

Assessing and acknowledging learning
through non-accredited community adult
language, literacy and numeracy programs

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The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author/project team and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government, state and territory governments or NCVER

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About the research



Assessing and acknowledging learning through non-accredited community adult language, literacy and numeracy programs

by Darryl Dymock and Stephen Billett, Griffith University

Beyond the obvious acquisition of the three 'R's'—reading, writing and arithmetic—many other benefits derive from learning. Increases in self-esteem and confidence have often been cited as consistent, if unanticipated, outcomes of learning and have been achieved even when there has been limited gain in the competency being learned. Further, such confidence-building can have a positive impact on how and what an individual learns. While the measurement of objective competencies acquired through learning is well developed, the measurement of the wider benefits of learning is still in its infancy.

This report by Darryl Dymock and Stephen Billett identifies the extent to which indicators might be developed for a range of learning outcomes in non-accredited community adult language, literacy and numeracy programs. It follows Dymock's earlier work, *Community adult language, literacy and numeracy provision in Australia* (NCVER, 2007), which attempted to gauge the extent of provision of this type of training in Australia.

Key messages

- It is possible to assess the wider benefits of non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy learning. However, different types of assessment instruments, which cater for the diversity and complexity of learners' needs, motivations and outcomes, are necessary. Special attention must be paid to the language adopted in the instruments so that these can be easily used by tutors and their students.
- Both learners and tutors derive personal and educational outcomes by participating in the process of assessing and acknowledging learning outcomes.
- Tutors in this field, many of whom are volunteers, are in need of professional development to fully understand the purpose and language of the assessment instruments.
- The right approach to assessment can build the self-confidence of students, many of whom are not suited to formal education settings.

Tom Karmel
Managing Director, NCVER

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Behind them were the numerous learners, teachers, and volunteer tutors and coordinators in the non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy programs in four states who so willingly contributed to the discussion on the extent to which it was possible to identify 'wider learning outcomes' and to selecting the instruments to be trialled. Thank you all for your input, your criticisms, and for making sure we kept the research well grounded in practice. Special thanks to Liz Hughes in Northam, Western Australia, and Ellen Jezierski at Aberfoyle Community Centre for additional support, and to Miki Petrusic at Overload Solutions for excellent transcription of the interviews.

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Executive summary

Purpose

This research explores the potential for developing instruments that assess and acknowledge the wider benefits of learning for adults participating in non-accredited community language, literacy and numeracy programs. The extent and variety of the learning needs and motivations of participants in these programs are not yet sufficiently accounted for in other assessment frameworks, such as the National Reporting System (NRS).¹ Therefore, it is necessary to identify approaches and procedures for assessing and acknowledging the outcomes that participants achieve in these courses. For this study, 'non-accredited' learning is that for which no nationally accredited vocational education and training (VET) qualification is awarded to learners.

Approaches

The research comprised three stages. Firstly, a review of national and international research was undertaken to map the wider benefits of learning that have been identified in non-accredited adult learning. This review was augmented by an analysis of data collected in a 2006 study that mapped the provision of non-accredited community learning in adult language, literacy and numeracy in Australia (Dymock 2007a).

Secondly, following that review, a number of potential assessment instruments that could be used to assess and acknowledge the outcomes of learners in non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy programs were identified by the authors. Through collaboration with five research partners, six of these instruments were selected as being most appropriate for these purposes.² The research partners were community education providers in Queensland, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia and were selected for reasons of diversity in user groups and locations.

Thirdly, the selected instruments were trialled and evaluated in the field at the partner sites. After the trial period, partner representatives reported on their experiences in using the instruments to assess and acknowledge wider learning outcomes in non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy.

¹ The National Reporting System (NRS) is a mechanism for reporting the outcomes of adult English language, literacy and numeracy provision in the VET system in labour market programs and in the adult and community education (ACE) sector. The National Reporting System takes into account the complexity of language, literacy and numeracy competence, considering not just competence with linguistic and mathematical systems, but also the ability to shape language and numeracy use according to purposes and contexts. The National Reporting System has been recently reviewed. It will be known as the Australian Core Skills Framework and will be released in late 2008.

² The selected instruments were: (i) Changes in confidence; (ii) Learner outcomes: personal, social, economic; (iii) Individual learner profile; (iv) Learner indicators of success; (v) Criteria for achievement; (vi) Skills and wider outcomes. Each of instruments (i) to (v) was based on existing measures and adapted by the participating research partners to suit local needs. Instrument (vi) is a composite instrument developed by the authors from their review of research and the interview responses. The 'Findings' section provides further information on each of the selected instruments. A copy of each instrument can be found in appendix 2.

Findings

An understanding of the full extent of the learning arising through learners' participation in non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy programs takes account of the following key factors: the purpose or motivation for learning; the processes of assessment, if it occurs at all; and the competence of voluntary tutors. As a result, the study found that a range of instruments and approaches would probably be required to assess and acknowledge learning outcomes that are specific to particular learners or cohorts of learners.

Diverse needs

People who participate in these programs range from learners with significant disabilities, to those whose language development has never been fully realised, through to those developing their language competence because of social, family or work-related necessity. Other reasons for participating include changes in attitudes and wanting to develop a greater sense of self and personal competence (that is, being confident enough to accept new challenges). Such diversity of learner and learning goals warrants assessment processes commensurate with these goals.

Diverse outcomes

From the review of literature the research identified seven categories of 'wider benefits' of learning. These were: self-confidence; engagement with others; attitudes to learning; agency/pro-activity (actively learning through experience); life trajectories; personal growth; and social capital. This study confirmed those categories and the importance of acknowledging the wider benefits of learning. In general, these benefits include enhanced personal confidence, heightened social competence, and the opening-up of possibilities and prospects that were not options prior to participation in these programs. Outcomes such as these are not the focus of or are captured in accredited learning frameworks like the National Reporting System. Importantly, the findings of this review also pointed to the development of a 'learning identity' as a key element of engagement in the learning process, a concept that needs further research.

Diverse kinds of instruments

Given the diversity of learner outcomes arising from non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy programs, the approaches to assessment need to be correspondingly diverse to ensure that the wider benefits of learning are captured. In the practical component of the research, all six instruments were used to some effect in different teaching and learning contexts. However, no single instrument was identified as being the most preferred across all sites. Instead, each of the instruments in different ways had particular qualities and uses, which underlined that these assessment processes are likely to require a range of instruments and usages.

The instruments were most useful when the level of language used to capture the learning was easy for the learners to understand—or at least for the tutors to interpret for them. Moreover, the relative value given to each of the wider benefits will vary at a local level, and, consequently, so will the choice of indicators. A 'portfolio' of instruments is therefore likely to be necessary to address diversity in learners' and tutors' needs. In other words, greater consideration needs to be given to the processes involved in assessing and acknowledging learner outcomes. The simple adoption of uniform measures is unlikely to prove satisfactory or be appropriate.

How such instruments are used instead of or in conjunction with existing frameworks is a decision for those responsible for the programs, but their administration has the potential to be particularly useful in formative as well as summative learner assessment. External reporting (for example, to management or a funding body) may best be done through the aggregation of individual assessments of outcomes, the nature of this summary depending on the instrument used.

Role of tutors

The instruments trialled were used to identify individual achievements; they also enabled tutors to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses in those achievements, this process informing subsequent learning and assessment activities. The assessment processes found to work best were those that comprised a joint activity between learner and tutor. Moreover, there are potential benefits for both learner and tutor from engagement in processes that extend beyond what is captured by the instrument. However, like the learners, the largely volunteer tutors in these programs have different levels of competence and readiness to assess these kinds of learning outcomes. They possess diverse levels of language and literacy and instructional and assessment competence. So, training tutors to understand the purposes and language of the instruments is likely to be essential.

Conclusion

The importance of establishing assessment measures and approaches commensurate with the diversity of learner needs, motivations and outcomes in non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy programs is a key finding of this study. Allied to this is the value of tutors engaging directly with participants in completing these assessment instruments. This study has shown that it is possible to develop and use instruments to assess and acknowledge the benefits of learning through these programs; the benefits are of the kind that goes beyond the outcomes addressed by the National Reporting System. Indeed, the diversity of outcomes necessitates having access to a range of instruments from which to select, in order to cater not only for the learners' individual needs, but also for the abilities and preferences of tutors and coordinators.

The findings also identify potential benefits for both learners and tutors from joint engagement in the assessment process. However, tutors may need training to better understand and use the instruments available to them. The instruments also need to be accessible and comprehensible to the learners, particularly those who are second language learners.

While this study has highlighted the diversity of purposes, processes and outcomes from non-accredited community language, literacy and numeracy training, it also draws attention to the potential for developing a national scheme for reporting on the wider outcomes of this type of learning. However, the desirability and practicality of developing and implementing such a reporting scheme warrants further investigation. At the individual level, the development of 'learner identity' as part of engaging in the learning process also needs further exploration in non-accredited adult learning generally, because this appears to be a key factor in engaging disengaged and disadvantaged adults in learning and helping them into more active, productive and satisfying lives.

