

# Victorian Applied Learning Association

## Report for Annual General Meeting, 2009

**Andrew Williamson, President**

It is with great pride that I deliver this annual report to the members of VALA. In the life of this young organisation, the last twelve months represent an extraordinary year.

The Victorian Applied Learning Association was borne from humble beginnings: a group of applied learning educators and administrators committed to support and champion both the practitioners and pedagogy of applied learning.

Through the last few years we have grown slowly, steadily, surely. In the last year, the growth has become exponential.

VALA now has 350 members and a mailing list of over 1000 people. Our monthly newsletters deliver information about applied learning and other relevant matter, while our website ([www.vala.asn.au](http://www.vala.asn.au)) continues to develop.

The professional development program remains the cornerstone of VALA's activity. The 2009 Annual Conference (Takeaway with the Lot) attracted a record number of people, and it was duly noted that this event could be recognised as the largest collection of applied learning practitioners in the country! VALA's status and role in the Victorian education system was acknowledged during the opening address to this conference, by VCAA CEO, John Firth.

Changing the format of professional development, the VALA Learning in the Pub series has been incredibly successful, with excellent content delivered and discussed. Other PD events over the course of the year include Numeracy Day, the VISTA – VALA Day Conference, Student Engagement seminar, etc all being well-attended.

Another significant aspect to VALA's year is SAFE-T1, a resource development project for WorkSafe Victoria aimed at young workers. This, the first of three years of funding, has been an exciting time during which an idea took shape and became a reality. SAFE-T1 is true to applied learning principles, and has travelled around the state to seek input and information. I would urge all members to have a look at the site, [www.safe-t1.net.au](http://www.safe-t1.net.au) and feel free to draw from and contribute to the project. VALA looks forward to progressing the SAFE-T1 project in partnership with WorkSafe Victoria.

Other resource development projects over the last twelve months reflect the growing capacity for VALA to meet community needs: this is an important growth area for the organisation and for the sector.

VALA's success can be measured in many ways: increased membership and mailing list; a tripling of our annual budget; increased number of PD events; and increased

funding and responsibilities from government agencies. Ultimately, VALA returns to its roots to measure its success: are we providing the membership with the service they need and want? This is the fundamental driver behind the VALA existence, and I am proud that we retain this focus.

I can not stress too much the importance and value of the people who make VALA tick. In the early days, Karen Dymke worked as the Project Officer of VALA and laid the foundations for our existence on the smell of an oily rag. Following Karen's move into the school system during 2008, VALA appointed its first fulltime employee – Jan Hagston – at the end of 2008. As Project Manager, Jan is responsible for the SAFE-T1 project and leads all other VALA activities. She has done an amazing job with SAFE-T1 and continues to act as the face of VALA.

Don MacDowall is the hidden glue that makes VALA stick together: he manages our accounts, administration and website. Don's skills behind the scenes at VALA events are unsurpassed, and he keeps us all on the straight and narrow in between.

Linnet Hunter has recently been appointed to the new post of Education Project Officer, and we welcome Linnet for the skills and knowledge she brings to the role.

There are two committees that must be mentioned tonight: first is the SAFE-T1 Steering Committee, which includes:

Megan Verry, WorkSafe Victoria

Edward Howard, DEECD

Cornelia DeBrincat, VCAA

Karen Dymke, VALA and Luther College

Jim Johnstone, Incolink

Janet Marshall, AEU

Mick Murphy , Baw Baw LLEN

Michelle O'Brien, VALA and Victoria University

Bruce Pridham, VALA and LaTrobe University

Ron Wilson, VISTA

Danielle Archer, Young Unionists Network

Gayle Anderson, Footscray City College

The VALA Committee comprises a profound collection of stakeholders within the applied learning community:

Michelle O'Brien, Vice-President (Victoria University)

Bruce Pridham, Treasurer (LaTrobe University)

Mick Murphy (Baw Baw LLEN)

Karen Dymke (Luther College)

Kay Hawkins (Partners in Youth Engagement and CFA)

Onno Van Den Eynde (DEECD Gippsland)

Gill Meek (Inner Eastern LLEN)

Elisa Ryan (Wantirna Secondary College) left VALA (and education) in February

To the paid and unpaid folk of VALA, I salute you and the work you do.

VALA has an exciting future, building on much of the good work that has already existed. We anticipate a large and broad VALA Committee, and a strong staff team of Jan Hagston, Don MacDowall and Linnet Hunter. A growing team of contract curriculum writers will respond to the increasing number of requests VALA is receiving for teaching and learning documentation, evaluation and mapping. SAFE-T1 will shift into a very operational phase, and our professional development program will continue to evolve.

This is such an exciting time for VALA. Thank you all for your participation and involvement in what is a nationally recognised movement.

Andrew Williamson

President