

Moving forward: ACAL and ALLS

Dave Tout

Dave Tout of Multifangled P/L and CAE Melbourne was a consultant on the Numeracy Working Group of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALLS), and is a member of the Australian Reference group for the ALLS for ABS. He has been working with ACAL on how to make the best use of the ALLS data and was the author of the ACAL Position Paper on ALLS.

At the end of November, the results of the 2006 Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey (ALLS) undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics were released. The ALLS gives us up-to-date information on how many adults are estimated to have skills that are inadequate for the demands of everyday life and work. For the first time in Australia, we now have equivalent figures for numeracy.

Since early in 2006, ACAL has been working to promote the importance and value of adult education (particularly English language, literacy and numeracy skills) in the light of the release of the ALLS results. ACAL has:

- maintained representation on the Australian Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey (ALLS) Reference group for the ABS
- organised and supported presentations on ALLS at the 2006 and 2007 ACAL national conferences
- liaised with the ABS about the release of the results and how the data may be best used
- commissioned a Position Paper on the ALLS: *(Moving forward: Towards a Literate Australia. An ACAL Position Paper on the 2006 Adult Literacy and Lifeskills survey* – available on the ACAL website at: <http://www.acal.edu.au/>) which highlights the need to use the data in a constructive way; and
- undertaken a publicity campaign targeting different sectors and organisations to alert people in influential positions to the potential in the ALLS data to generate more information and greater understanding about the benefits of working together to develop adults' literacy and numeracy skills.

ACAL's main message is that a national response to the challenges of competing in a global economy with its increasing technological demands must include a strategy to support the development of adults' educational skills both within and beyond the skills development agenda. ACAL wants to get governments and other organisations onside and seriously interested in life-long and life-wide learning. ACAL wants researchers from across different fields to use the data (available to researchers from January

2008) to investigate issues and questions surrounding the influences, impacts and consequences of inadequate adult literacy and numeracy skills on not only the individual but on families, communities, workplaces and society as a whole.

ACAL is stressing to governments the importance of secure funding for programs, professional support and standards for teaching, and the need for a strong research base to inform policy and practice.

For information about the latest activities that are planned go to the ACAL website at: <http://www.acal.edu.au>. And if you want to get involved please contact a member of the ACAL Executive – they are always pleased to have more volunteers.

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Let's Get Real! Integrating LLN into Indigenous VET delivery

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Alison Reedy has a diverse and interesting position as Senior Lecturer in ESOL – CSWE at Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education in the Northern Territory. She coordinates English language, literacy and numeracy programs across the Top End of the NT and delivers programs on campus and in remote communities to Indigenous students. She has been working in this capacity for 2 years and previously worked in LLN programs on the South Coast of NSW.

This paper describes an emerging model of collaborative practice between adult language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) lecturers and health professionals in the training of Indigenous health workers at Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (Batchelor Institute) in the Northern Territory. This collaboration evolved from an awareness by health trainers in the VET sector that poor course outcomes were related to the low levels of English language, literacy and numeracy skills of participants enrolled across a number of health courses. The health trainers were also aware that they were not 'in a position to confidently incorporate LLN into their delivery' (Mackay, Burgoyne, Warwick & Cipollone 2006:1).

The collaboration on this project was initiated when the Indigenous and Clinical Health team at Batchelor Institute was identified as the preferred training organisation to deliver Certificate IV in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Care to thirty health work apprentices to be recruited and employed by the Department of Health and Community Services. The Clinical Health team felt that it was critical that the selection process included LLN assessments to ensure the apprentices had the underpinning literacy and numeracy skills to succeed in their training and lobbied for funding to allow this to occur. The assessment phase was conducted by LLN lecturers from Batchelor Institute on a fee for service basis.

The process of conducting the assessments was a major organisational and logistical operation in a tight time frame. Thirty-three applicants were assessed across twenty remote communities by nine LLN lecturers. The results were reported against National Reporting System levels and were provided to the Department of Health and Community Services in order to assist them with the selection of applicants.

The information from these assessments provided great insight into the applicants' literacy and numeracy levels. Reading levels were assessed at NRS 2 or lower for approximately 50% of applicants, writing level were at NRS 2 or lower for 60% of applicants and numeracy results were at NRS 2 or under for 85% of applicants.

Although the assessment exercise was taken into account, the selection process strongly reflected community recommendations for the apprenticeship positions. This resulted in the selection and employment of a number of apprentices who, at the commencement of the training, did not have the literacy or numeracy skills required to successfully engage in training at the level of Certificate

IV in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Care. The decision relating to who is to be trained to become a health worker is often made at a community level.

From the community's perspective, an individual's capacity to do a job is not dependent on the autonomous accrual of mainstream skills and competencies. It appears that the concept of an individual's ability to do the job successfully is more closely aligned with being the right person for the role according to one's relationships and status in the community, irrespective of English language, literacy and numeracy requirements and mainstream qualifications (Kral and Falk 2004:48).

This reality means that English language, literacy and numeracy supports are a necessity when planning vocational training in health work as well as in other areas of vocational training for Indigenous students, although this imperative is not always reflected in policy or funding models. The 'built in not bolted on' model of integrating language, literacy and numeracy skills into vocational training recognises the essential nature of LLN in training packages; however, cannot be relied on to ensure that vocational trainers have the knowledge or training to develop LLN skills or to teach them explicitly.

Although the need for specialist language, literacy and numeracy provision was identified in order to provide successful health work training for this cohort of apprentices, additional funding was not available for this purpose. In lieu of funding for LLN support to be incorporated into Cert IV in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Care, an alternative arrangement was instigated through the cross enrolment of students into numeracy modules in the Certificates in Spoken and Written English. Delivery was provided in intensive blocks where students accessed a week of health delivery and then a week of health related numeracy delivery.

The development of practical, health specific numeracy skills was the key focus of this delivery, with some of the numeracy training conducted in Batchelor Institute's mock health clinic. There was ongoing planning and consultation between the clinical health and LLN teams. A great deal of work was done to adapt and utilise authentic materials and methods to place the numeracy delivery in the arena of the student's known world, to relate the numeracy concepts to practical situations and to create the context, through scenarios, in which the knowledge could be applied.

The additional support provided through this collaboration

reflects an understanding that the LLN needs of the health work students must be addressed if the training is to be effective, if students are to become safe practitioners who are able to do drug calculations, read labels and document their practice. Marr and Hagston (2007:22) have reported on the high levels of numeracy skills required by health workers that are embedded in tasks such as administering medication. The ability to effectively carry out these tasks has a direct relationship to the occupational health and safety outcomes in the workplace. English language, literacy and numeracy delivery is undoubtedly required to equip students with the necessary grounding to read, understand and respond effectively to the complex environments that they work in, as well as to understand the policy and procedures that inform their practice in their community clinics.

Initial reflection on the collaborative process described above has been positive, marked by good will and a sense that a partnership model including explicit LLN delivery provides greater opportunities for students to progress and achieve positive learning outcomes in the vocational arena than without this support. The health lecturers, while acutely aware of the difficulties their students face with literacy and numeracy tasks, and their responsibilities with regards supporting these needs, feel that they are unqualified to deal with these issues on their own and they have little time to do so given the high volume of content they are required to cover in their course.