Introduction

A recent study of non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy provision in Australia (Dymock 2007a) found that the perceived benefits of program participation were diverse for learners and included the development of language, literacy and numeracy skills and personal growth. Participants also gained confidence to engage in further education and training or in employment. That report concluded that, in non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy provision in Australia, the ‘development of language, literacy and numeracy skills goes hand-in-hand with development of self-confidence’ (p.35). So, beyond the development of literacy and numeracy skills, other important personal learning outcomes might be achieved.

This confirms findings in other adult literacy research (for example, Ward & Edwards 2002; Westell 2005) and experiences in the wider field of adult and community education (ACE). For example, the Adult Community and Further Education Board (2006, p.3) in Victoria stated that non-accredited learning is not only a pathway into accredited courses, but also a means for ‘building confidence, resilience and self worth, enabling learners to make connections with family and the wider community’. Similarly, a British study linking learning and confidence development noted that:

In non-accredited learning, the challenge is to clearly capture individual and group achievements, in order to demonstrate to learners, tutors and funders what has been gained. If gains in confidence are as significant as many learners and tutors appear to suggest, ways of evidencing them seem to be important. (Eldred et al. 2004, p.4)

Currently, such important learning outcomes are not effectively accounted for in existing assessment regimes, including the National Reporting System. In non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy in Australia, Dymock identified that ‘ways of evidencing’ varied considerably. From a national survey of 125 providers and seven case studies in three states, he concluded that:

... assessment of student learning, particularly among those using volunteers one to one is not especially rigorous. On the other hand, the range of motivations identified in the survey and in the interviews suggests that a more rigorous approach to assessment may not be appropriate. And if, for example, the development of self-confidence is seen as a worthwhile outcome, how might that aspect be assessed? (Dymock 2007a, p.33)

The present project further explores this concern. That is, if the development of language, literacy and numeracy skills is concurrent with growth in learners’ confidence, the assessment of outcomes in non-accredited programs needs to find ways of assessing and recognising this learning, as well as supporting it. Consequently, the focus here is restricted to non-accredited learning; that is, that for which no nationally accredited vocational education and training (VET) qualification is awarded to learners, and including courses or learning activities for which statements of attainment or statements of attendance are given.

To date, no widely acceptable instrument has been developed or adopted in the non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy field in Australia that captures these wider kinds of learning outcomes. The National Reporting System (Department of Education, Science and Training 2007), soon to be revised and renamed³, is specifically designed to measure levels of competence in five

³ The revised National Reporting System, the Australian Core Skills Framework, is due for release in the near future.

skill areas: reading, writing, oral communication, learning strategies and numeracy. Absent here are those outcomes associated with other areas of learner development and identified in studies from Australia and overseas. Also, as a competency-based approach is adopted for the National Reporting System, which by definition and practice focuses on measurable performances, it is not a wholly appropriate approach for identifying or recognising outcomes from learning that cannot be easily measured.

The only systematic attempt in Australia to acknowledge wider achievements in *non-accredited* learning, as well as pathways to other options, appears to be the ‘A-frame’, endorsed by the Victorian Adult and Further Education Board in 2006. The A-frame, ‘an ACE framework for non-accredited learning building on the best’, comprises eight forms for ‘considering and documenting a learner’s goals and outcomes and for recording and monitoring learner feedback’ (Adult and Further Education Board 2006, p.2). One form provides for ‘Pathways and options – where learning leads’ and includes such aspects as work, further education, improved confidence, and attitude change. However, this description is given as part of a tutor’s program planning process, rather than for monitoring individual outcomes. The learner feedback form allows the learner to comment on the learning process and on what they plan to do with the new knowledge. The A-frame might be seen as a precursor to the sorts of instruments explored here, except that the latter are in a specific language, literacy and numeracy context.

The purpose of this project is not to try to fit existing frameworks to learning outcomes, but to identify the extent to which indicators might be developed for the *range* of learning outcomes achieved by learners in adult language, literacy and numeracy programs. No doubt there are examples of such indicators being used by practitioners at a local level. However, this project applies the findings from national and international research to a number of language, literacy and numeracy programs across several states in order to identify potentially useful approaches. It does not attempt to validate the instruments used, nor to develop a particular instrument for national use, but to explore the potential of such developments for Australian programs. Such considerations might also inform any subsequent revision of the successor to the National Reporting System.

Approach

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to explore the potential for developing an instrument or instruments capable of assessing and acknowledging the wider benefits of learning for adults participating in non-accredited community language, literacy and numeracy programs. Such instruments need to take into account the extent and variety of their learning needs and their motivations and readiness. Four research questions were developed to guide that exploration:

- 1 What are the main language, literacy and numeracy learner groups and their needs in non-accredited programs?
- 2 What are the main outcomes from non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy programs, and what is the role of personal agency and goals in achieving these outcomes for individual learners?
- 3 How might these outcomes best be ‘measured’ in order to indicate the extent of progress that learners are making, in terms of reporting against existing frameworks and the personal needs and interests of participants?
- 4 To what extent might such indicators of progress be appropriate for incorporation into a national reporting process?

Methodology

This research project comprised three stages: a review of existing research; the development of a portfolio of possible instruments for monitoring learner outcomes; and the trialling of those instruments in non-accredited literacy and numeracy programs.

The *review of research* considered existing literature focusing on assessment practices in non-accredited adult and community education and language, literacy and numeracy. The literature was both international and Australian in focus and aimed to identify the strengths and weaknesses of practices. Literature on personal agency and learner identity was also reviewed to identify those aspects most relevant to adult language, literacy and numeracy learning. In addition, data collected from the 2006 national mapping exercise of non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy (Dymock 2007a) were interrogated in order to inform the proceedings and derive findings particularly relevant to this project.

The process for *developing a portfolio of possible instruments* comprised the identification of research partners, undertaking semi-structured interviews and discussions with coordinators, teachers and learners at the partner sites, and working collaboratively with the partners to assemble a tentative ‘portfolio’ of assessment instruments designed to monitor wider learning outcomes in non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy programs.

The research partners were chosen from responses to an invitation (see support document) sent to 59 organisations in Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria and Queensland which had identified themselves in Dymock’s study (2007a) as community providers of adult language, literacy and numeracy. Five partners were chosen, based primarily on the need for a variety of provider types

and client groups, and for metropolitan and rural representation. The partners were: Pine Rivers Neighbourhood Centre, Lawnton, Queensland (semi-rural); Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre, Victoria (urban); Hackham West Community Centre, and Aberfoyle Community Centre, South Australia (urban); and Read Write Now! (RWN), Western Australia (two sites: one rural, one urban). A profile of each of the partner organisations is included in the support document.

The purpose of the interviews was to gather data that would permit the development of assessment instruments that would meet both individual and institutional imperatives for determining outcomes. Copies of the interview schedules are included in the support document. The breakdown of the interviews at the six partner sites is shown in table 1.

Table 1 Interviews and other data sources, by partner and category

| Partner | Coordinator | Teachers | Tutors | Learners | Other | Total |
|---|-------------|----------|-----------|-----------|---|-----------|
| Aberfoyle Community Centre, SA | 1 | 1 | 5* | 3 | Community Development Officer | 11 |
| Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre, Vic. | 1 | 2 | | 6 | Written feedback from coordinators' meeting with 4 teachers/ tutors | 13 |
| Hackham West Community Centre, SA | 1 | | 5* | 4 | | 10 |
| Pine Rivers Neighbourhood Centre, Qld | 1 | | 5* | | 1 team leader—community learning | 7 |
| Read Write Now!: Northam/Toodyay, WA | 1* | | 3* | 2 | | 6 |
| Read Write Now! Perth urban/regional | 1 | | 3* | 5 | 1 program manager, 1 learner survey interviewer | 11 |
| Read Write Now! Coordinators' conference, Perth | | | | | 35 coordinators (group)* | 35 |
| Total | 6 | 3 | 21 | 20 | 43 | 93 |

Note: * Work in voluntary capacity

Table 1 indicates that data were gathered from a total of 93 people in four states. A feature of non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy provision is the heavy reliance on volunteers and part-time paid staff. As indicated in table 1, 57 (78%) of the teachers, tutors and coordinators informing this research project were volunteers.

Trialling the instruments in the field was undertaken over a period of eight weeks. Six trial instruments were sent to the coordinators at the partner sites, with a proviso that they could amend individual instruments for local use, as well as create their own to add to the portfolio (see appendix 2). The coordinators were asked to document the feedback from tutors and learners on the instruments selected, along with justification for any changes made or new instruments developed, and to report on these at a national workshop. Those reports provide the main basis for the discussion section later in the report.

Findings

This section reports, in turn, the findings from the three strands of research: the review of existing research; the development of a portfolio of possible instruments for monitoring learner outcomes; and the trial of those instruments in the field. A full account of the review of research is included in the support document.

