OCCASIONAL PAPER

Blind date: an exploration of potential partnerships between literacy teachers and community service workers

Ann Leske
TAFE NSW Riverina Institute

Participant in the NCVER Building Researcher Capacity Community of Practice Scholarship Program 2009

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Australian Government
Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

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As part of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) Building Researcher Capacity Scheme, a community of practice scholarship program has been created to encourage a culture of research in vocational education and training (VET) organisations. With the guidance of an experienced mentor, VET practitioners without any formal research experience undertake their own work-based research project. The scholarships also provide participants with an opportunity to have their research peer-reviewed and published by NCVER.

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About the research

Blind date: an exploration of potential partnerships between literacy teachers and community service workers

Ann Leske, TAFE NSW Riverina Institute

Building the research capacity of the vocational education and training (VET) sector is a key concern for the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). To assist with this objective, NCVER supports a community of practice scholarship program, whereby VET practitioners without research experience are given the opportunity to undertake their own research to address a workplace problem. Scholarship recipients are supported by a mentor, and NCVER publishes their research results.

Ann Leske participated in the 2009 community of practice. Ann is an adult literacy teacher and TAFE STEPS program coordinator at the Wagga Wagga campus of TAFE NSW's Riverina Institute. Ann's research investigates the potential for team-teaching partnerships between literacy teachers and community service workers from the perspectives of these two groups.

The study comprised interviews and surveys with community service workers and literacy teachers to uncover their views on partnerships with each other.

Key messages

- Overall, literacy teachers are more positive about the potential for partnerships than community service workers. The majority of community service workers view literacy teachers as consultants rather than as partners.
- Both groups of professionals have differing views about the meaning of literacy. These divergent views can be an obstacle to forming successful partnerships.
- Community service workers are unsure about what literacy teachers actually do. If partnerships are to proceed, both community service workers and literacy teachers need to develop a greater awareness and appreciation of each other's roles.

Tom Karmel
Managing Director, NCVER

Acknowledgments

In 2008, the National Centre for Vocational Education Research commenced a three-year Building Researcher Capacity scheme in the VET sector, through which early-career VET researchers are supported to undertake work-based research projects. Through this scheme, ten VET practitioners received an NCVER scholarship to participate in a community of practice to develop their research capacity. With the support of the Head Teacher, Vocational Access Foundation Studies Department, I was successful in being accepted as a 2009 community of practice participant.

The strength of the NCVER Building Researcher Capacity scheme and the community of practice lies in the mentoring component offered through workshops and individually from experienced and senior researchers from the Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association (AVETRA). My mentor, Associate Professor Barry Golding from the University of Ballarat, provided targeted guidance, support and expertise through each phase of the research project. Professor Golding's contribution is particularly appreciated, as is the support provided by Llandis Barratt-Pugh; Berwyn Clayton; Roger Harris; Geri Pacini; TAFE NSW's Riverina Institute, Wagga Wagga campus; Leonie Francis, Head Teacher, Vocational Access Foundation Studies Department; and NCVER.

I also acknowledge the significant contribution made by all community service workers and literacy teachers who offered their time and feedback through participation in the interviews and surveys.

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Introduction

Recent reports about a crisis in the literacy levels of Australians and national initiatives for 'skilling' marginalised groups (including the disconnected and unemployed) have given rise to debates about how best to re-engage adults with literacy learning in the labour market. Team-teaching partnerships between literacy teachers and community service workers are being advocated by prominent literacy commentators as a potential model for addressing these issues.

In this study the feasibility of implementing such a model from the perspective of prospective partners, that is, literacy teachers and community service workers is investigated. Such a study is timely in the context of national agendas for workforce development and social inclusion. It is important in helping us to augment the body of knowledge on the creation of hybrid partnership models for teaching adult literacy and for informing prospective partners about where each stands on the issue of adult literacy. Knowledge of the strategies and dialogues that can be used to promote such partnerships will also be useful. They can be used to inform prospective partners about their role in promoting social capital outcomes in their professional contexts.

In theory this cross-sectoral model of teaching has the elements required for a successful partnership. The literacy teacher would provide the pedagogic skills and experience necessary for helping adults improve their literacy and link the learner with desired social capital outcomes, while the community service worker would have the required knowledge which underpins the course intent. It is suggested that, if the two groups have a similar appreciation of literacy issues and what can be achieved by working together, there is room for optimism, more so than if such agreement does not exist.

The findings indicate that significant and difficult challenges exist in developing the interface necessary for the implementation of this model, which seeks to offer additional learning opportunities to address national literacy and social capital concerns. Also uncovered are disconnections between the two groups about how and where adults learn and what a literacy teacher does. These challenges and disconnections create potential barriers to forming successful team-teaching partnerships and suggest that, in order to be successful, greater awareness and appreciation of each other's roles is needed.

Adopting a metaphor of a 'blind date', this is the story of two sets of professionals on a blind date, standing on opposite sides of a dance hall, making assumptions about which one might be their partner, what they might be like, uncertain about who will make the first move, and what the dance steps are.

Why partnerships?

Adult Literacy Life Skills Survey (ALLS)

Seven million people in Australia scored below the minimum level for one or more of the literacy/ numeracy domains identified as being required to meet the demands of everyday life and work in the emerging knowledge-based economy. This was a key finding of the 2006 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ABS 2007). Four million people in this cluster were in the workforce. At least half of these did not have post-school qualifications or had not completed secondary schooling.

The Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL) sees this as an indication of a 'crisis' with adult literacy in Australia and argues that the cost to the nation of deficiencies in human, social and financial capital are high (Perkins 2009, p.12).

> The proportion of the population with low literacy and numeracy skills constitutes a challenge for Australia's federal, state and territory governments, which are focusing their attention on two interrelated areas seen to be of critical importance to Australia's future, namely, the requirements for extensive upskilling of the workforce and the need to address social inclusion. In both areas literacy and numeracy play a key role. (Perkins, 2009, p.11)

There exists a clear statistical relationship between the low literacy levels of adults and a range of social and economic indicators (including a lack of social and workplace engagement, limited education and training involvement, lack of qualifications, low income, poor health and a poor sense of wellbeing) (ABS 2007, 2008; Perkins 2009, p.11). The national Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey results indicate that the literacy outcomes from the education system were not sufficient to meet the needs of a significant proportion of the Australian population, since existing literacy programs only reach a small percentage of the target population. There is a clear need to look for better solutions to address these literacy issues. It has been suggested that creating cross-sectoral adult literacy partnerships between literacy teachers and community service workers may be an effective means to engage a proportion of the adult Australians who scored below the minimum literacy level in the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey. This partnership model may also offer an intervention approach to address the needs of unemployed people, presumably because they are the group who is most likely to interact with community service organisations for access to benefits and referrals to services. Benseman, Sutton and Lander (2005) suggest that, if these collaborative programs are to make a difference to learner literacy and social capital outcomes, then any programs should be a minimum of 100 hours duration and require frequent attendance.

Creating learning opportunities

Learning happens in all life stages. Our present learning and education systems are based on the principle of learning early on for use later in life. However, this might not be the best model.

> Initial education does not serve as a secure foundation for lifelong learning: finding a way through the system is complex, opaque and demotivating for too many: the 'system' is not sufficiently intelligent, i.e. it does not create and use information as well as it might in order to innovate and improve. (Schuller & Watson 2009, p.4)

The *Learning through life* report in the United Kingdom promotes the notion of adults of all ages returning to learning either through education, leisure activities at home and/or links to community services. It is framed by the premise that a 'right to learn throughout life is a human right' (Schuller & Watson 2009, p.2). The Australian Council for Adult Literacy (2001) proposed a comprehensive policy agenda which included embedding adult literacy issues in a framework of lifelong learning, addressing social inclusion and community capacity-building. The importance of literacy for the national economy, society, and individual capacity is also highlighted by Golding (2008), who suggests that the need for government-supported opportunities for adult lifelong learning is urgent.

Cooperation between adult literacy providers and community agencies has the potential to establish a range of learning options by identifying learning topics, developing non-formal activities, and providing practical support (ACT Council of Social Services 2009). Innovative approaches to embedding literacy learning in authentic community, education and workplace contexts would then become possible. These arrangements would also enable literacy teachers to work alongside others in a host of contexts, including supporting colleagues and friends who need help with literacy (Australian Council of Adult Literacy 2007). As Wickert and McGuirk (2005, p.6) note: 'More can be done to build literacy capabilities of adults by integrating literacy learning into activities beyond formal education and training programs'.

