

Integrating literacies: Using partnerships
to build literacy capabilities in communities

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Additional information relating to this research is available in *Integrating literacies: Using partnerships to build literacy capabilities in communities—Support document*. It can be accessed from NCVER's website <<http://www.ncver.edu.au>>.



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Key messages

This report seeks to identify examples of successful integration of literacy learning in community and workplace settings.

- ✧ More can be done in Australia to build the literacy capabilities of adults by integrating literacy learning into activities beyond formal education and training programs.
- ✧ Literacy workers can act as mentors, brokers and facilitators supporting social and community workers to embed literacy development into their policy and strategies.
- ✧ As in successful workplace literacy programs, educators must be open to the knowledge and experiences of other sectors regarding effective or appropriate action or intervention. Collaboration is a two-way learning experience. Vocational education and training providers could improve collaboration across sectors to achieve effective and sustainable responses to literacy challenges.
- ✧ A 'simpler' message about literacies is required to build understanding and allow workers in other sectors to act with confidence in relation to clients with literacy needs.
- ✧ A better understanding of effective localised approaches appropriate for different populations is also required to assist policy and funding decisions.
- ✧ Short-term ad hoc funding provides no real incentive and limits change possibilities. Innovation is easier to encourage when there are funding incentives and people understand and can relate to the overall strategic objectives and desired outcomes, as exemplified by the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) Program.

Executive summary

It has long been accepted that adult literacy is best taught and learned in authentic contexts using materials which relate to real-life needs. An important implication of this ‘situated learning’ is that opportunities for learning are everywhere, not just in colleges or designated learning centres. This understanding was crucial to the development of early workplace learning programs, and underpins Australia’s significant success in integrating literacy and numeracy with wider vocational skills development.

The integration of literacy skills acquisition with vocational education and training, however, is only one of the possible approaches to the development of these skills in varying social contexts. Just as literacy educators have learned to avoid treating literacy needs in isolation, governments and other social agencies have acknowledged the inadequacy of uncoordinated responses to a range of social policies, and the need for cross-sectoral and joined-up (whole-of-government) approaches to a wide range of social issues.

Governments have increasingly come to favour partnership models for policy development and service provision over a broad spectrum of social programs. At the same time, there has been a growing recognition of learning as a central driver in the building of social capital, or the skills, networks and capacity for communities to function well. The challenge for governments is to link policies in various sectors to the goal of a learning society, and for educators to move outside the educational domain to an expanded arena of social environments.

Literacy is fundamental to the growth of social capital¹, not least for communities where there is a sense of being left behind and socially excluded. But how does literacy development contribute to the construction of social capital? To what extent are opportunities available for literacy learning beyond the educational domain? Can the lessons learned from the integration of literacy learning with vocational education be extended to other forms of integration, that is, to literacy partnering in other social domains?

The research

The study was intended to act as a preliminary investigation of these issues by exploring:

- ✧ how literacy approaches are being, or might be achieved in cross-portfolio relationships with agencies for whom education and training is not core business
- ✧ how approaches to building literacy skills might be further developed through partnerships and joined-up or whole-of-government approaches.

The report seeks to identify examples of successful integration of literacy learning in community and workplace settings. It draws a number of findings from a comprehensive analysis and critique of recent relevant literature, backed up by an analysis of data from a range of programs and practices outside and beyond traditional literacy programs offered in institutional settings.

¹ Social capital is the accumulative benefit accruing to individuals and communities as a result of their engagement in community and civic activities and the consequent networks established.

The study deliberately includes recent research and policy literature to help better understand the role literacies and learning can play in building social capital and community capacity.

The methodology combined research of the literature and the internet with interviews of coordinators in cross-sectoral community projects and successful integrated workplace literacy projects. This was complemented by a think tank assisted by the Australian Council for Adult Literacy, and overseas information on the subject.

Sites were selected from various sources, including suggestions from a range of community organisations and government agencies. Because of the necessarily limited size of the project, programs targeting specific groups were excluded, such as those dealing with Indigenous people, those from non-English speaking backgrounds, the disabled, and job seekers in programs funded through the federal Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program.

The findings

The review of workplace literacy programs confirmed the success of initiatives in Australia in integrating literacy, numeracy and vocational skills acquisition through 'built-in' rather than 'bolted-on' methodologies. It also confirmed the importance of valuing and embedding a range of literacies into workplace and community practice, rather than teaching literacy in 'programs' in isolation from other learning. The review also showed that various approaches to integration are adopted in these programs.

There are also other, perhaps less expected, outcomes from workplace literacy programs that have a wider impact and can be said to build social capital and community capacity. It is reasonable to conclude that some of the lessons learned in these workplace programs can be transferred to other social environments. However integration, even in workplace education, proved a complex task, and there remain varying views on how and where it should be approached.

While the workplace approach could be transferred to non-workplace sites (such as health or other community settings), significant resources would be required to train non-specialists in literacy and numeracy identification, and to train specialists in the culture and context of the community setting. It is not easy to integrate literacy and numeracy in wider activities, while also finding ways to make visible and reportable literacy outcomes explicit for those not engaged in a vocational education or general education pathway.

The investigation of the five welfare and community sites revealed the importance of working in partnerships, but also the challenges inherent in this goal, particularly in the absence of a long-term program commitment. Agencies working in the most challenging situations, and for whom education is not their top priority, will withdraw when they feel the other parties are not in for the long haul. All the community sites experienced difficulties working with mainstream education providers. Overall, the study highlighted the difficulties in developing and sustaining partnerships, and the importance of finding a balance between accountability and local flexibility.

All the sites have a complex and multi-faceted array of impact measures reflecting their particular priorities and client groups. How best to weave the acquisition of literacy skills into these indicators is one of the ongoing issues raised by this study.

Further detail about the findings, including responses from professional bodies; information about workplace programs; presentations to the think tank; and news on international developments can be found in the support document. This document can be accessed from NCVET's website at <<http://www.ncver.edu.au>>.

Implications for policy and practice

- ✧ There is a need to seek greater collaboration on building literacy improvement possibilities in social policy areas such as health, youth, housing, welfare, crime prevention and community development. Literacy development must be embedded in the policy and strategies of these sectors.
- ✧ A targeted approach aimed at policy domains outside the formal education and training sector should be based on sound needs analysis of populations known to have literacy development needs. One way forward might be to focus on one policy domain (such as health) so as to better understand the needs and possible responses.
- ✧ Understanding these collaboration possibilities is a significant factor in developing a nationally agreed approach linked to a comprehensive literacy learning framework that can accommodate local diversity of approach and outcome.
- ✧ Funding incentives for the participating agencies can then be used to stimulate collaborative approaches with high potential, to encourage innovation and to build upon successful initiatives.
- ✧ Professional development in other sectors and domains should build the capacity of frontline workers to assist clients with literacy needs. Awareness of literacy challenges and issues should also be built across all policy domains.
- ✧ Successful workplace literacy programs show that educators must be willing to take up new roles when working outside of institutional settings. These new roles require a re-assessment of teacher preparation and professional development opportunities.
- ✧ The shortage of information available to this study shows the need for more systematic measurement of successful outcomes at the micro-level, and program evaluations at the macro-level. Pilots and trials of adult literacy interventions and collaborative programs need to be systematically followed up. This will assist in the evaluation of innovations and effective targeting for longer term project funding. Such studies may also assist in better understanding how to achieve greater coordination of separately funded projects.

Finally, for real progress to be made, it is essential that there is infrastructure support for collaboration and alliance building among the players.

Background to the project

A new direction for adult literacy policy

A number of recent reports have argued for a broadened policy direction for adult literacy in Australia. This direction should build on the successful strategies developed in relation to vocational education and training but also aim to strengthen social capital and community capacity through collaboration with other social policy sectors and agencies (for example, Castleton, Sanguinetti & Falk 2001; Australian Council for Adult Literacy 2001; Beddie 2004). Others have called for better-informed policy based on more detailed needs analyses and a clearer understanding of alternative approaches to adult literacy development (McKenna & Fitzpatrick 2004; Shore 2003). This project is in large part a response to these challenges and begins with three assertions:

- 1 More can be done to build the literacy capability and social capital of Australian adults. One way towards this is to broaden the range and scope of opportunities to learn.
- 2 There are possibilities inherent in current national and international policy interest in joined-up/whole-of-government/cross-sectoral approaches to addressing social issues.
- 3 The broad adult literacy field in Australia can learn from industry partnerships and successful examples of the integration of literacies with vocational and workplace training.

Increasing the social and labour market participation of people who face barriers to employment for any of a number of social, economic and personal circumstances is a key challenge facing governments and a major motivation for the National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 2004–2010, *Shaping our future* (Australian National Training Authority [ANTA] 2003).

The breadth and reach of the strategies proposed in *Shaping our future* is recognition that the consequences of poor skills go far beyond their impact on the labour market and affect individual and community survival and renewal (Hartley & Horne forthcoming). Social researchers point to the decline of rural and regional communities, exacerbated as industry and skilled workers migrate to population centres. A crisis rhetoric is invoked of individuals and communities left behind and socially excluded, unmotivated to learn and change as work and training opportunities disappear. There are many layers of complexity to social exclusion and governments are increasingly looking to more coordinated responses to better meet these multi-dimensional challenges.

Challenging boundaries to learning

Recent responses to the most intractable and difficult social issues include joined-up approaches and partnerships that work *across* government portfolios and *between* government/non-government sector boundaries. These are also referred to as ‘whole-of-government’ or ‘cross-sectoral’ approaches. Such initiatives are largely focused on the individuals and communities at greatest risk of social exclusion, particularly at the many points of transition in their lives (Howe & Howe 2005). Finding appropriate responses to these complex social and individual realities presents considerable challenges (and potential risks) to sectors and portfolios used to focusing on what they traditionally consider to be their own slice of business.

Nonetheless, with growing evidence that low educational achievers are least likely to return to mainstream learning (National Literacy Trust 2005), a number of Australian states are now acknowledging that learning and skill development is not solely the domain of the education sector and are recognising the role that other sectors and agencies can play in supporting learning, including giving credit for informal learning achievements outside school (Fearnside 2005).

Literacies provide useful examples of capacities that can be acquired and developed in multiple ways and contexts, formally and informally. Furthermore, building or integrating learning opportunities with real life experience is consistent with a 'needs-based' and 'situated' approach to learning. In this regard, Australia has enjoyed considerable success with its workplace literacy programs and the 'built-in' not 'bolted-on' approach to integrating literacy with workplace training. Less is known, however, about the potential for adults to acquire literacy skills in other community contexts, yet an important implication of situated learning is that opportunities for learning are everywhere, not just in designated learning centres. An analysis of factors contributing to the success of workplace literacy skill development may assist in understanding how to best achieve integrated learning in other community contexts.

Aim of the project

In summary, the report seeks to identify examples and principles of successful integration of literacy learning in Australian community and workplace settings with the aim of informing a broader community building perspective on future directions in adult literacy policy and provision. It does this by analysing:

- ✧ recent research and policy literature that may inform our understanding of the role literacies and learning play in building social capital and community capacity in joined-up approaches
- ✧ sites where literacy development is built into joined-up initiatives where the education and training sector is not the main driver or possibly not even a stakeholder
- ✧ how aspects of successful workplace literacy programs might contribute to a clearer understanding of ways of building literacy learning into community activities beyond traditional literacy programs in institutional settings.

This approach leads us to draw a number of important findings about literacy development for adults, particularly regarding embedding the learning of literacies in integrated workplace and community practice, rather than through teaching 'literacy' in programs in isolation from other kinds of activity.

Although the concept of community is used extensively through the project, its varied meanings are not at issue here. Two common-sense meanings of community serve our purposes:

- ✧ community as an identifiable physical location within which relationships occur
- ✧ community sector as the government and non-government agencies in direct contact with recipients of government services, but whose core business is not education, training or employment services.

Literacy is used as a catch-all term incorporating English language, numeracy and information technology literacy although there were differing emphases of these skills in the different sites explored. The term 'literacies' reflects the multi-dimensional nature of these skills.