Review of research

It was important initially to identify the nature of the participants in these programs, their reasons for participating and their readiness to participate. In the 2006 survey mentioned above, 64 of the 125 respondents were identified as community providers on the basis that they nominated their *primary* role as either ‘General adult/community education’, ‘Specific adult literacy/numeracy improvement’, or ‘Community information/referral’ (Dymock 2007a). For the current study to further clarify the nature of the client groups and, in particular, their learning needs amongst these providers, the responses to selected items from the 2006 survey for those 64 providers were re-analysed.

It was found that approximately two-thirds of the learners are women, and the largest group is in the 30–49 years age bracket, the prime family-rearing and income-earning years, which may influence learning goals and life trajectories. The next largest is the 50–59 years age group, also an active earning period for many adults. However, the perception of one-third of the providers is that the biggest motivation for learners in such programs is a general need to improve their language and literacy skills for daily use rather than for any specific needs such as employment. But employment-related needs are still strong and perceived to be relevant to learners by about a quarter of the community adult language, literacy and numeracy providers who responded. Overall, general and person-oriented needs (for example, social interaction and developing self-esteem) comprise some 60% of the reported perceived reasons for participation in these programs. For the purposes of this study, the breadth of ages and diversity of needs suggest that any instruments used to monitor outcomes have to allow for a range of individual purposes and a variety of outcomes. Importantly, this includes those associated with personal growth, enhanced self-confidence and capacities for greater social interaction.

The concept of ‘wider learning outcomes’ is pervasive in the literature, particularly in language, literacy and numeracy learning. For example, a Tasmanian adult literacy survey (Department of Education, Tasmania 2005, p.12) identified 11 ‘other outcomes’, including pathways to further study and employment, better skills in researching and finding information, and a significant increase in self-esteem and in opportunities to participate in the community. A United Kingdom study of adult learners’ lives (Barton et al. 2004, p.101) identified the ‘wider benefits of learning’ as empowerment in the classroom and in life, new skills acquisition, and a change in attitudes to learning, which added quality to life. Ward and Edwards concluded from their research with literacy and numeracy learners in north-west England, which used the ‘learning journey’ as a metaphor, that:

Perhaps the most profound change for most learners interviewed was a massive enhancement of their confidence and self-esteem. This increased confidence had a significant impact on their learning achievements, attitudes to learning, aims and aspirations, ability to do real life activities and their social activities with other people. (Ward & Edwards 2002, p.4)

Similarly, a study of adult numeracy learners in England (Swain 2006) found that almost three-quarters reported they had changed as a person in some way through learning maths, and that some learners changed their aspirations, as their sense of achievement and level of self-esteem grew. Swain concluded that:

Although human agency may be fragile, particularly for those with little power, the students in this study were still able to make decisions that had the potential, at least, to be able to re-direct their lives. (Swain 2006, p.3)

In a review of United States literature on 'non-academic' outcomes of adult literacy programs, Westell (2005) identified five main outcomes: self-confidence, independence, attitude change, relationship and community building, and learning to learn. Westell stated that every study mentioned self-confidence as being crucial to ongoing learning and development.

Eldred et al (2004, p.57) concluded that further research 'should be carried out to develop best practice in framing confidence growth as a learning outcome and methods of recognizing and recording in this area'. This current study is intended to contribute to that work. We are conscious, however, of Grief and Windsor's warning that:

We need to be cautious that the desire to make systems robust and ensure the credibility of data on learners' achievements does not encourage the development of systems that resemble that of award schemes and qualifications. By doing this, we lose the very features of non-accredited learning for which this option is currently valued. (Grief & Windsor 2002, p.63)

Consequently, this research project resisted trying to fit existing competency-based frameworks, such as the National Reporting System, to the range of learning outcomes from non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy programs. Instead, it was decided to consider the outcomes broadly in order to explore the extent to which a complementary framework might be developed to assess and acknowledge the breadth of learning occurring in these programs.

Possible bases for revised approaches for monitoring learner outcomes

Drawing on the findings reported above, a number of possible bases for assessing and acknowledging the wider benefits of learning in non-accredited community language, literacy and numeracy, in terms of growth of confidence and related attributes, were identified. These included:

- ✧ *self-confidence and personal competence*: the extent to which the learner has a sense of self and a belief in being able to put their capabilities into action
- ✧ *engagement with others*: the extent of the learner's interaction with other individuals in the family, at work and at sites such as schools, government offices, and shops
- ✧ *attitudes to learning*: the extent of the learner's attitude towards current and future learning, and their ability to learn how to learn
- ✧ *agency/pro-activity*: the extent to which the learner actively accesses and negotiates with and learns from experience and is able to shape construction of that experience
- ✧ *life trajectories*: the extent of the learner's goals and ambitions and expectations of where life will lead
- ✧ *personal growth/personal change*: the extent to which a learner perceives they have grown and/or changed as a person
- ✧ *social capital*: the extent of community participation, involvement in networks, clubs and other social situations.

These potentially useful bases for assessing and acknowledging learning in these programs were subsequently explored through interviews and discussions with the research partners in the next phase of the project to develop assessment instruments for trialling, along with confirmation of the needs of learners.

Collaborative identification of potential instruments

Confirming learner needs

Discussion with learners, coordinators, teachers and tutors confirmed the diversity of learner needs identified in the literature review. For example, one learner told of her embarrassment and indignation when a gardener was brought in to interpret when her husband was admitted to hospital, and how that incident finally motivated her to join an English class. Another learner said:

I was ... with Centrelink and I ... had to do a big group class of improving your skills to look for work and write resumes and read papers and all that. And I just blew up under pressure and couldn't understand and wouldn't even let myself try to understand. I just ran out of the room ... and my room teacher ... said '... you obviously need one-on-one to help you understand things a bit more.'

The motivations expressed by learners included a desire to be able to learn English at a mature age and to improve opportunities through higher levels of educational outcomes. Moreover, learners wished to overcome personal limitations that constrain work and/or life options, to participate in Australian higher education (for a new arrival in this country), and to have the capacity to play a more central role in family life.

Coordinators of non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy programs provided examples of learners with disabilities, learners who had very negative school experiences, those who left school early, or who lacked self-esteem. Coordinators commented that some had short-term needs, such as getting a driver's licence, or improving their English for accredited courses or for employment purposes; others need long-term support to achieve their personal goals.

A variety of individual needs and motivations were revealed—personal, social and vocational—confirming the findings from the literature.

Testing the possible bases for identifying wider benefits of learning

Coordinators, teachers, tutors and learners were specifically asked to identify wider learning outcomes, that is, beyond the development of language, literacy and numeracy competence. Their responses were then categorised under each of the seven concepts identified from the literature review as possible bases for indicating the wider benefits of learning: self-confidence; engagement with others; attitudes to learning; agency/pro-activity; life trajectories; personal growth; and social capital. Further details and illustrative examples of these responses are provided in the support document.

The examples obtained through the interviews show the extent of the interrelatedness of the seven proposed bases for assessing these wider benefits and the recurrence of certain general outcomes: improved personal capacity and competence; empowerment, responsibility and autonomy; greater engagement with others and in the community, and a new capacity for perceiving the world and their place in it. Underpinning every one of these bases is learner confidence.

What was also evident from this research phase was that any attempt to monitor learner outcomes in non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy programs must take into account a wide range of possible indicators. This poses the challenge of developing an instrument or instruments that can meet local needs as well as be applicable across the many programs. The next step was to obtain the research partners' opinions about the possibility of developing indicators associated with each of the seven possible bases, with a view to ordering the perceived value of the bases.

Identification of indicators

Data from 46 paid and volunteer coordinators, paid teachers, and volunteer tutors were obtained at five of the sites. The data related to the possible indicators; that is, evidence or examples of changed learner behaviour, for each of those seven bases. A summary of the responses is shown in table 9 in the support document.

There was strong support expressed for increased confidence as being a valuable outcome of learner participation in these programs. Respondents, generally, claimed that there were numerous factors that would indicate growth in confidence and that these would be evident in their interactions with the learners. ‘Engagement with others’ and ‘social capital’ were generally regarded as strong factors. However, some respondents doubted that these could be measured or observed, because indicative activities tended to take place outside the learning situation. As one coordinator suggested: ‘We can only assess [social capital] as much as we know’. There appeared to be more opportunity for this to occur in neighbourhood centres where there was more interaction between learners and staff, than in one-to-one tutoring.

Ambivalence was expressed about ‘life trajectories’, with one tutor suggesting it sounded ‘a bit Californian’. Some respondents struggled with understanding the term ‘agency’, and the perception generally was that it would be difficult to identify concrete indicators. This reaction was even stronger for ‘personal growth’, which was described by one coordinator as an internal change and, therefore, far less visible than growth in self-confidence, for which it was suggested there were observable behavioural changes. Nevertheless, one person with significant experience in community settings believed indicators for all the bases could be identified by developing appropriate scenarios to which learners could respond.

