

## ACAL Response to the Community Education and National Reform Discussion Paper

*The ACAL Executive has prepared a detailed response to the Discussion Paper released by DEST in 2006 entitled Community Education and National Reform. The ACAL response and the original paper can be viewed on the ACAL website [www.acal.edu.au](http://www.acal.edu.au) ACAL is inviting responses to the paper.*

Community Education and National Reform (DEST, 2006) made a number of suggestions that, if adopted, would radically change the way VET sector certificate I and II level courses would be funded, delivered and regulated. The paper proposed that these courses would be more effectively and more cheaply delivered by community-based providers than they are at present by the public provider (TAFE). Since 75% of literacy and numeracy delivery is at certificate I and II levels, the proposals are of paramount importance to literacy practitioners and other stakeholders in the delivery of 'mixed field' courses.

ACAL responds enthusiastically to the opportunity to engage in a discussion about possible reforms to the delivery of literacy-learning services to adults. Over a number of years now, ACAL has been promoting a view that the definition of literacy skill as an attribute of work-readiness, or as an employment skill, is too narrow a definition to be effectively adding to the nation's stock of educational capital.

The effort over the last decade and half to integrate literacy and numeracy skills development with vocational training has met with mixed success. Accredited literacy and numeracy courses comprise a substantial proportion of the national VET effort in 2007 and these credentials undoubtedly offer benefits to the people who hold them. There are now well-established and well-understood articulation pathways for adults with low school achievement who wish to re-enter formal education and training. The public provider delivers most of this training; only in some states are there formal arrangements to support a network of complementary community-based providers.

The expansion of accredited course delivery is one of the achievements of Australia's vocational training reforms. If the public provider were no longer able to deliver certificate I and II qualifications (including language, literacy and numeracy qualifications), the gains established over the last 16 years could disappear overnight.

Less successful in Australia have been the efforts to make literacy and numeracy skills development an explicit component of the delivery of Training Package qualifications. Key attributes of system management and regulation have tended to undermine the development of mainstream, vocational teaching and assessment practices that provide effective language, literacy and numeracy learning opportunities. At the same time, the rate of change in electronic communication technologies, and the increasing bureaucratisation of many aspects of education, social service and legal practices place ever-increasing demands on the population to develop skills

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# Integrating literacies: Using partnerships to build literacy capabilities in communities

## NCVER Report Executive Summary

Rosie Wicket, Jenny McGuirk

It has long been accepted that adult literacy is best taught and learned in authentic contexts using materials which relate to real-life needs. An important implication of this 'situated learning' is that opportunities for learning are everywhere, not just in colleges or designated learning centres. This understanding was crucial to the development of early workplace learning programs, and underpins Australia's significant success in integrating literacy and numeracy with wider vocational skills development.

The integration of literacy skills acquisition with vocational education and training, however, is only one of the possible approaches to the development of these skills in varying social contexts. Just as literacy educators have learned to avoid treating literacy needs in isolation, governments and other social agencies have acknowledged the inadequacy of uncoordinated responses to a range of social policies, and the need for cross-sectoral and joined-up (whole-of-government) approaches to a wide range of social issues.

Governments have increasingly come to favour partnership models for policy development and service provision over a broad spectrum of social programs. At the same time, there has been a growing recognition of learning as a central driver in the building of social capital, or the skills, networks and capacity for communities to function well. The challenge for governments is to link policies in various sectors to the goal of a learning society, and for educators to move outside the educational domain to an expanded arena of social environments.

Literacy is fundamental to the growth of social capital<sup>1</sup>, not least for communities where there is a sense of being left behind and socially excluded. But how does literacy development contribute to the construction of social capital? To what extent are opportunities available for literacy learning beyond the educational domain? Can the lessons learned from the integration of literacy learning with vocational education be extended to other forms of integration, that is, to literacy partnering in other social domains?

### Note

<sup>1</sup> Social capital is the accumulative benefit accruing to individuals and communities as a result of their engagement in community and civic activities and the consequent networks established.

## ACAL eNews ACAL's electronic newsletter

ACAL eNews is ACAL's electronic newsletter with links and short, sharp national and state news. It's available to anyone interested in adult literacy and numeracy and emailed bi-monthly. To receive a copy just email [acal@pacific.net.au](mailto:acal@pacific.net.au) with your name and 'ACAL eNews Subscribe' in the subject line. It's completely different material to *Literacy Link*, the print newsletter you're reading now.

## The research

The study was intended to act as a preliminary investigation of these issues by exploring:

- how literacy approaches are being, or might be achieved in cross-portfolio relationships with agencies for whom education and training is not core business
- how approaches to building literacy skills might be further developed through partnerships and joined-up or whole-of-government approaches.

The report seeks to identify examples of successful integration of literacy learning in community and workplace settings. It draws a number of findings from a comprehensive analysis and critique of recent relevant literature, backed up by an analysis of data from a range of programs and practices outside and beyond traditional literacy programs offered in institutional settings.

The study deliberately includes recent research and policy literature to help better understand the role literacies and learning can play in building social capital and community capacity.

The methodology combined research of the literature and the internet with interviews of coordinators in cross-sectoral community projects and successful integrated workplace literacy projects. This was complemented by a think tank assisted by the Australian Council for Adult Literacy, and overseas information on the subject.

Sites were selected from various sources, including suggestions from a range of community organisations and government agencies. Because of the necessarily limited size of the project, programs targeting specific groups were excluded, such as those dealing with Indigenous people, those from non-English speaking backgrounds, the disabled, and job seekers in programs funded through the federal Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program.

## The findings

The review of workplace literacy programs confirmed the success of initiatives in Australia in integrating literacy, numeracy and vocational skills acquisition through 'built-in' rather than 'bolted-on' methodologies. It also confirmed the importance of valuing and embedding a range of literacies into workplace and community practice, rather than teaching literacy in 'programs' in isolation from other learning. The review also showed that various approaches to integration are adopted in these programs.

There are also other, perhaps less expected, outcomes from workplace literacy programs that have a wider impact and can be said to build social capital and community capacity. It is reasonable to conclude that some of the lessons learned in these workplace programs can be transferred to other social environments. However integration, even in workplace education, proved a complex task, and there

remain varying views on how and where it should be approached.

While the workplace approach could be transferred to non-workplace sites (such as health or other community settings), significant resources would be required to train non-specialists in literacy and numeracy identification, and to train specialists in the culture and context of the community setting. It is not easy to integrate literacy and numeracy in wider activities, while also finding ways to make visible and reportable literacy outcomes explicit for those not engaged in a vocational education or general education pathway.

The investigation of the five welfare and community sites revealed the importance of working in partnerships, but also the challenges inherent in this goal, particularly in the absence of a long-term program commitment. Agencies working in the most challenging situations, and for whom education is not their top priority, will withdraw when they feel the other parties are not in for the long haul. All the community sites experienced difficulties working with mainstream education providers. Overall, the study highlighted the difficulties in developing and sustaining partnerships, and the importance of finding a balance between accountability and local flexibility.

All the sites have a complex and multi-faceted array of impact measures reflecting their particular priorities and client groups. How best to weave the acquisition of literacy skills into these indicators is one of the ongoing issues raised by this study.

Further detail about the findings, including responses from professional bodies; information about workplace programs; presentations to the think tank; and news on international developments can be found in the support document. This document can be accessed from NCVER's website at <<http://www.ncver.edu.au>>.

