

THERE'S VEGEMITE ON MY ASSIGNMENT

An Impact Assessment of Wimmera Adult Literacy and Basic Education Group

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INTRODUCTION

The Wimmera Adult Literacy and Basic Education Group (*WALBEG*) has provided adult education courses to large areas of the state over the past twelve years, reaching out into the more isolated parts of the Wimmera, Mallee and Western District of Victoria, as well as servicing the local Horsham area. Given that *WALBEG* has been providing courses since 1985, evaluation of the impact of these courses seemed timely. The type of evaluation perceived as appropriate by the *WALBEG* administrative committee was, not so much in terms of course criteria, but rather focussing on identifying the way in which *WALBEG* courses undertaken had affected individuals and their communities. Rogers (1992, P.69) refers to this form of evaluation as 'Impact Assessment' where evaluation goes beyond achievement of targets to an assessment of the impact of the program, not just on individuals, but on the community in general.

The purpose of the study then was to identify and describe the outcomes of *WALBEG* programs, and the following aims related to the purpose were identified:

1. To identify the reasons people undertook the course/s.
2. To assess the impact of *WALBEG* programs on the individual.
3. To assess the impact on the neighborhood/community as a whole.
4. To investigate possible use of New Learning Technologies in future delivery of adult programs.

LITERATURE REVIEW / FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

While there is considerable literature addressing evaluation, there is very little on subjective evaluation in the form outlined. (ie impact assessment). However a useful framework for conducting such a study is provided by Rogers (1992). He makes the point that for an evaluation to be of any value it must determine if the program meets the expectations of the individual and the community, and outlines the following criteria for evaluation:

1. That outcome evaluation of adult education should be based on participants' values and not those of the service provider and educator.
2. That participants make their own qualitative evaluation of programs.
3. That the evaluation is not just in terms of course goal achievement but also pays attention to assessing 'the foreseen and unforeseen, immediate and delayed outcomes or spin offs'. (p. 72)

In order that this may be achieved Rogers (1992) recommends a qualitative approach be used. Parlett and Hamilton (1972) view past reliance on quantitative instruments to measure educational objectives as inadequate and inappropriate, since they do not allow for the free flow of information and the unfolding of complex issues. They recommend along with Rogers, that

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the evaluator make an intense study of the value of the program offered, through immersion in the students 'learning milieu', observation, interview, analysis and use of background information. Outcomes of this form of evaluation should then serve to 'illuminate' the problems, issues and significant program features and value.

METHOD

Research Approach

A qualitative case study approach was therefore seen as the most appropriate to meet the study purpose and objectives. House (1980, p47) sees the case study approach as 'resolving the evaluator's predicament by attempting to represent all significant value positions within the case study, drawing upon its criteria and standards from those positions and letting the reader of the study weigh and balance these elements within her own mind'. Adelman, Jenkins and Kemmis (1976, p139-150) outline some of the values of this approach including: paying attention to the balance of power in the interview, giving the participants control over the information process, and facilitating both of these objectives via a research contract, and writing up the findings in such a way to allow the research consumer, or reader, to judge the implications of the study for themselves.

Recruitment of Participants

Participants involved in this research study were identified through the random selection process. Aspects of purposive sampling were utilized to avoid a biased sample. Computer print outs of *WALBEG* students over three years (1994, 1995, 1996) were obtained with every sixth name targeted. A letter explaining the purpose of the study was then forwarded to forty students inviting them to participate in the research study and return the reply slip in an enclosed stamp addressed envelope. The aim was to get a return rate of 30. A second and third mailing of interview material was necessary as insufficient replies were received from the initial mail out. It was found that follow up telephone calls often jogged the memory or clarified potential participant concerns. Thirty participants were eventually recruited.

Developing the Research Instrument

An interview was seen as the most appropriate method of data collection since it allowed the elaboration or clarification of items. The interview schedule was developed with the aid of the research project advisory committee and two former students

Collecting The Data

Data was collected over a vast geographical area encompassing the Mallee, Wimmera, Western District and Horsham city, (see Table 1) with some 2,350 kilometres travelled. Participants were interviewed under gum trees, in business houses, interview rooms, back gardens, own homes and in one case, my Holden ute.

