

ENGAGING ADULT LEARNERS: THE ROLE OF NON-ACCREDITED LEARNING IN LANGUAGE, LITERACY AND NUMERACY

DARRYL DYMOCK

GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY

**VISITING RESEARCH FELLOW
ADULT LEARNING AUSTRALIA**

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Adult Learning Australia
Level 1, 32 Northbourne Avenue, Canberra
PO Box 260, Canberra City, 2601, ACT
Tel: (02) 6274 9500 Fax: (02) 6724 9513
Email: info@ala.asn.au
Web: www.ala.asn.au



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Australia Inc.



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INTRODUCTION

At its meeting in February 2006 to develop a National Reform Agenda, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG, 2006, p. 2) agreed that:

A healthy, skilled and motivated population is critical to workforce participation and productivity, and hence Australia's future living standards. By focusing on the outcomes needed to enhance participation and productivity, the human capital stream of reform aims to provide Australians with the opportunities and choices they need to lead active and productive lives.

Reforms in education and training were seen as one way of assisting this process, including improving the skills and qualifications of adults, particularly people on welfare, the mature aged, women, and Indigenous Australians (COAG, 2006, p. 4). However for some Australian adults, engaging with the education and training system is difficult because of their limited language, literacy and/or numeracy skills, so that the 'opportunities and choices they need to lead active and productive lives' are constrained.

In an international study that included Australia, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2005, pp. 85-6) concluded that those with the lowest scores on the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) had the least likelihood of participating in adult education and training. A Canadian follow-up to the second IALS in that country (Brink, 2005) found that participation in adult education and learning activities was around 20% for those with Level 1 proficiency in prose literacy (the lowest) compared to some 70% for those at levels 4/5. The recent Australian Government discussion paper, *Community education and national reform* (DEST, 2006, p. 11), recognised that one option for meeting the National Reform Agenda, was to 'better address the needs of particular target groups, such as those with low literacy and numeracy skills'.

A key issue in widening participation in education and training is how to encourage such adults so that they can begin on pathways to further learning and employment, if that is their choice, as well as to participate more effectively in their communities. An earlier national consultation paper on adult learning in Australia (DEST, 2004, p. 1) noted that 'learning serves personal, civic and social purposes as well as vocational ones'. The Australian Council for Adult Literacy (2007, p. 13) recently called for a national discussion on 'alternative mechanisms for people to learn new skills, including educational skills, and take part in new forms of community engagement that are not limited to training for jobs'. This paper is about engaging adults in learning so that they not only meet their own goals but also increase their contribution to their communities in various ways.

Choy, Haukka and Keyes (2006, p. 41) observed that one area of educational provision in Australia well placed to provide such a role is Adult and Community Education (ACE), through its role in encouraging people who are intimidated by mainstream vocational training to return to study, in improving language and literacy skills, and in providing individualised learning for Centrelink clients. Similar conclusions were reached in other recent studies of



the role of ACE in Australia, including the two 'Cinderella' reports (Aulich, 1991, Crowley, 1997) and that by Clemans, Hartley and Macrae (2003). Campbell and Curtin (1999, pp. 84-5) identified the strengths of ACE as *responsiveness, community focus, flexibility, accessibility, collaboration*, and that it is *welcoming*. A report commissioned by the Victorian Adult Community and Further Education Board also pointed to the accessibility of ACE and the pathways it facilitates (Walstab, Volkoff & Teese, 2005).

The discussion paper on *Community education and national reform* (DEST, 2006, p. 12) summed up the contribution of the community education sector as 'the ability ... to engage adults who would not otherwise use the formal VET system'. However the view of the Adult Community and Further Education Board in Victoria (2006, p.3) that non-accredited learning is not only a pathway into accredited courses, but also a means to 'building confidence, resilience and self worth, enabling learners to make connections with family and the wider community', suggests that the nature of the role is considerably richer, fostering personal, social and economic outcomes.

One of the elements of ACE provision in Australia is that in some instances the learning outcomes are not accredited, i.e. the learners do not receive a nationally recognized certificate under the Australian Quality Training Framework. In the language, literacy and numeracy area, much community non-accredited learning uses volunteer tutors, often through one-to-one tuition. A recent study by Dymock (2007, in press), funded by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), concluded that 'there is a strong continuing demand for non-accredited community language, literacy and numeracy assistance in Australia by the many adults who do not need or would struggle with accredited courses'. This is consistent with the observation in *Community education and national reform* (DEST, 2006, p. 12) that community education offers 'second chance easy access opportunities for adults with literacy and numeracy problems'.

