Australian Council for Adult Literacy

2004 Annual General Meeting

10th September 2004
Carlton Crest Hotel
Melbourne

PRESIDENT’S REPORT

Jim Thompson
ACAL’s focus over the past twelve months has been to work towards making as significant contribution to the development of a national strategic approach to adult literacy and numeracy. Our thinking about the need for a new look at a national approach was stimulated in Launceston, during the 2003 ACAL national forum, *Beyond training: locating literacy in social policy.*

At about the same time, the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) was conducting focus sessions around Australia on the 2004-10 VET strategy, *Shaping Our Future.* The timing seemed right for ACAL to make an investment in strategic work.

The ACAL Executive formed a Strategy Group, led by Rosie Wickert. We asked Rod McDonald to lead us through a two day workshop in Melbourne last December, to help us get started. Rod has extensive experience working with high level projects in the VET sector. With Kay Schofield, he recently facilitated the High Level Review of Training Packages.

As a result of the Strategy Group’s work, ACAL developed the following position statement.

ACAL supports an integrated approach to adult literacy and numeracy practice and policies entailing:

- more effective collaboration across sectors
- greater connectedness with communities
- greater responsiveness to the needs of individuals
- greater self and collective management
- more opportunities for learner engagement
- multi-disciplined approaches to meet the increasing complexity of everyday life, and changing skills requirements

To identify issues concerned with extending collaboration across sectors, ACAL employed Jane Figgis, a renowned educational consultant and broadcaster, to interview key people from health, finance, welfare, community building, housing and related sectors. Jane’s report needs to go through a final editing process and will be available shortly. Her findings are summarised in the August 2004 issue of *Literacy Link.*

Our next step was to bring together key people in the adult literacy and numeracy field for a ‘Think Tank” held at the University of Technology, Kuringai Campus in Sydney. The Think Tank was titled *Let’s Get Serious,* reflecting ACAL’s belief that it is time for a national strategy to be put into place. We brought Geoff Bateson from Birmingham in the UK to discuss his work in community building to raise literacy and numeracy levels across a sizeable community. It is interesting to reflect on his presentation in light of Ursula Howard’s Conference Keynote address on the national adult literacy and numeracy strategy for the UK. At this point, I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Adult Learning Australia in bringing Geoff to Sydney.

Rod McDonald again facilitated our work during the Think Tank. An ACAL National Forum was convened the next day to bring together representatives
from a range of sectors to discuss our work to date and to gain their input. Although there was support for the idea and some representation from other areas, most participants were from the language, literacy and numeracy field. This highlighted the amount of work needed to get people to the table to discuss and act on literacy and numeracy issues. As Jane Figgis says, “Building partnerships is pavement pounding work”.

The Strategy Group’s work is on-going. We met after the Sydney events and mapped out a representation of ‘where to next’. This was tabled during the National NCVER Research Forum before the conference and at the ACAL Executive conference session. There are obvious opportunities to link ACAL’s work with the ANTA national action plan.

I would like to thank Rosie Wickert for her leadership and Jan Hagston, Pauline O’Maley and Karen Dymke for their persistence and contributions to what has been extremely hard work – meeting on weekends and adding it to other activities to cut costs. Gearldine Castleton and Jana Scamozzon also made valuable contributions to the early work.

In support of our strategic approach, ACAL has also made contributions to the revision of the Training And Assessment training package (see the website and past issues of Literacy Link)
- NCVER’s Adult Literacy Research Program
- VET Student Outcomes Survey Project (NCVER)
- Federal Minister’s Literacy and Numeracy Awards selection process
- Reading Writing Hotline National Reference Group
- ANTA National Adult Literacy Innovative Project Reference Group
- Advisory panels of national projects
- Senate Enquiry into Lifelong Learning

ACAL has also managed the
- Production of Literacy Link, the only national adult literacy and numeracy newsletter
- Think-Tank, Let’s get Serious
- National Forum, Responding to diversity: building literate and numerate communities
- National Conference in conjunction with VALBEC

Without the support of the Adult Literacy Programs section of the Department of Education, Science and Training, and its Director, Catherine Gyngell, Literacy Link, the Think-Tank and National Forum would not have been possible. ACAL is greatly appreciative of the support for these projects.

I would now like to acknowledge the work of my ACAL colleagues.

Firstly, Alex Tsakmakis, our Administrative Support Officer, who looks after finance, administration and many other things on request. Thank you Alex for everything you have done this year.
Secondly, David Dickson who produces *Literacy Link*. David manages all aspects of the production and is to be commended for sustaining the high quality of the newsletter. I would also like to thank Pat Hazell, who has done an outstanding job as Editor.

Thirdly, the members of the ACAL Executive. The Executive is a voluntary group whose members make significant contributions as well as manage work and families. Some long standing members are retiring at this AGM. Suzanne Bozorth-Baines has been treasurer for six years. She has worked quietly and efficiently with Alex to manage ACAL’s finances and keep us on track. As an experienced practitioner, Suzanne has made a range of contributions along the way. Thank you.

Robyn Jay has contributed her knowledge and experience in community education as well as her considerable expertise in technology and flexible learning. She has been an active member of the Professional Development, Website and Literacy Link committees.

A number of state representatives have changed through the year. Thanks to Sheila O’Leary-Woodhouse (TCAL), Lois McManus (WAALC) and Pat Hazell (NSWALNC). Pat will be sorely missed from the Literacy Link and Professional Development committees. I welcome the new state representatives and thank the continuing reps for their contributions to lengthy teleconferences and email discussions.

Finally, the input of Jan Hagston (Vice President) and Pauline O’Maley (Secretary) has been vital to ACAL’s effort this year.

I have enjoyed my two years as President and three years as a State Representative. I have learned a lot from my colleagues and have found the breadth of ACAL activities and achievements both stimulating and exhausting. I have found my involvement a meaningful way to put something back into a field which has given all of us so much.

The best way to get involved is to put your hand up, take some manageable, and sometimes unmanageable, tasks and get used to many more emails everyday.

Let’s keep moving on.

Jim Thompson
10.9.2004