SUPPORT DOCUMENT

Integrating literacies: Using partnerships to build literacy capabilities in communities – Support document

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This document was produced by the authors based on their research for the report *Integrating literacies: Using partnerships to build literacy capabilities in communities* and is an added resource for further information. The report is available on NCVER's website: <http://www.ncver.edu.au>.

Contents

Acronyms

AACE-NLA	American Association of Adult and Community Educations – National Literacy Advocacy
ACAL	Australian Council for Adult Literacy
ANTA	Australian National Training Authority
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
EFF	Equipped for the Future
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
LLEN	Local Learning and Employment Networks
LLN	Language, Literacy and Numeracy
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NIACE	National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education
NLT	National Literacy Trust
NRDC	National Research and Development Centre (UK?)
NRS	National Reporting System
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WELL	Workplace English Language and Literacy
WIA	Workforce Investment Act

Responses from professional bodies and other networks about potentially relevant community programs

Apart from the Community Reintegration site, the suggestions made by professional bodies and other networks about possible sites did not fall within the criteria of the project but have been listed here to give an idea of the types of programs that people thought were worth suggesting as examples of integrated programs. Please note that this only reflects replies received and is by no means a comprehensive list of programs.

Australian Capital Territory

1. An individual who runs small social skills groups, teaching social and friendship skills to primary school age children outside of school hours and plans to extend the program to adolescents and adults. All individuals have learning disorders, Asperger Syndrome or High Functioning Autism.

New South Wales

1. St John's Ambulance NSW runs a program where trained volunteers work for an hour a week with children in primary schools to improve literacy and self esteem.

2. The Smith Family runs three programs: one with disadvantaged school children through their Learning for Life program (a scholarship program); another 'Student2Student' literacy support program where older children teach younger children over the telephone and the 'Each-One-Teach-One Program' that provides non-English speaking clients with volunteers trained to teach them 'survival English' in their own homes.

3. A home based parents-as-teachers type project based at La Perouse in Sydney.

4. Life Experience Counts which is a seven-session program run in neighbourhood and adult education centres that aims to assist people with limited formal education uncover hidden skills and prepare a personal skills portfolio.

Queensland

1. Fifteen workplace language and literacy projects for workers in aged care services.

2. Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre runs a literacy program overseen by a qualified person but facilitated by volunteers.

3. A farm based project that is registered as a 'school' but only takes young people who have dropped out of mainstream education. They undertake numeracy and literacy but also manual based subjects such as metal work, woodwork and farming. Subjects are taught by teachers with the assistance of paid youth workers.

4. Caboolture Community Learning Centre offers courses in Literacy/Personal Development, Computers, Job Interviews, Road Rules for Learner Driver, Living Skills through Cooking.

5. Since 1994, Yeronga Institute of TAFE has supplied programs and services to prisons, community corrections centres and placement centres across Queensland. In the past seven years, the Institute has gone from teaching prisoners basic reading and writing skills to supplying more than twenty training courses in eleven correctional facilities.

6. Multicultural services in Centrelink are developing pathway literacy and numeracy and English programs aimed at migrants.

7. A program in volunteer tutoring in the Woodford area run by a volunteer organisation.

8. Caloundra Community Centre's Adult Literacy Programme - linked with Caloundra Libraries.

9. Bremer Institute of TAFE life skills programs for adults with disabilities.

South Australia

The Learn2Earn program is a pre-employment program for young people aged between 16– 24 years who prefer learning through a 'hands-on' project-based approach, rather than being in a classroom. Learn2Earn gives young people the chance to develop job skills and personal development skills while working on real projects in local businesses and community groups.

Tasmania

Good Beginnings Australia. Outcomes of the projects included people re-engaging with learning and literacy through programs initiated by the projects, usually in partnership with community houses and TAFE adult basic education, also community online access centres.

Victoria

1. Community Reintegration Program: a partnership between the state government and three agencies who offer emergency accommodation for the homeless: the Salvation Army (who auspices the program), St Vincent De Paul, and Hanover. Site elected for the project.

2. A non-government welfare agency offering a range of programs for youth.

3. Yooralla Society of Australia offers various programs for people with disabilities.

4. Schools and Agencies Together: a group that brings schools and agencies together for case discussion, sharing agency programs, informal supervision for clinicians in the Moreland/Hume area. Their June meeting focussed on literacy/numeracy for at-risk children.

5. Sandybeach Community Co-operative Society is a registered training organisation which provides education and leisure activities for the community.

6. Wangaratta Op Shop provides opportunities for young people to learn literacy and numeracy through working in the op shop.

Western Australia

Read Write Now! Volunteers working one-to-one with adults seeking help with literacy and numeracy in a variety of community settings.

Workplace programs

All state Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) coordinators were asked to nominate two exemplary workplace projects. Four states responded with information about the following projects, which we provide below. The projects have been coded to maintain confidentiality, although in many cases respondents were happy to be identified because they were proud of the work that had been done and the successes achieved. However, we decided for consistency's sake to code all programs.

✦ P1: manufacturing industry/food processing

✦ P2: local government

✦ P3: public safety industry

✦ P4: manufacturing industry/textiles.

The following trigger questions were provided to the project coordinators:

How successful is/was your WELL program/project?

How did you measure its success?

What helped, or hindered, the success of your program/project?

In terms of integrating literacy and numeracy (LLN) into the training, how did you do this? How well does integration work? What do you need to integrate literacy and numeracy successfully? Is integration one of the factors in the success of your program?

What lessons can be learned from your program/project? What can we learn from this workplace context that can be transferred to other contexts, such as community or non-vocational contexts?

Data were received in relation to four programs. Respondents answered either in writing or via a phone interview. Notes from the phone interview were then validated by the respondent. Responses to the questions have been collated under question headings.

How successful is/was your WELL program/project? How did you measure its success?

[These questions tended to blur together so responses are combined.]