Summary

On the basis of the ratings given by the 46 respondents, and from the responses in the interviews, five of the bases identified from the research literature were proposed as foundations for developing draft instruments for assessing outcomes: self-confidence and personal competence; engagement with others; attitudes to learning; life trajectories; and social capital. It was concluded that identifying a number of possible bases would ensure that the partner organisations were not restricted in their choices of wider learning outcomes when attempting to assess learner outcomes.

The researchers worked with the partners to develop this ‘tentative portfolio’ of possible instruments into a ‘working portfolio’ that would become the basis for the trial. The steps in the development of this working portfolio are summarised from left to right in table 2. The first step in this phase was to canvass views on a range of possible monitoring instruments.

Responses to possible instruments

During the literature review phase, examples of instruments used in assessing a range of wider learning outcomes were identified, not all in the literacy and numeracy field. For example, some were instruments for identifying ‘soft outcomes’, described by Dewson et al. (2000, p.2) as: ‘outcomes from training, support or guidance interventions, which unlike hard outcomes, such as qualifications and jobs, cannot be measured directly or tangibly’.

Table 2 Development of working portfolio of instruments

| Initial exploration | Outcomes from review of research | Testing outcomes from review of research | Selection of bases and instruments | Modification of selected instruments | Trialling of instruments |
|----------------------------|---|---|---|--|--|
| Review of research | Seven possible bases for monitoring outcomes identified Nine examples of monitoring instruments identified | Interviews and discussions with coordinators, teachers, tutors and learners | Five bases for monitoring outcomes selected Five examples of monitoring instruments selected | Five selected monitoring instruments modified from outcomes of interviews and the selected bases and one composite assessment instrument developed | Six instruments trialled by five partners in four states |

As shown in table 2, nine examples of assessment instruments were initially chosen for consideration by coordinators, teachers and tutors at the research partner sites. These instruments were characterised only as examples that had been found during the literature review and were selected in order to provide a range of the *types* of instruments that could be used, rather than necessarily being considered for final adoption. Respondents were asked to identify the potential usefulness of each instrument for assessing the wider outcomes of learning in non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy programs, on a scale of 1 (not useful) to 5 (very useful).

On the basis of the respondents' ratings (see support document), and from comments in the interviews, it was decided to focus on the five monitoring instruments most favoured. An additional instrument was created in order to provide the partners with another comprehensive instrument from which coordinators might choose. The six instruments, which are attached as appendix 2, are:

- A Changes in confidence
- B Learner outcomes: personal, social, economic
- C Individual learner profile
- D Learner indicators of success
- E Criteria for achievement
- F Skills and wider outcomes.

The instruments

Each of the instruments A to E is an adaptation of the five instruments selected through the process shown in table 2. Instrument A was adapted from the Catching Confidence grid (Eldred et al. 2004) and provides different contexts for learners' confidence and participation. Instrument B is an adaptation from Foster, Howard and Reisenberger (1997) and allows literacy tutors and learners to provide examples of outcomes in three categories: personal, social and economic. Instrument C is adapted from individual profiling using soft outcomes indicators developed through the European Social Fund and adapted by the Welsh Department for Work and Pensions (2003) and provides for ranking of learner perceptions under three headings: achievements, social, and personal growth. Instrument D is an adaptation of Eldred's (2002) list of indicators of success identified by literacy learners, with the addition of a ranking scheme which provides for charting of progress. Instrument E is based on Charnley and Jones's (1979) 'emergent criteria' of literacy achievement, and includes selected items from their lists of indicators in five categories: personal, social, socio-economic, cognitive and enactive achievements. Trial instrument F is a composite instrument developed by the researchers from their review of research and the interview responses and provides for examples under four headings: skills outcomes, personal outcomes, social outcomes and vocational outcomes.

The intention was to provide a range of instruments, any of which might be utilised to meet the requirements of a particular program or particular learners. The instruments per se were not under scrutiny, rather their capacity to assess outcomes not captured by existing instruments. Consequently, in response to suggestions made during the discussions about outcomes and indicators, some minor modifications to the wording in the draft instruments were made. Inevitably and importantly, there are some overlaps of groupings and indicators across the instruments. However, it was not intended that the instruments would be mutually exclusive; rather, that each should have a slightly different emphasis in assessing outcomes, which would give coordinators some leeway to meet particular needs.

It was also intended to provide examples of instruments that assessed learning outcomes beyond language, literacy and numeracy competence, which would therefore not usurp either existing instruments that measured language, literacy and numeracy skills or the autonomy of the coordinator. However, because of the need for variety in the instruments selected from the range

available, two of the instruments drawn from literacy contexts, instruments C and D, and the expanded version, instrument F, include such indicators.

No attempt was made to validate the instruments or any modifications to them during the trial period, since that was not part of the research purpose. The instruments trialled were simply *examples* of a range of instruments drawn from the research literature in order to determine whether such instruments had the *potential* to identify wider learning outcomes in non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy learning.

Trialling the instruments

The trial period ran from late May to early July 2007. It had been hoped to use the instruments in pre-test and post-test situations, in order to document the extent of learner progress, but in most instances there was not sufficient time for this within the constraints of the project and the partners' program schedules.

A workshop was held in Adelaide in July 2007, where representatives of the partner organisations reported on the outcomes of the trials. Edited versions of the reports are included in the support document.

All of the partners, except one, distributed all six instruments to the tutors and invited them to choose the instrument/s they saw as most appropriate. In Western Australia, where the administration of the statewide volunteer groups is centralised, two senior Read Write Now! staff and a regional volunteer coordinator selected two instruments to send out to the groups. A variety of approaches was adopted by the tutors at all sites, with some at one organisation opting to use all six instruments with their learners over the trial period.

Table 3 Choice of trial instruments at each site

| Partner organisation | Final choice | Comment |
|--|---|---|
| Aberfoyle Community Centre (SA) | Instrument D | Tutors could choose any of the six instruments. |
| Glenroy Neighbourhood Centre (Vic.) | Instrument B – Road rules Instruments C and D – Women's ESL Instrument C – Story group Instrument F – African Women's sewing class Instrument E – non-accredited General Certificate in Education learner | Tutor also devised own instrument. Tutors could choose any of the six instruments. |
| Hackham West Community Centre (SA) | Instrument C | Initially instruments C, E, F chosen by tutors for trial. |
| Pine Rivers Neighbourhood Centre (Qld) | Instruments A and C | Tutors could choose any of the six instruments. |
| Read Write Now! (WA) | Instrument E modified* | Initially instruments C and E chosen centrally for trial; language slightly modified. |

Note: ESL = English as a second language
* See appendix 3 for a copy of the modified instrument.

Table 3 shows that no single instrument stood out as a preferred choice amongst the partners. Instrument C (Individual Learner Profile) was the one most identified as potentially useful, with initial nominations from four of the five partners. However, at the end of the trial only two partners nominated instrument C as their primary choice, and one of those co-nominated it with instrument A (Changes in Confidence).

Issues arising from trial of instruments

The reports and subsequent discussions at the workshop identified a number of issues in relation to the use of such instruments in non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy programs. By far the biggest issue was the language used in these instruments. There was general agreement that much of the language used in the trial instruments was too difficult for many learners in these programs, particularly English as a second language learners. It was concluded that terms should be either simple enough for the learners to understand themselves or to enable the tutor to explain them easily to the learner. There was also the suggestion, incorporated in one of the modifications, that a key term such as 'confidence' could be briefly defined at the top of the instrument. Some felt there might be a case for different instruments for different types of learners.

Related discussion focused on the use of such terms as 'soft outcomes' and 'social capital' and whether practitioners should be looking for terms that are better understood by policy-makers and, by implication, funding bodies. One suggestion was that terminology relating to community capacity-building outcomes should be adopted. It was suggested that the number of questions should be determined by the need for all learners to be able to identify those that applied particularly to them. Generally, there was support for using scales with words (for example, 'about the same', 'a little better') rather than numbers.

Workshop participants agreed that the instruments should be completed jointly by the tutor and learner. Such a procedure appears to encourage the development of confidence gained from completing an instrument, as well as assist in tailoring the tutoring to meet an individual learner's needs. One concern raised was the possible additional workload for volunteer tutors, with a couple of the coordinators reporting some resistance from tutors to taking part in the trial for that reason. The audience for the completed instruments was seen as primarily the tutor and learner, and subsequently the program coordinator (where relevant), and possibly managers of these providers. However, it seemed that managers were more likely to be provided with a summary of the achievements of all learners rather than individual assessments as recorded by the instruments.

