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By Lesley Farrell and Chris Corbel

Best practice models of professional  
development By Margaret Corrigan

High visibility in the community

By Jillian Ashley

Picking up the conversation

By Tao Bak and Pauline O'Maley

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Adult Education in  
the Community

# Editorial

The warmer weather has finally arrived. My garden beckons after hours in front of the computer. Pottering in my vegie bed amid the blue and white borage, I hear the contented buzzing of bees. There appears to be a perfect partnering of the flower and the bee as it sips nectar then moves on. An observance of nature's workers, the flower benefits, as does the bee, as does the hive. In turn, we may benefit from some honey or the fruit pollinated further afield. In the news is a timely reminder to us all that we need to protect and nurture the bees for future generations.

In some ways volunteer tutors may be seen as worker bees alongside learners and teachers. They play a nurturing role for an individual, as well as contributing to social capital through building connection and community. Volunteer tutors feature in several articles in this edition and we are reminded of their contribution to the sector. An unknown writer expresses it another way: 'Volunteering is the ultimate exercise in democracy. You vote in elections once a year, but when you volunteer, you vote every day about the kind of community you want to live in'.

The push toward the gig economy and increasing technological demands are factors in workplaces, education and our day to day lives. We are engaged in literacy acts that are augmented by apps and require constantly changing digital literacy skills. The shifting concepts of work and the intersections of writing and technology skills

are playing out in changing scenarios. Lesley Farrell and Chris Corbel describe Literacy 4.0 demands on workers who need to be skilled in 'pitching for jobs, negotiating conditions, quoting for work or managing time, budgets and the constant updating of expertise'.

Agency is critical to effective learning and Margaret Corrigan observes that PD approaches 'need to be developed with a bottom-up approach, in which teachers are actively involved in their own professional learning, through goal setting, reflective inquiry and engagement with research'. Jillian Ashley reflects on successful learning approaches drawing on constructivist theories and placing negotiation at the heart of student learning.

Tao Bak and Pauline O'Maley suggest that we need to keep the conversation alive as to how we respond to learners and specifically to stay attuned to the needs of refugee background students. On a final note they contend that 'it is educationally important that we aim to know our students well, and particularly as fully realised individuals rather than as one-dimensional stereotypes'.

Many thanks to the rich and thoughtful writing of all the contributors to this edition of Fine Print. I trust you will enjoy the experience of reading and reflecting on your teaching practice.

Lynne Matheson

**The Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council (VALBEC) aims to lead the adult literacy field through identifying issues of importance to practitioners and facilitating positive change. This is achieved through networking, professional support, the sharing of information and the promotion of best practice.**

# Literacy events in the gig economy

By Lesley Farrell and Chris Corbel



This article is an extract from *Working Paper 1: The Literacy Practices of the Gig Economy* (Farrell & Corbel 2017). It is part of the Literacy 4.0 Project at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, which is examining the workforce literacy needs of the workplaces of the future.

## Industry 4.0

The themes of innovation and disruption are prominent in the current discourse of business and economics. In recent years this discourse has coalesced around the notion of an emerging fourth global era, referred to as Industry 4.0 (Schwab 2016). In Industry 4.0 workplaces are changing into workspaces. 'They now [form] local nodes of a complex network of people, technologies and practices that constitute a potentially globally distributed workspace. [Workspaces are] dynamic, fluid, often transient, working units defined and bounded by regular, routine information and communications technology routes.' (Farrell 2006 p. 17)

Industry 4.0 is typified by the greater use of smart systems and by the gig economy. Smart systems are those in which some form of artificial intelligence is embedded in products and processes, usually based upon information gleaned from vast amounts of data (Farrell 2016). The gig economy is a process in which information about tasks and resources is shared to maximum benefit of owners, producers and users. The key feature of the gig economy is the emergence of online platforms that bring producers and consumers together directly on a peer-to-peer basis. These have emerged in transport (Uber), tourism (Airbnb), resource circulation (eBay) and work (Mechanical Turk).

## The gig economy

As an employment system the gig economy has three main features (Richardson 2015, Martin 2016). The first is the use of employment platforms to bring together people who need a task done with others who are willing to do it. These digital platforms mediate between firms, customers and workers through the creation and management of an online community. This community may be both local and global, vastly increasing the range of customers and competitors for each worker.

The second feature of the gig economy is the employment relationship between firms, customers and workers. Workers are treated as stand-alone entities fully responsible for all aspects of their own working lives, with few or none of the entitlements (like leave) or protections (like unfair dismissal) afforded through collective bargaining. This can be seen as both empowering and limiting for individuals. (See, for example, Aloisi (2016) and the campaigns for worker recognition by The Independent Workers of Great Britain <https://iwgb.org.uk/>.)

The third feature of the gig economy is in the structure of the firms which contract work. There is an increasing gap between the small core group of relatively secure workers who develop and manage the platform and the very large number of workers who carry out the tasks (AIG 2016).

This pattern of work is not entirely new. There have always been enthusiastic freelancers and they have often been concentrated in particular sectors or professional fields. Examples include designers, writers and others who value the autonomy that freelancing work affords. What is new, however, is that the gig economy may now attract, or be the only option for, those displaced by industry disruption. These workers, such as those traditionally employed in manufacturing for instance, have worked in more regulated environments where security of employment and other entitlements have been valued over autonomy. Many of them have little or no experience in pitching for jobs, negotiating conditions, quoting for work or managing time, budgets and the constant updating of expertise.

The gig economy is growing rapidly (Deloitte 2016) and expanding its reach to cover comprehensive work (Wisskirchen et al. 2017). It is the subject of much promotion (for example, AIG 2016a) and also critiques (Grey 2017, Chalmers & Quigley 2017). A feature of

the gig economy is its reliance on communications technologies, most notably the development of ubiquitous collaborative software programs. However, too intense a focus on these programs can distract us from other technological advances on which the gig economy relies.

Prominent among these is the impact of automation on almost every form of production. One effect of automation is to atomise full-time jobs into tasks which can be distributed between people and machines. Once jobs have been divided into tasks, those tasks can be undertaken by people (paid at a range of rates depending on the sophistication of the task and the scarcity of labour) and by machines at a distance, with the whole process co-ordinated through a collaborative platform. While claims like '40 percent of jobs will be lost to automation by 2025' are reported in the media, a more useful focus may be on the shift from (fulltime, secure) jobs to discrete tasks which can be completed in a range of ways, by a range of people and machines, in a range of local and remote locations.

It is the needs of workers transitioning in mid-career from jobs in disrupted industries to contractors bidding for tasks, which are the driver for this study. The purpose of the study is to understand the literacy practices required for their effective participation in the gig economy and how policy makers, educators, careers advisors and support staff, such as those at Skills and Jobs Centres, can help prepare workers for them.

## Literacy 4.0

The term literacy has a wide usage as part of the debates surrounding skills and work. It is often used to refer to a general facility with something, as in ICT literacy or science literacy, or as a blanket term covering reading and writing as in the National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). A narrower view of literacy is found in the use of the term as part of the notion of foundation literacy which is associated with basic reading, writing and numeracy.

Much of this usage conflates skills and literacy, yet it is important to maintain a distinction between these two notions. Literacy underlies skill, and requires investigation in its own right. A key issue for engaging with Industry 4.0, therefore, is the nature of the literacy texts, events and practices that underlie the skills, knowledge and attributes required by Industry 4.0. In other words, we need to understand Literacy 4.0. The literacy practices of Literacy 4.0 need to be

investigated and understood to ensure the best policy and pedagogic responses.

## Research on workplace literacy practices

The workplace has been studied as a key setting for literacy practices (Gee, Lankshear & Hull 1996, Hull & Zacher 2007). A focus has been on the effect of changes in reading and writing requirements that have accompanied changes in work practices as workplaces have become more automated and, in Zuboff's terms, 'textualised' and 'informed' (Zuboff 1988, Baynham and Prinsloo 2007, Holkner 2007, Farrell 2007, 2009, Brandt 2005, 2009, 2015).

Deborah Brandt argues that there is in fact a revolution going on in workplace literacy practices as a result of the emergence of the knowledge economy over the past forty years. Brandt argues that because of the knowledge economy there has been what she calls 'the rise of writing' at the expense of reading, and that this is redefining mass literacy (Brandt 2015). For Brandt, a key feature of the knowledge economy was that increasingly firms created value by embedding knowledge in written texts as well as goods and services.

Remarkably, this change in mass writing practices has gone almost unnoticed:

...it is through the efforts of everyday writers that the streambed of mass literacy is changing course - even though this change is going largely unrecognized by the institutions that should most be paying attention. (Brandt 2015, p. 12)

Brandt's study focuses on professional writing. She acknowledges that she does not look at work in which writing may once have been incidental to the work itself but now is central. Now, more than ever before, writing is a feature of many workplaces. For example, much vocational writing now involves filling in a form on a device. This has benefits in the form of 'adaptive case management' (Fisher 2016). It also causes problems, for example, where reports are framed by templates (Sellen & Harper 2002, Brandt 2016, Karlsson and Nikolaidou 2015).

## Research on literacy in the gig economy

Most research on literacy in online settings has been done on changing literacy practices in educational and social settings (Pigg et al. 2014, Jaworski 2015, Messina-

Dahlberg & Bagga-Gupta 2016). Much less research has been done on changing literacy practices in new online vocational settings, an exception being a study of career portfolios by Collin (2011). Although there is work being done about the cultural and legal aspects of labour practices in the gig economy (Aloisi 2016), there is none to date on literacy practices.

Brandt's work on literacy in the knowledge economy (2005, 2009, 2015) examines the changing writing practices of workers over a twenty-year period. It takes us up to the beginnings of the new vocational settings of Industry 4.0. Her subjects were still employed within companies in 'middle class jobs' and called upon those organisations internally for support. Nowadays, as companies shed workers, many people like those Brandt studied are left to fend for themselves. The textual practices of those now working online and on their own are the focus of this study.

### **Findings of the desktop literacy audit**

Our intention has been to lay the groundwork for an understanding of Literacy 4.0. In the Working Paper from which this article is taken, we examine seven typical gig economy platforms and identify the textual cycle of the core gig economy literacy event. We also examine a sample text task in each of three high stakes surveys of competence: Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and NAPLAN.

Our examination at this stage remains largely descriptive, rather than analytical or critical. There is no actual participation as a worker or customer and no engagement with workers or customers. None of the external reviews and debates surrounding the platforms has been included. (These are numerous and extremely mixed, though, it has to be said, mainly negative.) The broader implications of what Zuboff (2015, drawing on Orwell) calls 'Big Other: Surveillance capitalism and the prospects of an information civilization', are also beyond the scope of this paper. Here we are summarising what we have done and found so far, what we still want to know, and what we still need to do to find out about gig literacy as an element of Literacy 4.0.

### **Gig economy platforms**

We conducted a desktop survey of seven collaborative software platforms. They were chosen based on their apparent reading and writing requirements. We examined each platform as a visitor and as an (inactive) Member. The

platforms were Airtasker, Freelancer, CrowdFlower, Local Motors, 99designs, Scripted and SkillShare.

The platforms share a strikingly consistent view of the world and the role of platforms, customers and workers in it. References to the goal of changing the world for the better are almost interchangeable across the platforms. Each seeks to create a community of like-minded souls to help bring about fundamental changes and have fun on the way.

Communication remains key in these workspaces. However, most of that communication, including that which once was done in person in the workplace, is now conducted through written texts mediated by the platforms. The study thus supports Brandt's view that writing is central to the new mass literacy required by the knowledge economy.

However, the gig economy has heightened the precariousness of employment identified by Brandt, and puts the onus on the worker, with support from the platform community, not the employer, who is now, more often than not, out of the picture. Support for writing, if it is to be found, comes from the platform team and the community.

The opportunities on the platforms for mid-career workers in disrupted fields such as manufacturing are limited. There are very few positions in the small, relatively securely employed, central team, and individual workers may not find enough gigs to make a living. The tone and outlook, rather than the processes, of the platforms may also be hard for mid-career workers to engage with. Notwithstanding claims made on the platforms, the chances seem low of participation becoming anything more than what SkillShare calls a 'side hustle'. This impression is supported by debates outside the platforms.

### **Gig economy texts and literacy events**

A literacy event is a recognisable, identifiable, everyday activity in a particular community that involves reading and writing. In the gig economy, carrying out a gig is a literacy event. From the data, we identified three categories of text in a gig event: core, peripheral and product texts.

