

The Union Movement and Literacy in New Zealand

Chris Holland

Between 1994 and 2001, Dr Chris Holland was the professional development manager / associate director of The Network in the UK, a national, DfES-funded agency based at Lancaster University, for providers and practitioners of workplace language, literacy and numeracy. From 2002, Chris designed and taught distance and face-to-face post-graduate teacher education programmes in workplace literacy in the UK, New Zealand and more recently, Canada. Now working as an independent consultant, Chris is establishing workplace literacy clusters for the New Zealand Ministry of Education's Learning for Living project, and is the literacy advisor for the NZCTU, with particular responsibility for research and union Learning Representative training. This year she will be conducting research into training within freight forwarding enterprises in Auckland.

There have been a number of legislative attempts in the last three decades to restrict union power during the new right regimes of the last two decades of the twentieth century. For instance, in the UK, the Thatcher government deregistered powerful unions during the 1980s, and the New Zealand the employment relations act of 1991 severely restricted union access to sites, and crushed delegate education. The increasingly globalised workforce also affected unions, as cheaper migrant labour crossed borders and bargaining power at a national level was reduced by factories relocating to parts of the world where labour costs were lowest. Such legislative and profit driven changes left unions struggling to hold their membership base, and unable to consider activities such as education, that were not 'core' to the union movement.

The late 1990s saw an intense focus on lifelong learning as a means to upskill workforces and build national economic competitiveness. In countries such as the UK, embattled and weakened unions saw a way to build their membership base and assist workers, and began to work in partnership with government and industry to forward upskilling agendas. As funding to develop adult literacy became available, unions began to take a particular interest in being involved in literacy education.

Unions and Literacy in the UK

Unions were also seen by some governments as an essential partner in ensuring that workers engaged in upskilling. Indeed, there is a wealth of international literature that argues the importance workers place on having a trusted union structure/organisation involved in workplace learning, including industry training (Spencer, 2002). The Trades Union Congress (TUC) found that the unique position of confidence and trust that Union Learning Representatives have in the workplace, means

that they have the powerful potential to reach learners with learning needs who do not open up to employers or outside providers. (Swift, 2000). The payback to the union movement for its involvement in the skills agenda has been positive: besides the improvement in workers' literacies, the TUC reports an improvement in union recruitment and image in the workplace (TUC, 2006).

Early in the New Labour term of office, *A Fresh Start: Improving Literacy and Numeracy* (1999) made recommendations to the DfES that included the establishment of a TUC managed 'union learning fund' and the training of 'union learning representatives'. Since then, the TUC has had massive injections of funding to support its affiliated unions to negotiate workplace basic skills and to train workers (not always members) to become union

contents

The Union Movement and Literacy in New Zealand	1
Foundation Learning Progressions for Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, and Numeracy	5
Literacy support for Indigenous VET students	6
Transforming Roles, Transforming Relationships	7
The Literacy Gateway to Gaining and Maintaining Income Support	9
Meet Michael Goghlan – the new Literacy Live facilitator	11
Literacy and Numeracy Research Funding Slashed	13
Airwaves improve literacy skills	13
Literacy and Numeracy Minister's Awards – nominations are now open	14
ACAL contact details	16

learning representatives (ULRs). The TUC has established a Unionlearn website and works with the Confederation of British Industries, the Basic Skills Agency and others to promote the literacy crusade.

Union learning representatives are a key union tool in this strategy. Local union educators train interested workers in companies to be ULRs, training which focuses on identifying individual learners' deficits and helping them to access local provision. ULRs may include non-union members and even human resources personnel—in fact the proportion of union learning representatives who have never held a union position before rose from 9% in 2000 to 33.5% in 2005 (TUC, 2006). A workplace of 600 employees might have 3-4 representatives who are responsible for advocating learning in the workplace to employers and workers, identifying workers with basic skills needs and supporting these and other co-workers to access education. The role was not developed to include an education/employment relations component—learning representatives are expected simply to support the adult basic skills agenda.

The TUC union alignment with the skills agenda has been strongly criticized. Payne (2001) voices the concerns of many in the union movement that an increasing focus on learning is a shift away from union issues such as collective rights. Cowen et al. (2001) report success in relation to both increasing awareness and widening participation in learning activities through the ULR initiative, although they also note that a large proportion of ULRs who have received training report difficulties in carrying out their role, many of which are related to employment issues, such as release and time to train.

Unions and Literacy in Canada

In Canada there are at national and provincial levels, joint labour-provider-employer partnerships, but unions have come to these partnerships from a position of greater strength than in the UK. The National Literacy Secretariat had a Business and Labour Partnerships program for over a decade, and this has been the primary source of support for innovative applied projects (curriculum, tools, awareness, professional development, research) in workplace education. The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and provincial labour federations in Canada have commissioned research, promoted and supported local unions undertaking literacy-related activities, provided professional development initiatives for workplace literacy practitioners, produced resources including Clear Language programmes (for unions and companies), and assisted local unions to offer direct literacy provision. With the support of organisations such as the CLC and the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS), and sometimes with their own funds, unions in the provinces and territories have taken various innovative workplace literacy initiatives.

Although much of this activity has been eroded over the last year by the incoming Harper government, there is already an intensive commitment and involvement in literacy by many unions and labour organisations. While many union-led initiatives are under threat, there continues to be promotion and support for local unions, the development

of peer learning guides (where literacy practitioners and union representatives are both trained to work side by side in the workplace), clear language programmes (within unions and companies), and direct literacy provision.

The important difference between many Canadian and British initiatives, is that in Canada, employment relations are often an integral part of the content of programmes, and many are guided by the following union principles: that union learning is participatory, inclusive and democratic in both its aims and methods; that it acknowledges and builds on the experiences and skills of workers; that it promotes solidarity and respect among workers; that it enhances workers' capacities for critical reflection and action; that it links education and action in the world in a project of social transformation (Connon-Unda, 2001). In other words, the union aim is not so much to support an government-industry agenda as to create powerful learning in union terms.

The NZ Union Learning Representative Model

Unlike Canada and the UK, the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (NZCTU) has so far had little direct involvement with the adult literacy strategy and is a latecomer to workplace literacy development. While the Employment Contracts Act of 1991 decimated unions, the Employment Relations Act of 2000 allowed the unions back onto sites, funded delegate education and introduced good faith bargaining, all of which enabled the unions to focus on more than their immediate survival. From 2002-2003, the NZCTU began to explore the UK learning representative model.

Based on research conducted in the UK during 2001 (Holland & Castleton, 2001, Holland, 2003), a proposal for Tertiary Education funding for a ULR pilot was developed and submitted. It aimed to address some issues with the TUC model. These included the following: the TUC ULRs did not include an organising agenda in basic skills support work; ULRs could be non-members; learning was individually rather than collectively focused; and very few learning agreements (which essentially establish appropriate conditions and rights of learning representatives to carry out their role) existed. Although literacy support was written into the proposal, when the NZCTU was awarded funding to run the pilot from 2004, literacy aspects of the programme were not at the time forefronted. What the NZCTU did focus on, was incorporating an organising agenda, ensuring the learning representatives were elected from among union members, exploring how learning could be collective rather than individually focused and embedding learning agreements in collective agreements. This focus on the union aspects of the programme first, and the literacy/upskilling aspects second gave the learning representatives programme the union strength that the UK model lacked.

A reference group was established and the aims of the learning representatives programme were promoted to unions throughout New Zealand. Based on the strength of support from unions, specific industry sectors were targeted for the initial training of learning representatives. High interest was shown by rail and post workers, and

a training programme was developed for this group. The learning representative training course comprises three workshop days and some self-directed study. The first two-day workshops took place in November 2006. The participants then complete the (supported) distance learning component before day three, some four months after the first two workshop days.

