

A message from the CEO



ALA's policy platform identifies 6 key advocacy areas. These 6 areas reflect not only the core educational values identified by our members but also what we see as the most pressing public policy needs in the Adult and Community Education space.

This edition of Quest includes articles on three of these. The first of these is learning for civic participation. This edition features interviews with Australian experts on the relationship between learning, civic participation and the health of our democracy. Politically this is a challenging issue to sell in Australia and with the notable exception of local

government, is poorly understood and funded.

We know, for example, from the 1995 International Adult Literacy Survey, that there is a correlation between higher levels of literacy and participation in voluntary community activities. Also that countries with higher average scores on the prose scale have a greater share of their parliamentary seats held by women. (OECD, Highlights, 2000, p.11) We also know that those countries with these high literacy scores fund high levels of adult learning for civic and social purposes alone and accept as self-evident the correlation between civic participation and productivity.

Another area of focus in this edition is later life learning. ALA has long advocated that the learning needs of the second fifty years of life are vastly different to the first. As a nation, unlike our colleagues in Europe, we have been slow to pick up on the implications of an aging population although there are some positive signs that this is changing, most notably in

ALA Professional Development

- ALA run FREE PD webinars!
Upcoming topics include
- Attracting and supporting learners with disabilities
 - Facebook - the ins and outs
 - Understanding the basics of financial statements. See pg.12.

the prominent role that lifelong learning plays in the recent report of the federal government's Advisory Panel on the Economic Potential of Senior Australians.

In this edition we look at new research by Jane Figgis on the 'encore career' and the implications that this new phenomenon has for adult education.

Finally, a third area of policy focus for ALA is adult literacy, particularly the way that literacy is developed through non-formal and informal learning. In this edition we report on an innovative adult literacy program being run in Wilcannia and release a report developed in collaboration with the Australian Education Union, which outlines the case for a more holistic public policy approach to adult literacy.

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Jim Fenemore at the Leadership Onkaparinga Graduation in 2009 with the Mayor of Onkaparinga, Lorraine Rosenberg

Seniors take the stage for an encore career

South Australian Jim Fenemore has just embarked on a brand new career in community capacity building after over forty years working as a photographer. Jim is 70. His life-changing career shift is part of a trend that social researchers are terming 'encore careers' and it would not have happened without a learning experience that opened his eyes to new possibilities.

With the dramatic increase of people living until their 90s, the period of time between retirement age and end of life has become a new focus for employment, skills and learning. In an innovative research paper published by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research, researcher Jane Figgis shows that far from being a time of inactivity, the traditional

'retirement years' are becoming a period when people can achieve significant personal and social goals for which they may not have previously had time.

Figgis uses the term 'encore career' to describe a new direction in work (paid or unpaid) undertaken at this life stage and suggests it presents a large opportunity for Australia's learning and training industries; one which she believes the ACE sector is well positioned to meet.

Australia's remarkable change in life expectancy (25% of 65 year olds will now live to 90 and that figure is rising) has effectively created a new life stage, known as a third age. Far from being a time of inactivity and decline, the third age is increasingly being seen as a time of new opportunity. "After around 50," Jane Figgis explains, "age predicts very little about

a person's mental acuity or capacity to conduct activities and harbour ambitions. The point where health and vigour give way to frailty is highly variable between individuals."

Figgis believes our whole concept of retirement needs to shift. "The current retirement age (65 years) is an entirely arbitrary point in someone's life," she says. "It was introduced in the 1880s in Germany, when average life expectancy was less than 50 years but it still defines our public and policy imagination world wide."

Figgis is quick to point out that the third age should not be merely a prolonging of the second stage. "There is a point when people should close a mid-life chapter in their work, yet stand decades away from anything resembling traditional old age." She describes it as a shift from an almost exclusive focus on work and family to self-fulfilment and community.

Negative and often inaccurate perceptions of aging remain one of the key barriers to changing mindsets. "Considering the profound antipathy to, if not downright fear, of aging in Western society, the message that we should be prepared to move beyond mid-life may not always be warmly received," says Figgis.

Even for those still below traditional retirement age, discrimination is an issue. Age Discrimination Commissioner, Susan Ryan, speaking at a Human Resources Directors' Networking Forum in Sydney earlier this year, revealed that the long term unemployment rate

for people aged between 55 and 64 is double that of younger age groups. “People who lose their jobs between the ages of 45 and 65 have huge troubles finding another one, and many don’t,” she says.

With Ryan’s research also showing that poverty and homelessness are growing among older Australians, it is time for some radical rethinking about the issue of training, work and older people.

Lifting the workforce participation rate of older workers has been the policy of both Coalition and Labour governments since 2004, however according to Figgis, progress has been limited by entrenched assumptions about older people as workers (ageism) and lack of flexibility in the workplace. “One of greatest barriers to moving past ageing

stereotypes is that people often do not believe they are being ageist. They see their stereotyping as simply reflecting ‘the truth’ or ‘reality,’” she says.

Figgis believes that the answer lies in reskilling older workers for an ‘encore career.’

An encore career will mean different things to different people, but generally speaking it is defined as work undertaken in the third age that is different to a person’s previous work, and importantly, involves new skills, growth and renewal. “The idea that an encore career takes a person to new places, that it requires learning—non-formal or formal—is exactly what makes an encore career attractive to many people,” says Figgis.