Table 1
Course, Age Range, Sex and L.G. Area

Course	Age Range And Sex					L.G.A.
	- 20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51+	
*Back to Study				1F		Buloke
*Back to Study					1F	Hindmarsh
*Back to Study			2F			Horsham
*Back to Study			1F	1F	1F	Northern Grampians
*Back to Study				1F		Pyrenees
*Back to Study			1F	1F	1F	West Wimmera
*Back to Study			3F	2F		Yarriambiack
Basic Computer Course				1F		Hindmarsh
Basic Computer Course			1M			Horsham
Basic Computer Course				1F		Pyrenees
Basic Farm Bookkeeping				1M		West Wimmera
CGEA Trades		1M				Horsham
Learning Disabilities Seminar				1F		Horsham
Police Entry		1F				Hindmarsh
Police Entry		1F 1M				Horsham
Police Entry	1M					Horsham
SIP Numeracy/literacy				1M		Hindmarsh
VCE English Units 1 & 2				1F		Hindmarsh
VCE English Units 1 & 2			1F			Northern Grampians
VCE English Units 1 & 2					1F	West Wimmera
VCE English Units 1 & 2			1F			Yarriambiack
VCE English Units 1/2 & 3				1F		Buloke
Vic Roads Basic Business			1M	1M		Horsham
Womens Return to Work				1F		Horsham

Table 1 M = Male F = Female
* Certificate of General Education for Adults

Table 1 details the various *WALBEG* courses, undertaken, the age range and sex of the participants and the local government areas in which they lived. People interviewed ranged in age from under 20 years to over 51 years. A variety of courses was undertaken with the majority of participants (16 females) undertaking the *Back to Study* course. Five of these students continued on to complete VCE English units.

Of the 30 participants eight (27%) were male and twenty-two (73%) were female reflecting percentage of females to males in courses. While it could be argued that the random selection process targetted a much greater percentage of females, *WALBEG* computerised records (1994, 95, 96) average teaching contact hours for females indicate 67% with males receiving 33%. Interview times ranged from 15 minutes to 1 hour with the norm being 30 minutes.

While most participants agreed to taped interviews, machine malfunctions and the interview venue resulted in some untaped sessions. Notes were taken at each interview and the co-ownership method of reporting followed, ie. read back notes, confirm, amend, delete, add. Each participant was given a copy of the questions before the interview commenced and allowed time to consider interview responses.

REASONS FOR UNDERTAKING THE COURSE

Table 2

Reasons	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Learn Computer Skills	5									
Future Employment/Get Back to Workforce	3	2	1	4						
Further Education	1									
Improve Self Image	1									
Business Management		1								
Farm Management						1				
Revise/Improve Maths & English Skills	4				1			1	2	
Talked into it/Big sell	2		1							
Exercise mind/refresh memory	1		1							
Get out of home/something to do	1									
Get mind active	1									
Get course numbers up	2									
Gain confidence	1		1				1			
Prove self academically/refresh learning	3		1							
Influenced by former WALBEG students	1									
Mix socially	1									
A challenge/real challenge	1		1							
Time right/free time	1									
Insight into VCE subjects			1							
Assist children/keep up with schooling			2							
Lead into TAFE/Tertiary courses	2									
Wanted to do it	1		1						2	
Assist with workplace demands										1
Get through apprenticeship schooling course					1					
Get reading skills up for TAFE Auto Transmission									1	
Prepare Police Entry Exam/ explore career				4						
Wanted to achieve at Year 12 level	1									
<div> <div> A = Back to Study B = Basic Computing C = VCE Units 1/2/3 D = Police Entry Course E = CGEA for Trades </div> <div> F = Basic Farm Bookkeeping G = Return to Work H = Vic Roads Basic Ed & Basic Business I = SIP Courses J = Learning Disabilities Seminar </div> </div>										

* NOTE:- SOME PARTICIPANTS HAD MORE THAN ONE REASON FOR UNDERTAKING THE COURSE.

Responses have been summarised under the following categories:

1. Personal reasons.
2. To develop work skills
3. Revision of numeracy/literacy skills
4. A way into Higher Education
5. Preparation for entry into the Victorian Police Force and other Services
6. Other factors

Personal Reasons

Participants reflected upon their life and the need for new directions and Challenges - a kind of personal stock take. The reasons given ranged from not wanting to vegetate, to wanting to regain social skills lost as a result of depression and 'change of life'. Others mentioned exercising the mind beyond the home environment after their children had commenced school or established themselves in secondary or tertiary education.

'I didn't want to vegetate on the farm - my daughter was now at boarding school and it was a time in life to improve one's self - my husband has a high profile job and I didn't have much schooling.' (Margaret)

Fay had experienced a loss of confidence coupled with an anxiety build up brought on through depression and change of life. As a mother of primary school children keenly interested in their education, Fay wanted to be part of the school's community involvement program through school canteen service, hearing children read and participation in school based activities. 'I needed to gain confidence lost through depression and change of life. I wanted to develop skills in the Numeracy area. Money exchange was an anxiety exercise - I took any change given - couldn't go on school tuck shop.' (Fay)

Reasons for undertaking the course in some instances related to personal goals. For example Garrie, in his forties, stressed his reasons for undertaking a numeracy/literacy course were to learn to read as a pre-requisite for admittance to a TAFE course. Garrie mentioned a 'lack of sensitivity' in the community to the needs of people with literacy problems (the under achievers) and how he could not read up to two years ago. 'I felt like an idiot - I couldn't read. I wanted to get my reading skills up so I could do an Automatic Transmission course at TAFE.' (Garrie)