P1: The program was considered to be very successful, with a 100% completion rate for 70 trainees. The training organization won an award for educational excellence. On-going evaluation of the project was conducted through regular meetings with the employee/employer reference group on site. Post-training feedback was also gained from a number of participants. This project had a time frame of nine months, so to maximise access to learning, the vocational trainers (in First Aid, Chainsaws, Responsible Service of Alcohol for example) were given a 'quick-fix' on

adult learning principles and were provided with concrete, practical ideas on how LLN could be dealt with in the context of the course requirements.

P 2: A very successful program success being measured in terms of its impact on the whole organization. The program is not a stand alone one, but is an integral part of the whole organization. The organization has been prompted to examine its five year plan/strategy and to think about what outputs it wants to achieve; what skills/competencies it needs to achieve them, and where literacy/numeracy fits into that picture. As well, impact is measured six weeks after training where participants sit with supervisors (at all levels of the organization) and discuss how they've implemented or applied what they've learnt in training, and what evidence they can provide to demonstrate competency in relation to the industry standards. They are assessed as competent, requiring mentoring, coaching or further training. This review is linked to performance appraisals.

P 3: 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 program was a partnership between a metropolitan project manager, local WELL providers and regional and local unit leaders. There was a marked increase in participants' confidence in undertaking training; their willingness to use training materials and their readiness to tackle written tasks. 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 organization, some volunteers have been losing interest in continuing their membership as the assessment requirements have been seen as an insurmountable barrier. They are now more positive about training in general, and are prepared to do more. The success was measured by the numbers of people participating in and completing training, and by participant evaluations.

Another outcome of the project has been 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 for future training.

P 4: Also a very successful program that is now in its fourth year. Initial training was in 'Workplace Communication Skills' with operators. The program later expanded its focus and took an action learning approach to solving workplace problems. In the fourth year, the program includes supervisors and shift leaders working to understand the performance appraisal system. Success is measured through formal and informal evaluations and evidence of success is seen in management's response to recommendations arising from the training about communication in the organization. Further concrete evidence of success can also be seen in improvements in the way faults are reported (both written and verbal) and in shift changeover forms that were developed as part of the training and are now in operational use.

What helped the success of your program/project?

P 1: High-level organisational skills, a well-developed capacity to deal with ambiguity on the part of the project coordinator and responsiveness to learner needs and flexibility of provision. Relevance is a key success factor in all learning activities. Through discussion with training providers, unnecessary training materials that were considered 'nice to know' were minimised as being not critical to demonstrate competency.

P 2: Key factors in the success of the program were commitment from all levels of the organization; a skilled project manager and skilled facilitators who are flexible and can tune in to the needs of the organization. Also important was matching the facilitator with the skill level of the group. For example, some facilitators work best with learners with low levels of literacy and are not so successful with senior management or team training, and vice versa. Facilitators with broad life experiences (rather than just classroom based) are generally more successful in workplace contexts.

The development of trust is another key factor – that the trainers are there to help the organization achieve its goals. Listening to what participants say leads to discussion of other problems which can then be addressed. In problem solving sessions, actual problems are discussed in the presence of managers who hear first hand what's going on, and participants are encouraged to suggest at least three solutions that are risk assessed and then presented to management. The emphasis is on sharing accountability for problems and solutions.

P 3: High-level project management was necessary given the large scale nature of the project, and was enabled by a supportive steering committee. The goodwill of the organisation's training staff towards their workers helped the project manager to develop relevant and effective training programs. The enthusiasm and commitment of local training providers and their professionalism and flexibility were also important factors.

P 4: The approach taken helped the project. First, a communications network analysis is conducted in which the provider roams the workplace, observing, listening, looking at the context and environment, asking questions such as 'What are your problems?' Communication (including LLN) issues usually arise in response to this question. Communication is always much broader than language problems on the floor. It includes poorly written documents, old faded posters, inadequate minutes that no one reads etc.

Next, numerous digital photos are taken of the machines etc. These are then developed into vocabulary and language field workbooks, which then become portable reference manuals and are often seen in people's back pockets. Included in the workbooks is a table of machine parts and their common faults which is used to report faults etc. Trainees can use the workbook to copy from in a reporting log, or to describe faults over the telephone. Role playing phone conversations and practising pronunciation of terms becomes part of the training.

What hindered the success of your program/project?

P 1: The logistics of shift schedules can sometimes hinder programs. In this case, workers were not able to be released from their job to undertake training because there was no casual work pool in the town that could backfill absent workers.

P 3: Given that the main thrust of accredited training is on operational content, LLN is not seen as 'core business', in spite of genuine concern for the personal development of the workforce. However, this project went a long way to demonstrating the central and integral part that LLN skills play in training and to justify its intentional inclusion in some training, rather than it being seen as an optional extra.

The hierarchical nature of the organisation and the number of personnel who needed to be contacted in order for the project to be introduced and to proceed meant that initial awareness raising took a lot longer than expected.

The move to accredited compulsory minimum skills training is facing a degree of resistance from many members, particularly those with negative attitudes to formal learning and a fear of failure. These people, who are probably the most likely to benefit from WELL training, were often difficult to recruit for training.

Keeping the options for WELL support as broad as possible meant that some managers were unclear of the intent and delivery mode of the training which made recruiting harder.

The wide mix of LLN levels (NRS levels 1 to 2-5) was a challenge for both trainers and participants.

P 4: Hindrances to the program could be said to be management's initial lack of understanding of the time taken to develop language and literacy skills. Also, the Human Resources Manager

changed and there was a resulting eight month hiatus in training. As well, when there's a financial downturn, and costs need to be cut, training is often the first thing to be questioned.

How did you integrate literacy and numeracy into the training? How well does integration work? What helps to integrate literacy and numeracy successfully? Is integration one of the factors in the success of your program?

P 1: Literacy and numeracy are integrated into training by analysing the LLN requirements of the training package, either within the Evidence Guide of the Unit of Competency or the course content. It was important to ensure training providers were clear about the specific LLN skills needed to demonstrate competency. Opportunities for holistic training/assessment were also identified, eg competently demonstrating safe work practices also requires training participants to communicate competently. LLN were integrated into a problem solving approach.

