

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 442 938

CE 080 325

AUTHOR Sanguinetti, Jill, Ed.; Jones, Myfanwy, Ed.  
TITLE Literacy for Youth: Programs, Problems and Perspectives. Proceedings of the Youth Literacy Forum (Melbourne, Australia, July 30, 1999).  
INSTITUTION Language Australia, Melbourne (Victoria).; Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium, Melbourne (Victoria). Victorian Centre.  
SPONS AGENCY Australian National Training Authority, Melbourne.; Australian Dept. of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra.  
ISBN ISBN-1-876768-02-9  
PUB DATE 2000-00-00  
NOTE 43p.  
AVAILABLE FROM Victorian Centre of Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium, School of Education, Victoria University, Footscray Park Campus, MCMC 14428, Melbourne, 8001, Tel: 03 9688 5086, E-mail: alnarc@vu.edu.au. For full text: <http://www.staff.vu.edu.au/alnarc/docs/lityouth.pdf>.  
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Proceedings (021)  
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; Cooperative Programs; Developed Nations; Dropout Programs; \*Dropouts; Foreign Countries; \*High Risk Students; Learning Disabilities; \*Literacy Education; Postsecondary Education; School Community Relationship; Secondary Education; Shared Resources and Services; \*Unemployment; \*Youth  
IDENTIFIERS \*Australia

## ABSTRACT

These proceedings document some of the work and the stories of literacy teachers who work with youth outside the school system and help to paint the educational and policy context of their work. "Professionalism and Passion: A Report on Teachers Working with the Literacy Needs of Unemployed Youth" (Beverley Campbell) introduces the report. The nine presentations are "Introductory Remarks: Unemployed Early School Leavers and the Knowledge Society" (John Wilson); "An Overview of the Situation of Early School Leavers" (Helen MacDonald); "Extending Learning Options for Early School Leavers" (Maureen Ryan); "Creating Links and Sharing Resources: An Overview of Programs at Morrison House" (Barb Lorey); "'Every Now and Then You Get One Over the Line...'" (Jules De Cinque); "Working with Unemployed Young People: The Teacher's Learning" (Lindee Conway); "The NMIT Youth Unit: Diverse Programs and Pedagogical Challenges" (Fran O'Neil); "Youth Forum Workshop Groups: Issues and Challenges" (Jill Sanguinetti); and "The Need for Multi-Media Resources for Young People with Learning Difficulties" (Ron McGlynn). (YLB)

# Literacy for Youth

## Programs, Problems and Perspectives

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
Office of Educational Research and Improvement  
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION  
CENTER (ERIC)

- This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND  
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS  
BEEN GRANTED BY

*J. Kindle*

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES  
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

Proceedings of the  
Youth Literacy Forum  
July 30, 1999  
CAE City Conference Centre  
Victorian Centre of ALNARC

2 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

**Literacy for Youth:  
Programs, problems and perspectives**

Edited by Jill Sanguinetti  
and Myfanwy Jones

ISBN: 1 876768 02 9

Produced by the Victorian Centre of the  
Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium  
(ALNARC)

Published by Language Australia,  
the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia.  
GPO Box 372F  
Melbourne VIC 3001

For additional copies contact:  
Victorian Centre of ALNARC  
School of Education  
Victoria University  
Footscray Park Campus  
MCMC 14428  
Melbourne, 8001

Ph: 03 9688 5086  
Email: [alnarc@vu.edu.au](mailto:alnarc@vu.edu.au)

© 2000 Commonwealth of Australia  
ALNARC is funded under the ANTA Adult Literacy  
National Project by the Commonwealth through the  
Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

# Contents

Professionalism and Passion: A report on teachers working with the literacy needs of unemployed youth <b>Beverley Campbell</b> <i>National Manager, Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (ALNARC)</i>	1
Introductory Remarks: Unemployed Early School Leavers and the Knowledge Society <b>John Wilson</b> <i>Director, Victorian Centre of ALNARC</i>	4
An Overview of the Situation of Early School Leavers <b>Helen MacDonald</b> <i>Research and Policy Officer, Brotherhood of St Laurence</i>	8
Extending Learning Options for Early School Leavers <b>Maureen Ryan</b> <i>Head, School of Education, Victoria University</i>	12
Creating Links and Sharing Resources: An Overview of Programs at Morrison House <b>Barb Lorey</b> <i>Education Team Leader, Morrison House, Mount Evelyn</i>	16
'Every now and then you get one over the line...' <b>Jules De Cinque</b> <i>Teacher and Program Coordinator, Preston and Reservoir Adult Community Education</i>	20
Working With Unemployed Young People: The Teacher's Learning <b>Lindee Conway</b> <i>Teacher, Adult Migrant Education Service (AMES), St Albans</i>	25

The NMIT Youth Unit: Diverse Programs and Pedagogical Challenges 29

**Fran O'Neil**

*Teacher, Access Department, Faculty of Further Education, Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE*

Youth Forum Workshop Groups: Issues and Challenges 33

**Jill Sanguinetti**

*Coordinator, Victorian Centre of ALNARC*

Supporting Literacy Learning with Computer-Assisted Learning 36

**Ron McGlynn**

*Karingal Inc. and Mem Educational Resources*

**Professionalism and Passion:  
A report on teachers working with the literacy  
needs of unemployed youth**  
**Beverley Campbell**  
*National Manager, ALNARC*

Imagine this: you are a teacher. Your everyday reality is working with young people who are more often late or absent than on time, who come stoned to class, who are involved in crime and drug dealing, where you have to be locked into a room with your group of students and a security guard. Your task is to teach literacy and numeracy to unemployed youth.

This imagined scenario was echoed in the real stories told by participants in a recent seminar 'Literacy for Youth', organised by the Victorian Centre of the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium at the Council of Adult Education in Melbourne. A group of literacy teachers who work with youth outside the school system had come together with a shared concern – how to work more effectively with young people. I was there as literacy educator and researcher, and as listener – what these teachers said made compelling listening.

The stories that unfolded during the day need to be told, not to disclose details of the lives of the young people, but in order to acknowledge the commitment and professionalism of the teachers. Their students are 'kids at risk': those who have been thrown out of four or five schools; who have come to Australia as refugees from war torn countries; kids who are school refusers; who may be incarcerated, homeless, or who are living six in a one bedroom flat. For most, attendance is compulsory, on pain of losing the dole.

The same themes recurred as teachers spoke about their experiences in country towns, in the juvenile justice system, or in learning centres in the Western suburbs or the inner city. They spoke about young people who come from dysfunctional families and need to find a sense of stability; young people who 'always feel different' and are searching for a sense of identity and belonging; or those who hold onto hope and try to make meaning of their lives in the face of gross unemployment and a social climate under-pinned by despair. Teachers attempt to provide a sense of connectedness with these young students. But the students often kick against these attempts because they feel no sense of self worth, nor little reason to work to improve themselves for a possible better future.

Some teachers told of the qualities it takes to work with this very marginalised group in our society, 'Sit with them, don't play a teacher role and stand over them'. 'Look them in the eye and treat them as the human beings that they are rather than as the failures or the dregs they have often been made to feel'. 'Don't treat them as 'other' – they can sniff someone who is judgemental a mile away'.

Teachers working in literacy programs for young people work at the intersection of two pervasive social phenomena, fragmented postmodern society and economic rationalism. The young people they work with experience many forms of dislocation and instability. They live with the term 'unemployed'. The word itself has been shaped by the agendas of economic rationalism. There was little hint, though, of these teachers being overwhelmed by the task, no note of dispiritedness in the face of high rates of absenteeism, lack of resources and the impact of casualization of workers and over-reliance on sessional teachers.

