

Quest

Issue 3 Summer 2003



Adult Learning
Australia Inc.



Net*Working 2003

- *Loneliness of the Long Distance Learner?*
- *Citizenship Education*



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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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- Web Manager: Jacqui Levan
- Administration: Naomi Grainger

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Adult Learning Australia
GPO Box 260
CANBERRA CITY ACT 2601
Ph: 02 6274 9500, Fax: 02 6274 9513, e: info@ala.asn.au
<http://www.ala.asn.au>

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Editorial Coordinator: Margaret Bates
Artwork: Whizzbangart

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Editorial

The final edition of *Quest* for 2003 brings both good and sad news. We publish obituaries recording the achievements of two members. George Shipp was made a life member of the Association last year in recognition of his indefatigable commitment to liberal adult education. To commemorate Peter Poulson's dedicated contribution to adult learning, Adult Learning Australia (ALA) has introduced the Poulson Award for outstanding partnerships in adult learning.

We report on a very successful Adult Learners' Week (ALW) which has set the bar high for next year, both in terms of the number and calibre of events, and in taking forward two initiatives, the Great Literacy Debate and Learn @ Work Day. We also publish the winning entry in the ALA/ASA Short Story competition.

In Quest of Learning profiles Dr Ching Jung Ho, one of the ALW international guests. Dr Ho mentions the creativity she finds in her teaching. Tom Bentley, who addressed the Australian Flexible Learning Framework's conference, Networking 2003, also spoke about creativity and the need to promote teaching as a creative profession. It seems to me that Adult Learners' Week is a very useful vehicle for doing that and encouraging respect for an undervalued profession.

The article on Networking 2003 picks up some broad themes in adult learning and reports in detail on the presentation on disability, an issue we have not aired in the ALA magazine for some time. There are opportunities for adult and community educators in the Framework and these are growing thanks to the energetic efforts of our representative on the Flexible Learning Advisory Group, Rita Bennink.

Congratulations to the new Board of Adult Learning Australia! The nine members were elected in a system of proportional representation, with a one-off arrangement to allow a transition to the new constitution. This means that the three members with the most votes are elected for a three-year term, the next three for a two-year term, and the last three for a one-year term.

The Association has introduced a new fee structure. The national executive devoted a lot of time to working out a structure that would not discourage individual members, who do so much for the Association, while also making some modest increases in fees to help cover the costs of providing membership services. New categories cater to those people who might prefer just to receive information from the Association and to support its mission rather than being active members, as well as to practitioners for whom professional recognition is important.

I am also pleased to announce that ALA has entered into an arrangement with NIACE, our sister organisation in the UK, which will enable us to give members regular information about its excellent publications, many of which will also be housed in our library. If you are in Canberra, you really should visit us and take advantage of this specialist resource on adult learning.

Adult Learning Australia was represented both at the mid-term review of CONFINTEA V in Bangkok and at a workshop on citizenship in Kathmandu. Mary Hannan reports on her trip to the troubled kingdom of Nepal, where the thirst for learning is not matched by adequate resources. For that reason, ALA would like to propose to members that we launch a book drive and fund raising campaign for the money to send the books to the World Education, Nepal in Kathmandu. It would be great to finish this year and start 2004 by doing something concrete towards fostering learning as a mechanism for peace and security. Contact Mary if you would like to take part.

With best wishes for 2004.

Francesca Beddie

ALA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

A brief note from Tassie...

On 15 December the Minister for Education, Paula Wriedt, will be launching the Post Compulsory Education and Training Strategy for Tasmania, **Tasmania—A State of Learning**. This document, which has been worked on for two years now, consists of a policy framework and a strategic plan which includes as one of the many initiatives, an Adult and Community Education Policy for Tasmania. This policy has had extensive consultation during its development and will be welcomed by the ACE community in Tasmania as a great starting point for collaboration and recognition of ACE in Tasmania.

Maggie Aird, Department of Education, Tasmania
maggie.aird@education.tas.gov.au

Getting Our Act Together, UK (Unit for Arts and Offenders)

Getting Our Act Together is a three-year British pilot program to research the value and viability of using drama-based approaches in improving the literacy skills of prisoners. The project was conceived on the basis that ex-offenders are ineligible for 96 out of every 100 jobs because of poor literacy and numeracy skills and this often leads to re-offending on release. The participants in each establishment engaged in a drama-based project culminating in a small-scale performance. Simultaneously, they were given the opportunity to develop basic communication skills qualifications at levels 1 or 2. The program has demonstrated that drama help in removing obstacles to learning and motivating people to communicate. The Unit for the Arts and Offenders has written a manual to guide drama practitioners and basic/key skills tutors in the co-delivery of drama-based approaches to literacy.

For further information please go to www.a4offenders.org.uk

OUT OF OUR MINDS; Learning to Be Creative, Ken Robinson 225pp

Available from Capstone Publishing Ltd, UK
Tel +44 (0) 1865 798 623

In this book, Ken Robinson argues that in a world of pervasive economic and technological changes, people are increasingly required to be innovative, creative and flexible. Robinson explores the need for creative abilities, analyses the conditions under which creativity can thrive or be stifled, and sets out a series of key principles for developing and harnessing creativity in organisations and communities.

He strongly underlines the limits of an education system obsessed with academic achievement and advocates the need to reconnect feeling and intellect in order to fully develop human resources and to promote creativity.

Out of Our Minds calls for radical changes in the way in which we think about intelligence and education, in order to meet the extraordinary challenges of living and working in the 21st century.

The returns from education

According to a joint UNESCO-OECD report, *Financing Education – Investment and Returns: Analysis of the World Education Indicators*, investing in secondary and tertiary education as well as primary schooling, pays rich dividends for emerging economies, both for countries and individuals. Investment in human capital over the past two decades has accounted for about half a percentage point in the annual growth rates of 16 emerging economies, found.

Yet access to secondary and tertiary education, the key to building a knowledge-based workforce, is progressing slowly. In 2002, adults in the 16 countries surveyed spent an average 7.6 years in school, more than double the 3.4 years recorded in 1960. This was still almost three years less than the average 10.2 years in OECD countries. And at the current rate of increase, it will take another 30 years for some of these countries to reach present OECD educational duration.

The report found that the link between education and economic growth over the past 20 years was strongest in Argentina, Chile, Jamaica, Malaysia, Peru, the Philippines and Uruguay. Malaysians, for example, spent an average 3.22 years in school in 1960 when per capita GDP was US\$2,000. By 2000, the average time had increased to 9.31 years, with GDP tripling to some US\$6,000.

Knowledge Management (KM) – New Community Area on EdNA Online

<http://www.edna.edu.au/edna/page2092.html>

There is an increasing acceptance of KM in many organisations. Some organisations have successfully implemented KM strategies while others are implementing or interested in KM. In EdNA's Online community you can contribute by suggesting links to KM and your own research papers. There are also opportunities to form discussion groups and communities of practice to share knowledge.

Obituaries

Vale George Shipp



George Shipp, life member of both the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and Adult Learning Australia, and a passionate advocate of liberal education for over forty years, died on 9 September 2003, aged 77, after a six-month battle with leukaemia.

George's involvement with adult education began in 1956 when a committee of the Workers' Educational Association of New South Wales interviewed him for the position of Assistant Secretary. He was not the committee's first choice, but when he was offered the job, few could have realised how important an appointment it was to be for the future of the WEA. After insisting that he take leave to complete his MEC in 1960, the WEA saw George become a respected academic at the University of Sydney and then the University of NSW. While the association lost an energetic executive officer, it gained a dedicated and gifted volunteer.

Born in Vienna on 30 May 1926, George was the second child of Austrian Jewish parents. The Shipp's left Austria after the Nazi annexation, arriving in Sydney in December 1938. They settled at Eastwood, running a bakery supplying speciality biscuits and cakes to coffee shops. George began work in the printing industry and then joined the public service while studying for his economics degree part-time. He was a lover of classical music, a keen chess player and sportsman.

George was a passionate defender of liberal education all his life. Until a few months before his death, he was still active on WEA committees and at the state and federal levels in adult education. He was involved in the foundation of the Australian Association for Adult Education (now Adult Learning Australia) in the early 1960s, and although not initially a supporter of the national body, he felt honoured to be made a life member in 2002.

