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Adult Education in the Community

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I was drawn to trees without knowing why. 'Longing to grow, I looked outside myself, and the trees inside me grew'.

Roger Mc Donald wrote these words in *The tree in fading light* (2001) an exquisitely illustrated book that contains his musings on trees and human relationships with the landscape. I was reminded of this book when I chose the image for the cover of this edition of a lemon-scented gum tree that I have observed in changing light for many years. I wonder if we all have an innate connection to trees that form part of our being and sense of where we belong and where best we can thrive.

Making connections through learning is a theme throughout this edition. Whether it is teachers being connected through Google communities, students learning how to better manage their finances, or students and teachers supporting each other to achieve goals for better health outcomes.

In our first feature article, Tony Dreise explores concepts of 'place' in relation to framing Indigenous education policy and program design. Meg Cotter reports on the success of two CoPs involving teachers in an ACFE funded project. Julianne Krusche gives an honest account of the early parts of her PhD journey and Sally Hutchison provides a report on a brilliant Adult Learners' Week event.

This year we aim to shine a light on diverse and innovative programs, teaching practices that are assisting learners to achieve their goals in education and life. Through holistically designed, real life learning experiences, teachers are meeting the challenges of engaging students in learning through a wide range of activities and projects that integrate skills and community building.

I trust that you will find this edition an engaging one and that you will share our gratitude to our writers. We appreciate the effort involved to meet copy deadlines in their busy schedules. I am sure you will agree that one of the ongoing strengths of *Fine Print* is the authentic voices we feature with the focus on learners foremost.

Lynne Matheson

First People, First Place

By Tony Dreise

Putting 'place' at the heart of Indigenous education and employment policy and programs is key to making progress and building human capital and innovative capacities in communities.

Introduction: Race, equity and place

The pursuit of improved educational outcomes for First Nations (Indigenous) people in Australia, over the past thirty years, has been framed fundamentally by a question of 'equity'; as illustrated by the ascendancy of the 'Closing the Gap' campaign now sitting at, or near, the apex of national Indigenous affairs policy. There is little question that redressing long-standing inequities makes sense, is justified by evidence, morally truthful, and properly represents a sizeable task in education policy and service delivery. Put simply, overcoming current levels of Indigenous disadvantage and correcting past injustices is very much unfinished business and goes to the very heart of Australia's egalitarian promise of a 'fair go'.

Australia over the past several decades has attempted to tackle educational inequity by organising work around, and directed at, 'equity groups' (namely women, people with a disability, people from a non-English speaking background, and Indigenous people). This frame operates in a way that preferences institutional initiatives to bolster access and equity among equity groups in accredited and institutionalised education and training. But does this approach by its own represent the best organising frame for First Nations interests? Is equity enough?

Present indicators would suggest that while participation rates may have increased, the impact in terms of social and economic wellbeing in many Indigenous postcodes has been slow and low. Does equity need to be de-institutionalised to empower communities directly? Is the challenge best defined as a quest for equity for a race of people (Indigenous people) or a question of getting the right educational, social, cultural and economic responses *in* place and *to* place?

Internationally, people are beginning to openly pose questions around race versus place. For instance, Sheryll Cashin, Professor of Law at Georgetown in the US, has authored a book on this very topic. Aside from socio-economic considerations, is equity the right frame through which to consider Indigenous interests? I argue that what is at issue is not the status of Australian Indigenous peoples as a racial minority, but rather the inherent rights they hold by virtue of being the Indigenous peoples of Australia.

Is Australian education meeting the demands of First Nations people, not simply for earning or learning, but for lifelong and life-wide learning opportunities that go to a yearning? A yearning for cultural affirmation, attachment to country, and communities that are prosperous, connected, healthy, empowered and self-determining. Perhaps one of the unintended flaws of equity thinking is that it promises 'no less' but also, by logical extension, 'no more'. And yet First Nations will naturally seek more as custodians and guardians of Australia's first cultures. Put another way, do First Nations simply yearn for the same things as other Australians or something unique?

This article explores these and related questions from the perspective of future policy development in Indigenous education. It begins with definitions of *place*, before discussing and analysing the role and potential of place in Indigenous education policy and program design. This is done through models I have developed, including one called *Learning, Earning, and Yearning*, which seek to recalibrate and secure a balance in Indigenous development interests by coupling equity in education and employment with the essence and uniqueness of Australian Indigeneity through a focus on place.

Definitions of place

Place is more than geography. It has multiple dimensions, applications and interpretations, including cultural, economic, social, and political. The notion of place can have a cultural or spiritual meaning, socio-economic meaning, and meaning which goes to the essence of one's identity.

Aboriginal leader and Professor at ANU, Mick Dodson, has been quoted as saying that 'all landscapes are cultural'. This neatly captures the deep cultural and ancestral affinity that Aboriginal people have to place. In a paper written for the Australian Government in 2012, which considers place from a socio-economic perspective, Ingrid Burkett (2012) writes, 'In Australia, disadvantage has a postcode'. US author, Wallace Stegner, once articulated the idea

that a sense of place is central to the human condition, 'If you don't know where you are, you don't know who you are'. The writings of Dodson, Burkett, and Stegner each illustrate the rich definitional tapestries of place.

Place as a policy approach

In policy terms, place-based strategy is a conceptual and strategic approach whereby local or regional communities are empowered to devise and implement solutions that tackle multidimensional problems or seize opportunities at the local level. It is fundamentally different to programmatic or target group approaches to policy design and program delivery. Place-based strategy, as a public policy approach, is particularly evident in communities of disadvantage.

Tomaney (2010) describes it in the following way:

> The new paradigm of local and regional development emphasises the identification and mobilisation of endogenous potential, that is, the ability of places to grow drawing on their own resources, notably their human capital and innovative capacities. (p.6)

Barca (2009) defines place-based policy as:

> A long term development strategy aimed at reducing underutilisation of resources and social exclusion of specific places, through the production of integrated bundles of public goods and services … Determined by extracting and aggregating people's knowledge and preferences in these places and turning them into projects … Exogenously promoted through a system of grants subject to conditions and multilevel governance.

In Australia, place-based strategy at the time of the Rudd-Gillard Government was closely aligned to the aspirations of the Government's Social Inclusion policy. That is:

> To be socially included, people must be given the opportunity to secure a job; access services; connect with family, friends, work, personal interests and local community; deal with personal crisis and have their voice heard.
>
> <div align="right">Social Inclusion Board, Australian Government 2011</div>

The Government's Social Inclusion Board also made the following key point on social inclusion:

> Using locational approaches—Working in places where there is a lot of disadvantage, to get to people most in need and to understand how different problems are connected.

Professor Tony Vinson, a former member of the Social Inclusion Board, has written extensively about the relationship between place and locational, multiple and intergenerational disadvantage in his *Dropping off the Edge* series of reports. Whilst fundamentally concerned with equity and social justice, place-based approaches differ in approach to conventional approaches to equity (namely 'equity groups' based on race, or gender, or disability) to one concerned with postcodes that are experiencing multiple, locational, and intergenerational disadvantage. It could be argued that 'bush equity' or a 'fair go for regional Australia' is a long-standing example of place-based equity policy which has had varying degrees of political support in Australia. However, this overlooks two realities.

Firstly, investment in regional infrastructure and a fair go for the bush are not what they once were. Professor Judith Brett, in her essay *Fair Share (*2011), explains:

> Once the problems of the country were problems for the country as a whole. But then government stepped back....The problems of the country were seen as unfortunate for those affected but not likely to have much impact on the rest of Australia. The agents of neoliberalism cut the country loose from the city and left it to fend for itself.

Secondly, in Australia postcodes of disadvantage are not limited to those communities west of the Great Divide. Many coastal communities, such as those along the North Coast of NSW, and urban settings such as Redfern in Sydney, or socially marginalised peri-urban settings, such as Inala and Woodridge in Brisbane or Broadmeadows in Melbourne, clearly point to the fact that Australia needs to rethink equity to accommodate a place perspective which extends beyond the bush and looks to empower communities and not just the institutions within them.

Indigenous Australia has many postcodes of serious disadvantage. For example, in New South Wales, where the vast majority of communities that experience multiple, intergenerational, and locational disadvantage, as found in Vinson's study, have sizeable Aboriginal populations. Research such as this points to a strong correlation between place and disadvantage. And yet, the pursuit of equity

policy too often overlooks this reality; instead Australia continues to pursue equity principally on the basis of gender, race, and disability as measured by participation in educational institutions; and to an extent, understandably so.

Whilst there has been little doubt improving outcomes for traditional equity groups in institutionalised education and training remains an important national challenge, we cannot afford to stop there. Concerted and concentrated attention to postcodes is a necessary imperative. Anything less is unlikely to overcome inequity in Australia, which is often spatial, intergenerational and multifaceted in its nature.

Place design principles

A number of key underpinning and design principles should be considered into the future by policy writers interested in place-based investment. For instance, the *Reaching Out* Action Plan in the UK has identified five key principles that underpin its approach to social inclusion:

- better identification and earlier intervention—developing and promoting better prediction tools for use by front-line practitioners
- systematically identifying what works—a common approach to rating programs by the quality of evidence behind them
- promoting multi-agency working—strengthening local area agreements, public cross-agency costs of social inclusion, data sharing in relation to disadvantaged groups
- personalisation, rights and responsibilities—programs of support to be built around strong and persistent relationships with at-risk groups
- supporting achievement and managing under-performance—encouraging Local Areas to come forward with innovative proposals, while having an intervention strategy to manage underperforming local authorities.

Bellefontaine and Wisener (2011) articulate a range of important design principles in the form of Common Characteristics of Place-Based Approaches that:

- are designed (or adapted) locally to meet unique conditions
- engage participants from a diverse range of sectors and jurisdictions in collaborative decision-making processes
- are opportunity-driven, dependent on local talent, resources, and constraints

- have an evolving process due to adaptive learning and stakeholder interests
- attempt to achieve synergies by integrating across silos, jurisdictions, and dimensions of sustainability
- leverage assets and knowledge through shared ownership of the initiative
- frequently attempt to achieve behaviour change.

In addition to these design principles, I would add a number of others that are important in Australian contexts:
- encouraging partner agencies to develop and implement joined-up services to address multiple disadvantages
- engaging target populations in situ (for example when leaving prison) when conventional strategies have not been effective
- having centrally developed targets and coordination
- including formal local arrangements (such as local agreements) to ensure coordination across organisations
- targeting clients at multiple points throughout the life cycle, with a particular focus on preventing intergenerational disadvantage by working in a more deliberate and concerted way with teenagers and youth
- empowering communities through 'place action accounts' that allow communities to purchase services, prioritise and marshal resources in an integrated and holistic way
- embracing commercial and non-government sector partnerships
- including strategies (such as social marketing) for attitude change—both in the target population and the wider community
- adopting evidence-based approaches fuelled by ongoing evaluation and continuous improvement.

The contested nature of place thinking

The research shows that place-based approaches are not without contest or criticism. When it comes to welfare, governments invariably intervene or invest through support payments to individuals and families. Glaeser (2000), for example, provides the following insights into the contested nature of investment in place as opposed to investment or intervention at the person level:

> Place-based strategies can have real advantages, primarily because of what economists now call 'neighbourhood effects'—outcomes that are very much a function of the people who live nearby…But place-based policies suffer from several major problems. The biggest pitfall is their tendency to attract the poor to (or repel the rich from) areas of high poverty…The

second problem occurs even when a given policy attracts everyone, not just the poor. An enterprise zone, for example, may temporarily increase local employment. This will cause some families to stay in a poor area instead of moving. But moving might have been the best thing the family could have done, especially for its children…The case for focusing on children is also based on research that suggests that neighbourhood effects are more important for them than for adults. More generally, policies directed at children have effects that are reaped over a longer time period.

Griggs et al (2008) also make the point that a mixture of person and place-based approaches can make a difference in education, further education, and employment in disadvantaged areas particularly when:

> …the greatest impact can be attained by focusing individually tailored packages of provision on the most disadvantaged while simultaneously ensuring that excessive, confusing complexity is avoided. There is also fair consensus that policies blessed with clear, measurable and achievable objectives and implemented by competent, appropriately trained and well-managed staff are likely to be most effective.

Advocates for place-based action in Australia highlight growing literature pointing to its success. Trudzik (2012) for example writes:

> There is a growing awareness, both in literature and of policy makers, that today's major public policy challenges play out in local places:

> Geographers studying innovation in the knowledge based economy emphasise the importance of localised knowledge clusters for national economic success.

> Analysts of social inclusion describe the multiple barriers that people face living in 'distressed neighbourhoods'.