These days a lot is loaded onto the term 'literacy'. Society expects much from education and nowhere more so than in the area of education, literacy and numeracy for unemployed youth. There are repercussions in education being commodified as a marketable product. The ethos brought about with the language of self-governing schools and schools of excellence comes at great cost to those who don't measure up to the standards of achievement and excellence. Literacy education for unemployed youth is a growth area. Increasingly these young people who don't fit, who are not well accommodated academically in the school sector, are turning up at adult literacy providers. Schools themselves are seeking solutions from adult literacy providers to the problems associated with educating those who are in transition from adolescence to adulthood, from school to work. They know that a proportion will get caught in the unemployment cycle and remain there for prolonged periods and they want to work out effective ways to prevent that happening. Nic Frances, the newly appointed Director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, said in *The Age* (2 August 1999), 'At least it would be more honest to acknowledge that jobs are not available for everyone...'. Maybe it's time to re-define youth 'unemployment'.

Teachers and youth workers working with unemployed young people are called upon to enact complex roles, sometimes one or a combination of all – counsellor, teacher, surrogate parent, nurturer, mentor, role model, friend. While literacy education seems to be taking over the role of traditional welfare, this may be a more appropriate basis for creating

opportunities for personal transformation and social and economic rehabilitation.

Throughout the youth seminar, different teachers spoke with commitment and professionalism about their work. Transcending their professional voice was their passion and compassion for the young people with whom they work. They spoke about the need to love the young people in their classes and to accept them even when they come stoned to class. They have taken on that very difficult role of working with people who have been relegated to the edge of society, literally and metaphorically. They are trying, in creative and innovative ways, to put a sense of personhood back into those who live within the category of unemployed youth. As teachers they know the urgency of creating a feeling of connection in unemployed young people which might be stronger than the pervasive feelings of marginality and uselessness they experience.

These teachers would not promote themselves as heroines or heroes (it's a female dominated area of education); they are just doing their job, at times depressing and difficult, occasionally rewarding, always challenging. They have entered the intersection inhabited by those who are labelled 'unemployed youth' and they are not afraid to be there. They grieve their students' failures and know the urgency of standing by them because tomorrow they might be gone; they know the importance of celebrating their successes. We ask a lot of all our teachers, especially those who have taken on the demands of working with unemployed youth. It's a big ask and they have risen to the challenge.

If teachers are to continue to fulfill the demands of working with unemployed young people, teaching them skills and helping them find more positive ways of being in the world, then their work needs to be publicly acknowledged and properly resourced.

This Report documents some of the work and the stories of youth literacy teachers and helps paint the educational and policy context of their work. We hope that it will contribute to conversations and debates supporting the public acknowledgement and proper resourcing of their work.



## Introductory Remarks: Unemployed Early School Leavers and the Knowledge Society

**John Wilson**

*Director, Victorian Centre of ALNARC (VALNARC)*

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the first meeting of the Victorian Centre of the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (VALNARC). VALNARC has evolved from the former Language Australia Adult Literacy Research Network Node for Victoria (ALRNNV) and has funding for six months i.e. until the end of February 2000, to undertake research in the vocational education and training (VET) context. Thus its situation is **provisional**, in that its long term funding situation is uncertain, **evolutionary** in that it is venturing forward uncertainly in the new terrain of VET, and yet **focussed** in that it has been given two specific tasks: to investigate the role of language and literacy within the emerging National Training Packages, and the literacy and numeracy needs of unemployed young people.

As we move into this new territory I would like to pause a moment to thank those who made such an important contribution to the work of the former ALRNNV:

- to Language Australia, through which the ALRNNV was established and funded,
- to the members of its Steering Group from Kangan Batman TAFE and what was formerly Western Melbourne Institute of TAFE, prior to its absorption into Victoria University,
- to the members of its Research Committee, and particularly to its chair, Dr Lesley Farrell, and
- to all the many other individuals, from a wide range of institutions, who supported our activities over several years, some of whom are present today.

The wide support that ALRNNV could draw upon was one way of demonstrating its relevance, and was undoubtedly one of the factors that influenced the Federal Government's decision to continue funding research into Adult Literacy.

The Victorian Centre of ALNARC has myself as Director, Dr Jill Sanguinetti as Coordinator, and a Research Advisory Group that Dr Leslie Farrell continues to chair. I shall take this opportunity to say a word about

the focus of our work and what I believe to be the kind of research that it should promote.

## **Projects**

The Victorian Centre of ALNARC will manage two projects:

(a) To investigate the effects of the integration of literacy and numeracy within Training Packages on quality of learning and work outcomes. Dr Sanguinetti will be managing this project which is likely to involve case studies of two enterprises in one industry.

(b) Literacy for Youth : This project will comprise four studies, each funded to \$3000, and supported by a mentor, and will focus on the needs of unemployed school leavers. Literacy for Youth will also be managed by Jill. Expressions of interest are invited.

## **Methodologies and scope of the work of VALNARC**

Since the Literacy for Youth Project is open for competitive funding I think it is important to make clear that the Victorian Centre of ALNARC has an open mind on the methodologies that it will consider funding. I believe that it should promote both quantitative and qualitative studies, as well as combined approaches when these are appropriate. In the past, the ALRNNV promoted participatory action research and I would like to see the continuation of such research. At the same time, there is also place for studies conducted in ivory towers, away from the scene of action: research is not **of** the ivory tower in my view, but such a tower may be needed to think through the design of a study, to develop appropriate data collecting instruments, and to analyse and interpret the data collected prior to reaching conclusions.

Whereas the former ALRNNV was mainly focussed on practitioner-based research and classroom issues, the Victorian Centre of ALNARC has a broader methodological brief. The need to look more broadly was brought home to me when, on study leave recently at UNESCO in Bangkok, I was reading OECD (1997) *Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society*. This report makes inter-country comparisons on the basis of the International Adult Literacy Surveys (IALS) that were carried out in several countries including Sweden, Poland, Netherlands, UK, Germany, Canada and US in 1994 and 1995.

## **The Key Role of Literacy in the Knowledge Society**

Australia certainly would like to think of itself as a 'knowledge society'. In fact it is the attempt to create such a society that is driving VET reform in this country. *Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society* argues that literacy is an essential pre-requisite for active and equitable participation by citizens in social, cultural, political and economic life. Participation is the very premise upon which social stability and economic development of society are based. Literacy, therefore is everyone's concern, not because it confers vocational advantage to the few, but because of its contribution to economic health and vitality for all. It is essential, therefore, that we create opportunities in every context for people to practise and develop their literacy skills.

IALS provides a snapshot of the literacy levels of nations. What is our vision for literacy levels in Australia? What are we trying to achieve? For example, could Australia raise the level of literacy of its population to that of Sweden? Such a question needs to be asked: we need to have a vision that we are working towards. To realise the vision requires not only commitment from adult literacy teachers, but the creation of an interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral approach to policy making, as well as research and evaluation targeted on monitoring attainment, and on documenting the teaching and learning strategies that are most effective for learners with different backgrounds and characteristics.

The report argues that, if we wish to develop a literate society, we must give people opportunities to practise and develop their literacy skills. In workplaces it found that levels of engagement with literacy tasks vary with the job and with the sector of the labour market.

## **The Role of this Forum and the Literacy for Youth Research Project**

The Victorian Centre of ALNARC is tied through its funding to the VET agenda to a greater extent than was the former ALRNNV. The workplace is undoubtedly an important setting in which literacy skills may be practised and enhanced. Low levels of literacy not only limit vocational possibilities outside the workplace for the individual — and above all for the disadvantaged youth whom this workshop is about — but they also limit the contribution that young people can make within it: in the knowledge society, production is **NOT** capital and labour, but ideas and applied intelligence. Employers have an important role here. But the problem of adult literacy must be seen on a wider screen: limited literacy

is a cost for the whole society, and threatens its social fabric by creating a dependent underclass whose welfare and social well-being are constantly at risk.

We hope that the contributors to today's workshop will illuminate these issues and provide guidance on ways to enhance literacy levels for young people who are as important a part of the future of Australia as those who enter tertiary education.