## Implications for policy and practice

- There is a need to seek greater collaboration on building literacy improvement possibilities in social policy areas such as health, youth, housing, welfare, crime prevention and community development. Literacy development must be embedded in the policy and strategies of these sectors.
- A targeted approach aimed at policy domains outside

the formal education and training sector should be based on sound needs analysis of populations known to have literacy development needs. One way forward might be to focus on one policy domain (such as health) so as to better understand the needs and possible responses.

- Understanding these collaboration possibilities is a significant factor in developing a nationally agreed approach linked to a comprehensive literacy learning framework that can accommodate local diversity of approach and outcome.
- Funding incentives for the participating agencies can then be used to stimulate collaborative approaches with high potential, to encourage innovation and to build upon successful initiatives.
- Professional development in other sectors and domains should build the capacity of frontline workers to assist clients with literacy needs. Awareness of literacy challenges and issues should also be built across all policy domains.
- Successful workplace literacy programs show that educators must be willing to take up new roles when working outside of institutional settings. These new roles require a re-assessment of teacher preparation and professional development opportunities.
- The shortage of information available to this study shows the need for more systematic measurement of successful outcomes at the micro-level, and program evaluations at the macro-level. Pilots and trials of adult literacy interventions and collaborative programs need to be systematically followed up. This will assist in the evaluation of innovations and effective targeting for longer term project funding. Such studies may also assist in better understanding how to achieve greater coordination of separately funded projects.

Finally, for real progress to be made, it is essential that there is infrastructure support for collaboration and alliance building among the players. ■

*Reprinted with kind permission of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) from the following publication Wickert, R and McGuirk, J.(2005) Integrating literacies: Using partnerships to build literacy capabilities in communities, NCVER. The full report and supporting documents can be downloaded from [www.ncver.edu.au/publications](http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications)*

**Integrating literacies: Using partnerships to build literacy capabilities in communities**

**Literacy Link** (ISSN 0158-3026) is the newsletter of the Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL), a voluntary organisation set up in 1976 to support the development of adult literacy, numeracy and basic education in Australia.

ACAL promotes co-operation among interested organisations and individuals, both government and non-government, by undertaking and encouraging appropriate study, research and action.

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Material published in **Literacy Link** should not be viewed as endorsed by the Australian Council for Adult Literacy.

## Respect is due ...

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For years the BBC (the UK's public broadcaster) has had a great reputation for the quality of its radio and television productions. It is not surprising, therefore, that their branching into the world of cyberspace has maintained many of those standards. This article will focus particularly on the adult education resource of [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk).

Those of us working in the general education areas of TAFEs and other RTOs, understand the need for varied and alternative resource options for our students. **Skillswise** (<http://bbc.co.uk/skillswise>) provides a wealth of activities for us and our students to use. The site is divided into **Numbers** and **Words**. Each of these strands contain subsections covering the main basic areas eg **WORDS – Grammar, Spelling NUMBERS – Whole Numbers, Handling Data**

Once you've selected the area that you want, there is a menu of aspects of the nominated area and from there, a list of activities related to that topic. Each aspect provides an information download; I don't often use this, having provided information to the student, in advance and to suit them. Some students like to go there and some like to have copies of the information. The only ones I've kept and laminated are the sheet on the apostrophe (simple and clear) and the fraction wall (appealing in its colourful presentation). For students studying in other areas, or for those with particular vocational interests, **Vocabulary** provides a range of specialist word sheets with definitions (e.g. Childcare, Aged Care, Decorating). This has been very useful in specific instances.

In nearly all instances there are 3 stages of quiz on the topic. Again, some are more useful than others but being interactive there is a general appeal. My more mature

students prefer this to some of the games, whereas many younger students prefer the games.

Many topics have interactive games with sound. *(There is no apparent issue with sound delay/ buffering. This has been a problem for me with the interactive activity for **Listening** where the student needs to listen to an excerpt from a hospital drama and then make notes onto a prescribed worksheet. If you do have trouble, the problem may be localised to the network that you are using. I also had a problem with our TAFE 'fire walling' anything that said Game, they initially released the sites during fixed times during the week but have now relaxed that to unrestricted access.)* The games' area has proved very popular and useful, providing interesting, engaging and fun ways of achieving consolidation of teaching. Students regularly ask to go to this site as a respite, relaxation between tasks or because they feel that they'd like extra practice of something. I have one student with intellectual disability who really likes the sequencing activities for First Aid, another student, who is doing her B Ed and is with me to get her numeracy up to speed, regularly uses the Multiplication Tables Game. I constantly refer students to the game for Apostrophes for ownership, because although not the most flash game, it is a better way to provide practice than endless written exercises. The game in **WORDS** under **Instructions** is good for lower levels of Maths for Location, although they do require a basic reading ability. For the right person, the game/activity for **Scanning** on solving a murder, is good fun but you do need time for the student to work through the whole thing i.e. it's not a 5 minute task.

Lastly, there are lots of great downloadable activities. Worksheets, plus answer sheets for almost every topic and ranging from beginners to more advanced. So my students are regularly asked for the website by students from other courses who can observe what they're doing from neighbouring workstations. Nearly all are amazed that it is free.

Things I use most (based on student need rather than my preference): **Times tables** – Game 2, **Apostrophes** – all aspects, **Silent Letters** – **Silent Invaders** game, **Instructions** – **Destination Impossible** game, **Look, Say, Cover, Write and Check** – Game

Limitations – Some Number aspects use pounds sterling (obviously) and temperature includes Fahrenheit.

The site is regularly updated and there are sometimes requests for user feedback. I have completed this, as I think it's important to reinforce a good thing and to show how widely it is being used.

If you like this site, take a look at the upper levels of the schools' section (the content is often a bit harder but the presentation a bit more funky). I really like the **Mathsfile Game Show** (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/mathsfile/index.shtml>) and with the electives option or Complete a Project of the new CGEA or as a GCO (while you still can), you might know someone who wants to learn a bit of French – high quality and interactive (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/french/>). To get the most out of it, go exploring and enjoy. ■

### 2007 ACAL Conference in New Zealand

As previously announced the ACAL Conference for 2007 will be an International Adult Literacy Conference to be held in Auckland on Friday and Saturday, 28 and 29 September with some pre-conference events on Thursday, 27 September. The Conference is being co-hosted by Workbase, NZ in collaboration with Literacy Aotearoa and the National Association of ESOL Home Tutors.

Readers are encouraged to submit proposals for presentations to the conference. Visit the ACAL web site for a link to the conference web site and the Call for Papers. Papers should

- \* Provoke critical thinking and discussion
- \* Highlight effective teaching and learning
- \* Reflect on innovation and risk taking
- \* Encourage dialogue between different sectors and groups
- \* Engage participants in interactive learning experiences
- \* Examine social change and adult literacy
- \* Link research, evaluation and practice.

After the conference, presentations or a synopsis may be published in Literacy Link or loaded on to the ACAL web site. Some may also be published in Fine Print, journal of the Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council (VALBEC).

Note that all accepted presenters must register to attend the conference. The closing date for submissions is midnight 1 June (New Zealand time). Presenters will hear back by 15 June if their presentation has been accepted.



# Community Literacy at Manukau Institute of Technology – moving forward together

*Ingrid Vinkenvleugel teaches community literacy and has many years experience in tutoring one-to-one and small groups in her role as Language Advisor at Manukau Institute of Technology's Language Support Centre. Laloifi Lelaulu has an EAL qualification and was a home tutor. She now puts all her considerable energies into working one-to-one with WINZ clients. Mercy Chiluvuri has a varied background in research and teaching in the EAL and literacy fields and is now teaching on the whanau/literacy programmes.*

Community literacy comes in many forms and is an exciting field to be in. Through the Foundation Studies programmes offered by Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT), we reach out into our local communities in a variety of ways. A literacy course during the day is offered in partnership with the Mangere East Community Learning Centre. A night course is also offered to anyone in the local community but held at MIT in Otara. One-to-one or small group work with people who are not currently working is offered in partnership with local offices of Work and Income NZ (WINZ), a government department, and whanau (family) literacy programmes which work as a partnership between parents, tutors and two local schools is another of the successful government-funded courses which aim to address various needs in Manukau City, our local area.