This paper explores the question: 'What is the role of non-accredited community language, literacy and numeracy learning in engaging adult learners in education and training?'

The project addresses two particular questions within that broader question:

1. What are adult learners' motivations and goals in non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy programs?
2. To what extent is there a link between growth in confidence and the development of language literacy and numeracy skills in non-accredited adult learning?

These questions are explored through further analysis of the data collected by Dymock for the NCVER report referred to above (2007, in press). This paper also draws on Australian and overseas research into non-accredited learning and into the significance of confidence as a factor for adults engaging in learning.

The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of non-accredited learning in language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) for widening adult participation in education and training in Australia.



THE RESEARCH – A SUMMARY

The purpose of the research carried out by the author under a National Centre for Vocational Education grant in 2006 (Dymock, 2007, in press) was to obtain as full a picture as possible of non-accredited community adult language, literacy and numeracy provision across Australia. Non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy were taken to include courses and other activities where students were given a statement of attainment or participation, but not nationally accredited qualifications, i.e. the learning outcomes were not formally assessed, even where the organisation used an accredited course for curriculum purposes.

Data were collected by a national survey sent to providers, identified through a variety of sources, including the Reading Writing Hotline (a national referral resource administered through TAFE New South Wales), as well as through the cooperation of peak bodies such as the Australian Council for Adult Literacy, Adult Learning Australia, government departments, and a number of other key agencies. Questions were asked about the nature of the organisations, the characteristics and motivations of the students, what the outcomes were and how these were assessed, and the nature and extent of pathways to other education and training and to employment.

In total, 125 eligible organisations from every State and Territory, except the Northern Territory, responded to the survey. Almost 60% of these were from organisations that identified their *primary role* as community education providers, and there was a further 13% which specifically provided English as a Second Language assistance rather than general education, but might be considered as an element of community provision. The other two main categories were registered training providers (21%) which offered non-accredited assistance alongside accredited training, and disability service providers (7%).

In addition, seven providers in three states were selected as case studies, a mix of urban and rural areas and of program types, including small group and one-to-one tuition. Across the seven sites, interviews were conducted with 37 people, including program and course coordinators, teachers, tutors and students.

The main findings of the research mapping non-accredited community language, literacy and numeracy provision across Australia appear in the report from the National Centre for Vocational Education and Training (Dymock, 2007, in press). In this paper, the data analysis is reoriented to focus on the topics of learner confidence and identity, and learner motivations and goals, and their relevance for re-engaging adults in learning who have language, literacy and numeracy difficulties.

ADULT LEARNERS' MOTIVATIONS

The issue of engaging re-engaging adults in learning through non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy support is influenced by their motivations and goals. Research into why adults learn has uncovered a range of factors, including communication improvement, social contact, educational preparation, professional advancement, family togetherness, social stimulation, and



cognitive interest (Boshier, 1977; Fujita-Starck, 1996). Merriam and Caffarella (1999, p. 56) concluded from their review of research that learners' motivations for participating in adult education are many, complex and subject to change. This is particularly true in adult language, literacy and numeracy learning.

Dymock (2007, in press) reported that the main reason perceived by providers for learners coming to ALLN programs was to improve their language, literacy and numeracy for everyday living (35%). The next most important reason (16% of providers) was seen as vocational - those seeking employment or wanting to prepare for training for employment. Below these was a range of other motivations, and several respondents to the survey said it was too difficult to isolate particular reasons. The preponderance of a general purpose for learning, and the number of other reasons offered indicate how diverse the area of non-accredited LLN is. Some illustrative examples of the range of motivations, taken from the case study interviews for Dymock's study, are presented in Table 1. Most of the examples come from providers; the final two are from students.