In the United States, where the term originated, an encore career

is defined quite specifically as work in the second half of life with a social impact, a social purpose to ‘get America back on track.’ In the United States, encore careers are backed by a large national organisation, Civic Ventures, who funded community colleges to award Encore Career Program Grants worth \$75,000 for three years.

Jane Figgis approached people in the VET and ACE sectors during her research and received a positive response from both. In the words of one VET executive training for encore careers was a ‘no brainer!’

However it is the ACE sector that Figgis believes has a really important role to play in encore careers training because it’s

Continued next page...

Encore careers in action

Jim Fenemore is 70 years old and has worked as a photographer for most of his life. Three years ago he responded to an ad in the local paper to undertake Community Leadership training run by his local council in South Australia.

He now has a fulfilling, dynamic career facilitating ‘photovoice’ projects in a variety of community settings. (Photovoice is a community capacity building tool that uses participatory photography and storytelling processes to achieve positive social change.)

Quest speaks to Jim about his encore career.

What led you to undertake the training?

My photography work dropped off when I reached retirement age but I wanted to keep going.

I saw so many people retire and then watch their lives come to a standstill—I wanted to stay focused as long as I could. I was looking for an extension of my career, but I wanted to get more involved in the community.

Why photovoice?

As part of the Community Leadership training we looked at projects from overseas and I became aware of photovoice projects that had been done in the UK. We had to undertake our own project as part of the training, so I decided to give that a go.

Since then I have been employed by the City of Onkaparinga to run several photovoice projects in the community including a series of ten workshops designed to determine a community’s issues and concerns regarding a proposed major redevelopment.



How important was the learning to your encore career?

Without the training opportunity it would never have happened. Learning programs such as the Community Leadership Program really make a difference. They open people’s eyes and make them more aware. The learning process creates empathy.

In your twenties, you want to gain skills for work, so the training needs to be very specific, but when you’re older I think it needs to be more open, then you can find your own possibilities.



Jane Figgis

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flexible and not constrained by a large bureaucratic framework.

“ACE is the natural next step,” says Figgis. “I’d like to really encourage the sector to get creative with this idea. It’s an emerging concept that really needs imagination and creativity and the ACE sector exemplifies this. They have that openness.”

The conclusion Figgis has reached through her research process is that training for encore careers will work best when it is highly specific and targeted to local interests. “If a community has a high interest in environmental issues,” says Figgis, “then a centre could run session for ‘encore careers in a green economy’. Older people could become involved in auditing people’s homes. There is some training needed, but not a full course.”

Figgis believes that ACE centres have this capacity to respond in a targeted way to their local learning community and as community hubs, they are also a natural fit to provide the social connectivity needed to start generating conversation and support around encore careers.

If you are interested in discussing encore careers training and the possibilities for your centre, Jane Figgis would like to hear from you. Please contact her directly at j.figgis@iinet.net.au

\$3.25M to boost adult literacy and numeracy skills in South Australia

The South Australian state Government is allocating a further \$3.25 million next financial year as part of its ongoing Skills for All commitment to create an extra 6,000 training places aimed at increasing adult literacy and numeracy over six years.

Employment, Higher education and Skills Minister, Tom Kenyon said this investment in community education would give adults the opportunity to improve their foundation skills leading to better prospects of further training and finding a job.

“Accredited training through Adult Community Education (ACE) programs will be available in a range of literacy and numeracy skills, such as reading, writing, listening, speaking and maths,” Mr Kenyon said.

“The training will also include other skills relating to improving employment prospects like problem-solving, self management, collaboration, and computer technology. “The funding—on top of this year’s allocation of \$3.1 million—will provide 14,000 training positions to be offered by community-based, not for profit training providers at more than 80 sites across the state,” Mr Kenyon said.

“ACE providers can apply for a share of the funding to support adults who face economic and

social barriers to finding work and gaining access to training to take part in community-based learning or further education and find work.

“The ACE sector is an important starting point for people who may consider vocational education and training and university study to be initially out of their reach.

“Adult Community Education providers offer programs to help adults get basic workplace skills in small, friendly groups, or even in one-on-one coaching situations.

“The ACE program is part of the State Government’s Skills for All reforms which aim to revitalise vocational education and training in South Australia,” Mr Kenyon said.



The Hon Tom Kenyon MP, Minister for Employment, Higher Education and Skills at the Skills for All launch with Kristy and Mina who completed a Foundation Skills course at Morella Community Centre.

An exciting new model of adult literacy teaching for Aboriginal students is being piloted in Wilcannia NSW.

The pilot will utilise an internationally recognised mass literacy campaign model not previously used in Australia. The Yo! Si Puedo or Yes I can! model was developed in Cuba in 2000 and has been successfully adopted in over fifteen countries including New Zealand, Argentina and Timor Leste to increase literacy rates amongst Indigenous populations.

Funded by the Commonwealth Government, the project is being facilitated by the University of New England in partnership with The National Aboriginal Adult Literacy Commission. The Wilcannia Local Aboriginal Land Council is the lead agency for the implementation of the project with support from the Wilcannia Central School.

It is well known that literacy levels among Aboriginal adults in Australia are significantly lower than those in the non-Aboriginal population. While there has been no national-level attempt to measure literacy levels in the Aboriginal community, evidence from various sources suggests that at least 35% of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adult population have minimal English language literacy, with the figure rising much higher in rural and remote areas. Many Aboriginal leaders believe that these low levels of literacy are a major impediment to improvements in

Cuban literacy program comes to Indigenous Australians



a range of other areas, including health development, community governance, economic participation and involvement in school education and post school education and training.

