Learningguild Letter

2.2010

Dear members and friends of Learningguild,

This letter tells of my eight weeks of overseas travel from the 13th of October to the 8th of December.

One main purpose was to make known our half-yearly and repeatable exam for the Learningguild Certificate in Reasoning and Expression, and discuss possibilities of its being taken in other countries. I accept that, until the exam gets sponsorship in Australia (as I hope it will, from one or more companies whose leaders are concerned that too few graduates one might say in the past thirty years have learned to write well and to think clearly for themselves), it will not be widely taken here, or therefore likely to make much impact overseas. Meanwhile it has great value for those who do take it, here or in the US or anywhere else, and make progress thereby, as one of our members did in 2010: she gained an upper B in the March exam and went up to an A in the September one.

In Boston I was invited to breakfast by my friend John Silber, President Emeritus of Boston University, who has thought well of the exam since 1998, when we met. He agreed to write to one Australian educationist and has done so, stressing the developmental role of the series of exams, calling them "the best tools for developing writing skills that [he has] seen", given markers' advice on candidates' scripts and the printed reports. In these respects our practice is quite unlike that of universities.

In Oxford in the following week the invitation from Sir Keith Thomas, whose article "What are universities for?" I had drawn upon in my letter in the previous issue, was to lunch at All Souls. He suggested that I write to tutors concerned with admission to the colleges, and even to the Minister for School Education in the coalition Government. There is considerable discontent in Oxford with the exams now commonly taken at the end of the first of two years in the sixth forms of British schools. They are often largely composed of short-answer questions, which give too little opportunity for sustained discussion and original thought, and so marks in them give little evidence of likelihood to do well as an Oxford student. A professor at my college, Christ Church, told me of his concern that, though Oxford wanted to be open to people from underprivileged schools, admission on demonstrated merit, though necessary, meant that few were at present likely to come from such schools because too few able people were becoming teachers and those who did tended to go to schools with a strong tradition. One man I met at Loughborough Grammar School, Leicestershire, where I taught from 1959 to 1961, told me how dissatisfied he was with the examination system he now had to contend with by contrast with the International Baccalaureate, whose exams he approved. There is a great need for a respected, repeatable and developmental exam, with related written guidance offered, as ours is, free on a website and through inexpensive books (such as Gowers's *The Complete Plain Words*) and booklets.

At George Washington University in DC and at Boston I talked with people concerned with the writing courses provided for first-year students, which used to be called Freshman Composition. There seemed to me to be too great a concern with the subject-matter of whatever theme was offered by a particular instructor (e.g. life on the American frontier) rather than direct attention to the grammar, logic and rhetoric of the traditional *trivium* (see my letter of 1.2008). The greatest general need of students is to learn more and more about

the principles of sentence-construction, of formation and testing of hypotheses, and of analysing, criticizing and creating or modifying arguments, at least partly by studying systematic expositions but also through exercises such as past papers of the Learningguild exam provide.

It was good to talk with Tim Williamson, the Professor of Logic at Oxford, about conditional statements and about my interest in the history of Oxford philosophy. His question to me "What was T.H.Green's conception of philosophy?" deserves to be as fruitful as it is valuable, and it will shape some of my reading and writing. It is saddening for me to enter Tom Quad at Christ Church because my own hospitable tutor Michael Foster, who suffered from depression, ended his own life in his rooms there in 1959, a month after he had attended Margaret's and my wedding. This time in Oxford I studied his papers, and I read his book *Mystery and Philosophy*. (SCM Press, London 1957). He seems to me not sufficiently ready to question his own Christian presuppositions. For example he writes of "the unity of the Church" as a mystery (pp.23-26), without attending to the view that, given various deep divisions present and probably future, there is no such thing. I was glad to talk with his friend and colleague Dr Paul Kent about Michael. At Basel University I met professors with whom I should like to maintain contact. How difficult it is to do such things in our busy lives! Sending a magazine such as this one is a way to do it, if possible with a letter, however brief. There is too little interchange of ideas between people of different countries.

In December I visited the two schools in India to which Learningguild gives support, Holy Mother Public School in Bharatpur, near Agra, and a school in Okhla, an industrial suburb of Delhi. I took a number of classes at the first, and a swathe of material was draped around my head at a school assembly, and at the second I sang our alphabet song that uses the short names of the letters, and later went to a bookshop with members of the NGO to make purchases for the school. My friend Romey Borges made the valuable suggestion that we publish a booklet based on our sheets for the method we call SSC, Sentences to Study and Change, and he arranged for me to visit a secondary school at Gurgaon, on the outskirts of Delhi. I took classes in Years 9, 10 and 11, and met the Principal. To my surprise I was paid a fee; I used some of it later in the day to order a copy of Gowers, to be sent to the school. It makes such a difference in English-medium schools in India if (as is often not the case) the teachers speak and write excellent English and enable the children to become fluent.

Of the fifty-six nights that I spent during these eight weeks, three were with a cousin and thirty-seven in the homes of friends! How grateful I am to them all: to Alistair Anderson and John Bishop in Auckland, Steve Coleman and Roza in Washington, my cousin Stuart Hester in Sidley, near Bexhill in Sussex, John and Isabella Birkin in Oxford, Anthony Clunies-Ross in Kinbuck, "by Dunblane", in Scotland, Laurence and Mary Le Quesne in Shrewsbury, Dietrich and Rosemarie Ritschl in Reigoldswil, a beautiful village in Switzerland, Elaine Griffiths in Heidelberg, and Romey and Savita Borges in Delhi. I invite my hosts to consider themselves members of Learningguild without any need for a subscription, and I have told the children at Holy Mother that they will be considered members if they send us six pages of SSC and a letter, from which we could take extracts for *Learningguild Letter*. Hospitality and international correspondence must be features of Learningguild.

I had some enjoyable journeys. I recommend the quiet car (no mobiles or music) on Amtrak's comfortable and inexpensive night train between Washington and Boston. That train, taken each way, allowed me three long days in Boston. On the London plane I talked at length with a young woman, a student from Texas, who promptly brought up our exam on her I-Pad! I stayed up all night on arrival, and had a good chat at Victoria Station and on a train with an insurance man I met. A minibus from Heidelberg to Frankfurt took me past snowy fields and forests.