## Community literacy

The literacy course offered in Mangere East draws not only on the local community but others in neighbouring parts of the city. There is a wide age range of learners, from school leavers at 18 years old to retired people in their 60s or 70s. In each group (a maximum of 11) there is a wide range of cultures, needs and interests, with the majority of learners also being parents or grandparents. It is incredibly hard to take the initial step and come forward to join a literacy class so motivation is usually high amongst these learners. This is encouraged and built upon by the development of individual learning plans (discussed with the tutor) each week. The Otara night class also attracts a wide range of ages and cultures and learners from all over Manukau City, but there are generally more males and fewer parents on the course. Another major difference is the proportion of those also working or studying during the day. This is higher, and many learners on the night course are motivated by the need to get a job more to their liking or succeed in their studies.

Wherever possible, applicants are interviewed initially by the course tutor. This helps to form a relationship between learner and tutor before the course begins. The interview involves some questions to help the tutor identify the learner's strengths and needs and an informal analysis of the learner's ability to read and write is also carried out. The course itself follows a balanced approach to literacy and includes the kind of numeracy skills needed in everyday contexts, for example money handling and map reading. Learners are encouraged to bring writing that is important to them or useful in their everyday lives to class to share,

and this plus excerpts from the local newspaper are used to model and practise reading strategies employed by good readers. Each strategy is modelled and practised so that it is easier for learners to add it to their reading toolbox. Readers are also encouraged to think about what they are reading, what it means to them, how much they have learnt from it and what new and interesting words and ideas they have picked up. This is part of the discussion over learning plans for the week, but learners are also encouraged to read widely and fill out a reading log throughout the 18 weeks of the course.

The decoding elements of reading are introduced using an approach that covers basic knowledge of the alphabet, sound and letter recognition and manipulation, identification of syllables, words and sentences and the building blocks of sentences. Punctuation and handwriting are also covered. A multi-sensory approach is used e.g. using blocks for identifying sounds, exploring the shape, feel, sound and name of letters and doing sky or table writing to help with the formation of letters. This part of the course is always interactive and fun!

Writing is an important part of each lesson and writers are encouraged to write about what is important to them in their own context. The tutor models the writing process and strategies for improving writing, answers questions, facilitates group writing sessions and gives individual feedback in areas that will build the writer's confidence and skills. Writers are also encouraged to read their writing to other learners. This is useful in a number of ways. It can be fun to share ideas. It can also strengthen bonds between beginner writers and their co-writers as audience. Also, it is a chance to re-read and re-assess one's own writing and develop it further. Dialogue writing, a conversation between learner and tutor which is conducted in written form, is also a great way to encourage reluctant writers who are worried about producing the 'perfect' piece of writing at first draft. The emphasis is on communication rather than correction and the relationship between reader and writer is on more of an equal footing. I love the time that we spend on writing because it is so wonderful to see all different types of writing styles and ideas forming around the room. At this time, the tutor circulates to encourage and facilitate the writing process but it is also a time for budding writers to encourage and help each other and to use tools like dictionaries to develop their writing further.

The numeracy element of the course can be great fun and an ideal place for learners to share their knowledge. ▶

When doing basic maths, there are many ways to come to an answer and learners share the processes they use to get their answer. A number of fun games and everyday life activities involving maths engage the learners and this is backed up by practice and discussion of what can be learnt from activities and how they can be applied in the learner's context.

Culture is an important part of who we all are. Aotearoa /New Zealand has a very rich cultural context and this is also apparent in community literacy. In any discussion of reading, writing or daily life, the learners are eager to share their cultural perspectives. This leads to amazingly rich discussions which often flow into strong pieces of writing. It is also a wonderful way for those with limited writing skills to share their knowledge and feel an active member of the learning community. This begins with learners sharing greetings in their own languages in the first class and is one of the many rewarding aspects of community literacy. We share stories and we share our lives.

Independent learning is encouraged in these courses and, on the day course; time is also spent in the local library every week. This opens new doors and gives learners an opportunity to explore the many resources that a public library in New Zealand has to offer, including literacy readers and resources in book, audio and computer formats, as well as links to local clubs and community events. Learners also have a chance to become comfortable in this kind of 'learned' environment and this often leads to family visits outside of class time.

### Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ)

These learners usually have high needs and, because they only have one hour per session and one session per week, need a one-to-one tutor focus. Learners are varied in ages, needs and backgrounds and we do the best we can to make learning a lifestyle. As well as those in or seeking employment, learners can be parents, grandparents or guardians yearning to participate in their child's learning but frustrated because they are illiterate.

There are diverse needs and the tutoring is contextualised and relevant to each learner. Some learners attend for assistance with the numeracy required in their workplace. While in class, these learners also 'brush up' on their writing skills. Other learners want to secure employment but lack the basic skills required in the workplace.

Many learners have English as an additional language, cannot speak English and have no knowledge of the alphabet and its sound system.

They therefore have great difficulty finding work. With these learners, the tutor encourages the use of their first language as an aid to learning. The learners write the equivalent meanings of words in their own language or, for pronunciation, similar sounding words.

Learners are on a pathway to further study or work and this journey can take a short or a long time. This one-to-one tutoring is a crucial first step for many on their lifelong learning journey.

### Parent/Whanau literacy course

Along with courses that have been offered successfully for number of years in the community literacy area, the Parent/Whanau Literacy Course is a unique new programme which commenced last year. This is, in fact, a relatively new field in New Zealand. The programme is offered at two different sites in Manukau City: Sir Edmund Hillary Collegiate in Otara, and the Mangere East primary school.

#### Aims of the programme

This Programme is particularly for adults who have difficulty reading and writing English, are motivated to help their children, lack knowledge and or confidence to support children's learning; and, either are not engaged or have limited involvement with their child or children at school. The specific aims are to:

- Improve parent/whanau literacy and numeracy skills.
- Increase parent/ whanau strategies to support their children's learning.
- Develop shared understandings of language, literacy and numeracy between parents/whanau and schools in order to strengthen the links between home and school.

The adult participants of nominated children come from different cultural backgrounds, having different needs and interests. The majority of learners are actually grandparents rather than parents of the children in the schools.

Initially, applicants are interviewed by the course tutor so that they get a thorough introduction to the course which they intend to take for 16 weeks. This enables them to develop positive perceptions about the course. The interview involves a set of questions to help the tutor identify the learner's strengths and needs. The interview scenario also enables potential learners to build a closer connection to the tutor and make the decision to participate in the course.

The programme takes a balanced approach to literacy, involving both phonics and whole language instruction. The approach taken combines a family literacy model with a school literacy model. The programme establishes strong connections by working with the local schools through both principals and teachers to achieve the course aims. It revolves around the content and strategies of reading (the demands of reading, goals for reading, the components of reading etc), writing (forming intentions, composing a text, revising a draft, publishing a product and a using a reflective journal), and numeracy (place value, digits, addition and subtraction of whole numbers, calculation with money, measurement, proportion and data.)

