

Literacy and numeracy pedagogy and social capital: Three case studies

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This document was produced by the author(s) based on their research for the report *A new social paradigm for adult literacy: Partnerships, Policy and pedagogy*, and is an added resource for further information. The report is available on NCVER's website:
<<http://www.ncver.edu.au>>

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Introduction to the case studies

The three case studies featured in this publication need to be viewed in conjunction with the recent NCVET report: *A new social capital paradigm for adult literacy: Partnerships, policy and pedagogy* (Balatti, Black & Falk 2009). The case studies form an important research phase of this report and due to the interest they could have for practitioners in the adult literacy and numeracy field, they are presented here as a separate publication.

The project undertaken, in which the case studies form a part, researched social capital approaches to adult literacy and numeracy provision and focused on partnerships, pedagogy and policy. The research aimed to provide guidelines for developing effective and possibly innovative approaches to literacy and numeracy delivery that deliberately drew on and built social capital. By social capital, we mean 'networks, together with shared norms, values and understandings which facilitate cooperation within or amongst groups' (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2004, p.5). For further details on what is meant by social capital please refer to our main research report (Balatti, Black & Falk 2009, pp.12-13).

An action research approach was taken with the focus of the case studies on various adult literacy and numeracy teaching strategies and how these can enhance the social capital outcomes for students (for more details see Balatti, Black & Falk 2009, pp.17-18). The teachers featured in the case studies received some initial professional development on social capital and the action research process. Teachers and students were interviewed at regular intervals and the transcribed tape recordings of the interviews formed the basis of much of the reports of the case studies outlined in this publication.

The first case study was a health literacy partnership involving Muslim women in metropolitan Sydney. The second was a jobseeker program with a financial literacy element conducted to mainly English speaking background learners in a regional city in North Queensland. The third case study was a literacy and numeracy program conducted in the Northern Territory and involved mainly Indigenous learners. The programs were undertaken over an 8-13 week timeframe in the second half of 2007. Additional details of the programs are provided in the introduction to each case study in this publication and in the main research report referred to above.

The three case studies are a demonstration of how specific teaching strategies in adult literacy and numeracy programs, such as encouraging peer learning and introducing guest speakers and organising outside visits can be seen in turn to lead to greater social networks and changed relations within these networks for the learners in these programs. While building social capital is presented in a mainly positive light and can be seen to relate to socio-economic wellbeing, these case studies demonstrate that there can be negative aspects also. Further, social capital building as it relates to adult literacy and numeracy programs, needs to be viewed within the broader socio-political and economic realities of individuals and communities, as the Northern Territory Indigenous case study well demonstrates.

A health/literacy partnership and Muslim women

Author: Stephen Black

Background

This case study featured a partnership involving three organisations: a Muslim women's centre in western Sydney, a metropolitan TAFE college and an area health service. Given the challenges that many Muslim women face regarding access to health information, English language and literacy proficiency and engagement with mainstream Australian society, it appeared especially appropriate to explore ways of improving learning outcomes for this group.

The centre is a community organisation catering for the needs of Muslim women in the area. It provides advice, advocacy and support to Muslim women, acts as a refuge for women in need of emergency accommodation, and provides a number of different educational programs. For the past few years, a NSW TAFE college has provided a literacy class one morning each week at the centre as part of the college's community Adult Basic Education (ABE) program. On several occasions, the centre has invited community health workers to speak with groups of Muslim women on a number of health issues.

With the success and popularity of the literacy class and the continuing enthusiasm and need for health education, the researcher, who is also the Head Teacher of the ABE unit at the TAFE college, proposed to combine the literacy and the health education into one trial program and thus provide a more extended 'health literacy' program for Muslim women at the centre. This proposal was welcomed by the Muslim Women's Centre. The new program funded with annual Commonwealth (DEST/DEEWR) literacy funds for innovative programs, did not replace the literacy class. The literacy class continued as usual in the mornings and an additional 'health literacy' class was planned for one afternoon a week (for 2 hours) initially over one term and later extended to one semester. For the learners, the program was primarily about exploring health issues while at the same time improving their English literacy. For the teachers and the researcher, it was also about focusing on social capital outcomes.

Once the Muslim Women's Centre endorsed the proposal, the researcher sought a health educator willing to deliver the course in partnership with the adult literacy teacher. A week prior to the course commencing, the literacy teacher and the health educator and the two key coordinators from the Muslim Women's Centre met with the researcher. This was the first time all parties had met together. It was partly a planning meeting and partly a workshop on the action research approach to trialling approaches that enhance social capital outcomes for participants.

The data sources for this case came from regular discussions with the teachers and from two focus group interviews with the learners at the end of the course. It was agreed that the researcher would meet with the literacy teacher and the women's health educator at the conclusion of each weekly session for a reflection on strategies used and the outcomes experienced by the learners including social capital outcomes. The discussions were led by the researcher. In all, ten discussions were conducted and taped. Learners were not interviewed by the male researcher because of cultural sensitivities. Student data were collected via two focus group interviews undertaken by one of the coordinators of the Women's Muslim Centre. All interviews were transcribed.

Student group and the course

The Muslim Women's Centre took responsibility for recruiting learners for the health course. The centre utilised its networks with Muslim women and through the distribution of pamphlets, community radio and by word of mouth, a total of 12 women enrolled in the course. Some of them were women who were attending the regular literacy class in the morning. The group was diverse in terms of age and ethnicity.. Many were married but some were not. Many had children, but not all, while others were grandparents. Some, but not many, were in paid employment. Most spoke Arabic, but not all (for example, women from Bangladesh and Algeria). Proficiency in spoken English varied too and was often linked to how long the women had lived in Australia. Some were new arrivals who had very limited English while others were quite proficient.

The starting point for the course content was the health topics identified by women in the existing literacy class. These topics included healthy eating, exercise and stress relief. Further topics were offered by the women as the course progressed.

The course was conducted in the 'popular education' tradition in so far as it was based on what the learners wanted to discuss; it was dialogic, and tapped into the knowledge and narratives of the learners. A major role of the literacy teacher in the course was to ensure the pedagogical conditions enabled all learners to benefit. This included attention to vocabulary, appropriate group composition and activities. The health educator had a nursing background and her work responsibilities included delivering information sessions on women's health to community groups.

The 'new' elements in the health course

Health presentations to community groups are usually short, involving an invited 'guest' speaker on topics like contraception and breast checks and held over one or two sessions. Information is often conveyed in a 'lecture-type' format. This pilot health course was different in the following ways:

- It involved a partnership between the health educator and the literacy teacher in the new experience of team teaching.
- It was an extended course, not a one-off health presentation.
- It was particularly focused on identifying social capital outcomes and their relationship to improving health practices and literacy.

Both the literacy teacher and the nurse educator, following the initial workshop, concluded that their existing teaching strategies promoted social capital outcomes. Hence their focus was on developing effective team teaching and being more cognizant of the social capital outcomes that their sessions were producing for learners rather than trialling new teaching strategies.

Pedagogical strategies

A number of pedagogical strategies were employed by the two teachers in this course, and they were all designed to encourage dialogue, discussion and interaction among learners.

The *physical layout of the classroom space* had some role to play. Apart from the first week of the course, the sessions took place in one smallish room with a central table and just enough room to accommodate up to 12 learners around it, which was in marked contrast to the desks and chairs arrangement of a conventional TAFE classroom. In this confined physical space learners had no choice but to interact with their peers.