Rural areas and smaller centres face another set of risks, managing change with declining, and often ageing, populations

Rather than a question of 'either or', in seeking to overcome entrenched poverty and disadvantage, policy makers should be considering investment at 'person', 'group' and 'place' levels simultaneously.

Conceptualising place models in the Indigenous space

The potential role of place investment in Indigenous education, training and employment is worthy of consideration on a number of levels. The idea of place as an approach to Indigenous education specifically can be grouped into three categories:

- place as an approach to educational pedagogy and curriculum (such as the role of place in outdoor, cultural, or environmental education)
- place as a more holistic approach to improve educational outcomes for learners by improving their wider social environment
- the idea of education and training as an investment and intervention tool to break a cycle of locational, intergenerational and multiple disadvantage.

The second and third categories focus on empowering communities of disadvantage by a purchasing capacity to buy education and training that is responsive and context-sensitive to local and regional social, economic, cultural and environmental needs and opportunities. In practical terms, this could be advanced by providing communities of disadvantage with 'place learning accounts' driven by an integrated and holistic community development plan as opposed to limiting funding to institutionalised equity group programs. This could be advanced by providing communities of disadvantage with 'place learning accounts'. A potential process (Figure 1) would be driven by an integrated and holistic community development plan as opposed
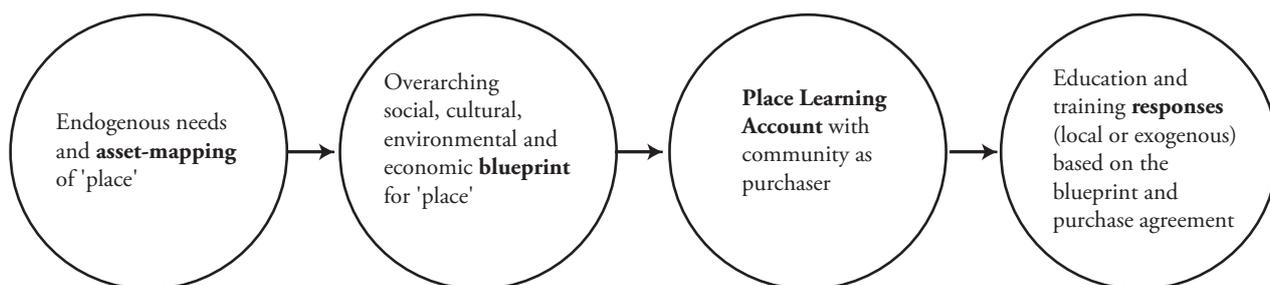

Figure 1: Place learning accounts

to limiting funding to institutionalised equity group programs.

As many authors, leaders and advocates have argued throughout the ages and across the world, education needs to be at the heart of human progress. This is particularly true for communities that are suffering. Governments too often see education as a silo which sits alongside other public policy portfolios such as health, environment, commerce and so forth, as opposed to envisaging it as the engine room of place development (Figure 2). In communities that continue to experience entrenched disadvantage across generations and are not showing signs of turning the corner, then positive disruption is ideal, with education at its centrepiece.

With regard to Indigenous communities, socio-economic considerations are but one consideration in place design. The Learning, Earning and Yearning model (Figure 3) illustrates that place has a relationship with culture and identity, pathways and opportunities, and local employment. At the heart of the model is the notion of learner-centredness.

Place being another key driver, given that approximately 85 per cent of Indigenous young people attend a local public school and in light of Indigenous cultural preferences for staying on country. Developing entrepreneurial mindsets, supporting personal agency and fostering creativity
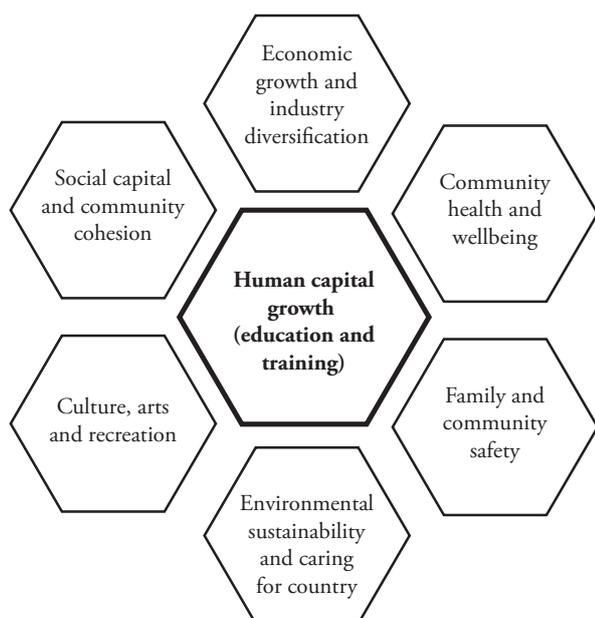
Figure 2: Human capital growth at the heart of place development
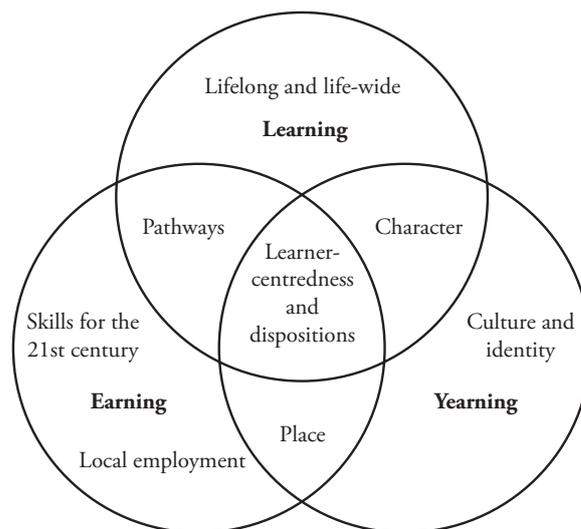
Entrepreneurialism, agency and creativity

Figure 3: Learning, Earning and Yearning

underpins the model so that learners are not simply consumers of learning, but producers of it. Further, the model simultaneously embraces the idea that young people should grow not only their identity but their character. Lifelong and life-wide learning is at the top of the model to symbolise the need for learning dispositions.

As the model illustrates, positive place development is more likely to become a reality when it is underpinned and spurred by a community's capacity to pursue entrepreneurialism, agency and creativity. This means communities need to be resourced to foster such capabilities. The future choices we make in educational research, policy and practice will have a significant bearing on the types of positive choices that Indigenous young people can make about their futures. We should be all yearning for stronger futures and choices.

Conclusion

There is much we know about place-based theory and implementation, however there is equally much we do not know. What we do know is that there needs to be stronger interest among governments in place thinking, trialling and evaluation. We know that many Australians are concerned with rural decline and others are worried that peri-urban and coastal places are socially and economically marginalised, with no scalable positive change in sight. We also know that positive change in Indigenous Australia is uneven, slow and marginal.

Furthermore, we know that the absence of social capital and human capital seriously hampers place development and transformation, if not making it entirely impossible.

For any model to work, governments and other funders (such as philanthropists or corporations), would be wise to position human capital growth and place development at the heart of Indigenous and social policy and program design. To do otherwise, would only see more First Nations dropping off the edge when they should be at the cutting edge. In other words, to put First Nations people first is to put place first.

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CoP project for teachers

By Meg Cotter

As a Communities of Practice (CoP) project officer, Meg Cotter was able to demystify CoPs and establish positive working relationships with teachers from Learn Local centres across Melbourne's north-west.

Background

In September 2014, I took on the part-time position as a Teacher CoP Coordinator in an ACFE funded project. The brief was to connect teachers and trainers from nine Learn Local organisations across Melbourne's north-west. The project outcomes were to improve teaching practice, student achievement and provider compliance through better connections between teachers and organisations. The idea of working together with teachers focussed on teaching and learning, rather than just responding to compliance issues, was a very attractive component of the role. And best of all there was a budget for professional development where the teachers got to identify their own activities.

The main role of the Teacher CoP Coordinator was to organise and facilitate CoP meetings in the four areas of:
- Foundation skills (Accredited and Pre-accredited English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Programs)
- Digital Learning (Accredited and Pre-accredited programs)
- Community Services and Health training packages
- Training and Assessment training package (TAE).

For the purposes of this article, the Foundation Skills and Digital Learning CoPs are the main focus.

So what is a CoP?

Simply put, it is a group of people with a similar interest or profession, coming together to learn. A community may be organised and funded with clear objectives, or may occur organically without intention. There are various models of CoPs that vary in size, activities and modes of meeting: online, face-to-face, phone.

> Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.
>
> Wenger-Trayner, 2015

A Community of Practice includes three elements:
- Domain—a shared competence of interest
- Community—people engaged in joint activities and discussions, and
- Practice—practitioners developing a shared repertoire of resources.

Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner (2015) explain that it is these three elements together that make up a community of practice and by developing these in parallel it is possible to cultivate a community.

The project plan

A Compliance Community of Practice, originally established by the North Western Metropolitan Region of ACFE, and which has continued to operate independently, initiated this Teacher CoP project. The managers recognised the benefits of their own CoP and wanted to replicate it for their teaching staff. The project was funded by an ACFE Capacity and Innovation Fund grant and managed by Wyndham Community & Education Centre. The project had a very clear timeline of ten meetings of two hours (face to face and online) over twelve months, with additionally funded professional development hours.

The CoPs in each area of delivery were to undertake the following activities:
- develop assessment tools (including assessment tasks, marking guides, mapping documents)
- develop compliant validation and moderation tools
- industry engagement and feedback on delivery strategies and assessment tools
- share information and strategies on meeting legislation and regulations related to the program area
- identify shared professional development needs
- review and develop Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) kits
- develop best practice guidelines and tools for pre-training assessment.

The project setup

The project was launched at Preston Reservoir Adult Community Education Centre (PRACE) in February, 2015. The project's objectives and requirements were outlined at the launch to CoP participants, centre managers and coordinators. The participants of each of

Foundation Skills CoP Assessment tools workshop

the four communities met each other for the first time and formulated key ideas for the year. The day was very positive and expectations were high.

The big challenge then was logistics. This project involved nine organisations spanning Werribee to Melton and out to Eltham. Finding available meeting rooms, at times that were convenient for all teachers, most of whom worked part-time at various locations and times, was very challenging. Finding a day and a venue that suited everyone proved to be impossible.

Initially, the meetings occurred on various days and locations to accommodate as many participants as possible. Although members enjoyed seeing different venues, this also caused some confusion for members and coordinators attempting to cover classes. Eventually a set timetable and venue was arranged allowing more lead time to meetings. It also became quickly apparent that more than two hours was needed for face-to-face meetings, and so it was changed to three hour sessions.

Summary of activities

The Foundation Skills CoP has had seven meetings and a workshop session for creating and validating assessment tools. An online Google community space was created for ongoing contact and sharing. The main themes covered have been: sharing resources; creating assessment tools and validation; discussion around whole language versus phonemic awareness approaches; industry consultation and partnership; using Google and other digital tools for learning; group learning activities and addressing specific learning needs; managing slow, or lack of, progress with students; and student stories.

The Digital Learning CoP has had six face-to-face meetings and two online meetings using Skype and Google

chat. An online Google community has encouraged ongoing contact and sharing. The main themes covered have been: new technologies; using Google tools such as communities, blogger, and hangouts; speed of change in technologies and online security issues; updating materials; catering for android and i-devices; wikispaces; working with seniors, English language students and young people.

Key challenges for teachers

The teachers shared many common concerns and issues at CoP meetings that may sound familiar to readers:

- How do you balance the learner-centred curriculum with the requirements of the seemingly assessment-driven needs of accredited curriculum?
- If people are missing on the day of assessment, when can you get them in to do the work?
- How do you cover four modules with sixteen assessment tasks without it being too overwhelming?
- How do you find relevant activities, when people have lived their whole lives without reading or writing? Even greeting cards & invitations are a stretch for my group and it takes hours to create tasks and map them to the curriculum.
- How do you make sure that students have enough practice in the new skills before being assessed?
- I like making my own tasks. It is hard implementing a bank of tasks that are not contextualised to the learners.
- My students are at all different levels with their skills. Some are good at numeracy while others are at the beginning. Others can speak but not write and vice versa.
- Although overall they are at the same level. What strategies can I use in class to teach everyone?

These perennial issues I feel sure would resonate with most LLN or ALBE teachers. And attempting to address them is no mean feat. So far, through our Foundation Skills CoP, we have focussed on increasing teacher capability in developing assessment tools, conducting validation of tools and sharing appropriate recommended resources. In addition, discussing how to develop and implement project-based activities as a mechanism for delivering meaningful learning, as well as ticking off all assessment requirements.

