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IN THIS ISSUE

- ◆ Turning pages for literacy
- ◆ Prescribing art
- ◆ Life after Holden
- ◆ The Learning Age – 20 years on
- ◆ ACE News

TIPS AND TRENDS

- ◆ Tips for social media planning

Turning pages for literacy

What do you get when three adult literacy tutors face the same problem? The solution. Almost 20 years ago tutors Anne Dunn, Chris Malakar, Moira Hanrahan with Preston Reservoir Adult Community Education (PRACE) launched PageTurners, a best selling series of books for adult literacy students.

Anne started hand making books in her adult literacy classes, using photos students brought in or printed off the Internet. She worked with students to write stories to accompany them. 'I'd type them up, and make up copies and I'd put them in the book basket. An early one was a story by a woman called Stephanie about her baby nephew. It was really simple and told in her own words. She took copies for friends and relatives and I put half a dozen in the book basket for other students to borrow. Students were taking them home and not bringing them back. So I made another batch, put them in the basket, same thing. It was a bestseller.'

'We were frustrated because there were so few appealing stories written for adults learning to read,' Anne Dunn says. 'And giving adults kids' books is just demeaning.'

Their boss Libby Barker at PRACE seeing the popularity of the books suggested they make the books to sell to other adult literacy services and organised a small loan to get the project off the ground. With Anne and Chris as writers of the first series and their friend and fellow tutor Moira Hanrahan as illustrator, the PageTurner series was born.

'We didn't think it would make a profit, when we started we just hoped it would break even. We got a \$1000 loan to set it all up and we paid that back pretty quickly.'

These days you're as likely to come across PageTurners in libraries in America, Canada and New Zealand as you are in your own local library.

When did they realise that they had a hit on their hands? 'I took a book into class fresh from the printers, called "I want a holiday." And a student called Graham, an older guy saw the book and said, "I want one of those". He started to read it aloud and the whole class went quiet. He just kept reading it and checking every word, and when he finished it everybody clapped and he said, "That's the first book I've ever read!" It was just fantastic you know. We weren't sure of the reception we'd get and he picked it up because he liked the topic, so that's when we knew. I said to Chris and Moira, "Wow, they love it!" Anne says.

(Story continues on p. 3)

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**Adult
Learning
Australia**

*Lifelong and
lifewide learning
for all Australians*

Message from the CEO



In this the National Year of Lifelong Learning, what better outcome could there be than to define a national policy that will help to build the healthy, productive, inclusive and sustainable Australia we all want?

The problem with a big concept like lifelong learning is identifying the best way to apply it in policy terms.

In our view, the right way is through a social justice lens.

We already know that people who are self motivated and take full responsibility for their own learning and who acquire new skills, knowledge and attitudes throughout their lives are better equipped to adapt to change. But what about those people who find it difficult to engage in lifelong learning or struggle to access basic educational opportunities? How can we put measures in place that will support them to learn rather than setting them up for failure?

A national lifelong learning policy would reclaim learning as a basic human right and place the experience of the individual learner front and centre. It would set out the roles and responsibilities of community, business and all levels of government. It would facilitate access to learning opportunities and track progress and be responsive to the growing rate of change in our society.

The truth is, we still have only a hazy idea of what workplaces and communities will look like in the future. There are just too many variables considering the potential impacts of science, technology, climate, population growth and demography. What we do know is that a policy approach that only focusses on the skills required by industry and fails to recognise the role lifelong learning has in helping people overcome disadvantage and adapt to changing roles at work, in families and in their communities misses a vital opportunity.

How can our education system meet the changing needs of our people, places, society? How can lifelong learning counter entrenched poverty and disadvantage?

How can we make inclusive adult education a high priority? What do businesses gain from a commitment to educating workers? How can we shift the education debate from higher education and qualifications to include all forms of learning? What role can local governments and libraries play in educating citizens and communities? How can we reclaim the role of adult education in tackling disadvantage?

