

Workshop 23: **Literacy – The key to unlock the doors**

Heather McEvoy
Literacy Teacher/Training Coordinator
Australian College of Tropical Agriculture

Introduction

Approximately 25 years ago I was invited to join a pilot program to train volunteers to teach adults to read and write. Working full time and raising a couple of teenagers, I was not sure if this was something I really wanted to get involved in. Not only did I become involved, it is now my full-time occupation and I love it!!

My first student was Ruth, a young mother living on the outskirts of a country town. Ruth wanted to be able to read the notes her son brought home from school instead of having to take them round the corner to her mother. I can still see her face the day she came to our regular session and told me, with such pride, that she had not only read the note, she had written the reply as well. Imagine how excited we both were when she got her driver's licence! Ruth could now pick her son up from school on a hot day and take the family to the swimming pool. She could go shopping without having to wait for her mother to take her. She could even read the labels on the products. She had independence for the first time in her life.

More recently I had the privilege of working with 'Charlie' an aboriginal who was an initiated man and elder of his tribe. Although very knowledgeable regarding the culture of his people, and able to speak numerous native dialects, it was in prison that he learned to read and write. He possessed a natural flair for story telling and poetry. Unfortunately he died just prior to the publishing of an anthology of poems which included three of his works. I think I learned more from him than he did from me.

The "Ruths" and "Charlies", and all the others in between, are what make my work worthwhile and keep me hooked on literacy.

Integrating literacy

- Difficulties experienced with 'jargon'
- Ways to cope with essential terminology

Plain English

- Integration of 'plain' English into the classroom
- Getting the message across

Best practices

- What has worked for you?
- Fair and equitable assessments