Ian, an automotive apprentice, had enrolled in an adult literacy course in order to cope with the reading and writing demands associated with automotive study and assignment work. He believed that if he did not seek special help and assistance with his literacy problem he would not achieve his ambition of becoming a motor mechanic. 'I wanted to read and spell better so I could get through Apprenticeship schooling. Also life in general is easier, if one reads and spells better.' (Ian)

To Develop Work Skills

A number of students cited obtaining skills as the reason for undertaking courses. Three of the *Back to Study* students hoped the computer component of the course would assist them in gaining employment or returning to the workforce. The growth of technology together with industry demands to be computer literate in the workplace was acknowledged. A requirement to update computer skills or gain a basic understanding of computer operation was considered necessary if future employment prospects were to be enhanced.

Kay, in her thirties, presently manages a business. 'I had been out of secretarial work for eight years and I was not looking for English or Mathematics. Computer study was a long term investment in future employment. Everyone should become familiar.' (Kay)

Two of the three students who undertook the basic computer course also identified the need to update technical skills and gain employment as their reasons for entering the course.

Revision of Numeracy/Literacy Skills

Four of the *Back to Study* students made mention of the Maths/English component of the course as valuable since they had been away from the educational system for an extended period of time. *Back to Study* presented the opportunity to revise and brush up on numeracy/literacy skills. Joan, who had left school in Year 8, now in her forties, was very keen to revise numeracy/literacy skills in order to further her education, and improve employment prospects. 'I did *Back to Study* to refresh my memory on Mathematics and things forgotten from school - to gain confidence and possibly get back into the workforce.' (Joan)

A Way Into Higher Education

A number of students saw *WALBEG* courses as a means of getting into higher education. Following completion of *Back to Study* courses five participants chose to continue on with VCE English units for a variety of reasons ranging from assisting own children to wanting to return to tertiary education. Jill, a mother saw this as a way of comprehending the study pressures Year 12 students experience while at the same time equipping her to assist her own children. 'VCE units 1 & 2 have helped to bring me up to date with my children's study - given me an insight into VCE subjects.' (Jill)

Back to Study and VCE English units were also seen as preparation for a return to tertiary education for those who had been out of the education stream for some time.

While Jill had viewed completion of VCE units as a way of assisting her secondary school children Marie believed the *Back to Study* course coupled with VCE English 1 & 2 would be adequate preparation for tertiary study with its relevant assignment demands. Marie intended to pursue a Nursing career through TAFE college work and wished to prepare thoroughly. 'I was desperate to get back to learning - better to do *Back to Study* prior to Nursing - this helped ease me into the Nursing course.' (Marie)

Preparation For Entry Into The V.P.F. And Other Services

All participants involved in the *WALBEG Police Entry Course* highlighted the necessity of preparing well prior to sitting the police entrance examination, a pre-requisite for joining the Victorian Police force. All acknowledged the importance of revising numeracy/literacy skills prior to the exam. 'I was advised to do the *Police Entry Course* at *WALBEG* after sitting for the police entry examination - I wanted to improve Maths, Spelling and English standards.' (Joseph)

Susan, currently employed, viewed the *Police Entry Course* as a means of exploring various career options before deciding on the career path she wished to follow on reaching 21 years of age. 'I am presently 20 years of age and interested in joining the police force however I want to know what it is about - what is involved in the course at the Police Academy?' (Susan)

Other Factors

Other factors sometimes influenced students to enrol in courses.

Being talked into doing courses was among reasons put forward by two participants. Whilst one participant went on to complete the *Back to Study* course and subsequent VCE units the other participant ceased attending as she wished to care for her kindergarten age child. Being talked into it involved *WALBEG* co-ordinators convincing prospective students that study would be

worthwhile and enjoyable. Carmel was a *Back to Study* student who later completed a VCE English unit. 'I was talked into it - Big sell from *WALBEG* - you'll love it.' (Carmel)

ASPECTS OF COURSE PERCEIVED AS MOST HELPFUL

The aspects of the course participants found most helpful, not surprisingly, related to the type of course and reason for undertaking a course; for example to qualify for entry into the police force, to complete apprenticeship, or to improve literacy.

However, there were some exceptions and the responses from these participants provided added insight into the overall value of courses undertaken by them.

Teleconferencing and the 'impact' it had upon outreach students involved in group discussions is one such instance. A second is the consultation of tutors with students, resulting in modifying curriculum content to better answer student needs. These will be discussed later.

