



The job of teaching adult literacy is getting more and more complex

As adult literacy and numeracy teachers, it's more urgent than ever that the general public knows more about the work we do and that we demand and maintain professional standards writes Steve Goldberg.

Since becoming the Coordinator of the Reading Writing Hotline in 2000, I have overseen more than 37,000 enquiries to the Hotline service. From where I and my colleagues at the Hotline sit, the job of teaching adult literacy and numeracy is getting more complex. The range of students seeking help is diversifying and our skills need to stay abreast of the changes currently taking place and in the years ahead. Even as recently as 2000, not many of us were talking about the need for special provision for young people at risk. Nowadays, they are very much part of the mainstream. We are also seeing larger numbers of people on disability pensions in spite of the multiple health, educational and social barriers many of them face enrolling in adult literacy courses.

In contrast, in 2006, one in every eight Hotline callers had completed year 12 or higher. Likewise, it is no longer unusual for a person undertaking a Certificate IV level course to request learner support.

Well-educated people from the Asian sub-continent who speak a dialect of English are ringing the Hotline in greater numbers. Often it is because they are under-employed and hope that gaining native-like proficiency will provide them with the ticket to more fulfilling work. Another group we call the "techies" – well educated people, usually male, employed in a technology industry and have strong mathematical, technical and problem solving skills but very poor writing skills by comparison also call us from time to time.

Recently, the Hotline took a call from a young woman who had completed year 12. She said that although English had not been her strongest subject, she had been managing just fine in her office administration position until new technology required her to regularly send detailed messages to mobile phones using an e-mail to SMS program. She was uncertain how she should pitch the message, given that people very senior to her would receive it. She also had to, at the behest of old-school managers, resist overuse of SMS shorthand and yet compress a lot

of information into a single message with a maximum of 148 characters to fit a mobile phone screen.

It is also common to take calls from people who have moved from being employees to private contractors and are now responsible for all kinds of electronic paperwork including Business Activity Statements, as well as writing their own publicity and do their own networking. These callers are all from a very diverse range of backgrounds, educationally, culturally and geographically.

Most callers cite work-related reasons for needing to improve their literacy skills but there are those who wish to assist their children with their schoolwork. It seems that the homework is becoming harder, especially where the internet is involved. There are also enquiries from parents of children with learning difficulties, who have

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not had much education themselves and ask us to explain over the phone in lay terms information they have found on the internet using a search engine which may provide them with a key to better assisting their children.

Put simply, the days of enrolling in a literacy course to focus on what we once universally understood as “everyday” tasks are over. “Everyday” tasks are proving to be extremely complex and vary from person to person. Commonly, they require increasing levels of underpinning knowledge, critical thinking, the ability to use technology and the skill to advocate for oneself. And the urgency in which Hotline callers tell us they need to gain mastery over particular tasks for personal, employment-related and training-related reasons is becoming more and more pronounced.

In turn, the implication for ALBE teachers is that the process of interviewing and assessing students and providing ongoing program delivery and re-assessment, analysis and reflection becomes more challenging. Whether it's delivering learner support for trainees or conducting WELL programs, understanding the context where the training is taking place requires time to learn aspects of it ourselves. We often need time to know what kinds of questions to ask of managers and trainers so that we can be effective in what we do.

In NSW, adult literacy teachers also deliver a Teachers Aide Special course and a course in Peer Tutoring in schools. Adult literacy teachers need to have a diversity of knowledge and understanding of the needs of a broad range of client groups. It is not the time to be dumbing down the profession. But unfortunately, at the Hotline, this is one of our greatest concerns.

In the past twelve months, numerous enquiries, by phone and e-mail were made to the Hotline, all from people who were receiving payment for teaching adult literacy. Here is a sample:

“I am teaching a group of guys aged 15-17 who were all basically kicked out of school. I was wondering if you could tell me where I could find someone older who is doing an adult literacy course who can come along to read these guys the riot act. I want someone who'll say to them “pay attention or else you'll end up like me [as an adult literacy student]”

“I recently completed a Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessing. I'm about to start teaching some mature aged people and was wondering if you can provide me with a range of interesting books that I can use with the class. I need a good selection because I don't know what they'd like. What sorts of things do adults like to read?”

“The man I'm tutoring has a reading age of eight. What reading age do you have to be to do a class at TAFE?”

“How would you get started with someone aged 50 who can barely write his name?”

“I've decided that the best way to teach someone is to find a good computer program that teaches writing and spelling. I saw one called ‘x’ that was

featured on [name of current affairs television program]. Would you personally recommend it?”

“I recently did a course in remedial phonics and in addition to doing some teaching for a not-for-profit organisation, I'd like to work at the Hotline. What method of teaching do you use?”

“I'm calling from an RTO and we're happy to provide literacy help for our trainees if English is their first language but we've got two new ones from Thailand. They are too hard to teach. What should we do?”

In many parts of Australia, our profession is ageing and the succession plan in any organization needs to ensure that good practice in literacy and numeracy program delivery continues long after we are gone. In addition to good practice, crucial to the survival and strength of our profession is that the general public has a better understanding of the work we do and why people from all walks of life may have poor literacy. It is eighteen years since the first national adult literacy survey was conducted but I still feel that very few people seem to know what our work as adult literacy and numeracy teachers entail.

One e-mail I received in 2006 read in part “I'm not after help. I can read just fine. I want to know, for the sake of an argument, aren't people illiterate simply because they can't be bothered to try reading a book?”

In another instance, a senior manager in a public education setting whose background was not in Adult General Education said at a meeting “I thought that schools dealt with stuff like that [illiteracy]. Why are we getting such people enrolling at TAFE?”

But it is not all bad news. We also take calls at the Hotline from primary and secondary teachers who are curious about the pathway to becoming an adult literacy teacher and warm to the idea of retraining. Invariably, we guide these callers to the websites of the university faculties which offer an appropriate qualification. In terms of getting the message out about adult literacy in Australia, I am continually invited to speak on ABC and commercial radio about who calls the Hotline and why. Ninety-nine percent of the time, the radio hosts are friendly, curious about the issues and the climate we work in.

At the Hotline, we are always happy to help anyone who calls, and that includes those tutors quoted above. In such instances, we informed these callers about *Literacy Face to Face* which arguably provides an excellent model of good practice in ALBE. But they were not interested in knowing more about the National Reporting System, for example, nor could we encourage them to enrol in a volunteer tutor training program. These callers already saw themselves as ably qualified.

We expect other professions to uphold high standards. Not only should new teachers replacing those who are retiring have proper qualifications but we must be vigilant that professional standards and therefore good practice remain high in ours as well.

And, it goes without saying that the general public needs to know more about who we are and what we do. ■

The Reading Writing Hotline is funded by DEST and managed by TAFE NSW Access and General Education Curriculum Centre. For more information on the Hotline visit www.literacyline.edu.au

For more information on Literacy Face to Face visit www.lg.tafensw.edu.au/facetoface

The Learning for Living project: New directions in training support for foundation learning

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Jane Terrell has extensive experience in adult education, with a particular emphasis on foundation or "second chance" learning and tutor training. She is presently contracted to the NZ Ministry of Education and Tertiary Education Commission as a developer for the foundation learning capability project, Learning for Living.

The New Zealand Ministry of Education, working with other government agencies, has developed an exciting, innovative model of clustered, ongoing, participatory professional support for tutors and managers in tertiary education organisations (TEOs). An initiative of the Learning for Living project, this support has had a deep impact on the practice of participants, and learning gained from the first year of its provision is to be applied in the model now being replicated for workplace trainers.