P 2: LLN are integrated into generic skills such as problem-solving, role clarification, team building, customer service. They're not addressed separately, except for individuals who may need one-on-one mentoring. Provision of very basic level language and/or literacy and numeracy training requires the skilled facilitator to have specialist expertise in these areas, which is probably true for other equity programs. Offering stand-alone LLN does not work for the majority of people. There is too much of a perceived stigma. Numeracy is integrated into computer training such as with Excel. Attitudes to LLN are not positive with comments such as 'I don't need that', so it's important to integrate it into generic skills such as problem-solving, team building. Employees engage in real work tasks, for example, as part of one team session, the team drafted a role description to be put on the intranet. Another team worked on solving a problem and their presentation of their solution to management.

The program reported that literacy needs to be embedded in something else and you need a specialist to draw out the underpinning skills.

P 3: This training was aligned to accredited modules from the industry curriculum. The underpinning LLN skills needed to be 'unpacked' from the modules. The organization identified the content that needed to be covered in the training and the desired outcomes. Session plans were developed by the provider that integrated the content focus and the LLN. In some cases whole modules were not covered because the client in that case opted for short courses with specific outcomes. In this way, the program was tailored to meet the organisation's needs.

P 4: LLN skills are integrated into the training through the vocabulary workbook which is immediately relevant and totally contextualised. Skills such as question formation, pronunciation, spelling, reporting etc. all occur in the context of workplace situations and 'problems'. After a period of time, it could be said that LLN become almost too integrated. The focus of the training may shift to other areas and LLN may be lost. Integration is important, however, because it makes the learning relevant.

What lessons can be learned from your program/project? What can we learn from this workplace context that can be transferred to other contexts, such as community or non-vocational contexts?

P 1:
- Make things relevant and meaningful to the learner
- Make assessments valid and fair
- Be efficient and flexible
- Use a problem solving approach
- Be responsive to the needs of the organization and the learner
- Have respect for the adult learner.

P 2:
- Commitment from all levels of the organization
- Enthusiasm and passion of staff
- Skilled manager and facilitators
- 'Disguise' LLN with other things – problem solving, computer training, customer service etc.
- Listen to the needs of the organization
- Develop a relationship of trust.

P 3:
- Time and energy spent at the collaboration stage is extremely worthwhile to ensure that the program is targeted to both the organisation's and the individual's needs
- It's crucial that the training is of value as the 'What's in it for me' factor is very important.

P 4:
- The critical importance of treating people as adults and making the learning relevant to their immediate needs
- A continual and determined focus on the learner, not the materials
- Experienced, skilled and flexible facilitators
- Committed and supportive management
- A realization that language and literacy development takes time.

One of the key lessons mentioned by a number of respondents was to avoid the term 'literacy':

P 2: It's an 'albatross'; you need to embed it in something else.

P 3: It's a 'detractor'; we talk about the development of workplace communication skills.

P 4: The term 'literacy' is not used; rather we use 'Workplace Communication Skills Training'.

Presentations to the Think Tank, August 2004

Dr. Geoff Bateson

In response to joint support from Australian Council for Adult Literacy and Adult Learning Australia, I was delighted to be able to take part in a number of events and to:

✧ describe some of the journey that Birmingham, England, has made in trying to drive up levels of language, literacy and numeracy (for all ages; via all organisations i.e. taking a 'whole Birmingham' approach).

✧ describe how the development work to improve adult literacy/numeracy outcomes in the city was interacting with the more recent national whole-of-government developments.

✧ set this in a context of Birmingham's wider aspirations to be a city that is 'learning about learning' and the attempts to create neighbourhoods where learning is one element in ensuring that they are places where residents are happy to live and work.

Ten years ago the state of learning was such that two thirds of children entered secondary school with a low skills set, such that they were unlikely to be able to really get to grips with the secondary school curriculum. One result of this was a 20-25 per cent 'success rate' at age 16, in terms of school leavers having the levels of language, numeracy and literacy skills to underpin their transferable employability across into their first job and on into subsequent jobs or promotions. Whilst 9,000 adults were in basic skills classes, with around 3,000 substantially making progress each year, the entry of an equivalent number of underachieving school leavers into the 'pot' meant that the overall size of the adult problem remained the same year-on-year.

There was a realisation that Birmingham's ambition to be a forward-moving city was being absolutely held back, in a number of ways, that these 'drag effects' of low levels of basic skills. The mechanisms to bring about change (annual development bids; fragmentary attempts at being 'innovative'; short term funding; disconnected developments even across different parts of the same organisation, let alone across different organisations; 'either/or' arguments about educational approaches; focusing on processes, meetings, ownerships, structures (rather than on a concerted drive to make real tangible differences to people's lives etc) had got us to where we were, so weren't going to be the solution looked for.

If we were to make real, lasting differences to the ways that people were helped to get the necessary skills (in ways that people could have some choice over), within relatively short timescales ('3-5 years to transform the system'), in ways that would impact on huge numbers ('every school pupil', 70,000 adult learners etc) then a totally new approach had to be tried out.

In 1995 the major education and training bodies across the city signed up to working in partnership and to having joint development money sitting behind a jointly agreed annual business plan ('this is how much change we're going to bring about this year – and this is how we're going to pay for those changes').

All of this was ambitious and innovative at the time. The approach is now also being used at regional level (an English region covers around 6 or 7 million people). The national 'Skills for Life' adult basic skills strategy introduced in 2001, similarly takes a cross-cabinet whole-government approach with key strategic objectives and a coherent set of developments.

In all cases the purpose is to ensure that larger numbers of learners get ready access to an appropriate, high quality service whichever part of the system they find themselves in and they then can expect to make relevant progress in acquiring skills. Previously the variability in effectiveness between providers was too great, learners were far from guaranteed any substantial outcome to their learning and moving from one bit of the system to another could easily mean the learner disappearing down the gulfs between them, or being endlessly reassessed by different organisations etc.