Other sectors targeted for this training include mining, plastics, seafood, care, dairy and timber. The next workshop will run in March 2007, and will be followed by several others. The training workshops have been designed to equip learning representatives with the knowledge and skills necessary to begin to identify both personal and environmental learning (including literacy) issues, and to promote, negotiate and provide ongoing support for workplace learning. The learning representatives' self-directed project work includes looking at enablers and barriers to learning, interviewing other workers about their learning needs, researching qualifications and external learning opportunities, and creating workplace learning agreements. The goal is to train 100 learning representatives before June 2007. Participants in the pilot learning representatives' training found the programme helpful:

It was excellent. Really good. This should have been in the workplace years ago.

We've got a guy here leaving our worksite soon, after 30 years in the industry. He's got a lot of experience in machine operation, but has been offered no qualifications. If Learning Reps had been up and running 10 years ago he might have had some really good qualifications behind him and be able to front up to a new employer with that information.

This is going to be a real benefit to the workers. I've spoken to them about it already – and they were all keen to know about what we were going to be doing. The young fullahs are lining up already – they want to take their learning further. I'm really looking forward to it.

(The Unionist, NZCTU, December 2006)

The NZCTU has succeeded in securing a collective agreement in the care sector, in which a learning agreement is embedded. However, in other sectors it has

been difficult to interest employers in the venture. Likewise, some unions in New Zealand remain unconvinced that the learning representative programme is worth the diversion of valuable resources. Some key unions are fully engaged, such as the engineering and manufacturing union, the maritime union, and the road, transport and logistics union. One union, Unite, has found another way to help members with their literacy issues.

A Union – Provider partnership

The Unite union is a relatively new and small union dedicated to working mainly with low paid, part time and casual workers in hospitality and service sectors such as hotels, fast food chains, security, and call centres. It achieved international recognition for its Supersizemypay.com campaign in 2005/2006, where it succeeded in raising the wages of workers in fast food chains such as McDonalds, Starbucks, Pizza Hut and Burger King.

At the end of 2006, Unite entered into an agreement with the Wananga, a Maori tertiary education provider. The Wananga had become the largest tertiary provider in New Zealand, focusing on low cost or free education of young, working class people, many of whom are Maori. Under this agreement, the tertiary institute agreed to trial two programmes that the union would promote to members—first steps to business, and computers. There was a very high response rate, with 400 people enrolling to do a three-year computer course.

While the union was approaching people for these courses, it became apparent that there was also a strong interest in doing literacy and ESL courses. Unite identified additional courses that they thought would be of interest to their members including literacy and ESL, Maori language and lifeskills.

Unite provides the premises and promotional framework for the Wananga to deliver the courses. This is helpful in enabling the Wananga to reach the type of people that they want to reach - working class people who don't access traditional education. The students are given a box of print and DVD resources, and, in addition, after the first four weeks of study, are loaned a computer for their use at home. Currently these are returned at the completion of the course, but the union is exploring how the computers might be bought by the students. The National Director of



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. Back issues are available from the ACAL website: www.acal.edu.au

Contributions to **Literacy Link** should be sent by email to acal@pacific.net.au

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Margaret McHugh (Editor), Jim Plumridge, Yvonne Russell, Gabrielle Markus (Layout and Production).

Correspondence for ACAL including membership should be addressed to:

GPO Box 2283 Canberra ACT 2601

Telephone: (03) 9546 6892

Facsimile: (03) 9546 0421

Email: acal@pacific.net.au

Web: www.acal.edu.au

DISCLAIMER

Material published in **Literacy Link** should not be viewed as endorsed by the Australian Council for Adult Literacy.

Unite, Mike Treen, explains why the partnership between the union and an education provider is effective:

By partnering with the union, in this case, there are relationships of trust and confidence that allow people to make that transition more easily into education and they have a premises and environment in which they are going together with their workmates into a friendly place that is full of people like them. It's not alien or alienating to them. And we have found that people are enjoying their courses, that people are helping each other, it's being discussed at work. We seem to have quite a good success in reducing the dropout rates that have been associated with these courses in the past.

Mike Treen

The materials chosen by the Wananga are taken from the Green Light literacy programme, which is an adult literacy programme developed by Cuba's Ministry of Education, and adapted to the New Zealand context (Te Wananga o Aotearoa and IPLAC, 2004). The programme has been well adapted for New Zealand learners, emphasising grammatical conventions but encouraging some critical thinking at higher levels. As a tool for workers, it has no workplace or employment-relations content. Despite these limitations, interest in the programme is high, and there are possibilities for a more multidimensional approach once the partnership and programmes are more established. The aim is to get enrolment and participation levels up and then to explore ways of adapting delivery that draw on (workplace) cultural and critical dimensions through employment relations issues.

Through this venture, the union has become more interested in being involved in the Learning Representatives programme. In fact, the literacy and other education programmes offered to delegates and other members through Unite could act as an impetus to members who want to become learning representatives.

Conclusion

The unions' late entry into the adult literacy arena has been the result severe restrictions on membership building throughout the 1990s. This late entry should allow lessons to be learned from the experience of other countries such as the UK and Canada, in terms of signalling and retaining a union perspective on literacy.

The NZCTU has been very proactive in developing its own model of union learning representatives, and in establishing and running training for those intermediaries. It has understood from the UK experience, the value of building a literacy component into learning representative

training, and is also exploring ways in which it can increase its influence in this area, while retaining 'union' education principles.

The Canadian experience of direct provision and clear language programmes have shown other ways that members in New Zealand can be supported. Direct union-facilitated literacy provision has already been explored by one union. But lack of research and knowledge of the theory and practice of workers' literacy development among unionists in New Zealand means that decisions about learning programmes can be uninformed, and there is no clear direction about what to do next. Awareness of the importance of union influence and involvement at both policy development and implementation levels can be low. Union educators are struggling to develop effective tools to critique current or planned initiatives and to articulate other models. Yet in today's mainly business and economically focused model of education, these new beginnings are exciting. Unions may help find the way to a fresh alternative.

References

- Connon-Unda, J. (2001) *Seeds for Change a curriculum guide for worker-centred literacy*. Canadian Labour Congress: Ottawa
- Cowen, G., Clements, M. and Cutter, J. (2001) *TUC Adapt/Util Learning Services: Union learning representatives*. London, Trades Union Congress.
- Holland, C. & Castleton G. (2002) *Basic Skills and Union Activity in the UK and Australia in Unions and learning in a global economy: international and comparative perspectives* Spencer B. Thompson Educational Press: Toronto
- Holland C. (2003) *Joining the crusade: the recruitment and deployment of Union Learning Representatives* in Castleton G., Gerber R. & Lankshear C. *Improving Workplace Learning*, Routledge, UK
- Moser, C (1999) *A Fresh Start: Improving Literacy and Numeracy* Department of Education & Skills: London
- NZCTU (2006) *The Unionist*, December 2006.
- Payne, J. (2001) What do trade unions want from lifelong learning? *Research in Post-Compulsory Education* Volume 6, Number 3 / October 2001 355 - 373 Taylor & Francis: London
- Spencer, B. Ed. (2002) *Unions and learning in a global economy : international and comparative perspectives* Thompson Educational Press: Toronto
- Swift, J. (2000) *New partners – new start for Asian textile workers*. Workplace basic skills funding conference presentation, May. Trades Union Congress.
- Te Wananga o Aotearoa and Instituto Pedagogico Latino America Y Caribeno (2004) *Greenlight Learning for Life: a basic literacy and numeracy programme* Te Wananga: Te Awamutu
- Trades Union Congress. *The Learning Rep.* Autumn, 2006

ACAL eNews ACAL's electronic newsletter

ACAL eNews is ACAL's electronic newsletter with links and short, sharp national and state news. It's available to anyone interested in adult literacy and numeracy and emailed bi-monthly.

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

Foundation Learning Progressions for Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, and Numeracy

Susan Reid

Feature

Susan Reid from Workbase in New Zealand charts the development of the Foundation Learning Progressions launched in October 2006. Susan compares the work being done in New Zealand with Australia's National Reporting System.

