

Literacy beyond the classroom: ACAL's approach to literacy as both lifelong and lifewide – Part 2

*This is the second part of a paper presented by **Dr Pauline O'Maley** at the International Adult Literacy Conference held in New Zealand last year. Pauline works for the Salvation Army as Co-coordinator of the Community Reintegration Program in Victoria. The first part of the paper, which was published in the April issue of Literacy Link, looked at the way in which ACAL developed its lifewide, lifelong literacy and numeracy strategy. This part of the paper fleshes out the idea of literacy beyond the classroom and provides a case study of what it looks like now and what it might look like in the future. Pauline would like to acknowledge the invaluable help of Margaret McHugh in providing input into the paper*

The Community Reintegration Program, one example of practice beyond the classroom

The Community Reintegration Program is a multi-focused program that is part of the Victorian Homelessness and Drug Dependency Program (HDDP). The HDDP is a joint initiative between the Department of Human Services Victoria, the Salvation Army, St Vincent De Paul, and Hanover Welfare Services. The aim of CRP is to provide individuals with activities and linkages to assist building and strengthening community links. The program has four key foci, therapeutic, employment focussed, educational and health and social. CRP is conceived as a safe substance free positive environment.

CRP is a stepping stone to community, vocational education and employment. I think of the program in terms of opening up discursive possibilities to imagine different futures. Gee's (1996) conceptualization of literacy as mastery of a secondary discourse is significant to the work we do at CRP. Gee sees discourses as 'identity kits'. Discourses are ways of being "people like us". They are "ways of being in the world"; they are "forms of life"¹ (1996, p.viii). For the CRP participant the ways of being in the world that have been their dominant discourse for some time, for some up to thirty years, are no longer sustainable and they are seeking different ways of being in the world.

Within the context of our broader aims we also attempt to provide literacy and numeracy support that is relevant, contextualized, timely, sometimes explicit, sometimes

embedded, on opening up discursive possibilities/vistas. Our purpose is to go beyond the no longer sustainable familiar (and comfortable) discourses. So how does this translate into practice? A lot of the literacy work, the opening up of discursive possibilities is oral work but much of it is also focused on reading and writing tasks, which aim to be situated and purposeful. There is nothing new in the list presented here of examples of literacy and numeracy in practice, yet it is important to articulate them, to examine what they look like. They include but are not limited to:

- 1:1 support with developing confidence with literacy skills ('I don't know how to spell')
- ICT mediated literacy; linking to email, using email as a means of connecting (back) to children, family, friends; exploring areas of interest (old mines and historical societies), job applications

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¹ Gee defines discourse as 'a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and 'artifacts', of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network', or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful role (1996, p.131).

- Digital storytelling; as memory making, as memory holding
- As part of development of ICT skills/limiting of the digital divide, in completing assignments for computer course
- In completing units for other accredited courses, for example Certificate 1 in Vocational Preparation
- In researching areas of interest on the internet, for example recreational activities for the group, camp possibilities
- In preparing to return to study, for example research skills, understanding genre and academic writing, reading of meaning, oral presentations
- In discussing current affairs
- In doing the quiz from the daily newspaper as a group, following up areas of interest/ dispute on the internet
- In writing letters and filling in documents, for example housing applications
- In reading letters from the government
- In doing resumes and application letters, addressing job criteria
- In creative writing
- In using the phone
- In doing phone interviews
- In practising interview techniques in mock situations
- In engaging in discussions around the recent ABC best speech competition and talking about and reading speeches, in reading the winners
- In reading and discussing literature pertinent to participants lives, for example two participants have fathers whose service in the army in Vietnam had had enormous impacts on their own lives, both read Barry Heard's book about Vietnam veterans *Well Done Those Men* after we had listened to a reading on Radio National and we were able to discuss the book which helped them to contextualize their experiences and those of their fathers, particularly in relation to Post traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- In engaging with a participant led word of the day contest and the discussions that come out of an activity of this sort
- In numeracy; in preparation for study, in cooking, in recreation activities, in design making and reading for woodwork, in supporting participants in pertinent courses, for example Cert IV in computer design.

As you can see in many ways CRP mirrors the work done in adult education but in many ways it is also very different, our participants do not come to us because they believe their literacy or numeracy skills need improvement, they come to us because they have come to a place that is unsustainable, they have not been able to maintain housing and basic relationships, at this stage the imperatives in their lives don't include literacy, nevertheless many have had interrupted and incomplete educations and when thinking of and planning for different futures literacy plays an important part.

There are several elements of CRP that I think are noteworthy when we think of what is necessary to build and sustain literacy opportunities beyond the classroom

- *Skilled staff with dual qualifications:* all the staff at CRP have drug and alcohol and counseling qualifications

and well as additional other specialist qualifications, in my case adult literacy qualifications

- *Time:* the program affords us the time to work with participants on a one to one basis, in small groups both informal and formal and in larger groups where necessary, we can usually work with participants for up to three years
- *Flexibility:* this point relates to the last, we are fortunate enough to be able to work flexibly with both our participants and in concert with their case managers
- *Partnerships:* we work in very close partnership with case managers from the three services we collaborate with to support our participants in their goals
- *Ongoing funding:* the HDDP has the luxury of ongoing funding so we are not using our energy to scramble for funding nor is our relationship with colleagues at supporting services marred by the closed atmosphere that comes with competitive funding

I believe this approach that acknowledges and understands specific community contexts, in this case drug and alcohol, but also focuses on opportunities to embed literacy and numeracy is a sound and sustainable model. It is contextualized, can have an individual focus and can easily bypass the debilitating deficit focus that can be difficult to avoid in a single focus program setting.

Literacy dreaming

So now is the time for me to dream about what happens when we look beyond institutions, when we shift our focus from thinking that we need to bring prospective participants to our literacy classrooms and think instead of increasingly taking literacy into setting they are already comfortable with. The work of Wickert and Mc Guirk (2005) gives us some guidance here when they talk of expanded roles for literacy practitioners as mentors, brokers and facilitators. But we also gain insights from the other researchers mentioned above; Cumming and Wilson (2005) point to the need for resources to support this exploratory work; Balatti, Black and Falk (2006) stress the importance of social capital in community capacity building; Golding et al (2007) focus on settings where individuals and communities can feel safe and Hartley and Horne (2006) give details of impacts which are complex, cumulative and interactive and sustaining as well as transforming. There are definite themes here, funding is a significant challenge, roles needs to be conceived broadly, resources need to be developed and fruitful partnerships need to be developed because as Wickert and Mc Guirk point out there are 'possibilities inherent in current national and international policy interests in joined up/whole of government/cross-sectoral approaches to addressing social issues' (p.10).

The imperative is there but I think we still struggle with what it would and could look like, so let me give another example from the work I am familiar with. In the Homelessness and Drug Dependency Program case workers are employed to work with clients for up to three years on issues around harm minimization, sustainable housing and future planning. They would benefit from also knowing about, and being able to support and help expand the literacy and numeracy repertoires and strategies of these clients.

If the case workers had a 'kit' they would be able to begin to broaden their awareness of literacy and then extend this, perhaps with some training, into incorporating literacy and numeracy strategies into their work. There could also be a literacy professional, employed as part of a multi-disciplinary team, in much the same way as mental health professionals are, to provide support, education, strategies and secondary consultations.

There are challenges to this approach as Wicket and Mc Guirk (2005) point out, once the learning is embedded we would have difficulty in extracting that embedded learning to measure. It would be so entwined in the learnings about relapse prevention, budgeting, handling payday temptations and other strategies learned in the new discourse of establishing and maintaining transitional housing. Ironically our very success could make this measurement more elusive.