Background

Governments in both NZ and Australia acknowledge the need to integrate language, literacy and numeracy in adult learning, and to support this thorough focused professional development for tutors and trainers. In 2001 the NZ government's *More Than Words* literacy and numeracy strategy was developed and launched in response to the International Adult Literacy Survey findings that a high percentage of New Zealand adults had inadequate language, literacy and numeracy skills necessary to function effectively in everyday life. The strategy focused on the need for improved professional development for tutors and trainers, increased provision, and improved quality of provision. At around the same time, the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) published the *Built in Not Bolted On* report (2000) which promoted the inclusion of language, literacy and numeracy in vocational training packages, and asserted that integrating language, literacy and numeracy learning within organisational learning (including vocational learning) is more successful than teaching such "foundation" skills as an add-on to vocational learning.

This approach is echoed in the NZ Learning for Living project, established in 2004 to raise the language, literacy and numeracy skills of adults, and the recently released NZ Tertiary Education Strategy 2007-2012 with its central focus on improving the quality of foundation learning and integrating foundation skills into vocational education and training.

The Learning for Living project

An exploratory project which aims to assist adult literacy educators to understand and deliver embedded foundation learning competencies, Learning for Living aims to raise

the quality of education provision through practitioner professional development. The project is supported by a range of government agencies and includes the development of national tools such as adult educator qualifications, being offered for the first time in 2007 with associated fees grants to support uptake, the Tertiary Education Commission's Draft Foundation Learning Progressions, and the creation of national specialist and development teams to develop content and facilitate professional development clusters.

An underlying belief of the project is that skilled, focused teacher practice lies squarely at the heart of student gain in foundation skills. This is a shift towards an acknowledgement of the centrality of effective professional practice and the importance of the quality of delivery. It is also an acknowledgement of the importance of ongoing, practical professional support. Recent research favours a model of professional development that moves away from short training courses or one-off workshops, and towards ongoing in situ training in work groups, intensive staff development programmes involving shared knowledge, reflection, exposure to different and sometimes more appropriate models, refinement and transformation of practice and peer mentoring.

From 2005, therefore, the project has explored the impact of practitioner participation in 18 fully funded professional development groups or clusters of TEOs. Clusters of practitioners have been formed in locations throughout NZ focusing on either reading or numeracy (and more recently on a combination of both) and have been facilitated by developers who are specialists in professional development. Participants include both tutors and management and are drawn from TEOs representing the breadth of adult literacy, numeracy and language education provision, including polytechnics, small private training establishments and vocational training organisations. It is anticipated that this diversity will benefit the clusters and encourage the establishment of self-sustaining professional learning communities.

This initiative of the Learning for Living project is being evaluated through assessment of student gain, and interviews and surveys of cluster developers and participants. Initial findings indicate the professional development has had a range of significant impacts on

teaching, management and student achievement. The majority of participants valued taking part in the initiative and were planning to continue to use what they had learned and to build on that learning. An evaluator reported that “there’s a sense that learners value being part of a project and that they appreciate being consulted and their feedback being sought.” This participatory approach, she commented, leads to greater motivation and engagement. Insights gained from the evaluation and from the ongoing experience of cluster participants will be applied in a newly formed workplace cluster.

Learning from TEO clusters: participant perspectives

The recent experience of developers and tutors from two TEO clusters provides significant learning for the implementation of workplace clusters. From July 2006, developer N (numeracy) has facilitated a cluster that is city-based, and developer R (reading) has facilitated a cluster based in a small town. Both clusters comprise two tutors and a manager from each of five local TEOs. Nine are private training establishments, and one (in the reading cluster) a polytechnic. While some tutors are specialist “literacy” tutors, responsible for programmes focusing on literacy and numeracy, others are “vocational” tutors, responsible for programmes in carpentry, warehousing, retail, performing arts, computing and business administration.

The aim of each cluster was to introduce participants to the changes in teaching and learning of numeracy or reading for adults, and to encourage them to make shifts in their practice to focus on deliberate acts of teaching numeracy or reading. In Phase 1, which ended in December 2006, clusters focused on professional development for the participants in terms of a broad three part framework. This focused on “Knowing the learner”, “Knowing the text (or course material)” and “Knowing what to do (as a tutor).” In a series of three-weekly meetings over six months, tutors learned new strategies, which they then trialled with learners and reflected on in subsequent meetings. In Phase 2, starting February 2007, the focus has moved more strongly to “Knowing what to do”, with the emphasis shifting to embedding the learning into all material being used with learners. In the numeracy cluster, this shift in emphasis was in direct response to cluster participants’ requests; in the reading cluster, this shift was a result of the developer’s reflections on participants’ needs as evidenced by their practice.

The level of commitment and enthusiasm of cluster participants has surprised and pleased both developers. This is particularly rewarding for Developer N, who quickly became aware of participants’ fears about numeracy. She notes that, “despite their own fears and in some cases low levels of mathematical understanding, participants have just lapped up the learning and tried new things.” From the first meeting, developer N made frequent references to the common fear amongst learners about “getting it wrong” in maths, and she thinks this helped participants open up to other participants about their own often negative experiences which contributed to a collegial atmosphere. She believes this camaraderie was also aided

by participants’ perception that they were all equal – that no one in the cluster group was “a real mathematician”.

Developer N reported that tutors particularly noticed learners’ low level of understanding of anything to do with proportional relationships, ie. fractions, decimals and percentages. Despite the significance of this area of numeracy in everyday life, the developer realised that the learners’ low level of understanding was often mirrored in cluster participants’ own levels of understanding. This has resulted in her constantly revisiting the knowledge and strategies for this area.

Similarly, Developer R noticed that learners’ lack of confidence and competence in reading sometimes reflected tutors’ own lack of confidence in reading and/or teaching reading. It seemed that tutors had accommodated learners’ low literacy levels, and their own lack of confidence in moving them forward, by requiring very little in the way of reading and writing from them, heavily favouring assessment alternatives such as speaking and observation. A large part of R’s role has thus become encouraging cluster participants to read and use more challenging texts with learners: in some cases the challenge was for tutors to use any form of text regularly.

The approach taken by the Learning for Living project towards teaching numeracy and literacy to adults emphasises the significance of contextualising learning. Developer N became highly aware of the challenge presented by contextualising numeracy knowledge and strategies: “You’re constantly learning things about what tutors have to deal with in the different trades. In building, for example, learners need to know their 2 and 3 times table for ordering materials.” The time constraints of the various educational contexts created further challenges for participants seeking to integrate the new approaches. While specialist “literacy” tutors could focus on filling the gaps in their learners’ mathematical knowledge, “vocational” tutors had to prioritise teaching that would enable learners to pass assessments with understanding.

Developer R found progress in contextualising reading strategies hampered by participants’ reluctance to bring teaching and assessment material to cluster meetings: in many cases the material had been developed by the provider and was jealously guarded intellectual property. Consequently she found it most effective to work with such materials in individual meetings with providers, and with generally available texts of high interest to all participants in cluster meetings.

Both developers learned it was vital to have patience: “You have to bite your tongue when they say things that you know are not quite right, and focus on what they’re doing right and go with that (Developer N).” Both note that this is of course modelling the approach developers would like tutors to take with learners. This patience was also vital in waiting for participants to put new strategies into practice. Both found it took some participants until the start of Phase 2 (and the new academic year) to really try things out – when they had new groups of learners.