It was a great delight to run wherever I went. Three hills revisited were in the Meridian park in north-west Washington, above the Severn in Shrewsbury, and on the *Philosophenweg* in Heidelberg. In Loughborough I ran up to, in, and down from Charnwood Forest, as I used to do with the boys fifty years ago, this time on a frosty late November morning with a splendid sunrise as I ran beside the ploughed fields.

Yours in Learningguild,

John Howes

Conserving water on Dhaka's rooftops

In 2009 we welcomed as members of Learningguild **FAHMIDA KHANOM** *and her husband A.K.A.Nuruzzaman, who are from Bangladesh. Each is engaged in doctoral research at the University of Melbourne. .Here Fahmida describes her field.*

My subject is "Feasibility of rooftop rainwater harvesting in mega-cities of developing countries". My case study area is Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. Since 1950, numerous mega-cities (cities with more than ten million people) have come into being in developing countries. Examples are Mumbai, Mexico City, Manila, Sao Paolo, Shanghai, Calcutta, Jakarta and Karachi. They have experienced rapid unplanned growth because of very high rates of population increase. Water supply, one of the basic requirements of these mega-cities, has often been inadequate, and, because of a lack of resources and inadequate technologies, all of the utilized natural sources of water have been over-exploited and/or highly polluted. The mega-city Dhaka, with a population of around 15 million, is no exception. The main source of its water supply is groundwater, which is falling by 2-3 metres every year. All the rivers around Dhaka are highly polluted. The supply from the mains has therefore been intermittent and sometimes absent in most parts of the city. Rainwater, a free gift from nature, can be a very important resource for dealing with such a critical situation.

Although rainwater harvesting has several dimensions, I am focusing only on rooftop rainwater harvesting (RRWH), because of its technological simplicity and lower cost. The intermittent supply from the mains has the consequence that every building in Dhaka needs an underground tank for storage of mains water and an overhead tank for its distribution. The main objectives of my research are to look into whether RRWH is technically feasible, given that these tanks are already built, and to ascertain what citizens think about it.

Dhaka has a marked seasonal variation in rainfall. During the monsoon (May-October), there can be as much as 300 millimetres of rain per month, but in the dry season as little as 50. The huge rainfall during the monsoon causes prolonged waterlogging in dwellings.

My hypothesis relies on the assumption that, if rainwater is used for household purposes and can also be used for recharge of groundwater tanks during the monsoon, it can significantly reduce abstraction of that groundwater and increase the supply in the dry season.

I have engaged in three different activities to collect data on technical and social feasibilities. The first phase was to identify RRWH technologies suitable for Dhaka. Five different options were designed in relation to building structures, cost and environmental sustainability. In the second phase, I went to Dhaka to interview 148 randomly-selected owners of houses and other buildings to ascertain their attitudes towards the five options. I also installed two RRWH systems (one on a concrete roof and one on a roof of corrugated iron sheeting) to discover the quality of the water and the cost of the system. All this fieldwork was conducted during the monsoon season of 2010.

The most interesting part of my fieldwork was locating the respondents around Dhaka. The city has neither a systematic road directory nor a list of houses, so I had to appoint people who knew the areas concerned like the palms of their hands. The second difficulty was to gain access to the randomly selected owners. Because of a lack of security, the main gates of all buildings and houses are kept closed all the time and people do not usually talk to strangers. So, for the first few days, I was wandering around and desperately knocking on the doors of my sample owners and failing to get any interviews. Later I adopted a different strategy. As I have lived in Dhaka for the last 30 years, I have a lot of friends, relatives and colleagues there. I started to contact many of them to find a person who knew a respondent, or lived near a respondent's house, or knew anybody who lived nearby. When someone suitable was found, he or she was requested to inform the respondent that my interviewer or I was coming. I also had to explain to the contact and the respondent the purpose of the interview, and convince them that

we were not from the Water Supply Authority or any marketing agency. When a respondent agreed, an appointment was made and an interview conducted. Though it was a very demanding and time-consuming task, there was a very good outcome. I finished the interviews and the opinions of the respondents were very valuable.

At present I am analysing the data. Preliminary results show that a majority of the respondents living in the concrete buildings preferred recharge of groundwater to household use of rainwater. They were prepared to pay for the recharging, or (in some cases, and illegally) to use a second pump. Some thought rainwater collected from their rooftop would be dirty, and related maintenance expensive, and some expressed an environmental concern for more groundwater. On the other hand, the respondents representing the poor community preferred rooftop water supply to groundwater recharge. They face an acute shortage of water in both the monsoon and the dry season. It has been found that harvesting rainwater can meet 100% of their demand in the monsoon. In that time it does not meet 100% of the demand of respondents living in concrete buildings: their demand is six times higher than that of the poor.

Teaching in a school for Aboriginal children

ELIZABETH HOWES *tells of a fascinating part of the third year of her course at the University of Melbourne in primary education. Elizabeth is one of the three daughters of Michael and Dorothy Howes: all five are members of Learningguild.*

Anyone who has seen the 2009 film *Bran Nue Dae* will be familiar with the bright red soil, the clear blue sea and the tropical plant life of Broome, and the tongue-in-cheek humour and vibrant, diverse culture of its inhabitants. In October 2010 I was lucky enough to experience all these first-hand. I was chosen for a teaching placement in Djarindjin-Lombadina.

It is a combined community of the Bardi people of north-western Australia, which is three hours' journey from Broome by four-wheel-drive. The original Lombadina was a mission founded by a Filipino priest, whose descendants still live in the community and have surnames of Filipino origin. Memories of the mission remain: the paperbark church, the lawns and the specially-planted trees. Red earth tracks surround the lush grass. The school grounds are bordered by eucalypts, mango trees and the sea.

About 300 people live in the community, and about 80 of them attend the school in which I taught. I was placed in the Year 6/7 class (in Western Australia, Year 7 is the last year of primary school) with students ranging in age from 9 to 13. Four of them were teachers' children, originally from Victoria, who have been exceptionally fortunate to have had their lives enriched in such a way. The class consisted of anywhere between 6 and 14 students on a given day.