What would it look like if we bought a focus on literacy and numeracy to the work being done in one of the settings referred to in the research above? I find the men's sheds idea exciting, perhaps because I work predominately with men who are in their 40s and 50s and often feel redundant and I have seen them blossom when they are working with wood. The men's shed is a terrific vehicle for providing purposeful activity and building self confidence.

The research of Golding et al (2007) indicates that for a lot of the men who use men's sheds the touchstones by which they define themselves, work and relationships, have gone. As a result of this they struggle in the process of negotiating the new world in which they find themselves. The shed offers a safe and familiar place to support this new negotiation process. As I have indicated earlier, the opportunity to work positively with these men on a number of levels is clear, so now let me be more specific about some of possible literacy and numeracy work that could be done in this setting.

Let's imagine a man, let's call him Frank, who has been referred to a men's shed by his local community health clinic. I am going to flesh this out with some details, Frank is 54 years old, he has been made redundant from his manufacturing job, a job he has done all his working life. His kids have left home, his wife has left also. Frank is suffering from depression and he is increasing his drinking. The social worker at the community health clinic has referred him to the shed as a way of connecting with others in his community and giving him an outlet for purposeful activity.

The foremost thought in Frank's head at this time is not, 'ah I must work on my literacy and numeracy!' his thoughts are on 'reading' the world he now finds himself in, on coping with his new situation. The Freirean notion of 'reading the word to read the world' is, I think, very pertinent in this situation.

So what specific work might be done with a literacy and

numeracy focus with Frank? It strikes me the most valuable and pressing work would be to ensure he understands the discourse of Centrelink, an organisation he will now be working closely with at this stage in his life. He may need support in understanding his rights and his obligations, in understanding what services are available and how to access them, with the paperwork associated with this relationship - all critical literacy tasks.

The first step for Frank will be to apply for Newstart. He will need to go to Centrelink to fill in the appropriate forms, before he does this he would be well advised to read the 24 page booklet entitled *Information you need to know about your claim for Newstart Allowance* which can be found on

the Centrelink website. Once Frank has signed up to Newstart he will have participation requirements. The most likely scenario is he will be sent to a Job Network, here there will be more forms to fill in. He will also, potentially, be required to fill out a job seekers diary where he will have to give details of his job search activities.

If he believes his depression is making it difficult to work, Frank

could at this stage be given a temporary exemption with a medical certificate, he may be able to, with medical evidence, obtain a second temporary exemption. After his exemptions run out he will be referred for a Job Capacity Assessment, and will need to take medical evidence to this assessment. It is Frank's responsibility to obtain this medical evidence. Frank will then receive a letter from the Job Capacity Assessor telling him to go to an appointment with an Employment Service Provider. This will either take him back to a Job Network provider or if the illness is deemed to be major, unlikely with depression, this could be a provider with the Disability Employment Network. The advantage of this is no diary, and more intense support, but of course there would be more paperwork.

Let's assume Frank does not have a lot of experience of dealing with bureaucracies and handling paperwork. His job in manufacturing was very hands on and the only kinds of work-related paperwork he dealt with were timesheets and ticksheets pertinent to quality control. At home his wife took care of running the household, dealt with accounts, did the shopping and the cooking. Frank left school when he was fifteen. He was born in Australia but his parents were Italian migrants and he spoke Italian as his first language. He never mastered the English phonics system properly because, when he went to school, in Australia, he was still learning English and he was speaking it with a heavy accent and it was difficult for him to match sound and symbols—he didn't have either the sound or the sense that makes phonics possible to learn. He never caught up. Every year at school, he got further behind. He never learnt to read fluently, so he does not really enjoy reading, and because he doesn't read, he was denied access to varied linguistic experiences and the kind of language-expanding, vocabulary-building experiences that reading gives you, and he was denied as well, access to a range

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of information. Frank has had to keep pace with a rapidly changing world without the help of strong reading skills to do it. As the whole world gets more bureaucratic Frank, like everybody else, is required to use literacy skills to navigate through it. Moreover, Frank has this idea about himself that he is not a good learner and the last thing he would ever think of doing is enrolling in an education course.

The last thing that Frank wants—now that that he has found a refuge in the Men's Shed—is to meet someone who reminds him that his educational skills aren't up to scratch. He likes feeling comfortable and competent using the wood-working equipment, he is taking pride in his creativity and he is making new friends and finding that other men are in the same boat as he. How can a well-meaning literacy expert make Frank an offer that he does not want to refuse, an offer that goes beyond the literacy of survival of Centrelink and offers rich, situated and forward looking opportunities? It is a seriously difficult question to answer.

Here is one way to approach literacy work with Frank, and others in the shed—it, like all possible approaches in this context, requires 'literacy experts' to find different ways of working.

The Coordinator of the Men's Shed, could be approached about the possibility of starting a project, requiring Shed members to work as a team to produce something (an object of wooden or metal fabrication) which is more complex than any of the members could currently undertake individually. The project might make a contribution to the neighbourhood, or another community, and bring a sense of achievement and a degree of public recognition. The project is complex because it requires interaction with Local Authorities and knowledge of by-laws and legislation, financing, budgeting, purchasing, project management, public health and safety liabilities etc. Most team members will have to learn more trades skills. Team members will also require quite sophisticated reading, writing and maths skills to undertake the tasks and bring the project in on budget and on time, and to work efficiently as a group of volunteers. As a group they might have the skills they need, although all members—like Frank—may not have all of them.

To make sure that the project is successful, the Shed Coordinator will source a range of expertise and schedule

regular meetings attended by these experts so that the team begins to build the skills and knowledge they need as they undertake the tasks in the project. One of the experts is really good at maths and understands how maths is applied in trades contexts. The maths expert and the metals expert will run a series of skills workshops to show the men how to measure, cut, weld etc. The maths expert will then be on hand for the duration of the project. (Experts can be sourced from within the group.) If anyone, as a consequence, wants to learn a bit more about maths, the maths expert can arrange that (he does it himself as a volunteer or paid tutor, he arranges for a volunteer, he recommends a class where he knows the teachers and will introduce Frank or anyone else to the teacher.)

Similarly, team members have to get to grips with planning requirements: the Coordinator persuades someone from the Local Council to come and explain planning regulations, but these documents, and plans themselves, are not easy to read—for anyone. So, the Coordinator also brings in a person who is good at teaching people how to approach complex reading tasks, but who is also interested in finding out a bit more about planning regulations themselves. This person will be available at scheduled times when the team is meeting to work on the project to help out with interpretation. If this person is someone who is part of the team, so much the better.

We can see how the project could be a great success, with some of the team wanting to work together on another project, and how they could begin to put together the resources they need to undertake the new enterprise. They would want the maths and reading experts in again because they help solve the problems in the group and this saves time and costly mistakes.

Other members of the original team would have found something new that they are interested in and may want to do some formal learning or join another group working on something in their area of interest.

Everyone would have enjoyed the challenge so much that they want to continue taking on things that are difficult and learning new skills—some of these skills are 'educational' and could involve formal abstract learning—reading, writing and maths skills. Some team-members want to help other people undertake similar group projects and offer themselves as mentors. They would be on the look out for

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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Jan Hagston and Dave Tout (Editors), Margaret McHugh, Stephen Black, 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: info@acal.edu.au

Web: www.acal.edu.au

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Making Connections in the adult literacy and numeracy classroom

The DVD and Handbook, 'Making Connections: Teaching Practices of Experienced Adult Literacy and Numeracy Teachers', was launched at UTS by Dr Rosie Wickert on 27 March 2008. The project team was Jacquie Widin, Keiko Yasukawa and Andrew Chodkiewicz and Summerhill Media. In this article Jacquie Widin explains some of the thinking that underpinned the project and the final product.