The collaborative approach to the delivery of the Indigenous Health Work program represents a model that works. It also makes the connection between training and real jobs. While this collaboration is a work in progress that commenced prior to the announcement of the Intervention in the Northern Territory, it is consistent with the stated aim of training Indigenous people to take 'real jobs' (Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs 2007a:1) in their communities. The Australian Government has identified 2955 real jobs across 52 remote communities in the Northern Territory, with Indigenous people holding only 44% of these jobs. The real jobs identified include vacant positions that currently exist in communities, particularly in the health industry. The government believes that Indigenous people can potentially move into mainstream employment in jobs such as Aboriginal health workers and in a professional capacity as nurses (Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs 2007b:1).

The dilemma is that while there may be jobs available, many people in remote Indigenous communities do not have the English language, literacy or numeracy skills to access the training for these jobs, particularly as the vocational training funded and offered to Indigenous adults is mainly focused at Certificate III level and above. Consequently many students drop out of courses or fail, with the result that vocational training has a minimal impact on community capacity building in remote Indigenous communities and this is reflected in the 'almost imperceptible pace at which the socioeconomic disadvantage of Indigenous Australians is narrowing' (Dockery & Milsom 2007:47).

There is a great deal of work to be done to advocate for increased funding and more responsive policy in the area of LLN provision to support vocational education for Indigenous Australians. This should include the funding of longer delivery periods for training in recognition of the underpinning literacy and numeracy support requirements that Indigenous health work students in the Northern Territory clearly need. Funding models must also be responsive to the needs of a range of client groups and must include provision for specialist language, literacy and numeracy practitioners to be involved in the planning and delivery of vocational training. ■

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Let's Get Real!
Integrating LLN
into Indigenous
VET delivery

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.

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.

“Why do so many adults have literacy problems?” The question has been asked many times, and it is revisited in the mainstream media

Steve Goldberg

Steve Goldberg has been the Coordinator of the Reading Writing Hotline, a national adult literacy referral service funded by DEST and managed by TAFE NSW Access and General Education Curriculum Centre since 2000.

As part of this year's Reading Writing Hotline annual national community service announcement campaign, I was interviewed on radio 34 times. Before I could explain what the Reading Writing Hotline does, the question: “Why do so many Australian adults have literacy problems?” was almost always the first cab off the rank. Most of the time, the radio announcers who interviewed me expressed an open-minded curiosity as to why this was so. But every year, this year being no exception, there were a couple of radio shock-jocks who lined me up for a ten minute interview with their proverbial triggers at the ready, hoping that I would name on air, the persons or the institutions that were to blame. Before I got to speak, they introduced the Hotline, its role and me to their listeners by prefacing the interview with a statement such as: “It's hard to believe that in this day and age, there are adults who cannot read and write but to tell us why people are falling through the cracks in the education system, the Reading Writing Hotline coordinator, Steve Goldberg is on the line to tell us more. Welcome to the program, Steve....”

These interviews are the ones I enjoy the most because the first thing I do is challenge the loaded assumption about adult illiteracy that's made when I'm introduced. The assumption is that there once was a golden age of literacy until cracks appeared in the education system which is why many young people (and only young people) have terrible spelling and can't put a sentence together.

I find the best way to field these questions is by answering with examples of real life stories of what Hotline callers tell us about themselves and why they have literacy problems. Most of the time, they don't mention what happened or did not happen at school. The causes of their poor literacy were much more complicated. For many years now, we have kept a book by the Hotline telephones to record some of the stories our callers tell us about themselves. It makes for fascinating reading and reminds us why people grow up without being able to read or write properly. Their kinds of stories are rarely discussed in the public debates which occur in the media from time to time.

One story from our callers which I like to relate on air is that of the man in his thirties who rang the Hotline asking for a referral to an adult literacy course provider. He had come from a middle class background, had a happy family life and had enjoyed school until a fateful day, when he was seven years old. He was walking to school with his best friend, who suddenly decided to cross the road ahead of him only to be killed by a speeding motorist. From that day on, his learning ceased. He told us how he

had trouble concentrating. Then the labels came – “lazy,” “uncooperative”, and, then a bit later on, he was told he was “dyslexic.” He left school at 15 and became a labourer. He married, had children and then had a workplace accident resulting in a need to retrain. This coincided with marriage breakdown. It was through therapy, paid for by family members, that all his problems came back to this one incident which he had no control over. In his words, “I lived for three decades with an undiagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder. There was nothing wrong with me. My writing and spelling problems boiled down to being in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

The radio interviews take a different turn whenever I tell this story. Perhaps it is because everyone understands that bad luck does happen and that it is a huge determinant of life's circumstances. At the Hotline we discover that the element of chance seems to take an enormous role in determining why people have literacy problems as adults. Other examples of Hotline caller circumstances which also get an airing on radio include:

- the story of the Hotline's oldest ever caller – a ninety three year old lady who was orphaned at seven and fending for herself at age 13
- the mother of three who acquired a brain injury and needed to learn to read and write all over again
- the 17 year old who became his invalid mother's carer at age six
- the various callers whose parents were itinerant farm workers resulting in broken schooling.

Hotline callers' stories are diverse. The examples above are just the tip of the iceberg. The current Hotline story book has almost run out of blank pages.

Apart from talking about our callers who experienced bad luck early on in their lives, I also mention the many Hotline callers who tell us how they were getting along just fine and felt that they had enough literacy to get by until the 21st century technological revolution occurred and changed the jobs we do and how we do them. “I never needed to write stuff on computers for work till recently and didn't see myself as having a problem” is one often expressed sentiment among Hotline callers.

Tales of bad luck and evolving technology. When the media next visits the issue of adult literacy, it would be good if these two aspects were given proper coverage.

For more information, visit www.literacyline.edu.au or telephone 1300 6555 06. ■

Classroom management strategies to address the needs of Sudanese refugee learners

Ursula Burgoyne, Oksana Hull

Feature

Background

This study arose from the findings of a previous research project completed for the National Centre for Vocational Education research (NCVER) on the professional development needs of the English language, literacy and numeracy teaching workforce in Australia (Mackay et al. 2006). That research indicated that many teachers were struggling to adapt their teaching to meet the needs of a new population of learners. These new learners were humanitarian refugees from African countries. As indicated by statistical data from government sources, Sudan was the main source country for humanitarian refugee arrivals in Australia between 2003 and 2005. Hence, while acknowledging a wide variety of individual variation, the focus of the present study was on the specific needs and characteristics of adult Sudanese refugee learners presenting for tuition in English language, literacy and numeracy classes. In particular, the study sought to identify teacher interventions that were successfully addressing these needs and characteristics; it also sought to highlight areas where needs were not being adequately met.

This study included participants from New South Wales and Western Australia and was supported by input from Victoria via the project's advisory group. To date, these three states have the highest intake of Sudanese refugee families in Australia. Data for this study were gathered from two types of participants: specialist English language, literacy and numeracy teachers currently teaching Sudanese refugee learners; and non-teaching experts in refugee rehabilitation and resettlement, including representatives from Sudanese community organisations. Teachers of Sudanese refugees provided data via an online survey and telephone interviews. Non-teaching experts provided data via telephone and face-to-face meetings.

