

Adult literacy and numeracy as social practices: What does this mean for pedagogy?

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Main themes to be covered in this keynote

- The 'crisis' discourse – a deficit approach
- A deficit model of pedagogy and what we think is wrong with it
- Shifting pedagogy beyond deficit models – a research study of integrated LLN in VET
- Theoretical frameworks
- 'Study skills', 'socialisation', 'social practices'
- The potential for pedagogical change in VET

The literacy and numeracy 'crisis' - the dominant discourse

- ***'Millions behind on basic skills, threatens Australia's international competitiveness'*** (*The Australian* 4/4/11).
- ***'VICTORIA is in danger of becoming the dunce state, with half of our adults unable to read or count well enough to get through daily life'*** (*Herald Sun* 29/11/07)
- ***'It seems improbable, but an international survey indicates that nearly half of all Australians can't read or write properly'*** (ABC News 21/8/08)

The key drivers

- Government – National Foundation Skills Strategy (DEEWR 2011) – largely a response to the ALLS.
- Australian Industry Group (2010) – ‘more than 75% of employers reported that their business was affected ...’
- Skills Australia (2011)
- Industry Skills Councils (2011) ‘No more excuses’
- Focus on the ‘problem’ of low adult L&N levels e.g. ALLS
 - Approximately 7 million (46%) Australians aged 15 to 74 years had scores at Level 1 or 2 on literacy scales; On the numeracy scale, approximately 7.9 million (53%) Australians were assessed at Level 1 or 2. (ABS 2007)

Employer groups

Heather Ridout, CEO of the AiG in a radio broadcast

‘ 75 per cent of our members in the survey we’ve just done said their business is affected by low literacy and numeracy levels. There are seven million people in the Australian workforce that just can’t do it. They can’t read standard operating procedures, for example, which leads to all sorts of safety issues and poor use of machinery ...’ (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2010).

Later in the interview discussion turned to the ‘capability’ of workers to take on new job roles, and Ridout commented, ‘That’s why this literacy thing is so important, because if you don’t have it, it’s very hard to build those other skills on top of it ...’

Deficit thinking

- ‘blaming the victim’ (Valencia 1997:x). In other words, people are held responsible for their own failures rather than any structural inequalities in society.
- Rogers (2006:129) sees the paradigm of lifelong learning to be a deficit one: ‘some people lack resources which others possess, a matter which can be remedied by the provision of inputs’. Typically, special programs are set up for the less well educated, ‘those who are in deficit’, in order for them to ‘catch up’.

A deficit model of pedagogy - key elements

- There are pre-determined, externally defined learning outcomes in the curriculum – a set of standards.
- Students are diagnosed to determine their gaps in knowledge and skills in relation to these standards. Hence pre-assessments to determine students' L&N levels.
- The aim through various remedial strategies is to equip students with the skills and knowledge to reduce the 'gap', the extent to which they are in 'deficit'.

What's wrong with the deficit approach?

- Impact on an individual student's self-concept
- Impact on teacher's expectation of an individual student's capability to achieve their vocational outcomes
- Tendency to focus on basics as a remediation strategy with questionable impact

A research study: *Working together: Integrated LLN in VET (Black & Yasukawa 2011)*

To examine how LLN is 'built in' (integrated) with VET pedagogy

- What types of LLN support?
- What are the main benefits and pedagogical challenges?
- How do students respond?
- What recommendations for VET policy, pedagogy and professional development?

Integrating/embedding literacy and numeracy in VET delivery

Integrated delivery - the concurrent development of literacy and numeracy and vocational competencies, seeing these 'as interrelated elements of the one process' (Courtenay & Mawer 1995: 2)

Research methods

- Initial scan of known LLN providers
- Semi-structured interviews with LLN and vocational teachers and managers. Interstate and regional respondents interviewed by phone. All interviews recorded and transcribed in full
- Three case studies of integrated LLN support programs. Included observations of classroom practices and interviews with teachers and students

Types of integrated LLN in VET

- Withdrawing students for 1:1 or small-group
- Individual/learning/study centre support
- Individual support in VET classroom
- Team teaching
- Shared/co-delivery

An overall 'deficit' approach

Key findings:

- A strong focus on pre-assessing and screening learners
- LLN addressed as the skills that students were deficit in
- LLN learning targeted only some students, usually those who fell into identified 'equity' groups
- The pedagogy and content of the VET curriculum was uncontested
- LLN teaching was the responsibility only of the LLN teachers
- LLN was *not* being integrated into VET delivery

Is team teaching the answer?