The *non-didactic approach of the teachers* further facilitated interaction in the classroom. The health educator, for example, said she preferred to present information sitting down rather than standing up because, 'I feel like I'm part of the conversation and I think it flows better and promotes that talking, that chatting,

conversation ... as opposed to me telling'. The literacy teacher also specifically promoted *group work* in classroom activities that encouraged dialogue between learners. For example, one of her early teaching strategies was to divide the learners into groups of three or four with a large A3 sheet for each group and learners then discussed their diet and listed what they had eaten the previous day. They then came together and reported to the whole class.

Topics for discussion varied according to the interests of the learners and as the health educator explained, the session each week took on 'a life of its own'. Talking initially about stress relief, for example, led to deep and engaging discussions about infidelity, divorce and domestic violence, with a couple of learners revealing some very personal details to the group. Other topic tangents involved in-depth discussions about the cross-cultural aspects of bringing up children in Australia and how to engage with the schools their children attended. Food was always a popular discussion topic because as the literacy teacher noted, 'a lot of their socialising is around food'.

The physical classroom environment, group work and familiar topics resulted in a high degree of interaction among learners, who were 'talking across' each other and with some learners interpreting for others and 'people telling stories about their families, how they dealt with their kids with eating ...'. The literacy teacher later said of these discussions, 'it's more like the conversation around the family dinner table':

... it's like that kind of way that often a theme will run through but people go off on this completely different tangent, and you'll have conversations sort of over the top of each other, and you are sort of half listening to the other one but it doesn't take you away from the one you are having ... kind of multitasking.

Both teachers *encouraged informality and involved themselves personally with the lives of the learners* which partly explains this 'family dinner table' atmosphere. There were instances recounted for example, of learners joking and playing with the veil of another learner and suggesting the teachers try it on. The teachers incorporated their own family lives in the discussions. For example, when issues of the behaviour of children came up in discussions the teachers provided examples of issues involving their own children. Further, the literacy teacher, with the permission of the learners, brought her own daughter (University student) to the class and her daughter also accompanied the learners on an excursion into the city.

Links with the local community were encouraged. Healthy living and exercise discussions, for example, led to the request for learners to compile and report back to the class on all the local gyms, swimming pools and walking groups for women-only. There was also much discussion over external courses and where women could enrol in a range of courses the next year.

Social capital outcomes

The above pedagogical strategies resulted in strong social capital outcomes for participants, including the teachers (elements of social capital are shown in italics).

Growth in trust was an element of network qualities that was clearly apparent. This was amply demonstrated when one woman in a discussion about relationships 'disclosed' to the group some domestic violence aspects in her private life. In another discussion a woman spoke candidly of her divorce traumas. Such discussions could only take place in an atmosphere of strong mutual trust.

Bonding between the women was also experienced. The word 'sisterhood' was used several times to describe the 'we' feeling, the bonding that developed in the group. The health educator referred to the group as providing 'family-type' support. For example, she said of a new learner who was pregnant, 'I'm thinking if she stays probably a couple more weeks with this group, this will actually be part of her support ... I can see it happening'.

Ethnic, cultural or linguistic 'difference' in the group was accepted. There were different languages spoken, including Arabic, English, Tamil and French. Some women wore Western clothes, others were in the full hijab.

Religious differences and issues such as the wearing of the hijab were discussed with good humour and non-judgemental attitudes, as the literacy teacher commented, 'We tease each other about it, but it's in good nature. It's not saying you must give this up because you live here or anything like that'.

Self efficacy, that is, recognition of their ability to solve their own and other's problems was demonstrated in a number of ways. For example, one woman felt sufficiently confident to independently attend a Christian church-run course in order to improve her English literacy. Discussions on stress relief in the class focused on the need for the women to take 'time-out' for themselves in order to have better control of their lives. One woman told the group a humorous story of how she took the whole day off from family and domestic chores, only to work 11 hours straight the next day to make up for it. Another woman was happy to discuss how she managed the divorce process in a way that she could cope with. Some women demonstrated they were actively engaged in confronting and solving issues to do with their children's schooling by getting directly involved in schools, through joining parent bodies and talking with teachers and school counsellors about their children.

There was also evidence of change in health practices at home. A discussion about sugar in the diet led to one woman restricting the sugar-type drinks she gave to her children at night and she found this had a marked effect in moderating her children's hyperactive behaviour and enabling improved interactions and relations generally within her family. The woman then ensured this message was known to all her family and friends far and wide (including in Algeria). These are examples of the women taking greater control over their own lives and those of their families.

There was evidence of *changes in the nature of network memberships*, especially within family networks. For example, some women expressed the view that they were becoming increasingly dislocated from their children at home as their children often preferred to speak in English but by coming to this course, relations with their children had improved. As the literacy teacher noted:

... because the children see them making an effort (to learn English) and because of that they'll help them, you know, engage more with them, rather than just say she's the one in the kitchen, she's not making an effort ... and so that actually opens up those lines of communication ...

There was some evidence of *linking social capital* as learners, with the advice of the teachers, were planning further education courses next year at TAFE, but it is impossible without longitudinal data to know if this eventuated. Also, one learner with a nursing background felt more confident to take up a nursing course next year.

Certainly at a broader social capital level, it was clear that while there were only a limited number of participants in the course (starting at twelve and in later sessions, five or six) the implications and effects of the course went well beyond the women. *Networks connections* extended to the family, friends and to the local community generally, and even overseas. One woman for example, stated in relation to what she had learnt:

Yes, use this (information) to my home, to call my friends and tell them about new things, my family and my country. I tell them about what is new, what is the best for you and your family and for your life.

There were some unexpected social capital outcomes for the teachers as well. For example, the health educator realised the significance for these women of issues involved in raising children in a different culture, and she sought to *share that knowledge and information* with others in her health sector networks:

I've given it to our bi-lingual coordinators ... and they are now looking at instigating that in teaching up members of the community who go out and do health talks to their different communities, and that's one part they are going to incorporate.

At the conclusion of the course, however, when learners were interviewed by one of the coordinators of the women's centre, it was primarily the health content (and to some extent their improved English skills)

that they spoke about in relation to what they had learnt from the course. That is, they spoke primarily of human capital outcomes. For example, one learner said she gained:

A lot of information, especially with the women health issue. We learn about immunization, about scanning things, about cancer, about the human body, anatomy, a lot of, er, dietitian things you can use at home for your kids ... very good information I get from this course.

The teachers' perspective

The most obvious partnership that operated in this case was the co-delivery of the program by an adult literacy teacher and a health educator. The two educators explained that much of the way they approached their teaching in this program was not a radical departure from their previous experiences presenting to groups of this type, notwithstanding the fact that they were team teaching. The main difference for the health educator was the extended nature of the relationship with learners because it was unusual to conduct a community health course over so many weeks. She recognised this as an opportunity to develop trust, build the relationship with learners and explore some issues in depth.

From their perspective of the educators, the partnership worked well. Their initial concern about stepping on each other's toes did not eventuate. They attributed their successful partnership to two factors. Firstly, each brought to the learning experience relevant content specific expertise that the other did not have, and knowledge that they both had with respect to adult learning which could lead to learning from one another. Secondly, they had a similar philosophical orientation about what it means to educate, which can best be encapsulated in the term 'empowerment of the learner'.

For the health educator, empowerment appeared primarily to involve the fostering of self confidence and self belief, thus enabling women to assume control over their own lives, especially in relation to their own health. At the initial meeting she explained her approach:

The whole idea is for them to take control, it's about empowering them ... to be healthy themselves, and if we can guide them – we can't hand deliver it to them – and tell them it's important ... it's still empowering them with that knowledge

Empowerment was seen to be demonstrated partly by the 'incredibly personal stuff' (health educator's comment) that came out of some of the sessions.