Core texts are those involved in accessing and using the platform. They are essential to getting a job done. These process-oriented texts form a continual cycle of which posting jobs and bidding for jobs are core. Providing

reviews or updating profiles are optional. Peripheral texts are not central to the work of the platform, but provide information and support for the platform community to carry out their jobs. Product texts are those which are the actual outcome of a job.

Core text types tend to be simple and alphabetic rather than multimodal, but the complexity of product texts varies greatly. In all text categories, language matters. Members comment on it, and in some cases, emphasise their perceived native speaker advantage.

Textual entry to the gig economy is simple. However, thriving rather than simply surviving generally requires a much more complex engagement with texts. Paradoxically, although there is an apparent focus on community, at the heart of the gig literacy event is competition. There is a need for participants to establish status and reputation textually and constantly curate it.

### Preparing for the gig economy

It is certainly true that there is a perception in the public domain that work-related literacy matters more than ever, and that we need to monitor it. There has never been such comprehensive, womb to tomb, literacy assessment as we have today. In recognition of the significance of literacy assessment, three competence assessment surveys, PIAAC, PISA, and NAPLAN, were examined for indications of how well they address the textual demands of these new work platforms. The surveys were examined to see which of their domains, if any, best addressed the gig economy text cycle, either directly or indirectly. The domains chosen were those that involved being online, collaborating, and problem solving in some way.

We found the international competence surveys to be addressing some aspects of gig literacy. The three sample tests and their conceptual domains can be seen to be broadly addressing the textual practices of the gig economy in that they require elements of working online, collaborating and problem solving.

The surveys have three main limitations. The first and perhaps most significant limitation, acknowledged by the surveys themselves, is that they do not actually require participants to write. They work with, but do not create the kinds of alphabetic texts, such as bids and chats, that exemplify the gig economy textual practices. However, their increasingly online character may require the same textual skills that they are yet to formally assess.

Secondly, they focus on information texts rather than collaborative texts such as chats. Thirdly, the tension between collaboration and competition, which lies at the heart of the gig economy, is missing. If tests are to tell us anything useful they need to reflect worker-customer and worker-worker collaboration and competition as well.

### Next steps in the Literacy 4.0 project

Literacy practices are more than texts and literacy events. Literacy practices locate texts and events in a wider, contested social context. Although the Working Paper on which this article is based is entitled Literacy Practices, it really only scratches the surface of the gig economy. Nor does it even begin to address that other key element of Industry 4.0, the smart factory. To understand the literacy practices of Literacy 4.0 we need not only a more thorough analysis of the texts and events involved, but a proper engagement with the people who use them, and the involvement of the policy makers, employers, agencies and educators with responsibility for their work in Industry 4.0.

The Working Paper on which this article and more about the Literacy 4.0 Project can be accessed at: [http://education.unimelb.edu.au/news\\_and\\_activities/projects/workplace-literacy-in-the-fourth-industrial-revolution-the-literacy-4.0-project#work](http://education.unimelb.edu.au/news_and_activities/projects/workplace-literacy-in-the-fourth-industrial-revolution-the-literacy-4.0-project#work). We are hoping to engage with practitioners about all aspects of Literacy 4.0 in the next stage of our study. If you would like to be a part of that conversation, or if you have any questions or comments, please contact Chris Corbel at [corbelc@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:corbelc@unimelb.edu.au).

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# Best practice models of professional development

By Margaret Corrigan



## Introduction

In November 2016, I was awarded an International Specialised Skills Institute (ISSI) fellowship, funded by the Higher Education Skills Group (HESG), to investigate best practice models of Professional Development (PD) for teachers of EAL/Literacy learners. The fellowship enabled me to further explore the Victorian context, but importantly, provided the platform and resources to investigate what is happening in other countries.

After much emailing and skyping of contacts I had made through introductions, as well as cold calling, I travelled to Canada and the USA in March/April 2017 to attend the TESOL 2017 conference in Seattle; visit Bow Valley College in Calgary and meet with practitioners, teacher trainers and Education Department personnel in Minneapolis/St Paul. As well as providing for some wonderful learning experiences, the fellowship has afforded me the opportunity to disseminate my findings and to begin putting into practice some different models of professional development for teachers of EAL/Literacy learners.

## The issues

Over time, I had shared the frustrations of colleagues and others in the sector that there are no clear mandated PD guidelines for the sector, which has resulted in an ad hoc approach. Although teaching disadvantaged Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) adults requires a very skilled approach, there are no particular qualifications required for teaching adult literacy students who have had little, or interrupted schooling. The best postgraduate TESOL qualifications do not fully equip teachers with the skills they need in this area, nor do they adequately address how to teach pronunciation.

The field of language teaching is always changing, so teachers need to regularly update their skills. There are PD opportunities provided by various bodies, but the approach to these is generally uncoordinated and the PD provided tends to be one-off events. Without the provision of opportunities for follow up and reflection, the PD learnings are often not translated into changed classroom practice.

There have been some great projects over the years, but unfortunately, a platform has not been set up to allow for sharing the learnings from these in a systematic way. The result being that there can be an unnecessary reinvention of the proverbial wheel. In addition, the nature of our sector is such that many teachers are engaged on a part-time basis and often teach at multiple sites. This can make it difficult to attend PD and maintain collegiality.

## The approach

At Carringbush Adult Education, it had become apparent to me that we were not getting the best oral communication outcomes for our students, despite the fact that our teachers, who all had postgraduate qualifications, were being very creative and hardworking. Our students were giving us the feedback that what they most wanted to learn was how to speak and to be understood. We surveyed our teachers to measure their levels of skill and confidence in relation to teaching pronunciation and found that they didn't know what pronunciation concepts to teach and how to teach them.

We began a journey of discovery and learning from research, which included a two-week intensive course at Cambridge University on teaching pronunciation, led by Adrian Underhill, a teacher trainer from the UK. Liz Keenan, a teacher/mentor from Carringbush has added to our collective learnings through her 2015 ISSI fellowship, in which she investigated best practice pronunciation teaching strategies.

After consulting with experts in the field, Dr Shem Macdonald from La Trobe University and Dr Beth Zielinski from Macquarie University, we commenced an Action Research project, funded by an ACFE Capacity and Innovation Fund grant (CAIF). Our teachers participated in PD workshops and then assessed their students' intelligibility and developed teaching activities which could be used to assist with their students' particular needs. After some weeks of trialling their activities and

reflecting on them through an online wiki, a bank of trialled activities was created to be used by teachers into the future.

The Carringbush experience led me to the following questions: What alternative approaches to PD for ESL/Literacy teachers exist in other countries? What are the most effective strategies for teaching adult learners with interrupted schooling? How can we improve the coordination of PD at both a state and national level? These formed the basis for my application and success in being awarded an ISSI fellowship.

### **My ISSI fellowship**

The first highlight of my fellowship was attending the TESOL 2017 conference in Seattle, which was a fabulous experience. With over 6000 participants, there was a great variety of learning opportunities in the form of presentations, Special Interest Group panels, extended workshops, 'coffee talks' and poster presentations. The sessions I attended were in three areas: PD strategies, reports on PD research projects and pedagogy approaches to teaching adults with interrupted schooling and to teaching pronunciation and numeracy.

I was most interested in the Special Interest Group panel presentations related to teaching adult learners. These included Connecting Research Practice: Serving Adult Emerging Readers, Adult ESL Teachers to Meet Today's Rigorous Language Demands and Keeping it Real: What Works For Adult Emergent Readers. A practical all-day workshop I attended was Techniques for Teacher Observation, Coaching and Conferencing with Christopher Stillwell from the University of California (Irvine). A key learning from this was the importance of having a meeting prior to an observation session to establish what the teacher is aiming to achieve in the lesson. Then scheduling a follow-up meeting to allow reflection and discussion of goals going forward.

I went on a school visit to Casa Latina, an adult education centre which empowers low-wage Latino immigrants to move from economic insecurity to economic prosperity. Whilst utilising the Popular Model of Education, the participants are actively encouraged to lift their voices to take action around public policy issues that affect them; gain confidence and skills through leadership programs; get employment through the Day Worker Center and committees which support the rights of the worker. The ESL classes are delivered as discrete lessons, so people can



**Margaret at TESOL 2017 conference, Seattle**

participate on the days they do not have work, with all content based on actual workplace issues which have been problematic for students in the past.

Coffee talks are a great way for a small group of around eight people to interact with an expert. I attended coffee talks with Amanda Baker, from the University of Newcastle, on the Haptic approach to teaching pronunciation; Donna Brinton from University of California (LA) on Content Based Instruction and Tom Farrell on Reflective Inquiry as part of PD for teachers. This format allows participants to hear from an expert and to ask questions in a more intimate setting, with afternoon tea provided. It is also an informal opportunity for the expert to hear from participants about what they are doing in their settings.

I then went on to spend two days in Calgary, Alberta at Bow Valley College, where I was made most welcome. Bow Valley College is well-known for the work it does with learners with interrupted schooling and it was great to be able to discuss their approaches to PD for teachers. Through meetings with the director, Diane Hardy, and with several other faculty members and through observations of programs in action, I got a real sense of the wonderful work they do. Their Intercultural Centre, with its different programs, is a great model for encouraging learners and staff to grow together.

The third leg of my trip was to the twin cities in Minnesota, Minneapolis/Saint Paul. There I spent time with Astrid Liden, the Department of Education PD Coordinator, teaching faculty at Hamline University, and key personnel from Adult Teaching Learning Advancement System (ATLAS) and Minnesota Literacy Council. I was fortunate

enough to be able to visit several adult education centres, including Adult Options in Education, Pathways to Hospitality, ELS Language Centre, H'Mong American Partnership and Lyndale Community Education, to observe and discuss approaches to teaching their adult learners.

In addition, I assisted in the delivery of a PD workshop to the teachers in the Metro North region, which was largely designed to assist teachers to further understand the new College and Career Readiness standards currently being implemented across the country. The workshop focused on exploring ways to increase rigour in all teaching, from beginner to higher levels, through providing students with varied opportunities to extend their thinking related to any topic or activity.

### **My learnings**

The overarching theme I observed for effective PD approaches is that they need to be sustained, rather than one-off. They need to be developed with a bottom-up approach, in which teachers are actively involved in their own professional learning, through goal setting, reflective inquiry and engagement with research.

The use of Study Circles has proved to be an effective way for teachers to read relevant articles and to have an opportunity to reflect on these and discuss with colleagues how the research might translate into changed classroom practice. Utilising teacher observations, either by management or peers, and lesson modelling for development were other PD tools observed.

There were many interesting pedagogical approaches used, including the concept of increasing rigour in the classroom. This relates to the fact that students, no matter what their level of English, need to develop the skills and habits of mind required for modern living. Teachers need to use authentic materials and ensure that all activities are designed with an outcome or purpose in mind.

It was evident to me that numeracy should be incorporated into English language teaching, as should pronunciation. A Guided Reading Program was used successfully at Bow Valley College to teach learners about how to read the types of materials which are required for success in further study. The Bow Valley Intercultural Centre encourages learners to take on creative teaching or responsibility roles, such as teaching a group of teachers a skill, or introducing a guest speaker. Content-based instruction in the form of project-based classes is used effectively with youth to encourage

deeper thinking and engagement in topics of real interest to the learners.

### **Models of PD**

The state of Minnesota has a unique model of PD for teachers of Adult Basic Education (ABE), which includes EAL and literacy learners. Within the Department of Education, there is a coordinator of PD in the state who liaises with six organisations who have tendered successfully to deliver the PD over two years. Government priorities and latest research are filtered into all education centres in a systematic way, with the Minnesota ABE PD standards setting out clear guidelines for PD. This includes ensuring multiple evaluation strategies are used, that it enhances practitioners' abilities, that it fosters collaboration at all levels, from local to national, that it includes collection of multiple sources of data and that leadership at local and state levels promote effective PD.

I was fortunate to spend some time with the faculty from ABE Teaching and Learning Advancement System (ATLAS), which is a division of Hamline University, as well as with staff from Minnesota Literacy Council (MLC). ATLAS and MLC are two of the six organisations delivering PD in the state. The model used in Minnesota has resulted in a systematic approach to the delivery and oversight of PD throughout the state and is one from which we can definitely learn from in Victoria.