The programme also highlights teaching strategies used in the school setting such as modeling, role plays, small group discussions, explanations, etc. The mode of delivery is small group, face to face interaction which contains some small group activities and some individual instruction time. This is the phase wherein learners get the opportunity to share ideas, exchange their roles in educational activities, and establish bonds with each other and with the tutor. Even the most lethargic and fearful learners are encouraged to take part in different activities. I really love the time spent listening to them.

*Continued on page 14 ►*

# Is this class right for me? Acknowledging and addressing feelings of identity among adult literacy students

**Steve Goldberg** has been the Coordinator of the Reading Writing Hotline, a national adult literacy referral service funded by DEST and managed by TAFE NSW Access and General Education Curriculum Centre since 2000.

I am currently undertaking further study on part-time basis and one of the pleasures of this venture is the diversity among the participants—the male to female ratio is approximately 1:1, we are from many language backgrounds, and are aged between 20 and 70. However, this is the type of course undertaken by experienced learners who have a strong sense of identity of who they are as learners, and are not afflicted with the understandable embarrassment many adult literacy students feel, especially when fronting up to their first class or initial interview.

Looking back over all the adult literacy and ESL classes I have taught and reflecting on the ones that were most successful in terms of both learning outcomes, student attendance, student satisfaction and my own job satisfaction. The classes which stand out are the ones that were in some way homogenous where students felt that the group was one where they belonged and were accepted.

Several examples come to mind:

- An all-female literacy class – a mix of native-born and immigrant Australians from non-English speaking backgrounds.
- A literacy class comprised of gay men, nearly all of whom had left school early in response to the bullying they had experienced.
- A group of Australian-born males aged in their thirties and forties, all employed and all seeking to improve their literacy to improve their performance for the jobs they were currently doing.
- Successive groups of young people aged 16-21 from non-English-speaking backgrounds, all of whom had been in Australia less than twelve months.

Only the last example of the four – a course titled Access English for Migrant Youth was engineered, recognizing that this was a group with particular needs.

In meetings with colleagues at the start of each teaching semester, when student numbers were high enough for the possibility of creating more homogenous classes, the issue was raised and eventually rejected on the grounds that access and equity was, in terms of who got priority for placement in a program, best addressed by intersecting educational need with the length of time person has been on a waiting for a class. Indeed, there were times when a new student was placed in a particular class when the teacher perceived that he or she would relate well to one particular student already in the course. But on the whole, placement in classes was conducted randomly without real consideration of students need for social identity in relation to other adult learners.

At the Reading Hotline, 13% of our callers say they have sought help previously to improve their literacy skills. The main reasons callers give for wishing to have a second (or third or even fourth) attempt at improving their skills are:

“The previous class did not offer the flexibility I needed to accommodate my irregular or long working hours.”

“The last course I did was too short in length for me to develop the skills I need.”

“I moved house and need to find somewhere closer to where I now live.”

“My personal circumstances changed and I couldn't keep going to classes at that time.”

“I didn't like the class.”

The last point is often a sensitive one to address. We have all taught students who have had unrealistic expectations of their learning. But more often than not, at the Hotline we hear things like:

*“I enrolled in the class but everyone else was originally from overseas. I was the odd one out.”*

and

*“Everyone seemed to be better than me at reading and writing. I needed one-to-one help which wasn't available. I felt like a failure all over again.”*

Over the past seven years, staff at the Hotline have heard these kinds of sentiments hundreds of times.

Etched in my memory is the young, quietly-spoken man who very reluctantly approached the college where I was teaching. He had had a fairly tumultuous childhood which involved being moved, sometimes between states whenever his mother found a new partner or job. By age ten he had never been at the same school for more than six months and had missed whole terms. He was able to write his name using a mixture of capital and lower-case letters. He could only copy his address and had a very limited sight vocabulary. He urgently needed to improve his skills—he had a tenuous hold on his afternoon job in a factory and was available for face-to-face help on weekday mornings only. Subsequently he was placed in a morning class—his fellow students were all women in their 40s and 50s from non-English speaking backgrounds, all of whom had been in Australia a very long time and had adult children who had achieved well academically. Their goals were very much personal and social. The first 90 minutes of the three hour session went well. My new student and I worked on a range of tasks relating to his initial assessment. When we

*Continued on page 14 ►*

# Do lower level courses produce lower outcomes?

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Recently a colleague said to me: “You should read the latest NCVER research on lower level courses. It proves them to be of doubtful value, particularly if they are for over 25 year olds.” I was surprised as I had spent a lot of time comparing course outcomes and certainly nothing so definitive had emerged previously. A quick browse of the key messages of one of the reports confirmed that this was the view being promoted. It made statements like: “There were no substantial vocational and further study outcomes for prime and mature aged people who had undertaken certificate I and II qualifications.” and “Study pathways were not a major outcome of certificate I and II courses.” Within minutes of reading further into the reports I was cross: these key messages bore as much relationship to a fair reading of the data presented as a sensational headline does to the body of a serious article.

The significant discrepancy between the key messages and the data presented in the body of the report worries me for several reasons. The NCVER statistical collection is a valuable resource for VET stakeholders and analyses of the kind produced by NCVER can add great value to it. The data is complex and simplistic, headline messages belie the complexity (and value) of the data. Furthermore, it may be that policy-makers and managers rely on the key messages and that these, rather than the data analyses influence decision-making. This article looks at the data analysis provided in three separate reports about outcomes from VET programs to show that readings other than those contained in the key messages published at the beginning of each report are possible.

## Australian data on outcomes of VET students

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) holds a large body of data about students in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector in Australia. The Centre collects enrolment and results information from every publicly-funded provider in VET. Great effort has been expended to make this data comparable across providers and states and territories by requiring all providers to comply with the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information System Standard (AVETMISS). Student contact details from this data set also allows NCVER to survey students from every course in Australia about their satisfaction with the services they received and what happened as a result.

NCVER regularly publish snapshots of this collected information. Over the past couple of years, a more in-depth analysis of the 2002 and 2003 collection has been completed by one of their staff researchers, John Stanwick.

1. Stanwick, J. *Outcomes from higher-level vocational*

*education and training qualifications*, NCVER, 2006.

2. Stanwick, J. *Australian Qualifications Framework lower-level qualifications: Outcomes for people over 25*, NCVER, 2006
3. Stanwick, J. *Australian Qualifications Framework lower-level qualifications: Pathways to where for young people?* NCVER, 2005

This suite of reports offers a very useful analysis of the available dataset. The three reports are companion pieces and therefore comparisons between them are invited. Unfortunately, a comparison of the key messages suggest that the outcomes from the lower level courses are nothing like as good as those from the higher level courses—a closer look at the data suggests that there are in fact some similarities in course outcomes. What makes the invitation for comparison frustrating is that the data is not segmented in the same way for each analysis. Each of the reports uses the same proxies for course success. These are enrolments at higher levels of study and employment outcomes within 6 months of completing the course. The report acknowledges that there can be other measures of success, but only two are used for the present analysis.

In the two reports about outcomes of lower level courses an interesting distinction is drawn between graduates and subject-only completers. The graduates are defined as students who completed a full award within the two-year period (2002 - 2003). Everyone else is classified as a subject-only completer and sometimes referred to as a ‘non-graduate’. Subject-only completers include those who did not complete any subjects, those who successfully completed all they enrolled in as well as fulltime students who did not complete sufficient subjects to gain an award.

Subject-only completers in lower level courses are in the majority and this would appear to be a key difference between certificate I and II level courses and Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas. 75% of students aged 25 and over enrolled in certificate I and II courses are subject-only completers and the figure is not much less for younger students. This difference is clearly worthy of further analysis and research. The distinction between graduate and subject-completers is little used in the report on higher level courses, presumably because there was a smaller group of these subject-only completers at this level.