Any conversation about Aboriginal com munity schools will lead to the topic of attendance. Although there were in my class several students whose attendance record was impeccable, there were others who came to class quite infrequently. The causes of this are many and varied. Sometimes a student might simply have had a bad day and want to take a break from his or her fellows. Sometimes there are family reasons – it was not uncommon for families to spend a long weekend on their "block", an area used by particular families for camping and time together. At least one of the students in my class, aged about 13, had already gone through the Law, the traditional initiation ceremony from boyhood to manhood, and thus was considered (by himself and the community) an adult, and no longer in need of classroom schooling.

In an attempt to motivate sporadic attenders, the school has an Incentives program: every student who has attended all day every day in a given week is able to take part in an enjoyable activity on Friday afternoon. For the three weeks that I was there, these were a board games session,

a visit from a Victorian Aboriginal guitarist, and a "slippery slide", i.e. a large plastic sheet covered in water and detergent. The use of rewards for motivation has been questioned, and I myself am not a fan of stickers or other such material motivators. However, when the rewards and consequences of different behaviours are made tangible and realistic ("If you are part of the school community you get to join in its social events") I believe that they have value. When joining in the chorus of a song by the *Pigram Brothers* (a local folk band) or speeding along the smooth black plastic in a foam of suds, the students were certainly enjoying themselves!

In lectures we had been told that the best way to manage and motivate children is to praise and use as exemplars the ones who are behaving as you would like them to. Not so in this community. If a child receives exuberant praise, they see it as being shown off, which makes them feel embarrassed or "shamed" and is counter-effective. I learned that a better way to motivate the students was to relate the activities to their family and community life. I also learned to ensure that the activities were motivating from the beginning, usually by making them hands-on, outdoors, artistic or all three.

In these last skills, the students could certainly teach non-Aboriginal people a thing or two. They had an ability to draw realistically and effortlessly (most of my students preferred to express their thoughts in pictures instead of, or along with, words). They engaged in regular routine exercise (for example, swimming in order to spearfish). They could run up a tree and perform a backflip. And, most importantly, and not at all surprisingly, they know how to care for and live in their environment. They respect all living things with which they share their land. They can recognise edible plants and endemic species of birds. They use traditional hunter-gatherer skills in combination with modern practices of food production. Consequently they have a healthy diet, including tropical fruit, fish and turtles. Djarindjin-Lombadina is one of the only places in Australia where turtle-hunting is permitted, because the Aboriginal people will never hunt anything to extinction.

I did face some challenges in my teaching. For example, there were three students who were struggling with their literacy (while others, of course, were working above and beyond the standard expected of them at that stage – a classic example of diverse student needs). One Grade 6 student could write his name and recognise about three high-frequency words, and that was it. He had a wonderful sense of humour and would laugh at anything that came his way. He could also place himself unfailingly in other people's shoes, and asked constant questions about the way the world worked. Another student was academically bright, but was so bent on making his work perfect that, if he made a mistake, he would stop working altogether.

Teaching in Djarindjin-Lombadina, then, was different in many ways from teaching in a Melbourne school. But, as anywhere else, a teacher needs to get to know the students, discover their unique and varied personalities, find out ways in which each learns best, and use all this knowledge to teach them in the most effective and enjoyable way possible.

I will sum up my feelings about my time in Djarindjin-Lombadina by sharing a particular experience. One day one of my students, with whom I had previously joined in singing *Bran Nue Dae* songs and exploring the school garden for bush tucker, asked me if I was Aboriginal. On hearing this, I felt so privileged to be living, even for such a short while, in such a unique community, full of the most natural, Earth-aware, respectable and humorous people, and to have been accepted into it thus, that I answered him honestly: "No – but I wish I were!"

An instruction book called 'Pre-aircrew English', supplied during the war to airmen in training in a Commonwealth country, contained an encouragement to its readers to 'smarten up their English'. This ended:

Pilots, whose minds are dull, do not usually live long.

The commas convert a truism into an insult.

(Gowers, *The Complete Plain Words*, Penguin Reference, 3rd edition, p.159)

Thoughts after travel in Vietnam

JOHN DRENNAN, *Assistant Editor of* Learningguild Letter**,** *has travelled extensively during the past 52 years and has written the draft of a book on the philosophy of travel. Here he gives us some impressions from his recent four-week tour of Vietnam, the 64th country in which he has travelled, and also ventures some advice, especially to those intending to visit Asia for the first time.*

I was fortunate in being able to visit Vietnam during late November and early December, weather-wise probably the best time for it, finishing before the busy holiday period and avoiding extremes of hot and cold. I found travelling in Vietnam easy, cheap, and generally pleasant, and there is much to recommend the country for anyone not yet accustomed to Asian travel. Persistent cacophonous noise from car horns elsewhere sometimes the greatest, even the sole, bugbear of overseas travel occurs much less than in some other countries I have visited, though bus horns can be irritating. Motor-cycles and scooters are ubiquitous. The traffic is often said to be unruly, but in fact the bikes and other vehicles follow a consistent logic of their own. Although they do not stop at zebra crossings, they drive **around** you if you walk steadily across the road. Speed limits (40 kph, in some places only 30) are very well observed. So traffic is rather slow, and correspondingly safe. (Take constant care nevertheless!)

A general tour of any country should, I believe, include a balance between the **intensive** and the **extensive**. Stay in one place (maybe two) for a decent length of time, rather than attempt to "go everywhere" and experience little; but make shorter visits to a comprehensive and representative range of other places. One plan is to stay put in one place throughout your sojourn, and from there radiate, making one-day excursions to places of interest, perhaps staying the night in some of them. In contrast, you can follow an itinerary which joins places you want to visit in a continuous line, staying at least one night in each. It is important, anyway, to consider what effect your choice of itinerary plan might have on your perception of the country. (My four-week trip concentrated mainly on urban areas. More time would be needed for rural areas and those inhabited mainly by minority or "ethnic" groups.)

Vietnam's long narrow shape makes desirable a mixture of the two plans, a "backbone" arrangement, staying in five or six places and radiating from some of them. This is facilitated by the train service from Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) in the south to Hanoi, Vietnam's capital, in the north. That was the basis of my own journey: I stopped several nights each in Phan Thiet (reached by taxi from Man Muong station), where I met the parents of a student who stayed with me 10 years ago, and her Australian former boss, who contributed a great deal to my insight into the country; Da Nang, from which I was able to visit the historic town of Hoi An (in some ways a sort of Vietnamese Venice); Hué, the former imperial capital; and finally Hanoi, where I stayed with a young Vietnamese family, who came to a Learningguild function a few years ago.