The project

Research approach and questions

The main purpose of this study is two-fold: on the one hand to explore how current social policy-related literature may provide a set of concepts to guide a broader community building perspective to future directions in adult literacy, and on the other to undertake an investigation of instances of literacy learning in line with this more integrated approach, including in workplace settings. Specifically, the following questions guided the design of the project:

- ✧ how do notions such as social capital and community capacity building contribute to ways of thinking about future policy directions for adult literacy?
- ✧ outside certain specified target groups, what examples exist of community programs aiming to include literacy learning outcomes but are that not primarily education related?
- ✧ what factors contribute to or inhibit the achievement of literacy outcomes in community sites?
- ✧ what meanings of integration in current thinking about policy and practice apply to adult literacy?
- ✧ what characteristics contributing to the success of workplace literacy programs might also apply to community contexts?
- ✧ what can Australia learn from international experience to inform policy and practice regarding joined-up approaches to adult literacy development?

Design of the project

The project was conceived as a first, rather than a conclusive, exploration so as to enable more informed policy consideration of the questions posed above. The researchers gathered various strands of information to construct a clearer picture of what building literacy capability in communities—through the work of agencies not in the education and training sector—might look like and entail. These strands include:

- ✧ a desktop review to clarify related concepts and discover appropriate sites
- ✧ interviews with coordinators of cross-sectoral community initiatives to identify the opportunities and challenges for achieving successful literacy learning outcomes
- ✧ interviews with coordinators of reportedly ‘successful’ workplace literacy projects
- ✧ a think tank held in association with the Australian Council for Adult Literacy

One of the researchers was also able to conduct interviews with people engaged with similar issues while visiting the United States and United Kingdom.

Identification of community sites

Given the small nature of the project, the following criteria were used to limit the search for community sites. Programs did not have to meet all the criteria, although we aimed to find programs that:

- ✧ made some reference to/or strongly implied a literacy element to their work, although this was not the key focus
- ✧ were working in partnership with other agencies or made reference to a whole-of-government or joined-up perspective in their work
- ✧ made explicit reference to the impact or outcomes of the program
- ✧ were not based in education institutions or driven by educational practices such as curriculum or timetables, that is, the literacy learning was not a stand-alone activity
- ✧ were inclusive of young people, but not exclusive to them.

Sites were identified through a literature and internet search, through email requests to relevant professional bodies, government departments and contacts and through informal networks.

Twenty-five suggestions for sites were received from professional bodies and other contacts. Of these, nine were stand-alone literacy (or similar) programs offered in community settings, six were for children or were related to schooling, four were exclusively for early school leavers, three were for migrants or people with disabilities, one was a set program delivered in different sites, one was in workplaces and one corresponded to a site we had already selected for further exploration following a conference presentation. (See the support document for further details of sites suggested for the project.)

The various Commonwealth departments contacted were unaware of any relevant initiatives apart from the Department of Employment, Science and Training who provided information about potential sites that had received project funding through the National Adult Literacy Program innovative grants. We selected one of these in addition to the one above. Of the other three selected, one was identified through the research literature, one from another conference presentation and one through the desktop search. No other appropriate sites were found on the web, with most being exclusively for young people.

Potential sites were mapped onto a matrix (table 1) to determine if they met the criteria. Only one site met most of the criteria and a small number met some of the criteria. Five community sites in all were chosen for the study as we judged that they met sufficient criteria to yield data pertinent to the research questions.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the project manager or coordinator of four community sites. Follow-up phone calls were also made if required. In one case, the project had finished some time ago and we had to rely on the project report. We sought information about:

- ✧ the funding and basis of the partnership program and what helps and hinders the effectiveness of the partnerships
- ✧ the focus on learning outcomes, what evidence of success is used, and how learning outcomes are documented and reported
- ✧ the approach taken to developing literacy skills and what helps and hinders successful learning
- ✧ future intentions regarding building literacy learning into the program.

The information from the community sites was analysed in line with a broad framework derived from the desktop review. Where possible, the analysis was sent to the sites and/or informants for fact checking. The analysis of the sites is in the chapter called *Findings from community sites and workplace programs*.

Table 1: Results of application of selection matrix for the five selected community sites

Criteria	Sites				
	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3	Site 4	Site 5
Not primarily education and training provider or in a workplace	Y	Y	Y	Y	Semi
Not just a literacy program in a community setting	Y	Y	Semi	Y	N
Working in partnership with other agencies	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Not based in education institutions or driven by institutional practices like timetables and curriculum	Y	Y	Y	Y	Semi
Not designed for a specific target group such as Indigenous adults, adults with disabilities, early school leavers	Semi	Semi	Y	Y	N
Inclusive of, but not exclusive to, young people	Y	To age 24	Y	Y	Y
Made some reference to/or strongly implied a literacy element to their work, although this was not the key focus	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Made explicit reference to indicators regarding the impact of the program	Y	Semi	Y	Y	Y

Identification of workplace programs

Workplace programs were chosen because they reported successful instances of the integration of literacy with workplace activity. They were identified in a number of ways:

- ✧ a literature and internet search
- ✧ national and state Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program coordinators were asked to nominate two of their most successful projects
- ✧ through informal networks.

Seven programs were identified in four states. Data were received about four, two in a written response and two in a phone interview. The following trigger questions were asked via email:

- ✧ How successful is/was your workplace literacy program?
- ✧ How did you measure the program's success?
- ✧ What helped, or hindered, the success of your program?
- ✧ How did you integrate literacy into the training? Is integration one of the factors in the success of your program? What enables successful integration of literacy?
- ✧ What can be learnt from this workplace context that could be transferred to other contexts, such as community or non-vocational contexts?

Notes from the phone interviews were sent to the interviewees for confirmation. Data from the workplace programs are provided in the support document. The analysis is in *Findings from community sites and workplace programs* in this report.

Overseas visits and think tank

Further useful data for the project were gained through two international adult literacy conferences and visits to colleagues in the United States, Canada, Ireland and England.

The think tank was held in August 2004 in conjunction with the Australian Council for Adult Literacy. Its purpose was to engage key people with a number of the issues that had emerged through the earlier stages of the project, with particular emphasis on the possibilities and constraints regarding more joined-up ways of working with other sectors. Twenty-five key players in the field of adult literacy attended.

Geoff Bateson, the Partnership Manager from the Birmingham Core Skills Development Partnership, spoke at the think tank about lessons learned from the Birmingham initiative. Jane Figgis, an educational consultant working for the Australian Council for Adult Literacy, spoke about her research on the potential for adult literacy experts to work alongside other sectors. Both the think tank and a related forum on the following day provided useful data for the project, the implications of which are discussed later in the report. The talks given by Geoff Bateson and Jane Figgis at the think tank are provided in the support document.

Limitations of the project

The report does not explore programs that target specific groups such as Indigenous people, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, people with a disability, job-seekers undertaking programs funded through the federal Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program or programs exclusively for early school-leavers (such as excellent projects funded through the Partnership Outreach Education Model initiative). This was both to limit the scope of the study and to avoid duplicating other studies looking at those areas (see <www.dsf.org.au> for examples). Also, we did not explore outreach programs designed to build pathways to further education institutions.

Finally, the research does not tell us how to build literacy capability in diverse settings or how literacy should be conceptualised in such contexts. It draws out some implications for policy and practice and suggests some possible future directions following a small number of case studies and the review of some key policy constructs, to which we now turn.

Findings from the literature

Building the conceptual field

Literacy is conventionally understood as the business of the education and training sector irrespective of what kind of construct of literacy is used. The notion of 'sector' imposes a demarcation between education and training and other sectors and hides not only all kinds of learning that take place outside education and training, but also the potential for other sectors to see themselves as enabling and supporting learning through their various interactions with clients. Imagining new possibilities for learning is constrained by thinking in terms of particular sectors. The growing interest in concepts like cross-sectoral, joined-up or whole-of government approaches (to describe ways of working across sectoral boundaries, public and private) is creating new opportunities for thinking about approaches to literacy development (Beddie 2004; Wickert 2004).

Social capital and community capacity building are two other terms currently in vogue in policy circles. These terms are providing new ways of talking across policy boundaries about how professionals from different backgrounds can contribute more to achieving greater social inclusion by working in partnership than they can by working on their own.

One of the aims of this project is to see how these terms and their associated practices, such as partnering and integrated delivery, might contribute to more of a common language and shared understanding about how to build some new and creative opportunities for literacy capability building, particularly in disadvantaged communities. The conceptual categories that follow help to provide a framework for our later discussion of the community sites chosen for analysis.

Literacy, social inclusion and social capital

The long history of community involvement in adult literacy provides many examples of strong collaborative partnerships between government, community agencies and industry (Lo Bianco & Wickert 2001). What has changed in recent times is the nature of government interest in such activity. The productive forces of social capital and their intersection with human capital are a growing theme in current social and education policy (ABS 2004). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which has called for more research to better understand these connections, distinguishes between human and social capital as follows:

... social capital refers to the networks, institutions, policies, norms and relationships that enable people to act together, create synergies and build partnerships ... human capital refers to the knowledge, skills and competencies embodied in individuals.

(OECD 1999 in Kearns & Papadopoulos 2000, p.35)

Central to notions of social capital is the proposition that trust and reciprocity are both a source and an outcome of social capital and promote effective cooperation. Such characteristics contribute to social cohesion and enable communities to build (McLure 2000).

A common distinction, following Robert Putnam's (2000) work, is between bonding and bridging forms of social capital. Bonding ties involve relations of trust and reciprocity within members of a group or network who know each other and share a sense of identity or common purpose. Networks of relationships that facilitate access to other resources of value across a broader range of groups and institutions outside the immediate community contribute to bridging or linking social

capital. Although we note that some social policy analysts are concerned about the uncritical adoption of social capital, and are cautious about the ways in which it is being used to explain and justify new forms of government operations (Daniel, Schwier & McCalla 2003; Seddon, Billett & Vongalis 2002) it seems reasonable to agree that, in general, lack of social capital contributes to social exclusion and impedes individual, social and community capacity building and renewal.

Limited literacy can add to, as well result from, social exclusion. There is increasing evidence, particularly through extensive longitudinal studies in the United Kingdom, of the intergenerational impact of educational underachievement and the strong influence of low parental expectations on learning success and life chances (Bird 2004). An implication of this, as Bynner (2005) has recently pointed out, is the importance of seeing literacy not only as an individual capability, but also as having a role as part of a 'whole lifestyle that needs to be embraced to tackle the social inclusion problem' (np). Thus, in addition to understanding literacy in terms of human capital, Putnam's concept of social capital considers both what might strengthen literacy within communities, and the contributions that community literacy can make to capacity building (Golding & Rogers 2001; Balatti & Falk 2002; Balatti 2003; Kearns 2004; Cowan in press).

Now we will focus on three perspectives on literacy and social capital, each of which provides insight into the research sites discussed later in the report.

Building local community support for adult literacy

The first relevance of social capital to literacy relates to the challenge of securing sufficient bridging social capital. This enables communities to acquire the financial and other resources necessary to address literacy development in a sustained, coordinated and holistic manner. In his recent discussion of this issue, Michael Cowan (in press) argues that, in the United States at least, literacy advocates have not been very successful in building social capital in support of adult literacy as a serious social issue. He observes that adult literacy remains a relatively marginal single-interest concern—a matter left to educators to 'deal with'. He argues that multi-interest coalitions at a local level are needed to build the commitment and action to address adult literacy effectively.

Cowan worked with others to establish the Literacy Alliance of Greater New Orleans, a broad-based collective of leaders from business, local government, faith-based organisations, literacy providers and learners, and higher education. Motivated partially by a serious local shortage of skilled labour, the Alliance has been working collaboratively for two years to expand and systematically improve literacy opportunities for adults. The Alliance is working with voluntary organisations and education departments to restructure and improve the quality of adult education. They are also working with the major work-readiness agency to create comprehensive, sector-specific programs integrating pre-employment education and workplace literacy. The Chamber of Commerce is working with them to address literacy issues critical to the development of the local workforce. They have also developed ties with health care agencies to encourage them to incorporate literacy learning. All these connections help to build social capital.