Professional Development

Three professional development days were conducted from suggestions that came from the CoP meetings. The days
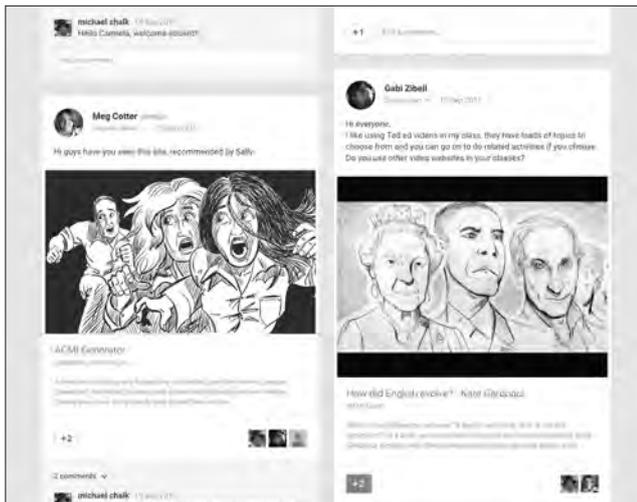
Google community page

were designed with the following titles: Meet the Auditors, Teaching with Google and Promoting Aboriginal Cultural Safety.

Both the Digital Learning and Foundation Skills CoPs initiated the Teaching with Google day which proved to be a highlight for members and enhanced their use of online tools. The CoPs agreed to use Google communities as an asynchronous mechanism of communication between each other. Teachers were also interested in how to use this tool, as well as Google drive, photos and blogger, in the classroom with their students. Blogger offers a web space to present material, curate your teaching lessons, or a classroom blog for students to share and present work.

Michael Chalk and Wayne Burrell co-facilitated the Teaching with Google day and teachers learned how to create their own digital tools on Google platforms. Feedback from the day was very positive with teachers valuing the practical skills they developed. Another positive outcome of the day was the involvement of the two CoP groups who reported on the value of learning from each other and expressed their desire to do so again.

Feedback

Feedback from each community was sought using two methods, group discussion at meetings midway through the year and an online individual survey. For the group feedback, participants were asked to discuss three questions and fill in a table during a CoP meeting. The three questions were: What is working? What could work better? and Priorities for going forward. The

opportunities to network and for new teachers to learn from more experienced teachers through sharing were the main positives noted, as well as the chances to use technologies both for communication and teaching. The professional development days based on identified needs and the collaboration of the two CoPs was also highly valued. Both groups were keen to see the CoPs supported to continue and grow.

The group feedback was validated by the CoP participants online anonymous individual survey responses regarding their experiences. The most significant positive changes to skills and knowledge of Foundation Skills CoP members included improved digital tools for teaching and learning; creating assessment tools and learning of students. Members from both the CoPs reported that the most valuable activities were meeting new people; sharing ideas for teaching and sharing resources and materials.

Most of the respondents (80%) used the Google community online space. Activities included; posting comments and information, reading information, posting resource links and liking posts. The biggest barrier to participation in meetings was reported as being coordinating attendance on specific days and times. The other barriers were reported evenly across the spectrum: no replacement teachers or too busy to miss classes. By far the most popular format for meetings was one each term and one professional development day. A majority of respondents (85%) indicated they would like to continue in their CoP in 2016.

Participant testimonial

I enjoyed taking part in the Foundation Skills CoP meetings this year, particularly in offering suggestions to those just starting out in ALBE and EAL, and of course to glean gems of wisdom from those who have been a long time in the caper. To me, the true value of being in a CoP lies in these bits and pieces of advice, suggestions and insights that make a difference. It was pointed out to me very early in my career that we are in a sector where it is our responsibility to generate our own resources. We need to put the antennae up, think laterally and be on the lookout constantly for these bits and pieces of inspiration. Like I keep saying, every resource we generate is an investment, and we need maximum return on our investment.

Paul Rawlinson (CGEA and EAL teacher)

Road blocks, turning points and light bulb moments

By Julianne Krusche

In 2011, Julianne commenced the long and winding journey to undertake PhD research, fully aware that it was likely to take at least six years of her life. Despite reservations and setbacks, she has found the journey, thus far, to be worth it and commends others to take the plunge.

The journey begins

My PhD research journey may best be described as one where you embark with little more than a broad 'navigational tool' that you don't really know how to use. Like most other early PhD students, I really had no firm idea about my research questions. All I knew was that it was always going to involve something around adult literacy, as this has been my passion for a long time. Thus far in my research, I have experienced a series of 'turning points' and many 'road blocks'. However, I have been fortunate enough to work with great supervisors who have been instrumental in teaching me how to turn on the navigational tool and then allowed me, through trial and error, to progressively learn how to use the buttons properly.

I have been frequently asked, 'why undertake this study?' My initial response has been something along the lines of having unfinished business; a curious nature; seeking a personal challenge; and wanting to broaden my knowledge within the Language Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) field. Like many of the teachers that I have interviewed, I have been immersed in the LLN field for a long time and have witnessed and implemented many government policy changes handed down at an institute level.

With my very broad concept proposal propped under my arm, I went to meet with Professor Barry Golding at Federation University. After this first meeting, although still bereft of concrete ideas and with even more questions, I saw this as the first turning point in my research journey. Barry instilled in me a sense of self belief that I was capable of undertaking this level of study. We should not underestimate the power of agency and building confidence to work towards achieving goals for ourselves, just as much as for the students in our LLN classes.

My first 'light bulb' moment occurred while attending the Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL) Conference in 2011. During a presentation about the lack of clarity of roles and qualifications regarding adult literacy and numeracy teachers in Australia, it occurred to me that this would be my research focus. There appeared to be very limited research on LLN teachers themselves, at both a national and international level.

Finding a focus

As my initial focus was to investigate how the LLN teachers understood the term adult literacy and numeracy, I embarked on a whole range of reading in this area. I discovered that, although the discourse had changed over time, there was very little research about how teachers perceived it. After discussions with Barry Golding, it had become apparent that my research was going to take me down a post-structural theoretical path, although I did not know it at the time, I was starting to develop interest in exploring the relationship between discourse and the formation of teacher identity.

To explore this further, Barry recommended that I meet with Dr Annette Foley, an expert in post-structural theory, and send her copies of the research questions and preliminary literature review work that I had already undertaken. Being the naïve emerging research student that I was, I assumed that this meeting would confirm that the work I had achieved to date was fantastic, and that I was on the right path. I can only describe my first meeting with Annette as being both a 'roadblock' and a 'turning point' all in one. I left this meeting very confused and frustrated. I believed that she was asking me to consider theoretical concepts that were foreign to me and had little to do with the work I had completed to date.

As it turned out, this meeting became the greatest turning point because after I had gone away and reflected on our discussion, I was compelled to explore the ideas that she had asked me to consider. Symbolically, Annette challenged me to hold up the navigational tool and look at it from a different angle and, like Barry had done, didn't tell me exactly which buttons to push but gave me a whole series of options to consider.

Another light bulb moment came early in one of my supervision meetings with Annette when she commented:

> Most PhD students commence their study because they are interested in a topic. However, what they are actually measured on is their ability to understand and apply an academic theory. The topic is just what keeps you entertained along the way to master the theory.

Prior to this, I'm not sure exactly what I was thinking in terms of what PhD actually stood for. After all, it does mean Doctor of Philosophy, not Doctor of LLN!

Exploring post-structural theory

With this in mind, I set about reading as much literature as I could on post-structural theory, in particular, the work of Michel Foucault. To say that understanding his post-structural theory was challenging, is an understatement. From my perspective, Foucault appeared to articulate his ideas in semi-prose writing. This was very difficult to comprehend and make sense of what he was actually saying, and in turn consider how I was supposed to apply this to my own research. To combat this, I was advised to read up on how others had applied his theories as a way of making sense of it all. This advice really helped.

To summarise, post-structuralist's such as Foucault, see language as the 'common factor in the analysis of social organisation, social meanings, power and individual consciousness' (Weedon, 1987, p.21). Post-structuralists presume that identity is created as a response to ongoing and pervasive changes in cultural practices and discourses (Fenwick, 2006). In essence, this means that the teacher's identity is constantly renegotiated in relation to experiences, situations and other community members in culturally constituted working life contexts (Wenger, 1998).

Identity can be constructed out of numerous and competing discourses (Whisnant, 2012) and certain discourses may dominate the culture by helping to shape the political and social institutions. Cross (2010) also states that the teachers' identities are also derived in part from their lived experiences and their own social and cultural history which form their personal narratives (Cross, 2010). All of this combined to inform and influence teachers' practices (Widin, et al, 2012). Foucault describes discourse as, 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (2010, p.49). Such practices produce meaning, form subjects and define what is, and what is not possible for people, such as teachers, to say within specific institutions (Foucault, 1981).

Staying calm

The working title for my thesis was, and still is *Unpacking the Professional Identities of LLN Teachers in Victorian VET Institutes.* Along with a 10,000 word summary document, I successfully undertook my Confirmation of Candidature presentation in June 2014. Anybody who has been through a similar experience is likely to describe it as a nerve racking ordeal. My supervisor calmed me by saying, 'You'll be fine. Remember that you are the most expert person in the room with regards to this particular research'. This was yet another light bulb moment.

Another useful piece of advice was that if people are polite enough to ask you what your research is about, you have a maximum of three sentences before their eyes will start to glaze over and lose interest. My three sentences were:

1. I am investigating the professional roles and identities of LLN teachers working in VET institutes in Victoria.
2. This is in light of massive governmental policy reform in both VET and LLN in recent times.
3. To do this I will be using a post-structural theory to examine how language and discourse has played a role in the creation of LLN teacher identity.

Finding a voice

I believe that the decision to undertake this research has come at an important time in the shaping of VET and LLN policy in Australia, coinciding with the release of the *National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults* policy in 2012. Although the policy reinforced the critical role that adult LLN teachers play in the success of the strategy, it also raised questions around the current professionalism and experience of the teachers involved (Roberts & Wignall, 2011). At the same time Widin, Yasukawa and

Chodieswicz (2012) had claimed that 'the field of adult language, literacy and numeracy in Australia is a site of struggle as policy changes...challenge teachers' expertise and beliefs about good teaching practice' (p.9)

According to McGavin (2013) this could result in teachers potentially questioning their professional identities due to changing roles and performance expectations. My review of the literature in this area led me to believe that, in spite of the importance being placed on the role of the adult LLN teacher, to date little research had been done in this area (Aspin et al, 2012) and as such, LLN teachers are 'in desperate need of a voice' (Harris & Morrison, 2011).

Without doubt the most positive experience to date has been interviewing the twenty-three participants in the research. Using a series of open ended questions, I sought to capture the first-hand experiences of LLN teachers working in VET in Victoria. The participants came from both TAFE and ACE institutes, ranging from three to over 27 years' experience working in the LLN field. It was such a privilege to speak with them and hear their professional stories. The questions were centered on what had led them into the LLN field, the impacts of policy and practice on their roles and identities, what they needed to do their jobs better, how this made them feel and what they saw as the future for VET and LLN.

Interpreting the data

Once I had completed the data collection phase of my research, the next challenge was to make sense of and analyse the wealth of data into themes (or interpretative repertoires) for later discussion. To have twenty-three individual transcripts laid out in front of you, each one being approximately six A3 sheets in length, is daunting in itself. To make sense of this data, I borrowed from the work of Talja (1999) and used a discourse analytic method. She describes the process thus: 'the analysis of interpretive repertoires is like putting together a jigsaw' (1999, p.8). The discourse analytic method does not take an individual viewpoint as the primary point of analysis but rather looks for consistencies across a range of viewpoints to draw out emerging themes.

Through the process of a series of mind-mapping exercises, I saw the emergence of repertoires that could be grouped into three layers of discourse: macro, meso and micro. The macro layer structure can be defined as the broad policies of Federal and State governments concerned with economic,

environmental and political developments and trends affecting VET and LLN reform (Lemke, 2007). The meso layer structure encompasses the institutional level discourse originating from institute managers, vocational teachers and students. The final layer can be described as the micro structures which refer to the deep internal feelings, values and actions of the participants (Lemke, 2007).

Mindful of the fact that this analysis is still in draft stage, still subject to change, a summary of the emerging themes to date is:

Macro layer

- LLN teachers' roles and identities are influenced by rapidly changing governmental policy reform in funding, compliance and curriculum change.
- The focus of LLN curriculum has shifted from a primary focus on social inclusion to employment outcomes. This is due to changes in funding and a greater voice from vocational industries.