At our Summit in April, we are bringing together leaders from across adult education, community, social services, government and business to explore these big questions. We want to support the Federal Government to articulate a truly integrated and comprehensive lifelong learning policy that embraces the transformative power of education; particularly for disadvantaged and disengaged adult Australians.

Our Summit will bring together experts from St Vincent de Paul, ACOSS, Community Council of Australia, the Mitchell Institute and from across the adult and community education sector. We want to hear from you as well. Your contribution to this process is vital and I encourage you to participate. Beginning with the Summit, there will be other opportunities throughout the year for you to add your views to this important discussion.

Happy National Year of Lifelong Learning #YOLL2018.

Jenny Macaffer

CEO



Adult literacy tutors and creators of PageTurners Chris Malakar (L), Moria Hanrahan and Anne Dunn (R).

(story continued from p. 1)

Each series of 10 books is divided into 4 levels of difficulty from the 100 word Level 1 stories to up to 600 word stories at Level 4. A full vocabulary is included at the back of the book as well as exercises to help students' comprehension.

'The questions and exercises in the back of each book are not just for students,' Anne says. 'We know from working in the ACE sector that tutors like us pretty much work alone. They teach in church halls, in factories, they come and go, with no desk or meeting place where they can catch up with other teachers. So the ideas in the back of the book are our way of giving adult literacy tutors some professional development in a laid back kind of way. Teachers can pick up the questions we pose in the back of the books and adapt them for different classes.'

Challenges of writing

'We wanted to provide books for beginner adult readers with stories that reflected their lives,' Anne says. But there's no "typical" adult literacy student so they've written stories to appeal to a broad range of people who want to improve their reading and writing.

'They're aimed at everyone from young ratbags who love motorbikes to older migrants who've worked in factories for 50 years and everyone in between,' Anne says.

All three agree they've gotten better at it over time, although Moira points out that the simplicity of the books is deceptive. 'They're a real challenge to write,' Moira who has since turned author as well as illustrator says. 'I've never

been able to crack a Level 1 story. It's really hard to write something with a good punchline in so few words.' Chris who says she's always been a "closet writer" agrees, 'Writing humour in a limited number of words is really tricky.'

Often they turn to their own lives and stories students tell them in class for inspiration.

'One student came into class after a weekend and told us how she went to a beach and there was nobody there and it turned out to be a nude beach.' Anne laughs. 'That sounded like a perfect story idea! Then another student came back from a holiday with her family and when we asked her "How was your holiday?" she said "What holiday? Who had a holiday? I was cleaning and cooking the whole time!" One student who had just had his tongue pierced despite his mother's warnings became fodder for a story, as did the couple in class who were planning a huge wedding that neither could afford. All of these experiences and stories ended up inside the covers of PageTurners. But their specificity doesn't count against them, if anything their popularity overseas suggests that PageTurner stories tap into something universal. Perhaps because they take a light-hearted look at experiences of real people.

The trio plan each series, identifying gaps, developing stories that they feel need telling. 'We get together every so often for a planning meeting where we talk about who we are aiming at, what we need more of and at which level, as well as talking about the kinds of people we have in our classes and what stories might appeal to them. From that conversation, we come up with a list of story ideas and make a deadline for first drafts,' Moira says.

'For example we decided to do a series to introduce Australian culture and history to people without high levels of reading. So we wrote ones about Ned Kelly, the cameleers, fire, the goldfields, Cyclone Tracy. And we've had

'We've been in profit every year since we started. We're not exactly taking world cruises but in a good year we make as much as most other authors of Australian books.' Anne Dunn.



EAL students from Preston Reservoir Adult Community Education in Melbourne's north (from left) Mahir, Louisa and Ahmal.

really good feedback on those,' Anne says. 'We also did some on things that come up every year in the news – Anzac Day, Cup Day, that sort of thing.'

'It's kind of an organic process that works,' Chris says. 'We have different writing styles, we all work on our stories and come together and give one another feedback. If we were all working on one story we'd probably kill each other.' She laughs. 'There've been plenty of tense moments over the years when it comes to critiquing work but Libby's a good mediator, she brings out the best in us. She's a great manager, she doesn't micromanage, she just helps us get on with it,' Chris says.