The view that literacy is for educators to 'deal with' can also be inferred from Kearns study of 350 firms in Australia (cited in Shore 2003) and in Figgis's (2004) study of potential partners in other sectors who might be prepared to work with the adult literacy field. At a community level, the lack of connection and understanding across sectors revealed through such studies contributes to fragmented, unconnected and uncoordinated responses to literacy learning needs which neither build-on nor build social capital. As Cowan (in press) stresses, understanding the organisational interests and priorities of potential partners, and having the capacity to compromise are important characteristics in building and mobilising community support.

More generally, others have noted that Australia lacks the local collaborative-building infrastructure that might deliver appropriate, coherent and sustained responses across a wider range of organisations (for example, Kearns 2004). In some states, however, greater collaboration and coordination of effort is occurring in building the support and infrastructure to generate creative alternative sustainable pathways to work and learning for early school leavers. In relation to older

learners, McKenna (2003) reports on an innovative community network model of partnership building involving local emergency services that promises to have the capacity to generate broader coalitions of community support for adult literacy. Also, in addition to the broader action front that cross-sectoral partnerships can bring, there are the more personalised impacts such as when local people become mentors and champions of literacy (Beddie 2004).

Building social capital through adult literacy

Social capital has value as an explanatory concept to examine the impact of literacy on community capacity building. This has two dimensions. Social capital can help explain and understand:

- ✧ the contributions that literacy makes to communities in the sense that literacy skills are resources drawn on in the interactive processes that enable social capital to build
- ✧ the benefits that accrue from the trust (bonding) that can develop from supportive relationships within learning situations.

As Balatti and Falk's (2002) case studies of adult literacy and learning programs in regional Victoria show, the capacity to develop bridging ties to obtain access to resources previously inaccessible to adult literacy learners can lead to more active community participation. Adult learning activity can thus 'build connections out as well as draw community connections in'. The benefits of this activity flow not only to individuals, but also to the group and to the community as a whole (Balatti & Falk 2002, p.292).

Falk and Kilpatrick distinguish between knowledge resources and identity resources (in Balatti & Falk 2002). They maintain that human capital relates to knowledge resources including basic skills and literacy, whereas the attributes that build social capital, such as confidence, self-esteem, trust, norms, shared values and so on can be understood as identity resources. What is crucial to effective learning, they argue, is the way in which knowledge and identity resources intertwine and reciprocate.

Identity resources are central to how learners may see themselves in new roles and how they are able to take on and manage new challenges and commitments. Literacy workers have long been aware of the significance of trust and confidence, not only to successful literacy skills acquisition, but also to learners being able to develop the trust and the networks to *use* new skills and knowledge in new situations. Realising this potential takes time and requires consistency of personnel and learning opportunities. As Falk (2001) cautions, learners can become disillusioned when they discover they need more than their newly acquired human capital (literacy) to gain employment. Strong bonding ties that often develop within adult learning situations might lead to nowhere without building ties that bridge to networks outside.

Connecting professional communities with adult literacy

The third relevance of social capital to adult literacy relates to bridging ties with professional networks beyond education and training in ways that can strengthen collaborative possibilities. Health provides a useful example, but similar points can be applied to, say, finance or housing or welfare. Linda Shohet (2003, p.67), in writing of the differing primary focus of health and literacy practitioners in Canada, refers to the challenge of finding:

... ways of merging and integrating practices to better meet the goals of both fields and ... serve adult learners as well as the broader citizenry ...

and that:

... like most professionals, health care providers read mainly within their own area of specialisation. Therefore it is highly unlikely that many health care providers would have been aware until quite recently that colleagues in another specialty were discussing the same issue in different terms.

This observation applies equally to conferences and other professional gatherings. Shohet comments further that the understanding of adult literacy within the health field remains narrow, focused on

reading levels and comprehension, while in a parallel sense, literacy teachers understandably remain cautious about building-in (say) health content without deeper knowledge of the subject. She does, however, offer some examples from Canada and the United States of health and literacy professionals working together through what she calls 'health action' approaches, which are adding an important dimension to professional and vocational training, and which might offer some useful models for Australia.

These three perspectives of literacy and social capital provide multi-dimensional insights into the connections between adult literacy and social capital, focusing respectively on the broader community, the individuals in the learning situation, and different professional groups likely to have contact with disadvantaged adults. They show that literacy capacity is a community issue but that building community support for and engagement with literacy is challenging work. At the individual level, social capital provides a language for understanding that literacy is more than an individual deficit, and that various benefits can accrue from engaging in literacy learning, wherever this may occur. Further, the notion of bridging social capital provides a rationale for the importance of building connections across professional boundaries.

These insights will contribute to the analysis of our sites and also have implications for practice and professional development and for how adult literacy policy might be framed, matters that will be considered later.

We turn now to the notion, central to social capital, of community capacity building.

Literacy and community capacity building

Community capacity building is a broader concept than social capital and emphasises the contributions of both social and human capital to building community capacity. According to Hounslow (2002), community capacity building has become a central objective in a wide range of public policies and programs in Australia and is most commonly applied to disadvantaged communities. In part, Hounslow claims, this is in acknowledgement of the uneven impact of the profound economic restructuring and social change of the last decades. The Institute of Public Administration Australia (2002) argues that the growing use of the term indicates a modulation of recent emphases in social policy on individual accountability and signifies a resurgence of interest in the potential of collective action to engage people in a shared vision for revitalising communities.

For Cavaye (2000), community capacity building encompasses human capital, leadership capacity, organisational capacity, and financial capital, which, along with social capital allow communities to work together to develop, manage and sustain community led development. The State Library of Victoria (2003, p.7) reports that community capacity building refers to 'developing and acquiring the skills and competencies, tools and processes needed to strengthen a community's processes and systems so that individuals, families and groups can take control of their lives'.

Recognising that building community capacity is a process focuses attention on the importance of deliberate action to locally build the skills and knowledge required for individuals and communities to achieve greater participation in mainstream society. The achievement of such goals requires local ownership, strong networks, commitment to a shared vision and the strong and active participation of community leaders, stakeholders and citizens (Pearce & Mawson 2003). How effectively these different levels interact to achieve politically desired outcomes rests on a number of assumptions:

- ❖ the physical and other assets available that allow members of the community to enter into partnerships with governments
- ❖ the potential for 'local solutions to local problems'. Some problems need state or national level changes in policies, political approaches and/or resource allocations
- ❖ differences between the goals set by governments and those of local communities
- ❖ the extent of common or homogeneous interests within communities.

(See Hounslow 2002 and Seddon & Billett 2004 for discussion of such issues.)

It is apparent from the literature that successful community capacity building, in the ways intended by governments, is a deliberate act requiring cooperation across many agencies at local levels, a focus on human capital development and the capacity for flexibility. In their study of five Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, Kearns and Papadopoulos (2000) note that Australia is deficient in providing adequate support for building capacity at a local level to strengthen communities. Also, the notion of 'building' suggests the existing presence of strengths to build on which, according to Hounslow (2002) is 'counter to the deficit prism through which disadvantaged people and communities are usually viewed (p.2).

A commitment to community capacity building is one of the key elements enabling a 'joined-up' approach to social issues and thus, by extension, to possibilities for adult literacy skill development. As with the concept of social capital, evidence of a commitment to community capacity building provides a marker for the considerations of future policy.

Whole-of-government, joined-up government, partnerships and possibilities for literacy

In Australia, the term 'whole-of-government' is used by the federal and state governments to refer to 'public service agencies working across portfolio boundaries to achieve a shared goal and an integrated government response to particular issues' (Australian Public Service Commission 2004, p.1). This definition implies that integrated planning, management and delivery are limited to government departments and jurisdictions. It is clear, however (from various initiatives in Australia developed under a whole-of-government banner) that a key aim is to achieve greater connectedness and effectiveness through service delivery partnerships with non-government agencies as well. In reality, then, the intended scope and meaning of whole-of-government in Australia captures both government and non-government sectors. A particular aspect of this in Australia concerns closer cooperation between federal and state and territory governments.

In the United Kingdom the term used is 'joined-up government' and it is here, in the social reengineering of Blair's New Labour government that the impetus for the current Australian interest in the whole-of-government approach can be found. Through the explosion of writings about the construct of joined-up government, two major motivations for change are clear:

- 1 The fragmentation of government services has prevented the achievement of the goals of public policy, particularly in relation to what have been coined 'wicked' or seemingly intractable social problems.
- 2 That effective solutions to such problems demand local knowledge and the active engagement of local expertise and networks, rather than top-down solutions imposed through separate government agencies.

Joined-up government is about alignment. That is, the intention is not only to align and connect formerly discrete government actions, but also activity across corporate, public, voluntary, community and government sectors. As the notion of joining-up across government, and between government and non-government agencies is arguably less ambiguous than whole-of government, we use the term joined-up for the rest of this report.

Policy analysts write that joined-up government denotes a move away from a command and control mode of governance and towards governance through multiple stakeholders working together to deliver integrated solutions to social problems (for example, Institute of Public Administration Australia 2002). However, studies show that the kinds of system change envisaged by governments (whereby complex social problems are effectively turned around in sustainable ways by localised coalitions of government and non-government agencies) require major cultural and structural realignments and encounter significant resistance by government agencies (Ling 2002; Pearce & Mawson 2003). In England, for example, despite the massive resources and infrastructure put in place, the evidence of sustained impact is mixed.

Joined-up approaches in education and training

As noted earlier, a strong impetus for joined-up solutions is concern about social and economic exclusion, particularly within rural and remote Australia and in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods. Consequently, most current initiatives relate either to Indigenous communities (for example, Council of Australian Governments 2003) or to young people particularly those 'at-risk' through drug use, leaving school early, crime or living in a disadvantaged urban area. Examples such as the Victorian Local Learning and Employment Networks and the South Australian 'wrap-around' approach bring together education providers, industry, community organisations, individuals and government organisations to improve education, training and employment outcomes for young and isolated people. Other joined-up approaches include the NSW Regional Coordination Program and Queensland's Community Renewal. For some specific examples, see research working papers from The Australian Centre for Organisational, Vocational and Adult Learning 2003 forum on Urban Disadvantage and Learning Communities, <<http://www.oval.uts.edu.au/publications/index.html>>.

Partnership is a common term used to denote the arrangements for delivering these kinds of programs. Seddon and Billett (2004) note that the concept of partnerships is developing a new significance and meaning as a mechanism for achieving more devolved, locally appropriate and integrated responses. They distinguish between community initiated and enacted social partnerships. Enacted partnerships are stimulated by agencies external to local communities and are a form of social re-engineering to encourage greater community participation in local education and training issues, particularly by local industries. The Victorian Local Learning and Employment Networks are examples of enacted social partnerships.

Joining-up with adult literacy

Working in collaborative partnerships across government, industry and the broader community has long been a feature of adult literacy. Mostly these involve the delivery of language or literacy classes in informal off-campus settings. Sometimes, with young people, projects involve alternative informal literacy learning opportunities such as building a skate-ramp or painting a community graffiti wall, where literacy teachers assist with developing underlying skills. Historically these kinds of arrangements have been ad hoc and short-term, dependent on project funding and the presence of local people with a particular interest. However, increasingly, state jurisdictions are building ways to enable these informal learning outcomes to count towards various formal certificates.

The moves to more joined-up government approaches are resulting in more coordinated and planned proposals across education sectors and involving adult literacy. South Australia's Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Training (2004) has developed a ten point plan for action, *New times, new ways, new skills*, that includes a collaborative, state-wide adult literacy policy and related strategy. The emphasis throughout the action plan is on collaborative partnerships with the Commonwealth government, local councils, communities and the business and industry sectors. However, it is still early days and the plan has yet to be implemented.

Tasmania is also developing deliberately coordinated policies and strategies. In 2003, the Department of Education released a number of issues papers resulting in an overarching policy framework for post-compulsory education and training. In the Tasmanian discussion paper, *Literacy throughout life* (Tasmanian Department of Education 2003), a range of current services are outlined from pre-school, through school, post-school, work, unemployment, university, libraries, online access centres and community-based groups. It is a holistic picture although, as with the South Australian development, it is primarily focused on better integration within the education and training sector.