I strongly recommend the train journey. Extending 1,726 km, it takes about 34 hours, and costs between $50 and $60, depending on the type of seat or bunk you order and the number of stops. Separate tickets are required between each pair of stops you make. Your hotel can help you arrange tickets and hotel bookings. The most picturesque stretch is along the mountainous coastal area between Da Nang and Hué (about 3 hours), so best traversed during daylight hours. Other stretches can be taken partly at night. The train provides a good opportunity to meet and talk with other travellers, which is perhaps the most important thing to do on a general tour.

The Australian dollar goes a long way in Vietnam. (Currently it buys 20,000 Vietnamese dong.) A hotel room, with ensuite facilities and usually including breakfast, costs between $10 and $20; meals $2 or $3; a city bus journey (any distance) 15 cents; taxis just under $1 per km. Overall, you can travel independently for half or one-third the cost of organized package tours, with equally good or better facilities, and with freedom to choose where to go and when. Day excursions

can be taken from all main cities, costing $10 or so. From Saigon I used such tours to visit the Mekong Delta and also the main temple of the Cao Dai (a syncretic religion founded early in the twentieth century) near Tay Ninh, and some former war zones. From Hanoi I went on a two-day excursion to the famous Ha Long Bay, nine of us overnighting in a boat: total cost, including bus (about 5 hours), boat and all meals, $45.

As always, I walked extensively. That can often be difficult, since, for much of their length, many footpaths are fully covered with neatly parked motor-cycles and scooters. But in Hanoi there is usually a space left for pedestrians to squeeze through, in Saigon sideways and in Da Nang often not at all (so that the only alternative to walking on the busy roads is to swivel your body from lamp posts – a difficult feat when it is raining).

Everywhere I noted the relative prosperity of the country Clearly much improvement has occurred since the adoption of the open door policy (*doi moi*) in 1986. But – and I recall the late Professor Gibson recommending that we remember "the tears of history" – ghosts of the past seemed to hover everywhere: memories of the incredible suffering and death that accompanied reunification of south and north and the end of colonialism, over four decades or more, within my own lifetime.

I was fortunate to be able to see something of education, especially in Hanoi, since all of the friends whom I met there are involved with university or other tertiary education. It would be difficult for a foreigner to see anything of the life of schools and/or universities without such personal contact. Universities in Vietnam tend to be specialized, e.g. the Law University in Hanoi. As an interdisciplinist, I have qualms about such a system, though it seems to work reasonably well.

Fortunately, too, the friends I met, especially those with whom I stayed, understood – or at least accepted! □ my dislike of being taken by the hand to be shown around streets and museums and the like. It is my belief, supported by long experience, that to learn and internalize the topography of a city or town, and to remember it later, one has to work this out for oneself, with the help of a map and suitable written material. In Vietnam, as elsewhere, I found it very efficacious to familiarize myself with the local bus system in each town, as intra-city bus travel is a most useful adjunct to walking.

I travelled alone. But I should add that Vietnam is notable as a specially child-friendly country: an added reason for families with young children to choose it for an overseas excursion. Just be very careful with the traffic. Accidents are, in fact, not infrequent, but avoidable.

To sum up. My recent journey confirmed my belief in the value of preparatory reading (ranging from history to timetables) and planning. Far from constraining them, such preparation in fact enhances the possibilities of elasticity and spontaneity in one's travels. I realized again the value of talking, and if possible residing, with local people, and also with expatriates from one's own country. One needs to explore extensively by oneself, to have time to look at and contemplate buildings, works of art, and people in the marketplace, and to see them in their wider context.

Travel: Intentions and Discoveries

HELEN COONEY, *who graduated in art history and English at ANU and gained a Master's degree in government and commercial law, is an adviser to a Parliamentary Secretary. Here she describes her first trip to Europe and Russia.*

My travels between May and July 2010 fulfilled some of my intentions and led to some unexpected discoveries. My intention had been to go to places on "the trip list" kept in my wallet since the late 1990s. The unexpected discoveries resulted in changes to my mindset.

Russia was my first destination. Having learnt about it as a student of art history and literature, I wanted to see the religion, the art, the politics and the Moscow Metro. Russian churches were a bittersweet sight, as many had been quarried for their marble in the early 20th century. The Metro was stunning but had been built by the Bolsheviks partly from marble from altars I'd longed to see. The State Tretyakov Gallery gave me the opportunity to see Our Lady of Vladimir, one of the most venerated Orthodox icons, and to have the corner of my eye pierced by the sun depicted on a canvas in just the way my professors had described.

My itinerary took me through Bangkok, where I had to stay away from civil strife, and Prague, and Paris, from which I walked to Chartres on a revived medieval pilgrimage for Pentecost. In England, I visited some early work of William Wilkinson Wardell, a 19th-century church architect I had studied, and some of the architectural marvels of his teacher Augustus Welby Pugin, a trailblazer for the Gothic Revival. I headed to Ireland, where much of my family origins can be traced. In Spain, the homeland of St Teresa of Avila, I could not miss the chance to see Gaudi's architecture in Barcelona, and to attend the holy Catholic Mass said in an ancient rite steeped in the history of Toledo.

A statue by Bernini, *St Teresa in Ecstasy*, drew me to Rome. The Saint's mysticism is coupled with her bringing extraordinary reason to faith. As a young woman, I was inspired to find out about her from a dialogue written by Louis Nowra. "God fired a burning arrow of love into her. When it penetrated her, Saint Teresa could smell the burning flesh of her heart." I am quite taken by St Teresa and the representation of her. In my early twenties, I had been struck by the use of light by Wardell and others in their art. Bernini drew on these two of my loves in his Baroque representation of St Teresa.

The "trip list" had no hidden agenda. I was not out to find myself or to revive my faith. I hoped I might see someone who looked like me in Ireland. Rome, I had thought, would primarily be a stop-off. It would be a chance to have a relaxed visit to artistic places, discover fine food and buy some leather gloves. Russia was a place where I would see art and think about politics. My visits to these three places provide examples of gaining much more than one has expected.