The pilot is following the three-phase campaign model which includes promotional and community education to mobilise the community; literacy classes; and post literacy activities. It commenced in August last year and is scheduled for completion in August of this year.

The method was originally developed by the Pedagogical Institute for Latin America and the Caribbean (IPLAC). It is a unique method of teaching literacy via audio-visual lessons. The method is in some ways fairly traditional in that it is based on learning the letters of the alphabet, followed by words, followed by sentences. However the Cubans introduced their own innovation, which they call alphanumeric. This involves the learners first associating

each letter of the alphabet with a specific numeral. The rationale for this is that many non-literate people do in fact have basic numeracy and will therefore learn their letters more easily by this associative method.

IPLAC understood that it is not possible to lower illiteracy rates on a national scale in most countries where the need is greatest without a low cost, simple mass method capable of reaching very large numbers of people in a short space of time.

Its central feature is a set of sixty-five one hour lessons on DVD/video, which the students watch under the supervision of local monitors. Each lesson shows on screen a class of non-literate learners (played by actors) being taught by an experienced teacher.

Under supervision, the local monitors are able to help their students follow the DVD teacher's instructions and, using printed manuals and workbooks, complete oral and written exercises being modelled on the screen.

Jack Beetson of the National Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign Commission is the on-site project leader. Quest will continue to report on the success of the pilot.

This article is based on sections of the Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign Pilot Project Background report written by Bob Boughton.

The rules of the game

Teaching and learning for civic participation

Resilient communities understand their own governance and participate in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. Active citizenship requires specific skills and knowledge but despite this, opportunities to learn about civic engagement in Australia are surprisingly few.



Rob McCormack

Rob has been working as a second chance educator in the western suburbs of Melbourne since 1979. Through his work in the Adult Literacy Department at Footscray College of TAFE, he developed a notion of Literacy for Public Discourse, which meant literacy for being involved in political debate, or, as he puts it, “explicitly teaching the rules of the game.” Later in his innovative work in the Bachelor Institute in Alice Springs, Rob was instrumental in developing a series of courses that used Greek rhetoric to teach persuasive speech to Indigenous students.



Sharon Zivkovic

Sharon is a South Australian educator and researcher who has developed an internationally recognized active citizenship education program known as the *Community Capacity Builders Community Leadership Program*.

The program is now offered annually to residents of the City of Onkaparinga at no cost, as a component of the council's Leadership Onkaparinga Program. The Community Leadership Program is directed at people who are passionate about their community and teaches skills for developing collaborative community projects and for participating in community governance processes.



Mark Brophy

ALA Board member, Mark Brophy is the director of the Australian Study Circles Network, which uses the Swedish Study Circle methodology to engage citizens in discussion about the issues that affect them. Study circles involve a community dialogue that helps people explore complex issues, make decisions and take action. They don't advocate a particular solution, instead, they welcome many points of view around a shared concern.

In Sweden, study circles are a mass phenomenon and have broad national support with around 300,000 occurring each year. Funded by the national government, study circles allow citizens to understand and participate more fully in their communities and nation. They have been successfully transplanted into the USA.

Seeking stories of ACE Do you know a learner whose life has been changed by ACE? Adult Learning Australia is seeking compelling and inspiring stories from learners about their experiences of adult and community education. See page 12 for more information.

Learning for civic participation is one of ALA's six key advocacy areas and is perhaps one of hardest to define. In this issue, we speak to three prominent educators in the field of civic engagement to find out what they see as the key issues and challenges in this complex yet crucial field.

What is your definition of civic engagement? What do you think it means to the Australian population more broadly?

"I think the Australian population predominantly considers civic engagement to just consist of electoral participation and volunteerism," says **Sharon Zivkovic**, "It is probably not widely understood that the complex problems Australia faces such as an ageing population, climate change, water basin management, and location based disadvantage cannot be solved by governments working alone. They require the engagement of Australian citizens in both policy making and implementation."

Rob McCormack's definition encompasses an idea that he has termed 'public literacy', which means a clear understanding of the competing values and theories that play out in public political debate. Often this is assumed or taught 'osmotically', but Rob believes it can be made explicit.

At Footscray college of TAFE, Rob taught public literacy by analysing simple, accessible written examples of public debate such as Letters to the Editor. "We taught students to

look at a letter and be able to say 'this person's appealing to this value, which means they are conservative.' It actually explained the ideas behind conservatism, socialism, democracy, managerialism, feminism; the different discourses that people draw on in order to say how we should live together."

For Rob, the reasons why people lack public literacy goes back to the social conditions in which they grew up or in which they live, whether they are rural or Indigenous or newly arrived migrants. "Helping people to understand the terms on which they've got to argue, but also being able to call other people from their situation as well... that's citizenship."

"Civic engagement can encompass anything from a citizen voting to joining an organisation that is focused on an issue that concerns them," says **Mark Brophy**. "I'd like to think that the term has evolved a bit, and is somewhat synonymous with, 'community engagement.'"

Mark believes Australians are not as advanced as the Scandinavians and North Americans in the emerging field of community engagement. "There is no government department that oversees community engagement in Australia as there is in Sweden."

