

Quest

→ Balancing life, work and wellbeing



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Learning 'not to fall' – A new Learning Circle



Adult Learning
Australia Inc.



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COVER: ALA recently developed a Learning Circle Kit (sponsored by the ACT Government) that is currently being used by groups including Carers ACT and Belconnen Community Services. One of the participant groups is pictured here.

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 education, advises and lobbies government, promotes policy development, represents Australian international bodies and more.

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Copy: Contributions of news, stories, reviews and photographs are welcome.

Advertising: ALA accepts advertising from appropriate vendors in quarter page, half page and full page formats as well as inserts.

For rates and dates, contact Janie McOmish or Louise Gardner or download from <http://www.ala.asn.au/pubs/advertising.pdf>

Views expressed in Quest are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of ALA. Written material from Quest may be reproduced, provided the source is acknowledged.

ALA also publishes the Australian Journal of Adult Learning (AJAL) three times a year. ALA members receive these publications as part of their membership but single or extra copies are available at minimal cost.

ALA gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. It thanks the many volunteers who submit material to Quest.

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Australian Government
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Editorial



Welcome to the Autumn Edition of Quest. Due to a number of internal changes within your organisation towards the end of 2008, I have returned as the acting Executive Director. This is an interim appointment until the end of June when your Board will make a decision about either extending my tenure or making a new appointment to this position.

Over the first quarter of 2009 we have been busy finalising some outstanding reporting and forward planning requirements with DEEWR. These processes are now all but complete.

In relation to governance matters, completion of the AGM that commenced at the 48th Annual Conference in Fremantle will conclude in Melbourne on Friday 1 May 2009. Details will be published on the ALA website.

One of ALA's forward planning tools is our Strategic Plan. This document outlines a range of valuable services ALA will provide for members and the broader ACE/CET sector. This document will be accessible via ALA's website shortly.

Amongst these services will be a series of information sessions presented as workshops, both face-to-face and online, about the Teaching and Learning Capital Fund (\$100M) initiative during late April and early May. Dr John McIntyre's paper in this edition provides a context for this initiative.

The Better TAFE Facilities (\$200M) and the Training Infrastructure Investment for Tomorrow (\$200M) are currently being dealt with by DEEWR. If you are a member with a close working relationship with your local TAFE College you may wish to have a look at the second of these two initiatives. However be aware that you can only make a bid from one of the funding pools.

Because our resources only allow for a limited number of face-to-face sessions to walk you through the guidelines about making a bid for funds from the Teaching and Learning Capital Fund, ALA will also be conducting a series of on-line information sessions through Elluminate.

Both types of sessions will be open to all in the sector. Any further assistance in the formulation of proposals will only be available to members of ALA.

If you feel uncertain about engaging with Elluminate Live ALA has arranged for a number of introductory training sessions throughout April at no cost.

Please avail yourself of this learning opportunity because an increasing amount of ALA activities in 2009 will use this platform.

Many of you will be aware by now of the results of the recent Board elections. Greg Peart (current President) was re-elected to serve another term on the Board. We also welcome Dr Barry Golding and Dorothy Lucardie onto the ALA Board in 2009.

Both are well known to the membership for their different contributions to the sector over many years. Barry for his contribution to our knowledge of Men's Sheds and as a regular speaker at ALA conferences. Dorothy returns after a break away from ALA as a past President and active, long serving Board member.

We also take this opportunity to extend our heart-felt thanks to two former Board members who were not re-elected, Dr Roger Morris and Vanessa Little for their extensive contribution to the organisation over many years.

Our thanks also go to those who nominated to represent the organisation but did not achieve the quota required.

In the Summer Edition of Quest the President asked for member input around the issue of ALA's vision, role and direction. Thank you to those who contributed. Some of those aspirations and thoughts have already been included in the Strategic Plan.

There are two final matters.

We wish to advise that due to budget constraints we are giving serious consideration to moving from a paper-based Quest to an on-line version. We feel the contribution Quest makes to informing the sector is important, and rather than face the possibility of losing it altogether, because of financial constraints, it may be prudent to move to an on-line version for the next 12–18 months.

Lastly, we are considering a 'Letters to the Editor' section. Any thoughts you may have about this, as an added feature, would be most welcome.

I look forward to both a challenging and exciting year with you as we work together for the ACE/CET sector.

Ron Anderson

Executive Director (Acting)

Briefs

Keep up to date with what is happening in our sector

Visit the **Adult Learning Australia Blog**. Every relevant press release or news item is posted on the Blog immediately. Keep up to date by visiting the site each day. Click on ALA Blog at our website—www.ala.asn.au



Infrastructure Funding for ACE

The Teaching and Learning Capital Fund initiative consists of three elements:

Better TAFE Facilities (\$200 million) – all TAFEs across Australia will be eligible to receive a grant of up to \$8 million to help them address immediate maintenance needs, small capital works and equipment and plant purchase.

Training Infrastructure Investment for Tomorrow (\$200 million) – TAFE Institutes and consortia led by TAFE will be able to apply for competitive grants of up to \$10 million to adjust to the emerging training needs of the local economies in which they operate, and enhance the viability and capacity of the training system to address industry's emerging green skills requirements.

Investing in Community Education and Training (\$100 million) – Community Education and Training providers are eligible to apply for small grants of up to \$100,000 to assist with maintenance or the purchase of equipment and for larger grants of up to \$1 million for major upgrades.

As more details are released they will be announced on the ALA website and ALA will be briefing the sector in a series of face-to-face and on-line workshops

News from the 'Framework'

The Framework's 2008 national E-learning Benchmark Survey found that 94% of VET students wanted a component of e-learning in their course and 36% of VET activity now involves e-learning. *How much e-learning does your course embrace?*

Home office surge

The home office is now the fourth most important aspect in buying a new home. Architects are designing redesigning home offices. And home offices are now more customised to match the needs of the home worker, rather than simply replicating the generic office cubicle.

(LERN Magazine – Special Report: Nine Shift for 2009)

eMarketing strategies

eMarketing strategies continue to grow and become more sophisticated with the addition of new software tools:

- **Facebook ads.** You can target people by demographics as well as keywords with Facebook ads.
- **Web page tester invented.** Google has invented software so you can test different versions of a web page to determine which one produces results better.
- **Tracking registrations.** New software allows you to track where registrations came from, including GoogleAdwords, email promotions and other web pages.