Some comments on team teaching:

One LLN teacher explained that in the vocational classroom she mainly works with 'her' group of students who need additional help, 'so I just hover and take good notes and then I just ask questions that I think they may not understand'

'I move around sometimes, just maybe if I pick up a term that I think a particular student might not be aware of; I might just quietly go to that person and explain particular terminology.' (LLN teacher)

'We just deliver normally and they (LLN teachers) sit and observe or go to these students and see if they're coping okay, working with them.' (Hairdressing teacher)

Three models of integrating LLN in VET delivery

| The deficit model ('study skills') | CAVSS team teaching model ('vocational socialisation') | Shared-delivery model ('vocational literacies and numeracies' or 'social practices') |
|--|---|---|
| LLN as basic skills that some groups of students lack | LLN as practices that should be explicitly taught to all students in the vocational context | LLN and vocational content as dynamic and contestable |
| LLN teacher as support teacher who helps learners address their 'deficits' Vocational teacher as the one in charge of the students and the pedagogy | LLN and vocational teachers having equal space and time in the classroom. LLN and vocational teachers plan the lessons together, but the vocational teacher 'owns' the course. | LLN and vocational teachers share equal responsibility for the same student cohort. LLN and vocational teachers' mutually supporting and challenging each other's pedagogy |

Adapted from Lea and Street (1998)

CAVSS - an example of moving beyond the deficit model to a 'socialisation' model

- CAVSS – Certificate in Applied Vocational Study Skills
- Vocational and LLN teachers work as a team, as 'tag teachers'
- LLN skills and knowledge of the vocational course are delivered to the whole class
- LLN teacher is involved in both the 'theory' and 'practical' work of the course
- No pre- or post-assessment of students' LLN because the focus is vocational competence

CAVSS pedagogy

‘No student ever sees you as judging them or being the person who holds the key for them to open the door ... You're just a person that is ... genuinely interested in helping them get through what they're doing so they can go onto the next part and finish this course and become the tradesperson that they want to become.’

(CAVSS teacher)

CAVSS - a socialisation model but ...

CAVSS integrates LLN in both the theoretical component and the practice components of the course, **but it does not:**

- encourage the vocational teachers' pedagogies to be challenged by the LLN teacher. The Handbook for CAVSS states a successful CAVSS teacher needs to remember '... you are in another lecturer's classroom, not your own. To fit in you've got to stop talking, listen and learn, and be very aware of showing some professional respect to the lecturer in charge, and don't forget that it isn't you' (WA Dept of Education 2008:33).
- explicitly encourage the students' existing LLN practices to be used as the basis of learning new vocational literacies and numeracies.

Shared-delivery as a model of encouraging a dynamic VET pedagogy

- Shared-delivery - LLN teacher and vocational teacher sharing the responsibility for the student cohort studying for a vocational outcome
- Students co-enrol in a vocational course and a LLN course
- LLN and vocational teachers work together to plan their lessons to ensure the students can achieve employment outcomes
- LLN teacher actively engages in the theory and practice of the vocational course
- Vocational teacher actively reflects on their pedagogies to make explicit the LLN practices needed in the course

LLN and vocational teachers challenging pedagogies

- ‘I’ve gone from a telling, leading sort of style to more interactive. I want feedback. I want the students to be involved. I want them to have more hands on. My style has changed.’ (a vocational teacher with 30 yrs teaching experience)
- ‘We start questioning everything. Is this really necessary? Should this be done this way or another way?’ (ESOL teacher)
- ‘I couldn’t believe that you could have a subject called handling mail without handling the mail.’
(ESOL teacher working with a Business Admin teacher)

