DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 445 276 CE 080 792

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TITLE Considering the Research, Debating the Issues: Proceedings of the National ALNARC Forum (1st, Melbourne, Australia, February 17-18, 2000).
INSTITUTION Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium, Melbourne (Victoria). Victorian Centre.
SPONS AGENCY Australian Dept. of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra.; Australian National Training Authority, Brisbane.
ISBN ISBN-1-876768-15-0
PUB DATE 2000-00-00
NOTE 69p.; For related reports by the same preparing institution, see CE 080 790-797.
AVAILABLE FROM Language Australia or ARIS, GPO Box 372F, Melbourne VIC 3001, Australia ($13.20 Australian). Tel: 61 3 9926 4779, Fax: 61 3 9926 4780, E-mail: sales@la.ames.vic.edu.au, Web site: http://sunsite.anu.edu.au/language-australia. For full text: http://www.staff.vu.edu.au/alnarc/forum.html.
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Proceedings (021) -- Opinion Papers (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Standards; Administrator Attitudes; Adult Basic Education; *Adult Literacy; Community Programs; Competency Based Education; Conferences; Disadvantaged; Education Work Relationship; Educational Attitudes; Educational Practices; *Educational Research; Employer Attitudes; Foreign Countries; Human Capital; Instructional Materials; *Integrated Curriculum; Labor Force Development; Learning Modules; *Literacy Education; Material Development; Mentors; National Curriculum; Numeracy; Politics of Education; School Business Relationship; *Theory Practice Relationship; Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS Australia; Grassroots Efforts; Impact Studies; *National Training Packages (Australia); Social Capital

ABSTRACT

This document contains 10 papers about and from a national forum that was conducted by the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (ALNARC) to gather various perspectives on the inclusion of literacy and numeracy standards in Australia's national training packages and to discuss research about the implementation of training packages that have been developed with consideration for literacy and numeracy standards. The following papers are included: "Introduction: Literacy in VET (Vocational Education and Training) and Literacy in the Community: ALNARC's Research Challenge" (Jill Sanguinetti); "Literacy in Training Packages: An ANTA (Australian National Training Authority) Perspective" (Rob Bluer); "Literacy in Training Packages: An Industry Perspective" (Bob Paton); "Literacy in Training Packages: A Registered Training Organisation (RTO) Perspective" (Linda Wyse); "Literacy in Training Packages: A Registered Training Organisation (RTO) Perspective" (Rhonda Raisbeck); "Reflections on Literacy, Workplaces and Training Packages" (P.J. Waterhouse); "The Implementation of Training Packages: Critical Perspectives on Language, Literacy and Numeracy

in Training Packages" (Damon Anderson); "The Politics and Practicalities of Grassroots Research in Education" (Marie Brennan); "Sleight of Hand: Literacy, Social Capital and Social Disadvantage" (Ian Falk); and "Mentoring in Practitioner-Based Research" (John Wilson). Two papers include substantial bibliographies. (MN)

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First National ALNARC Forum
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ISBN 1 876768 15 0

The research in this report was funded under the ANTA Adult Literacy National Project by the Commonwealth of Australia through the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

Published for ALNARC by Language Australia Ltd
The National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia
GPO. Box 372F
Melbourne Vic 3001

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Introduction

Literacy in VET and Literacy in the Community: ALNARC's Research Challenge

Jill Sanguinetti

National Manager of ALNARC

In what ways can ALNARC contribute to the quality of practice, training, research and policy development in the field of adult literacy? The inclusion of literacy and numeracy in industry standards in National Training Packages was a radical innovation whose outcomes are as yet uncertain. The role of research in this context is to harness the insights, experiences and wisdoms of the industry representatives, enterprise managers, trainers, teachers and worker/trainees who are currently putting that innovation into practice. It is ALNARC's job to lead that process and to involve all of the players in reflecting upon the findings, debating the issues and articulating new ideas. Do we have the research and organisational capacity to ensure this happens?

Our other job is to facilitate, support and disseminate practitioner research in community-based and TAFE settings. Are we able to bridge between literacy teaching and learning in the domain of VET and in the domain of the community, so that each of these influences and enriches the other?

ALNARC's first national forum held in mid February 1999 in Melbourne went part way to answering these questions. The content of the forum reflected ALNARC's two main purposes: to carry out policy research into adult literacy and numeracy in VET and in the community, and to help build a culture of research across the field of practice. It provided an opportunity for the field to respond to the findings of research projects coordinated through ALNARC's various state-based centres, to hear the perspectives of a range of stake-holders and to think across the binaries of 'industry' and 'community', 'training' and 'education', 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' research. This collection of the presentations of invited speakers at both days of the forum invites us to reflect on the productivity of practice and research that bridges between the categories.

The first day of the forum focused on the effectiveness of the inclusion of literacy and numeracy in training packages. The move to 'embed' literacy within industry standards has raised a complex bundle of issues involving different stake-holders, different providers and contested understandings about what literacy is and why we need it. Speakers at the forum including ANTA and DETYA representatives, an ITAB representative, Registered Training Organisation (RTO) personnel, and academic researchers shared their different experiences in implementing 'literacy in training packages' and tackled the

complexities from different viewpoints. A fascinating picture emerged; a snapshot of 'where we are up to' in the implementation of a radical training initiative.

ANTA representative Rob Bluer spoke of the significance of ALNARC's work in producing a national perspective on adult literacy in VET. The teaching of generic skills in the course of teaching technical skills represents a huge challenge to RTOs. The other big challenge is assessment and the need to find fair and effective ways of assessing competence; training packages will "stand or fall" on whether units of competence can be effectively and consistently assessed in relation to each other.

Bob Paton from MERSITAB (the Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Industry) represented an ITAB perspective. He said that many industry standards were set as the result of industrial relations issues, rather than on the basis of training requirements. There are problems in the area of assessment being experienced in many industries: for example, the imposition of written assessment tasks in order to assess work skills. On the other hand, we cannot be sure that oral testing is always valid and reliable.

Damon Anderson, Research Fellow at CEET (the Centre for the Economics of Education and Training) at Monash University, gave a provocative talk comparing the understandings of literacy that were implicitly constructed in the discourse of training packages, with more 'traditional' understandings of literacy as social and critical practice. He asked, what would Freire have said about training packages? A lively debate ensued in which one participant replied that Freire would have embraced training packages on the grounds that they provide a framework which can be applied in many different ways, rather than prescribe a fixed content.

A panel of three literacy practitioners from different RTOs each spoke about their experiences in working to ensure that literacy was a central element in training programs structured by training packages. Rhonda Raisbeck from Holmesglen Institute of TAFE talked about her involvement in a program of training workplace trainers and assessors in the forest products industry. Rhonda said that working in industry as a literacy teacher is fraught with difficulty because there are so many stake-holders, "it is like working out a Venn diagram". The ITAB has an agenda; the union has an agenda, and the enterprise has an agenda. The RTO come somewhere in the middle and has to try to ensure that all the stake-holders get something out of it.

Linda Wyse, from Linda Wyse and Associates, reminded the gathering that at this early stage of implementation, it is easier to raise issues than to find answers. What holds good for one set of learners at one site, may not hold good for others. The training packages themselves vary greatly in the way that they address language, literacy and numeracy (LL&N). Language, literacy and numeracy in training packages need to be addressed in two key areas: we need to understand LL&N skills as underpinning or enabling the technical skills in the

units of competence and we then need to look at LL&N skills as communication skills when they are overtly identified as such as parts of particular jobs.

Peter Waterhouse from Workplace Learning Initiatives talked about multiple literacies, local literacies, and different 'truths' in relation to literacy. He argued that training packages can be read as creating the space for innovative educators to explore and colonise. "There is plenty of scope for dialogue on design and there is also scope for exploring languages and literacies but they may not be the languages and literacies we are most used to. We may need to restrain (and re-train) our urge to teach, and to cultivate our capacity to listen and to learn from the multiple voices and tales of the workplace."

The second day of the forum saw a new group of participants and a different focus: practitioner research into literacy provision for groups with special needs and circumstances.

Associate Professor Ian Falk, director of the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia, and director of the Tasmanian Centre of ALNARC, spoke about 'Literacy, Social Capital and Social Disadvantage'. Learners and educators are aware that literacy is a crucial step in the acquisition of qualifications leading to employment. However, there are dimensions to 'literacy' such as identity formation and self-esteem which are a crucial part of lifelong learning. As yet, there has not been an accepted way to insert the discourse of the 'social' into the policy discourse of the 'economic'.

Professor Marie Brennan of Canberra University spoke about the Politics and Practicalities of Grass Roots Research. Marie put the issue of practitioner research in the context of the changing nature of work (Gee's 'new work order'), shifts in expectations being made of research and the implications for research of globalisation. Grass roots research may provide a "telling and complex picture of local conditions"; a "reading against the grain" of policies; or a method to improve and develop practice through cycles of action research. Marie proposed a "rhizomatic" image for thinking about grass roots research: inter-connecting research projects like root systems developing underground, sending up shoots in unexpected places, and anchoring their grasses or potatoes in productive and growthful ways.

Professor John Wilson presented the Victorian experience of mentoring practitioner-based research, highlighting some of the benefits as well as the problems.

This volume contains most of the plenary papers presented at the two-day forum. The reports presented by ALNARC researchers at the forum are not included as these have been have been published separately by Language Australia and are available through them. These papers and executive summaries of the ALNARC's 1999 research reports are available on the ALNARC web site: www.staff.vu.edu.au/alnarc.

Together, these papers open up a number of difficult issues that are emerging at the cutting edge of practice: on the integration of literacy and

numeracy in training packages, on practitioner research, and on literacy in the context of lifelong learning. On reading the papers, the issues unfold and the potential significance of ALNARC's role in developing a culture of research that links between the industry- and community-based fields of practice becomes increasingly apparent.

Literacy in Training packages: An ANTA Perspective

Rob Bluer,

Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), Victoria

We think the funding of ALNARC is extremely important for two reasons. Firstly, we think it's important that the research community help us in our endeavours to build the National Training Framework. The consortium is doing that very explicitly in relation to some of the projects it is carrying out. Secondly, and just as importantly from our perspective, we want to build the research culture in adult literacy in this country. We want an Australian adult literacy research culture built and maintained. And we want that to have a very strong national perspective. We think that the way we've done it promises that it might be achieved. Now of course it's much too early to say how this system is going to work. We've tried to build an organisation which is based in universities all around the country but working together on very important projects. In two or three years time, we'll be able to judge how effective that's been. But let no one be in any doubt about our commitment to trying to ensure that that research community develops into a vibrant and effective adult literacy research network.

Before I talk about language, literacy and numeracy issues in training packages, I want to talk a bit about training packages. I think it's very important to understand what we are trying to achieve here. The National Training Framework within which the training packages operate does two fundamental things. First of all it regulates training outcomes. It says that industry shall define what the outcomes of the training system are. And we do that by defining units of competency or workplace standards in the training packages. They represent the outcomes of the system. That's a big shift in itself. The other fundamental pillar of the National Training Framework is that we have deregulated delivery. We have basically said: "we have defined the outcomes; how they are delivered is up to the teaching/training profession".

I've heard lately that people are arguing that we've denied the VET teaching profession its professionalism. On the contrary, the National Training Framework actually exalts it. It challenges the profession in situations where there aren't a lot of so-called curriculum materials available to deliver the product. I'll have that argument with anybody about whether or not we've attacked professional teachers and trainers in the VET system because I think the training package approach provides them with an opportunity that they've never had before. I know it's difficult to accept that somebody else is defining an outcome. And I suspect that's where some of the resistance and some of the defensive noises we've heard are coming from. The right to define the

outcomes, we say, should belong to industry. It's in the workplace that the final judgement has to be made about the effectiveness of Vocational Education and Training. And if that's the case (some people will argue with that assumption) then it's quite logical that industry should define the outcomes.

In a nutshell, what training packages do is link workplace standards with VET qualifications. That's what they're all about. They define workplace standards as units of competency and they package units of competency together in certain ways that lead to VET qualifications. This is not an easy task. In some senses, writing the standards has been easier than defining the qualifications. You've no idea the struggles that go on within industry about how the units ought to be packaged to lead to qualifications. That's at heart what it's about. We link workplace standards with VET qualifications.

The other important characteristic of the National Training Framework is that it's national in character. And that is another fundamental issue that we are all struggling with at the moment. You have national training packages. They define workplace standards on a national basis. They define national VET qualifications. Hence we do have to have some consistency in assessment outcomes. We have to have a lack of diversity, if you like, in terms of the outcomes but not in terms of the delivery.

All the states and territories are starting to understand some of the implications of having a truly national system. From one perspective the training package and the National Training Framework are revolutionary. But they're not really. They are evolutionary, in the sense that they actually built upon the training reforms that have been developed over the last 10 or 15 years in this country. Competency standards have been around for along time. What we've done is basically mandate them and say they represent the outcomes of the training system. That's the radical step that's been taken.

There are a number of implications that I'll get to in a moment. One of the fundamental questions that we have to ask about training packages is: do they provide enough data, information and intelligence to allow for effective assessment against the units of competency? There is a range of different kinds of units of competency that define workplace standards. Some of them are mainly technical in character. Many are to do with generic skills such as communication. But probably the majority are a combination of technical and generic skills especially skills requiring language, literacy and numeracy. And that is where the real problems begin in terms of assessment.

It's not just a question of assessing technical competence or competence in communication. It's most often a question of assessing both, usually at the same time. This, of course, has some implications for the way teachers go about their job. It means for example that the teaching and assessment process that in the past has been basically compartmentalised as either technical or communication, can in many cases now be brought together.

Fundamentally the training packages are going to require changes in the practice of VET teaching and training. That's about the hardest thing to achieve:

getting people to change the way they work. I don't think we should try and diminish what is being asked for here. There is a huge challenge being provided to training organisations in terms of the way they go about their business. This is especially so in this area of technical and the generic skills. How do you do it? How do you deliver it? How do you assess it when the technical and the generic are most often intermingled within a unit of competency?

The answer to my question as to whether training packages provide enough data, information and intelligence to lead to effective assessment is probably "yes" but also "not good enough yet". It's important to understand that in developing this radical, if not revolutionary innovation of training packages, we didn't do any research and development or carry out pilot projects. They were simply introduced. We are doing the research and development as we go. You can argue about whether or not that was a smart thing to do but political imperatives being what they are, there was probably no alternative.

We are finding that, as we continue developing these things called training packages, issues of a very serious and fundamental nature keep cropping up. And we've got to tackle them on the way. We've tried to do it within ANTA in a number of ways. I think this year 2000 will be the real test as to how effective we've been in tackling some of these issues.