For the literacy teacher, empowerment was seen more in the pragmatic terms of enabling people to engage more effectively within a 'new' culture, and she was referring in particular to Muslims 'breaking that sense of isolation and otherness' as they try to live and adapt to a new community and way of life. In effect, then, she saw the course aimed at helping the Muslim women to engage more productively with others in the community (the Muslim community and beyond). The two interpretations of empowerment were compatible.

To foster empowerment, they explained that it was necessary to create classroom conditions which were safe and conducive to the women exploring aspects of their lives without fear. They both agreed that there was a very high level of interaction in the main classroom network. Further, they acknowledged the extraordinary honesty and personal disclosures on the part of some women. But herein was a dilemma for the teachers, and in particular for the health educator. Was it possible that the pedagogical conditions could go too far in promoting personal empowerment with possible negative consequences? Could there be too much trust and support in the group?

This was the issue both teachers grappled with when a classroom topic on stress management led to discussions about infidelity and domestic violence and one woman in particular disclosed some very personal details to the group. The health educator was circumspect as she reflected later in the course:

... when she started to disclose it and then other people have an input into it, I found that very challenging myself to try and, because I didn't want that to be happening because, you know, you've got to be very careful ...

The woman herself was then absent from the class for the next two sessions and later apologised for how she had acted. As the health educator explained, this incident occurred in the context of a trusting and yet highly charged discussion:

I think it just came out and then it built up momentum in the class and it was very hard and, I could see it was becoming very sticky ... I was worried more for her safety. Everyone had their opinion which was good I suppose but I think it was too much. In that situation it is usually a one-on-one and that person can then off-load without having all this other stuff come back on them.

Clearly, according to the health educator, this session had gone beyond the regular boundaries of a discussion in a health course. The literacy teacher, however, took a slightly different perspective, explaining that it's difficult to know when to stop with a class, and that the learners themselves had to take some responsibility, 'they have to make that decision ...'

Both the women's health educator and the literacy teacher had pre-existing understandings of social capital. The initial workshop and subsequent post session 'reflections' reinforced and clarified the meaning of social capital in this program context, and thus they had a heightened awareness of the concept and their role in furthering social capital outcomes.

The teachers were uncertain about the extent to which team teaching facilitated social capital outcomes. They noted that having two teachers in the room did allow for more time to be spent with individual learners. It was certainly more supportive and reinforcing for the teachers. Also, the literacy teacher had previously worked with some of the learners in her literacy class, and as a consequence the health educator acknowledged what she termed the 'dynamics' work already done by the literacy teacher had enabled the learners to reach a 'comfort' level where they could be relaxed and open. It meant much of the groundwork of building trust, essential to social capital building, had already been done.

The teachers noted that the program integrated the literacy knowledge with the health knowledge. For example, the literacy teacher explained that she did not try to teach specific grammar rules as she may do in a designated literacy class. Rather, with a heightened awareness of the difficulties some learners might experience with the course content, she highlighted and reinforced the learning of linguistic features as they arose in the classroom context, but not in the sense of a separate and specific 'literacy' teaching element. She facilitated learning, using her knowledge and skills as a literacy teacher, but in an incidental way. Literacy was not the focus, the health content was. Hence there was no 'dumbing down' to make the content easier to manage, and both teachers were quite surprised at the language the learners could manage. For example, after one particular lesson the literacy teacher commented to the health educator: 'The vocabulary you use is just extraordinary, 'anti-inflammatory' and 'anti-' whatever ... and if anyone hadn't realised what 'anti' meant before, well, they will certainly realize now, after today!'

Conclusions

The focus of this case study was to explore how a jointly delivered health/literacy program could enhance the social capital outcomes experienced by a group of Muslim women from diverse ethnic, educational and sociocultural backgrounds and for whom, English was not their main language. This case showed that learning outcomes including social capital outcomes are likely to increase from such a partnership. The primary requirement for a successful partnership is compatibility between the teachers' approaches to educating adults. This requirement was present in this case.

This case study suggests that if educators have a philosophical position of learner empowerment in their approach to teaching, they can easily accommodate a social capital framework in designing courses or programs. To teach for social capital outcomes came easily to the teachers even though prior to this

program, neither had used a social capital framework when designing learning experiences for learners. However, both believed that the purpose of education was empowerment of the learner. Thus, because they wanted to improve the lives of the learners, and because they respected and valued difference and genuinely felt they, too, had much to learn about the culture, backgrounds and the stories of the Muslim women they taught, they then taught in a particular way. They created a safe and secure learning environment that encouraged learners to speak freely and without fear on any topic that was of interest to the women. Necessarily this involved a large degree of informality in the classroom and a focus on group work to encourage dialogue. Further, as mothers themselves, the teachers shared their personal lives and experiences as they responded, for example, to the problems of parenthood identified by the learners. Often there were no clear answers to these problems and the teachers, like the learners, could simply outline their perspectives and share in the dialogue.

The co-delivery of this program illustrated the adage that the 'the total is more than the sum of its parts'. The knowledge bases of health, adult literacy and adult learning brought to the experience did not remain discrete. The learning experience was co-designed and co-delivered so that literacy skills were being acquired (integrated) within the social practice of engagement in dialogue about health and a whole host of related topics to do with relationships and values. The learners were learning about health in relation to issues and concerns in their everyday lives, and in the process they were learning, quite incidentally, literacy skills. They were also learning, quite incidentally, how to connect differently with people and networks.

It is highly likely that the co-delivery of the course by a health educator and a literacy teacher improved learning outcomes for the learners, including social capital outcomes. It is important to note here that the duration of the course could have been a significant factor in producing social capital outcomes. Because the sessions were weekly over several months, there was the time for relationships to build among the learners and teachers.

The social capital outcomes for these learners, as outlined earlier, were numerous and significant but, interestingly, not at the forefront of their awareness as course outcomes. This may be because they were not used to thinking of course outcomes as their connections with others in networks. These social capital outcomes were considered incidental to the content-based outcomes – in this case, health knowledge. While undoubtedly there were social capital outcomes (aplenty, see previous sections) on the whole, unless prompted, the learners did not perceive of course outcomes in social capital terms. Although one learner did say she came to the course in order to 'balance my social life' and she enjoyed discussing stress management and 'to see the people listen to you and give you new ideas'.

A health/literacy program such as this one that was co-presented by an adult literacy teacher and a health educator is still rare in Australia. This case occurred at the researcher's instigation. Despite its success and the Centre's request to offer more programs, lack of funding prevents this particular partnership for this group of women to be repeated. The funding for the literacy teacher came from the annual DEST/DEEWR Literacy funding that is not ongoing. Funding appears to be tied to innovations and ironically, once the innovation has proven to be successful, there is no funding to repeat it. There is no policy direction from Health or Education to support the development or sustainability of partnerships such as the one presented in this case study.

Financial literacy ‘This isn’t for the likes of me’

Author: Jo Balatti

Background

This case study is of how an 80 hour course (Certificate II in Business for Workplace Re-entry) that included a personal financial literacy component produced social capital outcomes. It is also a case study of what happens when there is a mismatch between personal financial literacy training and the learner group. It was delivered over an eight week period in the second half of 2007. The case was selected because the teacher, who had become aware of the research project, was interested in improving the social capital building capacity of the training she delivered, using an action research approach. She had delivered the basic course many times but this was the first time she was going to include a ten hour, non-assessable and non-compulsory financial literacy component. Her rationale for its inclusion was the importance of improving the financial literacy of the people who were undertaking the course.

The training centre is one of approximately forty centres that the training provider manages across the state of Queensland. The centre is in a regional city which, in 2007, had an unemployment rate of 7.5 per cent, approximately double the state average for the same period. The relatively high unemployment and the federal government Welfare to Work reforms generated the need for training that prepared mature aged people to return to or enter the workforce for the first time. To be eligible for this course, participants had to be parental jobseekers or persons over 45 years of age.