In considering George's half century of activism, we are reminded of the history and tradition of adult education as a cultural enterprise focussed on the rational intellectual development of Australian men and women and how he himself personified this ideal.

Richard Pinder

EXECUTIVE OFFICER
WEA SYDNEY

Vale Peter Poulson



The adult education sector was shocked in September by the tragic death of Peter Poulson, principal of Parramatta Community College. Peter will be remembered for his outstanding contribution to the world of Australian adult education. He was the quintessential teacher of adults, a person with a keen intellect and curiosity about the world, an open-minded and questioning

attitude, shaped by his many and varied life experiences.

Peter was born in Britain. At the age of 12 his parents moved to India (and then Hong Kong) and Peter was sent to boarding school. There he faced bullying. He hated the place and ran away to County Cork in Ireland where he worked on a farm. Subsequently he returned to school, in Hong Kong, where he excelled in both study and sport.

Peter moved to Australia in 1966 and at various times worked as a coal miner, a union organiser, a labourer, security guard, small business owner, storeman and packer. It was an interesting life which later informed what became his vocation—teaching—where he wanted to ensure he imparted learning the way he would have enjoyed receiving it.

He was committed to the professional development of adult educators and was well-known at the University of Technology Sydney where he was a part-time lecturer and postgraduate student in the Faculty of Education. He was a leading figure in the field of adult education in NSW and nationally, including as a member of the ALA national executive.

Peter had great amounts of energy for any projects he thought worthwhile but at the same time a capacity for healthy cynicism about life and an ability to deflate social and political pretensions where he found them. He liked to challenge others' thinking but did so with a light touch and a characteristic good humour.

Though it is now a cliché to describe some people as passionate lifelong learners, he was one. He was the genuine article. He was passionate about life, which makes his tragic death the harder to bear.

John McIntyre

MEMBER, NSW BOARD OF ACE



Net*Working 2003

NET*Working 2003 brought over 600 people in the vocational education and training (VET) sector together to discuss flexible learning in its many facets. The conference was held in the Blue Mountains in a resort transformed from a place for golfers and honeymooners into a high-tech meeting place.

NET*Working 2003 buzzed. It was a conference full of energy and good humour. The only problem was that all this enthusiasm was being soaked up by the converted. The next step for flexible learning is to take it beyond the Australian Flexible Learning Framework. For that to happen

more work needs to be done on selling the idea of e-learning—consumers know it is flexibility they want—and that will require a good deal of work on quality issues. As we heard over and over, technology is a means to an end. In our context, that end is effective learning.

The conference was jam packed with sessions. Many of the papers will be available on line. Some already are, as are discussions about people's impressions. Go to <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/nw2003/>.

Engaging business

I was not able to attend the opening sessions. Those who did were impressed by George Lewin, the Triton Foundation, whose main message was to be brave and persistent with ideas for innovation. Business was represented at other sessions of the conference, notably at a discussion facilitated by Dr Karl Kruszelnicki (better known as Dr Karl, the science guru). The familiar

cry for the return to generic skills, in particular the ability to communicate, was heard, as was the plea for TAFE to be more accommodating of business culture, for example in the language it uses to engage industry. What was absent in the session was the promised discussion of ethics in a world confronted by gene technology, biometrics and so on. That was rectified in an impassioned session by Steve Keirl, who reminded the audience that people do care about the environment and the human condition.

The disability sector

I did hear Mark Bagshaw (Ability Australia and Marketing Manager for IBM) speak about the fact that one in five Australians has a disability; that 1.2 million people with a disability are out of work; and only 360,000 are involved in the VET sector. Disability costs the government \$12.5 billion in welfare. Bagshaw believes that new strategies, which better engage those with disabilities, could turn this around and see \$46 billion added to the economy.

Bagshaw said there were three issues to be addressed, all of which needed 'whole-of-life' solutions:

- Infrastructure barriers
- Community expectations
- Empowerment of those with a disability.

INFRASTRUCTURE

For many people with a disability getting out of bed, going to work or doing the shopping are currently gargantuan tasks. Bagshaw argues that this could be changed with some smart thinking about the adaptation of technology and the creation of business opportunities. Business wants markets. While not all could afford expensive technology, a recent Deakin University study had found that of the one billion people with a disability in the world, ten percent had an average income and purchasing power. That's already a very sizeable market. Moreover, people with a disability are an articulate consumer group, who know what they want. And what they want could appeal to many others. For example, the able-bodied would also welcome a mobile technology which helped track down the right transport options (bus—with wheelchair accessibility; taxi; train; etc.) from the place the consumer was located to their destination.

COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS

The way in which people with a disability expect to operate in society and how they are perceived has an impact on the way in which infrastructure is modified and business responds. Bagshaw said that to change these perceptions required a significant marketing strategy.

EMPOWERMENT

A vital element of empowerment was the promotion of lifelong learning strategies to encourage the acquisition of life and vocational skills (and—*my addition*—prepare the able bodied for the prospect of disability).

ANTA's perspective

Janina Gawler reminded participants that the Australian VET system was industry-led and that one of the challenges facing the sector was the need to move the perceptions of VET as highly institutionalised and, more broadly, to increase respect for VET. Other challenges were to improve recognition of prior learning (RPL) processes and for the National Skills Councils (formerly ITABs) to make training packages more flexible.

A view from Britain

In Britain there are such things as policy entrepreneurs. One of those is Tom Bentley whose powerpoint presentation beamed in from London is available on at <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/nw2003/presentations/Tom%20Bentley.ppt>.

He argued that with learning becoming more and more important for improving people's life chances, new and flexible practices in education were vital. The school was a creature of the industrial age. Automating it was not the answer for the knowledge economy. Moreover, he reminded us, learning is a social process. Therefore, we need to know the best contexts for learning in the current society. This, in turn, gives rise to a policy debate about the public entitlement to personalised learning and the challenge of combining a diversified learning environment with quality and equity. For Tom Bentley, a critical ingredient in the new mix is radical bureaucratic reform. Another is to re-invigorate teaching as a creative profession which can respond to a new learning environment in which learners are self-directed and where successful enterprises become highly adaptable learning organisations. A third is the challenge of finding collaborative rather than competitive funding models.

Bentley's recipe is one that could help to shape Adult Learning Australia's advocacy agenda as we enter an election year. We'd love to hear how you think we should shape that agenda. Email me at f.beddie@ala.asn.au if you have suggestions.

Francesca Beddie

ALA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Adult Learners' Week 2003

ALW 2003 bigger than ever!

Adult Learners' Week (ALW) in Australia continues to grow, with more events, activities and celebrations taking place around the country in 2003 than ever before.

The interim *National Analysis of Adult Learners' Week 2003* (now available from www.adultlearnersweek.org) has revealed awareness of Adult Learners' Week and associated publicity materials this year is also the highest on record.

Throughout the Week, ALW was observed with a wide variety of events across the nation, from the launch of the Learning Communities Catalyst at the National Museum of Australia on 1 September, to the Tough Learning Conference in sunny Queensland which commenced on 7 September.

Popular events around the country included SMS literacy classes in Hobart, community radio sessions in Katherine and DanceFever in Fremantle.



Focus on adult literacy

The national theme for Adult Learners' Week 2003 was literacy, stemming from the alarming fact that around 45% of Australian adults have insufficient literacy to cope in a sophisticated society (IALS 1999).

Together with ALW Coordinators in each state of Australia, Adult Learning Australia worked with partners including the Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL), Reading Writing Hotline and the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) to highlight the importance of competency in a range of literacies—including media, financial, IT, visual and information literacy, as well as basic or critical literacy.

Continuing this theme, The Great Literacy Debate was one of two new national activities introduced to the celebration



Dr Allan Quigley from St Francis Xavier University, Canada, shows his salsa dancing skills at the launch of Adult Learners' Week in Perth.

in 2003. The debate was an enormously popular series of more than 20 individual forums held around Australia and New Zealand during Adult Learners' Week—and those are just the ones we know about! From Perth to Thursday Island, Mackay to Horsham, citizens, politicians and local celebrities argued that it is better to be literate than to fish, that literacy is the cornerstone to our democracy and that literacy is defined by context.