These insights from two developers’ experience had echoes in those of two participating tutors. Warehousing tutor A,

a numeracy cluster participant, noted a significant shift in his teaching practice as a result of his involvement in the cluster group. He had always taught numeracy the way he had been taught “Maths” at school – using algorithms, or rules focusing on process rather than understanding, and using no materials. “This way of teaching”, he reported, “only led to frustration.” Being in the cluster made him look at his teaching in more depth. He became more open minded, able to appreciate and learn from his students’ approaches to mathematical problem solving, and began to supplement his audio and visual teaching approaches with kinesthetic hands-on activities. He began to prepare his lessons around the students, creating activities and using games not just talking and expecting them to listen.

A attributes significant changes in students’ attitude to and achievement in numeracy to this shift in his practice: “Now I find it easier to teach in a way they can understand. (Before) they learnt it on the surface but never really understood it in depth.” Through using what students already knew to solve what they didn’t know, he felt able to help them overcome their fear of numeracy. Students became more attentive and more engaged, and looked forward to numeracy classes. Furthermore, they began passing their numeracy assessments more quickly and easily.

Specialist literacy tutor B, a reading cluster participant, noted a less fundamental but still significant shift in her teaching practice as a result of her involvement in the cluster group. A very experienced tutor, she reported that she had “gained some new tricks which I have added to my kete”¹ and also appreciated learning “the names of teaching methods which I have been using over the years but were nameless.” This enabled her to focus her planning: whereas before she would have been more “hit and miss” in her selection of strategies to use with students, now she could be “more direct” and make conscious decisions based on knowing what end result she could expect from using specific strategies.

Like A, B could attribute changes in students’ attitude to and achievement in reading, to this shift in her practice. She noticed that teaching reading comprehension strategies to students facilitated their independence and enjoyment as readers. Students who reported that they hated reading

and never did it for pleasure began to select and use the strategies themselves; they became more confident and knew what to do when faced with unfamiliar or challenging reading material. B found this made it easier to prepare students for assessments.

Applying learning from TEI clusters to workplace clusters

Drawing on the experience of TEI clusters, a new cluster has been formed to support workplace trainers as they improve their understanding and integration of foundation learning competencies. This initiative shows a strong commitment by the government to build professional capability that supports integrated foundation learning in all contexts throughout New Zealand. The first cluster, working within the road transport industry in Auckland and supported by the Road Transport Industry Training Organisation Tranzqual, will provide a model for the development of subsequent clusters. Other Auckland road transport companies have already expressed interest in participating in any future clusters.

The introductory meeting for the first Learning for Living workplace cluster was held in March 2007. Hosted by Tranzqual’s northern regional Industry Training Organisation (ITO) office, the meeting drew together major players in the freight forwarding industry in Auckland, and some contributing training providers. Participants, including training managers, HR managers and trainers, were excited by this new governmental direction in supporting workplace trainers and are keen to begin the first working cluster in May 2007.

Applying learning from the previous clusters, the workplace clusters will focus on “Knowing the learner” and “Knowing what to do”, with an emphasis on workplace literacy teaching principles and practices, interactive learning and teaching, and specific teaching strategies. It will also touch on clear language issues and team teaching. In contrast to the TEO clusters, workplace clusters will work with both in-house and external vocational trainers and will offer a combination of language, literacy and numeracy based on vocational content. They will offer fewer actual cluster meetings in the first phase, while providing more on-site support to trainers. The road transport ITO, Tranzqual, will continue to provide support to the project.

The Learning for Living project:
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Note

1 a New Zealand Maori word meaning basket and commonly used to refer to a repertoire of skills

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Contradicting the stereotype: Case studies of success despite literacy difficulties

NCVER Report 2005

Peter Waterhouse, Crina Virgona

Background

This study set out to investigate how successful people with limited literacy have achieved and sustained employability.

- Based on ten case histories, the study reveals that individuals achieve success in their lives, despite their literacy difficulties. However, the strategies adopted often involve some degree of deception, avoidance and dependence. It is not an easy path. Perseverance, networks and technologies emerge as key strategies used by these people, and resilience is identified as a significant personal attribute for success.
- The study reinforces the observation that schools and adult literacy education providers have a relatively narrow interpretation of what counts as success. The lives of the individuals represented in this study show that broader interpretations and multiple pathways to success are possible and needed. A focus on positive capabilities rather than perceived deficits will open up possibilities for learning, personal development and vocational success.

Executive summary

This project began with the observation that some individuals are able to succeed in life and employment, despite continuing difficulties with literacy. Such people are contradicting the stereotype, which is often painted of adults lacking literacy skills. This study identifies and explores the strategies and behaviour of ten individuals who agreed to share their life stories with us. These stories are presented in digital form on the accompanying CD-ROM, produced as part of this project.

It is hoped that this report and the digital stories will encourage adult literacy educators and policy-makers to re-think some of the assumptions and taken-for-granted 'truths' about what it means to experience difficulties with literacy, and what the consequences of such difficulties may be.

What is 'success'?

The project enabled us to explore notions of 'success', which proves to be a slippery concept. We considered a range of indicators to be relevant. These included economic independence and continuous employment, stable relationships and successful parenting. Other criteria, which some may find surprising for this group, included academic achievement, attainment in business and wealth generation. In various ways, the individuals whose stories are told in this project are living successful lives. However, their success has not been due to mastery over the written word. Perseverance, networks and technologies emerge as key strategies, and resilience is identified as a significant attribute for success.

What is 'il/literacy'?

Most practitioners working within the adult literacy field consciously avoid the term 'illiteracy'. However, the participants in this study self-identified as having severe and continuing difficulties with reading and writing. Some had been diagnosed as dyslexic and/or with learning disabilities.

The various labels (such as 'dyslexic' or 'learning-disabled') are shown to be double-edged. On the one hand, they may promote prejudicial judgements, serving to relegate people into pigeon holes in life by defining them in terms of their disability. On the other hand, such diagnoses can provide, in some cases, a platform for the development of 'alternative' strategies, building on capabilities and a positive orientation to life and learning. The label may serve to liberate and to empower. Having identified and accepted that there is a disability, new strategies and resources can be brought to bear to provide support for individuals. Such approaches can lift an intolerable burden of expectations regarding literacy learning. These issues are further discussed in the literature and the findings of the study.

This study also suggests the value of further exploring what we have termed 'para-literacy'. Despite their avowed difficulty with and resistance to literacy, virtually all of the participants in the study used written texts, at least to some extent. In a sense, they were simultaneously rejecting and adopting literacy skills. Some theorists, embracing the notion of 'multi-literacies' might suggest that, in their own ways, these individuals are literate after all—and (in a limited sense) we could agree. Yet it seems inaccurate to use the term 'literate' for individuals who are consciously resisting and rejecting literacy as a strategy for success. For this stance we are proposing the term 'para-literacy'.

We also note that, while resisting the need to read the written word, these successful individuals were very adept at 'reading the world' (Freire 1983). However, their accounts suggest that their strategies and interpretive skills are not legitimated by the world at large, and by educational institutions in particular.

The questions

The study set out to investigate how successful people with limited literacy have achieved and sustained employability. We were interested in how they developed resilience in the face of significant setbacks and whether their strategies are transferable to the contemporary and often fluid worlds of work and employment. We were also interested in whether literacy teaching had been of assistance, and what teaching approaches, interventions and resources have assisted in achieving sustainable employability.