Mark believes Australia is lagging in terms of practical initiatives, "I think in Australia there is a lot of research and analysis going on in this area, but the USA is full of 'on the ground' practitioners who are trying, making mistakes and experimenting with these methods. The practitioners doing work at the coal face in Australia, are few."

There are many reasons for this, including funding. "Getting funding for research is a lot easier than getting funding to go out and actually ask people to make considered opinions about change," says Mark. "The Citizens Assembly on climate change is an example of how it is very easy to criticise attempts to engage communities."

How would you describe Australia's level of civic engagement? Are we civically 'disengaged'?

Sharon Zivkovic believes that while Australians have a high level of participation in our electoral processes (due to compulsory voting) and a high level of volunteerism (according to Volunteering Australia 38% of adults in Australia volunteer and the number is increasing), our level of collaboration with government is low compared to a number of other countries.

"Many cities and towns in Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America have implemented participatory budgeting processes where local residents come together to decide how to spend public money," says Sharon. "Participatory budgeting has also been implemented by several Canadian and American local governments. I don't believe many Australians are even aware that participatory budgeting exists."

Sharon attributes this to Australia's history: "Australia was established primarily as a penal colony with the colonial government controlling most aspects of the lives of Australians. This view, that it is the role of government to fix problems and provide basic services, probably continues somewhat today."

Rob McCormack agrees that many people feel alienated from the political system. “Most people feel as though they’ve got no say. Particularly since 9/11 people subconsciously feel it was best just to keep their heads down and not make fuss because if you make a fuss you don’t know what might happen.”

Contrastingly, **Mark Brophy** believes that Australians are engaging more now than any time in history via the net. “The internet and ICT have opened up Australians and the world to discuss and create change,” he says. But there are limitations: “If the internet is the be all and end all, then why do people need to meet after ‘engaging’ on a dating site?”

Mark fears that internet dialogue can fuel an adversarial tone, “Debate and arguing are fine, but we also need deliberative dialogue. Debate is about competing, seeking majority, persuading, digging in and who wins and loses. Deliberative dialogue is about exchanging ideas, weighing up the pros and cons, building the relationship, understanding the other views, seeking common ground and learning.”

“Civic engagement should be about citizens involving themselves in tackling difficult ‘wicked problems’ and finding solutions to these problems – being the active agents for change,” says Mark. He suspects there is some fear of this approach in Australian government. “Agreeing to allow your citizens to be directly involved in decision making is dangerous. You may not get what you want. Yet in Sweden, millions of people go to study circles, funded by the government. The participants decide what they want to dialogue about and the ideas and suggestions are sent up to government.”

What role can adult and community education play in increasing civic engagement?

Rob McCormack believes it can play a critical role because it’s teaching methodologies are not as wedded to the written word as they are in higher education.

In his work teaching Greek rhetoric to Indigenous students in Alice Springs, Rob discovered that performance, specifically creating and delivering speeches, was a very powerful tool in educating students for civic engagement.

“We asked students to talk on behalf of a value, usually to do with human rights or something like that, and to call for people to embrace that value more deeply into their lives,” says Rob. “This was very powerful for the students because instead of going to class and being told that white fellas are the only ones who know anything and your knowledge is all just rubbish, they could stand up and speak with a lot of authority and with a lot of power.

“We’d have two or three that would run away, but most would stay, even under huge pressure and hardly any sleep on the night before. It was a rollercoaster and a huge adrenalin rush but then at the end they couldn’t believe that they’d done it.”

Rob believes that adult and community education has the capacity to deliver these kinds of creative and flexible programs, “but it has to be a structured curriculum so that people are not just giving a speech,” he says. “They have to think about what they really believe, what they really feel. Then they need the linguistic resources to talk about their beliefs.”

At the Bachelor Institute, Rob gave students the linguistic resources by using very clear models and examples, what he calls ‘the grammar of the ear.’ “We listened to hundreds of speeches of Indigenous leaders and copied their speech patterns,” he says, “Each day the students would learn a new text pattern, a new grammatical structure.” The persuasive tools of language were made explicit.

Rob acknowledges that these moments of political empowerment may be only transitory (he calls them moments of effervescence) but they can leave people feeling more engaged, more likely to get involved again.

Sharon Zivkovic considers education for civic engagement to be a specialist field within adult and community education. It should provide citizens with the skills and attitudes required to effectively collaborate with government on policies for addressing complex social problems. She believes that civic engagement programs need to be embedded in the traditional work of government to enable learners to develop collaborative relationships with government and gain skills in accessing government information.

“All three levels of government in Australia promote the need for learning for civic engagement,” says Sharon, however programs like her Community Leadership program remain relatively unknown.

Mark Brophy believes that the ACE sector is in a perfect position to drive good community engagement practice. “ACE providers are diverse, extremely well respected and trusted in their community, non profit, hold social justice issues close and are community

focused,” he says. “There are competing agendas, like the vocational funding focus but are generally the ACE organisations are a great springboard for community engagement initiatives.”

Mark emphasises the need for citizens to take responsibility, “I see the problems that are associated with Indigenous communities as a white person’s problem too. This goes for any group; youth, unemployed,

mature aged, disabled, etc. The problem belongs to all of us, and as a citizen in a democracy we all have the right and responsibility to work together to solve it.”



2012 National ALA Conference

Lifelong Learning = Resilient Communities

Byron Bay, NSW

11th and 12th October, 2012

Adult Learning Australia is holding its 52nd Annual National Conference hosted by Byron Region Community College.