I have many treasured memories from my travels, but two stand out, partly because they made me realise that overseas travel could affect me deeply. The first is from Ireland, the second from Russia.

One Sunday morning I woke in Belfast and, because of political unrest in the north, decided to wait until I got to Dublin that night to find Mass. On my way, I visited megalithic passage mounds believed to be tombs, called Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth. The guides at this UNESCO-listed site were researchers and story-tellers. They made sure I knew that those mounds, built around 3200 BC, were older than Stonehenge in England and the Pyramids of Giza in Egypt. The people of Ireland were ancient and inventive. Someone with my DNA was almost certainly nearby. At these tombs, in my sacred homeland, I realised the importance of indigenality. I could see its effects on politics, migration patterns, and music. The use of the words 'sacred' and 'homeland' isn't just an expression of Irish-Australian antipathy towards England. It is part of our self-understanding.

The second very special memory is of the smiles of the Russians. Within minutes of being in the company of eastern Europeans and central western Asians, I realised that the books were right. They do not smile at strangers. The Russians were polite, professional and courteous, but did not smile at me. Some smiled in the company of strangers, but did so discreetly. The driver who collected me at the airport gave a sheepish smile when I attempted to say 'Spasiba', which is Russian for 'Thank you'.

Only a few days after that trip from the airport, I saw another smile when touring Veliky Novgorod, from the granddaughter of an activist in the Decembrist uprising. Her story was familiar to the granddaughter of an ANZAC. A mass grave, too, was a familiar sight. There was a daily vigil underway, as it was the lead-up to May 9, 2010, the 65th anniversary of the capitulation of Nazi Germany in World War II. When describing Victory Day, our guide was focussed on a future free of the human, architectural and environmental impact of war.

Something like 15 per cent of the people from within the then Soviet Union borders died during WWII, and the people there today still feel the pain of that loss. Our guide made her comments in a suitably matter-of-fact style. Victory Day was not to be forgotten, but it was not an obsession. It reminded me of the Australian way of talking about war. When I said "On Anzac Day in Australia, we also have a parade; it is the anniversary of a loss in a war, not of a victory", she self-consciously smiled. "I've heard this about Australia. In Russia, we remind ourselves that our country is strong."

In the context of such rare smiles, a big Aussie-style grin from a young Russian man was touching. On the day of the anniversary, when I was wandering alone in St Petersburg, a young man stood in a military uniform at the entrance to a park. I suspect he was a cadet or doing national service. As I approached, he said something at least four sentences long, none of which I understood. As he handed me a red carnation I once again said "Spasiba". His grin widened and he let me into the park, which was filled with families, children and veterans enjoying a day of national pride in fine weather. Once I'd found a stream of people wandering toward a tomb for an unnamed soldier, I decided that I would lay the carnation there. I felt as if I was part of the Russian community.

Gaining a new grasp of indigenity in Ireland and receiving rare but exquisite smiles from Russians awakened me to the realisation that travel could be more deeply beneficial than I had expected.

The places I visited which I loved the most – Moscow and the Vatican City – had two things in common: their people had come from far and wide and their shared values were clearly articulated in their cultural institutions.

My stories of St Petersburg and Veliky Novgorod over the Victory Day celebrations are examples of articulated shared values. In Moscow, in this respect unlike those cities, I saw faces of many different shapes and colours. According to the 2002 official census, the ethnic make-up of the city was about 87 per cent White Russian. The official population of Moscow includes none but permanent residents. According to Russia's Federal Migration Service, Moscow also contains 1.8 million official "guests", who are temporary residents on the basis of visas or other documentation. The number of unofficial guests, those without proper documentation, is estimated to be an additional one million. The majority of the faces I saw were almost certainly western and central Asian in ethnicity. I also saw White Russians and people who were likely to be of German, Scandinavian or eastern European extraction. A few seemed to be from families at least partly from eastern Asia. While the skin colours and shapes of faces were different, the diversity itself was like that of Melbourne, which is home to people from over 230 countries. Melburnians speak over 180 languages and dialects and belong to over 115 religious communities.

Vatican City was likewise diverse. There were priests, nuns and lay Catholics from around the world. With the Vatican City as its sovereign territory, the Holy See maintains diplomatic relations with 176 countries. While most of the lay people who live there are from the diplomatic missions and the members of staff are often Italians, the Catholic pilgrims who fill its streets are from all over the world. As in Moscow, there are shared values, but they are articulated in a different way. Catholic values were apparent at Vatican City in the traditions and customs such as daily Mass (protected from tourists), images of the Virgin and other saints, and due respect given to deacons, priests and bishops.

In Australia, we have cultural diversity, but I struggle to see evidence of our shared values. Even our Government is unsure how to describe us. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade says "Some people see Australians as egalitarian, irreverent people with a deep suspicion of authority while others regard them as mostly law-abiding and even conformist." In 2006, the then Prime Minister, John Howard, oversaw a revision of migration tests that was controversial. Perhaps it is time for Australians to articulate our liberal democratic traditions and values in visible ways as occurs in Russia and Vatican City. If we do not, I fear we risk their being lost, and the peaceful diversity we have gained as a result of those values may come under threat.

I would never have thought along these lines had I not travelled. I would also not appreciate the place in my society of Indigenous people had I not

been to Ireland. The experiences I have enjoyed have changed my mindset. The understanding I gained is important, so much so that I am encouraging others to seek it too. I am part of a group organising an Australian chapter of the 30th Pentecost pilgrimage from Notre Dame de Paris to Notre Dame de Chartres. I hope some of our pilgrims will visit other places and learn new things as I did.