Responses are categorised under the following headings:

- | | | |
|----|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1. | Computers | - Skill Acquisition
- Access |
| 2. | Mathematics | |
| 3. | English | - V.C.E. English Units/Tertiary Study |
| 4. | Teleconferencing | |
| 5. | Police Entry | - Reasoning Ability
- Essay Writing |
| 6. | Provision of a Supportive Environment | |
| 7. | Other | |

Computers

Skills Acquisition

Nine *Back to Study* students remarked on the value of the computer segment of the course, stating they had gained knowledge of computer operations, and an ongoing interest had been created in further developing computer skills.

Joan, with a computer at home, said the skills gained had enabled her to go on and complete Certificate 2 in Information Technology following the *Back to Study* course. Joan contrasted her ownership of a computer, which assisted her skills acquisition, with students who did not have access to one outside the classroom. 'Some students stressed out before they started because of work load on the night and lack of computer at home'. (Joan) This would demonstrate the need to make lap top computers available to future students who require one.

Access

WALBEG provision of lap top computers to take home and practise on between teaching sessions, was greatly appreciated as most students didn't have a computer of their own. 'Lap Tops were great - could master computer with time and effort'. (Lynette) Two participants indicated they would love to have a computer of their own and Cara, A Neighborhood House co-ordinator, stressed how access to *WALBEG* lap top computers had helped students in their

introduction to computers. She also drew attention to the fact that the Neighborhood House was equipped with computer facilities (Microsoft Word program) for those who wished to continue on, following course completion.

Mathematics

Seven *Back to Study* students listed Mathematics among the most helpful aspects of this course. Participants were generally appreciative of the opportunity to refresh their memories and revise Mathematics concepts in a supportive learning environment, using modern approaches centred on student understanding. Mathematical skills learnt were applied in the work place, business transactions, or helping children with homework.

Wendy, employed part time in a local business, mentioned how she now takes her calculator to work to assist with the pricing of articles and customer transactions involving percentage calculations. Percentages and fractions were two areas of the Maths course Wendy perceived as most helpful to her.

Marilyn, who had recently purchased a family home explained how she had gained a clear understanding of bank interest from the Mathematics segment of the *Back to Study* course. Marilyn found this newly acquired knowledge of bank interest calculations of great value when the house loan was being negotiated with the bank. 'It made it easier to buy the house'. (Marilyn)

English

Nine *Back to Study* students identified various components of the English program as most helpful to them. These components ranged from a revision of the mechanics of writing, to resumé preparation and preparation for tertiary study.

Rosemary detailed how revision of the mechanics of writing (ie vocabulary, punctuation, sentence structure, spelling) had helped her to express herself better, both orally and in written form. Increased understanding of the meaning of English words was most beneficial as Rosemary had left school in New Guinea at fourteen and later migrated to Australia. 'I thoroughly enjoyed English; it has helped me to communicate better with people'. (Rosemary)

Proof reading skills were acquired by Joan, whilst completing *Back to Study* and V.C.E. units 1 & 2. These skills have transferred to everyday Reading and Writing demands. 'I now read more – always a poor reader – I now pick up the papers and identify mistakes'. (Joan) Joan mentioned how proof reading skills were developed through essay writing.

Lynette spoke on how Spelling activities from the *Back to Study* course had aroused her interest in the way words are spelt. 'Spelling awakened my interest in words – I look more carefully at them'. (Lynette)

Preparation for interviews involving resumé preparation and the video taping of a simulated interview involving student participation, was considered by Marilyn as sound preparation for those seeking future employment. 'It was most valuable for a real life interview'. (Marilyn) She went on to relate how a student from her group applied knowledge gained through a simulated interview to a 'real life' job interview situation.

June, currently employed as a nurse, explained how the writing side of the *Back to Study* English course was useful preparation for a return to tertiary studies requiring written assignments.

V.C.E. English Units / Tertiary Study

Reference was made by Marie, a *Back to Study* student, who went on to complete V.C.E. English – Units 1 & 2, of how *Back to Study* demands fostered sound study habits prior to commencing V.C.E. English Units 1 & 2. 'It was a great lead into V.C.E. English Units 1 & 2 – Terrific – One enhanced the other – led in gradually. Getting a certificate for V.C.E. English Units 1 & 2 was like I got Tattsлото. Like to see more V.C.E. Units'. (Marie)

For Carmel, *Back to Study* and V.C.E. work had left her with a sense of achievement, and increased confidence. But the 'biggest thing' for Carmel had been the influence her study had upon her own school children.

Her positive approach to study and assignment work had stimulated her children to adopt a similar approach to study and completion of their own homework tasks. This was best reflected in a remark her son passed to her when she was 'panicking' before a V.C.E. examination. 'This is a learning situation for the whole family – sacrifice things because homework has to be done'. (Carmel's son)

Teleconferencing

Teleconferencing sessions were seen to have a positive impact upon the lives of four *Back to Study* students, two of whom continued on with V.C.E. English units. They cited group participation in teleconferencing as beneficial in encouraging individuals to modify their behavior in response to personal and group needs. Elements of group dynamics emerged as students learnt to interact as a group. They learnt to be more assertive so as to be heard, to fully participate in group discussion through overcoming shyness, and to contribute as a team member.