Over the years literacy practitioners in New Zealand have looked at the Australian National Reporting System with a mixture of emotions. Some of us were glad that we didn't have to report against a centralised system. Others amongst us wished for a system where we could measure learner progress in a way that was nationally validated not just to report to our funders but to enable us to have conversations with learners about their progress towards achieving their goals.

A few of us were fortunate enough to hear its genesis explained by Australian experts such as Rosie Wickert and were impressed by its theoretical underpinnings. All of us marveled at its complexity and looked at the professional development videos that were produced to support its introduction and implementation. We also watched how the NRS was modified over the years as the groups who used it changed.

We also became aware of other international examples such as the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) in the USA and the 'Equipped for the Future' initiative at the University of Tennessee.

When the New Zealand Adult Literacy Strategy 'More Than Words – Kei tua atu i te kupu: Te Mahere rautaki whiringa ako o Aotearoa' was launched in 2001 (http://www.tki.org.nz/r/literacy_numeracy/clarifying/adult/morethanwords.pdf) reference was made to the need for "an effective system for assessing and measuring learners' literacy gains that ideally would be linked to national benchmarks of literacy skills." (page 7)

In 2002 the Ministry of Education funded a small group led by the late Liz Moore and Alison Sutton to develop the Adult Literacy Achievement Framework (ALAF). ALAF was a framework for recording and reporting on the literacy gains of learners. It was intended to assist in the identification of learner goals and recording of progress as a first step towards reporting the achievement of learners on a common framework. Based on the Four Roles literacy model from Freebody and Luke, ALAF consisted of six reading and six writing profiles. Each profile contained descriptions of what skills learners would be expected to have as well as the concept that learners might be at different stages within that profile – beginning, developing or consolidating.

Trialed in 2003, ALAF was the first step in building a common language around adult literacy. The report from the ALAF trial found a positive response to using a common framework. The trial report also commented on the limited capability of tutors to teach literacy and identified the need for professional development and resources.

The Ministry of Education decided not to continue with ALAF for a number of reasons including the fact that there were no national literacy standards describing what adults were expected to know and be able to do. These were established by the ministry in 2005.

This initial work was built on by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) who funded a much bigger project using expert academics and researchers mostly from the compulsory sector with input from adult literacy and numeracy practitioners to develop a series of Foundation Learning Progressions. The experts used successful strategies and models from the compulsory sector and adapted them for the adult learner. The EFF Standards were also instrumental in guiding the development group's initial thinking.

The draft Foundation Learning Progressions for Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, and Numeracy were launched in October 2006. The Progressions focus specifically on reading, writing, speaking, listening and numeracy skills and describe the key learning steps taken by adults as they build their literacy, numeracy and language expertise.

In the press release accompanying the launch the TEC described the Progressions as "a reference resource for tutors and programme developers". The TEC went on to say that "this new coherent teaching and learning framework will help tutors shape programmes that will meet the needs of their students."

The Progressions use a series of different terms and vocabulary. The Progressions are organised under Strands: Listen to understand, Speak to communicate, Read with understanding, Write to communicate, Make sense of number to solve problems, Reason statistically and Measure and interpret shape and space.

Each Strand has a series of Progressions under it. For example the Make Sense of Number to Solve Problems Strand has the following progressions:

- Additive strategies progression
- Multiplicative strategies progression
- Proportional reasoning strategies progression
- Number sequence progression
- Place value progression
- Number facts progression.

It is really useful for practitioners to understand that learners using numbers will have a combination of numeracy knowledge facts as well as numeracy strategies. The Make Sense of Number to Solve Problems Strand and related progressions are based on a very successful approach used in the primary sector.

Continued on page 14 ►

Literacy support for Indigenous VET students

Narelle McCluskey

In 2005 the Indigenous Studies Product Development Unit (ISPDU) located at Tropical North Queensland TAFE in Cairns undertook a research project to identify and develop concrete, practical information for teachers and administrators in the vocational education and training sector, to provide effective literacy support for Indigenous students (see *Literacy Link* 25, 4). 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 results were published in 2006 in the report *Literacy support for Indigenous people: Current systems and practices in Queensland*.¹

In accord with its underlying philosophy of providing practical support to teachers, students and administrators, the ISPDU recently developed a *Good practice guide for Literacy support for Indigenous VET students*. The *Good practice guide* provides teachers with guidelines for designing and developing literacy and numeracy support systems for Indigenous VET students. Drawing on the systematic review of Indigenous education conducted by NCVER in 2004-2005, the Guide includes the key practices required to ensure successful delivery of VET programs to Indigenous students.

The systematic review of Indigenous education published as *Aspects of training that meet Indigenous Australians' aspirations: A systematic review of research*,² examined and evaluated the national research on Indigenous VET education as well as a selection of relevant international studies to determine 'the key features required in the planning, design and delivery of VET and ACE learning programs to ensure positive educational, employment and social outcomes'³ for Indigenous Australians. The review found that successful VET programmes produce two types of outcomes for Indigenous students:

- personal outcomes: enhanced self-confidence and self-esteem; improved sense of connection to, and engagement with, the community; improved communication skills and knowledge; and improved understanding of Australian systems and culture
- employment and education outcomes: improved subject and course completions; and increased movement to further study at higher levels that is likely to result in employment.

The study identified seven key factors from the research which, when combined, provide improved outcomes. The seven key factors are:

- community involvement and ownership
- incorporation of Indigenous identities, cultures, knowledge and values
- establishment of 'true' partnerships
- flexibility in course design, content and delivery
- quality staff and committed advocacy
- extensive student support services
- appropriate funding that allows for sustainability.

For any training to be successful, Indigenous input and consultation is critical. Teachers in the VET sector can

ensure this input and consultation is happening by:

- encouraging Indigenous input (both formal and informal) regarding design, development and delivery at all stages
- collaborating with Indigenous staff
- collaborating with the local Indigenous community
- seeking out successful models of collaboration, including community advisory boards.

The findings from *Literacy support for Indigenous people* confirm that the most effective literacy and numeracy support for Indigenous VET students utilises one-on-one support, preferably in the form of in-class tutorial support and/or peer tutoring. The good practice principles of adult learning apply. The teacher needs to develop a positive relationship with each individual student, acknowledging that students are adults and that they bring prior knowledge, skills and life experience to the relationship. The teacher also needs to acknowledge and respect the student's cultural and educational background. With regard to Indigenous students this should include an understanding of the student's cultural history.

Pre-course assessment to determine the literacy and numeracy level of each student is essential. This assessment should be relevant to the course content and carried out in an informal environment with oral support for written text wherever necessary. Students should be asked what they want from the learning experience. This information can then be used to individualise and customise the learning program, thus reinforcing one-on-one support for each student. Collaboration and support should be encouraged between literacy and numeracy specialists and vocational teachers. This collaboration will place the literacy and numeracy learning in context, ensuring it is relevant to the students' lives and aspirations.

Teachers can enhance their delivery for Indigenous VET students by building on the good practice principles of adult learning. Cultural awareness and cross-cultural competency training is a good place to start. The basics can be provided by a cultural awareness course but this should be supplemented by seeking out Indigenous advisors and mentors, either Indigenous staff or community members. Understanding the cultural protocols which apply in the community where the teacher is practicing will break down barriers to communication. A grasp of the different attitudes of Indigenous peoples to family, time and community will enable the teacher to adjust more readily to their student's needs.

A significant part of this cultural awareness is the recognition of the diversity of Indigenous culture and history across Australia. Apart from the major division between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, there is the great diversity between Aboriginal cultures throughout the country. An awareness of this cultural diversity will bring with it the recognition that for many Indigenous students English is their second, third or fourth language. Employing English-as-a-second-language strategies will help to supply effective literacy and numeracy support for these students.

Notes

1 McCluskey, N. & Thaker, L. (2006). *Literacy support for Indigenous people: Current systems and practices in Queensland*. NCVER Adelaide.

2 Miller, C. (2005). *Aspects of training that meet Indigenous Australians' aspirations: A systematic review of research*. NCVER Adelaide.