The realisation that the partner organisations couldn't solve their problems alone, and the commitment to 'get real' about finding a way of productive working in partnership that would focus on maximising change and keeping procedural structures to an absolute minimum, was all begun in a different political climate to the one that exists now. The work was started before any national school literacy or numeracy strategies, before the election of the current government and at a time when publicly funded organisations were often being defined as the problem not as potentially the solution. Also, some historical funding was being shifted onto more modern agendas but coming across as 'cuts'. As the national context changed, the Partnership has a close interaction with emerging national developments (having both fed up into those developments, and drawn the benefits down as quickly and widely as possible)

The original 'start-off' long-term development resources were gained by redefining an area-based regeneration budget as being applicable to the regeneration of people (through higher skills etc) rather than simply assuming that it only applied to physical regeneration. Since then there have been a number of budgets that have been lined up behind the joint commitment for change.

The Partnership made rapid success early on. Reflecting on why is was able to be so effective from the beginning has highlighted a few key elements that are adaptable to other developmental contexts:

✧ The key partners were those able to bring about large-scale change to parts of the education/learning infrastructure. They were the organisations responsible for running chunks of the system; their Chief Executives/Leaders met as a strategic board 3-4 times/year to focus on 'How far have we got? What's the distance still to travel? What still needs changing? What needs to be done to make it happen?' The senior managers of the same organisations then came together to put together the annual business plan and to make sue that their own teams and own delivery mechanisms were best placed to respond.

✧ A systems of loose 'attachments' of key development workers, for a small proportion of their time, to the Partnership meant that the partner organisations had a direct mechanism for discussions with each other, on a day to day basis, about what ideas each were thinking of. It also meant that the recurring, common 'Partnership' messages were able to be fed constantly and directly into the planning mechanisms of the various partners. This was vital since the Partnership was intended not to take on a life of its own, but to operate by influencing the ways the various partners planned and delivered their mainstream services.

✧ The focus was kept on changing how people do their existing jobs (within the confines of those things that the Partnership was unable to change – even though we were able to influence much more than we had at first thought) – and what supports and challenges they needed to be able to successfully make those changes. Initially these were mostly 'education workers' – i.e. school teachers and support staff; college and adult education teachers and learner-support people – but soon included librarians; staff of preschool groups; community workers, probation service staff, health service workers, people in social benefit and work-

linked offices and suchlike. This focus on changing systems and processes kept it well away from the old agenda of 'doing projects'.

The other dimension to focusing on change was to keep stressing that we were engaged in development activity i.e. were a Development Partnership. Reports to the Board mentioned money only in passing – the focus was kept on 'change' and on 'getting there'. How will we know when we've got there? What more needs to change to sort out secondary schools? When can the Partnership think about ending?

The business planning against the same strategic objectives meant that, although the emphasis may change from year to year, rapid progress would be made across a broad set of fronts, in ways that went faster, deeper, wider than any partner organisation on their own could manage.

The scale of the task was set as challenging as possible whilst still being just at the edge of being realistically feasible. For example, the task around adult basic skills was to halve the problem over the ten years from 2000 to 2010. The 140,000 adults with low levels of basic skills would be reduced to 70,000. This would be achievable if we reduced the 'flow' in from schools by working to double the success rate of school leavers (which we did); by doubling the number of adults working seriously on the gaps in their spiky profile of basic skills (which we have more than achieved); and by improving the achievements on courses (which we are currently doing).

Seventy thousand felt like an unmanageable number, but over 10 years it meant 7,000 'successes' per year. The types of people likely to have low basic skills were known, as were the programmes designed to meet these needs. Breaking the 7,000 down into these groups and looking at how individuals progressed through the various programmes, most relevant to those groups, made the whole thing feel much more do-able.

We needed ever more reliable and ever more disaggregated data and that was something we put energy and resources into. Analysing this data has helped us be more and more specific about what needs accelerating, for what groups of people, in which locations across the city. This has helped pinpoint the agencies already engaged with those learners and the most appropriate responses to make.

In some cases this has led to clarifying the roles (signposting to other provision, doing initial assessments, meeting people's needs but not necessarily by direct teaching etc) that staff can play in housing, in libraries, in community groups etc. Some of the work has been practical (producing helpful checklists or exemplars, confirming the roles already played, pointing out the gaps and the things that might be done), some of the work was more on attitudes and assumptions (unravelling that adult learners mostly didn't mind assessment and achievement, if done properly, lifting the definition of adult basic skills to mean much, much more than being equated with learners who are likely to make fairly slow progress to focus on the larger numbers who may need a rapid, intensive, focused brush up on specific, neutral skills.

Considerable progress has been made:

✧ literacy levels are climbing – halving the need by 2010 is quite feasible

✧ numeracy is a huge problem – larger need, few classes, very few skilled teachers, but we're focusing on it

✧ basic skills work has a high profile – and in many ways is leading the way

✧ literacy, language and numeracy issues have been built into a range of other developments and is one of several key commitments in the long term Community Plan

✧ literacy and numeracy issues have been connected across to the progress to be made if Birmingham is to make progress in its aspiration to be a learning city and if it is to raise the levels in particular neighbourhoods.

Jane Figgis

Taking Literacy to Fresh Fields

The 'built-in not bolted-on' model of literacy learning has been an effective strategy for improving the basic skills of people at work. Extending the model to other situations in the community, beyond workplaces, seemed a logical avenue for the Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL) to investigate as part of its forward planning.

The first step in the project I undertook for ACAL was to identify the 'fresh fields' where improving the literacy and numeracy of customers and clients might deliver benefits both to the individuals concerned and to the field itself. It was essentially a scouting mission: to find potential partners and then discuss with them ways improved literacy and numeracy might advance their agendas and ambitions.

The list of potential fields where literacy and numeracy might play a significant role was easy to devise. Health was an early entry where it seems obvious that being able to critique the flood of messages about dieting, for example, or simply to read accurately the directions on a prescription is critical. There are also the agendas of welfare organisations, community development agencies, banks and other financial institutions, housing commissions, the electoral commission, justice departments – all areas where the literacy and numeracy of clients, if limited in some manner, could decrease the effectiveness of the agency or organisation working with them.