Meso layer

- Teacher's daily job roles have changed where they now spend greater time on compliance related work and less time on preparing meaningful learning experiences for their students. This raises questions as to whether the increased auditing and paper trails are making sustainable differences to student outcomes.
- The unique identity of the LLN teacher has become increasingly subsumed into wider VET practice which is perceived to have both positive and negative impacts on teacher identity.
- At an institute level the majority of professional discussions are now centred on funding and compliance rather than teaching and learning.
- The teachers feel valued by their students and believe that in spite of policy change restricting funding and curriculum, that they continue to make a difference.
- Teachers working in settings where other vocational courses are being delivered feel that their expertise is valued by vocational teachers.

Micro layer

- In defining LLN, teachers place equal importance on the development of student attributes and 'learning to learn' skills as they do on the development of functional literacy and numeracy skills. Due to limitations in funding and allocated time, it is becoming more difficult to provide meaningful learning experiences to cater for all the students' needs.

- The role of the LLN teacher is very broad and, along with being a literacy and/or numeracy teacher, they are also playing roles such as advocate, counsellor, supporter, parent to accommodate the range of needs of their students.
- The teachers feel that they have lost the capacity to have a voice to influence policy and practice changes. Contributing to this has been the decline in LLN pedagogy professional development opportunities.
- There is a lack of real understanding by the policy makers about the realities of LLN students' needs.
- The students deserve better - changes to policy is having a detrimental effect on students' ability to succeed.
- The teachers are feeling challenged in their ideological stances on what teaching literacy and numeracy should be compared to the actual practices they are allowed to implement within their institutional settings.
- The teachers feel that they have been undervalued and, although many are positive that an LLN future exists, they are very uncertain about what that may look like.
- In spite of all the challenges noted by the participants, LLN teachers still maintain a passion for the work that they do.

The written analysis in its current draft form is actually 49 pages in length and has a series of verbatim quotes and discussion points, of which the short summary above does not appear to do justice. To highlight the three broad layers of discourse emerging from the data, I have presented it in a pictorial representation (Figure 1).

Standing back and viewing the pictorial representation, I began to see similarities to a weather system. The three layers of discourse could also be described as atmospheric climatic conditions (macro layer), ground weather patterns (meso layer) and subterranean conditions (micro layer). Weather systems occur as a cause and effect of climatic conditions resulting in actual weather patterns occurring at the ground level, which in turn creates the subterranean conditions affecting growth and regeneration. Similar to a weather system, the emerging discourse within each layer can be seen to have a direct upward and downward effect on the surrounding levels.

When I embark on the discussion chapter ahead, I am fairly certain that I will continue to be presented with many simultaneously occurring road blocks followed by light bulb moments, as I attempt to make sense of the data and link it with post-structural theory, Foucauldian theory and the current literature, while drawing some conclusions. I will also be confronted with the challenge of articulating what is new and different about my research from those researchers before me.

My experience over the last four years has given me the opportunity to learn many things about myself. Reflecting on the experience, I have learnt that in order to succeed you need to take on the role of project manager of your own learning journey, including mapping out steps and phases along the way. In line with sound project management principles I also need to be prepared to constantly re-assess and make changes as required.

I have discovered that undertaking research is like juggling a whole series of balls in the air at the same time: literature review, theory/methodology preparation, data collection and review and analysis, plus trying to maintain some type of study/life/work balance at the same time. When people have asked me how I fit study in with a demanding job my answer usually is – I treat my study as a hobby that I really enjoy. During the week I will read academic articles and highlight parts relevant to my research and on the weekend I do more intensive written work.

Early on, I was forewarned by both supervisors about the temptations of 'jumping down rabbit holes' that distract me from my topic and, then when I resurface, find myself in another research paddock all together. Usually this occurs because there are so many interesting things to read related to my topic, which can steer me off in another direction. Like many other research students, this has occurred to me on numerous occasions and it has been my supervisors who have pulled me firmly back on track.

Another challenge is not to allow the many roadblocks to become 'road stoppers'. I have learnt through many moments of despair that it is a necessary part of the journey as just on the other side of despair comes the next light bulb moment. My advice to those who are interested but undecided about whether to undertake post-graduate research includes:
- If you are waiting for the period in your life when you will have more time, it will never happen.
- If you have an interest and your personal life has some degree of flexibility, then do it.
- If you think that you aren't smart enough—you are. However, it is a unique style of literacy that many
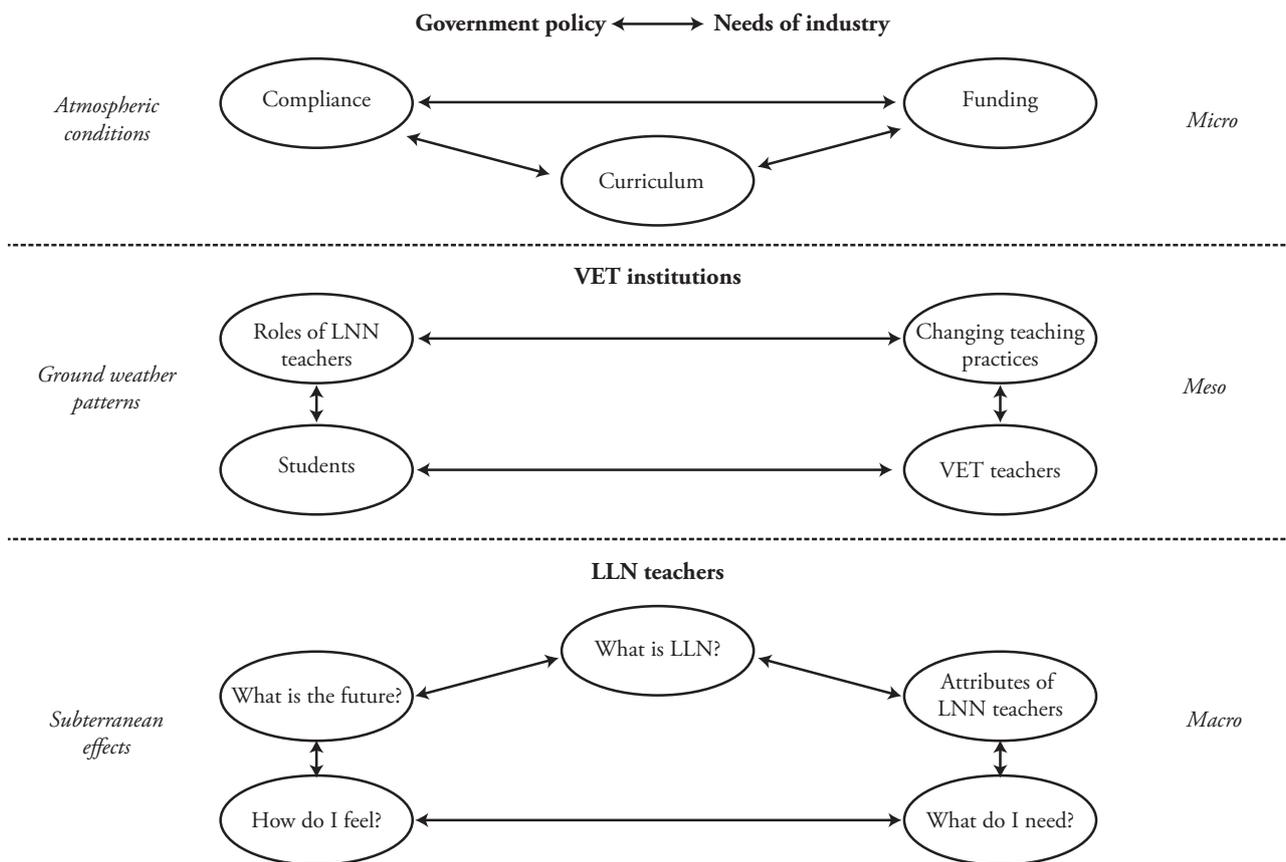
Government policy ←——→ **Needs of industry**

Atmospheric conditions

Compliance ←——→ Funding

Compliance →—— Curriculum ——← Funding

Micro

···

VET institutions

Ground weather patterns

Roles of LNN teachers ←——→ Changing teaching practices

Students ←——→ VET teachers

Meso

···

LLN teachers

What is LLN?

Subterranean effects

What is the future? ←—— What is LLN? ——→ Attributes of LNN teachers

How do I feel? ←——→ What do I need?

Macro

Figure 1: Layers of discourse

of us, including me, was quite unfamiliar with at the beginning. The largest factor to your success will be commitment.

- There will be many times during your journey when you believe that your supervisors are being overly critical of your drafts. Remember they are not—it is their job and they just want to bring out the best in you and your research.
- If you have a broad study interest but can't define it exactly – discuss it with a potential supervisor as they are skilled to assist you to hone your research questions.

Throughout this journey, both Barry and Annette have made it very clear that, as a postgraduate research student, they would critique my work and offer suggestions for improvement. However, it would beup to me to decide whether to accept them or not. But what foolhardy research student would be arrogant enough to go against the expert advice of their supervisors?

One unexpected outcome of this journey has been how I have become drawn into this research work. For this

I must give credit and express admiration to my two wonderful supervisors for bringing that out in me,and believing that I am capable of success. What this research has shown me thus far is that I have gone on a personal journey of reflection and discovered the many ways I view the world. Research has played a role in sharpening my professional practices. Finally, although I still have a long way to go, I continue to be more captivated by my research and look forward to future challenges that will come my way.

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Next phase

Final evaluations and recording value creation stories from members will be the last part of the CoP project. Documenting the value of the CoPs from the stories of members' experiences is an important part of the project. This will aim to identify and promote the effects of CoP activities on teaching practice and other project indicators. An analysis of what has worked and what could be improved will be written and published to inform other interested training providers who may wish to set up a CoP. There are plans to sustain the CoPs past the end of the project funding and for further professional development using CoP models.

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If you are interested in more information regarding the teacher CoPs, or would like a copy of the Implementing a Teaching Community of Practice guide, please contact Meg at megco@wyndhamcec.org.au

Unlocking learning

By Sally Hutchison

Each year Adult Learners' Week is a highlight and Olympic Adult Education made sure that everyone who participated in their half day event experienced the pleasure and value of learning.

Olympic Adult Education (OAE) students, staff and volunteers were invited to a special Adult Learners' Week (ALW) event on September 1, 2015, that was also open to their friends, families and the general public. The main ALW theme was *Unlocking Learning* and OAE chose a sub-theme of *Breaking Down Barriers*, with the intention of encouraging more interaction and understanding between the ESL, literacy and special needs students. After much planning and preparation, the day turned out to be a great success.

The OAE staff and students made use of the ALW resources available on their website, such as webinars to stimulate ideas about what kind of event could be developed and how this could be promoted. The ALW toolbox and logos were also useful to develop posters and flyers which were distributed around the OAE buildings and amongst the students. All OAE staff, the manager, coordinators and teachers were involved in planning. The event was posted on the ALW website with the invitation: Join Olympic Adult Education students past and present for an inspiring morning.

Students participated enthusiastically in a range of educational workshops, competitions and fun activities that included mosaics, jewellery making, maths games, floristry, ukulele, knitting, quizzes, and seeing what students had made in their sewing classes. High energy levels were evident in the centre as the students moved between workshops to play games, learn new things and

Students enjoying the ukulele workshop

complete quizzes. The staff baby photos competition was popular and attracted much laughter as students tried to guess the identity of each baby. Cup cake decorating was also a hit. The teachers had all brought along a dozen cupcakes each for students to decorate, before eating at morning tea.

After morning tea, the students gathered to hear the guest speaker, Zahra Mustaf. A Somali woman who came to Australia several years ago, Zahra studied at OAE before going on to complete an Advanced Diploma in Building Design (Architecture) at NMIT (now Melbourne Polytechnic). Zahra works for an architectural firm and is a great advocate for taking advantage of educational opportunities. She inspired many students through her story and by encouraging them to never give up learning.

The students had many questions for Zahra about how she managed having a career and a family. They were also keen to hear how she maintained her cultural identity in Australia. Some of the Somali women in particular, were impressed by her confidence and achievements and mentioned this to their teachers later in class. They related to her as a role model and Zahra has now become an OAE spokesperson.

Five literacy students, who had recently had their writing published in this journal, read their stories out aloud to the attentive audience. This served as practice for them for the following evening when they would present at the Fine Print student writing edition launch at the North Fitzroy Star Hotel.

One of these students, Lindsay Howell, had recently started working at Chemist Warehouse in the online orders section. He was delighted to tell his story and show that anything is possible when you put your mind to it. Some Somali students told stories of their journey to Australia, the hardships and their hopes for the future. This was the first opportunity they had had to do this and it was a proud moment for them.