## **Reference**

OECD (1997) *Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society* Human Resources Development, Canada/OECD, Paris

## An Overview of the Situation of Early School Leavers

**Helen MacDonald**

*Policy and Research Officer, Brotherhood of St Laurence*

I've recently been involved in an action-research project, based in two secondary schools, where a service was set up to assist early school leavers in their transition to the labour market. Today, I'd like to provide an overview of what happens to early school-leavers in the labour market, before focusing on the on-the-ground experience of the service that we've been providing in these schools.

The state of the youth labour market today is the result of major transformations over the past 25 years and the collapse of full-time employment opportunities for young people. It's been a story of their increased participation in education, a rise in part-time employment, and, compared to other age groups, higher unemployment rates. They have more job mobility between different forms of employment, as well as between employment and unemployment, and they have a higher incidence of part-time and casual work compared to other age groups.

But the group of young people in the labour market that we really need to be concerned about are those described as being involved in 'marginal activities'. Drawing on some unpublished material from the labour force surveys, we've estimated that there were 343,000 15-19 year olds who were not in education in 1996. Of these, nearly 188,000, that is 55%, were in marginal activities. This includes young people who were not studying and were employed only part-time, and those who were not studying and were not in the labour-force at all — more than 42,000 young people at that time, which is quite a substantial number (McClelland et al., 1998).

That's the big picture for young people. If we turn our attention now to early school-leavers, we find that, compared to young people who do complete Year 12, those who leave school early experience lower levels of participation in further education; higher rates and longer duration of unemployment; greater representation in marginal activities; and an increased risk of ongoing labour market disadvantage.

To focus on some of these patterns, only one third of early school-leavers progressed to further education compared to two thirds of those who complete Year 12. Job seekers who are early school-leavers have lower educational attainment than employed persons do. Early school-

leavers experience a longer duration of unemployment, particularly those from a low socio-economic background. Furthermore, while those in the 15-19 year old age group make up over half the number of people in apprenticeships and traineeships — traditionally a very important source of employment for young people leaving school early — there's been a decline in the number of these entry-level training opportunities available to young people in the 1990-1996 period. Finally, early school leavers are almost three times more likely to be involved in marginal activities compared to young people who leave school after Year 12 (McClelland et al., 1998).

In addition to these labour market characteristics, young people leaving school early experience a particular policy and program context. The policy context affecting young early school-leavers stems from the ad hoc nature of advice and information available to people who aren't going on to tertiary education. The training and service environment for young people has undergone a rapid change in the recent past, exemplified by the far-reaching changes to employment services which we now call the job network. In 1996, the incoming Coalition government reduced the number of places available for young people in labour market programs and it reduced the range of activities available for young people to participate in.

The other policy environment that affects early school-leavers is the government policy that promotes self-help and self-reliance by young people and their families. In this context of declining opportunities for participation, there's been a heightening of the expectations of young people, by government and by many people in the community, through the application of the mutual obligation principle. That principle asserts that job seekers, and young people in particular, owe their labour effort to the community in return for receipt of income support. It is this policy and program context, and the labour market experiences of early school-leavers, which informed the development of the Transition Project that I'll now talk about.

We set out to design a two-year action-research project, in which the Brotherhood of St Laurence has tried to integrate its research and service delivery activities. A lot of my work as a researcher involves working closely with service-providers and service-users, particularly unemployed people, to learn about the impact of government policy on their experiences within our programs and how that government policy might be changed and improved.

The Transition Project involved a partnership with two secondary colleges, one in inner Melbourne, the Brunswick Secondary College, and the other in Frankston, the Karingal Park Secondary College. Both schools were in close proximity to our existing employment service infrastructure. A key aspect of the Transition Program was that the relationship between the young person and the service project officer commenced at school, before the former had actually made the decision to leave, and continued on once they'd left, in an attempt to bridge the gap between school and the labour market. Hence, it involved early intervention and ongoing case management on an individual basis.

It's this type of intensive and ongoing assistance that is not currently available to young people during the period of transition. They move from the education system, which is funded primarily by the state, into the labour market, which is primarily funded by the federal government. So, the aim of the service that we set up was to design and implement a model that enhanced the transition from school to further education, training or other activity linked to achieving employment. It focused on the young people at the time they were beginning to make the decision to leave school before completing Year 12. While some people did choose to stay on at school, with the support provided by the project workers, others were already at the stage where they'd had enough and were about to leave.

In summary then, the service objectives were to establish the relationship at school, support the young person at the time that they were deciding to leave, support them during the period where they entered an employment or training program, and then continue support from this point.

A fifth objective, linking service delivery and the research components of the project, was to try to establish what comprises good practice in terms of providing advice on potential pathways, supporting young people, and helping to link them to employment, education and training. To this end, I worked very closely with teachers, service providers and the young people to identify the useful and valuable components of the project model, and the providers monitored the young people on a monthly basis to identify the impact of the service on their activities. Hence, there was both process – and impact-evaluation.

To look now at the project outcomes, what we found was that over three quarters of the participants left to undertake some form of education, training or employment. Those that stayed at school or went to another

secondary school were included as positive outcomes because the project was about keeping them engaged in an activity of an educational or training nature. In all, about one third of the young people went into employment and about half to other education or training destinations (MacDonald, 1999).

One of the basic conclusions we arrived at through the project was that efforts by schools and governments to maximise student retention are important, but it is also very important to support young people who leave school before completing Year 12 in their efforts to establish themselves in the labour market. The project that we undertook tried to demonstrate one model of supporting young people through this transitional period, from school to work, and it provided an intensive and ongoing case management approach. However, underpinning the type of support that we've demonstrated, sufficient opportunities need to exist for young people in the labour market. This means that there needs to be real pathways from school to work and to other education and training environments. And there needs to be clarity about those pathways for young people: they need to know about them and they need to be accessible.

There are three questions I'd like to leave you with. We need to consider, in this environment of mutual obligation, what levels of support and assistance young people who leave school early should be entitled to? How do we ensure that young people access their entitlements to support and assistance? And, finally, what is the nature and extent of our obligation to young people, to ensure that they do participate in meaningful activities in the community and in the labour market?

## References

McClelland, Alison, MacDonald, Fiona and MacDonald, Helen (1998) 'Young people and labour market disadvantage: The situation of young people not in education or full-time work', in *Australia's Youth: Reality and Risk*, Dusseldorp Skills Forum, Sydney.

MacDonald, Helen (1999) 'Bridging the Gap: Assisting Early School Leavers to Make the Transition to Work', Brotherhood of St Laurence, Fitzroy.



## Extending Learning Options for Early School Leavers

**Maureen Ryan**

*Associate Professor, School of Education, Victoria University*

The Institute for Youth Education and Community, within Victoria University, is involved in a wide range of projects around youth homelessness, drug education and youth-worker training. Today I want to talk about one particular project that I've been involved with and to draw from that a few ideas for directions that future research might take.

Last year, a group of twenty Year 10 students joined a special school-based program called LEAP — Leadership, Enterprise, Achievement and Progress. To apply to enter the program, they had to submit an expression of interest and their parents had to approve their participation as it required some attendance at excursions and the like. The group spent a year within the program and were involved in a range of activities, from driver education to first aid, in addition to the core work the other Year 10s were doing.

I became involved because the school was interested in having some youth-work students participating in the project and they also wanted to examine the link between these young people and their local community. I would meet with a group of about 15 youth-work students every Monday afternoon at the school and then we would all go to the classroom to work with the Year 10s. We decided that out of all the activities carried out during the year, the students would produce a mural. This was a very exciting venture for them, this opportunity to draw on the wall. The mural is still there and is going to stay until these kids finish school at the end of next year.

Recently, I went back to talk with the participants who are now in Year 11. There are nine of them still within the school; many of the remainder are in other schools, a few have taken apprenticeships and a few are difficult to track down. When I went back and spoke to them, I showed them the photos of the mural and asked them to write down some of their comments while we chatted about what they are doing now.

