ACAL Conference in New Zealand in 2007   *Susan Reid*

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Each year a small number of people working in New Zealand's adult literacy sector travel to Australia to attend the ACAL Conference. We come for a range of reasons – to learn from the Australian sector which has the benefit of larger scale provision, to share our own experiences, to network and catch-up with our trans-Tasman colleagues. Each year we are very aware that we are the privileged few whose organisations can afford to send us and that there are countless others in the adult literacy sector in New Zealand who would give their eye teeth to participate in an ACAL conference.

Dates

So when I was approached in 2005 by the then joint chairs of ACAL- Jan Hagston and Pauline O'Maley - to consider having ACAL in New Zealand I was very enthusiastic about the opportunity for a much larger group of New Zealanders to attend this conference. We consulted with the other literacy organisations in New Zealand and had further discussions with the ACAL Committee this year. As a result we are thrilled to announce that the ACAL Conference in 2007 will be a trans-Tasman affair. It will be held in Auckland New Zealand on September 28 and 29 2007 with September 27 being reserved for a pre-conference forum or good practice visits.

We have specifically chosen those dates because they coincide with school holidays for most Australian states. We hope this will give Australians who are interested in attending the Conference the option of extending their visit to include a family holiday or other travel. The conference will be coordinated by Workbase in collaboration with ACAL and New Zealand's two other literacy organizations – Literacy *Aotearoa* and the National Association of ESOL Home Tutors.

Possible Content

As well as lots of content of mutual interest, the Conference will provide a unique opportunity for people from the adult literacy sector in Australia to learn about successful New Zealand literacy initiatives. In particular there will be a focus on Maori (indigenous peoples) literacy initiatives and *whanau* (family) literacy programs.

Literacy Aotearoa has promoted and delivered literacy programs for Maori in English and *Te Reo Maori* (the Maori language). There are a real range of *whanau* literacy programs in New Zealand from programs situated in schools to those based on *marae*.

The Conference is also timed to follow the initial release of data from New Zealand's participation in the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey (ALLS). In New Zealand we are slightly ahead of Australia in our terms of ALLS data collection and analysis. If the trends from the first wave of countries which took part in ALLS continue with the second wave countries, then New Zealand's results in ALLS will be of major interest to Australian as you prepare for your own initial release of data.

contents

Adult literacy and numeracy research and briefings on the way

Michelle Circelli, Senior Research Officer, NCVER

In the first half of this year, NCVER expects to release a suite of six new adult literacy and numeracy research reports.

These reports focus on:

- enhancing the acquisition of language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills of refugees
- mapping literacy and numeracy provision in community settings
- examining the relevance and responsiveness of current literacy and numeracy training to workplace needs
- learnings from cross-sectoral linkages that may enhance adult LLN provision.

Enhancing the acquisition of LLN skills of refugees

Two forthcoming reports, *Classroom management strategies to address the needs of Sudanese refugees* and *Creating learning spaces for refugees: The role of multicultural organisations in Australia* draw attention to strategies that enhance the LLN learning experiences of refugees, as well as their employability.

The first, by Oksana Hull and Ursula Burgoyne, focuses specifically on adult refugee learners from southern Sudan. Many of these learners have been denied access to formal education because of years of conflict and poverty in their home county. As a consequence they enter English LLN classes in Australia at a very basic level. Through their work Hull and Burgoyne sought to identify those teaching strategies that worked well for the Sudanese refugee learners and to highlight the areas where their needs were not being met. Current teachers of Sudanese refugee learners were interviewed, as well as non-teaching experts in refugee rehabilitation and resettlement, including representatives from Sudanese community organisations.

Learners from Sudan come from a highly oral cultural background and have well developed informal learning strategies. The researchers found that programs which require the concurrent development of speaking, listening, reading, writing, numeracy and learning skills may prove to be too great a learning burden. To address this, the researchers call for greater flexibility in course content and outcomes, allowing learners to concentrate initially on oral English language skill development. Of further concern is the teaching of numeracy appears not to have been a focus for Sudanese learners potentially disadvantaging this learner group even further in accessing work opportunities and/or entering vocational education and training.

The second report, by Beatriz Miralles-Lombardo, Judith Miralles, and Barry Golding examines how multicultural community organisations, through the programs and informal networks they offer, can help the development of LLN and employability skills of refugees. This study concentrated on three refugee groups, from Bosnia, Iraq and Sudan. Using interviews with staff from community organisations and focus groups with refugees, the study looked at the range of factors that enhanced or inhibited the opportunities to develop English language, literacy and employability skills.

Miralles-Lombardo and colleagues highlight that development of trust is imperative between the community organisation and the refugees it seeks to serve. It is this trust that allows refugees to become involved in learning, whether this is informal or formal. The researchers also found the community organisations provided important informal networks that helped connect the refugees with the wider Australian community.

Mapping literacy and numeracy provision in community settings

In his report, *Community adult language, literacy and numeracy provision in Australia: Diverse approaches and outcomes*, Darryl Dymock describes the mapping exercise he undertook of the non-accredited community-based adult LLN provision occurring across Australia. The focus was on courses for which no accredited qualification is awarded noting that the extent and impact of this provision has been over-shadowed in recent years by the emphasis on accredited education and training. A questionnaire was distributed nationally to which 125 providers responded, and seven case studies were undertaken in three states.

Dymock found there was a strong demand for courses from adults who were not interested in or would struggle with accredited courses. Dymock also found that for these learners, the development of LLN skills occurred in parallel

with the development of self-confidence. More than one-third of providers who completed the questionnaire used volunteer-tutors, and sometimes coordinators, an often unacknowledged community resource. Only about one quarter of the providers used formal assessment tools, the use of small assessment tasks in combination with perceptions of progress based on observations and student feedback were more common. The issue of reporting non-accredited LLN was a contentious one with half the providers advocating mandatory reporting while 30% were opposed. Professional development tends to occur in large organisations rather than in smaller organisations (especially those using volunteers), or those in rural areas. The lack of government funding was a major concern for all providers with this issue tied up with a broader concern, namely, the lack of government acknowledgement of the worth of non-accredited LLN provision.

Dymock argues the need for better government recognition and financial support, and ongoing professional development. He also argues for a more sustained approach to monitoring the progress of students' personal growth and LLN skills developments.

Examining the relevance and responsiveness of current literacy and numeracy training to workplace needs

Thinking beyond numbers: Learning numeracy for the future workplace by Beth Marr and Jan Hagston, with Sharon Donohue and Peggy Wymond, looks at the numeracy needs of employers and employees, while a report by Ray Townsend and Peter Waterhouse, *Provision or development? Exploring employers' understanding of workplace literacy, numeracy and employability skills*, focuses specifically on the LLN needs of workers as perceived by employers.

Nobody debates the need for numeracy skills; however, what is not well established is how numeracy skills are best learned in workplaces. The work of Marr and colleagues seeks to redress this. Interviews with various industry representatives (covering peak employer organisations, Training Boards, unions and employers) and case studies at three work sites (having differing numeracy requirements of their staff) were undertaken. For this study, the researchers unpacked the term 'numeracy' into a number of components: measurement skills; number calculations; reading and interpreting diagrams; using simple formulae; and collection, analysis and interpretation of data.

They found that workers who take responsibility for their own work areas use many numeracy skills although these are generally embedded within routine tasks and go unrecognised as numeracy. The implicit use of numeracy skills did not necessarily increase workers' confidence in undertaking explicit numeracy training. The majority of workers did not have a positive experience of secondary school maths education and, as a consequence, preferred training that was informal, immediate, and delivered on-the-job by peers or their supervisors. There was a strong preference among the industry representatives for both 'on' and 'off the floor' training, which had immediate workplace application while also

incorporating opportunities for practice and reflection.