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Employability, resilience and transferability

In relation to questions on employability, resilience and transferability, the findings highlight the importance of:

- an individual's sense of personal autonomy, self-direction and identity
- the ability of the individual to accept responsibility for his/her own life and learning
- the capacity for critical and independent thinking—which is not dependent upon literacy skills
- the role of family, friends, employers and others in providing strategic support to enable individuals with literacy difficulties to maintain self-esteem and develop positive strategies for learning and personal development. In many cases these relationships have sustained individuals in spite of the corrosive effects of their experiences in education
- the need for assistance to employers and educators to help them enable people with limited literacy to make contributions commensurate with their potential.

Literacy, teaching strategies and resources

In relation to questions on literacy, teaching strategies and other resources, the findings highlight the importance of:

- the relative and subjective nature of 'literacy'—which takes different forms and has different meanings (and value) according to the lives people lead
- the relative importance of other (non-literacy) skills which might be characterised as 'generic' and/or employability skills
- the role of multiple intelligences (Gardner 1985, 2003), particularly those other than linguistic intelligence which provide 'alternative' strengths, strategies and pathways
- the value of appropriate technological aids, including digital technologies which enable individuals to function more independently (for example, speech recognition software).

Technological assistance can overcome many of the barriers, but the technology is not promoted as an option to employers, educators or people with literacy difficulties (as, for instance, it may be for people with more recognised disabilities). Some helpful technologies are also expensive and no assistance is available to defray the cost.

One of the significant findings of this study is its reinforcement of the observation that schools and adult education providers teach particular literacy/ies. Teachers' expectations of learners may be shaped within relatively narrow, scholastic interpretations of what counts as successful reading and writing. When these expectations are not met, for whatever reasons, it is often the learners (rather than the expectations) who are deemed to have failed. The lives of the individuals represented in this study show that broader interpretations and multiple pathways to success are possible.

The study also suggests the value of re-thinking assumptions about what is 'essential' or 'necessary', and asking whether, in some circumstances, there might be equally legitimate, but quite different ways to move forward.

Issues and implications

The study raises issues and implications for diverse groups with interests in adult literacy, vocational education and employment. These audiences include: adult literacy and vocational educators; academics, researchers and teacher educators; adults with literacy difficulties; school teachers; employment/careers advisors (the pathmakers); education policy-makers and employers/human resources personnel (the gatekeepers). The implications for each of these particular audiences are discussed in the report. However, taken as a whole, and in brief, the major issues and implications of the study are:

- Focusing on the positive, on capabilities (rather than perceived deficits), opens up possibilities for learning, personal development, and vocational success.
- While it is increasingly important, literacy is not the only criteria for personal, vocational or employment success and critical thinking; education and achievement are not dependent upon literacy (although it may help).
- Literacy takes many legitimate shapes and forms—the teacher's literacy is not the only one.
- People with minimal formal literacy may have exceptional skills (including entrepreneurialism and creative capacities), which may be hidden behind a veil of uncertainty and apprehension.
- There is value in identifying, developing and celebrating multiple forms of intelligence and capability within learners and recognising that the 'new basics' include developing diverse capacities for 'learning how to learn'. A key dimension of this is developing a positive sense of self as a learner—an identity, self-concept and self-confidence which enables robust learning and the capacity to rebound from setbacks.
- Employees not practising conventional or expected literacy skills are likely to conceal their non-compliance unless employment relationships are open and trusting.

The study also suggests the value of:

- recognising the strategic role of social, kinship, and other relationships within which the learner is embedded. Literacy is a social practice. Hence the value of others—friends, family, partner, workmates etc.—who can provide a web of support, both personal and practical, should not be ignored
- re-thinking and broadening the concept of 'disability' and 'disability/learning support services' to enable adults with literacy difficulties to access appropriate support services. This is particularly important in the context of initiatives to address lifelong learning, the retention of older workers and the needs of an ageing population
- helping learners in some instances to disconnect their sense of self-worth from literacy achievement, thus lifting the 'weight' from literacy, making it easier to bear and to learn
- recognising and legitimating 'para-literacy' skills which may help to build autonomy and independent learning
- recognising the importance of supportive technologies, including digital technologies, not only to facilitate literacy learning, but to provide tools which facilitate

Contradicting the stereotype: Case studies of success despite literacy difficulties

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'E-word' being heard by teachers

Alastair Lindsay is a media officer for The Australian Flexible Learning Framework - the national training system's e-learning strategy, collaboratively funded by the Australian Government and all states and territories at \$15 million annually.

Teenage students are demanding that education and training institutes provide them with a choice about what, where and how they learn.

Providing good libraries, canteens and social facilities, are becoming less important than giving students access to new technologies such as wikis, blogs and mobile learning.

At Brisbane's Career and Employment Expo in April (similar to the Western Australia Careers and Education Expo), the overwhelming view from the teenagers was that access to technology was a key determinant of what educational institute they will choose.

Brisbane student Kate Cooling said that e-learning, such as the use of online tutorials, was a convenient method of learning.

"It (technology) helps a lot. It is a lot easier than going through a thousand books," she said.

Another Brisbane student, Sam Sanderson, agreed that having access to technology in learning would help him choose where he went for higher education.

He said the standard 'chalk and talk' method of teaching did not engage him in the learning process.

"I'm into hands-on learning - the software used must be interactive."

Recent research from AAPT emphasises how much technology is part of the average teenager's life.

The research reveals that 16 to 20 year olds spend an average of 3.2 hours a day using some form of technology.

To make sure educators and trainers respond to students' demands for technology in learning, the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (Framework) has been conducting a campaign called 'PUT THE HARD WORD ON 'EM' - <http://www.elearn.net.au>.

The idea is to prompt teenagers to ask

education and training providers about the e-learning options, access and infrastructure they provide before making a decision on where they study.

Students are encouraged to investigate whether e-learning tools, like the internet, mobile phones and virtual classrooms, will be used in the delivery of their education.

Edgy and vibrant, the 'PUT THE HARD WORD ON 'EM' campaign includes funky teenager focused 'elearn' dogtags and huge posters.

The dogtags come packaged with a small information card that outlines four essential e-learning questions to ask prospective education or training providers.

The questions are:

1. Can I study online and off-campus?
2. Can I study at my own pace?
3. Can I complete exams and assignments online?
4. How will you use technology to enhance my learning?

Students are encouraged to fill in an online survey through the chance to win one of 50 iPod shuffles.

The survey will collect data about young people's use of technology at home and at school as well their expectations of technology once they reach higher education and training.

The data will be used to help recognise the learning wants of its 21st century learners.

The Framework's National Communication Manager Lindy Smith said that the current generation of school kids are demanding more flexibility and expecting greater access to education and training opportunities.

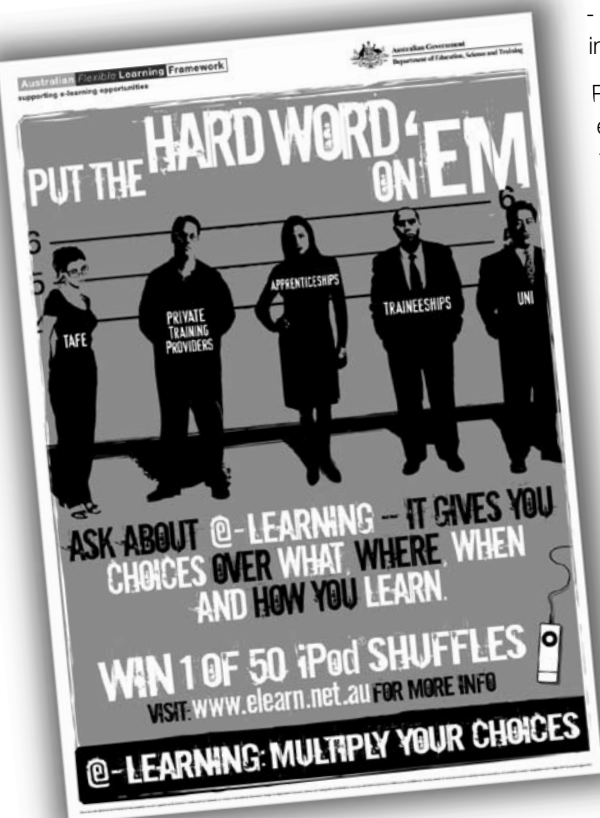
"But it's not just about going online," she said. "Technology means teachers and trainers are no longer confined to the constraints of the structured classroom format. Teachers and trainers can now bring in learner area specialists via video conferencing or use online forums to facilitate a topical discussion."