I'd like to share with you some of the things they wrote and talked about before I draw all this together. When Chris came in to speak with me, he brought very up-to-date football lists because he has an extensive involvement in his local football club. He wrote, 'Last year, in term 3 and

4, we worked on a mural. It took the whole time but still no one had a theme to the story. In the long run people just did what they wanted to do. We all had fun on it, especially the student teachers.' These were, of course, the youth-worker students. He talked about the subjects he is doing this year and told me that he is enjoying them all. He is looking at apprenticeships in hospitality because he thinks that hospitality will provide fun and world travel as a chef, and he says you need to learn about safety, hygiene and rules. He watches the chefs on the lifestyle channel on television and he's hoping to work there for a week in September. Someone from the local football club is following up an opportunity for him. If you just hold all these bits in your head for a moment you'll see how they come together.

Rena came in. Rena was very quiet and timid last year but she is now much chattier. She wrote, 'These pictures are telling a story about what we did last year in the LEAP program and the sorts of things we did on the mural we painted. I think it turned out really good when it was finished. Everyone painted what they thought would look good, like some people put their handprints on the wall and people just put names and words. Aidan put fractions on the wall because he liked doing fractions in Maths because he thought he was really good at them. Other people put their country's flags on the wall. I think that LEAP was a really good program to be in.' Rena wants to be a graphic designer. She's tried for work experience but hasn't been able to get in anywhere; she had somewhere lined up but the place closed down. However, she said she knows about the graphic design courses that she needs to do to get into graphic design.

There are other examples, but one of the main points I'd like to make from this is that what these young people produced in the mural was their world. The cartoon characters and the stylised images showed the important influence of the media, the computer games and t-shirts in that world. As things started going up on the wall, there were images that I didn't know, and I'm sure there are symbols there that I don't really want to understand, but this is what they created. So one of the key points I'd like to make, in terms of using it as a pointer to future projects, is the importance of focusing on *youth literacy*. I'm sure that some of us are too far away to appreciate the level or nature of youth literacy and it is something we need to tap into more effectively.

Another important consideration is the whole idea of project-oriented approaches. There is now much evidence to suggest the immense value of

visual and performing arts activities, and recreational activities, in supporting young people who are at risk. Often, rather than putting the focus on what it is that may be perceived as a difficulty or a weakness, these activities can be used as an entrance to something more, to getting closer to young people and where they are actually situated.

The third key point is the whole idea of networks and links and looking at what knowledge young people have about their community. What do they know about getting jobs? What do they know about courses? What sort of adult support do they have? One of the things that we're interested in at the moment is the work of Whalen in Chicago, particularly looking at the notion of social capital — the idea of the web of relationships and social mechanisms that parents or other adults may draw on to enhance children's chances for success. Take Chris, for example, whose involvement with the football club led to a person within the club looking at potential employment for him. These are the sorts of links and networks we should be looking at. Another of the student participants in LEAP, Toni, has sent off a folio of her animation work to an animation centre in the city. She's also involved in karate. So it's the range of extra-curricular activities that kids are linked into and the spin-offs from that: the opportunities to feel good about those things; the opportunities to meet other people; the role modelling; the support of networks and so on.

Family social capital factors, including family cohesion, parents' acquaintance with their children's friends, and parents' expectations about educational attainment, have been found by Furstenberg and Hughes (1995) to influence the economic and educational attainment of teenage mothers in early adulthood. Another study by Mahoney and Cairns (1997) found a strong association between middle school extra-curricular involvement and reduced school-leaving rates, especially among students at greatest risk of academic failure.

In summary, these would be the key points that I'd suggest in terms of future work: looking at youth literacy, the importance of project-oriented approaches, and, finally, tapping into this notion of networks and how we can help to create those.

## References

- Furstenberg, F. and Hughes, M.E. (1995) 'Social capital and successful development among at risk youth', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 57, 580-592.
- Mahoney, J.L. and Cairns, R.B. (1997) 'Do extra-curricular activities protect against early school dropout?' *Developmental Psychology*, 33(2), 241-253.
- Whalen, Samuel P. (1999) 'Applying Social Capital Theory to the Evaluation of Full Service School Outcomes', Paper presented at American Educational Research Association Conference, Montreal, April.

## Creating Links and Sharing Resources: An Overview of Programs at Morrison House

**Barb Lorey**

*Education Team Leader, Morrison House, Mount Evelyn*

I'd like to start with a small story before telling you about our program. I was teaching a group of adult learners about 12 years ago, when a young woman of 30, with two children, struggling with her literacy and her spelling, looked at me and said: 'You know, it's like he's a bloody ghost on my shoulder.' I said: 'What do you mean?' She said: 'I can hear him saying, "You'll never do it, you can't make it, what are you doing that for?"' She was talking about her Dad.

Most of our students bring ghosts with them: these people who have said, 'You can't, you'll never be able to'. In that respect, I don't think there's any difference between that 30-year-old mother of two, a 55-year-old male or a 15-year-old straight out of school. All of us in this profession are in the process of being ghost-busters. What I plan to do today is talk to you about one literacy provider, Morrison House, and the ghost busting that we do. We cater to a very wide range of people but what we're doing in each case is reversing those negative images and replacing them with positive ones.

Morrison House has been operating since 1981. It's an old farmhouse in Mt Evelyn, right on the edge of the country and the city. We started off with a female population — women coming in to do creative work, literacy, or just be involved in the community after their children had gone to school. Industry restructuring over the last ten years has seen a huge influx of male, middle-aged, very low literacy students and, in the last few years, we've had the youth group added in. The whole tenor of the place changes each time and so we have had to adapt.

We moved into the area of youth education after we were approached by several high schools in the region that knew we were a literacy provider. As a result, we worked quite closely with a Maths and English program at one of the local secondary schools where they had a group of Year 11 students who were really struggling. We were then asked by the Shire to be part of a program based at the Youth Works Office, a shopfront in Lilydale, where we worked in tandem with the youth workers with a group of very at-risk students. We also rented a house in Lilydale and a whole group of at-risk young students came there to work on a

literacy and employment program. While each of these projects had benefits, there was still something missing; there was no real sense of community. Since Morrison House was a community provider, we decided to bring youth groups back there.

Why does it work? First of all, let's look at the resources that we have. We are a minute place: we have three training rooms, an old farm house, a mud-brick pottery room, and there is a secondary college down the hill with a mighty kitchen. We have a budget that is less than the million-dollar view up the valley. A couple of minutes' walk away is a tiny nursery and the owner gives us access so our students can take part in horticulture activities. Our learning groups are comprised of about 70-80 adult literacy students, of whom the oldest is 85, a number of 15 and 16 year olds, and the entire range in between. We run two TAFE courses on-site, a Child care course and a Home and Community Care course. 'Build A Park' is a work-for-the-dole project we've taken on recently. It is based at Morrison House, but some of the students are ours and some are people who have come from Centrelink. They've ripped the innards out of an awful old park and they are completely rebuilding it and doing a mighty job. So, we have all of these people who make up the community and we've got all of these resources, which are community resources.

Our learners come from a diverse range of learning groups, as listed below:

### **Morrison House Learning Groups**

- Literacy / Numeracy Students. CGEA 1-2, 3-4
- English as a Second Language Students: Egyptian, Bosnian, Taiwanese, Italian etc.
- Adults with Mild Intellectual Disabilities
- Office of Corrections — Placements
- Men & Women 15 — 85
- Employed & Unemployed
- Employers — Employees
- TAFE Students: Child care Course, HACC's Course
- Volunteers — reception, tutor, outdoor maintenance
- Build-A-Park people (Work for the Dole)
- Computer Students
- Art & Craft Students
- Tutors — all varieties!!