3 Ibid., p. 6.

Continued on page 14 ►

Transforming Roles, Transforming Relationships

Susan Bates

Susan Bates worked in the adult literacy field in Australia as a practitioner, and in curriculum development and professional development training, for 21 years before moving to Scotland in 2004. She is currently responsible for implementing adult literacy services in Renfrewshire, as part of the Scottish Executive's Adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy for Scotland. She lives and works in Paisley, an industrial town near Glasgow. For more information, Susan can be contacted at buddies.learning@renfrewshire.gov.uk.

Literacy as Social Practice

Most Australians involved in adult literacy will be familiar with aspects of the *social practices* perspective for understanding and addressing adult literacy issues, as one of many theoretical approaches that find expression in literacy delivery in Australia. The central ideas and practices underpinning the social practices approach will also be familiar to most: the centrality of learners' choices, learners' goals and learners' real life literacies usage in determining teaching and learning activities; and the concept of deploying critical literacy practices (including discourse analysis) to include the diversity of real-life literacies and challenge the imposition of irrelevant discourses. Those who have been around for a while will know how difficult it is to establish these ideas and practices in day-to-day delivery, and how curriculum frameworks can, over time, narrow learners' choices (the tail wagging the dog) rather than offer starting points for more inclusive practices.

Here in Scotland, we do adult literacy differently. One of the differences is that we speak about literacy in the plural, to reflect the range and complexity of literacies practices and literacies cultures that exist in Scottish society, and to indicate the inclusion of numeracy. One of the other main differences is a shared, heartfelt and often expressed commitment to implementing a social practices approach to the adult literacies provision being developed and delivered here. The differences between the Scottish approach, and the curriculum-based approach being used in neighbouring England are well understood by Scottish practitioners, bureaucrats and learners alike. The Scottish approach is based on a shared belief that the most effective support for adult literacies learners is one that promotes self-determination and recognises and respects difference and diversity.

One of the criticisms of this type of learner-centred approach is that, without a specified curriculum, teachers will find it difficult to know what to teach. However, the Scottish model is built on a set of principles and prescribed program elements which ensure that delivery services and organisational processes and structures function to keep the learners' goals and choices as the primary reference point. We ask learners what they need to be able to do and this generates a program of learning.

Service provision and practice within the Scottish adult literacies field is supported by theoretically rigorous, insightful, courageous resources. The *Literacies in the Community Good Practice Framework*, is a quality assurance framework designed specifically to address

the issues and barriers faced by literacies learners. This framework ensures adult literacies-specific good practice in provision, marketing, articulation, evaluation and reporting mechanisms across a range of literacies programs in community, TAFE and workplace settings. Practitioners are supported by centralised professional development training and the *Adult Literacy and Numeracy Curriculum Framework for Scotland* which, rather than a set of learning outcomes, is a framework of strategies for effective teaching and learning, all of which reflect and support the social practices literacies perspective.

Transforming Roles and Relationships

This article explores the theme of transformation in adult literacies learning in relation to two adult literacies delivery models being used in Renfrewshire, Scotland. It provides a glimpse of how the social practices approach is being applied in Scottish literacies, and how the Australian CAVSS (the Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills) model is fitting neatly into that approach. It examines literacies delivery models which function at two levels: at one level to provide a process for delivering effective literacies support, and at another, to transform aspects of the learning environment, and by doing so, transform the learning experiences of adult learners. Some of these processes are discussed below.

The delivery models

The Buddies for Learning model is well established in Renfrewshire, Scotland, providing community-based delivery in a number of locations. Learners attend weekly group learning sessions for three hours. Within any group, some learners attend independently, and some choose to be matched one-to-one with a trained volunteer tutor and attend the session with their tutor. These sessions are delivered by Supported Learning Tutors (SLTs) who provide advice and assistance to the volunteer tutors, and at the same time, maximise opportunities for peer learning and group learning for learners and volunteers alike. The session is designed to provide pathways for learners who might otherwise find it difficult to move from individual, one-to-one tutoring to joining a group – they are already part of a group. The SLTs work in conjunction with Community Work Assistants (Outreach) (CWAs) and Community Learning Officers (CLOs) to support learners' involvement in a range of awareness-raising activities, and to ensure that the Buddies for Learning processes are maintained.

CAVSS (Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills) is also being delivered in Renfrewshire at Reid Kerr College. ►

This article has been published by the Research and Practice in Adult Literacy (RaPAL) Network in the RaPAL Journal. Information about RaPAL can be found at www.rapal.org.uk

CAVSS is a model for integrating literacies support with vocational training and employs a specific team-teaching methodology. The literacy/numeracy specialist (CAVSS tutor) spends a few hours a week team-teaching alongside the vocational lecturer in theoretical and practical workshop settings. During that time, the two lecturers take turns to instruct the group. The vocational lecturer teaches the vocational course as usual while the CAVSS tutor steps in to revise and re-teach the literacy and/or numeracy processes that students need to apply at the point when they actually need to apply them. All students have access to CAVSS support, and no-one is singled out for help. The CAVSS tutor takes an auxiliary role and only teaches in line with the vocational lecturer's planned activities, course materials and advice.

Ensuring learner-determination

In both the Buddies for Learning and CAVSS models, structures and processes are designed to ensure that the learners' goals are wholly and exclusively addressed in the learning process.

For example, the Buddies for Learning model includes systems for ensuring that learners identify their initial goals and determine new and/or different goals throughout their time with Buddies. Learners' immediate and long-term learning goals are recorded in their initial Individual Learning Plan. At the end of each learning session, learners identify what they want to work on with their volunteer tutors in the next session. At six-week intervals, every learner meets with a third party (usually a CWA or CLO) to review their experiences in the project, including evaluating goals and determining goals for the next stage of their learning. After twenty-four weeks, each learner meets with a third party to review long term goals, and produce a second, new Individual Learning Plan.

Learner-determined delivery within the CAVSS model is achieved differently. CAVSS is delivered to students as part of their industry training. Students do not choose to have CAVSS support: at this stage of implementation in Scotland it is delivered where lecturers and college managers have identified that student outcomes would be improved by literacies support.

However, the CAVSS model is designed to ensure that students' learning goals (specifically, to achieve an industry qualification as identified by their enrolment in a particular industry course) are neither disrupted nor increased by learning activities extra to those delivered by the industry lecturer. CAVSS tutors do not deliver learning activities of their own. Instead, they teach literacy and numeracy processes using the industry lecturer's teaching and learning activities as context and content.

Ensuring dialogue

At each stage, Buddies learners are actively engaged in reflecting on their progress, and determining new goals, through dialogue with volunteer tutors, SLTs, other learners and CLOs. This dialogue is central to opening out the business of goal setting for literacies learners, many of whom have difficulty identifying what they might still see as

impossible goals. The dialogue within Buddies sessions provides much more than peer learning opportunities for volunteers and learners. Learners talk about their experiences and the progress they have made over time, and this dialogue supports newer learners to develop confidence in their learning abilities, and look to longer term goals for themselves. Confidence-building is central to the Buddies ethos, and the multi-layered dialogue that surrounds procedures for goal determination by learners means that confidence is grounded in the achievements of every learner in the group.

For CAVSS, dialogue is a central strategy for the delivery of literacies support, as well as an important outcome of that support. It is not uncommon for students undertaking industry qualifications to struggle with the literacy and numeracy processes involved in completing and passing their course, no matter how skilled and talented they are with the practical aspects of their training. Arguably, this accounts for the significant withdrawal and failure rates experienced across Further Education (FE in Scotland, or in Australia, Technical and Further Education, TAFE). These students usually keep quiet, neither asking questions nor drawing attention to themselves. Instead, somehow, they try to struggle through.

One of the key strategies for CAVSS delivery is to have the CAVSS tutor and industry lecturer engage in dialogue in front of the students demonstrating the selection and application of literacies processes to solve an industry problem. The result is that students who have access to CAVSS witness this application of processes over and over, and quickly start taking part in, and initiating, the dialogue themselves. CAVSS models collaborative problem solving and importantly, normalises the problem solving process so that it becomes OK to ask questions and OK to not know.