Discontent with a maths syllabus

A hard-hitting article appeared in The Age *(Melbourne) on the 4th of March 2010, written by Burkard Polster and Marty Ross, who were introduced as writers of "the Maths Masters column for Education Age online at theage.com.au/education". I invited* **MAX STEPHENS** and **STEPHEN PAATSCH** *to comment on it. Max, a longstanding member of Learningguild, is a former school teacher and inspector who has for many years been engaged in lecturing and research concerning approaches to teaching the subject. He is now a Senior Research Fellow in Science and Mathematics Education at the University of Melbourne. Stephen is Head of Mathematics at the nearby University High School in Melbourne. He has been a secondary teacher of mathematics in Victoria for 21 years. JH*

Max Stephens:

State and national curriculum documents serve a variety of purposes. They are intended to express an expectation or broad agreement about what should be taught and in what order, and possibly how some key ideas are to be developed. They are not recipes for teaching in any day-to-day sense. There is always a gap between what is expressed in curriculum documents and how teachers give shape to their lessons. Very rarely does a curriculum document dictate how subject-matter should be taught. Occasionally, these documents may recommend or suggest particular ways of teaching particular topics. Essentially, they are intended to be helpful to teachers, schools and school systems in planning for instruction and in publishing resources to support teaching. Thus curriculum documents act as checklists and frameworks. They are, of course, intended to set out what children are expected to know and be able to do; and therefore are often used to describe what content might reasonably be included in examinations and tests of achievement.

It is not easy to imagine a State or national curriculum document setting out in detail how lessons should be taught each day. This would require a very large and intricate document which would be difficult to apply across the range and variety of schools and students' backgrounds. At the present time, State and national curriculum documents take a broader view, usually setting out the content to be covered at given year levels. This is the scope of the current Australian Curriculum, which was approved by State and Commonwealth governments in December 2010 – for the first time, it should be noted, following Australia's long history of education as the preserve of the respective States and Territories.

One of the key features of the Australian Curriculum in Mathematics is that content is described for each year level, from Preparatory Year to Year 10, using three common content categories: Number and Algebra, Measurement and Geometry, and Statistics and Probability. In addition, four proficiency strands, Understanding, Fluency, Problem-solving, and Reasoning, are expected to guide teaching and learning at all year levels, across all areas of content.

This new Australian Curriculum has been developed by the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority (ACARA), itself a relatively new body, representing all education sectors, government and non-government, and given the task of developing a national curriculum that builds upon current curriculum documents in use in the States and Territories. Inherent in this process are obvious strengths and weaknesses –

achieving consensus across the many stakeholders is a political imperative, but may come at a cost, with some compromises and a lack of a consistent unifying vision.

Burkard Polster and Marty Ross have raised a number of questions about specific elements of the new curriculum, and express their disappointment with several areas of emphasis. Their article was based on an earlier draft of the document that was finally approved. They are worried about the emphasis given to calculators and technology, the de-emphasizing of reasoning involving proof, and a "preference for 'practical' mathematics". In their words, "number (mainly arithmetic) crowds out algebra, measurement crowds out geometry, and statistics swamps everything". Their view is that mathematics is best taught "as ideas, as something beautiful and fun". They contend that this view of mathematics receives insufficient attention in the current document. Achieving a balanced presentation is very difficult when documents are assembled by consensus.

What do I make of their concerns? Some of their objections to a cultural bias in favour of Indigenous "uses of mathematics" may have been overcome in the final version of the document. The strongest point of their criticism is that the new mathematics curriculum does not succeed in elucidating the "big ideas" of mathematics. These are known by good teachers and are not easily understood by teachers who lack a confident grasp of their subject. Such a lack of confidence is becoming a problem for an increasing number of maths teachers in Australian primary and junior secondary classes.

Polster and Ross are opposed to the use of calculators and technology, arguing that this can easily become "button pushing". I must agree that this is never mathematics. The use of technology must be guided by understanding, reasoning and problem-solving. There are many others who would express caution about having calculators on hand for all mathematics lessons, advocating instead judicious use where they are appropriate. In fact, all national testing in mathematics now includes some tests which are **calculator-free**, where students are expected to think for themselves and recall essential knowledge, and other tests containing more difficult numbers which are "calculator-allowed". Teachers have received this message.

On the balance between the practical and the theoretical, one has to say that a tension is always there in a subject that has to serve several purposes – some idealistic and theoretical about the world of numbers and geometry, and others practical. The practical dimension cannot be excluded, especially for mathematics, a subject that occupies a privileged position in our school curriculum along with English. These two subjects occupy large proportions of teaching time and are required of all students, almost without exception, in all years of schooling, unlike subjects such as music and foreign languages. Like English, mathematics is charged with developing forms of thinking and acting that connect with the world of practice. We can adapt to the teaching of English the challenge put by Polster and Ross: how can English be taught as something beautiful and fun, as well as useful and practical for all young Australians?

Personally, I am sympathetic to the point made by these critics that the current maths document doesn't capture the "big ideas", especially in that it does not give adequate emphasis to the links between arithmetic and the beginning of algebraic thinking, or a clear focus on geometrical understanding and proof. However, I am happy to see the document "out there" for trial during 2011. These curriculum documents are never final. They need critique from teachers and schools. How well do they help teachers to plan for teaching? How well do they help schools to develop programs that are coherent across year levels and challenge able students, as well as helping those who experience difficulties? In this respect, the critical perspectives of Polster and Ross, like my own, have to take a back seat to the opinions of those for whom these curriculum documents are primarily intended. Teachers and schools will need training to understand the intentions of the new national curriculum, and they will also need additional resources that exemplify the big ideas, including student work samples that illustrate different levels of achievement and understanding. Sample teaching programs will also need to be developed to meet local circumstances. From ACARA and from the various school systems, there is still much work to be done.

Stephen Paatsch:

I respond to the article from the perspective of one required to oversee a large and diverse faculty which has a history of academic excellence but must also cater for all students, with their varying abilities.

Any large-scale documentation concerning mathematics, regardless of its good intent, makes me wonder whether it is being constructed so that almost anybody can come in and teach the subject Given that teaching is, for most, way down the scale of possible careers, that makes good economic sense, but is clearly to the detriment of our children and the future of Australia.

I agree that statistics appears to swamp the curriculum. I do not dismiss its relevance and strength, but it requires the analytical skills being developed in the middle to later secondary years, which is where it is currently. It sits nicely in many other subjects as well and sharing its teaching would make sense.

The curriculum's approach to calculators does not cause me concern at the secondary level. Used as a tool, they are a wonderful addition to the classroom, and good teaching can keep their use in check. It is rare that we can make up for what has been missed in primary school, so the use of technology is to the advantage of students and staff. There are so many students who will only ever require a correct and relevant approach to mathematics in order to use it after leaving school. Technology is part of their lives and we can certainly use all at our disposal to help our students succeed.