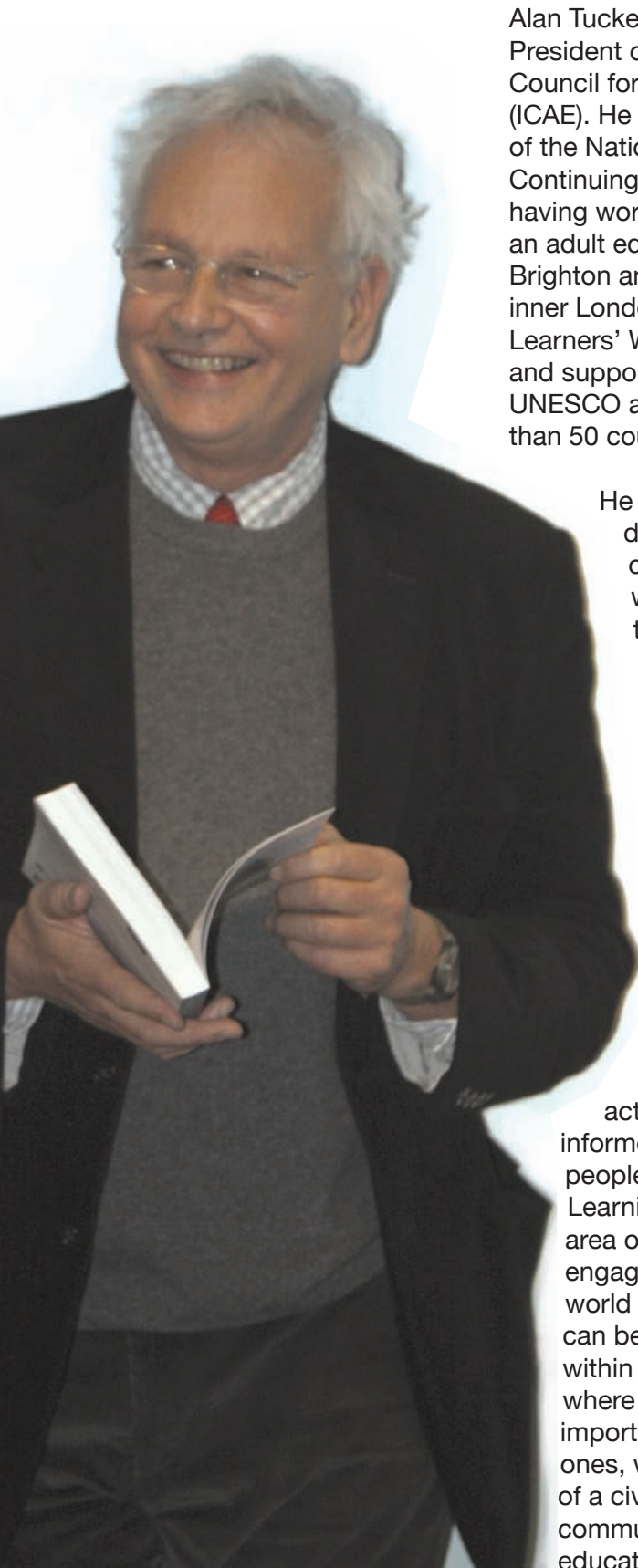
Our theme is Lifelong Learning for Resilient Communities.

Resilient communities withstand and respond creatively to adversity. Building community resilience means valuing respect and cooperation between all groups including Indigenous Australians, an economy that works for all, and living in harmony with the natural environment. This conference will explore ways that Lifelong Learning nurtures this resilience in the face of challenging times. This is also an opportunity to renew your personal resilience in a beautiful environment.

For more information, ALA Award nomination forms and booking information contact ALA on 03 9652 0861 or visit www.ala.asn.au

Interview with Alan Tuckett

ALA is proud to present Alan Tuckett as this year's keynote speaker at the National ALA conference in October.



Alan Tuckett OBE is the President of the International Council for Adult Learning (ICAE). He is the former Director of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education in the UK, having worked previously as an adult education organiser in Brighton and as a Principal in inner London. He started Adult Learners' Week in the UK in 1992 and supported its adoption by UNESCO and its spread to more than 50 countries.

He has seven honorary doctorates, is a Fellow of City & Guilds, and was inducted into the International Hall of Fame for Adult Education in 2006. He was awarded the OBE in 1965.

Quest speaks to Alan about his role at ICAE and what he hopes to bring to our conference.

1. ICAE's agenda to 'promote adult learning as a tool for active citizenship and informed participation of people' is echoed in Adult Learning Australia's policy area of learning for civic engagement. In a globalised world where communities can be enormously diverse within a single city, and where virtual ties can be as important as geographic ones, what are the features of a civically engaged community and how can we educate for one?

*Raymond Williams, the Welsh adult educator and cultural critic wrote that at times of change people turn to learning to understand what is happening, to adapt to change, and most importantly to see how to shape change. That seems to me a reasonable agenda for civic engagement. Of course understanding involves appreciating and celebrating diversity, respecting difference, recognising the complexity of the forces shaping the ways our lives are changing and building the solidarities needed for shared action. Of course, all that is easier when you don't feel under threat. Learning can help with all those things. At NIACE in England, where I worked until last year we published the findings of an inquiry into the future of lifelong learning, which argued the case for a citizenship curriculum building on the thinking of Amartya Sen—to include financial capability, digital capability, civic capability and health capability. It involves contesting prejudice (something Mike Newman writes about wonderfully in *Defining the Enemy*), assessing risk and uncertainty, celebrating cultures, recognising conflicting needs, listening, learning from mistakes and strengthening tolerance. Patience is important, too – 50 years ago in Britain people used to ask to move house 'because of the funny cooking smells next door'. Now a survey tells us that chicken tikka masala is the national dish.*

... using longitudinal population studies that showed that women who had taken part in learning had a lower incidence of cervical cancer ...