The action research framework was established at a workshop attended by the teacher and two other staff members. Data for this case study were collected via a series of five unstructured telephone conversations with the teacher over the duration of the course and a set of face to face interviews with the teacher and ten of the thirteen learners in the last two days of the course. The purpose of the discussions with the teacher was to provide the opportunity for reflection on the course, an essential component of the action research process. The purpose of the interviews with the learners was to find out how they experienced the course, and to explore any connections between the outcomes the learners experienced and what the teacher/trainer did in the course. All interviews were transcribed.

Student group and the course

The course is designed to assist participants re-enter the workforce or continue with learning (TAFE or University) in order to obtain employment in their desired area. Learners are referred to the course by agencies including Centrelink, Job Network members, CRS Australia, Centacare, the Women’s Health Centre, other community groups and past learners. The course is also advertised in school newsletters that are sent home to parents. Learners in this particular cohort were a result from these various forms of recruitment and promotions.

Fourteen learners began the class. The group was all from an English speaking and low socioeconomic background. Ages ranged from the mid-twenties to the late fifties with most people being over forty years of age. All but two were women with most not having worked outside the home for many years, some decades. All began the course as unemployed although some gained casual work during the course. Most had never had a job interview in their lives and many had not undertaken any formal education for many

years. Consequently, enrolling and turning up on the first day produced discomfort, if not fear, for many learners. Below are three women's recollections of their first day:

Oh, I felt really sick and nervous the first day and didn't want to come, got here, was really quiet, didn't want to speak to anyone. I just don't like big groups of people and I don't have much confidence. (Age 27, married with children, completed Yr 12, has never had paid work)

I really wasn't that confident that I would actually get here on the day. [Why?] Nerves and the fact that I don't go anywhere, I've been stuck at home for 27 years with my kids. (Age 47, married with 5 children, completed Yr 8)

Oh my heart was fluttering and I thought I don't know whether I can do it. Just to walk through that door, you know, it was really scary. [Why?] Well I'm not a very good speller and I can read quite well but I would never, ever stand up and read to a group and I was worried whether I'd have to stand up and read what I'd written or whatever. I think that maybe I felt dumb. But, to get in here and find out that nearly all of us felt exactly the same way! They'd never done anything since they'd had their children and yeah, they were all scared too. So I wasn't the only one. (Age 52, school aged child, recently separated, first formal course since leaving school at 14)

People were motivated to enrol in the course to increase job prospects. Some expressed cynicism about securing a job at their age, a result of frequent rejections in the past. Some were planning to continue their studies the following year although none had recommenced studies six months after completion of the course. A strong motivation to attend the course was gaining computer skills and for many, it also included the social aspect of meeting other people with the hope that this would increase their self confidence.

In terms of knowledge and skill level, the group was diverse. For example, there was a wide range in written literacy skills and in computer skills. In terms of computer skills many had not used a computer at all while others were familiar with some websites e.g. eBay, and some functions in WORD.

The eight week course covered units in business, computing and job preparation. The course included work on using software packages such as WORD and EXCEL, the Internet, communication in the workplace, working effectively with others, workplace health and safety, career planning, job interviews and personal financial literacy.

The 'new' elements in the course

This course was different from previous courses delivered by the teacher in the following ways:

- The teacher was going to be more aware of the group dynamics and respond accordingly.
- The teacher was going to try to connect learners with useful contacts in the community.
- The teacher was going to deliberately foster a strong team identity using specific strategies including mentoring and group assessment practices.
- The course was to include a ten hour financial literacy component.

The personal financial literacy component was to be delivered over a two day period, approximately half way through the course after the computing units. The intended financial literacy component was a commercially available online self-paced package purchased by the provider. Because the component was not part of the formal course, the teacher would not be paid for any tuition she offered to learners. The package included work on budgeting, saving, investing, and planning for retirement. It was anticipated that learners would independently work through the package using headsets in the computer laboratory. The package included written tasks. In response to the negative reaction that almost all the learners had to the online package, the teacher chose to change the pedagogical approach. The rest of the financial

literacy component was discussion based with some work using websites on budgeting, tax and superannuation, an approach that was consistent with the rest of the course.

Pedagogical strategies

The teacher used pedagogical strategies that from experience, she knew developed social capital outcomes within the group as well as new strategies.

Past practices that she would use in this course were the following:

- Engage learners in group projects and activities that have them interact.
- Co-create with the learners a safe, supportive and highly respectful environment.
- Encourage the learners to believe in themselves and their abilities.
- Act as a role model.
- Be a critical friend to learners. This is achieved by being supportive and friendly but also ensuring they have reached their full potential when completing the course.
- Encourage humour and enjoyment.

The new content was the financial literacy component and the new strategies that the teacher planned to use in the overall course were:

- Multiple peer learning strategies including mentoring
- Strategies that strengthened a team identity within the group
- Having people from the community present some sessions that could inspire and provide useful connections for the learners.

According to the teacher, the above strategies would enhance social capital outcomes for the following reasons:

By providing an environment where learners can connect with each other and build positive networks, it can potentially increase their social capital outcomes. The group consists of learners who have not undertaken learning for a long period of time. For this reason, it is important to ensure a supportive, friendly and respectful environment is created. This can have an influence on the kind of learning they do and the level of commitment they show in improving their skills, knowledge and attitudes. This in turn can help them have a more positive influence on their external networks and relationships.

Peer learning strategies

The trainer focused on having peers support peers in all aspects of the course and especially the work on computer literacy. The teacher established that a third of the class had skills in computing while the remaining two-thirds had very limited or no knowledge at all. To facilitate learning, learners were located at the computers so that more experienced learners had less experienced learners on either side of them.

In addition, the teacher made available the computer laboratory in and out of class time for learners who wished to do further work. This offer was taken up on a regular basis by four of the learners who had low level skills. They would arrive at the centre and help one another during their time on the computers. On occasion, the teacher would enter the laboratory to see if any assistance was needed.

Building a sense of team within the group

With this group, more than any previous groups, the teacher wanted to develop a strong positive group identity by deliberately encouraging a sense of team identity. She did this by establishing a code of behaviour that engendered mutual respect, collaboration and optimism. This included strategies that set the 'tone' of the classes as a safe learning space. It included insistence on the ban of some words such as 'dumb'. It included a visual aid, which a learner described as 'clever', to invite people to leave any worries and other negative emotions they may have at the door. She encouraged group work. In order to increase the completion rate, she also implemented the rule that no assessment would be marked until all learners had completed that particular item. In terms of assessment, she also allowed some pairs to do bigger assessment items together so that they could help each other.

Community members as teachers

In an attempt to help learners establish useful contacts outside of the class, the teacher invited, for the first time, a successful past learner to talk with the group. This ex-learner was employed as a coordinator within a large community agency. The teacher's rationale for choosing this particular learner was the following:

I have some wonderful ex-learners that have gone on and you know are in wonderful jobs that they just love. They followed their passion and they've got where they want to be. This lady is one of those people. She had a lot of obstacles to get over during the course. She certainly didn't have it easy and she did volunteering in this organisation and she now is the Coordinator of [name withheld]. She just loves what she does and she's just a sweet, lovely lady that could mentor them and encourage them to follow their dream and let them know that they could do it.

The guest teacher delivered a motivational session followed by a question time and a lengthy morning tea which provided the opportunity for people to ask her further questions.

For the financial literacy section, the teacher planned to have a financial advisor as a guest teacher. This did not eventuate due to unavailability of an advisor.

A concern that the teacher had regarding implementing strategies that build social capital outcomes was the time it could take and how that could impact on achieving the assessable outcomes.