Lindsay Howell with fellow OAE students

Our part-time administrative assistant, was a student in one of the literacy classes in 2014 and received the Student of the Year Award. She reflected upon her journey of returning to study and what the offer of employment at OAE in 2015 meant for her. It was fantastic to have such great stories from the presenters and everyone listened attentively and were certainly inspired.

OAE was subsequently awarded a $1000 prize from Adult Learners' Australia for the best Adult Learners' Week event in Victoria. This money was put towards supporting a special project called the *Step Challenge*, in which most of the OAE students were involved later in the year. Also, the purchase of an artwork done by an OAE student at Arts Project Australia. This is now framed and displayed in the administration section at OAE.

The other highlight for OAE students was entering the ALW iPad Air competition. Students had to post photos of themselves online showing them being involved in a learning activity and explaining how this demonstrated them #unlockinglearning. To everyone's delight one OAE student was a winner and received her iPad in the mail.

Overall, the event was a very worthwhile activity and we look forward to getting involved again in 2016.

Student testimonial

On 1st September, we gathered at the OAE hall for Adult Learner celebrations. There were more than 50 students and many teachers were gathered, also past students attended too.

Firstly, we started with a variety of activities such as floristry, making necklaces and played some games; I made one necklace for an old lady that I know.

We also enjoyed decorating the cupcakes and we ate them and they were delicious. I was very grateful for all the things provided and prepared. The materials were all provided by teachers. The teachers worked hard to teach us and they even made cupcakes on top of their hard work.

Secondly, the Somalian old student from OAE gave a speech. She studied one year at OAE 15 years ago. This English course helped her future and lead her to become a professional career woman. She was most grateful for the help of OAE. I did ask a cheeky question. Which teacher did you like most at that time? All the teachers replied 'we are all nice!'

We also had five competitions; all the winners took nice rewards. An interesting competition was we had to match the teachers and baby photos, one student matched nine out of thirteen but I only matched one teacher.

Most students were encouraged and challenged from this celebration and had a fantastic time with beautiful weather.

Kim Koschade (Certificate III in
Spoken and Written English)

Sally Hutchison is the Language and Literacy Coordinator at Olympic Adult Education.

Practical Matters

VOX Pops: what has worked for you in the classroom?

This section of Practical Matters continues with a selection of informal snapshots from different teachers. They provide examples of successful teaching practices from a range of adult learning settings, both Learn Local and vocational education and training.

Sharing ideas and resources is something that takes time and for most people working in the adult LLN sector, time is a very precious commodity. Nonetheless, we appreciate the generosity and good will of the teachers who contributed to this selection. Again we have asked teachers to describe learning activities that worked and hope you will find some ideas and nspiration.

Unleashing ideas for writing

Aisha uses this activity for building up students' ideas for writing. She posts the writing topic at the top centre on the whiteboard. In two teams, the students race to the board and write all the words and phrases they remember about the topic (having previously discussed and read about it). Then they sit down and complete their own writing using the abundant ideas that are now dotted on the board in front of them.

> I find that this activity works really well for all levels. It really helps the students unleash all their ideas and share them in a way that generates new ideas, while emphasising the central importance of content in writing.
>
> Aisha

Time to relax and listen

Johanne has found reading a story over the duration of the term a successful learning activity. It has proven to be enjoyable and valuable. However, the main thingshe finds challenging is getting the level and the topic right.

> The students get really involved and I can get so many other valuable learning opportunities out of the reading, such as: discussions, creative writing, numeracy, role plays, dialogues, and plot predictions. The benefits of reading to students are that I can change things as I go; paraphrase; add detail; leave out detail to suit the need; stop and explain and ask and answer questions.
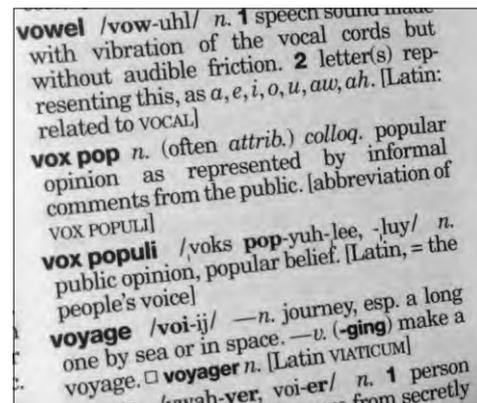
Last term's story was *The Client* by John Grisham. It was a little hard for some students but I was able to get the film as well. So we would read on Wednesdays and watch the corresponding chapters on film on Fridays. It's such a relaxing activity especially at the end of a long day. I encourage students to grab a drink and just relax.

> Johanne

Navigating new apps

Ahmet likes to show his students apps that enrich their mobile digital literacy experiences. One that he regularly uses in class is from Dictionary.com. This app helps to teach students how to use dictionaries and find synonyms. The app helps students to expand their reading and writing and improve their English. For one of his students who reads the news on her mobile phone, the dictionary app was most useful in building her knowledge of words and their meanings.

> When she reads the newspaper, she looks at the picture and the headline and when she finds a word she doesn't understand she refers to the dictionary to be able to link the headline with the picture and kind of understand and predict the main idea of the article.
>
> Ahmet
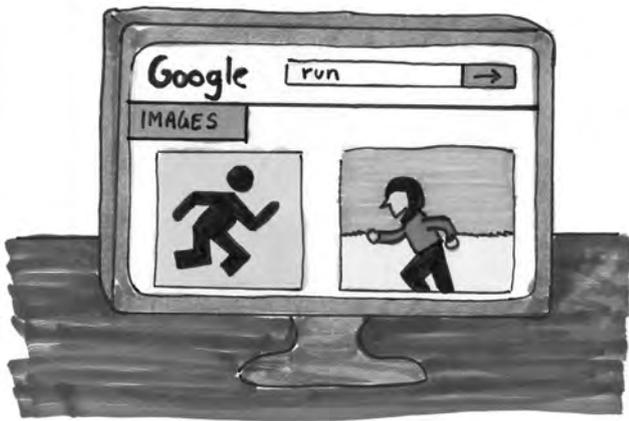
To keep up with changes in government services, Ahmet helps his students navigate apps from departments they are in contact with regularly.

> Centrelink has an app now so that people who are on benefits don't need to go to Centrelink to do their weekly reporting. One student brought me her mobile with the app asking me for help to use it. It is quite straight forward but navigating through the first time is the hardest part. Once the student has figured it out, the questions are always the same and they can do it independently.
>
> Ahmet

Informal environments for writing

Wazih uses Google images with his class of beginner students whose English literacy level requires a more introductory approach to mobile phone apps. By entering particular vocabulary items into Google images, Wazih can show students what the words mean.

> It helps me a lot, because when I'm teaching them something and they want to visualise what I'm talking about I first tell them if it's a verb or if it's a noun and then I show them the pictures in Google.

Wazih uses the Facebook group function to share pictures between class members. After an excursion the students shared images they had taken. They were shown how to upload and share them with other people in the group. They enjoyed picture sharing that facilitated writing and many comments.

Wazih finds that students' posting of comments greatly improves their confidence and self-esteem around the tasks of writing English and using technology. They are more inclined to take risks in their writing on the Facebook group because they know it is not a formal test but rather an opportunity to practise their writing skills.

Students happily take the initiative to write comments on the Facebook group because they feel comfortable to express themselves there, and they appreciate the freedom and independence such writing is affording them. Wazih adds that he limits his Facebook interaction with students to the class group site so that he can keep his own personal privacy.

> We are actually creating an informal environment where everyone can be brave enough and put something there and know that if there is a mistake it's probably not going to be an issue.
>
> Wazih

Framing personal information questions

In the first week of class, Manjit likes to spend time with her students getting to know them and introducing herself. She has found this personal information grid activity works as a way of eliciting 'Wh…' questions and gauging understanding of what they are and how to use them in a sentence. She uses a twelve square grid with a series of words, images, phrases and numbers that refer to her own personal information such as: country of birth, age, suburb where she lives, number of children, favourite food.

The students then frame questions to ask her using What, Where, Why, Which, When, Who, How, Do you, Did you…For example, with the word Manjit on the whiteboard they cannot ask Are you Manjit? Or Is your name Manjit? They can ask What is your name?

When the students ask the correct question, Manjit answers and circles the response on the whiteboard. This activity is a fun way to get to know each other and can be repeated with other members of the class or staff.

Some of the questions to base a grid of personal information on:
- What is your name?
- How old are you?
- Where were you born?
- Which suburb do you live in?
- Who do you most admire?

- Do you enjoy your work?
- Did you know anyone before you came here?
- What do you like doing in your free time?
- When did you come to Australia?

Learning through song

Asha allocates Friday afternoons to music lessons which include listening to songs and singing in pairs, groups, or for the more adventurous, singing solo. She uses the resource *Sing with me! Book 1* which is suitable for different skill levels and features songs that cover settlement topics relevant to many students.

Asha finds that the vocabulary and grammar learned through these songs enhances the students' English language learning skills. The students can write down what they listen to and thus improve their writing and listening skills. They can look at the lyrics later to check on their spelling and vocabulary. Asha likes to vary the class activities to sometimes start with a grammar lesson, do more reading and writing and then listen to a song. An added bonus is that it keeps students engaged and interested on a Friday afternoon, thus maintaining good attendance.

> The design of *Sing with me! Book 1* allows for flexibility and the songs provide lots of fun.
>
> Asha

Crafty questions

Phil finds the Wikihow website particularly useful when he is designing units of work involving reading and following instructions. The students can go to this easy to navigate website and choose an art or craft option that they are interested in learning. Then in the search box they can ask for instructions. Some examples under How to draw: a baby, cartoon character, faces, animals; How to make things from paper: origami, paper planes, flowers. With minimal equipment such as paper, pencil and a rubber, students can follow the step by step instructions to complete a task and learn a new skill.

> And it's really a lot of fun.
>
> Phil

One step at a time

By Maria Lipinski

Olympic Adult Education (OAE), in partnership with Medibank, launched the *One Step at a Time 7-week challenge* on Monday October 26th at 10.30am. This program was primarily a walking initiative designed to promote and encourage general health and wellbeing among the OAE community. However, the program also formed part of a more complex integrated learning platform that focused on both literacy and numeracy skills.

The main premise of the program was to see if we could make it around Australia by the end of the seven weeks. At first everyone doubted that we could do it because it would take a total of 19,431,780 steps (14,807 kms) to make it around Australia. Well, not only was this target easily achieved, but we managed to walk more steps than anyone could have imagined. Thanks to the collective efforts of the 120 people on the program we walked an amazing total of 36,220,902 steps (28,977 kms). Whoever said, 'there is strength in numbers' must have had OAE in mind.

It was essential that the program was simple to follow, inclusive of all who wished to participate, and had the required support mechanisms to maintain interest and help achieve personal goals. Even the title of the program promoted the concept of working at your own pace, taking one step at a time to overcome personal challenges and achieve short and long term goals.

After the initial teething problems with using and understanding the pedometer and recording booklet, the program was off to a flying start. By the end of the first four weeks we reached Hobart, Tasmania. Faced with the early end to the program we quickly needed another goal. A decision was made to continue our journey through central Australia (Darwin). This was achieved within the fifth week. With each week, new destinations were set,

such as to Papua New Guinea, then to New Zealand, and then finally back to Melbourne Australia.

What an incredible effort

I'm still pinching myself. To maintain interest during the program, as well as educate our participants, an information bulletin board was set up. The board displayed all the numerical information (kilometres walked, distances from destination to destination), as well as health and fitness facts and geographical facts. Some of the information available was used by the teachers to supplement their lesson plans and resources for the CSWE and CGEA programs, such as numeracy projects, reports, posters and comprehension activities.

Apart from the educational benefits we also saw some remarkable health milestones achieved by the participants. Weight loss was a common one. Many also reported feeling a general sense of wellbeing, such as, sleeping better and thinking clearer. Some students managed to encourage friends to join them on their morning walks. Teachers also reported that students were concentrating better in class and were more conscious of personal eating habits. Health and fitness became the catalyst for class discussions and tearoom conversations.

It was also important to reward and acknowledge the efforts, no matter how big or small, of those on the program. We decided to offer two weekly awards: one for the most steps walked and one to reward a special effort to stay on the program. Such things as never giving up despite an injury or health issue, highest percentage increase or inspiring others were acknowledged. Prizes ranged from wrist weights, free weights, large and small drink bottles

The One Step at a Time launch

Walkers from the EAL class

and flasks, salad spinners, vegetable slicers, portable BBQ sets, and juice makers. All things designed to encourage a healthy lifestyle.

On Friday December 18, 2015 at the annual OAE Certificate ceremony we had the great pleasure of celebrating the achievements of the weekly and end of program winners, as well as congratulating all the 120 participants on the program. Our overall winner was a tiny, young Sri Lankan student who managed to walk a total of 999,123 steps (799kms). In fact, she recorded the most steps over five consecutive weeks.

