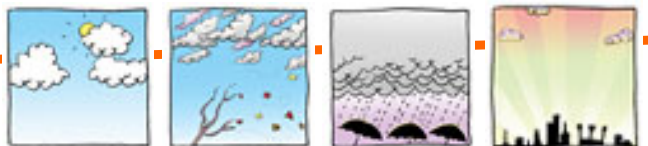


four seasons in one day –

literacies in changing climates

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Indigenous student teachers learning to become adult literacy and numeracy educators

**Leanne King, Deb Maza, Kim Thursby, and Keiko
Yasukawa**

**Faculty of Education
University of Technology, Sydney**

Introduction

This presentation is about the experiences of staff and students in the Language Literacy and Numeracy program in the Bachelor of Education in Adult Education program at the University of Technology, Sydney. The particular focus is on the experiences of introducing this program to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students in the course, both from the staff and the ATSI students' perspectives.

What is the Bachelor of Education in Adult Education program?

The Bachelor of Education Adult Education (BEd Adult Ed) at the University of Technology, Sydney is an adult teaching qualification program that is offered to non-recent school leavers. Each year, it has an intake of two cohorts of students: the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students who come and study the course in block mode, and the non-Indigenous students largely from metropolitan Sydney who come and study the course separately in weekly mode. The ATSI students are offered an Aboriginal Community Program which includes both an Aboriginal studies component and an adult education component. The adult education component, until 2000, focused on community adult education. The non-Indigenous students are offered choices from four majors: community adult education; human resources development; language literacy and numeracy; and vocational education.

Who we are in the BEd (Adult Ed) program?

Leanne King teaches in the BEd Adult Ed program, mostly in Aboriginal Studies major and Community Adult Education major. She coordinates the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Program within the faculty. As a prior student of this program Leanne was very pleased to see the Language, Literacy and numeracy major introduced.

Keiko Yasukawa teaches in the BEd Adult Ed program, mostly in the adult language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) area. She has been the Coordinator of the Language Literacy and Numeracy major in the BEd Adult Ed program, and was one of the proponents in 2000, of introducing the LLN major to the ATSI students.

Kim Thursby and Deb Maza are final year ATSI students in the BEd Adult Ed program. They are the third ATSI student cohort going into the LLN major. Kim is from Rockhampton QLD. Deb is from Kawana QLD.

Why did the Faculty introduce the LLN major for the ATSI students?

At that time, there was already some interest from the students to study LLN subjects, and some ATSI staff support for its introduction. The LLN major had always made up a very small cohort of students among the non-Indigenous group, and in 2000, was under some threat of being discontinued. The interest for an LLN major from the ATSI students was timely because it allowed us to think about bringing the small non-Indigenous LLN student group and the ATSI LLN student group into the same classes, thus expanding the specialisation options for the ATSI students while also ensuring viability of the LLN program for the non-Indigenous students. Although up until that time, all the ATSI students studied all of their subjects strictly within the ATSI program, offering the LLN subjects for the mixed group of ATSI and non-Indigenous students had a lot of educational appeal as well. Rather than reading *about* literacy issues of Indigenous people, the non-Indigenous students could learn first hand what the issues were within the communities that our ATSI students work. The ATSI students could also learn about the broader contexts of adult LLN education, and perhaps even more importantly gain the affirmation that their achievements in the BEd Adult Ed stand up to what is expected of the non-Indigenous students.

What have been some of the rewards and challenges?

For the teachers, working with non-recent school leavers always presents a challenge because the levels of confidence and preparedness for engaging in academic study are much more diverse than among recent school leavers. On the other hand, mature age students bring with them a wealth of life experiences, a sophisticated understanding of the importance of education in their own and others lives, and a motivation to learn and apply their learning in tangible contexts.

For the LLN lecturers, all of whom are from non ATSI background, it has been a privilege to work with the ATSI students. The students have challenged and expanded the way the lecturers had to think about literacy and numeracy. Working with the ATSI students has forced them to ask some difficult questions about what has been accepted as a relatively unchallenged curriculum for educating adult LLN students. The lecturers now have to ask whether the curriculum and the teaching approaches that have been “tried and tested” with the non-ATSI students are necessarily appropriate and effective for the ATSI students. This then raises the question of appropriateness more generally – if a curriculum is not appropriate for one group of students, is it an appropriate curriculum for anyone, particularly when the curriculum is about teaching literacy and numeracy to very broad cultural groups of learners?

There have been small instances of tensions in the classroom between the ATSI and non-ATSI students as well. Because most of the readings in the course are by non-ATSI writers and none of the LLN lecturers are ATSI staff, it is not surprising if some of the non-ATSI students form a view about some people having the authority to teach about literacy generally, and others only have the authority to talk about literacy in relation to their own cultural groups. The classroom has been an opportunity for uncovering some of these assumptions and turning them into rich learning experiences. But this has required period of self-doubt and anxiety for some of the lecturers, and working with the ATSI program staff and debriefing with them has been a critical part of the process.

For students, Kim and Deb had similar reasons for choosing LLN, and that is the real need in their communities for indigenous LLN teachers. Both reflect on the statistics on literacy and numeracy amongst the indigenous communities. Both Kim’s and Deb’s hopes for the future are to teach LLN. Kim and Deb have also reflected on how their experiences have impacted on them and their learning. Kim states that the LLN major has increased her confidence in LLN and her public speaking ability. Deb states that it has been challenging but worthwhile in the long run, being able to reach her goal of helping Indigenous and non-indigenous students.

In the presentation, the presenters will share their reflections from their respective perspective as coordinator, lecturer and student.