Outcomes

Thirteen of the fourteen learners were successful in achieving the required competencies. Six months after the course concluded, nine of the thirteen are employed, with seven in fulltime employment. The focus in this section is the social capital outcomes learners experienced. Social capital outcomes have been defined in this project as changes that participants experience in the kinds of networks with which they interact, and also the changes in how they interact within networks.

The class as a new network

The class became a new network for many of the participants. Most learners reported they enjoyed coming to class with the fellowship they experienced being one of the main sources of enjoyment. The bonding extended for many to meeting up as a group at the pub every Friday afternoon. The comments below from three learners suggest a range of reasons for the class becoming a significant network for learners:

What I like most about coming I think is just being with the girls. I'm going to miss it when we all finish.

This is my free time, this is my world – I love the learning, I love the people, it's just a new world.

I've kept coming because I'm getting something out of it and I'm liking the people and I don't want to let the teachers down because they've been good – yeah – just to do the right thing and to feel good for myself.

All learners found the atmosphere friendly and positive. Many commented on the teacher's ability to set a tone in the class that encouraged them to learn and to feel accepted. Three participants offered the following reflections:

She's just so open – she makes you want to learn. Something just comes from her that makes you want to learn. She's just enjoyable that's all. She just encourages you every step of the way.

She doesn't sit up there on a pedestal, she's down there with the rest of us and she doesn't make herself out to be better than anyone else even though she's had education and we have not. She's worked hard to get where she is and I respect her for that. I appreciate her for that but, like I say, she doesn't treat me like I'm illiterate or anything else.

She is in there laughing and joking around with people and even making jokes about the work that we're doing. So we all felt comfortable enough that, okay, this isn't an uppity course. You don't need to be perfect to be here.

The peer learning strategies produced social capital outcomes for learners by building relationships which, in turn, resulted in improved skills. For some, the mentoring changed the way they perceived themselves. Two of the participants commented that they were surprised that they had found themselves in a situation in which they could help others. For one learner whose confidence was very low but who had skills in computing, the opportunity to help someone had a profound effect on her own sense of self and her self efficacy. She reported that she had never thought she would be able to help anyone else and being able to do so, made the course enjoyable for her.

Learners reported other changes in how they perceived themselves. Increased confidence was often reported and in the case of the three learners quoted below, the increased confidence led them to think of themselves in different ways:

I know I can go off and start studying now and I've got more confidence if I'm going to go applying for a job now.

I've just gone for a job interview which I wouldn't have done before. My Dad found it in the paper and then he said to me, 'You should go for this.' So then I rang up and then I told the teacher about it and she said, 'Yeah, that would be great, go for it.' And she gave me a few hot tips. So I went for it and it was a long interview – it was hard but it was good.

If I didn't do this course, I don't think I'd ever have even thought about going on to do anything with Child Services or anything like that.

New networks outside the class

Learners who have successfully applied for jobs have entered networks that are new to them. The deliberate attempt during class to widen the participants' circle of contacts by inviting a successful ex-student to give a presentation appeared to have been successful. Apart from the learners asking her a number of questions in class and during morning tea, several learners continued contact in the subsequent months.

Changes in how people interact in existing networks

Some learners were aware that the learning experience had changed how they interacted in their networks outside the classroom, especially in their families. They also noted that they were perceived differently by family members. For those who had school aged children, computer related knowledge changed the interaction between parent and child. Mothers felt they were now able to help their children with their homework. Some mothers reported their family being happy for them because they were doing a course. One mother explains, 'Oh he loves it because I'm happier, I'm more fulfilled, I have a purpose'.

Response to the financial literacy component

The response to the online self paced financial literacy package which comprised the first part of the financial literacy component was generally negative. Learners objected to the tone, the content, and the mode of delivery. Most learners felt disconnected almost immediately, when they could not identify with the explanation given in the package of the milestones that people should have achieved or be experiencing at different ages, in order to achieve financial security in retirement. The reflection from this learner reflects the general response:

Oh I got very frustrated with it. I didn't like it at all. Well I may be in the 40 year age bracket but I'm not even at the 20 year bracket when it comes to my finances. Because I've been in this relationship where we have a very low income, we have no assets, I don't even have a registered vehicle at the moment or a home phone – I think I have about \$800 Super from when I was working at the Bakery.

The actual program, in my opinion, should not be used for people in this situation. In this situation you have women who have been out of the workforce for an awful long time, you have single mums, people who have never been in the workforce, therefore they don't have any Super put aside and they're struggling from day to day to pay the bills and get food and take care of their kids. And, when you're looking at that, and it tells you where you're supposed to be in life and you're not anywhere near that, that actually brings you down and it did it to a lot of people. So I did not like that one little bit.

When the teacher redesigned the rest of the component with input from the learners, interest increased significantly. They reported they enjoyed listening to their peers' views about money. They also felt that they learnt useful information about superannuation, making wills and calculating one's tax.

Teacher perspective

The teacher observed that this class, unlike some others, had been an example of a group that had successfully bonded as a team. Her evidence included the completion rate, the way in which the learners helped one another in formal and informal ways in class time and in their own time, and the almost palpable sense of camaraderie that existed when they came together. The teacher attributed the success in this class to two factors. The first factor was the composition of the group, a factor over which she had no control. She explained that almost all the participants had a common desire to learn and improve the quality of their lives, and having sufficient people skills they were able to pull the few more difficult ones 'into line'. The second contributing factor was the particular strategies that she deliberately used to develop cohesion within the group. These included co-developing and insisting upon a set of norms and values that fostered cooperation, sharing and learning in a safe and supportive environment. While the strategies used in this group were successful, the teacher cautioned that similar outcomes for another group may require different strategies. She stressed that the first base for any class planning is getting to know one's learners, a process that begins for this teacher with one to one interviews with all learners before enrolment.

For this teacher, each group of learners offers the potential to increase her own social capital as it does for the learners. She explains that teaching for her is an interpersonal investment that requires emotional, social and intellectual outlay. The teacher's efforts in developing relationships with her learners range

from sharing personal stories and potentially useful contacts with her learners to issuing handwritten personalised certificates upon completion of the course. She explains the significance of the latter in the context of her approach:

I bond with the group and I feel part of the group and I guess I take them all under my wing. I want them to take a bit of us with them you know, not just the official Certificate. I also want them to see that we pick up on their personality and I guess, with a lot of them, especially when I make them a funny award, I want them to know that we appreciated that. I mean they can look back at their official Certificate and you'd hope that would encourage them but I think if they can look back on a Certificate and smile, it encourages you more because you have a good feeling about it. And hopefully that might encourage them. I know that when they go out those doors, there's nothing else I can do except let them know my door is open and it always is and we do ask them to come back if we can do anything to help them.

The mixed response to the financial literacy component provided important learnings for the teacher. It became almost immediately obvious to her that the online package was not effective for the following reasons:

...one, it didn't pertain, it doesn't pertain to our clientele. Two, there was no interaction and this group loves interaction so they were bored just sitting there listening to someone giving them financial advice that didn't pertain to them.

This online package was designed for people who are employed and/or have the capacity to save. Learners in this course belonged to neither category. Once the approach changed to one that was interactive and responsive to the learners' interest, engagement increased. The learners' lack of knowledge in topics such as wills, superannuation, tax and effective budgeting became very apparent. Almost all learners had no knowledge of the role of the financial counsellors who offer their services at no costs and most thought that accountants' fees were in the hundreds of dollars and therefore not accessible to them.