All three agree that the purpose of PageTurners is to entice and interest budding adult readers. 'We keep them fun because we're encouraging reading for pleasure,' Anne says.

As for the future, things look bright. Literally. Their next series will be published with colour illustrations. Moira says 'Back at the start I just quickly scribbled the drawings because I thought we'd just be using them in our classes. I had a kind of 'that'll do' approach. But my drawings have improved a lot since then. I've gotten a lot neater, and I've got more technical skill. I've always loved drawing I've done it all my life. Now that I'm retired I can put more time into it and I'm much more painstaking. It takes me back to my childhood, sitting around drawing all day.'

With series 8 finished and 67 stories complete, the three have plenty of ideas for more. 'We laugh about doing it in

our nursing homes and on our deathbeds,' Chris says. 'Yes.' Anne laughs. 'We've talked about what will happen when we die but haven't come up with a plan – yet.'

Mahir, Louisa, Ahmal and **Dikea** are students in Chris Malakar's EAL class at PRACE. Louisa never went to school in her native PNG and has only recently learned to read. She's a big fan of PageTurners. One of her favourites is about a robot that can do the shopping, clean the bathroom and mow the lawn. Another is a story about a woman who takes a reading and writing class and Louisa loved the story because she identified closely with it.

'Before I felt shy and ashamed because I couldn't speak good English and I couldn't mix properly. But now I can travel on the train, take the bus, go to church and I feel happy. Now I can go to the shops and the doctor by myself and I can talk in a way I couldn't before. These books and my teacher Chris give me confidence.'

Mahir says, 'My English is OK for reading but bad for writing. English is very tricky, the reading and writing are very different. I like the stories. I am reading now about 1960 and Neil Armstrong landing on the moon and the Sydney Harbour bridge. Every book is different. Some are easy with just five pages, some are 12 pages. I've read two a week since I started last term, so that is 24 books so far. Some of the books are funny, some are sad. I feel good at how much better I am now than before.'

Dikea spent the last 38 years working long hours as a pieceworker, taking few holidays and breaks. 'Before I had no time to learn English. So this is my time to learn. I like all the PageTurner books. You learn with these books. We read them, we talk about them, then we write. We learn from one another's stories too. Each person has their own story. Coming here it feels like my house. They are all very happy people in our class.'

'One book really really touched my heart. It's about a lady who is learning to write and read who was scared to go to class and mix with other people. When I read it I felt it was like me, it was my story.' Louisa, PRACE student.

Tips for social media planning

In social media spontaneity and responsiveness have their place, but forward planning allows you to be more strategic and make best use of your time.



Tips and Trends

Here are our tips for using social media more efficiently.

1 Set up a planner

This can be as simple as a spreadsheet or as complicated as an online template, whatever suits. Keep it up to date and use it to guide not just for when and where but what you'll post as well. Share it with colleagues.

2 Make a list of your organisation's helpful content

This might include how-tos, tip sheets, blog posts or infographics. Your followers will appreciate content that makes life easier for them and are more likely to pass it on. Sharing useful and interesting content is a great way of building awareness and trust.

3 Keep your different audiences and social media platforms in mind when you are planning what content to share

Definitions of what's useful and engaging will vary with different audiences and channels – just think Instagram versus LinkedIn and you get the idea.

4 Add promotional content to your planner

It might be a call to enrol in a new class, to sign up for a newsletter or take part in a competition. Don't let this type of content dominate your news feed and make sure you balance it out.

5 Schedule time to be social

Answer questions, praise or thank people, initiate interactions and add your voice to relevant conversations. Or host your own regular events such as 'Ask an Expert' or something similar to show that you are interested in two-way conversations.

6 Connect with influencers

Engage with people who can help you extend your reach. Share their posts, tag them and show how your organisation values or benefits from their work. This is a great way to build and develop relationships.

7 Add awareness days, themed months, holidays and other major calendar events to your planner

Give these events a special twist by linking them to your organisation's philosophy, learners, or programs to tell the story of who you are and what you stand for.