Table 1: Examples of learner motivations in adult language, literacy and numeracy

Illustrative data	Motivations
Last week, I interviewed a chap and he's quite a bright fellow, very well skilled in life skills but he worked as a machine operator and I said "What makes you want to come?" He said "Well I've always sort of thought about it... At work I know I could have moved on but not having the literacy that I need is costing me at least twenty grand a year"	Workplace demands; income loss
People that come to us as ESL students, they're there because they really want to learn English and usually there's some kind of vocational motivation. But Aussie students have come either because they're old enough now to have full-time jobs and they've got time to do it properly now, or young people trying to get into the workforce, or [who have] disabilities.	Preparing for employment; new opportunity to learn missed skills
Some come because they're not yet ready for TAFE -TAFE has a pre-literacy level but a lot of them do find it actually just overwhelming. Some have been to TAFE and not much has sort of got in, so they really come here to reinforce and some actually are going to TAFE and come here to supplement, to sort of flesh it out.	Preparation or support for accredited training
He was getting to the stage where he had a toddler son [who] was starting to ask him to read to him at night and he knew it was only a matter of time before he would be struggling being sort of there as a parent figure and to answer questions. ... But ... through that period he lost his job ... , so we went from the basic techniques we were working on to suddenly writing and assisting him with resumes and CVs He then found a job and he found himself doing management reports and presentations and I was suddenly helping him with that.	Taking parental responsibility; employment preparation and workplace support
Her mum brought her in because she was at the end of her tether, she'd been in all of these classes and she has trouble with money. ... Anything to do with numbers, she gets the wrong change and things like that, but she's improving on that, she's a lot more confident. ... She catches the bus now, we did a timetable session and we actually caught the bus to where she worked and caught it back.	Numeracy difficulties; parental pressure
[The learner] was referred ... by Centrelink where it was required that she take some study or do some work and she chose study. So I don't think she would	Mandatory requirement;



have come unless she was required to but now I think she would certainly carry it on just because of her own interest and enjoyment and learning.	satisfaction with learning
There's a very large African group who attend and ... a lot of the clients would fall into the age group of wanting to find employment and wanting to enter the workforce when their English does get to a good enough level, because that really is the primary concern of most of the people who are attending.	Preparing for employment
People just want to improve their reading and writing, mainly 'cause there's pressures at work to do certificates or further training ... We have old people who come who want to read to their grandchildren and their reading's not good enough. ... We have referrals from workplaces as well as from just people who are at home and just want to improve their reading and writing.	Changes in workplace requirements; family responsibilities; general skills improvement
I'd always wanted to go back to school, I do feel I'd always left school a lot earlier, and so I'd always wanted to go back but ... it wasn't sort of happening. I needed to ... really assess what I wanted to do with my life and myself ... and so I was given this opportunity.	New opportunity to learn what has been missed
The most important reason is to speak English and because I'm living in Australia, so the official language in Australia is English, so I must understand when the people talk to me, when I go shopping, go everywhere in Australia; and the second reason – seriously – is to take a Certificate of Level III and go to the plumbing college.	Social interactions; preparation for training

The motivations identified in Table 1 include parental responsibilities (as well as parental pressure), taking opportunities to make up for learning missed at school, changes in workplace requirements, and preparation (sometimes enforced) for employment. Other research discussed above suggests that learning language, literacy and numeracy for everyday living is a priority, but 'everyday living' may be different for every individual. In other words, in answer to the question, 'what are adult learners' motivations and goals in non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy programs?', the answer is that they want to engage with the world on their own terms, and that their goals are a mix of personal, social and vocational. Sometimes the learners find it difficult to articulate their goals.

Motivation gets adults to the point of learning, and sometimes that point is slow in coming - one learner said it took him three years to make the phone call. That is the first step in re-engagement in learning. But as discussed in the next section, the research suggests that there is a *process* of re-engagement, which involves developing confidence and identity, and that the process may take time. During this process, the learners' goals may change as a result of their involvement.

CONFIDENCE AND LEARNING

Kearns (2006, p. 16) concluded from a review of research into the wider benefits of learning that a recurring theme is that personal outcomes, such as confidence, self-esteem, and the aspiration to engage in learning, are 'important and necessary stepping stones towards confident participation in VET provision'. Similarly, Ward and Edwards (2002, p. 39) found from their research with literacy and numeracy learners in north-west England that:



Perhaps the most profound change for most learners interviewed was a massive enhancement of their confidence and self-esteem. This increased confidence had a significant impact on their learning achievements, attitudes to learning, aims and aspirations, ability to do real life activities and their social activities with other people.