The ACT Council of Social Services (2009) proposes that community service workers could encourage participation and help users to access learning opportunities. Partnerships between community service workers and literacy teachers are more likely to minimise barriers to learning and ease the transition from non-formal learning in community settings to learning in accredited training settings. Perkins (2009) reports that there is evidence of there being better outcomes from integrated approaches but also adds a cautionary note: that many adults with low literacy skills do not seek assistance (from community services) or take up assistance when it is offered. This suggests that there are people who may not be interested in further developing their literacy skills.

Aiming for social capital outcomes

When we discuss social capital outcomes we are referring to improved social relations that have productive benefits. There has been limited government support for the development of cross-sectoral partnerships between community service workers and literacy teachers. However, their potential to contribute to community literacy as well as their capacity to address social policy problems and facilitate social capital outcomes is gaining momentum (Wickert & McGuirk 2005; Sanguinetti & O'Maley 2007; Balatti, Black & Falk 2009a, 2009c; Black, Innes & Chopra 2008). Proponents of team-teaching models advocate that partnerships between community service workers and literacy teachers make them a fertile source for improving social capital outcomes. This is because one aspect of the literacy teacher's role is to embed social capital pedagogies that foster the building of social networks characterised by trust and mutuality into the group learning environment. Also, the combination of the two practitioners with compatible philosophies about the purpose of the programs and common understandings of the need for evaluating outcomes is considered to be a strong advantage.

> A social capital perspective to adult literacy and numeracy delivery is likely to produce superior outcomes for the learners, helping service providers, governments and peak organisations achieve their own project goals. (Balatti, Black & Falk 2008)

While many learners will gain social capital outcomes, such as forming friendships and developing skills to connect with community services coincidentally, these outcomes can also be developed through pedagogical approaches that promote informality and a sense of belonging and trust among participants (see 'social capital pedagogy' definition in appendix 1). These strategies, according to Black, Innes and Chopra (2008, p.17), in general resonate with adult literacy teaching principles. Balatti, Black and Falk (2009a) also promote the view that the socioeconomic wellbeing of individuals, groups and nations is dependent not just on the acquisition of technical skills

(human capital), but also on social capital. According to Balatti, Black and Falk (2009a), despite the promoted value of social capital outcomes in people's lives, they continue to be excluded from most formal education assessment protocols. This may be due to the challenges of developing agreed and accepted measuring tools or processes.

Team-teaching model

A new team-teaching approach

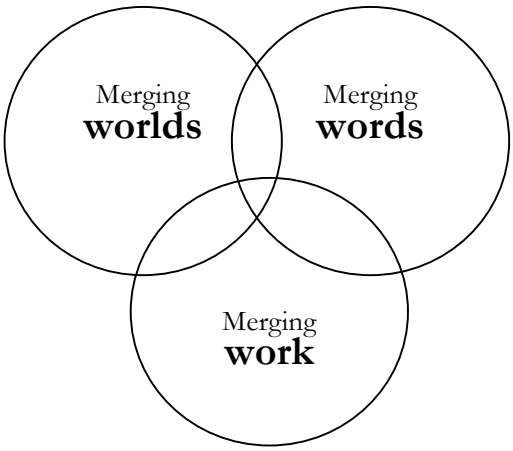
A number of recent reports (Balatti, Black & Falk 2009a, 2009b, 2009c; ACT Council of Social Services 2009; Black, Innes & Chopra 2008; Australian Council of Adult Literacy 2007; Sanguinetti & O'Maley 2007; Wickert & McGuirk 2005; Figgis 2004) have argued for adult literacy teachers and community service workers partnering as a professional teaching team. Inferred through this partnership model is the potential to increase opportunities for short course programs to facilitate individual literacy skill development and social capital outcomes such as developing skills to engage with community services and activities. The assumption is that the literacy teacher guides the pedagogy and strategies to facilitate knowledge development and social capital outcomes, and that the community service worker guides the content and knowledge area/s.

The model suggests that, since both groups have a common connection to marginalised community members, there is potential for shared motivation and discourse to generate partnership opportunities and outcomes. However, the factors that determine effective cross-sectoral partnerships are multiple, situational, and sometimes unpredictable. We can think of the potential partnership as something like a blind date between two individuals who have different expectations of each other and what may happen as a result of their meeting. There is always the possibility that the experience may disappoint one or both parties.

A partnership model which integrates social capital outcomes with community service objectives is new. So too is the related team-teaching concept between literacy teachers and community service workers, whose core business may not be education. The model, in its ideal form, encourages literacy teachers and community service workers to form partnerships to work together to realise specific aims and to achieve shared objectives or desired outcomes for the benefit of adult learners. The partnership approach is potentially a radical 'shift' in professional practice for both professional partners.

This partnership model presupposes a merging of three separate positions based on different professional contexts (worlds), language and terminology (words), and workplace realities (work). This model is represented in figure 1.

Figure 1 A new team-teaching model



Merging worlds

In Australia the predominant rationale for a partnership plan between literacy teachers and community workers is that by 'merging the professional worlds' of literacy educators and community service workers, it is possible to both improve literacy and produce positive social capital to address adult literacy problems. Included in the rationale is the potential for promoting pathways to further learning and development (Perkins 2009). Advocates for this partnership approach (Wickert & McGuirk 2005; Balatti, Black & Falk 2009a; Black, Innes & Chopra 2008) indicate that in some ways the two potential outcomes are inseparable, as literacy underpins the learner's capacity to engage with the learning content and social capital intent; that is, 'Literacy is fundamental to the growth of social capital' (Wickert & McGuirk 2005, p.7).

This partnership model can be viewed as offering three outcomes: delivery of the targeted content or knowledge, literacy skill development, and social capital outcomes. Aligning this important message with the client's perceived and actual needs is also relevant. Balatti, Black and Falk (2009a, 2009c) offer a 'how to do it' practical guide when the promoted model is in place. Linking the two professional groups is seen by them as the first step in approaching or conceiving a partnership. While this may appear to be a straightforward process, Figgis (2004) and the ACT Council of Social Services (2009) suggest there are challenges in forming partnerships where the potential to complement each other's role is unrecognised. Wickert and McGuirk (2005) also add that:

> Understanding the organisational interests and priorities of potential partners, and having the capacity to compromise are important characteristics of building and mobilising community support. (Wickert & McGuirk 2005, p.17)

This partnership model typically leads to team-teaching. It assumes that flexible and systemic arrangements exist between community services and education to facilitate new learning spaces and opportunities. However, integration between community services and literacy teachers with shared responsibility to deliver solutions and achieve learning and development programs through joint planning, delivery and evaluation is less common (Wickert & McGuirk 2005; Balatti, Black & Falk 2009a).

Most community service organisations have a complex and multi-faceted array of impact measures or indicators that reflect their particular priorities and client groups. How best to include the acquisition of literacy skills among these indicators is an ongoing issue (Wickert & McGuirk 2005). National and state sector policy and planning initiatives underpin the work of practitioners in community services as well as those in adult literacy. This is further exacerbated by a lack of consistent national policy on cross-sectoral partnerships for adult literacy and disjointed,

disconnected and uncoordinated responses to developing literacy learning opportunities. This neither builds nor develops social capital (Balatti, Black & Falk 2009a; Wickert & McGuirk 2005).

Balatti, Black and Falk (2009a) advise that in the case of community health services there has been little indication of government promotion of literacy at either state or federal level. In addition, dual-interest groups representing those who need access to good health and those needing literacy skills appear not to have been heard by governments (Balatti, Black & Falk 2009a, p.20).

Merging words

Developing the interface between two professional worlds ideally requires 'merging professional words', to achieve mutually agreed perspectives of the crucial terminology used by each organisation, such as 'literacy' and 'social capital'. The proposed partnership model is potentially a new way of strengthening literacy within a community. The way literacy is perceived determines policy and professional practice. The interpretation of the word 'literacy' can either be the barrier or enhancer for the conceptualisation of a partnership to support adult literacy learners. Perkins notes that the mental models that each person holds underpin everything they do, including influencing perceptions, focus, decisions and assumptions. As Perkins notes, 'Little will happen if people's core values are not in alignment' (2009, p.30).

Figgis (2004) notes that literacy is not a topic other professionals think or talk about. Perkins agrees: 'Despite the fact that everyone may think they know what they mean when they use the term 'literacy', there is no common understanding (2009, p.14).