Which of these elearning tools are you familiar with?

Ning – create your own social network for others using Ning. You have full control over who can access the site so it can become a private networking area.

Flickr.com – place photos of your activities here.

It gives you publicity and encourages visitors to come to you.

Blog – everyone uses a Blog as they are a quick and easy way to update and inform clients.

RSS Feeds – RSS feed software goes onto your web site and people subscribe for free updates. As news items originate, the information goes immediately to your subscriber's computer.


Twitter – here you can create a message of up to 140 characters that is communicated often in answer to a simple question.



The National Community Education and Participation Conference 2009

10th & 11th of June The Marquee Hotel, Canberra

Liquid Learning is delighted to present this highly informative two-day conference will provide practical advice on how to develop, deliver and improve community education programs. **Adult Learning Australia Members will receive a 10% discount on price.**



The Challenge of National Policy

Dr John McIntyre is Chair of the NSW Advisory Committee on Community Education.

This article draws on his presentation of the Bob Frew Oration at the Sydney Community College during NSW Adult Learners Week 2008. He recently completed a position paper on social inclusion and ACE for ALA (with Kaye Bowman) and in 2007 produced an evaluation for the Victorian Adult Community and Further Education Board of its Circles of Professional Research Practice initiative, published as *Engagement, Knowledge and Capability: Connecting Research to Policy and Practice*. Among his other community interests, John is on the management committee of the Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre.

December 2008 brought the welcome news that the Commonwealth would make available to community providers \$100m infrastructure funding as part of the Teaching and Learning Capital Fund for Vocational Education and Training. This funding was said to be an ‘investment [that] will assist in boosting the capacity of this sector to deliver relevant training to individuals who are taking steps to improve their employability, literacy and numeracy and job skills.’

It would have been gratifying if this new funding had come about as the result of effective lobbying for the kind of national support for ACE first recommended by the first Senate Report some twenty years ago. Rather it is driven by the Commonwealth’s nation-building measures that are a response to global recession.

Yet it is a significant moment when adult community education is recognised as a stream of vocational education and training in its own right alongside the TAFE systems. To those of us who have watched national developments for some time, often with growing despair at decreasing policy interest and diminishing funding in NSW, the news is doubly welcome.

Before we rush to self-congratulation, there needs to be a sober reckoning of the terms on which this funding comes and in what channels it will flow. The funding does not come out of the blue; at least three factors have prepared the way:

- The dominance of the COAG process in State–Federal relations and its human capital reform framework for education and training
- The transformation of the Ministerial Declaration on ACE from unworkable rhetoric to a more operational framework for developing ACE nationally and
- The adoption of a social inclusion agenda with a mandate for ACE to reach out to the disengaged and disadvantaged.

National policy realities

Too many of us in community education have been in denial about the realities of the national learning policy. There has been a long-standing resistance to the vocationalisation of ACE funding and too often there has been wilful misunderstanding of national developments in the search for the ‘holy grail’ of a lifelong learning policy.

The current infrastructure funding should not be construed as a long overdue recognition of community providers and the good work they do. It is intended to build the capacity of ACE organisations which deliver vocationally-focussed programs to less advantaged clients.

It has been clear since the publication of COAG’s Human Capital Reform Report (February 2006) that for all practical purposes, Australia had a national framework for lifelong learning—a policy tied, for good or ill, to the ‘participation and productivity agenda’ that makes adult learning an economic imperative.

The Challenge of National Policy

Asserting that ‘lifelong learning must become the reality’, the framework defines it in terms of a ‘whole-of-life’ perspective across four key transitions of early childhood development, basic school numeracy and literacy, the transition from school to work or further study, and the skills and qualifications of the adult population.

For some ACE protagonists, this requires a shift of understanding—above all, seeing adult learning in the bigger picture of education and training.

The first Senate report (1990) which set apart the ‘fourth sector’ of adult community education and emphasised its special qualities, is dead. The question is how ACE in 2009 (a much narrower constituency than Aulich’s broad church) forms an integral part of the broad education and training sector.

COAG’s lifelong learning framework is here to stay and the ACE sector needs to position itself within it or become irrelevant. The touchstone is life and work transitions—highlighting such priorities as early childhood intervention and parent education, alternatives to school to work transitions for youth and assisting older women returning to work.

Ministerial Declaration on ACE

Hence, the unequivocal goal of building the vocational capability of the ACE sector in the new Ministerial Declaration on ACE. This is a huge advance on earlier rhetorical statements. The harshest criticism of previous Declarations is that they did nothing to create a national commitment to developing the capacity of community providers, because they balked at the hurdle of defining ACE as a form of community organisation.

The new Declaration is unequivocal in locating ACE squarely within the national ‘participation and productivity’ framework. It urges the adoption of a collaborative approach to developing ACE’s capacity to offer ‘vocationally-focused programs’. It gives ACE a mandate to assist with social inclusion through the development of pathways to vocational outcomes for disadvantaged people and challenges ACE to develop the capacity to do so by ‘building foundation skills critical for effective educational, labour market, and social participation’. It recognises the sector’s capacity to perform the ‘engagement function’ {the argument of the Bardon Report (2007)}.

The Declaration promotes a collaborative, inter-jurisdictional approach to developing the ACE sector. The Committee believes it is important that there be greater inter-State cooperation regarding professional development and capacity building.

There is no question that the new Declaration is the framework within which the infrastructure funding will be allocated.

Social inclusion and the challenges for ACE

From any perspective, this shift in national policy represented by the Ministerial Declaration on ACE and the infrastructure funding is a huge challenge for many ACE providers.

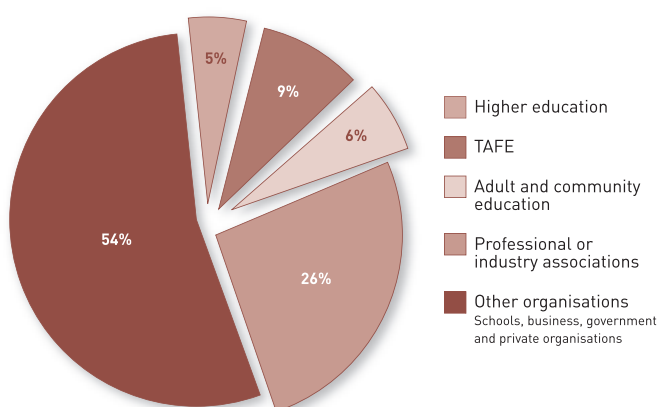
The ‘social inclusion’ objective of the Declaration will test the capacity of ACE organisations to deliver on their claims to provide second-chance learning. The Rudd Government’s policy paper (now amplified by other reports such as that by PMC 2008) makes it clear that social exclusion (disadvantage) is to be addressed by the re-engagement of people with social and economic life rather than welfare and income support measures. The community services sector is accorded a critical role in building social capital in disadvantaged communities, and workforce participation is seen as the key.

