

**Applying the Australian Core Skills Framework  
for Assessment  
in the Language Literacy and Numeracy Program:  
Issues and Challenges**

By Anh Le, DEd. Candidate  
Supervisors: Dr. Alan Williams; Dr. Ulrike Najar;  
Dr. Simone Senisin; Dr. Kieran O'Loughlin

**Melbourne Graduate School of Education**

# Outline

- **The LLNP**
- **The ACSF**
- **Theoretical challenges in defining real-life LLN performance**
- **Issues with LLN framework development and application**
- **Research's Focus and Methods**
- **Major Research Findings**
- **Recommendations**



# The LLNP/SEE



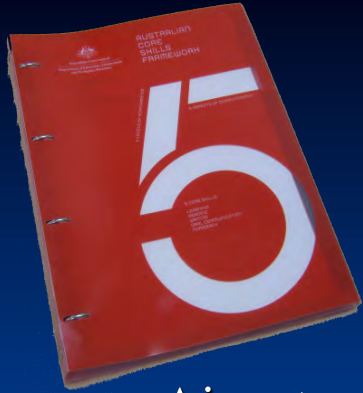
## ■ Renamed:

- The Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP)  
= The Skills for Education and Employment (SEE)

## ■ Aim: LLN training to Australian job seekers:

- working age from 15 to 64
- insufficient LLN skills for sustainable employment or further education and training
- from diverse cultural, linguistic, educational and employment backgrounds

## ■ The ACSF: compulsory for assessment and reporting



# The Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF)

Aims to provide:

- *“a rich, detailed picture of **real-life performance** in adult learning, English language, literacy and numeracy”*;
- *“a **consistent national approach** to the identification of the core skills requirements in **diverse personal, community, work and training contexts**”*; and
- *“a common reference point for describing performance in the **five core skills areas**”* of Learning, Reading, Writing, Oral Communication and Numeracy

(DEEWR, 2008, p. 2)

# Theoretical Challenges: Defining Real-life LLN Performance

- Defining LLN for real life performance

*'never ending search' for 'grammar of communication in human interaction'*  
([Davies, 1995](#))

## ■ **Bachman's (1990) Language Competence Model:**

- Organisational competence:
  - + Grammatical (vocabulary, morphology, syntax, phonology)
  - + Textual (cohesion, rhetorical organisation)
- Pragmatic competence:
  - + Illocutionary (ideational, manipulating, heuristic ...)
  - + Sociolinguistic (sensitivity to dialect, register, naturalness ...)

# Theoretical Challenges: Defining Real-life LLN Performance

## ■ Cazden, et al.'s (1996) Multiliteracies Model :

- Linguistic design: vocabulary, metaphor, local/global cohesion, etc.
- Visual design: colours, vectors, foregrounding, backgrounding, etc.
- Audio design: music, sound effects, etc.
- Spatial design: ecosystem, geographic meaning, etc.
- Gestural design: behaviour, gesture, proxemics
- Multimodal design: Mix of different designs

# Theoretical Challenge: Defining Real-life LLN Performance

## ■ Gal, et al.'s (2002) Numeracy Conceptual Framework:

- Range of real life contexts (everyday life, work, societal, further learning)
- Range of tasks (responding, identifying, locating, interpreting, communicating, etc.)
- Range of mathematical information (quantity & numbers; dimension & shapes; data & chance, etc.)
- Different ways of presentation (objects, pictures, numbers, symbols, diagrams, maps, graphs, etc.)
- Different types of knowledge and processes ( mathematical knowledge, problem solving skills, literacy skills, belief & attitudes)

# Issues identified in LLN Framework Development and Application

## ■ Domain Coverage

- **what to include, exclude:** e.g. inconsistent inclusion of LLN elements; omission of essential LLN elements
- **Interrelationships among LLN elements:** e.g. descriptors unrelated to features being described

## ■ Language and terminology

- **clarity, comprehensibility and transparency**

E.g. confusion of verb use; incomprehensible descriptors, use of normative terminology, multiple-part descriptors



# Issues identified in LLN Framework Development and Application

## ■ To Account for Different Learner Cohorts:

- linguistic and cultural backgrounds;
- education or schooling experience;
- age;
- stage of development;
- specific LLN needs

## ■ Common issues identified:

- not capture LLN progress of low level learners
- not reflect their learning pathways;
- not account for learners' specific LLN needs;

# Issues identified in LLN Framework Development and Application

## To account for Teachers as Assessors

- Vital roles of teachers as primary framework users

- Factors affecting teachers' assessment

- knowledge of current LLN theories;
- experience;
- judgment strategies
- teaching, assessment, reporting contexts;
- wider social practice and values;

- Needs of Teachers as Assessors

- assessment guidance & training



## The ACSF's Assessment Application in the LLNP: Research Focus & Methods



### ■ Areas of Focus:

- Domain coverage
- Language & terminology
- Account for LLNP learners
- Account for LLNP teachers as assessors

### ■ Research Methods:

- Document Analysis of the ACSF
- Questionnaire and Interview with 15 teachers in an LLNP provider
- Think-aloud Verbal Protocols of 8 assessors assessing 3 learners' writing samples

# Research Findings: Strengths

## ■ Domain Coverage

- Broad & detailed domain coverage
- Incorporation of current LLN theories

## ■ Account for LLNP learners

- Include a wide range of real-life LLN performance contexts, text types and tasks relevant to adult LLN learners