Wickert and McGuirk (2005) and Waterhouse (2009) both agree that it is necessary to reframe the way we talk about literacy, as sometimes the word itself gets in the way of building bridges between sectors and constructing literacy learning opportunities for clients. However, building community support for and engagement with literacy is challenging work. Sourcing potential community service partners has been described by Figgis (2004) as 'pavement pounding work'. This was also seen in the Balatti, Black, and Falk report (2009a, p.4), as the literacy teacher initiated the concept of linking literacy and health and then spent time sourcing 'a willing health educator' to deliver the course in partnership.

The contemporary definition of literacy has evolved to include at least three different models. The first comprises a cognitive model based on psychometric traditions and quantifiable ability levels. For example, a person may be assessed as having literacy skill gaps or 'deficits', which may become the basis for their individual learning plan. The second is the economic model related to workforce training, skills development, human capital and 'functional literacy'. The third is a socio-linguistic model, in which literacy is contextualised and which assumes multi-literacies and practices (Lonsdale & McCurry 2004). There is a difference of opinion and therefore practice, even within the majority of literacy teachers who operate within the socio-linguistic model. Perkins (2009, p.14) comments that the majority of literacy teachers believe that literacy skill development is a lifelong process and involves humans making sense of what they need to know. The general community, including both major Australian political parties, tends to hold what Lankshear calls (cited in Lonsdale & McCurry [2004]) the 'lingering basics' belief—that literacy is a set of basic and transferable skills.

Merging work

Creating hybrid models of learning involving community service workers and literacy teachers ideally requires each party to 'merge their work' to create a team-teaching partnership. For literacy teachers there is potential to build on and draw from other collaborations experienced in the past, including those with vocational education teachers, employers, government agencies and community organisations. However, there are some subtle differences. On one hand, the team-

teaching concept is new for literacy teachers who are used to teaching independently or teaching with other teaching practitioners (for example, a literacy teacher or VET colleague). Also new is the predominant focus on literacy for social inclusion outcomes, rather than literacy for specific vocational and employment outcomes. While literacy teachers may have embedded social capital aims in existing programs, this partnership model emphasises social capital. Also assumed in the model is that participants experience more changes in the way they interact because social capital gains are made and these objectives are often not included in the program aims (Balatti, Black & Falk 2009a, p.11).

On the other hand, the team-teaching concept is also new for community service workers. Empirical research (ACT Council of Social Services 2009; Figgis 2004) confirms that most practitioners in community organisations are not aware of current thinking about adult literacy service provision, or about the significant role they might play in assisting service users to enhance their literacy skills. Furthermore, community service workers may not seek partnerships to achieve core business outcomes.

Perkins (2009) concludes that, in looking to the future, there is a need for increased understanding of integrated approaches to adult literacy in vocational, workplace and community settings. This partnership approach to team-teaching is seen by Perkins (2009) as having the potential to influence practice. For community service workers, their role in the learning community is recognised, and for literacy teachers there are opportunities to expand practice into different community settings. Apart from the action research project reported by Black, Innes and Chopra (2008), there is limited related literature available from Australian contexts that evaluates team-teaching partnerships which have existed between community service workers and literacy teachers. Perhaps this is due to a limited 'take-up' of this model.

Hartley and Horne (2006) point out that the task of cross-sectoral partnerships involves understanding the other partner's world view. Of shared importance, though, is the delivery of the targeted content or information. Initially, both potential partners may be cautious. Community service workers will bring particular information, knowledge and possibly resources related to the program's objectives but may not be equipped with the teaching pedagogies or strategies to achieve social capital outcomes. Literacy teachers may have strengths in teaching pedagogies but not have content knowledge or social capital pedagogies. The teachers featured in the Balatti, Black and Falk (2009a, p.3) case studies undertook professional development in social capital pedagogy as part of the project. This strategy to introduce potentially new work skills may also be relevant to community service workers. In addition, a feature of the Black, Innes and Chopra (2009) case studies was a safe and respectful conversation zone to reflect on what actually happened at each session, a process which then guided program planning and preparation. This dedicated time of reflection enabled both professional partners to merge their work to achieve common goals, through evaluating their individual and combined practice. As the proposed team-teaching model is new to both potential partners, this additional reflective component may help to merge personalities, ideology and pedagogy.

Research methodology

Purpose

This research focused on what is required to initiate a team-teaching partnership between community service workers and literacy teachers. Specifically, it aimed to explore the perspectives of both parties about the meaning of literacy, its impact on their work, strategies for commencing dialogue, reasons to work together, and perceptions of past partnership experiences. Although there are a number of stages involved in setting up and implementing any partnering process, this study considers the pre-partnership stage.

The project aims to answer three research questions:

- What rationales and strategies do literacy teachers and community service workers have for creating professional partnerships?
- What do literacy teachers and community service workers perceive about literacy in relation to their work?
- How might more partnerships be facilitated between literacy teachers and community service workers?

Methodology

A review of research was undertaken to identify rationales for, and experiences of, adult literacy learning opportunities with cross-sectoral partnerships, mostly from an Australian perspective. Other purposes were to identify what is currently known about the formation of partnerships and what might be missing. This information was used to determine areas for further investigation.

The information was gathered by a mixed method approach using semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire. This approach was selected for its use of qualitative and quantitative data to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem being investigated. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with seven literacy teachers and seven community service workers. The information generated from this qualitative data was supported by quantitative data obtained through a survey distributed to 13 literacy teachers and 22 community service workers. Participants involved in the semi-structured interviews also completed a survey. Overall, 58 surveys were issued and 35 were returned (60% response rate). The semi-structured interviews were conducted either face to face or via telephone, and responses were partially transcribed. For each person, the interview questions below aimed to explore each of the research questions:

- Paint a picture of what you see as 'literacy' in your professional context.
- Tell me about how literacy currently impinges on your professional practice.
- How might a literacy teacher support a community service? OR
- How might a community service be supported by a literacy teacher?
- What are the implications for how a partnership may be conceived?
- Describe your perceptions of partnerships previously experienced.

The surveys (see appendix 2) explored the same issues for both groups of respondents. However, the titles and explanations were reversed to account for whichever category of respondent was completing the survey. An initial pilot survey with community service workers and literacy teachers resulted in adjustments to the wording of some response phrases. The survey was designed with three areas of interest in mind: perspectives of literacy, professional practice, and perceptions of partnerships. Each of these areas had two lead statements followed by five or six related 'endings'. The respondents were asked to record a response for each ending against a four-point Likert scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'.

Recruitment

All research participants were employed in the rural and regional Riverina district of southern New South Wales. Research participants confirmed their interest in voluntarily participating after a brief presentation about the research project at two different regional community service network meetings, which attracted a cross-section of services, as well as one regional gathering of literacy teachers. The prerequisites for involvement were personal interest and a willingness to complete the survey and participate in an interview. All participants signed a consent form confirming their commitment to participate through either the survey or the focus interview and survey. A plain language statement stressed the researcher's ethical responsibilities to maintain individual and workplace confidentiality.