There will be, or should be, a keen interest in what kind of organisational models in ACE will be needed to fulfil this mandate. Those best positioned are those community providers who are RTOs with an established vocational program and associated employment, advisory and support services, or good networks or partnerships with agencies that provide them. Bardon’s capability framework is very relevant to discussions about these models.

There are huge challenges in identifying and reaching specific client groups and tailoring services to meet their training and employment situation. The evidence is that ACE is particularly well positioned to assist older women returning to work. The lesson is that much of the lobbying and advocacy for ACE needs to be framed in terms of how specific client groups are assisted to make life/work transitions through the provision of particular education and training services.

The argument must now turn to capability on the ground and the capacity to deliver outcomes. It is crucial to appreciate that government is interested and will fund only certain, that is, vocational, outcomes leaving a wide range of discretionary ‘adult learning’ to be privately funded. This much has been

Most recent provider of non-formal learning



Source: McIntyre, Bob Frew Oration 2008.

apparent for many years. The real argument is not about whether government will fund non-accredited community learning (it will not) but at what rate and how equitably existing vocational provision by ACE is funded (at least in NSW and Victoria).

We need to place non-formal learning in ACE in the wider context demanded by national policy. In the argument for lifelong learning, weight is given to the 'value of non-formal learning', understood very often to be the lifestyle courses that are offered in ACE.

Thanks to the ABS Adult Learning Survey 2007, we have authoritative national household survey data on the extent of non-formal learning compared to formal and informal learning among adults aged 25–64 years. Three million Australian adults participated in non-formal learning in 2007 compared to about one million participating in formal learning. Eight million reported participation in informal learning (learning from libraries, books or manuals, from a friend).

Three quarters of recent non-formal learning is work-related in purpose (get a job, job promotion, requirement of job, wanted extra skills for job) compared to personal development (16%) and self development (6%).

The great majority of this course-taking (54%) was carried on in a wide range of organisations—business, government and private organisations, a quarter by professional associations (24%) and less than a quarter in educational providers. The share of the ACE sector in non-formal learning nationally is 6% compared to TAFE (9%, although this might include activity regarded as ACE in some States!).

One obvious implication of this new perspective on the non-formal learning of adults is the potential for ACE to develop a greater role in assisting people with the life and workforce transitions. This may include a greater role in securing recognition for learning for work purposes.

In summary, the national policy context, now powerfully embodied in the new Ministerial Declaration and backed with Commonwealth nation-building funding, throws out to ACE what might be called the credibility challenge'.

How can ACE providers develop the capacity to engage the socially excluded? How may the capability to reach new clients with new programs and services be developed through partnerships with other providers and agencies? Given the huge extent of non-formal learning for work, what new avenues can be found to support workforce development and skills recognition? Do life/work transitions for both young and older adults point to new client groups? And not least, how can professional expertise be developed in a part-time and casualised workforce charged with meeting these new demands?

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About myfuture.edu.au

myfuture.edu.au is Australia's national online career information and exploration service. It is freely available on the internet and it is aimed at all Australians wishing to explore their career options. From adults, further education and training students, to school leavers and all secondary school students, the myfuture website has a wealth of quality-assured career information and activities to suit everybody.

To support lifelong learning and career development, myfuture contains a personal career exploration and decision making tool called *My Guide*, comprehensive career-related information called *The Facts* and help those assisting others making career decisions, called *Assist Others*. The website also provides links to many sites provided by industry and researchers looking at skill shortages, the outlook for particular occupations and regions meeting challenges of economic growth and their workforce needs.

Career: more than just a job

An important part of career development today is lifelong learning and developing new skills for today's workforce. That includes recognising the skills people can bring from everything they do in paid or unpaid work, study, sport and community activities. It doesn't matter what stage of a career life cycle one finds themselves, whether entering the workforce for the first time, to possessing a variety of work experiences, it's important to look to the future and continue to develop a toolkit of skills.

The creation of myfuture has a foundation firmly built upon career development theory and practice in Australia. To help design and develop the myfuture website, the National Career Information System (NCIS) commissioned the publication, *Career: more than just a job*.

Written by Dr Mary McMahon and Peter Tatham, the booklet is a concise, informative document that will interest all career practitioners. It provides a theoretical understanding of the philosophies underpinning career guidance practice. It describes the complex, holistic nature of career development, which is seen as a lifelong learning process. McMahon and Tatham describe career to include all facets and roles of an individual's life. This perspective is vital in today's world of work because a 'job for life' is no longer the norm. The site contains extensive information and exploration activities to reflect this theoretical understanding of career. The second edition is now available to download from the myfuture website at www.myfuture.edu.au.

Support

Do you work to assist others in your community?

Community learning is about people learning through family, workplace, community, society, voluntary and professional activities and through organised community courses or programs. For those working in a community learning environment, myfuture.edu.au can support you. With up-to-date information on more than 600 occupations, over 19,000 course descriptions, 2,500 scholarships, plus local labour market information, there are relevant resources and articles for those helping others within the community. Visit the *Assist Others* area to freely access myQuiz Digital Learning Objects (with audio and text features of particular benefit for those with language and literacy needs, occupational videos, upcoming career events in your state and activities to present to those in your networks.

The Facts	My Guide	Assist Others
<p>The Facts section provides comprehensive career information about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Courses and programs • Awards and scholarships • Occupations • Labour market details • Work opportunities • Career support services 	<p>My Guide provides a personalised career exploration tool to support users with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career decision-making • Pathway planning • Setting career goals and actions 	<p>Assist Others includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articles and resources, to help career advisors, teachers and parents, guardians and influencers support others in exploring and planning their careers • Occupation videos • Bullseye posters • Quizzes • Links to key associations and organisations such as Adult Learning Australia



Be part of a major conference on postvention - with international and Australian experts

This conference will be of interest to people in the following fields:

Mental Health Professionals, Clergy, Pastoral care workers, Service Providers, Doctors, Psychologists, Social workers and counsellors, Youth workers, Aged care workers, Funeral services, Emergency services personnel, Teachers & school counsellors, Local Government, Service Organisations (Rotary & Lions).