To prevent numeracy becoming invisible or overshadowed within the LLN area, Marr and colleagues suggest that numeracy skills are given prominence in training packages, with underpinning knowledge and strategies for their development spelt out in greater detail.

Townsend and Waterhouse interviewed employers from four particular groups to investigate how the employers understood the provision (by the education and training sector) or development (by the employer) of literacy, numeracy and employability skills for their particular workplaces. The study covered community services and health; local government; manufacturing; and group training companies.

It became obvious to Townsend and Waterhouse that for employers, provision by training providers *and* development in the workplace were equally important. The employers recognise that it is not always possible for the education and training system to provide skilled workers on demand and the responsibility for the development of literacy, numeracy and employability skills lies with the training system *and* the employer. Those employers who are successfully addressing the provision and development of literacy and numeracy skills provided a supportive workplace learning culture and had pragmatic processes in place to help assist the ongoing development of these skills.

Cross-sectoral linkages that may enhance adult LLN

Working from strengths: Cross-sectoral exchange to enrich adult literacy provision, by Peter Waterhouse and Crina Virgona, is a study of the interactional style of adult literacy educators and community health and welfare professionals. The community health and welfare sectors have embraced 'strength-based practice' which focuses on the strengths, capacities and aspirations of individuals as a catalyst for positive change and growth. Waterhouse and Virgona argue this contemporary thinking puts these sectors at the forefront of dealing with relationship management. The researchers believe that the vocational education and training sector's emphasis on training and industry instead of on education and the individual is holding back the development of its educators and disadvantaging its learners.

Using the values of strength-based practice, the study examined the relationship between the adult literacy educators and their learners at the first intake interview, and compared this interaction with the interaction which occurred between the health/welfare professionals and the learner. Three characters, based on real people with literacy difficulties and portrayed by an actor, were presented to both groups of professionals. Waterhouse and Virgona compared the responses of both groups to identify if, and how, the learners were encouraged to take control of their lives and learning.

In the main, Waterhouse and Virgona found the adult literacy educators viewed their job as determining whether the learner was suited to what they had to offer, rather than

Balance of Power: Commonwealth and States ownership of VET

Gavin Moodie

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Big changes have been wrought on Australian technical and further education over the last 15 years in which adult literacy has variously tagged along, been forced to comply, has managed to escape in the interstices of State and TAFE bureaucracies, but in which it has mostly been ignored.

Governments have re-focussed TAFE from its multiple roles which included community education to its pre-Kangan single purpose of training workers. They have excluded employees from involvement in policy and institutional decision-making, either as prospective and current students or as social partners in skill formation and economic development. Now 'industry' involvement in TAFE is generally understood to mean employers, not employees and employers who share a stake in their industry's future.

Governments have required of TAFE multiple changes summarised in the change from teachers teaching students knowledge and skills outlined in a curriculum developed locally, to practitioners providing clients with support to achieve competencies specified in a national training package. And there has been a major shift in power from the States to shared federal responsibility and now to greatly increased Commonwealth power. All of these changes have further marginalised literacy – literacy in the margins.

All of this has been done with the States' agreement, much with their encouragement; and with the unions' various acquiescence and compliance. The next big change will be the centralisation of vocational education in the Australian Government, which will be the direct although perhaps delayed and gradual result of the High Court's recent decision upholding the validity of the Commonwealth's Work Choices legislation.

Big constitutional change

On Tuesday 14 November 2006 the High Court of Australia brought down its judgement in *New South Wales v Commonwealth of Australia; Western Australia v Commonwealth of Australia*[1], the decision which upheld the validity of the *Workplace Relations Amendment (Work Choices) Act* 2005 (Cwlth). This made a big change to Australia's constitution which will have a large and far-reaching effect on education and on many other areas of Australian life over the next 50 years, so it is worth examining in some detail.

Section 51 of the Constitution gives the Commonwealth Parliament power to legislate on 40 matters. Paragraphs 51 xx and xxxv of the Constitution provide –

> 51. The Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have power to make laws for the peace, order, and good government of the Commonwealth with respect to:
>
> (xx.) Foreign corporations, and trading or financial corporations formed within the limits of the Commonwealth:
>
> (xxxv.) Conciliation and arbitration for the prevention and settlement of industrial disputes extending beyond the limits of any one State:

Are the industrial relations of foreign, trading and financial corporations covered by paragraph xx or xxxv? For a century in hundreds of decisions the High Court and federal courts have held that the corporations power is confined to the recognition of foreign corporations and to domestic corporations' trading and financial activities and that the Commonwealth's only general source of industrial relations power is granted by paragraph xxxv.

This interpretation restricts the Commonwealth to legislating about conciliation and arbitration not industrial relations generally, for the prevention and settlement of industrial disputes not for the content of employment contracts or any other matter not related to preventing or settling industrial disputes, and for disputes that cross State boundaries, not for disputes within a State. Because of its importance every word of paragraph xxxv has been litigated in hundreds of cases.

Over a century successive Commonwealth governments have tried to expand their industrial relations power by referendum, legislation and persuasion. The electorate rejected the Commonwealth's attempt to extend its constitutional industrial relations power in referenda in 1910, 1912 and 1926. The High Court of Australia has struck down numerous Commonwealth Acts that attempted to legislate beyond the power granted by paragraph xxxv. Successive Commonwealth governments have failed to persuade States to refer their industrial relations powers to the Commonwealth until 1996 when finally just the Parliament of Victoria under Premier Jeffrey Kennett referred some of its industrial relations powers to the Commonwealth Parliament by the *Commonwealth Powers (Industrial Relations) Act* 1996 (Vic).

The Work Choices legislation ignores all these precedents by applying to employees employed by a foreign, trading

Note

1 [2006] HCA 52
(14 November 2006)

or financial corporation – what are known as 'constitutional corporations'. That is, the *Work Choices Act* is founded not on the Commonwealth's power to legislate for conciliation and arbitration to prevent and settle industrial disputes extending beyond State boundaries, but on the Commonwealth's power to legislate 'with respect to' foreign, trading or financial corporations. Previous decisions of the High Court would have struck down such legislation as invalid in two stages of reasoning.

First, the Court would have declined to interpret one paragraph of section 51 so broadly that it made any other paragraph close to useless. Since about 85 per cent of workers are employed by companies or corporations, interpreting the corporations power of paragraph xx to include corporations' industrial relations makes paragraph xxxv on the prevention and settlement of inter State industrial disputes all but redundant.

So in the second stage of its reasoning the High Court would have interpreted 'with respect to . . . Foreign corporations, and trading or financial corporations' so that it did not cover most of the same ground as the interstate industrial disputes power. In previous decisions the High Court has done this by holding that the corporations' power is restricted to the recognition of foreign corporations and to legislating about corporations' trading or financial activities. That is, the Court has interpreted the corporations power as applying to many of corporations' external activities but not to their establishment or internal management such as the management of their employees.

In upholding the *Work Choices Act* 2005 (Cwlth) the majority of the High Court held that the corporations power grants the Commonwealth power to legislate very generally about constitutional corporations' internal industrial relations, not just their external activities. So the *Work Choices Act* validly prevents employers from making employment agreements longer than five years and from including anything prohibited by Commonwealth regulation such as agreements to deduct union dues from workers' pay, to grant leave to attend training provided by a trade union or to award paid leave to attend meetings conducted by or made up of trade union members.

The High Court majority's new interpretation of the Constitution means that, contrary to its explicit wording, each paragraph of section 51 is not interpreted 'subject to this Constitution' and that contrary to a century of precedent each paragraph is not read to preserve the effects of all other paragraphs of section 51. Rather, the majority of the Court has preferred to read each paragraph of section 51 in complete isolation from the rest of the Constitution. This led Curtin University constitutional law expert Professor Greg Craven to observe in an opinion piece in *The Australian* on 16 November 2006 that 'Unquestionably, the majority judgment in the Work Choices case is one of the most constitutionally autistic in the High Court's long history of literalistic misinterpretation'.

