



## FROM THE EDITOR

The picture on the front cover is of a meeting between ALA representatives from around the country with the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) to discuss the 2004-2010 national strategy for vocational education and training (VET). This was an important opportunity to convey to ANTA perspectives from adult education practitioners and learners. I would like to thank all those who contributed. (Notes about the consultation can be found on [www.ala.asn.au](http://www.ala.asn.au))

Two themes dominate this first issue of *Adult Learning Australia* for 2003. The first deals with international events—in Taiwan, the United States, South America and New Zealand where various members have visited in the last few months. What is striking is the extent of the focus on learning all over the globe, even when most attention appears to be on matters of international security. This is one indication that lifelong learning can play an important role in nurturing greater understanding of the world and making more durable the peace we are striving to attain.

Garry Traynor talks in his article about the inspiration he drew from enthusiastic young Taiwanese community educators. Knowing what others are doing, against what odds and with what results, is certainly one way to

maintain momentum in our own work. That is one of the motivations behind ALA's newest project, the establishment of a learning communities website, which we hope will become a catalyst for new communities, virtual and real, for policy development and for initiatives in established communities.

Another international influence on our work this year is the fact that 2003 is the first year of the International Decade of Literacy. This has led to our decision to make literacy the theme for this year's Adult Learners' Week. The definition for literacy we are adopting is a broad one which in, the words of the Australian Council for Adult Literacy, is about

*being able to participate as a citizen in a democracy, understanding and fulfilling one's role, being able to assess one's needs, having one's say and responding to the views and actions of others by engaging in the range of literacy/communication practices required in the public domain.*

We are confident that this will give all those who participate in Adult Learners' Week great flexibility to promote their activities and achievements, while also helping us to bring to national attention the urgent issue of Australia's poor literacy levels.

The second theme of the newsletter is the art and results of surveys. We bring you the results of our own survey, to which around ten percent of the membership responded. That is only a very small sample of the Association. Nevertheless, within this group there were some consistent messages, which have encouraged the staff in the national office that we were on the right track. For those, however, who are concerned about the Association's commitment to positive social change, let me assure you that this underpins all the decisions we make on what issues to pursue and projects to implement.

ACNielsen recently completed a two-year evaluation of Adult Learners' Week which resulted in a very positive assessment of the week's contribution to our mission of promoting the value of learning. Its market segmentation suggests that around 60 percent of the population have positive attitudes to learning, while 26 percent have negative views. The rest seem to be indifferent. These figures pose a considerable challenge for ALA because we must still try to reach the uninterested and particularly the disengaged. This will be a strong focus of our research activities in 2003. ■

*Francesca Beddie*