8 Evaluate what works

Your stats can reveal interesting facts such as which are the best times of day for sharing, who's reading what you're posting, which posts took off and which died a quiet death.

9 Learn from others

Check out your favourite social media accounts and look at a week's or even a month's posts with a critical eye, look for patterns and things that you can adopt and adapt.

10 Be realistic

Make sure your schedule fits in with the demands of your organisation and block out conferences, staff meetings and deadlines that will impinge on social media time. Set targets so that you can measure progress towards your goals. Share your goals and progress towards them with colleagues.

Check out your favourite social media accounts and look at a week's or even a month's posts with a critical eye, look for patterns and things that you can adopt and adapt.

Prescribing art

Healthcare workers in Sydney are prescribing art classes instead of medication to improve healthy ageing.



Stressed? Depressed? Lonely? Imagine that instead of writing you a prescription for medication your doctor prescribed an art class. That's exactly what's happening in Sydney in a new project based on research that shows participating in the arts is good for your health.

In an Australian first, Arts on Prescription encourages healthcare workers to refer patients aged 65 and over to art classes as an antidote to stress, anxiety, bereavement and even chronic pain.

Once someone is referred to the program by a healthcare practitioner they join a small group of 6 to 8 others to undertake a 10 week, 2 hour class together with a professional artist as their teacher to promote healthy and active ageing. Some classes like music, drama and dance focus on improving physical fitness including balance and strength. Others like photography, painting and writing offer psychological benefits that come from self expression, exploring creativity, learning new skills and opportunities to socialise.

One of the teachers in the Arts on Prescription program, artist Annette Innis, who teaches drawing, painting and mixed media, says that for people who are unsure or shy it often only takes that first step. 'Once they get their foot in the door they often surprise themselves and their confidence increases and they are more willing to try other art forms such as music, drama or poetry.'

'I am inspired by the participants. With age comes wisdom and experience and their stories and the life experiences they bring to classes have really enriched my life. We are all learning from each other and it's a really wonderful thing.'

'Many are nervous but we create a welcoming atmosphere where everyone feels confident. We make a real effort in helping people to get to know one another and to have fun.'

'It's really hard to be a beginner at something. It's brave to experiment creatively especially with a group of strangers. So we keep it lighthearted, we set the tone, we allow people the time and space to relax.'

'Classes are free so there's almost nothing to lose and no reason not to give it a go. A lot of people have the curiosity but have not had the opportunity to explore their creative side. Having access to all the materials makes the classes even more inviting,' Annette says.

But participants often need encouragement to have a go. 'In my classes we take small steps. We start with a small piece of paper and use a pencil, then we get bigger paper and paint, and we take it from there. I aim to give people the information and knowledge and the relaxed environment. When people are relaxed and not worrying about the quality of the work they're doing, that's when magic happens.'

Annette has noticed big changes in the people who've taken her classes. 'It's had a profound effect on the participants, mostly in building confidence, having fun, getting some time out and distraction from difficult circumstances. One lady who came along to my class never saw herself as creative. She was involved in caring for her husband who was unwell. But in class she forgot about everything, she had time for herself so it was a real escape and something to look forward to.'

Being involved in creative activity and learning new skills affects participants' emotional health too. 'We've seen a lot of improvements in people's mental health. It really helps people to get out of the house every week and come to a class. They are more confident, they have new ideas. For people who no longer work or perhaps live alone and have felt that there's something missing in their lives, it's created a new sense of identity and purpose.'



'When the doctor first mentioned it to me I had a lot of doubts ... but it's great ... it's the best thing that's ever happened to me.' Tony

People outside the program notice changes too. 'One lady in our music group who had breathing and lung problems recently visited her GP for a check up and he said "What have you been doing that's new? Your breathing has improved dramatically!" And she said "Well I've been singing my lungs out in this music group."'

Loneliness can be a big problem and meeting with others each week for learning offers social opportunities many participants have lacked. 'A lot of the people who come along have been socially isolated so to come along each week and feel welcomed, and be part of the same small group in a positive affirming environment has been really powerful. A lot have developed new friendships. It's a wonderful opportunity to connect with others.