Our special achievement award was given to a Somali student who also recorded an impressive 852,932 steps (682kms). This student was truly inspirational as she organised several of her friends to join her each morning, definitely a role model. It was heart-warming to hear her family and friends cheering her on as she came up to receive her award.

In reflection, I would have to say that the positive feedback from all participants and the learning opportunities created throughout the seven-week program certainly outweighed the administrative nightmare of recording and maintaining records. Everyone was on board to ensure the success of the program and to spur each other on. Even after the official end of the program you can still see several walking groups and individuals pounding the pavements of West Heidelberg. Overall, a very worthwhile program and another OAE success story!

Maria Lipinski teaches at OAE and is passionate about health and wellbeing for herself and her students.

Numeracy Matters

Everyday numeracy
By Pam Mahlis

One of the most common challenges of teaching numeracy is keeping students engaged. Pam Mahlis has found that these challenges are balanced out by the many rewarding outcomes that she achieves with her students.

I have found that linking the curriculum unit to a theme that students can relate to is critical to success in teaching numeracy. The Certificates in General Education for Adults (CGEA) unit, 'Work with a range of numbers and money in familiar and routine situations', is one I have linked to a theme of Deals and Dollars.

Students explored daily activities where the main focus was money in this unit of work. They investigated their personal incomes, expenses and purchases; analysed their utility bills; and looked at different types of money used around the world. Students were given the opportunity to use the centre laptops to do internet searches and develop their skills in navigating websites to find specific information and to complete activities.

Budget planning
Each student set up a personal weekly budget. We used the ASIC's Money Smart website (www.moneysmart.gov.au) to produce an online budget planner, which they could then save on the website and access it at any stage. Students entered all their income and expenses for a week on the budget planner. Many students were very surprised to see that their expenses exceeded their income.

Students really enjoyed this, as it showed them how they should be saving and planning their weekly expenditure according to how much they earn per week. By doing this activity, it helped students to further understand for what, and where their money should be going. For instance, prior to this topic of budgeting, one student had three mobile phone plans. All three plans weren't cheap, and he was constantly spending money unnecessarily.

After learning how to properly budget using the online resource, it was only then that the student was able to understand why it was necessary to budget and plan for expenditure. The outcome of this activity was positive and tangible. The student converted to having only one mobile phone plan and now pays a cheaper amount for the same amount of gigabytes and calling hours that were previously on multiple phone accounts.

Students discovered they were spending money on items which were not needed and that they could budget for items that they really wanted.

> Spending $1300 on magazines a year is a lot of money! By doing a weekly budget, it helped me to see how quickly things can add up.

Dream cars and foreign currencies
Another activity involved students exploring the purchase of a dream car from Carsales.com (www.carsales.com) and to then take into account the running costs that would be involved. Once they found their dream car, they calculated how long it would take to purchase the car, depending on how much money they put aside every week.

Foreign currency and the exchange rates was another area of work with a collection of real currencies from around the world brought in to class. The students were very interested and crowded around looking at, and handling

OAE students at work on the laptops

the different notes and coins, identifying where they came from and the names of each currency.

One student shared with his peers that he does a fair bit of traveling and has a travel money card onto which he loads various currencies, depending on the countries he plans to visit. Some students talked about countries they had been to and the currencies they had used. Again they used the laptops to search for countries that particular currencies came from, or vice versa. They used the website Go Currency (www.gocurrency.com) and the currency converter to complete a number of activities, for example, converting the Australian dollar to the Euro.

Saving on utility bills

We invited a guest speaker from Environment Victoria to run a Bill Saving workshop aimed at putting things in context for students and focusing on how to save on utility bills. During the workshop, students were told lots of simple and practical tips, free or very inexpensive, that can reduce energy bills by large amounts. This helped students understand their power bills, smart meters, on and off peak usage and choosing a power company suitable for them. Students commented how they had never thought about analysing an energy bill before and did not realize how much energy could be saved by switching off appliances at the power point when not in use.

Finding solutions to real world problems became an keen interest for my students. With this in mind, I felt that they should be challenged by being given a numeracy project to do. They had not done project work before and this enabled them to see the relevance of numeracy in their everyday lives.

The students have been engaged in learning and have achieved a great deal in their numeracy class. They have developed skills in budgeting, planning and making more informed decisions about how they spend and save their money. They have been encouraged to demonstrate how to solve problems in front of the class and have grown in confidence through giving presentations. Earlier in the year, many of the students would say, 'I don't know' or 'I can't do that' for particular numeracy activities, but now they are keen to have a go at solving problems for themselves.

Pam Mahlis began her teaching career as a secondary teacher and taught a variety of Maths and Science subjects to a wide array of learners. Three years ago, she made the transition to adult education and teaches CGEA numeracy at Olympic Adult Education (OAE). Her passion lies in teaching numeracy to students in order to help them appreciate the importance of mathematics in their everyday life.

Technology Matters

'you could google forever'

By Hilary Dolan

As a teacher, I am often concerned with how I can empower students with language and literacy skills, as well as digital literacy skills, to participate fully in the world of education, community, home and work. Research suggests that society will need to be proficient in terms of digital literacy in order to thrive in all of these facets of life (State Library of Victoria, 2015).

Last year, I worked with a Diploma of Community Services student in our VET Support program who had purchased an iPad for her studies. Instant messaging, online shopping and Facebooking were easy tasks for her. Sourcing one good piece of research to back up her argument for an assignment was another matter entirely. At first glance, this student appeared to have good 'googling skills' but not the more advanced digital literacy skills she needed for her course.

There appears to be a mistaken belief that once a student has a tablet, smartphone or laptop, they are set up for success. However, there is much more to it than that. Devices are simply a medium. Judd (2007) explains that students are usually quick at conducting internet searches but these searches are usually quite superficial and do not yield useful results. This student indicated to me that she was perplexed in regards to finding good quality, relevant information. She had attended research skills sessions but was still struggling to apply the knowledge gained. In her bewilderment she told me, 'you could google forever'.

Getting lost on the Internet or googling forever was clearly an alarming thought for this student and in my mind posed a risk of disengagement from learning. I am confident in my teaching repertoire that I can turn moments like these into something meaningful. I believe that it is an essential part of a literacy teacher's role to show students how to become critical readers, in both online and offline contexts.

Jane Tomkins (1990) describes the classroom as 'a microcosm of the world' which is a perspective I share in my approach to teaching. What we value and do as teachers impacts upon how our students experience and understand the world. Some of us may not be as technically savvy as our students and may unconsciously avoid creating learning situations where our students are ahead of us in terms of the technological learning curve. However, one fundamental thing we can do is to teach students how to conduct efficient internet research.

I find the SEARCH framework, devised by Laurie Henry (2006) in order to build skills in the area of online reading, a useful tool for my students. Henry's framework identifies that the first major stumbling block for students reading online is locating the information. She calls this a 'gatekeeper skill'. Creating a word bank of suitable search terms greatly assists students to overcome this initial stumbling block and move forward confidently.

The SEARCH acronym represents the framework:
- Set a purpose for searching
- Employ effective search strategies
- Analyse search engine results
- Read critically and synthesise information
- Cite your sources
- How successful was your search?

This framework is supported by a dialogic approach where the teacher encourages students to develop a meta-language around the process of reading online. For example, I ask students to compare the search terms and search engines they used and how they determined the most appropriate search engine result. Students are then asked a series of questions: Is the information accurate? Is the author an expert in this area? Is there evidence of author bias? Is the information up to date? How does the information compare with other sources on the same topic?

Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General stated:

> Education is about more than literacy and numeracy. It is also about citizenry. Education must fully assume its essential role in helping people to forge more just, peaceful and tolerant societies (2012).

Reading critically online could be considered an integral part of the focus on global citizenship, as the very medium

encourages people to develop a multi-layered perspective on any given issue. In conclusion, I feel that it is vital to set up learning opportunities that encourage all students to have access to read online and develop their research and digital literacy skills at the same time.

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Hilary Dolan is a Language and Literacy teacher based in the Learning, Skills and Assessment Unit at Melbourne Polytechnic. She works with a diverse range of learners and is passionate about empowering students to achieve their goals.

Keeping your pre-accredited bits together

By Josie Rose

Two Capacity and Innovation projects funded by the ACFE Board over the past two years, have enabled Buchan Neighbourhood House, in partnership with a range of Learn Local organisations in the Gippsland region, to share resources and enhance course delivery.

The Gippsland Connect Moodle was set up in 2013 as part of a strategy to support Learn Locals in Gippsland to deliver into areas that have either very thin markets or no pre-accredited delivery. There are currently nine Learn Local organisations active or present in the Moodle which is managed and supported by eWorks. It has been structured in such a way that although everyone can see each other's courses, each organisation has password protected access to their own courses and documentation repository.

One Learn Local RTO has recently delivered two of their Aged Care units in a blended learning format through the Moodle. The form of blended learning used still means predominantly face-to-face, with supported web in the classroom delivery. This can be defined as teaching or training which is enhanced face-to-face group delivery using online and computer-based tools in an individual course or classroom context.

Learning activities are instructor-led and may include a range of structured activities including the use of technology, such as instructional videos, research, and any activities enhanced by the use of technology. The delivery method and tools depends very much on the learner cohort, and as our Buchan case study shows, the Moodle work done with the students was initiated in the classroom and then the students were encouraged to access the information in their own time at home or in supported homework sessions.

We also discovered that Moodle is a great repository for our pre-accredited paperwork. We all know how much

paperwork is generated when a pre-accredited course is developed and delivered; bits stored here and there; some hard copy and some electronic copy; some on the home computer and some on the work computer. All this documentation must also be saved and shared with teachers, ACFE, and used for reporting, moderation and verification.

For the Buchan team, the documentation needed to be shared amongst the centre manager, co-ordinators at participating centres, administration staff, tutors and students. This was a challenge, particularly since we were delivering across a range of venues and from a centre that is relatively isolated in East Gippsland. Buchan Neighbourhood House is just under an hour's drive from Bairnsdale, the largest town in East Gippsland.

Moodle in action

Here is the story of how we organised a course and put all our pre-accredited bits together online. We developed a course entitled Essential Skills in Using Technology, a taster course of four, three hour sessions, made possible by a research grant looking at different delivery models in regional areas with thin markets.

Each session addressed an area of information technology and included:
  • building a website from a free platform
  • staying safe online
  • managing files and folders
  • Windows 8 and 10 operating systems.

The course was delivered in Orbost, Briagolong, Sale and Loch Sport. Two tutors developed and delivered this course, one situated on the Mornington Peninsula and the other in Bairnsdale. There was a significant geo graphical divide between all stakeholders in this trial coures. The tutors worked together, utilising online tools to develop content for the course. This work was initially shared in the Gippsland Connect Moodle, thus creating a course which could be delivered online or face-to-face using blended learning.

As they began delivering this course, they realised that they were generating a significant amount of paperwork in various forms. They decided, as the course content was online in Moodle, to include all other course information in this format. This gave all staff involved in the project one-stop online access to all documents relevant to the project, at any time and any place. It also ensured that

tutors were teaching the same material and that all teaching materials were shared and could be re-used for future training.

Keeping your bits together

The Keeping your bits together site curated information that was organised using Moodle resources like folders and books. It serves as a repository of the Pre-accredited Quality Framework (PQF) requirements for the course. The site was designed and categorised into four sections:

Section 1: Planning, organising and administrative documents such as course overviews, enrolment forms and attendance sheets, photo consent forms, learner plans and moderation documents.

Section 2: The Course Modules:
  • Websites
  • Security—Staying Safe
  • File and Folder Management
  • Windows 8 and 10
  • Gmail
  • Microsoft Word
  • Basic Computer Skills
  • Backup and external storage.

Course content includes learning activities, assignments and handouts. Learners are able to print the course information and have a hardcopy as well.

Section 3: Discussion forms to be used when the course is delivered online.

Section 4: Links to Extra Resources. For students who want to know more and get further information about each of the modules and to meet diverse learner needs. Resources may be printed as a booklet to keep for future reference.

All the course information is housed together in the one secure environment that all stakeholders can access. This allows teachers to share course content and their experiences with different learners and organisations. The coordinator and other stakeholders are able to monitor the course as it progresses and all the course information is in one place ready for reporting.

Learners can access and complete their administrative documents and completed templates are then kept in a secure folder which only staff can access. At the beginning of the course students are given their user name and

passwords. Enrolment forms and Learner Plan A are then completed. At the last session of the course, Learner Plan B is completed and uploaded. Assignments and evidence of learners' work are stored in the Moodle. Access to courses and further details are only available to members with a user name and password.