The Need for the Project

In 2006, the NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council and the Faculty of Education at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) were successful in their joint application for funding from the federal government's Adult Literacy National Project scheme for a project aimed at capturing examples of effective teaching practices of experienced adult literacy and numeracy teachers.

The aim of the project was to explore the experiences, philosophies and approaches of experienced adult literacy and numeracy teachers at a time when many such teachers were contemplating retirement from the field. Many of these teachers have made significant contributions to the field, and the Council and the teacher educators at UTS felt it was important that their knowledge and expertise remained accessible to future teachers.

Also we were aware that increasingly many literacy and numeracy teachers were working in smaller and diverse organisations that may not be able to provide in-house professional development programs for teachers.

A number of teachers have asked us about the methods and technologies that were the focus of our project. While not discounting the importance of good methods, technologies and materials in effective teaching, the professional development aim of this project was to focus on the broader notion of practice. This meant showing that professional practice is more than just the application of particular methods and technologies, and how experienced and effective practice emerges for each teacher through an ongoing process of integration of their own beliefs about teaching, the contexts in which they work, and the learners' needs and aspirations.

A DVD based on a study of four different settings (an NSW AMES and community college VET program, a TAFE NSW numeracy class, a TAFE NSW ABE / Outreach / community youth centre program and a TAFE NSW ICT self-access class), features the classroom practices of teachers, together with interviews with them and their learners. A handbook accompanies the DVD as a professional development resource for new adult literacy and numeracy teachers. The handbook is a useful resource for teacher trainers and groups of teachers who are involved in formal or informal professional development programs. It contains descriptions of the various teaching sites, outlines of the DVD segments and suggests activities to use in professional development workshops.

Parts of the DVD are also intended to be used as promotion and advocacy material to promote the benefits of adult literacy and numeracy education to potential learners and groups.

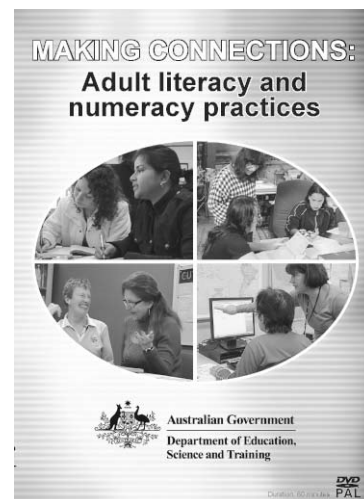
Making connections: teaching practices

As many of the readers are aware, adult literacy and numeracy provision in NSW takes place in a wide range of formal and non-formal, accredited and non-accredited contexts. They include programs that are delivered within the vocational education and training (VET) policy framework such as the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP), and the migrant and refugee settlement programs such as the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP). Although the discourse that currently dominates adult education is about VET and labour market outcomes, the tradition of adult literacy and numeracy as a "second chance" education for adults for whom schooling was not a successful experience, and as an important broader lifelong learning endeavour is still alive and valued by experienced practitioners in the field.

With the growing professionalisation of teaching, and the VET policy framework that stipulates a minimum qualification standard for teaching literacy and numeracy in public and private registered training organisations, there is a welcome recognition that adult literacy and numeracy teaching requires both specialised literacy and numeracy teaching skills as well as broader adult education and training competencies. Training packages such as the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment and the Advanced Diploma in Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy Practice in VET provide avenues for setting the key competencies that adult literacy and numeracy teachers will need to demonstrate in their teaching. It is often difficult, however, for a new teacher to see how different teachers might express and integrate the competencies with their more subjective philosophies about teaching and the needs of diverse groups of learners in equally diverse educational contexts.

The DVD and the accompanying handbook resource is about "making connections" in a number of different ways. It is aimed to enable new teachers to:

- observe what experienced literacy and numeracy teachers do to create a teaching and learning environment in which every individual learner feels valued and included
- examine the ways in which experienced teachers develop cohesion among learners from diverse backgrounds while also meeting individual and curriculum requirements



If you would like to order a copy of the DVD and handbook, please contact Renata Atkin, email: Renata.Atkin@uts.edu.au or ph: (02) 9514.3973 (Tues and Thurs). The cost is \$30.

- observe the ways in which team teaching by experienced teachers can enhance the learning opportunities for their learners
- reflect on how learners can benefit from teachers reflecting the connections between language learning and skills training in their approach to teaching
- observe how the experienced teachers allow the boundaries between the classroom and the learners' personal and social contexts to be permeable
- reflect on how the philosophies of experienced teachers are articulated and reflected in their teaching practices.

The term “practice”

What do we mean by “practice”, and what are we profiling when we say that we are describing the teaching practices of experienced literacy and numeracy teachers? We take as given that experienced teachers will have knowledge of key theories and methodologies pertaining to their specialist field – in this case, adult literacy and numeracy. As stated earlier, our aim was not to represent practice as a collection of skills or bodies of knowledge, but rather as an integration of both objectively recognised and valued skills and methodologies with the more subjective values, beliefs and perspectives of what teaching means to individual teachers themselves.

Our study of teaching practices focused on the dynamics of connections and relations between:

- teachers and their beliefs, knowledge, skills and professional requirements
- teachers and learners
- learners' classroom and their personal/social contexts
- learners' past and present educational experiences and aspirations
- dominant ideologies about education and the teachers' personal beliefs
- policy and curriculum requirements and the real constraints of and possibilities afforded by the contexts of any particular learner group.

This approach to studying practice was informed by the ways in which teaching practice is theorised in the literature by Kemmis (2000), Noddings (2003) and Kumaravadivelu (2003):

Teaching is thoroughly relational, and many of its goods are relational: the feeling of safety in a thoughtful teacher's classroom, a growing intellectual enthusiasm in both teacher and student, the challenge and satisfaction shared by both in engaging new material, the awakening sense (for both) that teaching and life are never-ending moral quests (Noddings, 2003, p. 249).

We see in the key findings of our research that there are no clearly established methods that all of the teachers applied or even talked about. Nor do we see the teachers espousing or privileging any particular established theories of teaching. We do see, however, that each of the teachers strive to make connections with their learners' lives and circumstances in what and how they teach, and give voice to the learners and their stories. The research approach taken in this project reflects our decision to give authentic voice to the teachers' ways of talking about their practice.

Researching practice

The research undertaken in this project consisted of an audit of available audio-visual professional development resources of adult literacy and numeracy teacher development; and interviews with experienced adult literacy and numeracy teachers about their practice.

Interviews with teachers

In developing the project we interviewed teachers who were recommended to us as experienced adult literacy and numeracy teachers. They worked in a number of different settings including:

- team teaching in a VET program in a NSW AMES college
- team teaching with a youth worker in a partnership program between an ABE unit of a TAFE NSW college, an Outreach program of the same TAFE college and a youth centre
- conducting a numeracy class in a NSW TAFE college
- providing one to one assistance in a drop in flexible learning centre in the NSW TAFE system
- tertiary teacher educators working in language, literacy and numeracy programs
- teachers working with refugees and asylum seekers
- teaching in ABE units
- teaching ESOL in NSW AMES colleges.

Views of good practice

Among the responses to questions about what the teachers saw as “good practice” in adult literacy and numeracy classrooms were:

- the principle of negotiated learning
- connecting with the authentic lives and situations of the learners
- creating a safe and supportive environment for students to take risks and promoting self-directedness in learning
- using professional judgement and working flexibly
- creating a cohesive group identity
- creating spaces for and supporting informal learning and social networks
- being inclusive of cultural diversity in each class or group.