'Some people who come along already know other people or they know each other. We've had people who've lived around the corner from each other for years but coming along to something like this where they get to know one another through a shared experience really deepens relationships. And that continues. Afterwards some of them will meet one another for coffee, they have stronger community connections.'

'It also offers a new way of connecting with people outside of the class. Now participants in the program have something to talk about and they can share their enthusiasm with friends and family. So we've seen big social improvements. People seem much happier, more confident, and they've got a new energy about them.'

'No one is too old to learn a new instrument, become a photographer, perform in front of a crowd or paint a beautiful work of art. I see this program as a wonderful way in which arts and health can work together.' Michelle Herndon, Project Manager, Hammondcare

As a teacher Annette says it's changed her too. 'I feel like I learn more from them than they do from me. We have a wonderful time and have terrific conversations not just about art, but about their lives and the experiences that have inspired or changed them.

'I've learned so much too because I've been experimenting through my teaching which means I reflect and consciously think about my art. Art is a source of such fulfilment and pride for me that it's wonderful to help others feel the same.

'Outside of Arts on Prescription I teach life drawing but it's very different, it's much more technical. Arts on Prescription is more about people and connections, about heart. It's a very enriching experience.'

Originally developed in the UK the idea was imported to Australia and taken up by a NSW partnership led by the charity Hammondcare, funded by the Federal Government, and run in partnership with UNSW Art & Design and UNSW Medicine. Arts on Prescription has run over 50 programs in the past two years in the southwest and northern suburbs of Sydney.

Budding artists put their work on display at an exhibition where they celebrate their achievements and raise public awareness of the importance of healthy ageing.

Project Director, UNSW Associate Professor Chris Poulos has been involved in the program's evaluation which shows participatory arts are good for older people's health and wellbeing. He hopes the success of the project will inspire other organisations to get on board. 'Our plan was to encourage uptake of the idea. It is still early days, but over the past few months over 60 people have registered interest. We are also developing training for artists and organisations in how to run Arts on Prescription programs. This should be available later this year.'

Life after Holden

A digital skills certification program is offering former Holden workers and others affected by the Adelaide plant's closure a digital edge when it comes to finding work.



When the gates shut on the Holden site in Elizabeth South Australia in October 2017, workers and businesses supplying parts and services to the company also felt the impact.

'Our community was hit hard too,' says Jo Cooper, Manager Community Capacity & Learning at the City of Salisbury, in the neighbouring suburb in Adelaide's north.

'Many of those exiting the automotive sector were men aged 40 plus who had low levels of digital literacy. We knew we needed a strategy to create learning pathways to support these workers to go on to further education and/or employment.'

But a training program that aimed to help people along the path to a new career or further study had to tackle the issue of digital literacy head on, as South Australia has the lowest digital literacy rate in Australia after Tasmania, recent data from Telstra's Digital Inclusion Index shows.

'We realised it was vital to link our community to the new employment opportunities arising within Defence and other growth industries and one of the critical skills required is digital literacy,' Jo says. The City of Salisbury library service was well placed to offer training. As part of a statewide effort to improve digital literacy, the City's library service has qualified trainers on staff and has invested in computers, laptops and the latest software for its community.

'Our research found that digital literacy was a big issue in our community. We're talking about people who have no wifi at home, and little access to desktop computers. Because of a combination of their age and the kind of work they had been doing, many people we engaged with did not know the basics of how to upload documents, use databases, and in some cases were not confident to work a mouse.'

A partnership between Microsoft Australia, the Department of State Development, Prodigy Learning and the City of Salisbury delivered a solution – a pilot program offering a

suite of Microsoft Office certified courses usually worth hundreds of dollars for free through the local library to give automotive workers a digital edge in applying for jobs.

The first pilot began in February with training, certifications and a two-day career path workshop delivered by Prodigy Learning, a global training partner of Microsoft who worked closely with the City of Salisbury to tailor the pilot for local needs and train local staff to deliver ongoing training and manage the IT required.