With ALA's continuing focus on literacy for the remainder of the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003–2012), The Great Literacy Debate will again take place next year, and we look forward to its growing success.

Literacy and Numeracy Awards

The Federal Minister for Education, Science and Training, Dr Brendan Nelson, announced the five winners of the inaugural Awards for Outstanding Contribution to Improving Literacy and/or Numeracy at a breakfast at the Sydney Opera House on 4 September, during both Adult Learners' Week and National Literacy and Numeracy Week. The five winners each received \$10,000 to further enhance the work they are undertaking in the field. The winners were:

Karen Hendrix—New South Wales—Co-ordinator of *The Meeting Place*, St Mary's High School

Kathleen Napier—Western Australia—Founder of *Read Write Now*, volunteer tutor scheme

Beth Powell—Western Australia—School of Education at Murdoch University, numeracy education

Margaret Simmonds—Victoria—*On Track Learning Wimmera*, community literacy

Narrellae Simpson—Queensland—Indigenous literacy programmes.

Around the country many other dedicated adult literacy tutors and their students were recognised for their achievements in ALW State award ceremonies.

Congratulations to them all!



Dr Nelson congratulates Narrellae Simpson, one of the winners of the literacy awards. Narrellae has lived in Goodna, Queensland for over 20 years and is a well known and respected member of the Ipswich community. She has established literacy training courses to help members of the Indigenous community obtain their driver's licence, forklift ticket and to become computer literate. She is now introducing Braille classes for those whose eyesight is impaired by glaucoma.

Australian audiences welcome international guests

This theme of literacy also influenced the choice of two international guests, who toured the country throughout Adult Learner's Week and who provided a valuable global perspective on local issues.

Dr Allan Quigley is Professor and Chair of the Department of Adult Education at St Francis Xavier University, Canada. A devoted literacy practitioner with over 32 years of experience, Dr Quigley explained to audiences in Western Australia, South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland why no industrialised nation has succeeded in eradicating literacy, and discussed the issue on non participation in literacy education. Allan reflected on his whirlwind visit and sent us the following remarks:

Having been invited by Adult Learning Australia to be one of the two international speakers for Adult Learners Week, 2003, I had one major concern: would my observations about adult literacy be relevant? After all, my experiences in literacy had been on the other side of the world. I had visited Australia in 1996. Then, the adult literacy systems, schemes, nodes, funding systems, and the whole new alphabet soup of acronyms convinced me that that there were many differences between literacy provision in Australia and Canada. However, Adult Learners' Week 2003 taught me that there are some deeper, universal, principles at work in this literacy field of ours. In a six-day tour of Perth, Adelaide, Sydney and Brisbane I gave five speeches, three workshops, and one (live) interview for ABC Radio. After participation in the literacy tutor awards at the Sydney Opera House; the tango at the Perth Cultural Centre, a million handshakes, and more warm hospitality from teachers, learners, and friends than I can ever recount, I have come to appreciate that it is people, not systems, who make up this field of ours. People on both sides of the world who have similar issues, who care about others, and who give of themselves, comprise literacy. From the whirlwind came many images: fun, food, energy, laughter. But the enduring memory I have is of concern and conviction—just like here in Canada. I returned renewed in the belief that literacy is the most important educational work there is. Thank you all for making this a great week for me.

Allan Quigley

We also hosted Professor Ching-jung Ho from National Kaohsiung Normal University in Taiwan who sent a letter to us about her trip. Here is an abridged version:

Dear friends

My first stop was in Brisbane. ... I really appreciated the responses to my speech in QCAL about education for immigrant brides. They made me reflect on the purpose of these classes which is to facilitate the students to express their thoughts and be self-confident. That is what literacy is all about.

Darwin is probably the hottest place I have ever been! I enjoyed the interaction with the audience in NT University and the trip to the Nungalinga College. I respect the College for its efforts to improve the lives of Indigenous people.

Indeed, I learned a lot about Australian aboriginal cultures and arts, for example the close relationship between the

Adult Learners' Week 2003

ALW 2003 bigger than ever!

Indigenous people and the land that has been long forgotten by most of the people in the world. My trip to the Sydney Aquarium again reminded me of the importance of the harmonious relationship among nature, animals and human beings.

In Sydney I also got a chance to visit old friends, such as Garry Traynor, Elaine Harris, Frank Storey, and Amanda Moore, and make new friends too. The discussion about the community university in Taiwan made me realise the importance of international world networking. We have to work together to realise our dream about this world.

At the Sydney Community College Award night it was marvellous to see how things were being done differently, in particular in the programs for the disadvantaged.

Finally, I would like to mention how I was impressed by how well-organised Adult Learners' Week was. Definitely, I will share what I have learned in this informative trip with my fellows in Taiwan. Again, please keep in touch!

Ching-jung Ho

Learn @ Work Day spotlights workplace learning

Adult Learners' Week 2003 also incorporated the first national Learn @ Work Day, held on Friday 5 September 2003. Learn @ Work Day activities ranged from a retail display at the ABC Shop in Melbourne to an online discussion forum held by the Australian Virtual Centre for Leadership for Women; from drug and alcohol awareness sessions at Alf's Smash Repairs in Innisfail to IT literacy



Learn @ Work Day 2003 resulted in special rewards for staff at the Northern Territory Chamber of Industry and Commerce, who received a new digital camera after winning first prize in the Learn @ Work Day Photo Competition.



The Gold Coast Hospital celebrated Learn @ Work Day with exuberance. Their entry won second prize in the photo competition.

classes at the Sydney Opera House and tai chi demonstrations at the Australian National Training Authority.

The results of a questionnaire distributed to Learn @ Work Day participants indicate that there is much enthusiasm about repeating and expanding Learn @ Work Day in 2004 (the full evaluation is now available from www.adultlearnersweek.org.)

Some innovative suggestions for future Learn @ Work Day events include:

- a national networking forum to encourage the exchange of ideas and experience between participants;
- specific targeting of Learn @ Work Day activities to industries and professions, such as teaching or manufacturing; and
- an online database of links to organisations who can provide advice and support on workplace learning issues—including ACE providers, peak bodies, community groups, etc.

Talking about Tough Learning

Learning Network Australia's Tough Learning conference represented a key stage in the ongoing project to explore learning in difficult situations. Drawing from practice in various sectors the project seeks to develop practical products to highlight the strategies, skills, knowledge and principles to successfully facilitate learning in tough environments.

The Brisbane conference represented the 'half way' point in a process that started with local workshops, discussion groups, community conversations and other activities around Australia. Following the conference, flow-on workshops are taking place to test and develop the ideas emanating from the Brisbane 'hub' conference.

Co-sponsored by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and Adult Learning Australia, the Brisbane conference was an opportunity for delegates to synthesise the underlying strengths that exist in those people able to learn well in tough environments. Four different models for 'tough learning' were drafted. Each model tried to make sense of the complexities involved with learning in the face of difficulty.

Among their common elements, the models showed the importance of learner empowerment, of spirituality and of re-framing the notion of success as essential to creating productive learning outcomes. The models also highlighted how many of the apparent barriers to learning might be re-framed, or addressed in innovative ways, so that they actually enhance, rather than inhibit, the learning experience. The work on the tough learning models continues.



Michael Tantaro addresses an enthralled audience, which includes Frank McGuire (Hume City Council) and Karen Dymke (ACAL) at the Hume Global Learning Centre's Great Literacy Debate on 1 September.



Nathan Deakes, Commonwealth Games medallist, talks to Alice Springs via the Learning Communities Catalyst website (www.lcc.edu.au), launched at the National Museum of Australia on the first day of Adult Learners' Week 2003

2004 and beyond!

Amidst all the good news, the *National Analysis of Adult Learners' Week 2003* also reveals some areas for concern. Most notably, the role adult learning providers play in informing the general public about Adult Learners' Week fell to its weakest level in three years.

Adult Learning Australia will be making a concerted effort in 2004 to find the most effective ways to help providers maximise the opportunities Adult Learners' Week presents to promote and celebrate learning.

To the many thousands of Australians who took part in Adult Learner's Week 2003, the staff of Adult Learning Australia offer our sincerest thanks. Planning for Adult Learners' Week 2004 is already well underway and we look forward to your ongoing support. For the latest news and information, stay tuned to the website at www.adultlearnersweek.org.