Although Tasmania's small size makes coordination of services easier, it is nevertheless committed to raise awareness of the significance of enabling literacy throughout life, to share understandings of what is required and develop partnerships between government agencies, enterprises, communities, groups, families and individuals. There is repeated emphasis throughout the issues papers on the need for a 'whole-of-state' response to the literacy needs of Tasmanians along with an

acknowledgement that new literacies are often learned through processes of informal learning. How this is to be implemented is, as yet, unclear.

A powerful international example of what can be achieved through joining-up is the Birmingham Core Skills Development Partnership which has developed a systematic citywide whole of life framework aimed at ambitious improvements in levels of literacy, numeracy and information technology key skills (Bateson 2003). The Birmingham partnership is pursuing this goal to break the cycle of disadvantage by working in a coordinated way with targeted population groups and organisations in contact with these groups. It is working to bring about long-term changes in the way systems work, long-term improvements in the quality of services and a sustained broader engagement of other sectors and has recorded significant successes (Birmingham Core Skills Development Partnership 2004).²

Successful examples like this show how inter-agency collaboration and support for literacy development can work productively, particularly when supported by national (or state and territory) priorities and funding possibilities. The growing literature of case studies and evaluations of joined-up approaches and partnerships confirm the Birmingham story—the importance of coordinated target-driven strategies with a long-term approach; of an acceptance that everyone has a role to play; of deliberately building literacy into a range of policy areas; of knowing what works locally and scaling this up; of focusing multiple funding sources on shared targets; and of finding a balance between central demands for accountability and local demands for flexibility.

The notion of integration is implicit in all this work in various ways and we now turn to an exploration of this term.

Integration and literacy

The concept of integration has a number of meanings for adult literacy as well as for how cross-sectoral arrangements might be approached, developed and evaluated. Notions of literacy ‘across the curriculum’, or ‘built-in’ to all learning activities certainly characterise the work of many youth and adult educators, particularly in outreach and community development settings. On the whole, integration is used in adult literacy contexts to refer to vocational education and training curriculum activities.

The literature considered here suggests that the concept of integration is very pertinent to notions of joined-up government and community capacity building, particularly in terms of how collaborative relationships are conceptualised, structured and managed. These kinds of considerations are in addition to the usual ways in which the education and training sector refers to integration as a curriculum or delivery matter. From the perspective of this project, how the meanings of integration are played out in practice will have an impact on how embedded or integrated literacy learning is approached and evaluated.

McKenna and Fitzpatrick’s (2004) report of international trends notes that Australia has not really expanded its model of integration to other areas of social policy. Elaborating differing meanings and uses of the term may help clarify ways such expansion might occur. In considering this issue, we distinguish between integration as it relates to approaches to curriculum, and integration as a structural and governance matter.

Integration and literacy in vocational education and training

Initially, the integration of literacy in vocational education and training in Australia was at the delivery or content level where authentic work-based texts and tasks were used as training material and training was delivered on-the-job rather than in separate classrooms. So, in a delivery sense, integration ‘involves concurrently developing language literacy and vocational competence as

² The Birmingham Core Skills Development Partnership predated by some years *Skills for Life: The national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills* (Department for Education and Skills 2001).

interrelated elements of the one process' (Courtenay & Mawer 1995, p.2). In some cases literacy teachers and vocational trainers work together as a team; in other cases, trainers without literacy training expertise undertake the concurrent delivery of training.

Later, the integration of literacy was embedded at the level of industry standards (training packages³) and integrated curriculum. In this sense, integrated literacy refers to the explicit identification and building-in of literacy skills standards for the training and assessment of vocational skills. Under the revised training standards in the Australian Quality Training Framework, all vocational trainers are now responsible for integrating literacy. They are expected to be able to identify the reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy skills associated with vocational tasks and apply that information to their training. This will see the formation of new, or extended, partnerships between vocational trainers and literacy specialists.

Although success is claimed for integrated delivery, the views of educators are mixed, there is no consistent approach and little is known about which models are the most effective⁴ (Sanguinetti & Hartley 2000). Nonetheless, employers and employees alike support the integration of literacy in vocational and workplace training (Balzary 2004; O'Neill & Gish 2001). In vocational contexts, literacy educators now occupy a range of roles requiring skills beyond those conventionally acquired in teacher education programs. A positive outcome of this is reported to be the wider impact that literacy educators are having in some workplaces and the supportive networks and partnerships that have emerged between educators, employers and industry bodies (Falk, Smith & Guenther 2002).

Integration and literacy in community development

An integrated community development approach is often associated with the Freirean (Auerbach 2004) perspective that literacy acquisition is best achieved when embedded in community action or development. This view, that the strongest way to foster collaborations for language/literacy acquisition is for the literacy learning to occur by connecting it with organising activities around the key issues in people's lives, was supported by a recent world-wide study of community partnerships in literacy development. It reflects a long tradition of literacy activity as oriented to empowering individuals to change their lives. This is more in line with the notion of community partnerships developing from local concerns rather than partnerships deliberately enacted by government or other agencies to deliver specified outcomes (Seddon & Billet 2004). There are instances of a community development approach in Australia but these tend to be in the form of stand-alone classes in community settings rather than literacy experts working in an integrated way with other community workers.

Less common examples of integration in community development are where literacy workers work within learning and development programs organised by other sectors (such as childcare, health or finance). Some regions in England and Ireland are deliberately building this capacity and there are examples along these lines in relation to health services in the United States and Canada (Hohn 2002).

Integration and governance

A consistent message through the literature about social capital, community capacity building and joined-up approaches is that greater flexibility and responsiveness to local needs will result in more effective and accountable provision. As noted earlier, joined-up approaches aim to deliver solutions within an integrated framework rather than simply a devolution of responsibility. Joining-up implies more than just collaboration or a contractual arrangement across boundaries regarding the

³ In Australia, 'training packages' are not a course or folder of resources, but a 'package' of units of competence that can be tailored to meet specific industry training needs. Training packages are made up of three components: specific competency standards, industry qualifications (certificates and diplomas pertaining to a specific industry), and assessment guidelines that are nationally endorsed for each industry.

⁴ An examination of integrated delivery practices is the focus of a forthcoming NCVET study by Fitzpatrick and McKenna.

delivery of services. It acknowledges a mutuality of interest and a shared responsibility for policy, planning, implementation and evaluation as well as delivery. The Institute of Public Administration Australia's recent report of approaches to joining-up suggests that the current interest in integrated solutions reflects a major shift in public administration governance. This shift is akin to 'organisational fusion' across tiers and sectors of government and non-government (Institute of Public Administration Australia 2002, p.2). The Institute report defines an integrated governance framework as 'the structure of formal and informal relationships to manage affairs through joined-up approaches' (p.2).

A relevant example, in England, is the use of the integrative governance mechanism of Public Service Agreements to encourage a whole-of-government commitment to the *Skills For Life* strategy. Incentives are built into these Agreements for implementing nationally agreed initiatives such as providing literacy improvement opportunities for all workers who request it, or including the provision of literacy training in the tender requirements for sub-contractors (Department for Education and Skills and Her Majesty Treasury 2003). In terms of accountability across government, all public sector organisations are required to report annually to a Cabinet Committee charged with overseeing the implementation of *Skills For Life*. These are examples of how the British Government 'governs' or manages its integrated basic skills strategy across a range of organisations.

In summary, integration is a commonly used term in both social policy and adult literacy contexts and discourses. Given its relevance to the concerns of this project, greater clarity about its various uses and their meanings contributes both to analysis of the sites and to future policy discussion.

Before moving to this analysis, we briefly consider what can be learnt from the literature about two key issues pertinent to any effective approach to integrating literacy learning in other sectors—outcomes and the skills needed to deliver them.

Outcomes

The literature about integration from a governance perspective signals the importance of clarity and explicitness in terms of accountability and funding. Although there is general agreement that integrating or embedding literacy learning in other activities is an important strategy for reluctant learners (Eldred 2005), this can present particular challenges for the visibility of evidence of impact and accountability, not only to funding bodies but also to all stakeholders. A forthcoming English study suggests that embedding literacy should not mean hiding it. Rather, there appear to be advantages to building the awareness that literacy 'runs through everything' (National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy 2004, p.4). Further advantages can be gained when educators build a positive image of literacy and assist workers in other sectors to do the same. If there is no explicit curriculum or stated competencies, how can agencies and learners know if, and what, they are learning?

There are differing views in the literature about whether the most disengaged learners are likely to care much about mapping their learning to explicit literacy and numeracy learning outcomes (Hannon, Pahl, Bird, Taylor & Birch 2003; National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy 2004; National Literacy Trust 2005). Some argue that engagement with learning is a sufficient indicator of success while others insist that the existence of explicit pathways leading to recognisable standard qualifications is an important motivator and an essential element in improving the quality of learning opportunities for the most socially disadvantaged (Lavender, Derrick & Brooks 2004).

A key aspect of the English approach is an active policy of linking the contributions of different agencies and networks to a National Grid for Learning, which lines up training provision, including self-access online, with the national strategy and infrastructure. National learning targets with common standards, and aligned across school and post-school, provide a common language and a

common framework of levels and equivalences. National basic skills and vocational skills strategies are complementary and dual certification is available. Providers who want to access *Skills for life* funding must align their programs with the national basic skills frameworks and targets.

Australia, however, is unlikely to develop a national integrated infrastructure to support a more nationally consistent approach to literacy outcomes reporting, although there are views that the National Reporting System for Language, Literacy and Numeracy has the potential to make a difference here (McKenna & Fitzpatrick 2004; Perkins 2005). A relevant question to this study concerns what evidence is emerging that a more standardised approach to assessing and reporting individual learning outcomes would promote and enable broader community engagement with literacy learning. Apart from informal accounts (such as those that were obtained regarding the Birmingham Core Skills Development Partnership), we were unable to find any systematic documented evidence of such connections.

Skills for delivering literacy outcomes

An important variable in enabling support for and recognition of literacy learning is the skill set of community workers engaged with disadvantaged adults. In this regard, McKenna and Fitzpatrick (2004) argue the significance of continuing the work of mapping literacy competencies underpinning industry training for those occupations in most contact with disadvantaged. Other reports point to the importance of Australian education and training systems building the capacity for recognition of non-credentialed and informal learning (for example, ANTA 2001; Victorian Qualifications Authority 2004).

Broadening the workforce's skill base to recognise and map literacy learning has potential to build the literacy capacity of workers as well as to build their awareness of, and potential for, integrated literacy learning in a range of contexts. Developing such expertise in a range of community oriented occupations, however, does have implications for literacy professionals and the skills and capacities they require to work across sectors and professional boundaries. Fogolyan, Stone, Wood, Fraser, McRae and McKenna (2003) note that the community network model of integrated training posed challenges for educators not used to working in a diverse community with competing priorities.

In 1999, Terri Seddon was calling for a new form of teacher professionalism in vocational education and training, where most literacy educators are to be found. Teachers, she argued, have the skills to cross boundaries, they know how to get out there and facilitate learning in enterprise and community settings but they resist because it is uncomfortable and unpredictable. A more recent analysis of the VET professional (NCVER 2004) highlights the key role of the VET workforce in delivering the national VET strategy and the importance of gaining a clearer understanding of the mix of skills needed for the future.

Seddon (1999) talks of education as 'a process of co-production involving joint work' (p.7). If so, then the study undertaken by Figgis (2004) highlights some challenges involved for literacy workers to 'co-produce' with social and community workers the knowledge and skills to act as brokers and facilitators of literacy learning. Cowan (in press) also writes of the brokering and negotiation skills needed to build the community potential to support literacy development and cautions:

... this potential can only be realised however if adult literacy leaders begin to think and act not as a single interest group with a righteous issue but as members of larger collectives with a multi-interest agenda for social change ... that orientation requires that local literacy leaders identify other institutions as potential partners with complementary interests, understand the particular interests of those partners and forge a larger shared agenda that includes but is not limited to or controlled by the interests of any of them including the literacy advocates ...
[this is] an example of creating a particular form of social capital.