We do provide a community of education and the powerful thing about this is that all people and programs are interlinked. Roles keep changing. Nobody is just a student. Nobody is a 15-year-old who knows nothing. One day a person might be a volunteer with an ESL group and the next afternoon be working as a Level 3 or 4 student. Or they are a person who is building a park and at other times working with an MID group and at other times cooking lunches for Morrison House. This is what our program does — we ‘mix and match’ the whole time. No one has a box any more. They can share the skills that they have. Incredible relationships develop because of the mixture and the community. People don’t talk about old and young, they just talk about John and Frank.

The other thing we do well is take risks and we encourage our students to do the same — just turning up is a risk for most of them. Risk-taking is an incredibly valuable activity for everybody, to be in a position where you *don’t know*. Both tutors and students benefit from this position.

For example, one of the specific projects involving considerable amounts of risk-taking that we’ve tackled over the last four or five years was a worm farm. The students made worm farms from 44-gallon drums that they chopped up, and the worms not only survived, but proliferated. Another example was the T-shirt business. There was also a car maintenance workshop where we had the older guys teaching people to look under their bonnets and change tyres in our car park. Similarly, the Morrison House Holiday Program needed billy carts. We wanted to make eight and we costed each one at \$100 but we only had \$100 in total. So all of the students in the class went out and got sponsors and they made the carts with very little expense. We had a big ceremony, passing over the billy carts.

These have all been long-term projects that go on for weeks or even months. They involve going out into the community and bringing back information, and they combine everything — the literacy is there, the numeracy, everything happens. People are learning. Tutors are not the experts. Students are able to utilise their many skills.

What we’re starting now is a new garden. A whole area looks pretty awful so students are going to put their designs in and we’re going to sift through them and price it and then students will make the new gardens. The other project that we’re hoping to begin is the Spore to Spoon project. The lady at the nursery wants to grow mushrooms and we’ve got a huge space under Morrison House that looks like a good mushroom proliferation area. She’s going to talk to us about how we can help her grow the mushrooms and we’re going to run the whole project: growing,

retailing, marketing and sales. We might not make a million dollars but we'll have a great time doing it. None of us, at present, know exactly how it will turn out, but the process will be incredibly worthwhile.

Some of the recent problems we have had to deal with are the increased incidence of drug use, which has meant that tutors are needing information and strategies. Similarly, an increased population of young teenagers has resulted in tutors having to deal with student behaviour problems, parental expectations, increased accountability, safety issues etc.

In summary then, the ghost-busting formula is: use community and student resources, mix and match roles, and encourage a 'risk-taking in learning' atmosphere where students and tutors can use their skills to work on *real* projects. Self-esteem and positive attitudes grow, and learning takes place.

I think the big question, in terms of research, is: What are the optimum conditions for learning? Even though our results are good, there are still problems. Learning for some people still does not happen and I'd like to know why. What are the secrets of making learning effective for *every* student?

### **Morrison House Resources**

- Old farm house (somewhat renovated)
- Mud-brick pottery / craft room and two training rooms (great views)
- Secondary College (down the hill with kitchen!)
- Walking Track (20 minutes walk)
- BBQ and Rotunda
- Child care Centre, 7am – 7pm
- After School and Holiday Program
- Lilydale Lake (5 minutes' drive)
- Tiny, private nursery (down the hill, 3 minutes' drive)
- 20-seater bus
- Mount Evelyn, Lilydale townships
- Yarra Valley: vineyards, cheese factory
- Healesville Sanctuary
- TAFE Courses (at Morrison House — Child care III and Home and Community Care)
- 12 Computers
- Historic Houses — Gulf Station, Mt. Delancy
- SDS School



**'Every now and then you get one over the line...'**

**Jules De Cinque**

*Teacher and Program Coordinator, Preston and Reservoir Adult Community Education Centre*

I am going to show you a video called 'Victim of Circumstance'. This video was made by a young woman as part of a short video-making course called GLAM that the Preston and Reservoir Adult Community Education Centre (PRACE) offered unemployed young women.

In this film, the young protagonist is having a hard time at school. She perceives that she 'doesn't fit in', that she's poor and from the 'wrong side of town'. Her dress is unfashionable and her body language is awkward. There is a group of female students who harass and abuse her. One day they assault her badly and leave her with bruises and blood on her face. The young woman screams with pain and hurt and her screams echo along the empty school corridors. The next time the group of female students attempts to abuse her, she pulls a gun from her locker, takes aim at her attackers and shoots them all dead. She calmly drops the gun and walks away. A voice-over tells us that she was punished for her crime but years later, she still feels they deserved it.

The young woman who made this film was only 16 at the time. She went through three refuges during the time it took to make it. She wrote, directed, filmed and edited it herself. I show it because I think it indicates how much young people know, but they don't necessarily know they know. She was given the idea — you're going to make a film, here's the camera, here's the edit-suite, off you go — and then it just tumbled out. She's done a good job.

The other thing it shows me is how big young people's feelings are. When they're at that age what's going on in their lives is huge. The third thing I get from this film is the courage that she showed. To get up at 16, having been kicked out of home, kicked out of school, with all these other issues going on, and then to produce that. I don't think we give young people at risk enough credit for the courage they show in having another go. Just to come to the Neighbourhood House is fantastic, and that's probably the third or fourth institution along the way. Or they might not have been at school since they were 12. They're supposed to be moved to a pathway when they're expelled but this doesn't always happen. There's something called indefinite suspension, so you can get rid of a kid under 15 without actually making sure they go elsewhere.

The fourth thing this film reveals is how important school is. She could make whatever film she liked and she decided to make one about school, and what she talks about is how she never fitted in. These young people are at risk of lots of things, but the thing that concerns me as a teacher is that they're at risk of finishing their school years with very little, if anything, to show for it. That must be very difficult for a young person to handle.

The difficulty for us, is *how* we teach them, not so much what we're teaching. We all know what to do — we know it's got to be engaging, something that's relevant to them — it's the way we do it that's the issue. We work with really marginalised kids who are right on the edge. They haven't got to Year 12 and decided, 'I don't think I'll do this any more, I'll go and get a job instead'. These are young people who haven't been at school since they were 12 or 13 and the issues impacting on them are so massive that they couldn't really go anyway. So how do we teach them? That's the big one. The other questions are: What is a student at risk? What barriers does the student face? What do they need from an education? What motivates me to teach them?

Today I'd like to talk firstly about what motivates me to teach youth at risk, and then how I teach them.

I believe if I put good things in, then good things will come out. I think that's the way we can look at our whole community. We've got to start putting in. There's this group of young people who are having a lot of trouble and it's not their fault. I believe it's our responsibility to support them through it. For me, working with youth at risk is about life — it's not just about my job. I think that by working with youth at risk, I'm a better person. If I learn about how to teach or be with a young person who's in trouble, I can apply that to everything else in my life — my partnerships, my own children, my colleagues, my family.

I've talked to a number of workers about what motivates them to work with young people and another thing that came up was the sense of achievement from getting one through. It makes it worthwhile because that one person might not have got there if we hadn't done what we were doing. And every now and then you get one over the line. Another thing someone mentioned was having an attitude of respect. As teachers, we can't just say, 'You're too hard, off you go'. As a profession, we need to figure out how to teach young people at risk and deliver them programs, because we're trying to get them to a point where they can make their life a little better.

I asked a young woman the other day to write down five wishes because she was a bit depressed, and I wanted her to start getting it out onto the page. Her first wish was 'I wish I had a better life'. We can't change their life experience or their family, but we can have an impact on their self-esteem and we can try to get them enough skills and knowledge so that they can learn how to go and get a better life. Right now, they don't know, because their parents didn't have a better life and their parents' parents probably didn't either so they have no idea how to go about getting it. That's what I reckon our job is.

How do we teach them? The number one thing is: **Be polite**. You would be surprised by how many people aren't polite. A school in Adelaide turned their whole school around just on that one thing. It's not that difficult.