The other model I have been researching is the British Council English Agenda Continuing Professional Development (CPD) framework, which describes the overall competence and the kinds of professional knowledge, understanding and skills associated with the role of a teacher. It is used to help teachers, and those involved with the professional development of teachers, to develop supportive teacher education. The framework identifies four stages of development that differentiate between levels of understanding, knowledge and skills in relation to each professional practice. Professional learning activities appropriate to the needs of the teachers are then offered. There is an extensive selection of online resources available to teachers and managers, with teachers able to self-select or be directed by their managers where appropriate.

### **Where to from here?**

Being an ISSI fellow has enabled me to try some new approaches to developing the skills of Carringbush teachers

and to share some of my learnings with others in the sector, such as at the VALBEC conference, Learn Local Forums, a Skills First Quality Workshop and follow-up meeting with HESG personnel and key people from the Learn Local and TAFE sectors. My colleague, Liz Keenan and I also had the opportunity to try some PD approaches in July when we volunteered in Cambodia for Teachers Across Borders. We were delighted to present the experience of our journey at Carringbush at the Pronunciation in Second Language Learning and Teaching (PSLLT) conference in Utah in September. The fellowship has opened doors for me and has given me opportunities to connect with practitioners and researchers who I will continue to communicate with and share learnings, both here and internationally.

It is exciting to be part of the discussion of how we can best facilitate the professional development of our teachers, as we know that teacher effectiveness is so important to improving student outcomes. There are many aspects of practices around the world which can inform the approaches we take to professional development of our EAL/Literacy teachers. We are trialling a model of cost effective study circles at Carringbush to promote engagement with research, along with more systematic teacher observations for professional development. Perhaps VALBEC might even consider incorporating 'coffee talk' sessions at their next conference? After all, we do love our coffee in Melbourne!

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# High visibility in the community

By Jillian Ashley

In regional areas across Australia, the challenges of engaging youth at risk are being tackled through a range of programs. A community-based projects model has been successful at Macksville TAFE, giving learners a community focus and employment pathways.



## Background

Macksville is located in the fertile Nambucca Valley on the mid north coast of NSW. Local industry revolves around fishing, oyster and dairy farming. At the 2011 census, Macksville had a population of 2,786. The Dropping off the Edge report (Vinson 2015) portrayed Macksville as a community entrenched in disadvantage with high levels of criminal convictions, domestic violence, disaffected youth, limited qualifications (ESL/no Year 12) and long-term unemployment. Two of the three main towns in the Nambucca valley were listed in the top 24 most disadvantaged areas in NSW.

The Macksville TAFE is a small campus comprised of six classrooms, which have traditionally been used to deliver Adult Education, Business, Information Technology and Aged Care qualifications. There is one head teacher and several teachers who together deliver to a wider community of approximately 19,000 residents. Over the last four years, we have successfully delivered to disengaged students Certificate I and II courses based on community collaborations. This model has increased engagement and retention of disaffected community members and youth. We have connected to our community and we are delivering meaningful training based on community needs.

Many of the disaffected youth, or youth at risk in our community, have come to the campus having left school before completing Year 10. They come to TAFE to get a Certificate II or a Year 10 equivalent to satisfy Department of Education legislative requirements. Many others are also Early School Leavers (ESL) as defined by Centrelink and Jobactive as being aged between 16 and 24 with no HSC. They are required to be engaged in full time training to satisfy their mutual obligation.

Although the required outcome for these ESLs is actually a Certificate III, many have disconnected from school as early as year 7 and consequently do not have the Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) skills to complete training

at this level. What is common to all these students is the fact that they have disengaged from learning due to previous negative experiences. It is essential that their curiosity be invigorated and that they begin to take an active role in their own learning.

## Lessons from Brazil

The Brazilian educator and theorist Paulo Freire's educational theories were developed against a background of oppression and poverty suffered by millions of peasants in Brazil. As Bailey (1997) notes, Freire reported that the usual response to this oppression was acceptancy and despondency. As can be seen in the Dropping off the Edge report (Vinson 2015), some of the young people we aim to engage have experienced failure in the school system, as well as disadvantage and oppression in their community. They have not only disengaged from school, their community and friends, but in extreme circumstances have disengaged from Centrelink due to the reporting and mutual obligations they find difficult to manage. They receive no financial support and struggle to maintain a reasonable standard of living, consequentially falling through the cracks and links to mainstream support. Turning around their despondent and negative beliefs about themselves and their place in the community is a significant aim of our training.

The application of Paulo Freire's methodology is based, from a learner's point of view, around the willingness to dialogue (student/teacher, student/student). Developing an element of openness to what other people have to contribute, and the unexpected realisation that what you know is valuable and appreciated by others who do not have the same experiences or understanding. To engage our cohort, the foundations of negotiation and communication were essential to turn around previous negative learning experiences. It was also necessary to demonstrate the value of their existing capabilities and knowledge, to link them back to community and to value cultural practices to ensure their learning is real and meaningful.

## The process

We trialled many different approaches to engage this cohort including embedding vocational units into Adult Education TAFE courses; delivery of hands-on classes using Adult Education training packages with no vocational base and finally vocational courses delivered on campus with no real workplace environment. We reflected that what was missing was community interaction and projects with real purpose.

The training had to be meaningful in that it was like 'going to work'. The students needed to wear work gear like high visibility shirts and work boots. They wanted to be like any other 'tradies' and to feel like they had accomplished something they could see to make the theory and knowledge meaningful and relevant. To ensure that previous barriers were eliminated or reduced we would provide a specialist LLN teacher to support and advocate for the students.

We started with a group of fifteen 'youth at risk' young males who had full-time training obligations but struggled to engage in a classroom. They also struggled with the LLN requirements of vocational qualifications, lacked confidence and had no transport. Often, they had driving fines and their personal circumstances had previously resulted in irregular attendance and therefore non-completion of courses and loss of their Centrelink payments.

We negotiated with the students around the kinds of training that interested them and had pathways to higher level qualifications or employment. The feedback identified that the students wanted training in more practical knowledge and ideas; where they could learn more about (their) Aboriginal culture; to get a job qualification and a pathway to the Certificate III Construction course. Basically, the students wanted better skills for on the job site and skills and experience to apply for jobs.

Based on this feedback we partnered with the Building faculty at Coffs Harbour TAFE, 50 kilometres away. This faculty would deliver the vocational qualifications under Smart and Skilled funding and we, the Education, Employment and Support (Adult Education) LLN specialist teachers, would deliver the contextualised LLN support in a team teaching model using a variety of funding models including SEE, Smart and Skilled and NSW TAFE Community Service Obligation funding.



Students on the road

## Real workplaces and projects

We formed the Community Construction Crew (CCC) and put it out to the Nambucca Valley community that we had youth wanting to learn skills and gain knowledge experientially on the job and in community, and we needed some community projects. Fortunately, the first contact was made by a local primary school principal who needed some concreting done on their bush tucker track. This project, between supportive and like-minded community organisations gave us the opportunity to take the students to a real workplace where they were valued and respected, well fed and clothed in high visibility shirts just like any tradie in community. After negotiation with the school, community and Jobactives we delivered a Certificate I in Construction to test the waters and see if the students could complete their studies and the job at hand.

The role of the LLN support teacher was to build on the student's strengths and experiences, provide support that was not intrusive and focused on addressing previous barriers to engagement and course completion. This included the inclusion of the '8 ways of Aboriginal learning' in all delivery; transport to and from the training site to home; constant communication regarding absences; advocacy in dealing with Centrelink and Jobactives; access to TAFE counsellors for Work Development Orders (to facilitate the payment of driving fines); support for personal issues and career counselling. The students were treated with respect and it was made obvious by the school that they and their hard work were highly valued.

Feedback from the principal, Gillian Stuart, at the end of the six months of initial training included:



### **Celebrating the Scotts Head Community Group grant**

... Scotts Head Public School has benefited greatly by site improvements developed through our partnership with North Coast TAFE's Macksville campus.

### **Pedagogy underpinning our practice**

In looking at the best practice principles for learning programming from a constructivist viewpoint, (Freire, Hammond et al 1992 and Freebody and Luke 1991), there are many important principles evident. The primary one is the importance of negotiation with the student. Negotiation around learning not only develops a sense of ownership of the learning activities by the student, but the 'getting to know you' nature of the learning may help to reveal student interests and lay down the foundation for future negotiation.

The rationale for negotiating learning can be found in the principle that adults learn most efficiently if learning results from and reflects the needs and interests of their own lives. Learning is more appropriate when it is programmed to reflect real life situations rather than specific subjects. We based our programming on the principle that adult education should respond to the individuality of the students involved in learning and not be based on uniform content and results. Adults live varied lives with different experiences and learn at different rates and in individual ways and as Cook (1982) reflects, 'the learning experiences we provide need to cater for these differences and be as individualised as possible'.

Our learner's past experiences may also hold the key to what barriers may have prevented them from originally learning literacy and numeracy skills, as well as showing where their strengths lie. The process of negotiation in adult education is necessary if we intend to address this need for teachers to get to know individual students, but

it is also relevant in the process of reaching a common purpose and in deciding how this common purpose will be achieved.

One of the most effective roles of negotiation is that of naturally engaging a student's curiosity and trusting the student to take an active role in their own learning. Rather than the 'banking style of teaching' (Freire 1972) where many educators act as a knower or giver of knowledge, the negotiator will attempt to create 'praxis', or the process of reflection and action in dialogue, to help students try to change the reality (Freire 1972) they find themselves in.

Learning is improved when students can share their needs, interests and problems in a group. When negotiating learning each member of the group starts to understand the learning needs of other members. This can enhance group dynamics and create a more equal relationship in learning. Rogers, in Newmann, M. (1995) notes that by using flexibility and following student's interests, it is similar to applying the negotiation principle spontaneously.

One area of great success was the way the students started use the language of the vocational course with increased familiarity. They demonstrated not only knowledge acquisition but also real understanding of processes and principles of the construction industry by confidently 'talking the talk'. This skill transformed our student's confidence.

Working on the job and out in community allowed the students to use the language with support and in a safe environment. Genre based pedagogies make use of this via Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the 'Zone of Proximal Development'. The community workplace allows the use of scaffolding to develop learner's skills. This included both the practical skills of the construction faculty and the technical and informal language used on the job. Scaffolding emphasises the notion that to enable progress or students moving towards their potential, there needs to be input through social interaction and the assistance of more skilled and experienced individuals such as teachers, community volunteers and mentors (Hyland, 2004b).

### **Outcomes**

Of the fifteen students enrolled in this training, nine students continued to be engaged throughout the delivery period of six months and completed their Certificate I Construction. Based on the employability skills and self-confidence they had developed during training,

two participants secured employment with a local small business and the local council. One student articulated to a Certificate III Civil Construction, which he completed with support.

So successful was this model in terms of engagement, retention, course completion, soft skill development and pathways to further higher-level qualifications that these nine students plus an additional cohort of six students then moved into a Certificate II Construction Pathways. This qualification allowed the inclusion of a variety of units, which enabled the delivery to be contextualised to the specific project: the construction of a Yarning Circle using brick-laying, carpentry, concreting and Workplace Health and Safety skills.

In 2015, the Scotts Head Community Group, sponsored a grant to support this great project and the ANZ bank granted another \$10,000. This enabled the participants to have the best materials to complete the building tasks, to develop their construction skills and to make the learning real and valid.

Word spread throughout the community and other community groups nominated their spaces for collaborations. These included two more public schools who also wanted physical spaces to deliver the '8 ways of Aboriginal Learning' including Yarning Circles and Bush Tucker gardens. We now deliver Certificate II Horticulture on a long-term basis in these spaces. The Nambucca Shire council, Lands Council, and Aboriginal Housing also supported the delivery of a Certificate II in Conservation and Land Management in the Bowraville community where it is hoped that we will one day form a work crew to support these organisations and may lead to part-time positions for qualified students.

Delivery of qualifications in community in collaboration with community organisations has extended to Certificate II Horticulture, Certificate II Conservation and Land Management, Certificate II Construction Pathways and Certificate II Construction. In 2017, TVET Pathways to Trades courses were delivered in community based on a real community need to build a shed at the Community Garden. In fact, many other vocational courses are now delivered using a collaborative, project-based model. This includes collaboration with the local Automotive and Engineering cluster, Hospitality with the local RSL clubs and Construction with local businesses and schools.