## Comparing further study outcomes for graduates

It is possible to make some comparisons of course outcomes for graduates in the age cohorts and across levels of qualification. About a third of graduates in all levels of course went on to a higher level of study.



Graduates from certificate I and II courses achieved the lowest rate of further study outcomes but only by about 2 or 3 percent. Older graduates at all levels achieved significantly fewer further education outcomes, not just in lower level courses.

There are some interesting exceptions seen in smaller data sets. For preparatory courses, graduates average similar percentages of further study outcomes, except for graduates aged 45 and over that complete a certificate I: only 16% of them immediately go on to a higher level of study. Older graduates do worse than young graduates in both higher and lower level courses. Only 23% of graduates aged 25 and older in accountancy go on to tertiary study compared to 53% of graduates under the age of 25 of Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas in this industry area.

So a fair analysis of all the data would be that about one third of graduates of both the higher level qualifications and certificates I and II went on to higher levels of study. Older graduates of both higher and lower level courses are less likely to immediately enrol in a higher level course. If this is the only measure of success, it is possible to say that older people get less value out of participation in VET. However, this measure in itself is a narrow measure—and the report acknowledges that other positive outcomes are not captured by this data analysis.

The comparability of course outcomes for graduates of all courses is not reflected in the key message sections of the publications. Compare these two key messages. The first is taken from the report about higher level courses and the second from the report about people over 25 in lower level courses.

*“Thirty-two percent of young graduates and 14% of graduates aged 25 years and over went to university level study. In some minor fields, such as accountancy and banking and finance over half of the graduates aged 15 to 24 went on to university level study.”*

*“Study pathways were not a major outcome of certificate I and II courses. Around 30% of graduates and less than 10% of subjects only completers were estimated to have gone on to further study at a higher level.”*

In the first of these, the figures are presented without an introductory comment but with an additional qualifier that describes the best of course outcomes. In the second, very similar data (30% rather than 32%) is introduced by a qualifying sentence “Study pathways were not a major outcome...” The additional piece of information, about subject-only completers, is a much lower figure. In these ways, the impression is created that higher level courses have ‘excellent’ outcomes and that lower level courses do not, yet an almost identical proportion of graduates have a positive course outcome as measured by a further enrolment at a higher level. Older graduates of Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas go on to university at less than half the rate of graduates under 25 but this is not remarked on.

In the third report, young people studying lower level courses are given a somewhat grudging recognition that some

do go on to further study if they graduate: *“Reasonable proportions of graduates enrolled in further study at a higher level within six months after the course, with about a third of certificate I graduates and 43% of certificate II graduates doing so.”* Again, a third is remarkably close to 32%. The certificate II students at 43% do on average almost as well in the further study stakes as the very best of the graduates in the higher level qualifications (the “over half” of graduates) but this is simply described as “reasonable”.

## The outcomes of subject only completers

It is no surprise that subject-only completers fare differently to graduates when the rate of immediate further study is measured. The reports make it clear that some of these only complete a subject or two. Surely a subject or two would not be expected to have the same impact as a complete program of study successfully completed? In fact, a person who completes only a subject or two (whether by choice or circumstance) will usually be ineligible to enrol in study at a higher level.

One of the key messages in the report about young people doing lower level courses states that subject-only completers are “less likely than graduates to enrol in further study at a higher level, or to complete an additional qualification”. No overall figure is given but if you dig into the body of report, you will see that these figures are between 7% and 18% for the two age groups in certificate I and II. This is similar to the 10% quoted for subject-only completers 25 years and older. Unfortunately, comparative data was not available for subject-only completers in higher level courses.

What is intriguing is just how large the subject-only completer group is at certificates I and II level. About 75% of all enrolments in certificates I and II in the 25 and over age group are classified as subject-only completers. To me, these figures suggest a whole set of questions with far-reaching implications for provision. How many subject completers are students who want to complete a full qualification but for whom the service is not suitable (e.g. the full course is not offered locally, service does not meet student needs and expectations, time and mode of delivery is unsuitable)? How many are actually the same students who attend different providers for different parts of their program? Since we have no single student identifier that tracks students as they move between sectors, locations and providers, we do not know. How many subject-only completers are students who require skills sets rather than a whole qualification? This group has actually successfully completed what they needed from VET for now. How many students participate in a subject or two for other reasons e.g. as taster courses or to build social connections?

There are some opportunities for NCVER to create, capture and analyse data that may begin to answer some of these important questions. Perhaps the student surveys could be redesigned? A new piece of research being conducted in the UK by the National Research and development Centre (NRDC) for adult literacy and numeracy focuses on factors that affect student persistence. This ‘Motivating

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# The Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey: What's happening in New Zealand

*Paul Satherley is Project Manager, Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, New Zealand Ministry of Education*

## Introduction

The Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL) is an investigation of the distribution of skills—literacy, numeracy, and problem solving—within a country's adult population.

ALL follows a similar study—the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS)—conducted in New Zealand in 1996. ALL is, in part, directly comparable to IALS. This comparison will provide a picture of some of the changes that may have occurred, both nationally, and internationally, over the decade.

This article aims to describe the approach New Zealand is taking with ALL and our plans for analysis.

## ALL in New Zealand

### What information will the ALL study findings provide?

Strong evidence exists internationally that, for developed countries, full participation in society and the labour market is linked to the capacity to accumulate knowledge and to develop and maintain a broad range of skills.

ALL results will provide new information on the relationships between skill levels and the labour market, economic growth, and education systems and services. They will throw new light on the role of skill in creating social equity and inequity in economic outcomes, particularly for groups functioning, on average, below the level of competence.

### Who does the ALL study focus on?

The ALL study is designed to measure the distribution of skills in the adult population aged 16-65 years old living in private households.

### What does the ALL study measure?

ALL measures skills in four "domains":

- **Prose Literacy** is concerned with continuous text – such as the type found in books and newspaper articles.
- **Document Literacy** deals with discontinuous text – such as graphs, charts, and tables.
- **Numeracy** is concerned with mathematical and numerical skills.
- **Problem-Solving** involves analytical thinking, reasoning and logic.

### How is the ALL testing implemented?

As required by the international consortium, ALL has a nationally representative, geographically-based sample design. One eligible person is selected per household. In addition, enough Maori and Pasifika respondents are included in the ALL study design to allow for statistically useful analyses of these ethnic subpopulations.

Each interview is administered, face-to-face, by an interviewer of the Auckland-based research company, National Research Bureau, according to international guidelines.

### What are the elements of an ALL interview?

A background questionnaire collects information including the respondent's gender, ethnicity, labour-force status, education and training experience. This provides the scope to analyse the distribution of skills in subpopulations.

After the background questionnaire is complete, the interviewer asks the respondent to complete a task booklet.

### How are an individual's skills measured by the ALL study?

For each individual, and for each of the skill domains, a score is calculated on a 0-500 scale. The basis of the calculation includes the difficulty of items a respondent gets right or wrong.

### Who implements the ALL study?

ALL is a joint project of the Government of Canada, the US National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). In addition, the Educational Testing Service (ETS), a US-based non-profit agency, provides design and analysis services. For all participating countries, the processes of undertaking ALL are monitored by Statistics Canada to ensure that participating countries conduct the ALL study in a standard way to guarantee internationally comparable results.

In New Zealand, ALL interviewing is undertaken, under contract to the Ministry of Education, by the National Research Bureau.

### Which countries are involved in the ALL study?

The ALL study has been carried out in two groups of countries.