- ▶ Numerous practical workshops on postvention issues
- ▶ Practical workshops on everything from best practice for suicide bereavement support groups and suicide loss in schools to bereavement in adolescents and children and responding to the suicide of a client
- ▶ A special session 'Bereaved by Suicide'
- ▶ There will also be a bereaved by suicide healing and remembrance service
- ▶ Hear the latest research

Enhance your skills – and learn from international and Australian experts.

The 2nd Australian Postvention Conference will happen at the Melbourne Convention Exhibition Centre from Thursday May 21st – Saturday May 23rd 2009.

Many international speakers will be at the 2nd Australian postvention conference. By attending you'll get numerous benefits. They are:

- An opportunity to network and talk with many top people working in the field of postvention – people from Australia and also international experts.
- You'll hear the latest research in suicide prevention and techniques to support people bereaved by suicide
- An opportunity to hear the latest information about postvention techniques from many different experts.
- A chance to be part of workshops looking at a range of issues linked to postvention.
- An opportunity to enhance your skills in postvention which may assist you in your future work in this field.

Here are just 3 reasons you should consider this conference:

- 1 This conference will enhance your skills in the field of postvention and help empower you in your work
- 2 The conference is highly educational and covers many vital topics linked to postvention and will assist you with a broad knowledge about what's happening in the area of suicide prevention in Australia and overseas
- 3 The conference will show you programs that are effective and relevant to local communities and groups.

To get more information visit www.hotelnetwork.com.au or visit www.suicideprevention.salvos.org.au. If you'd like to know more you can also call Alan Staines who is the Chair of the conference organising committee on 0412 164 575. To register you can call 02 9414 4968 or email postvention@hotelnetwork.com.au.

Top experts attending include:



Frank R. Campbell – Dr Campbell has conducted a private practice in forensic suicidology and is the past president of the American Association of Suicidology. He has authored numerous articles/book chapters relating to suicidology.

Michelle Linn-Gust, PhD is an international author/speaker about suicide prevention and postvention. She was the co-chair of the International Association for Suicide Prevention's Postvention Taskforce and was the survivor division chair for the American Association of Suicidology.



Kari Dyregrov – Kari Kyrregrov is a doctor of sociology from the University of Bergen, Norway. Her book 'Effective Grief and Bereavement Support' was released in 2008. She's worked as a researcher on traumatic bereavement. She is part of a large scale psychological study on suicide.



Dr Scott Poland – Dr Poland is a US nationally recognized expert on school crisis, youth violence, suicide intervention and self injury issues. He's led multiple national crisis teams following school shootings and suicides and as a school psychologist he has received the Houston Wage Peace Award. He's done over 1,000 national and international presentations.



Professor Onja Grad – Prof. Onja Grad serves at the University Psychiatric Hospital of Ljubljana in Slovenia as a psychotherapist and supervisor for individual/family therapy – especially people bereaved through suicide. She is the past vice-president of the International Association of Suicide Prevention and has worked with suicide survivors for over 20 years.



Dr Sheila Clark – Dr Clark has worked in the area of suicide postvention in Australia for over 20 years and has undertaken research, teaching, publications and clinical work in suicidology. She has contributed to many state, national and international committees concerned with postvention.



Professor Graham Martin – Suicide in young people is a major focus of Professor Martin's research. He is the National Advisor in Suicide Prevention to the Australian Government and does over 70 invited lectures a year on mental health and suicide prevention in young people.



Adult Literacy Research

Research on adult literacy and numeracy helps educators respond to the needs of their adult learners. From 2002 to 2006 the Australian Government funded the Adult Literacy Research Program (ALRP), which was managed by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). The program boosted adult literacy and numeracy research in Australia.

Topics covered included:

- the conceptualisation of literacy
- the social and economic impacts of ‘low’ or ‘poor’ literacy and numeracy
- the professional development needs of literacy practitioners
- teaching and learning approaches, including specific teaching strategies, for different learner groups and delivery contexts.

The research also looked at literacy and numeracy issues relevant to Indigenous and ethnic communities, and within industry, volunteer and community settings.

What have we learnt from the ALRP work?

A starting point is a **definition of literacy**. ‘Literacy’ involves a range of complex and diverse skills and understandings (Lonsdale & McCurry 2004). This is apparent in the prevalence of concepts such as health literacy, financial literacy and digital literacy.

With respect to defining **numeracy**, we point to Coben’s definition: ‘to be numerate means to be competent, confident, and comfortable with one’s judgements on whether to use mathematics in a particular situation and if so, what mathematics to use, how to do it, what degree of accuracy

is appropriate, and what the answer means in relation to the context’ (Coben 2000a, p.35, cited in Marr & Hagston p.11). Numeracy cannot be considered as entirely separate from literacy as these skills are often used in conjunction with one another (Townsend & Waterhouse 2008). However, several reports comment that many people have significant fear about ‘doing maths’ that links back to negative schooling experiences and do not acknowledge their existing practical numeracy skills.

We have also learnt about the **relationship between literacy and social capital and human capital**, and the subsequent impact on economic wellbeing. By looking at adult literacy courses, it was found that there can be positive social capital outcomes from participation, even when there is no evidence of improved literacy attainment. Where the latter is achieved, the combination of improved reading, writing and/or speaking skills as well as better interpersonal/intrapersonal skills often results in greater wellbeing. It also became clear that different learners acquired different benefits from literacy programs (Black, Balatti & Falk 2006).

Looking at **what learners want**, most of the research focused on learners who were in classroom-based programs. Less is known about learners in community programs or in the workplace. However, the studies of what learners in each of these groups prefer provide remarkably consistent messages, notably, that learners prefer training that is time-efficient, personally relevant, non-threatening and easily accessible. They see the quality of the trainer as critical and value trainers who know what to do, are empathetic and supportive. The research also suggests that most prefer to work with a trainer who has the relevant vocational skills and knowledge. Literacy and numeracy specialists without the vocational knowledge they seek are less well regarded. Learners also welcome regular feedback, including formal assessment (Miralles 2004; Hayes et al. 2004; Burgoyne & Hull 2007; Marr & Hagston 2007; Miralles-Lombardo et al. 2008).