At the moment there are nearly fifty training packages out there. They cover very significant proportions of the work force. They are now starting to be delivered on a substantial enough scale for people to be able to make judgements about their efficacy. At bottom, this is about whether there is relative ease of assessment against the units of competency. That's the issue in my view. I think we're going to get different responses, different kinds of feedback about that.

We have had difficulty within ANTA in communicating the need to embed the generic skills, communication skills and so on, in the units of competency in a way that leads to ease of assessment. We've even had difficulty understanding ourselves, making sure that all the people in ANTA who work with Training package developers properly understand the issues. That's not surprising, but I think we're starting to get there.

One of the important indicators is a recent technical document, *Process for Training Package Development.* It sets out in considerable detail the steps developers have to follow when developing a Training package. It makes about sixteen references to language, literacy and numeracy issues and the need to embed them appropriately in the units of competency. There are a number of checklists (and other devices) in this document which stress to developers the importance of that process. The important thing, of course, is how teachers and trainers use it 'out there', how they interpret it.

I want to briefly go through some of the ways in which we've tried to communicate the importance of communication skills in training packages. I've already mentioned the first one. The *Training package Development Handbook* is a more technical document which also provides support for package

developers. It has a great deal of technical advice about communication and other generic skills. The Workplace Communication Project has, over the last two or three years produced a number of support materials for training packages which focus on literacy issues. These products have been developed by the Industry Training Advisory Bodies. They vary in their quality. They vary in their usefulness. But nevertheless I think they will be an important resource for teachers and trainers who are delivering training packages in the VET system.

In the training package development process, there is a requirement that when the training package is near to completion it should be evaluated by the state and territory training authorities. We want, if we can, to ensure that the issues that we want to deal with here – communication, language, literacy and numeracy – are properly embedded and easily assessed in the training package before it gets to that stage. We've set up some internal processes to try to ensure that. We also have, finally, a formal review process that is currently looking at about a dozen training packages. These were the packages that were first endorsed some time ago. An important element of that review is to consider the issues we've been talking about today.

All of this means something but it doesn't mean everything. In my opinion, training packages are going to stand or fall, as I said, on the issue of ease of assessment. If the units of competence are very difficult to assess on a widespread scale, then I think we have to say that that particular package, or at least those particular units, have failed. If teachers and trainers do find ways of assessing these competencies in ways that don't require huge amounts of energy and effort, then I think we can say that they are succeeding. But as I said before, the issue is for teachers and trainers to find ways of working as teams to deal with the intermingled technical and communication issues that pervade most of the units of competence in most of the training packages.

Literacy in Training Packages: An Industry Perspective

Bob Paton, Executive Officer, Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Industry Training Body (MERSITAB)

The Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services ITAB (MERSITAB) was formed in 1995/96 when the National, Metal and Engineering Training Board and the Aerospace Industry training body were combined.

My background is that I was a motor mechanic. There's not a lot of grease under the fingernails now. I spent quite a few years in TAFE in NSW in various roles, and I've been with the ITAB for four years now.

Industry is committed to the training of workers for a variety of reasons. An arch capitalist would say, "we've got to have people to do the job to make the money and to pay the shareholders". Others would say, "it's for the good of Australia and the public in general". ITABs represent industry in the public arena. We enjoy funding from ANTA, from DETYA (occasionally) and from industry to carry out our role.

There are several things to say regarding an industry perspective on literacy in training packages. One is the need and the demand by industry for people that have the general or generic skills (sometimes poorly titled 'soft skills') which enable people to work together, to interact and communicate with others, to process information and so on.

The Australian Industry Group that represents employers in the manufacturing industry, aerospace, building and construction industry, information technology (IT), printing, textile clothing and footwear, and so on, has a very broad-based membership. It commissioned a significant survey last year undertaken by the Allen Consulting Group.

There were several quite interesting outcomes from that survey. One strong outcome was that what employers valued most of all were non-technical skills, the things that made people useful and valuable employees. The fundamental skills of being able to communicate with others and work with others are very difficult to train people in or to instil. It's far better to employ people who already have them. Communication skills are probably the most valuable component of vocational skill. The technical skills can always be gained providing somebody has the general aptitude, interest, motivation and communication skills.

The survey said that we want people who can do all those sorts of things. We don't care about the technical side too much, because the workers of today and tomorrow will need the general skills to enable them to work in a changing work environment. Company X now typically has short-term contracts of supply and manufacture and the term of the contract might be three months. Hopefully

they have something lined up for next year. No longer are there smokestack industries, producing the same product year after year. Employers want people who are adaptable, people who can shift from one task, process or job role to another. They want workers who can communicate and use work sheets and instruction sheets and produce reports at whatever level is required. Employers are obliged to have workers who are able to understand notices, hazchem sheets and all those sorts of things. Typical quality systems applied in Australia are heavily document- focused. Individual workers are becoming more autonomous and therefore they need to have greater self-reliance and they need the generic skills. Instead of somebody standing over them saying, "do this, do that", they actually need to self determine at their own level. They are working in teams (although these are a bit passé now) and in coordinated work groups. For their own personal development, they'll also need the sorts of skills we're talking about.

Workplaces are becoming more and more culturally diverse, and this in itself creates a need for language, literacy, numeracy and communication skills. The key competencies are being addressed in the training packages in various ways and it's interesting to see that some years on now the key competencies still keep bubbling up to the top. Employers are still saying these are really important to us. The Mayer framework of key competencies is getting a bit old – it needs a bit of touching up in terms of detail because time has moved on – but fundamentally those competencies are still central to employer requirements.

MERSITAB has two training packages at the moment, with another one coming along. We've got the Metal and Engineering Training Package which covers the manufacturing and engineering industry. We've got the aerospace one, called 'Aeroskills'. We're also developing one for the recreational boating industry.

The Metal and Engineering Training Package was based on a set of competency standards that have been around in about four different forms and formats since the early 1990s. Their original production was for industrial classification purposes. The metal and engineering industry decided in the late 1980s that it would restructure the industry, and the way people were employed, by changing the federal industrial award. People would be paid for the skills they use at work, rather than the skills they possessed. The skills they use at work would be defined. Through a combination of curriculum modules and competency standards, they defined the sorts of things that people did at work. They then gave points of measurement. If the worker carried it out, then he or she had a rightful claim to be paid for doing that. A combination of units of competency gave a particular level in the industrial award and hence an amount of money. It is these competency standards that the Metal and Engineering Industry Training Packages are built on.

From the industry perspective, the competency standards were primarily for industrial relations purposes and not for training. For that reason, every word, full stop, comma, colon, semi-colon etc has been pored over in painful

detail: not by people like me, but by the industry parties that have participated in MERSITAB – employer organisations and unions. This is a bit of an apology as well. If you read one of the units of competency of the Metal and Engineering Training Package you'd say "Who wrote this? It's really hard. I don't understand this." The reason it's written like that, often obscure, is for an industrial purpose. Perhaps someone said, "we're not going to put up with this unless you put a comma in there, or an 'and/or' in there, or separate that out and make it another sentence, or another item in that list", or whatever it is. That's the environment the industry and ITAB people have to work within. Some ITABs and training packages don't have that same focus but quite a few do.

The Allen Consulting Group reported to the Australian Industry Group that employers are saying, "we value these 'soft' skills – literacy and numeracy are really important as well as being able to communicate, use IT and so on". However, when some employers were asked the hard question on literacy and numeracy, they said, "we want our workers to be literate and numerate and to be able to converse in the English language if required, but we're not going to pay for it to happen. If they can't do it, then that's tough. We think it's the role of government to do it." Ian Spicer, representing a large employers' group, once said that literacy is really important but it's not the job of employers. It's the school system's problem. That perspective is still held by many employers. They value the benefits of a literate work force, but they're not prepared to support the development of literacy and numeracy skills in training.

So, if we specify levels of language, literacy and numeracy within training packages, that places an impost on the employer to ensure that that happens. "If I, the employer, am responsible for literacy, then we're not going to have a bar of it." So, industry will steer some away from that specification. What we've tried to do is to embed it. Hopefully, people can identify literacy competencies and say, "oh yes, I can understand what's needed here". But it's been very difficult.

The change in training packages away from a curriculum focus to an outcomes focus, and the deregulation of the training (so that registered training organisations could more or less do as they wish providing they produce the outcomes that we specify) has shifted the load back onto the RTOs to deliver the outcomes.

What I want to do is to talk about the role of assessment in training packages and the language, literacy and numeracy issues there. This is my personal view but it's certainly shared by some of the directors of our company and some of the organisations represented by MERSITAB.

Training packages have shifted the focus away from issues of learning as they only look at outcomes, and the performance of outcomes is determined through assessment. The other day, when I was starting to write these few words down, I had a look at the ALNARC brochure, at the vision. I thought "That's not too bad" because there was something in there that really grabbed me. The part that was interesting was the vision to contribute to the quality of practice, training, research and policy development in relation to the provision of adult

literacy, numeracy, in community and industry based education and training. It's that industry-based education and training part that I'm interested in. It's about practice. I'm assuming that education and training includes assessment, and assessment includes the gathering of evidence and making a judgment on that.

The issue I want to raise centres on the distinction made in assessment processes between determining workplace competency and off-the-job competency. There is a distinction. My concern is the common identification of knowledge acquisition as being an off-the-job thing and the over reliance on written assessment practices. This affects the fairness of assessment as well as its flexibility and validity.

The term 'competency' has been in our common VET language for over 10 years now. We saw it initially in competency-based training subjects broken up into modules. They gave a convenient method of breaking up large learning processes. However, these learning processes should lead to workplace competency. By tradition, developers of the modules sought to convert well-established off-the-job learning processes or curriculum to a so-called competency model. I was involved in some of that work 10 years ago and I can assure you, and many of you would also know, that often the curriculum developers were miles away from what industry actually wanted. In defence, the industry didn't know what it wanted either, whichever industry it was. Often I'd go along to an enterprise and say, "okay, what sort of training do you want?" and the enterprise would say, "well you tell me".

The accepted view of workplace competency is the specification of knowledge and skill, and their application to a standard of performance required in the workplace now and in the future. Training packages incorporate workplace competencies. However many players in the Australian VET system continue to pursue the distinction between on-job and off-job 'competency'.

Training package implementation plans from many of the registered training organisations provide a tacit or very weak link between institutionalised learning and workplace competency. What they do is certainly linked to the workplace but often it is not well linked. The majority of the vocational education and training effort by these organisations is directed towards completion of modules or similar curriculum pathways. This is for a training package which has workplace competency outcomes. For those learners who are being trained for the job they hold, as opposed to the majority who are training for their first or their next job, their performance against the modules is matched with often minimal workplace information. For those not employed in a job role related to their training, workplace performance is assessed by simulation.

Modules, courses and institutionalised delivery mechanisms have a valued place in vocational education and training in Australia. They can get large numbers of learners from point A to point B in a learning process, and do so efficiently. Institutions make some provision to support learners who are not sitting in the middle range of the 'bell curve'. However, this form of provision frequently marginalises learners. The marginalisation can lead to situations

where whole groups of learners who don't neatly fit the criteria of the disadvantaged target groups ("they aren't bad enough!") are left to deal with standardised or mainstream learning and assessment methods and materials. One of the critical things that we were always taught as teachers was to cater for individual differences. Yet we've got systems in place that actually don't allow for it. Where rigid criteria are applied to determine say literacy needs then there are often people who don't fit in the box but still have the need for support, and so the delivery and assessment mechanism can't cater for them.

Once decisions are made to use written testing methods assessment, an element of discrimination starts to creep in. The term 'written testing methods' should also include written response from candidates. Written assessments shouldn't be viewed as pen and paper testing only but written assessment tools are also used in online computer based resources and so on. Given the mainstreaming situation described above, for those who still have some need but don't fit the criteria to go into the 'marginal' group, what provision in assessment processes will be made for the outstanding language, literacy, numeracy, cultural and ability issues experienced by those people not swept up by the special provision process?

For those of you who have experienced an assessment, how do you feel about written tests compared with oral questioning and responses? Which was the most comfortable for the assessor? And, more importantly, which was the most comfortable for the candidate? Written assessment tools are efficient when big groups of people all do the same thing. It's quite efficient to develop a written assessment instrument that can be used by many candidates. It's not very easy to go through and mark them all but once the final assessment decisions have been made, the assessor has a record of the questions and responses for each candidate. By using the same assessment instrument, validity and reliability can be better assured. Flexibility can be enhanced by the design of the instrument but fairness often suffers. Fairness is often one of the key things that makes assessment either a good thing to do or something that many people are wary of.

Assessment through oral questioning and response is widespread throughout society. What would be the impact on the carriage of justice if our legal system relied solely on written questions and deposition? Think about that. Perry Mason would have been out of a job. I don't know how well he wrote but he certainly talked. Why is oral questioning so discredited when used for vocational education and training? When the national metal and engineering curriculum projects were under way in the late 80s and early 90s a standard module format was agreed to on a national basis. This agreed format included the use of phrases to describe standardised practices. For example, an assessment method used in most of the 1600 modules was for short-answer questions and practical exercises. Invariably, for 'short-answer questions' most people read 'written questions'.

If this singular interpretation of short-answer questions is applied to all

assessment candidates, many will be disadvantaged. This disadvantage could equally apply to those undertaking a course and to those seeking recognition of skills already held. It particularly applies to disadvantaged candidates who've been away from formal education for some time. The use of jargon and obscure language in written assessment tools invariably raises the language and literacy requirements of the assessment beyond those required to perform the competency in question.

This gets back to the role of educationalists versus industry requirements in terms of looking after the needs of the student. From the industry ITAB point of view, the industry is correct. However, a balance is needed. Industry wants people that can perform at a particular level whereas we all know that individual learners need more if they are to progress. I think there is a reasonable compromise to be struck in education and training processes that tries to deal with each perspective.

In the guidelines for designing assessment materials in the Metal and Engineering Training Package, we say that, for assessments to be valid, language and literacy requirements during assessment should be no greater than the levels required to demonstrate competency in the unit being assessed. If you have a look at some of the assessment tools that are used, that's not the case. Many institutional assessors (teachers, lecturers and so on) do not feel comfortable when using only oral questioning techniques. They feel they have to have it in writing to assure quality. Many institutional managers don't feel confident that oral assessments will always be valid and reliable although they pay lip service to it. RTOs generally don't promote oral assessment except in the case of special needs target groups. For these people, it is common to have the assistance of readers and writers during examinations and tests. Why can't others use similar techniques?

We are now in a process of transition from outcomes being described by curriculum-based courses to outcomes being described by workplace competencies. The change process is difficult for some, and many VET practitioners have opted to keep as much of the old as possible. This curriculum approach to workplace competency using the modules means that many learners will be offered training and assessment activities that are no longer relevant or appropriate. For example, most of the Metal and Engineering modules do not align very well with the competency standards. They were written at a different time for different purposes. There was a whole raft of them updated about 1996/7, in the updated modules. The content is better aligned, however, the old methodologies remain, including written assessments.