Social practices: fertile ground for transforming adult literacies

The social practices perspective offers significant insights into what have proved to be effective teaching and learning practices for adult literacies learners. The term 'social practices' is used widely and probably not consistently. In applying the term to teaching/learning practices, one common meaning is that each learner has input into choosing what they want to learn and/or that the learning activities they undertake are related to their use of real-life literacies.

From a broader perspective, a social practices approach is one in which the connections between language, ideology and power are acknowledged and explored.

The challenge for all literacies tutors is to recognise that within any community, there are many literacies, and that in many cases, their own language and literacies practices will be foreign: not necessarily relevant, not necessarily valued, and not necessarily respected. Some literacies tutors find it difficult to resist trying to 'correct' and/or 'improve' the literacy and numeracy practices of the adults they tutor. To do so is not only a highly political act, but one that will close down dialogue, prevent learner-determination and

Continued on page 15 ►

The Literacy Gateway to Gaining and Maintaining Income Support

Elspeth McInnes

Dr Elspeth McInnes AM is a sociologist in the School of Education at the University of South Australia, and Director of the DeLissa Research Group into Early Childhood and Family Studies. She is also the Convenor of the National Council of Single Mothers and their Children (NCSMC) and has a long-standing interest in social policy, income-support and social inequality. She has served as Deputy President of the Australian Council of Social Services and has continuing involvement in a range of social policy issues, including the Welfare to Work agenda and its impact on disadvantaged individuals and families.

Changes to the Social Security system from July 1 2006 make it harder for vulnerable people to gain income support payments and to stay on them. New rules for parents and people with disabilities mean that many more people are forced to actively engage in workforce activity and face 8 weeks of non-payment if they fail to cope. The changes also introduce increased complexity, increased discretion for decision-makers and increased demands on claimants to recognise and advocate around their own needs. These expectations are incongruent with the characteristics and skills of the most vulnerable social security claimants and it is these people who will be at greatest risk of failing to gain or stay on payments.

July 1 2006 Welfare to Work Changes

Disability – before July 1 a person had to be assessed as unable to work for 30 or more hours per week. After July 1 where a person is potentially capable of at least 15 hours work per week within two years they will not qualify for Disability Support Pension (DSP).

This change means that a person who is unable to work 15 hours a week, would nevertheless only be eligible for DSP if their impairment also prevented them from undertaking a “training activity” that would lead to a capacity to work 15 or more hours a week within two years. In deciding whether a person is capable of undertaking a “training activity”, the legislation does not require Centrelink to take into account the availability of the training in the person’s local area. In other words, so long as a person could do a “training activity” if there was one, even if there isn’t one available to them, they will not qualify for DSP.

People receiving DSP prior to 10 May 2005 will not be affected by these changes and will continue to be reviewed under the current rules.

People who were granted DSP between 10 May 2005 and 1 July 2006 will remain on DSP under the current rules, however at their first review after 1 July 2006 will be assessed under the new rules. People no longer eligible for DSP under the new rules will be transferred to Newstart Allowance.

A person’s capacity for work is assessed on referral from Centrelink.

Parents – before July 1 a person had to be principal carer for a qualifying child aged 0-15, attend an annual interview when the child was at primary school and undertake part-time workforce oriented activities once the child turned 13-15.

After July 1 new claimants of Parenting Payment (Single) must have a qualifying child aged under 8 years. They are required to meet “participation requirements” once the youngest child is 6 unless they have been exempted. Annual exemptions are available for active foster carers, home-schoolers, distance educators and parents of a child with a disability or 4 or more dependent children. Temporary exemptions of up to 6 weeks may be sought for pre and post natal leave, up to 13 weeks for a person with an illness or incapacity preventing them from working 8 hours a week; and up to 16 weeks for domestic violence which has occurred in the past 26 weeks; or other special circumstance.

A person who was receiving Parenting Payment before July 1 will continue to be eligible until their youngest child turns 16, however they will be subject to “participation requirements” (unless exempt) from either 1 July 2007 or once their youngest child turns seven, whichever occurs later. Where a person does not qualify for Parenting Payment because their child is above the allowable age, they will generally qualify for Newstart Allowance (NSA) and will be subject to activity requirements with penalties to apply should they not satisfy the activity test. Parents with majority care of a child will qualify as Principal Carers and be able to access a Health Care Card Pharmaceutical Allowance, Telephone Allowance and be subject to a range of protections.

Principal Carer Parents’ activity agreements require them to

- undertake paid part-time work of at least 15 hours per week; or
- look for part-time work of at least 15, but up to 25 hours, per week; and
- participate in employment services, usually this will be Job Network; and
- undertake an annual “mutual obligation” activity (for parents aged 18 to 49 years). This activity will be for 150 hours over a 26 week period and may be education or training, voluntary work, a literacy or numeracy program or “Work for the Dole”. “Work for the Dole” is the default activity where a person does not choose any other activity.

To remain on payment a parent must take “reasonable steps to comply with” the Agreement. A person who is subject to an Agreement may be required to accept “suitable” paid work or face a loss of payment for eight weeks. A job can not be deemed to be suitable where:

- the parent cannot get suitable child care
- it would take longer than 60 minutes to travel ►

This article formed the basis of a presentation at the ACAL National Conference in Adelaide in October 2006.

- from the parent's home to the place of work
- the parent would be less than \$25 per week better off after the cost of child care, tax, increased public rental, reduced income support and travel.

If the parent has 50% or less care of a child, they may not qualify as a Principal Carer, as only one parent may claim this in respect of a child. This means that the extra payments and reduced activities and protections for parents will not apply. The person will face the same conditions as any other person claiming Newstart Allowance.

Income support claimants face immediate 8 weeks loss of payment if they leave a job, get sacked for misconduct, refuse a 'suitable job offer', or fail to undertake an approved program. Payments can be suspended for offences such as failing to attend an interview or comply with an activity agreement, until the person complies. Three failures to comply in 12 months leads to an 8 week loss of payment, unless the person has a 'reasonable excuse'.

Persons with dependent children or others deemed 'exceptionally vulnerable' who lose payment may be eligible to receive 'case management' where their payment is administered via Centrelink or a contracting agency to meet essential expenses such as rent and utilities and food. The other common example of an 'exceptionally vulnerable' is a person with a mental illness who requires medication to manage their condition.

Literacy Implications

The July 1 changes have brought many more vulnerable people into the Job Network system and exposed them to activity requirements and potential loss of payment. People with less than a Year 10 education, people with poor English literacy and people with intermittent mental illness and cognitive impairment comprise an increasing proportion of people reliant on income support. It is these individuals who will face increased difficulties in managing their access to income support as rules become more complex, administration becomes discretionary and penalties more severe.

The 'work first' approach makes it harder for people to improve their education. Parents and people with disabilities receive a lower rate of payment on Newstart and can only get limited support for short-course training through the Job Network. Full-time students have to claim the AUSTUDY payment at an even lower rate than Newstart.

Claimants will have to increasingly advocate for their own needs. They will have to make a case for 'activity test exemptions'; they will have to demonstrate 'reasonable excuse' if they fail to comply and they will have to be aware of the protections available to them if they are to be able to advocate for their needs on the basis of those protections.

Claimants who are cut off payments for 8 weeks will have to self-advocate for access to case management.

Those who are rejected for DSP because they are deemed to be able to undertake 15 hours per week of work in 2 years' time will have to argue their case if they disagree with the finding.

What's Been Happening

The new rules have created greater complexity, increasing the propensity for error and the need for people to manage more complex information.

For example NCSMC receives widespread complaints of misinformation from Centrelink about requirements for parents. Many parents whose youngest child is less than six have been wrongly told they have to register with the Job Network and seek work. Under the new rules a parent of a seven year old faces different requirements depending on when she claimed Parenting Payment. If she claimed before July 1 2006, she does not have to register with the Job Network until July 1 2007. If she claimed PPS after July 1 2006 she will currently be required to register with the Job Network.

