

# Western Australian Adult Literacy Council Conference Report 2012

This year the Conference theme was *At the heart of the matter – identity and trust in adult learning*. The intention was to place people – teachers and learners – at the heart of educational quality and ask the question: what makes learning work for people?

The WAALC Conference Committee decided to address what we know are the factors that make the difference between accessible, effective literacy services, and those which, for adult literacy learners, just replicate what didn't work well enough in the first place.

We decided to open up discussion about the human element, and how what happens during initial schooling almost always impacts on, and must be acknowledged and addressed in literacy learning. We took guidance from what learners have told us, and showed us, and proved to us over and over again – that understanding, trust and commitment between teacher and learner is central to successful adult literacy learning. Sixteen workshops were delivered at the conference to explore and renew our focus on the heart of the matter: ways of working that meet the needs of learners and, as a natural result, achieve better outcomes for the wider society as well.

The response from adult literacy teachers across WA was brilliant, with wholehearted support for the opportunity to explore in depth what is *At the heart of the matter – identity and trust in adult learning*. 102 delegates attended the 2012 Conference over two days.

## **How the 2012 WALCC Conference impacted on the delegates...**

Some quotes from delegates' evaluations:

It has to be reiterated that for another adult to trust in you, trust in learning and education, you MUST trust, respect and learn with them.

Build relationships that impact on the transitioning of ideas and education for the learner and the trainer.

Trust that the learner can perform well with motivation and encouragement.

Being able to relate to the identity of the learner and establish trust is crucial to the learning experience.

....how our institution meshes (or doesn't mesh) with student identity.

I am going to deepen my interpersonal relationships with students to empower students how to retain their identity and to deal with/cope/explore the change in their identity. This will foster their trust in me and therefore their learning journey (hopefully).

To understand and remember that differences between identity have potential to disrupt trust.

It is important to know that new learning bring about changes to learners' understanding themselves and their worlds. Teachers need to be aware and look for opportunities to support learners.

Resilience is a crucial success factor for both teachers and learners in adult education and learners must persist and get pleasure and reward from doing so!

This year the theme was close to what I feel, what we often forget in the game of outcomes, certificates, reporting and paperwork - that at the heart of the matter we are dealing with human beings who are most often disempowered, and our role above all is to help them build confidence and empower them, help them to see and work from their own strength.

Adults need to trust and value you and the organisation in order to learn productively. They have to have a sense of ownership in the learning and identify themselves as a learner – fully part of the learning environment and co-creator in the process.

Thanks for the reminder that whilst many of us are using ‘heart’ in our practice we sometimes feel it is undermined by funding bodies, agencies’ guidelines etc and a conference like this helps bring the importance of the ‘heart’ of the matter back to the forefront again. Cheers!

I gained a greater insight into what learners/students bring with them and the need for trainers to be aware of this and have compassion. I found the issue of identity of the learner as he/she progresses through education very interesting. I had never really thought of learner identity before.

Lots of thought about the processes and implications of learning and how they affect the individual...how to remember the history of student experiences and how that impacts on future learning.

My focus has made me reflect on my own bad experiences in learning. It has given me some strategies to assist learners heal and support them with the stigma. When learners are resistant to take on a new identity; with respect of their identity, I need to encourage, support them to explore new worlds.

This conference has driven home the importance of ‘meeting’ the student where they are at in their learning journey so that learning material is contextualised and relevant to the student.

Can my students trust me never to look down on them, belittle them?  
Work on student’s identity as a learner and what is holding them back. Listen to them.

Learn from your students. Listen to them. Express how you are learning from them.

