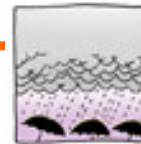


# **four seasons in one day –**

**literacies in changing climates**

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## **Liberating literacy for adult male learners**

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## Introduction

The project was designed to embrace adult male learners, a noted marginalized group, using specifically selected facilitators who would provide support, guidance and strategic planning, and would, as its major outcome, transform the status of the learners.

The particular emphasis was on older males who, in their transition years (years 9 – 11), had found that their skills were inadequate, and had become disengaged from the learning process, their employment pathways had become obstructed. The frequent response was to drop out and thus they had become a current statistic and a potential unemployment case.

The global trend towards a knowledge-based economy means that these men needed to gain those skills that would enable them to become part of the economy, and to have a stake in the future.

The problems posed by this project were:

- how to connect disengaged males in literacy acquisition through the use of enterprise and technology
- how to encourage greater participation by the males in the enrichment of society
- how to harness the energy and creativity of these males

Research into changing employment conditions and social upheaval in the area has revealed issues that have confronted some males who, until recent years, had been able to remain cocooned in work and the status quo. Change brought with it issues which were unfamiliar to many of the men and they had no strategies for coping. These strategies had not been an ingredient of their early lives. This is the cause of major bottlenecks of learners in the mature age group. Such learners have not been aware of how to access new knowledge. Therefore, with the certainty that computers are firmly entrenched in modern society and employers now require workers with technological and communication skills, the issues facing the project became based on what strategies could be utilized to assist the men in the focus group to become participative members of their community.

The methodology selected was Action Research, as it allows for action, evaluation and reflection, and directional change. The actual project was unable to be definitive due to the restrictions of time, funds, and opportunity. However the infinite processes embedded within the literacy project although not allowing for definition, did offer possibilities regarding strategies for all learners in the process - a process that constantly exposed innovative dynamic ideas, posing ever changing theories about what we, as members of a society, view as literacy. Therefore, limited by evolving demands, and differing viewpoints, the process sought to empower all participants, and to be fluid, open ended, flexible and to allow for reflection and evaluation.

## Project Context /Background

This section presents information on the context of the project conducted at Penguin, on the Central Coast of North West Tasmania.

### Penguin Skill Centre

The Penguin Skill Centre was established through ANTA funding, in response to the need for greater access to education and training beyond the compulsory years of schooling in rural and isolated areas in Tasmania. There is a network of such Skill centres throughout the state.

The Penguin Skill Centre is a Registered Training Organisation and offers accredited training through the use of training packages, such as Community Services, Information Technology, Visual Arts and Contemporary Crafts and Mentoring.

The three areas of emphasis for the Penguin Skill Centre are

- Regional and economic development
- Youth participation issues
- Access to lifelong learning

## **Regional Demographics**

Issues arising from unemployment are prominent in the economy of North Western Tasmania's demographic profile as, in relation to current global labour developments, Tasmania's status is that of a non-competitive participant.

The demographics of the North West Community show that 72.8% of the adult population has no qualifications (Australian Bureau of Statistics), yet the global trend is towards an economy based upon knowledge and flexible skills, one that has a high level of education in the post compulsory years.

Statistics indicate that 70% of adults who did not complete the highest available level of secondary schooling had poor literacy skills. There are also statistical indications that people who do display low levels of literacy and numeracy through to adulthood are more likely to be unemployed than people with high levels of literacy and numeracy.

A global knowledge based economy, competitive in employment and enterprise opportunities, will be unavailable to a large proportion of the Tasmanian population, specifically those who exhibit the correlated poor literacy skills, low education level, and an unemployed status. Thus there is a need for strong social capital investment now through community cohesion, community supportiveness, community self confidence and leadership development.

## **Background to the ANTA Innovative Literacy Project Initiative**

The Innovative Literacy funding was granted to the Penguin Skill Centre in response to a submission outlining a project that would ascertain the needs of mature aged unemployed males, design a programme through the formation of a learning community and have the learners develop a business plan that would be accessible to other Skill Centres should they implement a literacy learning programme for mature aged males.

## Issues Confronting The Project

1. Marketing the program
2. Finding the clientele
3. Engaging the interest of the clients
4. Finding facilitators
5. Structuring a learning program
6. Identifying the learning obstacles
7. Building a team of facilitators
8. Understanding and implementing a learning community
9. Continuous engagement of learners
10. Providing professional development for facilitators
11. Having a functioning steering committee

## Major Findings From The Project

1. The literacies established as foundational for mature aged participants are those related to development of self-awareness;
2. The ability to make meaning out of diverse situations, to be able to communicate in a range of environments, and under varying conditions, converge to develop literacies;
3. Being able to participate in a technological society encourages self esteem, i.e. belief in one's own worth;
4. Powerful literacy learning will perpetuate the desire to continue the learning process;
5. Teachers are learners and, to be active in the learning process, must engage, collaborate and cooperate;
6. Teachers must learn to differentiate between adult learning and learning by youth. The skills learned to teach children and adolescents in the school system should never be assumed to be transferable to adult learning contexts. This conflict of values and ideology is a core finding of this project and has broad implications for providers, such as VET in schools, where there is a blending of the two teaching fields.

## A Learning Model

