

# ▶ ADULT LITERACY RESEARCH

## A new social capital paradigm for adult literacy: Partnerships, policy and pedagogy

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▶ **THIS PROJECT EXAMINES** three specific aspects of delivery of adult literacy and numeracy provision—partnerships, policies and pedagogies—from a social capital perspective. It adds to earlier research by Balatti, Black and Falk, and other researchers in this field, which demonstrates that learners can build social capital through their participation in adult literacy and numeracy courses.

The study encompassed a diverse range of adult literacy and numeracy provision and adopted a broader than usual definition of it to enable the inclusion of literacies required in the areas of health, finance and justice, where partnerships have been established between community sector agencies, and literacy and numeracy providers. Literacy in these broader contexts refers to the knowledge and skills required to successfully participate in the particular social sector. The study investigated those learners who were socially excluded or marginalised.

The research comprised three elements—a literature review, environmental scans and case studies—with each stage informing the subsequent work. The literature review highlights that the number, type and nature of the partnerships involved in adult literacy and numeracy provision in the three sectors vary considerably. The finance sector's promotion of financial literacy currently displays the most significant partnerships, including ones involving federal government organisations and departments, major banks, philanthropic organisations, professional bodies and community advocacy groups.

The purpose of the environmental scans was to determine both the nature of the program delivery, and the partnerships between the providers and various agencies in the selected areas of health, finance and justice. The scans were conducted in New South Wales (health),

Queensland (finance) and the Northern Territory (justice). The case studies were conducted in each of these states and required teachers to deliver education and training which focused on building social capital.

### ▶ What do we mean by social capital?

Social capital refers to the networks of relationships that facilitate access to other resources for individuals or groups, and which can lead to an improvement in their socioeconomic wellbeing, as well that of their community. For this study, social capital was investigated in two specific contexts: firstly, the networks between those who are involved in adult literacy and numeracy provision—government agencies, service providers and community groups; and secondly, the changes experienced by participants in how they interact with members of their existing networks and the changes in the types and numbers of networks accessed.

### ▶ Partnerships for social capital outcomes

The research demonstrated that appropriate partnering across government, industry, community groups and philanthropic organisations—'linked-up' approaches—proved to be an effective means of getting the right sort of provision for the intended audience.

Certain elements or characteristics of partnerships involving literacy and numeracy providers make them effective facilitators of social capital outcomes. The research demonstrates that successful partnerships:

- have common understandings of their joint purpose

- have common understandings of how to determine progress made towards achieving the joint purpose
- bring with them the appropriate resources, in terms of financial, social, cultural and physical capital to achieve the common purpose
- hold compatible philosophical positions with respect to their common purpose
- have good communication.

## ► Pedagogy for social capital outcomes

The literacy and numeracy teaching practices teachers adopt affect the social outcomes the learners achieve. Choosing which practices to adopt to maximise social capital is influenced by the resources learners have before starting their course (as a result of the networks they already belong to) and the resources they acquire as a result of the learning experience (which in turn can alter how they interact in their current networks or enable them to access other, useful networks).

Teaching practices developed from a social capital perspective place the learner as a member of a number of networks: the *learner group* itself; the *networks that the learner already accesses* or of which he/she is a member; and the *new networks* that the learner will interact with as the result of the learning experienced.

For each of these networks, this project identifies teaching strategies that draw on and build social capital. These include:

- for the learner group, fostering relationship-building between learners, and learners and teachers; and working with students to create a common purpose and to negotiate content and approach.
- for existing networks, using content relevant to everyday living (for example, working with computers at home) and drawing on learners' life experiences.
- for new networks, setting tasks that require learners to interact with networks (organisations, community groups, service providers) they have not yet accessed; and inviting people from potentially useful networks to co-teach or participate in the training.

## ► Policy for social capital outcomes

Policy is often the invisible but defining foundation of the partnerships that produce the networks, which in turn draw on and build social capital. Policy also provides the rules and rationale for the implementation of the practical strategies, including adult literacy and numeracy programs.

## ► Social capital guidelines for literacy and numeracy provision

A social capital perspective to adult literacy and numeracy delivery is likely to produce superior outcomes for the learners, helping service providers, government and peak organisations achieve their own project goals. The research has resulted in a set of guidelines for the interrelated elements of partnerships, policy and pedagogy which underpin the design and delivery of adult literacy and numeracy programs. These involve an integrated and whole-of-government approach to adult literacy and numeracy, understanding the dynamics of change at a local level, engaging with recipients, ensuring continuity of resourcing, and building on existing successful models from inside and outside government.

***A new social capital paradigm for adult literacy: Partnerships, policy and pedagogy, by Jo Balatti, Stephen Black and Ian Falk, will be available shortly from the NCVET website at <<http://www.ncver.edu.au>>.***