Research Project: What we have learnt

While vocational qualifications will continue to be offered by training providers in institutional settings, training that occurs in the workplace is increasingly important.

A number of the projects focused on different **delivery approaches**. Most current provision for adult literacy and numeracy in Australia is through dedicated programs. Work by NCVER (2006) found there were nearly 190,000 students enrolled in literacy and numeracy courses in the VET sector in 2004. Just over 60% of these were dedicated or **‘stand-alone’ courses** focusing on literacy and numeracy skills development. In recent times, the learning cohort has been changing, with an influx of learners with multiple disadvantages such as youth at risk, refugees and students with undisclosed psychiatric disorders (Mackay et al. 2006).

The issue of **integration** with mainstream vocational education has also been examined. Integration here refers to the acquiring of literacy and numeracy skills within broader skills development, and where literacy and numeracy learning is placed in authentic and real-life settings (McKenna & Fitzpatrick 2005, p.7). Wickert and McGuirk (2005) identify examples and principles of the successful integration of literacy learning into Australian community and workplace settings. McKenna and Fitzpatrick canvassed the practices of experienced VET teachers who offered an integrated approach to language, literacy and numeracy in the community services sector. They found that many practitioners used to the stand-alone English language communication programs initially found the integrated model challenging and were often unable to ‘see’ the language, literacy and numeracy that had been integrated into VET competencies. Redevelopment of Training Packages and subsequent professional development over the last eight years has resulted in the ‘building in’ of language, literacy and

numeracy to Training Packages. However, there are still contested views about the quality of delivery and proven efficacy of an ‘integrated’ approach. Further, McKenna and Fitzpatrick, and Wickert and McGuirk warned that integrating literacy and numeracy provision is complex and potentially costly, requiring new ways of operating and a new range of skills from teachers.

While vocational qualifications will continue to be offered by training providers in institutional settings, **training that occurs in the workplace** is increasingly important. The effectiveness of work-based training for the delivery of literacy and numeracy training is not well researched but the work of Townsend and Waterhouse (2008) does provide some insights into what works and why. This study found the degree of company commitment, through the provision of a supportive environment, training in work time and adequate funding, all influenced the impact of work-based programs. Nevertheless, Townsend and Waterhouse caution that, even in companies with high commitment, there are major pedagogical challenges and it should not be assumed that training providers and individual trainers know how to teach literacy effectively in the workplace.

Although thousands of students are involved in non-accredited, **community based literacy and numeracy programs** each year, little is known about its impact. There is notable diversity in terms of course focus, structure, teachers, learners and methodologies (Dymock 2007). Specialists in community programs are also split on the issue of whether they should formally monitor and report on learner progress. However, all organisations surveyed

Adult Literacy Research Project:

What we have learnt

believed that their programs resulted in 'strong development of learners' language, literacy and numeracy skills and self confidence, with levels of self confidence slightly higher than skills levels' (p.9). This work was extended when Dymock and Billett (2008) considered assessment instruments that might capture wider learning outcomes in non-accredited programs. They found that learners and tutors gained personal and educational benefits through the process of assessment and acknowledging learning outcomes.

Access to professional development, as well as the nature and quality of that learning is always a critical one. The literacy and numeracy workforce in Australia is made up of four distinct groups, namely, specialist providers of literacy and numeracy tuition; Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) practitioners; vocational trainers who are incorporating literacy and numeracy into their delivery of training packages; and volunteer literacy and numeracy tutors in community settings. Mackay et al. (2006) found that the professional development needs varied between the groups and that a 'one size fits all' approach was not appropriate. There were some common needs. Professional development that was preferred was of short duration, face-to-face, hands-on and interactive and provided by experts. Opportunities for sharing good teaching practice with peers were seen as a simple and effective way to address gaps in skills and knowledge.

While there is currently no national funding program available for adult literacy and numeracy research two of the federal government's current policies implicitly stress literacy and numeracy: the social inclusion agenda, which ties the social and economic development of the community closely together; and the push for skills reform through programs such as the Productivity Places Program. Implicit in these policies is the underlying need for literacy and numeracy skills to be of a level that will allow for the potential of all individuals, and current and prospective workers in particular, to be fully realised. These policies together with the wide-ranging consideration being given to the outcomes from the 2006 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey bode well for a renewed focus into adult literacy and numeracy.


This article is based on the findings from two pieces of work that reflect on the research undertaken. NCVER commissioned two projects. The first, undertaken by Louise Wignall brings together the key messages from the ALRP projects in a 'wiki' for practitioners. The Adult Literacy Resource (www.adultliteracyresource.edu.au) is designed to get adult language, literacy and numeracy practitioners thinking about how they can apply the key messages from the ALRP research in their work.

The other, considers how the ALRP has contributed to the adult language, literacy and numeracy sector (Kate Perkins forthcoming). It also draws attention to areas that were not addressed during the life of the program and highlights how literacy and numeracy issues fit in the current political focus of social inclusion and skills reform.


For further information visit NCVER's website www.ncver.edu.au.

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E-portfolios for RPL Assessment



Key findings on current engagement in the VET sector March 2009 – Final Report

The following is the Executive Summary of the recently released 'E-portfolios for RPL Assessment' report. This report was commissioned by the national training system's e-learning strategy, the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (Framework), through the E-portfolios business activity, and is based on consultation and research in the vocational education and training (VET) sector and beyond. It aims to inform further development of e-portfolio systems and the implementation and use of relevant standards and technologies in the national training system.

Currently, RPL (recognition of prior learning) assessment procedures are numerous and diverse. Individuals need to be able to identify and describe evidence for RPL claims in a meaningful and consistent way. E-portfolio tools are currently being identified which will assist learners in documenting their RPL claim. These will help maximise the chances of success, help streamline the RPL process, and provide the potential for use beyond RPL.

RPL, or skills recognition, provides an assessment or snapshot of an individual's skills and competencies at a point in time. The term 'skills recognition' is used in this report by the Framework, as an RPL client friendly term covering recognition of prior

learning, recognition of current competency, recognition of informal learning and credit transfer.

A good practice RPL model includes facilitated self-assessment, links to units of competency and qualifications, evidence validation (not gathering and collection), use of a variety of evidence forms that corroborate the individual's competence and a conversational approach to assessing.