The DVD provides an opportunity to engage teachers in discussion about the “relational aspects” of teaching and the centrality of the needs of the learners. The project team greatly enjoyed the privilege of visiting classrooms of experienced teachers and talking with teachers and learners about the attributes and qualities of effective teaching. ■

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Making Connections: Adult literacy and numeracy practices

Reviewed by Dave Tout, an experienced literacy and numeracy trainer. Dave is Manager, Education Quality and Compliance at CAE and a numeracy consultant.

Making Connections: Adult literacy and numeracy practices is a professional development resource made up of a 60 minute DVD and associated handbook. Aimed at new teachers of adult English language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) it is a new and valuable resource for teacher trainers and groups of teachers involved in formal or informal professional development programs.

The material is based on four different case studies:

1. Integrating literacy teaching: Learners from diverse cultural backgrounds

An ESOL teacher from NSW AMES and a VET child care teacher from a local community college integrate the teaching of language with vocational skills, team teaching a group of learners from diverse cultural backgrounds.

2. Working to re-engage young people

A literacy teacher and an outreach teacher work together at a youth centre to re-engage young people, who have dropped out of school, back into learning. The teachers discuss their approach, individual and group work, the role of volunteers and how the learners respond.

3. Teaching numeracy concepts: A numeracy workshop

A literacy/numeracy teacher runs a numeracy workshop teaching numeracy and basic maths concepts with a diverse group of learners. Discussing her approach and her practices the teacher shows how she is able to address the range of needs of her learners.

4. Working with ICT: using a Flexi-room

A literacy teacher uses a number of ICT in a learning support environment to individually support a group of learners who are taking other courses at the college. She draws on various software programs, digital story telling, audio and print to encourage and support self directed learning.

Each case study offers glimpses of the classroom practices of the teachers, along with interviews with them and their learners. The handbook accompanying the DVD contains descriptions of the various teaching sites, outlines each of the case studies and suggests a number of activities and reflective questions that could be used in professional development workshops or by individuals.

The quality of the video of the teachers, along with the interviews, is excellent and is structured and segmented well so that it could be used flexibly in training programs or by an individual if someone wanted to work through it as a self-study activity.

The DVD and the accompanying handbook are, as the

title suggests, about “making connections” and could be used in a number of different ways in training teachers. For example, it could be used to analyse:

- the connections between language, literacy and numeracy learning and vocational skills training
- the connections between language, literacy and numeracy learning and student interests and skills
- how to work in language, literacy and numeracy classrooms to make connections with learners from diverse backgrounds
- the benefits and challenges of team teaching or working in a learner support role in a learning support environment
- how the philosophies and practices of experienced teachers are articulated and reflected in their teaching practices.

A number of the examples and practices demonstrated in the DVD raise issues and concerns that all teachers and trainers may not necessarily agree with, and, as well, the case studies do not always highlight or bring out the roles that theories and content knowledge play in the teaching and learning of English language, literacy and numeracy. But this is not a negative as it can be used constructively in order to analyse and review what is being demonstrated and used to reflect on, debate and discuss the challenges, issues and influences on the teaching of adult English language, literacy and numeracy.

Making Connections: Adult literacy and numeracy practices is a new and valuable resource that fills a gap in materials to support the professional development of adult LLN teachers. It promotes discussion of a range of issues that new teachers have to deal with in their teaching, and can be used to effectively facilitate and support discussion about the theories underpinning the teaching of adults, and of literacy and numeracy. ■

To order a copy of the DVD and handbook, please contact Renata Atkin, email: Renata.Atkin@uts.edu.au or ph: (02) 9514 3973 (Tues and Thurs). The cost is \$30.

Are you a member of ACAL?

Some of the benefits of membership to ACAL include receiving your own copy of Literacy Link, special rates for forums and conferences, access to information regarding current practices in all states and territories throughout Australia, representation on committees, information relating to latest policies on adult literacy and numeracy, and government lobbying.

Cost: \$44.00 for an individual membership, or \$66.00 for an organisation (all costs incl GST).

You can join online at www.acal.edu.au

Thinking beyond numbers: Learning numeracy for the future workplace

Beth Marr, RMIT University and Jan Hagston, Swinburne University of Technology TAFE

Background and research purpose

Globalisation and technological advances are rapidly increasing workplace numeracy demands. With greater numbers of workers currently engaged in more sophisticated maths-related tasks, numeracy is now recognised by the Australian Government, industry and employer groups as an essential employability skill. In Australia, numeracy is also recognised as an equity issue, as adults with poor numeracy skills are more likely to be unemployed or have relatively low work positions with fewer promotion prospects and lower wages.

Although the term 'numeracy'—originally coined as the mathematical equivalent to 'literacy'—is used in policy and education circles, it has yet to gain popular usage or understanding in the wider community or industry. At policy and research levels, numeracy is understood to encompass the confident and thoughtful application of a broad range of mathematical skills to real-world purposes at home, in the workplace or in the community. It also includes the ability to interpret, analyse and communicate mathematically related information.

Workplace numeracy research suggests that numeracy for the workplace incorporates: the skills of measurement; number calculations; reading and interpreting diagrams; and using simple formulae. It also includes collection, analysis and interpretation of data. In addition, a 'readiness for thought and action' (the capacity to appreciate the purpose of numeracy-related tasks and to use numeracy skills for critical thinking, analysing situations and solving problems) has been identified as important in workplaces. This capacity relates to a personal confidence to use mathematics in appropriate situations.

Research into workplace numeracy has also identified a phenomenon described as the 'invisibility of numeracy' at work, meaning that numeracy is often used in a tacit or unconscious way, embedded within other tasks, although not acknowledged as numeracy.

Currently little is known about learning and transference of workplace numeracy skills, nor the understandings of the term 'numeracy' held by people with influence in industry, business and training. This report documents a study which sought to address these gaps with a view to identifying useful models for future numeracy skills acquisition, transfer and development.

Methodology

The study was guided by themes derived from critical analysis of Australian and international research into workplace numeracy and literacy. It used semi-structured interviews with a variety of industry representatives (key stakeholders), as well as case studies of three worksites. These case study worksites were selected to represent a range of industries with different profiles in terms of

employees, technology use and training cultures and included an aged care facility with a predominantly female workforce over 40 years of age; a 'high tech' engineering manufacturer of parts for the automotive industry, with a large, predominantly male workforce; and a small, traditional, family-owned sheetmetal engineering factory in which technology is increasingly being used. The case studies included work shadowing and interviews with workers, supervisors and managers to explore the numeracy skills used at the worksite; workers' attitudes to numeracy and school mathematics; learning and transfer of workplace numeracy skills; and workers' engagement with the meaning and consequences of numeracy-related tasks.

Key stakeholders and workplace managers were asked about their conceptions of numeracy, as well as their opinions on the importance of numeracy skills for the workforce, including trends that may have an impact on the current situation; the relationship between workplace numeracy and school mathematics; and effective strategies for future numeracy skills development.

Findings and implications for numeracy skills development

The study found that workers taking responsibility for their own work areas use a wide range of numeracy skills, which are often embedded and unrecognised within routine workplace tasks. In the manufacturing and aged care workplaces studied, the numeracy skills of measurement, number calculations, reading and interpreting diagrams and using simple formulae are commonly used. Interestingly, metric measurement and digital readouts have made fraction manipulation far less necessary, and division without a calculator was seldom used. A trend towards workers taking greater responsibilities within their own specialised situations is likely to necessitate even more independent use of their numeracy skills than in the past. There are also increasing expectations that workers engage in collection, display, analysis and interpretation of data—not only related to efficiency, product quality, or patient care but also to matters of occupational health and safety (OH&S). It is apparent that taking on positions of greater responsibility in the workforce will require confident use of these numeracy skills and an accompanying facility with the relevant computer software.