As far as participating in an action research project on enhancing social capital outcomes for her learner is concerned, the teacher described the main benefit as being the better quality interaction within the group. This she believed was perhaps due to her more systematic reflection on her lessons:

I think this has made me be more aware of the dynamics of the group. Like I've had to, everyday, think more into that side of it and not just go in and say, 'Okay, this is what we're going to do' but more look at what are we going to get out of it. I guess that's the main thing I've got out of it. It's made me reflect more every day and not just after when it gets a bit tense.

Conclusion

The social capital outcomes and the benefits they produced for learners in this case support the view that courses such as these can offer and in fact, should offer, social capital building opportunities for learners. Many people who enrol in courses similar to this one are often isolated in their homes or in closed networks in ways that can result in being socially, culturally or economically marginalised. By virtue of inviting people into a new learning network, their class, courses such as these can be the gateway to new networks and to new ways of interacting within existing networks. These changes are the social capital outcomes that can lead to personal, social or economic benefits.

Critical to this teacher's capacity to improve the social capital outcomes of her learners was developing an awareness of social capital in the planning phase of her teaching. The key step was increasing her knowledge of social capital and its relationship to pedagogy and socioeconomic benefits so that existing practices could be enhanced by new ones. In this case the increased awareness of the hitherto unnamed or unseen social capital outcomes experienced by her learners came through the initial workshop, and the ongoing reflection process aided by the researcher as a critical friend.

The case illustrates that the extent to which social capital outcomes are experienced does depend on the individuals themselves – as is the case with any learning outcomes – but the approach and strategies the teachers use in designing learning experiences have a very large influence. Teachers’ decisions about how they see themselves in the classroom, the psycho-social climate they wish to create, the content selected, the connections they have with the community and the pedagogies used impact the social capital building potential of their courses. Although the lifespan of the class is necessarily limited to the length of the course, its members, that is, learners and teachers together, provide the social network in which social outcomes leading to positive socioeconomic benefits can generate.

With respect to personal financial literacy, this case study highlighted the complex ways in which we learn and enact our personal financial literacy. As with other literacies, it is a social practice that is understood and practised in various ways depending upon the groups or networks of which one is a member. For the learners in this class, the initial training via the online self paced mode of delivery in which they used headsets was the antithesis of what they had been experiencing in their course up to that point. What’s more, they felt they did not belong to the group targeted by the online package. They much preferred to choose their own topics of interest regarding money and they were happy to discuss them in their group.

Finally, this case study also illustrates the consequences of education systems not recognising important learning. Despite the value of social capital outcomes in people’s lives, they continue to be excluded from formal assessment protocols. While educators may appreciate the value of social capital outcomes, the fact that they do not count in the way learners are assessed, means they lack the legitimacy that other outcomes have which impacts choices that teachers make about focusing on social capital outcomes. In terms of the financial literacy component, the students in this case valued learning more about financial literacy, providing the pedagogy was appropriate. However, the importance of improving the personal financial literacy of people such as those in this case goes ignored when it is not included formally in courses that are aimed at improving the socioeconomic wellbeing of its participants.

Where's the justice?

When social capital resources are necessary but not sufficient for sustained change through learning

The domestic violence those two learners went through was horrific. And you know it was all because their partners could see the change in them from going to the course. This is what happens when a lot of adult learners, especially women, start learning – it changes the way the family sees them, and sometimes, obviously, not for the good. (Teacher)

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Background

The least 'mainstream' of the three case studies is that of the Northern Territory. Part of the reason for this is because the NT demographic is quite different from the overall Australian one, the population being 28% Indigenous. 'Demographics', though, provides an inadequate descriptor of the reasons for the differences, and the impact of those differences. The other part of the reason lies in the historical and geographic circumstances that have mingled to produce a disparate, isolated, dispossessed set of *different* and distinctive communities whose collective health, education, housing and other common indicators of socioeconomic wellbeing are recognised as being among the lowest in the world.

In the area of adult education and training, with which we are concerned here, governments have attempted many and varied programs and strategies over the years aimed at improving literacy levels. In the area of adult education, the fundamental instruments for these changes have been the adult literacy programs and strategies prevalent since the early 1990s of which the federal government's Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP) into which the participants in this case study fit, is one.

Any training program that has been developed with the 'mainstream' in mind, and then applied in diverse sociocultural contexts, is likely to have some issues in its application, and the two other sites for this study (in NSW and Queensland) show some of these issues. For the NT, where Western cultural policies and their embedded programs aimed at getting people into paid work, meet starkly different socioeconomic and cultural understandings, the issues become even more obvious, as this case study will show.

One of the impacts of the disenfranchisement experienced by Indigenous people has been high levels of substance abuse, and issues surrounding domestic violence. In the case of the NT reported in the next section, domestic violence figures as a prominent issue in seeking out, attending and achieving results from programs such as the LLNP. The intergenerational transmission of dysfunction as the norm is the reason why government programs (Learning Research Group 2006) spanning decades have failed to deliver effective outcomes.

What do educators do when the social capital resources available for learners are inadequate to achieve lasting change? The question raises the additional issue in the quotation at the head of this case study, and one that all sites in the study showed: the issue of managing the learning that does occur, and how it transfers (or not) into the participants' lives and ongoing identities. In short and very blunt terms, how can learning be sustainable when the learner ends up in hospital for weeks as a result of the learning changing her identity? The case study that follows, points to some ways the delivery of programs can be improved, as well as to issues of embedding

the learnings from the programs into the everyday social practices of learners – sometimes referred to as ‘transfer of learning’.

Site selection and the learner group

The course delivered was the LLNP CGEA. The overriding aim of the program is to prepare learners for employment. The learner group in this course comprised Indigenous learners from Indigenous settlements in and immediately around a regional centre. There were six participants in the class, and between one and six people attended daily. The average overall attendance was three. The majority of the learners lived in urban Indigenous settlements. The remainder lived in the town, in public housing. The three most regular attendees were therefore selected for interviewing. All three were women ranging in age from their mid-twenties to mid-forties. Their first language is not English but one of the traditional Indigenous Australian languages. None had been in paid employment in the white mainstream cultural context, and none therefore had a concept of the nature of work or what ‘mainstream work’ entailed. There was no readily available transport for learners to get to and from the course, and this was an impediment to attendance. One learner, for example, had to walk an hour in the sun each way to attend class. Two of the three learners terminated their course before completion, both from domestic violence events. One fell victim to domestic violence the day before her first work experience and was taken to Adelaide hospital for many weeks. The second also experienced domestic violence, and against all odds, attended the first session of work experience but once again domestic violence occurred and she was counselled to terminate her course until the matter was resolved.

The ‘new’ elements in the course

The course varied from previous courses delivered by the teacher as follows:

- The teacher did not have experience teaching in this geographic area or to this cultural group.
- The teacher intended adopting a ‘personal value’ approach.
- The teacher was going to try to connect learners with peers and to mainstream work contexts through community work placements.

The teacher was aware of the potential client group’s characteristics, and was experienced in this respect. In addition, she was willing to explore the practical ideas of social capital embedded in pedagogies.

Pedagogical strategies

In this case four major strategies were put forward for trialling. The first strategy was to adopt a ‘**personal value**’ approach. A personal value approach is one which attempts to build personal esteem and efficacy. As the teacher noted about the source of her inspiration on this matter (GROW 1983), ‘Personal Value teaches people to recognize their inherent value as a person, regardless of their circumstances, academic achievement and merit’. The teacher recognises that in preparing these clients for work, it is important for them to have self esteem. Generally they are very shy and would not do at all well at interviews (lacking confidence). She has implemented personal value teaching to help these clients feel better about themselves, and to get them to think more about negative thinking patterns that influence the way they perceive their place in society. Improved confidence is likely to spill over into class activities – more participation, confidence to answer questions, be more active in the learning group etc. Some evidence of increased confidence is evident in their taking their first tentative steps towards work via work experience.