In the Metal and Engineering competency standards, we have varied our format from the common model so that we can include direct guidance for assessors. Against each performance criterion, against each element in the unit, we've included two statements. The assessor is to observe that so and so has happened and to confirm that – whatever the statement of competency is. The statements are designed to help assessors focus on the items that are critical to

the demonstration of competency. 'Observation' can certainly include direct observation of behaviour but it can equally include consideration of evidence of behaviour such as supervisors' reports, authenticated completed work and so on. The confirmation component is about the assessor being satisfied that the candidate has sufficient knowledge and the capacity to apply the knowledge in new and different situations and contexts. Typically the assessor would ask a range of 'what if' questions as their method of confirmation.

MERSITAB encourages the use of workplace assessors to carry out full competency assessments. This is encouraged through the assessment arrangements where a workplace assessor works in conjunction with an RTO teacher. Irrespective of the assessment method used, we expect that all assessors will record the details. Where oral techniques are used they need to plan and organise and keep notes in detail of what was done. That way, it should be still valid and reliable, and certainly a fair process.

What I want to leave you with is a challenge. And the challenge to ALNARC, or any of you, is about that vision: the vision of contributing to the quality of practice. What can ALNARC do to improve the quality of assessment practice? How can the use of non-written assessment techniques be increased? What can ALNARC do to influence policy- makers with regard to assessment? Those are the points I want to leave with you.

One last point. Under an ANTA sponsored program, we produced Making Sense, a resource for assessors dealing with language, literacy and numeracy issues. It gives examples of good and bad practice. It doesn't try and make assessors into literacy and numeracy experts but it says, "These are some of the ways you can overcome the difficulties and if you have a problem then this is how to find an expert".

Finally, have a look at the ANTA website: there's a section devoted to workplace communication resources. You might be interested to compare the different approaches to assessment taken by different industries.

Literacy in Training Packages: A Registered Training Organisation (RTO) Perspective

Linda Wyse

Linda Wyse & Associates

I thought that I would start by raising some of the issues in relation to language, literacy and numeracy in training packages. Then I'll look at one of our projects which unpacks language, literacy and numeracy. It's an ITAB project which is a Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) funded project but which we haven't actually started yet. I'll be looking at the design of the project, using a training package that allows for teachers to use innovative curriculum and to create the spaces to look at issues like critical literacy with their learners.

While it's easy to raise the issues, I don't actually have any answers with which to address them. This is partly because implementation is still at a relatively early stage, so what holds true for one group of learners in one workplace, doesn't necessarily reflect what's the best approach or the reality for learners in another site. Training packages themselves vary in the way they address language, literacy and numeracy. Sometimes this is a reflection of the stage at which the training package itself was developed. For example, if it was early in the process, there may not have been an awareness of how to address language, literacy and numeracy because a lot of those guidelines were, as Rob Bluer said, developed on the run. These inconsistencies in approach – in what to look for and how to read them – make it difficult for teachers and trainers when they are working with training packages.

Language, literacy and numeracy in training packages need to be addressed in two key areas. Language, literacy and numeracy, as we all know, underpin almost everything that goes on at work, so we need to read the units of competence looking at language, literacy and numeracy as underpinning or enabling skills. If they are underpinning or enabling skills, how explicit should they be and where should they be addressed? If they are made explicit, is there a possibility that this will lead to an over-emphasis on language, literacy and numeracy? Will this then form a barrier to the people that we deal with, non-English speaking background people or people with low literacy? If they are not made explicit, how do workplace trainers (who may not have a language, literacy and numeracy background) know how to address these skills? How do they know how to build them into their program, how not to over emphasise and how not to under-emphasise them? And that leads on to the third issue. Does that mean that we should have separate communication skills units within training packages? Does this encourage the teaching of discrete units rather than a more holistic approach in which communication is seen as fundamental to all

workplace practices and processes? If you have discrete units of communication skills, does it ensure that communication skills are actually addressed rather than being seen as soft skills that are peripheral to what really accounts for work? We've debated this within our office many times but nobody really knows the best way to address it. They're issues that really need a lot of thinking about, and issues that teachers need to workshop themselves if they are to address them within the workplace.

Most of our work involves using training packages in industry through the WELL program. The way we normally go about identifying the language, literacy and numeracy components is by having an initial meeting with a company to identify the skills it wants us to provide training for. As part of our submission for funding, we then map this against what we think are the relevant units of competence in the relevant training package. We then identify the language, literacy and numeracy requirements for jobs in that particular workplace around those particular skills. That doesn't necessarily mean a reductive view of what language is in the workplace. If we're looking at a holistic approach to a job description, then that obviously includes workers talking to workers about their jobs, about their lives and about what they've done on the shop floor. It doesn't just involve talking about jobs. Looking at a machine, while you're standing there watching packets of soup go through, often gives you ample time to exchange personal bits of information on the shop floor. It involves workers talking to supervisors, it involves workers talking to unions, to Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) delegates, to tradespeople to come and fix machines. It may involve them in talking to teachers, trainers, and researchers who come out to find what goes on in their workplace.

At this point, we identify the language, literacy and numeracy requirements that are specified within the designated units of competence. We look at the enabling and underpinning language, literacy and numeracy skills. Then we map these against the National Reporting System (NRS) both as part of our planning and as part of our reporting commitments. We then design a holistic, broad range of contexts, looking at language as it occurs in a procedural context, in a technical context, in a systems context, and cooperative and personal too. Our skills as teachers come in when we get to the stage of designing the curriculum and assessment tasks for the program. That's where it allows the space for us, as teachers, for innovative and critical curriculum design. One of the ways that I can exemplify this is to talk about a project that we're hoping to get going.

This project is in a laundry. It hasn't started so I can't say whether it's going to work or not although we've worked at this site before. This company is about to move site and they've taken on a number of new workers because some people didn't want to travel the distance. The managers said they had taken on board some of the messages they had learnt from the previous WELL program, especially the need to include people at all levels of the workplace in what you are going to do. If you impose things afterwards, they just don't work. So, right

from the beginning they set up meetings. They carefully explained to people why they were moving, what they hoped to get out of it, why they hoped people would come with them as well as the new workplace practices that they wanted to put in place. They've also just taken over another business and the two businesses are going to be integrated.

The managers said they ran the weekly meetings and they thought they were being really inclusive of everybody. But nobody ever said anything. There they were talking and there were these blank faces and they said to us, "What did we do wrong?" We said that as we weren't there, we didn't really know, but that, "maybe one of the problems is that if you don't have everybody involved in the talking, then maybe you've lost them right from the beginning." As most of the people were Vietnamese or from mainland China, perhaps they were not culturally used to participating in meetings.

Our WELL program is going to be handing over the running of these weekly meetings to the workers themselves. There will be three people, hopefully, in each meeting who will have responsibility for going around beforehand and talking to a range of stakeholders to find out the issues to be addressed, including management, union delegates and operators. They will draw up an agenda, chair the meeting and write up minutes so that everybody has a record of what happened. Then they will follow through with the actions that arise from those meetings and then hand that process over to the next group of three. I know this is still using language within a workplace context. It is still looking at one form of mainstream language, and it's not necessarily looking at encouraging a diversity of languages or language forms within that context. However, I still think it allows us as teachers the opportunity to help learners engage in critical debate about what's going on in the workplace.

Why are we looking at our project like this? What is the agenda for management? What is the agenda for all stakeholders in the workplace? It allows us to critically unpack what language is about, how we use it and why we use it in a range of contexts. This can then be mapped against the workplace units and the appropriate units of competence within the training package, so that we're meeting the needs of a whole range of stakeholders within the program. I believe that there is space there for us, for the freedom that we're used to, in terms of meeting learner needs and addressing the needs of individuals within the workplace.

Literacy in Training Packages: A Registered Training Organisation (RTO) Perspective

Rhonda Raisbeck,

Holmesglen Institute of TAFE

I have been asked to speak about a small project for which Holmesglen Institute of TAFE received funding last year to work with the Forest and Forest Products Industry. Our project was to conduct workshops with assessors and trainers. The aim was to raise awareness of the issues surrounding language, literacy and numeracy in training in the Forest Industries and to provide practical English language, literacy and numeracy strategies which they could incorporate into their training and assessment practices.

The start of this project was the 1994 study in the Forest Industries, written up as Branching Out. It identified some of the deficits in language, literacy and numeracy in the Forest Industries.

The second part of the project is to write up case studies of good practice of incorporating language, literacy and numeracy into training and assessing in the industry.

This industry is characterised by great diversity. The Forest and Forest Products Industry ranges from the forest growing management sectors to sawmilling, harvesting, processing, panel products, manufacturing and merchandising. It goes all the way from growing and harvesting, to selling in the hardware shop.

As I said in the *Branching Out* kit, published in 1994, workers in these industries had significantly low levels of reading, writing and maths and, in many cases, skill levels that were inadequate to do their jobs. The industry, that is the Forest and Forest Products Employment Skills Council, has addressed these in a number of ways. They appointed a worker, a person to work for the Industry Training Advisory Body (ITAB), to ensure that literacy and numeracy issues were dealt with in training policy, planning and implementation. Workplace communications were to be integrated into training packages.

Here is an example of the competencies from the sawmilling and processing sector. It's called Tally Timber. Competency B. says: "Piece counts are legibly and accurately recorded in the required format and appropriate sections of the tallysheet". D. says: "Non conformances are identified and reported to supervisor". E. says: "Production and quality records are completed in accordance with enterprise standards and supervisor's instructions", and so on. They made a real attempt to include, to write in the communications competencies required. And materials have been developed to assist trainees with limited communications skills.

In this project, as a Registered Training Organisation, we are expected to do research. A large industry like this requires a lot of research, because it's such a varied sector. There are so many jobs and so many standards and competencies that need to be written. The ITAB was to advertise the workshops and we thought trainers and assessors would really want these workshops, that they'd all come and we'd have no problems. We anticipated developing practical workshops because we felt that what they needed, at this stage, was practical clues, strategies and examples. We thought it wouldn't be too hard to find people to take part in actual research to help other trainee assessors. But what actually happened?

As the RTO we didn't have control over the marketing of this process. The ITAB did that. Initial response from industry sectors was reasonably poor. Some trainers said things like they didn't have language, literacy and numeracy problems. "We read the stuff out, if necessary, and we read it out and we read it out". A few trainers have really thought about the issues surrounding language, literacy and numeracy. Probably there were the usual problems of time and training schedules and so on. But also a lot of training is done in this industry in one-to-one, on-the-job situations, where trainers don't actually train a lot of people at a time. It's more like a mentoring situation, quite often training with somebody you're working with. Therefore we marketed this project work differently. We targeted the enterprise level and we marketed it as part of the marketing of training packages in the industry. In hindsight, of course, this was the best way to go because we could then use the exact training packages that were used in whichever enterprise we were going into. So we advertised and became more flexible in terms of workshops, what we did, the different standards that were used and so on. We also showed the contents, in fact ran the workshop with the union, so that they could see what was going on, to promote it.

Last year, we conducted many successful workshops over the last half of the year at the enterprise level, using the training packages. What we found, as a registered training organisation, is that we have to market ourselves and our services in innovative and flexible ways. If we're to serve people in the workplace who want our services, we have to think about how we're going to do this in different ways. Our training has to be very relevant to a specific workplace. We need to have competencies and training packages which are used on the site or at the enterprise part of training.

Some trainers haven't thought a great deal about literacy and workplace communication issues in a broad way. They have a very narrow definition of literacy, perhaps only thinking of numeracy. Many trainers have therefore been surprised about the broad way that we, in the literacy industry, think about the term literacy. With funding for workshops like this, we need to be a little bit more flexible. We also need to be available at short notice so it can be incorporated into an enterprise training plan when required. Language, literacy and numeracy training needs to be part of a trainer's repertoire of skills and needs to be updated regularly. Most people who came to the workshops were

grateful to get help in this area. They were grateful for insights into the processes of reading and writing, speaking, listening, numeracy and learning skills that some of us take for granted. They needed and wanted help and strategies to help their trainees. They felt that the kinds of train-the-trainer and assessor training that they'd done hadn't offered them much in the areas of language, literacy and numeracy issues.

The kinds of things I found most useful in the workshops we ran, were things like identifying and talking through each one of the competency statements, talking about the issues to do with reading, writing, speaking, listening and numeracy. Where it was needed, what was needed, pulling apart each of the competencies and all of the statements. There's one for chainsaws that contains very specific technical requirements. And trainers said things like, "We explain these notes extensively, over and over again to overcome the literacy problem of the trainees".

Some of the other things people needed were things like the difference between using upper and lower case on your training materials, assessment materials and on your signage. You just need to ask a trainer how many lines they can read of upper case before they give up: it's about two or three. They see how much easier it is to read in lower case. Things that we, as literacy practitioners, know a fair bit about. Something else found to be useful was talking through how good spellers, or reasonable spellers, go about spelling words. We asked, "now if it's necessary in the workplace to be able to spell something properly, how do you go about teaching the trainee to do it?" It's working with the words, the vocabulary, the technical terms needed in those work sites, simple things like that. These are examples of what I talk about when I run these workshops.

In conclusion, let me say that working in an industry like this, going in as a literacy teacher, talking to trainers and assessors is fraught with difficulties because there are so many stakeholders in these kinds of projects. The registered training organisation has an agenda and our agenda is connected with the funding body. The ITAB has an agenda, the union has an agenda and the enterprises have one too. It's like a Venn diagram with overlapping circles, and we come somewhere in the middle. When we deliver programs as an RTO we have to offer a program that's worthwhile to everyone so that every stakeholder in the program gets something out of it. Another point is that the best participants in workshops like this were those who were actually trainers, but with some experience. They can use their experience to discuss and respond to the strategies presented and are generally appreciative of the opportunity. Conducting workshops is a practical way to inform and give strategies to workplace trainers on issues surrounding language, literacy and numeracy. Like us, they too have difficulty finding time to read information and make use of printed materials.

Reflections on Literacy, Workplaces and Training Packages

Dr. P.J. Waterhouse,

Director, Training & Development,

Workplace Learning Initiatives Pty Ltd

I want to begin by noting that literacy is important to me. I've just completed ten years on a Ph.D that has explored the place of literacy in my life and professional practice. I've looked at how my identity – or my identities – have been shaped by (if I may borrow from Shirley Brice-Heath 1986) my 'ways with words' and the 'ways with words' of the many others that have influenced me through personal association and through the printed word. I still think of myself as a teacher and adult education practitioner. I am also a manager, a researcher, a writer and a poet. Words and written words in particular, are a very important part of my life. They are important personally as well as professionally. So I value literacy and I carry this value (along with many others) into all of my interactions as an industry training consultant and training provider.