The Gippsland Connect Moodle has provided improved efficiencies in course delivery and documentation. Teachers and administrative staff have moved into an online environment that defies geographic distance and enhances learning for students across the region.

Josie Rose was the eLearning project manager for the two Gippsland Connect projects, that amongst other things established an online learning presence for Learn Locals in Gippsland. Josie has recently become a full time Gippslander and is currently working as the business development manager at the Gippsland East Learn Local Alliance. Her collaborators on the projects were Evelyn Schmidt, Co-coordinator Buchan Neighbourhood House, Fiona Ross and Katt Matthews, Project Officers Gippsland Connect.

Open Forum

In our 2016 guest columnist section, we will feature three writers. Between them they have more than sixty years of experience in the adult language, literacy and numeracy field, having worked across the adult community and vocational education sectors. Each writer will reflect on a particular aspect, with observations on changes and where developments have made a significant impact.

A reflection on policy and program changes in youth education

By Ann Haynes

My experience with youth programs, issues and policy applications has been in the north of Melbourne, while working at Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (now Melbourne Polytechnic) between 2002 and 2014. During this time, I headed up the Youth unit and was involved in Youth programs across Melbourne's north, as well as being on the Committee of Management for the Inner Northern Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLEN).

There have been many initiatives during this time, but with a growing population and lack of employment opportunities in this area, many young people are still disadvantaged and at risk of not completing school. The concept of youth I refer to encompasses a broad range of young people. It is now evident that many primary aged school children are refusing school and, or are experiencing poor transitions to secondary school. This is leading to entrenched disengagement and failure in the education system from a very early age.

Education policy re-focus

The Victorian State Government has introduced a new Education policy, *The Education State*, following on from the cutbacks of the previous government. There is evidence of an increase in resourcing across regions and in schools, with a focus on support and connection for young people. This policy proposes that designated regional staff will connect with families, service providers, schools and communities in a linked up framework.

The aims of this policy include:
- increased regional support
- focus on 'at-risk engagement'
- facilitating regional and local collaboration and partnerships.

The literature promises a holistic approach through building stronger system capability, which will promote improved outcomes for all students, with an emphasis on disadvantage and need. One can be cynical here. How many times have we heard these cliches? However, the inclusion of a focus on equity, and improved regional and local collaboration will hopefully improve outcomes for young people.

Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) have received funding for two years, plus a further two years. The LLENs have played an important role in linking young people with schools, community services and employers over the past thirteen years. It is positive to see that their role in improved outcomes for young people has been recognised. LLENs were originally established in 2001-2002 in response to the findings of the Kirby Report, along with the introduction of the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). The State government had initially funded LLENs for only twelve months, with heavy cutbacks to subsequent funding. The new initiative recognises the valuable contribution many LLENs have made to the re-engagement of young people.

The new policy stresses the need for reform in the Victorian TAFE & vocational training sector. What this means is hard to say, but it is crucial to have an innovative and fully funded TAFE & vocational training system to provide young people with job prospects for the future. Previous governments, both Labour and Liberal, have wreaked havoc on the TAFE system and encouraged the promotion of private providers, who have on the whole rorted the public purse and offered sub-standard courses to unsuspecting and uninformed young people. This money would have been far better directed to upgrading TAFE facilities and resources, as well as to provide more courses relevant to our diverse population. The vocational training system should allow for young people to gain the skills needed

Federal policy shortfall

While these changes are occurring in Victoria, the Federal government is still refusing to honour the full Gonski agreement by disbanding it in 2017. Funding was originally flagged for 2014 through to 2020. The Gonski review of national education highlighted the fact that too many children were missing out on education due to lack of resources. Gonski funding was designed to ensure that every Australian child, no matter what their background, was entitled to access high quality education. History shows there is constant dysfunction between State and Federal government funding allocation and programs. Politics overrides a cooperative approach to funding education programs.

The Youth Connections Program was another example of this. Commonwealth funding for this national program commenced in 2010. I was involved with three consortia across Melbourne's north. These linked disengaged young people with local community agencies, local councils and education and employment stakeholders. The program successfully linked many young people to the community resources they required and reconnected them with education. It also promoted close working partnerships with a range of community stakeholders. Although successful, this program ceased to be funded at the end of 2014.

Reconnecting young people and education

The VCAL Curriculum was trialled in 2002 and delivery commenced in secondary schools, TAFEs and community organisations in 2003. The implementation of the VCAL certificate provided students with practical work-related experience, literacy and numeracy skills and the opportunity to build personal skills that are important for all aspects of life and work. Schools were encouraged to offer it as a VET option for young people who did not want to do VCE and who were at risk of leaving school. Some schools eagerly took it up, while others were less inclined due to a perceived impact on standards.

Around the same time, the building of four Technological Education Colleges (TECs) was proposed. These were seen as part of a replacement for the technical schools that had been closed down by the Kennett government. The TECs were built within TAFE grounds, with the purpose of easy access to trade facilities. Three TECs were built with varying degrees of success.

During the time that I have been involved in youth education, there have been many successful programs and initiatives in schools, TAFEs, Learn Locals and in partnership with community agencies. In my view, the VCAL Certificate has been the most successful in enabling many young people to reconnect with education.

However, there are still major challenges to overcome for many young people. These include: high youth unemployment; school completion and attendance; early school leavers; poor transitions; mental health issues; diverse communities of newly arrived migrants and refugee young people; poverty and associated issues; and a rapidly changing labour market. Hopefully, the new government policy will have some impact on this, but there is still a high percentage of young people throughout Victoria who do not have the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

English language learning for young migrants

With steadily growing numbers, newly arrived refugee and migrant young people face even greater challenges. The main factors influencing education for these young people has been:

- the increased market share of private Registered Training Organisations (RTOs)
- the shift in focus of Federal government Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) programs
- cutbacks in funding to TAFE institutions and Learn Local community settings.

A significant number of private RTOs have offered English language courses and vocational certificates at very low cost with considerably reduced hours. The low cost and the shorter completion time has attracted many young people, most of whom are unable to continue to further study or gain employment on completion, as their language and skills levels have not adequately improved.

Most newly arrived young people begin English language learning in the Australian Migrant English Program (AMEP) which is provided by the Federal government. In the past ten years, the focus of this program has changed from being a settlement and orientation course to one that emphasises gaining employment, as soon as possible. This emphasis has seen government agencies limit the number of hours some students can study in English language

classes and their access to studying vocational courses. The State government's cuts to TAFE funding have resulted in significant fee increases for students and a decrease in student support.

Students who require additional hours, or who do not qualify for AMEP hours, are particularly disadvantaged by these changes. The Northern AMEP Young Adult Migrant English Course (YAMEC), which has supported newly arrived young people for more than thirty years, has seen a decline in positive outcomes due to the reduction in services and the change in curriculum focus.

Improved outcomes for young people

Over the last decade, being involved in Youth education and a member of the Committee of Management for the Inner Northern LLEN, has given me particular insight into youth issues across Melbourne's North. These issues are just as relevant to other areas of Melbourne and regional Victoria. The constant changes in government funding and policy, and the interplay of State and Federal politics have been negative factors in the ongoing attempts to improve outcomes for young people, not to mention the time taken by dedicated staff to write submissions and oversee program changes and operations of varying initiatives. One can only remain hopeful for better outcomes for youth in the future.

Ann Haynes has had an extensive career in teaching and management, having worked in primary, secondary and special education, as well as the TAFE sector, from which she has recently retired. She has also worked as an educational consultant and been involved in small businesses.

Foreign Correspondence

The Learning and Work Institute (L&W) is an independent policy and research organisation in the UK. In this recent blog entry (3 February, 2016) Emily Jones reflects on educational developments in the UK in response to the OECD report. It is published here with permission.

Using evidence to support adult learning
by Emily Jones

The OECD's report, *Building Skills for All: A Review of England*, provides another reality check on the millions of adults who have low basic skills. An estimated nine million adults aged 16-65 have low literacy or numeracy skills or both. England is around average for literacy in comparison to other OECD countries in the survey, and well below average for numeracy. Young people are falling behind their counterparts in other countries, and perform no better than adults approaching retirement age.

These are shocking statistics, but sadly don't come as any real surprise. The UK is a research-rich nation and the challenges around basic skills amongst adults have been exposed through the Government's Skills for Life surveys in 2003 and 2011. We also know that in 2014 only around three in five young people left school with A*- C grade GCSEs in English and maths. The research, however, is particularly useful because it enables us to benchmark ourselves against other countries, and it identifies a number of specific groups who are missing out and therefore where resources may be best targeted.

So we know the nature and scale of the challenges, but what do we know about addressing them? The OECD report recommends using evidence to advance adult learning – that evidence should inform teaching methods and interventions. As an organisation committed to evidence-based thinking and approaches, Learning and Work Institute absolutely agrees with this statement. However, as the report acknowledges, evidence on what works and why is limited. We also need to have a more coherent and robust approach to capturing and measuring the impact that improving basic skills can make to people's lives.

Understanding what works in improving adults' basic skills is complex, but an intervention can only be effective if adults can be successfully reached and engaged. The OECD report describes some of the barriers that

adults experience to basic skills learning – negative perceptions of learning, lack of awareness, embarrassment, finding space in their lives for learning. Motivation is a real issue.

Last year, we carried out research with young people aged 16-24 years to hear about their experiences of learning English and maths at school and in post-age16 years education. We asked them what they would find motivating and what had made the difference for them. This research was all the more powerful because we supported teachers to interview their learners. They got to hear firsthand what they respond well to and what would hook them in. This is a good example of how small-scale research and learner voice can directly inform teaching practices.

We know that adults' lives are diverse and we're all motivated by different things, and it's crucial to take a personalised approach to engaging adults. Some will be motivated to improve their skills for a promotion at work, or to better manage their money, or to help children with homework.

Our Citizens' Curriculum is an example of an evidence-based approach to delivering basic skills, where the curriculum is tailored to the individual. The Citizens' Curriculum is an integrated approach to basic skills delivery. It is not prescriptive but rather provides a framework of learning opportunities built around the skills and capabilities that citizens need in the 21st century: literacy, language, numeracy, digital, civic, financial and health capabilities. These go beyond employability but look to encourage greater motivation leading to increased civic participation and greater resilience for social change. A scoping study for the

Citizens' Curriculum identified the following three underlying principles:

1. An holistic approach to provision for adult learners interpreted through the local context.
2. Learner involvement in determining the curriculum to meet their needs and interests.
3. An interlinked combination of literacy, numeracy, language (English for Speakers of Other Languages), financial, health, digital and civic capabilities.

We have been piloting the Citizens' Curriculum approach in a range of adult learning contexts since 2014. The pilots are already providing insights into methods of adopting a Citizens' Curriculum approach: how effective the approach is in engaging disadvantaged learners; the impact on learners and providers; and key success factors for both the learner and the provider.

Further information can be found on our website: http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/our-work/life-and-society/citizens-curriculum

Learning and Work Institute (L&W) brings together over ninety years of combined history and heritage from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) and the Centre for Economic & Social Inclusion. It continues as an independent policy and research organisation dedicated to promoting lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion. L&W research explores what works; development of new ways of thinking; and implementing new approaches. Working with partners, they aim to transform people's experiences of learning and employment, as well as to benefit individuals, families, communities and the wider economy.

Emily Jones is L&W Institute's Head of Research. She leads the Research team and has responsibility for co-ordinating research activity across the organisation's strategic areas, as well as leading L&W Institute's work on impact measurement and the wider outcomes of learning. Emily is currently leading a portfolio of work around maths and English research, and is supporting L&W Institute's research with the British army.

Beside the Whiteboard

Badminton player to Learn Local award winner

An interview with Karen Fleischer by Lynne Matheson

After the birth of her second child, Karen joined the local badminton club as a way of meeting people in her community. She was aware that isolation, lack of opportunities and child care were factors preventing people from engaging in learning, social activities or pursuing their career pathways. A conversation after badminton led her to become the first coordinator of Paynesville Neighbourhood House (now called the Paynesville Neighbourhood Centre) where she is still the manager, twenty-four years on.

Karen Fleischer received the 2015 Learn Local Outstanding Practitioner award for her work as manager and trainer for the Paynesville Neighbourhood Centre (PNC). She has brought her passion, hard work and commitment to the development of the centre and its programs. PNC has grown to meet the needs of the community, which continues to change with a transient population of around 4,000 permanent residents that peaks to around 8,000 in holiday periods. She relishes the challenges of finding ways to combine social, educational and recreational elements in PNC programs, that also work to build social capital, while being sustainable.