2. In your role as president of the ICAE, you have mentioned the need to gather evidence about 'intersectorality'. Can you describe what you mean by this term and how it applies to adult learning?

The term derives from the work of the feminist sociologist, Kimberlie Crenshaw, who identified the multiple interactions of gender, race, class, ability, and other forms of identity work together to create systematic social inequality. Much debate about inequality treats discriminations in isolation, but the way they reinforce each other is critical. In much the same way, the biases deriving from social policy streams interact at the level of individuals and communities. And adult education can have positive effects in ameliorating discrimination on issues addressed by a range of policy streams, so it follows that we need to assert its value in its own right but also to map those effects.

The positive impact of adult learning on mental health is well mapped. But the Wider Benefits of Learning centre at the Institute of Education in London did pioneering work ten years ago, using longitudinal population studies that showed that women who had taken part in learning had a lower incidence of cervical cancer. Taking up learning, they found, has a dramatic impact on increasing racial tolerance; it has a significant impact on giving up smoking; it reduces recidivism among offenders; and it prolongs active life. OECD is currently following up these studies, too.

It is also clear that children whose parents are learning do better in school. These effects happen whatever learners' level

of study, and whatever their social background. The point is that adult learning is a good in itself, but a key catalyst for the achievement of other goals. That is hard for policy makers working in silos to recognise – hence the need to get more evidence.

3. Part of your mission states that 'Adult and lifelong learning are deeply linked to social and economic justice; equality of gender relations; the universal right to learn; living in harmony with the environment and respect for human rights.' How do these values link with adult learning in the context of a developed nation such as Australia?

At ICAE's World Assembly in Malmo, Sweden last year there was a presentation of the findings summarised in 'The Spirit Level'. In it, Wilkinson and Pickett show that it is the gap between wealth and poverty in all but the poorest countries that has the greatest impact on health, longevity, social tolerance... and as the Human Development Index shows every year high GDP does not necessarily produce positive outcomes for everyone. I have always seen the key task of adult educators to recognise who isn't there, who gets the rawest deal, and then to work out how to overcome barriers. That involves outreach work, innovative programmes, starting from where people are. And borrowing ideas from how people address these challenges elsewhere – a key role for an association like ICAE.

4. Our 2012 conference theme is Lifelong Learning for Resilient Communities. How are you going to approach this theme in your conference presentation?

I expect to tell stories! I will look at the issues by having a look at how people in Haiti are dealing with education for legal rights, how learning is used to help people displaced and dispossessed by the earthquake to claim their rights; how people in the Philippines facing intensified typhoons and rising water levels manage having to move their communities away from ancestral homes; how Dalit women in Lalitpur, Uttar Pradesh assert their rights to learn against local customs; how a fish and chip shop owner in Salford led the regeneration of her community through a local learning centre – and to look, too, at the creativity and energy of the World Social Forum.

5. How can Australian policy makers and educators learn from the ICAE policies?

Adult education is on the back foot in many parts of the world at present, as neo-liberal and utilitarian policies have taken hold. Our task is to draw strength from our shared experiences, and to evolve strategies that work for our different circumstances to change that. Our focus in ICAE is on how we address the framework set at the CONFINTEA conference in Belem Brazil in 2009 – which had challenges for every country; how we achieve the millennium development goals; how we develop effective learning for sustainability in a climate changing world; how we secure gender equality, and contest discrimination through education for adults; and how to support decent learning for decent work. I am sure there will be experiences there that resonate for colleagues – practitioners and policy makers alike – from experiences in other countries, and I am certain, too, that there is much for ICAE members to learn from Australian colleagues' work.

Seeking stories of ACE

Do you know a learner whose life has been changed by ACE?

Adult Learning Australia is seeking compelling and inspiring stories from learners about their experiences of adult and community education.

The stories will be published as a book later this year. Featuring professional photography and beautiful design, the book will

show the personal narratives behind ALA's policy areas and will be a valuable resource and advocacy tool for the ACE sector.

ALA Writer, **Ilka Tampke** will be conducting interviews with learners from across Australia during May and June of this year. If you, or someone you know might like to tell their story, please contact Ilka directly at i.tampke@ala.asn.au



New ALA staff member

Adult Learning Australia welcomes **Catherine Devlin** aboard as our new Professional Development and Networks Manager. Catherine has a background in online content development in both the tertiary and VET sector. She believes technology enables cost-effective, flexible and accessible education for diverse groups of people.

Catherine is committed to promoting innovation in adult and community education and welcomes any discussion or feedback in this area.

Feel free to contact Catherine at c.devlin@als.asn.au.

Call for Patrons

Do you know somebody famous who loves ACE?

ALA are seeking patrons or champions of ACE who are willing to lend their name and face to the cause of promoting adult and community education. Duties are straightforward: we will feature their photo and a message of support on our website and may request them to launch the occasional ALA event, write a letter or give a media interview.