Eldred (2002, p. 27) found that a 'significant number' of adult literacy students appeared unable to achieve the external standards set, even after several years study, but that almost all students reported increases in confidence. This is consistent with Dymock's findings from his 2006 research into non-accredited learning that the development of confidence is a key aspect of language, literacy and numeracy learning. For example, one adult learner said:

I'd always wanted to go back to school ... but it just wasn't sort of happening. ... it's a confidence thing I think, just to know you've got enough confidence to go back, 'cause it's easy coming the first time, but it's coming back, and you think, 'Can I do it?'

In Dymock's survey questionnaire, providers were asked to indicate on a scale of 1 to 5, from 'not at all' to 'very much', to what extent they thought that learners developed language, literacy and numeracy skills and self-confidence, respectively. There were no responses in the 'not at all' and 'very little' categories, indicating that all providers thought their learners were achieving above those baselines. In terms of *skills* development, almost half the respondents thought that their students/clients improved 'quite a bit', the second highest level, as a result of being in their programs. Around 20% thought the learners achieved the highest level. On the *self-confidence* aspect, more than half the providers thought their students/clients improved 'very much' through participation in their programs, and most of the others thought they improved 'quite a bit'. A significant finding for the purposes of the present paper is that the development of confidence was perceived as being slightly greater than the growth in skills.

There may also be a question of emphasis: one ACE provider wrote that they were 'not interested in the assessment of skills – just the increase in confidence so they will take the next step to join a class'. A coordinator said that 'some of the students we have are never going to move long way forward with their literacy but they may be moving forward with their confidence or other things that are going on, that ... you can't quite measure.'

In the interviews, coordinators and tutors talked about the importance of developing learners' confidence as part of the learning process. One person described it as giving them the confidence to make a mistake ('many of our students haven't got that confidence'), and others suggested that competence and confidence were inter-related concepts.

The development of confidence was not explored *per se* in Dymock's study – it was an element that emerged through the written responses to the questionnaire and particularly in the interviews, mainly in relation to 'outcomes'. For example, a coordinator in a program in a community education centre said:

I think generally these people are pretty vulnerable, and they're not ready to go into a formal setting and they see it as a bridging. It's an



opportunity to just build the person's confidence, just make that first step and then go into an accredited program.

An example was given by another coordinator of a person who had been in one-to-one literacy tutoring every week for almost a year before building sufficient confidence to go into a classroom. Another spoke of learners having the confidence to go into further education and to 'not feel like an idiot or feel ashamed'. An example is a mature age TAFE student, seeking to upgrade his trade qualifications to become a supervisor, who had sought one-to-one help when he found his literacy skills were not sufficient to cope with the training course: 'You feel like a bit of a dummy actually ... and [when the lecturer handed out papers in the TAFE course] I thought, oh gosh I'm in trouble here, and I ... realised that I needed help. But [now] I think I'm on the right track.'

One coordinator mentioned that among those seeking help were young single men who had experienced problems throughout their schooling and were often employed in low skill jobs and who 'lack confidence to kind of kick on and do other things'. It was suggested that some young people who come for help in obtaining a learner driver's permit do so because they lack the 'grammatical skills, the literacy skills, or perhaps the confidence'. Another example is of a woman who opted initially to have a volunteer tutor and to defer joining a class until the following year because she did not want to put her children into childcare at that time in order to attend classes. The coordinator observed: 'Part of it's also about confidence'.

The significance of the development of confidence as a measure of progress is encapsulated by this comment from a mature age woman recently made redundant and unable to find new employment because of a lack of formal qualifications and of literacy skills: 'Actually, I told a lady in Coles yesterday that I'm going to school learning to read and write, and I wouldn't do that before.'

When Watters and Turner (2001) asked learners in non-accredited learning in the UK what they considered they had gained from the experience, increased confidence was one of the main outcomes identified, along with enjoyment and satisfaction, gains in skills, knowledge and understanding, a basis for further learning, a sense of well-being, seeing oneself and being seen differently, and seeing the world differently. According to that study, increased confidence was demonstrated by being able to speak up in class, feeling at ease with technology, learning that it's okay to take risks, and not being afraid of change. A sense of well-being came about through the emotional, psychological and physical benefits of learning: 'Learning makes you feel good'. This study also found that a significant number of learners spoke positively about how learning had changed their perceptions of themselves as learners and as creative people and a realisation that 'you don't have to be intelligent to come to learning'. These attitudes were also part of seeing the world differently as the learners' views of other and beliefs changed. Schuller et al (2004 in Nashashibi, 2004, p. 29) said:

Education transforms people's lives but also, less spectacularly, enables them to cope with the multifarious stresses of daily life as well as discontinuous and continuous social change and contributes to others' well-being by maintaining community and collective life.