Even though these fields are very different, I discovered fairly quickly that they share two common characteristics – characteristics which will determine the potential for ACAL (and for all people involved in providing literacy and numeracy programs) to build partnerships with them. They are:

✧ literacy and numeracy is not a topic people 'out there' think about

✧ literacy and numeracy is not a topic people 'out there' know much about.

These factors are real hurdles to extending the built-in not bolted-on model. This article describes each in a little more detail in the hope that, by understanding them, it will be easier to overcome them.

Literacy and numeracy not seen as problematic by potential partners

One person I spoke to who is highly regarded in the field of community capacity building said my approaching him made him realise that he simply took literacy for granted. Or, more accurately, he doesn't think about it because he doesn't *see* poor literacy or numeracy.

The point is an important one. He may well be in contact with people with weak or even very weak skills but the problem is often masked. People with low levels of literacy can be extremely articulate and good communicators. And people compensate – they use the literacy/numeracy resources of other people.

The statistics say that 20 per cent of Australian adults perform at the very lowest literacy and numeracy levels and that a further 20 percent do not have the necessary literacy skills 'to effectively participate in daily life' making up 40 percent of the adult population. Frankly, that doesn't correspond to most people's experience of the world.

It may be the case that there is a greater problem than is readily observed – that 40 percent of the adult population of Australia is struggling to participate in daily life – but, with the exception of migrants who do not speak English, it just doesn't sound right. People 'out there' will need to be

convinced of the deficits. Many of the people I interviewed said that one of the first things they would ask ACAL (or other literacy specialists) to do would be to show them that there are real weaknesses in the literacy and numeracy skills of their clientele or in their particular community.

In domains like health where there *is* a concern about clients' literacy, the public health professionals' solution has been to simplify the message and to market that message. Instead of improving the skill of people with limited literacy, these officers get around the difficulty basically by sloganeering. I'm sure we all applaud the efforts to encourage people to exercise more, stop smoking, use condoms, etc. However, turning health messages into (maximum) two-syllable word slogans does not lead to fruitful partnerships around developing literacy.

There is – this will come as no surprise – confusion about what the word 'literacy' connotes. Well, perhaps confusion is the wrong word. There is great consistency and little doubt for most people 'out there': literacy is being able to read – to decode text. Primary school type stuff. More than once in my conversations, the interviewee would be describing quite nicely the literacy demands on his or her clients – in one case, their having to write letters and how confusing some of the letters they produce actually are. But then, quite suddenly, they'd turn round and ask: but *is this communication or is it literacy?*

One of the informants, a person very knowledgeable about literacy who happens to do a lot of work in communities put the problem in stark (and startling) terms: *The term literacy is part of the problem, not part of the solution.*

Literacy has too much baggage and illiteracy too much stigma to be useful in conversation outside the profession.

It is interesting that although the word 'literacy' with respect to reading and writing is interpreted in the broad community in a rather pejorative way – to mean 'basic literacy' or, actually, illiteracy – deficits in decoding – the word itself, is used positively and frequently in other fields. People talk happily, not disparagingly, about computer literacy, information literacy, health literacy, and financial literacy. Some of the community development people I interviewed talked about 'institution' literacy as knowing how to set up and run local organisations. It is not clear to me whether this appropriation of the word 'literacy', by these other fields to mean a 'basic understanding', is doing the adult literacy field a service or a disservice. It gives prominence to the word, but it's not the literacy field's take on the word which is being promoted.

Building partnerships is 'pavement pounding' work

Literacy and numeracy educators may not always recognise just how special their knowledge and expertise is. It will require patient and detailed effort on the part of the profession before people in the 'fresh fields' clearly understand the roles they might play in improving the literacy and numeracy of their clients and customers.

The vast majority of my interviews ended with the person saying they would be really interested in having a conversation with someone associated with ACAL or other literacy or numeracy specialists. One person put it particularly clearly, but the sentiment was voiced by many: *It is intriguing to think that we could actually improve our clients' literacy. I like that idea!*

Those discussions are going to be time-consuming. Coming to an understanding of the ways literacy and numeracy are conceptualised and required in these arenas – including the language and meta-language used by these 'outsiders' – is not a task that can be short-circuited. Remember, these other agencies and organisations have accommodated to (or believe they have accommodated to) the current level of their clients' literacy and numeracy skills. It will be a search for effective 'hooks', as someone put it, with that quite accurate image of pulling two sides closer together.

These discussions will need to proceed at two levels. One is on the ground with the agencies and organisations who deal directly with the clients whose literacy and numeracy are of interest. The other is at the policy level where advocacy for literacy and numeracy needs to be built into on-going thinking and planning.

In health, for example, the two levels are the practitioners and the decision-makers. Both need to understand the value of people being able to critically analyse all the information they are subject to. In finance, both local bank officers and peak body associations, need to see the opportunities that are opened to them if client literacy and numeracy is improved. Similarly in the welfare sector, politicians concerned about poverty need to be engaged and so do social workers (and volunteers) helping disadvantaged families. The potential for knitting other people's agendas to literacy's is significant but it has to operate at many levels.

Once an agreed understanding of the potential is in place, sector by sector, then detailed program development work is called for. How is this extended literacy and numeracy learning to be built in? Where? Who exactly is going to do the learning? Who is going to do the teaching? Who's going to pay for it? What exactly is involved?

In sum, moving forward together requires extended conversations. In the first instance, because the concerns of the adult literacy profession about continuing poor literacy levels are neither widely shared nor understood. Then conversations need to be held to develop detailed programs and practical action plans that bring about mutual goals for improvements in literacy and numeracy. Literacy and numeracy will never be the core business of these potential partners but there is an opportunity to make many of them sincere and supportive allies.