It was foreseen that building personal value would result from the learner’s interactions with new networks, both in the classroom and outside. The teacher anticipated that marginalized people needed to be provided with a safe and secure learning environment in which their own value as a person could be solicited and endorsed by the new class network. In this way, it was felt, the learners would then be prepared to take new steps to engage with new contacts and experiences and so act to consolidate their new and emerging feelings of personal value.

The implementation of this strategy involved the preparation of scenarios and pictures for discussion. The discussion revolves around the personal value each individual presented has of themselves in the scenario portrayed. In the case of the pictures, the same pattern was followed.

The second strategy was to encourage **peer teaching**. In this strategy, learners are treated as both teachers and learners. Learners might work in small groups, one acting as the learning facilitator, or in pairs. The rationale here is that this strategy will develop self confidence and provide a secure learning environment in which learners progressively develop the interaction skills that are at the core of using and building social capital. As the teacher herself says, ‘...it involves oral explanation and demonstration of an idea – it encourages interaction’. It was implemented: ‘...one learner explaining or guiding others’.

The third strategy was **field visits**. It was expected that these would assist to bridge the gap between the learners’ background experiences and future employment, by focusing on a work context where learners might consider a work experience at some stage, as well as providing opportunities for creating and consolidating bonding ties within the learner group and linking ties with resources in the community.

The fourth strategy was **reflective listening**. The reason for wishing to implement this strategy was the teacher’s expectation that learners would question what was presented and learn to be more reflective or critical about the issues going on around them.

Outcomes: Factors facilitating or impeding social capital

By most criteria of course effectiveness, this program would be classified as a failure. The drop-out rate was high, attendance was sporadic, and learning objectives fell short of being realised. However, the task of a case study such as this is not to provide a rosy gloss on a situation, but to ask what we can and should learn from the situation. That is, what can this case study tell us about approaches to adult literacy development that deliberately draw on and build social capital, with regard to the three components of partnerships, policy and pedagogy? As stated in the methodology section of the main report, *the purpose of the trial was to develop a better understanding of specific strategies and to identify the factors that facilitated or impeded building social capital*.

The NT case study is particularly valuable in the latter point, shedding a great deal of light on the factors that facilitated or impeded building social capital. Outcomes for the NT case are therefore focused on these factors that facilitate or impede the building of social capital.

Cultural compatibility and social capital

Most of the factors facilitating and impeding the building of social capital relate to compatibility of cultural aspects of the course, its content, the teachers and students and the policies which support the educational provision. In the NT case, the compatibility is between Western and Indigenous knowledge systems. By Western ‘system’ we mean the assumptions about education (the way it is packaged as curriculum in particular subject areas, and the way it is delivered in a formal classroom setting via a set of Western pedagogies, for example). We also mean the policy system that supports and enables educational provision. Finally, there are specific assumptions about the term ‘partnerships’ in the Western culture that do not necessarily ‘translate’ into Indigenous contexts.

In the area of adult literacy and numeracy, for example, the concept of ‘work’ is central in policy, pedagogy and partnership structures, yet ‘work’ is a term at the core of the intersection of Western and Indigenous knowledge systems. One respondent noted: ‘We’ve got a concept of ‘work’ in our heads, and a lot of these people haven’t. And they don’t know about what’s inside a job’.

In addition to the apparently simple example afforded by differential concepts of ‘work’, there are the educational assumptions about learning that stem from different cultural traditions. In order to participate in a western styled learning environment, where interactive and often ‘critical’ or ‘reflective’ conversations are required, participants must draw on existing social capital resources, which assumes participants already possess such resources in the Western sense as understood in the literature review. To assume that any group of people do not possess such resources has the implication that they do not have family,

kinship or friendship networks in the communities of origin. From what we know, they do. So why did this case study detect an apparent reluctance to draw on these reserves? One reason could be that the nature of the resources differs from those that we, as Western researchers, are used to calling ‘social capital’.

Even the issue of policy is underpinned by cultural differences. Policy provides the enabling environment and usually the resources to get something done. In this case, policy enables LLNP programs to take place, and funds those programs. One of the respondents commented on the capacity, responsiveness and role of the macro policy environment within which the LLNP programs sit:

The choice of the LLNP course as a tool for the Commonwealth intervention strategy wasn’t the best....LLNP just doesn’t have the flexibility to adapt for these communities. It’s the guidelines.

Teacher perspective

The teacher set out to trial four pedagogical strategies: a personal values approach to teaching, peer teaching, field visit, and reflective listening. In the previous section, however, we noted how important it was to remember the different value systems at work in this case study: Western and Indigenous. Any consideration of pedagogical strategies originating from a Western pedagogical culture and evaluated against those same criteria, then implemented by a non-Indigenous teacher, must be prefaced with strong qualifications.

In the following extract from the teacher, she is talking about the nature of the participants’ attitudes to learning and how this is fundamentally different. The extract demonstrates the importance that cultural difference makes to world views, in this case, towards ‘learning’:

...they’re pretty passive...they’re **not active learners**, like, you know, pursuing their learning – I just think they’re not, they’re **not ready** you know. Probably **if they keep coming**... get them really thinking...taking initiative in their learning and initiative in their own lives. Because a lot of what the white, **the white culture gives them is very passive**. You know, ‘passive welfare’.

Initially a value judgement is made by the teacher: ‘...they’re pretty passive...not active’. The teacher is aware of the significance of the cultural differences and then relates this passivity to the history of Western passive welfare. However, there are in fact several important points embedded in this extract, of which the ‘passivity’ issue is but one. The discussion below refers to these, through the bolded text in the above extract highlighted for convenience. These four points cluster around two issues.

The **first** is the issue about passive/active. The attribution for passivity is that white culture gives them this in some measure. Certainly the experience of passivity related here is one commonly reported to Indigenous educators. Some would attribute the cause as well to the fact that the dominant culture is delivering education to the dispossessed one. Here, it is understandable that the participants lack confidence in communicating with the teacher, and opt instead for silence or ‘passivity’, which raises the next issue: is the observed behaviour ‘passivity’ or is it indeed simply ‘staying quiet’? There is a wealth of difference in these interpretations. In many cultures, it is considered bad manners and wrong to talk much, let alone to disagree or ‘question’ their teacher.

The **second** issue highlighted in the extract above concerns the readiness of the learners: ‘they’re not ready’ and ‘if they keep coming’. As was discussed earlier, the disparity between Western education and Indigenous culture is most likely to be at the base of this issue. These learners have little experience of (a) Western culture and therefore notions such as ‘work’, (b) Western forms of education and training, (c) Western expectations about the socio-cultural practices around these things (concepts of time as they relate to being on time, the nature and formality of the place where training occurs) and (d) live through the normalization within their communities of domestic violence and other practices related to health care, housing and so on not endorsed by Western law or public opinion. However, the funding criteria for LLNP requires certain benchmarks to be reached and certain forms of learning to occur, all within a certain period of time and assessed by Western prescribed means.

It seems clear that there is a wide gap between the learners 'readiness' and the learner needs, not able to be catered for by the existing LLNP format. These learners need, as the teacher says, to 'keep coming' so that some of the elements of the gap can be narrowed.

Given these earlier considerations about Western versus Indigenous knowledge systems within which all people's values are located, it is difficult to present a straight forward evaluation of the four pedagogical strategies the teacher intended to trial. This will therefore only be acceptable in the context of the vast cultural differences in which this learning story has occurred.

Personal value

The teacher made several attempts to imbue a personal value ethos into the teaching and learning. There is no strong evidence for its success or otherwise. However, one learner did note, 'I think I can get a job and a better place to live'. Here the participant shows that she now has the capacity to perceive a different value system for herself, one where 'work and housing' has a significant place.