Cases have already surfaced where cancer sufferers are being forced to argue their grounds for claiming DSP, and for temporary exemptions for parents from activity testing. Parents who have been awarded 50-50 care of their children under new Family Law rules are not gaining Principal Carer status if the other parent has claimed it, and are being treated by the system as if their child care needs are non-existent. Very few people who have been cut off payment have been able to access case management. Homeless people are not deemed 'exceptionally vulnerable' and have to make a case as to why they should receive case management support.

Literacy and Disenfranchisement in Australia's Social Security System

One of the adverse outcomes of the Welfare to Work changes is that people with poor health, poor literacy, high levels of stress and limited knowledge are being expected to be active in maintaining their access to income support. These people are receiving payments specifically because they do not have the skills or resources or capacity to cope with employment have to apply the skills they don't have to stay on payment.

According to DEWR there are two indicators of success driving welfare to work. One is an increase in the workforce participation rate and the other is a reduction in the numbers claiming income support. Whilst people moving into paid work will reduce the numbers on income support, bouncing people off payment if they cannot meet the conditions of staying on payment, is an alternative pathway to reducing numbers on income support.

Increasing the numbers of vulnerable people who cannot cope with the demands of staying on payment will have flow-on effects for emergency services in health, housing, child protection, police, corrections and homeless shelters – most of which are funded through state budgets. The result is an effective cost-shifting from the Commonwealth income support system to the state-funded tertiary services attendant on destitution, homelessness, parenting failure, criminality and other social disasters. The social security system has become increasingly insecure for those who need it most. ■

Meet Michael Goghlan – the new *Literacy Live* facilitator

Debbie Soccio

In the next six months, ACAL will be facilitating national events, some of them with international speakers, in virtual classroom space. This virtual classroom space is a great mechanism for communicating with other practitioners around Australia. By using this space, ACAL opens the door to more professional development opportunities for all practitioners working across Australia.



Michael Goghlan will be facilitating the ACAL Literacy Live forums (See page 16). Debbie Soccio interviewed him to find out more about this new technology.

Tell me about yourself

Well, I work for TAFE SA as an e-learning facilitator and do some work for the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (AFLF) as an e-facilitator, or online facilitator. I also do things for myself all to do with e-learning. I live in Adelaide, South Australia and have been messing about on the Internet since about 1996. I first got into it (the Internet) when I was teaching English as a Second Language. That was my introduction to the Internet actually.

What do you think are some of the most exciting technologies that are currently being used to support education?

Certainly exciting is the whole range of social software. Things like virtual classroom, You tube, My space, blogging, wikis are all tools that enable communication and sharing content between your personal networks, which may or may not have something to do with your school or college work.

The virtual classroom is one that I particularly like because they are so versatile, not only for distance students or for people who are teaching at a distance or online but they can be really good complements for classroom teaching.

Another example is the mobile technologies which are very exciting—like blue tooth. All that mobile stuff has to go into the category as exciting. It's technology that young people are using in so many different ways in their normal everyday lives.

That is the challenge for teachers in general in any education sector—what do they do with these tools that are out there which are becoming part of a lot of people's daily life and how do they use them in education.

How are you using some of these new learning technologies?

I have been using the virtual classroom almost on a daily basis for some years. Sometimes, merely communicating with colleagues on an informal basis (and I shouldn't say merely) because it's very important.

A lot of my work with the AFLF is facilitating national events. Some of these are international events. We have gatherings in a virtual classroom space and listen to the guest speaker, who may be around the corner or on the other side of the world.

I have been working with a group of lecturers at TAFE SA who are using the virtual classroom to deliver classroom lectures. The classroom lectures are recorded so that distance students can log in at the same time and experience the lecture in real time, or listen to the recordings later.

Occasionally, I have been asked to do the guest lecturer spot to a class somewhere in the world. They have asked me, or someone similar, to talk to a group of students. So, I might spend 10 or 15 minutes talking to a group of students in Taiwan or Chicago. That's a really exciting use of using virtual classroom technology.

The concept of "office hours" is a good way to incorporate virtual classrooms into teaching and learning. In particular, for distance students you can advertise when the teacher will be in the virtual classroom to provide teaching assistance for a couple of periods during the week. They are set periods. So, rather than the student having to use the phone to contact you and you may or may not be there and then you're trying to contact them, you can make yourself available in the virtual classroom. This way, all students know if they need the teacher they can come into the classroom at the designated time...say, between 2:00pm - 3:00pm on a Wednesday. So, that's another way virtual classrooms can be used.

We also need to think of virtual classrooms as a tool that is not just teacher led. If you have access to this software, students should also be given access to meet and communicate at any time without the teacher having to be there. Most of these tools are available without a facilitator being present. It is limited but you can talk and share the text and use the whiteboard. If it became a regular part of the learning program, you could arrange for students who are responsible or regular users to be upgraded giving them access to some of the facilitator's tools.

There are lots of other things that virtual classrooms can be used for.

ACAL has commissioned you to assist in delivering 6 virtual PD sessions using ACAL Literacy Live. What does this mean?

On 6 occasions, we will have events like the one I just described. ACAL will identify a guest speaker and we will have a session advertised where people will be able to come online and join that virtual classroom for about an hour and a half to listen to the featured speaker talk on their area of expertise.

new snippets

◀ They just won't be a one-way lecture. There will be some input from the guest speaker plus interaction and discussion between the participants. Hopefully, we will get around 15-20 people at these sessions as a minimum but maybe much more than that.

So, people will be able to log in from home, from work or if they are really clever via a blue tooth connection sitting on the beach...

What are the key elements of using Live Classroom?

Typically, they allow people to have two-way conversations: that is talk—quite similar to a telephone. You can talk to each other in real time. You can also write to each other using a text chat facility. You can show slides, websites and pictures. There's a white board where people can draw or brainstorm their ideas. It's a bit hard to describe a whiteboard without looking at one. But it's another interactive space that can be used for increasing the level of interaction between participants and between participants and speakers.

The really sophisticated virtual classrooms also have the ability to application share where I can show any part of my computer to people who are logged on. However, the virtual classroom software we are using for ACAL sessions won't have this application.

So, for the purposes of ACAL's Literacy Live the key things will be two way talk, two way text chat and display of images, websites and whiteboard in online professional development forums.

What do you see as some of the benefits of using Live Classroom for participants?

One of the difficulties for ACAL is the breadth of ACAL members working across Australia, and the geographical distances many have to travel to get access to professional development. ACAL's Literacy Live will provide access to these speakers in real time that many probably wouldn't otherwise have access to. In this case, we will be targeting the whole community.

We will be targeting guest speakers we wouldn't necessarily have access to or that the whole community might not normally have access to.

The concept of community may well be strengthened. These sorts of events can be effective at nurturing those communal ties because you're relating in a different medium. It's not just talking to a featured speaker but talking to each other and there's something about relating in that medium that changes the dynamics. Nearly everybody I know just loves communicating in these tools. And you can be quite provocative and make a case of saying that they are a better means of communication than sitting in the same room as each other.

How does the participant get the most from the virtual classroom?

Practice and patience, like with anything. If people are new to that environment it can be quite challenging initially.

The idea of listening to a conversation and observing a

written conversation (which might be happening in the text chat at the same time) and taking in the information that might be on slides or websites is challenging. It's new! It's very intense! That's why sessions will only run for an hour at most because they are tiring mentally.

For people new to the virtual classroom to get the best out of the sessions, give yourself time. By the 3rd or 4th sessions, you'll no longer notice that you are actually processing multiple channels. It will be all part of the same process.

Also, don't be afraid to speak up in one form or another. I think these tools really are more effective when you participate. So, even if you don't want to actually talk, use the text chat. If you don't like the text chat, use the microphone.

Be aware that lots of people are at varying levels of competence and confidence. There might be a new crowd every time. After a few sessions (not that everyone will come to all the sessions) but after a few sessions, you will be come familiar with how the virtual classroom works and how you can participate most effectively.