They don't have to be extraordinarily famous, simply someone who is reasonable high profile within their community and willing to be a champion of ACE.

Please email Ilka Tampke with any thoughts or suggestions at i.tampke@ala.asn.au

Professional development opportunities

ALA run regular, free professional development webinars on a variety of topics relevant to ACE providers.

All you need to participate is a computer and a set of headphones. If you are not yet familiar with webinar technology (and many of us aren't!) ALA's tech support officer, **Michael Chalk** can provide assistance for you to get involved in this fantastic opportunity.

The beauty of webinars is that people from all over Australia can participate and share knowledge without leaving their workplace.

The 2012 program of ALA webinars is shaping up nicely. Dates are being finalised at this moment, but upcoming topics include:

- Attracting and Supporting Learners with Disabilities
- Facebook - the ins and outs of social networking online
- Understanding the basics of financial statements

And an exciting interactive event we are bringing together which will be a moderated session on sharing teaching strategies for low level learners.

We will send out details once each date is locked in.

For enquiries, email Michael at m.chalk@ala.asn.au.

2012 National Training Awards OPEN

Applications for the 2012 National Focus categories are NOW OPEN.

The National Focus categories recognise outstanding contributions towards the attainment of Australia's national vocational education training system (VET) priorities. In particular, the National Focus categories acknowledge contributions of individuals, schools, businesses and organisations that have had a significant impact on the VET sector.

In 2012, categories include the Community Pathways to VET Award, which recognises community-based, not-for-profit organisations that demonstrate excellence and/or innovation in delivering pre-vocational education and training (VET) to their local community.

The award acknowledges the importance of an integrated system of quality training that offers multiple pathways to VET, particularly for hard-to-reach learners.

Finalists of the 2012 National Focus categories will be recognised at the Australian Training Awards in Melbourne on Friday 16 November 2012.

National Volunteer Week 2012



We all know how crucial our volunteers are to the ACE sector.

National Volunteer Week will be celebrated this year from the 14-20 May 2012.

National Volunteer Week is the largest celebration of volunteers and volunteerism in Australia, and provides an opportunity to highlight the role of volunteers in our communities and to say

thank you to the more than 6.4 million Australians who volunteer.

National Volunteer Week is celebrated in a number of different ways, depending upon the organisations and individuals involved. Formal ceremonies, morning teas, picnics, exhibitions and a whole range of events are held, as well as more informal events and private acts of recognition, all with the purpose of celebrating the work that volunteers do in our community and thanking volunteers for the contribution they make.

For the further information please go to www.volunteeringaustralia.org

Let's get serious about adult literacy and numeracy...

ALA in conjunction with the Australian Education Union has recently developed a policy paper on adult literacy and numeracy in Australia.

Australia has a significant problem with adult literacy and numeracy. The 2006/7 Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey indicated that between 46% and 70% of adults in Australia had 'poor' or 'very poor' skills across one or more of the five skill domains of prose literacy, document literacy, numeracy, problem-solving and health literacy. Further, that with the exception of the 15-19 year age group, each generational group had lower literacy skills than its

younger counterparts. In other words, lack of language, literacy and numeracy is not confined to the young or to job seekers but impacts across the lifespan.

It has been more than 20 years since the last national policy on Adult Language and Literacy.

ALA's policy paper is called 'Let's get serious about adult literacy and numeracy' and makes a case for action on adult education in Australia.

The policy paper will be distributed to ALA members. Please contact the ALA office if you would like to obtain a copy.

Provider Profile

Deborah Miller

Deborah Miller has recently joined the Linkwest team in Western Australia as the Adult and Community Education Manager.

Hailing from the UK, Deborah has always been passionate about Adult and Community Education and has spearheaded some highly innovative and successful literacy projects. Quest speaks with her about her achievements and plans.



The commitment that many Australian adult and community learning organisations have to non-accredited learning is inspirational. I have visited so many centres which have been run entirely by volunteers. They offer a huge range of programs using local residents to deliver them. This approach is so empowering for communities and it is wonderful to see how they take responsibility for these centres. Alongside this, comes questions about how quality improvement is supported, how centres can sustain activity when many centre volunteers in

WA are aging and how centres can engage all members of the community in their activities.

Can you tell us a little about your background?

I started my career as a young teacher in a social priority school and ended up as Assistant Principal, with special responsibility for adult learning, in a further education college. Alongside this role, I also set up a government funded organisation, The Essential Skills Support Unit, to support businesses, colleges, RTOs and community organisations to address the 'National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults'.

You have been involved in the UK education sector for 35 years. How does the Australian adult and community education sector differ from that in the UK?

This is an interesting question, and I must say I have had a few surprises since we moved to Australia. In the UK much non-accredited learning is funded by the Skills Agency. This funding has reduced over the years, but is still available, thus enabling centres to offer subsidised, or free learning opportunities to learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. Because these centres receive government funding they are inspected and have to prove that the learning they deliver is of a high quality and provides positive outcomes for learners. Organisations in the UK therefore have to be very careful about how they distinguish between a club and a learning opportunity to ensure that funding is allocated appropriately.

During your time in the UK, you worked on a \$14 million project for non-accredited workplace literacy and numeracy learning and train the trainer professional development. What impacts did this project have and what did you learn from it?

This was an interesting project, which covered the whole of the South East coast of the UK. It was initially established to support a wholly Government funded initiative to provide free level 1 and level 2 literacy and numeracy and Level 2 vocational programs to the UK workforce.