In their study of international trends, McKenna and Fitzpatrick (2004) note that countries like Ireland, New Zealand and the United Kingdom have developed accredited courses in recognition of the new skills needed by literacy teachers working in new environments such as health and welfare. In Australia, recognition of these kinds of training needs have been built into a proposed advanced diploma qualification for the Training and Assessment Training Package but there is yet to be agreement about this as an appropriate strategy to meet skill gaps. McKenna and Fitzpatrick (2004) cite a number of studies that suggest that not only are literacy educators unprepared for new ways of teaching, many appear not to be up to date in literacy theory and educational practices.

Summary of the literature review

This discussion of the literature illustrates that there are possibilities for adult literacy policy and practice inherent in a number of current policy directions. There is evidence from other countries of deliberate efforts to engage adult literacy with concepts of social capital and community capacity building. Such examples provide possible ways to broaden the range and scope of opportunities to build the literacy capability and social capital of Australian individuals and communities. For example, the literature points to the importance of an integrative infrastructure and a common language, easily accessible recognition and transfer arrangements, easily accessible, sustainable and flexible pathways, particularly for learners at the margins whose entry points to training are unpredictable.

In addition, the wider literature on partnership building in a joined-up government environment reveals some of the challenges involved in working in such ways. Two such challenges are highlighted here—accountability, and the capacity of workers in one sector to work with other sectors in a positive and constructive way. For the case studies that follow, the insights from the literature contribute to the framework for analysis. Specifically, we consider the infrastructure to support the project; the nature of partnerships with education and training; the approach to integration from a content and structural perspective; concerns with impact and outcomes; and the major challenges particularly in regard to the achievement of literacy outcomes.

Findings from community sites and workplace programs

In this chapter we visit sites to see how literacy development is integrated with other activities. What we are calling the ‘community’ sites were chosen because they are examples of joined-up programs involving more than one social policy sector, and include literacy development in their aims. They are not education providers themselves but may be working in partnership with education providers. The purpose of identifying the sites was to explore what contributes to or inhibits the achievement of literacy related outcomes.

The workplace programs were nominated as examples of successful industry partnerships where there is focus on literacy development but it is integrated with work and industry training. Our purpose for looking at these programs was to see if the factors contributing to the success of integrated workplace literacy could transfer to other contexts and help answer questions about the potential of integrating literacy learning elsewhere.

The community sites

The site selection criteria revealed very few examples of the kind of initiative that we were seeking, and five community sites were selected for investigation. Given our parallel finding that there is little, if any, mention of literacy, or even learning, in most national social policy statements, the lack of attention to literacy capacity building through other social policy areas is not surprising.

The sites chosen are all partnerships or collaborations of one sort or another and could all be said to contribute to building community capacity through the development of human and social capital. They also illustrate differing approaches to integration. The first three sites are located in welfare or community organisations, where the focus is not primarily on education or literacy, but where education is one pathway to be pursued. The final two sites (although receiving federal literacy project funds) developed from prior working relationships with community workers and are located in community contexts—one a caravan park, the other a community health centre. As issues of confidentiality emerged in some sites we have not identified any of the sites by name or publication reference.

Community reintegration site

This program provides a range of services to support recovery and create long-term pathways out of homelessness and drug dependency. It is part of a primary case management approach that reflects growing research that indicates that meeting basic needs first enables a more sustained focus on recovery and reintegration. This is in line with notions of ‘recovery capital’ (Granfield & Cloud 1999), or the assets that individuals have to assist them to change and includes physical, social and human capital. The brief of the community reintegration program is to offer a range of activities including education and training options. Our information about this program comes from a confidential review, a conference presentation and meetings with the project coordinator. At the time of writing it has successfully completed a substantial trial and obtained funds for a further three years.

The program is part of a longer-term partnership between a state government and three agencies offering emergency accommodation. It recognises that more stable housing is necessary for sustained

recovery from drug and alcohol abuse. One of the partners is a registered training organisation. Partnerships are also formed between the program and local community networks. The program employs a coordinator (accountable to one of the welfare organisations and a trained teacher), a drug and alcohol worker (accountable to the coordinator), sessional staff and primary case managers. An advisory group with representatives from the project team, the program, the three welfare organisations and the state government department guides the direction of the program.

The reintegration aspect of the program provides therapy, recreation, preparation for employment, second chance education, and integration back into the community. It runs on a 26 week cycle. At the same time, the program provides as much flexibility as possible by providing multiple entry points. Participants can move in and out of the program depending on the pathway they want to follow. One of the key strengths of the program is that participants on the program are engaged full-time, five-days a week. Typical of this target group is a lack of meaningful activity between appointments with support workers. Boredom is a significant risk factor, so the full program attempts to counteract this risk.

Literacy is incorporated indirectly into the program through activities with titles like Philosophy and Creative Writing, the names of which are considered to be more appealing than literacy. Offering literacy separately was not successful, with low attendance and lack of client engagement. Formal literacy training was considered too confronting for most participants.

Educational outcomes are not the major priority although they are valued and are often set as individual learning goals by clients. Understandably, given the nature of the client group and the multiple needs of participants, the challenges facing the program present major barriers to achieving education and training outcomes. Nonetheless, the review of the trial program after 15 months reported a number of positive impacts on participants' lives including developing skills for education and employment.

Outcomes of the program are measured in various ways. As the initial stage of the project was a trial, reporting of outcomes has been somewhat experimental and concerned largely with participants' achievement of personal recovery goals. For accountability purposes during the pilot, the funding body was primarily interested in numbers participating; that is, in the engagement of participants. It was acknowledged that more formal assessments of clients' progress are necessary to review achievements and plan future interventions.

Now that the program has gone mainstream, it will be required to report using Drug and Alcohol's Episode of Care criteria which include reduced high risk behaviour, improved social functioning, and emotional and psychological well being. Such reporting requires a team-based approach and an important challenge is that of coordination of services and collaboration between primary case managers, accommodation services, drug and alcohol workers and the community reintegration program workers.

A strength of the program is that the nature of the operations of the partner organisations enables the creation of appropriate work experience opportunities—bridging social capital at work. The program has started to build stronger pathways possibilities through the registered training organisation status of one of the auspicing organisations. It was too early to see what impact this may have on the ways that literacy is integrated into the program as it develops, but ongoing contact with the coordinator suggests this is working well.

One of the key things to be learnt from the program trial was the amount of time required for some clients to reintegrate into the community or to engage with a job network or training provider. For many, 26 weeks is not long enough. Initial conversations with the local major training provider suggested that mainstream providers are unlikely to have the resources, skills or flexibility to accommodate the needs of people in this kind of community program. This presents a conundrum about how best to connect with training providers when, as one of the workers said, if their clients can cope with training, or can plan ahead to access it when it is offered, they don't really need the reintegration program.

In terms of literacy, it appears that the best approach is incorporation into other activities. Some of the staff involved had literacy teaching expertise, which made such incorporation possible. Originally the project workers came in to occupy discrete roles but soon came to recognise that they could both 'get better at it' if they worked together, which led them to acquire accredited qualifications in drug and alcohol work. This raises the more general issue of the cross training of staff. The scope of existing literacy training may not meet the needs of educators working to achieve results in challenging environments such as this one, where one can soon come to the limit of professional qualifications designed for more stable teaching and learning environments.

Youth at risk site

This site, although focusing on youth, met many of our other criteria for site selection. It was in partnership with other agencies, not education based or driven, there was some focus on impact and an acknowledgement of literacy. The site is a welfare organisation offering a program for young people between 15 and 24 who have complex problems, such as mental illness, substance abuse, family violence, long-term unemployment, unstable living situations and involvement with police. The program aims to build capabilities and reconnect these young people to the mainstream, taking a multi-faceted approach including education and training, personal development, art, outdoor activities, therapy and personal support. The program also strives to facilitate better coordination across services. Individual participation is for one to five years depending on the time required to reconnect. Funding for the five-year project comes from a private foundation. We discovered this program through a web search and our information comes from documents on the project website and a follow-up meeting with the project coordinator.

The program was established and is managed by the welfare organisation and works in partnership with a youth substance abuse service and collaborates with the juvenile justice system, Centrelink, local education providers and local employers. This particular welfare organisation believes that comprehensive, planned support is necessary for this group and that a proactive, integrated, long-term approach is necessary to address effectively the needs of high risk young people.

The original planning document for this site proposed an 'integrated, holistic and flexible model that works closely with other services, in designing specific and targeted responses to high risk young people' (project plan). Literacy appeared to be embedded in programs, such as the arts and culture program, and the development of entrepreneurial skills. The aim was to weave the skills of literacy, communication and teamwork into all approaches.

Given the nature of the young people targeted by this program, success involves a complex array of indicators including increased participation in education or employment activities, reduction in offending, reduction of substance abuse, stronger social networks and increased confidence and trust. How best to successfully weave the acquisition of literacy skills into such an array of indicators is one of the ongoing issues raised by this study. At the time of meeting the coordinator, a literacy specialist was working on mapping the literacy competencies of the programs and activities to see how they might link to existing accreditation frameworks. Later enquiries suggest this development work is ongoing. There is no dedicated funding for literacy experts to work in the program.

Components of the education program can be credited to the Victorian Certificate in Applied Learning and participants can complete or part-complete VET qualifications relevant to specific industries. However, as the organisation is not a registered training organisation it was not clear how this is to be achieved. The complexity and cost of achieving recognition for prior learning contributed to a degree of scepticism from the project coordinator about these processes. He observed also that some of his colleagues were resistant to capturing what they considered to be 'silly' data in order to comply with the demands of the Australian Quality Training Framework.

Thus, the idea of becoming a registered training organisation, and therefore an assessor, was considered but rejected because of the costs involved and because the process would divert attention from other priorities of the organisation. The organisation does not have resources to train existing

workers as workplace assessors/trainers and there is a danger that if workers were trained as workplace assessors/trainers they would leave the organisation (given the difficulties of working with this client group) as they could be better paid elsewhere. On the other hand, partnering with a registered training organisation or employing teachers is also expensive.

The major focus for literacy in this organisation is about how to get recognition for the informal learning of literacy skills through its other activities. The site highlights the difficulties for non-education organisations who want to access accredited training and provide education pathways, as the system for recognising prior learning still seems to be inflexible, complex and cost-prohibitive. It is not possible, however, without some reporting or accrediting mechanism, to know how well the program is achieving its aim of integrating literacy learning into its work. An evaluator is now working alongside the program and so it would be instructive to keep track of how the project is managing some of the challenges identified above.

We now move to a site where literacy is a more marginal activity but nonetheless seen as an essential aspect of the work of the program.

Community development site

This site is a community development project with the residents of two public housing estates in an outer metropolitan area. The site was chosen because, according to a published evaluation report, one aspect of its community development role is to provide an education and training (including literacy) component. We learnt of the three-year community-building project through attending the 2004 *Communities in Control* conference and were attracted to it because of its commitment to building educational opportunities into its activities, and its concern to document impact and outcomes. Information about the project was collected from the evaluation report and a meeting with the project manager and one of the community development workers.

The three-year project involved building relationships and trust through a wide range of activities and events involving different groups on the estate. Partnerships were developed with residents, community and educational agencies, government departments such as housing, health, education, human services and drug prevention, local welfare agencies, community centres and libraries, local businesses, the local council and particularly the largest factory in the area. The organisation is explicit about its commitment to 'creating pathways to education, training and employment initiatives and inspiring and supporting people to take steps along such pathways' (project report). The involvement of the large local factory in the estate was of particular importance in creating such a sense of possibility.

Literacy was embedded in a range of education activities, such as informal and formal computer training programs; leadership training; letter, resume and proposal writing; literacy games (involving children, young people and adults); library and reading programs; homework club and reading groups; learning circles; and weekly current affairs quizzes. A family literacy activity occurred purely through the coincidence of a private company offering a particular kind of fun literacy activity at a time when funds could be found. It was clear that this opportunity was grabbed with enthusiasm by at least one resident who learnt to read through this one-off initiative. There was no money for a follow-up program.

As with the previous two sites, the community organisation experienced difficulties working with the training provider who proved not to have the flexibility to accommodate the needs of estate residents. This lack of flexibility was evident both in relation to approaches to teaching and learning (such as integrating literacy) and in the timeframes that people with multiple pressures would need to complete a course. Thus the initial efforts to link people on the housing estates to various kinds of training petered out and, although approximately 30 people participated to varying extents in computer training, eventually the funding dried up.