Unlike school mathematics practices, workplace numeracy tasks are performed using idiosyncratic methods developed within the workplace and couched in task-specific language particular to the industry or workplace. They are also performed with differing degrees of accuracy, as appropriate to the task and its consequences, with 'in the head' calculation strategies and estimation of measurements a common feature, especially when making judgements on the adequacy of

material stocks, production rates or occupational health and safety decisions about lifting and storage. Although the numeracy skills are adapted to specific strategies for each industry, they tend to be based on an underpinning of skills developed through a range of prior learning experiences and, in many cases, transferred between workplaces and life situations.

It was also apparent from the interviews that workplaces want workers who appreciate the 'big picture' surrounding their work and who use their numeracy skills proactively to improve work practices. To some extent, all of the workers interviewed used individual judgement and problem-solving beyond mere repetitive or procedural use of mathematical skills within their jobs. They all showed awareness of the consequences of the numeracy-related tasks they undertook and took responsibility for their performance to the required degree of accuracy.

These observations are in accord with broad conceptions of numeracy which emphasise the confident use of judgement on the appropriate use of a range of mathematical skills. Acquiring these numeracy skills is important for all new and existing workers. However, interviews with workplace managers and key stakeholders also indicated that the single term 'numeracy' tends to convey a narrow picture of basic number calculations rather than the broader policy and research conceptualisations.

It is clear that, in order for numeracy to receive the necessary attention in the training agenda, it must first be extracted from within the acronym 'LLN' (language, literacy and numeracy) at the policy level. In addition, in order to uncover the true training needs in each industry, the scope and breadth of numeracy needs more explicit unpacking within the workplace context as it gets further from policy to practical implementation, particularly in industry training packages.

Workplace numeracy learning and training

Most workers displayed signs of anxiety when discussing secondary school mathematics education, which they saw as useless, abstract, and taught without relevance. Commonly their mathematics learning experiences have resulted in a negative self-image with respect to numeracy and a consequent lack of recognition of their existing ability. This was despite competence in the fundamental arithmetic skills of addition, subtraction and multiplication. Even when they had learned new numeracy skills in the workplace, such as complex tallying strategies and calculating freight costs, there was a tendency for the less confident to regard them as merely part of the job or 'common sense', perhaps because they no longer resembled mathematics learned at school. Unfortunately, tacit use of numeracy skills neither alters a negative self-image nor increases worker confidence to engage with further numeracy-related learning. It is therefore important to encourage exploration of their tacit knowledge and its conversion to 'explicit' knowledge. In this way workers will become more confident in using and transferring their existing skills and realising that they are capable of learning the additional skills required for positions of responsibility.

It was clear that most workers prefer training that is informal, immediate and 'on the job' and conducted by peers or supervisors, rather than taking the form of something which reminds them of the school environment. According to stakeholders, this is a common attitude among shopfloor and equivalent level workers, particularly in relation to maths-related skills training. Workers spoke highly of methods which gradually give them greater responsibility with support or mentoring. However, there were indications that on-the-job learning could not only be dependent on the quality of the particular trainer, but also highly procedural and without the depth of understanding required for the innovative thinking needed in the workplace. Stakeholders were unanimously in support of a combination of 'on floor' and 'off floor' training but, to ensure that workers' existing attitudes to mathematics were overcome, emphasised the importance of its being extremely practical, preferably undertaken in conjunction with immediate workplace applications and incorporating opportunities for practice and reflection. Stakeholders also suggested that, ideally, workplace numeracy training should be framed positively within training for new workplace initiatives rather than being catch-up or 'deficit model' training. It was also suggested that training should be undertaken in a non-threatening atmosphere, with a spirit of employer support and pitched at an appropriate and attainable level.

Such training would need the input of trainers with adult numeracy expertise and sound knowledge of the local enterprise. A team approach which combines these areas of knowledge at both the design and delivery stages of training programs would be ideal. However, consultation between an adult numeracy specialist and a local enterprise trainer to design the training, followed by ongoing communication during delivery, would be another effective way of accomplishing a team approach. It is possible that the team approach to training may be impractical for smaller registered training organisations and enterprises. In such instances it will be essential to provide professional development to enable trainers to increase their skills in adult numeracy training in order to ensure quality delivery. This may also mitigate the seeming shortage of workplace numeracy specialists. ■

Thinking beyond numbers: Learning numeracy for the future workplace

Reprinted with kind permission of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). The full report is available from www.ncver.edu.au/publications/1795.html. Additional information relating to the research is available in the Supporting Documents which are also available at this web address.

Also, there is a page on the NCVER website where it lists all their literacy and numeracy reports. The direct link is: <http://www.ncver.edu.au/teaching/31035.html>

Working from our strengths: Building bridges between learners' literacies and identities

Ruth Wallace is a lecturer in Education and Director of Social Partnerships in Learning Research Consortium at Charles Darwin University, Northern Territory. Ruth has extensive experience in the innovative design and delivery of compulsory and VET programs across regional and remote areas of Northern Australia.

Background

Wickert and McGuirk (2005) found that literacy education needs to develop approaches that integrate literacy learning beyond the formal education sector, incorporate different knowledge and experiences and take a localised collaborative approach to literacy education. For schools to recognise and integrate the plurality of the society in which it operates, to be relevant to the participants' experiences in schools, we need to recruit rather than tokenise, ignore or erase difference; understand and explore the diverse ways students exist, live, operate and negotiate their lifeworlds and associated literacies; their languages, discourses and registers. This develops the opportunity for pedagogy that creates the conditions for greater access to learning and literacies.

The project

This paper is based on a PhD study through Charles Darwin University that explored the links between learner identity and engagement in post compulsory schooling in regional areas. It examined the disconnections between Northern Territory-based regional learners' literacies and their identities and explored learners' resistance to involvement in formal literacy education. The project conducted in-depth interviews with 15 people from a regional area about their experiences of learning. Portraits were drawn from these interviews and thematically analysed.

Findings

The findings suggest potential directions in developing approaches to literacy learning and training that incorporate an understanding of students' identities in relation to literate practices. It describes features of literacy pedagogy that recognises students' strengths and knowledge and adapts literacy teaching and learning to support and reinforce people's identities as literate practitioners.

For all participants, their experiences and attitudes about literacy learning were essentially informed by the attitudes and constructs of their families and communities. The majority of participants described the impact of the opposing constructions of identities about learning and identity as causing personal conflict about their education and role as a member of the peer and family group. The constructions of literacy included; what were the important things to learn, how the literacies relate to social engagement, how these literacies relate to imagined futures and roles. The greater the congruence between the literacies in the home and school, the longer participants enjoyed school and learning and saw themselves as successful learners. The disjuncture between perceptions and use of literacies resulted in participants having to

choose between developing the skills and roles related to the school's accepted view of literacies or those of their peers. Being part of the formal educational view of learning and literacies was often described as opposing full participation in family or community activities. This tension was challenged throughout their lifetimes when people wanted the outcomes of involvement in formal education; qualification, recognition and related roles in the workplace. For many, being involved in the related activities, reading and writing, formal assessment i.e. formal education's literacies, was an insurmountable challenge. Only when the desire to be involved in education became essential and articulated to their peer group in accepted terms, were people able to negotiate the conflicts in their identities.