The first group of countries has completed the study in 2003. This group consists of Canada, Italy, Norway, Switzerland, the United States of America, Bermuda, and the Mexican State of Nuevo Leon. Statistics Canada has published a report on the findings for this group.

The countries in the second group are currently at varying stages of completion of the ALL study. This group includes Australia, Korea, Hungary, New Zealand, the Netherlands and Germany.

### How do the ALL and IALS studies compare?

IALS, similar in content and purpose to ALL, was administered in New Zealand in 1996. The Prose Literacy and Document Literacy domains of the two studies are directly comparable. The Numeracy domain of the ALL is only partially comparable to the Quantitative Literacy domain of IALS. The Problem-Solving domain of the ALL study, however, is entirely new.

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# Getting ready for ALLS to hit

**Dave Tout** of Multifangled P/L and CAE Melbourne is a consultant on the Numeracy Working Group of the ALL survey, and member of the Australian Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey Reference group for the ABS.

The Adult Literacy and Life Skills survey (ALLS) took place across Australia between July 2006 and January 2007. It is being co-funded by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) with support from the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR). First results of the Australian ALLS are expected to be available in October 2007, subject to the timing of the standardisation of test results, which takes place overseas. The first wave of international data collection for ALLS has already been undertaken, and a number of national and international reports resulting from this first wave are already available. These countries were: Canada, Italy, Norway, the USA, Nuevo Leon (Mexico), Switzerland and Bermuda. Countries participating in the second wave of ALLS alongside Australia are: Hungary, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and South Korea.

The first, similar, International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) that Australia participated in was back in 1996—so the 2006 survey provides a neat 10 year span to be able to compare data and performance. However, whilst the 1996 IALS data potentially provided a wealth of data, information and analysis that should have been of interest to not only educational sectors, but also to government and business, little follow up research or analysis was undertaken. Beyond the production of several initial publications, data from the 1996 IALS was underutilised. This was partly because there was a long lead-time between the collection and release of data and momentum for the survey was somewhat lost. However, many of the other countries that took part in the IALS analysed the data in a multitude of ways, and countries used the data as a basis for a range of policies and strategies.

## What's in ALLS

The four directly assessed domains are:

- Prose Literacy (assessed in IALS)
- Document Literacy (assessed in IALS)
- Numeracy (new to ALLS)
- Problem Solving (new to ALLS).

However, the ALLS not only tests skills directly across these four different domains, it also collects background information (almost 300 different items) including details of participation in education and learning; educational attainment; parental education, languages spoken; labour force status and occupation; respondents' literacy and numeracy practices at work and elsewhere; social capital and well-being; use of information and communications technology; income; and other socio-demographic information. It is the linking and correlations of this background data with the performances of respondents that allows for a wide ranging and comprehensive analysis

of the abilities of adults and the different factors that impact on and influence performance.

## Planned research and publications

The initial summary publication is due for release later in 2007, and the microdata from the ALLS should be available to researchers soon after that. The ABS is in the planning stages of deciding what data analysis to include in the initial publication and decide on what other research projects could be undertaken. As well, ABS will be contributing to other publications that contain international comparisons and analysis, but these are not anticipated to be available until late 2008. There is also the intention at this stage to undertake four major international research projects that would include the Australian data:

### 1 Macro-economic analysis of the contribution of literacy to economic growth:

Studies using IALS data have estimated the impact of the level and distribution of literacy and numeracy skills on levels of economic growth, as measured by gross domestic product (GDP) and labour productivity. Such studies using IALS have quantified the effect of raising the average literacy levels of young adults on productivity (Statistics Canada, 2004).

### 2 Analysis of skill gain and loss:

Skills can be acquired, maintained and lost over a person's lifespan. The effects of ageing and different levels of workforce participation mean that skills are gained and lost at different rates for individuals at different times in their lives. ALLS can provide information about the acquisition of different literacy and numeracy levels which occur during particular periods of an individual's life.

### 3 Skills, the workplace and the labour market:

Employers require information about the nature of skills required for developing high-performance work practices, how businesses can recruit people effectively, and how to offer meaningful training opportunities and practices. With the growing share of knowledge-intensive jobs and increased use of information and communication technologies, these issues are of added importance. It is proposed to explore these issues by matching the objective skill information collected in ALLS to occupation and industry classification data, together with subjective data collected in the background questionnaire on the types of skills people use in their jobs.

### 4 Health literacy proficiency:

As some of the literacy tasks undertaken by respondents in the survey relate to people's ability to undertake everyday health-related activities (for instance, deciding appropriate dosage levels based on cough medicine instructions),

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## Re-Imagining Adult Literacy Policy for the Life-Course

Pauline O'Maley

**Pauline O'Maley is a member of the ACAL executive committee, she is also the secretary of VALBEC and works for the Salvation Army in Victoria in one of its social programs. In all these roles she is very interested in literacy beyond the classroom.**

On February 21 this year Jill Sanguinetti and I attended Melbourne University's Centre of Public Policy Conference entitled *From Welfare to Social Investment: Re-imagining Social Policy for the Life Course* at the Jasper Hotel in Melbourne.

The conference was planned as a forum about innovative social policy seen as investment rather than response to need. The conference background paper says '[t]his re-imagining and contemporary approach to social policy is one that aims to build capability, recognise difference and encourage participation, whilst also promoting citizenship rights and addressing issues of poverty and inequality'. The conference attracted several hundred delegates, academics, policy makers and social welfare practitioners.

ACAL believed this forum, with its focus on social investment, would be an apt one to at which to explore partnerships that would enable us to further our vision of

whole of life/whole of government approach to literacy. We submitted an abstract when the call for papers was announced and we were accepted.

The broad focus of work, welfare and transitions was addressed in the keynote by Sir Tony Atkinson from Oxford University in his paper *European Union Social Policy, Fighting Poverty, and System Competition*. The keynote was followed by four concurrent workshops: *Poverty and the Labour Market*; *Social Security: incentives and capabilities*; *Regulatory change in the labour market in a more deregulated environment: what is possible and how?*; *Labour market rights: what should be fundamental labour market rights and how can they be achieved?* I attended workshop two - *Social Security: incentives and capabilities* and listened to Peter Davidson from ACOSS speak. His topic was *From compliance to capability: reforming welfare to work policies in Australia*, and Terry Carney, from the University of Sydney, spoke about *Reforming Social Security: improving incentives and capabilities*.

The afternoon sessions started with a plenary session entitled *Social Policy as Investment: Creative policy levers to promote life-long learning and equitable access to education*. While the focus on education and lifelong learning, promised much for ACAL members, Peter Dawkins (Secretary of the Victorian Department of Education and Training) centred his speech around the ways in which schools in Victoria are viewing education as both an economic and social investment. Peter was followed by Paul Smyth from the University of Melbourne and the Brotherhood of St Laurence who spoke about the reintegration of social and economic policy. Paul suggested the concepts of social investment and human capital potentially provide key building blocks for a successful reintegration of economic and welfare policy ►

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in the so-called new literacies. An overhaul of language, literacy and numeracy policy would address these weaknesses in mainstream vocational training.

On the other hand, we need to have a national discussion about alternative mechanisms for people to learn new skills, including educational skills, and take part in new forms of community engagement that are not limited to training for jobs. Formal training environments may not hold out the same kind of promise to everyone. Community-based adult education organisations with close links to their local communities may, given the right funding and regulatory frameworks, be in a position to bring about new forms of responsiveness to community need. It would be a mistake to call on attributes of creativity and innovation for the purpose of providing more of the same but as a cheap option.