'Prodigy Learning was great to work with,' Jo says. 'They have done quite a bit of work in places where there's been a downturn in industry including with blue collar workers in Ireland. They worked hard with us to understand the particular content and make sure the context was right so that it provided participants with the knowledge and skills required for future employment pathways.' The result is a model that incorporates multiple levels of training in a mixed mode format.

The first step for people interested in the program is to undertake their own skills analysis – at the library or at home using GMetrix testing to establish what their skill levels are. The entry-level qualification is a Digital Literacy Certificate, which teaches people computer basics.

Local adult and community education (ACE) programs play an important role in the learning continuum. If participants are struggling with the basic level certificate they are referred back to ACE to get one-on-one support to build their knowledge and confidence and then re-enter the pilot. Once they have finished they can also enter into ACE employment pathway programs to build their skills for finding work.

After they have completed the Certificate, the participants can proceed to the next rung of the certification ladder, the Microsoft Office Specialist program which teaches people how to use core products that employers expect people in admin to be able to use in day to day work. 'As a result of this training, participants are able to feel more confident doing



basic and intermediate tasks including using Word, Excel spreadsheets and PowerPoint.

'We start most people at the entry level, however, we are flexible with entry points depending on the skill level of the learner. We help them become familiar with the software until it feels natural for them and we build it from there. We interpret digital literacy as also including the use of social media so we show them how to use LinkedIn, which fits neatly into the job hunting process,' Jo says.

'A lot of people already experienced in Office want to do the Specialist training.

'It's a modular system where they complete it onsite and at home including homework. If they don't have a computer at home, they can come to the library to use the computers there and there's staff on hand to help.'

Interest in the free training has been strong and the City of Salisbury have opened it up not just to automotive workers and their partners but when space allows, to the broader community as well. Feedback has been very positive and over 215 people have signed up for training so far. The training runs at the Len Beadell Library with groups of 20 participants at a time.

'One unexpected but great benefit from our point of view is that it brings people into libraries who wouldn't normally use libraries. More and more employment based programs happen in our libraries and this is all part of the South Australia's Public Library Services' plan to transition libraries from being more than 'just books' to innovative learning hubs for the whole community. We are currently working

'The course was very flexible so I could practice on the library's computers and get help and support from the staff when I needed it.'
Lailoma Shahdoost

with them to discuss the possible rollout of this program across identified libraries right across the State.'

Holden Worker **Brian Weste** was one of the course's early participants. 'I signed up for the program as a result of going to the transformation centre at Holden. I saw a bit of the spiel done by them and I thought, you know what, it's something I hadn't considered. But I thought digital literacy for me is very basic, and it would be a good way of expanding on that. It's the way of the future for me I hope.' Brian has since found a new job as a mechanical maintenance fitter.

Lailoma Shahdoost, 38, took time out from work when she had her daughter six years ago. Since then she's applied for a number of jobs with no success. 'I felt discouraged. Having kids you feel like it kills your brain. When I heard about this course I wanted to go back and test my ability.'

With no Internet at home and no computer Lailoma's digital literacy skills were very out of date. 'For six years I hadn't touched a computer. When I told them in class I trained in XP everyone laughed because no one even knows what that is anymore.

'When it came to the first exam I was very very worried. You have to achieve a minimum of 75/100 in 50 minutes and do 7 projects in that time. But I did well.

'What I loved about it was getting out of the house. I treated it like a job and it's the best opportunity I've had so far. I am really grateful for that. I love learning. I say even if you don't use it for work, you can use what you learn to help your children and your community. Everything is computerised these days, you can use it for banking, for paying bills and registration, for filling in forms. I really encourage them because it's such a valuable opportunity.'

What's next? 'I would love to finish the whole thing, the Expert level and then the Masters. I'm really excited at the idea of doing that.'

Photo credit: Industrial robots CC BY-SA 3.0

The Learning Age – 20 years on

Sir Alan Tuckett and Professor John Field report on a recent conference at the University of Wolverhampton to mark the 20th anniversary of visionary policy for a learning society.