"On the other hand, e-learning tools and resources brings an element of excitement to learning for students."

Comments from teachers and trainers who attended the Brisbane leg of the Education Network Australia's (Edna) national workshops, indicate that the 'PUT THE HARD WORD ON 'EM' message is being heard.

Ian Lees, from Brisbane's Canterbury College, said he attended the workshop to find information on resources that would capture his student's interest.

"(I am interested) in more up-to-date tools such as blogging



Continued on page 14 ►

New and emerging technology and literacy

Sally Burgess de Castillo, *Corporate Strategist for Centacare Employment and Training, Perth, Western Australia. Sally has been Project Manager for the WELL Resource Project: Transcom – a training resource for the transport industry and for the LearnScope 2007 project: Employment and Training – integrating with flexible learning*

Most of us know more about the rate at which technology is changing than the actual technology itself. It's easy to feel overwhelmed by new and emerging technology given that it is embedded throughout nearly every aspect of our lives. The pressure to keep up with the most recent developments is a very real issue for many people and the impact this is having on us goes largely unmeasured.

Teaching and Learning

It's not all bad news though. Technology provides us with extremely valuable and powerful tools that can be of great benefit, despite the related anxieties we may have. In the field of teaching and learning, new and emerging technologies are a frontier that is constantly being explored. The last 10 years has seen the field of e-learning (electronic learning) develop and become mainstream as a strategy used amongst teaching professionals to better outcomes for their students. Similarly, workplaces across all industries have seen technology become embedded into their daily operations. A certain level of computer literacy is now assumed of all employees, in addition to language, literacy and numeracy requirements.

The development of new and emerging technology is exciting, particularly as we learn of the many benefits it can offer on a personal level. Working with digital photos for the first time can bring satisfaction to both our home life and work. Not only are we able to communicate with more immediacy, relevance and enjoyment with our family, we can do the same with our students. Similarly, mobile phones were once used to make phone calls. Now, amongst other things, they are used to search the internet, send emails, access databases, take photos, listen to music and make phone calls. This technology is fun and convenient for our personal life and has great benefits for business. However, for education, it means m-learning (mobile learning) is becoming the most innovative approach to teaching, learning and assessment.

Widgets, ning, scratching and mashups are amongst some of the more talked about technology developments in e-learning and m-learning at the moment. Discovering these on a personal level and trialing them as a tool to enhance teaching and learning is both exciting and challenging. However, in considering new and emerging technology with a stand alone approach, we are falling short of its full potential.

Design for the Mind

Rather than focus on mastering individual technologies as they emerge into the market place, it's important to take a step back and consider the framework that supports the uptake of technology by teachers and learners. The true

value of technology is in the conceptual design that supports its application in the workplace and the classroom. Energy needs to be invested in how we design learning spaces, taking into consideration classroom-based learning, work-based learning, computer-based learning (e-learning and m-learning) and online learning.

New concepts in design that incorporate experiential design, instructional design and web-based design can be used to address real and current workplace challenges in training and literacy. This involves looking at conceptual frameworks that can support new and emerging technology. The conceptual design is more lasting than the technology it supports and good design provides the quality assurance that validates the use of the technology in the first place. Strong conceptual design will support changes in technology, without effecting the teaching and learning it supports. A strong framework, will act as the foundation which facilitates the use of new and emerging technology, today and into the future.

Engaging literacy and industry practitioners in the conceptual design and development of frameworks that support new and emerging technology is needed. Consideration needs to be given to a number of issues ranging from the workplace expectations to employee considerations. In assisting people to better achieve outcomes in the workplace, by increasing their skills knowledge and understanding of literacy, industry and literacy practitioners have the responsibility to be innovative in setting foundations for the future.

New and emerging technology is dynamic in nature. To ensure success, there is a need to conceptualise, plan, design and implement frameworks that support new and emerging technology which leverages our capacity to enhance quality teaching, learning and assessment. Innovative and cutting edge technology should encourage us to think about literacy in the workplace using new concepts that define the way we learn. The development and design of these new concepts will benefit most from a collaborative effort between industry, literacy and design professionals.

In an increasingly technology-driven environment, more work needs to be done in addressing literacy needs in the workplace. Solutions are needed that enable practitioners to address the barriers of today with the technology of tomorrow. Flexible learning strategies, that incorporate new and emerging technology, will go some way towards this, provided that a collaborative approach is used in the design of conceptual frameworks that support it. Ultimately, the capacity of new and emerging technology to address barriers in literacy in the workplace, is in the hands of literacy and industry practitioners. ■

Professional qualifications in New Zealand

Susan Reid is the Learning and Development Manager at Workbase, the New Zealand Centre for Workforce Literacy Development, and head of the Professional Development Team. She has been working in adult literacy education since 1992 and until last year was a tutor in NZ's longest running workplace literacy programme. Susan also manages the New Zealand Literacy Portal: www.nzliteracyportal.org.nz

Three years ago in New Zealand we had very few options for adult literacy educators looking for professional qualifications.

Both Literacy Aotearoa and the National Association of ESOL Home Tutors had their own Certificates at Level 3 on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and there were one or two university papers which focussed on adult literacy.

However in 2005, after 5 years in the development, the National Certificate in Adult Literacy Education (Educator) was registered. This national qualification is at Level 5 on the NQF and comprises between 78 and 83 credits. There are a number of compulsory unit standards that educators must be assessed against:

US 21191	Demonstrate knowledge of the history and development of adult literacy in Aotearoa New Zealand
US 21192	Demonstrate knowledge of Maori adult literacy
US 21193	Demonstrate knowledge of adult literacy teaching and learning theories
US 21194	Assess adult literacy learning
US 21196	Design literacy skills development for an individual adult learner
US 21197	Deliver literacy skills development for an individual adult learner
US 21199	Demonstrate knowledge of adult numeracy teaching
US 21200	Deliver numeracy skills development for adult learners

Then educators get to choose another two unit standards from this group of elective unit standards:

US 21195	Design literacy skills development for a group of adult learners
US 21198	Deliver literacy skills development for a group of adult learners
US 21201	Undertake an organisational adult literacy needs analysis
US 21202	Prepare and deliver an organisational adult literacy programme

US 21203	Develop adult learners' literacy and numeracy skills using information communication technologies
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At the end of April there were five providers mostly located in the North Island offering the qualification with others expected to offer it shortly.