Findings

The learners in the study

The consultations undertaken for this study highlighted the diversity of Sudanese refugee arrivals. The majority of recent arrivals in New South Wales and Western Australia, as for other states, are refugees from southern Sudan where the economy is based primarily on subsistence farming and pastoral activity. Their pre-migration experiences included armed conflict, and often years in refugee camps in other African countries. Years of prolonged conflict resulted in the disintegration of schools and other forms of government infrastructure. While there was a small but significant number of learners in this study with substantial schooling, the majority of Sudanese learners had little experience of formal learning.

Southern Sudanese refugees came from highly oral cultures in which all significant social transactions are conducted orally. They are mostly speakers of Dinka or Nuer languages—languages without written forms. The literature indicates that members of highly oral cultures

have highly developed strategies for the transfer and retention of information. Furthermore, our study confirmed that Sudanese adults from all parts of the country typically speak a minimum of two languages. The learners in this study have extensive experience of oral language learning, but many have no experience of using written forms of language. Those who do have some knowledge of reading and writing have used specialised forms of written language (mostly confined to replication of religious texts in Arabic). It would be fair to say that, on arrival in Australia, all Sudanese refugee learners are unfamiliar with ways of operating in a culture that places a high premium on the universal daily use of the written word.

Although many Sudanese refugees have high levels of learning needs, they also have the strength of survivors. Teachers in this study reported that their Sudanese refugee learners apply many positive attitudes to their learning.

Findings relating to responses to learner needs and characteristics

The challenge of transition from Sudan to Australia

Sudanese refugees face a complex range of resettlement challenges. The transitional challenges highlighted in consultations in this study were related to: learning English; work opportunities; educational aspirations; family; financial management; and system requirements. Sudanese learners face these challenges concurrently, and daily. The study indicated that registered training organisations were already responding to these challenges by providing information and assistance through interpreters. Teachers were also addressing these cultural concerns in their classroom management practices. Many of their teaching activities and the content of their lessons directly addressed issues relating to the learners' transition from their life experiences in Africa to their new life in Australia.

The effects of torture and trauma on the learning process

The consultations undertaken (and substantiated by the literature) on this issue indicate that it is difficult to distinguish the effects of past sufferings from the effects of forced migration itself and the challenges of re-adjustment in a new country. There was general agreement among participants in this study that the effects of past torture or trauma were not explicitly nominated as barriers to learning. Support from the Sudanese community and support in the context of religious affiliation and church attendance were overwhelmingly cited as significant factors in assisting learners to deal with the stresses of past and present. Teachers in the study reported that, for the most part, their Sudanese learners preferred to resolve their problems amongst themselves without assistance from teachers or counsellors. Teachers indicated that some of the strategies implemented to address issues related to the refugee backgrounds of learners were equally relevant in addressing issues relating to their limited experience of formal education. ▶

Introduction to formal learning in Australia

This study indicated that teachers were successfully using classroom management strategies to introduce their Sudanese refugee learners to the processes of adult learning in Australia. Some arrangements requiring institutional support, namely, placing learners with those from similar backgrounds, and smaller class sizes, were recommended by participants in the research and supported by the literature, but were not always in place.

Teaching and learning English language, literacy and numeracy

There was general agreement among participants in this study that learning to read and write presented the greatest learning challenge for Sudanese learners. However, there was no general agreement about the ease with which Sudanese learners were able to learn to speak English. There was little evidence that teachers were aware of the literature on learners from highly oral cultures or of the need to develop oral language teaching strategies that do not rely on written prompts. This is especially relevant in teaching the many Sudanese learners at beginning stages of spoken and written English. The Sudanese community representatives in this study expressed concern that many learners were overwhelmed by the task of learning all the skill areas of speaking, listening, reading, writing and numeracy concurrently. The community representatives recommended prioritising the teaching of oral skills before literacy skills are introduced; these recommendations are supported by the literature.

Teachers with learners at more advanced levels of spoken English also reported the need for extra time to enable these learners to learn the intricacies of writing with accuracy and in a style appropriate to an English audience.

The study indicated that not all teachers were explicitly addressing the teaching of numeracy. Those who did teach numeracy discovered that learners needed substantial tuition in learning the concepts and also the language of mathematical operations.

Successful initiatives addressing the needs of Sudanese learners

This study identified a range of initiatives which successfully accommodate the needs of adult Sudanese and other African learners. Such initiatives link English language tuition to immediate settlement concerns, local employment opportunities, or practical skills. These initiatives were strongly promoted by the Sudanese community representatives participating in this study.

Support for teachers

In relation to bilingual support, opportunities for sharing strategies, and availability of counsellors, this study indicated that teachers were receiving a high level of institutional support. The need for professional development, however, far outstripped supply. This study indicated the requirement for specific professional development to explore the teaching ramifications of learners with backgrounds in highly oral cultures; the study also highlighted the need for professional development to extend teacher skill in developing learners' numeracy.

Implications

This study demonstrated that teachers succeeded in meeting the needs of their Sudanese learners generally where the needs of these learners coincided with those of other learners of a similar profile. Teachers were less successful in those areas requiring specific knowledge and understanding of their Sudanese learners' backgrounds in language learning and use. The ability of teachers to address these learners' needs also appeared to be compromised by: contractual obligations to funding bodies, whereby all language and literacy skills were required to be addressed concurrently; the placement of Sudanese learners with learners from other backgrounds with different needs, or different levels of the same needs; and large class sizes, inappropriate for learners with such a high level of need.

A number of key strategies to address the specific needs of Sudanese refugee learners emerged from the study. These included professional development for teachers in the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of new populations of learners (such as Sudanese refugees), particularly where their backgrounds had a direct bearing on teaching practice, and professional development in developing or extending teachers' classroom techniques to build on learner strengths. In addition to recommending greater flexibility in program content, the strategies also highlighted the importance of outcomes and methods of delivery to more adequately respond to the needs of Sudanese and other learners presenting with very limited spoken English, very little experience of literacy in any language, and very little experience of formal education. To implement these strategies, support from funding bodies and registered training organisations is necessary.

Readers interested in classroom management practices for refugee or migrant learners or professional development for adult language, literacy and numeracy practitioners may also be interested in:

- *Insights from research and practice: A handbook for adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL practitioners*, eds. M Herrington and A Kendall (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, Leicester, 2005)
- *Current and future professional development needs of the language, literacy and numeracy workforce*, by S Mackay et al. (NCVER, Adelaide, 2006)
- 'Oracy is more than the absence of literacy: Changing learner groups in ESL classrooms in highly literate societies', by H Nicholas and A Williams, in *The kaleidoscope of adult second language learning: Learner, teacher and researcher perspectives*, ed. G Wigglesworth, National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research, Sydney, 2003, pp.29–52. ■

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Human Capital – the dominant paradigm we could do without?

Margaret McHugh

Margaret McHugh has served on the ACAL Executive for four years and has been national president since 2005. She lives and works in Western Australia where she has been closely involved with policy implementation and program management for adult literacy in the VET sector for the last fifteen years. She is particularly interested in the impact of regulatory frameworks for quality and compliance on teaching and learning.