The outstanding success of this delivery method is evidenced in the increased attendance and participation, development of self-confidence and self-worth as the students can see they are developing skills and knowledge that will lead them on a pathway to employment.

The word has spread amongst the local community with ongoing enquiries from potential students.

## Conclusion

When analysing the success of these programs, the team now recognise the value of programming the learning based on a constructivist methodology. By understanding the rationale that adults learn most efficiently if learning reflects the needs and interests of their lives, we felt more comfortable bringing the community into the learning space. As we recognised that learning is more appropriate when it is programmed to reflect real life situations we felt it was appropriate and relevant to collaborate with external agencies. With time, more agencies, schools and local businesses approached us and were able to provide a wider knowledge base and level of experience to the students in the learning environment.

With a real and meaningful learning space, we could engage the student's curiosity and the students took an active role in their own learning. The community learning space provided the opportunity for students to problem solve and share their knowledge and interests in a safe and respectful group. A revelation to us was the interest the community showed in participating with the students in the learning space. They could see the importance of providing real pathways and outcomes. The community started to share the responsibility of engaging these disaffected youths and to understand the importance of providing them with the employability skills, vocational dialogue and the interest in learning they needed to move on to further training or employment and ultimately, more fulfilling lives.

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# Picking up the conversation

By Tao Bak and Pauline O'Maley

**The educational needs and circumstances of refugee background students is a conversation topic that the literature would indicate waxes and wanes. It is a conversation that is picked up in this article in response to a fear that it is in danger of being subsumed by the 'one-size fits all' approach of the dominant neoliberal discourse that has had such a powerful hold on education in the last few decades.**



While the current discourse, like all dominant discourses, creates the possibility for some conversations, it tends to silence others. This conversation, in the spaces available for it to be held, is also, we believe, one that can tend to be siloed within discrete educational sectors rather than across them. While we come to the conversation from our perspective as academic support specialists within the university sector, we would like to acknowledge the interconnected work of further education, vocational education and higher education. Additionally, we would like to highlight the importance for staff and students alike of the cross-pollination of ideas across these sectors, along with the importance of dialogue in this process. We would also like to celebrate the important work being done in this space by our colleagues in further and vocational education, as we seek to revitalise a conversation that we feel we must not allow to get lost in the din. We understand it is a conversation not without tensions, contradictions and paradoxes, but it is a conversation we feel is important to keep alive.

The discourses within higher, vocational and further education have historically been distinct, but are increasingly converging towards a dominant neoliberal discourse. This latter development has potentially brought into question the premises, or at least implicit terms, on which refugee background students are engaging with the courses they are undertaking. Specifically, refugee background students are increasingly (under threat of) being positioned as less within a framework of collective social support and more explicitly as economic actors within a deregulated educational market place.

This is a change in positioning that extends well beyond the limits of refugee background students per se, but within which they may be among the most vulnerable in terms of potential to be left behind. While there has been some interest in the experience of refugee background

students in higher education recently, particularly as reflected in the *Not Yet There* report (Terry, Naylor, Nguyen & Rizzo, 2016), a focus on the circumstances of refugee background students within vocational education appears to have been somewhat sidelined within VET, coinciding with the imperative of the widespread deregulation of the VET sector over the past decade. Prior to this it attracted some interest, particularly as vocational and further education has long provided the main point of entry (Yak 2017, p.3) into education and skilled labour in Australia.

## Increasing participation and support

In higher education, the number of refugee background students in Australia roughly doubled from 1,687 in 2009 to 3,506 in 2014, and is likely to rise further with Australia's increasing humanitarian intake (Terry et al., 2016). Currently, they represent older students who are more highly represented by males than the average, and perhaps not surprisingly, are less likely to complete their studies (Terry et al., 2016). At the same time, there are more refugee background students in Innovative Research Universities and unaligned universities, such as RMIT and Victoria University (VU), compared to Group of Eight or University Network universities (Terry et al., 2016). The challenge for these institutions is not diminishing as they face potentially disproportionate budget cuts while continuing to carry more than their fair share of the load in terms of social inclusion.

Tertiary education, in its offer of a powerful pathway into Australian society for refugee background students, who are often picking up threads of disrupted education and interrupted lives (Earnest, Joyce, De Mori, & Silvagani, 2014), is highly valued by most refugee background students; and this despite the attendant challenges, including impacts on cultural identity and community identity that are difficult to negotiate. In the midst of this,

academic and literacy support for refugee background students continues to be complex and multifaceted, with the literature calling for a ‘fourth generation’ approach to transition (Penn-Edwards, & Donnison, 2014).

Central to this is the requirement to find ways to meet with the students, and honour and use the understandings they bring with them as a bridge into the academic discourse communities they are entering (Schneider, & Daddow, 2016). The work of vocational and further education in this regard is well known and acknowledged, and the importance of the pathway from vocational and further education into higher education courses of study is also a vital part of the enabling tertiary architecture that practitioners have worked hard to establish and maintain.

As Academic Language and Learning (ALL) specialists in VU’s Academic Support and Development (ASD) team, we are privileged to work with many refugee background students. Our experience of working with refugee background students mirrors the observation in the literature that ‘[d]espite multiple difficulties in commencing and completing tertiary education, the dedication and resilience of these students in education is indisputable’ (Earnest et al. as cited in Terry et al., 2015, p.17). We see this resilience every day as we talk to students who take hours to cross Melbourne, using multiple forms of public transport to come to our university with ‘high hopes’ (Harris, & Marlowe, 2011).

Nevertheless, we acknowledge the difficulty and complexity of the task, both theirs and ours, in terms of the challenges involved in ensuring learning experiences are both positive and fruitful, and that there is institutional sensitivity (Hannah, 1999) as well as effective, systematic support. As Harris and Marlow (2011, p. 192) have pointed out, the tension between meeting diverse student needs and curriculum imperatives continues to be ‘one of the most pressing challenges in contemporary education’.

The students that we see and work with, bring with them their rich and diverse cultural backgrounds and educational experiences. However, and in our view, it is educationally important that we aim to know our students well, and particularly as fully realised individuals rather than as one-dimensional stereotypes. In this endeavour, we see a synergy with the work being done by our colleagues in the vocational education sector. One example of this is Gunn’s (2015) work on tapping into students’ plurilingual capital that she demonstrates can open up our restricted

understandings of students’ literacy repertoires and at the same time foster more generous conceptions of literacy than those narrowly tied to market agendas.

Another area of congruence relates to collaborative work with discipline teachers. Black & Yasukawa (2013) argue for the importance of this, and we have ourselves examined some of the ways these collaborative partnerships can thrive in a VET environment (Bak & O’Maley 2015).

### **A call to action**

While visible successes are rightly valorised, it is more commonly the small victories, characterised by persistence that stand out to us, and by which we feel our own learning and sense of self is enhanced. We see from first-hand experience, and as noted above, the powerful role formal education can play in maintaining and restoring lost trajectories, and for addressing grounded practicalities of new lives. Yet we would like to make space also to acknowledge the role education can play in something as ephemeral, but fundamental, in the maintenance of personal dignity. Easily lost in the push and pull of transforming agenda discourses in higher education however, we are concerned at the extent to which dignity as an end in itself seems an increasingly fragile consideration.

In light of this, it becomes all the more important for educators to be attuned to responding to the needs of refugee background students in our classes. This point of focus is a possible place to energise the conversation. For us, essential tenets for engagement relate to:

- Knowing our students well so we can tap into their funds of knowledge (Comber & Kamler 2004) to bridge to academic discourses.
- Ensuring that course content is culturally inclusive and presents no unintended barriers, so that students can identify the institution as a welcoming space (MacNevin, 2012).
- Conceptualising success as multiple; celebrating the small achievements as well as the larger ones.

To finish where we began, we wish to revitalise a conversation that gets lost in the overarching neoliberal dominating discourses. We are now interested in your thoughts. We affirm Connell’s (2013, p.285) assertion that:

...one of the most important things that intellectual workers concerned with education can now do, is to build alternative spaces – spaces in which critique is

possible, practitioner knowledge can find expression and other trajectories for education are proposed.

We acknowledge it as a conversation with particular tensions and paradoxes; nevertheless, it is a conversation that matters. We thank VALBEC and *Fine Print* for opening up such a space.

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# Practical Matters

## Freedom to write

By Karen Manwaring

**An audience gathered in a South Melbourne community centre to watch a documentary film and hear three spoken word performances. It was the culmination of a Voices of the South Side (VoSS) project where residents of the Port Melbourne and South Melbourne social and public housing communities delved into the history of their homes, streets, suburbs and city.**



For me, as an adult literacy teacher with many years' experience, the idea of using research as well as the family stories of residents to discover more about the history of the local area offered a wonderful opportunity. I relished teaching the writing component of this project. Over the past few years, I have taught introductory writing courses in fiction and creative nonfiction. I was able to use many of the teaching strategies and activities I have found successful to encourage participants to write for this project.

### Getting started

The structure of each class pretty much followed that of my creative writing and creative nonfiction classes:

- Start with ten minutes of 'free writing' and then discuss how this went.
- Talk about any issues or insights that came up with homework over the past week.
- Workshop the writing of those who feel like reading their work aloud.
- Finish with a practical writing exercise that will lead into the homework for the following week.

Free writing is a great way to work with all writing students. Sometimes I think pretty much every student is starting from the same place if they are learning to be more confident with their writing and reading in any genre.

When I introduce students to free writing for the first time, I tell them:

- This piece of writing is for your eyes only. You will never have to read it out or show it to anyone (unless you decide you want to).
- Write without taking your pen off the page and be as untidy as you like.
- Don't worry about spelling, punctuation or finding the correct words.
- Nonsense is perfectly acceptable.
- Just keep writing until I tell you to stop.

Sometimes I will give students a theme word or phrase, but mostly I just get them to start with the phrase 'I want to write about ...' and off they go, writing whatever comes to mind. In the students' feedback at the end of the course, almost everyone mentioned free writing as being really valuable to them. With comments like:

I loved being able to write and be creative, with no pressure.

With free writing you can write almost anything.

I've learned about the pace and flow of writing and that we don't have to be rigid in our approach to expression.

These comments confirmed for me that free writing is the key to each student slipping under the radar of their internal critic.

### Three spoken word performances

As part of the course, we joined a History of St Kilda walking tour with Meyer Edelstein. We all learned so much of the incredible history of St Kilda. Stories and images from that tour and talk made their way into the students' writing.

At the completion of the project, three writing students read their work after the screening of the documentary, *Echoes of the Past: private lives/public housing*.

Helena Wilson was the first to perform on the night. She had chosen to write about the influx of gold prospectors into Melbourne and St Kilda during the gold rush of the 1850's. This part of her piece, 'Time versus Time' evokes the dark underside of the times:

The gold rush is on  
 as the ships keep coming.  
 The fighting is bitter and the streets  
 are bleeding.  
 The nights are long with the sound of women  
 screaming.  
 Typhoid is in the air.  
 The only ones to venture into the tents are the  
 nurses,  
 If they dare.  
 There's hooves clicking and  
 Barrels rolling.  
 The rich are getting richer and the poor are dying.

Next Mary Bourandanis spoke of how the walking tour  
 and the free writing exercises had contributed to her piece.  
 She said:

We had to do one of those writings, where you  
 sit for five minutes and write whatever comes to  
 your mind. We'd just been for a walk with Meyer  
 (Edelstein) through St Kilda and gone through  
 the railway station and talked about the tent city  
 and the people who lived up on Acland Street, the  
 more affluent people, and that sometimes some of  
 the women would come down and volunteer in the  
 tent city.

Mary then read her piece, written from the point of view  
 of a wealthy woman who has volunteered to help out in  
 the tent city. Here is an excerpt:

The wind roared up the hill  
 blowing open the tent flaps  
 Smells horrible! My clothes have been saturated by  
 this stench.  
 It's in my hair. It's on my skin and  
 No amount of scrubbing will get rid of it.  
 I try to sleep but my thoughts race over the images of  
 the poor wretches I had seen  
 Men, women, children  
 and oh the children – they are the ones who are so  
 deeply ingrained into my restless sleep.