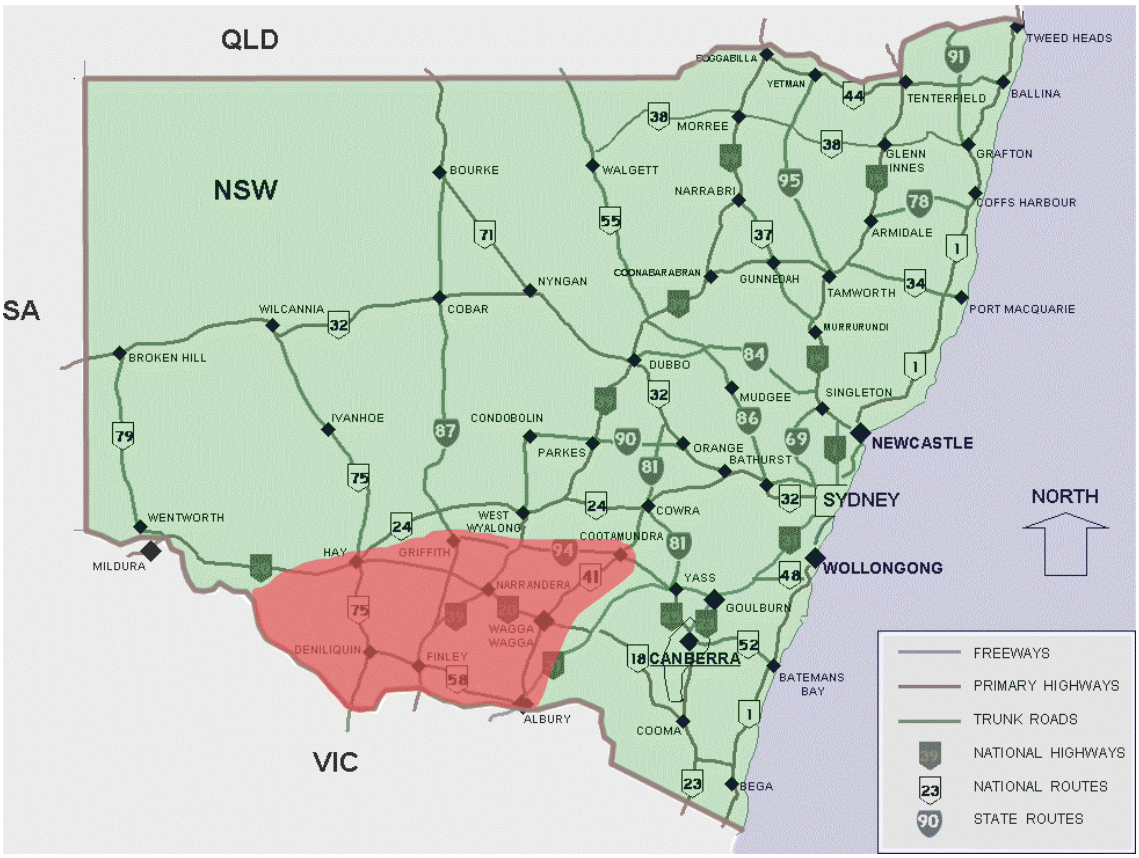
The literacy teachers were employed by TAFE NSW Riverina Institute and represented different-sized campuses, student cohorts and communities. The community service workers were located in a range of national, state and local government and non-government organisations and represented a diversity of clients and types of services. Clients included apprentices and trainees, parents, families, refugees and regional areas. The type of work undertaken by the community service workers included case work, promoting health information, matching clients to employers, helping with resettlement, assisting in access to government support entitlements, providing holistic support and organising support activities. At the time of interview and survey, the community service workers were not partnered with literacy teachers for workplace outcomes. Of particular interest were the views of community service workers from domains other than health, justice and finance, and whether attempts to implement this team-teaching partnership approach had 'reached' regional practitioners.

A regional location (see figure 2) was selected in part because recent relevant Australian research was generated from predominantly metropolitan perspectives. Furthermore, the community services located in the regional setting can be regarded as broadly representative of the range of services in other parts of Australia. Restrictions of size and time meant that this geographic area was also chosen for pragmatic reasons. The site locations were the locations in which the voluntary participants worked. It was anticipated that the findings of this research might be 'transferable' and therefore relevant to other Australian locations.

Limitations

It is acknowledged that the survey sample was not large or comprehensive. The survey sample (N = 35) achieved a response rate of 60% across 27 organisations, as well as 14 focus interviews across both sectors. This provides sufficient data to draw indicative results rather than definitive conclusions. The data were gathered from TAFE (technical and further education) literacy teachers and do not include literacy teachers from the community education sector. Moreover, there is no client perspective obtained from either sector, which could have informed both professional groups of their vision of the potential partnership and desired outcomes. The term 'social capital' was deliberately not used in interviews or questionnaires and its presence is only assumed. The capacity for respondents to perceive the 'presence' of social capital is therefore not evident, and on reflection explicit referral to social capital may have resulted in more targeted information.

Figure 2 Riverina region southern New South Wales



Note: The highlighted area is the Riverina region. Research sites within this region are: Albury, Deniliquin, Finley, Griffith, Leeton, Narrandera, Tumut, Young, Wagga Wagga.

Source: <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:NSW_riverina.PNG>, viewed 28 February 2010.

Findings

The interview and survey data from both professions are presented in the following tables, quotes and explanations. The quotes have been selected as typical responses and are extracted from the partially transcribed interview transcripts. This tabular format enables the community service workers' and literacy teachers' 'voices' to be heard and directly compared. The focus interviews involved five questions, while the survey had six sub-groups of responses. Due to this difference, there is not a neat match between the two sets of data. For some survey statements there were no supporting interview comments from either professional group. Also, the interview data may have revealed relevant comments not matched by the survey statements.

The dominant age group for the community service workers surveyed was between 25 and 45 years, whereas the literacy teachers were generally older and in the 46 to 65-year age group. Literacy teachers were mostly represented by people who had worked for more than ten years (60%). In contrast, community service workers were mainly represented by professionals who had worked for fewer than ten years (60%). Literacy teachers showed the greatest 'mix' of qualifications, with seven different qualification types, ranging from certificates to master's degrees. The most common literacy qualification, although not from the majority of respondents, was a master's degree, followed by an undergraduate degree. In contrast, the majority of community service workers (66%) held a degree qualification, with the remainder holding either a diploma or certificate-level qualification.

The findings are introduced under three thematic headings according to the original 'blind date' metaphor. Each area is seen as an ingredient of the process of developing a new professional partnership. These headings are 'Let's get together', 'Developing curiosity', and 'The first date'. 'Let's get together' refers to the rationales for merging two separate professional worlds into a partnership. 'Developing curiosity' explores the merging of professional worlds around perceptions of literacy and its impact on work. 'The first date' concerns facilitating the merging of workplace roles, in effect to achieve a common professional intent.

Let's get together

In this section, when asked to consider the proposed partnership model, potential partners express perceptions about professional roles, project outcomes and workplace challenges. In essence, they consider the perceived value of the team-teaching partnership to workplace objectives such as new initiatives, embracing a literacy approach, and developing strategies not previously possible.

Table 1 introduces two predominant rationales for developing a partnership. The data indicate and illustrate the differences between the two groups. There is agreement by community service workers and literacy teachers that this team-teaching model has the potential to offer new learning opportunities.

> It is worth building partnerships to offer more opportunities to those who may not have had the opportunity or may not know the opportunity exists. (Literacy teacher)

However, there are differing expectations, both between and within each profession, of the potential for the partnership approach to enable the client to achieve more than they would without the partnership. This indicates that potential partners may need convincing before they share the

same vision and commitment to the proposed partnership. Or it may be that respondents have limited experience of partnership programs to reflect on.

> We are encouraged to partner mainly because they may have groups of people and I can get the message out—it is about getting the message out. (Community service worker)

Table 1 Let's get together—why?

Survey statement responses	Community service workers				Literacy teachers			
Perception of partnerships	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
Partnerships enable new initiatives and resources	40	55	5		23	77		
Clients achieve more than without the partners	15	45	30	10	50	25	25	

Emerging from the interviews are negative responses and potential barriers to developing partnerships for both professional groups. While table 1 shows agreement that partnerships offered new opportunities, the following quotes indicate that this partnership model may not be considered advantageous or desirable to both community service workers and literacy teachers.

> I don't think there is a role for them here. (Community service worker)

> If it is not part of the person's passion, it won't work. (Literacy teacher)

The following quotes suggest that barriers to partnerships fall loosely into two groups. One is categorised as 'governing policy' and the other 'personal perspectives'. Both governing and personal barriers impact on the perceived necessity for this partnership. Obtaining permission, sourcing funding, interruptions to service outcomes and confidentiality are linked to governing policy and procedures.

> We have two main problems—privacy and confidentiality, and referral. (Community service worker)

> We have goals to service customers in a certain time and have to achieve our KPI for this. (Community service worker)

> We need permission from the hierarchy that this is something within our aims. (Community service worker)

> For me the issue is funding—if I had lots of it there would be more partnership programs—our capacity is limited by funding. (Literacy teacher)

By contrast, partnership confidence, personal interest, knowledge of how adults learn, and selection of non-literacy teachers to teach literacy skills are presumably linked to personal views and attributes.

> By the time people come to us their skills are set, I am not sure if their literacy skills can improve. (Community service worker)

> We have people deliver our programs—but don't seek literacy teachers. (Community service worker)

> Not everyone feels they can do the out and about stuff. (Literacy teacher)

There was unanimous agreement that if the team-teaching model becomes established the role of the literacy teacher will be to embed literacy into the service activity or partnership objectives (table 2).