Additional background information about overseas developments that may be helpful to readers

1. England

Strategy

Although there is a long history of adult literacy provision in the UK through community programs and partnerships and further education colleges, the results of the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), the subsequent enquiry into literacy and numeracy (Moser 99) and the election of a government committed to education as its 'best economic policy' has resulted in a highly ambitious whole-of-government strategy designed to improve measurably the basic skills of at least 1.5 million adults by 2010. To date, at least three billion pounds has been committed for the implementation of *Skills for Life: The national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills* (DfES 2001). It is impossible to provide here more than a flavour of the extraordinary breadth of activity linked to this strategy. The selection below is made both to convey this breadth and to indicate areas of activity that may have particular relevance for this project.

Skills for Life (SfL) has four interconnected pillars or strategies:

✧ boosting demand and improving access through a national campaign aimed not only at potential learners but also at maximising involvement across government and non-government agencies; financial assistance and incentives for learners are also part of the strategy for lifting demand

✧ ensuring capacity through a range of strategies to build supply at a local level including the use of all forms of media and various incentives

✧ raising standards through national curriculum materials, minimum teaching qualifications for all new teachers to the field and extensive accredited professional development opportunities; provider self-assessment as well as external inspections are also part of the picture

✧ learner achievement measured against national standards and agreed benchmarks; initial screening, diagnosis and assessment and a framework of national qualifications.

As well as more traditional adult basic skills learners, the *Skills for Life* strategy is designed to engage higher-level learners with more 'spiky profiles'. Through the *Move-On* initiative, people are encouraged to identify specific areas for improvement and to undertake 'brush-up' courses online. They can also acquire accredited Literacy and Numeracy Certificates following successful completion of online assessments. There are reports of fifteen hundred on-line test passes a month in Certificates in Literacy and Numeracy at Level 2 (DfES 2004a, p.28).

The 2003 national vocational skills strategy, *21st Century Skills* has broadened the scope of *Skills for Life* to include ICT as a third basic skill and confirmed that basic skills will be embedded in the definition of all Level 2 National Vocational Qualifications. Linked to this is the reform of all

post-16 training, *Success for All* (Learning and Skills Council (LSC) 2003) with incentives for colleges of further education to improve their capacity to deliver adult basic skills training. Alongside incentives for providers, Treasury has also voted 130 million pounds to reimburse employers for time taken off by employees during work time to enable them to improve their vocational and basic skills. Financial incentives for Jobcentre Plus clients are also available if jobseekers undertake literacy and numeracy training, with a further bonus on gaining a qualification. Prominent throughout these various strategies and reports is the message that the achievement of government targets requires broad involvement.

Implementation

McKenna and Fitzpatrick report that these policy developments in the UK have successfully embedded adult literacy and numeracy in a range of social policies and initiatives articulated through a whole of government approach. Indeed the Government claims that partnerships and the ownership of *Skills for Life* by key stakeholders is 'the most important element of successful delivery' (DfES 2004b, p.33). The implementation of *Skills for Life* is coordinated through a high level Adult Basic Skills Cabinet Committee. All government departments are expected to have basic skills action plans in line with the goals of *Skills for Life* and to report on progress to this committee. In addition, a high level body of government, employers, unions and delivery partners has been established to create the Skills Alliance, which is charged with overseeing the effective implementation of the Skills Strategy, within which *Skills for Life* is integrated.

Numerous reports on the web attest to the engagement of many agencies with these skills strategies including all public sector departments. The nature of involvement may range from substantial engagement of family and children's' services with family literacy programs to a range of strategies, such as procurement guidelines. A requirement of Public Service Agreements is that all public sector organizations integrate literacy basic skills in their training.

Integration

A further example of embedding and joined-up approaches to the implementation of *SfL* is the *Skilled for Health* project with the Department of Health, which is developing ways to deliver integrated health and literacy and numeracy training to particular groups. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport is working to reach priority groups through libraries, museums and galleries and the *Frontline Workers Project* aims to give 'frontline' workers the skills to recognise members of the public with low literacy levels and to use creative and innovative approaches to support them into learning.

The Adult Basic Skills Unit is working with Basic Skills Agency, the Financial Services Agency, Ufi, (University for Industry), Learndirect and Citizen's Advice Bureaux to work out how to improve financial literacy. The *Skills for Families* initiative is aiming to extend and embed local infrastructures and models of delivery for family language, literacy and numeracy. *Step into Learning* is a front line worker program for staff in children's centres, nurseries and such like and has so far fully funded training for two hundred and eighty early years' workers. Intergenerational learning is built into a new five year Strategy for Children and Learners (DfES 2004c), and basic skills development is embedded in the *National Strategy for Urban Renewal.*

A National Health Services University, set up within one immense national employer, is providing training from basic skills to senior medical consultants level. *Skills for Health* was spawned out of a basic premise that people with low literacy and numeracy are also high users of health services. Eight separate groups with different health care needs have been identified and groups such as Age Concern are funded to come up with ways in which people they are in contact with might be engaged to improve their basic skills and try out the approach with similar groups across the country and produce some evidence their approach works. The subtext is to

improve the capacity of all service organisations to understand they have a place to promote learning. In Bateson's words, '*Skills for Life used to be bolted on, now its built into everything*' (personal communication). Next, according to the *Skills for Life* Annual Review, is to achieve a whole-of-organisation approach 'for fully embedded literacy, language and numeracy' (DfES 2004b, p.30).

Outcomes and reporting

England has taken a skills-based approach to curriculum and assessment in relation to literacy and numeracy and it is largely this which has enabled the Government's Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit to build what it terms the Learning Infrastructure to drive the implementation of *Skills for Life*. Reporting and accountability are big issues for the Blair administration. Whether the basic skills framework is more akin to the 'lingering basics' than Lankshear's 'new basics' is a matter of lively debate in the UK and, as McKenna and Fitzpatrick (2004) note, there is some danger that the approach to assessment may narrow the focus of provision. The National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) and the National Literacy Trust (NLT) are two of a number of organizations that argue that success measures need to reflect more than just individual performance. Apart from the more obvious bureaucratic issues linked with an audit culture, there are some important questions about the wider benefits of learning emanating from a strategy driven in part by concerns about social exclusion. Are the accountability and reporting frameworks for *Skills for Life* reflecting what research has shown about successful literacy and numeracy activity for those who are socially excluded or at-risk ? Or is there a risk that overarching focus on targets and funding based on individual performance will act as a deterrent to participation for the most disadvantaged (NIACE 2003)? Do 'official' league tables divert resources to those groups most likely to meet targets within short timeframes (Bird 2004)? These kinds of issues have to be managed as one of the trade-offs of having a well-funded strategy that is delivering results albeit within somewhat restrictively framed constructs of literacy and numeracy.