Police Entry

Reasoning Ability Component

While all four police entry students acknowledged the *WALBEG* police entry course raised numeracy/literacy skills and prepared them well for police entry examinations, three students made specific reference to the complexity of the Reasoning Ability test. The added assistance provided, through co-operative learning situations involving guidance and explanation from an experienced tutor made the difference between success and failure.

Provision of a Supportive Environment

Aspects of the course most helpful to four participants related to their personal goals in doing the course. Generally, they were aiming to increase self esteem and confidence by increasing numeracy/literacy skills which would assist them in attaining the goals they had set. An increase in self esteem and confidence is reflected in the comments of all four participants as they related them and explained how their needs were met. They saw as central to the achievement of personal goals, the creation of supportive learning environments, encompassing provision of experienced, innovative teachers, who designed and modified curriculum in response to individual student needs.

Ian enrolled in *WALBEG* night C.G.E.A. (Certificate of General Education for Adults) as he was concerned he would be forced to drop out of his motor mechanic apprenticeship course if his basic numeracy/literacy skills were not improved. 'I probably would never have finished the first year of the course if not at *WALBEG* – I've learned more in the past 1 _ years than I learnt in my whole schooling – everything is explained to you – totally amazed at what I have picked up in the past year – got big confidence boost – great lift when teacher tells you you're doing well'. (Ian) He was now confident he was well on the way to becoming a fully qualified motor mechanic.

Other

Frank, a farmer, aimed to improve his book keeping skills when he enrolled in a Basic Farm Book Keeping Course. His intention was to gain competency in financial management, keep better farm records and make provision for taxation.

He felt that what he learnt from the course was the importance of doing things monthly and having more detailed headings. 'The course has assisted me in the financial management of the farm'. (Frank)

SOCIAL IMPACT OF COURSE ON PARTICIPANTS

The third question to participants, 'Did you find you used those helpful things from the course in other parts of your life?', addressed the impact courses had upon the lives of individuals and the wider community or neighborhood in which they lived.

An impact or influence was reflected not only in an enhanced quality of life for the individual, but also in the contribution course outcomes and spin offs made to the welfare of the neighborhood or community.

Generally people talked about rewards in personal terms but if one looks beyond the personal rewards one finds extensions or spin offs into the community in which people lived.

Table three (3) categorises participant responses under four headings and places participant responses in personal/individual – community/neighborhood realms.

Table 3

SOCIAL IMPACT OF COURSES ON PARTICIPANTS	PERSONAL/ INDIVIDUAL	NEIGHBORHOOD/ COMMUNITY
Improved Social Skills		
- Confidence	3	
- Negotiating	1	
- Communication	1	2
- Reasoning Ability		1
Social Interaction		
- Parental Involvement		1
- Voluntary Community Work		4
Computer		
- Business/Consultancy	2	
- Neighborhood House		2
- Passing on Computer Skills	2	
- Employment	1	
Literacy		
- Work/Home Application	2	

Improved Social Skills

Confidence

Three participants felt their confidence had been built up and restored as a consequence of completing *WALBEG* courses.

Increased confidence had now enabled them to mix more freely with people, commence tertiary studies, speak in public, or encourage others to do *WALBEG* courses because of the advantages they offered.

Carmel talked of the sense of achievement one feels when confidence rises, following successful completion of a course, and the impact this has upon one's life. 'This confidence level has helped me to approach people better'. (Carmel)

Cara, who works at a Neighborhood House, stressed how her confidence when speaking in public had risen. 'I am better at interpreting what people are saying to me'. (Cara) She also made mention of friendships formed over everyday services, such as photocopying material for people, since completion of the *Back To Study* course, together with her listening skills.

Negotiation

Lynette referred to the acquisition of negotiating skills as a result of course work. She considered negotiating skills as 'life skills' that would assist her in reaching agreement with others. 'Negotiating skills are most useful in life – not only for self but for negotiating with each other – a life skill – could be included in greater depth in future courses'. (Lynette)

Communication

Brian, now retired from Vic Roads, had improved his oral and written communication skills through attendance at a *WALBEG* Vic Roads Basic Business Course. These newly acquired skills opened up new communication horizons for Brian's thoughts on social, organisational and work related matters. The retrenchment of a section of Vic Roads workers was an issue on which Brian expressed his opinions, through letters to the local newspaper and to members of parliament.

