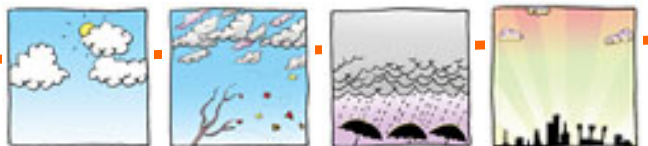


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## **The Potential of the Literacy and Numeracy Program of DEST's LLNP Contract**

**A Community Capacity Building Opportunity**

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## LLNP Contract History and Overview

- The LLNP contract commenced in January 2002 as a complementary service for the Job Network. The contract combined two prior existing programs namely the Advanced English Migrant Program (AEMP, now the Language stream of the new contract) and Literacy and Numeracy Training (LANT, now the Literacy and Numeracy program of the new contract) hence the LLNP contract has to be seen as one contract but two distinct programs. A brief review indicates that the history, client group and classroom dynamics of the two programs are quite different.
- The impact of making LLNP a "complementary service" has been to establish the usefulness of the two programs for case managers at Centrelink and the Job Network. At the same time the switch from TAFE as being effectively the sole provider of these programs to new service providers entering the field, has created a change of setting for the provision of the programs. This has tended to result in LLNP being provided in a less formally academic and more community development oriented environments, with good effect.
- To date demand for the Language program has absorbed about 90% of outlays under the contract with Literacy and Numeracy using up only 10% of outlays.
- With the surge of demand resulting from LLNP being listed as a complementary service, DEST experienced budget over run difficulties in the 2003 - 2004 year. The result was that some pressure was exerted by DEST on service providers for them to cut back on accepting new clients, particularly in the Language program. This caused financial difficulties for some new providers and tended to have the effect of undermining the confidence of them in general. This in turn had the effect of undermining these provider's services to client students.
- To some extent the opening up of the LLNP contract to new service providers, at the same time as listing it as a complementary service within the "Active Participation Model" of the Job Network, has created a potential new stratum or category of educational/training facility in Australia. As set out above, the main focus of these facilities to date has been to provide the Language program with the Literacy and Numeracy program being a poor cousin. What each of these new service provider facilities do have in common though is that they tend to have more of a local community feel to them than the previous TAFE facilities. In this way these facilities may be better placed to respond to local needs and to deal with the personal aspirations of their client students. The task will be to establish clear benchmarks as part of a strategy to protect and grow this initiative.
- It is the presenters view that the partial de-coupling of the Language program and the Literacy and Numeracy program from a purely TAFE provision has added vigor to the delivery of the two programs but has also highlighted two major weaknesses namely:
  - Large variation in the quality of delivery by service providers.
  - The lack of understanding in how best to deliver training within the multi-entry (ongoing top-ups) and the multi-level (disparate student skill levels) aspect of the LLNP contract classroom. It is the presenter's view that the methodology of the Language classroom is quite different from that of the Literacy and Numeracy classroom and as such dealing with the multi-entry and multi-level issue needs to be approached from a different perspective for each of the programs.

- The Australian Bureau of statistics recently advised that over 30% of the unemployed in Australia have barriers to employment as a result of the lack of basic literacy and numeracy skills.

**This presentation will now focus on the Literacy and Numeracy program part of the LLNP contract.**

## **The Literacy and Numeracy Program**

Before commencing, a comment on the name of the program may be useful. While the title of the program is Literacy and Numeracy in practice the presenter believes that the title basic education for adults probably provides a better description of the actual work done in a Literacy and Numeracy classroom. While the Language program is populated entirely by client students who are NESB, the participants in Literacy and Numeracy include both long term resident NESBs with level 3 NRS or above oracy and Australian born clients who have fallen between the cracks as far as their basic formal education is concerned. The class mix will vary considerably according to the locality of the service provider. The issue here that needs to be highlighted is that the provision of basic education to long term resident NESBs requires the teacher to have some cross-cultural understanding in addition to their other teacher skills, if he/she is to be effective.

At this stage in order to put into context the Literacy and Numeracy classroom I have set out below a list of the typical barriers to learning that are encountered by teachers with their client students.

- Low self esteem brought on by failure of the clients formal education.
- Isolation, depression and homelessness.
- Varying degrees of dyslexia.
- Damage to cognitive functioning caused by drug or alcohol abuse as well as clients with clinical mental health issues.
- Behavioral problems resulting from participant's recovery from substance abuse.
- Conflict and anger management issues.