### **Delegates’ reflections (Question 3) (44 responses)**

Delegates’ reflection on what they learned about

- 19 delegates commented on the issue of identity
- 11 delegates commented on the issue of trust
- 13 delegates commented on the issue of resilience
- 9 delegates commented on the issue of social capital

Asked to identify what would impact them and/or their practice,

- 5 delegates commented on contextualizing delivery to individual learners
- 4 delegates commented on learning from learners
- 4 delegates identified the tensions that exist between good practice and program requirements
- 3 delegates commented on the importance of interpersonal relationships
- 3 delegates commented on the issue of accommodating the impact of learners’ previous educational experiences

### **Future Conferences**

Suggestions were received from 47 delegates at the 2012 conference for future WAALC conferences:

**Liked it how it was: give us more like that (12)**

- Liked everything I saw in the sessions I went to (A1, A5, B3,BV6, C2)
- Just keep them coming
- More of this year's workshops for development of ideas
- Current developments in literacy and numeracy practice. More of what was presented at this conference
- The workshops I attended have been really useful for my learning journey and professional development. I would love to attend more such workshops that teach me more contemporary strategies that get learners more engaged in the learning process.
- Voices of Change – much more on same topic. More from Ruth
- Not sure at this point – had a good mix this year
- Let's have Ruth Wallace again. I felt some sessions did not connect to the theme (eg the grammar one). To someone with a strong ESL and linguistics background Pearson's approach was pretty shallow I thought.
- A whole day Ruth Wallace workshop!! More of the same. There's a new program developed by Christine Richards (?) at one of the colleges (like Carine?). Christine and Sandra Duncan are delivering at Casuarina Prison(new project) sounds very interesting
- More of what we heard this time
- Ruth Wallace re-visited. Susan Bates – the day to day practices of a CAVSS teacher
- Liked everything I saw in the sessions I went to

**Practical hands on (10)**

- Creating resources to make teaching easy
- more practical or tool box based workshops rather than just overviews of others practices
- More case studies success stories that could be implemented in other TAFE's Centres etc, present working models
- Case studies on some issues
- More practical resources and applications of best practice used to assist and support learners in general
- There are many great websites offering free resources that people could be informed of and shown via
- More practical workshops less discussion. All valuable discussion but opportunities to "do"
- More interactive conference attendees. Practical hands on workshops as opposed to 'listening' to every session
- More usable ideas
- Some practical ideas for teaching and assessing to keep auditors happy

**More of a particular stream (12)**

*Numeracy and Maths*

- More on maths finding out what they know in an ESL context
- Numeracy/mathematics teaching skills (especially for ESL students)
- Would like to see more initial and intro levels for numeracy
- Numeracy for initial learners (CGEA curriculum) for non-English speaking background

*ESL*

- Perspective on teaching new Australians and a focus on issues peculiar to their learning
- Involved speakers from non English speaking countries (quite sure we'll get some new ideas and information)
- More on maths finding out what they know in an ESL context
- Maybe more sessions about teaching migrants/refugees specifically

### *Indigenous focused sessions*

- Remote literacy and numeracy techniques for indigenous communities
- I loved the Indigenous focused seminars

### *Digital technologies*

- I would like to learn more about digital technologies and its application into LLN. In addition to how it fits with adult learners
- Bringing the 'heart' empowerment into the curriculum and reporting framework, digital literacies, found Audrey very inspiring, we need her out on the ground here in WA to help start up some social practice models within LLNP and other organisations. So, how can we make a difference and truly create an organisation that lives and breathes 'The heart fo the matter'? Centacare does this really well thanks to our pioneer Carmel Jennings who has infused the org with student centered adult learning but we are always constrained by rules, guidelines, restrictions: how can we marginalise this so the heart of the matter comes forward?

## **Other ideas/suggestions**

### **More handouts**

- Handouts proceedings
- More of the same: good practice/what has been learnt etc
- Conference papers posted on the web Discussion on whether teachers find Cert IV useful- believe this is still a requirement even though it has minimal application

### **Lower level literacies and numeracies focus**

- Would like to see included more initial and intro level
- Would like to see more initial and intro levels for numeracy

### **Assessment**

- Assessment
- Bringing the 'heart' empowerment into the curriculum and reporting framework, digital literacies, found Audrey very inspiring, we need her out on the ground here in WA to help start up some social practice models within LLNP and other organisations. So, how can we make a difference and truly create an organisation that lives and breathes 'The heart fo the matter'? Centacare does this really well thanks to our pioneer Carmel Jennings who has infused the org with student centered adult learning but we are always constrained by rules, guidelines, restrictions: how can we marginalise this so the heart of the matter comes forward?