Jane Speechley

COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

In Quest of Learning

Ching-jung Ho



Dr Ching-jung Ho is an associate professor at National Kaohsiung Normal University and a driving force in the Community Universities movement, which is seeking to bring about educational reform and broader social change in Taiwan, primarily by offering non-accredited learning in community settings.

Aside from adult basic literacy education, she promotes community reading and theatre groups, and has done much to assist newly arrived migrant women to learn Chinese and adapt to a new culture. Community universities offer three kinds of courses which concentrate, respectively, on academic learning, life skills and group activity. The first encourage critical thinking and reflection on society's issues. The second aim to enrich lives and to facilitate people remodel their personal lives. The third encourage community-based groups engage in social action.

1. What is the single most important lesson your parents ever taught you?

To be an honest person.

2. What were your best and worst experiences from school? Were you a good student?—Why/why not?

I had several really wonderful teachers in schools who influenced me a great deal. But one mathematics teacher at junior high school took out her personal problems on me.

3. What did you always want to be?—Did you achieve this? Why/why not?

I wanted to be an artist. That was an old dream. Still, I try to achieve this as an educator.

4. What was your first job and what did you learn from it?

My first full-time job was a copywriter. I learned more about how business works.

5. Complete this sentence: 'The most valuable thing I've learned this year is...'

The most valuable thing I've learned this year is that anything is possible if we use our imagination.

6. What new skills do you hope to acquire and how? What unfulfilled ambition have you yet to conquer?

If I can be more patient, my life will be easier. I always want to live in a just society and try hard to fulfil it. (It sounds so ambitious!)

7. What is one talent people might be surprised to know you have?

Being a person with all sorts of dreams and never giving up.

8. What piece of information would you most like to pass on to the next generation?

Find your identity from within. Don't admire others.

International

CONFINTEA V

Being in Bangkok as one of three hundred delegates to a meeting about adult learning was both a disheartening and inspiring experience.

The CONFINTEA V mid-term review of the Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning began with a provocative speech from the UNESCO Assistant Director General of Education, Sir John Daniel who found:

adult educators do have a reputation for being boring, sanctimonious, backward looking and parentalist. They have a propensity to miss the boat when new developments of importance to adult education appear on the scene.

To change this, he suggested adult educators go beyond the advocacy of good ideas to working with promising trends, mentioning in particular the need to get more involved with the private sector. The public pie was not big enough for lifelong learning, he continued, which was why governments focussed on basic education.

In such a context it is futile for adult educators to bewail the fact that they are not getting their share of the public pie. They ought to look at what other pies of money are available and take full advantage of them before going to government to flag areas of adult learning where the market has failed and public support is vital.

I would argue that that in Australia, where fee-for-service and user pays are the norm, we have already looked at those other pies. The challenge for us is to convince policy makers that the market does fail and the state has a responsibility to provide incentives for disadvantaged and disengaged adult learners.

The bluntness of Sir John's remarks were hardly appropriate given his audience. Most of those listening represented people working on the ground in Africa, the sub-continent, Asia and Latin America with the most meagre of resources and momentous problems. They do not have time to be sanctimonious. Those I met were never boring; they were fascinating and highly accomplished people able to operate in at least two languages and delivering fantastic results to adults suffering from the dislocation of war, poverty, disability and prejudice. And most operate in environments where survival means taking advantage of every possible funding source.

Despite his criticism of adult educators, Sir John concluded:

adult education should be understood for what it truly is, the opportunity to create the balance of human and



International Literacy Awards, Bangkok, 8 September 2003

social capital that can give our fragile societies a more confident and democratic future.

These remarks from a UNESCO representative rang rather hollow, given that agency's top priority is children's education and the meagre support it affords its Institute for Education (UIE), which has primary carriage for adult education.

Sadly, too, there were few officials present to hear this and the other endorsements of adult learning made during the conference. Many governments, including Australia, have not submitted country reports to the review. This reflects the low priority accorded to adult education in most nations as well as UIE's inability to properly administer the CONFINTEA process.

And so the conference proceeded in the cumbersome mode of all large meetings, with delegates repeating to each other familiar messages about the value of adult learning. Among its recommendations was that adult learning become integrated into the activities of all UN agencies and of a multiplicity of players in individual countries, including governments, civil society organisations and the private sector.

In the margins of the conference delegates became real people with inspiring stories, all of which confirmed Sir John's remarks about the power of learning to change people's lives for the better.

For a more comprehensive report on the meeting and the Call for Action and Accountability visit www.ala.asn.au and www.unesco.org/education/uie/confintea.

Francesca Beddie
ALA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

International

Engendering Citizenship Education



Mary Hannan, Adult Learning Australia; Kathy Solomon, Vanuatu Rural Development & Training; Molly Daure, Kup Women for Peace, PNG

Talking in Nepal

Nestled in the foothills of Shivapuri in the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal, participants gathered in October to attend a regional workshop on Engendering Citizenship Education.

The workshop was organised by the Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE) and World Education, Nepal, with the support of the Institute of International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association (IIZ/DVV) and the UNESCO Institute of Education (UIE).

Participants from Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Thailand, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and Australia shared experiences of their citizenship development programs and gender issues.

The purpose of the workshop was to:

- assist organisations to develop their citizenship education programs,
- identify ways in which ASPBAE can engender its own regional citizenship education programs.

Participants explored how communities, especially those of poor and vulnerable population groups, can participate in political affairs, thus encouraging democratic governance. It also looked at how to enhance the leadership capacities of women so that they could become more involved in political decision making.

Representatives from ASPBAE's Executive, member organisations and staff facilitated the workshop. They did an excellent job, devising a well-structured program and using

a participatory approach which allowed good interaction between participants both in the larger group and in smaller groups. At no time did anyone feel their views were not welcomed and appreciated.

Dr Chij Shrestha, Director World Education, Nepal welcomed participants to the workshop and explained that World Education and ASPBAE had a common mission to provide educational opportunities to people which helped them broaden their views and better engage in society.

Carol Anoneuvo from the UNESCO Institute of Education in Germany set a framework for the discussion. She said citizenship education had a long history, citing Aristotle's notion that political participation was a civic duty which must be nurtured through constant questioning.

Carol identified some desired outcomes from adult education programs which focus on citizenship:

- creating greater community participation,
- raising awareness about prejudice and discrimination in society,
- encouraging greater recognition and accountability,
- promoting a culture of peace, intercultural communication and human rights.

Participants heard three case studies from India, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea (PNG). I was particularly interested in the case study from PNG which looked at the Kup Women for Peace (KWP). KWP was built on the collective effort of leading women activists to address issues of tribal fights, violence against women and children and to build peace among the various clans and tribal groups. KWP has been working with the local police, churches, the tribal watch group, village courts and others to work for peace, to safeguard people's human rights, promote civic pride and self-employment opportunities. It is a big task in an area known not only for continual tribal fights but also for violence against women and for witch-hunts.

On behalf of Adult Learning Australia I talked about the Discovering Democracy project we have been involved in for some years and the power of learning circles not only to get people—including a majority of women—learning about the political process but also engaging them as citizens in that process. Participants were interested in the learning circle concept and, for me, it was particularly interesting to hear from the Vanuatu representatives how they are using the learning circle concept in civics education.

International

This gathering provided an opportunity to share our concepts, our successes and our struggles in defining the concept and processes of citizenship education. There was also much discussion on the challenges of reaching women in developing countries who, traditionally, have been excluded from such educational programs. Equally important was the need to engage both men and women in peace building and governance initiatives, if these were to be successful in the long term.

The various projects from the countries represented were hugely diverse; however, common threads became obvious during the many discussions. The workshop reinforced the view that non-government organisations play an important role in citizenship education and while we are all different we can learn from our differences.

Walking in Nepal

My lasting impressions of Nepal include the colourful clothing, the kindness and smiling faces of the people, the superb scenery and the extreme poverty. The host organisation did a fantastic job in managing the logistics of the workshop and caring for the participants.