> Literacy teachers could be expert mentors—encouraging there to be a literacy component in programs. (Community service worker)
>
> We have a fresh approach—we may have insight into issues the community service can't see … often organisations are struggling to assist their clients so it can be helpful to have fresh ideas. (Literacy teacher)

The data indicate that literacy teachers predominantly agree about the more specific potential rationales compared with community service workers, who express less agreement or certainty about the value or relevance of the proposed rationales for partnership.

> There could be a range of possibilities, the community service will involve different groups of people so that will influence what the literacy teacher will be doing and the program and activities that will be provided. (Literacy teacher)
>
> When we interview people we don't have a test for literacy—it would be handy but may not be appropriate. (Community service worker)
>
> All our correspondence is in writing. They are all computer generated letters for over a million people in Australia. It is impossible to write individual letters—we don't have the resources to write unique letters. (Community service worker)

It is relevant to note that none of the community service workers surveyed has sought literacy teacher input, or has experienced a literacy-focused team-teaching partnership; hence, this could contribute to their hesitant responses. Literacy teachers reported experiences of literacy-based partnerships in community and workplace locations, but not necessarily team-teaching.

Table 2 Let's get together—other rationales?

Survey statement responses	Community service workers				Literacy teachers			
A literacy teacher's role is to …	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
Embed literacy learning into the program	45	55			77	23		
Integrate Literacy skills within context	40	60			77	23		
Re-write relevant text	37	63			85	15		
Suggest learning strategies	50	45	5		62	38		
Suggest holistic strategies	50	45	5		62	38		

Developing curiosity

In this section, the potential for merging professional worlds is explored through ideas about the centre of the proposed partnership model—literacy. Each profession indicates their interpretation of the meaning of literacy and the bearing this has on their role at work.

Table 3 presents the similar and dissimilar perspectives about literacy held by both groups and suggests that there are common perceptions about the 'bigger picture' impact of literacy. The data from both groups suggest that literacy is required in a variety of locations and circumstances. Both groups agree that literacy is necessary for a person to fully engage in society.

Table 3 What do they think 'literacy' is?

Survey statement responses	Community service workers				Literacy teachers			
Literacy is …	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
Being informed to make independent decisions	27	68	5		70	30		
Being able to do what you want to do	23	64	13		62	38		
Coping with the everyday need to communicate	40	60			60	40		
Connected to using computers	5	76	14	5	8	77	15	
Mostly reading and writing	18	64	18		15	15	55	15
Mainly workplace-related	10	27	45	18			77	23
Different for each individual client	40	55	5		92	8		

> If people aren't literate that is a barrier to their understanding and taking full advantage of the things that are out there in society—to help them prosper. (Community service worker)

> Without a functional level of literacy it is very difficult to be part of society so it is therefore linked to social inclusion. (Literacy teacher)

There is agreement that skills are involved, and that technology, in particular the use of computers, is relevant to contemporary life.

> Literacy impacts on capacity to use computer technology. (Community service worker)

> It is not just the printed page; computers play a big part. (Literacy teacher)

Dissimilar perceptions centre on literacy prerequisites and its role in enabling a person to be independent. The dominant view held by community service workers is that literacy is a set of core skills, predominantly reading, which ensures a person's capacity to engage with service requirements, a program or activities and information, and also their capacity to be informed to make independent decisions.

> Literacy is being able to read and understand written documents in particular … the propensity to read books or newspapers, being able to read and understand—that is the core. (Community service worker)

> Literacy is the ability to read and understand what you are reading. It is a basic life skill—to function in life and to get to a certain standard you have to be able to read and understand lots of rules, regulations and policies. (Community service worker)

This contrasts with the view held by most literacy teachers that the range of literacy skills is infinite, individually relevant, and embedded in everything a person does on a daily basis. They are perceived to extend to the skills that enable a person to engage and communicate with family, friends, services, community, work, education and leisure.

> Literacy is individual … it is whatever allows a person to cope and communicate in everyday life … it gives them a choice … it is not just reading and writing—it is anything that allows them to communicate. (Literacy teacher)

> It is integrated throughout daily life, is gathered through knowledge and experience and continues to develop throughout life. (Literacy teacher)

Table 4 summarises how literacy impacts on professionals at work and confirms that literacy impacts on the efforts of both groups, most of the time.

> It is time-consuming explaining—and even then the client may not understand the concepts behind what is being said. (Community service worker)

> I am challenged to keep on thinking of different strategies—there is time taken to do this. (Literacy teacher)

Discussions about literacy and its impact on work take place for both community service workers and literacy teachers. However, differing perspectives on literacy are evident within the respective professional environments. Both groups suggest that they adapt professional practice to meet the clients' needs and agree that extra time may be required to fulfil this. For community service workers, this may not be straightforward, due to the limited time and capacity available to determine individual strengths and skills. Literacy teachers may also be challenged to determine appropriate strategies, but identifying individual strengths and skills is a particular expectation of their role.

> I need to be realistic about what people can read, I can't rely on resources across all areas … meeting people's needs. Sometimes the body of knowledge remains with the people who wrote it. (Community service worker)

> As a worker you need to use different language to how you would normally speak. (Community service worker)

> It is about adapting to the individuals and the group you are preparing for—this applies to any class when we meet individual needs. (Literacy teacher)

Table 4 Literacy impacts at work—similar perspectives

Survey statement responses	**Community service workers**				**Literacy teachers**			
How literacy encroaches	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
It is central to my work	73	18	9		92	8		
Discussed among colleagues	50	40	10		54	46		
Understood differently by colleagues	37	45	18		46	46	8	
Considered in planning	55	40	5		85	15		
Extra time required to support clients	42	48	5	5	54	23	23	
Adapting information to make it accessible to clients	33	62	5		46	46		9

Table 5 compares how literacy impacts on professionals at work in different ways. Of particular interest in table 5 is the proportion of community service workers who perceived that literacy was the barrier to meeting client goals. That is, the general perception held by community service workers is that, if a client demonstrates misunderstanding of the service expectations or disconnects from the service, it is due to the client not having the necessary skills to access service provisions. Implied in the responses from community service workers are constraints to their flexibility in terms of time, resources and practice.

> The client's literacy skill impacts greatly on the success of their plan, the trust they give me and their cooperation. (Community service worker)

> If they are not sending the things that we need back to us then we have to take them off the support. (Community service worker)

Although some literacy teachers acknowledged that literacy impacts on achieving client goals, their general perception was that literacy was not a barrier to access. Literacy teachers generally worked with some flexibility of time, resources and strategies, and perceived that progress could be achieved. While goals might not be achieved 'at this point in time', there was a perception that they may be fulfilled at another time.

> No matter what you do you can always do more—especially if you can follow their lead at the time. (Literacy teacher)

> If a student is challenged to learn, then I am challenged to keep on thinking of different strategies. (Literacy teacher)

Table 5 Literacy impacts at work—dissimilar perspectives

Survey statement responses	Community service workers				Literacy teachers			
How literacy encroaches	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
Literacy is a barrier to meeting client needs	40	50	10		8	54	23	15
Evidence of client misunderstanding service intent or information	38	57	5		15	38	32	15
Insufficient appropriate resources for clients' literacy capacity	20	55	25		8	62	15	15

The first date

The data in this section reflect perspectives about the merging of workplace roles and explore the outcome of deciding to prepare for, and possibly commence, a partnership. Just like a first date—how do you select a partner, who starts the conversation, and where is the best place to meet, and then—what's next?

In table 6 initial 'connection' strategies for approaching potential partners are considered and compared. The data indicate that 'soft entry points', enabling a focused opportunity for community service workers and literacy teachers to explore their perceptions of literacy, are preferable to one group directly contacting the other. Literacy teachers indicate more certainty that a cold call approach, either initiated by them or received from a community service worker, may be an effective way to establish initial dialogue. The success rate of a 'cold call' is more likely to be related

to a fortunate circumstance of connecting with someone with a shared interest, and may therefore not be considered a reliable connection strategy.

Table 6 The first date—how to meet?

Survey statement responses	Community service workers				Literacy teachers			
Connect to a partner by a …	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
Cross-sectoral conversation within networks	31	69			62	38		
Cold call by community service worker	23	60	17		15	70	15	
Cold call by literacy teacher	32	55	13		54	46		
Literacy teacher approaching known community service worker	31	55	14		54	38	8	

Literacy teachers had more to say about networking as a way of familiarising others with literacy but offered cautions about its effectiveness. Although networking is a current workplace practice for community service workers, the presence of literacy teachers does not necessarily lead to literacy discourse.