We met for this interview on a very wet Friday morning at Frankie's café in Warragul. It was easy to chat away several hours as Karen was keen to share PNC success stories.

How did you first become involved in adult education?
I grew up in Bairnsdale and was fortunate as a mum with young children to have a strong family network of support. I had observed though, that this was not the case for many people, women in particular, living in Paynesville. When the opportunity came to take up the role of coordinator of the newly established Paynesville Neighbourhood House, I jumped at it. Even though I knew I would be working way over and above the four and a half hours I was funded for back in 1992, it was what I felt most passionate about. Helping people to learn together and to provide a focus on skill building and lifelong learning, continue to be my passions. When I think about developing new programs, I always consider how hands-on learning will align training with employment opportunities in the region.

Can you tell us a bit about your professional background and career pathway?
Although my background was in clerical work, and I did not have formal training in community development, I was employed by the East Gippsland Shire Council to set up programs at the house and work with the Child Care and Neighbourhood House Committees of Management. I started work with only basic resources such as a desk, filing cabinet and telephone. I brought my own chair from home!

On my first day of work, I remember sitting at my desk thinking how the office looked barren. I realised that I needed a computer or at least a typewriter to write reports and submissions. I made enquiries for equipment from my support officer whose response was that there were no funds available to purchase any equipment. No money was available to implement and fund programs, so I learnt very early on to be resourceful.

I have a very practical approach to things and believe in getting things done. I regard myself as a lifelong learner and have been fortunate to undertake a range of studies. Most recently, I completed the Graduate Diploma in Community Sector Management and Certificate IV in Career Development Practice. These courses have helped me to improve systems and ensure PNC programs are sustainable.

How has PNC changed over the time you have worked there?
We have always maintained a focus on the learner, but I think we have evolved to be more focused on outcomes. Having greater access to funding and increasing the scope of our programs has meant we have been able to grow and expand delivery of our courses at venues across the region. We have benefited from ACFE's commitment and investment in infrastructure and professional development.

What do you see as a major achievement for the local region?
The Gippsland Learning Opportunities for Women (GLOW) project, which drove the duplication of

the Increasing Women's Options course throughout Gippsland, has been very successful in increasing women's work options. We have been able to train up eleven facilitators, share curriculum, resources, marketing materials and data in partnership with four centres. The course has been delivered at Paynesville, Lakes Entrance, Orbost (in partnership with Buchan Neighbourhood House), Traralgon and Moe.

In 2012, PNC nominated Janine Richards, who was enrolled in the previous year's Increasing Women's Options course, for the ACFE Outstanding Learner Learn Local Award and she was one of three state finalists. As well, Michelle Jenkins and Margaret Wilson, from the Traralgon Neighbourhood House Learning Centre's Increasing Women's Options Course were state finalists. Michelle went on to win the award. The intention of the GLOW project was to increase the capacity of Learn Local Organisations that were neighbourhood houses and it was rewarding to see the houses associated with winning state awards.

The Your Next Step course aims to raise awareness through community development. We know that people learn best if they can apply the learning outcomes or skills to life experiences. PNC incorporates workplace learning in community development events such as: The Biggest Morning Tea; Neighbourhood House Week and Adult Learners' Week. The planning that goes into our Biggest Morning Tea starts early in the year and there is a real excitement around the event. It grows each year and we are very proud of the way our students take on the responsibility of making sure everything goes smoothly. There have been some great employment and volunteering outcomes for participants that we hope to build on.

To what do you attribute the success of PNC programs?
Having child care at PNC has been such an advantage and we have a dedicated Committee of Management who are very familiar with the people and the needs of the community. Since October, 1996, I have produced a weekly advertisement and, or media release for the local paper, the Paynesville Post, to promote PNC programs and the value of lifelong learning. The weekly promotion helps to continue to build our brand in the region and attract new students to our programs.

What are some of the changes you have seen in learner cohorts?
Your Next Steps has expanded over time to provide hospitality, event management and digital media skills to

Laura and Karen Fleischer at the awards night

a wide range of learners. The hands-on workplace learning through our fund raising events has engaged vulnerable learner cohorts. We are seeing more young people attending courses and the gender balance is still about one third male, to two thirds female. Provision of free child care has made courses more accessible for women.

Learners are prepared to travel to our courses, or else we have ways to support the transport needs of our learners. We can arrange car-pooling or even driving a student to her workplace, which in one case involved me having 6.00am starts for six weeks. We are looking to the future with attention to regional labour market trends and mapping career pathways to employment or further education.

What are some of the key challenges to working in your region?
Internet access is problematic and can be very slow and quite frustrating at times. We are lucky to have a supply of fantastic tutors who find travelling to other sites is not a barrier. We have strong relationships through the Gippsland East Learn Local Alliance (GELLA) with plenty of collaboration, support and sharing. We are noticing a decline in referrals from the Job Network Agencies and so we need to be smart with our marketing and how we build online elements into our programs. We have long standing partnerships with Federation Training and job services networks, to assist in the transition from non-accredited training to accredited training or employment.

What was the best part of winning the Learn Local Outstanding Practitioner award?
It was the mayor who first suggested we put in an application. I guess it was an opportunity to get some recognition for PNC and all the wonderful tutors,

volunteers and committee of management who make it such a great place to work and learn. It seems like we are all so busy just doing that we don't take the time to reflect on our achievements.

I felt quite humbled winning the award and at the same time, appreciative of the support of my family and the PNC committee members and staff. It was very much a team effort and I felt they were all part of the award. It was real recognition of all the volunteers and the chairperson in particular, who intuitively find ways of doing things that will work for the community.

One of my favourite stories is about one of our female students who confided to her class that she had a dream of doing an electrical apprenticeship. For a single mum with six children (three primary aged and two preschool), this seemed an impossible dream. With the encouragement of her fellow students and with some negotiations with a local electrician, we were able to get her a work placement. She was so excited when her boss took her around to experience all different aspects of electrical work over a three month placement. I believe that through encouraging people to pursue their dreams and recognizing that we all have skills, anything is achievable.

What's Out There

Control your Money second edition edited by Beth Oddy
Reviewed by Pam Mahlis

Control Your Money sends a clear message to students that they need to make sure that their money meets their needs and that they are in control of their money, and not the other way around. The book consists of seventeen topics all relating to how to effectively manage your money to meet everyday needs. This is a thoroughly well thought out book that is well structured and I am sure students will easily follow and relate to the topics and activities. Even if students have not had the opportunity in real life to explore some of the areas that are discussed in this book, like applying for a loan, or having a credit card, it will prepare them for the future.

The first part of each topic area focuses on what the topic is about and then presents the essential components of how it is done, using examples and charts, thus giving the student the opportunity to use their own figures to produce results through various activities. The book uses practical applications enabling the student to put things into a real life perspective.

Throughout each of the topics there is a great connection displayed between the theory and the practical activities. The detailed explanations and instructions are clear, which help students understand the concept and they can use the procedure that has been modeled to produce their own outcomes using their own figures. For the students who have good literacy skills, the language is easy to understand. Basic addition, subtraction, division and multiplication skills into the thousands is required to successfully complete the activities.

The self-test at the start of the topic is a good way of determining students' assumptions about how they handle their finances. Once they have attempted all the practical activities and then have to answer questions about what changes they will make at the end of the book, it will give them a true indication of whether they were in fact in control of their money or not.

Throughout the book are hints and strategies around how to reduce costs and solutions to problems that may be faced when dealing with finances, along with an extensive glossary. There are only minor improvements I would suggest, as I feel that the book has covered all the topics adequately. It is great that reference is made to particular apps that allow students to deal with their finances wherever they are, but I feel that more reference should have been made to online sites.

For example, income and expenses charts can be produced on the computer using excel or even on a website that has a budget planner (Moneysmart.gov.au or equivalent) and they have the option of saving it online. Students may benefit if digital skills are incorporated alongside some of the practical written activities.

This book is American and so some of the terminology is different to what we use here in Australia. Teachers need to point out to students some of the differences such as a 'routing' number instead of a BSB number. Terminology and spelling of some words is also different such as cheques instead of checks. It would be useful for teachers to print an Australian consumer information sheet to insert into the book to assist students.

The topics covered in this book involve quite a bit of reading, so good literacy skills are needed if the student is to carry out activities independently. Ideally, each topic would be teacher lead and I would use the book as a main text book for the unit on money. I liked the layout which is easy to use and each topic comes with clear and concise examples that are easy to follow. The practical activities are great as they build the students' confidence and competence with both numeracy and literacy.

Control Your Money is a valuable resource for teaching about money that links theory with practical activities in the everyday lives of students and is suitable for adult education and secondary school settings.

Control Your Money is published by New Readers Press. It is available from the Bookery and can be ordered online at www.bookeryeducation.com.au.

Pam Mahlis teaches CGEA numeracy at Olympic Adult Education.

Sing with me! Book 3 by Carmel Davies and Sharon Duff

Reviewed by Phil Hudson

As a musician and teacher, I have long been a fan of using songs and music as a tool for teaching. But up until a couple of years ago, there had not been a relevant Australian resource that made this easy to do in the ESL Classroom. However, with the release of *Sing with me! Books 1 & 2* in 2013, all that changed and a long existing void was filled. Carmel Davies and Sharon Duff have brought over twenty years of ESL experience to this resource. Now comes *Sing with me! Book 3,* with fifteen new and well-crafted songs, which builds upon the foundation of the first two books

Sing with me! Book 3 is a fantastic resource for learning English because it uses songs that are accessible and relevant to students who did not grow up speaking English, while it also recognises their development as people and learners. The book is well structured and laid out, featuring worksheets that have been specifically designed to be used after teaching the songs. In fact, there is a 'map' of the book at the start which clearly lays out all the different language features, including grammatical structures, vocabulary and themes. Importantly too, there is a strong emphasis on pronunciation and the songs and activities provide ample opportunities for both one-to-one and class conversation.

The music on the accompanying recording is of a high quality. It features simple but beautiful arrangements, well delivered vocals and some smooth, sweet harmonies. The musical styles sit in folk-pop territory with occasional flavours of blues, country and reggae. Most songs are very 'singable' for students. There is a natural delivery and emphasis and a quirkiness inherent in the songs which helps to keep things interesting for student and teacher alike.

Sing with me! Book 3 builds on some of the themes introduced in Book 2, including the important topic of employment, recognising that more advanced students are more likely to have casual or part-time work than new arrivals. 'Found a Job' is one of two songs on this theme, and is an ode to the ups and downs of trying different types of work. Other more complex or advanced themes include housing, gambling addiction, generation gap, problematic neighbours and technology.

One of the highlights for me is 'Open Our Hearts', a song on the issue of refugees and asylum seekers, while the final song 'Words Can Be Offensive' tackles racism and promotes harmony in a way that only music can do. It is a fitting way to conclude the resource. Apart from songs addressing issues, there are also some songs celebrating the joys and special times in life. 'What are you doing tomorrow?' and 'A moment' are both uplifting songs that the students enjoy singing.

One of the real features of the material is its use of informal language. It doesn't just use the traditional Aussie 'G'day mate' slang, but features a lot of modern slang that students might hear outside the classroom. Phrases like 'showing me the ropes', 'up for grabs' and 'start from scratch' can now be taught in the context of an enjoyable song.

Feedback from students from this resource has been positive. Once they learned about it, they wanted to know where they could get their own copy so they could listen to the songs in the car! One of my students also wanted to teach the songs to his daughter. They have found that the worksheets have the right balance between being challenging and achievable.

Similarly, feedback from other teachers I have spoken to has been favourable. Comments have focused around the songs being at the right level for students and there being a sense of fun with the songs, despite covering many important issues. They have also noted that the songs are a great way to introduce grammatical structures that are often difficult to teach.

The authors provide a teaching methodology at the beginning of the book. This has proved to be helpful as for one thing, I had never thought of the students learning and singing songs together in a circle as opposed to singing from their desks. Students seem to be happy doing gestures to accompany the songs too!

The *Sing with me! Book 3* is a welcome addition to the body of work from Carmel Davies and Sharon Duff, especially for teachers teaching at a more advanced level. Like the first two books in the series, it is excellent value, and is a collection of songs that are accessible and age appropriate.

Importantly, it makes the job of the ESL teacher a little easier and more fun!

Sing with me! Book 3 and the other books and CDs in the series are available from Urban Lyrebirds (www.urbanlyrebirds.com).

Phil Hudson is a singer, songwriter and ESL teacher. He teaches the Learning English Skills Through Music course at Olympic Adult Education in Heidelberg West. Phil also runs a community music business, Black Sheep Music www.blacksheepmusic.com.au and is a community choir director at Sussex Neighbourhood House in Pascoe Vale.