### **Community based education**

- More community based adult education links. I feel there is a need to bring community adult education and VET pathways closer together. More recognition of informal literacy practices and their link to other skills learning. Life skills not just workplace skills.

### **Keynote**

- First keynote will make a huge impression and as such should be engaging and dynamic

### **Certificates of attendance**

- Certificates of attending the conference. It is a very big event, it would be good if we could have a certificate f attendance for our WACOT registration and RTO. This is really important.

### **Student input**

- More student input (if not in person then by video clip or by inviting students on-line as Jo hart did using Elluminate). hands-on sessions. Keynote speakers who use video/overhead projection (v. boring without)

### **Teacher quals**

- Conference papers posted on the web Discussion on whether teachers find Cert IV useful- believe this is still a requirement even though it has minimal application

### **Teaching literacy in multi-level classes**

- General tips for teaching multi-levels in the one class

### **And just a taste of the other comments from the evaluation.....**

- Informative supportive information
- Fantastic
- Loved it. Motivated. Inspired.
- Too many conflicting sessions availability of notes for sessions missed
- Thoroughly fantastic sessions! Learned heaps, gained useful strategies, welcomed the opportunity to have input into numeracy in the future.
- Gain a lot of information I can use in my job
- Thank you so much for this event which is always the most 'generous' experience I have/receive all year.
- Well done all! A great opportunity to meet like-minded colleagues and experts at teaching and people with hearts.
- Keynote address (Wed and Thurs) Topics certainly went to the heart of the matter. Interesting and had wide application.
- Brilliant conference.
- Thank you sooo much to all the WAALC volunteers for their excellent work
- The theme held together in a constructive way for our staff (DCS)
- Particularly enjoyed Ruth Wallace felt lots of areas she identified also relevant to our migrant learners
- The venue is really convenient and in future it would be more appropriate to hold all the conferences here (TAFE, city).
- Central TAFE is a great venue, overall everything ran very smoothly. Well organized – the workshop session and keynote speakers were all very inspiring. The 'heart' of the matter seemed to resonate with a lot of us – was the common consensus among casual chat.
- Best WAALC ever!
- Well sign posted! Terrific idea to include conference sessions on name badges. Very pleasant venue.
- Well done. Good healthy tucker at lunch, fruit available.
- Enjoyed my two days here. Learnt a lot of useful tips.
- Wonderful, re-affirming and fascinating . To be honest was not expecting such an inspiring experience. Have loads of new ideas to explore back in the workplace.
- First conference greatly enjoyed – much inspired – want to come back.
- Both keynotes were amazing. I will go back and research these ladies/leaders.
- Appreciated Neil Fernandes' succinct relevant welcome. Excellent catering.
- Exquisite lunch. Best lunch I have ever had at a conference.

### **And a very few complaints....**

- It was too cold in the lecture theatre (7)
- The coffee wasn't that great
- Ran out of forks. Meal great but no cutlery to eat it with.
- I was frustrated at having to pre-book sessions, wanted to re-visit some choices made blind several months ago. Some parallel sessions seemed to be on aligned topics and very frustrating if one was very interested in both.

# Summary of evaluations

	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Poor
Conference overall	28	16	3	
Program design	26	21	1	1
Venue	26	17	3	1
Catering	28	14	4	
Conference organisation	27	21	1	

## 2. Evaluation of Plenary and Workshop Sessions

	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	N/A
Wednesday am Keynote	26	14	8		
Thursday am Keynote	36	7			
<b>Concurrent sessions</b>					
<b>(list name or number)</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>N/A</b>
Session: A1	6	3	2	1	
Session: A2	8	1	1	0	
Session: A3	2	3	0	0	
Session: A4	4	7	0	0	
Session: A5	9	3	0	0	
Session: A6	8	5	0	1	
Session: B1	9	2	1	0	
Session: B2	3	1	0	0	
Session: B3	10	8	3	2	
Session: B4	6	6	4	0	
Session: B5	4	4	0	0	
Session: B6	3	1	0	0	
Session: C1	5	5	1	0	
Session: C2	2	4	3	0	
Session: C3	9	3	1	0	
Session: C4	2	4	0	0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>4</b>	