Towards a social practice pedagogy

Some principles:

- L&N as socially meaningful practices people do in their lives, and in this case, their vocational lives
- Program content and approach are contestable
- Existing L&N practices are adapted and extended to construct new L&N practices
- Acknowledgement of multiple literacies and numeracies
- Drawing on the agency of learners
- Negotiating purposeful and meaningful assessments

(Ivanic et al. 2009)

Student perspectives

In a 'deficit-based' classroom – a beauty course in which 1:1 support from an LLN teacher was available, by appointment. Student comments included:

- 'In the industry we need to know about skin and everything, but we don't need to sit down and do tests about it ...'
- 'I think too many theory exam. They should have more practical exam'
- 'we keep just doing it. Within two weeks another theory (exam), you know, until the end of the course'

Another deficit-based classroom, this time a trade course with a LLN team teacher

- ‘There’s a lot of formulas and stuff like that, whereas the practical side of things, I don’t think there’s enough – like, if you did the whole TAFE course and then went out for a job ... you’d know nothing sort of thing. It might get better or different.’
- ‘Like, we spent six weeks solid just doing transposition. We’re now in second semester and some guys still can’t do it properly.’

A 'shared delivery' trade course

A range of students for whom English was an additional language. Students were from Sudan, Afghanistan, Turkey and Vietnam.

- 'I have lot of experience, mechanics ... just the English here is difficult ... I know everything about the car, just after it is difficult, you need the certificate, you need to follow the rules' (Sudanese student)
- 'To me, their learning is based more about doing, so we spend large amounts of time actually doing the job, and then talking about how we do the job, and then writing about the job, where the (traditional) apprentice program is, we write about the job, and then we do the job. So I've reversed the whole process.' (trade teacher)

Changing pedagogies

Key elements of the shared delivery at this TAFE Institute included:

- A cultural shift to shared delivery involving the whole Institute over time (a documented process over several years)
- LLN support built-in to the Institute business and strategic planning documentation and processes
- All new VET teachers undertake the LLN elective of the Cert IV TAA
- LLN teachers are placed in enterprises with replacement teaching time

Improving integrated LLN delivery - improving learning in

Recommendations for -

- VET policy
- VET pedagogy
- VET professional development

Recommendations - for VET policy

- That integrating LLN in VET courses be acknowledged as **a significant dimension of the VET system**. This includes:
 - teacher training
 - ongoing professional development
 - tender specifications for the delivery of VET courses
 - improving equity and social inclusion outcomes
 - improving retention and completion rates
 - improving employment outcomes for VET graduates
 - teaching and curriculum development approaches
 - VET evaluation and research
- That the delivery of integrated LLN in VET courses be recognised as **a specialist pedagogical role** related to, though distinct from, the delivery of 'stand-alone' LLN provision
- That the delivery of integrated LLN in VET courses **incorporate the whole range of course levels**, and not only those at the lower end of the AQF

Recommendations - for VET pedagogy

That while a range of pedagogical practices provide LLN support to individuals and groups, greater focus should be placed on practices which require the LLN and vocational teachers to:

- **work together** in an equal role in the program planning, delivery, assessment and evaluation of courses
- **avoid a deficit approach** by delivering to whole student groups drawing on the learning resources students bring with them to the VET classroom/workshop
- address and make explicit **the different academic and workplace LLN demands** of VET courses in vocational areas
- continuously work together in **a spirit of critical enquiry to improve pedagogical practices** to meet the changing needs of students, workplaces and vocational disciplines

Recommendations - for VET professional development

- That **orientation or induction programs** be designed for LLN teachers and vocational teachers working together to delivering integrated LLN in VET courses
- That **professional development forums** – ‘communities of practice’, be established in VET organisations to encourage the sharing of knowledge and information about integrated LLN in VET courses.
- That LLN teachers be provided with the **opportunity for placements in industry or workplace visits** to develop their understanding of the LLN practices needed in workplaces
- That **practitioner research** be encouraged to enable LLN and vocational teachers to develop further their pedagogical practices and to explore good practice models of integrating LLN in VET courses.

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