Measuring learning outcomes in such situations is difficult and participation and engagement could be read as proxy indicators of community capacity building potential. In this particular project, over

400 people took part, approximately 20 people gained casual or permanent employment and more than 30 adults participated in computer training. Residents commented positively on the impact on their lives—of not feeling intimidated by living on the estate and of earning some respect.

This experience reflects the piecemeal approach that many community organisations are forced to adopt—seeking funds from various sources for small, short-term, one-off projects that reflect current policy trends, such as projects in information technology or youth. Other projects might be targeted because they ‘look good’, although they are not linked to a broader framework and may not reflect grass roots needs and priorities. At the time of meeting, the project manager had nominated to sit on the local committees for the Local Learning and Employment Networks and a local learning community project specifically to see if he could build some momentum and commitment to better integrate learning opportunities more effectively into the housing estates he works with (that is, to draw on some social capital). A look at the relevant websites three months later showed no evidence of greater engagement of this kind and nor did the coordinator amend the notes of our interview with him at this time.

The challenges for such community organisations include those typically associated with community development work where not everything works, where meetings have to be cancelled because no one turns up, where money dries up and where expectations are not met.

The issue of sustained education impact is also relevant for our next site, two caravan parks in Queensland.

Caravan park site

This project, titled *Real Life Literacy*, was funded through the innovative literacy grants element of the National Adult Literacy Program. Despite having this predominantly literacy focus, the project was chosen because it provides a model of an outreach literacy worker in a community context outside mainstream education provision. Information about this project was obtained from the project report only, as it had finished some time ago, and efforts to contact the project worker failed. It was a 12 month project that aimed to embed literacy into the lives of the residents of two caravan parks and create more of a learning environment. A literacy project worker, auspiced by a local school, worked 25 hours a week in the caravan parks with a community health nurse. The community development project was informed by the belief that literacy is about assisting people to develop a framework to articulate their view of the world, understand the world of others, negotiate their own way, and contribute to and draw on social capital.

The overall project was part of the Queensland Government’s Community Renewal program, a joined-up government strategy to ‘promote safe, health and confident communities’ (Institute of Public Administration Australia 2002, p.51). Locally, partnerships were formed between the residents, community health, the local neighbourhood house, local youth services and non-government agencies. The project’s approach was integrated, sharing resources, information and skills to build learning opportunities for the residents that could be sustained with the support of these different agencies. The cross-disciplinary work of the literacy project worker and the community health nurse were considered to be essential to the success of the project.

Literacy was embedded in the real life tasks that residents needed to perform, such as help with job applications; letters from government departments and to the local council; forms; leases and contracts; posters and flyers to bring residents together; organising meetings; public speaking; and working co-operatively in the landscaping and maintenance of a community garden. The literacy worker gradually got to know the residents, earned their trust and waited until they came to him with the tasks they wanted help with. The embedded or integrated approach to literacy informing the program resulted in a range of outcomes each of which involved literacy skills in some way.

From the perspective of social capital and capacity building, the project reported increased trust between residents, residents and park management, residents and workers. It also reported increased confidence and self-reliance, stronger links between residents from different caravan parks, and

participation in national networks. A video was made documenting the reflections of residents, which was aimed at providing a model for achieving long-term sustainability for the work in the parks. We were unable to find any evidence of whether this has occurred.

Similarly to the previous site, some of the other challenges faced by this project were typical of community development work, such as the time to develop trust and relationships between the community workers and residents and management. A larger challenge was the usual short-term nature of funding to alleviate problems that are endemic or systemic. Nonetheless, the project provides a model for literacy workers to work with community groups outside mainstream education institutions and in partnership with other agencies. It demonstrates literacy learning in the context of people's day-to-day lives, rather than in a training package or general education curriculum context. As with the other projects, it has implications for the training of both literacy and community workers.

In the next site, also located in a community context, curriculum has a greater influence.

Women's community health site

This site was chosen because of what might be learned about some of the difficulties associated with crossing boundaries and areas of expertise. It did not meet all of our criteria in that literacy learning was the main focus of the project, but it demonstrates a cross-sectoral partnership in action. The information about this site was gained from reports and conversations with the project education worker and a member of the project steering group.

The project took place in a policy context in which the federal government, through its Innovative Grants program, promoted and funded collaboration for literacy learning between individuals, agencies, community and industry groups, including those who may have had no previous involvement in the field of adult literacy. The community health service, the collaborating partner, was also committed through its strategic plan to promoting community health and well-being through working in collaboration with communities and relevant organisations within government and other sectors.

The project was a collaboration between a literacy/English as a second language educator (the educator's term) from a small consultancy company and a community health worker from a community health service. The original idea emerged from an earlier research study involving interviews with health services workers where the issue of literacy was raised (Gunn 2001). The ensuing 20-week project provided literacy classes for 12 women of diverse ages, language and cultural backgrounds who had experienced domestic violence. Participants in the program had identified themselves as wanting to improve their reading and writing skills and were referred by the community health worker.

After considerable planning discussions between community health workers, the literacy educator and the women, a program was drafted that included dealing with government departments, responding to agencies such as Centrelink and the courts, and writing their own stories. Modules from the Certificate in Preparatory Education were selected by the literacy educator to tie the material together. The actual sessions were co-delivered—the community worker presented material about building confidence for example, and the literacy educator focused more on building particular reading or writing skills, predicting content and ordering material. Literacy, rather than being integrated into something else, was the focus of the program.

The project was a more of a collaboration than a partnership as such. Collaboration was demonstrated in the planning discussions between the community health worker and the literacy educator about selection and recruitment of participants, about an appropriate and safe venue and about the structure and content of the program. Ongoing collaboration occurred about choice of materials, how to select and present material, and how far in advance the program content could be planned. On the surface, this would appear unproblematic. However, challenges and tensions arose at each stage of the project.

It became clear on reflection by both parties at the end of the project that they were operating with different understandings, cultures, expertise and expectations. For example, one party was particularly concerned that sessions be planned ahead, while someone else thought the content would emerge; one person thought they were offering and running a 'class' while the other thought they were offering and running a 'group'. One of the key lessons from the project is that despite goodwill and commitment, working across sectors and across fields of expertise is very difficult and requires considerable initial clarification of processes, roles and expectations.

Despite these challenges, the project achieved significant outcomes. Regular attendance and interest were taken as signs of success. Five of the women returned to study, one woman joined the local library, a small group continued to meet socially for support after the program, several women expressed greater confidence in using street directories and timetables and many were keen to learn more about computers. The women learnt how to initiate police restraining orders and they had greater awareness of local resources and services and their self-esteem had improved. They could identify literacy areas to work on, had developed a long-term plan with goals and they had developed stronger social networks in their own areas. Such individual outcomes can be seen to build human and social capital (both bonding and bridging) but were not measured in any formal sense in terms of module completion, statements of attainment or levels of the National Reporting System. However, this may not have been appropriate given the particular vulnerability of this group, nor what the women wanted.

This highlights more generally the tension between meeting the needs of a vulnerable group and meeting the needs of funding bodies for more formal outcomes. In this case, modules from a curriculum were used but because neither party was a registered training organisation, there could be no awarding of a formal qualification. The modules provided a useful framework, but perhaps also acted as a constraint to a more organic approach of allowing needs to emerge from the group as it developed. However, such modules can act as a bridge or pathway by giving participants the skills and familiarity with more formal learning, which is what seems to have happened for at least five of the women. Their learning may also be given recognition in any future training.

This project is an example of what Seddon and Billett (2004) refer to as a 'project' approach to partnership which, because of its one-off nature enacted for a specific purpose, is unlikely to be very strategic and has little long-term impact beyond the individuals concerned. However, one result of the project has been a recognition that workers in both sectors—community health and adult literacy education—could benefit from professional development to better understand and work with each other. Consequently, a proposal has been put forward by the consultancy organisation involved in the project to run one-day workshops to assist participants to network and access each others' resources more effectively, as well as produce materials that can be used in future projects. In this way, a longer-term impact may be achieved at a national level.

Before turning to the workplace programs, we summarise findings that are common, to various degrees, to all the community sites in terms of our analytic framework of policy context, partnerships, integration, outcomes and challenges.

Summary of findings from community sites

Each site acknowledged that policy makers are seeking more integrated solutions to complex social problems, although some find that the reality fails to support such intentions. Most experienced difficulties working in a connected way across professional and institutional boundaries, yet the findings reveal the necessity of working across sectoral boundaries in order to achieve effective outcomes for clients at risk.

Findings from the sites confirm the importance of long-term commitment for effective intervention. The two sites with longer term funding were systematically working to build up the potential for integrating literacy learning into their profiles. A long-term partnership commitment

focused on agreed goals also increases the potential for accessing mutually supportive sources of funding. Literacy, however, is not a specified outcome for most of the funding bodies supporting these sites, so their options are either to seek further funding or do what they can with what they have. The potential impact of the two sites that secured literacy funding was limited by the short-term nature of that funding program.

The notion of the integration is relevant to all the sites, but in differing ways. For some, integration was more of a content issue, for others it was more of a governance issue involving contractual institutional arrangements and requirements.

With the exception of the caravan parks, where there was no explicit intention to link the residents to other pathways through the project lifetime, the sites all reveal the difficulties faced by the non-education sector working with mainstream education providers. Trying to provide accredited education and training pathways for many community programs is not straightforward. The findings suggest that the VET sector appears inflexible to other agencies, particularly when trying to connect with vocational education and training in terms of the agency's own objectives. Timetables, student numbers and fixed entry points are examples of practices that work against the particular client groups represented in these sites. Accessing accredited training for projects was complicated and costly.

Literacy skill development is 'embedded' in or acknowledged as potential outcomes of all the sites, but it is not always clear how this development is addressed, nor how successful acquisition of such skills could be 'counted' or recorded. All the sites have a complex and multi-faceted array of impact measures reflecting their particular priorities and client groups. How best to successfully weave the acquisition of literacy skills into such an array of indicators is one of the ongoing issues raised by this study.

There is some concern that ways of accommodating and accounting for literacy learning are limited to accredited general education and VET qualifications, not least because of the significant cost and resource implications. This is an indication of the difficulties of integrating literacy in ways that enable explicit, reportable literacy outcomes for individuals who may want recognition of learning gains but who are not on a VET or general education pathway.

The importance of better understanding the professional expertise in other fields of work that might join-up with education and training came through strongly, suggesting that the knowledge and skills for cross-sectoral partnerships would be a useful addition to the training of both educators and other social and community workers.

It is hard to see how whole-of-government or other joined-up initiatives are enabling a more coherent and less fragmented approach to building literacy development in community capacity building initiatives, despite the rhetoric. From the perspective of the community workers, every new program seems to have little opportunity for consolidation. The potential for literacy development is there but incentives to take up this potential are minimal.

Workplace programs

The main aim of the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program is to provide workers with English language, literacy and numeracy skills. Funding is available for language and literacy training that will be integrated with vocational training to enable workers to better meet their current and future employment and training needs. Industry partners are expected to contribute 25% of the training costs in the first year, rising to 50% thereafter. Projects are not normally funded for more than three years. At the time of writing, the funding body requires that programs report completion rates and an aggregate National Reporting System score for the program as a whole, rather than individual scores. This means that it is not currently possible to track individual literacy learning gains.

All state WELL coordinators were asked to nominate two workplace programs that provide examples of successful approaches to integrating literacy. Four states responded. One state, because of recent staff changes, was not able to nominate any projects. Four programs were selected and coordinators were asked five trigger questions. Their responses were either in writing or via a phone interview. (For a full account of the interviews, see the support document.) Further information has been added from publications where appropriate.

The purpose of looking at these programs was to see whether aspects of successful workplace literacy programs could transfer to and assist in building the potential for integrating literacy learning in other contexts.

Manufacturing industry—food processing

This project was unusual as it had a short timeframe of nine months, with the goal of assisting workers to manage a life-transition experience of an imminent factory closure. Specifically, the project was to support workers to identify and participate in vocational learning that would provide them with confidence and the capability to gain employment after the closure. Twelve-hour shifts in difficult conditions had limited the workers' opportunities to engage in any formal learning outside the workplace. Because of a local shortage of casual labour to backfill, the management was unable to allow the training to happen in work time.