Sir Alan Tuckett: If governments in England had consciously set out to decimate opportunities for adult learning they would have been hard pressed to do better than the apparently accidental consequences of policy here over the last fifteen years. In that time, almost 2 million adults have been lost as public funding of further education [Australia's equivalent of TAFE and adult community education] swung to ever more narrowly focussed provision for the under 19s. In higher education meanwhile, 60 per cent of mature students have gone since student fees were tripled in 2012–13 – and four in five of them were at sub degree level.

This was the background context for a conference organised at the University of Wolverhampton, to mark the 20th anniversary of the publication of *The Learning Age*, the 1997 Labour Government Green Paper that led to a cornucopia of new initiatives to promote lifelong learning. The paper opened with an inspiring foreword from David Blunkett, then Secretary of State for Education and Employment. In it he argued:

As well as securing our economic future, learning has a wider contribution. It helps make ours a civilised society, develops the spiritual side of our lives and promotes active citizenship. Learning enables people to play a full part in their community. It strengthens the family, the neighbourhood and consequently the nation. It helps us fulfil our potential and opens doors to a love of music, art and literature. That is why we value learning for its own sake as well as for the equality of opportunity it brings.

It is just such a vision that is lacking from contemporary policy – so the event hoped to kick start discussion by reviewing critically the successes and failures of initiatives like the university for Industry, individual learning accounts, unionlearn and the Skills for Life literacy and numeracy strategy, asking what could be taken on board for a future lifelong learning policy perspective. The day was exhilarating – but will it make a difference? Watch this space!

Sir Alan Tuckett OBE is Professor of Education, University of Wolverhampton, and for many years led the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education.

John Field: The conference was an opportunity to assess *The Learning Age* and reflect on how we take forward its ambitious vision of lifelong learning. Despite a harsh climate today, the fact that over 100 adult educators created a lively discussion of these ideas is only one of many reasons to be cheerful about the longer term prospects for lifelong and lifewide learning.

The central argument and language of *The Learning Age* have become staples of today's educational policy debate. In his preface, David Blunkett set out a familiar agenda: 'To achieve stable and sustainable growth, we will need a well-educated, well-equipped and adaptable labour force'. Nothing unusual about that; similar phrases abound in policy texts from national governments and international organisations across the globe.

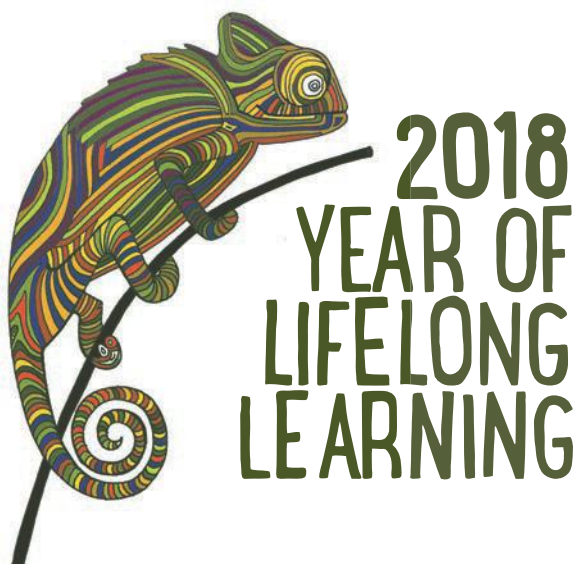
What marked *The Learning Age* as distinctive, and also provides a yardstick by which to judge its results, was its more visionary and humane perspective. Of course, this was a product of its time, following a long period of Conservative rule. There was a sense that things were possible.

With hindsight, there were probably too many initiatives – spread around like confetti – for all to survive the hard years of austerity and recession. And there might have been even more: with the comfort of hindsight, it is clear that *The Learning Age* underestimated the potential of digitisation and mobile devices, and focussed excessively on increasing provision rather than tackling the serious demand-side deficits of the UK skills mix.