I agree that in secondary education mathematical proof has gone the way of the dinosaurs, as has the whole history of mathematics. Yet there are examples of both that can be included in many a lesson, and I continue to find new examples to include and to share with my colleagues. These examples sit outside any centrally generated syllabus, and I doubt that they will ever appear in a NAPLAN test.

What the authors get across very clearly is the need for maths to be passionately presented. Relevance to what daily life may ordinarily require is important, but not at every moment of every lesson. History of maths, presented in context, provides a platform for maths to be seen as it is today, as an evolving and absorbing study. And there is so much fun to be had.

I conclude by agreeing with and adding to Polster and Ross's remark "To teach real mathematics makes demands on the teacher, and it is risky." I take risks, and sometimes make mistakes, because I try to improve on the way I did things in the previous year. I see the mistake, or my students see it, and we laugh and talk about it, and go on. Taking risks keeps teachers and students involved in every lesson of every year, and rewards those who participate. It also keeps me grateful for all that the choice to be a teacher of mathematics has opened up for me.

Recommended Book

A Pocket Style Manual, by Diana Hacker

This book deserves attention and use by students, primarily for its very clear presentation of examples of errors in English along with what is needed instead, but also because it contains at several points an indubitable, common and amusing species of mistake in the explanation of grammatical matters, against which one needs to guard if one is to avoid confused thought and exposition.

Diana Hacker (1942-2004) is famous in the United States for her books about writing. At hackerhandbooks.com, a website of her Boston publisher Bedford/St Martin's, one finds the statement that her handbooks are "used at almost half of the colleges and universities in the country". She taught writing at Prince George's Community College in Maryland for 35 years.

In Boston in October I bought the fifth edition (2008 and 2009), for $US25.75, and it is available in Melbourne at $A37.95. In the book's first section, "Clarity", under the heading for the first subsection "Tighten wordy sentences", is the first example of a defective sentence, 'Daniel is employed at a software company working as a marking assistant.' There is a red line through 'is employed' and another through 'working'; over the first is 'works' in red; and we have the succinct advice "There is no need to say the same thing twice." (One might prefer 'Daniel is a marketing assistant in a software company.') Eight more subsections follow, and then there are seven in a section devoted to grammar. These two sections occupy 56 pages, and on many of them there are three or more such combinations of error, correction, and explanation. So many common errors are well corrected here, with good explanation, that the book is worth a student's attention for this reason alone. Asked why her books had been so successful, Diana Hacker said that they give students practical solutions to real writing problems.

There follows good material on punctuation and "Mechanics" (use of capitals, abbreviations, italics and hyphens, expressing numbers, spelling). The section on writing essays (undergraduate essays do not usually deserve to be called, as they are here, research papers) is valuable, though the writer too readily discourages "questions … that address philosophical, ethical, or religious issues" (p.93). It would be helpful if, added to the good advice "Avoid bland questions that fail to provoke thought or engage readers in a debate", there was "Distinguish clearly between what can readily be agreed upon and what is controversial, and try to get right into the latter, and make some progress in it rather than be superficial about it."

Then, with much repetition, there are three sections of guides to the styles called MLA, APA and Chicago. So we have, rather absurdly, a subsection on avoiding plagiarism in each of the three sections that begins with the same three paragraphs (pp. 107, 158f, 199f). Of these styles I prefer the Chicago, with its footnotes or endnotes, in which one can occasionally make worthwhile comments about the value or weakness or interest of the work referred to.

There is a good "glossary of usage", which includes confusable pairs such as 'complement' and 'compliment'. Before discussing anything in the glossary of grammatical terms, I want to draw attention to an extreme example of the confusion that is endemic among writers on grammar. Hacker uses the term 'noncount noun', which is less ugly than 'uncount noun', and less open to logical objection than 'uncountable noun'. I recommend 'NU', short for 'noun for something thought of as uncountable with that noun': thus *money*, like *gravity*, is an NU, *boy* is an NC, and *cheese* can be either. Hacker writes, on p.52, "To express an approximate amount of a noncount noun, use a quantifier such as *some* or *more*: *some water*, *enough coffee*, *less violence*." It is not an amount of the **noun** that is concerned here, if that expression is meaningful at all (lots of little images of the noun *water*?), but the amount of **the stuff or activity to which that noun refers**. It would be apt to say, before the imperative *use*, "To indicate non-specifically an amount of something uncountable". Hacker is far from alone in this confusion between a word and its reference. Consider this example of multiple error in Marion Field's *Improve Your Written English* (4th edition, How To Books, Oxford 2003):

> The main noun or pronoun in the sentence is the subject of the sentence. It performs the action. All sentences must contain a subject. [The example given is 'Fiona was very tired'!]

In my book *Making up Sentences* (published by Learningguild, and being revised for a third edition), I begin from the example 'Jim swims', and in the first chapter, covering nouns, articles, pronouns and verbs, I have found it essential to distinguish between the particular **boy** referred to by the name *Jim* (or perhaps by *the boy* or *he*) and the **name or word or words** that do that referring. The first I call the subject, the second the subject-locution (Sub-L). 'Locution' serves as a very useful technical term for any word or similar item such as a numeral, symbol or abbreviation, and any unified set of these, such as a multi-word verb, a phrase, a clause and even a sentence. Then one

must have the concept of the **matching pair** that every normal sentence needs, unless the verb is imperative: there may be more than one, and each consists of a Sub-L and its personed verb (PV), i.e., the verb governed by it which accords with it in being 1st or 2nd or 3rd person (and singular or plural). Such verbs used to be called finite. By no means all verbs are "action words" (or "doing words"), nor *vice versa*. In a positive assertion, the personed verb is used to indicate that some action, activity, event, process or state pertains to some subject. (In conjunction with 'very tired', the verb 'was' indicates that some past state pertains to the subject Fiona.)

Those grammarians such as Hacker who define 'subject' as a word or words with a certain function (on p.249 in her grammatical glossary, "a word or word group that names who or what the sentence is about": there one would need 'sentence or clause') usually come to grief when they are explaining the difference between the active and the passive voice. Hacker has a mistake like Field's, if she wants to keep to her definition of 'subject', when she writes on p.249:

> When a verb is in the active voice, the subject of the sentence does the action. … In the passive voice, the subject receives the action.