At the same time the Auckland University of Technology developed a Masters in Adult Literacy programme. This is the first Postgraduate degree in adult literacy that has ever been offered in New Zealand. Papers include:

- Adult Literacy: Contemporary Perspectives
- Adult Numeracy: Contemporary Perspectives
- Adult Literacy: Teaching Strategies and Assessments,
- Adult Numeracy: Teaching Strategies and Assessments,
- Adult Literacy and Numeracy: Online Teaching and Learning,
- Adult Literacy and Numeracy: Programme Design
- Adult Literacy and Numeracy: Applied Project.

In 2006 a new qualification was developed for vocational tutors or workplace trainers who are integrating literacy, language and numeracy into their vocational or workplace programmes. The National Certificate in Adult Literacy Education (Vocational tutor/lecturer or workplace trainer) is at Level 5 and is 40 credits. The core of this qualification is made up of Unit Standard 21204 which assesses people's skills and knowledge in these aspects:

- history of adult literacy in New Zealand
- history of Maori literacy in New Zealand
- identify literacy demands of vocational programme
- identify strengths and needs of individual learners
- integrate literacy skill development into vocational programme
- use literacy teaching strategies to promote adult literacy skill development in the vocational programme
- assess learners' literacy progress
- evaluate effectiveness of literacy teaching strategies and activities and any specialist adult literacy support in the vocational programme.

The Tertiary Education Commission which funds all tertiary education in New Zealand has assisted with the uptake of all these qualifications by providing a number of study grants for tutors so that they can get their qualifications at no direct cost. This has made a significant difference to the numbers and range of people who are now working towards professional qualifications. ■

ALLS survey update: initial messages regarding numeracy

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.

In the initial analysis and results coming out from the first wave of the 2003 ALLS countries, the data seems to be indicating that numeracy plays a more important role in economic returns for individuals than do prose or document literacy, and seems to confirm that men outperform women in the area of numeracy and mathematics.

Some of the outcomes stemming from the results that will be of interest when the Australian results are released later in 2007 include:

- The overlap between respondents abilities in literacy and numeracy was lower than expected. For example, in Canada, though 9 million people had poor reading literacy and 10.5 million people had poor numeracy, only 6 million were shown to be poor (below level 3) in both.
- Early school leavers are much more likely to score at low levels of numeracy in all countries. E.g., in the US those without a secondary diploma are 26 times more likely to score at levels 1 and 2 than those who have completed an educational level "higher than upper secondary".
- The individual economic returns to increases in numeracy skill was larger than for the prose and document skills.
- There are indications that numeracy skills are more important than literacy at work, and skills deficit is greater for numeracy.
- Men performed better on the numeracy scale in all countries.
- From IALS research it is known that the proportion of individuals with Level 1 skills exerts a strong negative drag on growth in GDP per capita so one could realise quite large economic gains by investing in the bottom. IALS research also indicated that the skill levels of women seem to matter more to the growth in GDP than those of men. So from ALLS with its highlighted economic importance of numeracy, what does this mean about increasing the numeracy competence of women?

The initial ALLS data supports other research data from the UK that indicates the strong role that numeracy plays in both human and social capital terms. In *Does Numeracy Matter?* (Bynner & Parsons, 1997), and in their 2005 follow up study (Bynner & Parsons, 2005) the researchers found that poor numeracy skills did have a major impact on an adult's life, compounding the problems that can result from poor literacy skills:

People without numeracy skills suffered worse disadvantage in employment than those with poor literacy skills alone. They left school early, frequently without qualifications, and had more difficulty in getting and maintaining full-time

employment. The jobs entered were generally low grade with limited training opportunities and poor pay prospects. Women with numeracy difficulties appeared especially vulnerable to exclusion from the clerical and sales jobs to which they aspired (Bynner & Parsons, 1997, p. 27).

For women, while the impact of low literacy and low numeracy is substantial, low numeracy has the greatest negative effect, even when it is combined with competent literacy. ... Poor numeracy skills make it difficult to function effectively in all areas of modern life, particularly for women. (Bynner & Parsons, 2005, p. 7)

The potential for researching and analysing the Australian results

Despite limitations of such large scale assessments, there is valuable data within and behind ALLS that should be utilised when the results are released. The data and the results will be made available by ABS and will be of interest to:

- researchers
- policy makers and governments (State, Federal and Industry bodies)
- teachers and practitioners.

Below are some potential questions about numeracy that could be analysed.

At the government and policy level

- What is the profile for the distribution of numeracy in the adult population, and what is the inter-relationship of these skills to prose literacy, document literacy and other measured skills?
- What is the numeracy distribution among the working age population? Is this distribution in synch with labour market sectoral demand? Where are the shortages? Where is the excess? How do the skills match audits and assessments of workplace practices and needs across different industries?
- Do the outcomes of IALS and now ALL in relation to numeracy versus literacy and the differences in performance of women versus men in conjunction with the economic returns have implications for policies regarding the mathematical and numeracy competence and engagement of women?
- What is numeracy distribution among different age groups? Do the new cohorts entering the work force have better numeracy proficiency than the current work force, thereby raising national proficiency levels.
- What are the population characteristics associated with persons with low numeracy? Are these the same

International Adult Literacy Conference update

United States literacy expert Dr Heide Spruck Wrigley and Canadian-based innovation specialist Ed Bernacki are confirmed as key note speakers for the International Adult Literacy Conference being held in Auckland in September 2007.

The conference jointly hosted by Workbase, Literacy Aotearoa and the National Association of ESOL Home Tutors on behalf of the Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL), will be held at The Langham Hotel from Friday 28 to Saturday 29 September. The conference replaces the annual ACAL conference.

The conference is a great opportunity for educators, providers, researchers, policy-makers, Industry Training Organisations and other stakeholders in New Zealand to come together and interact with each other and our Australian colleagues to share experiences, practice and

knowledge in adult literacy, language and numeracy.

The theme for the conference is *the power of and* which reflects the breadth and diversity of adult literacy and language practices. *The power of and* reflects our need to bring together learning from many fields and experiences so that we can continually respond and adapt to the challenges in adult literacy and language.

Confirmed keynote speakers Dr Heide Spruck Wrigley from the United States is internationally recognised research and practitioner in ESOL and literacy. Ed Bernacki from Ontario, Canada brings an innovative thinking framework which he will introduce to conference participants to help them get the most out of this exciting event.

Also confirmed as a members one of the key note panels are Secretary for the New Zealand Ministry of Education, Karen Sewell and the New Zealand Tertiary Education Commission Chief Executive Janice Shiner.

More information on registering for the conference and pre-conference workshop is available through the Workbase website www.workbase.org.nz or email helen@conference.co.nz

ALLS survey update: initial messages regarding numeracy

- ◀ as for literacy? Is low numeracy concentrated among some population groups?
- What are educational outcomes for those with low numeracy? What are the average numeracy scores for populations with different levels of educational attainment? Do those with low numeracy use training after initial education?
- What are the labour market outcomes for those with low numeracy? Are they concentrated in certain occupations? Industrial sectors? Are they more likely to be unemployed? Have low incomes?
- Literacy versus numeracy – is it an equal partnership at the funding level? At the delivery and curriculum level?
- What are the implications for vocational and workplace education, training and curriculum?

At the research and educational level

- What is the numeracy distribution among males and females and how can this be explained? Are the results for adults consistent with PISA findings (and now initial ALL findings) that boys are likely to score better in mathematics/numeracy while girls score higher in reading. Is this trend consistent from country to country or within countries? Does it vary across different age groups or different educational groups?
- Do numeracy skills wane with age, as has been shown for literacy?
- What are some of the relationships and associations between the indicators from the Background Questionnaire and Numeracy skill level – what can we learn? For example, what are the correlations between use and familiarity with mathematics tasks in the home or workplace with numeracy competence?
- Using the theoretical constructs behind the literacy and numeracy domains, how are the cognitive processes for numeracy different from those used in literacy?