Watters and Turner (2001, p. 59) concluded that the range of anticipated and unexpected benefits identified in their study reflected the 'diversity and complexity of the learners' purposes and the range of ways in which non-accredited learning enhances adults' lives'. Torrance and Coultas (2004, p. 25) inferred from McGivney's 1992 study of 50 adult education organisations that for some learners, involvement in non-assessed activities might be a prerequisite for developing sufficient confidence to be able to engage in formally assessed courses. Eldred, Ward, Dutton and Snowdon (2004, p. 57) made a similar conclusion from a UK study:

The importance of non-threatening first-step learning which gives learners time to gain confidence, [and] develop their identity as successful learners, and [which] supports diverse aims and aspirations is vital.

The development of identity as a learner seems to be one of the key factors in helping adults re-engage in learning. Waterhouse and Virgona (2005, pp. 28-9) concluded from an Australian study of adults who had succeeded in life and work despite the apparent handicap of inadequate literacy, that 'literacy issues are about identity as much as [about] skills'.

Learner identity

There has been considerable recent research interest in the link between learning and identity (e.g. Gee, 2001, Falk and Balatti, 2003, and since 2004 the work of the 'Learning Lives' project of the UK ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme). Kelly (2006, p. 5) concluded from a review of the literature that

Identity is how a person sees themselves in relation to the world and their role in it. It is fluid, being shaped by the social context and membership of a community. Identity changes across a person's life cycle, based on a range of factors such as age, gender, cultural background, socioeconomic status and general life experience. ... Identity not only influences what a person is now, but also how a person behaves and conceives themselves in the future.

Clemens, Hartley and Macrae (2003, p. 47) characterised ACE outcomes in Australia as individual development outcomes, community development outcomes and economic development outcomes. Amongst the individual outcomes were several related to personal identity, e.g. knowledge of self, the world and how to learn; and a healthy, mature self-concept in private life, public life and the workplace.

Falk and Balatti, (2003, p. 182) explored the concept of 'identity resources' in learning, which they said comprised such attributes as self-confidence, vision, trust, and 'from which we derive our sense of who we are.' Guenther (2005, p. 5) interviewed more than 100 'VET stakeholders' at four sites across the Northern Territory and Queensland, including indigenous communities, and concluded that almost a quarter of all the perceived benefits from engagement with learning could be described as 'identity benefits'. He suggested (p.6) that the 'identity the individual comes to training with will influence his or her capacity to engage with the training context'. Such a conclusion has significant



implications for adult learners who have had negative schooling experiences and are unsure of their ability to cope with the requirements of accredited training.

The power of successful learning and formation of a learning identity are illustrated by a study of adult numeracy students in England (Swain, 2006, p. 3) which found that almost three-quarters felt they had changed as a person in some way through their learning endeavours, and that some students increased their aspirations as their sense of achievement and level of self-esteem grew. In Dymock's study, a former learner who had gone on to become a tutor said:

I ... started having a look around at other people and I thought well maybe I'm not that stupid, ... and then I just kept going from there. I think, too, once you get into it, it becomes a bit addictive and once you see that you can do something that you never thought you could, you want to take another challenge and challenge yourself a little bit further.

It follows that if the development of confidence and construction of an identity are essential components of learning in non-accredited LLN, the role of the teacher or tutor in language, literacy and numeracy learning is vital in encouraging and sustaining the learner. The role becomes much more than simply teaching language, literacy and numeracy skills, particularly if it takes into account even some of the factors identified by Kelly (2006) listed above.

Tutor's role

In community non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy provision in Australia, there is considerable variety in the way that assistance is provided. According to the findings of the 2006 study (Dymock, 2007, in press), those in one-to-one volunteer programs usually met for between 1.5 and 2 hours a week, often in school term times, and the tutoring was ongoing, sometimes for several years. Volunteer tutors were preponderantly in the community-based programs, and usually worked one-to-one, a few with a small group or supporting a teacher with a larger group. Some volunteer tutors met with students in their homes, others in community centres and others in a 'neutral' venue such as a library.