ACAL can envisage a future for literacy-learning activities whereby partnerships are formed between adult education organisations, businesses, local authorities and a range of other social service agencies that produce new and different opportunities for adults to participate in their communities and develop and apply new skills (including

forms of literacies) as they do so. This is unlikely to happen if community provision is treated solely as an 'outreach' of VET. New forms of engagement in learning need to be conceptualised.

The COAG reform agenda focuses on health and education and training. One target is to re-engage that proportion of the adult population with low educational achievement as a means of building Australia's stock of human capital. One means to do this is revisit the contributions made by the less formal adult education sector, often referred to as the Adult Community Education (ACE) sector. Currently there is very little specific focus on adult literacy and numeracy in the COAG reforms. The DEST Discussion paper represents a significant contribution from the Commonwealth that may be considered by COAG at a future time.

ACAL believes that a national discussion about new forms of literacy-learning engagements for adults is overdue. The international survey of adult literacy was conducted by the ABS in 2006 and this will be reported in October 2007 as the Adult Literacy and Life Skills (ALLS) survey. Now is the time to be coming up with new ideas for developing literacy and numeracy skills in adults. We can learn by both our successes and our failures of the past 16 years. ■



◀ in Australia. Again the plenary was followed by four concurrent workshops: *Early childhood education: the key priority?*; *Learning accounts for equitable access and life long learning*; *What are the main institutional requirements for education and training?*; *Capacity building, education and training*.

Jill presented a paper, *From Welfare to Social Investment: The (Neglected) Case of Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning* on ACAL's behalf in the second workshop, *Learning accounts for equitable access and life long learning*. In her speech Jill outlined the way in which basic education for adults evolved from early provision with its focus on private benevolence to the changing discourses of public entitlement, social and educational radicalism, through to the current dominant discourses of literacy with a human capital focus. She stressed the continuing disjunction between the discourse of social capital underpinning past provision and the human capital discourse increasingly reflected in national policies.

Jill then outlined the Australian Council of Adult Literacy's desire to develop policies that respond to the critical lack of literacy skills as a pressing social need to be addressed outside of industry policy and beyond the provision of minimal welfare-type programs for the most worse off. Australia needs to redefine adult literacy and lifelong learning not only in terms of welfare, social rescue and vocational preparation but as a necessary component of social cohesion, social capital and community capacity. ACAL believes we need to think laterally about the possibilities that emerge from the historic link between adult education, community capacity and community development, and to think beyond institutions if we are to achieve this aim.

In a recent (2005) report for the National Centre for Vocational

and Educational Research (NCVER), Wickert and McGuirk put forward some ideas as to how we might re-orient our thinking about adult literacy in this way. The report calls for the integration of literacy learning in community and workplace settings outside of formal education and training programs. Literacy practitioners would act as mentors, brokers and facilitators supporting social and community workers to embed literacy development into their policies and strategies.

ACAL hopes to find a way of mobilising the store of skills and public and private good will in communities and workplaces, to create new hybrid models of learning which are community-based and contextually embedded.

Despite being slightly out of place in the workshop we were allotted to, our participation in the forum was an opportunity for getting our message out, networking, and starting conversations with potential partners. We started conversations with a welfare provider and have been following up a discussion which we are hoping will lead us to a fruitful link in the Victorian Communities Initiative.

It is early days for us in the quest for partnerships. There is a lot of groundwork to be done in order to form one or more partnerships that will enable us to find a common language and work towards the goal of piloting innovative community or work-based, non-institutional contexts in which people will be supported and guided to develop their literacy skills in ways which are meaningful to them.

Abstracts and some papers from the conference are available on <http://www.public.policy.unimelb.edu.au> ■

Wickert, R. and McGuirk, J. (2005) *Integrating Literacies, Using partnerships to build literacy capabilities in communities*, National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER) Adelaide.

## ACAL President invited to speak at UK Conference

Margaret McHugh, the ACAL President, has been invited to make a presentation at the annual conference of the National Research and Development Centre (NRDC) for adult literacy and numeracy in Nottingham on April 26 and 27. She will speak about the Australian experience of integrating literacy and numeracy with vocational training and link this to a recent research report from the NRDC 'You wouldn't expect a maths teacher to teach plastering...' *Embedding literacy, language and numeracy in post-16 vocational programmes—the impact on learning and achievement*.

The UK research produces clear student outcomes data to show that the more highly embedded the literacy provision, the better the outcomes for both literacy and for the vocational training. The report also identifies a range of features within training organisations that are

necessary to bring about successful embedded literacy.

"I was genuinely excited when I read this report" Margaret said, "because it describes so clearly the experience we had in Western Australia when we designed and implemented the Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills in 2000." The report provides irrefutable evidence that students are more engaged in literacy learning when it is closely connected to work they are doing in their vocational course. "When we designed CAVSS, we built it on this hypothesis—we took a leap of faith, and it paid off," Margaret explained. "Embedded literacy, CAVSS-style, is certainly something that both students and lecturers enjoy and we think it generates some additional benefits – something remarkably similar to *social capital*. This is what I will be talking about in the UK—the effect of team-teaching partnerships on the experience of learning, and how the notion of partnerships might have broader application in developing literacy-learning engagements for adults."

The title of the presentation is *Social Capital: Policy Construct and Educational Practice*. It will make a case that exclusive use of the *human capital* construct in policy-setting and system management may not be the best option for encouraging more learning engagement among people with low educational achievement that the Government is now targeting. ■

new snippets

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The programme also touches on the cultural aspects of learning, since Aotearoa / NZ is a land filled with the flavour of rich cultural diversity. As one of the community literacy programmes, the parent/whanau course values cultural perspectives in learning highly. Discussions on teaching strategies often take the learners back to their culture and enable them to see the similarities and differences in different strategies employed.

In summary, the beauty of the programme lies in helping parents/whanau to realize the importance of their responsibility in shaping or moulding the behavioral and educational aspects of their children; first by becoming

literate themselves and later by employing their literacy strategies to help their kids to read, write and do maths. As a result, the notion, “*I want to make my child a better reader*” becomes a permanent motto of the parents/whanau group.

All three community literacy programmes target literacy learners but the approaches are contextualized to the targeted learners so they do vary somewhat. What they do have in common is that the learners’ needs sit at the heart of each programme. Student evaluations show that these programmes achieve their goal of making a difference in the learners’ lives and helping them make the next step in achieving their goals. ■

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took a 10 minute break, one of my other students leaned over and stared him down with the accusation, “You grew up in Australia. Why did you need to come here? Were you a naughty boy at school?” In a flash he was gone, never to be seen again and proved to be not contactable.

That was more than ten years ago. I can only hope he is over what must have been an immeasurably humiliating moment and has mustered up the courage to have another try elsewhere. It remains speculative that had the other students been briefed on the background of their

new fellow student that a safer more inclusive classroom environment, from the newcomer’s perspective would have put to rest any prejudices that the group may have had. But often, if the student has strong feeling of being an outsider in a literacy class, it is often deemed to be the problem of the student and not that of the processes involved in putting together classes.

Certainly funding, demographic and geographical circumstances will make it difficult to engineer homogenous classes. But the student’s bottom line – “is this class for people like me?” needs to be, whenever possible, acknowledged. ■

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*Skills for Life* learners to persist, progress and achieve’ project was launched in November 2006, running under the banner ‘Stick With It’. Perhaps the NCVER might initiate something similar in Australia?