At the end of the workshop I travelled to Potkara which is the most popular destination in Nepal after Kathmandu. Having managed the interesting task of navigating the Kathmandu Domestic Airport, the short flight to Potkara presented an opportunity to see the majestic white peaks of the Annapurna range. The valley surrounding Pokhara is home to thick forests, gushing rivers, clear lakes and villages which appear to cling to the steep terraced mountainsides.

My short time in Potkara was spent with the Chhetri Sisters—three Nepalese sisters who have worked since 1994 to empower other Nepalese women. The Chhetri Sisters are pioneers in the field of female trek guides and porters which has been traditionally a male domain.

Initially, their training program attracted women from rural areas, where they were deprived of a high level of education and job opportunities. Some were low caste women whom society looked down upon and others were socially disadvantaged women who were facing challenges in life. Now other women from all over the country are attracted to the program and its job opportunities.

The training includes trekking skills and information, basic trekking English, first aid, flora and fauna, local religion



Nicky, Bijaya and Dicky Chhetri (Lucky—the third Nepalese sister was leading a trekking party to India)

and culture, as well as something about western culture. Their aim has been and continues to be to empower and develop women through tourism and to encourage sustainable tourism in remote areas of Nepal.

Whilst I will have so many wonderful memories of Nepal I feel a deep concern for its citizens who are continually reminded of the fighting between the Maoist rebels and government troops. Many schools, libraries and other public institutions (particularly in rural communities) have been destroyed or abandoned. It is a daunting experience to come across an abandoned library or to talk to a young girl about the obstacles she faces when she considers a return to school to complete her studies so she can work and help the local community. Bijaya was a delightful young person who had a passion for reading books. I instantly thought of all the books my children had read and collected over the years. I have promised Bijaya that I will start sending her some of these books. This promise has inspired the ALA National Office to explore with the ALA membership the concept of supporting village libraries in Nepal by donating books from Australia.

More comprehensive reports on the workshop and on ALA's work in the citizenship area are available at www.ala.asn.au.

Mary Hannan

INNOVATIVE PROJECTS MANAGER

Guest Spot

The Loneliness of the Long Distance Learner? It Ain't Necessarily So!

What do Edward Said, Charles Darwin, E. Annie Proulx, Richard Burton (the 19th century explorer, not the actor), Julius Caesar, Margaret Atwood, Gertrude Bell, Salvador Dali and Paul Theroux have in common? And what is the connection between Cowra, West Wyalong, Hallidays Point, Young, Kotara, Cooma, Deniliquin, Dubbo and Kulnura—apart from the fact that trains no longer link them?

The first list of famous names represents just some of the characters who feature in a range of courses that can be studied under WEA Sydney's distance education operation—the Discussion Group Program. And the country NSW towns in the second list? Just a few of the rural groups who have studied the works or actions of the cast above, meeting (physically) once a fortnight to pour over texts, notes, discussion questions and other relevant study material. And there is also a missing link between the two lists: having mangled Darwin, I might as well now misquote Harry S. Truman ... because the buck stops with me, as author and tutor of the courses in which our cast of luminaries (and others) feature.

As part of its commitment to bring the study of the humanities and social sciences to as wide a population as possible, WEA Sydney took over the running of the Discussion Group Program from the University of Sydney in 1992. The scheme consists of the distribution of study material (texts, book boxes, specially written study notes, complete with discussion questions, and associated reference works), to groups around NSW—and indeed beyond, as our participants now include several Queensland groups, and one in Vanuatu. Groups are made up of friends or working acquaintances, many separated by considerable distances. In rural areas the coming-together of companions in this way can act as a boon in bad times.



Two loyal members of the West Wyalong Discussion Group at the Temora Rural Women's Gathering in October 2003.

One of WEA Sydney's latest groups was established in the drought-stricken back-of-Bourke area. Ground down by the physical and mental effects of the drought, seeking an outlet of intellectual stimulation beyond financial worries, the Marra Creek group was formed in early 2002 (the "Year of the Outback") with 11 students. The first course they studied was Susannah Fullerton's *Frustrated Heroines!* They have now moved from heroines to international politics.

The concept of meeting in a group to study should be seen in the wider context of distance learning, one that is dominated in most journals by developments in on-line delivery. But the sharing of ideas by enthusiasts still lies at the heart of the most basic mechanisms of adult education, and should be encouraged, rather than relegated to the sidelines. Increasingly too, the benefit of this type of shared study is reflected in research into basic health issues for the aged.

Naturally there is a social element in all this. But serious study underlies groups' work. With more than a hundred courses to choose from, spread over the disciplines of history, literature, social sciences, politics, fine arts (boxes of slides wing their way regularly from Bathurst Street in Sydney's CBD to the rural groups), philosophy and religion, a vast range of topics are open to discussion. And issues are taken seriously—one of WEA's most successful recent courses has been *The Wilder Shores of Love*, a program which examines the lives of several nineteenth century ladies travelling to the Middle East. (This is where Richard

Burton and his wife, Isabel, come in.) On one level romantic, the course in fact delves deep into modern cultural concerns such as Islam and the West, gender issues, traditional life and imperial imagery, and even philosophical concepts of “us” and “them”. Indeed, it was illuminating to have a group in Young, stimulated by discussion of just these issues, reply:

Said’s comment that Europe viewed the East as ‘Other’ is quite relevant but we felt that it is necessary to look at ‘others’ to define where we fit in the scheme of things. The negative point here is that in doing so, the status quo and differing cultural attitudes are reinforced.

Orientalism in the Outback? Escapism or relevant to twenty-first century Australia? Well, we read of Afghans in Orange and their success in joining a typically Aussie setting through their work in a bottling factory—and there are many other such stories of assimilation and acceptance to offset more regular images of refugees and detainees.

Stimulating discussion of such issues in a group setting remains, for many, the essence of adult education—in some ways, the light going on in the minds of WEA’s Discussion Group students shines brighter than the solitary glow of a computer monitor. Long may it continue!

Michael Newton

SENIOR EDUCATION OFFICER AT WEA SYDNEY.



Adult Learning Australia (ALA) is delighted to announce a new element in our cooperation with our sister organisation in the United Kingdom, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE).

NIACE exists to ‘promote the study and general advancement of adult continuing education’. Like ALA, it seeks to ‘support an increase in the total numbers of adults engaged in formal and informal learning’ while at the same time to taking ‘positive action to improve opportunities and widen access to learning opportunities for those communities under-represented in current provision’.

NIACE has long been respected as a leading publisher on issues of adult education and social participation. Recently NIACE generously contributed several of its latest publications to the ALA library, open to all ALA members. NIACE has an online catalogue and is able to mail its publications promptly to Australian customers. There is a direct link to the NIACE catalogue on the ALA home page. Their catalogue is well worth exploring, if only to gain a snapshot of the hot social issues in the UK at present.

One of NIACE’s recent publications, **Adult Learning, citizenship and community voices**, (NIACE, UK, 2003) Edited by Pam Coare and Rennie Johnston, 248pp, £16.95 Available from NIACE Please email orders@niace.org.uk examines the connections between theory and practice in citizenship learning. Focusing on the experiences and views of a range of citizens, many on the margins of society, the contributors explore the significance and impact of particular forms of educational policies and provision in people’s lives and the role adult learning can play in the development of citizenship.

Learning Circles

Learners learning from learners

In November 2002 Mary Hannan from Learning Circles Australia, visited Alice Springs to run workshops to train facilitators for Learning Circles in Central Australia. Participants attending came from the Central Australian Remote Health Development Services, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, Waljta Tjutangku Palyapayi and the Northern Territory Education and Training Authority.

By December our first Learning Circle was run in Tennant Creek as an assessment process for the Aboriginal Health Worker (AHW) competency "Pharmacy". Gillian Pengally, CARHDS Educator, reported that "the Aboriginal Health Workers were delighted to take control of the Learning Circle, share their knowledge in a safe environment and to encourage each other".

Further progress has been made in 2003 with the development of two learning circles in the first half of the year. The first was an assessment workshop designed around the AHW competency "Provide Interpreting Service". It took less than 10 minutes for the Aboriginal Health Workers to take charge of the Learning Circle, a number taking up the whiteboard markers to draw or write the points they wanted to get across, with the facilitator (me) really fading into the background. Normally a bit shy with role plays the Aboriginal Health Workers took to these activities with gusto as they felt that they were in control of the process.