This decision will have extensive consequences because it extends the Commonwealth's power to legislate on almost all matters concerning constitutional corporations and because many State powers are exercised through trading corporations. A corporation includes any body established by or pursuant to an Act of Parliament such as a company even if it is established by a State Act of Parliament such as a university or an incorporated association.

In *Commonwealth v Tasmania* (the Tasmanian dam case)[1] the High Court held that a corporation is not a trading corporation by virtue of its nature or character but by virtue of its conduct of 'significant' or 'substantial' trading activities. In that case the Court held that the Hydro-Electric Commission of Tasmania was a trading corporation and thus subject to the Commonwealth's corporations power notwithstanding that it was a public body established by an Act of the Tasmanian Parliament, was wholly owned by the Tasmanian Government and subject to various ministerial controls. Universities are therefore also trading corporations for the purposes of the Constitution, which the Federal Court recently confirmed about the University of Western Australia in *Quickenden v O'Connor*[2].

Effect on TAFE

The corporations power allows the Commonwealth to legislate directly rather than negotiate through funding agreements on all the matters included in the *Skilling Australia's Workforce Act* 2005 (Cwlth): on constitutional corporations' internal decision-making, internal employment conditions and industrial relations, relations with students and employers, fee levels and on providing competitors access to their facilities.

Most private vocational education and training providers are companies and therefore their VET programs are now subject to the Commonwealth's greatly expanded legislative power over corporations. The initial impact on technical and further education will depend on how it is constituted, which may be illustrated by comparing the constitution of TAFE in Victoria and Queensland. In Victoria, TAFE colleges are incorporated pursuant to section 24 of the Victorian *Vocational Education and Training Act* 1990. This makes Victorian TAFE colleges corporations. They are almost certainly trading corporations because they charge tuition fees, provide training services to employers for a fee, sell food to the public through their restaurants and canteens, operate other commercial services and sell various other goods and services ancillary to their main role. The Howard Government therefore has the power to transform all Victorian TAFE colleges to be like Australian Technical Colleges.

In Queensland, sub section 191(1) of the *Vocational Education, Training and Employment Act* 2000 provides that:

> (1) A *TAFE institute* is an institution operated by the State that provides vocational education and training.

Queensland TAFE institutes are thus like all State schools in being a part of the Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts, a department of State and therefore not a corporation. Of course TAFE Queensland charges tuition fees and offers the range of commercial services offered by TAFE in Victoria and the other States, as its

Notes

2 (1983) 158 CLB 1
3 (2001 FCA 303

Meanings, Traditions and Contemporary Policy Discourse in Adult Literacy

Jill Sanguinetti

Jill Sanguinetti **is a one time adult literacy teacher who is now a lecturer and researcher with the School of Education at Victoria University in Melbourne.**

What does 'adult literacy' now mean in national policy discourse? What do *we* mean by it? I want to reflect on changing notions of literacy, and to ask some questions about the implications of those changes. On the one hand, scholarly research over the last two decades has led to more sophisticated understandings of literacy and how learners could or should be supported to acquire it. On the other hand the changing language around literacy reflects the political agendas of governments and policy-makers in relation to VET and adult education. In the policy arena, the debates around the meanings and purposes of literacy exemplify Anna Yeatman's theory of the 'politics of discourse' (Yeatman 1990).

The term 'adult literacy' has now been stretched to encompass more meanings than it is possible to deal with. As Jane Figgis wrote in her recent paper to ACAL, it has too much baggage to be useful and the proliferation of 'literacies' has created confusion (Figgis 2004). Moreover, 'literacy' inevitably conjures up 'illiteracy', a deficit term that was rejected in the 80s because of the negative connotations it has for literacy learners. The deficit notion is always inherent, however, within arguments for boosting rates of adult literacy in Australia. Such arguments rest on statistics about literacy deficits in the population as a whole and the social impacts of those deficits. We think of 'illiteracy' as an educational deficit in the community, rather than in individuals. But the adjective 'illiterate' is a qualifier that is generally applied to individual people and carries many negative connotations

For many years ACAL promoted a 'social practice' definition of literacy, rather than the previously held 'functional' definition which was a more simplistic notion of reading, writing and arithmetic *per se.* The social practice definition drew attention to different social contexts of literacy practice in which listening, speaking, reading, writing, critical questioning and cultural understanding are integrated. 'Literacy as social practice' became further enshrined in the notion of 'multi-literacies' articulated by the New London Group and within the CGEA with its literacies for Self-Expression, Practical Purposes, Knowledge and Public Debate. The more sophisticated social practice definition helped to underpin the multi-faceted nature of literacy teaching practice, and provided the field with rich conceptualisations of their work, including underlying social and political dimensions of the potential uses of literacy. At the same time, in advocating for programs and funding we inevitably drew on the functional/deficit notion, which was at least generally understood in the community.

So in a sense we had two working definitions, or notions of literacy, related to two different purposes: an internal, academic one which related to theorising and teaching and a public one for policy and advocacy purposes. This was manageable and served both our educational and our strategic purposes at that time. But having a dual vision of literacy also had its down side and may have set us up for the deconstruction (and dilution) of traditional notions of 'literacy' in government policy discourse (and the consequent loss of policy profile that seems to be now taking place).

The current down-grading of adult literacy in national policy discourse as a public educational good and as an educational right is a reflection of neo-liberal political discourse. Yeatman describes discourse politics as *struggles over meaning* in political discourse, in that the commonly understood meanings of key terms set the frame for political reflection and action. 'Language politics', according to Yeatman, are a major form of contemporary political struggle … not simply to demystify inscriptions of power but to put forward alternative meanings. 'Discourse is the power to create reality by naming it and giving it meaning' (Yeatman, 1990).

Adult literacy can thus be seen as a 'site of struggle' in which groups of unequal discursive power are competing to establish their respective interpretations and representations of 'what it is' and 'whose needs count'. According to Fraser (1989), dominant groups articulate interpretations intended to exclude, defuse, and/or co-opt counter interpretations, while subordinate groups articulate interpretations intended to challenge or displace dominant ones.

Adult Literacy and Basic Education (ALBE) came into being as a field of education in the 1970s and 80s with the rise of community-based learning centres and the women's movement. It was a period of radical questioning, social experimentation and a search for alternatives to conventional wisdoms and institutions. Paulo Freire's seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* inspired Australian adult educators and provided an explicitly political framework for adult literacy teaching. Literacy would not simply be about developing skills in reading and writing; through learning *the word,* learners would be able to *read the world.* People who had been educationally disadvantaged and economically marginalised would be empowered to think critically and question their own circumstances in the broader social and political context, and therefore be able to participate in change whilst improving their life chances through adult and further education.

We could say that in those idealistic times, discourses of empowerment, welfare, philanthropy, feminism and social equity underlay understandings of adult literacy (and adult education), certainly in the field of practice. At the same time, 'literacy' was a contested construct. The deficit

account was fanned by the press into public discourse by the notion of a literacy 'crisis' in the mid 70s and 80s, laying the ground for the 'clever country' policies which underpinned the flourishing of literacy provision in the 90s.

The Australian Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP) (DEET 1991) and the National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA) (1991 – 1996) ushered in a boom period for language and literacy provision through labour market programs that were planned to offset mass unemployment resulting from microeconomic reforms. Today's National Training System underpinned by competitive tendering, the Australian Standards Framework (ASF) and competency-based assessment, were put in place. Whilst the rhetoric of the ALLP was steeped in liberal notions of equity and a 'well-educated, cultured, humane and purposeful' society, the implied definition and purpose of literacy was clearly functional and economic: a better skilled populace to meet the needs of industry and the economy.