I make this point as a preface (or preamble) to my first substantive point, which is that not everyone else values literacy the way that I do. One of the dangers with believing passionately about something is that it is then easy to fall into thinking that everyone else believes the same; or thinking that at least they ought to. Surprisingly, not everyone believes in literacy. For believers, like some believers in God, it is difficult to imagine that there are some (perhaps many) people who seem to lead quite happy and fulfilling lives despite (or perhaps even because of) their disbelief.

That not everyone believes in literacy (or education for that matter) is an important point when we begin to explore the place of literacy in workplaces – or in training packages. Despite our belief, our conviction, despite what *we know* to be true about the importance of literacy in workplaces (or in training packages) others may not share our belief. Our 'truth' is not the same as theirs.

Secondly I want to lend support to the notion that there are many different literacies. What we know (and believe in) as literacy may be quite different to what other people know. Certainly we find in our workplace practice that each workplace has its own literacies – and they are rich and subtle and complex all at once. They are also multiple. Even within one workplace there are multiple 'ways with words', multiple literacies – engineers talk a different language to trades people. Trades people have a different language and a different culture to non-trades workers. Accountants and accounts' clerk may share a literacy that is different to those of others in the workplace but even within their discourse there are significant differences. The clerk, after all, is not an accountant (she's not a

CPA). And so on it goes. There are multiple languages and multiple literacies even before we begin to consider (as I am sure Lynda Wyse will highlight) the diversity of multiple ethnicities and nation-cultures we find in many Australian workplaces.

Our experience has been that it is important to be respectful of these local literacies. What we do in our training needs to engage with, value, and where possible enrich these literacies. Back in 1992 I wrote a poem about workplace literacy, I'd like to share it with you here.

On Workplace Literacy

Scene: At the job-site workers are engaged in collective problem solving ...

George: (peering anxiously at the job)
I haven't seen one like this before.

Wally: No, me neither.

George: What about you Wazza? You seen one of these before?

Wazza: Yeah, I seen one like that at Rutherglen Road. A bit different but.
Ya need a proper literacy for them.

George: Ah shit! I haven't got a literacy on me.
You got one?

Wally: I've never had one!

Wazza: My ol' lady had a home-made one.

George: Well she's not here is she? We better bloody get one.
(leaning away from the job and shouting)
Macka! Have a look in the blue tool box and chuck us up a literacy will ya ...
... What do ya mean I've gotta come down. It took me fifteen years to get up here! ...
Ahh, bullshit, haven't ya got one ready, pre-bored? ...
Yeah, in twelve mill. ...
Yeah, in stainless. ...
Yeah, give us a look. ...
No! That's no bloody good, it won't fit!

The final point about the 'fit' is only partly tongue in cheek. If it doesn't 'fit', literacy won't be perceived or embraced as relevant or worthwhile (regardless of how important we think it is). The danger here is that we can't really teach what

we don't really know and we tend to teach that which we know best. Often our most important teaching is wrapped up in the things we do unconsciously, the language we use, the texts we create and value, the 'hidden curriculum' that can be so much more powerful than what we think we are teaching. My point here is that 'we' as adult educators, as trainers, as 'literacy people' or 'language teachers' or 'communication facilitators' – whatever 'tribe' we may claim membership of – we also have our ways with words and (for the most part) they are different ways to those of industry and workplaces. When our own 'ways with words', our culture, class and identity are different to those of the people with whom we are engaging, we can be giving powerful demonstrations which can be all the more powerful if they are also unconscious.

The language of educators, is not, for the most part, the language of industry. Nor I would suggest is the language of training and training packages. Indeed it seems to me that much of the peculiar acronym rich language of the training industry in Australia – a kind of TAFESE – is pretty much restricted to the training industry and its own bureaucracy. It is certainly not the language of any workplace where we have been engaged. As my colleague Crina Virgona has noted:

> *"the industry standards weight skills, prioritise processes and profile elements using some generic dip stick based on the way things usually happen in industry. But nowhere ever seems to be usual."*
>
> *(Virgona 1996 p.25)*

The generic language of packages, competencies and standards needs to be made meaningful in each particular industry or workplace context. We know from our study of language and discourse that meaning grows out of context and social interaction. This is also how meaningful curriculum and learning programs evolve – through engagement with people in a genuine context, with real issues to address and challenging problems to solve.

In our workplace programs we don't teach 'literacy' or 'language' per se. We are teaching manufacturing and warehousing processes, and Occupational Health and Safety and Frontline Management skills, all sorts of things. For the most part the focus isn't on language and literacy – or even workplace 'communication'. The interest is in engaging with people to address the particular interests and concerns that they have in that workplace. There are inevitably multiple agendas, tensions and contradictions between the stakeholders involved. I need to note here that (in our experience) a shared commitment to literacy is *not* the thing that binds them together. As I have said, they might not have much faith in 'literacy' at all, and even less in our particular literacy.

However if we can identify questions, issues, concerns and problems that are important to the people involved (even when the stakeholders have different points of view) then we have the seeds to grow a learning program. As we investigate, clarify, question and explore the issues, we find ourselves using language, 'doing' language, and 'doing' literacy as well. Through engagement

with genuine purposes, and with practice, the skills develop. With sensitivity, patience, craft and persistence, we can cultivate the voices, strengthen the tongues and also, most importantly, fine tune some of the ears. We want to get the multiple literacies engaged with one another, listening to and learning from one another, enriching one another.

This approach situates our practice deeply within the workplace context. The curriculum is 'home-grown', tailored to the particularities of each circumstance and what 'counts' as competence or 'literacy' or excellence is shaped by the context. However this work is not characterised by functional reductionism. The approach is grounded and pragmatic but it is not without vision or ideals. Engaging with workers on genuine issues of concern, to themselves and to their managers, provides plenty of opportunities for broadening horizons, stretching comfort zones and challenging tacit assumptions.

This kind of educational practice is not easy. It is challenging virtually all of the time and daunting on occasions. It calls for a sophisticated repertoire of professional skills and aptitudes on the part of teachers/trainers. There is not the scope in this paper to explore these issues although we have written about them elsewhere (see Sefton 1993, Waterhouse & Deakin 1995, Waterhouse 1996, Virgona 1996, Sefton & Waterhouse 1997, Waterhouse & Sefton 1997, Virgona, Waterhouse & Sefton 1998). In particular, the ANTA funded 'best practice' documentation on the *Opening Doors* project (Virgona et al 1998) and the earlier WELL funded report, *Breathing Life into Training* (Sefton, Waterhouse & Deakin 1994), provide detailed accounts of this type of educational practice. We believe it is worth striving to 'open doors' and to 'breathe life into training'.

I want to close by making specific reference to the new training packages and their scope for the type of approach I am advocating. The real value and impact of training packages will be determined, not so much by what they specify, include, or leave out. Their true value will be determined by the ways educators, and the other stakeholders involved, choose to use them. For the most part it is up to the educators to take the lead and show what might be possible. Like any document, a training package can be read in multiple ways. Recently (with Bruce Wilson and Peter Ewer) I wrote a review of research for the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). In that review we reported the need for a paradigm shift in vocational education in Australia. We summarised the required shift as a move from 'a focus on predetermined content for delivery' towards 'dialogue with the stakeholders on design for effective learning'.

In some respects the packages provide greater flexibility and scope for educational innovation and creative program design than was the case with the former accredited modular curriculums. The packages specify endpoints, in terms of endorsed competencies and standards, but they do not specify educational methods or the multiple ways the goals may be reached. The packages can be read as creating the space for innovative educators to explore and colonise. There is plenty of scope for dialogue on design and there is also

scope for exploring languages and literacies but they may not be the languages and literacies we are most used to. We may need to restrain (and re-train) our urge to teach and cultivate our capacity to listen and to learn from the multiple voices and tales of the workplace.

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The Implementation of Training Packages: Critical Perspectives on Language, Literacy and Numeracy in Training Packages

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I would like to thank ALNARC for inviting me to speak about training packages and language, numeracy and literacy. I've been requested to provide an 'academic perspective' though, as the organisers also asked me to do, I shall be providing you with a broadly *critical* academic perspective.

What does an academic do when asked to do such a thing? He or she conducts a literature search and an analysis of any relevant references that pertain to the subject. As you'd know, and as I've found, there is relatively little on training packages in general and almost nothing from a broadly critical perspective on language, numeracy and literacy within the context of training packages.

I should say at the outset, therefore, that it is premature to reach any definitive conclusions about the issues which I'm speaking about today. The questions that have emerged in my mind are ones that are probably close to many of your hearts and interests. They are questions about what types of language, literacy and numeracy are going to be feasible within the framework of the training packages-based system and the implications these are going to have for teachers and learners within the TAFE and also non-TAFE sectors.

Having read some more recent, up-to-date references, as it is a while since I've read in the area, the question that sprang to mind was: if he was asked to do so, how would Paolo Freire have delivered a literacy program in the framework of a training package? And having done so, would he have been judged to be an effective and competent teacher of adult language, literacy and numeracy learners?

The literature I've read over the last couple of days suggests that the debate, as far as language and literacy goes, has become a lot more sophisticated in recent times. There are new influences, particularly of post-modernism and post-structuralism, which I won't have time to cover in depth today. But while the debate has moved on, there are some fundamentals still in place which are not far removed from those in currency when I read around the topic some years ago.

What emerges from the literature is that there are basically two poles of adult literacy. At one end is what many analysts refer to as 'functional literacy',

based on a skills deficit notion, with education and training programs being a mechanism to top up learners with specific skills in a particular context.

Functional literacy assumes a uni-literacy, a mono-cultural version of literacy, which is held to be value-neutral and shared across diverse social and economic sites. It is performative in nature with prescribed or predetermined outcomes – performative in the sense that it is largely assessment driven. But also performative in the sense that it is linked to a set of reductive, economic objectives relating to work, that is work for productivity, profitability and so on. Other key features of this form of literacy are reflected on the overhead (see page 39).

At the other end of the spectrum is what I'd call 'socially critical literacy', which you have no doubt encountered before in various forms. There are a number of gradations between these two poles which I've not got time to elaborate on now. A socially critical approach affirms languages, literacies and numeracies that people already carry with them into the workplace prior to any sort of work-based training or education. It tends to be reflective and problem-oriented, recognising the diversified nature of language. It holds that all language is political and contested; that meanings are negotiated between learners and teachers and the wider social context; that learning should occur in a group-based manner and be integrated across the curriculum, not delivered as stand-alone modules or competencies; that learning outcomes are open-ended and determined through joint processes; and that there are multi-literacies, not just one literacy.

Advocates of socially critical literacies argue that they should lead to socially just outcomes and, in particular, socially useful outcomes. Useful, not in terms of the performative criteria of a particular workplace or industry or firm in which the learner is located, but useful in a broader sense – specifically for the learners themselves, while also incorporating industry, workplace and broader social needs at the same time.

Clearly, literacy in the context of the new workplace, or the 'new work order' as James Gee and others (1996) refer to it, requires fundamentally new forms of skill that go beyond the functional level. Anthea Taylor (1997, p.64) suggests that:

> *Where once there were few (formal) language or educational requirements for entry into unskilled and semi-skilled sectors of the workforce, there is now common recognition that a workforce that is multiskilled and more than merely functionally literate is essential, particularly in the light of the introduction of increasingly sophisticated technology and hazardous chemicals in the workplace.*

That is just a brief overview to set a frame for what I'm now going to say. However I should point out that I'm presenting a spectrum of critical views found in the literature and that I don't necessarily subscribe to all such views.

In the light of the continuum from functional to socially critical literacy, we need to look at where training packages are currently located along that

continuum. ANTA has recently produced a booklet called *Workplace communication: incorporation of language, literacy and numeracy into Training Packages*. It opens with the statement that:

> *To ensure training packages accurately reflect* ***industry needs****, all aspects of workplace tasks must be included. Workplace communication underlies almost all areas of work to some extent. From the factory floor to the highest level of management the ability to communicate* ***effectively*** *influences the* ***performance of workplace tasks****. Without explicit reference to communication skills, it is possible that the* ***specific demands of particular tasks*** *may be overlooked* ***in the development of standards****.*
>
> *(ANTA n.d., p.1, my emphases)*

So there is an emphasis on functional literacy, underpinned primarily by notions of performativity – the achievement of performance criteria that are linked to specific enterprise standards and geared to promote productivity within a particular workplace. Admittedly it recognises that so-called deficits do not necessarily exist just at the entry level, at the semi-skilled and unskilled level – that deficits may also exist at management level. Nonetheless, it is fundamentally a model or a view of literacy that is located at the functional end of the continuum – not necessarily at the extreme, but somewhere close to it.

The publication identifies what it calls 'Aspects of Communication'. The term 'communication' is used to refer broadly to language, literacy and numeracy. One form of communication is 'procedural'. Another is people communicating about technology – 'technological communication'. The third form, and these are represented in the precise order that they are in the ANTA booklet, is 'personal communication' – people communicate about themselves, about their needs and their goals. 'Cooperative communication' – people communicate to work as part of a team. People communicate to fulfil the organisation's internal requirements, defined as 'systems communication'. They also communicate with people external to the organisation – 'public communication' – and they also communicate when learning new skills – 'learning communication'. These are the seven aspects of communication identified by the National Reporting Framework.

There are some potentially promising elements there, for example where the text speaks of 'personal communication' and 'cooperative communication' or working with a team. Both suggest that workplace communication may have purposes other than the purely instrumental. 'Public communication' – working with people external to the organisation – seems to be the basis for expanding literacy beyond the narrow functional requirements of the workplace.

When I encountered these introductory statements, I was somewhat hopeful. However when I read what ANTA identifies as the purpose of those different forms of communication, I became less positive and optimistic. I've selected two aspects where I thought potential existed for moving closer to the socially critical end of the spectrum.

ANTA has provided a set of questions as guidance for training package

developers to identify the communication needs of different workplaces. First, in relation to public communication, ANTA (n.d., p.3, original emphasis) suggests the following questions should be asked:

> *Is there interaction with the **public**/wider community/customers? Do people take phone enquiries, deal with customers/clients and/or give oral presentations to members of the public or community groups?*

To me, that is a rather restricted and commodified definition of public communication. It is not one that is consonant with a socially critical approach to literacy. Secondly, ANTA (n.d., p.3, original emphasis) suggests that training package developers ask these questions in relation to personal communication:

> *Do people use language, literacy and numeracy to pursue personal needs or goals? Do they need to give/listen to an explanation of personal matters which affect work? Do they need to develop career paths/individual training plans?*

Again, my problem with this is that it is shifting the definition of personal communication, as it has with public communication, back to the functional end of the continuum or the spectrum. While both sets of questions recognise implicitly the integral nature of communication, the personal and public aspects of communicative relationships are fragmented and reduced to a function of workplace performativity and productivity.