When asked about learner needs and motivations, some of the tutors and program coordinators interviewed in Dymock's 2006 study were able to recognise their wider role. For instance:

If I get somebody who wants to do something towards a qualification, if I can get them so that they have the confidence and the necessary basics, to then be able to go into a classroom and cope and succeed, then I've done pretty well.

But really, that young man, all he needed was confidence building; he was very competent but he didn't think he was and ... he's done really well. And that's what I find with quite a lot of them. Sit them down, relax them, there's no pressure, they can do what they want to do. ... Just give them the confidence and a few extra skills and away they go.



I think their confidence more than anything has improved because I'm a person that they can relax with. I know their failings and their good points and they can say, 'I don't understand this'.

I think a lot of them are looking for help before they go for the accredited training, because I've worked [individually] with three people who've actually gone on and done the accredited training but didn't have the confidence to approach it first up. And by being the half-way person, which I think happens quite a bit, you help them over that.

These responses illustrate that the nature of the interaction is quite complex, whether or not all teachers and tutors are aware of it. This is true of any teaching-learning situation, but the learning identity that the learners bring with them to this particular learning endeavour means that there is considerable onus on the tutor in the relationship. In non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy learning, the interaction is often further complicated by the absence of a fixed curriculum, which sets non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy learning apart from accredited training. One coordinator explained how it worked in her volunteer program in relation to particular skills:

When I do the interview with them, and depending on what they've asked, what they want to learn, you draw your resources in that field. If they just wanted to learn how to spell, well we have a whole range of books on spelling. If they're right at the very beginning where they're not able to sound or anything like that, so you start right back at basics. If they've got past the sounding but they're having difficulty with how to sound vowels or words that have got the 'e' at the end that change the vowel sounds and things like that, well we look at a slightly different type of curriculum to start them. We ... have the books there that help us, and a lot of our work is commonsense.

Only some one-third of the respondents to Dymock's 2006 survey said that they used a structured course or accredited curriculum, as a basis for their tutoring, and some government funding was contingent on use of an accredited curriculum by community providers for non-accredited LLN learning. The rest did not follow a specific curriculum, with most of those indicating that their courses or activities were developed to meet learners' individual needs.

The widespread lack of a fixed curriculum places a heavy onus on volunteer coordinators and tutors in language, literacy and numeracy and also has implications for the efficacy of training. Almost 30 years ago Charnley and Jones (1979, p. 181) concluded from their research into the 'concept of success' in adult literacy that 'the counselling role of tutors and the criterion of confidence as a mark of success needs to be emphasised in training schemes'. There is evidence that this is happening in Australia, as encapsulated in this comment from a coordinator interviewed by Dymock in 2006:

The training course offers ... the strategies that we know work with adults in the sense of literacy achievement, but it also focuses on rebuilding confidence of the learner [which] quite often is an issue, and then focusing on lesson planning so that they can work on the person's individual needs because there's no set curriculum.



Another key aspect of non-accredited learning in LLN that came through in Dymock's research was that learners often needed *time* to develop skills and confidence. Those whose self-esteem had been knocked around for various reasons, and who might also have other issues in their lives they were dealing with concurrently, take time to regroup their personal resources and develop the learner identity discussed above. The need for sufficient time to develop skills and confidence was emphasised by a number of respondents to Dymock's 2006 survey. For example, a volunteer group in a major regional city said: 'Consider the people as individuals not numbers; all have individual needs - not a set curriculum; all learn differently and at various speeds - no set timeframe'.

In providing time for growth, the role of the tutor as both 'teacher' and 'nurturer' is again clear. And coupled with this supportive role is the learning environment that is part of non-accredited learning in LLN, as articulated by a manager of a community adult literacy centre:

The reason a lot of people come here is that we're non-institutional and we're non-threatening, so for people who have got literacy problems as adults, it's not something that they're proud of, it's a sensitive issue. They're people that have failed at school because of literacy problems, so to walk back into a TAFE classroom is putting them back into the same sort of environment that they failed in the first time.