Finally, Wendy Butler introduced her reading with a story  
 about a young boy who was rescued from the gutters of  
 St Kilda and taken to live at the Gatwick Hotel, only  
 to leave his 'Gat' friends and family behind and make  
 his fortune in the city. Wendy dedicated her poem to  
 the owner of the Gatwick, and the 'angel' of the story,



**Writers at work**

Vittoria (Vicky) Carbone, who ran the hotel as a boarding  
 house from the 1950s to her death in 1998. In part,  
 it read:

The years fled by on wings  
 Time went so fast  
 The boy in the gutter was  
 A thing from the past.  
 Made it big in the city, riches, fortune and fame  
 Erased the last of the past by changing my name  
 Then one day at my desk in the office I read  
 That Vicki the angel of the Gatwick was dead  
 I leapt from my chair full of grief and remorse  
 For promises broken  
 to the Gat set my course  
 found Fitzroy street covered from one end to the next  
 with mourners who'd come to see Vicki to rest  
 and each of them had their own story to tell  
 of how the Angel of the Gatwick  
 had reclaimed them from hell  
 and as they extolled her  
 I heard myself ask  
 How such a great spirit  
 Could be contained  
 In such a small cask

### **Wrapping it up**

For the documentary film part of the project, Rachel  
 Edward from Port Melbourne Neighbourhood Centre  
 filmed the students as they conducted interviews with people  
 who grew up in and around public housing in the Port Philip  
 area. The edited interviews formed the documentary *Echoes  
 of the Past: private lives/public housing*.

The overall co-ordination, teaching and support of the  
 students in this project were in the capable hands of Robyn

Szechtman and Deb McIntosh. I've learned so much from these two wonderful educators and look forward to continuing to work with the students and local residents.

This project was supported by the Local History Grants Programs from the Victorian State Government and the City of Port Phillip Art and Heritage services, which provided the group with a research workshop, an historical talk and access to the Emerald Hill Library and Heritage Centre. Voices of the South Side (VoSS) is a partnership between project leaders Port Melbourne Neighbourhood Centre and partners Inner South Community Health, Port

Phillip Community Group and Southport Community Housing. VoSS is a two-year, federally funded project that aims to reduce the marginalisation of social and public housing communities in Port Melbourne and South Melbourne through community arts and community development.

**Karen Manwaring is an adult literacy and learning skills teacher. Karen will be returning to St Kilda to work with public and social housing residents of the City of Port Phillip and together they will be working on poetry writing skills.**

## Online resources for tutors and teachers

*By Sarah Deasey*

**The need for a 'one stop' platform for teachers and tutors to access a range of good quality resources was the driver for this project.**

The *Resource Hub* is a website housing a collection of online training and teaching materials which can be used with adult literacy and English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners. The site is primarily designed for volunteer adult literacy tutors, but most of the content is also useful for classroom teachers.

The *Resource Hub* was developed in 2015 through a Victorian Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE) Capacity and Innovation Fund (CAIF) grant. We were lucky at Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre (CNLC) to have Robin Kenrick as the project worker. Robin applied her extensive experience teaching and managing adult literacy and EAL programs to the project.

The CAIF grant enabled us to do several things: fund the website; develop some case studies and lesson plans, provide key tips for adult literacy teaching and most importantly, spend time searching for and selecting a range of good quality online resources. There are many teaching and learning resources online but no guarantees of quality.



### Selecting resources

We used the following criteria to guide teachers and ourselves in the assessment of resources:

- Skill Level: Does this resource meet the skill level, needs and interests of our learners?
- Culture: Is the resource culturally appropriate?
- Pictures: Are there clear pictures to support the text and intention of the resource?
- Easy and Clear: Is the resource text uncluttered and easy to read?
- Website Navigation: Is it easy to navigate and move around the resource website?
- Links: Are there few external links?

We used similar criteria for apps and other learning tools:

- Can the app do something we can't do if we don't use it?
- Does it have content relevant to adults?
- Does it facilitate literacy development and give the adult learner independence?
- Is it easy to use?
- Is it multi-purpose?
- Does it have a text to speech function?
- Is it compatible with a range of devices?
- Does it have photos?

## Resource Hub structure

The *Resource Hub* is easy to navigate and is organised across a number of sections:

### Getting Started

This section provides introductory information about teaching adults and some broad tips for selecting learning online resources and apps. Special mention must be made of the resource *Literacy Face to Face* (2006) by Pamela Osmond, funded as an ANTA Adult Literacy National Project. It is an in-depth document, available online for volunteer tutor training and a key reference for tutors when they commence working with their students. It is in ten sections, covering the theory and practice of adult learning, reading writing and spelling, using a framework of different learner profiles and the teaching and learning appropriate for each. *Literacy Face to Face* is in the Getting Started page with links to each separate section. This model of learner profiles also helped us to organise the *Resource Hub* framework.

### Case studies and lesson plans

These are set out for three learner profiles: Beginner, Intermediate, and EAL Literacy. Each lesson plan covers reading, writing and spelling and other items relevant to the learner at that level, for example handwriting for the beginner learner, study skills for the intermediate learner, and grammar for the EAL literacy learner.

### Additional resources

Links to a broad range of resources that suit the learner profiles and more specialised areas such as Digital Literacy, Numeracy, Study Skills, News and Current Affairs and Numeracy are provided. These links are to sites developed by a range of organisations all over the world: the UK, Ireland, Canada, the USA, New Zealand, and Australia. Here is a selection of some of the sites and the skill areas covered:

### Reading

In the Beginner Learner profile section there is a link to the Adult Basic Education Minnesota website with graded reading materials for adult learners, with text and audio. There are over 100 stories, which relate to everyday topics with titles such as A Stolen Wallet; Finding a Job; Good Nutrition. In the EAL learner section there is a link to the printable, graded, Bow Valley Canada College ESL Literacy Readers, which have audio, and colour pictures. In both cases, these reading materials are culturally

specific to the US and Canada but there are enough titles with universal application.

### Writing and spelling

Links to the BBC Skills wise, with sections on spelling, reading and writing. There is the Western Australian Read Write Now website for tutor training and reading resources, and the NALA National Literacy Agency Ireland Tutors Corner with links to practical activities including wordlists and worksheets.

### EAL

Links to sites crafted by individuals such as English with Jennifer and Cielito's ESL literacy website. There is the award-winning Moreland Council's CALD COM Storyboards about community issues such as health and safety, citizenship, and sustainability. The Australian Smith Family Home Tutor Lesson plans and worksheets are also featured in this section.

### IT resources and apps

Basic IT skills is a fundamental part of literacy and there are links to a number of useful sites. Digital learn.org is published by the Public Library Association of USA, and provides a comprehensive series of videos and worksheets to introduce the basics of digital learning to students. The AMES resource, Digital Literacy for Mobile phones is included, plus In Pictures a site which uses screenshots to guide learners.

### Other online resources

Ultimately, we want our students to confidently access mainstream learning materials and websites. The *Resource Hub* references many mainstream online materials that can be used with adult learners, for example typing programs, the Victorian Road Rules test, YouTube, The Better Health Channel, Ted Talks, Consumer Affairs Victoria and The New York Times in Plain English, and the ASIC MoneySmart website. The *Resource Hub* is a living site with changing and updated links. Contact Sarah at CNLC if you have any suggestions for other great online resources to be added.

Access the *Resource Hub* at <http://www.cnlchub.org.au>

**Sarah Deasey is the Further Education coordinator at CNLC. She oversees the coordination, recruitment and training for the one to one volunteertutor program.**



# Open Forum

## Volunteer tutoring in ACE

By Linno Rhodes

**In the early 70's, the advent of the adult literacy movement was shaped by the involvement of volunteers, and in many ways, volunteers helped determine the ways adult literacy was delivered. With subsequent changes in policy and program funding, the role of the volunteer tutor has evolved, as have different models for supporting learners in community organisations.**



Volunteer tutors currently work in various ways across the ACE sector: as classroom support; one-to-one tutors in the learning centre or in the learner's home; and through other related organisations such as libraries. I have had experience working with ACE providers that use volunteers in different capacities. The three program models I have experience with are:

- A volunteer literacy tutor program where tutors are trained and work one-to-one with a learner.
- A 'volunteering in the community for one day a year' model using tutors who have no training but are fulfilling the community service requirements of their employment.
- Classroom support provided by volunteers, many of whom are ex-teachers, who may have had additional training.

In the first model, tutors undergo a six-week training program of about three hours face to face training per week. They are then matched to work with literacy students on site. I coordinated a program for a few years and enjoyed working with the volunteer tutors who were mostly retired professionals, sometimes with a teaching background. The tutor training covered: understanding adult learning principles, literacy theories and current best practice as well as some basic teaching strategies.

Patience, flexibility and empathy are key factors for a successful learning partnership. Adult literacy learners can often be juggling many other issues. They may not turn up at the regular meeting time, without any notice, thereby leaving the tutor wondering what has happened. This can be stressful, but ultimately part of the profile for learners seeking one-to-one tutoring assistance.

The profile of volunteers has changed over time with more university students volunteering and some people volunteering to address their Centrelink requirements. These volunteers were not always suitable and sometimes left within a couple of months, thus leaving the student and the centre without a tutor. The pairing part of this model is critical and a mismatch can easily compromise the progress of the learner. Gender, culture and personality were all taken into consideration. The tutor and learner meet at the learning centre, usually for an hour per week, often outside of business hours.

The second model, is the 'one day a year' volunteer, and to be frank I'm not a fan. Hard on the teachers, often confusing for the students and bewildering for the volunteer. In fact, I don't know why it is used at all. Part of corporate culture it seems, the motivation and actual implementation do not gel with the learner needs nor the community setting.

The last model uses experienced tutors in the classroom for learning support. Again, many of these volunteers are retired teachers and their teaching skills are invaluable. There can however, be problems from time to time. Sometimes teachers and tutors clash, or tutors try to take over the lesson, or argue with the teacher over minor things like a grammar point. It can take some managing and the coordinator may need to step in to mediate. The last thing teachers need are tutors who also need their attention, or who have not quite let go of their professional identity. Even though these are real issues and considerations, the positive aspects of the in-class tutor program far outweigh the negative. A dedicated and generous team of volunteers, who are valued for the experience and strengths they bring can be a real benefit to a literacy program.

## Reflections

Kay has been a volunteer in the classroom at Olympic Adult Education (OAE). She offers some of her observations and tips:

Volunteering in a numeracy class for adults makes you realise that what you had learnt and the method of learning has often changed, so there are times you may need to relearn your method of working when assisting the class in solving problems. Of course, if you are younger than me, that may not be an issue.

More importantly than the above will be the need to build rapport with the students. Step back, see what they know and can do, observe how they like to work (which will probably be very individual) and be guided by the teacher. You will need a sense of humour, lots of patience and the ability to fit in with both students and the teacher. Without those attributes your time won't be as productive and supportive as it could be.

I have been lucky enough to have worked with basically the same group of students for a couple of years, although in saying that, there are some that stay, some that leave and some that return. As I have a teaching background from many years ago, and have updated my qualifications, I occasionally teach the class if the need arises. Some maths background is handy to have but depending on the level of the class, sometimes it's more about life experiences and finding a way to relate a maths problem to their lives as you do to your own.

You can't escape numbers, they are literally around you every moment of every day. From time to money, from distance to temperature, from preparing meals and shopping, to working out the number of tiles you need to cover a floor. Give the students the confidence they need in handling all of the above problems in a way they understand, and enjoy the time you spend in the classroom with them.

## Final thoughts

I was a one-to-one tutor with a man who lived in a rooming house. He wanted to get his life back together so he could have access to his kids. We met in a library which, at first was completely alien to him, but he was soon borrowing DVDs. We worked together on true crime stories, as that was his interest. He made some gains, although it was slow and he often forgot what we covered the previous session, easily done with meetings a week or two apart. After about



**Classroom volunteer with students**

six months, he drifted off, as many literacy learners do for one reason or another.

It is well documented that adult literacy learners often have a raft of issues that are barriers to their learning and that need to be addressed. It is important to remember that we need to address the needs of the whole person, whether in a one-to-one tutor program or in a classroom. It is critical to the success of the tutor-learner relationship that the focus is on literacy skills and at the same time finding the opportunity to build the social capital of the learner. Access to support and resources is also important and there are some great materials available such as, *Building Strength with Numbers*, *Literacy Face to Face*, *Linc Tasmania* and *The Resource Hub*.

Adult literacy volunteer tutor programs are a critical part of the ACE sector and they continue to enrich the learning experiences of individuals, both for the tutor and the learner. The key to success is running a thorough and rigorous training program to ensure that volunteer tutors have the confidence to support adult learners, either in the classroom or one-to-one and that funding support is available for this training and program coordination.