What has not been identified in these notions of communication is that people also communicate about injustices and inequities in and outside the workplace, about trade union affairs, about global/national/state and local government issues, and about decisions made inside and outside the workplace. These forms of political-industrial communication are not addressed anywhere within the aspects of communication identified in the ANTA publication.

Also no reference to, or notion of, cultural communication is included. The definitions overlook the fact that workers talk about family and community affairs in workplaces; that they discuss traditions, rituals, values in and beyond the workplace, cultural differences and cross-cultural bonds; and that they also talk about art, sport, religion, literature and music, and a whole range of other things which generate ideas that enrich their personal and productive lives.

I think some key questions need therefore to be asked about training packages. These have emerged from the readings I have done. The first one is: *What exactly* is 'language', 'literacy' and 'numeracy' in the context of training packages? There does not appear to be a common, shared and negotiated meaning of what these different terms imply for teachers and learners.

The second question that needs to be asked is: *Whose* language, literacy and numeracy is going to be valued within the context of training packages? Is it going to be that of workers, employers, culturally powerful or powerless groups, local and/or global communities? Whose literacy and numeracy and languages? As you would be aware there are multiple different ones, but at no

point is this acknowledged in official discourse.

The fundamental question of *what* is 'language' is left unaddressed. Currently it is taken for granted. There's no notion of the meanings being contested. The question of whose language, literacy and numeracy has not been asked. For example, whose English is going to be used? The guidelines refer to non-standard forms of English, but the way in which the training packages are developed actually flattens out differences and diversity within the workplace environment. What we are likely to end up with, I think, is a relatively standard version of English language. There is no notion of multi-literacies within or beyond the workplace. The guidelines basically ignore the whole question of the political nature of literacy.

The next question is, *who decides* which literacies, numeracies and languages are valued, incorporated and embedded within training packages or within the competencies that they assess? Then there is the question of: *Whose* workplace? Not only are there different views within industry about what the 'workplace' requires as far as skills in language, literacy and numeracy go, but there are diverse viewpoints *within* workplaces and across the workforce. There is no one, common, generic workplace in existence, even within a single industry. Although ANTA is attempting to incorporate diversity through broad consultation, the problem is that you end up with a homogenised or standardised version which attempts to be everything to all, but is likely to be so generic and undifferentiated and mean nothing to most.

'*Whose* workplace?' is a question that makes me wonder about the unemployed. What is *their* 'workplace'? If training packages are to be socially just and inclusive, we need to address this question. But from what I can see, equity and inclusivity have not yet been broached in the context of training packages. Is it that their literacies are not valuable or worthwhile or legitimate because they are not affirmed within a workplace context? Again it is this tyranny of the workplace, the tyranny of a functional, performative approach to literacy which I think threatens to marginalise those groups which are already well out on the periphery.

Precisely what *purpose* is the language, literacy and numeracy within training packages intended to perform? Delia Bradshaw (1993, pp.211-12, my emphasis) really drives the point home when she argues that:

> *What matters is learning how texts are constructed, how to deconstruct them, and how to construct and reconstruct them* ***for the purposes of engaging more fully in all domains of private and public life.*** *It is, ultimately, knowing the significance of personal and political stance, knowing what constitutes stance, and knowingly choosing between stances.*

That is a socially critical approach to literacy that, I think, should be reflected in training packages. Of course, this raises the question: Ultimately, *in whose*

interests are these versions of language, literacy and numeracy competencies working? Will 'workplace communication', as it is currently constructed, simply reproduce the power relations that privilege some over others and undercut the potential for critically informed engagement in processes of democratisation in and beyond the workplace? These are major questions for adult educators.

There are several potential risks I can see emerging with respect to training packages. First, there is a danger that that they will move towards deficit-based notions of language, literacy and numeracy. Workers will be implicitly viewed as dysfunctional when their languages, literacies and numeracies do not serve the performative requirements of the generic workplace, because they are not producing the productivity outcomes that are expected of them. And they will be judged as deficient in terms of criteria derived from the workplace alone, criteria that value and reproduce forms of language, literacy and numeracy that 'industry' or, more accurately, that private enterprise and employers demand from their workforce.

The second potential risk is that the language, literacy and numeracy in training packages will reflect a mono-cultural version of language, literacy and numeracy. This is an issue that needs to be watched closely to ensure that people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds and people from non-English speaking backgrounds, that marginalised cultures and forms of communication are legitimised, assessed and rewarded within the context of training packages. Anthea Taylor (1997, p.71) suggests that as a consequence of "the application of selected (i.e. normative white, middle class) language and literacy competences in Aboriginal contexts, there are likely to be barriers for many Aboriginal people. Reporting on language and literacy competence ... is likely to be ... a judgment of cultural competence (and) an exercise in assimilation and surveillance."

There is a danger that language, literacy and numeracy will be decontextualised. I know that ANTA puts great emphasis on the need to contextualise the delivery of such skills but the context of learning is not the boundary of the factory or the four walls of the workplace. The context goes well beyond that particular, singular workplace within which those workers are located at the time and in which they are unlikely to spend most of their working lives. We have to move beyond the socially reductive and destructive notion that 'context' means 'workplace' or even 'industry'.

There is a significant risk that an instrumental and performative version of language, literacy and numeracy will be embedded in training packages. My real concern from an educational perspective is that they are *assessment* driven. They are nothing more than a set of prescribed competency standards which limit the scope for negotiated learning outcomes; and which the learners, and you and others on the shopfloor or in community-based providers and TAFE institutes, have had no direct role in defining. The needs of learners are those you confront on a day-to-day basis, *not* those identified through some generic process of training package development by third parties. There is a potential risk therefore

that the types of language, literacy and numeracy produced for training packages will be socially exclusive and culturally disenfranchising.

I would like to finish with some quotes which for me reflect the potential problems in training packages. In a critical evaluation of training reform over the previous decade, I've argued that:

> *The vocational curriculum has become increasingly narrow, instrumental and short-sighted as a consequence of CBT and industry-determined competency standards. CBT was initially promoted as a strategy for modernising the outmoded 'time serving' notion of apprenticeship training, and as a vehicle for achieving a more student-centred, vocationally relevant and socially inclusive approach to learning. In reality, however, CBT has facilitated corporate control of the curriculum to the virtual exclusion of workers and students.* *(Anderson 1997, p.11)*

The potential exists for such tendencies to manifest themselves in training packages, given their intensified emphasis on assessment against competency standards. In a similar vein, Peter McLaren (1988, p.222) notes that the linking of language and literacy to the generic workplace represents "a real threat to democracy, since the possibilities for making real choices and intervening in reality are all but foreclosed when the social, political and economic consequences of reading and writing are tied to the logic of the marketplace." Moreover such linkages are likely to further disenfranchise non-participants in the labour market and, in the absence of spaces for socially critical literacies, ensure that workplaces remain deeply segmented along class, gender, racial and ethnic lines.

Training packages are at a relatively early stage of implementation, so it would be premature to pass judgment on them. Although a critical analysis of the assumptions and tendencies inherent in training packages suggest they should be approached with caution by language, literacy and numeracy teachers. Research carried out by the Victorian Centre of ALNARC (Sanguinetti 2000, p. 28) suggests that scope may still exist for learning outcomes beyond the narrowly instrumental:

> *All of the teachers are trying to create opportunities for facilitating the development of 'generic' or 'soft' skills in the course of delivering training packages. In many cases, however, time constraints and managerial priorities allow little space for such efforts. Their attempts to broaden the training within the constraints are a reflection of the differing understandings and values attached to the notion of 'literacy' in the training context and the different agendas (RTO, company, the National Training Framework) they are constantly attempting to balance.*

Experienced adult educators, even in what others may regard as adverse circumstances, have the skills and perspicacity to find spaces and strategies for empowering learners. It is to be hoped of course that such adverse circumstances do not arise under training packages.

Finally, I would like to quote from Mike Brown (2000 forthcoming) who reaches a conclusion with which I would largely concur at this stage:

> *Clearly the jury is still out on training packages. ... It will probably turn out to be a double-edged sword. As for CBT there was a great deal of very instrumental and narrow interpretations, yet after a while as teachers and trainers came to terms with it, so too creative educationally sound and effective programs were developed ... From our experience ... it is evident that the neoliberal reforms which have the intention of removing barriers and constraints to market competition also open up space for other kinds of creative interventions.*

Possibilities may be opened up by training packages and, where they are, you need to take the initiative as adult educators to maximise the potential for socially critical literacies to emerge.

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A continuum of approaches to adult literacy

Functional literacy		Socially critical literacy
Deficit-based	→	Affirmatory
Reductive/instrumental	→	Reflective/problem-oriented
Standardised	→	Diversified
Value-neutral/given	→	Political/contested
Decontextualised	→	Contextualised
Prescribed meanings	→	Negotiated meanings
Individualised	→	Group-based
Fragmented	→	Integrated
Pre-determined outcomes	→	Open-ended outcomes
Uniliteracy	→	Multiliteracies
Performative	→	Socially just and useful
Primary discourse (Gee)	→	Secondary discourse (Gee)

The Politics and Practicalities of Grassroots Research in Education

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I would like to thank the organisers and you, as audience, for the invitation to speak today on a topic dear to my heart. In our busy world, it is always hard to make enough time for the things about which we care a great deal. Practitioner, grassroots, activist and action-oriented research has remained a crucial touchstone to my other forms of work and life. In this brief talk, I want to cover three main areas:

1) some discussion of current contextual issues which shape the terrain in which grassroots research can occur. I'd like to discuss some different shaping to what is possible to imagine, and to do, in the name of grassroots research than when I started thinking about it seriously some thirty years ago;
2) an exploration of some of the rationales for grassroots research, and a few of the tensions and problematics that arise from not being clear enough about why we might engage in forms of practitioner or grassroots research; and
3) a quick tour of some of the most recent issues which have caused me to reflect on the practicalities of grassroots research.

Now that grassroots research is at least on the policy agenda in a number of fields, it is important to remember that, in the past, grassroots research has had to be struggled for, even the occasion for talks such as today's, to inform people about the existence of grassroots research. In some places, it is still a matter of some considerable denial that there continues to be a strong tradition of activist and grassroots research which contributes to the development of strong democratic production of knowledge. I hope that my reflections today will be seen as a useful contribution to the ongoing and new debates occurring within the adult learning, literacy and numeracy fields of endeavour.

Some contextual issues for grassroots researchers

There are many changes and continuities in the work that is accomplished under the title of grassroots research. However, it is important to keep 'reading the context', to understand the new possibilities and constraints within which we work. It is really important when we are working in our own sites that we pay attention clearly to the links between our sites and other sites. In the interests of

brevity, and also in terms of what I see as key shifts that have altered conditions for grassroots research, I will deal with only three issues today:

- The changing nature of work
- Shifts in the role/placement of research
- Localism/Globalisation processes.

The changing nature of work

Texts such as *The New Work Order* (Gee, Hull & Lankshear, 1996) reflect the changing conditions of work for people in a wide range of settings across the globe. Gee and Lankshear also talk about the ways in which the 'fast capitalist texts' of new management and business gurus enter into public discourses, making certain approaches to work conditions and restructuring seem 'normal'. All of us have experienced changes in working conditions, both paid and unpaid, directly and indirectly. There is a strong move to regulate workplaces for what used to be middle class jobs in ways that used only to apply to blue and pink collar workers. We see it a lot in the so-called competencies, a way of codifying what we do. It's supposed to represent all the knowledge that we bring to bear in our work. Well, of course, it doesn't. It doesn't for the students, and it doesn't for us. The press to greater accountability, to codification of our knowledge (e.g. in competencies, in performance indicators, in strategic plans and annual reports) has a reductionist effect on our work but also takes enormous amounts of time from what I would see as more productive and educational uses of our time. The work of education has been re- and de-professionalised, in the sense of changing control over the conditions and activities in which workers engage. Tenure, where it ever existed, is largely gone, in favour of 'flexible', casual and short term contracts.

Such shifts as these have major implications for the conditions under which it is possible to conduct grassroots research. In the past, much of this kind of research has relied on paid employees providing some form of continuity for the research, enabling research which might include longitudinal studies, comparisons over time, and a real capacity to be in place long enough, with enough connections to link with policy and administrative changes. Grassroots research in current conditions, however, can also be seen as a refusal and resistance to being controlled from elsewhere. It asserts the right and necessity to continue to produce knowledge, particularly about and for those marginalised.

Shifts in the role/placement of research

Research work, in education and more broadly, is undergoing some major changes, both in terms of its location and in relation to how it is conceptualised in relation to professional practice. Much research work now is difficult to perform in the public arena. Where once there were large scale government policy, planning and research arms, there is now only short term and usually tendered-out research work, instrumentally funded by government for short term

outcomes. Outcome-driven research really puts a damper on 'discovery' and innovation-oriented research, not to mention unpopular research which might challenge the rhetorics of the day, since the tenders are usually clear in their outcome specifications.

To be able to undertake funded research is highly competitive, mainly oriented to government and business short term outcomes, and with short term timelines, often ridiculously so. This makes it hard for people without track records or full time permanent positions to engage in research, leading to a large gap between those who are starting in the work of research and 'licensed' or experienced researchers, and a gap between those with access to funding and those without. Some companies are moving into what Gibbons et al (1994) call "Mode 2 knowledge production", based on workplace sites, with multi-disciplinary, real-life problems in need of solutions. They, of course, think that this is a new kind of activity, but this has long been the case with activist, community-based and action research traditions. (It is nice that they think they have invented something new, which might give others a policy umbrella to conduct such research!)

What such a context suggests for practitioner or grassroots researchers is that research is likely to be highly contested, that only limited forms of research are likely to be sponsored, and that any production of research locally is an important contribution to the invention of new or adjustment of old forms of practice and knowledge. There remains space, though largely voluntary, for activist and practitioner researchers to conduct research – the systematic investigation of an issue made public. One of the important reasons for actually getting involved in research is not only to help produce knowledge about new and emerging areas of work but to recognise that it is something that needs to be made public. This kind of research, however, may be unexpectedly able to draw on populist forms of policy and research rhetoric about partnerships, flexibility and action-oriented research to make space for itself, preferably without being co-opted. Yet it does pose dangers to rigorous research by making it difficult to develop expertise, to avoid reinventing wheels, and to protect privacy and confidentiality locally.