Learning opportunities need to relate to the students' social practices and group memberships, working from these points of strength and knowledge forms starting points to build bridges between students, educators and communities' understanding of each other's knowledge and use of literacies. Developing identity affirming learning experiences can support regional students and communities' identities. If the educational system operates from a view that assesses what people coming to literacy and numeracy learning do **not** have – a cultural deficit view – their knowledge is not being recognised. The deficit view of literacy actively disempowers teachers and students, reducing their opportunities for learning. If students do not identify themselves as a part of the classroom; its literate practices and literacy learning, it is understandable they would reject participation in a learning experience that negates their identity as an individual and in relation to other groups.

To refine definition and better understand the literacies and literate practices that operate in the community and the classroom, there needs to be opportunities to openly explore and make explicit stakeholders' knowledge and their embedded beliefs or values. This presents not only one view of a topic or issue but demonstrates the multiplicity of views and treats the teacher as an equal member in this exploration. In this context the aim is to understand diversity rather than rank literacies and knowledge. Unsworth (2001) has described a pedagogic model that incorporates a focus on multiliteracies. The phases are *sharing*; where students understandings are shared in an environment that is supportive and takes account of their literacies, *unsettling*; educators challenge students through a series of scaffolded learning experiences and *bridging*; the educator teaches the student to develop a critical framework for understanding their own learning. This approach includes many of the important elements of a learner centred and critical approach to literacy education.

Continued on page 16 ►

What's happening overseas?

*A new and occasional segment of Literacy Link. It contains information about what's happening in different countries. In this, the first **What's happening overseas?**, we provide information about the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy in the United Kingdom.*

United Kingdom

The National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) was established in 2002. Dedicated to improving literacy, numeracy, language and related skills and knowledge, it is a consortium of 12 partner organisations, led by the Institute of Education, University of London. One of the key goals of the NRDC is to take forward the Government's Skills for Life strategy, the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills.

So what does the NRDC do?

According to the NRDC website (www.nrdc.org.uk), the organisation brings together research, development and action for positive change to improve the quality of teaching and learning and extend adults' educational and employment opportunities.

The research it conducts is broken down into five areas of study (or programmes):

- Economic Development, Impact of Basic Skills and Social Inclusion
- Motivating Learners to Succeed - Increasing Participation, Retention and Achievement
- Raising Quality - Effective Teaching and Learning
- Professional Development and the Quality of the Skills for Life Workforce.

Some recent publications from the NRDC

Research briefing: Family literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN)

by J. D Carpentieri

This is one of a series of publications produced to provide up-to-date summaries of recent research findings from the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) and associated organisations. The series features summaries on a range of topics including embedding, numeracy, priority groups, and progression.

The impacts of family literacy, language and numeracy learning (FLLN) are vast. In addition to building confidence and improving attitudes to education, both in children and adults, FLLN has a key role to play in increasing social inclusion and reducing the intergenerational transfer of disadvantage. For FLLN to have these wide ranging effects, however, practice needs to be both effective and inclusive, from recruitment through teaching and, when appropriate, assessment and accreditation.

This paper offers a brief summary of recent and ongoing NRDC research and development looking at this topic, drawing on international research and UK case studies to offer practitioners and policy-makers guidance on the effective provision of FLLN.

Effective and inclusive practices in family literacy, language and numeracy: a review of programmes and practice in the UK and internationally – Research Paper

by Kate Pahl, Greg Brooks, Felicity Rees

Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy (FLLN) naturally helps the learning of both children and adults, typically parents and grandparents. It is often especially important for the adults, perhaps as their first contact with education for some years or decades. Its importance is recognised by the government, for example in the Skills for Life strategy.

Through both development and research activities, NRDC conducted a research project which aimed to identify and support effective and inclusive family literacy, language and numeracy practices. This research took account of the changing nature of family structures and ways of living, and the global pressures accounting for the unprecedented upheaval in the profile and circumstances of families in the 21st century. Diverse and innovative evidence-based materials, models and strategies have been developed throughout the project. Practitioners were involved as sources of effective practice, as consultants on proposed developments, and as practitioner-researchers



Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy - A Practitioner Handbook

by David Mallows

Following the research on effective and inclusive practices in family literacy, language and numeracy a Practitioner Handbook was developed to encourage innovative and inclusive learning and teaching FLLN practices, and to provide practical guidance and tips for practitioners.

These reports can be accessed online at www.nrdc.org.uk/publications

To find out more about the work of the NRDC

You can find out more about the work of the NRDC by going to their website (www.nrdc.org.uk/), subscribing to the NRDC e-newsletter.

You can also subscribe to *reflect*, the magazine of the NRDC. *reflect* is produced three times a year. The latest issue of *reflect* contained a special report on ESOL provision; tips on improving attendance at adult literacy classes; how to demystify maths in the workplace; and how publishing one learner's writing can motivate the whole class. ■

News snippets

Health literacy report coming soon!

The next release of data and analysis of the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills survey will be a report on the health literacy scale. The report, *Health Literacy* (4233.0), will be available on the Australian Bureau of Statistics website (www.abs.gov.au/) on 25th June. ■

Keep up to date with VET news

You can keep up to date with what's happening in the vocational education and training sector by subscribing to key newsletters. The following are some newsletters you might like to subscribe to.

- **NCVER News** is an e-newsletter which provides information on the latest NCVER publications, forthcoming conferences and forums and the latest statistics. <http://www.ncver.edu.au/newsevents/news.html>
- **Insight** – another e-newsletter produced by NCVER but with more indepth information about NCVER research projects and issues in VET. <http://www.ncver.edu.au/newsevents/insight.html>
- **Training Packages @ Work** is a FREE national newsletter for teachers, trainers and assessors in the vocational education and training sector. This e-newsletter is published monthly and features the latest information on the development and implementation of training packages and other key issues in the training sector. <http://www.tpatwork.com/>
- **The Knowledge Tree** is an e-journal of learning innovation, enabling the sharing of research and innovation in global e-learning practice. It focuses on practices and innovations that relate to the VET sector. <http://kt.flexiblelearning.net.au/>
- Industry Skills Councils' newsletters. Each Industry Skills Council has its own e-newsletter containing news relevant to the industry areas covered. This includes news about Training Packages, new resources, projects and research. Go to <http://www.isc.org.au/> to link to the Industry Skills Council relevant to your work.
- Up to date news from training.com.au, a single access point to a vast range of vocational education and training information, products and services in Australia. You can subscribe to their feed and have relevant VET information automatically downloaded to your computer. www.training.com.au/news/news.rss ■

All around Australia in 24 hours at the Reading Writing Hotline

Steve Goldberg has been the Coordinator of the Reading Writing Hotline since 2000. The Hotline is a national adult literacy referral service funded by DEEWR and has managed by TAFE NSW Access and General Education Curriculum Centre since 1994. For more details telephone 1300 6555 06 or visit www.literacyline.edu.au

Between 12.00pm and 12.00pm on the 16th and 17th of April this year, the following calls to the Reading Writing Hotline were taken in the sequence shown below. Several of these were callbacks via our messaging service for after-hours enquiries. Not only do they reflect the broad diversity of enquiries, they also indicate how much information the Hotline can provide to the general public.

The majority of these callers sourced the Hotline's telephone number via the Hotline's television advertisement. At the time of writing, the advertisement was being screened in a paid television campaign across regional Queensland, hence the significant percentage from this sample of callers from that state.