During this period, discourses of social democracy, welfare and educational rights co-existed with the 'functional' and 'deficit' discourses in government policies and programs. There was much debate, but most of us came to be comfortable with the duality of *both* social justice *and* economic purposes, and work was backed by funding streams that matched both kinds of programs. The duality was reflected in policies and research sponsored by ANTA and in state policies and programs. In the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (ALNARC)(1999 – 2002) there were distinct funding streams allotted to research into literacy in training packages and practitioner research into community needs (albeit a lesser program).

It could be said of this period (1992 – 2002) that there was a contradictory policy environment in which earlier discourses of adult literacy and adult education, discourses from the (hitherto largely un-funded) margins, were being blended with (or perhaps colonised by) the agendas of power - of industry and the global capitalist economy. The *traditional* meanings of literacy were gradually oriented away from social justice and community values towards the human capital model which was to augment productivity and profitability. At the time, a number of academics and practitioners raised the alarm about the discursive shift in policies and programs that they saw taking place. Simon Marginson argued that competency-based education does not bring improved learning but that it appeared to resolve the tension between a view of the student as *subject* of learning (where students' empowerment is the goal of learning) to a view of the student as *object* of learning (where meeting the needs of employers is the goal) (Marginson 1995: 105). Nancy Jackson wrote of "a process of ideological capture" (Jackson 1993: 165).

The Certificate of General Education for Adults (CGEA) brought competency-based, performative assessment into adult literacy for the first time and was met (at least initially) with a wave of resistance from the field, as recorded in numerous issues of *Fine Print* (1993 – 1994).

But the CGEA also reflected a strong 'social practice' literacy discourse and retained (required) the inclusion of critical literacy in the 'literacy for public debate stream'. Over a series of revisions, the framework became more 'user friendly' and focused on the assessment of learning outcomes rather than the performance of tasks. The CGEA became embedded in literacy and numeracy practice in Victoria and elsewhere nationally, and while the debates about the pedagogical and curriculum aspects of the certificate continued, it became an accepted and useful framework for community literacy and general education provision for over a decade.

Poverty and exclusion were recognised as the unfortunate results of market forces…

With the accession of the Howard government in 1996, 'industry planning' was abandoned in favour of a neo-liberal faith in the effectiveness of market forces in allocating resources, including the allocation of resources for VET. Labour market programs were abolished and employment services were privatised. National Training Packages were introduced and literacy provision was to be 'built in' to industry skills modules. However, with a primary focus on skills performance and a lack of appropriately trained trainers, it is questionable how much literacy (defined either in social practice or functional terms) was happening in training package training. No new national language and literacy policy was developed by the Howard government. Poverty and exclusion were recognised as the unfortunate results of market forces which are nevertheless still seen as the preferred way of allocating resources. Increasingly, the industry employers who drive training policy are representatives of transnational corporations, rather than nationally-owned companies.

In 2001 the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and Business Council of Australia (BCA) published their framework of Generic Employability Skills (2002), which significantly changed the terms of the debate, again re-framing (and implicitly down-grading) the notion of literacy as a public good. The message of their report, *Employability Skills for Australian Industry* (2001) was that what industry needed was not so much a literate or even technically skilled workforce as a workforce that was equipped with 'employability skills'. There was no reference to literacy as such. Instead c*ommunication skills* featured in a list of skills and attributes that included *team-work*, *problem-solving*, *self-management, learning skills, loyalty*, *enthusiasm, customer service* and so on.

The ACCI/BCA report was taken up in national policy and the VET system was required to include 'generic employability skills' in training packages and general course provision. There was a dramatic contrast between the vision of ACCI, reflected in this and other reports and that of Dawkins, ten years earlier, where literacy would help to keep Australian productivity growing, in an increasingly complex technological world, as a *national project*. The ACCI/BCA report represented a further step in the ▶

colonisation of a public education discourse (including adult literacy) on behalf of business and industry, whose profitability, was being made synonymous with 'the public interest'. ACCI was aware that their report might not be well received by educators, and that there may in fact be conflicting views about the role and purpose of education:

… The employability skills provides (*sic*) an excellent example of where the tension between the business and education sectors produces a tension to create reform and make the education sector more responsive to the needs of industry (ACCI 2001).

Here the education sector is cast as a sector with its own agenda in competition with the interests of the business and industry sector. The notion of education as a public or community good is entirely absent.

Elsewhere, lists of employability skills include *information literacy, computer literacy, visual literacy, financial literacy, social and emotional literacy,* while what we used to think of as 'literacy' is often rendered as *communication skills.* The term 'literacy' seems to have lost its earlier power as a signifier and is now tagged onto various learning and vocational domains in the sense of 'knowledge and skills about' rather than as a foundational educational domain in its own right.

In a 2004 issues paper, *The Importance of Literacy and Numeracy Skills,* ACCI has however, reiterated the impact of literacy deficits on business and industry, in particular the need for skilled and qualified workers.

Meanwhile, under the ANTA Agreement, State Training Authorities have been funded to deliver accredited Language, Literacy and Numeracy courses such as the CGEA. This funding has continued under DEST since the demise of ANTA, but such programs may now be at risk in the light of DEST's recent proposal to use the community as a major VET provider, specifically for the delivery of Certificates 1 and 2 (DEST, August 2006).

The future policy directions for VET (now called VTE) (Vocational and Technical Education) were spelt out by a DEST representative at a briefing for educational researchers in Melbourne in September. VTE is to become even more 'industry driven' than it has been in the past; 'regulatory burdens' on industry are to be lifted; and 'more appropriate regulations for educational providers' are to be put in place. DEST seemed to be signalling a further shift in (or consolidation of) the power of the business and industry lobby in relation to VET policy and research, and a further diminishment of the role of educators and educational researchers and institutions (and thus of educational discourses) in the future shaping of national policy.

In a more recent development, the 14 November 2006 judgement of the High Court of Australia, upholding the validity of the *Workplace Relations Amendment (Work Choices) Act* 2005 (Cwealth) (HCA 2006) has clear implications for adult literacy provision. Elsewhere in this issue, Gavin Moodie (*loc.cit* p.4) has pointed out that this constitutional interpretation signifies a virtual takeover by the Commonwealth of VET and TAFE institutes, hitherto the responsibility of the States. According to Moodie, it

is likely that TAFE systems will be narrowed even further to concentrate on training and upgrading workers. The Commonwealth may fund short term contracts for literacy programs for workers, but general adult literacy programs risk being removed from TAFE and offered by the community providers only. Is this a sign of public training provision again being increasingly geared to the needs of employers rather than to the community?

It seems as if the TAFE system is being tailored for ever more customised industry training provision, and dollars of public adult education and training funds are being put at the disposal of business and industry, while national regulatory overview is being decreased.

It is interesting to speculate on the discourse politics in relation to this latest move. To what extent have the language and rhetoric of neo-liberalism, and the corresponding silences in relation to adult and community education priorities created the discursive conditions for such wide-reaching change to be accepted?

The analysis offered in this paper is just one way of seeing things. Of course there are other ways of representing the infinitely complex dynamics of history. I am certainly not saying that the political economy analysis / politics of discourse perspective offered above is the only way of interpreting these issues. Just that it is one way which can give us a (sometimes useful) perspective on the more immediate personal transactions of our daily work and striving.

ACAL has called for a national policy in which the strengthening of individuals and communities through adult literacy and general education will be at least as significant as the needs of industry. This is the 'social capital model' in contrast with the 'human capital model', a distinction elaborated by Falk *et al* (2000.) Australia must provide for quality general education and vocational skills programs for adults (of all ages) who are at risk of being permanently marginalised by today's economic and digital divide. They are the individuals who make up the 45% of Australians whose literacy skills, according to the IALS (1996) survey, are inadequate to deal with the demands of contemporary society. (The IALS found that 27% have 'poor' and 19% have 'very poor' literacy skills).