Fourthly, of the acquired and useful abilities of all the inhabitants or members of the society. The acquisition of such talents, by the maintenance of the acquirer during his education, study, or apprenticeship, always costs a real expense, which is a capital fixed and realized, as it were, in his person. Those talents, as they make a part of his fortune, so do they likewise that of the society to which he belongs. The improved dexterity of a workman may be considered in the same light as a machine or instrument of trade which facilitates and abridges labour, and which, though it costs a certain expense, repays that expense with a profit."

ADAM SMITH

I want to argue that it is worth critiquing 'human capital' despite the fact that it would appear to be so pervasive and powerful an idea for all modern governments. There are three reasons for suggesting a vigorous critique is long overdue. Firstly there is the fact that Australian Governments are using a human capital approach in a range of social policy agendas with no evidence that this approach will be successful. Secondly, the vocational education and training sector clearly has a special relationship with human capital since, to a large extent, its purpose is to generate the skills and attributes people need to be employable and support industry in generating the nation's wealth. Adult literacy provision, for better or worse, is framed in Australia today as a component of skills development—it is understood to contribute to developing human capital. Thirdly, it is my contention that, no matter what agreement or disagreement there may be about the goals of human capital policy, this approach gives rise to management practices that will prevent the social policy goals articulated by government from being realised. I'll attempt to illustrate these contentions with reference to particular policy, management and auditing examples drawn from the vocational education and training sector, with a special focus on the way adult language, literacy and numeracy provision fares in that sector.

What is 'human capital'?

Adam Smith is credited with the first articulation of the concept. His proposition is that human beings can be theorised as a 'components' of a wealth-creation machinery in the sense that each is a repository of skills and knowledge without which enterprise could not function. A cost is incurred as this human component acquires his or her knowledge and skill to which a value can then be attributed. The cost can be incurred by both the state and by the individual, but these costs are off-set by the profit that the individual generates by means of the application

of his or her skills or labour. The human being is theorised as an economic equation, and the value of a person, in this model, is vested only in their skills. A central tenet of capitalist theory is that the interests of the individual and the interests of the economy coincide: a strong economy produces wealth; wealth cascades downwards; individuals become more affluent; and affluence confers on individuals access to goods and services that prolong life and enhance well-being. This gives rise to an argument that individuals must make investments (of time, money and effort) in gaining skills that enable them to contribute to wealth-creation, because they themselves will profit from this.

Human capital, however, is more than an ideological construct. Human capital theory has escaped from the academy and turned itself into, among other things, the pragmatics of human resource management. On reading the literature on human resource management, one experiences a 'shock or recognition' so similar are its terms, concepts, arguments to those used in a range of social policy documents and much of the research recently produced on education in all sectors. Governments would appear to be adopting a role rather like the Human Resource department in a large corporation and are intent on using many of the same tools: "information systems, scorecards, benchmarks, outsourcing contracts, and competency models". (Boudreau and Ramstad, 2007). Consider for a moment the items in this list together with the management systems in place in the vocational education and training sector: the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) focuses most of its attention on the regulation of assessment; governments have become 'purchasers' of training and training outcomes through a model of funding in which the unit of currency is a Student Contact Hour (SCH) which enables benchmarks for through-put and outcomes (in the form of Module Load Completion Rates) to be monitored and audited; the public provider (the TAFE college network), once owned by the state governments, has been privatised (in some states) or made into semi-autonomous institutions; and last but not least, we have Training Packages—the 'competency model', a product that assists management rather than education.

The problem with a human capital approach to governance and policy-setting (a pragmatic drawn from human resource management) is that it does not allow for a focus on the nature of the activity – the 'core business' as we seem to be fond of saying. A human capital approach colonizes educational discourse: we all spend our time talking (and thinking) in the acronyms of system regulation, reporting and auditing. There is literally no space left for ▶

A personal view

talking about the learning process. A really clear example of this is the way assessment has been appropriated as a measure of productivity; a point of regulation; and a focus for compliance. Assessment is no longer a function and attribute of teaching: a judgement a teacher makes in order to further the learning of the student. The purpose of assessment in a training environment managed under a human capital approach is to produce a key metric. A reliance on metrics is one of the defining characteristics of human resource management.

Human capital as a policy construct

Human capital paradigms are explicitly referenced at the highest level of government in Australia. The Australian Council of Australian Governments (COAG) deals with a range of high-level issues such as mental health, pandemics, climate change, counter-terrorism and indigenous issues. One of COAG's current policy planks is the National Reform Agenda (NRA) which has three strands encompassing 'human capital, competition and regulatory reforms'. The purpose of these three strands is 'to help underpin Australia's future prosperity.' (COAG, 2006)

Because the purpose of reform is to 'increase the nation's productivity and workforce participation', the COAG sub-group named the Human Capital Working Group oversees reforms in education and vocational training as well as health, childcare, industrial relations and welfare. Reform in the training sector is linked to all three of the NRA strands—human capital, competition and regulatory reform.

Under this policy setting, health and education systems are viewed as mechanisms whose main product is a healthy and literate workforce. Consistent with the model of the theorised person (the repository of skills), the government justifies spending on health and education to improve the stock of human capital. Health and education systems under this model serve the economy rather than people or communities. This approach is consistent with the view of corporate stakeholders that the main business of the national education system is to produce in children the skills that make them attractive employees (ACCI, 2007).

The focus of the National Reform Agenda is to improve outcomes—improved child-care, better employment prospects, improved educational outcomes, parity of

outcome in both health and education for indigenous people, fewer accidents at work and better health all round are listed in the eleven high-level indicative outcomes of the COAG Communiqué from July 2006. All of these outcomes are highly desirable. Individual people and communities would be better off if they could be achieved. However, what the model lacks is recognition that that inequity of outcome is produced because people have inequitable access to social, cultural, linguistic and material resources—there is no way to theorise this within a human capital model. In the capitalist model, it is argued that market forces will find ways to address shortfalls.

I suspect that the focus on outcomes actually prevents proper recognition of inequalities in the distribution of resources and in particular the part played by public institutions, such as schools, in this unequal distribution. While there continues to be a focus on the metrics of outcome (such as the literacy benchmark assessments in schools) and a commitment to this type of metric as a management tool (associated with determining merit-based pay for teachers, for example) there can be no real interest taken in the 'how' and the 'why' of the systemic failures in literacy for Aboriginal people, for people from lower socio-economic groups and for people in regional and remote parts of Australia.

Will we, for example, have better and more equitable outcomes from schools if we re-conceptualise the goal of education as building skills for employability? Will we eradicate the difference between educational performance in indigenous children and the rest of the population by testing for speech impairments in pre-school and overlooking the importance of dialectal differences? Will more children have better literacy and numeracy skills if they are tested more often and the results of these tests are published so that schools' performance can be ranked? Will performance-based pay scales for teachers produce better educational results in schools in low socio-economic locations? I must admit, I cannot see how strategies such as these will drive the changes in institutional practice and the professional knowledge base that will be necessary if we really are to increase the proportion of the Australian population with post-compulsory qualifications and 'deepen' the qualification base (a proxy measure for becoming a cleverer country).

It is a priority of the current policy model to produce more

Continued on page 14 ►

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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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Applying the 3 Rs to training packages

Sean Felsman is Editor of Training Packages @ Work

When it comes to addressing the language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) needs of their students, TAFE Tasmania strives for the attitude of 'I can, we can, they can'.