In many instances, callers tell us that they have seen the Hotline advertisements on television for many years but feel embarrassed or nervous about calling the Hotline. As a means of addressing this, a new Hotline television advertisement inviting callers to "take the plunge" is being currently developed and will begin screening nationally as a community service announcement in late May 2008.

Townsville, Queensland

Caller: Mother seeking help for her children because she is unable to assist them with their schoolwork.

Comment: She is unaware that the Hotline is set up to help adults and that we can provide her with a suitable referral to an adult literacy class. She expresses much surprise that adult literacy classes exist and gratefully accepts a referral to a provider.

Orange, NSW

Caller: Woman seeking a suitable course for her soon-to-be ex-partner.

Comment: She says his reliance on her to do the

paperwork for his business and generally manage all literacy and numeracy tasks on his behalf has put too much strain on their relationship.

Melbourne, Victoria

Caller: WorkCover provider seeking help on behalf of a 57-year-old Italian-born man on workers' compensation.

Comment: His client has been out of work for two years and needs to improve his literacy and numeracy skills in order to retrain.

Tamworth, NSW

Caller: Male in his early 50s is writing a letter and asks if we could spell two

words for him.

Comment: He only wants small amount of over-the-phone assistance. He knows about ALBE classes but does not wish to attend them at the present time.

Moura, Queensland

Caller: Mining company representative.

Comment: He is seeking advice and referral information on how to get help in the workplace for "a significant number of employees." Referral information given includes the DEEWR WELL coordinator for Queensland.

Gosford, NSW

Caller: 18-year-old male shop assistant.

Comment: He works as a casual. He has been told by his employer that he needs to improve his literacy and numeracy skills if he wants to apply for an upcoming full-time job.

Wollongong, NSW

Caller: Employment agency seeking advice on behalf of a client.

Comment: The client has attended various ALBE courses at TAFE and community colleges for several years and says that he has "plateaued" in his learning. We discuss a number of options and suggest that a Certificate 2 level vocational course with learner support may be a pathway worth exploring with both the client and a local VET provider.

Shepparton, Victoria

Caller: Representative from an Aboriginal cooperative.

Comment: She is seeking literacy and numeracy classes for 2 clients.

Bendigo, Victoria

Caller: A primary school teacher.

Comment: He wishes to retrain as an ALBE teacher

and is seeking information on how he can make this transition.

Darwin, NT

Caller: Woman aged 23.

Comment: She works in a government department and has just been asked to take on new roles which require writing e-mails and reports.

Bowen, Queensland

Caller: Male security guard in his late 20s.

Comment: He has had minimal schooling and seeks help in relation to his job. He says his employer has just introduced shift reports.

Geraldton, WA

Caller: Woman seeking help for partner who had only a grade 3 education.

Comment: Her partner has just been offered a job and is concerned that his poor literacy will undermine his job security.

Sydney, NSW

Caller: Male in his 40s.

Comment: He is seeking hands-on help in writing a letter in relation to a consumer matter. He does not want at this stage to go to a class. He is given contact details for his local community legal centre where he may be able to get assistance.

Sydney, NSW

Caller: Social worker.

Comment: She is seeking a referral for an Aboriginal client who had minimal schooling and is a full-time carer for her grandchildren.

Rockhampton, Queensland

Caller: Mother seeking referral information for her 18-year-old son.

Comment: Her son is seeking a job as an apprentice electrician but has not been successful because of his poor literacy and numeracy skills.

Newcastle, NSW

Caller: Human Resources Manager for NSW Roads and Traffic Authority.

Comment: She is seeking information on enhancing the literacy and numeracy skills of their workforce in the Hunter region. She is given several contacts including the DEEWR WELL coordinator for NSW.

Hobart, Tasmania

Caller: Personal Support Program field worker

seeking a literacy referral for a 28-year-old male client.

Comment: She is given the contact details for the local TAFE and the RTO offering provision funded under the LLNP. We explain the enrolment process via Centrelink for accessing LLNP provision.

Gawler, SA

Caller: 56-year-old woman originally from Scotland.

Comment: She left school early and wants to be able to read to her grandchildren. She is given a couple of community education referrals.

Sunshine Coast, Queensland

Caller: Male aged 39.

Comment: He works as a salesman. He left school at 15 and needs to improve his literacy skills for employment-related reasons.

E-mail enquiry received

Caller: "I want improve my reading ritting but dont want to go to a class can I study at home"

Comment: No name or location is given so we compose a reply in a simply worded e-mail listing the distance education contacts for each state and territory.

Toowoomba, Queensland

Caller: Woman calling on

behalf of her husband.

Comment: His poor literacy skills are causing strain on their marriage. She has tried tutoring him but now wants him to enrol in a course.

Hobart, Tasmania

Caller: 30-year-old woman.

Comment: She says she's in a "dead-end job." She wants to do a catering course but wishes to improve her literacy skills first.

Mackay, Queensland

Caller: Woman aged 25.

Comment: She recently moved from Brisbane where she was doing a literacy and numeracy course and is seeking a similar course provider with whom she can continue her studies.

Toowoomba, Queensland

Caller: 17-year-old male.

Comment: He had a very itinerant upbringing. He left school at 14 and is seeking an apprenticeship to become a house painter. He feels he needs to improve his literacy skills in the meantime.

Sydney, NSW

Caller: Church volunteer.

Comment: She is seeking one-to-one help, preferably at home, for a recently arrived Sudanese woman with young children. We provide her with information on the AMEP home tutor scheme.

Perth, WA

Caller: Woman who is tutoring her partner.

Comment: She is looking for some suitable self-help spelling resources. She is also given information on free volunteer tutor training offered by Read Write Now as well as a list of resources she can purchase.

Surfing outside the flags: Catching waves, avoiding rips

Adult literacy and numeracy learning continues to be influenced by a range of internal and external debates and intersecting forces that are shaping its future. These include the results of the international Adult Literacy & Lifeskills Survey (ALLS), budget responses to the skills shortage, and interventions in Indigenous communities. Other influences include the blurring of sectoral boundaries, the influence of learning technologies and calls for new pedagogies for learning across the lifespan. This conference seeks to critically engage researchers, educators and policy-makers in informing this future.

Registration open

Details about forum and conference registration and accommodation are now available on the website.

Keynote Speakers

Noyona Chanda is Assistant Director and Head of the Adult Numeracy Division at LLU+ (formerly the Language & Literacy Unit), London South Bank University. LLU+ is the UK's largest specialist professional development training and consultancy organisation in the field of adult literacy, numeracy, ESOL, family learning, and community and workforce development.

Noyona Chanda first engaged with adult education in

the UK in 1980 as an adult literacy, ESOL and numeracy teacher, bucking the trend to become a "specialist" in any one discipline in favour of strengthening her broad-based experience in the adult learning context. She has since added teacher education in these areas to her portfolio of expertise, contributing to the early and subsequent development of national teacher and learner standards and qualification specifications in adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL. In particular she is currently working in adult numeracy at a national strategy level.

In 2003, after many years of championing the corner for adult numeracy, LLU+ was funded to set up the Adult Numeracy Professional Development Resource Centre – still the only one of its kind in England. Noyona now heads up a team of 6 numeracy specialists who are engaged in the important work of building capacity in the adult numeracy professional workforce, and developing innovative approaches to improving adults' numeracy. To this end, they work at all levels – from informal family maths to national research and strategy and all stages in between.

Noyona's current projects include research into adult numeracy for the National Audit Office, numeracy co-ordination across a national quality improvement programme, capacity building within the offender learning sector and managing the revision of the adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL core curricula. Her articles can be found in a range of practitioner journals.