**Linno Rhodes works at Olympic Adult Education. She is VALBEC co-president, a member of the Fine Print editorial committee and the Reading and Writing Hotline advisory committee. She is a recipient of a 2017 International Specialised Skills Institute (ISSI) fellowship supported by the Victorian Department of Education and Training (Higher Education Skills Group).**

## Read Write Now celebrates a milestone

By Anna Cranney

**Read Write Now (RWN) has been a quiet achiever in the provision of voluntary literacy support in Western Australia (WA). In 2017, it celebrated the work of thousands of volunteer literacy tutors.**

In its 40<sup>th</sup> year, Read Write Now can lay claim to supporting around 40,000 adults with their literacy skills. The WA State Government funds and supports the program through the Department of Training and Workforce Development. In any one week in WA, up to 500 volunteer literacy tutors right across the state meet with their learners. The organisation has seen over 6000 tutors trained and go on to provide literacy support for learners across the state.

In Broome, adult learners in a rehabilitation centre have weekly sessions with three volunteer tutors. RWN has responded to the WA mining boom by providing support for the needs of workers in remote areas. Fly in fly out (FIFO) workers at sites across WA can utilise Skype to work on their literacy skills with RWN tutors.

Over 2000 kilometres away in Katanning, local residents learn English as an additional language and participate in lessons to develop their skills in between shifts at work. There are approximately 5000 people living in rural Katanning, and remarkably, 52 cultural groups are represented in that population. RWN also offers new arrivals vital support and connects them to a support network in the small community.

The diverse needs of learners are catered for by recruiting tutors with diverse backgrounds, work experience



**Broome beach classroom**



and across all age groups. Around 20% of volunteers have a teaching background and others come from all walks of life. Over half of the volunteers are still in the workforce. All tutors are committed to training and ongoing PD in literacy approaches and strategies to then use in sessions with their students. One of the key features of the program is the one-to-one tutoring which allows tutors to craft lessons to the diverse learning styles and interests of their students.

Over four decades of providing literacy support, RWN has witnessed many changes. Technology is one of the most exciting changes in recent years. This is both in terms of the increasing digital literacy needs of the learners, but also in technology's ability to reach learners and tutors in regional and remote areas of the state.

Over RWN's years of operation and experience, many of the same barriers to learning continue to feature in the learners' lives, such as the sense of shame that surrounds poor literacy, social issues and mental health issues. Marcia Barclay, the Read Write Now Program Manager, has observed that learners most often come to the service when they have reached crisis point. It may take a long time to build up the courage to seek help. One recent example is a man who said that he had the phone number of RWN for two years before finally contacting them for help.

For many learners who pass through the doors of Read Write Now, once the bond with a tutor is established it can be their first experience of a supportive learning environment. This, along with the dedication of staff and volunteers, is a major factor in the program's ongoing success.

**Anna Cranney currently works in adult learning and development in Western Australia and Timor-Leste.**

## ACAL conference report

*By Rhonda Pelletier*

A conference is such a fine thing. Where else can you meet old friends and acquaintances, talk the same language with everyone who perfectly understands what it means to be a literacy and/or numeracy teacher? Added to which is the stimulation of hearing interesting and challenging ideas to refresh your focus and tease you to try something new.

The 2017 Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL) conference, 'Traders, Neighbours and Intruders: Points of Contact' was a perfect format for all of that. Held at the Darwin Convention Centre, the two-day conference followed a pre-conference forum on indigenous learning and preceded a half-day forum on research into language, literacy and numeracy. It was a big task for the Darwin ACAL executive and membership but it was beautifully carried out.

### Personal insights

An early highlight for me was the Arch Nelson address by Heather D'Antoine from the Menzies School of Health Research in Darwin. Her personal story of her childhood, education and career was engaging and illustrated the vital importance of family in a person's development of LLN skills. The abiding message I gained from her talk was that the parents' determination and focus on their children getting a good education has a lasting impact on future generations in the family. Heather's story also underscores the deleterious effect of taking children from their families. Heather noted that her family did not suffer that horror. So, you think what might have been if others had not experienced it. It was a very grounding talk and prepared conference participants for the highly engaging, practical and challenging program over the next two days.

As was fitting for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ACAL (hard to imagine, isn't it?), Pam Osmond provided a flying review of the years 1977 to 2017, with an illuminating timeline to accompany her talk. The timeline was set up in the foyer to represent funding and policy changes over the decades. People could post their experiences onto it and these will be collated and made available on the ACAL website in due course.

The ACAL story starts with something some might find a bit surprising – forty years ago literacy was an issue still waiting to be discovered. Socially and politically it was the right time for literacy. The issues had to come

to the surface and it was time to recognise the needs of those who had not received adequate, or had interrupted, education. With the publication of the Kangan report (1974), the adult literacy scene began to form. There have been challenges and hiccups for the sector and profession as a whole, as Pam's talk and the timeline so thoroughly explored. Knowing where the sector has come from is so important in understanding where we stand today.

### Key presentations

Cheryl Wiltshire provided an overview of the dual enrolment vocational support courses in Western Australia: CAVSS and the Underpinning Skills for Industry Qualifications (USIQ). These are programs that some other states used until funding rules made it impossible. They still flourish in their state of origin and provide support for two distinct cohorts: CAVSS is for those needing a skills boost and USIQ, a program with more hours, provides support for students with a multitude of needs, including overcoming an underprivileged background. For more information about these two programs: <http://bit.ly/2ivPrkm>.

Louise Wignall gave a summary of the Foundation Skills Professional Standards framework. A detailed description of it here would take too long but you can refer to Fine Print, 40 (2). Louise made a few important points for people to note: the use of the tool is not prescribed; the capability profile generator has been quite popular with users and everyone should feel free to experiment with it.

The first day's final session was an interactive discussion, 'Re-imagining Workplace English Language and Literacy for work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century'. Jenny Macaffer and Ros



**Christine Tully and Rhonda Pelletier**



**Cheryl Bartolo, Louise Wignall and Julianne Krusche**

Bauer from Adult Learning Australia (ALA) are in the early stages of a project to survey the profession and set up a reference group to establish the best way to address Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) needs in the workplace. With 2018 being the National Year of Lifelong Learning, ALA hope to release a report on this project in 2018.

A feature of this conference was a new session type, Practice Tasters. Kerrie Tomkins from the Leopold Community House provided a 25-minute exploration of her work with mature age learners who need help with digital skills. The learners, mostly over 70 years of age, needed a program that addressed their needs, rather than a scaffolded program that started at the beginning and went to the end of a generic skill set. Kerrie used the time well providing the participants with some technical challenges that might have left them in awe of the seniors back in Leopold. Certainly, the session ended with plenty of people sharing their new skills and chasing up questions with Kerrie.

### **Shifting our thinking**

An important aspect of any conference is the way in which speakers challenge our assumptions or the way we tend to 'fall asleep' in the status quo. It is so easy, with the distractions of a hectic work schedule and the rest of life, to not stop and ask questions such as: why am I doing this? or what's my thinking behind that decision? Three keynote speakers on the second day challenged me to think in different ways.

Dr John Guenther, with his 'Applying *Red Dirt Thinking* to adult learning in the Northern Territory', was an eye-opener for me, a southerner with little knowledge of the educational environment in the Northern Territory. I hope to have expressed the impact of this talk and

show why I will be spending some time reading John Guenther's work in these brief notes (with italics to show my thinking process):

Red Dirt Thinking – to think from remote spaces, challenge hegemonic thinking, schema...*google the journal papers from 2012.*

Rethink the idea of remoteness – who is remote, from what? look at philosophy of the project, axiology, epistemology, cosmologies...*look these up.*

Language – embedded attitudes within their meaning, 'Closing the Gap' – 'disadvantaged learners' – from whose perspective? And who is to 'blame' for that gaps, disadvantage?

*John seems to be saying* – do it yourself – reframe how educators think about funding – not only Government but philanthropic.

Create your own theory: don't just accept adult learning theory as is.

John Guenther is a thinker and writer who I will continue to follow with interest. He referred to two sites: *Academia* and *Researchgate*. These are academic network sites that require signing up to an account, but may well be worth the effort.

The title of John Garrick's talk says a lot about the information he provided: 'Tacit Knowledge, Performativity and Professionals as 'Number Crunchers' of the Digital Age: Implications for Adult Education'. I strongly encourage you to follow up on the ACAL website, however these are some of my notes:

Neo-liberal thinking that has narrowed and fragmented activity – education, business – destroys the social capital of teaching people to think of themselves as productive in a community – think as a necessary positive outcome – result is a community that can no longer talk to itself to develop itself and protect itself from a stronger community's critique of it and so falls to a more powerful community – loses its history, philosophy and creed.

Melissa Steyn's keynote on the final afternoon, 'Literacy in the Time of Decoloniality: New Critical Capacities', also shifted my thinking to consider who decides what

is knowledge and how it is gained. 'The victors write the history', is a saying I have heard many times but until Melissa's presentation, one I had not really considered in depth. Again, my hasty notes to help remind me of the import of what I had heard:

...be personally literate ... be mindful of the webs of significations we are caught up in.

As is the case at many conferences, sitting at the table with people from all over Australia, many ideas were generated. Mixed among the conversations were many 'what ifs', 'I'm going to do...when I get back' and 'yes, that's exactly what I think/do/have seen'. These kinds of conversations are a sign of a good conference, in my book. I ended the conference thoroughly stirred up and ready to pursue the references and titles given by the speakers.

A colleague once told me to be careful of conference overload – that you can go to too many, too often and never follow through with ideas and hints given to you by the presenters. It is a fair enough piece of advice; however, it is not one that applies in this case. This was the type of conference program that I adore. Loaded with good practical ideas for working with students supported by sessions that made me question myself and want to shake out the dusty shelves of my thinking. Congratulations to the team and we look forward to providing an equally exciting program in Melbourne next year.

**Rhonda Pelletier is an English and EAL teacher who has taught in a range of contexts: overseas, secondary, TAFE and the workplace. Her various roles have included course design, facilitation, coordination and management. She is a member of the VALBEC committee and convenor of the 2018 ACAL conference.**

# Foreign Correspondence

## Fostering natural communication

By Annie Macdonald and Elizabeth Gunn

### Background

Hands Across the Water (HATW) is an Australian charity that has been supporting children living in homes in Thailand since the tsunami left many Thai children orphaned in 2004. The charity's incredible fundraising efforts provide for many of the children's basic needs. More recently, HATW's focus has shifted to education to ensure that the children become adults who can sustain themselves with meaningful careers, thus breaking the poverty cycle that so often accompanies loss of parents and family. Learning English is an important element of HATW's educational program.

English has been a dominant foreign language for the Thai elite since the early 1800s. Missionaries introduced English to the Thai court, and in the mid-1800s, King Rama IV, a fluent English-speaker, hired governess Anna Leonowens (remember *The King and I*) to teach English to his family. The trend to learn English was gradually extended to the wider community. From the late 1980s, education reforms and compulsory English learning in schools mirrored Thailand's increasing integration into the global economy.

However, implementation of communicative methods in English language teaching has been slow. Despite huge efforts to improve students' English skills since the late 1990s, Thailand's rankings on global English proficiency score tables have been amongst the lowest (Kaur et al, 2016). Many Thai children report that they regard English as a 'fearsome subject' (Kaewmala, 2012). This suggests that there are opportunities for improving English-learning practices in Thailand.

English language skills are critical in Thailand. English proficiency is a marker of modernity and educational achievement. Proficiency in English opens social and economic pathways that would otherwise be closed, particularly to disadvantaged children, such as orphans who usually lack the all-important family connections to the Thai job market. Learning English provides the children of HATW with options for their future as well as



the added cognitive benefits and enjoyment of acquiring a second language.

The HATW English program incorporates western communicative teaching methodologies and the children in the homes are responding well to this different style of language teaching. One key feature of the program is the tailoring of materials and resources to align with local customs, cultural patterns and social situations. For instance, the adult care-givers in the HATW homes are regarded as integral to the success of the English program.

In 2015, HATW commissioned Annie Macdonald and English language expert, Lee Nicholls, to develop an English curriculum tailored to the needs of the children. The idea of tailoring a curriculum to such a specific group seemed an exciting and luxurious proposition. Imagine working with a curriculum that contextualises the particular social and emotional needs of learners alongside its language-learning aims. Here, Annie Macdonald details the journey she and her colleague embarked on to create this curriculum for HATW.