TAFE Tasmania's Learning Development Manager, Graeme Kirkwood, says this means that the most important source of support provided to students in the area of language, literacy and numeracy is from their teacher or trainer.

'We find that the training environment is the best place to deal with these issues and get the best outcomes for the student' Mr Kirkwood said. 'Where necessary we encourage our teachers to collaborate with our LLN specialists. And in some cases a teacher will refer a student on to someone else.'

To achieve this organisational goal, TAFE Tasmania developed a program that would equip teachers with the strategies and confidence to deal with language, literacy and numeracy issues in the classroom.

A key aspect of this, according to Mr Kirkwood, is a teacher's understanding of a training package from the perspective of literacy and numeracy.

With training packages being a core component of the delivery of vocational education and training across Australia, it is important that teachers have a strong understanding.

Training packages outline the industry-developed competency standards which people must meet in order to receive a nationally recognised vocational qualification, whether it be a Certificate I or Vocational Graduate Diploma. A training package can only be delivered through a register training organisation, such as a TAFE Institute or private training provider, and by a suitably qualified teacher or trainer.

In total there are 74 nationally endorsed training packages covering all the main industries, industry sectors and enterprises in Australia. Each training package outlines the units (of competency) or subjects that a person has to pass to gain a qualification.

'Training packages underpin the education and training we deliver, so we felt that we needed a program which focused on assisting teachers interpret the communication requirements of training packages,' Mr Kirkwood says.

'When you go back and reinterpret a training package you will find that there are many different literacy and numeracy components.

'In some cases the requirements are obvious in the form of a separate unit or an element within a unit which may focus on literacy or numeracy skills. More often than not, the LLN requirements are embedded throughout the unit and the communication skills needed for satisfactory performance of work roles and tasks need to be identified.'

With funding through Reframing the Future, the national vocational education and training staff development and change management initiative, TAFE Tasmania has developed the 3R's Revisited program.

Originally developed as a face-to-face professional development initiative, the program has transformed into an activity based website targeted at staff delivering training. It aims to help them:

- identify the literacy and numeracy demands of their training package, and the workplace
- identify learners who may need support with literacy and numeracy in training and assessment
- design a variety of teaching and assessment strategies which will help learners develop their literacy and numeracy skills
- review teaching and assessment materials to ensure they are not making undue demands on the literacy and numeracy skills of learners.

As part of the program, teachers undertake a range of practical activities including one where they go through a unit of competency and use a colour code system to highlight six different LLN criteria which match the following questions:

- what do people have to listen to and understand?
- what do they have to say?
- what do they have to read?
- what do they have to write?
- do they need to understand any diagrams, pictures or symbols?
- what maths calculations do they need to do?

According to Mr Kirkwood the process of re-interpreting a training package has been extremely powerful because teachers are able to physically see the underlying LLN requirements within a unit of competency.

'The program aims to give teachers the skills and strategies to break down the language of a unit of competency to suit the needs of the learner,' Mr Kirkwood says.

'It also encourages them to recontextualise units of competency to suit relevant workplace contexts, as well as review their learning and assessment resources which may set up unnecessary barriers, or do not match the LLN requirements of a unit of competency.

'Ultimately we want to equip our teachers with the skills to integrate learning and assessment strategies into training programs which support students' LLN skill development.'

Along with the analytical skills, the program also provides teachers with information to allow them to identify students with literacy or numeracy difficulties. Following on it explains some of the processes which can be undertaken to support a student with difficulties. ■

For more information on TAFE Tasmania's 3 R's Revisited program contact Graeme Kirkwood on 03 6233 7017, graeme.kirkwood@tafe.tas.edu.au or visit www.tafe.tas.edu.au/3rs

For more information on training packages visit www.tp@work.com/Back2Basics/sb2_trainingpackage.htm

News mippet

Update on the release of the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey (ALLS)

Dr Chris Duncan,
Director, National Centre for Education
and Training Statistics,
Australian Bureau of Statistics

From my perspective, attending the International Adult Literacy Conference in New Zealand provided one of this year's highlight thus far. I was particularly taken by the challenge to ACAL by your New Zealand colleagues to optimise the findings of ALLS in order to provide an evidence base for policy and program development. Judging by the numerous conversations I had with Australians attendees, ACAL intends to take full advantage of the opportunity that the release of ALLS will present.

The Summary Publication for ALLS were released on 28 November 2007 and are available on the home page of Australian Bureau of Statistics website (<http://www.abs.gov.au>) in pdf format for downloading. The publication contains 25 tables which contain data on:

- skill levels on the four domains (prose and document literacy, numeracy and problem solving) by age
- comparison of the skill levels of Australians compared to the 'first wave' countries (including Canada and the United States)
- comparison of skill levels by state/territory of usual residence
- skill levels by the highest year of school completed or

- level and main field of highest non-school qualification and length of time in education, and
- skill level and usage of information communication technology.

Basic and expanded Confidentialised Unit Record Files (CURFs) will be released on 8 January 2008. In accordance with policy, access to the ALLS CURF will be tightly regulated by the ABS as CURFs contain detailed statistical information. The ABS considers the protection of respondent privacy as vitally important and goes to great lengths to maintain it by confidentialising all microdata.

The release of the CURFs will herald the start of in-depth analysis of the findings of ALLS by or on behalf of a range of organisations. In order to promote discussion of the findings of the research projects that will be undertaken, the ABS has had preliminary discussions with several organisations including the Department of Education, Science and Training, the NZ Ministry of Education, the National Council for Vocational Education Research and the University of South Australia about organising an ALLS Conference. At this stage it is likely to be held in Adelaide in April 2009. Once details are finalised, there will be a call of papers and more specific details of the conference will be made available.

The ABS intends to contribute to upcoming issues of *Literacy Link* in order to keep ACAL updated on developments related to ALLS. ■

For additional information about the release of ALLS, please contact Chris Duncan on:

Phone: 02 6252 5936

Mobile: 0419 412 770

Email: christopher.duncan@abs.gov.au

Australian Council for Adult Literacy Conference 2008

Thurs October 2 – Sat October 4

Crowne Plaza
 Surfers Paradise QLD Australia

For registration or more information visit: **www.qcal.org.au**



Training Packages @ Work

Training Packages @ Work is a free national e-newsletter funded by the Department of Education, Science and Training and supported by all state and territory training authorities. It provides vocational education and training professionals with up-to-date news and information about the national training system.

The newsletter contains articles about training packages, their use and resources supporting their use. As well it includes information about other issues and developments within Australia's vocational education and training sector. It also features links to forthcoming events and professional development opportunities.

The website includes a full list of training packages, their current status and the contact details of the Industry Skills Council responsible for managing the review.

In addition, the popular *Training Packages @ Work: Back 2 Basic* publications are available online. Back 2 Basics are a collection of articles which use simple and clear language to explain the national training system and key aspects and issues within it. They are ideal resources for people starting out in the vocational education and training sector or for more experienced professionals who need a refresher. To subscribe to *Training Packages @ Work* go to www.tp@work.com ■

The 2007 International Adult Literacy Conference

The *International Adult Literacy Conference 2007: The power of and* was held at the Langham Hotel, Auckland, New Zealand from 28 - 29 September, 2007. It was co-hosted by Workbase, Literacy Aotearoa, and the National Association of ESOL Home Tutors and incorporated the 2007 annual conference of the Australian Council for Adult Literacy.