How easy is it for someone to join in?

Let's pre-empt that question with the caveat that "all technology can be problematic!" But, let's assume that all the technology is working and that the ACAL participants are all happily logged in and the technology is working.

Once the technology is working and you know how to click the microphone button (which is an icon used to turn your microphone on and off) and you know where the text area is to type, I think it is dead easy.

I think the problem is the other stuff - the mental attitude that goes with it. It's that whole process of "I don't like the sound of my voice," that "people will think I sound silly," or "maybe people will think this is a stupid question." Maybe you worry about spelling mistakes or typos in your text chat—that's more the issue.

There are lots of people out there who will see the flyers and notices for the PD ACAL will be offering in Literacy Live Forum. However, a lot of people will see that is via this thing online and many will shy away from joining in. What advice can you give to these first-timers?

Have a go! You will have to install the software, which is usually automatic and usually simple. If you are a first timer, or you are reasonably new to using computers or the Internet, have someone on hand to help you download the software. Don't get hassled if it doesn't work automatically the first time. Have someone nearby by that can get things in order for you.

Again, working with the technical stuff, I understand the potential difficulties. Try and have someone there to troubleshoot before the session. Become familiar with the icons and the different components of the virtual classroom. Know where the microphone button is. There are really good notes to follow that you can download from www.acal.edu.au that will help you be prepared before your first participation in a virtual classroom. ▶

◀ **What do you hope to achieve during 2007 in relation to helping the adult literacy field embrace this new technology?**

I hope that all participants develop an increased level of confidence and competence in the use of this kind of software and a realisation that it has a place in education. It's not a big scary thing. These are amazing tools for communication. Finally, whatever suspicions people might have of them, you can really do these things on the Internet. To have that kind of realisation happen would be fabulous. ■

Literacy and Numeracy Research Funding Slashed

The \$500,000 budget to the National Centre for Vocational and Educational Research (NCVER) for adult literacy and numeracy research has been withdrawn. This funding has been provided to NCVER since the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (ALNARC) funding came to an end in 2001.

The literacy and numeracy research funding for NCVER was provided from the Adult Literacy National Project which is managed by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). DEST had a budget of \$2m which has funded the *Reading Writing Hotline*, the Adult Literacy Innovative Projects, *Literacy Link*, and others as well as the NCVER research program. News that the Adult Literacy National Project allocation has been slashed is of concern at a time when literacy and numeracy remain centre stage in education and training policy and practice.

The \$2m budget for adult literacy national projects is part of the Strategic National Initiatives program and is the subject of annual negotiation between the Australian Government and the states and territories. Different priorities must compete for a finite amount of money, and new priorities are being set by the new wave of reforms in the VET sector driven by the Coalition of Australian Governments (COAG) agenda. One of the COAG targets is to improve the percentage of the Australian population that have post-compulsory education or training qualifications.

It is difficult to understand, in this context, the logic behind the cuts to research funding for adult literacy and numeracy. Literacy and numeracy are key issues related to low educational achievement and COAG targets are unlikely to be met if we reduce the research base that provides information to inform policy and support the development of improved practice. Policy developers and decision-making forums are increasingly reluctant to act without an evidence base. Where will the evidence come from if the only dedicated research capability for adult literacy and numeracy in Australia is to be demolished?

Go to the ACAL website to see what action you can take. www.acal.edu.au ■

Airwaves improve literacy skills

Alastair Lindsay

Airwaves, servers, and e-learning – these are some of the words buzzing through the corridors of two Western Australian (WA) colleges.

A group of WA students are improving their oral literacy skills by creating their own internet radio station.



The education program for 15 and 16 year olds has enabled students who are at 'educational risk' to use e-learning to develop information technology and business skills, which has also led to a significant improvement in literacy levels.

Funding of \$24,338 for 638 Radio has come through the Inclusive e-learning (Youth) Project of the national training system's e-learning strategy, the Australian Flexible Learning Framework.

The students from Ballajurra Community College and Mandurah Senior College have found that persistence, patience, and a lot of creativity were the key ingredients in making the station.

All the station's on air content was chosen and created by the students, which ranged from an extended narrative about an accident in the school gym, to a three way discussion about teenager gay sexuality

Students practised their literacy skills by writing interview questions and interviewing each other.

Susan Wallis, the English teacher who coordinated the project from Ballajurra, said she wanted to use a teaching method that was more interactive than one-way teacher to student communication.

"Most students are very comfortable with Internet communications, and they are also big listeners to the radio, so I knew the creation of an internet radio ▶

news snippets

◀ station would capture their interest,” Ms Wallis said.

“Through the program, basic literacy and numeracy skills are taught and practised through practical exercises and hands-on activities that are not only essential requirements for employment in the radio industry, but are also key skills needed in most work places”.

The editing of the content was the most useful stage for literacy learning, according to Ms Wallis.

“After compiling the information, the students recorded interviews and discussions, and then listened back to what they had created.

“Having the chance to listen to the way they spoke, the words they chose, their articulation, proved to be a great learning experience. It really helped improve their oral and written literacy.

“I am also trying to facilitate speaking skills assessment for some of our new migrants whose culture does not encourage them to speak in public.”

Ms Wallis said there are plans in place to extend the student participation in the project.

“Last year approximately 300 year 11 students participated, and they had varying levels of literacy, ranging from well above normal to functionally illiterate.

“Next year, I am hoping that all parts of the school will contribute. For example the school’s annual musical production can be recorded and played on the radio station.”

Ms Wallis said there are also plans to build an internet community on the station’s website.

Several obstacles had to be conquered before the project was a success. These included, overcoming hardware and software technical issues, and dealing with the fact that some students did not have home access to the technology required.

While the large number of technical difficulties was not foreseen, finding solutions to the problems also proved to be an invaluable learning experience.

Ms Wallis said she hoped that in the future, the students will be able to run the station themselves.

“We are planning a course in entertainment management in which the students will learn how to manage all aspects of the station.”

Whatever happens in the future, Ms Wallis said that the use of e-learning in the creation of the radio content has proven to be an excellent alternative for students who have difficulty developing literacy skills through conventional schooling.

During the course, units of competency from the Certificate III in E-Business will be met, to help students qualify for the Western Australian Certificate of Education.

Information on 638 radio can be obtained from <http://638radio.com/>, and information on the Australian Flexible Learning Framework is available from <http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/flx/go>. ■

Continued from page 5

Under each Progression is a series of up to six Steps which describe the skills and knowledge that learners would have at that step.

At the launch of the Progressions officials rejected any suggestion that the Progressions would be used as a reporting framework but there are a number of practitioners who would welcome such a national framework particularly for reporting to learners about their progress.

There have been some criticisms of the draft Progressions – for example under the Listen to Understand Strand there is a Vocabulary Progression. The first step in that Progression states “have a basic listening vocabulary of common ▶

Continued from page 6

Language difficulties are often exacerbated because Indigenous students are often reluctant to ask for help or clarification due either to shyness or for reasons of protocol. Teachers should use plain English, both verbally in the classroom and when developing print based resources.

Appropriate resources are an ongoing reason for concern and anxiety for teachers attempting to supply effective literacy and numeracy support for Indigenous VET students. The advice of successful teachers is to use relevant, real-life texts that are culturally inclusive and customise them to individual students’ needs. Teachers gave examples of using and adapting newspaper and magazines articles, advertisements, telephone directories and menus. Existing resources may need to be customised. For example, a Victorian produced resource using bus timetables needed ▶

Literacy and Numeracy Minister’s Awards – nominations are now open

The National Literacy and Numeracy Week (NLNW) 2007 Minister’s Awards recognise and acknowledge the outstanding work being carried out by individuals in the community who are making a difference to literacy and/or numeracy education.

Up to five individual awards of \$10,000 are provided by the Australian Government. There are two categories this year: one for paid professionals—researchers, leaders, teachers—and one for people working in a voluntary capacity in literacy/numeracy education.