What we realised was that many businesses and members of the workforce did not realise the impact that low levels of literacy and numeracy could have on personal progression and a company's bottom line. Our project carried out literacy and numeracy awareness raising to businesses so that they would buy-in to the project. We then developed literacy and numeracy programs tailored to the individual businesses and linked that to individual participant needs. The impact of this element of the project was startling. Hundreds of business engaged with the project and released staff to attend courses. Our research showed that the impact of literacy and numeracy courses had a significant and positive impact on business profitability and productivity. From the learners' perspective, we found that learners were more successful in achieving their vocational qualifications and were more likely to access accredited literacy and numeracy programs later down the line.

The professional development programs we offered teachers and trainers literacy and numeracy were a resounding success. Teachers were more confident in their delivery and believed they were better equipped to support their learners. Huge numbers of professionals undertook a range of the mandatory literacy and numeracy qualifications with very high success rates and with positive outcomes for the quality of their delivery.

So what have I learned from this experience? I know that businesses will only engage in projects such as this if they see a positive benefit for them. Deliverers need to fit in with their requirements, be prepared to deliver programs at a time

and place to suit them and their employees and parcel courses in an attractive way. My belief that those delivery literacy and numeracy should be well qualified and skilled in the subject was also substantiated. Many adults who missed out at school have very negative attitudes towards learning and therefore need to have the very best teachers and trainers to support their needs. Finally, the role of mentoring and information, advice and guidance is crucial to supporting the lifelong learning journey. Many adults who would benefit from developing their literacy and numeracy skills have other life issues which need to be addressed before they can become successful learners.

Australia's literacy and numeracy levels have not altered or improved since last surveyed ten years ago. Is non-accredited literacy and numeracy training going to be a continuing focus in your work in WA?

Yes, I am passionate about the importance of non-accredited learning in supporting progression to accredited learning. Many people need stepping stones to build confidence before they move onto more formal learning, and non-accredited programs around

individual learner interests and needs that contextualise literacy and numeracy are highly successful. During my career I have developed and delivered such programs around supporting your child in school, interior design, cookery, getting back to work and much more. Programs such as these engage and enthuse learners to progress and achieve and I would really like to explore opportunities to develop these programs in Australia.

With a new name and a new website, it seems like Linkwest is in a process of dynamic rene wal. What would do you hope to achieve in your role at Linkwest?

I am thrilled to have started work at Linkwest at such a seminal time. I have lots of ideas, but the most important first step for me is to talk to centres about what they want and need from a learning and training perspective. I have already seen opportunities to develop new initiatives such as: introducing more ICT programs into centres, looking at how we can share resources across centres more effectively, developing an interactive learning platform, introducing a quality toolkit for those delivering learning and developing a learner Champion project. I don't think I will be retiring in the near future!

Would you like to advertise in Quest?

Quest has a readership of over 3000 subscribers in Australia and around the world, all interested in adult and community education.

Half, quarter and full page space available.
Please contact ALA for further details on **03 9652 0861**

OBITUARY

Matatumua Moana Vermeulen 1936-2012

ASPBAE has lost an outstanding woman leader, a champion of the right to quality education for all and a tireless worker for sustainable livelihood systems that transform the lives especially of poor, marginal communities in the South Pacific and the Asia Pacific region.

Matatumua Moana Vermeulen, South Pacific representative to the ASPBAE Executive Council for two terms passed on to a better place on Thursday, January 12, 2012 in Auckland, New Zealand after a lingering illness.

She is survived by her husband, Walter Vermeulen, children and grandchildren and by METI, an organisation in Samoa she co-founded more than decade ago.

Hers was clearly a pioneering spirit - her life, fiercely dedicated to public service. She was a former member of parliament in Samoa and the founder of the Samoa All People's Party (SAPP) - the first political party to be founded and headed by a woman. A former Superintendent of Nursing, Matatumua was also

instrumental in the founding and development of the Samoa School of Nursing. In the last decade, Mua threw her energies in the work of METI, an NGO member of ASPBAE, working on preventive health care especially in the treatment of sleep apnoea, in agro-forestry development and conservation, organic farming, marine rehabilitation projects and second chance teacher training.

In 2004 she was elected for the first time as South Pacific representative in the ASPBAE Executive Council. She was re-elected in 2008 and held this post until her untimely demise. As a member of the Executive Council, she was passionate about issues of gender, sustainability, citizens' participation and good governance. She was one of the first in the Executive to point out that climate change should be high on the agenda of adult educators - as an issue of power, marginalisation and survival.

For those of us who had the privilege to interact and work closely with Mua, we knew we were in the presence of a

great soul. She was wise, she was razor sharp, grounded and strategic. She was unfailing in reminding the Executive of the specific concerns of the small island states of the South Pacific - and yet she steered us all to focus on the larger picture and uphold the organisation's broader, overall interest. She took clear, firm positions even when it was not easy or popular to do so. And she did these all with humanity and great kindness.

Rest in peace, dear Mua.
You have left a world, much saddened by your passing but much enriched for the life you have lived.

We can only pray our work will honour your memory well.

The ASPBAE Executive Council and staff



ASPBAE are the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education. ALA are one of three Australian member organisations along with RMIT University and WAVE (Women in Adult and Vocational Education).



**Adult
Learning
Australia** INC

Lifelong and Lifewide Learning for All Australians

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