This issue of Literacy Link includes two reflections on the conference: a New Zealand perspective from Susan Reid, one of the key organisers behind the conference, and one from Jenny McQuirk from NSW who provides an Australian reflection.

Wow what a great conference!

Susan Reid is the Learning and Development Manager at Workbase, the New Zealand Centre for Workforce Literacy Development, and head of the Professional Development Team. She has been working in adult literacy education since 1992 and until last year was a tutor in NZ's longest running workplace literacy programme. Susan also manages the New Zealand Literacy Portal: www.nzliteracyportal.org.nz

Looking back on the 2007 International Adult Literacy Conference, the Organising Committee can reflect on mission accomplished. I am not referring to the fact that the conference was attended by 350 people, was well organised and went off without any real hitches but more on the achievement of the conference theme "The power of and".

To the 50 or so Australians who made the trip across the ditch – thank you so much for joining us and I am sorry that so many others weren't able to make it because of the cost. This article, which is a retrospective on some highlights of the Conference, may not make much sense to those who didn't attend, but the Conference papers will be up on the Conference website shortly.

The Conference programme was deliberately diverse to attract as many different elements of the adult literacy sector as possible as well as provide food for thought.

Heide Spruck Wrigley, as key note speaker at both the pre Conference workshop and the Conference itself, was superb. Everyone really valued her considered and humorous contributions which were so obviously underscored by her deep understanding as an adult literacy practitioner, researcher and second language learner. In addition she was deeply interested in what New Zealand and Australian practitioners and researchers were doing and validated the practices that are happening in our countries which is incredibly affirming coming from someone who has just authored the huge 'What Works' study in the USA.

The Pre-Conference Workshop was a real bonus for the 100 people who were fortunate enough to attend. Not only did we get a German lesson (on cognates) from Heide but also we got an Australian retrospective from Louse Wignall and Michelle Circelli, about integrated literacy and reflections on lessons learnt and what that means for New Zealand who are really at the beginning of the integrated (embedded) literacy journey for vocational education and industry training. (Also who can forget the added bonus of the Caramello koala bears!!!!!!) But the real sleeper of the pre-Conference workshop was the session with John Hattie and Alison Sutton in which they presented their research into how the hugely successful e asTTle could be used for formative assessment in the adult literacy sector. It had the crowd buzzing and Australians asking when they could have it as well!!!!!!

To honour the Conference theme the Committee had wanted to showcase examples of successful Maori education initiatives and Linda Smith and Pita Sharples provided eloquent testimony of these, along with a number of workshop presentations.

Here is a link to Dr Sharples' after dinner speech which reflected on a Maori perspective of 'and': <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PA0710/S00007.htm>

If you missed the Aunties session you missed what some have called the highlight of the Conference. (There is some disagreement about this as others say the conference bag was the best thing). Anyway it was a particular coup to have four top level public servants, all women, (Karen Sewell Ministry of Education; Maryanne Thompson, Department of Labour; Janice Shiner, Tertiary Education Commission, and Carol Nicoll, DEST)

who were able to give insights of policy thinking for a field that very seldom has access to this level of engagement. It helped tremendously that the four women (aided and abetted by Head Auntie, Bronwyn Yates) entered into the spirit of the session with such enthusiasm and good humour.

Humour was a feature throughout the Conference – set by Hon Marian Hobbs job-seeking status provided a fascinating focus for literacy skills. And who would have thought people presenting about the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey could make it so amusing but then again who knew that in Australia you could be penalised for not taking part in ALLS. Brings a new perspective to the idea of Australia as the 'lucky' country.

Ed Bernacki proved to be challenging – challenging us to get a lot more out of the Conference and do something about it when we went back to our work – how is that going for everyone? What has happened to those little conference handbooks?

Thanks so much to Dave Tout and Beth Marr and Gill Thomas for agreeing to get up so early to facilitate the ▶



Dr. Heide Spruck Wrigley

Newz mippet

Numeracy Breakfast and to all those hardy souls who joined them. I am certain it was more about the reputation of the three facilitators than it was about the free breakfast. Someone said to me at the breakfast that Dave and Beth had been their numeracy heroes for so long and it was hard to believe they were now sitting in the same room as two people who have been so instrumental in promoting numeracy for adults and I couldn't help but agree.

But what the Conference really provided was an opportunity to network, learn, reflect, question, discuss, disagree, discover and ponder what is happening in the adult literacy sector. It was a chance for those who have been in the field for a long time to mix with new comers, it was a chance for Australians to find out what some of us Kiwis already knew – that we are doing some cutting edge stuff in New Zealand, and it was great for some of us Kiwis to see some of the really good stuff happening in Australia (which some of us have known about for ages as well).

And, based on the trust placed in us by the ACAL Committee, the Conference did prove that Kiwis, while unable to win any international sporting events this year (I am not holding my breath about the World Netball Championships as much as it pains me to say that), are able to run a really good conference. ■

Warmth, wit, women and wisdom

Jenny McGuirk is an adult literacy teacher at Randwick TAFE, Sydney. She has been involved in professional development, resource development and research for than longer than she cares to remember. She is currently the Secretary of ACAL.

One can't ask for much more than that – and that's what the NZ conference delivered.

The 2007 ACAL conference took place in Auckland NZ 28-29 September, hosted by Workbase, ESOL Home Tutors and Literacy Aotearoa and was a resounding success. There were over 350 delegates (more than 50 from Australia) and the atmosphere was warm, enthusiastic, and heart warming.



From the opening song of the welcome ceremony – the powhiri – that stirred the heart and soul, to the closing ceremony of the poroporoaki, the Australians in the audience were blown away by the Maori presence. We were also struck by the power and possibility for unity of one indigenous language. There were noticeable tears in the eyes of myself and those around me as we reflected on the contrast between what was currently happening in the NT and what we were witnessing as the hosts sang their welcome.

The conference was officially opened by the Hon Marian Hobbs MP and she was the first of many articulate, strong, witty, well-informed women (which came to typify all the NZ women who spoke). It was unbelievable to us to see and hear a politician speaking with such honesty, vigour, knowledge and passion about education.

The keynote speaker – Dr Heide Spruck Wrigley from the US talked about her work with immigrant education and the importance of addressing real issues with adult learners, of using visuals and technology and getting students to create their own materials, eg making a spaghetti dinner and videoing it. While nothing particularly new was raised, it was refreshing to have 'Freirean' notions of liberation education alive and well in a world of competency-based agendas and fixing skills shortages so we can all be more competitive. A video clip showing an informal assessment of reading was also shown which demonstrated assessing what students can do rather than being overwhelmed by what they cannot do: <http://www.literacywork.com/readingdemonstration>. Heide stressed the importance of less teaching and more learning – and one certainly can't argue with that! Her quote of the day was from Somerset Maugham: She plunged into a sea of platitudes, and with the powerful breast stroke of a channel swimmer, made her confident way towards the white cliffs of the obvious. (I can't actually remember the reason for the quote – but thought I'd share it with you anyway! You can find your own context.)