Hermine Scheeres is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education, University of Technology, Sydney. She has worked for over 30 years in TAFE colleges and universities in Australia and overseas in the fields of adult education, and language and literacy education. Hermine uses ethnographic and discourse analytic approaches to research culture, communication, identity and learning, particularly in workplaces and organizations. Her current government-funded research projects focus on communication flows in hospital emergency departments, and the relationships between employee and organisational learning across a range of workplaces. She was the original developer of the national course, Adult Literacy Teaching: A professional development course, and she was the chief investigator and author of the report, Adult Basic Education and Competence: Promoting best practice. Hermine is a co-editor of the international journal Literacy and Numeracy Studies and her publications cross the disciplinary areas and fields of practice of Organisation Studies, Applied Linguistics and Literacy, and Adult Learning.

Michael Balfour is a Professor and Chair, Applied and Social Theatre, Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia. Michael's research expertise is in Social or Applied Theatre – theatre in communities, social institutions, and areas of disadvantage and conflict. He is currently involved in pilot projects developing arts-based work with multi-ethnic groups of refugees. He is part of a new international war artist research network, funded by the Leverhulme Trust, and was co-director of the research project In Place of War (www.inplaceofwar.net) which explored the role of performance in contemporary sites of conflict. Previously he worked extensively in prisons in the UK and Europe, ▶

Australian Council for Adult Literacy Conference 2008

Thurs October 2 – Sat October 4

Crowne Plaza
Surfers Paradise QLD Australia

For registration and Call for Papers
visit: www.qcal.org.au



◀ developing a range of cultural programs exploring issues of social justice, violence and offending behaviour. He is the author of a number of key publications in the field of applied theatre, including *Performance: In Place of War* (Seagull, in press), *Drama as Social Intervention* (Captus Press, 2006), *Theatre in Prison* (Intellect, 2004) and *Theatre and War 1933-1945: Performance in extremis*.

Colleen Mitrow is an experienced educator who has worked in a wide range of education settings. Since 1997 Colleen has developed a new education model based on democratic principles where each young person is encouraged to become an active citizen in the school community and in the wider community.

Using sound educational principles, this school model has had great success in providing access to education for young mainly indigenous women between the ages of 12 and 24 years, whose lives have been marked by trauma and disadvantage. The school has a multi disciplinary staff

who respond to both the personal and academic needs of each young person. Southside Education is a fully accredited school with a broad curriculum, approved by Queensland Study Authority and Education Queensland. It also has a strong cultural program including art and performance with a student group, the Southside Ginibi (Blackswan) Dancers.

The school has a strong vocational thrust and explores a diverse range of educational and vocational pathways for each student. The latest addition to the school is a family centre and crèche that enables young women who are parenting to continue their education and training. ■

ACAL has a new email address
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Please change your address book now

News mippet

◀ Continued from page 4

problems that could get solved if a reading or maths expert were included in the group. Other members of groups may decide that they are going to get some help so that they can become the reading or maths experts.

This literacy and numeracy that is embedded in the work related to skill exchange in these projects will lead to skill development and renewal through volunteerism, which could provide one possible pathway back to employment, if this is what Shed users want.

And I think we could continue to tease out many varied scenarios here. What about one that involves Martin who is actually quite good at reading and/or maths, and who begins to understand that not everyone is. He could see an opportunity to make a particular contribution by taking minutes of meetings associated with the Shed project and take up the challenge of learning to do this directly onto a laptop. There are many possibilities for thinking of other individualised scenarios of Shed users, and I believe we need to do this thinking, so men like Frank and Martin are given abundant opportunities to develop their repertoires of personal resources, take pleasure in their capacity to learn and achieve more of whatever it is they want to achieve so that an unequal distribution of language resources no longer contributes so powerfully to socially constructed inequities.

In many ways we could say these are outcomes about health and wellbeing, about human connections and renewed confidence in skills. Indeed that is true but they are also rich sites for literacy and numeracy enhancement, work that can be done in a natural integrated way. So who would do this work? It could be done by a literacy professional working in a multi disciplinary team, like the example of the Community Reintegration Program above or it could be done by a welfare worker who has some literacy training and has the support of a literacy professional for secondary consultation.

If we are to take the next steps towards strengthening

literacy and numeracy beyond the classroom and redefining adult literacy and lifelong learning not only in terms of welfare, social rescue and vocational preparation but as a necessary component of social cohesion, social capital and community capacity, we need to think laterally about the possibilities that emerge from the historic link between adult education community capacity and community development, and to think beyond institutions. We need to set in place a system in which literacy professionals can work alongside others in a host of work and community contexts, to support colleagues and friends who need help with literacy. We need to find a way of mobilising the store of skills and public and private good will in communities and workplaces, to create new hybrid models of learning that are community-based and contextually embedded. We need to keep talking, and to keep envisioning the possibilities. ■

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Literacy beyond the classroom: ACAL's approach to literacy as both lifelong and lifewide – Part 2

Integrating new Literacies into Classroom Practice. How do we engage reluctant learners in reading and writing?

Upper Yarra Community House, funded by a DEEWR Innovative Literacy Project grant, conducted an action research project which showed that teachers know very little about their student's home literacy practices and that young people use the new literacies with functional and social ease yet lack critical thinking around these practices.

The research team, consisting of both teachers and students, created a web site (underpinned by a critical literacy perspective) to both inform and guide teachers to integrate these new literacy practices into the classroom.

Kerrin Pryor, the project manager, ran a successful *Literacy Live* session about their project on Monday, 23rd June. With a group of interested practitioners, Kerrin explored questions such as:

- How mobile phone texting and playing computer games can be used to teach spelling and critical thinking?

- What activities are associated with new literacy practices?
- What are the educational challenges associated with these new literacy practices?

The *Literacy Live* virtual meeting room provides a free online meeting space for ACAL practitioners, working within the same organisations, but at different locations to have meetings. The virtual meeting room could be used for project meetings or meetings across small clusters of providers, geographically separated. As well, the virtual meeting room can be used as a teaching space to support learners who may be working or living at a distance from their educational learning place.

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. ■

For more Information contact Debbie at Debbie.Soccio@gmail.com.au

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Conclusion

By developing an understanding of students' identities in relation to literate practices and identities as individuals and group players, we develop the starting point for an education system that works from students' strengths and knowledge and adapts literacy teaching and learning to support and reinforce people's identities as literate practitioners. By developing this bridge between learners' literacies and identities, we can imagine a new way of working that challenges much of what we have accepted

as literacy but describes a challenge we can take together as a necessity. ■

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Working from
Our Strengths:
Building bridges
between
learners'
literacies and
identities

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

Vice-President:
Debbie Soccio
debbiesoccio@gmail.com

Secretary:
Jenny McGuirk
jmacgg@gmail.com

Treasurer:
Lorraine Sushames
lorraine.sushames@cdu.edu.au

EXECUTIVE SUPPORT

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

STATE REPRESENTATIVES

NSW
Susan Roy
susan.roy@det.nsw.edu.au

NT
Ian Falk
Ian.Falk@cdu.edu.au

QLD
Sandra Rennie
sandrarennie@optusnet.com.au

SA
Sue Shore
Sue.Shore@unisa.edu.au

VIC
John Radalj
jradalj@gordontafe.edu.au

WA
Maxine Tomlin
Maxine.Tomlin@central.wa.edu.au

TAS
Jakki Bourke
jakkibourke@bigpond.com

Co-opted
Kita Scott
kita.scott@tafesa.edu.au

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
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
WAALC Secretary
PO Box 6304
East Perth Business Centre 6892
shero_d_au@yahoo.com.au



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