In similar vein, the coordinator of a community literacy 'drop-in' facility catering mainly for immigrants and refugees observed that 'they come here because it's sort of a trusted space and a comfortable one and they just come here and hang out ... and get a bit of English on the way'. This may not be very structured learning, but the centre recognises that it is catering for a wide range of needs under the banner of 'learning'.

In relation to the second subsidiary question asked in the introduction to this report, the research is showing is that the development of confidence and identity in a supportive environment appears to be concurrent with the growth of language, literacy and numeracy competence in non-accredited learning. For some it's, 'just give them the confidence and a few extra skills and away they go'; for others it's a long haul while they deal with disabilities or health issues and what Schuller et al (2004) called 'the multifarious stresses of daily life'.

IMPLICATIONS

The research findings discussed above suggest that in terms of what has been termed 'client differentiation' in vocational education and training (McIntyre, 2007), learners in non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy should be considered as having particular characteristics that set them apart from most other adult learners. LLN learners are not homogeneous any more than adult learners in general are, but what differentiates them from those adults for whom the current education and training system is intended is that they lack confidence in their ability to learn and to cope with that system as well as the language, literacy and numeracy skills they need in order to be able to negotiate formal learning.



A few years ago, the then Australian National Training Authority (ANTA, 2000) categorised vocational education and training learners into eight 'social market segments': *passionate learners, almost there, learn to earn, might give it away, make it easier, learning on hold, done with it, and forget it*. However, in adult language, literacy and numeracy learning, such attitudes may well mask dispositional learning barriers that are to do with confidence and identity.

The learners in non-accredited adult language, literacy and numeracy might be characterised as: lacking in confidence, often with negative experiences of school; some have disabilities, others are grappling with English as a second language; sometimes they are already in employment which is low skilled (but with exceptions); and sometimes they are already in accredited training but are not coping. All have taken the step (which for some is a large one because of the social stigma they perceive) to undertake non-accredited language, literacy and/or numeracy learning in order to meet their immediate goals. The diversity of needs is greater than those in accredited training, which by its nature is intended for vocational purposes.

These learners need time to grow in skills and confidence and to develop an identity as learners – as one learner said, it's about having the confidence to go back after the first time. They need encouragement and support to develop as learners, and non-accredited learning is the most appropriate way for them to achieve their diverse goals at that stage of their lives, whatever their age or situation. This diversity of goals points to the significance of non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy in re-engaging learners so that they can contribute more fully personally, socially and vocationally. The tutor's role in this process is clearly a key factor.

The findings discussed above point to a broad role for the teacher or tutor, incorporating teaching expertise and encouragement for the learner's endeavours in order to develop skills and wider learning outcomes, and providing time for skills and confidence to grow. This is not new to people working in the LLN field (see, for example, Brennan, Clark and Dymock, 1989) but it is an aspect too readily discounted in an era of accredited training and an emphasis on achieving 'outcomes' in minimum time. Not everyone fits the dominant system. Nashashibi (2004, p. 27) noted that wider benefits of learning can result from *participation* in a learning activity as much as from *completion*, and that 'engagement in learning is not all future oriented', a comment that is very relevant to LLN learners in non-accredited community programs (and of course to adult learners generally).

At the beginning of this report, the question asked was: What is the role of non-accredited community language, literacy and numeracy learning in engaging adult learners in education and training, and in developing people as individuals and as part of their communities?' The answer is that it has the capacity to develop the confidence and identities of adults so that they can move on as individuals, into other education and training, into employment, into engaging more strongly with other people and with their own communities. In response to ANTA's marketing strategy for skills and lifelong learning, Sanguinetti (2000, p. 2) argued that what Australia needed was an 'integrated and innovative [education and training] system that offers unending opportunities for learning and re-skilling, accessible at every stage of life.' More recently, Kearns (2006, p. 29) concluded that the evidence 'points to



the value of the ACE role as a learner-friendly gateway to learning for disadvantaged individuals, and the need to adopt systemic perspectives which cross sectoral boundaries in a more co-ordinated approach to second-chance opportunities throughout life’.

If the National Reform Agenda is to ‘better address the needs of particular target groups, such as those with low literacy and numeracy skills’ (DEST 2006, p. 11), there needs to be recognition of and support for the role of non-accredited learning in language, literacy and numeracy in re-engaging learners in education and training in Australia.

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