Adult literacy practitioners must continue to speak out on behalf of large sections of the community whose previous educational disadvantages need to be addressed; and, for the vision of a cohesive, participative and literate community. As such we are adding our voices to advocates in other areas of social policy who are challenging the discourses of power and privilege by naming *our* realities and *our* meanings of the power of literacy for individuals and society as a whole.

In this context, having an awareness of discourse is a form of political vigilance. If those of us who identify as adult literacy practice (as a project of inclusion and participation), fail to notice the slippages of usage and subtle policy changes as reflections of changing discourse, then we will find ourselves distanced from the strategic pressure points where the meaning of adult literacy *in practice* is being determined.

Being non-judgemental - what does this mean?

Melissa Jones

*Melissa Jones **is an adult literacy teacher who has worked in a range of settings including the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program, prisons and TAFE. She is a member of the WA Adult Literacy Council Executive.***

I have admitted something to myself: I am judgemental. Furthermore, I believe everyone else is as well. I don't believe that it is possible for human beings to be non-judgemental. Being judgemental is an essential part of human make-up. Why then does the term 'being non-judgemental' come up so often in discussion about what makes a good adult literacy teacher?

On reflection, I've decided that what we mean when we speak of being 'non-judgemental' is that we should behave in a way that does not reveal our judgements to others at inappropriate times. As a teacher of adult literacy and numeracy, I have tried to develop this skill (the skill of not revealing the judgements I am making) so that the classroom environment feels safe and comfortable for the other adults I share it with. I believe my students need to feel that they can reveal their circumstances, past, personality, interests and ideas without the fear of jeopardising their peer and teacher relationships.

So, what are the skills that a teacher in my position is trying to exercise in order to conceal the judgements I make about other people, their values and their behaviour? I suppose my main strategy is to be accepting of difference: I strive to cultivate and exercise tolerance and patience. I try to be well-behaved. I like this notion of teachers being well-behaved because we are often working in an environment where we can socially misbehave. We have an elevated status in the classroom that allows us to gain attention, take the floor and force our opinions and values on those we teach. We are also in a position to influence others strongly by showing disapproval and inciting the group to disapprove. That is why we must take extra care not to reveal our judgements without evaluating the possible effects on others in the room. At times, this means planning an alternative reaction to the one that occurs naturally, that is as a 'natural' consequence of our own upbringing, values and experiences.

Over time and with practice, I am finding it easier to reconcile the stories confided to me with my own experience and outlook. I hear my inner voice saying, 'Well, perhaps I would be behaving similarly if I had faced the extremes of hardship this person has faced.' Or, 'They have not had the same opportunities as others, and so now they see things from a different perspective than my own.' I also find I am not bothered by superficial differences such as cleanliness, clothing, piercings and tattoos for example. I am not shocked by accounts of drug use, binge-drinking or promiscuity. There is no doubt that I have seen the best of human nature within adult literacy groups. I have been astounded by the generosity of time, spirit and resources from those who have very often not been the recipients of it. This has taught me about real values and the importance of delaying judgement.

You could say I am desensitised but I don't think that's entirely accurate; the truth is, I am less sheltered and more aware of differences. I have met a much wider group of people than I may have done had I made a different occupational choice, and I have found that opportunity wonderful. But there are still times when I must think twice and plan a better reaction. Personally, I still find it hard not to pass judgement where children are involved. I would be lying if I said accounts of situations where children are being neglected didn't disturb me greatly and cloud my opinion of a student or their behaviour. Of course what constitutes neglect to me may not be supported by others. I believe it is not my place to lecture a student about their personal choices and it would be wrong for me to allow my feelings to interfere with my professional role as that person's teacher.

Working with teachers

I considered what is involved in delaying judgement and planning for better reactions and developed a two-hour workshop to raise awareness of these issues with other teachers. The basis of this workshop is the Plan an Alternative Reaction Flowchart (see Fig.1). ▶

Tough, tougher.... toughest

I began the session by describing my interest in the concept of being 'non-judgemental' as recounted above. I described the way certain incidents seem to trigger our biases and that sometimes these can be quite a surprise, even to us. I provided them with an example of what I referred to as my own 'bad behaviour'. This story involved a student I had taught for quite some time handing me a story that had been written by someone else. I felt very insulted and questioned her about it within ear-shot of others. It was a surprise to me just how insulted and shocked I felt. I admitted to the teachers in my group that my behaviour was far worse than her offence and that I now realised I had probably caused the whole situation by making her feel pressured in some way. (When the student and I spoke about it later she told me she was worried she wouldn't achieve the certificate.) I certainly could have handled the situation with a lot more sensitivity and thought. In a way I was ambushed by the strength of my reaction and I wanted to find a method of anticipating and rehearsing such events beforehand. This is how the

Planning an Alternative Reaction Flowchart came to be devised.

Having shared my own 'bad behaviour', I asked the participants to share theirs and recorded a summary on the board. In about 15 minutes we had 10 different examples. I was surprised (and pleased) by the enthusiasm this activity generated: recounting an incident seems to be a basic human pleasure, even when the story shows you up in a bad light! My main tasks were to prompt for specific detail (who said or did what) and to limit the inclination of the participants to start unpacking all the incidents.

At this point I introduced the Planning an Alternative Reaction Flowchart with the incident of the student who is late and worked through it with participants.
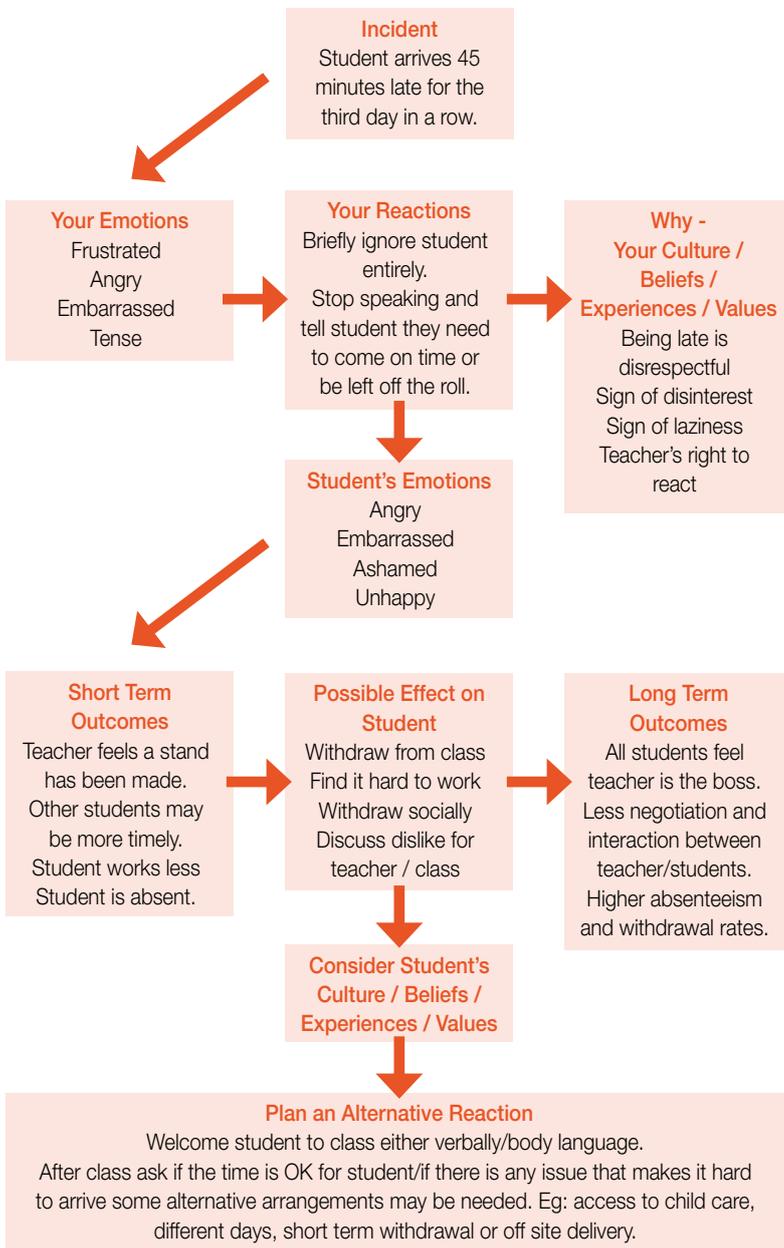
In this example the student has arrived late for the third day in a row. For many of us this would trigger feelings of frustration, anger, embarrassment and tension. The class may be interrupted, we may feel the student doesn't respect us or value the education that is being provided. We may have grown up to believe that lateness is a sign of laziness or rudeness. All these feelings lead to the construction of a judgement; a judgement about the event and the person. But is it right to display that judgement in the classroom context? How could I avoid displaying it? What information am I using to make this judgement in the first place? Is the information I have true and accurate or have I, 'jumped to conclusions'?