## ■ Account for teachers as assessors:

- Clear format (colour coded, appendix with summaries of all the five levels)
- Core skills divided into indicators and performance features

# Research Findings: Areas for Improvement

## ■ Domain Coverage

### – Inconsistent inclusion of LLN elements

e.g. spelling devices for levels 2, 3 but not 1, 4, 5;  
vocabulary types for levels 3, 4 but not 1, 2, 5

### - Tenuous interrelationships among elements:

e.g. Descriptor of Grammar (Speaking) “Refines **conversational skills** by using common **openings** and **closings**”

Bachman’s (1990): ‘Grammar’ = ‘Grammatical Competence’ but  
‘conversational skills’, ‘openings’ and ‘closings’ = ‘Textual Competence’

### - Multifunctional Descriptors:

e.g. “Make connections between personal knowledge and experience and the ideas and events” = descriptor of Prediction & Prior Knowledge for Reading; Audience & Purpose for Writing; Structure & Cohesion for Speaking

# Research Findings: Areas for Improvement

- **Terminology and Wordings**

- **Normative terminology**

e.g. *“short and simple texts, highly explicit purpose; limited, highly familiar vocabulary”*

- **Synonymic wordings**

e.g. *“Develops a simple learning plan with several sequenced steps, with assistance’ for Learning Level 1*

= *“Develops a sequenced learning plan with assistance from an appropriate person” for Learning Level 2*

## **Teacher’s comment:**

*“ In CGEA, if they have used technical terms like ‘highly familiar situations’, then they explain that terms in the range statement, further document to give you examples like ‘advertising leaflets’, ‘notices’, or ‘signs’ or ‘simple price list’, etc. So by giving that, the teachers and assessors are not left to interpret the term “highly familiar situations” on their own...”*

**(Denis’ Interview Extract)**

# Research Findings: Areas for Improvement

- **Account for LLNP learners**

- Not mentioned: account for adult learners of different age ranges and education, employment, linguistic and cultural backgrounds which are typical for LLNP/SEE learner cohorts;
- Not mentioned: trial on different learner cohorts

## **Teachers' dissatisfaction with**

- + Lack of account for learners with little schooling and English
- + Lack of account for differences in writing performance by NES and ESL learners

## **Research Findings: Areas for Improvement**

- **Account for teachers as assessors**
  - Limited guidance on assessment administration and judgment
  - Not include assessment tasks, tools

### **Teachers' requirements:**

- terminology glossary;
- samples of learners' performance of the five core skills at different levels
- samples of best assessment practices



# Research Findings: Vital Role of Professional Community & Knowledge

- For assessor's professional development:

*"It doesn't come naturally and requires a lot of correction and feedback from coordinator of our centre plus again having other people to have a look and getting some feedback from them as well ... There is no example of PTA or Block Exit to show how it is used. We basically learn from each other in our centre. I don't think there is sufficient guidance for assessment."*

(Carl's Interview Extract)

*"By the time we work with the ACSF, we were just told this is how it is done and the supervisor would show us how to use it. But because it takes time, you can't really use or understand it more fully unless you are already practising, you are already spending time with your students. You already know what they need, where they fall short."*

(Vivien's Interview Extract)

# Research Findings: Vital Role of Professional Community & Knowledge

- **For interpretation of the ACSF**

*“At the beginning it was a bit daunting but with use it started becoming a bit more clearer ... It becomes easier when we discuss, because a lot of times when at point we are not very clear, so we discuss with other assessors, and then slowly with use it started getting a bit better”*

(Natalie’s Interview Extract)

- **For filling in the gaps in the ACSF**

*“Most of the time when they do assessment by themselves, they have mistakes for learning and oral, so I have to write down to show like specific learning goals in level 1 would be ‘I want to do a job’, but in level 2 they may say that ‘I want to be a cleaner’, and level 3 would be ‘I want to do training to be a cleaner’. You know things like that.”*

(Diana’s Interview Extract)

# Conclusion and Recommendation

- **Domain Coverage**

- revisit theoretical LLN models, e.g. Bachman's (1990) CLA , Cazden, et al.'s (1996) 'Multiliteracies',

- **Terminology**

- eliminate normative terms and reword synonymic expressions
- include a glossary, illustrative examples and samples of actual learners' performance across levels

- **Account for learners**

- Trial of the ACSF on different LLNP/SEE learner cohorts

- **Account for teachers as assessors**

- Provide additional assessment guidance
- Ensure the availability of professional community
- Incorporate teachers' professional knowledge and judgment

# References

- Bachman, L. (1990). *Fundamental consideration in language testing* Oxford: OUP.
- Cazden, C., Cope, B., Fairclough, N., Gee, J., Kalantzis, M., Kress, G., et al. (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Education Review*, 66(1).
- Davies, A. (1995). Testing communicative language or testing language communicatively. *Melbourne papers in language testing*, 4(1), 1-20.
- DEEWR. (2008). *The Australian Core Skills Framework*. Canberra: Adult Literacy and Policy Section.
- Gal, I., Groenestijn, M., Manly, M., Schmitt, M. J., & Tout, D. (2003). Adult numeracy and its assessment in the ALL survey: A conceptual framework and pilot results. Retrieved 20.09.13, from Statistics Canada:  
[http://oggiconsulting.com/wp\\_content/uploads/ALLS-Aug2003\\_Numeracy\\_Framework-1.pdf](http://oggiconsulting.com/wp_content/uploads/ALLS-Aug2003_Numeracy_Framework-1.pdf)

**Thank You !**

**Questions**