The second workshop was a Learning Circle designed with three objectives. One was to learn about the competency "Provide Informal Training", the second was to learn a bit more about sexually transmitted infections, particularly Hep C and HIV and the third was to explore some different resources which could be used in community education programs around STI's. The learning resources included video, flip charts, multi media CD Rom "Sex Yum Ouch", music (Groove Box) and the use of multimedia scripting tool MASH. This Learning Circle can be adapted to focus on a range of different health issues and provides an opportunity for Aboriginal Health Workers to either

develop their own resources or plan for the use of existing resources.

Comments from participants in both Learning Circles were that this was an opportunity for "Learners learning from learners". They enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere, the facilitator's attitude, that it was open, that each person had a say, that it was mellow and that they were learning together by sharing ideas. They also were enthusiastic about learning about new technologies and ways to help community members learn.

We have continued to develop the use of Learning Circles in Central Australia as part of the New Practices Project: Online Learning for Healthy Communities, funded under the Flexible Learning Framework in 2003. Two guides will be published early 2004 which provides details about how we have used a number of different communication methodologies including Learning Circles.

Dorothy Lucardie

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

CENTRAL AUSTRALIAN REMOTE HEALTH DEVELOPMENT SERVICES



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Learning Communities

The Observatory of Place Management Social Capital and Learning Regions (PASCAL)

In November, the Vice-Chancellor of RMIT University, Professor Ruth Dunkin, launched another exciting initiative in the development of learning communities.

Observatory Pascal will bring policy-makers, researchers and other stakeholders together to find ways of improving people's living and working circumstances in an increasingly internationalised economy. It will focus on partnerships between government agencies, community organisations, private businesses and corporations who are undertaking social, cultural, economic and environmental initiatives within defined communities and regions.

The Observatory grew out of an international Learning Regions conference held in Melbourne in October 2002. That conference demonstrated the advantages of cross-sectoral collaboration in building social capital and regenerating regional economies. This encouraged the founders to explore how to facilitate international collaboration among people involved in different roles in regard to place, community and learning. Observatory PASCAL is that resource.

The Observatory will offer a strategic information tracking and sharing service. Initially it will provide:

- substantial monthly reports on 'hot' topics, commissioned from international experts
- regular briefings on emerging issues
- access to a clearinghouse of relevant policy, research and programs
- research and consultancy services on public/private partnerships designed to promote community well-being
- a news clipping service, providing daily insights into news stories relevant to social capital and place management and learning regions, from around the world
- seminars and conferences on topics of interest to stakeholders.

The practical manifestation of Observatory PASCAL will be the website (www.obs-pascal.com). The site will encompass databases on current and proposed interventions, relevant government policy statements and research reports. It will give access to leading-edge knowledge and practitioners, and the capacity to connect people to emerging initiatives. Over time, the Observatory may develop a more substantial physical presence, depending on the kinds of activities stakeholders consider valuable.

RMIT will serve as the foundation of a partnership involving a variety of stakeholders, each contributing to the operation of the Observatory and drawing from it knowledge and links to enhance their own activities. Adult Learning Australia is already a partner and has been working with the Observatory's key staff, Professor Chris Duke and Leonie Wheeler, particularly in conjunction with the Learning Communities Catalyst website.

The University of Stirling will be the European node for the website and for managing the work of Observatory PASCAL in the European Union. Dr Jarl Bengtsson, the recently retired Head of the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation at the OECD has agreed to serve as the founding Chair of the Observatory's Advisory Board. Observatory PASCAL will facilitate exchange of experience, learning and development, across and beyond the various EU-sponsored networks.

Access to the website will be free for the first eighteen months. After this the Observatory aims to become self-sustaining, based on subscriptions to its services. At the moment it is seeking sponsorship, with several sponsors already on board. These include RMIT University, the University of Stirling, the OECD, and Kent County Council.

Leone Wheeler

PROJECT MANAGER, RMIT

Phone: +613 9925 3733; Fax +613 9925 9540

Email: leone.wheeler@rmit.edu.au

Short Story

Ants Go Marching

We are delighted to bring you the winning story 'Ants Go Marching' by Joanne Lennan. The judges commented on the story, saying it was a cleverly crafted story that brings to life the challenge of becoming literate as an older person. The story reveals that the challenge is not only one of learning, but of interpersonal relationships.

Joanne Lennan, is a 21-year-old Arts/Law student at the University of Technology Sydney. She grew up in country NSW and recently spent a year studying in Japan. Both these settings have given Joanne insights into how people without adequate literacy struggle. She observed, for example, the distress a girlfriend's mother experienced when she could not help her own daughter with homework. Joanne is currently taking a break from her studies to spend more time writing. This was her first entry into a short story competition.



ALA President Garry Traynor presents Joanne Lennan with the prize for her winning entry in the ALW 2003 Short Story Competition, which was held in conjunction with the Australian Society of Authors.

Ants Go Marching

It's often awkward, when you can't read. It is at times humiliating. At those times, it is as if the words on the page are a mean joke that everyone except for you gets. But most of the time, you can hide it pretty well. You can laugh along, louder than the rest, and no one notices you don't get it. So it isn't until I can't help a little girl I call Miss Jassy with a story about ants that I finally decide to try again to learn.

Jean brings her daughter around on Tuesday nights when she goes to yoga.

"Say hello to your uncle!" she says, as she drops Jasmine off.

"Hello to your uncle!" Jasmine says.

"Hey, Miss Jassy!" Miss Jassy is my name for my niece.

"No telly until your homework's done!" Jean says, kissing her forehead.

Perched on a chair at the kitchen table, Jasmine spreads out her books.

"It's a story about ants," she says, "You have to fill in the blanks with the words from the list at the bottom of the page."

"Really?" I say. I am making us dinner.

"Yep," Jasmine says.

"Cool," I say. Slicing cheese. This kitchen, I am thinking, is an ant story.

"What's for dinner?" She is a fantastic little boss.

"Burgers," I say, "extra special."

"Cool," she says. And she leans over and nicks a piece of cheese and crams it in her mouth.

"Hey!" I say, "Stop that!"

"Mmmhthrmffph," she says. Hers is the last word.

"Read me the story," I say, "I want to hear about these ants."

"Ants," she begins, "Ants live in colonies. Some ants build nests, some are fierce warriors, some collect and store seeds. Ants, like all insects, have an ..." Jasmine halts.

"There's another blank space here, but I don't know what word fits it," she says, "What one do you think it is?"

"Oh, Jassy, I wouldn't know."

"You might," she says, holding out her workbook, "Have a look."

"My hands are all messy from the burger mince," I say.

"I'll hold the book and you look," she says, "Okay?" I hold the tea towel in my hands.

"Okay?"

"Okay," I say, "How could I say no to you?" I look at the page in her book. At the top of the page are drawings of insects. Below, the page is covered with words that crawl like black ants across the white of the page. Long ants and short, a colony of ants. I squint and they swarm on the page. What are they saying? I will them to crawl into sense. I will them to reveal their meaning. Give it up, ants! Ants, you! But, as always, they frustrate me. The ratbags. Traitorous words, they lie silent, incomprehensible.

"I don't know for sure, Jassy," I shrug, "It's hard to choose." I turn back to the sink and the construction of the burgers. Slicing tomato. I am pressing down hard with the blade and the seeds spurt out as the tomato bursts. The line of ants marches from the windowsill across the sink. Cursed ants. I would squash them with the butt of the knife, but they just come back.

"Don't you don't know the answer?" says Jasmine, "You're a grown-up." Undeniably, I am a grown-up.

"Grown-ups don't always know everything," I say.

"Mum knows everything," Jasmine replies.

"She's an exception," I concede.

"But you know what might help?" I say.

"What?"

"Go through and read out each word and see which one sounds right in the sentence."

"Okay," Jasmine says, "Have an yellow, have an queen, have an every? No."

"Have an exoskeleton? Have an exoskeleton! That sounds right! Doesn't it?" Exoskeleton. A long ant of a word fills the blank.

"That does sound right." There are more blanks to fill in and Jasmine fills them with different ants that she draws herself with the pencil.

When Jeannie comes back, Jasmine is asleep on the lounge and we have a cup of coffee together. It's a warm night and we sit on the back porch and look over the rooves at the passing lights of the trucks on the highway.