Although current engagement with e-portfolios in the VET sector, and in particular, for RPL, is limited, this report demonstrates how e-portfolios are supporting all components of good RPL practice through effective evidence capture and validation; by establishing linkages to existing forms of evidence, and by complementing the conversational style of good RPL process through regular asynchronous dialogue.

The use of an e-portfolio benefits all RPL candidates, and in particular individuals who are geographically isolated or live in different time zones from their assessors, by:

- utilising templates to structure the presentation of RPL evidence, and tags to organise and find artefacts, which helps streamline the assessment process
- reducing the need for paper based, hard copy evidence and limiting excessive evidence collection
- developing and strengthening information and communication technology (ICT) or digital literacy skills.

- Successful uptake by individuals to utilise the e-portfolio during the RPL process occurs when the e-portfolio is utilised beyond the RPL process, when the individual is adequately supported to use the e-portfolio system, and where the individual has basic ICT or digital literacy skills.

Other considerations for effective e-portfolio usage relate to the individual RPL candidate:

- being in control of their e-portfolio, by deciding who has access
- being able to link to existing evidence as much as possible and knowing that their information will be secure
- having ongoing access to their e-portfolio after their engagement with a registered training organisation (RTO), and whether there will be any ongoing costs to the individual.

For RPL candidates to utilise their e-portfolios beyond the RPL process, the on-going benefits need to be made clear, including the value add of social networking functionality and their ability to use it for job applications, professional and career development, and re-accreditation/licensing requirements.

In the context of the RPL assessment process, the e-portfolio is able to streamline evidence identification and validation, and enable assessors to effectively make judgments about the authenticity of evidence when it is verified through existing legitimised sources, such as student management systems or learning management systems. Improved means of capturing and managing evidence in the RPL process, through the audio recording of interviews, could better address AQTF 2007 (Australian Qualifications Training Framework 2007) requirements.

E-portfolios for RPL Assessment

Australian Flexible Learning Framework 2

Consideration of the understanding of what e-portfolios are was reflected in feedback with comments implying that 'e' means e-learning, which some VET practitioners haven't embraced, and that a 'portfolio' is a concept in current RPL practice that is being moved away from, as it conjures up the idea of large lever-arched folders and collections of evidence which is no longer considered good practice.

Nonetheless, many RTOs indicated that they are interested in exploring the use of e-portfolios to support the RPL process. However they needed to know more about e-portfolios, how the RTO could get started and what skills and structures were required to manage them. Some RTOs indicated that they plan to trial an e-portfolio in the near future to replace their existing heavy paper based processes.

Implementation considerations include:

- selection of a suitable e-portfolio system
- providing appropriate professional development for staff and assessors
- understanding the level of ICT skills required of candidates and assessors
- ensuring adequacies in internet access, server storage capability, security of data, privacy issues and meeting AQTF 2007 requirements.

Summary of recommendations

Recommendation 1: The Framework should seek closer collaboration with the COAG (Council of Australian Governments) RPL initiative to ensure the benefits of e-portfolios for RPL are widely communicated and supported in the VET sector.

Recommendation 2: Examples of the use of e-portfolios to support 'live' evidence generation in the RPL process which involves a variety of RTOs, RPL candidates and industry contexts should be trialled, documented and shared.

Recommendation 3: The potential of an assessor's or 'group' e-portfolio which integrates RPL, evidence validation and results recording should be investigated.

Recommendation 4: Further trials should be undertaken to identify the factors that contribute to the successful implementation and use of an e-portfolio in the RPL process, particularly in relation to supporting national COAG initiatives such as skills shortage areas and fast tracking apprenticeships etc.

Recommendation 5: Support should be provided for VET practitioners through professional development links to national and jurisdictional initiatives to build capability across the VET sector in the use and application of e-portfolios in the RPL assessment process.

Recommendation 6: Support materials and a toolkit should be developed for assessors and RPL candidates on good practices in using, capturing, managing, presenting and validating evidence in e-portfolios.

The report was compiled by Wendy Perry and based on sector wide consultation and on projects conducted by Charles Darwin University and Desart; Lifeline Tasmania; Swinbourne TAFE; Adult Learning Australia through Community Colleges NSW, Community College East Gippsland and the Brisbane North Institute of TAFE.

E-solutions for adult learners



In 2007 the Commonwealth Government set out plans for a social inclusion agenda, which said that all Australians need to be able to play a full role in all aspects of Australian life.

This agenda includes providing the opportunity for individuals to secure a job, deal with personal crisis and connect with the local community. This rings true for people working in adult community education (ACE), as they strive to engage the disengaged in lifelong learning and provide education and training for those people marginalised in society.

But how can practitioners working on the ground train people based in isolated communities? Or access the latest tools for teaching and learning? How can they engage those people disinterested in traditional forms of learning?

E-learning provides an answer to these questions, as it offers a flexible and cost-effective way to tailor training to individual learners within the community. Through e-learning, community organisations and adult learners can:

- access affordable training which cuts down on overhead costs such as travel time and face-to-face training fees
- learn at any time of the day from any location including work, home and local community centres
- connect, interact and collaborate with teachers, experts and other learners who they would normally not have contact with
- learn at their own pace, giving them more control over their learning
- direct their own learning, allowing them to tailor learning to suit their needs.

The national training system's e-learning strategy, the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (Framework), makes it easy for adult learners to access vocational education and training (VET) by providing a range of mostly free e-learning products, resources and support networks.

This includes an e-resource database, LORN resource search facility, Flexible Learning Toolbox repository, interactive events and e-learning networks, through which adult learning practitioners can access the right e-learning knowledge to assist community learners.

In 2009, the Framework will continue to support adult learners, with some key developments that will build practitioner's ability to help learners gain new skills for the workplace.

E-portfolios (<http://flexiblelearning.net.au/e-portfolios>) are becoming increasingly popular in adult education, as they allow learners to easily develop a digital collection of learning experiences and work history. They can be used to apply for jobs, identify any training gaps and to show a transfer of skills between volunteer and paid work.

This year, the Framework will use research and trials of e-portfolios to provide practitioners and other key stakeholders with guidelines and standards for their use. This will be supported by an online e-portfolio community where practitioners can access blogs, toolkits and resources specific to e-portfolios.

Through LORN (<http://flexiblelearning.net.au/lorn>), the Framework shares free or affordable online training resources, from repositories across Australia, with teachers and trainers. In 2009, practitioners will find it easier to purchase low-cost products through LORN, as the site is enhanced with a straightforward e-transaction facility.