Reasoning Ability

Joseph, who passed the police entry test went on to become a Prison Officer, although he would join the Police Force if the opportunity arose. Whilst the *WALBEG* police entry course was also good preparation for the Prison Officer's test, the part of the course he found most useful in his job as a Prison Officer was the 'Reasoning Ability' section. He said, 'It has helped me think through work and social relations'. (Joseph) He applied concepts of the 'Reasoning Ability' test to aspects of his work where answers had to be figured out or arrived at through seeking out solutions or applying the correct formula.

Social Interaction

Community Involvement

Fay believes she has more to offer people, following an increase in confidence and self esteem emanating from mastery of money transactions and improvement in oral and written skills. The fact that she no longer 'freaks out on money exchanges' has enabled her to become involved in parental assistance programs at her local school. 'I'm now more involved at school - have worked on the stall - helped in tuck shop - helped with reading - wouldn't have done this earlier on'. (Fay) She makes a further contribution to community service through staffing the local art gallery as a volunteer.

Marilyn recalled how her *Back To Study* course had not only prepared her for employment but had wider application to community affairs. Marilyn had recently accepted a position as President of the local kindergarten. 'It was not only education for a job but for social positions in town'. (Marilyn) She also stressed what a good social experience it was to meet people from your own town and share a common interest - your studies.

Computers

Having gained knowledge of computers through *Back To Study and Basic Computer* courses nine participants applied things learnt to other parts of their life. These included business, employment, introducing family members to computers, Neighborhood House application and furthering computer studies.

Business/Consultancy

Margaret has applied computer skills learnt from *Back To Study* to the management of her agronomist husband's research, consultancy business, operating from their farm. Prior to the introduction of the computer, research pamphlets were hand written by her husband. Margaret now uses the computer to print research pamphlets, and store relevant information. At first her husband resisted the idea of the computer but became increasingly interested. Gradually, he took

up the challenge and with Margaret's assistance now operates the computer himself. He told Margaret that he was beginning to like it!

Neighborhood House

It was interesting to hear from participants involved in Neighborhood House work, and listen to them relate how computer skills learned from *Back To Study* had proven beneficial in the Neighborhood House environment. Pam, employed in a local industry, said that being computer literate provided her with the skills necessary to set up and run a Local Exchange Trading system from the Neighborhood House. 'I can track debits and credits - print out newsletters and a directory of members - wouldn't have considered any of the above without doing course first - computers are part of lifestyle today'. (Pam)

Passing on Skills

It is obvious that computer studies completed by a family member created interest in the minds of other family members. The case of Margaret, teaching her husband how to use the computer for research work, has already been cited. Influence of this nature was also evident in another home situation where Dave had completed a *Basic Computer* course to update accounting procedures and save on business costs. 'Owning the computer equipment provided the facilities for the wife to take up word processing tasks which she learnt herself'. (Dave) While Dave was not directly involved in his wife's learning situation he believed the provision of a computer caused this to happen. Dave concluded by saying his wife now prints letters out on the computer.

Employment

Three *Back To Study* and two *Basic Computer* participants cited seeking employment or return to the workforce among reasons for doing the course. Two of the five are presently engaged in running or managing family businesses. Acquiring computer knowledge was viewed as a long term investment for future employment should they decide to re-enter the workforce. Jill is presently seeking employment. 'Computer skills learned from the course haven't helped with a job yet'. (Jill) On the other hand Patricia, who had ceased employment, completed the *Back To Study* course because most advertised jobs required computer knowledge and she wished to increase her employment opportunities. Patricia is receiving a small remuneration for designing brochures and doing small typing jobs. She has been successful in securing a paid position in the local library. 'Computer skills assisted me to get the job and I am now doing a programming course in computers'. (Patricia)

Literacy

Ian said he would probably never have finished the first year of his motor mechanic apprenticeship course, if he had not attended WALBEG's *CGEA Trades Numeracy/literacy Course*. Ian told how a marked improvement in his reading/writing skills were things from the course that had helped in other parts of his life. He now writes up his own job cards, notes, Christmas cards and bank forms. He regretted he had to 'turn down' an invitation to be a best man at a wedding but believed he now had the confidence to do a thing like that. 'If I need to write or explain something it is so much easier'. (Ian) Reading to his own children was something he could not do prior to the course, but he now gets great satisfaction from reading to them.

FORMS OF SUPPORT IDENTIFIED AS USEFUL

Participant responses indicated a high level of support was provided by family, *WALBEG* staff, fellow students and friends, which is reflected in student comments. Material and resource support in the form of finance, texts provided, video conferencing, teleconferencing and computer provision was acknowledged with attention drawn to some problems experienced with teleconferencing link ups and computer provision.

Physical/Emotional Support

Family Support

Fifteen participants made reference to the support and encouragement they received from husbands, wives, children and mothers particularly when it was most needed.