Given the urgency, the literacy experts worked with the vocational trainers (for example, in certificate courses in First Aid, Chainsaws, Responsible Service of Alcohol) to give them advice about adult learning approaches as well as concrete, practical ideas for helping learners develop the literacy and numeracy requirements of the courses. Ensuring the trainers were clear about the specific literacy and numeracy skills required was a priority of the Workplace English Language and Literacy program. In addition, individual learning support, available during work time, was available for all the employees

This program was considered to be very successful, with 100% completion rate for 70 trainees. Ongoing evaluation of the project was conducted through regular meetings with the employee/ employer reference group on site. Post-training feedback about further employment and training take-up was also gained from a number of participants.

One of the lessons from the program was that workers preferred gaining their skills through the vocational program, rejecting the 'bolted-on' support offered by a local education provider. Given the learners' situation, their priority was to gain the certificates as quickly as possible. Relevance was a key success factor. The capacity of the trainers and the WELL workers to be flexible, given the complications of organising the training around differing shift patterns, was also a major factor contributing to the success of the program.

Local government

This successful workplace program has been running in a small regional local government area since 2003. This is not a stand-alone literacy program and, following a small initial pilot, has become an integral part of the whole organisation. The organisation has been prompted to examine its five-year plan and to think about what skills and competencies it needs to achieve its aims, and where literacy and numeracy fit into that picture. Three generic skills areas in the Local Government Training Package were identified for training—customer service, change management and team building—and everyone participates in this training. The training approach is to use real work tasks and incorporate literacy skills development at differing levels. Additional basic literacy assistance is available if needed, but is not generally considered to be a preferable option because of the stigma attached.

Outcomes are measured six weeks after training, when participants at all levels in the organisation discuss with their supervisors how they have applied what they have learnt in training, and what

evidence they can provide to demonstrate competency in relation to the industry standards. This review is linked to performance appraisals and further training plans.

The success of the program, then, is measured in terms of its impact on the whole organisation and the achievement of its goals. The factors that are considered to be contributing to the program's successful outcomes include the trust that has been built, the willingness to be flexible and match the training to the needs of the organisation, shared accountability and the use of educators with broader experience in life than classrooms.

Public safety industry

A recent Workplace English Language and Literacy funded initiative to trial a 'community network model' of delivery of literacy support was a set of pilot projects with volunteer fire fighting and emergency services agencies in Queensland and Victoria (Fogolyan et al. 2003). Although linked to the Public Safety Training Package, the contexts were more like a community setting than the usual workplace, and the participants were all volunteers. This was a large-scale program that provided training to people who normally have little access to training, many of whom are volunteers in rural areas.

The pilot program that we were provided with information about was a partnership between a metropolitan project manager, local WELL providers and regional and local unit leaders. The role of the WELL provider was to unpack the literacy and numeracy skills underpinning the content and to design session plans that integrated the two. There was a reported marked increase in participants' confidence in undertaking training, their willingness to use training materials and their readiness to tackle written tasks.

The overall project evaluation strategy included a number of impact indicators including evidence of the transfer of skills to other life contexts. One very important success factor is preparedness to do further training. This was seen as very important as, due to the increased emphasis on accredited training in the organisation, some volunteers had been losing interest as the assessment requirements had been seen as an insurmountable barrier. This has important implications for public safety. They are now more positive about training in general, and are prepared to do more.

Another outcome of the overall project was the high degree of commitment from local WELL providers and the upskilling of WELL trainers. The partnerships with the organisation's regional staff are also strengthening and moving towards independence from WELL funding for future training. The evaluation of the overall project also found that success was more likely if the local program is responsive to local culture and conditions. Some of the literacy teachers were reported to have found this difficult.

Building literacy into the few learning opportunities that exist in such areas can bring wider benefits to communities and contribute to social capital and community capacity building. However, particularly among men, there is likely to be resistance to such learning, however informal, and thus the skills of trainers are an essential part of a successful program. On the basis of the evaluation, further exploration of the potential for creatively embedding literacy development in appropriate industry standards in community activities seems promising.

Manufacturing industry—textiles

This is also a very successful program, now in its fourth year, in a large weaving mill. Initial training was in workplace communication skills with the largely non-English speaking background operators. (Note that the term 'literacy' was not used in any of the workplace programs reported.) Thus, the provider did not design the program in isolation, away from the shop floor. Rather, learning activities were developed as a consequence of 'roaming the workplace, observing, listening, looking at the context and environment, asking questions such as "What are your problems?"'. Attention was drawn also to poorly written documents, old faded posters, inadequate minutes and so on, which had the effect of engaging higher level staff with literacy and communication issues.

The program later expanded its focus and took an action learning approach, involving workers in teams working on specific projects to help solve workplace problems. This is reported to have been a useful approach and increased the potential to integrate literacy skills with the work situation. The fourth year is focused more on assisting shift leaders and supervisors to understand the performance appraisal system and is another example of ways to build in the message that literacy is not just a personal deficit issue.

The outcomes of the program are measured formally and informally. Evidence of success is seen in management's response to recommendations arising from the training. Examples of such recommendations were to 'fix up' safety signs and other material, and to generally improve communication. Further concrete evidence of literacy development was seen in improvements in the way faults are reported (both written and verbally) and in shift changeover forms that were developed as part of the training and are now in use.

Summary of findings from the workplace programs

Through these examples of successful workplace programs, we can conclude that there are a number of elements that are not exclusive to workplace settings and that could transfer to and facilitate successful approaches in broader community partnerships. These include:

- ✧ sustained targeted funding linked to a deliberate and explicit strategy, with time to embed effective models and approaches
- ✧ commitment from all levels of the organisation and clear understandings of the various roles, responsibilities and outcomes
- ✧ acknowledging that there are various approaches to integrating literacy skill development, and that choice of approach is linked to the objectives of the organisation, and to local conditions
- ✧ the willingness to be flexible and work as a team
- ✧ building the appropriate knowledge and skills in training workers in other sectors
- ✧ training literacy specialists in the context and culture of the community setting, and in expertise at building cross-sectoral partnerships, including using appropriate language
- ✧ finding skilled and flexible facilitators with broad life experiences who are able to apply up-to-date understandings of literacy theory
- ✧ providing the integrative infrastructure and frameworks that clarify how to recognise and credit literacy learning outcomes and potential learning pathways.

There are also other, perhaps less expected, outcomes from workplace literacy programs that have a wider impact and can be said to build social capital and contribute to community capacity building. Workers report improved self-confidence and a willingness to take on further training or leadership roles. They also comment that the benefits transfer to other areas of their lives, such as greater confidence in dealing with their children's schooling and participation in family and community activities (McKenna 2001 p.9). The development of trust between trainer and organisation and between trainer and workers (Program 2), and the partnerships that are formed between local training and other community organisations (Program 3) also contribute to social capital. A study looking at the wider community and social capital benefits of workplace learning would seem worth pursuing to inform further policy and program development.

Finally, before we turn to our conclusions, we re-emphasise the most significant lesson which is that integrating literacy in workplace training has been a deliberate top-level policy commitment for more than ten years. Many resources have been provided to support this and the VET system infrastructure provides the framework for this development to occur.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to undertake an initial exploration of the potential for extending opportunities for integrated or embedded adult literacy learning beyond the education and training sector. The methodology included an analysis of related social policy and adult literacy literature and websites; an exploration of community projects that seemed to have taken up this potential; and an analysis of characteristics deemed to contribute to successful workplace integrated literacy initiatives. Although the study is small in terms of the number of programs the search strategy yielded, our observations and conclusions are nevertheless in line with issues that are emerging elsewhere, in research findings reported in the broader literature. Here, we summarise our findings in terms of the key underlying concepts introduced in the chapter called *Findings from the literature*.

Social capital and community capacity building

The frameworks and case studies reported in the literature offer a number of ways of understanding how literacy skills and literacy learning opportunities can contribute to social (and human) capital, which in turn contribute to community capacity building. These include the networks, relationships, trust and engagement that can build from the confidence that grows from increased capacity to learn, wherever and however that might occur. Social capital and community capacity building provide important 'bridging' concepts by suggesting how the oft-quoted gains from literacy learning (of increased confidence and self-esteem) can have benefits beyond the individual learner. Anecdotal evidence from the community sites and workplace programs confirms the relevance and importance of this relationship. These findings support literature that advocates a broader approach to documenting literacy learning outcomes than the acquisition of technical skills.

Joined-up government and partnerships

The notion of joined-up government is reported to be a key driver in bringing agencies together in coordinated social policy frameworks aimed at social inclusion. The United Kingdom is a leader in relation to adult basic skills, but there is clear evidence of the impact of this approach in Australia, particularly in strategies to re-engage young people at risk of social and economic exclusion. In relation to adult literacy more broadly, however, Australia, as Figgis (2004) reported, has a relatively weak voice and is at the margins of consciousness, even amongst those who work most closely with those with literacy and numeracy needs.

Even where the will is there, achieving joined-up solutions is not an easy path and a growing body of research and evaluation literature is reaching similar conclusions about factors that contribute to or constrain successful joined-up or partnership activity at various levels of government and delivery. Factors found to lead to successful partnerships include top-level political and resource commitment realised through enabling policies and strategies. Further, the willingness to implement in ways that build the capability of agencies to succeed through sustained support is essential, rather than short-term or one-off project funds unlikely to deliver desired outcomes.

Our study confirms this as well as other findings that major challenges to multi-agency collaborations include inflexible short-term contracts; competitive funding that undermines local collaborations; onerous reporting because of multiple funding sources and differing performance measures; constant

changes to funding conditions and expectations; competing professional priorities and approaches; unrealistic expectations; and no time to build trust and good working relationships.

Integration

The study shows that integration has a number of meanings and implications. We have pointed to some of these meanings but further unpacking could help clarify policy objectives and program implementation decisions and flag areas for research. For example, at a governance level we point to the importance of an integrative infrastructure including a common language, easily accessible recognition and transfer arrangements. Of further importance was connecting with sustainable and flexible pathways, but more work is needed to clarify how these connections can be developed.

Differing models and meanings of integration were evident in different community sites and workplace programs largely to do with local circumstances and objectives. It is clear, however, that integration was more than a content delivery issue in a number of the workplace programs studied and was additionally related to achieving certain operational, cultural and broader community objectives as well as competency related outcomes.

This approach is advocated for those groups hardest to reach and most resistant to ongoing education and training. Integration makes it easier to avoid the term literacy, which almost all of the projects did, but the literature is inconclusive about whether it is better to build a more positive image for literacy or to avoid using the term altogether.

Outcomes and accountabilities

The question of appropriate performance measures highlights some of the more paradoxical elements of embedding learning objectives in activities beyond the education and training sector. Making reference to literacy development as a potential outcome is one thing, but how this development is to be recorded is another. This is an indication of the difficulties of enabling explicit, visible, reportable literacy outcomes for participants who may want this but who are not on a vocational or general education pathway. There is no common language or policy framework that can be applied flexibly outside the education and training system and enable reporting on skills gained. There are mixed reports from England about the appropriateness and applicability of its somewhat stringent approach to performance measures for new alliances that are being formed to support the basic skills strategy.

Capabilities

There are indications, through the research literature and the sites studied here, of the importance of workers from different sectors having a better understanding of each other's differing roles, professional priorities and expectations. Furthermore, based on the findings from the workplace programs as well as the community sites, there will be new roles and expectations for educators working in other areas such as community development, health or housing. It seems that educators with a broad experience of life are better equipped to take up these new roles. This has implications for the training of both adult educators and workers in a range of other sectors.

Summary

This study reveals both possibilities and difficulties associated with the three assertions with which we began the project. The first assertion was that more can be done to build the literacy capability and social capital of Australian adults by broadening across policy contexts the range and scope of opportunities to learn. The study found few instances of such work outside specific youth-focused initiatives, and these were beyond the scope of the study. A range of challenges and complexities were evident at various levels of policy and implementation as well as at the specific sites where there are or have been explicit attempts to build-in literacy learning. Nevertheless, a number of successful outcomes were reported particularly in relation to the wider impacts of learning on social capital and community capacity. The sites with longer-term horizons are able to build the relationships necessary to find ways to overcome initial challenges such as those relating to education and training, and it would be useful to keep track of these projects.