Some key achievements remain, while the remarkable research programme on the wider benefits of learning has had international impact. But the question of adult learning and skills remains a live one. The challenges of inclusive and sustainable economic growth are as pressing as ever, and if anything the potential for adult learning in civic democracy is greater than it has been for some time. For those of us who enjoyed the vibrant discussions at Wolverhampton, the conversation has only just begun.'

John Field is emeritus professor at the University of Stirling and Gastprofessor at the University of Cologne

Photo credit: University of Wolverhampton CC BY-NC 2.0



FROM IDEAL TO REAL

We believe in equality of opportunity. We also believe that people have a right to accessible and affordable education throughout their lives.

Lifelong learning fosters prosperity, social inclusion, health and wellbeing, and creates a richer more engaged society.

That's the ideal.

But inequality, disadvantage and poverty is on the rise. Intergenerational unemployment, widening disparities between rural and regional Australia, and increasing inequality all suggest the reality is a long way from the ideal.

Our Summit aims to right that imbalance and put lifelong learning centre stage.

NATIONAL LIFELONG LEARNING SUMMIT

DATE 17 APRIL 2018

TIME 9:00 am – 12:30 pm

LOCATION

Australian Centre for Moving Image (ACMI)
The Cube, Federation Square, Melbourne, Victoria.

KEYNOTES

Sandy Morrison

President – International Council of Adult Education

Tony Dreise

Indigenous Scholar – Australian National University

PANELISTS

Perspectives on lifelong learning

Cassandra Goldie – ACOSS

John Falzon – St Vincent de Paul

David Crosbie – Community Council of Australia

Peter Noonan – Mitchell Institute

Michael Taylor – Australian Industry Group

Lifelong learning in action

Maureen McConnell – ANHCA

Sue McKerracher – Australian Library & Information Association

Bruce McKenzie – formerly TAFE Directors Australia

Chris McCall – Adult Learning Australia

Cr Mary Lalios – Australian Local Government Association

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Learning changes lives



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ACE News

In **Victoria**, Neighbourhood Houses Victoria (NHVic) have had a busy few months. New CEO Nicole Battle brings qualifications in social work and public policy, as well as experience in government, community and the not-for-profit sector to her new role. NHVic's budget and election campaign 'We deliver! Will you?' is making an impact. Neighbourhood Houses have been getting thousands of postcards signed and are arranging meetings with local MPs and councils. NHVic is getting great feedback and support from local MPs, government and the media. Meanwhile NHVic have finished collecting the data in their participant survey and received over 47,700 responses. Once the analysis is complete a research report will be out in May.

In **New South Wales**, Community Colleges Australia (CCA) has announced its annual conference in Sydney from 13 to 15 November 2018, with the theme Taking the Lead: Building Community. The conference includes four streams: leadership and governance, building skills, community and economic development, and social justice. More details here: <https://cca.edu.au/what-we-do/2018-cca-annual-conference/>



Community Resource Centres in 100 remote and regional communities across WA provide locals with access to government and community services and information.

In **Western Australia** Linkwest is protesting against the state government's proposed 40 per cent cuts to Community Resource Centre Programs (CRCs) and calling for a comprehensive review. Linkwest says such a cut will not only be a blow to the regional jobs market and local economies but will go against the government's drive for better social outcomes and job creation in the WA economy.

Located in more than 100 regional and remote communities throughout the state, CRCs are friendly, locally owned and operated service and information centres. The centres are not-for-profit organisations, which are independently managed and governed by their local community. They are a central point for businesses, local residents and visitors, and provide access to government and community services and information.

Linkwest CEO Jane Chilcott said a 40 per cent funding cuts will have a profound impact on the ability of CRCs to cover their staff and operational costs, resulting in job losses, significantly reduced hours and probably closure of some centres.

In many of these towns, the local CRC is the only service available within a population where many either have no computer, limited Internet access or limited digital literacy.

'With more and more state and federal government, and business and banking services being made available exclusively online, these local place based points of access, and the support of CRC staff for those with low digital literacy, are becoming increasingly vital,' Ms Chilcott said. Read the full press release: <https://www.linkwest.asn.au/news-events/media-releases>.

QUEST

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