As well as a very attractive satchel, delegates also received a very attractive spiral bound notebook and Mr Ed Bernacki from Canada sought to inspire us to get the most out of the conference by using this little notebook for jotting down insights, ideas, questions, quotes etc. He also talked about problem solving and I soon discovered that the mild-mannered, unassuming mature man sitting next to me probably knew more about problem solving than anyone in the room. Robert, a volunteer adult literacy tutor in his spare time, bends glass for a living. In a small



company in Hamilton NZ, they bend glass to go in windows of high speed yachts, most of which get sold to Australia – and they have to solve problems every day. One of the pleasures of conferences is to strike up conversations with unknown people and discover such treasures.

The next highlight of the first day was a panel event, based on a top rating Maori TV show titled: 'Ask Your Auntie' (a straight-talking agony aunt show). Four senior bureaucrats (3 from NZ, 1 from Australia) were subject to questions from the audience. All acquitted themselves amazingly well – with humour and content, including our very own 'Aunt Carol', Dr Carol Nicholl, the recently appointed Group Manager, Industry Skills Development Group, DEST. Aunt Carol made 5 main points:

- the work of the interdepartmental committee looking at the integration of LLNP and AMEP in 2009
- the situation in the Northern Territory
- the need for professional development
- the opportunity that the release of the ALLS data gives – a policy moment that we should take advantage of
- DEST is open to ideas.

Aunt Carol assured us that her 'door is open'. So, next time you're in Canberra, why not pop in for a chat?

We were extremely privileged at the conference dinner to be addressed by Dr Pita Sharples, the co-leader of the Maori Party and recent recipient of a communicator of the year award. Passion and humour underpinned all of his speech which can be found on the conference website: <http://www.workbase.org.nz/Conference/Resource.aspx?ID=412>.

The next morning we were also privileged to hear Professor Linda Smith, Pro Vice-Chancellor Maori at the University of Waikato. Linda's talk was a bitter-sweet mix. She's been involved in thirty years of Maori development and has witnessed and been responsible for significant achievements in Maori education, but still acknowledges the great disparity between Maori and non-Maori. A key challenge is to re-invigorate intergenerational transfer of knowledge and culture.

And so to the ALLS data. Chris Duncan from the ABS and Paul Satherley from the NZ equivalent updated us on the situation so far. The results will be released in Australia towards the end of November and indications are that there will probably be little significant change in Australia's figures from ten years ago. It will provide us however with very rich socio-demographic data to do further analysis.

I've only briefly mentioned the keynote addresses – there were also numerous workshops and feedback was generally positive about them. Catering and venue were also most satisfactory.

Overall, the feeling of the conference was passionate, enthusiastic, warm, funny and heartening. NZ seems to be at the peak of its adult literacy and numeracy provision whereas Australia is slipping down the other side of the mountain. It's unclear where the energy and growth will come from to re-invigorate the sector.

Thank you to the NZ organizers for a fabulous conference – see you all next year at the Gold Coast. ■

Adult Learners Week ACT

Christine O'Callaghan, Canberra Institute of Technology, reports on the ACT's Adult Learners Week (ALW).

Adult Learners Week ACT was launched on 31 August, by Ms Mary Porter AM, MLA, Labor member for Ginninderra ACT, at the Page headquarters of the ACT Vietnam Veteran's Federation, whose choir entertained guests. The Federation's definition of learning is "an extension of one's skills in a supportive, fun loving and caring environment."

The winners of seven ACT ALW Awards were announced at the awards dinner, on 4 September, at Canberra Institute of Technology's restaurant in Reid, ACT. The dinner was an opportunity for the adult and community education sector to join together and celebrate adult learning in the ACT.

Jim Wain, President, and other members of the ACT Vietnam Veteran's Federation, won this year's award for Community Contribution for the 3rd year running. Using some re-furbished government sheds, they teach cooking in the kitchen area,

computing in the computer room, and woodwork and metalwork in the workshops. Their 600 members have also studied courses in aged care, and the group raises funds with a monthly lunch, and provided 6000 needy Canberrans with meals, served from a food van, over a 12 month period.

The Outstanding Program Award went to Radiance Dance Project, for their work with people with disabilities. Bob LeFebvre, Manager of the Erindale College Community Education Program, won the Individual Service Contribution Award. Erindale College who won the ACT Award of Excellence for the third year in a row, was also awarded Adult Learning Australia's 2007 Australian Adult Learning Community of the year.

Kaaren Blom, Acting Director, Training and Tertiary Education, presenting a bouquet to Ms Porter, who announced and presented this year's awards.

The ACT Department of Training and Tertiary Education held a very successful day with staff attending dancing lessons, seafaring lessons, and a workshop during which a CD was produced and launched.

My thanks to Mary Corscadden who coordinated Adult Learners Week 2007 activities for the ACT Department of Training and Tertiary Education, for this information. ■



News mippet

News from South Australia

Sue Shore, South Australia

Attending the jointly convened ACAL/New Zealand national conference in Auckland in September of this year reminded me where SACAL was around this time last planning ways to renew our energies having just completed the organisation of the 2006 ACAL national conference in Adelaide. Since then the SACAL executive have made a number of strategic decisions to build on the networking of that conference and at the same time keep a healthy check on energy levels as we continue our activism for adult literacy. In October 2007 we combined our AGM with the first of what we hope will be many Literacy Dialogues. A literacy dialogue might begin with a panel of speakers, a single guest presenter, or interactive workshops. The overall aim is to engage with the troubling issues, tricky politics and challenges of day to day work associated with LLN. Our first guest included Loucas Harous, from the Adelaide office of the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Rick Henke, Youth Centre Coordinator with the City of Salisbury and Bianca, SACAL's nomination in the state Adult Learners Week awards ceremony.

Loucas began the dialogue with some background to the soon to be released findings of Australia's participation in the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills (ALL) Survey. In addition to hearing of the process for collecting data we heard that this round of surveys, some 10 years on from the previous International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) will work much harder to connect the dots between the findings and follow-up policy activism, including health literacy, explorations of regional modelling exercises using a wider set of census data and comparative analyses of the 1996 - 2006 findings

for 15-24 year olds. Loucas challenged us to consider possible partners and collaborative efforts to make better use of this data, extend the findings beyond our own networks, and indeed even exploring how we might better educate ourselves by updating our own survey literacies.

Bianca, captured our attention with her story of learning as a young woman re-negotiating the last years of high school and the many challenges she faces as a young woman re-engaging with the school system and family life. She reminded us that literacy never sits alone, emphasizing the point, often invisible in policy discussions, that for many learners, success might begin with simple expressions of faith and support – as Bianca said her tutor 'believed in me, thought I could do it'.

Rick Henke, a youth centre coordinator working with the City of Salisbury introduced us to the TWELVE25 youth program, a collaborative partnership between Salisbury Business and Export Centre (SBEC), Mission Australia and Youth Achievement Australia, designed to engage the community, provide educational programs and build enterprise skills. Rick reminded us that literacy is central to all of these activities, describing how over 50% of young people self-identified as having literacy problems, that demand for help with obtaining Learners permits was not able to be met on a regular basis and that more than 25% of youth applying for membership with TWELVE25 had trouble with the membership forms. Have a look at the website: <http://cweb.salisbury.sa.gov.au/manifest/servlet/page?pg=14259&stypen=html> for more details.