While the Language program has a clear vocational potential (along with strong social benefits) The Literacy and Numeracy program is probably better thought of as welfare education in that it's primary focus is the holistic welfare of the client/student rather than training him/her for a job as such. In my experience many participants who have attended the Literacy and Numeracy program have gotten jobs however having regard for the participants barriers to learning, a work outcome must be seen as a bonus. In the presenter's view, the primary focus of the teacher in the Literacy and Numeracy program is to try to re-ignite the participant's belief in their own ability to learn, not to teach them things. In this way the aim of the program can be summed up as capacity building for the client/student. The benefit to the individual participant and through them to the overall community if this can be achieved is considerable and is well capable of withstanding a cost benefit analysis.

## Teaching Implications

Given that we have already touched on the issue of the multi-level classroom of the LLNP contract we can now add the issue of multi-barriers to learning in the case of the Literacy and Numeracy classroom. What then are the teaching implications of these three issues?

The reality in the classroom with the above issues is that each and every client student participant needs to be treated as an individual learning program. To highlight this we need only compare the interested participant who comes five days a week to class with the less motivated participants who only comes say two to three days per week. While observing that there are as many potential learning programs in the class as participants it is also recognised that the social community feel of a group in a classroom is a better learning environment and certainly more cost effective than say one to one training. The approach which brings these two seemingly conflicting factors together is team teaching.

With team teaching there are always two teachers in the classroom which allows for a class group feel and at the same time permits a level of individualised training. It is a demanding technique to master and requires close team work between good teachers but applied over time, the classroom dynamic can be brought to life for the benefit of both the client student and the teacher. The perceived benefits of team teaching in the Literacy and Numeracy classroom are set out below:

- The capacity for individualised participant learning in a supportive group environment.
- Good order and personal security can be maintained in a classroom without putting undue stress on any single teacher
- The training of new staff can be achieved on the job quickly and effectively without risking a reduction of service delivery quality (because a trainer is effectively in the room by way of the senior colleague and strategies are planned together).
- Easier to maintain the quality of delivery in the classroom once practice and procedures are set up.

My co-presenter Jenny Magrath and I were recently involved in a team teaching activity in a Literacy and Numeracy class operating in the inner west of Sydney. Prior to moving to team teaching, the single teacher class was demonstrating poor morale by staff and students, considerable frustration was being experienced by both teacher and students and there was poor attendance by students. Little learning development appeared to be underway. After initiating team teaching in the classroom the following changes started to show up:

- Classroom dynamics significantly improved with the classroom developing a flow.
- Teacher and student satisfaction improved dramatically.
- A sense of learning empowerment started to pervade the classroom.
- A non-threatening classroom community feel developed.
- Attendances improved significantly.
- Withdrawal rates dropped to virtually zero within two months.

As far as Jenny Magrath and I are concerned team teaching in the Literacy and Numeracy classroom, works. That being said, team teaching will only achieve it's full potential if teachers are chosen carefully and where they are compatible with one another. The presenter's guide in teacher selection in this field is the teacher's ability to engage the client student (professional empathy not sentimentality). The participant in the Literacy and Numeracy classroom is by and large suffering some form of isolation or alienation. The paradigm of lecturing to only exacerbates this and needs to be avoided. The ability

to engage students is a subjective personality gift but nevertheless lies at the heart of successful teacher selection for the Literacy and Numeracy program. With most teachers having little experience of this style of teaching there is no doubt that teaching teams will become more effective over time if they stay together. In order to achieve this funding to the service providers has to be stable and predictable.

## **The Demand for the Literacy and Numeracy Program**

Literacy and Numeracy program training can be recommended by either Centrelink or a Job Network member. In addition however a significant pool of parties who could potentially benefit from the Literacy and Numeracy program are located in the Personal Support Program (PSP) operated by FACS. Under this program the client is assigned a case manager often a psychologist, who works with a client over a two year period. The presenter has had considerable success with PSP clients referred to the Literacy and Numeracy program which to a large extent may have been due to the close collaboration that was achieved between the client's PSP case manager and the teachers in the classroom. The dynamic of the PSP case manager having an on going involvement in the client's Literacy and Numeracy program training is by and large absent with direct Centrelink or Job Network referrals.

## **Conclusion**

It is difficult not to come to the view that properly administered, the provision of Literacy and Numeracy training for those surviving at the margins in our society could make a real difference for the right reasons. My co-presenter Jenny Magrath and I would argue that this can only really be achieved by using the team teaching technique in the Literacy and Numeracy program classroom. This would however require DEST to acknowledge the merit of the case and be prepared to amend the new LLNP contract in relation to Literacy and Numeracy to reflect this, as the cost structure for team teaching obviously is higher than for that of single teacher classrooms. It is the presenter's view however, that a little more money to produce an effective result is money well spent. This contrasts with money currently being spent on this program, where the technique being employed is considered to be limiting the effectiveness of the program.