



The Workplace English Language and Literacy Program

A new solution to an enduring
problem?

**Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said in his
“Sorry Speech” to Indigenous
Australians:**

“A future where we harness the determination of all Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to close the gap that lies between us in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity.

A future where we embrace the possibility of new solutions to enduring problems where old approaches have failed.”

Questions for today

- What role can Adult Literacy policy makers, researchers and providers play in helping to find “new solutions to enduring problems, how can we help to “close the gaps” between Indigenous and non Indigenous outcomes?
- Could the Workplace English Language and Literacy Program be one new solution to an enduring problem?

Questions to consider

- What do we know about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia?
- What do we know about the literacy and numeracy levels of Indigenous adults in Australia?
- What do we know about best practice models and methodologies for delivering training to Indigenous people, particularly literacy and numeracy training?
- What is the Workplace English Language and Literacy Program?
- Why is the WELL Program an effective model for delivering literacy and numeracy training to Indigenous workplaces and communities?

What do we know about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia?

The 2006 ABS Census identified that:

- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population was 517,000, 2.5% of total population
- One third of Indigenous Australians lived in cities, 21% in Inner Regional Australia, 22% in Outer Regional Australia
- The remainder of the population lived in remote Australia (9%), or Very remote Australia (15%)
- The Indigenous population is much younger than other Australians, with more children and young people, and fewer older people

- In 2007 ABS data indicated that Indigenous people had a labour force participation rate of 56% (including CDEP)
- The 2007 ABS data also identified CDEP participants accounted for one third of the employment numbers
- NCVET statistics, students and courses data for 2007 indicated that there was a 4.5% increase in Indigenous people participating in VET, but that the majority of activity is clustered around Certificates I to III, this is reasonably unchanged from 2006 data

“The Challenge of Closing the Gaps of Indigenous Socioeconomic Outcomes” CAEPR

- The number of Indigenous people attending school, and the number of people obtaining post school qualifications is improving
- Relative to the non Indigenous population, labour force participation and median weekly income has actually declined between 1996 and 2006
- If we don't find new solutions to the enduring problems that Indigenous people face, these trends may worsen

What do we know about the literacy and numeracy levels of Indigenous adults in Australia?

- 1996 Survey of Aspects of Literacy identified that Indigenous people were at low levels compared to other people
- Not identified as a specific group in 2006 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey
- 2006 ALLS was not conducted in very remote locations
- In 2004 Kral and Falk in 2004 identified that 50% of males and 40% of females in the Sandover region, NT, were not competent at NRS level one
- In the 2007 National Benchmark Results of Reading, Writing and Numeracy for years 3, 5 and 7 Indigenous children performed poorly in relation to the non Indigenous population, with these results exacerbated by remoteness

What we can assume...

- Literacy and numeracy levels vary for Indigenous people across Australia, but that remoteness is a significant disadvantaging factor
- If Certificate III is a mainstream entry level qualification for work and some Indigenous people are not able to achieve NRS Level 1, then there is a significant literacy and numeracy “gap”
- This “literacy and numeracy gap” is a significant barrier to achieving mainstream training, employment and community outcomes

What models and methodologies can we access to enable successful implementation of training for Indigenous people?

- Much of research on literacy and numeracy practices focuses on traditional TAFE or classroom models
- Is about making mainstream facilities more “Indigenous friendly”
- Need to consider other models, in environments that integrate into Indigenous lives and experiences
- Learning for Indigenous people needs to be linked to not only to employment opportunities and but also be linked to community goals and aspirations.

Good practice in delivering training to Indigenous people...

A 2004 Publication by ANTA described that successful VET Programs for Indigenous learners are “underpinned by a view of teaching and learning in which:

- Learners have control over their learning
- Learning is experiential
- Learning is cooperative
- Learning is reflective”.

What is the Workplace English Language and Literacy Program?

Commonwealth Government funding initiative to help industry meet staff training needs.

The aim of the program is to:

- Assist employees develop English language, literacy and communication skills to enable them to meet the demands of their current employment and their future employment and training needs
- Assist existing employees to undertake training essential to retaining their job and to progress in the workplace by integrating English language, literacy and numeracy with vocational education and training delivered in the workplace

Features of A WELL Program Project....

- Projects are customised to suit each workplace
- Project design and implementation is flexible
- Attendance at training is voluntary
- Training is delivered during work hours
- Training is delivered on site
- Training content is negotiated between the Registered Training Provider, management and a worker representative
- Training delivery is flexible – one on one, small or large group

- Learning materials are gathered from the workplace
- Learners undergo a pre-training interview and assessment
- In Indigenous workplaces course content may range from basic literacy and numeracy, learners driver licence test support, computer skills, supervisory skills, customer service, developing tour guide stories or business writing skills
- Teachers can support employees experiencing difficulty in accessing vocational training
- Can be funded for an extended period of time e.g. up to three years

Why is the WELL Program an effective model for delivering literacy and numeracy training to Indigenous people?

- Projects use a Consultative Committee with relevant Indigenous representation to manage the project
- Projects are delivered on site, in the workplace or community, where students are surrounded by other Indigenous students, in familiar surroundings
- It uses a pre training interview/assessment to provide a picture of learning needs and establish the learning relationship before training commences
- Practical, customised, authentic literacy and numeracy training that provides tangible outcomes – learner driver licence training, computer skills and resume writing, governance, finance training

- The design and delivery is flexible – can be adjusted to meet learner and workplace needs
- Can be multi level – form filling, Indigenous governance, finance training, learner licence training, work readiness
- Learning relationship can be developed over a long period, up to 3 years of funding to allow the learners to understand how to use the program effectively and for the RTO and teachers to develop their cultural, workplace and community competence
- Can be a bridge or a connection from community life to mainstream life, allowing students the opportunity to develop skills in both worlds
- Learning is “connected,” connected to work, connected to the organisation and connected to community.

So is WELL a new solution to an enduring problem? Can it help to “close the gap”?

- The 2006 KPMG review of the WELL Program recommended that the Program should provide more projects to Indigenous people “where the need is high”
- The expertise for delivering WELL Programs is well established in Australia, the Program needs to be adapted and extended to meet the needs of Indigenous people
- WELL Providers need to develop their “cultural competence”
- The WELL Program is a good “cultural fit” for Indigenous workplaces and communities
- Funding authorities need to understand that addressing the educational disadvantage will be costly and require long term concentrated effort

New and alternative models for improving the literacy and numeracy levels, training levels, work outcomes and social indicators of Indigenous people need to be explored.

The WELL Program can make a valuable contribution to “closing the gap” of Indigenous disadvantage, perhaps one of many “new solutions to an enduring problem” that we need to develop.