The second assertion was that there are possibilities inherent in current national and international policy interest in joined-up and cross-sectoral approaches, particularly as these largely concern individuals and communities at greatest risk of social exclusion. Our study found that there is a growing trend in the adult literacy policy and advocacy literature in favour of this direction. Our analysis of related concepts indicates a potential here for a common language and framework to better integrate collaborative efforts, and help overcome some of the challenges experienced in cross-sectoral partnerships. However, apart from some notable exceptions—particularly in relation to young people and Indigenous programs—the potential of engaging agencies outside the education and training sector in enabling learning does not appear to be well appreciated. Taking advantage of this potential will therefore depend on greater political will, better policy coherence, stronger incentives and more support than currently exist. There is growing research evidence, particularly from the United Kingdom, to help inform ways forward in Australia.

Our final assertion was that the broad adult literacy field in Australia can learn from successful industry partnerships and examples of the integration of literacy with vocational and workplace training. Our study of four workplace programs confirmed the findings in the literature about the factors that contribute to successful partnerships. In addition, the related literature and the four programs revealed differing approaches to the integration of literacy in workplaces, reflecting differing program and organisational objectives. This suggests that further study of workplace programs can provide useful models to apply in other community contexts.

Finally, the shortage of information available to this study underscores the importance of more systematic measurement of successful outcomes at the micro-level, and program evaluations at the macro-level. More systematic follow-up of pilots and trials will assist in evaluating the impact of strategic intentions and contribute to effective targeting for longer term project funding. Such studies may also assist in better understanding how to achieve greater coordination of separately funded projects.

The implications for policy and practice that follow reflect our conclusion that even though the evidence is slight, moving in the direction explored by this study warrants further exploration as one way to further build the literacy capability of Australian adults.

Implications for policy and practice

The implications of this study essentially concern creating change that allows literacy learning opportunities to go beyond formal education and training. Underlying the following points is our conclusion that agencies beyond education and training can support literacy learning and open up learning pathways for adults at risk of social exclusion if the right conditions are in place to support them. A key question for policy makers is whether current policy and implementation frameworks maximise the opportunities for literacy skills development for those adults most at risk.

A coordinating and supportive framework

Collaboration and alliance building require action at local, state and federal levels to secure the necessary social and financial capital to address literacy and numeracy in this more holistic and sustained manner. Such initiatives require leadership at all levels, supported by the appropriate policies. Agencies working in the most challenging situations, and for whom education is not their top priority, will withdraw when they feel the other parties are not in for the long haul. Thus, although there is a crucial role for policy clarity here, it is the commitment to systemic infrastructure support that will ensure real progress.

Community building is a shared responsibility. The literacy challenge, Tuijnman (2001) argues, requires a coherent approach that also seeks a convergence among different departments and portfolios. There is a need to seek the possibilities for greater collaboration for literacy across social policy areas such as health, youth, housing, welfare, crime prevention and community development, and to embed adult literacy in broad policy strategies such as those aimed at neighbourhood renewal. A deliberate strategy could identify one core area for action and systematically work through how literacy development can be incorporated in ways that mutually reinforce strategies and tactics relevant to all partners.

Understanding better these possibilities is a significant factor in developing a national approach around a nationally agreed set of priorities. A nationally coordinated approach facilitated by a national agency could set the framework for improved cross-sectoral collaboration (McKenna & Fitzpatrick 2004). A comprehensive literacy learning framework can support and resource local diversity of approach and outcome. It could connect diverse learning activity with a nationally consistent system that could be linkable to, but not constrained by, the current VET system. It could also connect with policy frameworks in other sectors. Such an approach could stimulate strong, productive and creative collaborations between educators and trainers and other community workers as appears to be happening in relation to general education for early school leavers in Victoria.

A simpler message

The challenges involved in building more of a shared understanding about literacy and numeracy across domains and sectors may require a 'simpler' message than education and training providers are accustomed to giving. It may require a more limited construct of literacy and numeracy, at least in the short term. There are of course risks in doing this and it will be important to develop a good understanding of both positive and negative impacts of the current narrowing approaches to literacy and numeracy delivery and reporting that are occurring overseas.

Evidence-based policy and funding

Convincing evidence is more likely to build political will, attract the support of community leaders and help strengthen the local commitment to draw on and build social capital and community capacity to maximise the potential for learning. However, providing visible evidence of success is not easy.

Greater clarity about ways literacy could permeate social, economic, political and cultural policies could assist adult literacy advocates prepare for the data driven and focused conversations necessary to convince other parties. A targeted strategy aimed at different policy domains will require better needs analysis of populations known to have literacy and numeracy needs (McKenna & Fitzpatrick 2004; Bateson 2003), particularly in those policy domains where there is likely to be some 'literacy sensitivity' (Tuijnman 2001).

In order to understand where collaborative work is likely to be most suitable and have the greatest potential, it would also assist policy makers if Australia were more knowledgeable about effective approaches with different populations. If literacy and numeracy skills are learnt in context, a clearer understanding is needed of how this can be achieved most productively and what kinds of roles different workers can play to contribute to such outcomes. Funding and other incentives can then be used to stimulate collaborative approaches with high potential.

In the spirit of joined-up approaches, it should be easier for local agencies to employ different funding sources to support linked initiatives. From our limited sample, it appears that this is not so and that the differing accountability and reporting demands of various agencies are a major barrier. Incentives for such action could be built into commonwealth/state agreements or into contracts with other providers.

There are tensions between encouraging and stimulating more joined-up approaches to delivery, and funding agencies needs to retain some central direction and accountability through financial control. Partnerships in a competitive culture can be as likely to be driven by the desire to gain market advantage as by altruism. All this belies trust and this can destroy the social capital that lies at the heart of community capacity building. Differing priorities and obligations, norms and values lead to competing interpretations.

Encouraging innovation

Australia has a reasonable record of embedding successful innovation such as the Workplace English Language and Literacy Program. However, the nature of state/federal arrangements and conflicting policy priorities and funding accountability requirements make it difficult for the federal government to build a sustained approach to innovation in relation to adult literacy.

This and other studies have shown how short-term ad hoc project-based funding provides no real incentive and limits change possibilities (Ling 2002; Milbourne, Macrae & Maguire 2003; Tett 2005). Others show that innovation is easiest to encourage when people understand and can relate to the overall strategic objectives and desired outcomes (Seddon & Billett 2004). There is merit in recommendations to strengthen the innovative grants scheme to lead to sustainable change through supporting targeted pathfinder pilots rather than one-off projects unconnected to a broader strategy (McKenna & Fitzpatrick 2004). Such pilot projects should be simple and be designed to carefully address local priorities.

Project applicants could be assisted to construct achievable objectives and outcomes that have the potential to start adults on recognisable learning pathways. The pilots could be actively monitored and successful initiatives supported for sufficient time to secure additional funding or adoption by state or other appropriate agencies.

What kinds of outcomes

Inevitably, this study raises the questions about whether a more standardised approach to assessing and reporting individual learning outcomes would enable greater community engagement with literacy learning. Literacy skills are acquired in many ways and can be developed through activities outside those provided by education and training, so how can the learning that occurs, however informally, count and have currency for the individuals concerned? Should the literacy learning that may occur in a range of contexts be countable? What mechanisms are available for that learning to get recognised outside a general or vocational education system? Could agreement be reached about a common set of indicators to which different agencies and learners could relate?

With the likelihood of an increasingly diversified post-compulsory education and training sector, it will be important to come to national and explicit agreement about what outcomes should be measured or at least be measurable, and in what kinds of ways. At the moment, these are restricted to outcomes linked either to training packages or to general education. Agencies in other policy sectors use reporting frameworks developed for their purposes and priorities. It may be useful, as a first step, to look for linkages across such frameworks and map these to existing education and training frameworks more explicitly so that people can get credit for what they know and can do. At the very least, this could increase the potential for the formal recognition of prior learning and make for smoother auspicing arrangements by registered training organisations. It could also encourage agencies in other policy domains to see how their work connects with adult learning and how they might access funding to assist literacy learning.

Professional development in other sectors and domains

If the engagement of a wider range of organisations in literacy learning is supported, a clearer understanding is required about how to build the capacity of various front-line workers to act with confidence in relation to clients with literacy and numeracy needs and build learning strategies into their work. An example of the kinds of skills and knowledge that could be acquired concerns how to build 'literacy-rich' environments at work, in the community and in the home which, according to Tuijnman (2001), is an essential tool to improving literacy in society.

An audit of how awareness and understanding of literacy has been built into training packages for front-line occupations could be a helpful step in this process of clarification and may encourage further attention to this issue. It may be best to start by achieving focus in a systematic yet multi-faceted way within one policy domain, as in Ireland, and then transfer the learning from this to other domains.

Australia could learn from England in this regard where deliberate attempts are being made to engage various occupational groups in contact with at-risk families and adults in the *Skills for life* strategy and to provide resources and training to help them do this. Often, successful strategies are simple to understand, such as the importance of a positive projection of literacy in motivating disengaged young people and adults (National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy 2004).

As well, it is important to ensure that competency standards are updated with the changing literacy demands on all workers, and that appropriate literacy development opportunities are available. This is an important awareness raising strategy in itself. Here again, Australia can learn from England's use of the internet to provide ongoing literacy learning opportunities at differing levels of competence.

Reassessing the role of literacy workers

Joined-up approaches to learning require educators to take up new roles brokering learning opportunities in community settings and building learning pathway possibilities for adults.

Through the study we became aware of how literacy workers can move in behind other social and community workers and act as mentors, brokers and facilitators in a range of different ways. But at the same time as bringing knowledge and expertise to other agencies in contact with at-risk adults, it will be important for educators to be open to how the knowledge and experiences of these agencies can contribute to their understanding of what might be an effective or appropriate action or intervention. A review of the training and preparation for adult literacy teachers as well as other workers to enable them to better understand and engage with adult literacy issues beyond education and training seems timely.

Ironically, perhaps, recognition of prior learning is less evident in teacher preparation than in many other occupations. For a range of reasons, including availability and relevance, there is little incentive to undertake more than the minimum training. Most of this training portrays a rather conventional model of a teacher. It is hard to see teachers seeking new skills in an increasingly market driven system where tensions will inevitably exist between quality improvements of the kind suggested here and the (short-term) efficiencies sought through current tenders for literacy services.

Nonetheless, the success of industry or enterprise-based teachers is one model to learn from, although it is reported that these educators sometimes find it hard to move away from a conventional teaching space. There are also many examples of creative teaching in community adult education settings although, again, a traditional delivery model continues to dominate. One respondent despaired of what he called the literacy ‘brick wall’, namely the difficulty of getting teachers out of the classroom and working in partnerships in the community with open minds about the possibilities therein.

The ongoing deregulation of vocational education and training is forcing many changes to the role of educators anyway, but the point remains that a different approach to training could help reorient teacher expertise to new settings and situations. There was evidence through this study that education providers do not respond constructively and convincingly to invitations to offer solutions to the kinds of literacy challenges faced by other agencies, or embrace opportunities to cross boundaries and facilitate learning in enterprise and community settings.

One approach might be to build a national network of literacy services or brokers—a loose coalition of highly trained and knowledgeable workers. Their role would be to build connections with the other sectors, rather like the moderators in the Language Literacy and Numeracy Program have done. The moderators’ contributions to the Language Literacy and Numeracy Program could be evaluated as a possible model for the establishment of a network as suggested here.

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Support document details

Additional information relating to this research is available in *Integrating literacies: Using partnerships to build literacy capabilities in communities—Support document*. It can be accessed from NCVER's website <<http://www.ncver.edu.au>>. The document contains:

- ✧ Acronyms
- ✧ Responses from professional bodies and other networks about potentially relevant community programs
- ✧ Workplace programs
- ✧ Presentations to the Think Tank, August 2004
- ✧ Additional background information about overseas developments that may be helpful to readers
- ✧ References



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