'In the English and Maths part of the program others caught on more quickly and I felt pressured – lost self esteem as others could work quicker than me [and] I felt I was thrown in the deep end. I was going to chuck it in many a time [but] my husband and daughter kept me at it – supported me. At some stages got support from co-ordinator when things were bad.' (Margaret)

'Lots of support from my husband – children supported me [and] they were happy I did the course.' (Rosemary)

Tutors/Co-ordinators/WALBEG Administration

Twenty six participants made reference to the strong support they had received from tutors, co-ordinators and *WALBEG* Administration, through encouragement, individual attention, assignment assistance and constant availability.

'My tutors were great [and] you could phone any time. Assignment extensions were granted [and] they didn't mind if there was vegemite on it.' (Marilyn)

'My tutor was very encouraging and sensitive on an exclusive one to one basis. Many different texts were used [with] resources shared [and I] was never made to feel inferior.' (Fay)

Fellow Students/Friends

Sixteen participants spoke of the co-operative learning environment that operated within groups with students providing mutual support through encouragement, sharing and assistance. Friends also provided an added incentive by taking a keen interest in course progress and achievements.

Employers

Two participants told how they had been funded by Vic Roads to undertake the Basic Business Course. Brian said, 'My course was funded by Vic Roads – it created an interest in learning [and] all adult learners would like to continue' [these courses].

Financial

Earlier in this report documents the perceived need to keep course cost attractive and appealing if future study aspirations are to be met, with four participants citing low costs as a major reason for doing courses. The low cost of courses undertaken was re-affirmed by three participants, as a most valuable source of support for them. Unemployment, distance from tertiary institutions and budgetary constraints are factors which impinge upon study aspirations. 'I had lost my job [and] couldn't afford to go to Horsham - budget [is] a large factor in people going back to study'. (Patricia) What helped Patricia, she said, was , no fee for *Back To Study* and only a small fee for books.

Instructional Books

Anne, who completed a Basic Computer course was most impressed with the clarity and instructional excellence of computer books made available to her throughout the *WALBEG* course. 'The books associated with the course were excellent [and] most user friendly - much better than Windows [texts] - very pleased with outcome [of course]'. (Anne)

Video-Conferencing

Marie and Carmel saw video conferencing as a useful way to expand educational horizons and challenge perspectives through contact with students in other colleges. '[I was] exposed to teleconference by big video screen [with the] whole day very interesting - variety of viewpoints'. (Carmel) Marie thought that being linked up with students from other colleges through video conferencing was great.

Teleconferencing

Teleconferencing not only had a positive impact upon the lives of four participants, (Section 3.4) but was also seen as a source of support by four outreach students, because it provided a forum for sharing ideas and expertise with fellow rural students, within a supportive environment. 'No way would I have travelled to Horsham, without teleconferencing - [the] way for isolated rural people'. (Carmel) Pam and Marie considered teleconferencing to be helpful and terrific.

Lap Top Computers/Computer Resourcing

Student access to *WALBEG* lap top computers to take home and further skills on was a valuable source of support for three participants who didn't have computers of their own. This contrasted with other students who neither own a computer nor had access to lap tops. 'Many people doing computer courses didn't have computers at home. Availability or access to use of lap tops or [a] computer at school would have assisted'. (Joan) Eight participants mentioned they did not have computers at home but indicated they would like one.

'If I had my own computer [it would be the] most helpful course of all time'. (Kay)

'Need computer at home to practise on'. (Jill)

'Access to computer would be most useful'. (Lyn)

'Computer would assist in assignment work'. (Wendy)

PERCEPTION OF POTENTIAL OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Participant responses to the questions 'What New Learning Technologies Do You Think Would Help People To Complete Courses?' varied according to participant familiarity with 'new learning technologies'. The term 'new learning technology' meant different things to participants and they addressed the question within the context of their own learning environment and constraints. Only eight of the thirty participants interviewed owned computers, whilst one participant had Internet and E-mail facilities. Probe questions seeking opinion on the use of the Internet, faxes and video conferencing to help complete courses were used where participants sought additional information on what constituted 'New Learning Technologies'. Teleconferencing facilities were freely discussed as nine outreach students had experienced their use.

Video Conferencing

Video conferencing was seen as a form of contact which facilitated the sharing and exchange of ideas together with the opportunity to put a face to a voice. Four participants indicated that video conferencing would be beneficial to people completing courses. It was seen as a useful way to expand educational horizons (Section 5.2) by two participants.

'Video conferencing between students and lecturer would save travel to Horsham [if] students met in [their] own town - would save night travel'. (Margaret)

'Video links where you see the person you are talking to would be beneficial'. (Marilyn)

Teleconferencing

While five of the outreach participants identified technical problems experienced (Sect. 5.2) teleconferencing assisted four students to overcome shyness, become assertive and develop team work. Three participants spoke of teleconferencing as being terrific, helpful and great when you got used to it.

This would demonstrate a need to provide the best possible teleconferencing service if its full potential is to be realised.