Given the complexity and rapidity of change in England, it is not easy to see how small projects like those we looked at in Australia fit into the national picture. There are indications in various reports that 'community focussed' literacy programs and volunteers risk funding cuts if they do not deliver against regional targets. It is too early to see what the mid- to longer-term impact will be of *Skills for Life*.

2. Ireland

Strategy

Three documents inform Ireland's first national adult literacy strategy. They are the White Paper on Adult Education (DES 2000), the National Development Plan 2000-2006 (DoF 2000) and the National Adult Literacy Programme (DES 2001). In this brief account of Ireland's approach, we draw heavily on McKenna & Fitzpatrick's (2004) study of international trends in adult literacy.

Implementation

McKenna & Fitzpatrick (2004) report that the aims and implementation plans for the National Adult Literacy Plan, which is occurring largely through the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA). Projects of this Plan include developing a model for strategic planning for vocational education, family literacy, health literacy, a quality framework for adult basic education, integrating literacy, literacy through the media, plain English, specific learning difficulties, return to education, workplace basic education, literacy and sport, and an assessment framework. As part of this latter project, a literacy resource website has been developed with online tools to improve spelling, reading and number skills (http://www.literacytools.ie/ viewed 26/08/04).

What is perhaps the most useful when looking at what Ireland is doing, is that information about all of these initiatives can be found on one website. Using the key words 'Ireland adult literacy', Google takes you straight to the NALA website. One gets a sense from this website that this is a national, coordinated, coherent system, informed by research and policy, offering training and provision in a variety of forms and seeking to cater for the complexities of the literacy 'problem'. It takes a 'whole of organisation' approach and stresses the responsibility of all for improving literacy and numeracy skills.

Following from this responsibility-of-all approach, NALA works in partnership with a number of organisations on various projects and work programs. According to McKenna and Fitzpatrick (2004) NALA is a member of a number of strategic committees such as the Information Society Commission and the Irish Trade Union Trust. At a national level, a National Adult Learning Council is to be established to advise the Department of Education and Science, with partners from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, the Prison Education Service, Local Employment Service, the National Training and Development Institute and the Further Education and Training Council. Similar partnerships would be replicated at local levels. One partnership in operation is that between NALA and the Fingal Sports Partnership who are jointly coordinating a project on sport and literacy which aims to get youth more involved in sports or physical fitness activities and to build literacy and numeracy development into these activities.

Integration

Ireland also takes an integrated approach to literacy. This means that within a further education and training program the needs of people with literacy difficulties are recognised and addressed. This is the responsibility of the whole centre – subject teachers/trainers, management, administrative staff, guidance and counselling staff. (This is similar to current requirements in Australia that Registered Training Organisations recognise and address the literacy and numeracy needs of their clients.) NALA has produced ten guidelines for how centres go about this integration at management and planning level and at program design and delivery level. A 100 hour course is available to give participants an understanding of literacy issues and the knowledge and skills to integrate literacy development with other subject areas. Successful participants are awarded a National University of Ireland certificate in Integrating Literacy. This appears to be similar to the course that TAFE NSW used to run titled 'Working Together'.

Outcomes and reporting

In terms of outcomes and the impact of literacy programs, Ireland is committed to increasing the opportunities for those with literacy difficulties to access tuition, following what was considered the shocking results of the 1997 IALS survey that found that twenty-five per cent of the Irish population were at the lowest level of literacy. There has been a four-fold increase in those accessing provision since 1997 but this is still too considered too low being only five per cent of those assessed as in need. NALA is working on a range of accessible options and are grappling with ways of measuring, or mapping the learning journey such as developing an assessment framework for adult basic education that is learner centred and that feeds into the quality framework.

Despite the challenges remaining for Ireland, one gets the impression that a national, coordinated and comprehensive approach is being taken, supported by national policy, research, training and infrastructure, including ICT. There is commitment from the highest level evidenced in the President of Ireland's welcome message on the NALA website.

3. USA

Strategy

Like Australia, the United States is a federation and federal legislation provides the framework for funding performance agreements with the states and other providers against national objectives. This federal legislative framework has undergone major change since the passing of the 1998 Workforce Investment Act (WIA). Stronger accountability requirements and incentives are designed to achieve greater coherence to adult literacy as well as between adult literacy, 'welfare-to-work' workforce development provisions. Although previous accountability moves made local providers more accountable at state level the WIA now requires states to become accountable to the federal system.

The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, which sits under the WIA and was passed in the same year (1998) establishes the accountability requirement that states develop outcomes-based performance standards for adult literacy. This requirement is realised through the core (obligatory) measures of the US National Reporting System, established in 1997 and modified to fulfil the WIA requirements (Condelli 2000). More recent legislation is the 2003 Adult Basic and Literacy Education Act (ABL) which signals a further consolidation of the alignment of basic skill qualifications to school standards rather than the more adult oriented outcomes approach of the Equipped for the Future (Stein 2000) and SCANS (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills) Frameworks (1991).

Implementation

The notion of working together with government, particularly in relation to philanthropic organisations and local businesses, has a long history in the USA. In adult literacy, there is a relatively long tradition of local groups coming together to build awareness and raise funds for (often volunteer) local programs. At a national level, organisations such as the National Coalition for Literacy, the National Alliance of Urban Literacy Coalitions and ProLiteracy Worldwide support local coalitions and providers.

According to McKenna and Fitzpatrick (2004), major philanthropic organizations support family literacy including the National Centre for Family Literacy; major business sponsorship is being brokered to support the development of IT literacy, and the American Medical Association supports health literacy. Also, the federal funding eligibility prerequisites support partnership development.