### Research phase

The first stage of the project was to research; live in the children's homes; assess the children's English language ability and observe how the homes operate and how the children and staff communicate in general, in order to be able to contextualise the learning. The children all attend regular government schools during the day where they learn English for approximately two hours per week. The English program would be taught as an after-school and weekend program which meant it had to be engaging and

stimulating so the children could participate after a full week of schooling.

Colourful text books were selected and lesson plans adapted to simulate the life and experiences of the children as much as possible. For example, flashcards were made of local Thai foods, famous Thai people and local places the children had visited. The children do not go to the movies or watch TV at night so many of the leisure time activities in the standard ESL text books were irrelevant to many of the children. Incorporating photos of the children and staff working in the vegetable gardens or doing jobs around the home contextualised the learning for them and aroused their interest. We were able to source a series of children's picture story books set in Thailand, depicting Thai life but written in English.

### Putting the curriculum into practice

Once part of the curriculum was written, it was then trialled over a couple of months at one of the homes to iron out any issues and learn how the children would respond to a Western-style teaching methodology, very different from the English teaching they receive in their own schools. The hundreds of action songs and YouTube clips and inclusion of arts and role-plays are very unusual and exciting for students both young and old.

During 2016 and 2017, more than eight teachers taught the curriculum at four of the homes and their insights and feedback have also been incorporated not only into the curriculum but also into the induction of future teachers.

I've noticed that the children are interacting with visitors more, understanding what is being said.  
(Jeng, 2017)

Experiences of teachers living in the homes have shaped the whole program. For instance, it quickly became apparent that the local Thai staff were key to motivating and maintaining the use of English around the home, outside the classroom. If they knew the songs the kids were learning and were enthusiastic about learning English, they too could practise with the children. 'Staff English' and 'Visitor English' are now included as part of the program. Students are encouraged to give a tour of their home to any English-speaking visitors; this provides a real-life opportunity for the students to use their language and gain confidence. Home events such



as English-speaking dinners or concerts in English also support the program and students' language acquisition.

Having English speakers living at the home, sharing meals together and participating in the children's daily life, fosters natural communication in English. The children are unsurprisingly curious and enjoy playing with and learning about the teacher's family and life back in Australia.

### Future plans

This collaborative curriculum-writing process, of observing and writing, trialling and ironing out, responding to the students' activities within their social milieu,



suggests that the HATW curriculum is a document that foregrounds care and support for learners. Perhaps these characteristics become lost when curricula are designed for learners on a mass scale. No doubt the process of refining the HATW curriculum will continue with community and teacher input playing a major role. It is an interesting approach to education and curriculum design. It leverages the communality of orphanages and creates synergies between care-givers, children, foreign volunteers, and fund-raisers.

For 2018, teachers are being recruited for the whole year to provide more consistency for the children and longer access to English language. This is an exciting phase to be part of, as this length of teaching time will really provide insight into how the children's English language progresses. To volunteer to live and teach in this program, readers can apply or contact Hands English through the organisation's website:

<https://handsacrosstthewater.org.au/get-involved/hands-english-program/>

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**Annie Macdonald has worked, taught, trained staff and written curriculum and teaching materials in China, Thailand, Oman, Taiwan, Vietnam and India. She brings expertise in anthropology, EAL, community development and music to her work.**

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# Beside the Whiteboard

## Equal partners in learning

*An interview with Laura Chapman by Lynne Matheson*

Vitality and passion are two qualities that Laura brings to her work as Volunteer Program Manager and Coordinator of the Adult Literacy Program at Carringbush Adult Education. The old adage of 'ask a busy person to get things done' certainly applies in Laura's case.

Carringbush Adult Education is a welcoming warren of below street level offices and classrooms. The walls are adorned with photos of students from the diverse Carringbush community, as well as black and white images of Richmond's past, displayed by the historical society that shares the space. On a busy Monday morning, Laura showed me around. Then, over coffee, across busy Church Street, we talked about some of the successes and challenges of working with volunteers at Carringbush.

In her part-time role, she juggles calls from volunteers and students, works on professional development projects with teachers, delivers Learn Local adult and family literacy programs, and seeks out learning resources and support services for a diverse mix of students. She never loses sight of the ultimate rewards of seeing progress with each individual learner and the volunteer tutor working as equal partners in learning.

### **Can you tell us about your background and how you came to your role at Carringbush Adult Education?**

I started teaching English as an Additional Language (EAL) in the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) at TAFE Tasmania in 2001, after returning from teaching in Vietnam. In the early 2000s, Hobart had a very high proportion of humanitarian clients with backgrounds of low literacy or minimal prior formal education. In working with these clients, I developed a strong interest in the intersection of language and literacy, which continued when I became coordinator of the Home Tutor Program and Home Tutor Scheme Enhancement Program (HTSEP) for TAFE Tasmania.

Making the move to Victoria in 2012, I worked as an EAL Teacher and AMEP Program Coordinator for Fitzroy Learning Network (FLN). Across the community



sector, providers were grappling with how to deliver EAL programs to people seeking asylum who were not eligible for government funding. I ran a small program for asylum seekers with dedicated volunteers at FLN. In 2014, I took up a role at Carringbush Adult Education to run a similar project. The Carringbush team had the vision to expand their volunteer program to reach disengaged adults with low levels of literacy and so, step by step the program has grown.

### **Can you describe the approaches you have taken to the successful training and coordination of volunteers and changes you have seen over time?**

I believe that thorough recruitment is the key to establishing a good volunteer team. Over the years, my processes have become more comprehensive. At Carringbush, we advertise with full position descriptions and screen applicants over the phone. Shortlisted applicants are interviewed by a panel of two staff and we run referee and police checks for successful applicants. Some organisations are surprised to hear that we only accept about a third of applicants. However, we work with vulnerable clients and require a specific set of skills and personal attributes in our volunteers.

Our goal is to set up volunteers for success and satisfaction right from the word go. I have found that it is crucial to truly listen to volunteers, provide multiple avenues for feedback and involve volunteers in decision making and program development. When we do these things, we learn from volunteers and the relationship is truly a collaborative one.

It has always been a challenge to fit enough content into our volunteer training course – how do you learn to teach literacy in a few weeks? We all acknowledge that teaching language and literacy is complex. We utilise learner stories



**Ken with his tutor, Michael**

as it is vital to look at the many factors that influence language and literacy learning, and how those may play out in an individual learner's life. We focus on how the learner's life factors may determine their learning needs. We explore a range of teaching strategies and resources in the training course, but emphasise the need for a balance between systematic literacy skills development and meeting a learner's incidental daily needs.

As a manager, I have gained immense support from being active in the volunteer sector and learning from others – we can't do it all on our own. I have benefitted greatly from Volunteer Management Networks and professional development from organisations with experts in the field, such as Justice Connect and our peak body, Volunteering Victoria. The 2017 Volunteering Victoria State Conference I attended was invigorating, informative and invaluable in terms of networking and strategic thinking about future directions for our programs and the sector.

The big changes I have seen over the last ten years are more proactive, systematic ways to recruit volunteers; more emphasis on systems and compliance; the massive advances in digital technology that change the ways we engage with volunteers; the rise of corporate volunteering; the increase in 'short term' volunteers; greater networking of volunteer program managers; and some improvements in much needed resourcing for the volunteering sector, which we can never take for granted.

#### **What is distinctive about the Carringbush adult literacy program?**

All our one-to-one tutoring is run onsite at one of our outreach community venues or in a library, so there are

always staff present for assistance. That's one of the huge benefits of having a smaller program. I have witnessed other programs where volunteers are matched with students, but then do not get support or supervision for months. This can put a lot of pressure on volunteers and leave managers wondering about the quality and efficacy of the tutoring. When we place volunteer tutors with clients who have complex needs, we ask a great deal of them and so we need to support the learning partnership as much as possible. We see amazing progress in some of our learners, which reinforces that when a tutoring relationship really works it can achieve more for the individual than a general class.

Our volunteers work in classrooms to both support learners with class activities and run 'pull out' tutoring for individual literacy skills development. We also integrate adult literacy and family literacy activities so parents and children learn concurrently with separate programs tailored to individuals. Carringbush has a broad catchment with outreach education programs run across nine different venues in and around the housing estates and libraries of Richmond and Collingwood.

#### **What do you see as the most important qualities in an adult literacy volunteer tutor and how do you develop these?**

The ability to form and build trusting relationships is crucial to a successful one-to-one tutoring arrangement, so we look for volunteers who are non-judgemental, open minded and come from a place of mutual respect. We look for compassion, and can build this through telling learner stories and exploring our own learning experiences. However, 'being nice' is not enough in itself; volunteers need to work with learners strategically to help them achieve their goals.

We are very lucky to have retired teachers and postgraduate TESOL students apply to volunteer with us, but from the highly experienced to those who have never taught before, we look for people who are open to learning new strategies. For example, we need volunteers who are willing to take on board explicit pronunciation and phonics techniques with a 'sounds to spelling' approach. We run rigorous professional development for our teaching staff, who mentor and supervise the volunteers.

I promote a strengths-based approach to empower learners to recognise and develop their skills and to take

charge of their learning. This is embedded in community development and social justice approaches, particularly the 'right to learn'. It is important that volunteers don't ever see themselves as charitable saviours, but equal partners with students in an adult learning arrangement. We emphasise guided individual learning and assist learners to develop learning strategies and critical literacy skills.

Outreach education in venues around the social housing estates is by nature dynamic, unpredictable and diverse. So we definitely look for flexibility and adaptability in our volunteers. I run activities on 'identifying and setting boundaries', as it is a challenge for anyone working with high-needs or vulnerable clients to refuse certain kinds of assistance. We have a strong referral network and access to external services so it is vital to acknowledge what we can and cannot do professionally.

Our volunteers continually astound me with the qualities they demonstrate, but to get the best from volunteers the onus is on us to provide adequate training; place volunteers in roles that allow them to both utilise their expertise and develop new skills; maintain ongoing personalised communication and seek feedback; provide effective professional development; engage volunteers in decision-making; support volunteers in their roles and recognise their contributions. They are integral members of the Carringbush community.

#### **How has the partnership with Yarra libraries evolved and what do you see as the strengths of this model for both learners and volunteers?**

Carringbush Adult Education actually started out as a program within Richmond Library in 1984, so it's been a long connection with Yarra libraries. Volunteers benefit greatly from always having a Carringbush and library staff member available for support, working alongside or collegially with other volunteers and being surrounded by the extensive resources of the library. For adult learners, having the opportunity for one-to-one tutoring at their own pace in a non-threatening environment is a good fit. Engagement with their local library service is a wonderful outcome for the libraries, who can connect with community members they otherwise wouldn't reach. The libraries provide access to a wide range of learning resources, participation in community activities, opportunities for independent learning and early literacy activities for their children. We cannot underestimate the

importance of such meaningful outcomes for learners, such as watching a mother and child read together and borrow books from the library for the first time. It's definitely a win-win partnership.

With one-to-one tutoring and small group guided individual learning in the library, we truly individualise delivery. We might have a mum learning her son's year 3 spelling list, another student getting assistance with online reporting requirements for the workplace, a student with an intellectual disability tracing giant letters on an iPad, another student working on an application to a vocational training course – everyone's needs are being addressed.

#### **How have the education needs of the local community changed over time?**

We are seeing a greater emphasis on embedding employability skills and employment outcomes into programs. The changes in digital technology and the need for digital literacy are concerns for us all. I think the biggest need that has emerged for literacy learning is 'literacy case management'. We are increasingly working with people needing urgent assistance just to function in their daily lives. Community members are overwhelmed by the literacy demands embedded in technology, such as appointment text messages, online forms for school, transport apps, online workplace resources and emails, MyGov and Centrelink requirements. The one-to-one approach can assist so long as there are support services available.

We constantly welcome and adapt to different cultural and linguistic communities as they move into the area and try to identify programs and services to engage and support them. We also think it's an important part of our role to advocate for and with local community members on current issues relating to community engagement. This dovetails with community education in our current work with the We Stand Together project through the Yarra Settlement Forum that addresses racial and religious attacks on community members. Let's hope this is a need that will reduce over time!