One question that had been raised earlier by the researchers was whether learners should be awarded a certificate on the basis of achievement as recorded by the instruments. This question generated a variety of responses from coordinators in the discussion. For example, one said the practice had been to present certificates of participation to all learners annually but that had been discontinued, because some learners, particularly those with acquired brain injuries, claimed they did not deserve them and had questioned the value of them. Another centre coordinator suggested that a certificate of achievement implies a set of hard outcomes, and that might encourage a learner to think they had finished learning, whereas in a course such as obtaining a driver's licence, 'you can usually identify that they have further literacy and numeracy needs, not just getting their licence'.

At another centre, there was strong support from tutors and learners for the acknowledgement of this learning in the form of certificates, including learners with intellectual disabilities who valued a piece of paper that indicated that they were regular attendees. It was suggested that certificates of achievement could be based on the growth of self-esteem and confidence, and that they were particularly important for learners from backgrounds where learning was not rewarded and where previous education had not been a positive experience for them.

Discussion

An abiding concern and focus of government-sponsored policy initiatives and practices associated with vocational education and training in Australia has been securing uniformity in its purposes, processes and outcomes, which has been achieved through the establishment of national standards of competence for and across industry sectors, nationally consistent training packages, and an assessment focus on reliability of outcomes through the use of objectives that are measurable and through processes that acknowledge or deny competence. The National Reporting System is part of this approach. However, this project reveals that, in the area of assessing the wider learning outcomes of learners' participation in non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy programs, diversity rather than uniformity is the reality and central concern for the purposes, processes and outcomes of learners' learning.

Consequently, the approaches to assessing and acknowledging the outcomes of non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy learning need to be diverse and open to benchmarks or goals of different kinds. Some of the factors associated with the diverse purposes, processes and outcomes which were identified in the research are discussed below.

Purposes and processes of assessment

Factors associated with the purposes of the assessment of unintended learning outcomes include the diversity of learners' backgrounds, the level of their language skills and the potential for them and their often voluntary tutors in using the instruments. Indeed, the competence and confidence of these tutors in choosing and completing the instrument and their capacity and confidence in assessing learners' development was a second key factor. A third factor is the extent to which any selected instruments might be seen as an initial, formative and/or summative assessment instrument, and the purposes for which the instruments are being used. Some of the factors associated with both learners and tutors, together with the implications for using the instruments, are set out in table 4.

Table 4 Factors associated with the process of assessment

| Focus | Factors | Implications for instrument use |
|--------------|--|---|
| Learners | Readiness – level of language competence | Complexity of instrument |
| Learners | Readiness – level of confidence | Capacity to engage and kinds of outcomes desired |
| Learners | Readiness – need for tutor assistance | Requirement for one-on-one assessment and support |
| Tutors | Readiness – level of language competence | Capacity to understand, select and explain the instrument's worth to learners |
| Tutors | Readiness – level of tutoring competence/ confidence | Capacity to tailor/modify to learners' level of readiness |
| Tutors | Workload | Length and complexity; additional demands on time |
| Tutors | Volunteer | Difficulties for moderation; role of coordinator |

Table 4 shows some of the variables associated with the process of assessment and factors related to the design and administration of appropriate instruments. For instance, the capacity of learners

to engage—either on their own or with their tutor—with the assessment processes and any particular assessment instrument (their ‘readiness’) will be premised upon their level of language competence. Similarly, the level of the tutors’ competence to engage in the assessment process, including the selection of the most appropriate instrument, is likely shaped by their competence and confidence. Further, the tutor’s capacity to use the instruments effectively and modify them to suit particular individual or cohorts of learners’ needs shapes the assessment process and its outcomes. Also, given the voluntary role of the tutors, there are limits to what their workloads and commitments can withstand. So, through consideration of these kinds of factors, the design, use and outcomes of assessments need to be understood. In the following sections, these diverse factors are elaborated.

Diversity of learners and their purposes

Given the findings from the international and Australian research discussed earlier, it was anticipated that catering for the assessment of the diversity of learners in non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy would be a key challenge in developing instruments for assessing and acknowledging learning outcomes. The first research question for this study: ‘What are the main language, literacy and numeracy learner groups and their needs in non-accredited programs?’ was designed to confirm the extent of the diversity. A re-examination of selected data from the 2006 survey of Australian providers (Dymock 2007a) found that, nationally, about two-thirds of such learners are women, that the age range is broad, with the majority being in the 30–49 years bracket, where work and family demands are likely to be particularly strong, and that there are numerous reasons for seeking support. The most frequently reported motivations perceived by the responding providers are related to social and personal development needs, but often a strong vocational element was also reported. This finding was reinforced by data collected from the interviews for the present project, conducted at six different sites in four states, which confirmed Dymock’s assessment of learners in non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy as:

lacking in confidence, often with negative experiences of school; some have disabilities, others are grappling with English as a second language; sometimes they are already in employment which is low skilled (but with exceptions); and sometimes they are already in accredited training but are not coping. (Dymock 2007b, p.15)

So, underpinning concerns about confidence are issues of circumstance, health, age, place of birth and other factors which have inhibited language development and with it, the confidence of the learners to use English language in the various situations in which they find themselves.

In this study, catering for the range of needs and outcomes is well illustrated by the responses from the tutors in the Glenroy Neighbourhood Centre program, where each tutor selected the instrument they thought best suited the learners in their class. The result was that five different instruments were selected; one tutor designed another instrument. On the other hand, three of the partner organisations decided on one particular instrument as best meeting their needs. Nevertheless, in relation to diversity, it is significant that, across the partner organisations, each of the particular instruments chosen is different. In other words, individual and/or group needs predominate as the basis for selection of an instrument.

Level of language

The level of language was the most frequent issue nominated during the trials of the instruments. This determined the readiness of learners to participate in the assessment processes and was perceived to be a particular issue for those who had English as a second language. The level of the language used in particular instruments was considered too difficult for learners at some sites. Elsewhere, tutors used terms like ‘convoluted’, ‘obscure’, ‘academic’ and ‘universityfied’. The issue then becomes one of the lowest common denominator: should the design of the instruments be based upon the likely lowest language competence of the tutors and their learners or on variations which permit their broad use, yet offer levels of more nuanced use?

Issues of learner capability and the capacities of tutors to use the instruments therefore need to be considered as central elements in the design and administration of processes that assess and acknowledge these kinds of learning.

Tutors' role and abilities

In most cases, the trial instruments were reported as being completed jointly by the tutors and learners. There was variation in tutor input in explaining the purpose of the instrument to the learner, in clarifying any obscure terms or difficult words, and in helping the learner decide on the most appropriate response. The implication here is that the tutor needs to be clear on the purpose of the instrument as a means for monitoring outcomes; the tutor also needs to understand the terms and concepts used in the instruments and to be as objective as possible when helping the learner to choose appropriate responses to the items on the instruments.

An issue arising here is that, just as there is a diversity of learners in non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy, the volunteers themselves are diverse in their backgrounds, levels of language and literacy competence, and instructional and assessment competence. Some tutors were often not confident of their understanding of some of the terms and concepts and/or with their ability to explain them, which may affect their capacity and willingness to administer certain types of instruments. Clearly, these issues are the inescapable reality in many of these non-accredited programs and need to be seen as central issues in the design and administration of assessment instruments.

The voluntary aspect of tutoring in the program also needs to be considered as a further crucial element. Coordinators indicated that, since tutors volunteered their time to assist learners, being asked to administer an instrument they didn't support or felt uncomfortable using might be seen as an imposition, particularly if additional training were also required. Gaffney and Humm (2002, cited in Grief & Windsor 2002, p.6) report concerns from community organisations in Britain that the development of 'measurement systems' would turn volunteers into 'professionals'. However, the positive outcomes of the process in the present study, discussed below, suggest that the use of an instrument might be integrated as part of the tutoring role and as another way of further developing the learners' conception of themselves as learners. This would also prevent tutors being seen as monitoring and summatively assessing learners. Encouraging such attitudes would need to be incorporated into tutor training courses.

Use of instruments

The final issue for discussion is the place of the selected instrument within the language, literacy and numeracy program. As seen in the trials, the choice of instruments will be determined in part by whether they should be used formatively to provide a means of reporting outcomes over time (that is, monitoring progress), or whether they should be used a summative assessment instrument, or as some combination of the two.

The norm in non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy for initial assessment of a learner's needs and capabilities tends to take place through interview and discussion, so it seems unlikely that the sorts of instruments trialled would be used for initial assessment by the coordinators. Several of the coordinators commented that such instruments might create unhelpful anxiety for potential learners, who are often at a quite vulnerable stage and who may view it as a test of their inadequacy. Overall, these instruments are likely to be best utilised at the tutor-learner level as part of teaching-learning interactions.

In addition, there is the question of whether a particular instrument can be used in conjunction with an existing assessment instrument. The use made of instruments C and D in the trial suggests that there may be a place for a combined instrument; one partner indicated an intention to integrate the chosen instrument with an existing assessment instrument to develop a single formative reporting instrument. However, as noted earlier, the purpose of this study was not to develop

specific indicators of language, literacy and numeracy skills or of wider learning outcomes, but to explore whether assessment of wider learning outcomes was possible. More research, consultation and trialling would be required for the development of a set of comprehensive indicators. For language, literacy and numeracy skills, the indicators of competence used in the National Reporting System would be a possible starting point in further research, but no attempt was made in this project to make comparisons with such indicators.