> We need to get better networking here … we need to get together in different ways. (Community service worker)

> When you have that connection you can break down the perceptions and look at how things can happen rather than focus on the barriers for why they can't. (Literacy teacher)

Previous experiences of networks by literacy teachers is that organisations sit around the table talking about what they're doing, but don't talk and develop programs across the table. Also the vision or plan may be clear but because it is outside what is 'normally' done, it is a challenge to work around systemic policies or practices. Or, within the network discussion particular programs may be discussed, 'but we haven't cracked a way to work out our way into that role' (Literacy teacher).

Table 7 compares conversations about 'literacy' within and across sectors. For context in understanding this table, it is important to stress that the partnership approach is centred on providing literacy opportunities; therefore, literacy would ideally be at the core of initial conversations with potential partners. Without exception, the data in table 7 suggest a 'struggle' for both groups when conversing about literacy. While table 3 showed that colleagues within the same workplaces understood literacy differently, table 7 suggests a notable difference between sectors on literacy perspectives. Rather than elaborating on the word 'literacy' with confidence, it is veiled, particularly by literacy teachers, who become concerned for what might happen to the conversation if it is mentioned. An example of this is shown in the following quote, which describes a planned approach with two clear stages.

> The first thing is the goal of the partnership—what are we trying to achieve, then we talk about the language or skills the people might need to participate. (Literacy teacher)

The survey data give strength to the observation that community service workers will require literacy to be 'unpacked' if they are to foresee potential benefits to a partnered approach. Twenty-seven per cent of community service workers strongly agreed and 73% agreed that literacy needs 'unpacking'. In addition, only 8% of literacy teachers disagreed with this statement.

Table 7 The first date—what to say?

What to say?	Community service workers	Literacy teachers
Talking about literacy	Two ways of looking at this: the individuals becoming more literate and the organisation becoming more literate. Literacy per se is not talked about amongst staff. We talk mostly about connecting people to services not about being innovative and looking at what we can create.	I find most partners don't ask about literacy. Literacy is not the first thing we talk about Literacy is hidden in the initial conversation. I give the teachers advice about what they might say … to put a positive spin on any idea. I reinforce the value of literacy to the clients. Describe a vision of what could be achieved, even if it is fuzzy around the edges.

Although the survey data in table 8 indicate that, if you find a partner with shared or similar client groups, partnership potential may be favourable, the interview comments highlight that partner selection was seen as having a substantive influence over outcomes. Both professions noted that the partnership is dependent upon the person being communicated with; however, it was the literacy teachers who had more partnership experience to reflect on.

> Partnerships rely on individuals not organisations—they are critically related to the individuals involved. (Literacy teacher)

> Pick the person carefully—when there are changes in an organisation the partnership can go from super to below average. (Literacy teacher)

> I rate potential partners on a scale of 1 to 4 for their like-minded-ness. (Literacy teacher)

It is also important to recall from the 'Let's get together' stage that, in either sector, working as a team teacher is not something that all professionals feel that they can do or are interested in doing.

> This team-teaching approach suggests the need for adjustment to the roles and responsibilities within the workplace environment. (Community service worker)

Table 8 The first date—who to select?

Survey statement responses	Community service workers				Literacy teachers			
Deciding who to partner	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
Identify partners with a shared client focus	40	60			46	54		

Table 9 presents and compares the survey data linked to working in a partnership. The critical role of communication between key people involved in team-teaching is emphasised. Interview data suggested that this should be centred on 'best practice' strategies. Although literacy teachers had less to say about the role of management and leadership, the comments of community service workers indicate there is a perceived need to embrace leadership to facilitate implementation.

> In a partnership there is a whole skill set there that we take for granted that will happen … how are we going to do this … you have to work out who is going to do what. (Community service worker)

> There is talk about multidisciplinary work but I don't think people really know how to do it. (Community service worker)

Literacy teachers view a 'steering approach' as valuable. This aspect becomes relevant, and possibly more necessary, if their plans are not fulfilled, as indicated in their comments.

> Some plans haven't gone as far as I had hoped. (Community service worker)

Our partners don't refer the people we want—they refer the people they don't want. (Community service worker))

When things don't work out—look at why and be solution focused. (Literacy teacher)

Table 9 Shall we dance? What are the steps?

Survey statement responses	Community service workers				Literacy teachers			
Perception of partnerships	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
Involves considerable communication between partners	50	45	5		55	45		
Joint planning, delivery and evaluation is fundamental	35	60	5		85	15		
Partnership took too much time		25	70	5	5	15	50	30
Partners learn from each other and adapt their roles	25	75			50	50		

When considering the broad rationales proposed for developing team-teaching partnerships between community service workers and literacy teachers (to achieve national workplace and social capital agenda), the concept appears to be achievable. The survey and interview data presented here clearly indicate uncertainty ahead for the take-up success of the proposed team-teaching partnership. This information highlights the challenges for both professional groups in taking the first steps to progress conversations about the concept potential. In part this is due to governing policies but also relates to strongly held perceptions about literacy and partnerships, which are explored further in the following section.

Discussion

Merging worlds

The data were collected from employees at what may seem to be 'local' community services in a regional area. However, all organisations, including education, are satellites of much larger and complex community sector providers or are compelled by funding to achieve defined outcomes for government organisations. Where community services have national or state-level governance, 'top down' messages about literacy, its significance, and the organisations' capacity to be part of the education arena are not apparent. Independent non-government community services also appear not to be aware of the role they can play in adult literacy. This is consistent with the observations of the ACT Council of Social Services (2009), Wickert and McGuirk (2005) and Figgis (2004), that most community organisations are disconnected from current thinking about adult literacy provision or from their potential contribution to its provision.

Policies which determine funding for cross-sectoral partnership programs impact on partnership capacity. For example, it has been suggested (Perkins 2009) that literacy teachers draw on their experiences of Workplace English Language and Learning (WELL) programs to establish potential partnerships with community services. WELL programs offer a significant incentive to employers. Such dedicated funding for new team-teaching models is not currently available. From a policy perspective, community service workers are often in a role with defined expectations and key performance indicators, with little connection to 'up-skilling the nation' initiatives and possibly little capacity to commit to a program offering more than 100 hours of dedicated literacy teaching, as recommended by Benseman, Sutton and Lander (2005). Organisation requirements and duty statements which define specific boundaries and roles for workers may also reduce flexibility and promote a 'one size fits all approach' to achieving workplace outcomes. The consequence of this is that community service workers are unlikely to see themselves as having a role in helping to improve adult literacy. An example of this is the suggestion of some community service workers that partnerships will offer opportunities to provide information required by the client; however, this is an objective different from that of an adult literacy professional, who focuses on 'teaching' the message. The community service objective implies that all people present are ready and able to receive the 'message', and that the more people involved, the better the outcome. The literacy perspective acknowledges that learning a message will require engagement with a range of learning strategies, possibly independently or in small groups, over time. These two objectives contradict each other.

Literacy teachers suggest that partnerships with community service workers offer the possibility for more learning opportunities for people who may not normally connect with education. Where possible, they believe in embedding literacy into the community service practice; that is, helping people to read and understand the written information provided and develop functional and contextual literacy skills. This perspective is not shared by community service workers. Community service workers agree that a literacy teacher is required to mentor the embedding of literacy into the workplace practice, but this is not their priority. Some are challenged to see any valid role for literacy teachers at all. There is some support for viewing the literacy teacher as a consultant who might advise community service workers of any literacy assessment tools and other strategies that can be used to enable them to improve what they are currently doing. The concept of team-teaching was not spontaneously raised by community service workers.

Merging words

This section reflects on the impact of personal perspective relating to literacy and social capital. Currently the establishment of partnerships relies on the interest and motivation of individuals. Both professions report common perspectives about the relevance and scope of literacy across wide-ranging life experiences. In general they agree that there is a pertinent relationship between literacy and the capacity to be informed, make decisions, connect and contribute to society. In contrast to the findings of Figgis (2004), the current study shows that literacy is a workplace conversation topic within both sectors, but that there are different perspectives on how literacy is understood and reported. The social capital concept has more recently been embraced in adult literacy reports and is promoted informally through personal practice by both professional parties. However, neither group explicitly referred to it, or used the words 'social capital'. Therefore it is difficult to know whether social capital is understood in workplace practice, is actually part of current workplace conversation and planning, or is presumed to be deeply embedded in (although not named) in practice.