In order to better understand what makes for effective partnerships at a community level, the Office of Vocational and Adult Education recently commissioned a set of twelve case studies of 'promising' community partnerships across the USA (US Dept of Education 2003). The main focus of the C-PAL study was on how partnerships can result in more effective provision of and support for local literacy services, and the findings reinforced those of other studies of effective partnerships such as the importance of leadership, common purpose, infrastructure and funding.

The findings showed that partnerships can lead to better coordination across providers and other agencies such as child care and health; more effective use of available funds in relation to provision, publicity, better referral practices and better leverage to gain access to different funding sources including sources that stipulate partnerships and the potential to wield greater influence. There would be many similar examples in Australia of how local agencies work together to share space and other resources, provide support such as child care and transport, submit joint funding proposals and so on.

The report also found similar difficulties for partnerships as exist in Australia. Even within effective partnerships matters such as multiple sources of funds create particular difficulties. One

site spoke of the challenges of meeting the requirements of seventeen different funding streams. There are often contradictions between meeting partnership eligibility requirements for funding and the strictures of ensuing accountability conditions and there are similar issues to here about time frames and conflicting priorities concerning employment and work-related priorities.

Postings to the National Literacy Advocacy electronic list of the American Association of adult and Community Education (AACE-NLA) suggest that participation rates in adult literacy programs appear to have declined since the introduction of stricter reporting requirements and that funds have not increased while quality expectations have (Sticht 2004). Sticht, a well-regarded literacy expert in the US, makes the often overlooked point that programs can only be held accountable if they have the resources to deliver good services. To ramp up expectations without professional development support sets providers up to fail, which only results in disillusionment and possible withdrawal.

Integration

In terms of integration we see more of a model of local inter-agency collaboration and support for literacy services rather than literacy learning built into programs of other sectors. The tightened reporting requirements suggest that this is the preferred model. For example, eligibility for funding through the Workforce Investment Act (1998) requires evidence of integration of literacy with vocational training.

Family Literacy is a major component of adult literacy in the USA and programs provide educational support for families including education for adults in conjunction with early childhood and school provision. Apart from the obvious close partnership with schools, many other agencies become involved in various ways with family literacy. *Even Start* is the predominant source for funding. *Even Start* is intended to be available in sufficient intensity and duration to be able to make sustainable changes in a family, but as Belzer and St Clair (2003, p.33) comment, family literacy programs are challenged to justify their existence 'since the returns on such work are very long-term and hard to express through current accountability mechanisms'. The funding body, community partners, program staff and participants often have very different ideas of what the program will achieve and how it should be measured. Nonetheless, there are recent indications that the Bush administration is unhappy with the impact of this program, claiming there is no evidence that it works and funding may be substantially reduced in 2006.

In relation to health, a number of states are actively building health literacy partnerships and collaborations (sabes.org/health/collaborations.html and able.state.pa.us/able/leb/able/HEALTHLIT_2002). Most activity appears to be concerned with developing resources and worksheets on health matters, constructing measures for assessing poor health literacy or 'simplifying' health messages (Shohet 2003, Belzer and St Clair 2003) However, other more innovative, integrated approaches are being developed that are more in line with an understanding of health literacy as the 'knowledge and skills needed to be aware of one's own health beliefs and practices [and] make personal choices about health and health care options' (Singleton in Belzer and St Clair 2003, p.35). This is a long way, as Belzer and St Clair comment, from health literacy as the ability to read and understand medicine labels.

Of particular note is a project in Massachusetts (Hohn 2002) where a full time health literacy coordinator with a nursing background has been appointed to work alongside community health leaders. Among other things, this person is working as a kind of literacy broker building understanding and developing joined-up ways of working around key local health issues. One aim is to embed literacy learning within health education geared towards local health priorities. According to Hohn (2002), the initiative has grown from a concern that patients could not read labels into a significant source of critique regarding the interaction between health care providers and the people they are trying to assist, and offers useful pointers for other areas of literacy work.

Outcomes and Reporting

There is intense pressure for funded providers to demonstrate performance through tests that match the hotly contested gold standard research. In the belief that this medical model of research will reveal the answer to the literacy method war, control and experimental classes have even been established.

The National Centre for Family Literacy in Louisville, Kentucky, provides assessment and evaluation material on individuals and programs, using standardised tests and qualitative data. However ther standardised tests may bias against the very people these projects are designed for, given the likelihood of poverty in those families.

In relation to programs funded through the WIA and ABL Acts, the American National Reporting System (NRS) is the mandated accountability mechanism. Every state and local program must report learner outcome data using national definitions of educational gain along the dimensions of reading and writing, and functional and workplace skills. The approach to assessment is a choice for the states and a validated portfolio assessment method is acceptable as long as it reflects the basic skills areas identified in the American National Reporting System. Nonetheless the predominant effect of the American National Reporting System has been to push states towards a few standardised tests partially, it is argued, because of the challenges of professionally developing a largely casualised teaching force to adopt more demanding frameworks. The take up of the EFF for example, which is designed to assist providers develop a more adult oriented approach to their work, has reportedly been patchy.

Educational gain is just one of the core outcome measures used in the American NRS, the others being employment entry, employment retention and placement in further education or training. There are also a number of (optional) secondary outcome measures including involvement in community activities, involvement in children's education and completion of a work-based project (Condelli 2000).

Despite the legislative frameworks, and the millions of dollars, learners and volunteers involved in adult literacy in the USA, reports state that the field remains somewhat fragile and marginal. Interestingly, and despite the history of coalitions around adult literacy in the US, David Rosen (AAACE-NLA list – 11/4/04), a key advocate, describes community partnerships only as an *emerging* level of state literacy education. Multiple funding streams are not well coordinated and eight per cent of the workforce is casual and not organised, despite the efforts of organizations like the National Alliance of Urban Literacy Coalitions to build strength through broader based coalitions. Postings on e-discussion lists reveal a constant struggle to maintain funding tied increasingly to strictures about what it is possible to do in a literacy program. Innovative and responsive approaches to literacy development appear to be under increasing threat.

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