Other issues

Other issues arising from the research findings include whether the awarding of certificates would be beneficial to learners, the extent of further reporting of the outcomes (for example, to a management and/or funding body), and the implications for reporting outcomes nationally. Table 5 summarises the implications of the various factors associated with these other assessment outcomes of assessment. It identifies the different foci for assessment, the kinds of factors which need to be considered and the implications for assessment instruments and their use.

Table 5 Factors associated with outcomes of assessment

| Focus | Factors | Implications for instrument use |
|---------------------|--|---|
| Reporting | Kinds of goals reported on | Range of goals included |
| National reporting | Consistency | Training of tutors; moderation by coordinators |
| Learner involvement | Capturing worth of learner involvement and engagement | Reporting on outcomes beyond those listed |
| Certificates | Purposes of certification and subjects requiring certification | Degree of measures required (if at all) to validate and make certification worthwhile |

Other outcomes for learners

One of the unexpected outcomes of trialling the instruments was the positive response of tutors and learners to the assessment process itself. There were reports from the participating tutors of learners developing confidence as a result of participation in the assessment tasks, regardless of the actual results. The fact that completion of the instruments was almost invariably undertaken jointly by the tutor and learner may well have contributed to this outcome, with the tutor supporting the learner in responding to the items. However, tutors also reported benefits, not merely as a consequence of learners achieving outcomes, but also from engaging in the process with their learners. For example, the tutor in the 'Road rules' program at Glenroy Neighbourhood Centre observed how the interactions resulting from responses to the instruments led to a broadened discussion within the group. Further, the tutors at the Pine Rivers Neighbourhood Centre were reported to be stimulated to 're-examine the what, why and how of their own tutoring'.

Importantly, the instruments then became a means to appraise learning outcomes and also a way to support that learning by explicitly drawing attention to the kinds of development that the learners might be receiving through their participation in these programs. Given the nature of learners' participation and also that of the tutors, the worth of unanticipated outcomes should not be underestimated. Nevertheless, because they are unanticipated, it may be impossible to include sufficient provision for them on any instrument.

Acknowledgement of learning

There is no clear or single answer to the question of whether learners should receive a certificate of achievement on the basis of outcomes indicated through the assessment process. The value of awarding such certificates was perceived to be quite different across both participating organisations and learner cohorts. It seems that some learners, in particular those with an intellectual disability, are wary of acknowledgement that may be viewed as patronising. One coordinator was concerned that such an award might be interpreted by learners as the end of their need for learning, a perception he

did not want to encourage, for the learners' sake. Yet, conversely, there was strong support in at least one partner organisation for certificates, including for intellectually disabled learners to acknowledge regular attendance, and generally for learners because it was felt that achievement should be recognised. Here again, diversity in purposes and processes is determined by the needs and perceptions of both learners and tutors participating in these programs.

An issue for the awarding of certificates would be ensuring consistency of reporting by tutors. This presumably would be part of the training in the use of the instrument. There might also be a need for a moderating role by the coordinator.

Reporting

Given that in the trial the instruments were used to identify individual achievement and as a means for tutors to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses, both in learning and teaching, it seems that the greatest value of the instruments lies at the tutor–learner level. Results could also usefully be conveyed to a coordinator, where applicable, to enable the coordinator to review progress and discuss this with the tutor if necessary. External reporting (for example, to management or a funding body) would best be done through the aggregation of individual assessments of outcomes, the nature of that summary depending on the instrument used. Importantly, however, these instruments provide a means to identify, elaborate and potentially qualify and quantify important learning outcomes emerging from participation in these programs, which need to be acknowledged and rewarded. The question of national reporting is discussed under research question four, below.

Research questions

Research question 1

A response to the first research question: 'What are the main language, literacy and numeracy learner groups and their needs in non-accredited programs?' is provided above in the section on 'Diversity of learners'.

Research question 2

What are the main outcomes from non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy programs, and what is the role of personal agency and goals in achieving these outcomes for individual learners?

In regard to the wider benefits of learning, it was not difficult to identify outcomes in the interviews at the partner sites under all seven categories identified from the review of literature (self-confidence; engagement with others; attitudes to learning; agency/pro-activity; life trajectories; personal growth; and social capital). This ease of categorisation confirms the need to consider the 'wider benefits' of learning, that is, beyond the development of language, literacy and numeracy skills. It also confirms the findings reported in the literature (Ward & Edwards 2002; Westell 2005; Swain 2006) on the impact of learning on learners in adult literacy and numeracy programs.

Furthermore, the findings are consistent with recent research and policy developments in Britain vis-a-vis the extent of 'soft outcomes' in basic skills and workplace programs. However, it is worth noting Butcher and Marsden's criticism of what they saw as the narrowness of linking 'soft' outcomes with 'hard' ones. This is because they believed:

... such an approach narrows the interpretation of social inclusion to employability and educational achievement and ignores vast swathes of the community and voluntary sector working with clients who may never access jobs or educational qualifications.

(Butcher & Marsden 2004, p.6)

Similar concerns were expressed by some respondents to Dymock's (2007a) survey of Australian providers of non-accredited learning in adult language, literacy and numeracy.

Looking at the role of personal agency, the findings here indicate that the development of an individual ‘learning identity’ may be a key element of engagement in the learning process. Many of the bases for the learning associated with language, literacy, and numeracy need to be understood from the individual’s perspective. The degree to which individuals engage in, or withdraw from, a particular task will influence what they construct and how they engage with that practice. In what Watters and Turner (2001, p.59) described as the ‘diversity and complexity of the learners’ purposes’ and the outcomes confirmed through the present study, subjectivity stands as a common defining factor. This is consistent with what is emerging as a set of alternative ways of assessing learner outcomes through language, literacy and numeracy programs (for example, Eldred et al. 2004; Watters & Turner 2001; Ward & Edwards 2002; Swain 2006). In addition, Waterhouse and Virgona (2005, p.29) concluded from a study of people who had succeeded, despite the apparent handicap of inadequate literacy, that ‘literacy issues are about identity as much as [about] skills’. The findings here confirm that personal agency and goals are central to successful learning outcomes in non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy programs. However, the nature of ‘learner identity’ and how it might be enhanced need further exploration.

Research question 3

How might these outcomes best be ‘measured’ in order to indicate the extent of progress that learners are making, in terms of reporting against: existing frameworks; personal needs and interests of participants; and making a comparison between the two?

The trials showed that each of the six instruments is capable of making some assessment of the wider benefits of learning, but that the level of language used needs to be appropriate to enable learners to understand and/or to enable the tutors to interpret for them. Although all of the instruments had the potential to identify changes in individuals since an earlier previous report/assessment—some more clearly than others (for example, A, C and D)—there was insufficient time in this study to determine whether the instruments were capable of recording ‘progress’.

Furthermore, the relative value given to each of the wider benefits and, therefore, to the choice of indicators, will vary at a local level, so a ‘portfolio’ of instruments is necessary. This allows them to be adapted to local contexts. As noted, it was not the intention of the research to monitor the development of language, literacy and numeracy skills, although some instruments did incorporate those aspects because of their educational origins; it was also not the purpose of the research to identify or validate any particular instrument or to compare the extent to which each of the sample instruments was capable of monitoring outcomes in each of the areas identified. Instead, the concern was to identify a range of approaches capable of undertaking this task.

The assessment process seems to work well when it is a joint activity between learner and tutor, and there are potential benefits for both learner and tutor from engagement in that process, beyond what is included in the instrument. Whether such instruments are used instead of or in conjunction with existing frameworks is a decision for those responsible for the program, but their administration is likely to be formative and/or summative, rather than for initial goal-setting.

Research question 4

To what extent might such indicators of progress be appropriate for incorporating into a national reporting process?

The need to allow for a wide range of individual learning requirements and outcomes and for coordinator and tutor preference for particular instruments point towards the answer to the final research question. As indicated, it was not the intention of this project to develop a specific and broadly applicable instrument or to compare possible indicators of outcomes with those developed for the National Reporting System. The kinds of learning being considered here are not readily accommodated by measures of the kind deployed in the National Reporting System. In this context it is worth revisiting the warning given by Grief and Windsor (2002, p.63), quoted in the review of

research, that attempting such correlations risks losing ‘the very features of non-accredited learning for which this option is currently valued’.

The findings suggest that the development of a single instrument to facilitate consistent national reporting of learner outcomes in non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy learning would require considerably more research and consultation and, as noted by Grief and Windsor, has the potential to imperil the very purposes it seeks to achieve. As discussed above, even among the five partner organisations, there was no consensus about which instrument was most appropriate, and within organisations there was considerable diversity in the selection of instruments by tutors. Nevertheless, the identification of five possible bases for considering the wider benefits of learning and the alacrity with which the organisations and many of the tutors accepted the sample instruments for trialling suggest that many practitioners would be open to developing and trialling more rigorously validated instruments. A development such as this could lead to improved learning plans for individuals, more satisfying teaching for tutors, and consistent reporting to funding bodies.