The evidence is weak, isolated, and the conclusion is that this attempt to implement a 'personal value' strategy was not successful.

Peer teaching

Peer teaching was implemented with one learner explaining or guiding the others. With these learners, it was noted that there were difficulties encountered with confidence and facility in oral communication so outcomes were both nebulous and marginal. In terms of social capital, little social capital was seen to be drawn on or generated. The social capital outcome, however, was in the form of sound network development between class members. As one learner said, she liked to 'get to know other people'.

Field visit

One such visit was to the Child Care Centre, which was aimed at broadening the learners' background experiences, building social capital within the group and linking them with community resources. In terms of learning about social capital production, the teacher found that she could not assume learners had experiences that she or other Westerners might have. This limits the social capital resources that learners can draw on in the learning experiences in the classroom. When asked to comment on the value of the field trips, the teacher noted the value lay in:

...just the field trip itself – I realized that a lot of them haven't been to a lot of places that I take for granted that people in [this town] would have been – like they've never been to the museums.

Outcomes from the action research process include the teacher's growing understanding of the gaps between learner and teacher/Western background, as reflected in the above extract.

Reflective listening

As a strategy, this one was not a 'success'. The teacher tried to implement it, but found the learners did not react in the ways the teacher was accustomed to. As she said, 'I was hoping they would question me – but they didn't'.

Possible reasons for this have been discussed earlier and include the different value systems in relation to cultural views of 'learning'.

Conclusions

Context for the conclusions

Below are some headings that identify specific areas where difficulties were noted in the data. However, there is a danger in presenting these as isolated difficulties, as it may be interpreted that the solution to the

difficulties lies in tackling each, one at a time. In fact, all the difficulties are related in some way to the underlying contextual conditions of dispossession and disempowerment. These words seem to be dismissed and sometimes treated as putting the whole issue in a ‘too hard basket’. We suggest here that the focus for solutions is indeed available, and while it may not be easy, it is nevertheless important to take the matter seriously.

The learners’ community context is summarised here through the words of the teachers and other members of the action research team:

Living conditions overcrowded... not clean... alcohol and drinking all around you...unsafe... very noisy on Thursday nights, rioting on those nights, a lot of problems. Learners would either not come to class or be very tired on Friday. Hardly any sleep but she did the right thing...she did the responsible thing (in spite of context conditions)... very commendable. She was very polite.

Any discussion structured by a research report by Western researchers which reports Western research *about* another culture is bound to be flawed, and there is ample research evidence of Western and from other cultures to support this view. By portraying the lives of these Indigenous participants as ‘different’ from ‘ours’ and painting the context of these peoples’ lives as we have done in this case study, is still only reporting the views of others as they interact with the participants – the voices of the ‘others’ is only present in the form of responses to interview questions. For this reason, we have aimed at presenting the ‘failure’ of the NT case study in the bigger sociocultural context in which it rightfully belongs, and to draw on that bigger picture in making the conclusions we now set out.

Teacher learning

In addition to context factors, there were other areas where learning was apparent. The classroom teacher was discussing the issue of evidence base for her classroom practice. The interviewer asked if the teacher could cite the evidence for a growth in personal values. The teacher answered:

This is something I did not think about – that is – strategies to measure this strategy. This is something I will work on in the next round of training.

Here, we see that the action research cycle is promoting the attitudes leading to a change of practice. The teacher accepts the need for evidence, and is readying herself to build it into the following year’s program. However, underlying this is how a Western ‘evidence based’ framework could capture such information without a genuine collaboration between Indigenous and Western researchers to develop a cross-cultural evaluative framework. That is, there are ways forward, but they do not lie in the traditional Western way of evaluating a course outcome.

Difficulties in teaching for social capital

Attendance

When it is variable, with different learners coming at different times, it changes the dynamics and interrupts the development and implementation of the strategies. This in turn influences the drawing on of existing social capital and the building of new social capital.

Lack of out-of-classroom support

Changing social capital means changing of personal identity. Essentially this means the participant becomes a different person. Becoming a different person is threatening to the self and to the members of the person’s existing family and networks. This process needs support, as few make it through to become a changed person without falling back on the old identities, manifesting itself as ‘nil learning outcomes’. Another reading of ‘change through learning’ is that it is perceived as good by some and bad by others.

Domestic violence

The issue of changed identities observed as so important in the previous paragraph is reinforced in this extract:

The domestic violence those two learners went through was horrific. And you know it was all because their partners could see the change in them from going to the course. This is what happens when a lot of adult learners, especially women, start learning – it changes the way the family sees them, and sometimes, obviously, not for the good.

Underlying most of the difficulties encountered in the NT case are the conditions of the communities in which the learners live. These communities are regrettably typical of most in the area, but it is stressed that many communities are strong and resilient, and demonstrate real progress in meeting health, education and other significant targets. ‘Substance abuse’ is part of the scene in the so-called dysfunctional communities. The cycle of intergenerational enculturation which results in substance abuse and domestic violence of all kinds, keeps the impediments to improvement in place. That is, the effects we see of violence and substance abuse, health and education issues and so on, are reproduced across generations and have become the norm.

However, there are indications in the data of ways to approach the problem, and coupled with previous research, it is possible to suggest some ways forward, if we accept that the issue is best tackled by tackling the cause – intergenerational transmission.

Disparity in Western education system and Indigenous culture

One of the fundamental principles of sound pedagogy in adult literacy is ‘negotiating the course to meet the learner needs’. While LLNP is a program aimed at low level literacy and numeracy performers, it was devised under Australian Eastern seaboard training guidelines, conditions and policy environment for largely ‘mainstream’ client groups. The LLNP may well suit many client groups in Australia. However, this case study makes clear that there is a gap between the culture and skills of the client group in question and the nature and orientation of the provision. In other educational paradigms, specific learning provision for Indigenous learners has been trialled, and it is seen that something new and innovative needs to be devised to fill the gap between LLNP and the actual needs of these clients.

For sound pedagogy and some hoped for social capital development, provision here needs to be based on the principle of matching up course to learner need. Clearly this will be, at least initially, resource intensive. It would also need to work closely with other sectors and services in restoring safety and security to the communities in question, along with improved health, housing and other improvements. However, as additional evidence from other sources also indicates, a different approach based on a whole-of-community capacity exchange process is required. All ‘problems’ associated with dysfunctional communities have at their basis the intergenerational transmission of dysfunction as ‘the norm’. Only through a whole-of-community approach can this be addressed over time. There is research and practice to show how to do this effectively, but instead, successive governments have opted to treat the symptoms (health, housing, education, literacy) rather than the cause.

There are many of these beneficial impacts of social capital from the NT site demonstrated in the data and reported both in this case study and in the main body of the report. We have seen how two of the learners attended course and work experience in spite of seemingly insurmountable odds, and have expressed their desire now to continue in the following year of the course. These changes have occurred through the social capital made available in the course and its pedagogical experiences. It is important, however, to note where we can suggest limitations to a social capital approach.

This case study goes some way to confirming the need for a whole-of-community approach to addressing intergenerational transmission of dysfunction, and it can be fairly concluded that the positive benefits of social capital are limited by the nature and quantity of existing social capital resources available to the participants. One example is that, if sustained change through learning requires identity transformation,

which we know to be the case, we can also see how this is hindered significantly by the nature of the resources in the communities – substance abuse and domestic violence, the latter often triggered by the learning. Sustained learning requires people to not only see themselves in a different way, but be allowed to act out this changed self perception. A whole-of-community response to the available nature and quantity of negative social capital resources is indicated as the best way forward.