Localising/globalising processes

Globalising processes, with which we are made daily familiar in our evening news, have largely been discussed in terms of the economic, but they also involve cultural and political dimensions which have not yet been discussed. Too often, globalisation is discussed in terms of the global as 'out there', away from here, which is 'local'. This is a serious misrepresentation, in that we might then think that globalising processes occur elsewhere. But we are also engaged in such processes. What needs to be attended to are the parallel processes by which locals are differentiated from one another, through, for example, the new kinds of relations developed on the basis of distance, specific ('niche') markets, historical population or location. Erica McWilliam, in her little booklet *How to*

Survive Best Practice (1999), includes a definition of globalisation as meaning never having to say you are sorry. This accurately sums up what many theorists of globalisation (e.g. Baumann, 1998) note as one of the results of the capacity of capital to move fast from one location to another, without having to take responsibility for the effects of their movement on local populations, workforces, infrastructure and community resources. For those 'left behind' or left out by the shift of jobs and opportunities, that shift is not usually compensated for by new information technologies or other rhetorics of the 'new age'. What it means to be local may mean great hardship and little prospect of change. Thus, the dynamics of each local are both locally specific and also shaped by the relations possible with other sites in other places.

In terms of practitioner research, this has implications for both the conceptualisation and the conduct of research. It requires skills in being able to 'read' globalising processes, being able to map out the specific ways in which the local site is affected, and being able to see new possibilities as well as constraints in the shifting relations between one site and another. Some of the issues are: Who gets to define what counts as a site? What's local? Where do we draw the boundaries? Who gets to draw them? We have to be much more aware of the multiple definitions of site and the fact that boundaries aren't drawn in nice, neat lines. They are always both inclusive and exclusive; always about connection as well as about differentiation.

Some of this implies different kinds of writing up or presentation of projects. Many activists are finding the Net/world wide web a useful way to find others with similar interests and concerns, and to share/publish work relatively cheaply if there is access to computer networks. The Zapatistas in Mexico, among many other groups, have found the web an important source of gathering momentum for their cause, for advertising injustice and for sharing progress. New kinds of connection not bound to the local site are thus made possible.

Rationale for grassroots research

Grassroots research may take many forms. It may, for example, provide a 'reading against the grain' of a major body of statistics, showing for example how different interpretations might be made, offering new explanations for patterns or gaps, or suggesting policy and teaching strategies to address the issues. These are made possible precisely because of the local, deep knowledge which gives statistics meaning and may have significance for a wider group of other people other than the specific location in which such an analysis may take place. Sometimes, grassroots research is also a matter of joining with others, perhaps even people from widely differing backgrounds, to provide a telling and complex picture of local conditions. Another form of practitioner research has been the action-research project, in which one's own practice is invented, explored and documented over its cycles to improve or develop ways of working which are more appropriate and effective for those being served in the human sciences.

In these and many other forms of grassroots and practitioner research, it is important to explore the rationales being used as the basis for engaging in the research in the first place. Once, in the not too distant past, it was important to spend time justifying the legitimacy of such approaches to research as potentially able to contribute to local practice, community building, knowledge production, or policy development and evaluation. Now, such rationales have been developed well, and ought to be in circulation (Wadsworth, 1998; Kemmis, McTaggart, 1988) and there are many more handbooks which can be used to help with some of the technicalities of conducting research locally. This is an important step that we should not underestimate.

However, one of the learnings from such efforts over the years has been the need to clarify expectations and understandings of why the research is conducted. Susan Noffke (1997) divides most rationales for action research and action-oriented projects into three categories: personal, professional and political. Research may primarily work towards any or all of such rationales. What Wadsworth (1998) calls the 'ouch' experience that impels many of us to investigation might be connected to one's personal history, seeing the contradictions between what one hopes and what is experienced. Or the same 'ouch' experience might be professional, a practice that makes one uncomfortable in what is supposed to be valued practice or desired outcomes that are not being met. "Ouch' might also involve a recognition that there are broad trends which need addressing, the parlous state of casualised workers in the field, for example, or the appalling lack of adequate and accessible provision of adult literacy programs for those most in need. Each of these dimensions in itself can give rise to research projects.

What might need further examination, as a way of understanding the project better, is why different people are engaging in research, especially in a workplace or setting already fraught with difficulty. We need to recognise that conflict issues have broken apart project teams often by unspoken but contradictory expectations about the reasons for doing the research or the anticipated outcomes. Even at a personal level, a need for collegiality may not fit with others in the group. It is no use sweeping such conflicts under the carpet. Learning to deal with conflict by addressing it carefully and respectfully might help us to learn about difference in ways that our society tends to treat as adversarial or incompatible, having to be smoothed over, ignored or powered out of existence. This gives us good practice in working out emerging positions, and in how to work with other services, or with people who are very different from ourselves. Given the class, race and gender differences that exist in many adult literacy and numeracy programmes, such practice is an important step in uncovering our own implication in the relations of ruling – and how we play them out everyday, even in research.

Some issues for attention

In what follows I have raised some questions for the field of research in adult literacy and numeracy, issues which have grown out of some experience in working alongside practitioners in the field, with communities where there is a need for adult literacy and numeracy programmes, and with a range of grassroots and activist research projects. I hope some of them are relevant to your own deliberations.

1) What is and ought to be the balance between descriptive research, interpretation and analysis in the range and focus of projects undertaken in the field? There is a tendency to allocate most time, money and attention to descriptive work but this may not be politically desirable, nor produce the most results. I am NOT decrying the need for good descriptive research: we need to have rich, thick descriptions when a field is as under-researched as adult literacy and numeracy. In addition, the data in such projects are often useful in documenting needs at the grassroots in ways that are widely persuasive. But what about meta-analysis? Is there anyone in the position of being able to put together something of the range of work across different sites? Are bigger pictures possible to build, systematically? Is there enough compatible data emerging to build such bigger pictures? Is there a new terminology or set of concepts emerging to describe the field better?

2) How are the different projects engaging with theory building and theory used for analysis? Concepts such as 'social capital' developed by Ian Falk this morning, or Liz Campbell's use of the term 'resilience' in their respective projects, for example, could well be explored for their fruitfulness in other places, or other kinds of explanations could emerge. Who is keeping an eye out for good reading relevant to help in the work of theory building and theory exploration. We need all the good explanations we can get.

3) How are the projects dealing with the tensions between different audiences and products? For example, a project might aim to affect funding or policy development while till trying to meet the needs of locals for seeing themselves represented in authentic ways. Perhaps we need to get much better at writing quickly for different audiences, milking each project for a number of purposes and audiences. Naming some of the tensions is an important aspect of being able to steer good outcomes and products from research.

4) How much are you developing a critical literacy of researchfulness in the fields of adult education, literacy and numeracy? How much reading of each others' research really goes on? Is there a climate in which it is both necessary and desirable to be seriously critical of each others' projects? How do we make it possible to question even the most tried and true things we take for granted, even pride ourselves on? Is there a swapping

of useful materials, strategies and foci across sites? These are all hallmarks of mature communities of research practice. They are worth taking seriously despite the difficult conditions in which most of you work.

A rhizomatic model of research change

I want to leave you today with an image of change that is somewhat different to that normally used in debate, although it has been around for some time among French theorists (Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, 1987). If we go to the image of the grasses that I put up earlier, the part of the grass that is above the ground is only part of the plant. Perhaps it is extending the metaphor too strongly to suggest that we need to alter our image of change to be about connections among the roots, and the capacity for certain kinds of rhizomatic root systems (such as kikuyu) to keep developing underground, sending up shoots in unexpected places, almost randomly, it seems.

The older version of the relation between grassroots research and having a wider effect relied on some overlap or connection between what were fairly static and stable forms of organisation in the public sector. There were major government departments, longer-term funding, specific tenured positions that could be predicted, normally with a three-year funding cycle. Grassroots research in such conditions was able to rely on the infrastructure of policy groupings, long term planning, and people known and expert in particular areas who could be influenced. There was often an overlap of people engaged in grassroots research as junior members of departments in schools or other education settings and those engaged in policy development. People could influence the conditions in which they worked, directly and indirectly.

Now, however, given the changed work conditions and public sector climate, there is often a gulf between those working at the grassroots and those responsible for funding and policy. This suggests the need for new strategies of influence and new conceptions of how change might occur. It is to this end that the metaphor of rhizome, drawn from the biological structure of certain growths such as potatoes or kikuyu grass is offered. It is actually the thing that anchors everything else. A rhizome does not act in predictable ways, it offers a range of directions for growth, but it can be mapped out as it develops. It generatively leaves traces of itself as an underground structure by the growths that pop up above ground, often in places not seen as desirable by the incumbents of the space. In the process, rhizomes anchor their grasses or potatoes (among other species) in ways that are productive and growthful. I wish you growth and plenty in your research endeavours.

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Sleight of Hand: Literacy, Social Capital and Social Disadvantage*

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Falling for the policy line

This is the story of how some socially disadvantaged people try to become employed and can't, because they fall for the policy line. It is the story of their struggle and failure to meet society's expectations of what it is to be literate, confident and employed. These long-term unemployed people try to gain an education and qualifications that will act as the ticket to a job. They repeatedly follow the 'right' procedures, they access and attempt to access courses that show them how to get jobs, and how to acquire the skills for those jobs, only to have the doors shut, the courses gone or inaccessible, the jobs not there, the promises broken, and then have the threat of their allowance being cut for 'being illiterate'. When they do hear of networks that include employed people, they find that those people did not, in recent times at least, get their jobs by joining the employment placement agency queues. Society and the government blame these unemployed people. It's their own fault – who else's fault could it be? These long term unemployed believe 'the policy line' – that training – even lifelong learning – is likely to result in employment.

Society can understandably ask why this should be so. How is it that some people do get work as a result (we think) of going through the 'right' procedures and taking the 'right' education and training courses, while others can do the same and not get a job? In this chapter, I argue that the answer lies in two directions. One answer is in the lost 'third capital' called social capital, specifically the mechanism of social capital known as 'networks' with their associated oil of trust. The other answer lies in the fact that we persist in nominalising 'literacy' rather than putting it into practice as the process of *learning*. These two factors are related and entwined, a message that I hope will be clear as the voices of the long term unemployed people speak in this chapter.

The main forms of literacy entrenched in policy in Australia presently are components of *human* capital which, like other forms of capital, can be utilised without reference to their effects on the overall common good. Policy uses literacy for the whims of the political power of the time. Researchers get

* The author would like to acknowledge the work of Ms Suzanne Crowley in the conduct of the research discussed in this chapter.

involved in debates about the nature of literacy as texts, as possessing power and of the proficiency of textual performance – all of which serve the underlying human capital model of literacy as a tool for indiscriminate ends. Practitioners battle with conflicting stories about 'basic skills', 'empowerment' and 'whole language'. My question is, have we as literacy educators and researchers fallen into the trap of nominalising literacy as an entity rather than operationalising it as a process? The focus on form rather than function seems to have taken our eyes off the main game, which is in the literacy resources for learning. Learning is a social process, and involves a process of interactions – of people interacting with other people, with their computers, with rooms, buildings, books, with 'the texts of their thoughts' – which are in themselves all products of situated socio-cultural interaction.

As a social process, learning is ultimately restricted by social rules and values that result, more or less, in the common good. Given our recognition both of the importance of physical capital (such as tools, place and technologies) and of our society's more recent flirtation with human capital, we seem to have missed on recognising the significance of the *social* capital required for effective social interaction and participation. The empowerment rhetoric has led to a dead end – what does it *mean*? What it could mean is that people need to have the resources to engage in critical social learning. Critical social learning impacts directly on the development of trust, social cohesion, economic outcomes and the common good.

Social capital, learning and literacy

Social capital is the taken-for granted (and therefore often neglected) "third capital" after physical and human. Bourdieu introduced the term to the sociological world in his paper called "Economic Capital, Cultural Capital, Social Capital" in 1983, though it has been in use for much longer than that. While established authorities define social capital in their own ways (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993), broadly speaking, social capital "encompass(es) the norms and networks facilitating collective action for mutual benefit" (Woolcock 1998, p.155). Portes (1998) observes that, "[W]hereas economic capital is in people's bank accounts and human capital is inside their heads, social capital inheres in the structure of their relationships" (p. 7). Networks, norms, relationships of trust (e.g., Fukuyama, 1995) and the resultant social cohesion involve formal and informal associations – from formal and informal clubs and associations to the implicit networks encapsulated by "old school tie", the Hospital Auxiliary, the email chatgroups, to the neighbours over the fence and the lot we meet in the park. We are also talking about every other group, formal and informal, that we all belong to. It's not whether some of us belong to more or fewer networks that counts, it's the nature of those networks that seems to be important.

Two earlier groups of research relate the issue of networks to employment, namely that of Stack (1974) and Granovetter (1973). In each of these cases, it was found that accessing employment was enhanced if people had access to

networks outside their immediate circles. These ties are called strong ties and weak ties by Granovetter. He found that strong ties – those bonds that people used regularly, such as family and neighbourhood interactions – were not as useful for finding employment as the ties that bridged to outside the immediate community, which he calls weak ties. In fact, Putnam differentiates between these two kinds of ties by the terms 'bonding ties' and bridging ties'. Stack's (1974) comprehensive ethnography shows how the lack of ties to sources outside the community results in restricted (among other things) knowledge of employment opportunities.

While we all know the importance of physical (economic, infrastructural, technological, environmental) capital, and recognise the importance of human capital as knowledge and skills, we seem to have missed the significance of the social capital required for effective social interaction. After all, adequate stocks of physical and human capital can only be put into circulation and used (drawn on) through social processes. This is a crucial point to bear in mind as the ensuing discussion of research outcomes unfolds, since networks operationalise information and put it into circulation for others to access. Membership of networks with employment information, therefore, is a crucial factor in finding scarce jobs in a tight labour market.

To help clarify the point here, let me draw on some empirical work on social capital and learning processes in communities. The research analysed the interactions over time between around one hundred leaders in three communities. The multitude of interactions was categorised. We asked the question, *What is the nature of the interactive productivity between the local networks in a community?* In order to answer that question, we established what the resources were that these participants used to make sense of their worlds. Using various analytic techniques for large and small volumes of transcripts, and making various cross-community comparisons, the levels of interactions between individuals and associations in each of the three communities were compared.

Ways in which the communities could be said to learn during these interactions were identified. Using the concept of social capital (with its components of norms, networks and trust) as a basis, the effects and influences of the levels of interaction on the common good in the community were examined. After finding out the nature of these resources, we saw clearly how it was that people engaged in critical learning as they solved the problems of their everyday lives. The critical learning depended on the quality of the resources available for these people to draw on in their network interactions, and the resources fell into two categories. The two main groups are encompassed by the headings 'knowledge' and 'identity' resources. The knowledge resources concerns people and common resources that facilitate action through people's interactions, including various forms of literacies. The identity resources concern the need to help people change and foster their identities in ways that promote self-confidence and willingness to act for the common good of their communities.