This is your opportunity to nominate someone you know for an award. You can download the Award Nomination Guidelines and the Nomination pack from <http://www.literacyandnumeracy.gov.au/ministersawards/>

Nominations close 5pm AEST Friday, April 27, 2007 ■

nouns, verbs, and familiar phrases that they understand; identify words and phrases in running speech”.

A number of ESOL programmes in New Zealand work with adult learners who do not have the English language skills described in this very first step. There are other examples where other Progressions under this and the Speaking Strand do not start at a low enough levels to include low level ESOL learners. This raises the whole question of whether ESOL and literacy frameworks can be combined.

There are similar issues with the Progressions under the Read with Understanding Strand. Some New Zealand-born adult literacy learners do not present with the skills described in the very first step under some of the Progressions.

These issues will be reported to the TEC as part of the consultation process.

The Progressions document has been prepared as a draft for sector consultation and the TEC wants to hear from tutors, providers and all others who will be using learning progressions while delivering foundation learning programmes. The consultation period for the draft document is between 1 November 2006 and 30 June 2007 to allow sufficient time for educators to apply the Progressions in their teaching programmes and provide some reflection on their clarity and usefulness.

A copy of the Progressions can be downloaded from the TEC website <http://www.tec.govt.nz/upload/downloads/foundation_learning_progressions.pdf> ■

Foundation Learning Progressions for Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, and Numeracy

to be adjusted using tide timetables for a Torres Strait audience.

Resources should be culturally appropriate. Keeping in mind the diversity of Indigenous culture, this will involve customising examples, graphics, scenarios, case studies and language. As for all adult learners' resources, a balance must be struck between appropriate literacy and numeracy levels and age-appropriateness. Resources must be designed for adults, not children. The use of literacy and numeracy instructional design principles will contribute to this aim. Use a font type and size that is easy to read; use wide margins and plenty of white space; and use plain English.

The effectiveness of learning support centres for Indigenous VET students was questioned by the majority of teachers interviewed for the research. Where they are available they can be utilised, however teachers need to take the time to build a relationship with the centre staff and, without forcing attendance, offer to accompany students on their initial visit. By introducing students to learning support staff, organising flexible arrangements and encouraging students to attend further sessions, teachers can overcome some of the barriers inherent in the system. Support centre staff can be invited to visit the classroom to talk to students about their services and display their resources. The most desirable outcome is for support centre staff to be available to work in the classroom with students.

All of this information is summarised in the *Good practice guide*. The guide also includes a list of useful websites and references. The ISPDU are attempting to distribute a copy of the guide to every VET teacher across Australia. The links between education and training and employment are well established. While participation rates for Indigenous people in vocational education and training have risen, the lack of literacy and numeracy skills continue to hamper the completion rates of Indigenous students, particularly in higher level courses. For a variety of reasons, increasing numbers of Indigenous people are moving out of Indigenous specific courses into mainstream courses and the number of Indigenous people taking up apprenticeships and traineeships continues to rise. Therefore, the majority of teachers in vocational education and training will come into contact with Indigenous students at some point in their

career. The *Good practice guide* provides them with the immediate, practical assistance they require to give their Indigenous students the literacy and numeracy support they need to be successful.

The *Good practice guide: Literacy support for Indigenous VET students* is available, free of charge from: Indigenous Studies Product Development Unit PMB 1, Cairns QLD 4870 Ph: (07) 40 422480 Fax: (07) 40 422604 Website: www.ispdu.com.au

It is also available from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research or can be downloaded directly from www.ncver.edu.au/publications/1714.html.

Electronic copies of the report (*Literacy support for Indigenous people: Current systems and practices in Queensland*) can also be downloaded, free of charge, from www.ncver.edu.au/publications/1659.html ■

Literacy support for Indigenous VET students

Continued from page 8

make literacies support unacceptable to the learner. It will also prevent the tutor from accessing information and advice from their primary source, the learner.

By definition, adult literacy learners' experience of school is largely negative: a place where they, and/or their skills, knowledge and language practices failed to make the grade. From a social practices perspective, it could be argued that people who leave school lacking adequate literacy or numeracy skills have, in fact, been ill-served by a system which is incapable of recognising, much less valuing, language and literacies practices that lie outside the dominant academic paradigms.

It could be argued that the ideological narrowness of dominant literacies practices underpins the failure of very many people to achieve during initial schooling, including the widely-accepted, rarely-articulated myths that literacies reflect intelligence. The injustice, and the outrage, is that almost by definition, adult literacies learners will have been allowed, if not encouraged, by the schools system to take the blame for their individual failure. ■

Transforming Roles, Transforming Relationships

April Literacy Live Forum

Learning Literacies for the 21st Century

We are extremely fortunate to have secured David Warlick as our special guest for the April Literacy Live forum. David is known internationally as an innovative educator with 30 years experience in the North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction.

His web site, Landmarks for Schools, serves more than ten-million visits a month with some of the most popular teacher-tools available on the Net. David is also the author of three books on instructional technology and 21st century literacy.

Comments from those who have heard David speak include:

"The emphasis on the literacy issues within the framework of the technology hit a chord with me. The technology provides the potential but the literacy skills unleash it. - Thank you for not only being very informative, but also entertaining. "

"You changed the way I think about learning. I teach teachers how to "integrate technology". Now I will teach them how to integrate the new literacy - thanks."

More about David at <http://davidwarlick.com>

The **Literacy Live** forum with David Warlock will be held from 11 am – 12 noon AEST on Tuesday 10 April (yes, in the Easter break for some people!).

Check the ACAL website for details closer to the date. Don't miss this opportunity!

ACAL contact details

www.acal.edu.au

EXECUTIVE

President:

Margaret McHugh
Principal Consultant, Literacy
WA Dept of Education and Training
margaret.mchugh@det.wa.edu.au
Ph: 08 92644638

Secretary:

Debbie Soccio
debbie.soccio@vu.edu.au

Treasurer:

Lorraine Sushames
lorraine.sushames@cdu.edu.au
Ph: 08 89467219

Co-opted:

Christine O'Callaghan
christine.ocallaghan@cit.act.edu.au
Ph: 02 6207 4054

Pauline O'Maley
omaley@mira.net
Ph: 0418 357958

EXECUTIVE SUPPORT

Don MacDowall
PO Box 2283
Canberra ACT 2601
Ph: (03) 9546 6892
Fax: (03) 9546 0421
Email: acal@pacific.net.au

STATE REPRESENTATIVES

NSW

Jenny McGuirk
jmacgg@gmail.com

NT

Ian Falk
Ian.Falk@cdu.edu.au
Ph: 08 89466051

QLD

Sandra Rennie
sandrarennie@optusnet.com.au

SA

Jane Gunn
janegunn@proteatraining.com.au
Ph: 08 84402417

VIC

Yvonne Russell
yvonnell@kangan.edu.au

WA

Jim Plumridge
bljp@westnet.com.au
Ph: 08 9921 1982

TAS

Jakki Bourke
jakkibourke@bigpond.com

STATE AFFILIATE COUNCILS

NSW ALNC

PO Box K450
Haymarket NSW 1240
Renata.Atkin@uts.edu.au
nswalnc@uts.edu.au

NTCAL

Ian Falk
PO Box 31U
Charles Darwin University
Darwin NT 0909
Ian.Falk@cdu.edu.au

QCAL

Queensland Council for Adult Literacy
Inc
P.O. Box 301 Red Hill QLD 4059
Phone/Fax (07) 3878 9944
info@qcal.org.au
www.qcal.org.au

SACAL

PO Box 610
Magill SA 5072
tess.vincent@tafesa.edu.au

TCAL

PO Box 904
Devonport
Tasmania 7310
jakkibourke@bigpond.com

VALBEC

Box 861
Springvale South VIC 3172
info@valbec.org.au
www.valbec.org.au

WAALC

19 Brittain Street
Como WA 6152
robyn.rennie@gmail.com
helen.grimston@central.wa.edu.au



AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL
FOR ADULT LITERACY