Facsimile Machine

Communication by Fax machines was considered by six outreach participants as being more time and cost efficient than postage, especially when assignments, questions or queries required a prompt reply. Rosemary, who had recently purchased a fax machine, said she could use it to get answers quickly, ask questions and send assignments. She believed it would have been an asset when she was doing *Back To Study*.

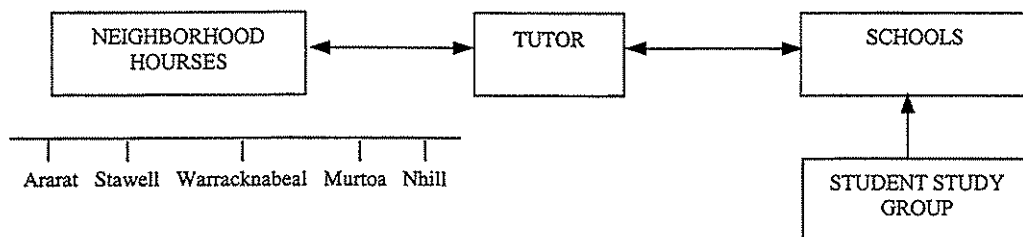
Internet/Email

Opinions on the use of the Internet to help people complete courses ranged from 'most useful' to 'exclusive'. Being 'computer literate' with 'access to' or ownership of a computer was considered a pre-requisite to the use of the Internet. Budget constraints could exclude some students from computer ownership and give those with access to Internet information a decided advantage over fellow students.

'If computer literate [you] can use Internet -- using Email a good communication tool if [you have] access to it'. (Pam) 'Access to a computer needed before Internet [but] Internet would assist courses in future'. (Kay)

The issue of access to computers and the Internet was addressed by Cara, a Neighborhood House co-ordinator and participant. She made the point that Neighborhood House resources included a computer with Internet facilities and that these were available to any student or adult learner who required them. She further explained that Internet resources were available in several Neighborhood House localities, with the Internet/Satellite Link facility also available at schools. The following diagram illustrates 's suggestion for student access to Internet facilities within nominated country areas.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR STUDENT/STUDENT GROUPS TO 'ACCESS' THE INTERNET



'[There is] nothing to stop teachers down loading on the Internet and [the] student could come in and do the unit at one of the Neighborhood House localities. If [there] were groups [they] could use the satellite systems in schools to study [say] Diploma of Liberal Arts outreach units. Through technology it can happen if people want it to happen [with] dollars for equipment a problem [but] human contact (face to face) is still needed no matter how much technology'. (Cara)

There is an obvious need for students to be computer literate and have access to Internet facilities if this form of new learning technology is to help people complete courses face to face.

CONCLUSION

The purposes of the study were met. This report identifies why people undertook courses and reports how *WALBEG* programs changed people's lives and impacted upon the community. The future use of 'New Learning Technology' is a guide to service providers on how computer resources housed in schools and neighborhood houses could be accessed by outreach students. Student appreciation of *WALBEG* lap top computer banks highlights the need to have all lap tops fully operational and available to those students who haven't a computer. The development of basic computer skills should form the first component of any course offered given participant demand for computer literacy and the emergence of the Internet as a learning tool.

The issues of clarity, technical proficiency and student adjustment requires addressing if outreach students are to participate fully in future teleconferencing sessions. Increased use of video conferencing facilities involving students from other learning institutions would broaden the learning base, expand educational horizons, further students' interaction and foster networking. Access to fax machines would reduce the 'turn around' time for assignments and speed up the

delivery of course material or clarification of study problems. Study groups need to consider use of Neighborhood House, school facilities or rental of a fax machine.

Rising course costs could exclude some students from future courses, hence it is important that costs be kept as low as possible. Unemployment and budgetary constraints emerged as major factors when people considered enrolling in courses.

Interviewees expressed a high level of satisfaction with the service provided by WALBEG administrators, co-ordinators and tutors with this report demonstrating outcomes and spin offs derived from courses undertaken.

A summary of 'needs' identified by participants:-

Course Costs

Keep course costs at an affordable level.

Teleconferencing etc.

Investigate and remedy technical problems documented in report.

Lap Top Computer Provision

Have fully operational bank of 'lap top' computers available for student group members who require them.

Computer Courses

The participants viewed computer literacy as a necessary pre-requisite for Internet work and therefore it should form the first component of any course offered. There is a need for a survey of past students regarding level of computer literacy with a view to answering needs through future computer course provision. A need for computer courses in outreach areas, (preferably at night), was identified.

Computer/Internet Access

Fully inform students or prospective students about Neighborhood House and school computer and Internet facilities. Assist in negotiating access to these facilities if necessary.

Fax Machine Provision

Investigate possibility of student groups having access to a fax machine for assignment and course work.

Video Conferencing

Expose more outreach students to the video conferencing process.

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