**Flexibility**. I was doing a film with one young woman and I went to pick her up and she said, 'Oh, Jules, I'm an actor short'. So I said, 'It's OK, I'll be your actor'. Then, 'Oh, all my silver paint got nicked, the kids wanted to "chrome" with it so I haven't finished painting my prop'. So I said, 'It's OK, we'll go and buy you some more.' Then, 'My friend didn't drop the costumes around'. So I said, 'No worries. We'll get you costumes'. You just have to continually shift the goal posts because the really important thing is that they kick a goal. That is absolutely vital. You just have to do whatever you have to do to make sure they get a goal.

**Be clear about what you're actually trying to achieve**. There's no point delivering something that you don't believe in or doesn't have any relevance. You've got to know what you're teaching and why you're teaching it. With youth at risk, I always see adult education as just the first step. I don't have to create someone who's going to read *Wuthering Heights* in ten weeks. I just want them to turn up and finish, produce what they're here to produce, and then that's that step done and on we go to the next one. Success is what will get them motivated to move on those pathways.

**Relax and sit down**. I think that works really well with young people, just sitting and chatting with them. Just hanging out.

**If you haven't got anything positive to say to a young person, don't say it**. It's the positive feedback that's really important. They already know what they don't know. They already know that they don't fit in and that they're failures and that their behaviour is not appropriate. We don't need to keep telling them. What they need to hear is what they're good at, what they're doing well.

**Observing myself.** If there's a problem in the classroom, it's probably me and I need to figure out what it is that I'm doing that needs to be fixed. I'm constantly observing myself, my behaviour, my state, what I'm teaching, the way I'm teaching it; so if there's a problem I'll address *me* first and usually that fixes it up.

**Observing the students.** My daughter's kindergarten just sent me a detailed three-page assessment of her. I don't know a teacher anywhere that could do that in the secondary or adult system. How much do we actually know about who we're teaching? Are we paying attention to the person who's sitting in the room or do we just deliver our lesson and leave?

**Be informed.** It's a whole life standing in front of you, not just a student. There are lots of things going on in the world that's affecting this young person and I think it's my responsibility to find out what they are. When John Howard changes his policy, how is that affecting the 15-year-old standing in front of me? When a peak youth advisory body is closed down, when there's some big publicity about 'naughty youths' or the drug problem, how is this affecting them? What's going to happen? What does work-for-the-dole mean? All that sort of stuff.

**You must have a product and it must be finished** — whatever it is. There has to be a product, something tangible, that this young person creates.

**Be tolerant.** Don't judge them. A marginalised young person can sniff someone judging them from about 500 metres. You've got to be open. This is a young person, whose life is what it is, who is the person that they are. We just have to get them along a path that's more constructive. They're not bad. They've just had a rough time.

Now I'd like to show my last film. I show this film because it portrays, again, how young people have big feelings, and how their lives are not always what they appear to be. The young woman who made this film was in the Parkville Youth Residential Centre at the time. The young women I worked with didn't want to get behind the camera, where I thought the power was; they wanted to get in front of the camera. We figured that was because when you're locked up, you don't even have an identity, let alone any power, so this young woman wanted to see herself and what's important to her on film.

This film is basically the 'Home Video of the Baby', but the context is what makes this film deeply moving. We see our protagonist preparing for an outing, putting on her shoes, wrapping heart-shaped chocolates that she

had obviously made and applying her make-up. When she collects her cigarettes and the door is unlocked we realise she is imprisoned. The next scene is in a different place and a beautiful baby is brought to her. We see her playing with what we now know is her child. She gives her son the chocolates she had made for him. They are smiling, happy and beautiful. Then a worker takes the baby from her and enters the elevator. The visit is over. The doors of the elevator close and our young woman is devastated. We see her return to the lock up, hand back her cigarettes and being escorted to her room. Here she grabs a big teddy bear from on top of her cupboard and sits on her bed hugging this bear, looking lost and miserable. The video closes with a photograph of the baby and his father and a slow tilt to the barred windows.

The music the young woman chose was 'The Rose', sung by Bette Midler. The words are incredibly poignant, especially 'and you think that love is only for the lucky and the strong'.

I have shown this film to lots of people. Nearly everyone cries.

## Working with Unemployed Young People: The Teacher's Learning

**Lindee Conway**

*Teacher, Adult Migrant Education Service (AMES), St Albans*

The challenge of teaching literacy to unemployed young people is perhaps best illustrated by the stories of what they have to contend with in their lives. The hurdles they face are enormous — Centrelink, housing, trouble when they sell drugs and don't pay the right amount of money over, no family support, no one to fall back on — and yet they survive and can still be lovable and loving.

I'll talk briefly about a few of the kids to give you an idea of the problems they face and why literacy wasn't, perhaps, a big deal to them. They were all referred by Centrelink so they had to go or they'd get 'breached'. Rosie was a classic example of a person not engaged in employment or training, who had nothing in her life but fashion. She looked fantastic every day, with the lippy and those mock tattoos, but there was nothing concrete in her life. Every day was the same as yesterday, punctuated by visits to Centrelink every fortnight. She was a troubled young woman who had a great need for being loved and a hell of a system for resisting the amount of drugs she put into it. One day I made a comment like, 'I can't quite see the point of coming to class stoned'. She said, 'Did you *know* we were stoned?' I think I went up in her estimation.

Another young woman was Thi, a Vietnamese girl, who I think had been branded by family and school as someone who wasn't going to be a high achiever. She had no ability to perceive herself as a learner. I was just an imposition put on her by Centrelink to get her dole money, so she saw the class and myself as just another hurdle. However, she began quite quickly to like the class, which was unexpected, and I think she liked being in an environment where she'd come in and we'd say, 'Giddyay, how are you?' It wasn't something that had featured large in her life before. She began to respond and want to do things. Nobody was more startled than Thi to discover that she had a bit of talent, that she could learn to read and write, that she could develop those skills. One day, we needed a Vietnamese speaker. We usually ask them to come out and help from our high level classes but this time I said, 'No, it doesn't matter, we've got Thi'. Thi just swelled, because she was suddenly an expert. She had no sense of herself as someone who could be like that.

Robert was a nice kid with the will to improve his skills. He was a very intelligent young man and he already had a security license, but he wanted to get a license number and to do so he knew he had to improve his skills. However, he came from the wackiest family situation I have ever known and it was a huge barrier to his improvement and his learning, and I could see that it had been all his life. One day, he rang up and said, 'I'm not coming because me Dad's in a car accident'. A couple of weeks later he called again: 'I'm not coming because me Dad's dead'. We sent him a card. Next time I saw him, I asked, 'Did your Dad die as a result of the car accident?' He said, 'Oh, no, that was me other Dad'. A couple of weeks later he turns up in a great puffy jacket and when I complimented it, he said, 'Yeah, me Dad sent it to me'. That day he was the only kid there so I drew him a diagram of my family and asked him to draw me his. It looked like a map of the London Underground. Let alone a homework desk, he'd had nowhere to even consider putting a desk in the twelve years of his schooling.

Tom is our success story. He is the only one, so far, who has left our training and got paid work. The difference between Tom and the others was that he had a Mum and Dad — not living together, but that's pretty normal — and he had contact with both. He was a bit older than the others and he was sick of what his life had become since he'd finished school. He was sick of being at home, being on the dole, having to hassle people at Centrelink and so on. So he thought, 'I am going to make a change'. It all came from him and we were just the agents of his change. A few weeks after he got a job, he turned up to visit me and he'd lost a bit of weight, he had trousers and shoes on, and he felt a million dollars. It was wonderful to see the transformation in him.