Perspectives matter, particularly in relation to the merging of two professional groups or two potential partners. Most community service workers hold the view reported by Perkins (2009), that literacy is underpinned by a set of core skills obtained at school that a person has either learnt or not, and if a person has left the education sector, learning these skills is likely to be a greater challenge. With current emphasis by national education authorities on measuring core literacy skills in schools, it is not surprising that the mainstream views hold steadfast. The perspective held by most literacy teachers is that literacy is a range of skills developed over a lifetime. Therefore an individual has the capacity to continue to learn and develop literacy skills, within different contexts and for various reasons. The difference between these perspectives has the potential to undermine the capacity for partnerships to flourish.

The implication of the view of literacy held by most community service workers is that they are less likely to see their workplace as a potential site for learning, or for offering programs promoting social capital. Nor do they tend to see themselves as part of the 'team-teaching' pool. If literacy and adult learning are misunderstood, it is unlikely that a person would recognise the potential for learning away from the education sector or in the workplace. Also, community service workers are likely to hold a particular, possibly inaccurate, view of what literacy teachers do. There are potentially three important implications of this finding. Community service workers may consider that literacy teachers mostly teach core literacy skills and therefore query the relevance or 'fit' of their workplace with learning these skills. They are also unlikely to be aware that many literacy teachers embrace various literacies, teaching contexts, contents and skills and could therefore offer strategies to help. Finally, the interest in facilitating integrated literacy programs with social capital outcomes is also less likely for the same reasons. Perkins (2009) also commented that there is not a great deal known about how a literacy teacher works with adult learners. It appears that, for this cross-sectoral model to occur, literacy teachers may need to initiate and propose team-teaching partnerships. This is consistent with the experience of Black, Innes and Chopra (2008), who found that in the Diabetes Literacy project the team-teaching concept was proposed by the adult literacy teacher to the community service workers. In this example, the literacy teacher canvassed a number of health workers before identifying an interested potential partner.

Community service workers report that changes in workplace practice to meet individual client needs mostly occur on an individual rather than on a workplace, or systemic basis. Community service workers report that workplace limitations may create barriers to the clients' capacity to access information (including insufficient time available, inadequate strategy awareness, and mass production of resources). Literacy teachers, however, expect there to be differences in client literacy capacity. They accept the fact they will have to structure additional preparation time into their work plans if they are to be well equipped to meet the needs of individuals. Community service workers may have systemic or local strategies to enable clients to engage with their service which may also dissipate the need for literacy teacher partnerships. The role of a literacy teacher implied in this

research does not closely match the characteristics of the professional doing the work in the situations examined. Community service workers respond to literacy issues in different ways. For example, they may reflect, at a personal level, about how they or their workplace can adapt what they do; suggest alterations to written communication; or consider resource selection. An increased reliance on volunteers, who may have limited knowledge about developing literacy skills, is problematic, presumably because it contributes to misperceptions about the value of the literacy teacher and the nature of the role of the literacy teacher. One way of looking at this is that it is relatively easy and straightforward to support individuals who may have literacy barriers in accessing services and that literacy support can be provided by anyone interested, such as volunteers. Using non-literacy specialists for literacy support can devalue the role of the literacy teacher and the need for literacy teacher partnerships as well as reinforce the perspective that literacy teaching can be done by anyone.

Merging work

To commence this partnership, 'literacy' and 'social capital' should be talked about, clarified, and be at the forefront of the partnership purpose; yet, the words are either misunderstood, hidden in conversation, bypassed, or not mentioned. The effectiveness of networking to achieve cross-sectoral discussions about literacy and social capital was not clear. Although network discussions between community service workers and literacy teachers may seem a natural zone for enquiry and discussion, it seems that even though both parties are in the same place at the same time the terms 'literacy' and 'social capital' are generally not mentioned. Instead, when the word literacy is mentioned, assumptions are made about literacy capacity, literacy teacher roles, literacy programs, and literacy skills, which may result in polarised or non-aligned views. Social capital is a 'new' concept in the literacy sector, which is little understood and possibly not likely to be raised in cross-sectoral forums.

Currently, the likelihood that a partnership will evolve appears to be critically linked to the perceptions, interests and motivations of people in both sectors. Both groups report that partnership work is not for everyone, due to personal exposure and an expectation that the partnership will require some adjustment to personal practice. Finding the right 'match' appears to be critical. Discussions with individuals from both sectors indicate that partnerships have inherent risks and vulnerabilities. As this is a potentially sensitive aspect, conversations and reflective practice may require guidance and direction. While cross-sectoral partnerships mean that literacy may not be left to literacy teachers to 'deal with', it doesn't mean that others are keen to take up the role.

Balatti, Black and Falk (2009a, 2009c) and Black, Innes and Chopra (2008) suggest that the community service worker will be involved with delivery of the content and recruitment of group participants, particularly the 'hard to reach' socially excluded groups. In addition to becoming conversant with the practices and goals of partner organisations, literacy teachers have the potential to guide this team-teaching approach. The team-teaching model presumes that literacy teachers might:

- ✧ act as mentors, brokers and facilitators, supporting community workers to embed literacy development into their policies and strategies (Wickert & McGuirk 2005)
- ✧ provide the pedagogical conditions to overcome barriers to learning and offer language and literacy support to enable participants to understand the content
- ✧ create comfortable and respectful learning environments to support the pedagogy necessary to impact on social capital building and outcomes
- ✧ facilitate course or program content through negotiation with participants to meet the learner's needs. This strategy may be new to community service workers, who are used to delivering 'one size fits all' content.

For both groups, some blank responses about partnerships imply that some professionals may have limited partnership experience. Both groups were able to report negative experiences of partnerships, usually based on an ideological mismatch, change of personnel, or inadequate partnership contributions. Those with cross-sectoral partnership experience clearly expressed the need for one person to hold responsibility for managing outcomes, including facilitating the circumstances to enable those involved to adapt to and develop into their potentially vulnerable new roles. This suggests a possible new role for professionals in both sectors.

Conclusion

Standing on opposite sides of the dance floor

Currently most literacy teachers are aligned pedagogically to the proposed model of team-teaching and need community service workers to participate. By contrast, most community service workers are not aligned ideologically to this model nor seek it to achieve core organisational outcomes. Community service workers typically view the connection with a literacy teacher as an informal, possibly short-term opportunity to obtain advice about enhancing their capacity as an individual. They do not consider the possibility of collaborating with literacy teachers on joint team-teaching programs with shared objectives. This suggests that, at both organisational and individual levels, community service workers are unlikely to initiate any such relationships with education providers, and that literacy teachers who make the first move may find their advances met with caution.

While the client target groups of community service workers and literacy teachers may be common and there may also be some aligned, underpinning social capital ideology, the vision of creating team-teaching partnerships between the two is not shared. To be effective, both sectors, especially the community services sector, will require adjustment to new workplace structures, new understandings of terminology, and new ways of working. If we are to achieve national targets for literacy and social inclusion, there is a need to encourage collaboration between the community service and literacy education sectors. This will help to develop innovative frameworks, specialised instructional and support strategies, and possibly mutually beneficial funding incentives.

The blind date is in jeopardy

Despite agreement about the importance of literacy to individuals' accomplishments in a wide range of social and economic contexts, literacy teachers and community service workers hold divergent personal and professional views on literacy issues. These divergent views seem to be the main barriers to developing effective partnerships for improving adult literacy and associated social capital outcomes. These perspectives will also determine the effort that is applied to resolving literacy issues in the workplace. In addition, there is little awareness among most community service workers and some literacy teachers about the expanding and evolving definitions of literacy, which emphasise its lifelong acquisition and its wide scope. Thus, this definition of literacy is invisible to those to whom it matters the most.

Perspectives about literacy held by most community service workers potentially reinforce their disconnection from literacy-based community education models and therefore the likelihood of their seeking advice from literacy teachers about how a partnership might support their objectives is low. They are also unlikely to initiate potential team-teaching partnerships. Where community service workers identify literacy as an issue for achieving outcomes, they may not consult with literacy teachers and will find other ways to identify and implement solutions. Finding ways to overcome long-standing and widely held public and professional perceptions about literacy are necessary if this team-teaching model is to work and be adopted nationally. A new national campaign to raise the profile of adult or post-school literacy, aimed at promoting new mental models of literacy, will require tenacity, innovative responses and, undoubtedly, some funding. Targeted, positive marketing that reframes or 'packages' literacy to promote alternative mental

models and perspectives will be required. Finding 'natural' and 'safe' frameworks for community service workers and literacy teachers both between and within each sector to explore concepts of literacy and social capital may lead to some agreement on the potential for this partnership model to develop and succeed. As the development of such partnership intentions may not be central to achieving workplace outcomes, it may be necessary to tender for community services interested in reaching and engaging literacy clients. Due to a general uncertainty about what literacy teachers do, it may also be necessary to promote to potential partners the possibility of flexible partnership approaches and the pedagogical practices of literacy teachers.