Conclusion

The diversity of learner needs, motivations and outcomes in non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy programs, as well as the processes of tutoring and learning, means that a choice of instruments for assessing and acknowledging learning is necessary. This study has shown that it is possible to develop instruments to assess and acknowledge the wider benefits of learning. These instruments can provide options to cater not only for the learners’ individual needs, but also for tutors’ and coordinators’ abilities and preferences.

The findings suggest that there are potential benefits for both learner and tutor from joint engagement in the assessment process, but tutors are likely to need training to better understand the purposes and language of the various instruments. The language of the instruments also needs to be intelligible to the learners, particularly those for whom English is a second language. Overall, despite criticism of some of the language and of aspects of particular instruments, there was very positive acceptance of the intention of the instruments—what one tutor group referred to as ‘having a measure of achievement not couched in the language of training packages and competency-based training’.

Further research is therefore needed into the desirability and practicality of developing a scheme for national reporting of the wider outcomes of learning in non-accredited community language, literacy and numeracy. At the individual level, the development of learner identity through the learning process needs further exploration in non-accredited adult learning generally.

In their study of the link between learning and confidence, Eldred et al. concluded:

Without increases in confidence, many adults will remain non-participants, not achieving their full potential in personal development as well as skills and qualifications. The importance of non-threatening first-step learning which gives learners time to gain confidence, [and] develop their identity as successful learners, and supports diverse aims and aspirations is vital.

(Eldred et al. 2004, p.57)

Community education providers are key agents in the provision of ‘non-threatening first-step learning’ in Australian education and training. This research has shown that it is possible to assess the wider benefits of the non-accredited community language, literacy and numeracy learning provided by many of these organisations and, in so doing, better acknowledge the significance of the contribution that individual learners make to the social and economic development of their local communities and, ultimately, of the nation.

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Appendix 1:

Cover email letter to partner organisations with trial instruments

Dear Debbie, John, Jacinta, Tamara, Marcia and Liz

As promised, attached is a ‘portfolio’ of six possible instruments for measuring progress in non-accredited language literacy and numeracy, for you to trial with your tutors and learners. These have been developed following interviews and discussions in four states arranged through the six partners with coordinators, teachers, tutors and learners.

Originally our plan was to send these instruments for your responses, and then for us to fine tune them before sending them to you again. However, given the extensive consultations that have taken place over the last two months, and the time constraints of the project, it seems more expeditious to send them to you as drafts for trialling, but with the proviso that you can amend these individually for ‘local’ use if you wish, as well as create your own instrument to add to the portfolio, if you prefer.

Here is what we would like you to do:

- 1 Consider which of these draft instruments, if any, might be appropriate for monitoring the progress of learners in your language, literacy and numeracy program.
- 2 If necessary, feel free to modify the wording slightly to suit your own circumstances. You may also want to create a completely new instrument to test in your program, now that you have seen what these are like.*
- 3 Trial these instruments with as many tutors and learners as possible between now and mid July.
- 4 Document the feedback from tutors and learners on the instruments you select for use, along with any changes you have made, and report on these at the workshop in Adelaide on 20 July.
- 5 Among the questions you might address are:

How can these instruments best be used in your practice?

What are their relative strengths and weaknesses?

Are there any particular preferences for instruments, from learners and/or tutors and/or coordinators and if so, why?

In the trial, were they completed by learners, tutors or a combination?

If you had to select just two of these instruments, which would they be and why?

Are there issues of monitoring progress in non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy which are not met by any of the instruments in the portfolio?

To what extent might it be possible to adopt one or more of these instruments for national use? If this is a feasible idea, how might that be done?

Should learners be awarded a certificate of achievement on the basis of progress made? If so, on what basis and over what time period should this be awarded?

*One suggestion made to us was the possibility of developing a number of scenarios against each of the possible bases for monitoring progress, e.g. for ‘Confidence’, the scenario might be: ‘You have

been dropped in the middle of [city]. Would you be able to get home from there, and if so how?' We think this notion is worth considering, but that the scenarios would best be developed locally rather than generically by us, in order to meet individual needs.

The original intention of this project was to see if it is possible to identify wider outcomes, i.e. those beyond the development of language, literacy and numeracy skills. Some of the attached instruments maintain that focus, and might be used in conjunction with skills assessments you already use; some of them incorporate both skills and broader outcomes.

Ideally, 'progress' is measured between two points, so it would be best if you could trial these over at least two sessions, say a month apart. However, if that is not possible within the time available, even a single session should help determine if an instrument is appropriate or not.

Please contact us if you have any concerns or queries. We will share these and our responses where appropriate with the other partners in order to keep you all involved and maintain this as a consultative process.

Darryl will give you a call within the next couple of weeks to see how you are going with implementing the trial.

We would appreciate it if you could acknowledge receipt of the portfolio, and perhaps give us some indication of how you are likely to trial the instruments over the next eight weeks.

With best wishes for a successful trial period, and our thanks for your ongoing cooperation,

Darryl Dymock and Stephen Billett

Griffith University

18 May 2007

Appendix 2:

Trial instruments for monitoring progress

Trial Instrument A: Changes in confidence

Learner name:

This report is for the period: _____ to _____

Write a number between 1 and 4 in each box below to indicate how confident you feel since starting your adult literacy program. Leave blank any boxes that do not apply.

Key: 1= Not confident 2 = A little confident 3 = Quite confident 4 = Very confident

| Statements | At home | Socially -with friends | In shops and government offices | At work |
|--|----------------|-------------------------------|--|----------------|
| 1. I am confident when meeting new people | | | | |
| 2. I am confident that I can use what I learn from the tutor in daily life | | | | |
| 3. I am confident to speak to a person I do not know | | | | |
| 4. I am confident to speak in a group | | | | |
| 5. I am confident in situations which may be difficult | | | | |
| 6. I feel I am generally a confident person | | | | |
| 7. I am confident I am learning from this literacy program | | | | |
| 8. I am confident that I have valuable skills to offer | | | | |
| 9. I feel I am generally a confident person | | | | |
| 10. I am confident with my reading | | | | |
| 11. I am confident when writing things down | | | | |
| 12. I am confident with my spoken English | | | | |
| 13. I am confident working with numbers and figures | | | | |

Total confidence score: _____

Tutor Name:

PROGRESS REPORT: From the individual responses above, in your opinion do these collectively indicate an increased level of personal competence since the last report? YES/ ABOUT THE SAME/ NOT SURE (please circle one)

Comment:

Signed:

Date: / /

Trial Instrument B: Learner outcomes – personal, social, economic

Learner name:

This report is for the period: _____ to _____

Indicate changes since last report. Leave blank any boxes that do not apply.

| Personal outcomes | Examples/Indicators |
|--|----------------------------|
| Confidence e.g. now able to catch a bus on their own; stands up for own rights; can deal with authorities; Personal goals, ambitions e.g. now wants to do TAFE course; wants to travel; now has clear goals beyond this program | |
| Social outcomes | |
| Engagement with other individuals e.g. now able to have two-way conversation; mixes better with others; reading to children Involvement in the community e.g. has joined a club; has joined library; now talks to child's school teachers | |
| Economic outcomes | |
| Employment e.g. got a job; started checking job adverts; attended job interview; working as volunteer Life management e.g. ability to shop independently; taking charge of own affairs; taking responsibility for improving health Learning e.g. took another course; is now aware of own strengths; has obtained learner's or driver's licence | |
| Other outcomes | |

Tutor Name:

PROGRESS REPORT: In your opinion do the individual responses shown above collectively indicate an increased level of personal competence since the last report?

YES/ ABOUT THE SAME/ NOT SURE (please circle one)

Comment:

Signed:

Date: / /

Trial Instrument C: Individual learner profile

Learner name: _____

This report is for the period: _____ to _____

Please tick one box in each row.

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Not applicable |
|------------------------|---|--------|-----------|-------|--------|----------------|
| | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Always | |
| Achievements | | | | | | |
| 1 | I am confident about my writing | | | | | |
| 2 | I am confident about my reading | | | | | |
| 3 | I am confident about my spoken English | | | | | |
| 4 | I am confident with my numeracy | | | | | |
| 5 | I am aware of my strengths and weaknesses | | | | | |
| 6 | I can complete official instruments | | | | | |
| 7 | I am able to learn new things | | | | | |
| 8 | I can find my way around and use public transport | | | | | |
| 9 | I can use a computer for writing | | | | | |
| Social | | | | | | |
| 10 | I am good at listening | | | | | |
| 11 | I am confident when meeting new people | | | | | |
| 12 | I am confident to speak in a group | | | | | |
| 13 | I am confident in strange situations | | | | | |
| Personal Growth | | | | | | |
| 14 | I know what I want to do in my life | | | | | |
| 15 | I feel good about myself | | | | | |
| 16 | I am able to speak up for myself | | | | | |

Tutor name: _____

Total score: _____

PROGRESS REPORT: In your opinion do the individual responses shown above collectively indicate an increased level of personal competence since the last report?