Recent research shows that 94% of students in VET want e-learning incorporated into their learning. Given this obvious demand, the Framework will continue to research the types of e-learning desired by learners, and how this can best be put into practice. Practitioners can access all the latest research on e-learning through <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/research> and use this to inform e-learning practices within their community.

In 2009 the Framework will again provide \$5.3m in funding to registered training organisations to implement innovative e-learning solutions. Practitioners can access the range of learning materials, case studies and e-learning models developed by successful 2008 teams, or learn more about funded 2009 teams, by visiting <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/innovations>

Adult learning practitioners can keep up-to-date with developments in e-learning by subscribing to the Framework's free monthly newsletter, Flex e-News, at <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/flexenews>. They can also browse the suite of products, resources and support networks mentioned in this article by visiting <http://flexiblelearning.net.au>

Elluminate

The ultimate live eLearning experience

In 2008 Adult Learning Australia purchased a licence for the online collaboration software Elluminate Live! During 2008 we facilitated a number of interactive workshops as a service to members and other interested adult and community education networks.

This year, the National Office will build and expand onto these workshops with plans to offer a range of professional development learning activities, offering online resources and learner support activities as identified by ALA members and other adult and community education networks.

Elluminate is being recognised as a powerful solution for real-time online learning and collaboration that delivers exceptional outcomes, including enhanced learning experiences.

The ALA website will be re-developed to better promote these activities with the introduction of an online calendar which will include monthly online activities

<http://www.ala.asn.au/elluminate.aspx> . We encourage you to regularly check for forthcoming online workshops.

We also encourage you to contact the ALA National Office and discuss issues you consider might be potential interactive online workshops that you have identified as important to the adult and community education sector.

To ensure ALA members are familiar with the range of Elluminate functions and tools we will be conducting a number of 'Introduction to Elluminate' online workshops across April. Watch the calendar for these events and join in!



Green Tips from LERN

DON'T let 'going green' be an excuse to stop printing and distributing brochures, however there are steps you can take to reduce your carbon footprint:

- Think about the initial design of the document and focus on text that conveys the main message
- Reduce size to save paper
- Reduce text to save pages
- Partner with a green printer who can help you identify options for environmentally preferable paper, ink and printing processes
- Target your mailing lists. Focus on your best customers and those most likely to register—this will decrease your print run
- Give your clients the option of receiving brochures electronically

- Supplement all printed brochures with e-marketing campaigns.

And don't forget to market that you have 'gone green' by saying it on all print and e-marketing material; generation X and Y expect it and make decisions based on if organisations embrace sustainable business practices.

...and then don't forget to be green in your disposal.





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Learning Works Update

The Aftermath of Tragedy

The Role of Neighbourhood Houses in Victoria

The Victorian bushfires have been much in the news lately. But much goes on behind the scenes that we don't usually get to hear about on mainstream media, including the central role of neighbourhood and community houses in providing all kinds of assistance in areas devastated by loss of lives, homes and livelihood.

Claire Corbet, Information Resources Manager for the Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres in Victoria, was interviewed recently in Melbourne for Learning Works, by PBA FM's Tony Ryan. The full radio interview (of about ten minutes) is now available as an mp3 audiofile, on the Learning Works website (www.learningworksradio.com), the ANHLC website (www.anhlc.asn.au) and on Adult Learning Australia's website (www.ala.asn.au).

Other recent audiofiles now online

The following audio resources from early 2009 may be of interest in your Neighbourhood House or Community Centre. You are invited to go to www.learningworksradio.com then to either the Online Resources section, or the Archives section, for links to all of the above programs.

- Meet Dawn Kelson, Coordinator, Gawler Community House (broadcast 16 Mar)
- Mawson Lakes—Building a Learning Community (broadcast 9 Mar)
- The Aftermath of Tragedy—the Role of Neighbourhood Houses in Victoria (broadcast 2 Mar)
- Abilities for All—Bedford Graduation (broadcast 23 Feb)
- Medical Decision-making and Young People—in three parts (from 16 Feb)
- So what is Flexible Delivery of Training? (broadcast 9 Feb)
- The Debt Trap in Hard Times (broadcast 2 Feb)
- South Australian Artist Sir Hans Heysen (broadcast 12 Jan)
- Mental Health First Aid (broadcast 5 Jan)

All are downloadable into your Centre's computers as mp3 audiofiles, for use as group discussion starters, or by individual learners with headphones. If your centre makes any innovative use of Learning Works resources, please tell Tony Ryan about it—learningworks@pbafm.org.au Many thanks.

Learning Works is heard each Monday evening at 8.30pm, and repeated on Friday mornings at 9am, on PBA FM, 89.7 on the FM Band in Adelaide. Most interviews are then available online by mid-week as mp3 audiofiles.



ABOVE: The welcoming artwork in the entrance hall at Gawler Community House (SA). Coordinator Dawn Kelson is on the left, with office manager Stephen Tovey

RIGHT: Mental Health First Aid was the subject of an extended interview in January, with trainer Naomi Madsen, from Relationships Australia in Adelaide.



The colour green...



The colour of the workplace is changing—it's turning green. Globally, the trend is no different.

President Obama in the U.S. has pledged 5 million new green jobs. In Australia, the government's Productivity Places Program (PPP) plans to have at least 40,000 green training opportunities by 2010. Responding to the multi-layered challenges of climate change and environmental sustainability requires not only substantial structural and policy reform, but changes to existing mindsets in the workforce.

In seeking to successfully implement institutional and attitudinal change, the vocational educational and training (VET) system has the potential to play a key role in ensuring that the workforce is equipped with the skills and knowledge that will accompany the transition to an environmentally sustainable economy. The question must be asked: Is VET geared up to accommodate such challenge and, are we in group training, ready to take up the cudgels?

'Going green' will not be cheap. In the current economic climate it would be easy and understandable to claim that such additional costs are prohibitive for many businesses: that going green is no longer a priority. I believe this would be a mistake. Clearly government has a central role to play. With the Rudd Government favouring greater government intervention and stimulus across a range of economic and social policy areas it is reasonable to expect that transitional assistance will be forthcoming. Just as successful businesses have seen training as an investment and not as a cost, the same approach must be adopted when it comes to embracing the challenges of a low carbon economy.

So is the VET landscape ready to confront the green challenges and will it help to deliver the changes required?