Who knows the steps to this dance?

The word 'literacy' can be both the reason for and the barrier to partnerships. The current research shows that the words 'literacy' or 'social capital' are unlikely to be mentioned until the parties have reached a level of understanding, security, and certainty such that speaking the words will not abort partnership possibilities. The current ad hoc 'bottom up' approach to identifying potential partners with shared values and perspectives can be time-consuming and unreliable. It relies on individuals making the first move, possibly without the full promise of support from their workplaces or organisations. The 'hit and miss' nature of these attempts limits the number of partnerships that might be established and the potential for establishing enough team-teaching partnerships to help achieve national literacy objectives. This is also borne out by the small number of partnerships that have actually been established in the Riverina region thus far.

Also at issue is the unlikely chance of identifying partners able to commit to a program of at least the 100 hours of dedicated literacy teaching recommended by experts for literacy skill development. This partnership model places both parties into new roles and contexts and will require them to acquire new knowledge relating to the central purposes of the program—literacy and social capital. Also recommended are professional development activities to enable each practitioner to consider how they might amalgamate their work practices as well as understand how to go about achieving literacy and social capital outcomes.

Respondents were cautious about giving their support for the team-teaching approach. We can only surmise that this is because team-teaching requires exposure of self and practice, which for some can be very threatening. Community service workers may need to change their practice in major ways if they are to contribute to partnership success. This is because they are less likely to have had any experience in team-teaching. This research also indicates there is 'sketchy' knowledge about how to proceed once the partnership has been established, which suggests that formal program management systems should be set up to provide opportunities for those involved in a team-teaching partnership to clarify assumptions, ideology and practice in respectful and sensitive ways. There will also be a need to define the roles and responsibilities associated with planning, delivery, assessment, program evaluation and management. Such definitions will also need to take account of the particular context in which the program is to be delivered, the specific knowledge areas, and participants' needs.

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Appendix 1: Definitions

Because of the wide range of definitions adopted in the literature, it is important to be clear and consistent about the way these terms are used for the purposes of this research.

A c*ommunity service worker* is regarded as a person who has the qualifications and experience to be appointed to a community service organisation for the purpose of community service work. The role centres on assisting individuals and/or groups to access government and community services that best suit their needs i.e. by directing them to and helping to provide services or information. Also relevant is the evaluation and development of service provision. Community service work may involve workers in a range of fields.

A *literacy teacher* is regarded in this research as a person who has relevant qualifications and experience to be designated to appointment in that role for the purpose of teaching literacy skills. These skills can include a range of personal, social, academic, and technology literacies, usually identified by the individuals and/or group, to enable them to achieve personal goals. The role of a literacy teacher is underpinned by a teaching pedagogy which usually involves face-to-face delivery, the diagnosis of a person's literacy skills, and the design of learning and assessment resources linked to authentic literacy events and experiences in the learners' lives. McCormack (2009) suggests that a literacy teacher is involved with cultivating phronesis, or practical wisdom, for responsible adulthood.

Team-teaching, for the purposes of this research, refers to a cross-sectoral partnership model between community service workers and literacy teachers. This team is ideally united to achieve education and social capital outcomes for the perceived or actual needs of their clients through joint commitment and participation in program planning and development, teaching strategies and outcome evaluation. The duration of the team-teaching arrangement may be flexible and depend on the intent of each individual program.

Literacy involves a continuum of learning through life. It is viewed as a flexible group of skills and strategies that are complex, cumulative, interactive and closely linked to context and purpose, which enable a person to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, reflect, compute and use information to make informed choices (Hartley & Horne 2006). Waterhouse (2009) says that, although shaped by society and culture, literacy must be personally constructed. To link understanding between educators and non-educators, Lonsdale and McCurry (2004) developed a definition of literacy which aligns to the belief that it is not a fixed set of transferable skills but rather enables capacity to participate in society (Perkins 2009, p.15).

Social capital has been defined by the OECD (2001) as the networks, trust and shared values and understanding between people which enable individuals and groups to trust each other and work together. Social capital refers to the social networks and the connections between people within or amongst groups (Black, Innes & Chopra 2008, p.5; Priest 2009) and the self-esteem and confidence gained through respect received from their teachers and peers. For some students, these advantages presumably help them find work and interact more easily with those around them.

Social capital pedagogy will ideally create a safe and supportive learning environment and acknowledge the capital the learner brings to the group. The approach should also engage the learner with networks at many levels: learner to learner, learner and teacher, learner and the community and networks (Balatti, Black & Falk 2009a, 2009c).

Appendix 2: Survey

This survey was used to obtain community service workers' perspectives of partnerships with literacy teachers. The same survey was used for literacy teachers but worded in reverse order.

Survey of Community Service Workers' Perspectives of Partnerships with Literacy Teachers

Thank you for agreeing to complete this survey.

The aim of the survey is to find out your view of literacy, how it impacts on your work, and your perceptions about the potential for partnerships with Literacy Teachers.

You do not need to tell us your name. We will not be reporting any information that can identify you. Please answer the questions by placing ticks ✓ in boxes or comment where appropriate.

Part A: Statements about your perceptions of literacy and its impact on your work

1. I see literacy as … *(Tick one box in each row)*	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Mostly reading and writing	☐	☐	☐	☐
Coping with the everyday need to communicate	☐	☐	☐	☐
Mainly workplace-related	☐	☐	☐	☐
Connected to using computer technology	☐	☐	☐	☐
Being informed to make independent decisions	☐	☐	☐	☐
Being able to do what you want to do	☐	☐	☐	☐

2. Literacy in my context is … *(Tick one box in each row)*	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Central to my work	☐	☐	☐	☐
Considered in my planning	☐	☐	☐	☐
Discussed amongst my colleagues	☐	☐	☐	☐
Impacting on funding and delivery	☐	☐	☐	☐
Understood differently by colleagues	☐	☐	☐	☐
Different for each individual client	☐	☐	☐	☐

3. Literacy impinges on my professional practice by… *(Tick one box in each row)*	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Extra time taken to support clients	☐	☐	☐	☐
Being a barrier to meeting individual client needs	☐	☐	☐	☐
Adapting information to make it accessible to clients	☐	☐	☐	☐
Evidence of client misunderstandings	☐	☐	☐	☐
Planning required to achieve program goals	☐	☐	☐	☐
Insufficient appropriate resources	☐	☐	☐	☐

Part B: Statements about potential partnerships and previous experience of partnerships

1. A literacy teacher might support my work by … *(Tick one box in each row)*	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Basing the program in adult literacy teaching	☐	☐	☐	☐
Suggesting relevant learning strategies to client group	☐	☐	☐	☐
Re-writing information to make it easier to understand	☐	☐	☐	☐
Integrating literacy skills within meaningful content	☐	☐	☐	☐
Embedding literacy learning in the client's 'world'	☐	☐	☐	☐
Suggesting holistic/intervention learning strategies	☐	☐	☐	☐

2. I think the partnership may be initiated by … *(Tick one box in each row)*	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Cross-sectoral conversation within established professional networks	☐	☐	☐	☐
A community service worker approaching a literacy teacher/department ('cold call')	☐	☐	☐	☐
A literacy teacher approaching a community service worker/organisation ('cold call')	☐	☐	☐	☐
A literacy teacher approaching a community service worker/organisation (familiar)	☐	☐	☐	☐
'Packaging' and marketing 'literacy' to community services	☐	☐	☐	☐
Identifying potential partners with a shared client 'focus' (e.g. social capital)	☐	☐	☐	☐

3. My perception of partnerships previously experienced is … *(Tick one box in each row)*	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Clients achieve more than without a partner	☐	☐	☐	☐
Partnership enabled new initiatives and resources	☐	☐	☐	☐
Joint planning, delivery and evaluation is fundamental	☐	☐	☐	☐
Partnership took too much time, easier to do independently	☐	☐	☐	☐
Partners learn from each other and adapt their role	☐	☐	☐	☐
Involves considerable communication between partners	☐	☐	☐	☐

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