What are the links or connections between literacy and numeracy? What's harder for (some) people and easier for others? What factors make items more difficult?

- In terms of ethno-mathematical research, what is the relationship between formal, or school-based, mathematics and informal, "real life" mathematics learning experiences? What counts most? What do adults use the most?
- What are the implications for school mathematics curriculum, standards and learning and teaching?
- What factors impact on success in numeracy?

Conclusion

It is hoped that Australia's investment in ALLS will result in valuable data and outcomes for all interested in improving the numeracy skills of the Australian population – including Government, policy and program makers, educational organisations, researchers, teachers and trainers.

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WELL Resource: OH&S for plasterers made easy

It's Not a Board Game: Safe work practices for plasterers is a new, innovative and practical resource designed to help plasterers work safely.

Developed especially for plasterers working in the residential sector, the content covers:

- preparing for plastering
- moving around the site
- doing the job
- your rights and responsibilities.

The resource was developed with the support of the Australian Wall and Ceiling Association and a number of wall and ceiling companies and has proved popular across Australia and in New Zealand.

According to Chris Morgan, Regional Contracting Manager for Boral Interior Linings

in Victoria and Tasmania, "*It's not a board game* is the most useful resource the plastering industry has ever had in promoting health and safety at work." Morgan said "It forms a major part in Boral Interior Linings OHS&E management system nationally. We use it as part of our induction program for all our subcontractors - including those with different language backgrounds and literacy levels."

The package, consisting of a DVD, Training Manual and Trainer's Notes, is designed to support new and existing workers from non-English speaking backgrounds as

well as those with literacy needs. Morgan said that "the subcontractors showed a good understanding of OH&S issues after viewing the DVD and using the Workbook. They found both resources really helpful and informative."

The DVD

- steps you through the most important aspect of OH&S
- contains activities for identifying plaster readiness, safe manual handling, and good work practices
- summarises key information at the end of each section.

The Training Manual contains:

- easy to understand materials using pictures to support the text
- learning aids such as word definitions, review checklists and practice assessment activities.

Trainer's Notes contain:

- activities mapped to competency standards
- ideas for assessment activities
- ideas for working with adults with low level levels of literacy and learners from non-English speaking backgrounds.

For more information about the resource contact Marilyn Bull, Workplace Skills Access, Swinburne University of Technology – TAFE on 03 9210 1963 or mbull@swin.edu.au

The resource was developed with funding from the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) Programme, an initiative of the Department of Education, Science and Training. For more information about WELL contact the WELL Hotline on 02 6240 7333 or visit www.dest.gov.au/well Information about other WELL resources is available on the LiteracyNet website: www.dest.gov.au/literacynet ■

new's snippets

Resource: Literacy Face to Face

Literacy Face to Face is a resource to assist volunteer adult literacy tutors and others who want to help someone improve their literacy. It could support adult literacy tutor training programs and also support new teachers of adult basic education. This resource has been developed by Pamela Osmond, author of the very popular *So you want to teach an adult to read* (1985), and draws on her wide experience in the field of adult literacy and volunteer adult literacy tutor training. *Literacy Face to Face* has been published by the TAFE NSW Access & General Education Curriculum Centre and was funded by DEST as a 2006 Innovative Project.

Literacy Face to Face covers eight main topics:

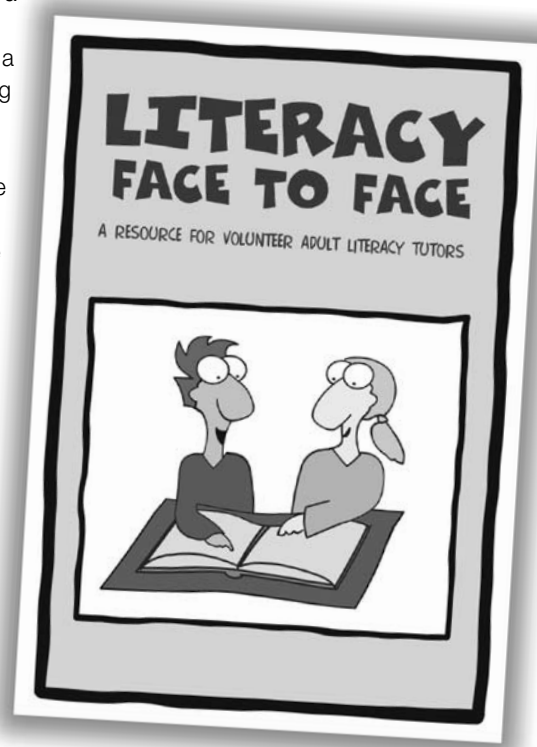
1. The Beginning Reader/Writer
2. The Intermediate Reader/Writer
3. The Vocational Student
4. Writing and Spelling

5. Does Your Student Have a Disability?
6. Is Your Student From a Non-English Speaking Background?
7. Everyday Numeracy
8. Getting Started on the Computer.

The resource is available free for download from: www.lg.tafensw.edu.au/facetoface

You can download the full document or the sections that best meet your student's needs.

If you would like to purchase printed copies of this resource please contact Access & General Education Curriculum Centre at TAFE NSW on 02 9846 8101 (International: 61 2 9846 8101) or email laraine.wiles@tafensw.edu.au ■



The Learning for Living project: New directions in training support for foundation learning

Conclusion

The Learning for Living project offers a high level of support for adult literacy educators, and its various initiatives promise fulfillment of the 2001 literacy and numeracy strategy.

There has been important learning for professional developers along the way, including that reading and numeracy can usefully be combined in sessions, that practitioners often need help in embedding foundation learning competencies into vocational learning material, that practitioners sometimes lack confidence with written texts themselves, and that the participatory, 'shared knowledge' element is considered especially valuable by many participants.

The Learning for Living project is unique in New Zealand adult education for its emphasis on communities of shared

practice for practitioners, both in the tertiary education sector and in the workplace. While professional support is commonplace in the tertiary education sector, in the workplace support for trainers is less common and much needed and appreciated. The project is still in its early stages of development, especially in regard to the workplace, and a fuller report on its impact will be available in 2008. ■

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Contradicting the stereotype: Case studies of success despite literacy difficulties

◀ Continued from page 7

'alternative' strategies (which may actually involve less reading and less writing in the conventional sense), but which will support the learners in their journeys towards their goals

- undertaking further research to illuminate the diverse para-literacies in action within workplace and educational settings, thereby providing more appropriate advice, resources and information to employers and educators to accommodate workers and learners who cannot easily decipher or produce text.

The experience of people with literacy difficulties who do not seek adult literacy programs is poorly understood, covert and unsupported. More work needs to be done to understand their needs and to assist employers and educators to maximise opportunities for these people.

There is a companion product with this written report. Please visit www.ncver.edu.au to access the digital stories from the people interviewed for this research. The digital stories are available as a CD-ROM product. ■

'E-word' being heard by teachers

◀ Continued from page 8

and wikis, that are more relevant to them (students)," Mr Lees said.

The Department of Education Queensland's Kirsty Weston agreed that e-learning tools are essential if you are going to engage students in learning.

"We can use blogging in terms of brainstorming, and wikis allow students to become experts, and it also enables them to put their words in a context that can be used and viewed by other students," Ms Weston said.