I'd like finally to talk about Stewart, because I think his situation is salutary. Stew was a highly intelligent young man with very few social skills. It wasn't that he wouldn't have liked to have said, 'How was your weekend?', but no one had ever taught him the social graces. One day we were on the topic of school and Stew told us a story that I found very moving. He was the oldest of his siblings and when he was in the upper years of primary school, his Mum used to say to him, 'Stew, do you want to stay home today and watch the telly?' He'd say, 'Yes', and she'd say, 'You can if you look after the kids'. Mum wanted a day down at the pub, which is fair enough given Mum's life; she needed a break and her only way of getting it was to give Stew a day off and, being young, Stew took it. We listened to that story and I asked him, 'What happened at secondary

school?' He said, 'Well, Mum just used to open up the bedroom door and say, "Are you going to school?" and I'd say, "Nuh", and she'd say, "Well, f\*\*k you then".' I said to him, 'Stew, how do you feel about your Mum now?' He said, 'I bloody hate her'. I found the whole generational malaise expressed in that little story very moving, because you wouldn't blame Mum, but you wouldn't blame Stew for blaming Mum.

Some of the educational problems that we've been faced with include a complete inability to commit to work, whether it's a job or some kind of training. A physical reluctance to pick up a pen, because it was picking up the pen all those years ago that led them into trouble in class. A very short attention span. Another thing that I've noticed, that I didn't expect — because I expected them to behave like young people but not like kids — was that a few of them found it difficult to resist falling into the habit of playing up. I had to say to a couple of them, 'Don't stuff me about, because it's just a waste of time. If you feel like that, go home'.

A lot of stuff didn't work. The literacy that I had taught for the last ten years was the literacy and language that goes with ESL teaching, so there was a lot that I didn't know. The situation was that kids would come in to do some literacy, some numeracy, some computer work, but there was no specific project attached to it such as at Morrison House.

Things that I found did work included letting the kids lead a discussion; allowing whatever topic was on their mind to become the discussion topic. Questions like, 'Why do people sell heroin?', 'Safeway as an employer', 'Why women should not have babies when they're young', 'The ideal age difference between lovers', 'Why I stuffed up at school' or 'The transit police and what a pack of complete and utter bastards they are to anyone who appears young'.

'Why I stuffed up at school' was an interesting one, because a lot of the kids, at 20 or 21, were able to look back on their time at school and say, 'I was really awful'. They didn't not say, 'Some of the teachers were bad to me', but they admitted quite freely that they'd made their school career into being a ratbag. That's how they'd built their persona and their identity and that didn't leave much space for learning.

Finally, I'd like to tell you very briefly what I've got out of the experience of working with these people. I've learnt not to be scared of a group of young people when I see them on the train, or on the platform, or in the street, whereas beforehand, I used to get a bit fretful. I've learnt to admire their ability to survive.

Dropouts in the class are very high and I've found that disillusioning,



particularly when I see them making real progress and then they just disappear with no explanation. I've wondered: Is it me? What can I do? Why don't they come back? Literacy is just one of a number of problems in their life, but perhaps they think that once they learn to read and write everything will be OK, that literacy will ameliorate their other problems. So they take a stand on literacy and they come to class and make some gains but the other problems are still there. So *they* become disillusioned. But, overall, I've found it a fantastic experience to work with them.

## The NMIT Youth Unit: Diverse Programs and Pedagogical Challenges

**Fran O'Neil**

*Teacher, Access Department, Faculty of Further Education, Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE*

I'm going to talk about how Northern TAFE has responded structurally to a huge increase in demand by young people for programs. But before I talk to you about the Youth Unit, I'll explain a bit about the Faculty and the sort of groups that make it up.

According to our Mission Statement, the Faculty of Further Education is a leader in the design and delivery of learning environments that enable access by the broadest diversity of people to education, training and employment. There are a number of Departments and Units within the Faculty:

The **Access Department** is responsible for Literacy and Numeracy programs, Return to Study program, Bridging and preparatory courses.

The **Centre of Excellence** for students who are deaf and hard of hearing is responsible for Literacy and Numeracy programs, Return to Study program, On-line training, Research and Professional Development.

The **Language Studies Department** is responsible for Language and Literacy programs for NESB students, Language and Literacy programs for recent arrivals and ELICOS (English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students) in conjunction with the Overseas Unit.

**Koorie Services** are specialists in Koorie education and training, provide consultancy services to Koorie community, business and industry groups, are trainers in culturally appropriate service delivery and offer appropriate Certificate courses for Koori people.

**English and Study Skills Advisory Service** provides individual and small group study support for students enrolled in Institute programs.

The **Industry and Initiatives Unit** is responsible for Workplace Communication, Fee for Service courses, Short Courses, Research and Projects.

**Jobs Pathway Program in the North** assists school leavers to make a successful move into the workforce, assist school leavers into Apprenticeships and Traineeships, offers referral services and has strong links to schools network.

As you can see, the Faculty of Further Education is a rich and diverse organisation with a complex internal structure. The Youth Unit is a new initiative and our rationale is:

- to focus our expertise around the needs of the group;
- to respond to the increasing amount of young people approaching us for alternatives to traditional secondary schooling;
- to respond to the increase in referral of young people, and increased demand for courses;
- we need to be responsive to the new level of demand placed on us to offer relevant and meaningful alternatives to school;
- we appreciate that our internal structures are complex and that navigating the system can be difficult. This is probably doubly difficult for young early school leavers who may be reluctant or hesitant about returning to a 'school-like' environment.

### **Aims of Youth Unit**

- To establish a centralised referral system;
- To investigate and provide support for the educational needs of young people in the north;
- To inform program design and delivery in regard to the literacy, numeracy and educational needs of young people enrolled in faculty programs;
- To further develop community networks to provide welfare-related support for young students;
- To evaluate existing programs for young people;
- To develop programs and curriculum which are diverse and responsive to the education and training needs of young early school leavers;
- To monitor pathways of young early school-leavers; and
- To be pro-active in policy development for young people.

### **Programs and Services Available to Young People in the Faculty**

- Young Adult Migrant Education Course (since the mid '80s)
- Literacy and Numeracy Programs
- Koorie programs
- Alternate Year 11
- Alternate Year 10 for young people
- Vocational electives

- Vocational Options
- Apprenticeship / Traineeship options
- Employment support and placement (15-19 year olds)
- Niche programs where integration is undesirable, eg. deaf and hard of hearing, Arts and Basic Education
- Maths and Science bridging courses

In working with young people and establishing the Youth Unit, we have had to address many issues. We realise we have many positive factors in our favour, while at the same time acknowledge that we have many issues and challenges to face as a Faculty.

### **Positives**

We are able to offer supportive learning relationships and environments. We believe that positive relationships and stability are crucial in working with young people. To ensure this, we have established a system of Core Teachers who are responsible for a group of young people.

We have many excellent and experienced teachers in adult language and literacy, committed to social justice issues and dedicated to giving people that second chance. These teachers have the experience to cater for the special needs of young people.

The diversity of age and life experience among students is a positive. Older students often contribute to the supportive environment and support, and encourage and challenge the younger students.

We are able to offer flexible programming which allows teachers and groups substantial blocks of time to work together. We can customise curriculum to meet the needs of young people in our programs.

We are able to offer an experiential learning framework. Work Experience and Vocational electives give students hands-on experience and realistic tasters, allowing students 'real' pictures of possible pathways.

We have witnessed many young people experiencing success where they never have before. They finally feel they belong somewhere, that they fit in. Their self-esteem develops and their status as 'student' is seen as a positive one.

We have good Strategic Alliances. Our existing referral systems work well, we are allied with the City of Whittlesea Youth Commitment and local support agencies and have strong and positive internal alliances with other faculties at NMIT.

## Issues and Challenges

Students often have high welfare and support needs that must be met in order for them to get on with the learning — finding either the time, the resources or the contacts is challenging. We are also concerned about overstepping our roles and expertise as teachers.

We are not dealing with traditional TAFE students when we work with young people in our programs. They have come from a compulsory school setting and the move to the non-compulsory sector is a difficult shift for the student. This creates many challenges for the students, the teachers and for program planning. We continually need to examine our models of delivery to meet the needs of all students.

The ‘reluctant student’ is a challenge. Sometimes young people are getting pressure to attend classes and often it is difficult to engage these students. Another reluctant student is the young person who has a high level of education in L1, but limited literacy in English. Where do they fit? How do we cater for them? How do we motivate them? For the reluctant student, there is often high absenteeism, which perpetuates the problems.