## Comparing employment outcomes

It would be interesting to make comparisons across the three reports for the other indicator of courses success—employment outcomes. Unfortunately even though all three reports provide data on the issue, the report on higher level courses does not provide average figures for all graduates. The results for a number of selected industry areas are provided which show wide differences. For example for 25 years old and over students who were not employed prior to the course, 12% of graduates in Creative Arts were employed 6 months after the course (the lowest) compared to 39% of Architecture and Building (the highest). Younger people (25 and under) had markedly different results in many industry areas to their older classmates, complicating the already large differences between industry areas.

The data provided for lower level courses does not provide this same level of detail, but on average about half of all graduates aged 25 years and over reported a job-related benefit from doing their course and about 40% of subject-only completers. Young people under 25 years reported slightly more job-related benefits.

Despite the limitations, the data clearly shows that all VET training at all levels has a positive impact on participants

getting work or getting more work. For most student groups you can expect this to be about 25% - 40% of all enrolments, even for those who only do a few subjects. VET students who graduate often gain higher rates of immediate employment with the best a little over 50%. However, the research shows that VET does have direct employment impacts for a fair percentage of students no matter how the data is segmented.

## For the future

This discussion illustrates the richness and inherent value of NCVER’s statistical AVETMISS collection. I applaud the intention behind the analyses provided in these three reports and I hope the NCVER is able to produce more of these value-added products in the years to come. We need reliable data and robust analysis of outcomes data as COAG considers new funding arrangements for certificate I and II courses and in the context of the next round of bilateral agreements. I hope I have shown that the message it is possible to take from these reports—that lower level courses produce worse outcomes than higher level outcomes—is too simple. For graduates, all levels of courses produce very similar outcomes. A key question remains. Why do fewer people in lower level courses complete full qualifications?

If you are interested in exploring the implications of these reports further join me in Literacy Live on Tuesday July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2007 between 12.00-1.00 pm AEST. Register by Monday July 2nd by email to [acal@pacific.edu.au](mailto:acal@pacific.edu.au) A fuller version of this paper is available on [www.acal.edu.au](http://www.acal.edu.au) ■

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## ALL results

The New Zealand Ministry of Education plans to publish a sequence of four brochures, followed by a longer report according to the following tentative timeline.

### Brochure 1 – Overview – September 2007

The Overview will summarise how each of the ALL skill domains is distributed through the New Zealand adult population, and compare New Zealand's ALL findings with those of other countries.

### Brochure 2 – Education and Labour Force Status – December 2007

This brochure will outline how the ALL skill domains are distributed through the New Zealand adult population according to educational status, and according to labour force status.

### Brochure 3 – Gender and Ethnicity – February 2008

The Gender and Ethnicity Brochure will focus on how each of the ALL skill domains is distributed through the New Zealand adult population for women and men, and for different ethnic groups.

### Brochure 4 – Age – March 2008

This document will investigate how the ALL skill domains are distributed through the New Zealand adult population for different age-groups.

### Report – Late 2008

This report is planned to include:

- A profile of the literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills of New Zealand adults

- A description of the changes in literacy skills from 1996 to 2006
- A description of patterns of participation in adult education and training
- A description of aspects of literacy skills in the workplace
- A description of associations between literacy, recreation, and social participation
- A summary of results for adults with low skills

## Further Information

<http://www.educationcounts.edcentre.govt.nz/research/all.html>

This is the URL of the New Zealand ALL study homepage and contains links to the OECD, Statistics Canada, and NCES websites

<http://www.nces.ed.gov/surveys/all/items.asp>

This URL is part of the NCES website and is where sample test items are presented.

<http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/89-603-XIE/2005001/pdf.htm>

This URL, from the Statistics Canada website, and contains the first international ALL study report (covering Canada, Italy, Norway, Switzerland, The United States of America, Bermuda, and the Mexican State of Nuevo Leon).

<http://www.nrb.co.nz/>

This URL is the homepage of the National Research Bureau Ltd – the company contracted to design and administer the ALL study in New Zealand.

<http://www.ets.org>

This URL is the homepage of the Educational Testing Service, responsible for design and analysis services for ALL. ■

**The Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey:  
What's happening in New Zealand**

◀ *Continued from page 11*

a Health Literacy Scale can be created as a by-product of ALLS. Performance on a wide range of health-related tasks can then be analysed. A Health Literacy Scale will allow researchers to investigate the relationship between (self-assessed) health status and health-related literacy; compare health literacy across a range of demographic and socio-economic dimensions; and compare Australia's levels of health literacy internationally. However, currently, there are no plans for Australia to develop the Health literacy proficiency scale unless stakeholders express interest in contributing funding towards creating the scale.

## ACAL's role

The ABS is very keen this time around to make sure there is a better understanding and use of the research capabilities of the ALLS data collected. ACAL's role will be to lobby and input wherever possible into the desired areas of research to be investigated and to encourage as wide a range of researchers to use the comprehensive dataset to analyse adult's skills and abilities and the different factors that impact on and influence performance. This is not only of interest to government and business in terms of human capital, economic and workforce issues but also to educators and social planners in terms of social capital

issues and education and training policy and planning.

To this end, and in advance of the results being released, ACAL is working on the production of a Position Paper on the ALLS with the aim of alerting people from all sectors about the survey and its potential uses (and dangers) prior to the release of the results. It is hoped by being pro-active ACAL can help ABS in its aim of achieving a better understanding and use of the research capabilities of the ALLS data collection and encourage positive and constructive analysis of the data to support ACAL's aim of leading Australia in the development and promotion of literacy practice and policy. ■

**Getting ready for ALLS to hit**

## Are you a member of ACAL?

Some of the benefits of Membership to ACAL include receiving your own copy of Literacy Link, special rates for forums and conferences, access to information regarding current practices in all states and territories throughout Australia, representation on committees, information relating to latest policies on adult literacy and numeracy, and government lobbying.

**Cost** - \$44.00 for an individual membership, or \$66.00 for an organisation (all costs incl GST)

You can join online at [www.acal.edu.au](http://www.acal.edu.au)

# May Literacy Live Forum

## New literacies, new selves

In the next Literacy Live Forum on **Tuesday, 22 May at 8:00pm AEST**, come and listen to VALBECs keynote speaker, **Margaret Somerville**, Professor of Education (Learning and Development) at **Monash University Gippsland**, continue her conversation about *New literacies, new selves*.

### Margaret reflects:

In the process of making (place) literacies with Aboriginal people I have often been the learner, the unknower. For both myself and the people I am working with, we are stitching together a whole out of fragments. We have visited places, told stories, made maps, taken photographs, looked at old photos, listened to songs, language, music and poems. In this process we have stitched these fragments together into a temporary whole, a fragile hope. It is a process in which we are making new literacies and new selves. In this talk I will explore the elements of self, home, belonging, place, language and story, in one of these productions, and how new digital technologies facilitate the process of making new literacies and new selves.

Margaret has always been interested in questioning academic knowledge and writing. Two of her four books, *Ingelba and the Five Black Matriarchs*, and *The Sun Dancin'*, were published with Aboriginal co-authors. *'Body/landscape journals'* and *Wildflowering: the life and places of Kathleen McArthur* continue her exploration of experimental writing and alternative knowledges. More recently this experimentation has led her into digital technologies using visual and aural forms. Place literacy is a major research focus. She believes that new technologies radically challenge our understanding of basic print literacy in ways that value the alternative and tacit knowledges that underpin our human desire to communicate with each other.

For more details about the forum and how to participate, visit the ACAL website or register at [acal@pacific.net.au](mailto:acal@pacific.net.au).

**Numbers are limited, preference is given to ACAL members and you must register.**

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