Teachers and trainers who are interested in meeting the demands of students by implementing e-learning in their teaching practice can find out how through the Framework's free CD-ROM, E-learning in Action.

E-learning in Action is a collection of quality products and resources that can kick-start or grow your pathway to e-learning.

Information that is relevant to teachers and trainers includes:

- Products to enhance the interactive teaching and training of learners through the application of e-learning (ie Flexible Learning Toolboxes - <http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/toolboxes>)

- Resources – Practical Tools that can help support the application of e-learning within the national training system (ie E-standards for Training - <http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/e-standards>)
- Professional Development – Enhance your e-learning and e-business knowledge and professional skills (LearnScope - www.flexiblelearning.net.au/learnscope/)
- Support Networks – Who to contact for e-learning help and advice nationally and within your state or territory (ie Framework Coordinators - <http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/frameworkcoordinators>)

To obtain your free copy of E-learning in Action contact the Australian Flexible Learning Framework on (07) 3307 4700 or email: enquiries@flexiblelearning.net.au

For more information about the 'PUT THE HARD WORD ON 'EM CAMPAIGN' and to order a campaign pack visit: <http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/learncampaign>

For more information about the Australian Flexible Learning Framework, telephone (07) 3307 4700, email: enquiries@flexiblelearning.net.au or visit: <http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au> ■

Sweeping reforms in the VET sector – how will literacy fare?

The Coalition of Australian Governments (COAG) agenda has very little to say about adult literacy. Where mention of literacy appears, it does so in the context of school literacy, concerns about transitions from school to work (for young people) and concerns about people who do not participate in the workplace or in formal education and training. In November 2006, DEST published a Discussion Paper—*Community Education and National Reform*—drafting a blueprint to shift the delivery of lower level vocational certificates from the public provider to community-based organisations. The *Skills for the Future* voucher system is the likely means of funding such an initiative. On Wednesday 30 May, Andrew Robb gave a speech to the Minerals Council of Australia outlining a plan to radically change the funding of TAFE colleges. Taken together, these Federal initiatives suggest that there could be a shift in funding for the delivery of lower level courses in TAFE. Seventy five per cent of literacy and numeracy delivery is in Certificate I and II courses. What impact will these initiatives have on the delivery of literacy and numeracy courses for adults? Here are two state adult literacy council's responses to these policy shifts.

NSW ALNC

The NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council is concerned that the latest suggestion by Minister Robb to change the funding arrangement for TAFE may impact negatively on adult literacy and numeracy students. Adequate literacy and numeracy skills are essential for

successful participation in VET, which is recognised in the integration of literacy and numeracy in industry training packages and the Australian Education and Employment Framework (AEET). While literacy and numeracy skills underpin vocational skills, they do not attract industry funds and there is a danger that the removal or reduction of public education funding will result in reduced provision of adult literacy and numeracy. The current focus on higher level qualifications excludes many students who need enabling and bridging courses in order to pursue vocational pathways (not to mention the skills necessary to pursue proficiency in health literacy, critical literacy, numeracy, problem solving, accessing technology etc). How is the Minister going to ensure, under the proposed new funding arrangements, that current levels of prevocational and integrated literacy and numeracy provision are maintained with the same, or increased, quality of provision?

WAALC

WAALC is concerned about the impact of the proposed reforms on the availability of literacy and numeracy services for adults in Western Australia. These reforms would disadvantage and have the greatest impact on students in non-metropolitan areas. In those low population regions, publicly funded providers are required to provide these services as their community service obligation because it is difficult to provide an adult education service adequately. The state government in WA provides differential funding rates for the inevitable smaller classes and higher costs of travel. Even in metropolitan areas, reducing or removing literacy delivery and other entry level courses from TAFE Colleges will disadvantage those students from community based providers, who rely on these services as a reliable pathway to higher level courses. The reforms seem to intend to reduce funding commitments to those Australians who have had the least educational services already. ■

◀ Continued from page 16

The future...

In the 2nd half of 2007, ACAL is looking to expand its use of the *Literacy Live* room. All ACAL members are eligible to use the room and are encouraged to consider how they may adapt and use this technology. It is important to note that it does not replace the need to meet face-to-face wherever possible. But, for those who can't because of time, distance or financial constraints, then the virtual meeting space offers an alternative means of interacting with peers, learning new skills and remaining connected.

Literacy Live provides a free online meeting space for ACAL members. Practitioners, working within the same organisations, but at different locations can meet in *Literacy Live*. Project teams can use the virtual meeting space for meetings. Clusters of providers, geographically separated, can also get together. Teachers and students can use the virtual meeting space—especially useful where learners may be working or living at a distance from their learning place. At least one state Adult literacy council (WAALC) uses *Literacy Live* to hold Executive meetings. ACAL members who want to use *Literacy Live* for any of these purposes

should contact Don at acal@pacific.net.au to book a time.

The ACAL conference will be held in Auckland, New Zealand from 28-29th September. It is planned that the ACAL AGM will take be held on 27th September, 2007 in New Zealand and be supported via the *Literacy Live* room for members not attending the conference but wishing to participate in the AGM.

Thank-you to...

Many people make this new form of professional development happen, including Michael Coughlin who acts as facilitator and supports the presenters with professional development prior to the workshop; Michael Chalk for his technical support; and Robyn Jay who began this initiative three years ago for ACAL.

So, how do I find out more?

If you'd like more information please do not hesitate to contact Debbie at Debbie.Soccio@vu.edu.au

To register for the next *Literacy Live* session on 21st June, at 8pm (AEST time) go to www.acal.edu.au. ■

ACAL's online
Professional
Development
program

ACAL's online Professional Development program

Debbie Soccio works at Victoria University in Melbourne Australia as Senior Educator – Teaching and Learning. She is currently the ACAL Secretary and has been coordinating the Literacy Live forums this year.

ACAL has acknowledged the need to ensure professional development is accessible to all ACAL members, as well as the wider Adult Community Education (ACE) field. So, in 2007 ACAL has tried something new. ACAL has gone online and provided some of its professional development through the *Literacy Live* virtual meeting space.

The 2007 Literacy Live Series

To date, five sessions out of a planned six have been run. Between 15-20 people have participated in each of the forums with numbers growing each month. Representation has been from across Australia. It is quite amazing to see where people are logging in from: Far North Queensland, the Kimberleys, Hobart, and rural, regional and metropolitan areas across the major cities of Australia.

The first session focussed primarily on getting practitioners familiar with, and comfortable in, the *iVocalise* virtual meeting space. In the 2nd forum held in March, a number of leading Australian educators discussed new technologies and how they could be used with the adult learner. In April we were fortunate to secure David Warlick, a key researcher from the United States. He discussed the impact technology has

had on literacy. He talked about how quickly technology is moving and how quickly information moves through the use of some of the newer technologies.

In May, Margaret Somerville, one of the keynote speakers at the 2007 VALBEC Conference, took the guest speaker role in the *Literacy Live* Forum, providing practitioners with the opportunity to have a more detailed conversation about some of the aspects of her presentation.

In June we are again going offshore: this time to New Zealand, where the ACAL conference will be held later in the year. Marica Sevelj, from the Open Polytechnic, will speak about social networking; that is, the application of computer technology to facilitate interaction and collaboration for both personal growth and professional development. The VALBEC AGM will coincide with this *Literacy Live* forum on the 21st June and VALBEC members will tap into the online virtual meeting space and will be able to link into Marica's presentation and discussion.

In July the proposed presentation will focus on helping practitioners to understand what they need to know to become effective facilitators in a virtual meeting space.

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