This research (Falk & Harrison, 1998; Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000) shows that knowledge and identity resources are crucial for the development of social capital, and that there is a relationship between social capital and the production of sound socio-economic conditions (Woolcock, 1998). Sound socio-economic outcomes embrace the notion of the common good referred to earlier. The need to plan and provide for opportunities to interact, opportunities in which the knowledge and identity resources can be practiced and applied, is often ignored or assumed. That is, without the interactions afforded by workplaces, participation in community events, activities, meetings and small and large interactions of all kinds, social capital simply cannot develop or be used. However, the qualities of those interactions are equally as important as their existence. The following diagram shows the relationship between social capital and the quality of its component interactions:

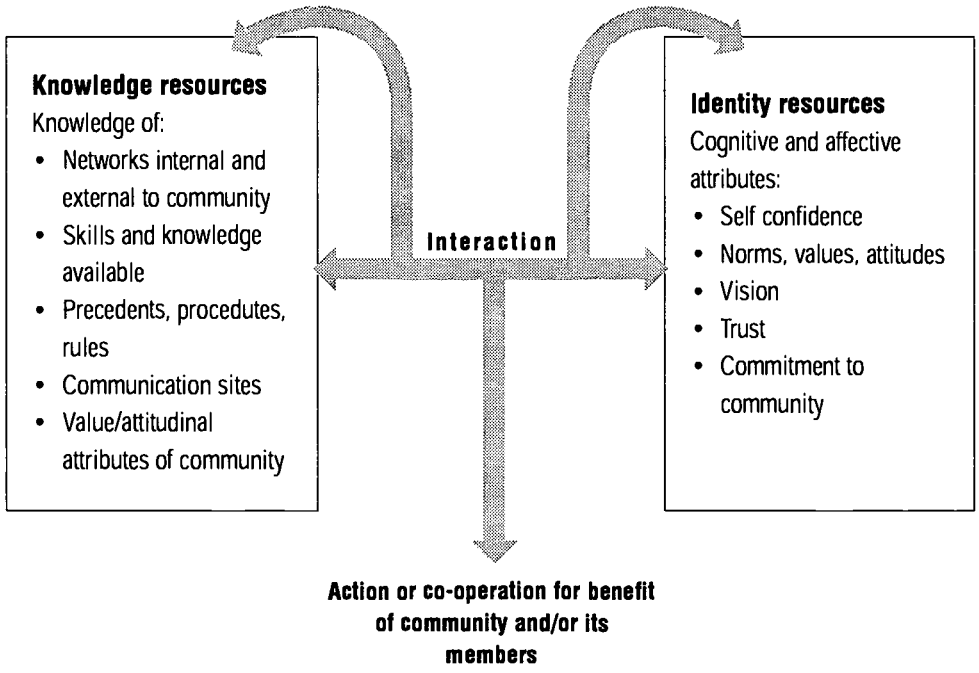

Figure 1: Building and using social capital. CRLRA model.

In summary so far, the quality of the knowledge and identity resources available for learning processes is proven to be paramount. Knowledge resources certainly includes those human capital literacy elements of basic skills, but it is much more than that. Quality knowledge also includes knowing the 'who, when where, why and how' of the situation in hand. Identity resources are those resources that shape our identities as we learn to adapt to change, or take on new roles and tasks. Unless we see ourselves 'in the new role' that our learning, education and training knowledge provides us with, we are unlikely to use that new knowledge. So the ways in which knowledge and identity resources intertwine and reciprocate are crucial to critical learning.

Literacy policy and social capital

In August 1996, following the election of the Coalition to government, the (then) Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, released the Ministerial Statement, *Reforming Employment Assistance*. The document stated that,

> *The Government has developed a streamlined package of assistance that involves a wide range of assistance to meet the needs of employers and help eligible unemployed people find work"* *(DEETYA, 1997, p. 5).*

Changes to the existing training programmes for unemployed people who have language, literacy and/or numeracy difficulties were outlined. In particular, the Special Intervention Program (SIP) was scheduled for dismantling in May 1998. This occurred as part of the replacement of the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) and the Department of Social Security (DSS) with Centrelink, and the tendering out to private and semi-government enterprises the development and delivery of labour exchange service training. The training placement coordination previously organised centrally by the CES was taken over by the new Private Employment Placement Enterprises (PEPES) and Employment Placement Enterprises (EPES), the public equivalent.

Literacy policy and the unemployed

The policy context of the research drawn on in this chapter is set at the time of the transition between the Labour Government's *Working Nation* social welfare policies, which I will call the 'social justice' approach to the matter, and the Coalition Government's 'social coalition' approach. *Working Nation's* dismantling paved the way for the approach of the ensuing Coalition Government's radical changes to those policies, that I shall call the social coalition approach, to use the Prime Minister's own term for his newly forged method of tackling social disadvantage. These two approaches to policy equate to two different views about social welfare.

The 'social justice' approach assumes that many people need help to get jobs, that they will be helped to get better jobs if (a) they have some income to assist with this process – the unemployment benefit or dole – and (b) receive training in skills which will assist them become more attractive in the job market. These skills may involve complex and 'high order' skills associated with professions or trades, and involve a long period of training, tertiary or further education. However, in the case of those who are long term unemployed, it was found that a large proportion of these people 'suffered' literacy or numeracy problems. The last two terms of the Labor Government (from 1992 onwards) resulted in *Working Nation*, a comprehensive and well-articulated set of differentiated provisions of employment-linked training for job-seeking people with literacy and numeracy difficulties.

The then Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) acted as a screening agent for eligible job-seekers in this category, using a simple literacy and

numeracy screening mechanism. Eligible people so screened were then referred to a training provider, often a TAFE Institute, for more detailed testing and referral to specific literacy and language training courses. These courses fell into two broad groups – those for teaching English to speakers of other languages, and those for teaching literacy and numeracy to those for whom English was their mother tongue. Within each of these two broad groupings, there were groups of courses from beginning levels to advanced levels, but all had a job-seeking focus. Even the beginning literacy courses utilised materials and content which was employment and work related, or taught a range of job-seeking skills.

The second policy approach, the 'social coalition', encourages the unemployed to seek and find employment, while training and education are treated as secondary tools rather than as a primary focus. Here, government sees its role as providing a free-market environment for job placement, while training is only paid from public funds for the extremely disadvantaged, and then only if all else fails, and not for long periods. 'Work for the dole' has becoming a reality, with groups such as GreenCorps charged with finding useful work for unemployed people to carry out their side of the 'mutual obligation', where the government's obligation is to provide some financial support while the recipient's obligation is to work for it. The Coalition Government that took power from the Labour Party from 1996 has introduced a free market approach to employment agencies. It dismantled the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) and the Department of Social Security (DSS) in favour of Centrelink and a variety of tendering arrangements for private employment placement providers, reducing its financial support for training to a very small trickle. Lately, the free-market approach has been expanded to embrace the term, 'social coalition', focusing on the role of partnerships to help tackle social disadvantage.

There are elements of social capital in both the social justice and the social coalition approaches. Social capital is locked into the Labour Party's education and training policy, while it is the Coalition Government's notion of a social coalition that provides the link between literacy and social capital.

Social capital and policy

The term 'social coalition' has been coined in response to what many see as the government's responsibility for social cohesion (e.g., Editor, 2000, p. 16), which is a term used in the social capital literature to refer to the reciprocal ties between people that bind a society together (e.g., Woolcock, 1998). Social capital is used by both sides of politics in Australia, as evidenced by the publications of the Labour member, Mark Latham, concerning social cohesion, social capital and trust (e.g., Latham, 1998), and Howard's many references to social capital in his earlier speeches as Prime Minister. However, social capital carries implications for a radical new way of viewing policy, one that Stewart-Weeks (1999) describes as:

> *... a profound challenge to the way we have become used to seeing public policy and government operate....you have to confront the need for*

> *profound, systemic change in the methods, structures and values of government ... The social capital logic challenges the balance between government and civil society. (p. 2).*

So is the message that we should not hold our collective breaths waiting for government to embrace this new position? Perhaps not. On the one hand, there is Minister Kemp's established record of back-to-basics literacy policy initiatives. On the other hand, there is the Prime Minister's current policy discourse about the social coalition that brings to a head a set of left-right embraced strands of rhetoric endorsing the notion of a partnership "... between business, government and welfare organisations aimed at tackling social disadvantage" (Editor, 2000, p. 16). Using our lens of social and human capital, Kemp's policy can be seen as the mechanical literacy tools of *human* capital, while Howard's partnership rhetoric (and a partnership *is*, after all, a network) introduces the principles of *social* capital.

Underpinning the current policy moves for a social coalition lies the 'mutual obligation' principles referred to earlier. The reciprocity envisaged in mutual obligation is between the recipients of social welfare and other sectors in society. The welfare recipient's role is epitomised presently through 'work-for-the-dole' schemes. The corporate sector is another partner, their role captured by the Prime Minister's associated notion of 'corporate philanthropy'. The community's role, formalised through the volunteer sector, is signalled in the Prime Minister's latest rural vote-catcher, the new *Australian Rural Partnerships* foundation. The latter provides business with a tax-exempt structure for donating funds to rural Australia through a partnership between government, the Myer Foundation and community groups. Admirable as these initiatives may be, they leave to one side the idea and implications of the term 'obligation'. Through its social capital analysis, this chapter suggests that there is a significant flaw in assuming that people will feel obliged in the relationship of reciprocity expected of mutual obligation. As in any initiative, there have to be benefits for all parties in the partnership. And at the time of the research, parties to the new policy initiatives are seen to be struggling with the benefits of the mutuality.

A little about the study

The research on which the discussion that follows is based is reported in full in Crowley (forthcoming). The study employed a qualitative case study approach in order to build some theory concerning the effects of policy change on the long-term unemployed, specifically those identified as being in need of literacy and numeracy improvement. In the study, 23 people were interviewed, consisting of 15 long-term unemployed people who are or were involved in adult literacy courses. They were selected because they had experienced the policy regime of at least one major change of government (and policy) at the federal level. There were four participants representing employment placement agencies of some kind, such as Centrelink. Four people interviewed were adult literacy

and numeracy providers, public and private. These people were all interviewed using a semi-structured schedule with open-ended questions and probe questions. The intention was to gain as much information as possible about the ways in which they had experienced 'being unemployed' during the time when policy affecting the training provisions for long-term unemployed people changed radically.

My intention in this section is to draw on the parts of the data from the study that relate specifically to the point I want to make here, namely that, to be successful, welfare policy related to the unemployed must address both human and social capital elements. One without the other produces ignorance rather than knowledge growth, contributes to reduced trust in civic and social processes and structures, and results in a loss of social cohesion.

The human and the social capital

The skills associated with human capital are undoubtedly vital in accessing and controlling the kinds of social forces that come with globalisation. The knowledge explosion is one aspect of these forces – how do we find, sort and sift the knowledge we need to operate in today's world? The flipside of the coin, however, is how we cope with these forces of change *as people*. That is, how are our identities affected, and should they be affected, in coping with the rate of change and knowledge expansion? The research referred to earlier (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000) clearly establishes the role of identity (including self-esteem and self-confidence) and its re-shaping during both learning and in adapting to social change. Where are the explicit policies and programmes that cater for this? Perhaps the gap implied by my previous rhetorical question is indicated by the move to the social coalition. There is strong political evidence that governments cannot afford to place all their eggs in the economic rationalist basket, as the Goss, Hanson and Kennett experiences illustrate. Rural Australians have made their voices felt in a number of ways, and underlying these ways is the loss of trust they feel in their politicians and political systems (e.g., Editor, 2000; Latham, 1998; Woolcock, 1999). This loss of trust is implicated in the reported reduction in social cohesion and social capital (Putnam, 1995).

Using the framework of human and social capital, human capital can be seen as 'knowledge', where I take knowledge to include knowledge of who, what, when, where and how, so incorporating skills as well. The form of capital that embraces the productivity of the interactions between people, providing for them to change their identities to embrace learning and change, is social capital. In this section I will drawn some illustrative examples from the data that show the two kinds of capital at work, and then close with some comments on the significance of these extracts.

Human capital

It is well-established that adult literacy students perceive that the basic literacy skills of reading, writing and spelling with some accuracy are at the core of improving their life's chances, and the data from this research confirms this yet again. As one participant put this feeling, summing up for most of them, "If people can read, they can better themselves". Classic representations of the popular 'more skills equals a better life' scenario also take the form of a belief in the positive potential benefits of qualifications:

> *I'm just doing an adult literacy course at the moment to get a high school certificate from Grade 10, and I'm doing maths, English and computers.*

And training in general is perceived to have its benefits: "You need training to do more jobs".

The benefits are reported as more jobs, as in the instance above, but also in seemingly minor yet important and functional ways:

> *...my maths and everything has picked up well, and when I go into a shop now, and if they give me the wrong change, like, I can sort of figure my change out straight away and get it back. And my English and my presentation have come along a bit better than it was, like my actual speech and everything else.*

The link between literacy, lower socio-economic class and unemployment also surfaces explicitly from time to time, as this 20 year old long-term unemployed man reports: "...if you're unemployed, then you're in the lower grade of society. It sucks. But I mean there's not much I can do about it at the moment apart from just go back to school and stuff". Literacy is seen to offer a way out of this class trap: "If people can read, they can better themselves".

However, the hoped-for outcome of a job is apparently not often forthcoming, as this bracket of extracts demonstrate:

> *You just get sick of doing courses, too. And you want to get out and get a job, and there's nothing around, see?*
>
> *There's no work around.*
>
> *There is less work.*
>
> *There's more unemployment out there... so when there is some work there is so many people up for the one job, and of course only one person is going to get it. That makes you feel very upset and depressed.*

Disillusionment sets in because the lack of employment is an open secret:

> *The work is not there any more...the companies haven't got the money to spend.*
>
> *They [the employment placement agencies] know there's no work.*
>
> *They're making it harder to find work, and the work's not there, making it harder for you...you know* – like *these things you've got to do to get the unemployment [benefit], when they know very well the work is not there any more.*

And a final comment from a participant that seems to sum up the feelings of being required to 'go through the motions' of pretending there are jobs, but knowing there are none for them:

We're trapped...

In essence, what these reports show is the construction of the long-term unemployed identities as being characterised by illiteracy, as needing education, as accepting that literacy leads to jobs and as being at the low end of the social scale. By and large, these identities respond to change in one narrow way. The change they respond to is the lack of availability of work, or of the type of work they used to be able to do. Their response is for their identities to become characterised by disillusionment, despair and lacking in self-esteem.

