



Arthur BOYD Australia 1920–1999
Persecuted Lovers (1957–58, Melbourne)
 oil, tempera on composition board, 137.2 x 182.9cm,
 Art Gallery of South Australia, A.R. Ragless Bequest Fund, 1964

♦ 'Persecuted lovers' is part of the National Gallery of Australia's exhibition 'Federation: Australian Art and Society 1901-2001'. Learning Circles Australia has produced kits on Federation, and has been negotiating with the NGA to link its exhibitions, especially the travelling versions, into Learning Circles programs.

Adult Learning Australia Inc. (ALA) is the peak body for organisations and individuals involved with adult learning in Australia. ALA informs and fosters networks of adult educators; advises and lobbies government; promotes policy development; represents Australia on international education bodies; coordinates Adult Learners Week; and more.

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ALA also publishes the *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, in April, July and November. ALA members receive this publication as part of their membership. Non-members may subscribe for \$66 (in Australia) or \$70 (overseas). Single issues are \$20 plus postage.

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A culture of learning – for all of us

Welcome to the first issue of the newsletter for 2001. This year, elections will dominate politics in Australia, and education will play a key role in the fate of governments and oppositions. Which parties will best capture the education aspirations of voters? Which parties will best articulate a vision of education and learning at the start of a new century? What will the parties' policies reflect about the type of Australian society they believe is possible and needed?

Already Labor has set its course to try to foster a 'knowledge nation' and the Coalition parties have responded by releasing their 'innovation statement' *Backing Australia's Ability*. It is almost as if knowledge and innovation, online study and science are being counterposed.

Labor's commitment to making knowledge central to future policy, and to extending university learning online, are welcome. So too is the Government's intention to re-invest in higher education and science.

But at this stage it is fair to say that both parties have fallen short in outlining a vision that can claim to meet the needs of the broadest sectors of Australian society. Both have taken the relatively easy step of committing more money to the education of the few. And while both parties say that lifelong learning needs to be encouraged there is little evidence that this means much more than new attempts to link technology with vocational skills, whether in the universities or TAFE. Lifelong learning means more than this.

The term lifelong learning has been around for a long time and in its more modern usage since the early 1970s. In the contemporary context

it needs to incorporate the following ideas:

- learning occurs through the lifecycle in a wide range of contexts,
- it encompasses both formal and informal learning,
- sites of learning in civil society – clubs and associations, churches, trade unions, environmental groups, book clubs and so on – are important,
- everyone should be able, motivated and actively encouraged to learn through life,
- it relates not only to the workplace but also to a continuous process of forming whole human beings, and
- it connects economic development objectives and employability with personal fulfilment and community development.

This year ALA will be actively promoting an agenda that we hope the political parties will take up. It will include the following key elements:

- a comprehensive and integrated national lifelong learning framework – this framework should include a national summit bringing together all interested parties and organisations with the aim of developing a national lifelong learning policy, and a government agency or bureau for lifelong learning to follow up on recommendations from the Summit,
- to stimulate currently discouraged learners, taxation initiatives such as lifetime learning accounts, and the removal of the burdensome GST

from Adult and Community Education providers,

- support for a national network of Learning Communities,
- support for a national campaign to promote lifelong learning, using Adult Learners Week as a spearhead,
- a Community Adult Learning Innovation Fund, to support innovative programs to encourage adults to take up learning,
- a national program of Learning Circles for education and information on key social issues within the Australian community, and
- a program of wired communities providing internet access through community learning centres.

ALA will soon release a toolbox for members suggesting ways that these ideas can be pursued within communities. It will include more detail on these policy ideas; information for members on who their local members are, the relevant Ministers and opposition spokespeople, and key Senators; and tips on what to include in submissions and on how to approach the media.

If education, knowledge, and innovation are to be for all of us then it is imperative that policy development and funding take into account where adults choose to learn, and support the learning that adults know is important for them. It is encouraging that the political parties acknowledge the need to foster a culture of learning, but we need to make sure that it is a broad and inclusive culture. ■

Tony Brown