YES/ ABOUT THE SAME/ NOT SURE (please circle one)

Comment: _____

Signed: _____

Date: / /

Trial Instrument D: Learner indicators of success

Learner name:

This report is for the period: _____ to _____

Please tick one box in each row to show how much you think you have improved since starting this adult literacy tutoring.

| Achievement | About the same | A little better | Much better | Not sure | Does not apply |
|--|-----------------------|------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| 1. I can read a newspaper or magazine | | | | | |
| 2. I can read instruments and letters | | | | | |
| 3. I can write letters & cards at home | | | | | |
| 4. I can read at work | | | | | |
| 5. I can write at work | | | | | |
| 6. I can use the phone to speak to people in authority | | | | | |
| 7. I can read things and look things up at home | | | | | |
| 8. I can read signs | | | | | |
| 9. I have increased confidence and feel better about myself | | | | | |
| 10. I am more independent and I can do more things outside my home | | | | | |
| 11. People in my family or at work notice that my reading and writing are better | | | | | |

Tutor Name:

PROGRESS REPORT: In your opinion do the individual responses shown above collectively indicate an increased level of personal competence since the last report?

YES/ ABOUT THE SAME/ NOT SURE (please circle one)

Comment:

Signed:

Date: / /

Trial Instrument E: Criteria for achievement

Learner name:

This report is for the period: _____ to _____

[Can be completed by learner or tutor or both, with slight variations to wording.]

| ACHIEVEMENTS as result of participation in literacy program | Tick all the achievements that apply |
|--|---|
| Personal achievements | |
| I am more confident in myself | |
| I am less anxious | |
| I stand up for my own opinions | |
| I am aware of own learning achievements | |
| I am willing to ask for help when I need it | |
| Social achievements | |
| I have better relationships with family members | |
| I can start conversations | |
| I have good listening skills | |
| I have joined a club | |
| I have developed relationships beyond family | |
| I have joined a library | |
| I am less anxious about meeting new people | |
| I can speak in a group | |
| Socio-economic achievements | |
| I have improved my chances of getting a job | |
| I have enrolled in another course | |
| I have a better understanding of the value of education | |
| I am now exploring job opportunities | |
| I have been promoted at work | |
| I am able to work unsupervised | |
| I have gained a driver's licence or learner's permit | |
| I have attended job interviews | |
| I am now working as a volunteer | |

| Cognitive achievements | Tick all the achievements that apply |
|-------------------------------|---|
|-------------------------------|---|

- I have improved my reading ability
 - I have improved my writing ability
 - I have improved my spoken English
 - I have increased my vocabulary
 - I have increased my awareness of what is going on in community/world
-

| Enactive achievements |
|------------------------------|
|------------------------------|

- I regularly attend the literacy program
- I use reading at work
- I read to family members
- I can write notes for my children at school
- I can write paragraphs
- I can use a computer for writing and searching for information
- I can use a telephone to ring organizations, tradespeople, doctor etc.
- I can read signs (for example: street signs, safety signs)
- I am able to take part in workplace discussions
- I am able to shop by myself
- I can speak to a doctor, dentist etc without help
- I am able to use public transport by myself

Total number of achievements ticked: _____

Tutor Name:

PROGRESS REPORT: In your opinion do the individual responses shown above collectively indicate an increased level of personal competence since the last report?

YES/ ABOUT THE SAME/ NOT SURE (please circle one)

Comment:

Signed:

Date: / /

Trial Instrument F: Skills and wider outcomes

Learner name:

This report is for the period: _____ to _____

Other outcomes can be added in response to individual needs and achievements

| OUTCOMES as result of tutoring | Examples since last report (leave blank if not applicable) |
|--|---|
| Skills outcomes | |
| Has improved reading not at all, a little more, a lot more, not sure.(please circle most appropriate) | |
| Has improved writing not at all, a little more, a lot more, not sure. (please circle most appropriate) | |
| Has improved spoken English not at all, a little more, a lot more, not sure. (please circle most appropriate) | |
| Has improved numeracy not at all, a little more, a lot more, not sure. (please circle most appropriate) | |
| Has better learning strategies not at all, a little more, a lot more, not sure. (please circle most appropriate) | |
| Other skills outcomes: not at all, a little more, a lot more, not sure. (please circle most appropriate) | |
| Other skills outcome: not at all, a little more, a lot more, not sure. (please circle most appropriate) | |
| Personal outcomes | |
| Has increased confidence not at all, a little more, a lot more, not sure. (please circle most appropriate) | |
| Has changed life goals not at all, a little more, a lot more, not sure. (please circle most appropriate) | |
| Has greater sense of personal responsibility is proactive not at all, a little more, a lot more, not sure. (please circle most appropriate); | |
| Has now recognized own personal growth not at all, a little more, a lot more, not sure. (please circle most appropriate) | |
| Other personal outcome: not at all, a little more, a lot more, not sure. (please circle most appropriate) | |
| Other personal outcome: not at all, a little more, a lot more, not sure. (please circle most appropriate) | |

Social outcomes

Engages more with family

not at all, a little more, a lot more, not sure.

(please circle most appropriate)

Engages more with people outside family

not at all, a little more, a lot more, not sure.

(please circle most appropriate)

Is more involved in local community

not at all, a little more, a lot more, not sure.

(please circle most appropriate)

Other social outcome:

not at all, a little more, a lot more, not sure.

(please circle most appropriate)

Other social outcome:

not at all, a little more, a lot more, not sure.

(please circle most appropriate)

Vocational outcomes (to be added if appropriate) e.g. in employment, volunteering, further education

Outcome:

not at all, a little more, a lot more, not sure.

(please circle most appropriate)

Outcome:

not at all, a little more, a lot more, not sure.

(please circle most appropriate)

Outcome:

not at all, a little more, a lot more, not sure.

(please circle most appropriate)

Tutor name:

PROGRESS REPORT: From the individual responses above, in your opinion do these collectively indicate an increased level of personal competence since the last report?

YES / ABOUT THE SAME / NOT SURE (please circle one)

Comment:

Signed:

Date:

Appendix 3: Modified Trial Instrument E

Read Write Now! Draft Tutor/Learner Feedback Form E [modified]



Learner name:

Tutor Name:

Region or Coordinator's Name:

This report is for the period: _____ to _____

[To be completed by Tutor and Learner together.]

| FIRST CHOOSE AND TICK YOUR GOALS | GOALS | For the goals you have ticked, rate your improvement for this period | | |
|--|--|---|-------------|----------|
| Literacy | | About the same | Progressing | Achieved |
| | To improve my reading and/or writing at home | | | |
| | To improve my reading and/or writing at work | | | |
| | To improve my spelling | | | |
| | To improve my maths | | | |
| | To improve my spoken English | | | |
| | To increase my vocabulary | | | |
| | To use a computer for writing and searching for information | | | |
| | (If studying) To improve my understanding of course materials | | | |
| | (If studying) To improve my marks for assignments | | | |
| | Other areas: | | | |

| Everyday Life | | About the same | Progressing | Achieved |
|---------------|--|-------------------|-------------|----------|
| | Regularly attend tutoring session | | | |
| | Complete my homework | | | |
| | Answer the phone | | | |
| | Ring organisations, tradespeople, doctor etc. | | | |
| | Read signs (for example: street signs, safety signs) | | | |

To become more independent eg shop by myself, use public transport, use ATM banking etc.

To be more confident to speak with others

To ask for help when I need it

To become more confident in myself

To join a club or library

Other areas:

| Work wise (if applicable) | About the same | Progressing | Achieved |
|---|----------------|-------------|----------|
| To explore job opportunities To get a job or a better job To be promoted at work To gain a driver's licence or other certificate To enrol in another course To work as a volunteer Other areas: | | | |
| <hr/> | | | |
| <hr/> | | | |
| <hr/> | | | |
| <hr/> | | | |

Additional comments:

Signed (Learner) _____

Date: / /

Signed (Tutor) _____

Support document details

Additional information relating to this research is available in *Assessing and acknowledging learning through non-accredited community adult language, literacy and numeracy programs: Support document*. It can be accessed from NCVER's website <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2021.html>> and contains:

- ✧ Introduction
- ✧ Literature review
- ✧ Possible bases for identifying wider benefits of learning
- ✧ Perceptions of indicators
- ✧ Collaborative development of portfolio
- ✧ Partner profiles
- ✧ Partners' reports on trial of instruments
- ✧ Letter to partners May 2007
- ✧ Interview schedules—pilot
- ✧ Interview schedules—revised
- ✧ References



NCVER

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