Social capital

Social capital includes the networks, social norms and trust that build social cohesion. Social capital is produced through the social interactive processes that draw on the skills and knowledge acquired through learning in all its forms, including education and training programmes. The links between people that result in trusting relations are as important for effective learning as is the appropriateness of the knowledge resources. Adult literacy and community education have come to be recognised for their role in supporting 'second chance' learning. This means that those who have for some reason missed out on formal education in their earlier years can have a second chance at learning through provision of learning programmes for adults. It is, in effect, concerned with re-constructing identities so people can see themselves as learners, and in roles that they previously were unprepared to undertake. One of the key features of these programmes that appears to underlie their success is the manner in which they develop trust, confidence and supporting networks among their adult students (e.g., Falk, forthcoming), as well as the integrity of the continuity of provision of the learning.

One private literacy provider put this relationship between trust first, then skills, as clearly as any I have ever heard:

I needed to build up trust first. I then contrived a way for clients to show me their skills...

But trust is undermined by systems that create suspicion through entrenched anomalies. The biggest such anomaly is the 'literacy = job' equation, where the participants in this study could see clearly that literacy and further education do not provide an automatic passport to a job. They know the work is not there, and that its nature has changed to render it inaccessible to them, but the system 'pretends' the equation is correct, even to the extent where the job placement agencies are not allowed to give out information about jobs under circumstances that seem inexplicable to some: "... they wasn't allowed to tell me who it was or where it was – like a job – what area it was in. That system is no good".

But some people *do* get jobs. However, those in job placement agency

queues are not in the right networks to find out about the vacancies. So what networks will help get jobs? In answer to the question, "What would help you find a job right now? What do you need most?", one English language learner replied: "Sometimes knowing someone in a business. If people have friends in a job, they have connections". And what might be these helpful connections? "Government friends. And some of my friends have connections with a Church".

> One twenty-year old young man describes the problem as follows:
> *There is work in building areas, but that's only if you are 'in the know'. You've got to know somebody in the business or something like that. Or there is work in hospitality, because it's quite a big market. But a lot of those jobs are already taken by family members and stuff like that. This is a big part of employment as a whole, that* ***you have to be in the know before you can get a job, no matter how much training you've had, or what education you've done.*** *[**bold** added for emphasis]*

There is a perception evident in the data, typified well by the above young man, that the amount of training and level of education will increasingly not necessarily result in a job. This youth only needs enough money to get his education and a job. As he says,

> *To get an education, I just need that money to get started, so my inspiration doesn't fall through the floor. I haven't got the money [for year 11 schooling]. I've got no income. I don't qualify for any allowances. I'm just getting in deeper and deeper while I'm at [TAFE].*

Bring them together and what have you got?

It seems that when human capital and social capital are combined, learning, education and training are perceived as more effective. The role of developing new identities as part of the learning process emerges as a crucial element for success in learning and coping with social changes:

> *Going back to adult literacy and basic education was a very important step for me in having, getting, gaining self-confidence and actually wanting to achieve something.*

Another literacy student put it this way: "I was just in a ditch and I couldn't get out of it and they really lifted me out of that". And another, "It's ... given me a bit of self-confidence". Forming new identities as active, learning, job seekers is fostered by the building of self-esteem. The one word answer of this participant to the question of what is most important in getting a job sums it up. She says, "...confidence". Confidence is at the core of being able to use the skills and knowledge that are acquired, a point made graphically by this private literacy provider: "Clients could write and read but had no transference of this into a workplace". The reason is, of course, that basic literacy skills by themselves are simply not enough. What is needed are the social skills as well, and if not

explicitly taught or addressed, their lack will cause the best-intended initiatives of policy to founder.

The significant of the missing 'social capital' to effective learning is underlined by these examples. It takes time to achieve the learning that involves both human and social capital, and it takes consistency of personnel and provision. This can be summed up as by the Integrity of Continuity Principle established in recent research (Falk, forthcoming). It's all very well to have skills, but putting them into practice requires a reliable context of use, not a moving target in the sense of being here one day, gone the next. A context of use is a place where the skills are used, such as a workplace, a training room, a computer or a community setting. The context of use always involves networks of either people or texts that have been created by people. The context of use is, therefore, always a social place. The people-networks either consist of real people or texts and artefacts that are a product of people in our society. That is, without the context of use, literacy skills cannot be used. Nor can they be useful.

By bringing human and social capital together, we increase the capacity of people to learn and respond to change. The networks, shared values and trust they acquire through their interactions serve to bring the appropriate knowledge together whilst shifting peoples' perceptions of themselves – that is, their identities – so they *manage* learning and change rather than simply being carried along on the tide.

The sleight of hand: discussion and conclusion

The extracts presented in the previous section show how literacy education is seen by participants as one aspect of the dimension of 'knowledge' – a crucial step in acquiring qualifications that will help them gain employment. Their comments also recognise that knowledge and skills are but one step, and only a small part of the requirements for managing change and learning for life. Literacy educators have known for decades the crucial element of 'self-esteem' or 'self-confidence' in education and training. They know it allows participants to slowly come to grips with their changing roles as learners and doers in different capacities. They know intuitively that the identity dimension is as important as the knowledge dimension. They also know that the 'interactive opportunities' to acquire knowledge and hone their identities as lifelong learners are vital in bringing together knowledge and identity resources into the active social forum. But as yet there has not been an accepted way to insert the discourse of the 'social' into the policy discourse of the 'economic'.

In essence, the research shows a rather depressing picture of how people try to find work and fail. They fail because they are trapped by the sleight of hand of the policy equation that assumes 'literacy = job'. There is a demonstrated mismatch between these participants' expectations of what it is to be literate, confident and employed and the reality of unemployment. The work is simply not there. Either there are no jobs at all, or the nature of work has

changed so much as to make it unobtainable for these people, even if they were 'literate'. Assistance to engage in further education and lifelong learning has shrunk so as to make it almost non-existent for some groups, in defiance of the Integrity of Continuity Principle noted earlier. One 20-year-old young man, who is trying to combine a return to complete year 11 of schooling with job seeking, puts it this way:

> *...they haven't opened up any new options. They seem to have just cut out as many options as they could. You can't go and study. They want you to do what they want you to do, not what you yourself* can *do.*

Lifelong learning fades into the status of a cruel mythology when there is the threat of allowances being cut for 'being illiterate'. Employment is however, possible for some. Such jobs are actually found not by going through the systemic job placement procedures, but through the closed networks that include employed people. It's not what you know, but who you know that counts here. These networks of employment opportunities are indeed an extension of the 'old school tie' and 'funny handshake' networks, but giving them these facile and catchy titles is a deceptive endorsement, and takes one's mind off the power and pervasiveness of the networks. It seems as if strong, bonding ties might presently be encouraged by existing structures and procedures, and research has shown these to be damaging to job seeking. The power of weak, bridging ties in finding employment is therefore diminished, a fact that decreases the likelihood of finding jobs.

There is an old Chinese proverb that says, 'If you don't learn, you die'. In a way, literacy provides the skills and technology for learning. Learning is about employing these skills in pursuit of the satisfaction of human curiosity through finding out more about our own and society's possibilities. It is possible that social capital can serve the advancement of policy by providing a language and conceptual framework that includes both the skills and the human relationship dimensions of effective learning. It is discursively armed with the right terms, such as 'capital'. It makes sense, it fits the world as we know it, it allows a vision of a world as we would like it to be, and it is used by both sides of politics. Not only politicians, but bureaucrats in all Commonwealth and State departments are using it.

But there are cautions about the cooption of social capital for policy use. First, it could be argued that the closed, bonding networks of the old school tie are social capital. If so, they have a negative effect – at least an exclusionary effect – on the people whose voices have been reported here. The caution, then, lies in the *effects* of social capital on various groups, a caution that needs to be noted by those concerned with policy. For example, funding networks for good community purposes or programmes needs to be tempered by funding networks with particular *qualities*. Hopefully this chapter has shown that social capital also has the potential to show up such potential problem areas. A second caution about social capital lies in the way it has the potential to be used to reduce support and resources for equal opportunity. A social coalition that reneges on

government support on the grounds that "People should work together cooperatively to provide their own solutions" is a denial of a principal responsibility of governments and needs to be watched.

There is a third and final caution, related to the idea of mutual obligation. It links to the social capital principle of reciprocity – the give and take of social relations. There has to be something in it for people to want to participate in society. Jobs, satisfaction, self-esteem and enhancement of identity are a few ways that people achieve this. The present government's emphasis is on the principle of 'mutual obligation' that underlies social welfare programmes in Australia. While the new *Australian Rural Partnerships* foundation provides an example of what is in it for the corporate sector, a lack of employment opportunities in many parts of the country make any benefits for the welfare groups doubtful. Perhaps a shift towards a refined principle of 'mutual benefit' might better capture the essential – and missing – requirement for success in harnessing the powers and benefits of literacies in learning to become a socially cohesive society.

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Mentoring in Practitioner-Based Research

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I have been asked to talk about mentoring in the context of ALNARC's practitioner-based research projects. ALNARC is attempting to promote a research culture amongst adult literacy practitioners. There are shifting perspectives on the advantages and disadvantages of mentoring as an approach to supporting practitioner-based research. Most of the ALNARC centres facilitated practitioner-based support during 1999 on the theme of providing literacy. What I'm going to talk about is the experience that we have had in Victoria with mentoring, raising some issues of general interest from that.

Let me give you some context for what we did in Victoria. First of all, we had a Youth Literacy Forum in 1999, about the special needs of youth in regards to literacy. That was our strategy for bringing practitioners together to identify the issues and the kinds of research questions that arise in relation to providing for the literacy and educational needs of unemployed young people. We then advertised that there were funds available for what we've called Project 2 on 'Literacy for Youth'. Funding of $3,000 was made available for four projects. Expressions of interest were appraised and a selection was made by a sub-committee of VALNARC's Research Advisory Committee.

In making that selection, the issue of 'who is a practitioner' arose. Some people took the view that a practitioner is somebody who teaches adult literacy clients. Another view was that people working in areas where literacy is an issue, or where clients with literacy needs are an issue, could also be regarded as practitioners. In the event, we funded four projects which covered both sets of interpretations.

Of the four projects that we funded, two were for evaluations of programs that were currently being run to provide for young people with adult literacy needs. One was a pathways project which was looking at adult literacy support for potential school drop-outs from the secondary school perspective. The other was a project looking at the literacy needs, and the support that might be provided, for unemployed young people through a job search training program.

Managers of each project agreed to work with a mentor who was nominated by VALNARC.

Why mentors? Clearly, the most feasible way to support these projects was to appoint mentors.

There were two criteria for selecting mentors. First of all, the mentor must have experience of research in education and training and, secondly, the person must have some background in adult literacy. The four mentors were all academics and were members of VALNARC's Research Advisory Committee. Giving university people that role might raise feelings of apprehension amongst those that they are asked to work with, but this did not turn out to be an issue in our case.

The Coordinator for VALNARC had the overall responsibility for managing the project. The mentors provided a direct link between each project and VALNARC, and could draw attention and respond to any difficulties that were being encountered locally.

The time for completion for these projects was extremely short. The time scale was from the 1st September, for the project to get up and running, to the 30th November. The other factor, besides the time scale, was the location of these projects. Three were in rural Victoria and one was in the metropolitan area. The question of providing support at a distance was quite a significant one.

The mentors met with each other and with the coordinator from time to time. The function of these meetings was:

- to decide who should mentor each project
- to review the proposals to consider what kind of support might be needed because the proposals varied in levels of clarity and ambitiousness of what they were trying to attain,
- to discuss the ethical implications, (Copies of the *Australasian Evaluation Society Ethical Guidelines* were distributed to the mentors. Each mentor was asked to fax these on to the project team and to discuss ethical issues with the project team to make sure that the projects were conducted in an ethical manner.)
- to report on progress and to review the interim reports,
- to prepare guidelines for final reports
- to review the interim reports, and
- to consider the final reports and to make editorial suggestions for each of them.

We considered what we could expect from a three month project by people who are relatively new to research. Are we looking for an academic minor thesis? Surely not! Are we looking for the kind of assignment that somebody might be doing as a part of a subject they were taking in a course? Perhaps something of that type is more appropriate. We tried to define the expectations that we had, so that the projects would be that both challenging (for the practitioner researchers) and doable.

What did the mentors actually do for the projects? The contracts defined role of the mentor as providing advice and support to the project. At the same time, it was stated in the contracts that responsibility for conduct of the projects rested with the project managers. Mentors therefore had an ambiguous role, as often they have in any mentoring situation. The project managers were not

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bound to accept the advice of the mentors. In some cases, they didn't accept the advice. In addition, because of the time pressures involved, mentors were often in the situation where they were asked to agree to a strategy or a draft report at very short notice because there was no time to get into wider considerations and longer discussions.

The guidelines that we prepared for the mentors required they visit each project at least once, to provide advice and support appropriate for each project. There were very different levels of need, reflecting the difference in experience and expertise of the project teams. What we, as mentors, ended up doing was spending our time clarifying research questions, commenting on some of the instruments that had been prepared, developing the data collection procedures, submitting suggestions about how data might be collected, analysed and so on.

Mentors would be likely to play the role they did depending on what they thought the best way to help people to learn about research. This would depend on their own view of research and also on their view of whether they were primarily agents of management or developers of people. All these factors influenced the way they contributed.

Both practitioners and mentors experienced useful professional development in the course of the projects. The mentors benefited enormously from learning about new contexts and thinking through the issues of supporting and promoting novice researchers. The practitioner researchers benefited from the experience of documenting and theorising their practice and going through the complete research cycle from putting up a proposal right through to producing a completed report. The presentations that we have seen at this conference of practitioner research attest to the success of this approach.

The mentors felt that more might have been achieved than was achieved – had there been a longer timeline, had there been more opportunity to interact, had there been some kind of orientation session and follow up from that. We have not asked the practitioners about how they felt about being mentored. Our sense is though, that they were satisfied with the support they received. The question is, did we make any difference to the capacity of these novice researchers, as researchers? They were all very enthusiastic about their work but, did they become more sophisticated? It's a difficult question to answer.

Mentoring is certainly an option for developing a research culture but there are many other options. There are workshops, there are courses in research methods and so on. Mentoring may work best with people who already have some insight into what's involved. Some mix of strategies may be required to optimise the potential new researchers and helping to build a research culture in the field of practice. ALNARC needs to give some thought to what its strategy as a whole should be, and how it can build on its experience of mentoring during 1999 to best support grass-roots research in the future.

Published by

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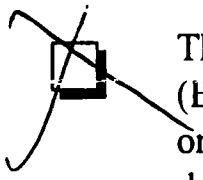

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