At Group Training Australia (GTA) we are confident that the reforms to the training system over the last decade or so will lay the foundations for swift responses to the demands of industry as they meet the requirements of sustainability. Competency-based training and Training Packages can be updated to deal with emerging needs, industry demands and changing economic, social and environmental conditions. In other words, standards and qualifications should reflect the reality of the labour market. The Industry Skills Councils

(ISCs), in concert with Skills Australia, will play a critical role. Provided the ISCs are sufficiently well-resourced, there should be no concern about our capacity, from a systemic point of view, to be prepared for what lies ahead.

The biggest previous workplace challenge was to become 'e-literate'. Now, the challenge is to become 'green literate'. Our training system is well placed to deliver. Indeed, some work has already begun using the available competencies and Training Packages to develop what has been labelled Go-Green Australian Apprenticeships. This initiative has been funded by DEEWR and managed by the Construction and Property Services ISC and Business Skills Victoria.

Many group training organisations are already well down the path of becoming green literate and imparting new green skills. Some are currently utilising parts of the existing four year apprenticeship to build additional skill sets in areas where the trade is changing to reflect new technologies and processes.

Our ability to 'go green' in VET will be well served by a flexible and responsive training system. The evolution of Training Packages has built a solid foundation in this regard. Moreover creativity, innovation and capacity-building in the delivery of training will ensure that we 'green-up' successfully. However, a major issue centres on the capacity of the teacher/trainer workforce. Not only is this workforce ageing, it is being asked to acquire a whole set of new green skills.

Going green is a challenge that all of us must meet. Climate change, environmental sustainability and the greening of current 'brown' skill-sets require us to fundamentally re-think how we work and live. Once again, we are asked to confront change on a potentially massive scale. Whilst it is achievable, it must also be affordable. Group training confronts this challenge knowing that it cannot do it alone. The key to successfully greening our network will be through partnerships—government, industry, business and local communities. Our time starts now...

James Barron
CEO, Group Training Australia

This abridged article is reproduced with the kind permission of Network, Issue .71, the Quarterly magazine of Group Training Australia.

Top 10 Recession Promotions Strategies for 2009

The current economic environment has repercussions for education providers world-wide. These ten strategies were outlined in the January eLERN newsletter, the newsletter for LERN members.

“It’s a simple fact that catalogues generally have at least 10 times the aggregate sales response compared to e-mails.”

— Direct Mail Catalogue Research

The following are marketing guru Paul Franklin and LERN President William A. Draves’ joint top ten recession promotions strategies for 2009.

MOST IMPORTANT

1

If it works

If it works, keep doing it — whether it is a marketing, message, strategy mailing frequency, graphical image, USP. If it works keep doing it until it quits working.

2

No big cutbacks on brochures

No big cutbacks on your brochures. Keep your brochures high quality and widely distributed.

3

Mail early enough

Mail early enough. Make sure you get the brochure mailed on time. This is 12–14 weeks before a continuing professional education (CPE) event.

4

Target brochures

Target brochures. You can trim brochure distribution and costs by up to 20% with selected targeted distribution. If you are doing professional work programs, distribute by occupational specialty and geography.

5

Mail twice to past participants

Mail the brochure again to past participants. For CPE programs, mail a second time 10 weeks out, and a third time to your very best customers six weeks out.

6

Email people twice

Email past participants twice. Email every past participant twice, once a month out, and a second email close to the start of the event with a “final notice” or other urgent headline in the subject line.

7

Focus on winners

Focus on your winners. Promote them harder, more frequently, with more copy.

- Do more of them.
- Do them more often.
- Package them together.
- Take them to specific new audiences.

8

Raise prices

Raise prices if:

- You have prices below a price point or in between. Raise prices to the price point.
- You have waiting lists for an event.
- You have higher registrations this time than last.

9

Hype presenters more

Hype presenters more. If need be, do it on the website and push people from the brochure to the website for more complete biographical info.

10

Know your primary segments

Know your primary seven segments and focus your marketing efforts on the 20% who give you 80% of your business. LERN members who segment report double-digit registration growth and double-digit drops in marketing costs!

Calendar

United Nations Literacy Decade 2003–2012, United Nations Decade for Sustainable Development 2005–2014, International Year of Languages 2008

5–7 May 2009

“U3A—Going from Strength to Strength”
Melbourne

8 May 2009

“Navigating Laneways” 2009 VALBEC Conference
Melbourne
Go to <http://www.valbec.org.au> for details

10–14 May 2009

5th World Environmental Education Congress
Montreal, Canada
www.5weec.uqam.ca
5weec@jpd.com

11–17 May 2009

National Volunteer Week

11–12 May 2009

Connecting Up Conference 09 Sydney
Enquiries to CU09@connectingup.org

14 May 2009

“strengthening our plACE”, ACEVIC Conference
Melbourne
Contact office@acevic.org.au for more details.

15–18 May 2009

National Library and Information Technicians
Conference 2009

17–20 May 2009

10th National Rural Health Conference
Cairns QLD

19–22 May 2009

CONFINTEA VI “Living and Learning for a Viable
Future: The Power of Adult Learning”
Brazil

21–23 May 2009

2nd Australian Postvention Conference
“Connectedness: A Link to Hope”
Melbourne
Visit www.suicideprevention.salvs.org.au for information

10–11 June 2009

The National Community Education and Participation
Conference 2009
Canberra
www.liquidlearning.com.au

7–10 July 2009

QUESTnet Conference “Leveraging our Investment”
Gold Coast
Go to <http://www.questnet.net.au/questnet2009/index.html>

8–10 July 2009

“No Frills” NCVER Conference
University of Ballarat, Vic

11 July 2009

Sydney U3A's 21st Birthday Celebration

29–30 July 2009

Associations Forum National Conference
Melbourne Convention & Exhibition Centre

18–19 August 2009

11th ASCCA Conference
Powerhouse Museum, Sydney
Contact office@ascca.org.au

9–10 September 2009

‘Brainfood’ Statewide Program Conference
Ballarat
Go to <http://www.narrecic.net.au/brainfood.htm> for details

28–30 September 2009

WISE—World Innovation Summit for Education
Details are available from www.wise-qatar.org or the Qatar
Foundation www.qf.edu.qa

1–3 October 2009

“From Strength to Strength” ACAL Conference
Fremantle
<http://www.waalc.org.au/09conf/> to register