a recipe for confusion and resentment. The current CGEA document has its failings, but it is holy writ compared to this.

James Plumridge

Dear Editor

There have been some heated words in the ALBE department recently! The cause of this passionate discussion is the reaccreditation of the CGEA. The most common teacher response to the proposed changes is astonishment. Why change a perfectly good, well accepted curriculum?

The proposed CGEA is a dramatic move away from the current genre based approach to teaching adult literacy, to one based on social context, where reading and writing are separate units of study. In proposing such significant changes, a comprehensive case for change and its theoretical basis should have been provided. This has not occurred.

In my view, these changes will result in a highly fragmented form of literacy acquisition. The goal of literacy teaching is mastery of the broad genres of language, to enable access to all aspects of contemporary society. However, the proposals reduce literacy to a set of skills through the compartmentalisation of reading and writing and use of prescribed content. This structure gives insufficient significance to the gaining and giving of meaning as the inseparable purpose of reading and writing. In the proposed CGEA, reading and writing can be

delivered and assessed as stand alone units; as if somehow the two are unrelated. It seems almost too obvious to state that writing rarely occurs without the reader in mind. Likewise reading involves a dialogue with meaning the writer sought to convey in the text.

The proposed unit structure based on tightly prescribed social contexts, which can be offered in a stand alone form, is also problematic. It will not allow a full range of genre types to be comprehensively studied and mastered. Particular social contexts generally lead to working with texts produced for similar purposes. These usually share a common structure, language and linguistic features. As a result, a breadth of genre types cannot be authentically addressed within each unit. Contrived genre content is not an effective vehicle for literacy acquisition. Similarly in the proposed CGEA, the teaching of critical literacy is undervalued. It is through the exploration of the multiple layers of meaning in reading and writing a range of texts, that literacy students gain a real handle on literacy as a force for personal empowerment.

I am particularly concerned that the suggested structure is not student centred. The narrowly prescribed content areas substantially reduce the teacher and students' ability to determine the subject matter on which new learning is based. Literacy students often present with negative ideas and self perceptions about their ability to learn. If the proposed CGEA is adopted, students will lose a fundamental and well established method used to address and effectively counter these barriers to learning. Unlike VET, literacy acquisition is not solely about learning skills to do a particular job. It does not have a narrow focus. The current CGEA recognises this fact. It has the whole learner's broad needs clearly in focus.

My colleagues and I expected the CGEA reaccreditation to do a bit of tweaking; with only some small changes, because the basics are very sound. No wonder ALBE teachers have been involved passionate discussion. I cannot see these concerns dissipating, because the wholesale changes proposed do not meet the requirements of our student group.

Elaine Cannard
Teacher
Brunswick, Victoria

Literacy Link Editor ...

ACAL was sad to farewell Robyn Hodge as the Commissioning Editor for **Literacy Link** last month. We thank her for her expertise and skill which she brought to the production of the newsletter and we wish her well.

The ACAL executive is seeking an energetic and passionate editor to work with the consortium of Don MacDowall and Gabrielle Markus to produce the annual 4-6 editions of **Literacy Link**. The editor will work in collaboration with the Editorial group chaired by Margaret McHugh. If you are interested in applying for this position contact Don or Margaret acal@pacific.net.au

ACAL annual general meeting ...

The **ACAL Annual General Meeting** will be held
on **Friday 6 October**
at **4-30 pm – 5.30 pm**
at **the ACAL National conference in Adelaide.**

If you are attending the conference make sure you
come along to hear reports on ACAL's activities and
meet the members of the Executive committee.

JOIN ACAL TODAY!

Come and have your say in influencing the nation's
literacy policy and practice.

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