While mixed age groups can be positive, they don’t always work. While these mixed groups can be richer and dynamic, they can interfere with everyone’s learning if there is a popular versus traditional ‘culture clash’.

Designing curriculum so we meet the general education needs of young students and balance that with their work focus is often a challenge, as is the tension in the relationship between literacy, level of education and realistic employment opportunities.

Communication with external agencies is often difficult — rapid systemic and political change can lead to misinformation and differing interpretations of new rules and initiatives. Sometimes it is very difficult for information to get through and this can affect referrals and pathways.

## Youth Forum Workshop Groups: issues and challenges

**Jill Sanguinetti**

*Coordinator, Victorian Centre of ALNARC*

Participants at the Youth Literacy Forum broke into four groups to discuss the presentations, to share information about the the various programs they are involved in, and talk about the challenges they face. The discussions focused on issues and questions for further research. The key points that emerged were noted down and presented to the full group in the final session. The list of issues and challenges below is a combined version of the notes taken within each of the four groups.

### **1. The need for teachers to be properly resourced to work with unemployed young people**

- There is a high burnout rate amongst teachers in this area. Special supports are needed.
- Because of the difficult circumstances of many unemployed young people, teachers are often forced to play a welfare role. Teachers need to be supported in this and need to have professional development in dealing with issues such as drugs, homelessness and social disaffection.
- Teachers need ways of addressing gender and cultural difference in class groups.
- Youth needs are multi-faceted. Professional development needs to cover many areas, including the specialist skills of working with youth. There is a danger otherwise of responding to ad hoc advice rather than drawing on one's own professional knowledge in dealing with crises, making referrals, etc.
- Teachers need to know more about pathways — where and how to tap into other forms of training and support.
- The challenges that teachers often need to deal with include family breakdown, lack of stability in people's lives, lack of community involvements and rituals, the drug culture, the isolating effects of unemployment, the trauma of refugee experiences and a pervading sense of hopelessness.
- On the other hand, there are a number of positives for teachers: the fact that it is possible to establish trusting relationships with students and to provide a sense of belonging, that tangible outcomes *can* be

achieved, and that helping to bring about small changes can be deeply rewarding.

## **2. The need to address curriculum and teaching issues:**

- Appropriate curriculum development: what course mixes will turn kids on?
- There is a need to be realistic about expected outcomes in the light of the issues young people are encountering and their frequent disaffection.
- There is a need to match gender of the teacher with gender of each group. More men are needed to teach unemployed young men.
- Teachers need to avoid getting involved in power struggles with students. In dealing with discipline, it is important to focus on the *context* of rules and regulations and the *reasons* for them. Discipline should be a collective matter and not be about teacher power.
- We need more examples of ‘best practice’ that we can collectively learn from.
- Teachers need to assist with learners’ goal setting and acknowledge every success.

## **3. Policy issues that need to be addressed:**

- Programs should not be constrained by institutional and accreditation requirements. The OTFE approach is too structured. This constrains the degree to which it is possible to innovate.
- Funding should not be tied to student contact hours, as much time is spent on liaison, counselling and program development.
- Class sizes: 17 — 18 is too big to deal adequately with all the problems and to provide workshops in vocational skills areas.
- There needs to be a component for evaluation in programs. We need that evaluation in order to support funding applications.
- Who is responsible for 15 — 18 year olds (for financial support, education, and welfare)? How can services be better coordinated? There is a lack of welfare services and resources and a need for networks to be developed. Education seems to be being forced to take on a welfare role.
- Overall, there is a lack of resources to provide for the educational needs of unemployed young people in ways that are likely to make a lasting impact. Young unemployed people who are at risk of long-term marginalisation should be a priority for government spending.

- Centrelink often gives unreliable information and makes inappropriate referrals. Centrelink officers sometimes appear to be unaware of their own policies.
- There are many negative effects of tendering and sessional employment on programs. The emphasis goes on filling the course, rather than finding the best program for any individual. On the other hand, there is no point putting people on waiting lists while awaiting funding, as young people tend to disappear. If a provider has a waiting list, it should not need to have to compete with other providers to deliver the program.
- The poor working conditions of teachers undermines programs and is an indicator of the low value placed on these programs. It is difficult to find suitable teachers given the conditions offered.
- Teachers may work to build up an effective program with resources, industry links, word of mouth referrals, then don't get funding for the following year. When the course changes, the venue and the tutor changes. They get lost at the transition point between courses.

#### **4. Possible research questions**

- How can links be created between schools and the ACE sector?
- How can we tap into skills that exist in the community? For example, how can we link in with unemployed older people and involve these as mentors?
- What is turning kids off school?
- Current policy emphasises 'individualism' and 'mutual obligation'. How can we develop programs which have more emphasis on 'community' and less emphasis on the individual and the 'obligation' of individuals to comply?
- How can we change attitudes of negativity towards young unemployed people in mainstream society. Such perceptions need to be changed.



## The Need for Multi-Media Resources for Young People with Learning Difficulties

**Ron McGlynn**

*Karingal Inc. and MEM (McGlynn Educational Resources)*

Ron McGlynn is author of the Certificate 1 in Initial Adult Literacy and Numeracy – (CIALN) which is currently being delivered by approximately 50 further education providers at more than 100 locations nationally. He is also a practicing teacher/co-ordinator for a large literacy program for teenagers and adults with an intellectual/learning disability. Ron was unable to attend the professional development forum but contributed this short piece to the proceedings.

I would like to highlight a major problem in the adult literacy field which relates to the professional development seminar about literacy for youth.

Due to a lack of Government funding and lack of relevant multimedia resources further education providers have traditionally found it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to adequately support teenage and adult participants at the initial literacy/numeracy levels. Students at these initial levels require intensive 1 to 1 support within a small group approach to teaching and learning, e.g. class sizes of 1 to 6/7. Current standardised ACFE/TAFE funding levels mean that such classes are not cost effective. Therefore, many further education providers cannot afford to offer such classes.

Secondly, when such classes are offered, students usually only attend a once a week 2 hour morning, afternoon or evening session. Within this session, the teacher is expected to teach the skills of reading, writing, general/oral communication and numeracy. In an ideal class size of 1 to 6 it is estimated that each student receives approximately 15 minutes direct instruction per week.

Further, as you will be aware, many teenage and young adult school levels at these initials levels do not want to attend traditional classroom-based classes due to past negative experiences.

Therefore, clearly, the challenge is to develop relevant initial literacy/numeracy multimedia student resources that are age appropriate and motivating for the users. Such resources will permit students to take more control over their own learning both in the classroom and throughout the week at home. Also such software , for the first time, will

permit the delivery of initial literacy/numeracy studies via a distance education mode for some students (for example, those who refuse to attend traditional classes).

To this end MEM has spent most of 1998 developing a prototype Proof of Concept CD for the production of an extensive range of CIALN compatible multimedia resources for student use. We are currently seeking production funding. Any support you may offer in this area would be appreciated. A summary of this project can be found on the MEM Home page <<http://www.memed.com.au>>[www.memed.com.au](http://www.memed.com.au) as can an assessment of the CIALN by 19 providers from around Australia conducted in 1997. MEM is currently analysing the 1998 assessments of an additional 26 providers. The results to date seem to mirror the 97 results (over-whelming support for the high standard and relevance of the CIALN courses for students at the initial literacy levels).

I would be most grateful if you could raise the issues highlighted here at the professional development day on my behalf. I would be happy to discuss the issues raised with anyone who would care to contact me.

Regards,

Ron McGlynn  
[jmcglynn@bigpond.com](mailto:jmcglynn@bigpond.com)

Published by



Language Australia Ltd



**U.S. Department of Education**  
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)  
National Library of Education (NLE)  
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)



## **NOTICE**

### **Reproduction Basis**



This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.



This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").

EFF-089 (3/2000)