#### **How do you ensure that programs meet the immediate learning needs of adults in their daily lives as well as provide pathways?**

I like to think we are very responsive to immediate learner needs as we look at needs analysis and learner plans that

allow for incidental and urgent support. We encourage learners to let us know what is important to them, and to bring in anything with which they require assistance. We are often pre-occupied with meeting immediate needs, so must step back to revise goals and make sure we are on track for longer-term pathways.

We have developed some pathways options such as work experience, a paid on-the-job program, referrals to training, and partnerships with other providers. It is sometimes difficult to find realistic pathways due to a lack of practical options and opportunities for learners from diverse backgrounds with literacy and other complex needs. Carringbush is involved in the Skills First Reconnect program that seeks to address disadvantage and promote equity. The program helps people engage with pathways support, informal learning, short courses or accredited vocational training according to their individual needs, to address barriers to success and help people achieve their personal goals.

**What have been some of the challenges and highlights of working in adult language, literacy and numeracy education?**

An ongoing challenge for the sector is finding ways to support people who fall through gaps in external systems where there is inadequate service provision. We see people seeking asylum, survivors of family violence, people with mental health issues, people who are isolated and in financial hardship, people facing homelessness, and people with many of these barriers intersecting. Often, we are the first point of contact for assistance for community members, triaging non-educational issues and referring to appropriate services. We provide a filter for community information, changes in government policy that affect community members and other issues as they arise.

There is still much work needed to keep engaging the disengaged; those people who have lost all trust in formal education systems. We are constantly challenged by limited resources with funding always stretched. Resourcing includes suitable venues, learning resources, updating technology, adequate staff hours and coordination time. An additional challenge is a lack of easily accessible, publicly available and affordable adult literacy resources. Our involvement with Adult Literacy Connect, led by VALBEC, seeks to pull together a repository of learning resources for the sector.

Highlights are always our students' achievements in language, literacy and learning skills, their growth in confidence and motivation, and increased community engagement. Bronika is one of our success stories. She could not read or write in any language before she started with us. Her words reflect her learning journey:

I come from my country, I'm not writing, I'm not reading...English hard. I come here a little bit now understand, sometimes I not understand. But Margaret (Volunteer Tutor) show me about reading and writing and talking for me...I'm reading good. I'm writing good. I'm helping small children about writing and help him for ABCD.

I love teaching in the Women's Program that provides content-based language and literacy instruction, covering information such as women's health, nutrition, crime and safety on the housing estates, parenting, family violence and legal topics. This dynamic program has been effective in raising awareness, capacity-building and giving women access to support and services. To enable mothers to attend, we provide onsite childcare with integrated early literacy activities for the children. We are always thinking from an intergenerational literacy perspective. It is important to know that we are offering a program for individuals that they cannot get anywhere else.

The daily achievements and pathways of volunteers and their learners continue to delight me. Another of our success stories is Wen Wu, who was supported by volunteer Employment Pathways Mentors to do both work experience and a paid food assistant role through our on-the-job program. He has recently secured employment as a kitchen hand at the Toorak RSL. He wrote:

My name is Wen Wu. I put the potato, bacon, hot dog, pumpkin and the egg in to the oven. I make soup. I like this job because I have work experience. I love work. Thank you.

**What do you see as the challenges of working in the adult and community education sector in the future?**

I think the biggest challenges in our sector are the lack of funding and resources to run truly comprehensive programs and the invisibility of literacy needs in the wider community. This lack of visibility of the adult literacy sector sits in stark contrast to the high level of

need in the community, and the importance of our sector's expertise in addressing those needs.

Keeping up with changes in digital technology and issues around access, affordability and digital literacy skills are constants. We see learners who have gained employment in an area such as health services assistants, security guards or professional cleaners, coming back for help with the digital literacy demands of the workplace that were previously not part of the role. We are not dealing with traditional literacy demands, but rather the multiple literacy demands around digital technology in the workplace and for daily life.

Attracting and maintaining a skilled and committed workforce is also a big challenge. Carrington has a rigorous professional development program for our staff, but we do not deliver it in isolation. We believe in evidence-based practice, so we have staff involved in fellowships and conferences, bring in guest consultants and have been fortunate to have input from researchers from La Trobe University and Macquarie University. Currently we are working on two ACFE Board Capacity and Innovation Fund projects: a 'CAIF 8 Teaching to Speak: Communicating for Pathways' action research project on teaching pronunciation, and a 'CAIF 9 Sharing Best Practice: Video Resources for Teaching Low-Proficiency EAL Learners'. These projects provide opportunities to enhance teaching and learning and develop more research based methodologies that will strengthen our provision into the future.

Our ongoing challenges – and the most rewarding ones – are to diversify the ways we reach out to and engage literacy learners in accessible ways, to really listen to community members and hear their voices, and to be truly responsive to their needs through evidence-based practice. If through learning with us, their voices independently tell their own success stories, we are on the right track!



**Bronika**



**Wen Wu**

# What's Out There

## ***The Rise of Writing: Redefining Mass Literacy* by Deborah Brandt**

*Reviewed by Pauline O'Maley and Tao Bak*

Deborah Brandt's book *The Rise of Writing: Redefining Mass Literacy* is framed sociologically, and takes a social biographic approach to the study of writers and writing. Brandt poses a fascinating and challenging thesis that we are having a subtle shift in which we are experiencing a writing turn, and this writing turn will inevitably impact on the ways we think about and enact mass literacy. However, she suggests for the most part it is going unremarked. Her writing style and use of language make this book a delight to read, for example, suggesting that '...the streambed of mass literacy is changing course' (2015, p.12).

### **Writing and reading perspectives**

In her introduction, Brandt outlines how this book emerged out of discoveries made in researching her earlier book *Literacy in American Lives* (2001). This book focused on the changing literacy of Americans in their everyday lives across the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She used as a starting point for this current project two discoveries she made in that earlier research. The first was the contrasting ways in which people talked about their earliest memories of reading and writing. Second, the importance of the workplace in literacy learning.

A strength of this book's methodological focus lies in the way it works from accounts of 'workaday' writers outwards to explore broader questions of shifting societal structures and contexts, whilst never losing the sense of the primacy, nor importantly the diversity, of the individual lived or 'felt' experience. Notably, the language of her participants is often compelling, allowing her to capture, as she puts it, some of 'the effects of writing on the humanity of the writer' (2015, p.52).

In broad terms, Brandt argues that the histories of reading and writing are different, not just pedagogically but also socially and culturally; they are premised on different fundamental values and that has consequences. Reading, Brandt argues, has a 'sponsorship' history initially auspiced by the church and the state, 'institutions that sought to universalize reading in order to integrate initiates

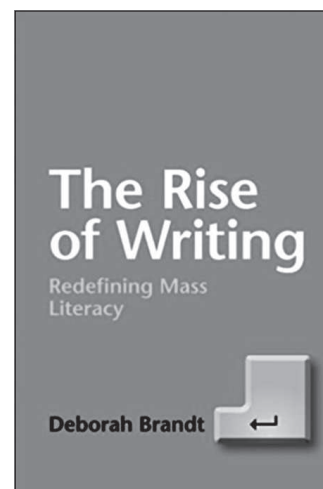
into shared belief systems' (2015, p.4). She suggests reading, in this history, is a vehicle for learning how to be 'good', and that the aura of goodness around such literacy activities as reading to children remains today; thus, reading retains its status of being 'morally wholesome' (2015, p.89).

On the other hand, the sponsorship history of writing, she believes, did not emerge in the civic space 'but in the realm of patronage' (2015, p.5). This history aligns it not to schooled literacy, but rather to artisanship and commerce; as Brandt puts it, writing is 'linked not to worship but to work' (2015, p.90). Thus, writing's rise has the potential to challenge the very beliefs, values, and (she stresses) practices, of mass literacy. She posits that now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century relations between 'reading and writing and print and digital texts' are in a 'new, complicated, and often tentative flux' (2015, p. 12).

For Brandt, forcing writing under the wing of reading has been part of a domesticating project to contain its potential for unpredictability and perhaps dangerousness. She suggests that for writing to flourish it needs to be able to shed this positioning. She clarifies that in talking about writing she is not focusing specifically on the writing associated with the rise of the internet but rather she has done a sociological study of emerging mentalities associated with writing, and how it is people and their writing habits that bring about change.

### **Research overview**

Brandt's research is based on interviews with 90 people, between the ages of 15 and 80, who write regularly for vocational and/or avocation reasons. Her interviews were conducted over a seven-year period. The book details the complexities associated with the rise of writing. Her first



chapter is devoted to the thorny issue of ghost-writing. It is a fascinating subject that is fraught with difficulties related to such things as authorial authority, copyright and originality, as she outlines how these writers navigate the challenging and ethically complex terrain of writing for others. It works well as a telling example of the far-reaching consequences of this writing turn.

This complexity is reinforced in the next chapter where she zeros in on the even more ethically fraught area of writing for the state. This chapter is followed by one focused on young authors and their engagement with writing, their motivations both intrinsic and extrinsic, and their everyday writing practices. In this chapter, Brandt endeavours to articulate a theory of literacy based on writing which is multidirectional, active and inclusive. In doing so she turns on its head the notion that writing is intimately related and sequential to reading, arguing that ‘...the perception that writing flows from reading may be the phantom effect of a normative social practice more than it is a developmental necessity’ (2015, p.120). Brandt’s fourth chapter, entitled *When everyone writes*, focuses on sense making, and how the interviewees make sense of their writing lives. Then she concludes by focusing again on literacy practices and proposing we think about ‘deep’ writing as a legitimate form of alternative engagement.

While Brandt is overt about how this research, with its focus on those who regularly write vocationally and avocationally, underrepresents particular populations, there are, nevertheless, some lovely challenges here for us as adult literacy practitioners. She successfully challenges narrow conceptions of the reading/writing relationship and troubles the conventional wisdom about needing to be a reader to write; she urges us to think about the ways in which ‘being someone who writes can shape the reading experience’ (2015, p.127).

Her argument also challenges the role of the teacher in terms of mastery of writing. Her informants, particularly the young ones, point to the importance of mentors who are unrelated to the classroom. She urges us to see writing as an active process that is enacted in proximity to other writers. While she acknowledges that her thesis complicates what we understand about literacy she suggests it can expand our understandings.

### **Challenging certainties**

It is perhaps inevitable given the ambitious nature of the broader arguments that Brandt presents that the book

runs the risk of at times applying brush strokes too broad to be consistently sustained. In emphasising the historical connection between reading and goodness, for example, there is little acknowledgment of the significant associations of some forms of reading, such as the novel for example, with both moral and political decline. Likewise, while limiting the scope of the study to the US context is justified, more explicit acknowledgement of differing contexts in related cultures may have added to the book’s strength and global relevance and applicability.

The emphasis on civil learning is not universally shared for example, being often differently constituted in other English-speaking countries, let alone other non-western contexts. One example would be the legacy of being a good ‘subject’ in British Commonwealth countries. Separately, it is testament to the speed of current global change, that in the short period since the publication of the book, the role of social media writing has moved more prominently into the limelight, particularly in US with the emergence of ‘post truth’, and ‘fake news’ as mainstream realities.

The book is a stimulating read, challenging our certainties and performing the important sociological task of ‘defamiliarising the familiar’ (Bauman, cited in Furze et al., 2015, p.23). But its focus also serves to highlight the growing inequalities amplified by a knowledge economy that increasingly requires its workers to have complex sophisticated writing skills. It was a shock to see how much writing different professionals reported doing; for example, a clinical social worker reported spending about 50% of his/her time writing. This rise in writing in the workplace foregrounds starkly the uphill battle for adult literacy students who may struggle to get a toehold in the knowledge economy.

Brandt suggests those for whom writing is a part of their work receive ongoing literacy support in the workplace but notes that ‘there is less support at the bottom of an organizational hierarchy’ (2015, p. 164). She further argues that ‘[j]ust as workplaces are formidable sites of literacy production, they are [also] formidable sites for the production of literacy inequalities ...’.

Today the growing gaps in wealth and wellbeing stem in part from the stratified patterns of access, investment, and reward that accompany the role of writing in society (2015, p.165). Sobering indeed, as we knew the literacy stakes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace were rising, but here is the stark evidence of the inequality that only increasingly widens the



gap. Brandt argues economics can 'pull along' learning and we know all too well it can also have the opposite effect if there is no imperative and support.

In relation to ourselves as literacy workers and academics, some of the interesting consequences that Brandt highlights include pressure on scribal skills, the time intensive nature of the work and the fact that it is work that tends to follow workers home (don't we know!).

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