"Was she good?"

"She was a star."

"Got her homework done alright?"

"Yeah. Alright. But I wish I could help," I say, "She thinks I know the answers."

"Tom. I'm sure you helped a lot."

"I couldn't read it for her," I say. Jean is quiet in the almost-dark. She knows, of course. She used to do my homework. Now she does my taxes.

"I wish I could read your book, Jean." She's written a book. It's about the reproduction of native flora.

"It's boring, Tom!" she says, "No-one actually wants to read it."

"I want to read it!"

"It's eight hundred and thirty-nine pages."

"Even so."

"Tom."

"Jean. I want to read it."

"Okay." We sit and watch the lights of the trucks.

I don't read Jeannie's book about the reproduction of native flora. Not all eight hundred and thirty-nine pages of it. I read, slowly, the acknowledgements, the table of contents, and the introduction. The ants on the page uncurl themselves and, leg by black leg, become words and sentences. On page sixty-one I discover that many lichens, bryophytes and fungi are entomophilous, which means that insects are involved with the dispersal of spores. Insects help them to survive. To persist.

"It's very good, Jean," I say, "It's a fantastic book." I put it down carefully on the kitchen table.

"But it is eight hundred and thirty-nine pages long."

"Yes," she says, "it is."

"But it's amazing." It astounds me that insects are so important in the reproductive processes of some plants. In the asteraceae family of plants, for example, pollination is by insects. And there are some ants, called leaf-cutter ants, that have the job in the colony of farming fungi. I open the book to my favourite part in the chapter on lichens. On the page the ants go marching. And then there are just words:

In many lichens the upper surface has powdery areas. Insects may carry this powder, or soredia, away to form new lichens elsewhere.

The shapes on the page make words and the words make sense. It is astounding.

I like the sight of the ants now. I imagine that the ants marching are, with their feet, spreading lichen powder with every step. I fancy there will be lichens sprouting soon in the kitchen, one under the table. One from the compost bucket. A bryophyte between the tiles by the fridge. I close the book that Jeannie wrote and we sit together in the quiet of the kitchen with the ants that she and a girl called Miss Jassy taught me to like.

Joanne Lennan
WINNER

On the ground

DanceFever in the West



Was DanceFever the biggest event of Adult Learners' Week 2003? A couple of WA ALA members and the community development officer from The Meeting Place in Fremantle planned and presented a ten-hour dance spectacular to celebrate Adult Learners' Week. With some funding from the Department for Community Development and local ALW committee and the in-kind contribution of the City of Fremantle the idea was to have seven different dance instructors offering lessons throughout the day to large groups of people.

Four hundred and fifty dancers attended the event, around 100 of these were volunteers and it was such a success we have already started planning for 2004. We would encourage our colleagues in other states to try this idea and have a whole range of support material available to them.

Contact Neil on stara@iiNet.net.au

Breaking the Unemployment Cycle in Deception Bay



The Queensland Government initiated and developed a project in Deception Bay to enable people disengaged from learning, to gain new skills and provide pathways to personal development, further training or at a later stage, employment or self-employment.

The first stage involved eight people employed under a Community Jobs Plan project undertaking a survey to establish residents' key areas of learning interests and existing skills. The second stage will provide a range of learning activities that community members can access at no cost for the first of a two-year program. Learning activities might include soap making, one-pot cooking and basic computing.

Given its innovative nature and the number of stakeholders, the project was developed over a two-year period. The result is a project which is strongly supported by all sectors of the community and resourced by several state agencies, the University of Queensland, local schools and community groups.

Julie Dare, Brisbane North Region
Ph 07 3247 9435

Conversation Café in the ACT



Conversation Café started in Belconnen over a year ago. It began as an offshoot of the Spirituality Leadership & Management Network based in Sydney, but Canberra has evolved its particular brand of operation which is open plan, flexible, free and evolving.

We currently meet weekly at Delifrance, Westfield Plaza, with people coming when and if they are able. We are interested in sharing personal experiences, resources or ideas that deepen our spiritual awareness and sense of connectedness. Conversation Café is inclusive. It empowers and encourages all of us to speak the truth as we see it, and listen deeply to one another.

We have given mini-lectures on topics of interest, but mostly we speak of health, happiness, hope and despair; we compare our visions, talents, insights and humorous anecdotes. Consider being an anchor person/facilitator for a Conversation Café. All it takes is a commitment to sit in a café at a regular time.

Fiona McIlroy
fionam@goldweb.com.au

7 habits of highly effective people



When Dairy Farmers' Farm Service Officer, Gavin Chittick, approached Southern Adult Education College (Nowra NSW) to establish a partnership to deliver the world renowned 7 Habits of Highly Effective People to groups of dairy farmers in South Coast of NSW, he put one of the 7 Habits into practice.

He asked Southern Adult Education College's (SAEC) Manager of Vocational Programs, Joy Sharpe, to help create a "win/ win" situation. Dairy farmers needed a Registered Training Organisation to partner with them so that they could attract financial assistance through Farmbi\$ for farmers to participate in the 7 Habits training course. She agreed if she could attend the course too!

Sixteen dairy farmers, mostly couples, as well as Joy and the principal of SAEC, Glennis Brooking, attended the first course at Bomaderry.

Over four days the group grappled with the challenges and rewards of Covey's 'principle centred' approach to time management, relationships and productivity. The principle centred approach is a life-long, integrated process that starts with Habit 1—Be Pro-active—empowering us to make changes in our lives—and finishes with Habit 7 'Sharpen the Saw' which means 'go back to the beginning and keep working on it'.

One of the most challenging habits to practice and perfect is 'Seek first to understand then to be understood'. Various activities helped each person learn to use empathic listening techniques. One of the rewards of truly listening is that the group found many common experiences.

The course was then presented throughout NSW and into South Australia and Northern Queensland. It promotes skills in planning, prioritising, building networks in relationships, managing time making decision—all vital skills for the future.

Joy Sharpe
Southern Adult Education College
jsharp@saec.nsw.edu.au
www.saec.nsw.edu.au

A first for youth training



In an Australian first for youth organisations, training undertaken while a Scout or Scout Leader can give advance standing in further education, or even lead to pay rises.

Scouts Australia has successfully passed its Leadership training course, nationally recognised through the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and is now registered as a training organisation to deliver Australia's first and only qualification available for youth leadership.

Scouts aged 14+ who complete the Scouts Leadership course will be awarded the vocational qualification, Certificate II in Leadership, which gives them advance standing for TAFE courses and other further education and training.

Scout Leaders too, who for years have undertaken extensive training, can now obtain nationally recognised Certificates III and IV and the Diploma in Leadership.

Scouts Australia Chief Commissioner John Ravenhall said. "We have now shown the government that the skills required to develop and lead young people are not only valuable but are also transferable to general administration, project management and all other industry areas. This is an important benefit for young people and those who work with them, who participate in Scouts and other youth development organisations".

Christina Gretton on 02 9413 1133 or 0410 33 55 46 or email nat.mgr.commspublishing@scouts.com.au

Older People Speak Out (OPSO)



Congratulations to Tony Ryan, whose radio series, *Rural Men*, was joint winner in the National Radio category of the 2003 OPSO Media Awards. *Rural Men* was broadcast during Adult Learners' Week 2002, on Radio

Adelaide and up to eighteen other community radio stations across South Australia. The co-winner was 612 ABC Brisbane, with their entry *Senior's Week Outside Broadcast*.

OPSO Chairperson, Val French AM, said that this year's entries reached a record of 1240, and the media were to be commended for the high standard of their work. 'Recent research has found that older people will live seven and a half years longer if they have a positive attitude to ageing. However, it found that the negative attitudes of the community are destructive to this positive attitude.' She regretted that, overall, entries from advertisers had been disappointing. 'While creative agencies undoubtedly recognise the value of the burgeoning market, businesses have been slow to accept that the 50 plus have to be respected as a highly significant market force', she said.

<http://www.opso.com.au>

Looking Back

Aboriginal Community Development

Alan Duncan, recently awarded life membership of ALA in recognition of a lifetime of service to adult education, in particular for Aboriginal peoples, remembers a time when there was real promise of grass roots community development.