After you acknowledge your own emotions, culture, values and experiences and have thought about your spontaneous reactions, the flow chart asks you to consider all of those same aspects for the student. What are they likely to be feeling? What is their set of values, experiences, beliefs and culture? How will your reaction affect them and what will the short-term and long-term outcomes be for everyone involved? This is important because if our goal is to maximise personal and academic outcomes for students we need to ensure that our personal beliefs and values don't interfere. We can't change our culture and shouldn't be forced into losing our values, but we can learn to conceal them or behave differently for the benefit of others.

In the final part of the workshop, I provided each person with a blank chart and with the option of working in pairs, asking them to work through an incident of relevance to them. A good range had been provided during the brainstorm but I said they could use others if they wished to. Participants seemed to enjoy the process of sharing experiences and being honest about reactions, even biases. They acknowledged similar experiences or lent support and advice to their peers. I suspect a safe environment for discussing these events was overdue for many and appreciated by all. I believe the 'I did this but perhaps it wasn't a good idea' aspect of the PD made it OK to expose mistakes.

I noticed very valuable discussions taking place. Some people were surprised to find how much their own experiences and values had influenced their reactions, and just how personal it really was. In some cases

Incident
Student arrives 45 minutes late for the third day in a row.

Your Emotions
Frustrated
Angry
Embarrassed
Tense

Your Reactions
Briefly ignore student entirely.
Stop speaking and tell student they need to come on time or be left off the roll.

**Why -
Your Culture /
Beliefs /
Experiences / Values**
Being late is disrespectful
Sign of disinterest
Sign of laziness
Teacher's right to react

Student's Emotions
Angry
Embarrassed
Ashamed
Unhappy

Short Term Outcomes
Teacher feels a stand has been made.
Other students may be more timely.
Student works less
Student is absent.

Possible Effect on Student
Withdraw from class
Find it hard to work
Withdraw socially
Discuss dislike for teacher / class

Long Term Outcomes
All students feel teacher is the boss.
Less negotiation and interaction between teacher/students.
Higher absenteeism and withdrawal rates.

Consider Student's Culture / Beliefs / Experiences / Values

Plan an Alternative Reaction
Welcome student to class either verbally/body language.
After class ask if the time is OK for student/if there is any issue that makes it hard to arrive some alternative arrangements may be needed. Eg: access to child care, different days, short term withdrawal or off site delivery.

Curriculum is everyone's business: why don't we have a national curriculum?

Kita Scott

***Kita Scott** convened a Focus Group session at the ACAL National Conference in Adelaide in October and summarises the discussion here.*

Federal Education Minister Julie Bishop's plans for a national school curriculum, designed to foster uniform educational curricula across the country, assisted in making this session a lively debate on the pros and cons of nationally consistent curriculum.

Shortly before the conference, the federal Minister said in the context of school-based delivery, 'The serious question needs to be asked whether it is time for a common model curriculum across the country. I think this is a debate that we must have ... .' This statement, and the requirement for a national debate, could equally apply to the VET sector.

With this in mind, the session *Curriculum is everyone's business: why don't we have a National Curriculum?* sparked passionate debate from everyone present and with representatives from each state outlining the LLN curriculum used in their state, it soon became obvious that the time allocated was not nearly sufficient to address all the issues on this topic.

The presenters were:
* Susan Lohmeyer (SA) IVEC 1
* Lyn Fitzpatrick and Liz Davidson (Vic) CGEA
* Sue Roy (NSW) FAVE
* Denise Maplestone and Ann Kelly (Qld) Courses in Vocational Literacy and Vocational Numeracy
* Pokua Asomani (WA)

Following the presentations from each state there was debate around the advantages and disadvantages of having a single national curriculum for Language, Literacy and Numeracy students across Australia.

Each table (with approximately 10 people per table) looked at one of the following questions:
1. Is it time for a National Curriculum? Do we need to change?
2. How many curricula do we need to deliver LLN?
3. What strengths would a National Curriculum have?
4. What weaknesses would a National Curriculum have?
5. Who funds it? Who would fund a National Curriculum?

One of the outcomes of general discussion was agreement that there are similar approaches to curriculum development in each state in terms of the outcomes for students and the ways in which the LLN needs of students are met.

There was general consensus that there are many positives about having a national LLN curriculum. However, there are also many complex issues associated with such a curriculum, not least among them issues around funding and state's rights to customise and adapt a national curriculum to suit individual state's needs and requirements.

Some of the issues raised by participants included the following.

To what extent would a national curriculum be prescriptive – would states be able to reflect their local needs and characteristics within such a national curriculum? How flexible would a national curriculum be? Would disparity between sparsely populated states, and metropolitan-centric states be catered for?

What about the diverse student groups that are catered for by LLN curricula - indigenous, disability, family, community, WELL, DEST LLNP and VTE? Would this diversity still be catered for through a national curriculum? Or would a national curriculum, in attempting to be all things to all people, lose essential educational integrity?

Participants felt that developing a national curriculum could lead to a loss of state-based LLN programs as the funds would not be forthcoming from the federal government to support these.

On this basis alone those present agreed that no move towards a national LLN curriculum was feasible until all the issues had been properly explored and assurances given that the integrity and availability of LLN curricula was not compromised. ∎

Technology in literacy: media sharing

Robyn Jay

***Robyn Jay** currently works at the International Centre for VET (ICVET) with TAFE NSW where she is the NSW Learnscope Project manager and has been, until recently a member of the ACAL Executive. Robyn established the web-based conferencing facility, Literacy Live, for ACAL in 2005.*

This is the first of a series of short articles focusing on technology related tools useful for both teaching and professional capability building in adult literacy.

As outlined in my previous article (pre ACAL conference) we are seeing a shift in mindset in e-learning. The Web2.0 and connectivism philosophy (see George Siemens http://www.connectivism.ca/about) demonstrates an increasing interest in how normal people, like teachers, can share collective intelligence through online linkages and across global communities. It has shifted the power base for what we do and learn online from you the user, to you the producer. The result is a rapidly evolving collection of easy to master and use online tools that to a large extent support the production of collaborative, dynamic, evolving content/ resources. ▶

In VTE teachers and learners are not only now able to produce their own multimedia content (digital storytelling is a prime example) but can upload and share that content within a much broader community with similar interests and needs. A wide range of media sharing services now allow rich media such as digital images, audio and video to be housed online and organized or classified by a process called 'tagging'. Tagging enables the content producer to assign key words to content, and works well within a community where a set of agreed 'tags' are used. Within our ACAL community we might decide to use the tags 'adultliteracy' and 'adultnumeracy' for example, along with any number of associated tags to more specifically describe the contents scope.