Literacy Dialogues #1 provided some different entry points for thinking about literacy in South Australia and we hope to use this model to strengthen our networks with a wider range of people in 2008. ■

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**Human Capital
– the dominant
paradigm we
could do without?**

higher level qualifications, and one consequence of this could be a reduction in adult literacy provision. Growth in the delivery of higher level qualifications may be off-set by a reduction in the delivery of lower level qualifications if there is no additional funding—75% of accredited courses for language, literacy and numeracy are at the level of Certificates I and II. Much of this delivery occurs in the public provider. Should the funding be reduced, the capacity of the public provider to deliver education courses will be diminished. Not only might the lower level, front-end bridging courses developing educational skills begin to disappear (as they are already doing), the capacity that this network of large training institutions currently has to deliver language, literacy and numeracy support to students in higher level qualifications will also be undermined.

The metric produced by the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) in 1996 told us that a significant proportion of the population had 'poor' or 'very poor' skills (45% in Australia). If Canada is any indication, the new metric, produced by the Adult Literacy and LifeSkills (ALLS) survey (2007) will not show a very different picture. It would not be wise for governments to ignore this metric: it suggests that in order to achieve more higher level qualifications, Australia will need to devise a first-rate policy that develops the population's educational skills base which, at the

moment, is too low to support successful performance in higher level qualifications.

Is resistance useless?

It is hard to argue against human capital. One difficulty is that the language of neo-capitalism is so ubiquitous and unrelenting that it now defines the world we live in and the world we think in. The logic of neo-capitalism—growth improves social well-being, and growth can never stop—appears as both inevitable and irresistible. If not capitalism, then what? What other system delivers the same social benefits in healthcare, life-expectancy, equality of opportunity, social and political freedoms? Capitalism may not be perfect, but it may deliver more benefits than alternative economic and political systems.

Very few people are in a position to offer effective resistance to the doctrine of neo-capitalism: we all earn our living within it. Academics and researchers are reliant on either corporate or government funding and in either case their work is subjected to a 'productivity' measure. In the private sector research contributes to corporate profit or market advantage of some kind; in the public sector research must deliver 'outcomes' in relation to defined policy goals, more often than not it defines or refines measurement tools. Public servants too have been ▶

◀ Continued from page 16

the almost completely novice crowd of participants with amazing patience and managed to achieve a great sense of excitement from the participants (even when the technology didn't work). We hope to get the archive of this session up on the website soon.

If you want to see more of what Viv has been doing visit <http://vivevans.wikispaces.com>. Judi has been involved with e-learning in a range of capacities - participant, mentor, co-facilitator and facilitator using Virtual Conferencing with both staff and students. You can check out the action from the ACE Connections Project which Judi facilitated this year at <http://aceconnections.wikispaces.com>

Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills (CAVSS)

The forum held on 29 November had five guest speakers including Margaret McHugh, President of ACAL, who lead a discussion on using CAVSS across the country and beyond.

CAVSS is a curriculum that promotes team-teaching as a means of delivering language, literacy and numeracy support to students enrolled in vocational courses. A number of states in Australia make use of this curriculum as do individual providers in New Zealand and Scotland. The forum held in Literacy Live on 29 November brought together CAVSS teachers (and some of their industry partners) from all over the world! Participants came to share ideas for delivering CAVSS. Topics included:

- CAVSS and Practice Firms
- New Course Structure
- CAVSS in NZ
- The CAVSS Teacher's bag of tricks

co-opted into the business of corporatising government and are becoming used to working in institutions that are subject to an endless round of restructuring, amalgamation and downsizing all of which activity is aimed at reducing the human resource budget. Publicly-funded training institutes are now service-providers whose service is 'purchased' by governments on behalf of industry and prospective employees. Teachers and lecturers are production-line workers generating the required output measured in both Student Contact Hours and in 'module completions' or, more problematically, 'course completions'. The student, or trainee or apprentice is the raw material to which everyone else adds value. The conglomeration of skills vested in the individual is the product. This is a machine that generates human capital.

To all intents and purposes the individual people acting and interacting in all these tiers of the great national skills-manufacturing enterprise have ceased to exist except as catalogues or repositories of skills or competencies that contribute to 'outcome' or 'product'. They also appear as 'costs' in the human resource budget. Their value is in their productivity: an ever-improving ratio of cost to output. The question is—can anything reverse this trend or do we have to wait until it overheats to the point of dysfunction, rather like the climate? ■

Margaret hopes this forum may be the first of many for CAVSS users and we are looking to develop a CAVSS Users Network supported by on-line conferencing facilities.

What's planned for 2008?

We are in the process of planning the first series of Literacy Live sessions for early in 2008. Already, we have lined up Heide Spruck-Wrigley to join us again and continue the discussion of working with low level ESL learners. We are also working on leads for someone to talk about Men's Sheds in Victoria, running a successful literacy program in rural NSW, discussion on current research conducted nationally and internationally in adult literacy, just to name a few ideas.

If you have a special interest or a special topic to see discussed in this forum, let one of the ACAL Executive or your ACAL State representative know.

If you'd like more information please do not hesitate to contact Debbie at Debbie.Soccio@vu.edu.au ■

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Literacy Live
Professional
Development
Program

Moving forward:
ACAL and ALLS

Human Capital
– the dominant
paradigm we
could do without?

Literacy Live Professional Development Program

Debbie Soccio works at Victoria University in Melbourne Australia as Senior Educator – Teaching and Learning. She is currently the ACAL Vice President and has been coordinating the Literacy Live forums this year.

We have been busy in the last few months using Literacy Live to support a range of very successful guest presentations.

In September, we conducted the first virtual ACAL AGM. Whilst there were a good number of ACAL members in the Grand Ballroom at the Langham Hotel in Auckland, New Zealand at the ACAL Conference, we also had ACAL members tap in virtually from 4 states in Australia. The technology worked well and ACAL history was made.

The second event in the Literacy Live room for September was held during the ACAL Conference and provided a link to the keynote presentation made by Dr Heide Spruck-Wrigley on Friday 29th September at 12:30pm (AEST). This keynote presentation ran for about 45 minutes and we were able to see, hear and view Heide's presentation via the Literacy Live room. Heide is a highly respected literacy practitioner and researcher from the US, well known for her work on English language as well as literacy. An archive of this presentation will be available on the post conference website. Keep your eyes open for a follow-up session in the Literacy Live room in early 2008 with Heide.

Strategies to engage students in online activities using Wikispaces and Virtual Conference Rooms

In October, Vivian Evans, a part time Adult Literacy and Numeracy teacher and General Education Coordinator at the Coonabarabran Campus of New England Institute of TAFE and a consultant specialising in online community facilitation and facilitating virtual conference rooms and Judi Gowing, a casual Adult Literacy and Numeracy teacher working for both Tamworth Community College (ACE) and New England Institute of TAFE, Gunnedah Campus conducted a very lively session in the Literacy Live room on Thursday 25th October. Vivian and Judi worked with over 30 people in this session, demonstrating their expertise and experience in using wikispaces and virtual conference rooms to engage students. They led participants through a very interactive session demonstrating a variety of strategies for engaging students online and discussed how they have worked collaboratively with teachers and students in different locations. As a participant in this session I was very impressed with the way they handled

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