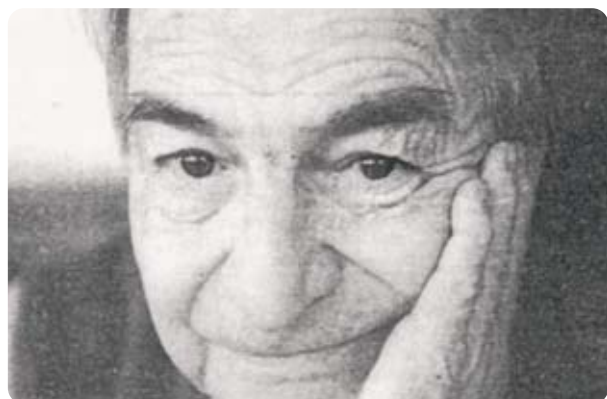
At the first meeting of an Aboriginal Adult Education Group in the late 1960's at Roseby Park Aboriginal Station near Nowra the participants complained how difficult it was to find out how their sick children were progressing at the hospital. The only phone on the Station was in the manager's office and he was often away. He had also made it clear that he was not happy with constant requests to make calls for people.

I then asked, 'What do the people in Nowra do when they want to enquire about someone in hospital?'

'They can use a public phone on a street corner', came the obvious reply.

The discussion continued for a further few minutes until one person asked, 'Why can't we have a public phone?'

'That's a great idea', I said. I was then asked if I could get them a phone. I pointed out that I was very busy and anyway I had no idea where to start on such a venture.



There was further discussion about who should be approached in Nowra. One person said they were almost sure that it had something to do with the Post Office. We soon had two volunteers to make enquiries and report back to the next meeting. Two weeks later the volunteers produced a piece of paper with the address of the responsible authority.

Again, I was asked to follow the matter up but pointed out that I had no idea what should be said in the letter. So the rest of the meeting was spent working out what the letter should say. As we were using the school building I was able to jot down the main points on the blackboard. I clearly remember the rather long discussion and the arguments for and against the inclusion of a sentence about making enquiries regarding the fate of someone arrested by the police for being drunk.

The main points of the letter were finalised and I was again asked to follow the matter up. I did not and eventually two of the younger members, who had completed a couple of years at high school, were persuaded to write the letter for endorsement at the next meeting, after which the letter was despatched.

That meeting discussed the roles of the State and Federal Governments and over twenty members filled in enrolment forms to vote in the forthcoming elections. With their permission, I invited the local Federal member to the next meeting. He accepted with alacrity when I pointed out that there were twenty to thirty new electors wanting to hear from him. At subsequent meetings, the work of the Australian Aboriginal Fellowship and the fight for a "Yes" vote in the forthcoming referendum on Aboriginal Rights was discussed. At another meeting one of the local Shire Councillors spoke, mentioning that he was a member of Rotary.

I arrived at a later meeting to find everyone looking defeated. They greeted me with the news that their application for a public phone had been refused.

ALA New Members

'Oh!' I said, 'that means we have lost round one so now we really have to do some fighting. Do you remember the fight last week when a well known Aboriginal boxer was knocked down in the first round but went on to win the fight. That's what we are going to do now.' I reminded the group of the promises of support made by the local member of Parliament and promises by the Rotarian and others. We soon had a list of ten to 12 people that we could call on and it did not take long to compose a short letter asking for their help. Once again we had a volunteer to write the letter. On that particular evening I was accompanied by a local high school teacher who offered to make photocopies of the original letter and the official refusal.

It was quite some weeks before I arrived again to be greeted with huge smiles and the news that a public phone had been approved for the Station. 'Thank you, Alan, thank you' was a common refrain but I stepped back with a look of mock amazement.'

'Why on earth are you thanking me when it was you who thought of the idea. It was you who made the enquiries. It was you who wrote the letters and it was you who did the follow up. It is yourselves that you have to congratulate for a job well done. You must realise that you have the power to do all sorts of things when you work together and put your minds to it.'

Alan T. Duncan

Alan Duncan was awarded life membership of ALA for his services to education at the annual general meeting of the association held in Sydney on 28 November 2003.

ALA New Members Individuals

Keith Barling NSW 2780

Gordon Dadswell VIC 3820

Stephen Darwin ACT 2601

Lisa Davies SA 5032

Greg Ferrier VIC 3691

Robyn Hanstock NSW 2760

Kerry Kruger QLD 4350

Alastair Rylatt NSW 2004

Neola Simkus QLD 4650

Organisations

ALBE TAFE Tasmania

ALANVALE TAS 7250

NSW Adult Literacy & Numeracy Council

HAYMARKET NSW 1240

Penrith City Council

PENRITH NSW 2750

Southern Western Port Learning Communities

DINGLEY VILLAGE VIC 3172

Calendar

INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF LITERACY 2003–2012

5–6 March 2004

Beyond Your Comfort Zone—Continuing Professional Education Conference

The special feature of this conference is that the discussion of CPE is cross-professional, not just a single profession. Topics include: How can CPE use new approaches to learning? What is the new research evaluation telling us? How does CPE enable us or hinder us from interrogating our identities? Does our CPE tell us who we are?

The conference will be held at University House, ANU, Canberra. For further information contact Linda Beverley, ph: 02 6051 6785 or email ripple@csu.edu.au

25–26 March 2004

Australasian Council of Open, Distance and E-Learning (ACODE) Meeting 2004

ACODE meets three times a year for two days at meetings hosted by member institutions across Australasia. The meetings usually consist of one-day workshops on a topic of policy and/or practice for Directors/Managers of university teaching and learning units or units concerned with open, distance or e-learning.

For further information visit www.acode.edu.au/

13–16 June 2004

3rd International Lifelong Learning Conference

The theme for the conference is “Lifelong Learning: Whose Responsibility and What is your Contribution?” Keynote speakers will include Dr Mairin Kenny, Trinity College and the University of Dublin (Access and Equity); Assoc Prof Christine Bruce, Queensland University of Technology (Information Literacy); Ms Francesca Beddie, Adult Learning Australia (Adult Learning); Dr Hunter Boylan, Appalachian State University, Boone NC (Graduate Attributes); Dr Ralph Catts, University of New England (Issues from Previous Conferences and Future Directions...).

To be held at Rydges Capricorn Resort Yeppoon, Queensland. For more information visit www.library.cqu.edu.au/conference/2004 or email lifelong-learning-conference@cqu.edu.au

14–16 June 2004

Adult Education and Poverty Reduction: a Global Priority

The aim of this conference is to provide an international forum to discuss initiatives, program strategies, and

research projects that will strengthen the role of adult education in poverty reduction worldwide. The conference will be held at the University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana. To access the conference website address, please go to <http://168.167.15.120/depts/faculties/events1.cfm?id=4> Then search for conferences in the search box showing ‘all events’.

8–10 July 2004

Communication Skills in University Education Conference 2003 (CSUE 2004)

The aims and objectives of the fifth biennial conference are: to promote the development of communication and literacy skills of tertiary students; to provide a means for professionals with interest in the area to get together and share ideas. The 2004 conference is hosted by the Student Learning Centre, University of Auckland, New Zealand.

For further information visit www.sl.c.auckland.ac.nz/csue2004/

14–16 July 2004

Building Foundations 2004

The National Conference of Enabling Educators, to be held in the Newcastle City Hall, is hosted by the University of Newcastle through its English Language and Foundation Studies Centre. The conference will explore the following themes: defining enabling education; methods of delivery; enabling students and staff; Indigenous programs and perspectives; international programs; equity and access; and curricula....



For further information contact Michelle Ross on 02 4984 2554 or email foundations04@pco.com.au

15–16 September 2004

Be Shaken—Learning for Change

The 3rd Australian Learning Communities Conference will be held at Noah’s on the Beach in Newcastle, NSW. This exciting, challenging conference will focus on topics such as virtual learning communities, school, business and Indigenous learning communities and will include the strands: Learning Leaders; Learning Communities in Practice; Learning for Change.

For more information contact contact Brett Gleeson at b.gleeson@bigpond.com or Thesese Postma at tpostma@ncc.nsw.gov.au



ALA
wishes all its
members and
readers a happy and
prosperous New Year