With the growing capability of mobile phones and digital cameras to capture short video clips sites such as youtube. com and bliptv.com have enabled sharing of that content. Any of these tools and emerging practices, of course, bring with them a whole swag of new issues that adult literacy teachers must grapple with in our programs. Copyright, ownership, security, personal boundaries, safety online are just a few. However our learners, particularly youth, ARE using these sites. It's essential that we use them and face these emerging issues head on rather than ignore that the lives of our students are changing. The whole notion of what it means to be 'literate' is evolving.

A very popular tool for adult literacy teachers is **Flickr** (http://www.flickr.com)**,** an online image storage and sharing website. While there are a number of image sharing sites, FlickR is probably the most widely known and used. By registering with *Yahoo*, users are able to establish a free account to upload, tag and share personal photographs. Content owners are able to assign a range of levels of copyright but many people allow use with acknowledgement and without changes.

A team of teachers at your college might decide to assign the tag 'sunshinecollege' along with other applicable tags. If every teacher uploads images tagged in this way, you will have a fantastic collection to draw on throughout the year. Better still, if each college uses the tag 'adultliteracy' you can also share images with other teachers around the nation or even internationally.

Learners can also use FlickR to share images related to a topic or program; simply decide on a shared tag to use by the class. By upgrading to a paid Pro account (around $40/yr) users have a significantly increased upload limit and unlimited capacity to create sets for organizing images in their space. Most teachers will find the free account more than adequate however.

Even if you don't use FlickR for uploading personal photos, it is also a valuable source of images for illustrating digital stories, teaching materials and publications. From the FlickR homepage terms (tags) can be entered in the search box – try entering acal06 for example and see what comes up. After clicking on a selected image to enlarge it, you can simply right click and save to your own computer.

Sharing even a small portion of your life online can be a confronting thing for some. By using tags that are fairly specific and by maintaining a select group of 'contacts' exposure is really quite limited if you choose it to be so. For years we battled to locate suitable, relevant images for our work. If as a network we collectively share what we experience and see our teaching programs will be richer and the media we use current and relevant.

A full set of 'how to' guides for getting started in FlickR are available at http://robynjay.wikispaces.com/flickr Feel free to email me for further assistance.
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A New Look for ACE?

On Friday 24th November 2006, at the Adult Learning Australia (ALA) National Conference in Melbourne, DEST released a new discussion paper entitled *Community Education and National Reform.* The 'national reform' in the title is a reference to the Coalition of Australian Governments (COAG) agenda which includes a focus on health, vocational education and training and workforce participation under the human capital reform strand.

The discussion paper was commissioned by DEST and written by Ben Bardon. Ben Bardon is currently the General Manager of Central West Group Apprentices Ltd in Bathurst, NSW and has previously held managerial roles with community education providers. In his keynote address at the ALA National Conference Ben spoke about the 'federalisation' of ACE and advocated for the development of the ACE sector as a strategy for meeting the needs of the four million Australians who do not hold qualifications.

The *Community Education and National Reform* discussion paper addresses the National Reform Agenda by posing four questions:

i.   What challenges does the National Reform Agenda pose of the VET sector?

ii. What role does Community Education currently play in VET?

iii. Where might Community Education fit in the coordinated response to National Reform?

iv. What actions might Governments take to achieve this?

In summary, the VET sector is expected to address a number of challenges in producing a highly skilled workforce for the future. The challenges include: an ageing population; competition from globalisation, resulting in loss of low-skilled jobs particularly in manufacturing; a substantial proportion of the workforce without post-school qualifications; the demand for higher level qualifications; and a lack of investment by business and industry in producing formal qualifications. To meet the challenges, the VET sector will need to do two things. Firstly it must package its services so that both businesses and individuals are attracted by the product and will agree to pay for it; and secondly it must 'gear up for extra demand for low level ▶

and higher level qualifications simultaneously' and find ways to engage individuals who are marginally attached to the labour force. (There is an unavoidable contradiction here in that the demand for low level qualifications may not come from the consumers – who have to be attracted – but from policy makers who find the idea of better qualified individuals attractive.)

The current role of community education providers is considered in terms of the contribution the sector makes to VET. Statistics are provided to suggest that community providers delivered formal training to 15.6% of all VET students. There are 1200 organisation identifying as community providers; 770 of these are Registered Training Organisations. The definition of community education provider encompasses a wide range of organisations: AMES, CAE, ACE, Group Training Companies, Community Colleges, Job Network RTOs, Telecenters, Neighbourhood Houses and Community Access Centres. Statistics are provided to suggest that where VET qualifications are delivered in the community sector, satisfaction and completion rates are high, even if only a small part of a qualification is completed.

This paper suggests that the role that community education plays in VET could be expanded in the future to help governments, businesses and VET meet the challenges that have been described. In summary, the community education sector could be engaged to deliver low level qualifications so that other VET institutions can focus on higher level qualifications. Low level qualifications include all Certificates I and II including literacy qualifications. There are three main supporting arguments: community education providers are more flexible with better developed links to community and local business and are therefore uniquely placed to engage with the challenges faced by the VET sector; there are high rates of student satisfaction with community based providers; and community education providers can offer provision more cheaply because they do not need to offer teachers award rates for teaching staff and are already accustomed to working in a competitive, short-term funding environment.

In order to bring about these changes, coordinated action from governments will be necessary, and the paper argues for a joint policy on community education. It proposes that a framework utilising three levels of 'capability' might be developed: Community Learning Provider; Community Participation Provider; and Community VET Provider. A set of regulatory principles would also need to be developed similar, perhaps, to those used in the AQTF.

The *Community Education and National Reform* discussion paper can be downloaded from the DEST website www.dest.gov.au It is not clear whether a formal consultation process is planned, but DEST has indicated that it would welcome comments. Literacy practitioners will be interested to read this paper because the reforms that are suggested will impact on the significant proportion of literacy provision delivered at Certificate I and II level.

There are other publications available from www.ala.asn.au that deal with similar issues including *Equity in Adult Learning: Integrating Social Justice and Economic Success,* Kearns, P, 2006 and *Ace's Role in developing Australia's Human Capital: A Structured Analysis,* Choy, S., Hauka, S, & Keyes, E, 2006. ■

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investigating other possibilities. However, the interviews assessed by both the participants and the researchers as having worked well were those in which the learner felt they were being listened to and valued for who they were. Waterhouse and Virgona make the point that the strength-based approach is more than just interactional strategies but it is an approach that is ideally suited to the adult learning environment where learners are encouraged to take control of their learning and personal development.

Three new research projects will be underway in 2007

- Darryl Dymock and Stephen Billet will build on Darryl's aforementioned study which looked at the extent of non-accredited community-based LLN provision in Australia. This new project aims to identify the range of outcomes that accrue from participation in non-accredited community adult LLN programs across a variety of client groups. From this it is intended to develop and appraise a portfolio of 'best practice' tools from which coordinators, teachers and tutors can select for monitoring individual student progress.
- Stephen Black, Ian Falk and Jo Balatti are looking at approaches to language, literacy and numeracy skills development that deliberately draw on and build social capital. The researchers will focus on five sectors - health, community development, welfare, finance and justice. By examining in detail an effective collaboration from each sector, the research will show how to implement social capital approaches to adult literacy and numeracy development.
- The impact of an intensive reading pedagogy in adult literacy will be assessed in a study by Helen de Silva Joyce, Sue Hood, and David Rose. The researchers will examine the best way to inform and train practising adult ESOL and Adult Basic Education (ABE) teachers in how to implement an intensive and scaffolded approach to the challenge of teaching of reading. With this approach, teachers guide students so that they can read, learn, and respond to text in ways they may not be able to do if they had not been given the help. The aim of this project is to contribute to the professional development in reading pedagogy, improve support for teachers, and enhance learning opportunities of ESOL and ABE students.