The passive verb, I want to say, lets us present as a subject rather than an object the focus or product of what a transitive verb used actively expresses, and so by way of a Sub-L, not an Ob-L.

I need not make a list here of a few other errors of a similar kind, but shall send one to Nancy Sommers, the lead coauthor of this book, if she would like one. One more of the kind will suffice, and again Hacker and Sommers are not alone. In the glossary we are told that an adjective is "a word used to modify (describe) a noun or pronoun", and the examples given are those italicized in 'the *lame* dog, *rare old* stamps, *sixteen* candles'. But *lame* describes the particular dog, not the noun *dog*! You could describe *dog* with the adjective *monosyllabic*. The word *modify* is unhelpful here. Are these things important? Yes, because grammar must be as accurate and non-misleading as possible. Adjectives are of many kinds, only some of them descriptive.

This book, valuable as I have recognized it to be, is no substitute for one of a kind now uncommon even for secondary beginners, which commences with an orderly and accurate explanation of the parts of speech, treats conjunctions in relation to clauses, and explains many matters related to verbs. Moreover, the student needs frequent encouragement to, and examples of, the close and appreciative study of elegant sentences: their precision of vocabulary and their clauses, order and punctuation. Call that rhetoric, or style.

John Howes

WHAT'S A GOOD INTRODUCTION TO ...
SUPPLEMENTED VERBS?

JUAN BARRENECHE *has come to Australia from Venezuela, where he graduated in business administration and tourism, and worked in real estate. A member of Learningguild, he is studying English.*

In his book *Making up Sentences*, at 3:4.4, Dr Howes uses the term 'supplemented verb' for "a verb ... used with an adverb and/or preposition so closely linked to it that it is as though a one-word verb were being used, and (usually) the meaning of the main word is thus modified". A common term for such a verb has been 'phrasal verb'.

I have found an excellent source for the study of these verbs, which are so common both in spoken and in written English. It is a combination of a section of a textbook and a related booklet of exercises, both by A.J.Thomson and A.V Martinet. The textbook is *A Practical English Grammar* and the section is 31 (pp. 206-250). The booklet almost entirely related to these verbs is *A Practical*

English Grammar Exercises 4: Verb + Preposition/Adverb Combination. A fourth edition (1986) of the book is still available at $55, but the particular booklet (1962) may be out of print. A photocopy has been made of it for the Learningguild Library, and that fourth edition of the book is to be purchased.

In the section of the textbook, the writers give us an enormous range of supplemented verbs. I have counted them, and there are 104. Here are just ten, each with a different verb.

1. account for = give a good reason for
2. bear out = confirm
3. give up = abandon (a habit or attempt)
4. blow out = extinguish (a flame)
5. fade away = disappear, become gradually fainter (usually of sounds)
6. jump at = accept with enthusiasm (an offer or opportunity)
7. do away with = abolish
8. knock off = stop work for the day
9. make off = run away (used of thieves &c.)
10. grow out of = abandon, on becoming older.

This section of the textbook is very valuable for students of English because it lists so many supplemented verbs and explains their meanings, which one would often fail to guess from the words considered separately. It also classifies these verbs as used transitively or intransitively or in both ways.

In each case, after explaining the meaning of a combination of verb + adverb and/or preposition, there are full-sentence examples for the student to read aloud and study.

The booklet provides very helpful exercises. Here are ten sentences given for completion:

1. We arranged to meet at the theatre but she didn't turn ….
2. Look ... the baby while I am out.
3. War broke ... in 1939.
4. The retiring general handed … to his successor.
5. He pretended to fall ... my plan but secretly he was working against it.
6. He only puts … his secretary's bad spelling because he can't find a better one.
7. He had to rub … his Greek to help his son when he started to learn it at school.
8. He doesn't care ... continental cookery. He thinks it's too rich.
9. He may be sorry but that won't make ... the damage he has done.
10. He worked ... his energy by cutting down the old trees.*

My learning of English has been considerably assisted by the section of the textbook and by the booklet: they offer a simple, clear and interesting way of learning the meanings of many supplemented verbs

* The respective answers are, for the first five, *up*, *after*, *out*, *over*, and *in with*, and, for the second five, *up with*, *up*, *for*, *up for* and *off*.

Proper words in proper places
make the true definition of style.

(Swift, quoted in Gowers's *The Complete Plain Words*, at the head of Chapter 9)

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The range of our activities (including the Saturday lunches and discussions begun in 2011, and the philosophy seminar in its seventeenth year) and of our publications is set out on our website

www.vicnet.net.au/~learngld.

At 'Certificate' are the five examination papers set between September 2008 and September 2010 for the Learningguild Certificate in Reasoning and Expression, and a detailed report on each of those examinations, the most recent in a half-yearly and continuous series going back to 1987. These documents show what kinds of abilities the examiners regard as needing to be fostered (at any age) during a secondary education, and then further developed, with a view to fruitful work at any tertiary or postgraduate stage, and in any employment that requires good writing. Concerning matters of grammar, punctuation, wording etc., reference is often made to Gowers's *The Complete Plain Words* and Burchfield's *New Fowler's Modern English Usage*, and also to John Howes's book *Making up Sentences*, published by and obtainable from Learningguild but now under revision for a third edition. Its first two chapters explain the parts of speech, and they and the other four chapters (at present available separately) offer those who will study them, doing the exercises, a level of familiarity with grammatical categories that would help them to write well and also enable them to understand references to those categories in Gowers and Burchfield.

Section 4 of the examination maintains the tradition of "Clear Thinking", which was a part of Victorian senior secondary English for forty years until 1983, with its requirement that candidates examine an argument put before them and say in what respects it is sound or unsound. John Howes's booklet *Reasoning* is a guide to this indispensable kind of work. It is obtainable from Learningguild for $2.40 (and will be posted for $3.60 sent in stamps), along with the green leaflet that describes the examination.

Professor Peter Singer of Princeton and Melbourne wrote in 2010:

> *To get an A, or an upper B, in the examination for the Learningguild Certificate shows abilities to write clearly, reason well, and see what is wrong with unsound arguments. Across a wide range of fields, these skills are in short supply, urgently needed and yet seldom directly tested. I recommend both to students and to report-writers that they visit the Learningguild website and take up the challenge of this exam.*