The Adult Literacy and Numeracy Research Program is funded under the Adult Literacy National Project by the Australian Government through the Department of Education, Science and Training. For more information contact Michelle Circelli by email michelle.circelli@ncver.edu.au.

Go to NCVER's website (www.ncver.edu.au) to check up on current research projects. ■

Adult literacy and numeracy research and briefings on the way

New Zealand's Ministry of Education has over the last few years undertaken some intensive national professional development using a cluster approach. The Conference will provide an opportunity for a much wider audience to hear about the impact of this professional development from not only the developers but the tutors and providers who have taken part in the professional development clusters. The approach to numeracy skill development follows on from a very successful early numeracy project in schools and its adaptation for the adult sector is of great interest.

Building the infrastructure of the adult literacy sector has been a key Government focus since the release of the New Zealand Adult Literacy Strategy in 2001. We now have national baseline qualifications for literacy practitioners as well as vocational tutors or workplace trainers who are integrating literacy into their courses. Quality assurance provisions are being instituted by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority and are scheduled for roll out in 2007. Recently the Tertiary Education Commission put out for consultation with the field draft Learning Progressions with a view to being finalised in 2007.

New Zealand's Tertiary Education Commission recently funded pilots with a number of Industry Training Organisations (New Zealand's equivalent of your old ITABs) to integrate literacy into industry training. This is a new initiative in New Zealand although it is something where Australia has taken the lead. We are looking forward to showcasing the best of integrated delivery from Australia so that New Zealand ITOs, providers and practitioners can have an opportunity to hear first hand the strengths and weaknesses inherent in such an approach.

We do not have a national reporting system in New Zealand and are interested to discuss the Australian system as you move to an Essential Skills Framework.

Other things to do

If you do decide to come and want to do some other traveling while you are in New Zealand have a look at these sites. The first two relate to Auckland where the Conference will be held and the last two are sites relating to tourism generally in New Zealand.

http://www.aucklandnz.com/
http://www.aucklandnz.com/VisitorInformation/
      ContactUs/ISite/
http://www.tourismnewzealand.com/
http://www.tourism.net.nz/

There will be more information on the Workbase website shortly www.workbase.org.nz. We really hope you can come and join us in Auckland in September – otherwise we'll be asking 'Where the bloody hell are you?'. ■

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the reactions had very little to do with the incidents themselves and in others the incidents were grounded in much larger problems. For example, one teacher was annoyed about mobile phones being allowed in the room. When he unpacked his reactions he could see he disliked technology, didn't use it and believed everyone could do without it. When the student's behaviour was unpacked he discovered she used the phone as a 'get out' when the work was too hard.

Following these discussions, the participants shared their flow charts with the wider group and considered alternative reactions. They had made many discoveries and I believe the session was of great benefit. The flow chart helped to keep the unpacking on track and focussed the attention on the outcomes and student's experience, thus avoiding the discussion degenerating into an attack on student behaviour.

Sometimes it's not OK to be yourself.

The Planning an Alternative Reaction Flowchart is not intended to change someone as a person, rather it is an attempt to acknowledge aspects of the individual, their emotions, values and culture and understand how these influences give rise to certain behaviours. It encourages the user to step into another's shoes and consider how a situation might look and feel to someone with different life experiences, values and upbringing.

I have used the ideas proposed by this flowchart with students, as a lesson or model. It is important to me to get to know more about my students, and I try to build my appreciation of difference and broaden my experience of different cultures and value sets. I also try to gain an understanding of the hardships and barriers the students are facing. This helps me appreciate the genuine need to reconsider my own behaviours and attitudes.

We are in a constant state of communication with our students, even when we are silent. I believe that sometimes it's not OK to be yourself, particularly if that entails expressing unrestrained negative value judgements about other people. My professional 'self' is endeavouring to model acceptance, respect and patience, but I am not aiming to turn myself into a non-judgemental person. ■

web site proudly promotes. However, because these are offered by TAFE Queensland as part of a department of the State and not as a corporation, TAFE Queensland is not a trading corporation for the purposes of the Constitution and is therefore beyond the reach of the Commonwealth's corporations power.

Many but not all Victorian TAFE colleges were initially established as part of the Victorian Government's State departments, just as many university education faculties originated as State teachers' colleges which were the training arms of the State department of education. There is nothing to stop the Victorian and other State Governments from decorporatising their instrumentalities including their TAFE colleges and thus removing them from the Commonwealth's corporations power.

However, the Commonwealth can also use its corporations power to establish a national scheme for occupational licensing, accreditation of training providers, monitoring of standards and quality control even if many or perhaps all States' TAFE systems were not constitutional corporations. The Commonwealth could legislate to require all corporations that supply, say, electrical services, all corporations that buy electrical services and all corporations that employ an electrician to supply or buy services provided by an electrician or to employ an electrician who is on a national register of licensed electricians and is licensed in accordance with the national scheme.

The national scheme could further provide that all licensed electricians must be trained by a training organisation accredited and registered in accordance with the scheme and it could impose all sorts of conditions on the accreditation of registered training organisations. TAFE Queensland would want its electricians to be eligible for the national register so it would have to comply with the Commonwealth's accreditation requirements even if it were not a constitutional corporation.

Implications for adult literacy

Experts in adult literacy will be able to extrapolate implications for adult literacy far better than I. However, two possibilities occur to me. It appears to me as an external observer that the Commonwealth Government is concerned with providing employers with skilled workers but that it is not particularly concerned about providing general literacy programs. It will therefore narrow TAFE systems even further to concentrate just on training and upgrading workers and it may fund by short term contracts literacy programs for workers, those in the labour market and perhaps also for migrants.

The States could respond to the Commonwealth's takeover of vocational education by relinquishing their remaining role in adult education, leaving general literacy programs vulnerable to withering through lack of Commonwealth interest and support. This would follow most States' practice after the Commonwealth's takeover of higher education in 1975: most States withdrew their funding from and active involvement in the universities established by their own legislation.

Alternatively, the States could respond to the Commonwealth's takeover of vocational education by renewing their interest in adult and community education, literacy and general education which have in recent years been subsumed in the drive to deliver improved and nationally portable vocational qualifications. This holds the potential for a very considerable improvement in the standing, policy, management and perhaps even funding of adult literacy and other community education programs.

However it turns out, the High Court's expansive interpretation of the Commonwealth's corporations power will have major long term implications for adult literacy along with many other areas of Australian life. ■

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Living Literacies
2007 VALBEC Annual Conference

"What is it to be literate? We have to draw our own maps, trace our own histories, acknowledge our own debts and consider ways not taken."

(Margaret Meeks, On being Literate, 1991:234)

Margaret Meeks' words still ring true today as we trace our own 'Living Literacies' to create inner landscapes that shape our interactions with the world.

How do we strive to articulate practice that moves us beyond a focus on the mechanics of reading and writing? How do we engage greater numbers of learners in adult learning and continue to make accessible second chance learning opportunities?

The VALBEC 2007 conference will provide a place for practitioners to reflect on where we have been and where we want to go in the future.

Keynote speakers: **Margaret Somerville**, Professor of Education (Learning and Development) at Monash University Gippsland and **Arnold Zable**, award winning writer, storyteller, educator, and human rights advocate will provide a focus on story and identity as integral to 'Living Literacies'.

More program information and registration: **www.valbec.org.au**

2007 VALBEC Conference Call for Presentations
http://www.valbec.org.au/05/conf07/call.htm

Proposals should be submitted by **February 23rd 2007**

**Friday, May 4, 2007
at the
William Angliss College,
Melbourne.**

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